

Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhananda



India 2010

These precious memories of Swami Prabuddhanandaji are unedited. Since this collection is for private distribution, there has been no attempt to correct or standardize the grammar, punctuation, spelling or formatting. The charm is in their spontaneity and the heartfelt outpouring of appreciation and genuine love of this great soul. May they serve as an ongoing source of inspiration.

MEMORIES OF SWAMI PRABUDDHANANDA

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April 27, 2015

Dear Virajaprana,

I am glad to receive your e-mail of April 24, 2015.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji and myself met for the first time at the Belur Math in the year 1956 where both of us had come to receive our *Brahmacharya-diksha*—he from Bangalore and me from Bombay. Since then we had close connection with each other. We met again at the Belur Math in the year 1960 where we came for our *Sannyasa-diksha* from Most Revered Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj. I admired his balanced approach to everything that had kept the San Francisco centre vibrant.

In 2000 A.D. he had invited me to San Francisco to attend the Centenary Celebrations of the San Francisco centre. He took me also to Olema and other retreats on the occasion. Once he came just on a visit to meet the old Swami at the Belur Math.

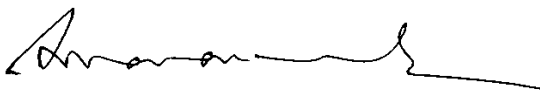
In sum, Swami Prabuddhanandaji was an asset to our Order, and his leaving us is a great loss.

I hope and pray you are all keeping well.

May Sri Sri Thakur, Sri Sri Ma and Swamiji bless you all!

With best wishes,

In Mother,



(Swami Smaranananda)
Pravrajika Virajaprana

SWAMI HARSHANANDA, BANGALORE

Down the Memory Lane

(My Personal reminiscences about Revered Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj)

Three happy things had happened in my life in quick succession. I had completed 60 years in this sacred Monastic Order, 25 years as the Head of this Math and 52 years after Sannyasa. Naturally elated – but in all humility – I had sought the blessings of Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj. That was 30th June 2014.

But instead of getting his blessings I got the shocking news of his Mahasamadhi.

When the shock subsided, my mind went down the memory lane starting with May 1948. It was during this period of May –June 1948 that I came to know Raghunandan (Pre-monastic name of Swami Prabuddhanandaji).

Gradually over the next few years our acquaintance increased to loving friendship, especially after our initiation together from Most Revered Virajanandaji Maharaj.

Since he had been permitted to stay in the Ashrama itself by Revered Tyagishanandaji instead of the hostel building, our personal meetings and exchange of views became more frequent.

When Revered Yatiswaranandaji came to Bangalore and stayed for a few days (during January 1951) both of us had a long interview with him about our desire to join the monastic Order. He gave us quite a few spiritual instructions that helped us greatly.

Since Raghunandan had completed the 2 year degree course in June 1951 itself, he could join immediately after the examination. Being a student of a four year degree course (Engineering), my joining was delayed by two years! When I actually joined he was naturally happy.

After doing puja for a couple of months I was shifted to the office building, the new portfolio being the book sales section, the library, marketing as also the Balaka sangha.

Now began a more intimate and a fairly long period of association (4 1/2 years) since we lived in the same room.

Apart from sharing the marketing and other works, thrice a week, we also shared the internal work of cleaning the rooms and bathrooms.

Coming from a rain infested and forest area he often fell ill by malaria. And, I am a permanent patient of gastric ulcer! As a result we often fell ill – not simultaneously but alternatively! – giving an opportunity for mutual service. I am very grateful to him for the loving care he bestowed on me (including washing my clothes) during that period.

Since both of us were inclined towards a serious spiritual life, we had made a private agreement between ourselves. On one of the week days – say Wednesday – he will take half holiday from the work. I would take care of his work on that day. Similarly, I would have a half day for myself, on another day he then taking care of my work. We would spend this time in more meditation and study.

Unlike some of the other brahmacharins he never quarrelled with others or even exchanged hot words. He was always cool by his very temperament, which even Revered Yatiswaranandaji appreciated.

Being a student of Sanskrit in his High School and college days, he was interested in reading the Ramayana of Valmiki. He used to go through a few pages everyday in the night before going to bed.

One night I was suddenly awakened from sleep – may be at 11pm – by somebody shouting in joy. It was Raghunandan because he had just completed the reading of the Ramayana!

Once I had been downcast due to a misunderstanding with a senior brother. As soon as he sensed it he comforted me, putting the other side of the story, like Solomon of the olden days, to restore my balance.

On ekadasi days he used to do nirjalopavasa (complete fasting without even taking water as Swami Vivekananda used to do). This was perhaps due to his family background. (He was a madhwa brahmana, who are the followers of the dvaita school of Vedanta of Madhvacharya)

Another interesting thing that comes to my mind is the way we were “cleaning” and tidying up Revered Yatiswaranandaji’s room before he returned from long tours. While cleaning the shelves in which he used to keep some tins containing biscuits and some dried eatables we would ‘decide’, after ‘mutual consultation’ that some of them were ‘not in a good condition’ and hence helped ourselves with them, in order ‘to help him’!

After I was transferred to the Mangalore centre we did not have much contact. When he was appointed as the President of the Bangalore Ashrama after the demise of Revered Yatiswaranandaji, I had sent a congratulatory letter. He had replied in all humility that it was due to the grace of Sri Ramakrishna.

During his four year tenure he had established a good contact with the students of colleges as also of the Indian Institute of Science.

When he was transferred to USA and came to Belur Math before leaving, I was there as an Acharya at the Training Centre. Hence I could meet him.

When he was in America, we occasionally exchanged letters.

Quite a few times he had helped us financially for some of our projects.

During one of his visits to Bangalore, he came to Mysore – the RIMSE, a B.Ed College and a Retreat Centre – and addressed our students and teachers.

At that time, his health was quite good.

Even today I continue to remember the old good and sweet days. His quiet and dignified bearing had endeared him to all of us, especially the devotees who were members of the Balaka sangha or had worked as Volunteers especially during the Centenary of Swamiji (1963-64).

There is no doubt that his demise has left a chasm in the history of this Bangalore Ashrama.

SWAMI GAUTAMANANDAJI, CHENNAI
Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj

In 1954, I first saw Swami Yatiswaranandaji, the Head of Ramakrishna Math, Bengaluru. His magnetic and spiritual personality drew me to himself and gave me permanent solutions for my existential problems.

As I became familiar to him, he gave me permission to stay in the Ashrama overnights, i.e, from Saturday night to Sunday evening of every week.

It was during these two days of the week, over a period of two and a half years, from 1954 (probably April) to 1956 (November) that I used to meet Swami Prabuddhanandaji as Br. Raghunandan Maharaj of the Ashrama. Perhaps he was looking after the kitchen also along with his other duties, because, one day, I went late to breakfast which was perhaps at 7:15 am, as it is now. He very politely, with a smile on his lips, told me, 'Brother, come at the right time for the breakfast. It is a different matter when you join here as a brahmachari!' Needless to say, I never repeated the mistake again.

There was an expectation from the Brahmacharins of the Ashrama that I would join as a Brahmachari. I was also trying to but various factors were delaying my joining. One day, Br. Raghunandan Maharaj personally spoke to me and said, "Srinivas, you have also to do something to join. Only depending on Sri Ramakrishna's grace won't do." That quickened my efforts to an extent.

Swami Yatiswaranandaji often remarked, 'Raghunandan is very balanced. i.e, he exerted to serve Sri Ramakrishna physically, intellectually and through worship.' He was very appreciative of his good physique. I may add here that Swami Yatiswaranandaji would ask many of us youngsters also to build up a good physique.

He would sometimes feel our shoulder and arm muscles and say, 'Don't you feel weak with so little muscles?'

I was undergoing a post-graduate training course of technical officers. The day I was released by my employer to join the Order, I went straight to report the same joyfully to Swami Yatiswaranandaji. It was past 12.30 or 1.00 pm. In my exuberance of joy, I told him, 'Maharaj, I will have my lunch here today.' Swami Yatiswaranandaji was in a fix. He did not want to say 'no' to me but he knew that the kitchen was closed after the lunch hours! Anyway, he called Prabuddhanandaji, 'Raghunandan, can you give some food to Srinivas? He has come so late from his factory.' Raghunandan Maharaj very gladly said, 'Certainly Maharaj, I can give him some biscuits, fruits and milk.' Very gladly he fed me sumptuously with them with his usual loving smile and affectionate words.

We celebrated Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary for three years in our locality called Malleswaram in Bengaluru, to which, we some young men, invited Swami Yatiswaranandaji to preside and speak. In the third year, i.e, 1956, I organised this function. Along with Swami Yatiswaranandaji and Swami Shastranandaji, Br. Raghunandan Maharaj had also come to the celebration. I don't remember if he spoke on the occasion. It was a good function. The presence of Swami Yatiswaranandaji was so impressive that many orthodox people in the audience unusually saluted the Swami saying, 'How divine he looks!'

I have heard that Raghunandan Maharaj had joined the Bengaluru Ashrama as brahmachari, immediately after he graduated. He was then an inmate of our Student's Home there.

His elder brother, Jagannath was also a brilliant student and had served as Headmaster of our reputed High School, 'Ramakrishna Vidyashala' of our Mysore Ashrama, but passed away immaturely.

I left Bengaluru when I joined as a Brahmachari of our Order in 1956 in Delhi under Swami Ranganathanandaji. Not until 1972, I could visit Bengaluru and meet Prabuddhanandaji. Nothing significant happened with respect to our relationship during this period.

Then, in June 1970, Prabuddhanandaji left India to join San Francisco. Annually, he would write me a greeting letter during Durgapuja and another during X-mas and New Year. I would reply with a lot of 'our Order's news' that too in our mother tongue, Kannada. He would invariably reply appreciating my 'interesting and informative letter'.

When I visited San Francisco in 2001, he with his usual affectionate way, showed me the activities of the centre. He took me to San Antone Valley where we spent a whole day celebrating Turiyanandaji and Trigunatitanandaji. He also took me to the retreat at Lake Tahoe and on the way to Sacramento also. He made me attend all the three days of Retreat at Olema. I was made to preside over one of the sessions and talk.

In the same year we met at the Ganges town for the New Millenium Vedanta Conference which was held under the auspices of Vedanta Centre of Chicago under Swami Chidananda. At the end of the session, I proposed a vote of thanks in which I gave a short summary of each of the speakers during the three day conference. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was immensely pleased with that and he profusely congratulated me in superlative terms adding, 'I never knew that you were such a good speaker!' He had a big heart to encourage the youngsters!

The next and last time that I met him was in August-September 2012. He was ill and so I thought I would meet him in his sickbed in San Francisco. But lo, he was in the airport to receive me with his welcoming smile! I was amazed!

During the next visit to the United States in 2014 November, I wrote to him earlier that I was not visiting our centres on the West Coast and would visit only those in the East Coast on my visit to Chicago. He very lovingly replied, 'I understand your difficulties in taking long journeys from East to West coast, but please keep our centre in view when you visit States next.' You all know that he passed away on 2nd July 2014 and I have yet to fulfill his loving invitation to visit 'Our Centre'.

I cherish his sweet words of advice to me as a young man and his mature counsels when I grew up as a monk. I cannot forget his unfailing and substantial financial help he gave whenever I asked. My heartfelt prayers to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Moher and Swamiji to bless and keep his soul in eternal peace and joy.

SWAMI DAYATMANANDA, LONDON

Sacred Memories

I penned below the precious memories I have of Revered Maharaj.

My contact with Revered Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj was brief. I met him first at Belur Math when I was in my 2nd year TC. I came from New Delhi Ashrama an year ago to the TC. Revered Maharaj was visiting Belur Math in 1968. (I guess now that it was in connection with his being posted to USA. At that time I had little inkling of what was going on in his mind.) One day he came to our training Centre. I met him on the first floor of the TC. He was standing near the railing. That first impression is unforgettable. Such a gentle and serene figure with a beautiful smile lighting up his face is truly impressive. I made pranams and he inquired my name, wherefrom I came etc. After learning about me we chatted for a few minutes.

At that time whenever I used to meet senior Swamijis I used to pester them with silly (spiritual) questions.

Q: How to progress in spiritual life?

A: Have a long term goal but take small steps, one small step at a time. Pray wholeheartedly to Sri Guru Maharaj and Holy Mother. No one can progress in spiritual life without the grace of the Divine. Most of the time our sight is fixed on the realization of God. That is a bookish answer. For us to really feel the urge to realize God is a long way off. We must pay attention to our everyday doings. Often we are not aware that while we are talking one thing we are walking in the opposite direction. (Obviously Revered Yatiswaranandaji's training has rubbed off a great deal on Revered Maharaj.

(Revered Yatiswaranandaji used to tell that in order to progress in spiritual life one must be very aware of what was going in one's my own mind. If one doesn't have this simple awareness out worldly he may be doing a lot of japa, meditation, scriptural Reading etcetera, but he would not make much progress. Many times we judge people only from their external behaviour.)

That was the topic I remember. Some other things also we talked about. But now I do not remember except that he invited me to visit Bangalore. But that did not happen when he was in Bangalore.

The next time we met was in 1995 when I happened to visit USA. I was there with him for four days. During those few days he himself took me round to San Francisco, to Olema retreat and Lake Tahoe. At that time there was a retreat going on at our Olema Centre. He asked me to conduct the retreat. We had a few talks but I do not remember much what we talked about.

A few years after I took charge of the Vedanta Centre here I had to go through many difficult problems. One of our inmates became intensely inimical and created lot of problems. I phoned to Revered Maharaj. His advice was just what I needed. He said “we have to be like Lord Shiva and swallow a lot of poison.” At that time I did not realize that he himself had to go through hell (I think even for many more years afterwards) and was telling me from his own experience. His timely advice saved me from a lot of mental anguish.

In this connection I can recall: “most of our problems stem either from ourselves or from our brothers and sisters. Jealousy, ambition and hatred are endemic among monks and nuns. There are some who would stop at nothing to malign and pull others down. That is the play of Mahamaya. In a way we may have to accept it as our own karmaphala. Do not forget it is also a spiritual challenge which can push us up. But we must not shrink but face the brute. We also need a lot of patience and endurance. If we can hold on to Sri Guru Maharaj and face the problems we end much stronger and nearer to Him. During such periods of trials our only succour and comfort comes from the compassionate Holy Mother.

If you find any of your brothers angry, surely it is a sign of intense lust. When lust does not find proper channels it turns into anger and hatred, and vents into the nearest neighbour. Many monks suffer from many unfulfilled desires and instead of trying to sublimate vent it into undesirable channels. When you study the lives of saints

you will find that most of them had to face even worse situations. Read the life of St. Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross. John used to be beaten up by his own brother monks. At such times strive to do more prayer, japam and meditation. Cling to the feet of the Divine Mother. We can derive strength and consolation only from the divine.”

Needless to say this is an advice which helps me even now. Being young I did not know that frustration can be the result of unfulfilled emotions such as lust, which can wreck our lives. It is very hard to understand the deep workings of our unconscious mind. That is why so many become mentally ill.

The greatest friend

Revered Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj had a very special talent. He makes friends of almost all who comes into contact with him. Loving, concerned and soft spoken any person who comes into contact with him becomes a friend for life. Hundreds of devotees from Bangalore get loving greetings every year. He never forgets a single person. And he used to help unstintedly anyone who needed help. I know many poor devotees whom he used to send money even though they did not ask or expect from him.

Revered Maharaj knew a large number of monastic brothers too. His love and concern for them is unforgettable. He used to send them gifts of books, clothes, or money for pilgrimage or medical help whenever necessary. It is not the mere help but the loving heart behind that help. I think nobody can forget him once they come into contact with him.

As far as I know Revered Maharaj was very particular about his spiritual practice. He would not tolerate any deviation from his fixed routine. One must see him when he sits to worship Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. He seems to forget the whole world. And his advice for devotees is also to keep regular practice. I think in his heart he is closer to Holy Mother.

Revered Prabuddhanandaji was not an orator. But he had his own unique style. Slow but clear speaking is his forte. I had heard him a few times and always came away with the impression he knew what he was talking about.

Revered Maharaj's love, gentleness and deep concern for the welfare of his friends and devotees can never be forgotten. Last month I met Revered Sureshanandaji Maharaj. His memory is failing. But whenever Revered Prabuddhanandji's name was mentioned tears would well up in his eyes. I am sure the same is true of all the devotees who had the good fortune to come into contact with him.

There are some more conversations I had with him. I cannot write them here as they are personal and private. I would always cherish Revered Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj as a spiritual giant, a loving friend and helper.

SWAMI BHASKARANANDA, SEATTLE
Memories of Swami Prabuddhananda

(per phone conversation 1/26/'16)

I always remember him as being very calm. I never saw him angry or agitated. He was always considerate, kind, and sympathetic to me. In the Bangalore center he was well-liked. People had great admiration for his calmness. It seems that the sattva guna was predominant in him. I would call him and talk with him as if he were an elder brother. He always warmly welcomed me when I visited the San Francisco center. He had so much interest in others: the devotees, swamis, and activities of the different centers. He also had a keen sense of humor.

His bearing was stately and dignified. He was never hurried, but deliberate in his speech and actions. Though a man of few words, he had a very loving heart full of sympathy for everyone. He was a pure and noble sadhu dedicated completely to the ideal of the Order: "For one's own liberation and the welfare of all."

SWAMI BHAVARUPANANDA, ULSOOR

A Selfless Saint

By the grace of the Holy Trio, I came in touch with Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, in August of 1967. My association with the Ashrama and Rev. Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj can be termed in short as *love at first sight*. The whole Bangalore Ashrama was replete with spiritual vibrations and the aura of Rev. Maharaj attracted me very much. Sweet smelling pollens emitted by varieties of beautiful flowers, green foliage of trees, plants and creepers and immaculate shining copper and brass puja vessels in the chapel, absorbing but elegant decoration of Sri Sri Thakur's photo, Sri Sri Mother's photo and the regal rows of the photos of the disciples of Sri Sri Thakur, Sri Sri Thakur's single photo in Samadhi in standing position and the smell of sweet scented incense sticks, and the silence in the chapel, created an ethereal atmosphere elevating the mind to a higher consciousness of existence. I really got charged with the atmosphere at once, hence I have termed it as *love at first sight*. I also witnessed unusual assemblage of very disciplined devotees, Balaka Sangha boys and monastic members at vesper prayers, participating very lively in chanting and singing sonorous Bhajans. The whole Ashrama, both inside the buildings and outside, was clean.

On the momentous day Rev. Maharaj took my interview in Rev. Swami Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj's Kutia, as I intended to join this holy Order. I was asked many questions and I replied to every question. Still I remember the two questions asked by Rev. Maharaj: One that if my brother parted with my share of property, I could pursue family vocation instead of becoming a Sadhu (monk). Question two was that in this Organisation the use of non-veg is not prohibited and those monastics who are used to non-veg could take. Rev. Maharaj was very free and frank but very amiable even to strangers. The interview ended after about forty five minutes or so. I had noon prasad offered to Sri Sri Thakur, which was very holy and delicious.

I was 21 years old at that time. Although I could not find an intellectual cause for the elevated consciousness in the Ashrama premises, the palpability of spiritual vibrations was a reality to me. Later, I came to know that spiritual dynamos like the Holy Mother Sri Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Brahmanandaji, Swami Ramakrishnanandaji and many of Sri Sri Thakur's, Holy Mother's, and Swamiji's disciples had sanctified the Ashrama by their holy presence. Spiritual giants like Rev. Tulsi Maharaj, Rev Tyagishanandaji Maharaj and Rev. Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj had lived here for decades for spiritual ministration. Thus, their tapasya had laid a solid foundation for the presence of elevated spiritual atmosphere.

Rev. Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj had lovingly and diligently served both Rev. Swami Tyagishanandaji Maharaj and Rev. Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj, by which he had imbibed all the good and gentlemanly qualities of Sadhuhood. Intrinsically Swami Prabuddhanandaji was an introvert and his eyes, if we could closely watch, revealed that of a person constantly meditating on higher values of life. He was very democratic in his approach and at the same time very scientific. He had an aura of an indrawn personality and never shown off this trait. He appeared to be a mystic and for every problem he sought divine intervention. From his letters we can make out that he wrote always “Sri Sri Thakur willing, Mother willing, God willing” etc. before he committed any plan. I have personally seen him meditating before he answered any question or implementation of any plan and its execution. He had super-human qualities of head and heart amalgamated in a very balanced way and we could not frame him with limitations. Because of these extraordinary qualities in him, many young spiritual aspirants joined Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore and elsewhere during his Presidentship, to become worthy monks of the Order.

I hailed from a place 220 miles away from Bangalore and it was not possible to meet Rev. Maharaj often except after long intervals. However, we were in touch with each

other through correspondence. Rev. Maharaj was transferred to San Francisco Center and he left Bangalore on 20th April 1970. On the way he visited Singapore and Japan. In Japan, he went round the Expo-70, an International Exhibition held at Tokyo. His letters bring us a vivid and picturesque experience of him in new lands getting acclimatised easily to newer people and circumstances. His unique outlook of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” and “Isavasyamidam Jagat” made him to embrace and love everything and everybody. Many Swamis in American Centres have always given very good reports about him. As also many American devotees like Ms. Marie Louise Burke (Gargi), Ms. Barbara Piner, Dr. Shelly Brown and others, who visited India and with whom I had personal interaction, revealed to me that Swami Prabuddhanandaji was very simple, easy to approach and his lectures poured out from his inner-being spontaneously.

In the beginning of 1975, Rev. Maharaj participated in an Inter-Religious Conference held at Ellicottville (America). One very important aspect he pointed out in that Conference was that ‘why we did not progress in spiritual life, was because in a day of 24 hours we gave time to God or spirituality, only about an hour or so and that too half-heartedly. Whereas our mind got occupied with mundane things rest of the time.’ The preponderance of mundanity outweighed that of spirituality. If this was so, Rev. Maharaj opined that our progress in spirituality got terribly hampered and stagnated. He visited India for the first time in the latter part of 1975 after he was posted to San Francisco as head. Rev. Maharaj wrote to me at Kankhal (Haridwar) that he would be coming to Delhi and I could meet him there for a few days and that he had written a letter to my Secretary Maharaj of Kankhal Centre to send me to Delhi Ashrama and that he would bear the travelling expenses. As per schedule I was permitted to go to Delhi. Rev. Maharaj came and it was a very joyous moment. Many Swamis known to him from Bangalore had come to Delhi to be with him for sometime. Rev. Maharaj had brought gifts to everyone of us. I had requested for “Many Mansions” and its sequels, which he gladly handed over to me on arrival.

One day we had been to the holy Vrindaban. Rev. Maharaj took us there to meet Rev. Saradeshanandaji Maharaj (Gopesh Maharaj), a disciple of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. We could pay our respects to him who was eighty years of age at that time. Rev. Gopesh Maharaj, even at his ripe old age used to wash his own clothes and washed his food plates. Though he was very austere, he was very progressive in his approach to life in general and in spiritual life too. We went to the famous Banke Behari Temple (Sri Krishna) and a few other important ones.

Rev. Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj had made it a holy ritual to meet elderly Sadhus of the Order while he was in India. He always visited Lucknow to meet Rev. Swami Shantaswarupanandaji Maharaj (Parvati Maharaj), who was his predecessor in San Francisco Centre. Rev. Prabuddhanandaji would brief Rev. Parvati Maharaj about the devotees associated with that Centre and also the important events that were taking place there. Many a time, he sought spiritual guidance from Rev. Parvati Maharaj, who was a disciple of Rev. Shivanandaji Maharaj.

My next meeting with Rev. Prabuddhanandaji was in 1980 at Belur Math, where he had come to participate in the famous Second Devotees' Convention. I was in the Training Centre at that time. Apart from hearing Rev. Maharaj's lectures both at the Convention and in the Training Centre, I got the opportunity of giving him some personal service. As usual, he had brought some gifts to me which he very lovingly passed on. Even to this day I have treasured some of his gifts given to me and I am delighted to recall here that he gifted one set of Ochre robes after getting Sanyasa from Rev. Vireswaranandaji Maharaj in 1985.

For almost a decade, he did not visit India, but we exchanged letters occasionally. He was very particular in conveying his blessings after Durga Puja every year. It is not just that he sent Vijaya Greetings to me alone but to all the Swamis who were intimately known to him. In 1989, Rev. Maharaj underwent cardiac by-pass surgery. He recovered

very well and became his normal self with scheduled medications, exercises, diet, etc. In 1990, he arrived to India and I synchronized my programme to be with him in Hyderabad Centre for a week. Every day, he used to narrate some elevating incidents about Rev. Tyagishanandaji Maharaj or Rev. Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj or some funny incidents in his Centre or about spiritual retreats held at different places. One day, we were taking morning walk and he was walking very briskly like a normal man. I was stunned at his speed and my worry was that he had undergone by-pass surgery the previous year and his fast walking might bring him some harm. After observing for sometime, I could not control and asked that he had by-pass surgery less than a year ago and how he was walking so fast which might bring him some harm. He enlightened me that in America, there would be a system of meeting of such patients after recovery from the trauma of the cardiac surgery at different intervals. There, the cardiac doctors and physiotherapists would show them the do's and don'ts. If the patient does not become his normal self in every way, then what was the use of the surgery, was the logic. This concept of exchanging views and enlightening the post cardiac surgery patients was new to me and I very much liked it. I was fortunate to hear his address given to the devotees at Hyderabad Center.

Again, I met Rev. Maharaj in Calcutta in June, 1996. This time he had already visited Belur Math, Ranchi and Lucknow. While at Lucknow, he had developed retention of urine due to enlarged prostate gland. The authorities at Belur Math decided that Rev. Maharaj should return to San Francisco to get best medical help. So, he came to Calcutta to get admitted at our hospital, Seva Pratishthan, and to leave for San Francisco from Calcutta. Fortunately, I was working in the hospital and got the opportunity to serve him personally. Our doctors at Seva Pratishthan managed to provide him some temporary relief measures for the interim period till he reached San Francisco.

Although, his return ticket was at a later date from Bombay by British Airways, with the help of the known Airport authorities and officials of the British Airways, we could

advance his ticket from Calcutta-Bombay to San Francisco via London, at the earliest opportunity by producing medical emergency certificates. Rev. Maharaj reached San Francisco safely and immediately informed his safe arrival. He thanked in his letter all the doctors and staff of our hospital, the trait which he never missed to express even for small assistance given to him.

Later, he wrote to me about his consulting the specialists for enlargement of prostate gland which got reduced by taking “Saw Palmetto” tablets, a herbal product, and there was no need of surgical intervention as the prostate gland had shrunk. Rev. Maharaj had sent to me a few packets of this medicine at Bombay to be handed over to Rev. Sw. Damodaranandaji Maharaj, who needed this medicine, when the latter was in India for sometime at that time.

It is worth mentioning here the generosity of Rev. Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj that he was always ready to help the ailing monastic members either by funds or by sending required medicines. In March of 2009, I underwent cardiac by-pass surgery at Bombay. Having come to know of this, he telephoned immediately to Swami Tattwarupanandaji at Bombay, to know about my health condition. Later, I sent him email giving all the details of my surgery. In 2012 also, I was admitted to Seva Pratishthan as I was not keeping good health. Rev. Maharaj enquired Sw. Shantimayanandaji of Bangalore Centre about my whereabouts. On enquiry, Shantimayanandaji conveyed Rev. Maharaj that I was getting treatment at Seva Pratishthan. Having come to know of this, one Sunday morning, he telephoned me at Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta and I was in a position to talk to him. He asked, “What can we do from here?” I was really astonished at his concern shown to me. He never took the onus of helping others to his own person alone but always describing it as collective. He never took credit to himself.

Next, Rev. Maharaj came to Bombay in 2000, on the last leg of his tour in India to catch flight to San Francisco. This time, he stayed for 3 days and as usual, I got the

opportunity to serve him personally. Some of his elderly blood relatives were staying in Bombay whom I knew. I had also informed them about Rev. Maharaj's stay. Rev. Maharaj was surprised to meet them after several decades. He treated them cordially without any air of superiority. He also addressed the devotees in his unique way. Again, Rev. Maharaj came to Bangalore in 2005. I came from Bombay to be with him for a week. This time, we went to Badrikashrama founded by Swami Omkaranandaji, with whom Rev. Maharaj had a very good rapport from San Francisco. The new Ashrama was coming up in a beautiful landscape, away from the din and buzz of city life. One day, we all had breakfast at Respected Kitty Master's house, evening tea at Shri Lal Sadhwani's house and dinner at Shri Bhaskar Mane's house. Devotees of Bangalore always tried to entertain Rev. Maharaj to get some joy and also to be in his company. Rev. Maharaj visited Ulsoor Math, to meet Rev. Shastranandaji Maharaj, Rev. Vibudhanandaji Maharaj, Rev. Kirtidanandaji Maharaj, Rev. Priyanandaji Maharaj and others, who had retired from active life and were staying at Ulsoor Math, to pay his respects to the senior swamiji's, known to him.

One day, we travelled to Mysore Centre, where Swami Sureshanandaji Maharaj, a very good friend of Rev. Prabuddhanandaji lived. The former would make himself free to be with the latter and both were chums discussing old and memorable events. Rev. Prabuddhanandaji enjoyed the talks and jokes but he used to keep mum most of the time. He would only comment a line or two at the end. Being an introvert, we could hardly make out what was going on in his mind. Rev. Atmavidanandaji of Mysore Centre was well connected with Rev. Prabuddhanandaji and the former gave a royal treatment. He had also arranged a discourse by Rev. Maharaj to the devotees and the monastic members. One day, we had been to Ponnampet Ashrama also to meet Rev. Jagadatmanandaji Maharaj.

Rev. Prabuddhanandaji was planning to come to India in 2010, which turned out to be his last visit. I requested Rev. Maharaj to pay a visit to Bhopal, wherein a new Centre of

the Ramakrishna Mission had come into existence in 2006. Rev. Maharaj was very kind to include Bhopal in his travel itinerary. As per schedule he came to Bhopal on 17th August, 2010 along with four male devotees, who had settled around San Francisco and had known Rev. Maharaj for decades. One day Rev. Maharaj addressed the devotees gathering and another day he spoke to the students and teachers of our Higher Secondary School. He also visited new school building under construction. Rev. Maharaj was very happy to see the huge lakes surrounding Bhopal. He also visited the famous Sanchi Stupa, the first of its kind, where Buddha's relics have been preserved and it was built by Emperor Ashoka in third century B.C. King Ashoka had also convened the first Buddhistic Conference here.

We had arranged visits to Bhojpur, where the biggest Shiva-Linga was enshrined in a temple built by king Bhoja of eleventh century A.D. Rev. Maharaj's health was very delicate with Parkinsonism etc. Despite he visited Bhimbetka, a place famous for pre-historic man's paintings on rocks of Vindhya mountain range. On 20th August, 2010, Rev. Maharaj with devotees left for Jammu Centre via Delhi, their next destination of the tour. This was the last time I met Rev. Maharaj in person. As days advanced there were many ups and downs in his health condition. More than getting emails written, he used to talk over phone. We had talked over phone just one week before his demise. His allopathic doctors had given certificate that Rev. Maharaj would live for only six months or so in 2012. Rev. Maharaj was also taking alternate medicines and it appeared by the grace of the Holy Trio, his life prolonged for another two years. Rev. Maharaj had developed a type of lung cancer. He bore everything silently as 'Prasad' from the Divine. His mind was alert and was fully conscious in taking the name of the Lord till he breathed his last.

Rev. Maharaj was a great support to many of our institutions, individual Swamis of the Order and also to some who had left the Order. His outreach was very extensive. I was posted as head of Bhopal Centre in 2006. We needed to build up the Centre for which

financial assistance was required. I appealed to Rev. Maharaj, who graciously sent around Rupees fourteen lakhs in all at different intervals. He had substantially helped 'Swami Vivekananda Educational Trust, Bangalore' started by Respected Shri Kitty Master. Rev. Maharaj had funded our Jammu, Cuddapah Centres and he used to regularly send for rural work done at Sakwar, under Bombay Centre. His assistance is very immense and he never expressed it. In 1982, Rev. Hiranmayanandaji Maharaj had taken up the work of renovating Holy Mother's House and it needed lot of money. I had heard from Rev. Hiranmayanandaji telling that Rev. Prabuddhanandaji had sent Rupees eighteen lakhs for renovation work of Holy Mother's House. As far as I know Rev. Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj sponsored the entire expenses of Revered Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, Rev. Hiranmayanandaji Maharaj, Rev. Gahananandaji Maharaj and Rev. Smarananandaji Maharaj and many more which we do not know, to tour American Centres. Rev. Maharaj used to help even known devotees who would be in financial constraints.

Rev. Maharaj had excellent rapport with all while administering a big Centre like San Francisco, having immense moveable and immovable properties. The percentage of devotees visiting the San Francisco Ashrama and its activities stood at 90% American devotees and 10% of other nationality. Olema Retreat would draw around 1,000 devotees of which 90% would be Americans. This only shows how Revered Maharaj was popular, disciplined, democratic and easily approachable. This could not be achieved easily if the person is not well balanced and spiritually elevated. Rev. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was one such rare person. Rev. Maharaj taught not by words but by action, very silently like dew drops. He was a treasure house of all that was good and excellent. Literally he showed Swami Vivekananda's dictum that true religion was always positive.

His premonastic name was Raghunandan. The name Raghunandana is none other than Sri Rama, the "Maryada Purushottama". Literally Swami Prabuddhanandaji was Sri

Rama to me. Many a times I wonder how I came to Ramakrishna Mission? Had I not got the touch of a touch-stone like Rev. Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj, I would have become any other worldly man!

The Qualities of a true Guru are:

- 1) Shrotriya (One who has mastered the scriptures)
- 2) Brahma Nishtha (Established in Brahman)
- 2) Avrijina (A sinless person)
- 3) Akamahata (One who has no desire to fulfil)
- 4) Parama Karunika (Extremely merciful)
- 5) Ahaituki Prema (Loving all without any cause)

Rev. Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj had imbibed all these qualities in him to become a Guru, and I considered him as my Upa Guru. I am blessed to have come in touch with him, who kindled real spirituality in me, and I am EVER AND EVER GRATEFUL TO HIM.

SWAMI VEETABHAYANANDA, ULSOOR

Revered Prabuddhanandaji: As I Knew Him

I am attaching herewith a file containing some of my recollections of personal reminiscences, feelings and thoughts on Rev. Swami Prabuddhanandaji. Rev. Prabuddhanandaji was really a great and magnetic personality, and I feel myself fortunate to have come in contact with such a noble soul. Though my interactions with him were short and occasional, I have noted down whatever I could remember.

My association with Rev. Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj began in a strange manner. Hence it has remained unforgettable. I had been visiting Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore since 1958. But, I had not been in contact with Swami Prabuddhanandaji. I was then a student. My brother Giri Maharaj (later Swami Tadrupananda) had joined the Order at Bangalore, and on some occasion I had to call him over phone. The call was received by one whose voice was very clear and pleasant. It was none other than Br. Raghunandan's (pre-monastic name of Swami Prabuddhanandaji). I conveyed to him my intention to speak to my brother. While speaking I was fumbling for words, as I was not accustomed to speaking English then. Then Swami Prabuddhanandaji asked me to speak in my mother tongue Kannada. That was the first time I had an opportunity to speak with Swami Prabuddhanandaji though over the phone. Little did I know then, that I was speaking with an exceptionally great monk I have ever come across in my life.

I joined the Math as a novice in 1962-63. After joining the Math, I was allotted duties in various departments like Puja, Kitchen, Vidyarthi Mandiram (hostel) and Ulsoor Math. While working as a Pujari, I purchased a tray costing Rs.3/- for temple and submitted the voucher to the office. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was then in-charge of the office and he appeared to be upset and shouted at me not to do such a thing without prior permission. My ego was very badly hurt. I didn't talk to him for 3 days. But Prabuddhanandaji, himself called me and talked to me lovingly and convinced me about my error. He was an adept in handling human relationships!

Swamiji was very particular about his daily routine of spiritual discipline, physical exercises. He was very simple in his food habits. When he was the Warden in Vidyarthi Mandiram, a hostel for college boys, he used to finish his morning meditation and japa before the boys got up. Again he used to sit for meditation between 3 and 4 p.m before the boys returned from colleges. He never missed even a single day his spiritual practices such as Japa and meditation. Once I had the privilege to sit with him and meditate in Holy Mother's shrine, at Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore when he had come from San Francisco on a visit to India. In this shrine Holy Mother actually stayed when she visited Ramakrishna Math at Bangalore in 1911. His pleasant face absorbed in deep contemplation is still fresh in my memory. So splendid and elevating it was to meditate along with him!!

A deep composure was a hall-mark of his personality. Once a Balaka Sangha boy while playing fell down and there were some bruises and bleeding. So he was sent to the Office for treatment. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was in charge of office. He told the boy not to move and himself went in search of first-aid box. On that day the box was in some other building. Prabuddhanandaji went himself all the way to bring it. The Swami came after sometime. By that time the boy was not found to be there. He asked a devotee who was standing nearby and observing all that had happened "Where is that boy?" The devotee replied, "Oh, he is cured and gone away. You need not worry." It was his nature to move slowly and steadily and not to get agitated. Everything he did calmly. Even while discharging his duties in the office, be it dealing with Balaka Sangha boys, or talking with devotees or transacting any business, Swami Prabuddhananda was not in a hurry at all. Though he appeared to go slow he used to handle the responsibility entrusted to him with meticulous care.

Another noble trait of Rev. Prabuddhanandaji that comes to my mind was his deep concern for his brother-monks, whether they were seniors or juniors. I had to undergo two operations –fistula and appendicitis both within a year. Seeing the condition of my ill health my spiritual Guru Swami Yatiswaranandaji told me that he would postpone my joining the TC at Belur Math one year i.e. instead of 1966, he

wanted to send me in 1967. Unfortunately Swami Yatiswaranandaji passed away in January 1966 itself. I thought Swami Prabuddhanandaji the next incumbent President may not know about Swami Yatiswaranandaji's wish to cut off one year. But, there were other two senior novices who had to be sent to TC and thus I was delayed by one year. So Swami Prabuddhanandaji naturally sent me to TC in 1967. Swami Yatiswaranandaji had perhaps foreseen what was in store for me. It was a divine plan. As it happened, before I had to go for TC, Swami Prabuddhanandaji sent me as an escort for a devotee from abroad, (Mr. Sulz from Kabul) to all important pilgrim centres in Tamil Nadu. I am ever grateful to both Swami Prabuddhanandaji and the devotee.

With a deep sense of gratitude I remember Swami Prabuddhanandaji for giving me an opportunity to serve my spiritual Guru for 3 long years from 1963 to 66. This privilege was continued up to Chennai Math and air-port where I made my last obeisance (pranams) to my Guru and spiritual mentor with a heavy heart and tearful eyes. Little did I knew I was bidding final farewell to my Guru.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji was generous enough to supply all my needs especially to maintain good health when I was undergoing training in Training Centre at Belur Math for two years. He had requested Swami Kshamanandaji (Bhavani Maharaj) to take special care of my health by providing whatever was necessary. So he was compassionate.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji was assigned by the Headquarters to take charge of San Francisco centre in 1970. Once in every five years he used to visit different centres in India. Once he paid a visit to Allahabad Centre in 1979 when I was the head of Math and Mission centre there and donated liberally to the activities of the Math there. I had the privilege to travel with him to different places whenever he visited India both by air and other modes of transport. That in itself was a blessing to me to converse and be with him. I was really elevated and spiritually benefitted whenever I was with him. To be with a spiritual personality like Swami Prabuddhanandaji used to fill my heart with great joy!

Once when I was in-charge of Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Mylapore Chennai, I gave Rs. 4,000/- for purchasing milk for orphans and destitute boys. But the boy to whom the milk duty had been assigned ran away with that money and we could not trace him and recover that amount. I had no personal money to make up for the loss. During that time, Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji happened to be on tour to various centres in South India. I wrote a letter in detail to Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji explaining the situation (the theft that had taken place). He gladly gave a demand draft to make up the loss and saved me from anxiety and loss to the Institution. I expressed my deep sense of gratitude to him for the timely help. He looked at me and smiled. This incident I narrated to my colleagues. Hearing this one of them remarked that Swami Vitabhayananda has no dearth of money as long as Swami Prabuddhananda is there.

I had repeatedly requested some donations to build up "Sadhu Seva Fund" for maintenance of Swamis working in the Students' Home. He had replied to my earnest request saying that if he gets any extra amount he could certainly send. But it remained unfulfilled.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji walked majestically and his gait was always like royal prince with a highly dignified demeanour. His presence used to command great respect and when Swami Prabuddhanandaji passed by, even people who did not know him, used to stand in awe with folded hands and bow down to him with all reverence.

When Swami Sureshanandaji heard that Swami Prabuddhanandaji has passed away, he shed tears and uttered spontaneously "a great Sadhu and a gentleman to the core has attained the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna. May his soul rest in peace." Swami Yatiswaranandaji had very high opinion about him. I have heard Rev. Maharaj saying, "Swami Prabuddhananda is a spiritually advanced soul."

Om Shantih! Shantih! Shantih!!

SWAMI KAMALANANDA, ULSOOR

Talk on Swami Prabuddhananda

[Recorded on 14.08.2016] Actually I had no contact with any Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission prior to my joining, except when I was a small boy when once Swami Somanathanandaji, who was the head of the Mysore Centre had come to our house. Probably I was in 2nd / 3rd standard something like that and my brother had brought him to our house. He had bhiksha (Food) in our house. And other than that I had no contact with Ramakrishna Math or Mission and I never read anything about Guru Maharaj, Holy Mother or Swamiji, and Holy Mother was unheard of then. That was the thing. And somehow by the providence I was brought to the portals of Sri Ramakrishna in July 1969. By the end of June, actually I had a dream where great Sw. Chandrashekhara Bharathi of Sringeri Math, who was no more at that time, came to me in my dream and asked me to go to the Ramakrishna Ashrama and join, and I neglected it, but it repeated for 3 days and after 3rd day I came to the Ramakrishna Ashrama and that was my first entry into the Ramakrishna Ashrama, though I used to move in front of the Ashrama a number of times and for years.

I used to move in front of the Ashrama, once or twice I might have entered in and sat for the Aarti and picked a few booklets, and apart from that I had no other contact. Then in June end I went to the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Basavanagudi, Bangalore and told the brahmachari who was in the book stall that I would like to meet the head of the centre as I was not knowing who was the head of the Centre. Then he told the swamiji in-charge and that swamiji asked me to come and meet him and we had a one to one meeting and I came to know that he was Swami Prabuddhanandaji. When I saw him first I took him to be a just an ordinary person. There was nothing to say about him. He was very simple and just like any other person he was, and then we had few talks. Swamiji said "You come and stay in the Ashrama for some time and then you can decide about the joining." Then I had to apply for leave from my job where I was

working then. I applied for one month's notice and came to the Ashrama on 1st August 1969. Then actually I came in contact with Swami Prabuddhanandaji, and other swamis. To name a few, Swami Sureshanandaji, Swami Tadrupanandaji, Swami Bhajananandaji (who was at that time Br. Yoga Chaitanya). So these were few to bench and Swami Purushottamanandaji was there and Swami Chidanandaji was also there. So these were the other swamis.

So when I started living with him, he went on in his own casual manner talking to us, enquiring about us, this and that etc. and things were going on. I was in the office one day and that time he had no separate office and he used to come there. In the office Sriranga maharaj was in-charge and I was helping him in typing, so he came and asked me "Oh! You know typing, have you passed?" I told I failed in Junior and he said "Oh! That is sufficient for us". This was the reply. When he told like that, I was very happy with that and that was a wonderful beginning. So after a few days like that, he used to come to the office and sit, the incident which made an indelible impression on me and transformed my life and made my opinion to rise to the highest pinnacle about him happened in that office.

One day, when I was also there in the office helping Sriranga maharaj, Swami Prabuddhanandaji came and he sat in front of Sriranga maharaj's table and did some little work whatever was there. On that day Sriranga maharaj said "Maharaj we don't have any funds for purchase of provision for the next week". And you know at that time we were 15 people in the ashrama (monastics including brahmacharis) and the fund allotting was rupees 75 per month per head which comes to about 1000 rupees per month. So for one week it used to be around 200-300 rupees and the Ashrama condition was such that there was not even 300 rupees for purchase of provisions. As you know any other person would have told "Oh don't worry, we shall raise funds from this person or that person etc. I will tell him," he could have told. But his reaction was spontaneous. He said "What Sriranga, who is maintaining the Ashrama, are we? Or Sri Ramakrishna? He will take care of it, why do you worry?" This was his reaction! And

when he was sitting there, within 5 minutes a postman came and in the post there was a cover (envelope) which came from France and there was a cheque for 4000 rupees. You know 4000 rupees in 1969 had a great value, not like today. The person who had sent 4000 rupees had written, 'This is for the maintenance of the sadhus of the Ashrama, where my great Guru Swami Yatiswarananda lived.' So, this was his reaction and this showed how much of dependence and how much he thought of Guru Maharaj in the time of crisis. So this was the lesson which I learnt for my life. This was one very important incident which had occurred in my life.

Another incident, maybe after a month or two, he had been to Belur Math and had come, and in the meeting it seems somebody had mentioned that each centre has to develop a group of good devotees who can support the Ashrama. And with a very heavy heart he mentioned that "Who maintains the ashrama, who takes care of it, who supports it, is it Guru Maharaj or this devotees?" With such a heavy heart he told that. I was very much touched by this. This was the guiding factor throughout my life and after 47 years today, I recall with great reverence and as I came closer and closer to him, my reverence towards him grew and he was a simple, a good sadhu. I feel he must have realised the goal of life. That was the main impression about him. So this is how I thought of him and later when I was in Chennai, he had come once and while talking casually he was telling one statement which was very interesting. He said "See, meeting is more important than eating". You know, whenever some sadhus come, we prepare some extra dishes and all those things and we all sit together and enjoy the food also. So he was telling the above statement. This was another wonderful statement which I recall. So, with this I pay my Obeisance to him. I fall at his feet and pray for his blessings!

Om shanti shanti shanti

SWAMI AMARESHANANDA, KANKHAL

Swami Prabuddhananda – A Memoir

His monastic name itself denotes PRABUDDHANANDA – a person of fully developed consciousness. Had the good fortune to be associated with this noble soul for over fifty years.

Prabuddhananda's premonastic name was Raghunandan (hereafter P). He hailed from Bhadravati in Shimoga district of old Mysore state. He joined as a boarder in the hostel run by Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore at Basavanagudi area of Bangalore City. P was a bright student and passes the Intermediate examination as a distinguished student. Due to domestic problems P wanted to give up studying further and wanted to join the Ashrama as a monastic novice. Swami Tyagishananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda was the president of Bangalore Ashrama then persuaded P to continue studies. P cited that he had to walk three miles and college timing was from 10 AM to 5 PM and Ashrma timings doesn't suit. T(Tyagishananda) solved this problem by telling P can take food with T(also was on diet and took food at 10 AM. P continued his scholastic career and passed Bsc degree examination with credit. Once again T advised to complete Masters' Degree. P humbly requested T not to press further. In addition to serving T(who was a TB patient in advance stage, looked after Ashrma cows. T's condition deteriorated gradually and was finally taken to TB Sanatorium of M/s Jhon Tyler Co. was running. Where outsiders were not treated, at the intervention of Mr. S D Ganesha Rao, a standing advocate, who was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and Venerated Swami Tyagishanandaji. Ultimately Tyagihsnanda ji succubed to disease in 1951. Pwas sent to Vidyarthi Mandiram to assist Swami Ritatmananda, the Warden.

Swami Yatishwaranandaji , a disciple of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, having served over seventeen years in Switzerland, france, Germany and Pensivenia, in USA has returned to india in 1950. He was sent to Bangalore Ashrama as head of the centre in

1951 in place of late Tyagishanandaji.

Raghunandan received Brahmachrya Diksha in 1956 and was named Br. Indracaitanya and was assisting in Vidyarthi Mandiram. Also took final vows from Swami Sankarananda, the seventh president of the Order, in 1960 and received the name PRABUDDHANANDA, exactly suited to his nature and continued to assist Swami Ritatmananda.

In 1964, Swami Sastrananda being selected for American work, to fill the gap Prabuddhananda began to assist Swami Yatiswaranandaji – in correspondence and Math administration – dealing with devotees and staff.

1963 was the busy year humming with hectic activities in all the centres of Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres. Bangalore Ashrama too planned to construct a Centenary Memorial Building for housing office, Library, Reading Room, Auditorium and a Hall to house Balaka Sangha (A club run after school hours for boys of 8-16 years) activities. There boys were trained in devotional and patriotic songs.

To raise funds for the project P chalked out “Three B” programme - “Bhajan”, “Book Sales” and “Bhasan” - Addressing . Covering entire Karnataka by launching programmes in all Taluks of the state within five years (January, 1963 – January , 1968)

A committee was formed with suitable persons to materialise the programme Rev. Yatiswaranandaji cautioned about type of Members – Let us not go to big people holding attractive posts -Members how far they are interested in working on the principle laid down by Swamiji- particularly beneficiaries – Let us not go to big people because they occupy big chair.

On demise of Swami Yatiswaranandaji on the 26th January, 1966 very early morning , mantle fell on Swami Prabuddhananda. He activated fund raising – three 'B'

Programme. The narrator had gone with P to a near by place. Three boxes were carried- Harmonium , Sound System and Book Sales.(Samll Simple books from 1 Anna to 1 rupee). As thre was no motorable road to the village we were perforced to walk the distance with load. On playing record music local people began to arrive.Bhajan Started and sales too slowly picked up. Swami Prabuddhanandaji talked about 30 minutes. The village head presented the collected amount to Sw. P . Along with this P added his own money telling, “ This dilapidated temple is the only place in the village for gathering. Repair the temple and have regular meetings to improve the mutual relation.”

Remembering Rev. Yatishwaranandaji's cautious words, Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial was dedicated in January 1968 on Swamiji's Birthday by Swami Gambhiranandaji , the then General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and was Chaired by Hon'ble Justice Koka Subba Rao,Chief Justice of India.

In 1970 March Swami Prabuddhananda was selected for American work and was deputed to fill up the gap caused by passing away of Swami Ashokananda, the Minister of San Fransisco and he reached there towards the end of May 1970.

Slowly he began to settledown improving relationship between Monks , devotees and members of Convent. He used to visit India once in five years and used to meet brother monks by visiting different centres and helping them in carrying on service programme i.e Swami Vivekananda Educational Society at Bangalore, establishing orphanage for Blind Girls at Shimoga, for building Temples dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna at various places – Chennai, Belagaum, Tiruvalla, Ponnampet, Jammu and Kadapa. Also distress relief programme besides helping individual monks. Students community and suffering individuals as well.

Also at San Fransisco passage problems at Ranch, development of Retereat Centres and

preseerving Hindu Temple built by Swami Trigunatitananda, by extending and taking protective measures. He was a silent worker but encouraged expansion keeping utility in view.

His health too began to suffer in 2010 onwards. When he visited India in 2010 had hinted that as his last visit. In 2013 he was hospitalised for treatment of cancer. He was provided an assistant by Headquarters in sending Swami Tattwamayananda who proved to be a worthy replacement. As there was not much relief from Modern Allopathic System switched over to improvised Ayurvedic system which provided some relief; but the spread of the disease could not be controlled. He maintained his cheerful gesture and calmly bore the suffering. While in that condition he gave approval for providing thorough protection for the upkeep of the Hindu temple, first of its kind in America built by late Swami Trigunatitananda, a disciple of the Great Master Ramakrishna – left the mortal coil in the hours of July 02, 2014 to join the Great Master.

Swami Jagadatmanandaji, Ponnampet

I have received your kind letter requesting me to send memories of Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj of hallowed memory. I am 85 now and my memory is also fading due to ageing.

I joined the holy Order in 1960 and stayed at Bangalore Ashrama for 2-3 years. During my stay I developed a high respect for Prabuddhanandaji for his quality of head and heart.

A harsh word never issued from his lips. He was of quiet disposition, considerate, a man of calm judgement and wide toleration. Even during a trying situation where he had to handle people of diverse temperaments he would coolly handle and tell soothing words. He was a real gentleman. He thought of the welfare of all, prayed for all and he was loved and respected by all.

I was a reader of "Edgar Cayce" and we used to discuss about karma and reincarnation.

I wrote a book in Kannada "Badukalu Kaliyiri" and about 400,000 copies have been sold so far in Kannada alone. During the course of writing this book Revered Maharaj used to encourage me by sending necessary and many valuable books on these subjects. This book is titled in English "Learn to live" in two volume and being published from Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. It has been translated into Hindi and other six languages in India.

With prayers,

Yours in the service of Sri Ramakrishna,

Swami Jagadatmananda

SWAMI PRANARUPANANDA

SRI SARADA NIKETAN BHUBANESWAR, ODISHA

Thank you for reminding me of my ideal Swami Prabuddhanandaji. Just remembering him a current of peace and joy flows through my whole personality. Though I am highly benefited by his close contact for 3 years (1968-1971) till he left for San Francisco, there are no striking incidents. But a few I will share with you.

Samadarshaka – though I am a monk since 40 years, when I meet a new person, I still tend to speculate whether so and so is rich or poor, educated or not, etc., but my wonderful dear Swamiji did not have a trace of it! I have tested repeatedly. He only thought “Sri Guru Maharaj has sent them. It is our duty to receive them with due respect and do what best we can do for them.”

One example of this is about Chamundamma. Everybody termed her as “hucchu muduki” (meaning crazy old woman) and some of us felt it is time to stop her from coming to the Ashrama. But see what happened!? She was a destitute woman who had lost all her kith and kin and taken shelter in a small girls school veranda (self appointed peon as Swamiji termed). Anyway, lady teachers were kind to her and got some work in return. She would attend the evening Aarati almost daily and mostly she would bring one or two teachers with her. I was in the bookstall and she would press the teachers to purchase a few books. “neenu teacher aagiddiya ninage jnana illadiddare makkalige enu helikodatiya?” – “you are a teacher, if you yourself are not knowledgeable, then what will you teach the children?”

In the prayer hall some lady volunteers would very politely request new visitors to sit in a proper line. But in their absence Chamundamma used to monitor on her own. But she was very rough and made a lot of noise ! If anyone tried to tell her to be polite she would retort.

After a few days she was absent and no there was no trace of her. One evening after prayer devotees would do pranam to Swamiji. That day Chamundamma was there.

Swamiji asked her “enu kaanode illvalla barthiddiraa?” – “what’s going on, you are not to be seen, have you been coming?) Oh! She jumped with joy and clapping her hands she said “neeve helidree – neenu bandu hogoodu yaarigu tiliya baaradu” – “you yourself said that nobody should notice my coming or leaving”. His affectionate instruction worked !?

After a few days news spread that Swamiji will be leaving for San Francisco. Rev. President Maharaj, Sw. Vireshwaranandaji visited Bangalore. At the time of pranams Chamundamma burst and told Sw. Vireshwaranandaji “nimma swamiji na ello kalisterante, haage maadabaedi, nammanella channagi nodikolluttaare” – “heard you are sending Swamiji to some place. Please don’t do that as he takes care of all of us so well”. All the devotees burst into laughter. President Maharaj also.

On the day of departure of Swamiji, many devotees went to the airport and returned and the news spread. Next morning we heard Chamundamma died in the night !!! what love and affection she had! God bless her.

Education – Silent Help

Long after Swamiji left we came to know from several young devotees that they could complete their education only with silent financial help from dear Swamiji !

Greatest visible help is his nurturing “Yuvaka Sangha” by ex-students of Balaka Sangha now they are running a school for poor boys and girls mostly children of labor class. Under the guidance of Kitty master. That group can give you many interesting and inspiring incidents.

Vidyarthi Mandir ex-students right from his class mates can give you a lot. Swami-in-charge of Vidyarthi Mandir can help you. After he left and stayed in a far off place but we were (about 20 Brahmacharis) not left in dark or “ardha daarili bittari annisolla” – don’t feel like we were abandoned half way through. His letters were such solace,

guiding and inspiring for years. Avara hridayadalli nammellarigu jaaga itthu ! – he had a place for all of us in his heart !

Formula for Life

When I joined there were nine Brahmacharis. After a few days I found each of them is multi-talented. So, I thought I will be a burden on the institution. When I expressed this to Swamiji he plainly said why should you worry? “whatever you do – do it whole heartedly to your best and mentally offer it to Bhagavan as Seva”. This formula has helped me the last forty years and now also.

Psychologist

He could easily read the mind and with simple words unburden. Once an engineering student from BMS College over strained himself before exam so much that he was termed by the doctor as “Schizophrenic” and the student lost one year and the family thought there is no future for him. But when the problem came to Rev. Swamiji, he called him to accompany him for the “evening walk” in the coconut garden below. Swamiji could easily make the person relaxed from tension !? From next year the boy progressed well in education. It was joy to see him visit the ashrama with a smiling face instead of dry and hopeless face previously.

Valuing the suggestions of elders

Sometimes few retired senior citizens would sit and discuss various topics of present society and what ashrama can do in that regard.

Once there was a report that in a town school a teacher spoke some nonsense about Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita. One of the elders told Swamiji “you are responsible for the ignorance of the teacher. If you sit in this beautiful ashram it won’t do you should make the message of Swamiji reach nooks and corners of the State”. Swamiji humbly accepted and started monthly once visit to a far off place in a van with a Bhajan group and a Book sale group and himself a speaker. And wherever he went he

sold the books for half price. It was a great success and was a pleasure for me to keep the books packet ready (I was in charge of Book Sale). May his memories inspire all.

Swami Pranarupananda

About the Author

The author used to visit Bangalore Ashrama since 1955. He joined the Ashram in 1968 and was ordained Sanyaasa from Sw. Vireshwaranandaji in 1978. He has had the privilege of being the personal attendant to Sw. Tapasyanandaji for a couple of years in Chennai, and has had close contact with Sw. Ranganathanandaji and other senior monks of the order. He branched out in 1982 and currently runs an orphanage he founded “Sri Sarada Niketan” in Bhuvaneshwar, Odisha in an attempt to fulfill Swami Vivekananda’s instruction to “assist the neglected masses”. He was instrumental in founding the Kothar center and is closely associated with Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

SWAMI MUKTIDANANDA, MYSORE

July 2, 2015

A few minutes ago, I emailed to you a write-up on Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji.

Subsequent to sending it, we learned that Swami Prabuddhanandaji left his body a year ago on the 2nd of July, that is today.

The write-up is my homage to the noble soul. We all remember him very often in Mysore. Revered Swami Sureshanandaji, whenever talk about him surfaces, often becomes deeply emotional and sheds tears of love.

Poornima, our neighbor and devotee, informed me via phone about the significance of today. We spoke at length about Swami Prabuddhanandaji.

Let us all together pray to Sri Ramakrishna that his soul rests in peace in his abode.

**SWAMI MUKTIDANANANDA, ADHYAKSHA
SRI RAMAKRISHNA ASHRAMA, MYSORE, INDIA**

Some Reflections on Swami Prabuddhananda, the generous monk

Swami Prabuddhananda, the illustrious, broadminded and generous monk of the Ramakrishna Order, epitomized the Gita idea, *Samatvam yoga uchyate* (“Yoga is the practice of equanimity”). In his equanimity and empathy was hidden his spiritual personality. In this brief write-up, I shall attempt to recall his pleasant but serious, majestic but humble, demeanour that commanded respect from devotees and brother monks. Hundreds of monks and devotees remember him fondly for his ability to quietly but effectively reach out to monks and aid in their service projects.

Swami Prabuddhananda began his monastic life at the Bangalore Ramakrishna Math under the inspiring guidance of the spiritual luminaries, the late Revered Swamis Tyagishanandaji Majaraj and Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj, spiritual giants of their time. Living and training with them gave a solid foundation and a spiritual impetus to his personality.

Right from his early monastic life, Swami Prabuddhananda displayed not only a cool, dignified personality, but also excellence in human relationships, and commitment to duty. He could accommodate all shades of devotees and monastic brothers and bind them to the holy order in a harmonious and affectionate web of relationships. His understanding of others was profound. He was a friend of all with a special knack of getting along without deflecting from his principles and spiritual convictions. I have heard from his contemporaries, such as Revered Swami Sureshanandaji and the Kannada writer Dr. Prabhushankara, many anecdotes, the sum of which indicate that he remained unruffled by adversities and maintained calm and poise under difficult circumstances.

Association with Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore, and Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala

Revered Swami Prabuddhananda's association with Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore, especially with Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala, is worth recalling. Revered Swami Sureshanandaji Maharaj, who was in charge of Vidyashala 1972-1991, had special admiration for Swami Prabuddhananda. The two were together at the Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, during the formative years of their monastic life. They lived with Revered Swami Tyagishanandaji Maharaj and later Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj for a number of years. They had a very special brotherly relationship, fortified by mutual love, admiration and respect for each other and their bond of spiritual kinship was such that it seemed as though the friendship was ordained in heaven. Whenever Revered Swami Prabuddhananda visited Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala during his travels in India, he was received with a special touch of loving hospitality. Students and staff would stand at the entrance on either side of the pathway to welcome and greet him. A special assembly would be arranged for him to address. What is more, Swami Sureshanandaji himself would carefully prepare the menu for the revered guest.

In several developmental projects and educational service activities of Vidyashala and in the publications wing of the Ashrama, including the *Viveka Prabha* monthly Kannada magazine, Swami Prabuddhananda evinced keen interest. He gave his loving support through ideas and monetary help. In fact, it was Revered Swami Prabuddhananda who coordinated with Vidyashala alumni in the United States to secure a sophisticated Celestron 14-inch prismatic telescope for Vidyashala. The swamis and staff of Vidyashala remember him with reverence. Incidentally, it is worth remembering that Sri K. Jagannath, the late second headmaster of Vidyashala, was the brother of Swami Prabuddhananda in his purvashrama.

Symbol of generosity

His friendships with Revered Swami Sureshanandaji Maharaj, Dr. Prabhushankara, Revered Swami Achalanandaji Maharaj, and his association with Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore, and other service institutions of Mysore district such as Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (started by Dr. H. Sudarshan for tribals at B.R. Hills), Vivekananda Youth Movement (started by Sri. R. Balasubramanya at H.D. Kote), and Chethana Trust (started by Dr. Rajini and Dr. Vidya Sagar for the mentally challenged in Mysore) indicate how he virtually followed one of the important guiding service ideals of Swami Vivekananda – “helping those who are trying to do good to the world.”

Swami Prabuddhananda was a master in extending generous help to the needy. He could show a proactive approach with full understanding of the need of the situation and the persons involved. Many centers and swamis owe a lot to Swami Prabuddhananda for help in times of need.

Over a couple of decades, I had several opportunities to hear his discourses and converse with him during his visits to India, especially at the Mysore Ashrama and Vidyashala. I was duly impressed by his ability to share refreshing insights that were deeply instructive. He had a skill of choosing apt words, which he used with a natural flair infused with dignity, softness and conviction. Following are some of his ideas that I am able to recall:

1. We should broaden our minds with the right knowledge of spiritual ideals, the virtue of service, and higher values. We should not be like frogs in a well.
2. We should strive continuously for our spiritual transformation, overcoming inner and outer obstacles through prayer and spiritual guidance that is abundantly available in the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sharada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, from sources in the scriptures, and in the lives of other saints. We have to pass through inevitable obstacles that are the dark night

of the senses and the dark night of the soul, as mentioned in Christian spiritual literature. If we have faith in God and faith in ourselves, we can gradually conquer the obstacles and progress in our inner spiritual journey. It may take a long time to control our minds for its obstructive tendencies, but we should silently and patiently practice spiritual disciplines and move forward. There is always a dawn that follows dusk; the darkness of night is never permanent.

3. We should try to serve as many people in as many ways as possible. Swami Vivekananda taught that loving service to those needy or poor is the best expression of religion and the clearest indication of spiritual evolution.
4. To the monastic members in a night study class at the Mysore Ashrama, Swami Prabuddhananda said by repeating Sri Ramakrishna's name through worship, by meditating on him, or reading about his life and teaching in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, they would see how to gradually get filled with a higher spiritual consciousness, knowledge of the divine, and techniques needed for spiritual progress. If they persisted in the study and contemplation of Sri Ramakrishna's life and those of Swami Vivekananda and the Holy Mother, then they would not be distracted by many unnecessary complications. Make your spiritual life simple, do your *sadhana* as guided by Sri Ramakrishna and your *diksha guru*, and render service to the community in whatever way you can. The rest shall be taken care of.
5. Let us take care of our general conduct. Excellence in behaviour is in itself an uplifting achievement. Try to be gentlemen before becoming godmen. That is what Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj used to emphasize.

To sum up, like the yogi extolled in the Gita – *Samatvam yoga uchyate* – Swami Prabuddhananda's actions and words reflected an equanimity that reflected his unflinching faith in Sri Ramakrishna and his will to do good for all those fortunate enough to enjoy his fellowship.

**SWAMISHANTINATHANANDA
RAMAKRISHNA ADVAITA ASHRAMA, VARANASI**

Ramakrishna Sharanam, Memories of Swami Prabuddhanandaji

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It is amazing to know your devotion and zeal to know about Swami Prabuddhananda. Goaded by a devotee I met Swami Swami Prabuddhanandaji. It was 1968 few months before I joined this Holy order one of the problems I had I opened it to him “I have no peace of mind- How can I get? – Instant reply - except for those who have realized God or touched him – none has”.

I used to participate in some activities – Voluntary- I noticed a sort of sweetness gentleness in the dealings of Swami Prabuddhanandaji.

In one or two Volunteers meetings- he told the young boys to be polite & respectful while talking with devotees or strangers- He used to always say ashrama means not just some sannyasins & brahmacharins- it includes devotees- they are part of ashrama. He used to stress one more point “You may have much work to do during vespers time you should not forget to think of God. However short it may be “. We were about seven (7 no.) young men like a group - after finishing our service, we used to read Vachanamrit or Great Master and then go. Prabuddhanandaji used to call us Saptarshi- 7 Sages of Puranas.

Just about this time I decided to join Ramakrishna Ashrama Bangalore (as it was called then) - He told me. Come on Wednesday – keep your things - go straight to shrine & report to Sri Ramakrishna. After joining Bangalore Ashrama, I saw another face of Swami Prabuddhanandaj. His dealings with brahmacharins & sadhus- was more like an elderly brother- than head of the centre. He tried for all round development of

brahmacharins. Encourage- ask them to read scriptures- one Sanskrit pandit was engaged to teach Sanskrit to brahmacharins. After becoming a member of Bangalore Ashrama, I used to feel immense joy. One could see this in my face - so, he used to call me "Sadananda." We used to have a little fun also - we had a non-singers association. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was its Vice President.

After going to U.S.A he used to write regularly- as my hand writing was not good - he used to tease me- I have received your Brahma(Creator) lilpi. He wrote me many letters - under Vedanta in Amercia- very funny. Unfortunately I have lost them but one fun I remember - Prabuddhanandaji came from very orthodox Brahmin family- it was very difficult for him to adjust way of eating- keeping eaten food in fridge & again eating- to teach also was not easy- he wrote " Hari om." I used to say & eat.

I used to receive his handwritten/ letter till 2008 - then e-Mail once I expressed my displeasure in sending Vijay greetings by e-mail as it has no personal touch- just mechanical- it stopped- But I used to write regularly whether he sent or not.

After my sannyas he used to address me as Shantinatha (Shiva's name) & one of the thirthankara's name.

Most of his letters used to be about sp. teaching- nothing personal used to stress. His complete self-surrender, dependence on God for sannyasa & others also -we could see this in his life - when he was asked to go to USA to San Francisco - without a word he marched off to USA like a soldier. People - Ashokananda - scholar & sp. personality. Swami Prabuddhanandaji became very popular in a year or two - not ordinary matter this is also Ramakrishna Leela. Swami Prabuddhanandaj conquered Americans with his simplicity & heart just as it did in India.

I don't have the monks to share few glass bits. I have shared with you - thank you much.

Yours Sincerely, Swami Shantinathananda

SWAMI SHANTINATHANANDA, ADVAITA ASHRAMA, LUXA, VARANASI
Swami Prabuddhananda As I Saw Him

(An article published in *Vivekahamsa*, a Kannada periodical. Translated by Srimati Shashikala Sreedhar)

When the Name of Swami Prabuddhananda is perceived, mind becomes naturally emotional. In a way it was God's Will which made my acquaintance with him possible. This is not an exaggeration. It is not incorrect if I say that I myself am solely responsible for the same. For, in those days I was not talking with sadhus or sanyasins. I had some kind of preconceived notions about sadhus and sanyasins. I was not visiting temples and was always trying to stay away from social meets as well as religious celebrations. Because of these reasons I was given the title as 'Atheist'. But as far as Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama of Basavanagudi, Bangalore was concerned, there was a kind of attraction, I can even call it as a 'spell'. I was simply going on my own, sit and listen to the bhajans, Ramnam etc. Sometimes if time permitted I used to listen to the lectures also. In those days there was a plantain shop near Nettekallappa circle area. I used to buy banana from that shop. The owner of this shop by name Mr Gopal once asked me, "I have seen you in the Ashrama attending bhajans and prayers regularly. But it appears that you do not know anybody there in person. Don't you know Swami Prabuddhananda, the President of the Ashrama?". I told him "I have not spoken to him till now." He told, "Go and talk to him once. He is a very nice person".

Next day when I went to Ashrama, I met Swami Prabuddhananda, did pranam and requested him that I would like to talk to him. After some preliminary talks he asked, "Can you come to Ashrama daily at 4.30 in the evening?". Since I did not have work in the evenings I agreed. I too had some problems in my mind. Mechanical life! I used to feel that there is no specific goal in my life etc. To be precise it was 'scarcity of peace'!

I reached Ashrama five minutes early to the time given and sat in the visitors room (this was next to the present Office Room then) waiting for Swamiji. Swamiji came and after

the casual talks I asked him, “Swamiji, there is no peace. How to obtain it ? Peace is only in those who have seen God and how can others have it ?” Swamiji spoke about meditation and other topics in reply to my question and the day’s meeting was over.

After this I started participating in small service works in the Ashrama. I could observe a kind of sweet soft nature and good culture in Swamiji’s work management. Daily in the evenings myself and few other volunteers used to stand in front of the temple to safeguard the sanctity of the place. Swami Prabuddhananda before going to Lecture Hall used to come to the shrine to offer pranams to Sri Ramakrishna. If he sees any of the volunteers near temple he used to ask, “Can I leave my footwear here?” and leave them near the steps and enter the shrine to offer pranams.

I remember even now some of the points told by him in the volunteers’ meetings in those days. Swamiji said: “See if you want to convey something to the devotees or a newcomer to the Ashrama , you should talk to them with politeness. You should never talk with a loud voice and never use harsh tone. Ashrama is formed by not only sadhus and brahmacharis , it includes devotees as well”. Nowadays we rarely come across such explanation! Swamiji was telling one more point : One should participate in the Evening Aarati without fail irrespective of one’s busy schedule and make time to contemplate on God.

After few months a few of us who were attending Evening Aarati and meditation used to sit together in the room next to Holy Mother’s Shrine (where Initiation was being given to aspirants) and read Gospel and Life of Sri Ramakrishna for 20-30 minutes and after coming out of the room we used to sit for sometime on the steps of the temple and disperse. Swamiji lovingly used to call our group as “Sapta Rishis” (Seven sages)!

After few days on one fine day I decided to join the Order met Swamiji and sought his permission. May be he had an intuition that I may join the Ramakrishna Order but he refused to say ‘ Yes’. Immediately I felt that he is testing me. He was postponing it by saying “Talk to the people at home. Talk to your father(he was no more) and

mother....talk to this swamiji, talk to the other swamiji, think yourself again before taking decision .”

One evening after Sandhya Aarati I went to swamiji who was sitting alone in the porch of Swami Tyagishanandaji’s Memorial Hall and told him directly “ Swamiji tomorrow morning I am coming to join the Order” Swamiji said “tomorrow is not an auspicious day. Day after tomorrow is Wednesday. You come after 8’o clock in the morning. Leave your belongings outside the temple and go to the shrine and offer pranams to Sri Ramakrishna. Do not indulge yourself in conversation with anyone.

I used to have very open talks with Swami Prabuddhanandaji. One day I asked him without any hesitation “I am having one complaint” . He asked “what is it ?” . I told him “.....Mr X started coming to ashram only after my coming. It is more than a month since he joined the Order. But in my case you were asking me to come back tomorrow and day after and thus you were delaying. Is it fair?”. To this Swamiji replied without feeling bad or annoyed “Is it so? When we plant a new sapling we should do it with lot of patience otherwise it gets dried up. You were firm about your decision the other person was not so. Thus we acted accordingly. Tomorrow it should fetch positive results, isn’t it”. Later I came to know that I had not thought so much about it.

After joining the Ashram I had an opportunity to witness another quality of Swami Prabuddhanandaji. His association with Sadhus and Brahmacharis was so good that we used to consider him as our loving elder brother and not as the President of the Ashrama. His casual talks were also like guidance to us. His advice and order were indicative. He used to say “Try this way, this may be alright”. For the all round development of brahmacharis he often, formally and sometimes informally, while washing the plates after the meals, he used to advise us to study the scriptures. “You have come to practise japa and dhyana. Along with this you have to work and read the scriptures” said swamiji. He wanted us to read the literature on Ramakrishna & Vivekananda thoroughly first and then read the other books. We, 3 to 4 brahmacharis,

used to read Valmiki Ramayana after the dinner. Swamiji felt very happy about it and often used to enquire: 'How are your Ramayana classes going on?'

I was sent to Halasur Ashrama to look after Swami Ritatmanandaji, who was staying alone without a cook or a person to help him. Here Swami Prabuddhanandaji was worried because I had to miss my Sanskrit classes. (A Sanskrit Pandit was coming to teach) Often he was telling this. At last he sent Mr Gopal Rao (Unmarried devotee) and Sridhar, a cook to Halasur centre and I was taken back to Basavanagudi centre.

Normally Swamiji never used to get angry, I should say never was he angry. He never used to address me in singular. He used to talk in singular only with the boys of Balaka Sangha, with Anandarama, Rajagopala and few others. After joining Ashrama I was feeling extremely happy. This joy could be seen on my face. Swamiji used to call me by name 'Sadananda'!

After I came back from Halasur I was asked to perform puja to Sri Ramakrishna In the shrine. Swamiji was enquiring me often if I had any inconvenience while performing this. He also advised "Swami Yatishwaranandaji used to say that we need not perform puja with empty stomach, Take little food like biscuits with coffee. Do not spend more time in decorations in normal days. Decorate well on Sundays, special days and on Ekadasi days. Always make time to read scriptures. He was telling one more thing. While closing the main doors of the temple, see if somebody is late and wants to have darshan of Sri Ramakrishna, do not deny them because it is closing hour. It won't cause any inconvenience to Sri Ramakrishna!"

It is not true if I say that the inmates of the Ashrama were always very serious with grim face. Good humour and many instances of humour were also there. To quote an example, we had one Non-Singers Association! Swami Achalananda, Swami Prabuddhananda and few other Brahmacharis were its distinguished members!

When swamiji was about to leave to America, the present dining hall was a newly built one. We asked him, "Swamiji, when are you coming to Bangalore ?" . For this he

replied, “When this dining hall is full with brahmacharis “. We were only eleven brahmacharis then. I feel if he had continued here as President it would have been possible; it is not an exaggeration !

After he left for America, he used to write letters to me. When my letters reached him, he used to reply “your brahma lipi”(means not a good handwriting) has reached me !” His letters were very title remember one point that he wrote : “ We have to face many problems in the new environment, that too in a foreign country. We have to get ourselves adjusted to it. “ Swami Prabuddhananda was born and brought up in a traditional Brahmin family. I had seen him in Bangalore washing his hands even after drinking water. In the Vedanta Centre where he headed, few American sadhus and others were having their food. They do not know our customs. They used to keep the leftover food along with the used food in the refrigerator and consume it in the evening. To swamiji it was an inexpressible difficulty. They would not understand if told in haste. It was a very delicate matter. “I used to consume food saying *Harihi om tat sat* (offering the food to God) “ he wrote.

Every year I used to receive his letter carrying good wishes for my success. If he could find time he would send in his own handwriting and humorously would write “I am sending my *Brahmalipi* ! which means very bad handwriting. (But Swamiji’s handwriting was actually very good) I started receiving typed letters and after 2008, I started getting letters through e-mails till 2013. But it later reduced. I was writing to him and sending e-mails also. After my sanyasa, he used to address me as ‘Dear Shantinatha’. Here is a point to be noted:

Shantinatha is the name of Lord Siva in a temple near Shihore-Jayarambati. It is also a name of one of the Jain *Tirthankaras*.

The main and noteworthy points in his letters were : “ Aspirants should surrender to God.....Sanyasins (monks) should remember the mantras of sanyasa over and again. This helps in facing the personal problems as well as problems aroused in the monastic

Order. He used to give stress on complete surrender to God. In one of the letters he wrote: *gatistvam, gatistvam vivaade, vishaade, pramaade, pravaase –tvameka bhavaani* (you are the saviour Goddess Bhavani during conflicts, distress, misdeeds and travels). This point of total surrender to God was not just his personal opinion. He practised word-to-word in his monastic life.

When he was transferred to San Francisco, he proceeded immediately without any second thought. Swami Ashokanandaji of SF centre was a great scholar and a famous spiritual teacher. Would it be easy to take charge and win the hearts of the people there? This was also Sri Ramakrishna's divine play! Swamiji won the hearts of Americans just in the same way as he won our hearts!

I tried my best to meet him whenever he came to India. Except for few formal talks, there was no opportunity for any other talks. He used to be surrounded by lots of devotees. In addition he had to attend various programmes!

SWAMI SHANTINATHANANDA, LUXA, VARANASI

My Memoirs of Swami Prabuddhananda

(Same article published in *Vivekahansa*, a Kannada periodical. Translated by Lakshmi Umesh)

The very name Swami Prabuddhananda gets me emotional. It would not be an exaggeration if I say that my meeting him was preordained. It would not be wrong to say that I was almost completely responsible for it. At the time I was not friendly towards sadhus and had some preconceived notions about them. I would not visit temples and tried to stay away from religious festivities, and had been called an atheist. But, I was drawn to the Bangalore Ramakrishna Ashrama. I would go to the Ashrama whenever I felt like, to listen to the bhajans, Ramnaam Sankeertan, and sometimes to the lectures as well. During that period I would buy bananas daily from a fruit vendor at Nettkallappa Circle (an area not too far from the Ashrama). The fruit vendor, Sri Gopal, one day told me that he had seen me at the Ashrama several times, but seemed like I did not know anyone there. He suggested that I meet the president of the Ashrama, Swami Prabuddhananda.

The next day, when I went to the Ashrama, I did pranams to Swamiji and requested for an appointment with him. He gave me an appointment for 4:30 p.m. on a certain day (I was free in the evenings). I had my own problems. Life seemed too mechanical with no goal in sight. In short, I had no peace. On the appointed day, I went there early, and after the initial formal talk, I asked him how I could find peace. He said that who but those who had seen God could have peace. On that day he spoke about meditation and other things.

After this, I started participating in some small service activities. One could perceive gentleness and decency about Swamiji at all times. A couple of us swayamsevakas would be watching the area around the temple making sure its sanctity was

maintained. Swamiji had the habit of stopping by the temple to do pranams before he went on to give a lecture. If he found one of us there, he would ask (as if to seek permission) if he could leave his sandals by the steps before walking in. I remember a couple of things he had said during the swayamsevak's meetings. He had told us that both strangers and devotees visited the Ashrama, and we had to be kind and courteous to them. He said that the Ashrama did not comprise only of brahmacharis and sadhus, but the devotees were also a part of it. You seldom hear these things now. The other thing he said was that you had to participate in the evening prayer and meditation, however busy you were.

Some time passed. A few of us, after the evening prayer and meditation would gather in the room across from the Holy Mother's shrine and study the Leela Prasanga or Vachanamrita sit on the steps quietly for some time before leaving the ashrama. Swamiji had named us the sapta rishis. Some more time passed. I decided to join the Ashrama. One day I informed Swamiji of my decision and sought his permission to join. He probably had guessed my inclinations. He would not easily agree, and seemed like he was testing me. He kept putting it off by saying, talk to your family, your mother, your father, Swami, Swami, and think it over. One day after the evening prayer he was sitting in the verandah of Swami Tygagishanandaji's Memorial Building. I approached him and said I would come the next day to join. He said that the next day was inauspicious (Tuesday), but to come the following day and that I should leave my belonging outside the temple and not talk to anyone, but go to the shrine directly.

I used to be very open with him. One day I told him that I had a complaint. He asked me what it was. I said started coming to the Ashrama much later than I did, but he had joined the Ashrama a month before I did, whereas he kept putting me off with excuses. Without getting annoyed or offended, he told me that when you have to

transplant a plant it has to be done with a lot of caution, otherwise it would dry up. He said thats foundation was not very strong, while mine was more stable. The goal had to be positive results. I had not thought in that vein.

After I joined the Ashrama I got to see another facet of Swamiji. His instructions and message to the brahmacharis and sadhus of the Ashrama were more in the manner of an elder brother guiding us. It was more of a suggestion bearing in mind the all-round development of the brahmacharis. He would encourage us to read the shastras. He would say, "You have come here to do japa and dhyana, but you also have to do some work." In his view importance had to be given to the study of books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and then study the other books. A few of us had taken to the study of Valmiki Ramayana, after supper every day. He was very happy to learn this, and would often ask us about it.

I was sent to the Ulsoor Ashrama to stay with Swami Ritatmanandaji. He had no one to help him here. Swami Prabuddhananda was concerned that my Sanskrit lessons were interrupted. He would often mention this. Finally after about 5-6 months, Sri Gopala Rao, a devotee sent the cook, Sridhar to get me back from Ulsoor Ashrama. Swami Prabuddhananda would seldom get angry, or almost never got angry. He always used the formal *you* while addressing me. He used the informal *you* with Anandaram, Rajagopal, and others who had attended the Balaka Sangha. After I joined the Ashrama, I was brimming with joy, which was noticeable. Swamiji always addressed me as "Sadananda."

After I returned from Ulsoor Ashrama, I was asked to take up the puja of Sri Ramakrishna. He would often inquire how things were going with the puja. He said that Swami Yatiswarananda used to say that you do not have to perform puja on an empty stomach, but could partake of some light food like coffee and cookies before performing puja, and also, not to spend a lot of time in decorating the Lord

everyday, but to do that on special occasions, and if there was time to spare to devote it to reading. Another thing Swamiji told us was not to close the doors of the shrine if we saw devotees coming in, and we would not be disturbing Sri Ramakrishna.

Just because we were residents of an Ashrama, did not mean there was no fun. There were occasions for all this as well. For instance, there was a non-singers association. Leaders in this group were Swami Achalananda, Swami Prabuddhananda, and some brahmacharis. The new dining hall was built by the time Swamiji was leaving for America. We asked him when he would visit us again. He said he would do that when the dining hall was filled with brahmacharis. (At that time we were eleven of us.) That would have happened if he had continued to stay here, and that is not an exaggeration.

After he went to America, he would write to me often. When he received letters from me, he would acknowledge them as your Brahmalipi has arrived. His letters were very interesting. He wrote many letters under the title, "Vedanta in America." I don't have them anymore. I remember one thing in particular. One has to make a lot of adjustments in a new environment. Swamiji was born and raised in an orthodox Brahmin family. I remember that he would sprinkle water on his hands even when he drank water. The American Center that he went to, had a couple of American sadhus, and they would eat together. They were not aware of the orthodox customs of food habits. Swamiji did not want to enforce his habits as soon as he arrived there. He said that he would say Harih Om Tat Sat and eat.

I would receive the Vijaya greetings from him every year with a letter included saying that his *Brahmalipi* was included. If he had the time he would hand write them, otherwise they would be typed letters. From 2008 to 2013, it was mostly e-mail, and after that, even that became scarce. I continued to send him e-mails. After I became a Sannyasi, he always addressed me as: Dear (Priya) Shanthinatha. Shanthinatha, is

place close to Shihore and Jayarambati, and is the name given to Shiva there, and is also the name of a Jain Thirthankara. In his letters, he always emphasized that Sadhakas should surrender themselves to the Lord, and that sannyasis should meditate on the mantra all the time. This helps in addressing the challenges in a sannyasi's life as well as in an organization. He laid great importance on surrender. In one of his letters he had quoted from "Bhavani Ashtakam", "gatistvam, gatistvam, vivade, vishade, pravase, pramade, - tvameka Bhavani". This was not just an opinion; he practiced this surrender to the letter. When he got transferred to San Francisco, he did not think twice about going there. Swami Ashokananda, who was there before him, was a great scholar and spiritual teacher. It was no small task to take Swami Ashokananda's place and gain the support and confidence of the devotees! Even this is the Leela of Sri Ramakrishna. As in India, he had gained the admiration of the devotees in America as well. I would try and meet him during his visits to India. Apart from formal talk, there would be no time for anything else. Devotees were with him always and he was busy with other programs.

SWAMI VANISHWARANANDA, MAYAVATI

I might have met with most revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj in the year 1964 or so in Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore. My elder brother Sri Malatish Kumar, was also a volunteer and my mother too was a regular visitor to his Saturdays classes. I was very eager to join Vivekananda Balaka Sangha, started by most revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj.

I approached the Balaka Sangha supervisor Mr. Somasundaram, but he refused to accept me. He asked me to attend evening prayer etc., for one year or so. Our house was about 3 Kms or so from the Ashrama and I was just a 10 year boy. Bangalore was not as developed as it is now and public transport was not efficient in those days. As a last resort, I went to revered Swamiji and told him everything in detail. He asked me to convey what he said to the concerned person and I did accordingly. But that supervisor got annoyed since he was coerced into taking me as a member of the Balaka Sangha (Sunday Section) through Sw. Prabuddhanandaji.

By now, revered Swamiji was acquainted with my mother and brother. Whenever I met him inside the premises he inquired, “How is your mother?” or “How is your brother?” Especially, if he did not see my mother during his lecture class on Saturday, he would invariably ask either me or my brother about my mother's health on Sunday morning. He was so concerned about everyone.

Whenever there was a function in the Ashrama, such as Sri Guru Maharaj, Holy Mother or Swamiji birthdays, the previous Sunday there used to be a meeting in which Maharaj himself used to chair and read out the duties. After reading out the duties, he would explain how one has to be responsible with one's duty and how one should be perfect with every task. Things should be put back in its original places etc. The kind of training we received during those days has moulded us so much so, that even to this day we try our best to maintain the discipline. He used to tell us that if you are sincere you don't need anybody to supervise your work. Each one of you is a leader for oneself.

Though Maharaj visited our house twice or thrice, I was never in the house when Maharaj visited.

In 1968, after my hand operation, after passing my school final, my aunt called me to her house in Gujarat. Within six months I might have written a few letters to Maharaj and he too had replied to all my letters.

In 1970, Maharaj was supposed to leave Bangalore, on transfer to San Francisco. Because he was leaving Bangalore, once and for all, lots of invitation started pouring in and he too obliged everyone. On the last day, the day he was to leave Bangalore, the HAL airport was almost over crowded. Airport authorities allowed the inmates to go up to aircraft rather, up to the door. He waved his hand turning towards the crowd. It was a touching scene for us to part from such a loving swami.

Whosoever sent letters to Maharaj, was sure to receive a loving reply. I too have many letters sent by him, and I have preserved almost all the letters till date.

In 1975, after completion of 5 years stay in USA, he came to India for the first time. When he came to Bangalore after 5 years, there was a grand reception to receive him. The Ashrama used to be always filled with plenty of devotees, either talking to Maharaj or waiting for their turn to talk to him. The devotees organized a retreat program to be held at Arsanakunte, about 50Km from Bangalore. I too got the opportunity to attend the retreat and while travelling by bus, I was seated very close to him and got an opportunity to ask many things. To none of our silly questions, did he ever get annoyed. That showed his great personality. It was a full day retreat. We all returned in the night, after enjoying the whole day with Maharaj. Again a day came when we had to face the same situation, which we had faced 5 years ago—the day of his departure from Bangalore.

I joined the order in 1976 April at Belur Math. After a long time, I informed Maharaj. It was not that easy to get the mail during those days. As far I remember, I must have informed after my first posting to Tamluk. I could not have much correspondence in the

beginning of my monastic life. When I was posted at Lucknow, especially for New Years and Vijaya, I used to send greetings and pranams. He was sure to send a reply greeting without fail.

When I was at Lucknow, he came once to meet with Revered Swami Shantaswarupanandaji Maharaj. It seems he was there for three days. I don't remember what conversation I had during that period. But his love and affection can't be forgotten. As far I remember it was in the year 1980, Maharaj came to India for the second time after he moved to the USA. Though I used to send letters especially during New Year and Vijaya, in 1981 I met with an accident and I was in hospital for more than six months. I could not convey this even to Maharaj (about my hospitalization in Seva Pratishthan). I was confined to bed & I was not in a position to sit and write. After getting discharged from hospital, I wrote in detail how things happened etc., when he came to India for the third time in the year 1985, I met him in Belur Math. Patiently he heard the whole story in detail.

Again in the year 1991, I met him at Lucknow, on my way to Uttarkashi. Invariably he used to ask about my spinal condition. During that visit, he explained to us the new philosophy which had come in USA recently. The philosophy says that whatever has to happen only will take place and under no circumstances human effort can't change. Everything is predestined. I liked that philosophy very much. Same thing Gita also says in a different way. Morning & evening Maharaj used to walk with us and used to ask about the devotees he remembered.

As far I remember he came to India in the year 1995/1996. I hoped to meet him in Lucknow. This time I went from Varanasi. Except for the casual chat, I don't remember any special things we had spoken during this visit. This was his last meeting with Most Revered Swami Shantaswarupanandaji Maharaj.

I think the next meeting was in 2003 at Bangalore, during Vivekananda Balaka Sangha, Golden Jubilee Celebrations. One interesting and funny incident took place. This time

too, I had gone to attend the Golden Jubilee Celebrations from Varanasi. I usually go to Bangalore once in two years or so. Since I was there as office in-charge, many people knew me. Many used to invite me to their house. That was the case with Maharaj too. One fine morning, he was to go to Sri Krishna Swamy's house. He was ready to leave and I too was near him and Revered Swami Harshanandaji Maharaj too was standing near him. Maharaj asked me, Dattu, would you like to come with me to Sri Kitty Master's house? I said Maharaj I have already given an appointment to Sri Madan Gopal. He is expected to reach in short while. So sorry, Maharaj. Revered Swami Harshanandaji Mj, told him that Dattu has got lot of devotees here. Maharaj seconded his remarks saying that not only here, at Delhi, Bombay, Kolkata everywhere he has devotees. He knew that I was at Bangalore for three years and devotees obviously know me, just to put it in a joking way about my popularity he commented like this.

In 2010, again when he visited for the last time in his life to Belur Math, right from receiving him at the airport to seeing him off at the airport, I was with him and got the opportunity to be like a shadow wherever he went. I had been to Joyrambati, Kamarpukur and Kolkata centres with him. I must thank Revered Swami Annapurnanandaji Maharaj, who spared me from my duties to serve Maharaj. That was my last meeting with him. Whatever expenses I had incurred for travel was reimbursed by Maharaj in spite of my refusal. Who knew that after bidding goodbye to him at the Kolkata airport, it was goodbye once and for all! I am writing my reminiscence just a year after his demise.

I am sending letters written to me during this span of time by him not to show that I was close with him, but by going through it you will certainly understand how broad and what a loving heart and kind concern he had for one and all who came in touch with him.

I had the opportunity to be with Most Rev. Swami Shantaswarupanandaji Maharaj, who was Rev. Maharaj's predecessor at San Francisco, under whom I had the opportunity to study 5 Upanishads and Vivekachudamani. Both of them had a calm nature and a very sweet demeanour with everybody. May their blessings be there on us forever to fulfil our ultimate desire (atmano moksharta) is our prayer at their lotus feet.



3rd
Vedanta Society of Northern California
2323 VALLEJO STREET • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94123

Dec 30, 1954

Dear Dattu,

I was glad to receive your vijaya letter and also that of 9/7/92. So, you got another massage. Sri Gurm Maharaj ~~benefits~~ is giving you chances to find out which place suits you best, considering your back pain and stomach problems. It is too bad Madras & Madras 5' time weather is too humid for you. Trust you will ~~get~~ relief both from inside and outside soon. Really the Mother has given you tremendous power of endurance. Most people under this much of stress would have broken down completely. May you have more and more of this grace in every way.

You say you are able to meditate only 5 or 6 hours a day! What more do you want? You can charge yourself excellently well during these six or hours, the effects of which must last at least for the whole day. Please pray for some of us too who cannot afford ~~that much~~ to spend that much of time in meditation, Japa etc.

I was glad to know that the back rest is giving you good service. If you want anything more, you let me know. I shall be happy to arrange for it.



32
Vedanta Society of Northern California
2323 VALLEJO STREET • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94123

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Swami Prabuddhananda
VEDANTA SOCIETY
OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA
2323 VALLEJO STREET
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94123 U. S. A.



Swami Vaniwarahanda,
Ramatkumar Bhawan Students' Home,
101, P.S. Sivarami Salai,
Mylapore Madras 600-004
India.

AEROGRAMME • VIA AIRMAIL • PAR AVION

2 Second fold

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Additional message area:

I am doing well so far. Our activities are going on as usual. Just now, we are a little busy in preparing for our annual carnival centenary celebration (93-94).

Please remember me to Harinada. Please tell him that I am eager to know the outcome of his meeting regarding the book project, lab. and related matters.
With love and fond wishes, Affectionately,
Prabuddhananda

32

San Francisco
July 3, 1985.

Dear Dattakeya,

I was glad to receive your letter of 7th March and to learn of your improved body condition. Both body and mind have infinite capacity for adjustment. Hope through the grace of his ~~great~~ Maharaj, you will be able to render good service to Him, in spite of all this ordeal. His love, His joy and His peace are not limited by the conditions of the body and mind. They can come to a devotee under any circumstance. May we all receive His grace.

I am herewith sending a small note book. I hope you can use it.

I am fine so far. Give your love now and then.

With love and fond wishes,

Affectionately,
Prabuddhananda



Vedanta Society of Northern California

2323 VALLEJO STREET • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94123

February 23, 1978

My dear Dattatraya

I was very happy to receive your welcome letter of 24th December. Someone had written to me earlier that you had joined in Belur Math. Now your letter confirmed it.

You say you wrote a letter from Gujarat before joining. I'm afraid I never received it. Needless to say, it gave me great pleasure to know that you have entered the fold of Sri Guru Maharaj. Out of His infinite grace, He has drawn you to Himself. Now it is for you to feel the close relationship more and more and serve Him to the best of your capacity. I wish and pray that He may ever guide your understanding and bless you in every way.

It's too bad that you fell down and fractured your leg in two places. I hope by this time, it has healed and you are able to do the worship as before. (When you were in Bangalore, I remember you had a small operation on your thumb.)

You are very lucky that Reverend Shantaswarupanandaji is taking classes for you. He is one of our much respected senior Swamis. Meet him often and take instructions from him to build up your spiritual life. Only if we strengthen our inner life, we will be able to render proper service to others.

When you write to your mother, please tell her that Sri Ramakrishna must have been greatly pleased with her because of her loving offering of one of her sons to His order. Please give her my best wishes also.

I am also glad to know that you have learnt Bengali. You must have already begun studying Sanskrit. If not, begin in right earnest. It is very necessary to understand the scriptures.

I am enclosing a photograph wanted by you. It's only for your personal use.

I shall be glad to hear from you occasionally.

With love and best wishes,

Yours affectionately,

Prabuddhananda



Vedanta Society of Northern California

2323 VALLEJO STREET • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94123

February 11, 1985

My dear Dattatreya,

I was very glad to hear from you after quite a long time and to know that you are doing much better now, and also that you are being looked after very well by everyone at the Belur Math. It is very good that you are strictly following the doctor's instructions, especially with regard to lifting heavy weight. Gradually the body will be able to make new adjustments and you will be doing many things which you are not able to do now. More than that, you have a very positive attitude to what has happened, and that in itself is a big help. For a sincere soul like yourself there is Sri Guru Maharaj who more than compensates for such setbacks. Let us take refuge in Him who is our all in all, and serve Him to the best of our capacity.

You have very kindly asked about my health. So far through His grace the body is giving good service. Except for very occasional cold etc., I'm doing fairly well.

The Lord's service here is going on as usual. Now we are getting ready for Shivaratri and Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, and in March we are going to have our annual business meeting. Then comes our retreat in Shanti Ashrama, where, as you may know, Swami Turiyanandaji started a retreat center at Swamiji's bidding, and led a very intensive spiritual life as long as he was here. We go there once a year and hold a day-long program. Then comes our May retreat in Olema which is more or less like our Utsavas in our Indian Centers. We put up a big tent and hold meetings there. During that time our Sunday School enacts a drama. It is usually written by one of our members. This time the theme is the story of the beginnings of the Benaras Home of Service. The children who take part are very young, but still they do their best.

I'm herewith sending a small gift for you. I hope it will be of some use. Please acknowledge receipt.

With love and good wishes,

Affectionately,

Prabuddhananda



Vedanta Society of Northern California

2323 VALLEJO STREET • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94123

Sri Vijaya, 1988

My dear Dattatreya,

On this holy occasion of the worship of Sri Vijaya, please accept my love, greetings, and best wishes. I pray to the blissful Mother that She may manifest Herself in our hearts, which alone brings peace, pure love, and fearlessness. May She be always with us as our guide and support.

We worshipped the Divine Mother on the Vijaya Day with songs, chants, and meditation. The devotees also offered flowers individually. Prasad was served at the end of the program. As usual everything went off very well bringing joy to everyone of us.

Kitty visited us again this year. He was in the San Francisco Bay area for two weeks or so. We had eight bhajan sessions in different places. He was a roaring success here. Everyone seemed to like him and his music. Many have asked him to come again. He could collect a sizeable amount for his school also. It's all very well deserved. No magic about it. B.C. Ramakrishna was also with us for a few days recently. Needless to say, it is a great joy to meet and talk with such dear friends.

I was glad to get your last year's Vijaya letter and to know of your trip to Bangalore and other places in South India. It's very good to know that you could manage the whole trip with your back problem. You have very kindly asked me when I'll be visiting India. The simple answer is, whenever Sri Guru Maharaj takes me there. Let us wait and see what happens.

With love and good wishes,

Affectionately,

Prabuddhananda



Vedanta Society of Northern California

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Dear Sukhatmananda, and Dattatreya,

Recd. 10/12/85 Sri Vijaya 85

Please accept my love and greetings on this occasion of the worship of the Divine Mother in Her various aspects. We had our Sri Durga Puja on the Vijaya Dasami Day. We worshipped the Mother Kali in Sri Ramakrishna with a simple worship, singing, and a long meditation until mid-night. We went to Sacramento for Sri Jagaddhatri's worship. Now we are slowly getting ready for our Holy Mother's birthday. Thus the Mother is giving us the opportunity to remember Her in all these different ways. May Her blessings be on each one of us.

Thank you for your loving Vijaya greetings.

Sukhatmananda, someone told me that you had gone to the Himalayas for tapasya. So, I did not send my Vijaya letter to you. It's good to know that you are enjoying your stay in Belur Math.

Dattatreya, I was very glad to know that your physical condition had improved, and that you were able to sit for a longer time during the Mother's worship. I'm sorry I delayed sending my greetings to you. It's very kind of you to have written first. I received your letter of 29th July acknowledging the notebook sent through Swami Aparananda. Yes, it would be very nice if you are granted sannyas this coming year. Please give me that good news as soon as you come to know of it.

My health is fine so far through the grace of the Mother. Here is a story, which I hope you will like.

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints and noticed that many times along the path there was only one set of footprints in the sand. He also noticed that this happened during the lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him, so he questioned the Lord, "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you would walk with me all the way, but I noticed that during the most troublesome times of my life, there was only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, when I needed you the most you deserted me."

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you." (AUTHOR UNKNOWN)

With love and good wishes,

*Affectionately,
Prabuddhananda*



Vedanta Society of Northern California

2323 VALLEJO STREET • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94123

Sri Vijaya, 1987

My dear Dattatreya,

On this holy occasion of Sri Vijaya, please accept my loving namaskars, greetings, and best wishes. I pray to the Mother that She may graciously fill our hearts with Her effulgent presence, which alone brings peace and joy. May She grant each one of us enough strength to serve Her children effectively.

I was glad to receive your letter of 31st October 1986. I had heard from other sources also that you went from Chandigarh to Kankhal as a parivrajaka. Such things happen in the lives of monks all over. There's no point in taking it seriously, as long as we are true to our ideal.

Trust your headache and backache are under control and you are able to carry on your normal duties all right. Please give your news occasionally.

Through Her grace I am doing well so far.

With love and good wishes,

Affectionately,

Prabuddhananda



Vedanta Society of Northern California

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With love and good wishes,

*Affectionately,
Prabuddhananda*



Vedanta Society of Northern California
2323 VALLEJO STREET • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94123

April 25, 1984.

My dear Dattakaya,

I was very glad to receive your letter of 13th March and to know that you were blessed with Brahmacharya Diksha by our Rev. President Maharaj on the birthday of Sri Gurm Maharaj.

You are a worthy child of Sri Gurm Maharaj. That is why He has made you an instrument in His work. Let us always remember that we eternally belong to Him, whatever may be our mental condition. That relationship does not depend upon whether we are good or bad, pure or impure. He is all grace. His grace makes everyone pure just like the philosopher's stone. Let us give our all to Him in every way.

I have a suggestion. Please memorize all the Brahmacharya mantras and remember them and then. It will help greatly. (You must have already done this. This is only a reminder).

It is too bad, you are still having pain. Be careful. Follow the doctor's instructions. Pray to Sri Gurm Maharaj to lift you up from all this. May He give you comfort and strength. He is our all in all. Let us go to Him for everything.

I am doing well so far. Our activities are going on as usual.

With love and fond wishes, Affectionately,
Prabuddhananda.

Sri Vijaya, 1991

Dear Dattu,

Please accept my love and good wishes on this holy occasion of Sri Vijaya. May the Divine Mother bless us all with purity, love, and devotion.

I received your letter long back. According to your request, I'm sending a photograph of the Holy Mother to Swami Sridharanandaji through our pravrajikas who are visiting India this fall. You wanted a negative of the picture that I sent to you for making copies for devotees. I shall try to send it also through them.

Trust your back is behaving better. However, please be careful. I'm doing well.

With love and good wishes,

Affectionately,

Prabuddhananda

SWAMI ATMAJNANANANDA, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhanandaji

My association with Swami Prabuddhanandaji goes back to my earliest days in Southern California. I joined the monastery in Trabuco Canyon in 1981 and had the opportunity to see Maharaj whenever he came to Hollywood to speak. He must have visited us in Trabuco during that period, but I remember him more from the few times I saw him at the Hollywood Temple. The visits to Hollywood were not that many, and I did not have much chance to interact with him on a personal level at that time. But, even from a distance, it was impossible not to notice and be impressed by his very dignified, calm, and peaceful nature.

In 1996 Swami Swahanandaji requested me to go to the Washington, DC area to help start the new center there. Since the property we purchased had only a small house on a lot of over five acres, it was assumed that we would one day construct our own building or temple there. So Swami Swahanandaji suggested that, before I start for the East Coast, I make a trip to Northern California to take my leave of the swamis and also look at the centers in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Sacramento to get ideas about buildings, shrines, etc. Accordingly, Swami Harinamananda (then a newly joined brahmachari named Prasun) and I began the road trip to Northern California to visit the three centers there. This was really my first opportunity to have personal contact with Swami Prabuddhanandaji, and I found him to be exceedingly gracious and loving. He made all arrangements for our stay and really made us feel at home in the monastery there.

Once I was settled in the East Coast, I had no opportunity to see Swami Prabuddhanandaji again for many years, with the exception of one or two memorial services and the like. But for a long time I had been pestering him to come to our center for a weekend and give a retreat. Despite his poor health, he himself called one day to

inform me of his willingness to come. The retreat was held the weekend of June 5th and 6th, 2010 and was, not to exaggerate, unforgettable. It was partly what he said, but more the quality of the man, his gentleness, his conviction, his compassionate and loving nature. The spiritual atmosphere and joy that were created that weekend were experienced by all the devotees fortunate enough to attend. Swamiji's topic was "The Art of Cultivating the Mind," and he spoke of the need to prepare the mind for meditation and spiritual practice. While I don't remember all of the details of that retreat, his main theme was that we place all of our emphasis on techniques of meditation, etc., but fail to work at purifying and refining the instrument we use for meditation, namely the mind. We spend a great deal of time thinking about spiritual truths, we put great effort into controlling our thoughts at the time of meditation, we try our best to practice detachment, contentment, forbearance, to open our hearts to love of God and our fellow beings, often with only mixed results. And the reason is that we overlook the most important element of the equation, the mind.

After that, Swamiji very kindly invited me to speak at two of the Olema Retreats. Once again, he was extremely gracious toward me and unstinting in his appreciation for my talks (not that they were anything special). While we all like to receive praise for what we do, what impressed me most was his perfect guilelessness and almost childlike exuberance. If he received even a single comment from one of the attendants who enjoyed the retreat, he was so happy to relay the news to me. I am not sure I am explaining his attitude very well, but it was something I have not seen in many of our sadhus or in people in general.

Not long after my second Olema Retreat, we heard that he might have only a few months left to live, though he actually lived another two or so years after that. Swami Brahmarupanandaji and I did not want to wait until his health deteriorated further, so we arranged to visit Maharaj as early as possible. That was probably the most intimate visit we had, because Swamiji was extremely generous with his time and spent about an

hour with just the two of us in his room reminiscing about his early days. Since Swami Brahmarupanandaji hailed from the same area and had studied in the same school (though some years later), Swami Prabuddhanandaji shared with us some of his boyhood memories. He did not seem very interested in talking about his own poor health or impending end, and was happy just to relate some of his cherished memories from the past. I felt very fortunate to get to see Swamiji in that mood, and was also impressed at his perfect detachment from his own health.

That was my last visit with Swamiji. We, of course, heard all about the wonderful experiences that he had toward the end and his great devotion to Mother. This too shows the great depths of his soul, for he was able to cultivate that tremendous devotion without making the slightest show of it until the final days. It seems to me that this tremendous devotion accompanied by a perfect absence of show were qualities that were most dominant in Swami Prabuddhanandaji, and the ones which had the greatest magnetic power, whether his devotees and disciples knew it or not.

Though my contact with Swami Prabuddhanandaji was relatively limited, I always felt a special bond with him and feel privileged that I was able to receive the love and affection that I did from him.

SWAMIYUKTATMANANDA
RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA CENTER OF NEW YORK
Glimpses of Rev. Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj

Whenever I think of Swami Prabuddhanandaji, his calm, soft-spoken nature and kind disposition come to my mind. He always treated everyone with respect and affection. I saw him first at Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama (now Ramakrishna Math), Bangalore, in 1980. I had joined the monastery two years earlier. Rev. Swami Yatiswaranandaji's book *Meditation and Spiritual Life* had just been released in 1979, and I was feasting on the book during my leisure moments in the Ashrama. We had heard about Rev. Prabuddhanandaji's close association with Rev. Yatiswaranandaji. We had heard from senior monks and senior devotees of the Ashrama about Rev. Prabuddhanandaji's loving nature. Though away in the US since 1970, he kept in touch with most of them through his loving greeting cards and gifts that he sent them regularly.

One evening in 1980 during Rev. Prabuddhanandaji's stay in Bangalore Ashrama, some of us monastics went to his room after supper, sat at his feet, and asked him if he could tell us something about Rev. Swami Yatiswaranandaji. He gladly agreed and narrated one incident after another. It all started at 9:30 pm, and when it was over it was already 1:30 am. None of us was aware of the passage of time. (All that we heard from Rev. Prabuddhanandaji that night is now available in print in the book *Swami Yatiswarananda As We Knew Him*, a wonderful publication by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai.) Rev. Prabuddhanandaji's deep gratitude to Rev. Yatiswaranandaji was evident as he spoke about the great Swami.

Thereafter, I met Swami Prabuddhanandaji during a few of his visits to India. They were almost always brief interactions, mostly because of my own shy nature. I was content to watch him from a distance and be around him whenever possible.

Rev. Prabuddhanandaji visited Bangalore in 2005. I was then at the Mysore Ashrama, waiting for my US visa. I went to Bangalore on the day of his arrival and accompanied a

good number of Ashrama monastics and devotees to meet him at the airport. During his stay at the Ashrama I had a brief interview with him. He was happy to learn that I had been assigned to the Vedanta Center of St. Petersburg as its minister and was waiting for my US visa. For me, it was a joy as usual to be in his holy presence.

Bangalore Ashrama has a beautiful shrine dedicated to Holy Mother. It is the room where she stayed during her visit to the city in 1911. I have heard that whenever he visited Bangalore, Rev. Prabuddhanandaji spent long hours in meditation in the Mother's shrine.

After I arrived in St. Petersburg, Florida, in May 2006, he would call me once in a while from San Francisco to know how I was getting on at the center. He invited me to speak at the Memorial Day program at the Olema Retreat in 2007. That was my first visit to San Francisco. Rev. Prabuddhanandaji himself gave me a tour of the new and old temples, and accompanied me to some places of interest in the city. The Memorial Day retreat provided me a chance again to witness his unruffled disposition. The retreat had about 800 to 900 participants. Before the beginning of any session it was a while before the chatter died down. I remember how Rev. Prabuddhanandaji stood before the mike patiently waiting for everyone to be silent without making an announcement for it. The noise did not seem to disturb him.

It was very painful for me to receive Rev. Prabuddhanandaji's health bulletin of September 18, 2011, according to which doctors had diagnosed him with lung cancer and had given him only six months to live. I went to San Francisco on October 16, 2011 and spent four days with him. By Mother's grace the alternative treatment that he had opted for proved effective, extending his life by a few more years. The next time I saw him was in June 2012 when I visited Sacramento center for a few days and went one day to San Francisco.

It was a blessing for me to be invited by Rev. Prabuddhanandaji to the annual retreat at Shanti Ashrama in 2013. That was my first visit to the sacred place. His health was not

very good, so he did not attend the retreat. But I could have brief sessions with him in his room at the monastery. To be in his holy presence was all that mattered to me.

I could not visit him again before he passed away on July 2, 2014, but I used to pray to Holy Mother every day to take care of him.

SWAMI YOGATMANANDA, VEDANTA SOCIETY OF PROVIDENCE

(Excerpt from an email)

I was not privileged to have a long association with Rev Prabuddhanandaji, but whatever little opportunity Thakur gave me. I do cherish the memory of those blessed moments. Surely, you know that it is not possible to capture the impact of that holy association in words; but I will take this opportunity to soak myself again in that memory-nectar.

(Sandhya Kunnatur's transcription of the talks given by Swami Yogatmananda and Swami Aparananda during Swami Prabuddhananda's memorial service in 2014.)

Swami Yogatmananda

When it comes to conveying the great impact that a person of Swami Prabuddhananda's stature had and his eminence is to be described, we feel the poverty of words evermore. It is a matter of experience and when you try to put it somehow in words, you feel that it is not adequate at all.

I first heard of Swami Prabuddhananda in India. However, I didn't get an opportunity to see him while I was there. I had heard from some senior monks and mentors about his very lofty monastic qualities and the great things one can learn from him. That created a beautiful mental picture in me. I came to USA in 2001, and I first got to see him the very same year at Providence. He had come for a couple of days mainly to see Swami Sarvagatanandaji. Then, the mental picture I had formed got further enhanced, filled with colors and filled with life. I could see that what I had heard was very true. In fact, what I had heard was an understatement. He gave an informal talk on Tuesday to various devotees assembled about spiritual life. He talked on what he had learnt from other great swamis like Tyagishanandaji and Yatiswaranandaji. The next year, I got to come to San Francisco. It was just beyond my expectations that such a senior swami would come to the airport to receive me and when I mentioned this to him, he said, "It is a matter of joy. It is a matter of honor to come to the airport to receive a brother

monk.” So, it was really quite overwhelming. He cooked for me, he prepared upama. He described how various types of upama are prepared. He also took me to different places in San Francisco.

The main program was in Shanti Ashrama. I went there and saw how meticulously he was attending to every work without feeling tense at all. So many things were going on and he was maintaining such a calm demeanor. Things were going on very smoothly. He was talking to me and explaining many things. Specially, he told me how Swami Trigunatita made those beautiful trails. He told how Swami Trigunatita once decided to make a trail to the highest point in Shanti Ashrama. He said, “What a great personality! We think one day and after six months start acting on it. Swami Trigunatita thought ‘yes, it should be done’ and by late afternoon more than half of it was already done.” He then took me to the Old Temple telling, “They are really a different category of people. You know, we think about construction and then it goes on dragging for months and years. First, get this permission, first think about whether to build this thing or not. Here, Swami Trigunatita got the discussion going in the board in the morning and by the afternoon he had purchased the land.” It was a great inspiration for me to see how there is no gap between spiritual life and secular life. In fact, spiritual life means bringing spirituality into what is considered as secular. There is actually nothing secular as such. We draw a line of separation and then what happens is that the secular becomes just lifeless matter and the spiritual becomes meaningless talk. It is when these two things really lose that line of demarcation—when what this spirit is conscious of gets expressed through action—that is where we say there is spirituality. One of the sentences from Sister Nivedita’s introduction to Swami Vivekananda’s Complete Works that I remember in this context, “One great contribution of Swami Vivekananda is to remove this fictitious line of differentiation between secular and spiritual. Everything is sacred.” It is this idea that I saw in Swami Prabuddhanandaji’s work here. He was a serene person. I had read in Swami Vivekananda’s Karma Yoga that a turbulent man, a restless man, one who seemingly runs about here and there, accomplishes very little.

Only a person who is calm, serene, peaceful, only that person does work. I came again for the Memorial Day weekend retreat at Olema, an event that was something unique in United States. A huge gathering of devotees had assembled. He was so calm and peaceful and things were flowing around him. That ideal of Bhagavad Gita—“You remain unattached, you are not working at all. Works are going on. You are established in the Self, you are established in complete peace”—that was very visible there.

There is another thing that I tried to learn from him but have not found it very easy to practice. That is, to be very disciplined in everything you do. This requires the capability of saying, no. Saying no, but without being offensive. That is the art of saying no. In Swami Yatiswarananda’s book, *Meditation and Spiritual Life*, you read that a spiritual aspirant has to say, no. What happens if you are weak? We know in our conscience that we should say no, but instead of saying no, a weak yes comes out. Instead of a strong no, a weak yes comes out. This has been a struggle for me. It feels like if I say no, it will come out in an offensive way, in an angry manner and so forth. By the time I am thinking how to say no, the passing time brings out a weak and tentative yes. That makes things very difficult for me: how to now manage too many “yes”s. But here, I saw how to say no without being in any sense disagreeable, very calmly, but with that definite sternness, “no.” That is certainly something I feel we need to learn from the way he acted.

Once he had agreed to come to Providence to give a retreat and I was trying to extend his stay by one more day. He said that, “I have to go that day to Olema. The next day I have to give class there, so I will leave on the scheduled day.” I said, “Well, you can give the class at Olema even if you start the next day. You take the early morning flight and you will reach in time for the class. The flight would arrive at 9 a.m and you will have ample time to arrive at Olema.” His way of saying no was, “I am not Ranganathananda. I am Prabuddhananda.” This was his way of conveying that he will not be doing all this; he needs to go on this particular day and that is it—that cut the conversation right there. Yet, he was so amicable and in the retreats he answered the

questions and treated the topics so beautifully. I remember so many things he told and which in my mind was a wonderful teaching for me. A question keeps on cropping up, “How much spiritual progress have we made? We have been doing spiritual practices for so many years. How much did I achieve?” We are human beings and want to measure everything. These things are not open to regular measurement in pounds, feet, etc. He told a nice story about how the monkeys destroyed the garden while trying to help the gardener in watering the plants. They were friends with a gardener and the gardener had to go somewhere. The monkeys said, “Don’t worry, we will water the plants.” “Are you sure you will?” “Absolutely, it is just watering, is it not? We monkeys can do it.” The gardener came back after a couple of days or so and saw that all plants had been destroyed. He asked the monkeys about it and they said, “We were watering everyday as you told. Not only that, we went one step further and then just to make sure that the water is reaching there or not, we uprooted the plants and saw whether the water reaches there or not.” So, trying to measure spiritual progress would have that kind of an impact. So, do your practice but don’t try to measure. So, friends, let us try to imbibe that great person. It is going to be an immensely helpful spiritual exercise for us.

SWAMI APARANANDA, VEDANTA SOCIETY OF BERKELEY

Now, tell me, how to forget him? Very difficult. It is the one big problem with all of us. Whom we love, respect and from whom we get something for our own life, when we miss that person, we feel very bad. But what can be done? But still one thing that we feel very grateful to such a soul is that in the midst of our busy life, there is every chance of forgetting a great ideal of our life; i.e., the spiritual aspect of our growth. Because of this we find the sages and the saints, the persons who carry the banner of spiritual wisdom everywhere, they establish the reality of spiritual truths everywhere. We are monks and we embrace this type of life. The life of a monk is a serious type of life, a very serious type of life. These souls establish the reality of the spiritual truth. Not only that, they open the way to approach the divine and explain the truth in a manner that is easily understandable by all. Their interpretation of the truth goes very deep into human beings, and appeals to not only reason and emotion, but something deeper than that.

My contact with Swami Prabuddhananda lasted for many years and my memory is full of so many events. If we begin to relate our personal reminiscences, there is no end. So, I thought, let me note down, my personal ideas about him and read them to you so that I can finish it within the allotted time.

In 1979, when I was staying at the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, as an assistant swami, I visited the Bay Area and spent several days in San Francisco. Swami Prabuddhanandaji welcomed me with an open heart. Long back, sometime in 1966 or 1967, when I was in Delhi, I had met Swami Prabuddhananda for the first time. After my arrival in the USA, I naturally wanted to know about many things from our own swamis. I remember vividly that during that visit to the Bay Area, I spent a few days at the monastery in San Francisco and some days at the Olema retreat. Swami Prabuddhananda was very kind to also arrange my visit to see many important spots in

San Francisco. On one occasion, I remember, Swami Prabuddhananda along with another monastic member came with me to board BART from San Francisco to Fremont. Then, we returned to San Francisco again. Beginning from May 1985, when I arrived at the Vedanta Society of Berkeley as swami in charge, I had many good occasions to meet Swami Prabuddhananda and talk to him about our Vedanta activities in the West. I was very much impressed to see how he was so open and kindhearted towards all people. I personally appreciated his outlook of carrying the banner of Vedantic knowledge to everyone everywhere. One of my favorite occasions of being with him was at the annual retreats at Olema starting from 1985 until the year I fell sick. I would love to go to the Shanti Ashrama program every year. I enjoyed his spiritual companionship very well. I personally enjoyed attending all the retreats at Shanti Ashrama for many years.

Another aspect of Swami Prabuddhananda's personality that I noticed was that whenever he would visit our Berkeley celebrations, four times a year, he would enjoy them immensely. He was so kind to talk to all the devotees and all the devotees would also feel very blessed upon seeing his presence on these occasions. I am very grateful to Swami Prabuddhananda because whenever I would request him something, he would agree to it. During the time when he wasn't physically well, Swami Prabuddhananda would still come to attend the Berkeley celebrations.

I also observed the other side of his personality that he was a strict follower of spiritual life. He would give great importance to following the rigid rules and regulations of living a religious life, which I presume he got from Sw. Yatiswarananda, a very senior monk of our Order. Many of you know that Swami Prabuddhananda joined the Ramakrishna Math at Bangalore and stayed with Swami Yatiswarananda for many years and learnt many unknown and important aspects of our spiritual life.

Let me close with one of the hymns from Guru Stotram which I love very much.

Dhyanamulam Guru Murti

Pujamulam Guru Padam

Mantra Mulam Guru Vakyam

Moksha Mulam Guru Kripa

We meditate. The best aspect of meditation is to meditate on the guru, the spiritual teacher. We perform worship of deities. The best way of performing worship is to offer something at the holy feet of the guru. We learn many mantras and other things from various sources. But the few words that come from the guru, the teacher, are the real mantras for the rest of our life. We seek liberation, salvation and for that we go here and there and we do lot of things in our life. But the grace of the guru is the only way to reach the ultimate goal.

SWAMI TYAGANANDA, BOSTON

Memories of Swami Prabuddhananda

My earliest memory of Swami Prabuddhanandaji goes back about 35 years ago, when the second big Convention of the Ramakrishna Order was held at Belur Math in 1980. It was a big occasion with about 10,000 devotee delegates and close to 500 monks. Many of the monks in centers outside India were also visiting, among whom was Swami Prabuddhanandaji. That was the first time many of the young monks of my generation got to see him.

There is an interesting incident I remember from those days. When I was doing pranam to one of the elderly, retired monks in Belur Math, he looked at me carefully and said, “I know who you are. You are Prabuddhananda’s younger brother!” I was taken aback by that confident declaration. In a way, yes, I was his monastic brother, but the old swami didn’t mean it in that sense. When I said, “No, that isn’t true,” the old swami refused to take my word for it. He said, in Bengali, “You think I’ll believe you just because you deny it? I know it’s true by just looking at you!” There was no point in arguing, so I smiled and left the room. Just to make it clear, 35 years ago I did have hair on top my head.

Years later, when I mentioned this to Swami Prabuddhanandaji, he had a big smile on his face. He asked me which part of the country I came from. When I told him I was born in Karnataka, his home state, he smiled again, opened his arms wide, and hugged me, saying, “Then you are one of us!” I had arrived from India only 6 months earlier and his warm welcome and acceptance at once put me at ease. This was a couple of days before the Memorial Day Retreat in 1999.

There is another incident I remember from the same visit. In Olema I was so impressed with the hard work of the devotees and volunteers in making all arrangements, and doing it so well, that I couldn’t help expressing my deep appreciation to Swami Prabuddhanandaji. He was happy, of course, but I think he also felt that my praise was

too effusive, and to inject some reality-check into me, he said matter-of-factly, “Every place, every center, has its own challenges and difficulties.

There is one picture you get from the outside, but from inside you get a different picture, because you know the practical problems.” This is so true, with regard to not only the Vedanta centers but every place, every family, every group. The “outside” view and the “inside” view are generally different, and that is only natural.

My last visit to him was in April 2014. He was ailing then and was mostly confined to his room. That gave me a chance to spend longer hours with him. He shared with me the kind of challenges and difficulties he had faced in life. He said that when he was asked to take charge of the center in Bangalore he was completely unprepared, because it was so unexpected. He said, “I didn’t know anything. I thought to myself, what am I going to do? I prayed to Sri Ramakrishna and completely surrendered to him.” The same thing happened when, not too long after that, he was suddenly asked to move to the United States to take charge of the Vedanta Society in San Francisco. Again, he was taken by surprise and again he felt he wasn’t prepared. He said he prayed to Sri Ramakrishna and surrendered to him. With his eyes filled with tears, he told me, everything that had happened in his life was due to Sri Ramakrishna’s grace. “I just gave myself to him and to Holy Mother,” he said. Without them, we are nobodies – that’s what he told me. When I asked him to bless me, he put his hands on my head and said, “Give yourself completely to Sri Ramakrishna and Mother.”

I feel I am most fortunate to have known Swami Prabuddhanandaji and to have had the chance to learn so many invaluable lessons from him. The best way I can show my gratitude to him is by putting into practice the ideals that he embodied, which I hope to do the rest of my life. I end now with what he told me the last time I saw him – I can still picture him in my mind and hear his voice – he said, “Give yourself completely to Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother.”



Swami Tyagananda with Swamiji

SWAMI SARVADEVANANDA, HOLLYWOOD

About Revered Maharaj: he has made a deep impact in my mind by his wonderful, austere, dedicated, monastic life.

In the center where Rev. Prabuddhanandaji moved, walked, and spent a major part of his life dedicated to the cause of spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Vedanta, naturally you will find his memory everywhere and can feel his physical presence also. In one way it will be a feeling of void, but in another sense it can be a feeling of direct touch of his divine presense in every place you move and work in the center. His life was one of relentless service to Thakur and Thakur's work. To love and respect someone is to follow in their footsteps. In that sense you will always be in touch with Revered Maharaj.

SWAMI PARITUSHTANANDA, NEW YORK

As requested, here under my memories about Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj (SP). I was at Belur Math for 23 years. 2 years (1985-87) at the training center and 21 years (1987-2008) at the headquarters office. When Swami Nirmalatmanandaji was posted to Brazil, I took over from him. At that time Swami Smaranananandaji was General Secretary who was close to SP. In his invitation Swami Smaranananandaji came to USA in 2000. After that when Swami Prabuddhanandaji (SP) went to India, Swami Smaranananandaji and I went to the airport to receive him. SP went to India with a group of devotees. I first saw him that time. Do not remember anything special that time. When SP came back to USA, I also went to the airport to see him off. Again when he visited (do not remember the year) I went to receive him and see him off at the airport which was one of the duties of that office. During one of his visits to India, he had to be admitted to our hospital in Calcutta for UTI treatment. At that time Swami Ranganathanandaji was also there for his treatment. Jitesh Vallabh was visiting India with SP.

I came to this country in March 2008. In the summer I visited Hollywood and Sacramento. In 2009 at Swami Sarvagatanandaji's memorial meeting most of the swamis in America came to Boston/ Providence. SP also came and was accommodated at the Providence center. The night before the memorial meeting when all the swamis were taking dinner, he noticed me from a distance and after the dinner instead of calling me, he himself came to me and expressed his joy. I was overwhelmed by his sweet behavior. So senior to me but no ego, he came to greet me for my coming to the USA. He invited me to visit SF. When I told him that I went to Sacramento in summer of 2008, he asked why I did not visit SF that time. I said nobody directed me in this regard. He said, "You could call me so that I can chalk out a program for you." This much during the Providence visit.

Then in 2010 during the summer was the first time I went to SF from Portland, Oregon. I reached SF at about 8 in the morning. I was so surprised to see SP and Vedanandaji at the airport to receive me. It was embarrassing for me. He was so senior to me and in the early hours he came to receive me. On our way to center he showed me some places of interest. Next day with a devotee Mohan he again showed me some places of interest. Among them the Crookedest Street, Fisherman's Wharf, Coit Tower (where we three went up to top and saw the city) . Before that he himself showed me round the center and explained its activities.

In 2010 Swami Aparanandaji went to India for one month in summer and requested me to stay at Berkeley center during his absence. I also agreed to that. So after spending three days at the SF center, I went to Berkeley. SP dropped me at the Berkeley center on his way to Lake Tahoe; SP requested Aparanandaji to send me one day to Lake Tahoe with a devotee. So one day with Jitesh Vallabh I went to Lake Tahoe. I reached there when SP was giving the morning class. I sat near him. After class he walked with a group of devotees in the ashrama campus. I also followed them. Many questions were put by the devotees and SP was also giving the answers during that time. One devotee said to SP, "Swami, in future Google will be like god, we will get answers to many of our questions." SP said, "Why in future? Google is now itself God." You will get the answers to many of your questions." After lunch I had to return to Berkeley. SP was there to see me off in the hot summer until our car had disappeared from his view. From 2010 to 2014, every year I used to visit SF during summer and stayed at the center 2/3 days. In 2014, 1st May I came to SF for a day just to see him when I heard that he was not keeping well. I reached SF in the morning and in the same day took a red-eye flight for New York. He was the attraction for me for my visit to SF. After his passing away I did not visit the center. During his memorial meeting, I went to SF but did not stay at the center.

Every time he used to give me some time to talk with him. He used to inquire about the old devotees of our center. He was very soft. It seems to me he always lived with Thakur, Ma and Swamiji and their messages. He did not talk much. Long pause sometimes. But that silence was more eloquent. Maybe during that time he used to think about the Holy Trio. He used to give tips about administrative matters as I am new to this country and had no idea about how to run the center. Once I saw him doing puja at Narayana Gowda's house. I came from Sacramento with Swami

Prapannanandaji. I have never seen this type of puja—so devotional. When he was offering flowers with two hands, as if he is seeing Thakur, Ma and Swamiji in front of him and offering flowers at their feet.

Every year during my short stay at the SF center, at my request SP permitted me to do puja in the monastic shrine. He was so affectionate. Every time he used to tell me, “You came to the airport with Swami Smaranananandaji to receive me.” His memory was so sharp. Even when he was seriously ill, he used to receive all the news about the SF center and its activities and guided the swamis, nuns and devotees. In 2013 when I was visiting SF, one day in a wheelchair he went to see the celebration kitchen to see the food arrangement for Guru Purnima following day. He lived the life.











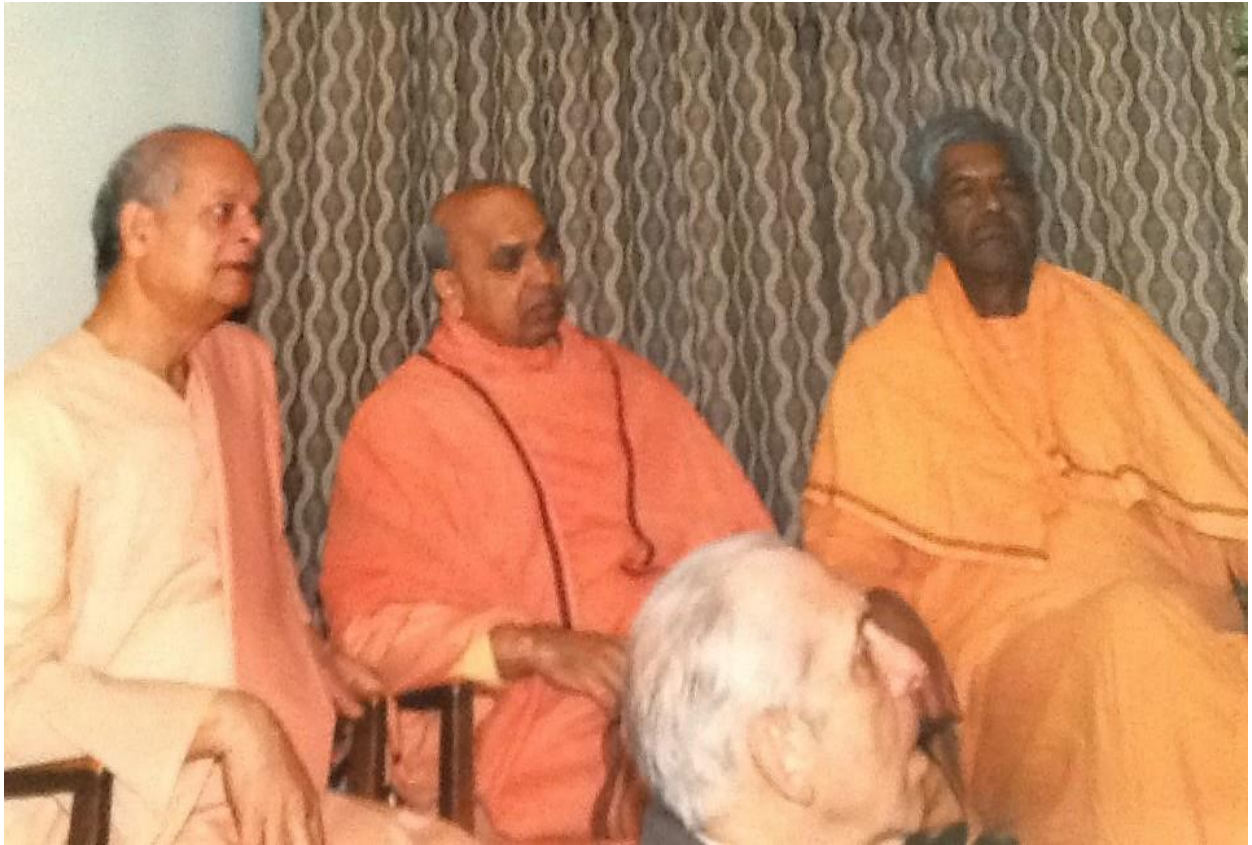


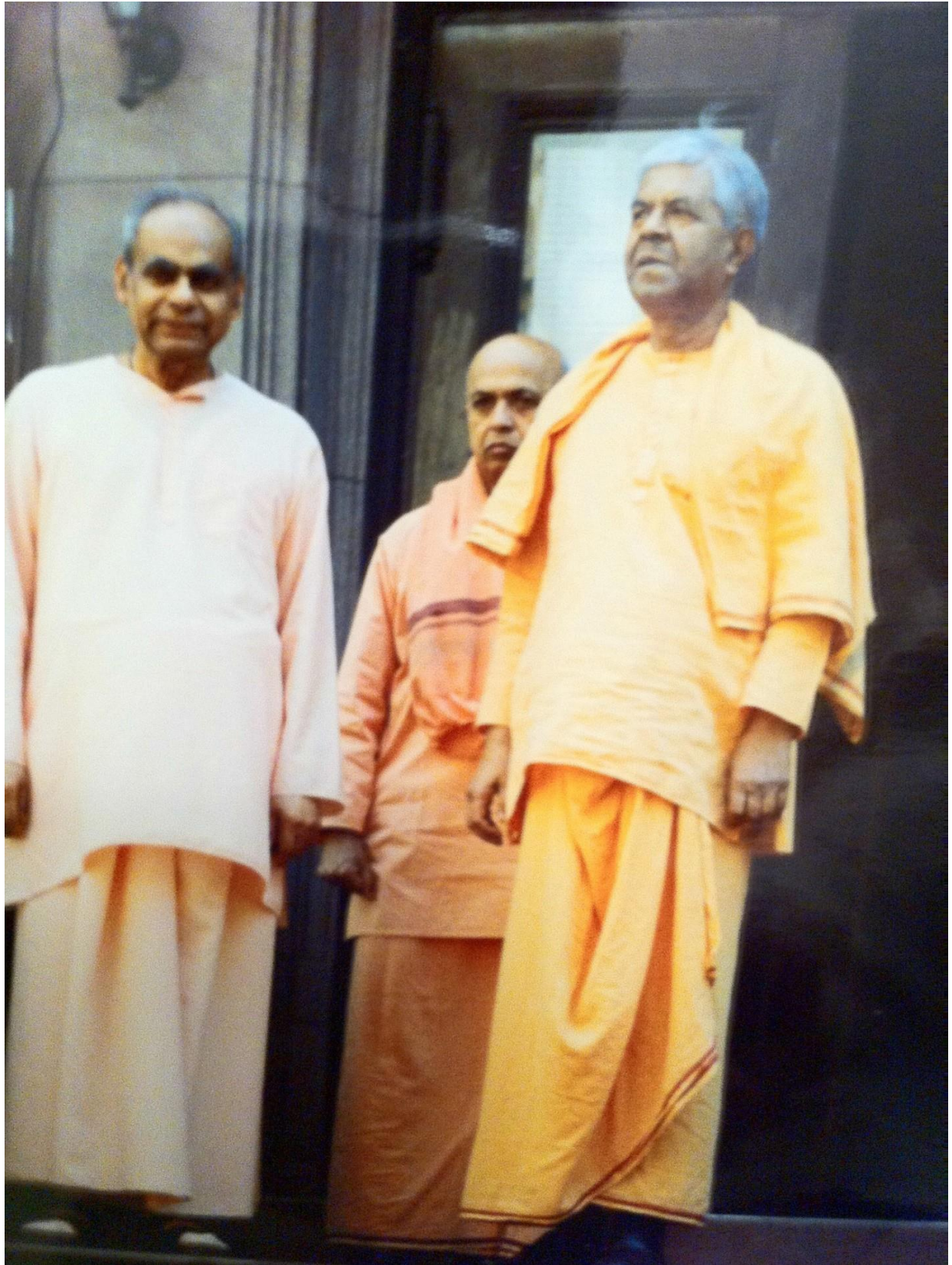
















SWAMI MAHAYOGANANDA, HOLLYWOOD

My association with him was very important to me. I lived for two years in San Francisco before joining the Order, and would go from time to time to meet with him and receive his guidance.

One of the lines that remains with me is his advice to me when I was going for a retreat at Olema. I later learned that he used to advise other retreatants similarly (from the video shown at the memorial): "Just you and God. Forget your job, your home, family, everything—just you, and God."

When I was sent to Berkeley during Swami Aparanandaji's illness, I was asked to give the Sunday lecture every Sunday. I was feeling not quite up to the task, and requested Maharaj if there was any possibility that he could send one of the monastics, like Vedanandaji, to take one lecture per month at least. But he said it wasn't possible. Then I said, "I guess then, for me, it's sink or swim!" and he replied, "No sinking! Only swimming!" That kind of encouragement was typical of him.

I really don't have lots of great stories about Maharaj. I just remember a great feeling of support and encouragement to "live the life" as he did so very well. And also, after I became a swami, he let me know by his loving welcome and behaviour that he accepted me as a brother monk, and appreciated me. That really meant a lot.

Just today I remembered another counsel: It must have been in 1994 or 95. I had just spent a few days in silent retreat at Olema, and I came to report to Reverend Maharaj about my experience. I felt I had had some good experience in meditation, and was eager to tell him about it. Hearing about it, he replied, "That's alright, now go forward!" I was mildly stunned for a moment—what a wonderful power he had to redirect my

mind back to the goal with two words! Let experiences come or not come; don't focus on them, but go forward.

SWAMI ATMAVIDANANDA
RAMAKRISHNA MISSION ASHRAMA, VISAKHAPATNAM
Reminiscences of Srimat Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj

14 January 2016

My contact with Rev Swami Prabuddhanandaji Mj (Sw P from now on) goes back to 1963. Then Sw P was incharge of the Vidyarthi Mandiram, Bangalore. That year the Birth Centenary of Swami Vivekananda the celebrations was spread over 10 days in a massive pendal erected for the purpose in the Ashrama campus with a seating capacity of more than 3000 chairs. Sw P was in charge of pendal-arrangements and being a senior member of Vivekananda Balaka Sangha, I was one of his assistants. That was the first time my contact grew with him intimately. We could see his most composed personality in spite of various challenging situations. In his characteristic style he would say (ta...lo), wai.....t to what ever urgent matters we brought to him. Those words still ring in my ears.

In the year 1964, the Holy Mother's shrine at Bangalore Ashrama was totally renovated. The work had to be done after the shrine was closed. Sri Rajagopal (later Swami Rajeswaranandaji) was in charge and some of us were working for the repainting of the walls, doors and vindows. Work would start after 10:00 pm after closure of the shrine and some days we worked upto 4:30 am next morning. Sw P would come at 11:00 pm and again at 4:30 am to encourage us. He would then attend the morning mangalarati and return to his room. This strict routine of his presence in mangalarati made a lasting impression on me and encouraged me to be very particular for Manalarati after my joining the order wherever I may be or whatever time I go to sleep the previous night.

In 1966 Sw P took over as the president of Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore. Our contact became a daily affair. His interest in all the activities of the Ashrama like Balaka Sangha, daily bhajans in the prayer hall, that were initiated by Rev.

Yatiswaranandaji Mj, strengthened the process. In the year 1969, I joined the Holy Order at Chandigarh. He planned everything like medical checkup, first set of clothes, train tickets and facilitated my journey. Before he left for the USA in 1970, he came to Chandigarh and spent a few days with us. Incidentally Swami Sastranandaji was head of Chandigarh at that time and Swami Sureshanandaji, myself and one more Br Kumaraswami - all previously closely associated with Sw P at Bangalore – were there. So it was a joyous reunion.

In 1976 he came for the first time to India and I was then at Along (Arunachal Pradesh). I came down to stay with him during his visit to Guahati, Shillong and Cherrapunji. Later when ever he came to India, wherever I may be, I would meet him and spend some days in his company. When I was at Ranchi as its head, he not only helped us in setting up a soil testing laboratory for its agricultural training centre, but also visited the centre. Again in the Kishanpur (uttarakhand) and Kadapa (Andhra Pradesh) he arranged some donations for the projects there. He visited Kadapa in September 2010 to inaugurate the renovated and expanded Math building in the company of Swami Sureshanandaji. It was a very tiresome road journey but his love would not care for the strain that was involved. After that he visited a few places in Karnataka and finally left for the USA from Chennai and I went there to see him off. Probably that was his last visit to India and our meeting physically.

I received many letters and there would be always his encouraging words starting with, **Dear Atmavit**. His very sober personality would radiate calm spirituality which we could feel in his presence and even through his letters. His concern for others' welfare and assistance he would extend in all the deserving projects would make everyone as their own person.

In the final illness also, the total detached way he expressed to all of us his real situation was really amazing. No anxiety on his part at all that the end is so near. His letters as you would have seen, would treat his body as an object which belongs to Sri Sri Thakur

and needs to be treated with care as required. Give best care but have no worry about it.

Though every one of us has to leave this world some day, the loss we feel in his absence is tangible. That graceful, benign presence will ever remain in our memories.

Om Shantih Shantih Shantih Harihi Om Tat Sat

Few photographs of Sw P's Kadapa visit in September 2010 are sent herewith.









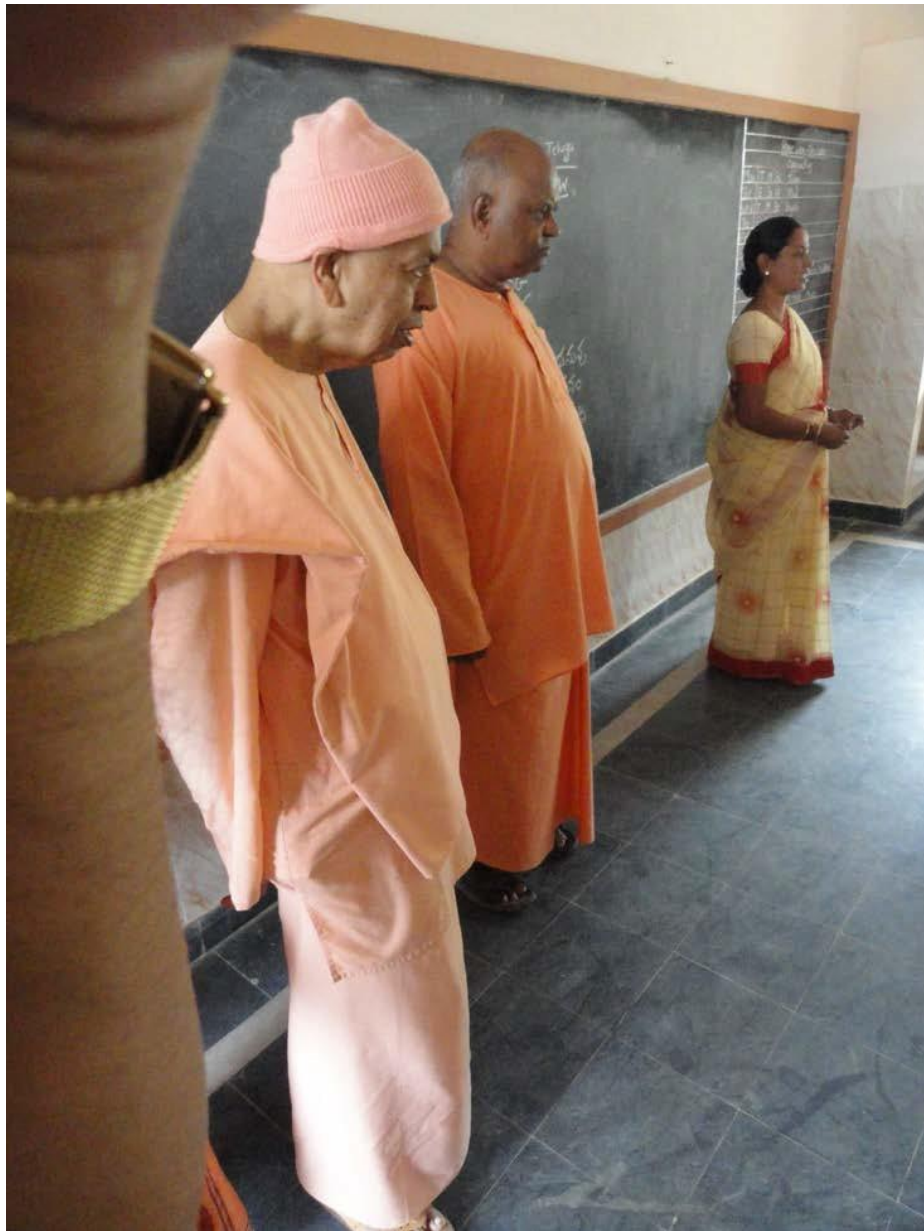
























SWAMI MANISHANANDA, SEATTLE

I had the good fortune to meet him on several occasions in San Francisco, Olema, Seattle and Vancouver. My contact with Swamiji was very meager in comparison to the years that you and others in San Francisco have had. That being the case, I feel like I am carrying coals to Newcastle!

It was the summer of 1971, about a month after I started living at the Vedanta Society in Seattle, that I first met Swami Prabuddhanandaji. It was his initial visit to Seattle. He was the second swami of the Ramakrishna Order that I met, the first being Swami Vividishanandaji, the then head of the Vedanta Society in Seattle. Over the years Swami Prabuddhanandaji visited Seattle several times and each time was a very memorable occasion for all of us.

My first impression of Swami Prabuddhanandaji was that here is a man of steady wisdom as described in the Gita. This initial impression was reinforced every time I met him in subsequent years. I also found that his calm demeanor and measured words were delightfully accompanied by a very refined sense of humor.

I and one other brahmachari took care of Swami Vividishananda without any break of more than a day or two from 1974 until his death in 1980. Many swamis attended his memorial service and stayed on in Seattle for a few days. I am very grateful to Swami Prabuddhanandaji. He brought up the topic that I and the other brahmachari (who later left the order) should get some time off after years of steady nursing. He then told about when he nursed Swami Tyagishanandaji in Bangalore. After the Swami's passing away, he was given two months of leave to visit other centers. Swami Prabuddhanandaji's consideration for us was very much appreciated.

As suggested by Swami Prabuddhanandaji, I was given a month vacation in February 1981. I first went to San Francisco. I had been staying at Olema for a week or so when Prabuddhanandaji returned from India. He told us about the convention at Belur Math and his visit to South India. You most likely know this next story, but good things are

worth repeating! In South India he was asked by a group of monks, “How many people attended the last Memorial Day function at Olema?” He answered that 350 came. The swamis present were impressed and said that 350,000 was really a very good turnout. As Swami Prabuddhanandaji continued with his narrative, a subtle, emerging grin was capturing our attention. It became a genuine full-blown smile as he told us that he replied to those swamis that it was not 350,000 people but 350 period, full stop! Then Swami Prabuddhanandaji told them that although the number is small in America in comparison to the turnouts in India, the quality of the attendees is very good.

During this stay at Olema, one day Swami Prabuddhanandaji asked me to go walking with him. We walked for about 45 minutes. During his trip to India, one of the Olema brothers had been conducting the monastic classes. The topic was Advaita Vedanta and I had attended a couple of classes. On our walk Swamiji asked me how I liked the class. I replied that I liked being with the brothers and discussing philosophy. Then I mentioned to Swamiji that the brother conducting the class had his own type of Advaita. After a short pause, Swami Prabuddhanandaji smiled and said to me, “You have found that out so soon!” I am mentioning this incident for the following reason: Swamiji did not say anything more about this monk’s rather original (and faulty) interpretation of Advaita. Rather, Swamiji told me that this man had always executed the work assigned to him in an efficient and timely manner. We read in spiritual books that we should see the good in people and not dwell on their shortcomings. On my walk that day with Swami Prabuddhanandaji I witnessed theory in practice. It left a deep impression on me.

I visited San Francisco and Olema again in May of 1987. An incident that happened comes to my mind. It occurred on the morning of the annual Memorial Day Retreat at Olema. Swami Prabuddhanandaji and two others, including myself, left the monastery by car and went to the Old Temple to pick up a young man who was living there. His name, as far as I remember, was Rody. Rody had been informed that he must be ready to go at the appointed time. The agreement was that if Rody was not ready, we would

not wait for him. We had a schedule to keep, which included stopping at the San Rafael convent to pick something up that was needed for the program at Olema. When we arrived at the Old Temple, Rody was not ready – he needed 5-10 more minutes. Swami Prabuddhanandaji said that we would go now and not wait for Rody. After a 5 or 10 second pause, Swamiji added, “Rody is young, smart, and resourceful. He will find a way to get to Olema. If we wait for him it will just reinforce his habit of being late, and we ourselves may be late in arriving at Olema.” We left without Rody and headed for San Rafael. After a short stop there, we continued on to Olema, right on schedule! As we pulled into the parking area at Olema we were met by a grinning Rody. He had hitchhiked all the way! Swamiji was all smiles.

Regarding Swami Prabuddhanandaji’s aforementioned sense of humor, I heard the following story from Greg Fields. The annual summer retreat at Lake Tahoe was in session and each day some time for devotional music was scheduled. Greg, guitar in hand, was ready to lead the singing as soon as Swamiji arrived. His guitar case lay open nearby. As Swamiji walked in the room he bent down and dropped a \$1.00 bill into the open guitar case. Everyone laughed!

As mentioned earlier, I admired Swami Prabuddhanandaji’s calm demeanor, measured words, and fine sense of humor. One day I was returning from Olema with Swami Prabuddhanandaji. Greg Fields was driving. On the way Swamiji was interspersing our conversation with some very funny jokes and also humorous true stories. I remember he told us about a trip one summer to the Vedanta group in Honolulu. One devotee, Steve Berg (he originally lived at the Seattle Ashram, but the past 30 years has lived on the Santa Barbara Temple grounds) had also gone to Hawaii for that month. Swamiji was very joyously recounting how Steve saved a lot of money by not renting a car. What did Steve do? He bought an old junker/clunker car for \$30 on arrival in Honolulu, drove it for a month, and then sold it for \$30 before leaving.

In 1982 the Vedanta Society in Seattle purchased a beautiful home across the street from the Society's "Church" building. This would serve as our monastery and guesthouse for men. Our society was buzzing with enthusiasm. Swami Prabuddhanandaji visited not long after the new building was purchased. Several members of the society were very enthusiastically talking to him about the new building and that its exterior walls were made of granite. Swamiji gently reminded this group that a spiritual society is not only houses and properties but, more importantly, should be looked upon as the collective spirituality of all its members.

The times I was in Swami Prabuddhanandaji's company, whether in a group or alone, are cherished experiences. In 2003 I was fortunate to have been invited by the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of British Columbia to attend their annual banquet commemorating Swami Vivekananda's arrival in Vancouver in 1893. As you all know, Vivekananda had arrived by ship in Vancouver and then went to Chicago by train. I thoroughly enjoyed being with Swami Prabuddhanandaji for those three days. Both Swamiji and I were asked to speak at the banquet. After my short (about 20 minutes) talk I returned to our table. While the master of ceremonies was thanking me and introducing Swami Prabuddhanandaji, Swamiji took hold of my hand and held it for a good 30 seconds. He spoke a few very kind words expressing his approval. Those words meant and still mean a lot to me. I view them as a parting gift from a great soul. That trip to Vancouver in 2003 was, alas, the last time I saw Swami Prabuddhanandaji.

Well, these are a few memories that come to my mind. Swami Prabuddhanandaji has been a great inspiration to me my entire monastic life. I think of him often. Your request that I write down some of my memories has given me the opportunity to think about him even more.

SWAMI VEETAMOHANANDA, GRETZ
Swami Prabuddhanandaji As I Knew Him

It was in 1963 that I met Swami Prabuddhanandaji in the Bangalore Ramakrishna ashram. He was the warden of the students' hostel. I was lodged in the ashram guest house for a month or two in order to recuperate my health. Also, it was a rare opportunity to spend time with my guru - Swami Yatiswaranandaji. Swami Prabuddhanandaji also used to come to the ashram every day to meet Swami Yatiswaranandaji and spend time in prayer, association with brother monks, etc. It was thus we became dear brothers.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji used to enquire about my well being, practice of japa or the scriptural studies that I was engaged in. We used to take long walks in the vegetable garden. The swami used to invite me for a cup of tea or coffee now and then, and encourage me to improve my musical talents.

I had to go back to my original monastery at Chennai (then it was known as Madras). We continued to keep exchanging views through postal letters. Many a letter of encouragement helped me to go forward on the way I had chosen. The swami came to Chennai when he was posted to San Fransisco. We used to take long walks during his stay. "We are to struggle to have success. There is no other, easier way for us. Aren't we monks, why not suffer for the sake of Truth?"

The swami was very generous. I used to keep in touch with him wherever I went, either from Mysore or somewhere else. He was of great help in showing me the right cause, and he inspired me in all ways possible. When I was asked to take up the Pinnapet [Ponnampet?] centre, he encouraged me to say that it is the Lord's work. "The Lord wants you to do His work through you." The swami not only inspired me but also used to contribute financial help.

The swami was very happy when I came to France as a permanent delegate. He invited me to San Fransisco to visit him. This is why I visited him 3 or 4 times there. It was in 1993 that Swami Prabuddhanandaji came to France. It was the occasion of the celebration of Swami Vivekananda's appearance in the Parliament of Religions. The Swami inaugurated the German Vedanta Centre. We had puja, homa, etc., on the occasion and the swami gave his benedictions. We were together for different celebrations in Germany. The swami's disciple known as Shantiprema was very fond of him. We visited her together several times.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji visited me two or three times. Each time was precious for practising meditation and prayers together. The ideal of the swami is so very bright for me forever.

SWAMI NITYASTHANANDA, MYSORE

Sweet Memories of Swami Prabuddhananda

For me it is not possible to think of Prabuddhananda without picturing in my mind his face beaming with an ethereal smile. I was not fortunate enough to live with him and have a close personal touch. I met him only occasionally; still these contacts with him strengthened my spiritual conviction and helped in sustaining my spiritual idea in adverse circumstances.

My memories of him go back to my college days. With the idea of joining the Ramakrishna Order, after the completion of high school education, I went to Ramakrishna Ashrama Bangalore. The one who took me there was Sri H. Ramachandra Swamy, then a chemistry lecturer at JCBM College, Sringeri, who was a great admirer of Swami Prabuddhananda. The very first sight of the swami made me feel that I had come to the right place where I belong to. After enquiring about my background and qualification etc., he impressed upon me the need for further qualification. So according to his advice, I joined the college at Sringeri, more than three hundred kilometers from Bangalore.

During my college days his affectionate letters were a great source of inspiration. I would be waiting for his letter so eagerly, and when I saw it, I would literally jump with joy. As long as he was in Bangalore, i.e., before going to San Francisco, I used to spend my holidays in the Bangalore Ashrama with the kind permission of Swami Prabuddhananda. During those days I came in close contact with many of the sadhus and brahmacharins and got acquainted with the monastic life. I was a rustic boy coming from a remote village, not used to city atmosphere and the sophisticated lifestyle of the Ashrama. It was the love and motherly patience of Swami Prabuddhananda that made it possible for me to stay there and feel comfortable. Often I used to go to him with some childish questions which never failed to elicit sympathetic answers from him. The most unforgettable thing was his affectionate enquiry “Ēnappa” (how do you do) with a pat on the back, and this, in fact, induced me to go to him often.

I was there in the Bangalore Ashrama when he left for San Francisco. There was a huge congregation of devotees to pay their tearful farewell to their beloved swami, filling the entire ground of the Ashrama. At the time of departure, so many devotees crowded around him to offer their pranams. I, being an ordinary boy, was standing at a distance hesitating to go near him. However, he called me near and said, “Keep coming to the Ashrama, don’t miss.”

Another loving gesture I cannot forget was his granting me the rare opportunity to accompany him in the same car to the airport. He and Swami Adidevananda, his successor, were sitting in the back seat, while a devotee sat in the front. Many devotees had gathered around the car. I was standing at a distance looking at him intently. Somehow his eyes fell on me and most unexpectedly he called me near and made me sit beside him in the car, perhaps to the utter consternation of others. While on the way to the airport, he requested Swami Adidevananda to accommodate me in the Ashrama whenever I go there. Later I had regular correspondence with him. Whenever he visited India, he would write to me in advance asking me to come and meet him either in Bangalore or Mysore offering to bear my travelling expenses.

All these expressions of sincere love are standing in good stead in my spiritual pursuit.

SWAMI CHIDEKANANDA, BELUR MATH

Observations of Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj

Whatever he did, whether it was eating, drinking, working, he performed it all in the same manner that he would do the worship on a special tithi puja- slowly, deliberately, and consciously. In San Francisco a small prasada (usually a nut) is placed on the spoon before each person seated at the table. At the end of *brahmarpanam*, I remember the deliberate and exacting manner in which Swami Prabuddhanandaji would throw the nut into his mouth and chew slowly yet in rhythm (*ritam*) – every part of that small act would be an indication of how he had approached all activities. It used to be said about his mentor, Swami Yatiswaranandaji that he moved in a *cosmic rhythm*.

I never saw Revered Mj rude to anybody. He could be tough on his disciples and the monastics under his care – but I never saw him act outwardly rude towards anybody. He truly followed Swami Yatiswarananda's teaching, "First, be a gentleman and then a sadhu."

On the few occasions when I entered into his room, it seemed to have the veritable vibration and smell of a place of worship. It is said that a sadhu can always be known by the *tanmatras* (vibrations) left in their bedroom – it seemed to me that his guru, Swami Virajanandaji, truly dwelled in that room.

Revered Maharaj never boasted about himself. He rarely spoke about himself or even his reminiscences of great swamis whom he had known. He was always keen to place the emphasis on Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and the other direct disciples.

On special days (such as retreats at Olema or Shanti Ashrama), it seemed that Rev Maharaj manifested a special shakti on those days, which many palpably felt. During one puja in San Francisco in which over 300 people came, Revered Maharaj would sit on the dais, watching as Swami Aparanandaji would perform the puja (along with Swami

Prapannanandaji). Yet devotees would attest, it seemed as if he could read the minds of every single person in that room. Once a devotee (Maya) sitting in the very back, seeing the delicious chocolate being offered as prasad, began to think about having it later, when suddenly Revered Mj shot a look at her. The devotee became startled and stopped dwelling on the chocolate being offered to the Lord.

In spite of his great spiritual stature, Revered Maharaj was also unassuming and simple, yet at the same time, watchful and conscientious.

Revered Maharaj was very disciplined. He did not take even water in between meals. Once he came to visit Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji (then Vice-President) after arati, along with many other trustees present. The other trustees were partaking of tea and biscuits, and had asked Revered Prabuddhanandaji to also do the same – but he only took water. So even when on visit, he maintained his discipline as far as possible. It seemed that he conquered that sense of taste.

It seemed that in every different stage of my life, either I would visit Revered Maharaj or he would coincidentally visit me, coincidence or Mother's grace.

When he visited and gave a talk at Training Center Belur Math in 2005 all the TC brahmacharis as well as PPTC brahmacharis, one brahmachari had asked him, "What have you gained after being a member of the Order for nearly 60 years?" Revered Maharaj's face beamed with an unearthly light and he said, "I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have been useful. Since joining, I have served Sri Ramakrishna with whatever energy I have had and this gives me great joy." I shall never forget the way his face beamed and the satisfaction he spoke with.

Revered Maharaj used to say that his purpose was not to start new centers nor to write new books, but rather, to serve the devotees of the ashrama as God himself.

During Dayaprana's sannyasa ceremony in Hollywood, a monastic gathering took place in the Hollywood monastery fireplace. There, he recounted a beautiful reminiscence of

his early days with Swami Yatiswaranandaji. He said, “As a brahmachari, once Swami Yatiswaranandaji asked me to go and purchase some sweets as some visiting swamis had arrived. I then went to the store and purchased some sweets for the visiting monks and returned. However when I returned, I was stunned to see that the entire ashrama (over 25 monks and Brahmacharis) were waiting to consume the sweets which I had purchased. I looked at Swami Yatiswaranandaji and told him that I had only purchased a few sweets for the visiting swamis. Swami Yatiswaranandaji then told me to go back to the store and purchase the appropriate number of sweets which I did. For a long time afterwards, I thought to myself, ‘Why did Swami Yatiswarananda not tell me the exact number of sweets to purchase in the first place?’ Then one day, it struck my mind – because he wants me to develop the habit of exercising my own buddhi.” This incident left an indelible mark on the mind of Swami Prabuddhanandaji. In later times, as abbot and guru of the San Francisco Vedanta Society, having to oversee so many nuns, monks and lay devotees, he would practice this habit of exercising his “buddhi” under all circumstances. One of his favorite sayings was, “Sleep with the sword of discrimination underneath your pillow.” What he meant was that we should be prepared to use that sword to slash away even in the dream state!

Another observation – he was always even keel externally – he never became visibly angry (at least I rarely observed this) – yet he always maintained full control over every square inch of the Vedanta Society of Northern California (not in a Draconian manner), but more in a natural manner and spirit. The monastics or devotees never felt oppressed by this, but rather, felt inspired to do their best to do the activity as “karma yoga” rather than merely “karma.”

SWAMI CHIDEKANANDA, BELUR MATH

Personal Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhanandaji

Great souls come very rarely, and when they leave the body, those with whom they showered their grace, never feel that they have left them – they perhaps feel that they continue to exist in a subtle form, and guide by giving the buddhi proper direction.

Such is the case with Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj, a direct disciple of Swami Virajanandaji and his devotees.

I first came into contact with Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji around 1993 – my parents and brother and I had driven from Southern California to Northern California for the Olema May Day retreat. We drove in a black Lexus – perhaps 7 years later Maharaj would recall our first visit to Olema, and that we had arrived in a “black Lexu.”

This was one of his sterling qualities – he never forgot an encounter with a devotee and he would even remember some small obscure detail.

When we arrived, it was a beautiful place – Olema – white deer – Swami Vedanandaji, Asitanandaji, Sahajanandaji, Brahmachari Vimuktachaitanya – and so many devotees – and such a large gathering (around 1000 people attended the function).

When we arrived, my brother and I were eager to engage in service of the Lord – so we helped to prepare the tents, sweep the grounds, etc. I remember as I was sweeping the grounds, Rev. Maharaj would walk by and give that familiar smile – the smile that “you are our own – we all belong to the same family of Sri Ramakrishna.” The May Olema Celebration in 1993 was an incredible event as over 1,000 people had come for the gathering – I had never seen such a large-scale gathering at any of our Vedanta Societies before.

One side note - during our visit, my brother (Swami Harinamananda/Prasun Mj) and I had gotten into an argument; we used to get into arguments quite frequently! Anyways on this particular occasion, I still remember either Sw. Vedanandaji or Sahajanandaji gently intervening and saying, “Well, well, well, would you both like to see illumination – and then turning on the light in the Olema barn.”

After this, I did not have any further contact with Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji until the year 2000. In the month of June 2000, I received news that I had passed the California Bar Examination, and was eligible to practice law. By Mother’s grace, I had received a very good position as an Assistant District Attorney at the San Francisco D.A.’s office. With Swami Prabuddhanandaji’s permission, I was permitted to stay at the Old Temple (paying rent which I myself insisted upon), and then everyday take the bus to work in downtown San Francisco. In the evenings I would return again by bus. When I had first drove up to S.F. and met Rev. Maharaj, I remember he again gave that familiar smile and said, “Welcome home!” And truly, I felt like I was at home.

Nonetheless, I was feeling a little nervous, as I had been close to the Hollywood and Portland Vedanta societies, but had had little contact with the S.F. Vedanta society community. When I would attend the first lecture of Rev. Mj, in the middle of the lecture, he somehow referred to something about law and then would look in my direction and say, “We have a new lawyer here.” Then during the question & answer session, he gave my introduction by saying to the devotees, “You see this young man – he is a criminal prosecutor so you should all be nice to him,” and then smiled!

Really the love he showered upon me was beyond words – it was not only love but respect and belief; it was a tremendous support, that he supported and believed in me. I have found that especially within the Indian culture, whether my parents or other swamis, the tendency is to scold (for one’s own good of course) and correct (especially when one is young). So this was refreshing – an Indian senior swami who believed in me! Again and again I would feel this, feel support, and feel it even to this day.

I especially loved the retreats we had at OLEMA – three day retreats in winter – I would sit and he would take some class – then he would say “any questions” and then would look in my direction and smile – I felt not only his support, but the support of the entire community (maybe 50 to 60 devotees were there). I was a young prosecutor and the mind was hungry for answers to the philosophical points he raised. I felt like a baseball pitcher and would throw the fastball, and Rev. Mj would take the bat and hit it out of the park and his answer would always penetrate deeply into me.

As I became a part of the S.F. devotee and monastic family, I would also often come to meals often. He would eat his meals slowly and deliberately. I would sometimes drive Rev Mj to Olema, or to Lake Tahoe, or to Shanti Ashrama. He would like the car to be warm, so would say, “Give more heat” even when it was hot. On one occasion, I drove him and Swami Bhaskaranandaji (who sat in the back seat) to Olema; Revered Maharaj kept saying, “Give more heat” – the car became so hot that Swami Bhaskaranandaji opened his window and kept his head outside for some cool air!

So I was so proud and happy in my new atmosphere and community, but one day it came to a crashing end – budget cuts were made and I lost my position as the Assistant District Attorney – it was crushing for me – I loved the SF ashrama much. Anyway, that weekend I returned to Los Angeles (where my parents reside), and then had driven Swami Swahanandaji to San Diego (for Friday lecture). I was feeling very low – then the phone in San Diego rang, and I still remember Swami Prabuddhanandaji’s sweet and compassionate voice saying, “When are you coming home?” This touched my heart very much. I decided to stay in SF and look for a job there. I then got a small part time job as a receptionist at the local gym (1 hour per day). Every day when I would return from work, he would cheerfully ask me, “How did work at the gym go today?” He did not care whether one was an attorney or receptionist – he cared about the attitude behind the work (service to the Lord) and devotion. Needless to say, he won my heart, and was my well-wisher. Another observation about him, when he ate, he did it very slowly and deliberately; in fact, in any decision which he took, he always did it in the

same manner – slowly and deliberately, as if he was practicing the Gita.

Six months later, I would get a job in Glendale as an insurance attorney – I felt sad to leave San Francisco – but I never lost contact with Rev Mj. I would call him at least once every week, and would especially call before any deposition or litigation meeting or trial. In fact, before any new encounter for the rest of his life, I would always remember to call him and seek his blessings. He would also say, “May Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother bless you,” and that was enough – I felt that success was inevitable with those blessings, and in nearly every circumstance, it was. I would also visit at least once or twice a year, especially in winter and also during the 10-day Lake Tahoe retreat. Those retreats were special. I would ask questions of him day and night, and he never grew tired of answering them. Perhaps he could see that they were coming from a place of deep yearning (which even I was not aware of yet). It was such a great joy to be with him day and night, asking questions – it felt like a different world. After the morning session we would go on walks – his affection was very powerful, penetrating and pure – one felt like a different person after those walks. But it did not end there – we would sit together during the meals, and continue with questions and answers even up to 11 o'clock at night.

By Mother's grace, after moving back to Southern California, my trial and deposition skills had sharpened, and the private practice financially flourished. I felt comfortable of reaching all of my goals.

Then in the summer of 2013, we went to Lake Tahoe – I went with my parents. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was reciting from the Vivekacudamani, and quoted the first part of sloka number four,

जन्तूनां नरजन्म दुर्लभमतः पुंस्त्वं ततो विप्रता तस्माद्वैदिकधर्ममार्गपरता विद्वत्त्वमस्मात्परम्

and then paraphrased the meaning for us – “You have your education, you have succeeded at your job, your parents and family are well taken care of – if not now then, when” – and then he looked at me and gave that sweet smile. At that moment, I knew

that my life would never be the same – at that moment I knew that this life “in the world” was over – I tried for a moment to reconvince my mind, but it was over – I do not know what Maharaj had done – but life would never be the same. That very day, I broke the news to my parents, and they were initially stunned. We then spoke to Revered Maharaj, and he told them in a sweet manner – “Both of your sons have joined and become monks – don’t worry – Sri Ramakrishna can take better care of you than either Prasun or Dipak ever could.”

My parents would eventually become my greatest well-wishers on this path, and convinced both Revered Swami Swahanandaji (in America) as well as Revered Swami Prabhanandaji (in Gol Park) who had raised doubts about taking two sons from the same family, when there was nobody else to look after.

I felt a bit sad because I knew that the freedom and access I had to the S.F. Vedanta Society would never be the same. Still, I kept contact with Rev. Prabuddhanadaji j throughout the years, and somehow the Divine Mother arranged that our paths would cross. When I joined PPTC in 2005, he came and gave a talk at the Training Center. Rev Mj gave a wonderful talk on monastic life. During that time, one brahmachari asked him, “What have you gained – you have given nearly seventy years of your life to the Sangha?” In a sweet and illumined manner, he smiled and suddenly a burst of strength arose which seemed to pervade the entire room, “I have the satisfaction that I have fully served Sri Ramakrishna.”

Again, in 2010, when I was in training center (in Belur Math, India), during my first year I had a little difficulty with one of the authorities in the T.C. This had been going on for some time, but when Rev. Maharaj, while meeting in his room, this particular swami also came. I did not mention anything to Rev. Maharaj, but on his own he quoted a Sanskrit sloka, and then translated, “If there is something deep beneath the ocean, Dipak will be able to get it – he can do anything.” After this, that particular swami became very nice to me (not that I asked for it either way). He also gave a talk at

our TC that year. I had the privilege of introducing his talk; after his talk, many brahmacharis exclaimed that “the atmosphere he created during that talk in TC they had never experienced before.”

Again before I left for sannyasa, I met him – again, he inspired with so many precious words and gave that familiar warm smile (it would be my last physical meeting with him).

I know that Revered Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj is still watching over and taking care of me; he is with me (especially in pressure situations) I remember him and remember to apply the buddhi.

My pranams to this great soul.

(E-mail sent July 15, 2014)

This last Monday, [July 14, 2014] Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Mj's bhandara was celebrated in splendid fashion in Belur Math. Extra spaces were made, and the event was well attended by our sadhus from all centers in the local area.

Holy Mother's picture (in Holy Mother's Temple) was very nicely decorated with extra garlands, and it seemed that Mother herself was beaming that day that her dear son had returned to her!

So many items were served and all enjoyed.

Sadhus were served 800 rupees pranami each, and Trustees were given 1000 rupees each.

All were happy and indeed it felt like Revered Prabuddhanandaji Mj was there.

Attached are the pictures I took that day.

With loving pranams,

Chidekananda (Dipak)























SWAMI VEDANANDA, SAN FRANCISCO

Swami Prabuddhananda

He was also at the center of my monastic life from the day he arrived, for which I am very grateful. He was steadiness embodied. It never wavered, never changed, always completely self-possessed. It was awesome, a totally dedicated personality. He was enormously gracious to me, unusually gracious. He was a huge mountain under whose protection we lived free of care, at least that was the way it seemed to me. Yes, he was strict, very strict, but you knew where you stood, and he would protect all of us truly like a mother hen protects her chicks. Without his protection, it feels to me like we have just come from under the lee of that mountain, and now we have to face the cold blasts alone. Of course we will do it and succeed, because none of us wants to think what he would say if we meet in some future loka and have to admit having failed at something, to think of him turning silently away as though he had not heard. To me he is a bright light that lit up my life, being himself the monastic life embodied, steady, always devoted to Mother, renunciation incarnate.

Jaya Sri Ramakrishna!

PRAVRAJIKAMADHAVAPRANA
VEDANTA CONVENT, SAN FRANCISCO

What was outstanding about Swami Prabuddhananda was his understanding of everyday problems and how to deal with them. A few examples I can give. One of his students was living with her mother-in-law who was bossing her around. She had two little girls and her husband to care for. Swami told her that she as a wife and mother was the head of her household now and she did not have to take orders from her mother-in-law.

Another student had been abused by her father, and the swami told her, “Look, think of your real Self, identify with that, and anything that bothers you on this lower level will pale into insignificance.”

Swami would find out what your skills were and give you the opportunity to express them. Matie Pringle was an artist and he put her on the project of organizing the Shanti Ashrama displays. Mr. Pringle was a contractor who painted houses. He not only used him for Vedanta Society painting jobs but put him on the Board of Directors of the Society where he helped a lot with business affairs of the Society. Mr. Harwood was Swami’s driver to Olema, as well as a board member. He appreciated his quite efficiency. When Mr. Harwood begged off the contentious meetings about the Women’s Retreat House planning, he understood and let him off. He also let Mr. Harwood out of the social side of the Olema celebration of Thanksgiving for men and okayed his work on trimming branches on the Olema Roads instead. When Mr. Harwood had a medical emergency (he lived in an apartment across for the temple) he called Swami for help and I think one or two of the monks climbed in the window to help him. For Thanksgiving and Christmas, Swami always made sure all the old and sick people got dinner, as well as some prasad after the pujas.

It is difficult to list all the people Swami listened to and helped, not just because there are so many but also because they are often scandalous or crazy or too sad to tell about.

Swami once told me that it is though people dump garbage in his lap. He said it was especially true in India, believe it or not. His attitude was so detached and God-like about people who went off the straight path. When one of the convent members had to leave after some twenty-five years of good life in the convent, I was upset and asked him about it. He answered thoughtfully. This happens, he said, and usually people blame the guru for it. He said the guru tries to correct them gently but there is only a limited amount he can do. But you should always remember everybody is going to reach the goal. They may take a detour or backtrack, but no one will be forever delayed or stopped from the great destiny.

Swami was always positive. He asked people to take that attitude about everything they do. If you said, for example, "Well, next life I will do it," he would correct you and say this is your last life, do it now. Swami liked fun, too and teamwork. I never saw him so happy as when he was arranging for convent vows or giving them. He loved to hear about the convent Christmas plays. And he had a marvelous sense of humor, like when I was telling him when he was walking in Vivekananda Hall that Swami Bhaskarananda called me to ask how long it would take him to recover after surgery and I said 6 months, Swami said laconically, "Well, when you're desperate you'll take anybody's advice!" Everybody, including Sudarshan, who was walking with him, laughed uproariously. Me, too. Marvelous line!

At Olema, preparing for the May Retreat or cleaning up afterwards Swami was so happy. He loved teamwork and he always took part in the physical work. In his last talk at the annual meeting 2014 he spoke of teamwork and praised us for it.

He never failed to acknowledge someone's service to the Society. He had me write a paper in praise of Nancy Jackman's work, which Swami added to and Dr. Carte read at her retirement. He praised Mr. Pringle also when he heard he had passed away. "How did you find out he died?" Swami asked me. "His prasad was returned with that

information,” I said. Swami said, “Ah hah,” You know how he used to say it when he was moved.

Swami once told me there were two swamis who did the most for San Francisco Vedanta Society; one was Swami Trigunatita, another was Swami Ashokananda. And I would add a third one myself, and that would be Swami Prabuddhananda.

Swami Prabuddhananda could be really tough as a leader of the Society. Once I was concerned about how tired some of the young convent members were after a big push and I called Swami about it. He wasn't fazed. He said – and I quote – “Let them drop dead in the service of Sri Ramakrishna!” To Swami, service to God required sacrifice.

I won't talk too much about myself and how he helped me spiritually. That is often too sacred to put in writing. He was often asking a little more than I thought I could do, but mostly I was able to do it. I never thought I would be able to stand up or talk, or even read before an audience. Somehow he managed it when none of his predecessors – including Swami Ashokananda – could. He had me give a lot of talks over time.

He respected the people who knew their job. He called Jo Stanbury, mother of us all in the work of pujas and shrine work. He said when she died there was no one to replace her and we would have to divide up her work and rotate it among younger people. As to Helen Sutherland, he bowed to her in all matters of decorating. When he got the idea, for example of putting a big cloth behind the New Temple Altar, she declared “No, Swami, you'll ruin the chancel and the altar's appearance!” Swami dropped it instantly. In the case of Ediben Soule he would go to her in her apartment at 2800 when she was no longer mobile and ask her advice on things. I know because I was companion.

In the case of Swami Chidrupananda, he was especially respectful of him. He said they used to do dishes together at the monastery and discuss the work. He told me of all the people around him Swami Chidrupananda was the person he could always count on to do what he asked and right away as well. Swami Chidrupananda reciprocated with his praise for Swami Prabuddhananda. He called him a “magnificent monk.”

In my experience I found this to be true. He knew an amazing amount of good monasticism. He said that it was very beneficial for monastics to eat together at the table and meditate together in the shrine. He also stressed the importance of music and chanting in spiritual life. And sitting together to solve problems. He stressed respect for one another. He believed you should give people chances, especially young people. And care and attention to old people or people in distress was paramount for him. He told me that at Bangalore two old devotees died before he was able to visit them, and he felt so bad that he did not want that to happen again. He was fatherly to everyone – monastic or devotee. At Tahoe retreats this was especially true. And it was a beautiful sight to see.

Virginia Varrentzoff (Vani) received many years of care from Swami. It began when Swami first came and ended in her death nearly 40 years later in an apartment with people to care for her. In the beginning Vani was advisor to Swami about Society affairs, then it went to friend and colleague with Vani as secretary of the Society, and finally to Swami replacing her with a different secretary and “treating her like a little girl,” as Vani put it. Vani’s daughter Chela was included in Swami’s all-encompassing care. Chela was a Tibetan Buddhist and frequently visited India. Swami had her stay in the convent building going and coming from India and often asked her to take things to the Ramakrishna Centers there.

Swami visited centers in the U.S. and Canada giving retreats, inspiring and guiding people like Sukh Sehgal, Arundhati, Inge Dutta and her daughters, just to name a few. He always made a deep impression that lasted through the years.

Swami Prabuddhananda’s fellow swamis all kept in touch, whether in India or the West. One of the most beautiful relationships he had was with Swami Swahananda. It ended with a very touching time when Swami Swahananda was taken off life support and Swami Prabuddhananda sat meditating with Bill, his (Swami Swahananda’s) disciple in the San Francisco monastery.

A few general things I learned from Swami in dealing with other people and difficulties in your life:

1. If someone asks for something even if it is unreasonable, give some portion of what they ask for. Somehow manage.
2. Remember that people change and improve in their life journey. Don't fix them in time as bad.
3. If people treat you badly forgive and forget. Include them, as for their help. Be proactive.
4. If you can't approach someone to correct them on something ask a friend of theirs to do it.
5. Wait until an uproar dies down before you act.
6. Take part in a good action. Eat a little bit of what is served you.
7. Meditate and pray is the best way to help someone in distress or your own hard times.

PRAVRAJIKA MADHAVAPRANA (cont.)

Swami Chidrupananda once called Swami Prabuddhananda “a magnificent monk.” He was first and last a monastic. He encouraged monastics, respected and loved monastics and encouraged renunciation and meditation in everyone, monastics and lay alike.

Swami Prabuddhananda and Swami Chidrupananda hit it off from the beginning. Swami told me that Swami Chidrupananda was the person he could always trust. He said they would do dishes together and talk about business and everything in a relaxed way.

The times I saw SP really joyful were when he was preparing to give brahmacarya or sannyas vows. He was glad to have Swami Aseshananda, Holy Mother’s disciple, as the vows guru. When we took sannyas he was really out of this world joyful and helpful in explaining the vows and conveying the meaning of renunciation for us.

He loved other swamis in the west, particularly Swami Swahananda, his peer. He said he missed him when he was moved to Southern California. Swami helped all the monastics in this country, especially the women. Even the men who left the monastery got respect from him. One man, Swami Ashokananda’s younger disciple, swami praised for not blaming anyone but himself for failure to succeed in the monastery. Once he said one of the best things Swami Ashokananda did was starting the convent.

When I consulted swami about convent matters, he taught me: keep in mind people are changing all the time for the better. Sit with others and solve problems as a group (he said he learned that from Swami Yatishwarananda). Remember that behind everybody as well as your self is the larger self, the real Self.

Once he asked me how I got up in the morning. I told him I set an alarm clock across the room so I’d be sure and get up to shut it off. He said if he did that he’d be sick all

day. He himself would wake up and lie quietly repeating God's name before getting out of bed.

One of the things swami did from the first was participate in the work. He wanted to do himself what he asked others to do. He learned to templesit and answer the phone. He used the chainsaw with Swami Vedananda hovering nervously behind him. He would stand and work one of the cranks for putting up the tent roof for the Memorial Day retreat.

Swami was saying how sometimes you have to use deception to save yourself or others from a dangerous situation. His grandfather was taking him and a sister in a horse cart through a forest when 2 robbers come out from either side of the road. His grandfather called out to his sister, "sister, hand me the gun!" The robbers retreated. There was no gun.

Swami had a presence which lifted a person's mind, but he also had a "sweet reasonableness" in his speech.

AN ANONYMOUS SANNYASINI
VEDANTA CONVENT, SAN FRANCISCO

Swami many times referred to a Kannada song: "O Lord, may I be like a flower blooming in the heart of the forest, offering my fragrance to Thee unnoticed by this world."

These words, for me, could serve as an epithet of that great soul and bring to my mind what Swami Vivekananda said in *Inspired Talks*: "The power is with the silent ones, who only live and love and then withdraw their personality. They never say 'me' and 'mine;' they are only blessed in being instruments. Such men are ever living fully identified with God, ideal existences, asking nothing, and not consciously doing anything. They are the jivanmuktas, absolutely selfless, the little personality entirely blown away, ambition non-existent. They are all principle, no personality."

An offering to Swami Prabuddhananda whose blessings are day by day transforming my life.

PRAVRAJIKA KRISHNAPRANA
SARADA CONVENT, SANTA BARBARA

We were discussing his heart surgery and how unsettling it is to have to face such a major surgery. He told me that he had a little reservation about how it would go. A gentleman that he had never met came into his room and asked him if he wanted to talk about what would happen. The gentleman had had the very same surgery and was approximately the same age. Swami talked to him and said how comforting it was. It had settled the reservations Swami had. After the surgery the same gentleman came to visit him and reassure him. As Swami said the emotions were very near the surface and getting the constant encouragement from this stranger was so helpful. Swami then told me that he also talked to patients who were facing heart surgery and shared his experience with them. He made the reference to Swamiji's precept of worshipping God in Man. Also of Holy Mother's final words "no one is a stranger, the whole world is your own". He was impressed with the kindness and generosity of time and spirit of these "strangers" who helped him in the hospital.

PRAVRAJIKA VRAJAPRANA *
SARADA CONVENT, SANTA BARBARA

(This is not Pravrajika Virajaprana, San Francisco)*

A common error of those who didn't have much association with Swami Prabuddhananda was to suspect him to be stern or merely uptight. For that reason, some people kept their distance, assuming that he would be critical of people such as themselves. I can say that because I was one of those people. But thank God I was given the opportunity to know him better and to bless the time that I was able to spend with him. He was truly a great man, truly a loving soul and one whom I miss.

Swami Prabuddhananda was quiet, never a chatterbox (like me), and he was, by nature, deliberate. He *never* hurried. But to think him stern, as I thankfully later discovered, was to miss the great kindness he possessed as well as the humor that hid beneath that quiet, occasionally sly, smile.

He was a sadhu's sadhu, a monk who embodied all the great traditions of Hindu monasticism while at the same time was available for all the problems that beset the modern world. I well remember hearing from San Francisco friends, during the height of the AIDS epidemic, the love and comfort he gave to those afflicted with the disease as well as to those who had lost loved ones to the illness. For them, he was a balm which soothed them as no one else could. He was equally available to those stricken with addiction—drugs, alcohol, you name it. He was tender, warm, and the soul of supportiveness for many wounded by so much. He gave them strength when they thought they had none and he gave them courage and hope when they thought theirs was forever lost.

While inherently conservative by nature, it didn't stop Swami Prabuddhananda from being open in surprising ways. Years back, when being out of the closet was considered poor manners, bad fashion or just plain *wrong*, Swami Prabuddhananda accepted some of the most out-of-the-closet cases one can imagine. What would elicit raised eyebrows

or even mild shock in Southern California (of all places!) only brought a gentle smile to Swami Prabuddhananda. I remember thinking, years back, that – because of his constitutional conservatism – he was the last person one would expect to be sent to serve in San Francisco. But as I later realized, he was absolutely, utterly perfect.

When Swami Tyagananda and I were working on our book, *Interpreting Ramakrishna: Kālī's Child Revisited*, we had to address material that was appalling at best, salacious and prurient at worst. For ten years we worked through hundreds of articles and books, written in several languages and published over a number of years. Many sadhus of our Ramakrishna Order averred that we shouldn't take issue with the offending book or the questions that it raised – that its distorted and twisted mistranslations and fraudulent documentation shouldn't even be addressed. We were reminded that an elephant walks through the town square and the dogs bark; it is beneath the elephant's dignity to even look at them. Like the elephant, we too should ignore the vulgar barking. One would think that Swami Prabuddhananda would also advise us to keep our heads raised high and ignore the controversial book. But as it turned out, he was one of our staunchest cheerleaders. He never missed an opportunity to ask how the work was going and he continually exhorted us to work hard, to make sure that the truth about Sri Ramakrishna was told loud and clear to all. Silence could be seen as tacit agreement and Swami Prabuddhananda loved both truth and Sri Ramakrishna too much not to spur our work on. When our book was finally published, we were so happy to send him one of the first copies.

Swami Prabuddhananda had depths that weren't always easy to see because he was so quiet, because he was so unostentatious, because he was so modest. When he first arrived in America, it seemed like he was the complete opposite of his extraordinary predecessor, Swami Ashokananda. They were not just temperamentally, linguistically and regionally dissimilar, they seemed to have inhabited different universes altogether. This made Swami Prabuddhananda's entry into San Francisco's Vedanta Society difficult.

My beloved friend Gargi (Marie Louise Burke) told me how aghast the “old guard” devotees had been with the arrival of Swami Prabuddhananda. In fact, they were eager for him to return to India so that someone more “suited” for the Vedanta Society of Northern California could be found. Gargi was, as she told me with great frankness and even greater regret, one of this group’s ringleaders. She had spent time in Belur Math and she was hoping that the sadhus there would see the light so that someone more appropriate, someone more like Swami Ashokananda, could be found and expeditiously sent over. Happily, Gargi lived to rue the day that this ever happened and as she said with moist eyes, “I not only love him, I totally *revere* him. I genuinely *revere* him.” And this from a woman who did not *revere* easily.

Swami Prabuddhananda totally depended on Mother and that dependence made him the sadhu and the saint that he was. That dependence was mirrored in his kindness and the modesty that graced all his interactions with others. He was a rare soul whose radiance served to inspire and guide many of us. I am so grateful to have known him and hopefully, to have learned from him.

PRAVRAJIKA DEVIPRANA
SARADA CONVENT, SANTA BARBARA

Last night I dreamt of swami, he was in the Ganges taking a dip along with other sadhus. I've been thinking of him. Mostly I remember how devoted he was to the Mother, depend on Her, he would say, pray to Her. Also, how available he was, whenever anyone visited, so unselfish with his time.

PRAVRAJIKA DAYAPRANA
SARADA CONVENT, HOLLYWOOD

Actually I cannot believe he is not here anymore. I cannot face the fact, actually. Even though I live here in Hollywood, he was my teacher also. Always I enjoyed being with him whenever I visited Olema. So once a year met him, but always I felt his love, affection to us all and his guidance. After Revered Swami Swahanandaji Maharaj left his body, I was hoping to see him in good health, to guide me. But this did not happen.

I met him for the first time in Japan about 28 years ago. I was just a devotee who visited the center. Still I remember that moment when he asked me to join the convent in the US. He was the first person who could see my hidden potentiality. At that time I was not interested to go to the US. After joining here, I was very happy to see him at least once a year. Now even though I will not be able to see him, at least I want to pay my respects to him.

February, 2016

Dear Swami Prabuddhananda,

When I tried to write my reminiscences of you as an essay it sounded a little dry, so instead I am attempting to write you yet another thank you letter such as I used to send once or twice a year to try to put into words my gratitude for what you were showing and teaching us about God. When I first met you around 1993—I think after one of the Friday classes in the Old Temple—I was facing major challenges in my life, and not long after that first meeting those classes and the retreats held at Olema and Lake Tahoe became a lifeline that kept me from drowning in the slough of despond. Everything you said seemed to speak to my anguish and help me see how to get free, and I would pour over my notes and other texts you and others recommended. Your opening chant brought solace to my heart and tears to my eyes, the prayer before meditation quieted and inspired me, and the closing chant gave me hope. The repetition of these invocations week after week helped me memorize them, and they would come as aids in difficult moments. For years the Friday classes were like stepping stones across an impassable river—they kept me afloat from week to week as it was wonderful to have that holy company to look forward to every Friday night. When you interviewed me so that I could receive permission to stay at the Society's retreat house for women in Olema, you were supportive and encouraging of my study and practice of Christian Science. As the years went by I began to make appointments to see you in your office, and your presence and words always comforted. Your renunciation, devotion to the Truth, steady persistence in service and practicing the presence of God, and trust in the divine Mother helped me see essential virtues in action.

You always made me feel welcome, inviting me to work Tuesdays and Saturdays with other devotees and members of the convent at Olema. Your gracious smile, your "please come," your inquiry about each one's welfare after a class, the yearly Christmas card and worship on Christmas day, the impression I had many times (which I am sure others had too) that you were speaking directly to me—all this kind attention to our spiritual progress was vital nourishment. Your expounding of scripture, which made the obstacles to and requirements for spiritual growth so very clear, as well as the many practices and helps for overcoming the former and fulfilling the latter were foundational, confirming, and reviewing my notes and others' is a powerful support to this day.

When you explained ideas of duty, renunciation, devotion, faith, maya, the gunas, and so on, or when you answered queries about these spiritual matters, your wisdom and humility from experience helped us understand and keep from unfruitful speculation. You did not speak about what you did not know, though it seemed you knew more than you spoke, and perhaps were refraining from talking beyond what served our present capacity to practice. More and more it was your "Go to God," "ask Mother," "trust Mother" that revealed what you were doing and gave us a picture of practical Vedanta, living the truth of the scriptures.

The blessing, honor, and privilege of serving as a caretaker at the Women's Retreat House has been one of the greatest boons to my spiritual journey that I have ever received. I can still recall my almost disbelief when Girija called to ask me—with your approval of course—if I would consider serving as a

caretaker. That service has been major in my becoming more consciously and actively a member of God's universal family. (That makes me recall a humorous moment when you said I was joining Ramakrishna's family and then quickly added that that did not mean family in the ordinary sense!) Once I drove some devotees from Olema to see you in your office at the New Temple. Their joy at seeing you and yours at being with them still makes me smile. It was a jolly, fun, yet sacred exchange, and I remember you were particularly interested to hear about the newly opened center in Nepal.

The Tahoe retreats are also highlights of my spiritual life. As we trudged up the road to the cabin, the bright sky and shimmering lake each with their different shades of molten blue, the majesty of the surrounding mountains and the scent of heated pine needles all seemed to embody the happy anticipation of hearing more about God. You always kept us spiritually focused. There was much laughter and great fun, but you kept the mood high. Once when another devotee and I were relishing our evening meal, you walked by, and almost without seeming to notice us, said quietly, "Don't say 'yum, yum.'" We were startled and laughed, and I felt a little embarrassed because that is what I was saying inside. Of course you wanted us to enjoy the lovingly and beautifully prepared meals (I recall on many occasions your saying to us "eat, eat!"), but your keen observation has been a saving reminder to me over the years on countless and not necessarily alimentary or culinary occasions. One year when parasailing and hot air balloons were popular, you mentioned these activities and asked "Why?" in such a way that we all burst into laughter. One year I was struggling in so much that I did not make arrangements to come, and then at the last minute just got in the car and drove to the cabin. Somehow I knew you would help me, and you arranged for me to stay at one of the cabins with some other devotees who graciously included me. Being with them and at the retreat was a huge help, and I left stronger in every way.

Once during an office visit I told you I was having great difficulty praying. You asked me how I was praying, and, after I told you, you were quiet and then suggested a gentle, simple practice for a time. Another time I called from campus to make an appointment and you could tell I was desolate and told me to come at a certain time. I couldn't come then and proposed another hour and without hesitation you said "yes, yes, come then. We will talk," or words to that effect. All I remember is that I felt renewed hope. Another time I told you that I was able to see unhappy events in my life as divine gifts, guidance, and protection, and you said "If you can see it like that, that is very good." Often you went over points covered in class and they would take on new force: "With one hand hold onto the Lord, with the other work (or fight)." Several times I asked if you would pray for me. "Yes," you immediately replied, and that blessing helped sustain me.

Attending your classes and retreats had another wonderful, practical effect in my life. Watching and listening to you helped me become a better teacher. When I told you this on more than one occasion you looked surprised and once said "Oh?" (an expression that meant so many things when you said it). I learned from you not to be afraid to repeat points, to be less concerned with entertaining or trying to appeal to people's interests or their current state of understanding and more courageous in clarifying the eternal messages of Truth in the literature I had assigned. I became less afraid of silences, more able to encourage the students to "say something!" as you used to say to us on numerous occasions. What you pointed out about Arjuna and about many passages in the Bhagavad Gita enlightened me about

Hamlet and other texts in my course. Again you seemed surprised when I told you, but without what I learned from Vedanta, my teaching of those texts would not have been as useful to the students.

Twice you telephoned to ask me to prepare a talk for one of the sessions preceding the big Memorial Day event. It was an honor, though a little scary, but I found myself feeling joyful and saying “yes” eagerly almost as soon as I heard your voice (if you called some weeks before Memorial Day one immediately knew why). You were so unproscriptive about guidelines, never asked to see my talk beforehand, so trusting of our ability to turn to God for inspiration that I felt up to the task, even if a bit daunted. I will never forget the happiness of sitting with you and other devotees on the stage in front of the backdrop for the children’s play—the summer sun filtering through the tent roof and lighting up the surrounding meadow—and being part of a rich spiritual discourse. You were helping us mature as spiritual seekers, to grow in poise and become less selfishly conscious.

On the two Saturdays before the Memorial Day weekend retreat, starting at 10 a.m., devotees work to spruce up the grounds and otherwise prepare for the big day. You were always going about, encouraging and observing. One day I arrived late and felt sheepish as I drove past you on the road. You were glad to see us whenever we came, but your punctuality was a powerful example. On the last Memorial Day you attended, I recall your smiling face looking out the east door of the men’s retreat house at the happy throng in the lunch lines. I think the year before you called while the meal was being served and asked to speak to a devotee who was busy getting butter for the rolls and so couldn’t talk, and I think that response pleased you, “serving God in man.”

The last years you were with us dear Swami Prabuddhananda were full of wonderful and sad times, as those closer to you know much better than I. Whenever possible Christopher and I would leave our church service in Berkeley as soon as it was over to get to the question and answer session to hear and be with you and say hello, and I remember one Sunday in particular when devotees had not seen you for a long time and were allowed to go upstairs to pay our respects. Bounding up the stairs I was rewarded by your beaming countenance and your greeting, “Oh! You are here! Welcome!” There were brief visits to your room along with others, and you always asked about the welfare of each and sent us away with prasad. Your luminosity and clear focus are impressed in my heart and my mind’s eye. It seemed you were there for us, and such an example of love still sustains.

When I was about six, my mother mentioned how much she loved the Bhagavad Gita, which she had studied in a course in college. I read it later in college and even taught it in a course, but not until I heard it explicated in your Friday classes did I begin to experience its power to save. Those famous lines “whatever you do, make it an offering to Me,” mean more to me because of your practice of them. You seemed to live the words of the scriptures you spoke of, a little like a fine Chinese drawing that is but a few strokes but infinitely suggestive, or like the “Twin Verses” outlining the selfless individual from The Dhammapada. You showed us what a life looks like of one who endeavors to give all to the Lord, who longs for Him always and thus becomes united with Him. We could not know you personally because there was so little of that incidental person left, but we could sense that union and thus feel to a greater degree than otherwise possible the reality of Shiva, Krishna, Arjuna, Sri Ramakrishna, and other sacred beings and of spiritual, universal truths.

I miss you Swami. I miss you especially at Tahoe, perhaps because there we all spent more concentrated time together. I miss you less when with other devotees and especially at Olema and when I stay focused on what you taught us. When I attend the Tuesday classes at the retreat house, I recall how shy and scared I was at first, trying to think of a question. You seemed to know what we needed to hear and made us all feel welcome. I remember sitting next to you once at the big dining room table when we had refreshments afterward, and I love to sit in that spot now studying and reading whenever I am there.

When fairly new as a caretaker, I went one beautiful sunny spring, summer, or fall morning to work in the orchard. You came by as you often did to see us and hear about the work. The occasions we all shared in tasting the fruit are like bright "spots of time," illuminated and delightful no doubt because of your quiet appreciation of the devotion and labors and state of reverence. You then asked me a question and I mentioned I was the caretaker, at which remark you looked surprised and happy because you had stopped by the retreat house and a retreatant had said the caretaker had gone to the ocean! I don't know if it was she who said or you who heard "ocean" instead of "orchard," but we all had a good laugh standing there among the apple trees, and I was relieved you had found me there.

Mary Baker Eddy mentions "the heaven of His presence," and that is what we felt and glimpsed in those eternal moments in the classes, retreats, your office, at Olema. Those are among the precious spiritual treasures you bestowed on this seeker for truth. From the hell, darkness, and death of the dream of my own and others' absorption in the unreal to intuitions and convictions of the light, you provided direction by living the Truth you loved. Recalling my encounters with you, I am full of joy and gratitude. It seems there was always laughter in your company. During this reminiscing the expression came to mind, "It doesn't get better than this." Then quickly followed the insight, "It only gets better than this." And now I can hear you saying, "Please move on," or "All right. That's enough. Let's stop here."

Thanking you again and again for making more real the ideal of God with us, for pointing to the perennial religion, the divine Science called by various names, for showing how to live in and pass from this world, may the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother ever be with you and fall on us through their grace.

With deepest appreciation, gratitude, reverence, and love,

Barbara O'Brien



Franciscan Friars of the Atonement-Graymoor

Saturday, January 31, 2015

Ms. Marianne Quinn
Secretary
Vedanta Society of Northern California
2323 Vallejo Street
San Francisco, CA 94123

Dear Ms. Quinn,

Thank you for informing me about the death of Swami Prabuddhanda's death this past July, 2014, and for the two enclosures – the San Francisco Chronicle article in his honor and the memorial service program.

Swami Prabuddhanda was a man of the highest honor and I regard it a privilege to have known him and to have worked with him as the Ecumenical Officer for the Archdiocese of San Francisco. I recall how pleased he was to attend the services at Candlestick Park when Pope John Paul II visited the city. He had missed the bus taking all the church leaders back to the city. I returned to Candlestick Park to find him walking peacefully along outside the stadium. He waved to me as I pulled up beside him and he said: "I knew that you would not forget me!" We had a great laugh over that experience for years later. Swami Prabuddhanada was a person of great patience and humor – a combination that made him a spiritual leader on the highest order. May he rest in peace!

I have offered a Mass for the repose of his soul and may I extend to all the members of the Vedanta Society of Northern California my sincerest sympathies at the loss of Swami. I too carry him ever in my heart and I wish you all the same peace and joy that he showed during his lifetime with us. How can we forget him?

Peace and All Good!

Fr. John J. Keane

July 27th, 2014

To all at the Vedanta Temple,

I was deeply saddened to hear the news of Swami Prabuddhananda's recent passing. I am very sorry that I was unable to attend the service for him at the temple, as I have moved out of state this Summer. I attended services at the Vedanta Temple whenever I was able. I cherish the few CDs I have of the talks he gave. I wish I had been present more often.

I first met Swamiji in the Winter of 2006. I was coming for an interview to hopefully be authorized for the retreatant list at the Olema house.

I was a bit nervous and intimidated as I entered his office and he gestured for me to sit. The moment I began to sit down, having seen no more of me than my appearance at the door and my short walk to the chair, Swamiji asked me, "Are you a writer?". I was instantly stunned and disarmed, because he had recognized me on sight. I felt at ease with him right away. I answered happily, "Well, not professionally, but I write." He waved his hand dismissively at the word "professionally" and said, "Then you're a writer."

He asked what I write about. I felt comfortable then and blurted out enthusiastically, "Oh, I write about everything!". His tone shifted subtly to one more stern, he looked deeply into my eyes and said, "Don't write about everything, just write about spiritual things."

I loved him immediately from that moment forward. I have always had the utmost reverence for his wisdom and guidance, and held his sweet and gentle manner very dear to my heart.

The times I have been able to go on retreat in Olema have been some of the most nourishing, enriching and healing times of my life.

I knew nothing of Sri Ramakrishna at that early point in my development, but learned a great deal very quickly by reading many books over the next couple of years. Also, through having some extraordinary, powerful personal meditation experiences in direct communion with Ramakrishna, in the beautiful meditation room at the Women's Retreat house.

I treasure the few times I was fortunate enough to be present when Swami Prabuddhananda would visit on Tuesday afternoons. I am forever grateful for the quiet intimacy of those group talks and snacks at the table with Swamiji.

I think of how it warmed and delighted me to see how cute he looked in his orange hat in crisp Autumn air, walking away across the field at dusk, deep in contemplation. I will think of him that way now, strolling into the twilight.

Adam Christopher Ruan

Swami Prabuddhanandaji & Gandhi Camp in America

Swami Prabuddhanandaji's greatness lied in his simplicity, civility, his unassuming nature and his friendly approach to everybody. He was profoundly learned, and yet never conscious about it. Everytime Swamiji visited Gandhi Camp, he met small children along with elders. He was equally friendly with all. He became a child when he talked to small children, so much fun.

Arachnidan, Swamiji student name, was Secretary of the Ramakrishna Vidyarthi Mandira in Bangalore. He had invited me in the 1970's to talk to the students about the event of the cruel ***decoits (bandits) of the Chambal Valley in north-central India surrender themselves to law and go to jails.*** It was a historic event in non-violence, bringing the message that cruel people can convert to become saints. Two former reformed dacoits also were with me. A total of 654 hard core dacoits had surrendered at the inspiration of Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Lok Nayak Jayapraksh Narayan. Gandhi Ashram that I had founded had played host to the later event. Students appreciated Secretary Raghunandan's initiative in inviting me to the Hostel.

When I visited the U.S.A . for the first stime in 1984, I was pleasantly surprised to know that dear Raghunandan Maharaj had become **Swami Prabuddhananda and as Head of the Vedanta Society North California.** I could not respond to Swamiji's invitation that year, but went to San Francisco in 1985. I felt grateful that Swamiji himself came to SFO airport, with Gaurev Prabhakar to receive me and take me to stay at the Old Temple.

Next day, Swamiji took me to Viveknanda Retreat at **Olema**. Swami Sahajanand took me an old jeep round the Retreat area, over 2,000 acres. On return, I sked Swamiji, "2,000 acres of retreat land ! What happens here, Swamiji ?" Swamiji said, " Our devotees come for rest and meditation. Once an year, we have a retreat gathering for 400-500 devotees." " What is the age

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Group ? Over 65-70-80-----.'But don't you have any program for the younger ones, who need it, who are the future ? '

Swamiji said, " Yes, I agree. But who will do it ?" I asked him, "May I do it Swamiji ? Because that is what I am doing in India." Swamiji said " If you can do it, most welcome." This discussion was in 1985; we had the first **Gandhi Youth Camp .at Vivekananda Retreat at Olema in 1986**. The first Camp had only 21 boys and girls. Inspired by Swami Prabuddhanand, the Prabhakar family supported it fully and the Kannada Koota provided the logistics. Beginning 1986, 27 Gandhi Youth Camps have been held in Olema and 3 at 'Krishnalaya' Chinmaya Centre at Piercy.

Swami Vedananda is a unique spiritual personality at Olema. He is highly learned in spiritual knowledge and at the same time, Swami Vedananda is well versed with the spade and saw ! He was great inspiration to Gandhi Camps. The nuns of the Vedanta Center guided our girl campers

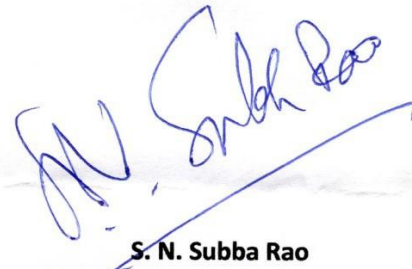
Swami Prabuddhanandaji is no more with us. But the Gandhi Camp continues to benefit youths. Dr. **Jyoti** Lulla, a Ramakrishna devotee is the pillar of strength for the camp. Dr. Chandrika Kapadia and her other colleagues have been holding the series of camps. Shri Abhay Bhushan and friends joined to make the camps more successful. Indians for Collective Action and India Community Center (ICA & ICC) have been providing logistics. **The 31st Gandhi Camp is running successfully at KRISHNALAYA at Piercy in California from July 31 to August 6, 2016.**

Long Live the Swami Prabuddhananda spirit.

Gandhi Camp

**'Krishnalaya'
Piercy Ca.**

July 31, 2016



S. N. Subba Rao

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CHARLES R. TAMRAZ

The following comment is about a wonderful gift given to me by Swami Prabuddhananda: "The Journey."

The event was at the Olema memorial program. The large tent was filling up with visitors and much talking and other activity was going on. Swami came to the front and addressed the crowd with these words, "This is now the time to leave everything outside and go inside with God. We leave other thoughts outside and we go inside with God." We leave other things outside and go inside with God. We leave other thoughts outside and we go inside with God." Many could deliver this message, but Swami said it as only he could, holding this truth, to go inside with God only. This was from a very special individual, one who knows what it is to go inside or to travel toward the Point of No Separation that is implied! I heard the message loud and clear. I left everything as I sat in my seat and started traveling inside, and inside and inside as you would have to do to reach God; i.e., the Point of No Separation. You would travel to the point of NO SPACE/TIME then unable to describe it! I continued to travel during the lecture; what an absolute joy! Since then I have used this message to begin my meditation and travel, travel to the Joyous Point of Peace! Thank you, Swami.

CHELA & PAUL KUNASZ

We have had the great good fortune to have first met Swami Prabuddhananda when he first came to San Francisco. My mother, Vani Varrentzoff, who was the secretary of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, worked closely with him from that time. Swami was so important in her life – in so many ways. Later when she aged, and while living in the convent, suffered from Alzheimer’s disease, Swami was the one who made sure she had the very best care and life possible (as did her Vedanta Convent housemates).

Later Swami took a very wonderful interest in my work with Tibetan refugees in India, helping, first through introductions to the Ramakrishna/Vivekananda Eye Clinic in Bangalore and then through other powerful means (at some sacrifice even to his personal needs) helped to make sure that an injured (badly injured) boy – who had crossed the Himalayas with an eye partly infected and very damaged coming out of its socket – got excellent medical help (5 operations of the highest level) in Bangalore Municipal Hospital. Swami also gave me lots of other advice about college scholarships for poor students in India, about crops in Karnataka, and many other things.

When the Tibetan lama, a great associate of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and a close teacher of mine, died in 2007, I called Swami, crying on the telephone, and he helped me so much to stop my tears and carry on with his usual clear words of wonderful spiritual wisdom. His immeasurable support both spiritually and practically have been a mainstay in my life. He had such a way of helping each of us from exactly where we were – not just theoretical words of generality – which are good but not as powerful as were his quiet, directed insight. Swami even invented a “physics meditation” for my scientist husband, Paul and was every kind and supportive to both of us. We again appreciated the compassionate words he sent us when Paul was diagnosed with metastatic prostate cancer.

Words, clearly, do not suffice here. Swami himself was such a font of love, support, kindness, knowledge, wisdom, sensitivity, enlightened calm, expertise of many kinds that it is impossible to express.

FRANCINE FALK-ALLEN

I was saddened to read of Swami's passing. I am of the Sufi community, and met with him in late 1987 for an interview so that I could take a retreat in Olema. I was nervous meeting with such an esteemed teacher. He put me at ease with his sincere and relaxed manner, and by the time I left, I too was relaxed and in fact joyful after reviewing my intended practices and finding our intention to be the same for my spiritual work. I remember him saying, "We just want to make sure people are not going to sit and read magazines and eat potato chips." We had a laugh over that. Much love to you all.

FELDER GRAHAM

Here is one of my favorite recollections:

It was my first Tahoe retreat, summer of 1997, or maybe 1998, and my first extended experience of Swami Prabuddhananda as a teacher. He was in top form expounding the *Kapilopadesha*. I was in awe; and though middle-aged, like a schoolboy I kept a tongue-tied distance.

Then one balmy night there was an irresistible full moon, and five or six of us in the main cabin decided to walk down to the lake. To our surprise and delight, Swami decided to join us. As we ambled down Shivagiri Road, the bright moon was not to be ignored, and I'm sure our first topic was chandra, and Swami thereafter was in story-telling mode. I can't remember the stories—they weren't ghost stories, but that was the mood, like a summer camp counselor giving his charges a good scare around the campfire so that they could feel all the more safe and snug in their sleeping bags.

The reason I like to think of this night in remembering Swami is not that it changed or even expanded my image of him. Rather, it's because that image remains constant—reaffirmed. He was the same solid man, a man of steady wisdom, regardless of what activity he was engaged in. He entertained us, yes, even endeared himself to us, but he in no way was ingratiating. He only let us discover what was always there—not just steady, but also kindly and human, wisdom.

JYOTSNA MAAN

Before we actually met Swami Prabuddhanandaji in person, we had heard a lot about Swami Prabuddhanandaji from our friends whom he visited in Dallas for retreats. It was however our first meeting with him, in July 2011 that we did understand how loving the swami was. I especially recall a particular conversation with him in his office at the Vedanta Society of Northern California. It was the time of his dinner meal post our one on one time with him and I was to go to the convent for the night, the men however would accompany Maharaj to the monastery and have their meal with him. The kind of joy we were experiencing by just being in his presence filled our minds with joy and peace and I particularly was not ready for it to end. As is the custom of bowing down and touching the feet of the Swami when we take leave of him, I just sat there kneeled down at his feet unable to move and I said to Maharaj "Maharaj, I do not want to go!" He ignored me the first time and I, being stubborn that I am, I repeated myself. It just felt as if I could be a child being foolish in front of him. I said "I do not want to go! I do not want to leave!" He finally looked me in the eye and in his famous one-liner tones said "Where are we going? We are all in Thakur!" and touched my head. That's it! There was nothing else to be said after that, I got up and saw them walk towards the monastery. The rest of the trip was equally joyous attending the July 4th Olema retreat when during the lunch prasad, he met all devotees and as such walked up to where we were and made sure we had enough food. There is nothing out of ordinary for an outsider to see but sitting with him in that office previous day, spending those couple of hours with him, and now seeing him interact with everyone else, etched a image of his smiling face that we could never forget.

Our next visit was in November of the same year, we did not spend very much time during this visit due to his ill health. I was even told that maybe he may not be feeling too well to see me in his office, but by Mother's grace he was feeling much better just a couple of days before we had arrived. During our meeting with him, it was very

endearing to note that he would enquire the details of our regular meetings here in Cedar Rapids, about the devotees, how many there were and about our regularity and encourage us to continue. We also talked at length about Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary celebrations being held in India and how we were excited to go to India later that year to visit Belur Math, Kamarpukur and Jayrambati for the first time. He enquired about our travel details and such. Even though this was a regular conversation for someone with an ordinary outlook, it was much inspirational for us as we got excited and enthusiastic about our pilgrimage after we heard more about it from Maharaj. The next day, at the Vedanta temple we were very glad to see him walking for the first time after a long time in the Vivekananda Hall. Although he walked a little for the last couple of days, he wasn't walking for longer times and was not walking in the Hall. I was especially so happy to see him again and thanking my fate and result of that was showing all my 32 teeth of joy when he asked "Why are you smiling?" I said "I am so glad to see you walking here Maharaj!" It is one of my best memories of Maharaj.

Despite spending very less time with him, there is an unending presence in our lives with his blessings and love that he showered unconditionally on us. He is one of the great swamis (in our opinion) we met whose silence and very few words (mostly one-liners) made a great impact in our spiritual lives. We pray to Thakur that he may always watch over us and keep all of us connected in Him.

DR. DORIS BERSING

Little I knew when I entered the New Temple of the Vedanta Society of Northern California (VSNC) in San Francisco; my life was going to take a turn for the best of my spiritual growth and for the worse of my radical thinking.

It was an evening of devotional singing at the temple in the beautiful auditorium, immediately, I, a liberal politically and socially speaking, thought that business of a men's choir and a women's choir was matter of the past and did not feel attracted at all by the leader of the event who encouraged such a thing to happen I was horrified—fter all it was already 1996 and things had changed—I thought!

Despite the conservative atmosphere, the seriousness and rigor of the practices at the VSNC, there was something that kept calling me. Until one Sunday morning in 1997, in the middle of the service, I just started crying filled by a feeling of “coming home.” Needless to say, this Sunday I was eager to greet Swami Prabuddhananda at the Vivekananda Hall, but this time not like other Sundays before, I did it with curiosity and a firm conviction that in spite of the contradictions Swamiji stirred in me, he was the one to ask for guidance.

Initiated in the Yoga Vedanta tradition of the Sivananda Centers in France, I was used to a different practice and although acquainted with different spiritual practices, I felt like I did not know anything. With this conviction, that Sunday after the greetings and Q&A, I asked Sw. Prabuddhananda if I could talk to him in private. He had seen me around the services, festival, and karma yoga activities at the temple, Olema or Shanti Ashrama, but I kept myself always an outsider of his entourage and his presence, and yet that Sunday without even blinking an eye, he told me to come, next week, gave me a day and time and directed me to confirm with the Society secretary, Girija what I did still shocked by my tears and my experience during the lecture.

For my first 1:1 encounter with Sw. Prabuddhananda, I had tried to tackle the FULL gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, few chapters of the entire works of Swami Vivekananda, all in an effort to look smart and impress Swamiji.

In his usual parsimonious way, he greeted me at his office and I found myself at a loss with no words of wisdom or signs of normal intelligence, babbling how different this Vedanta experience was from my prior ones.

He just said: "If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work," and after detonating that bomb, he proceed to ask me in a very normal and mundane fashion where I was from and what did I do for a living. After telling him I was a doctor in psychology, he said, ha! A psychologist, so you do know people, don't you, to what I said I really tried but people were a puzzle and their behaviors sometimes erratic and difficult to understand, like for example those who committed crimes and I wanted to change them and make them love others as God loves us and he just said, there is evil and good everywhere, you, it's just fine... do not try to understand, and you just gotta do what you gotta do...

Needless to say, I was speechless, thinking he did not know what he was talking about, what about social change, social justice, politics, and activism, his position was complaisant but his magnetism incommensurable, before I could open my mouth, one more time, he gave me some candy and nuts, and send me away...puzzled, confused, and disillusioned...I kept coming back.

One year during the Holidays (New Year's Eve) I came to the temple with my mother, my sister and my newly born nephew -Samuel- to introduce them to Swami. He was very kind and generous with his time -given other devotees were waiting for him- to greet all of my people, and bless my nephew... When he touched Samuel, the boy giggle and smiled and Swamiji said, "... He will be a happy child..." My sister say "I hope, swami..." and Swamiji answered "he already is...Mother always take care of his

children...”, which for us had a double meaning referring to Mother, as my sister’s being the mother and bestowing holy Mother’s blessings onto him.

One summer at the Lake Tahoe Retreat, I had offered the then VSNC secretary, Girija, to help out with the meals and prepare dinner for two days in a row. I like cooking and know how-to cook for larger than usual crowds. Of course after and along attending the regular lectures and meditation time in-group, there was all the hustle and bustle of the cooking, defrosting, cutting, and chopping. Inevitable, Swamiji was always touring the working quarters to supervise and overall to be present to the volunteers. The second day, he came by the kitchen and saw me getting dinner ready and said “... again in charge? And he told Girija, ...seems Doris is a good cook but she would need a relief so she does not get too tired to meditate and enjoy the view...” That was his subtle way to tell me to balance my act up ☺

Swami Prabuddhananda was very approachable and always made a point of addressing mundane matters, like how is this person, or the other, referring either to my family or friends. Always remember names and my last account of my business life and ordeals. Always made himself available just to check-in or in moments of need, even if it was pure-human-drama, he was there for me... and I know others, as well. For instance, the time I ran to him full of grief and despair when losing a very important relationship. I called him at his, then private number at his office sobbing and begging for an appointment, which he gave me right away.

When I arrived to his office, even after one day of sobbing on the phone, and although calmer just the view of his face made me feel safe and started crying. After few minutes he told me to tell him what was happening and to calm down, after explaining my loss, he said “...Relationships come and go, what you cannot bear...give it to Mother’ (referring to Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi),’ throw yourself at Mother’s feet and keep your meditation and when in grief, practice japa...” I continue complaining about the improper behavior of the other person and he aid “... Love this person as your

sibling...and offer that love to Mother..." Then he proceeded to offer me some sweets and finished our interview with his usual stroke on my head, which he did as a way of blessing. And acknowledgement, I think. Needless to say, I was in awe about the simplicity of the advice –given the depth of my despair and grief-

As I started working irregular schedules in my healthcare practice, my visits to Swami became less regular. One day I received a phone call from a member of the VSNC Convent to ask me if I could change my karma-yoga schedule so I could cross path with Swamiji. It seems he had been inquiring about me. Immediately I changed my schedule to be able to do my "shift-change" with Swamiji. It was just bliss! From that moment on, I was always looking forward to my karma yoga days covering the temple phones and door because I knew at the end of my shift; Swamiji will come few minutes earlier to check in with me.

A routine was developed, since sometimes I could not be in town or had other work engagements, he started calling some 20-30 minutes before my departure time to check if I was covering or not. When answering the call, he recognized my voice, and I guess my accent and said, "I see, it is you, I will be down, shortly."

Our chat used to be almost the same, some comments about the news in the world, any crazy issues going on in the city (He was almost well informed about the world and local news). Immediately, he checked on my spiritual practices. "How is your meditation?" If I said I had not had time to do it twice a day as usual, he said, "It's all right –with his Hindu accent- do it when you can but try to do it every day and carry Mother with you at all times. Find a time to do japa between clients, even during a short walk." When complaining about working a lot, he always said, "This time in your life it is karma-yoga your way of doing your spiritual practices. Remember to offer your job to Mother, at the beginning of your day, throughout the day, and at the end, even before going to bed if too tired to meditate, offer, your day to Mother and do japa, if easier."

He had never a scold or criticism of my lack of consistency or discipline when performing my spiritual practices or any of my choices of being more in the external world instead of the internal one, but just pure encouraging love. Many of my encounters and special moments with Swamiji were always marked by a feeling of entering the deep waters of the ocean while looking at a shallow stream. Always the impression that I had not impressed Swamiji and was no more special than any living person. After 17 years of experiencing Swamiji's grace and loving being, I realized that, Swamiji has touched tens of thousands of people's lives in very personal and profound ways, so my own experiences with Swamiji were not that unique — only unique to me and for that very life changing. That was my guru, Swami Prabuddhanandaji!

CHRISTOPHER CHIONO

Six years back getting ready for the Memorial Day event. Karma yogis, devotees and monastics were in a frenzy getting Olema ready. It was about three in the afternoon. A warm pleasant day and I was entering the Barnestery searching for a tool and I noticed a lone woman in the barn yelling loudly at the top of her lungs, "Swami, Swami! Where is Swami?" She stormed her way through the barn looking for him so I asked her if I could help her find him. He might have been napping for all I knew. She continued to yell in a very demanding fashion over and over again, "Swami! Swami! We need you now!" She actually tried to poke her way into the kitchen! I quickly said I would be more than happy to look for him and asked her to stand at the entrance to the Barnestery. When I entered the kitchen, I found Swami standing with his hands clasped behind his back. He was facing the half-opened window silently staring out. A soft breeze was blowing thru the kitchen and he had that deep penetrating stare. The devotee continued to holler from the entrance way, menacingly louder. He remained fixed, his mind never wavered, his glance far away, emanating imperturbable calm. He might even have been chewing a bit of prasad. Yet, he was fixed in thought, unmoving, radiating calm. I went back and told her that perhaps Swami was taking rest.

DEBORAH KEARNS

After many Sunday lectures, I finally noticed that when Swami appeared on the altar, he spent differing amounts of time in some kind of prayer there. This had a profound effect upon me--the realization that whatever he was doing at that moment was not mechanical, not something rote or merely ritual. I remember how after many months of Sunday lectures, I finally *heard* something Swami had said many times: that if one wanted to know more then come and meet with him. And so I did and so it changed my life.

I remember his kindness, how humane he was. He once said the academic field of “humanities” was a response to the failure of religion to address real human challenges and suffering. When I lamented a period of stalled meditation practice, he said: just begin meditation again now, don’t feel bad about stopping just start again. Yes, he said, it is better that you not stop altogether, best to at least do just 5 minutes a day, but it is OK, now just start again.

I recall his illuminating description of human love as meaningful and valuable but not the perfect love of what we call “God,” which fulfills every desire we have. Human love, he said, is a little more like a business deal; it is a kind of equal exchange (a quid pro quo), *unless* we nurture the higher spirit in our beloved, unless we help each other in our spiritual quest.

When the U.S. government was on the verge of the invasion of Iraq, I felt sad and hopeless. I did not expect Swami to speak about it, but hoped he might say something helpful. I was surprised when during that Sunday morning service Swami addressed the subject, which some might consider too “political” to be a concern for Vedanta. I recall his exact word--he said, “George Bush is increasing the suffering in the world”--brief and yet his words went straight to the heart of the matter and were so meaningful for me.

I remember how Swami made me feel important and fully heard in our one-on-one meetings, but (in some subtle way) he would not allow me to attach to him, would not allow me to believe that what mattered most (what we would call “Atman”) was in him exclusively, but that it was within me. He was a master at providing profound personal attention to his student while preventing attachment.

I was a new student of Swami Prabuddhananda’s and I was trying to determine what things to avoid in a spiritual quest, what might require caution, but what came out of my mouth was: “Swami, what is there to fear?” He was quiet for a moment and then replied, “Nothing, there is nothing to fear at all.” He gave me more than anyone I have ever known and asked for nothing in return.

MEERA KYATSANDRA

I do think about Revered Swamiji a lot, mostly the times when I do not take time to meditate or pray. In one of my meetings he had pointedly asked me whether I did meditate and pray. I could not lie to a monk, can I? I said no and what he said will remain for rest of my life. He mentioned how that runs in my blood and that I need to put some effort in bringing that out, being a daughter of a person who inspired Swamiji (my father and his elder brother Sri Jagannath) and related to Swamiji. I try now amidst all the mundane things related to life. I attend local Chinmaaya Gita classes and remember him when I read Gita.

He was calmness personified, more of a listener and observer than a “preacher.” I always felt such peace in his presence—not sure whether it was because I felt as if I was in my father’s presence. He somehow filled that void for a few minutes, void that I had felt since I was 7 years old. Perhaps Swamiji felt that I needed it so he never failed to mention incidents from his past that involved my father and his Bhadravati days. Over time we met, very few times unfortunately. Swamiji in spite of his restricted words was extremely affectionate. I still have the shawl he gave me as a gift and perhaps will comfort me when I need it.

He was forever thinking about helping someone. As a teenager when I was at crossroads, trying to choose my career, he suggested speech and hearing course where I could develop skills to help the needy. How I regret not taking that up! My life would have been spent in a more useful way. I am very privileged to be part of the family that swami was born in. Perhaps some more will come back to me as I think more about him.

SHANTA PADEGAL

Ever since my contact with him, he was always lovingly guiding me in my life in every way. His main emphasis was always towards inner life; that is how to turn outer life in harmony with spiritual life.

Just few months before his leaving this world, I spoke to him and mentioned how grateful I was who guided me at every step and I have no words to express my gratefulness & thankfulness and I can never forget in my life. His answer was, "I'm only an instrument; it is all Sri Ramakrishna who does." I'd like to mention some statements which he used.

1. Get in touch with the indwelling spirit always.
2. We exactly deserve what we get and what we are, nothing less & nothing more.
3. Law of karma is merciless.
4. His constant emphasis on the practice of the presence of god.
5. In my last talk, 2 months before his final departure, I asked him what exactly do you mean by the practice of the presence of god. He answered, "Feel him in every thought, in every action, in every motion, superimpose Sri Ramakrishna. Then we will have no feeling of our personality. Then it is all he and he alone."

I'm enclosing spiritual advice that he wrote to me in his letters. I have saved all his handwritten letters to me over the years.

Prayer is wonderful to lift us up and purify us. Pray by all means in a natural way, spontaneously. Pray to Mother for strength, guidance, and comfort within. We should pray for others too. It works.

Mind going downwards – Mind may go high or low but you are always the pure beloved child of God. Mind is not a part of ourselves. Let us assert this fact.

When the light shines, all darkness vanishes. Light cannot say that it will come after the darkness has been removed.

A Prayer: "O Lord, if you have the compassion to save me, then save me. Why weigh my good and bad actions? You, who are powerful enough to make and unmake the universes to "abide by the laws of one's Karma?"

Events and people come and go as in a dream. What is left? Mother and Mother alone. In all vicissitudes of life, let us hold on to Her and watch the things go by.

Problems: Offer them at the feet of the Lord once and for all. Continuous practice in this way will remove the sting and all the pinpricks

Discipline: Do not pay too much emphasis on morning, evening, night, or quantity of japa and meditation. There is no need to be too concerned about the timings and count. They are meant to discipline us and make us do the minimum. We should try to fill our time and all areas of life with Mother in a spontaneous way through silent prayer and inner conversations with Her. Everything will come through Her grace.

Worship: Convert the whole life into worship. Struggle, Struggle, Struggle is the way. Struggle with eagerness to do japa, to feel His constant presence. Offer all your actions, past and present at His feet again and again. Another important practice is to feel that you have been offered at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and Mother and they have made you their own and they are taking care of us. Add this important element in your struggles.

Service and Surrender: Let yearning for Him be transmuted into love for Him through service. Service of God in man is the spirit of worship. It will add a new dimension to spiritual life making it more satisfying and broad.

Do the best you can at every moment. Throw up your all at His feet. "Atma-nivedana" alone

will bring peace, strength, and finally realization. This will make our sadhana deep and calm removing all impatience, hurry, and worry. These two will do the job. Pester him day and night to reveal his presence.

Take refuge in Sri Ramakrishna who is the soul of soul, support and guide. Hold on to him with one hand and fight the battle of life with the other. That and that alone can give us inner stability, peace and strength. That is true in America, India, North Pole, Sea bed, or anywhere, now and always.

Again, holding on to Sri Ramakrishna and Mother at any cost, fight the battle. Through their grace slowly things will come around. What is needed is firmness. If we are steadfast in our spiritual ideal, the external world will slowly start cooperating.

External help comes and goes. Let us make use of them fully when they are available. When not available let us hang to our Mantra, Guru and instructions, more than all to our dear Lord within. If we persist in this way through His grace then we will be able to rely on Him for all things. Then we will have won the battle.

Mr. Krishna Murthy Padegal, my husband, has the memory of his vivid picture when he left USA finally to settle in India. He stayed in the Old Temple for 2 months. On the day of his departure to India, Swami came with him to see him off in the airport and while Mr. Padegal was boarding the plane, Swami stood there with closed eyes and was praying for him.

DR. R. BALASUBRAMANIAM

Swami Prabuddhananda was not only a great monk but someone who believed in my and my work. I had the greatest respect for him and valued his guidance a lot. I had written a short article of him and the same can be found at:

<https://rbalu.wordpress.com/2011/11/10/66-swami-prabuddhanandaji-our-silent-supporter/>

I recently visited the [Vedanta Society of Northern California](#) to meet Swami Prabuddhanandaji, the head of the center there. He has been ailing for some time now and I felt that I had to meet and enquire about his health. Meeting him brought back some memories of more than 20 years. I had met him for the first time in March 1991. I had come to the United States for the first time and Swami Sureshanandaji had asked me to meet with him and seek his support for SVYM. Both of them were contemporaries and had joined the Ramakrishna Mission at around the same time. Swami Sureshanandaji had spoken very highly of him and I went to San Francisco and spent a wonderful week with him. Swami Prabuddhanandaji had given me precise directions on how to reach the place on Vallejo Street and I was put up in the old temple close by. I enjoyed the daily interactions with him, Swami Sahajanandaji (who has since passed away), Swami Vedanandaji and the few serious devotees who visited over the weekend. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was very impressed with how SVYM was founded and how Swami Vivekananda had inspired the work all along. He wanted to know what we were doing (not much compared to the activities today) and what our plans for the future were. I was a novice who had no idea of philanthropy management or fund-raising, and Swami Prabuddhanandaji took on the responsibility of mentoring me. He spoke to me on making presentations, preparing suitable PR material and how to build donor networks. He seemed to have an endless list of people he knew across the US and he started introducing me to them. From Ms Barbara Piner, SV Murthy and Radhakrishna in the American Service to India to Ms Raj Prabhakar in Lubbock to Narayanaswamy Gowda and Shaku Shankar and others in the Bay area – he introduced

them all to me. Each one of them has visited our projects over the years and has been very instrumental in helping raise funds for us here in the United States.

As I spent time talking to Swamiji who looked frail and weak, I realized the extent of support and encouragement he had been silently giving me over the years. He was the ever-curious person that I had known and wanted to be updated on all the projects that we were undertaking since his last visit to our place. He wanted to know how each person he had met was doing and I was fascinated that he remembered not only their names, but also what they did at SVYM. He was fondly recollecting the visit to the Hosahalli school and the lunch that he had with us on that day. He was very keen on knowing about [GRAAM](#), our latest initiative and wanted to understand how public policy worked in India. His sharp mind and excellent memory reassured me that he was on his way to recovery.

As always, he was the perfect host. He wanted to make sure that I was comfortable in the old temple and that adequate arrangements were made for me. I still remember how I had foolishly underestimated the [microclimate phenomenon of the Bay Area](#) and gone unprepared for the unpredictable weather. Swamiji had graciously offered me his coat in 1991 and explained to me the importance and the art of staying warm.

During our conversation, the subject drifted to Swami Achalanandaji, my spiritual mentor. I was telling him how I missed him and how I did not even have a photo of him. Later that evening when I met him to bid farewell and take leave, he showed me three aging black and white photographs of Swami Achalanandaji and himself taken more than 40 years ago. He promised to have them scanned, photo-shopped and sent to me by email.

As I sat on the plane on the way back and thought about all the wonderful people who I have come to meet and interact because of founding SVYM, I felt humbled at the enormous support and encouragement so many have quietly given us. Amongst the many, Swami Prabuddhanandaji stands tall. I remember the nervous presentation that I

had made in 1991 at the Vedanta Society after his Sunday sermon. There were nearly 50 devotees and Swamiji had asked me to talk about SVYM and appeal for funds. Little did I know that he had already spoken to a select few on the need to spur me on. He had somehow made sure that people in the gathering would not only give me a patient hearing but also open up their purses and demonstrate their support and commitment to what we were doing. In his own quiet way, he had made sure that I would be encouraged and supported. It was this action of his that gave me the confidence to start making presentations all over the United States, and to this date has helped me transcend my own shyness and be bold about asking for support from the hundreds of people who I have met and interacted with subsequently. I felt fortunate that I have had the unique privilege of being guided and supported by such extraordinary people. I had once tried to ask him how was it that he could give so unconditionally, and his matter of fact response was “Oh, I am not the giver. All that I am is the instrument that Vivekananda wants all of us to be. And by the way, do not mistakenly think that we are supporting you. It is humanity in general that we are trying to work for. You are also after all only an instrument for this purpose.”

I was touched when Swamiji gently thrust \$500 into my hands and told me that I could put it to good use in GRAAM. It was his own way of validating the usefulness of GRAAM and what it could do in the future. I felt reassured and recharged as I embark on this next phase of my life in SVYM.

DR. JAIKRISHNA PRASAD

Swami Prabuddhananda was very dear and kind to us. After Swami Aseshananda's passing away, he had been a guide and teacher to us for the last 18 years. I considered him my Upaguru. We first met Swamiji in Ganges, MI in the summer of 1981 and he invited us to visit him in San Francisco. My wife Gauri, my daughter Lorna and I visited him that same year in October. Swamiji was very kind in arranging for Mrs. Caret to show us around San Francisco. The next day, one of the junior swamis took us to the Oelma Retreat across the Golden Gate Bridge. He also arranged for us to have day visits to Sacramento to see Swami Shraddhananda, and to Berkley to see Swami Swananda. I was on my way, along with Lorna, to receive initiation from Swami Aseshananda in Oregon. She was only 11 years old at the time. Gauri asked Swami Prabuddhananda whether Lorna should ask for initiation despite her young age. He said as long as Lorna wanted initiation and Swami Aseshananda would grant it, she ought to take it.

Since 1981, we have been going to San Francisco at least every third year for the American College of Surgeons meeting, and during these visits have had the privilege of spending time with Swamiji. I would eat breakfast with him, go on walks with him, and spend hours at a time in his office asking questions. I never missed the opportunity to see Swamiji when he would come to Ganges, MI for spiritual retreats.

One time, I suffered from viral pneumonia, unable to do my japa due to restlessness and breathlessness. I wondered what would happen if I gave up my body in such desperate sickness that I could not remember God at my time of death. The next time I visited San Francisco, I expressed this fear to Swamiji. He assured me that the Divine Mother, who looks after me on my days of health, would certainly not forsake me when I needed her grace most. Quoting the Chandi's eleventh chapter, he told me "Sarvasvarupe sarvese sarvasakti samanvite/ bhayebyastrahino devi durge devi namo stute" (Verse 24). Another question I asked about Brother Lawrence as to how he

constantly remembered God. Maharaj said that Brother Lawrence not only remembered God, but constantly saw and communed with him in a very high spiritual state.

We visited Maharaj in October, 2011. I was taken to the old temple, and Gauri went to the convent. As soon as I reached the old temple, Gauri called me, saying Maharaj was sick, and no doctor was available; I was needed at the new temple to attend Maharaj's health. When I reached Swamiji's room, he was quite sick and out of breath with profuse amounts of secretion from his airways. There were several attendants in the room, as well as medication and equipment present. He was in pulmonary edema from congestive heart failure. I tried to supervise his care with the help of the attendants, and his breathing slowly improved. He asked me to go back to the old temple and rest.

When I came in the morning to see him, he was sitting in his room and asking about our welfare. I asked Swamiji how he was feeling after the night before, to which he replied, "let nature take its course." My son Madhu also came from the airport to see Swamiji, and we spent almost an hour with him. He did not complain, even once, about his physical well-being. Later in the morning, he was sitting in his office attending to his emails and seeing some visitors. Gauri did not think she would be able to see Swami-ji, but he asked to see her the next morning.

The day after, Swami Vedananda gave a lecture in the temple, and following the lecture, Swami Prabuddhananda sat in the Vivekananda Hall taking questions on Advaita philosophy. I had to leave for the medical conference in downtown San Francisco. When I reached the hotel, it suddenly dawned on me that Swamiji is a sthitaprajna (man of steady wisdom). I called my close friends and family to see him. My younger son, Rashmi, came from Anchorage, AK, to see him. My daughter-in-law came to see him from Michigan. I also asked Mr. Mahavir Khetavat from Michigan to see him, which he did.

I again saw Maharaj in February, 2014 with Gauri, Rashmi, and daughter-in-law Roli. By now, Swamiji had been hospitalized. He was quite ill at this time. He had very little

energy. He was reluctant to move from the bed; however, I persuaded him to walk with me outside the room. He told us, "Keep coming to San Francisco temple. I may not be here." As we were taking his leave, he said in a feeble voice, "Ask for grace."

Swamiji had a calmness and peace on his face whenever I saw him. He was always ready to help us, no matter how bad his health. I always felt happy and fearless in his presence. We miss him very much, but know his teachings are always guiding us towards illumination and the very tranquility he embodied while he was with us.

POORNIMA ATTIGUPAM

Plunge in! Plunge in!

“Plunge in! Plunge in!! Take Mother’s name and just plunge in! Surrender everything to Her. Have faith in Her. She will take care of the rest. Why worry? There are two types of people. Those who rely on themselves and those who rely completely on God. The former will ensure their securities by carefully planning, calculating and saving for their future etc. The latter does not care about anything and entirely depend on God for their future come what may! They don’t hesitate to just plunge in head long as they surrender completely to the good Lord”. Strive to be the latter kind and Plunge In!” Swami would reiterate fervently over the years that keeps resurfacing in my mind whenever I think of him.

Initial Acquaintance

My journey with Swami Prabuddhananda began around 1989 - 1990 when I arrived as a graduate student fresh from India, reeling from homesickness and culture shock. I was not used to being alienated from Ramakrishna devotees/ashrams and was rather distraught. Although I did not know Swami personally, I had heard about him through extended family members who were closely associated with him and SFO Center for several years.

Out of sheer desperation one evening, I mustered up the courage to call him and was elated to find he was so down to earth and gracious. He suggested that I keep in touch with him on a regular basis and encouraged me to call him on weekends. Thus began my acquaintance with Swami, over the phone! I don’t remember missing an opportunity to call him on a regular basis initially. Swami was an oasis in a desert for me. He instantly took on the comprehensive role of becoming my spiritual guide, mentor, confidant, and guardian.

Eventually, he coaxed me to visit him in SFO and I did. I stayed with the nuns at the convent (there was no guest apartment at that time). It was a unique experience. They

were so very gracious, kind and hospitable that I felt right at home. I would try to visit SFO Center every opportunity I got especially on long weekends. He made it a point to meet with me twice a day at appointed hours on every visit.

Highlights of Visits

To describe all the visits and experiences I had with the Swami and the nuns, would probably take a book. Hence, I shall focus on significant events in this context.

Student Life

Swami was extra considerate as I was a student struggling to make it happen. Each visit, he would make sure I was taken care of boarding and lodging wise. He expected to be kept posted about my activities during the visit. He wanted to know my plans for each day and how I would spend time when I was there to the minute.

One of my favorite attractions was the book store. I had free access to the book store and was allowed to browse for hours even though I didn't purchase much. Swami noticed this and in one of the morning sessions with him, out of the blue, he looked at me and said "you know, you can go downstairs to the book store and browse. If you would like to purchase anything, just put it on my tab. I shall pay for your books. You don't have to worry about being able to afford them or not." He was so thoughtful to my needs and offered to purchase the books for me! This touching gesture gave me more joy than buying books.

On yet one another visit as I updated him up with latest events, I told him that recently my bicycle got stolen on campus. It was not a big deal to me as I had not purchased it. My ex-roommate had left it behind for me. Swami expressed his regret and promptly offered: "don't worry, I shall buy you a new one to replace it". I had to convince him that I was used to walking to the campus and that I really didn't need a bicycle. This meant so much to me that I don't think I would have been that happy if somebody bought me a Cadillac!

Upon my arrival to the Temple on a visit, the convent monitor ushered me into Swami's Office to report to him. After exchanging pleasantries with me, he looked at her straight up and instructed in a flat tone: "Don't put her to work of any kind. Let her take it easy and rest up while she is here." While I assured him that I volunteered to help around and would like to be of assistance and do my share of Karma Yoga. He was like a protective mother and treated me like a daughter who's come home for a couple of days.

Swami became not only my spiritual mentor but and an all around guardian. His concern manifested in just about so many ways. He would call me if he didn't hear from me, he would invite me during holidays and insisted that I attend retreats, put me on the list of people to receive Prasad from worship on special occasions, and sent me Birthday Greetings in addition to Christmas greetings without fail every year.

Post Student

Employment called for a move to the East Coast. The place I was moving to was in the middle of nowhere and there wasn't a single Vedanta Center in the vicinity or in the neighboring States. I was distraught at the thought to being alienated from my spiritual family all over again! Swami simply said "you must accept the position and move. There is always the phone to keep in touch and you can visit as frequently as possible". At the convent, the nuns consoled me saying this is a testing period and that it will give me a chance to test my spiritual mettle to prove how serious I am about it. Thus I moved 3000 miles away from my "Home Center" in the USA. Since then I made it a point to visit SFO once a year at least and tried to attend retreats as much as I could.

I was in touch with Swami over the phone. As always, he was ever anxious about my new place, employment, friends and was particular that I kept him abreast of all the news. I would pour out my heart to him about anything and everything while he patiently listened and counseled me.

Salutary Counsel

I feel extremely blessed that Swami out of his graciousness took me under his wing and molded me whenever possible. Once he sized me up and ascertained the lifestyle I wished to pursue, he prepared me to face the challenges of student life in the Western world. He never missed a chance to guide me gently like a caring parent. Instead of listing directives, he would take time to relate his own experiences during his college days. He told me about the long distances he had to walk to college, how he managed to avoid unwanted company, what precautions he took to avoid distractions, and how he maintained his reticence. When his friends / classmates invited him to join them for coffee or other social events, he would just politely decline and avoid mingling with anyone lest he lose his fervor. He didn't mind that they thought him to be anti social.

He exhorted that I should stay focused and not buckle under peer pressure, social norms and expectations. Often he quoted Swami Turiyananda's teaching : *"In matters of opinion be flexible like a blade of grass but in matters of principle be firm like a rock"*.

Dealing with the demands of the outside world he said: "behave like a normal person externally, do your duties and whatever is entitled to you, but internally, remain untouched and lead a nun's life. As far as the world is concerned, you are one amongst them but as far as you are concerned, your conduct should imitate that of a nun. Be cautious, disciplined and fastidious about your inner life". Swami instilled in me confidence and strength to cope with the challenges of student life at every turn.

Swami made me feel at ease and I was extremely comfortable sharing anything and everything with him. He could see right through me and was aware of my secular/spiritual struggles. I was an open book to him and had no inclination to conceal anything from him even if that meant falling short of his expectations or disappointing him. Down the line I realized how petty my thinking was to equate his outlook to that

of a regular human being! Swami was beyond being judgmental and beyond undermining anyone despite the shortcomings as seen in the eyes of the world.

On Confronting Problems

Many times I approached him about difficulties in controlling the mind especially when negative tendencies vehemently raised their hoods. He diligently explained how when a beautiful garden is watered, the weeds too grow around. The plant food also feed the weeds. It is but natural for them to grow and we should be ever alert to get rid of them instantly. He gave several solutions and the last one in particular, turned into a weekend retreat in Olema that year!

Hints to handle negative thoughts:

- The famous verse that he very frequently quoted was from Patanjali Yoga Sutras

Vitarka Baadane Pratipaksha Bhaavanam (Chapter 2, Aphorism 33)

When overcome with negative thoughts, replace them consciously with a contrary positive thought immediately

- Ignore, do not pay attention or show interest. He demonstrated this with an example. He was sitting behind his desk in his office. He took the newspaper and posed like he was reading it. He said “now, if you came to my door and started abusing me verbally and if I continued to read the newspaper without acknowledging your presence, and you continue to hurl offenses, but still I do not even look up to you and calmly go on reading the newspaper, how long will you keep shouting at me? You will get tired of abusing, will get annoyed that you failed to get my attention, you will feel it is useless to shout at me and eventually you will leave. Just like that, when a negative thought comes, do not acknowledge it. Once you recognize it, it will drag you down. Just ignore it. Let it be there, but you do not bother about it. Continue to do what you are doing

and don't let it control you. It will control you only if you show interest and give importance.

- Importantly, he suggested Japa and prayer. One way to override negative tendencies is to increase positive tendencies. A continuous, constant effort must be made persistently until you overcome. It is like cleaning an ink bottle he said. Initially, when you pour water, it still comes out the color of the ink in the bottle. That is okay. You must continue to pour more water, and some more, when it begins to get diluted. Persistent pouring of clean water in the bottle at some point will flush out all the ink and in the end what remains is clean water in a clean ink pot. To flush out the negative tendencies, you must keep adding positive tendencies like prayer and japa. Do more and more japa. Pray to the Mother sincerely to help you get rid of unwanted stuff. This has to go on and on until you overcome negative tendencies. Do not pay attention to the negative stuff and put yourself down. Instead, keep on praying and increase your Japa to eventually root out the weeds.
- Finally, he illustrated the allegorical meaning of the "Churning of the Ocean" mythological story from the Puranas where in the Devas (gods) sought the help of the Daityas (demons) to churn the ocean to access the elixir (Amritam) at the bottom of the ocean. The story goes such that a pot of this elixir was buried at the bottom of the ocean. Consuming even a drop of this elixir would mean immortality. The demi-gods (Indra etc.) were desperate to acquire this pot. However, they realized that it is impossible for them to achieve on their own with their puny strength and man power. Indra, their leader strikes upon a plan and lures the demons into a partnership with them. He promises to share the elixir after procuring the pot. The demi gods befriends their arch rivals and enemies to seek their assistance to perform the job.

In a nut shell, Swami's take on this was – this is how we should be. In all of us there is virtue and vice. However, most of the time, the virtues are overruled by the vice as they are more powerful. The virtues are not strong enough to meet the vices head on. Never confront the negatives directly. Instead, collaborate with the enemies to use their strength to get the job accomplished. See attached document for detailed notes on this retreat.

Growth and Progress

Knowing my temperament, Swami would advise me accordingly and never forced me into something against my grain. He knew and strongly approved my intention to return to India and serve my Motherland. He didn't feel shy to remind me of that every time I visited him. Meanwhile, I wanted to gain work experience. I thoroughly enjoyed my job, had good friends and even a Satsang group that I enjoyed participating every week. I was well settled and comfortable in my professional and personal life.

Au contraire, Swami's perception differed. He was gung-ho about me returning to India ASAP and pushed me every time I visited him. In his words: "You are still here?! What are you waiting for?" Although he supported my stance on preparing to support myself without having to depend on others, he was anxious for me to return to India. The sooner, the better in his opinion.

Each time he asked me when I planned to return, I had a valid excuse to extend my stay a bit longer. I was well established and enjoyed my freedom in all aspects of my independent life. Also, I was keen in securing a visa status that would allow flexibility in the event things did not work out for unpredictable reasons. I was covering all bases and was just not ready to jump ship yet.

Swami's persistence got to a point that I could no longer hold back my curiosity as to why he was so eager to send me away for good. On one visit when he expressed his opinion again, I blurted out and asked him why he is so particular that I return to India ASAP. I mean, what is the hurry? I was determined to return but it was just a matter of

time. I would not change my mind about returning for sure. His reply was one of the most profound lesson's I learnt that day which left an indelible impression on my mind. It altered my outlook towards life and changed my attitude to last a lifetime (hopefully)! To recall that conversation etched in my memory goes thus:

As I sat across from him in his office, he was pensive for a while with his hands together with only fingertips touching each other. He was a Swami of few words. Nothing he uttered was extra, vain or mundane. Every word carried weight and precisely appropriate for that moment. Being familiar with his style of counsel, I kept mum after posing my question and waited patiently for his response. After a few moments of silence, he slowly looked up at me knitting his brows together he said "You see, it is like this: right now, you have a good job, you like your job, your colleagues, you have good friends, you have a nice Satsang group that you enjoy, and you are well settled. Life is good. You do not have any issues, or problems of any kind. So where is the challenge? There is no challenge in your life! You are stagnated. He shook his right thumb sideways and said: *No challenge means no growth*. Where is the room for growth in your current situation? That is why you must go back to India where you will be confronted with change and fresh challenges. Then you will grow".

He continued with another illustration: "It is like this: let us say you are in 10th grade and you pass the exams in flying colors. Will you continue to study in 10th grade? What's the challenge in studying the same class all over again? You already know the syllabus and answers for the questions in 10th grade. So you move on to the next grade. Take up new syllabus, learn new things, study and pass that class too and so on. There is no challenge for you here in country anymore, hence there is no room for growth. If you want to grow, you must have challenges. Otherwise you will be stagnated. "

Karma Yoga

Swami enthusiastically supported the idea of karma yoga or service especially so in India. He liked the thought that I would return and serve the less fortunate in whatever

capacity I could. On one occasion, he sermonized at length about service, its implications, pit falls, traps to watch for and precautions to take. Please see attached document on “Karma Yoga” for detailed notes.

Another hint that he would often quote is “The way to work in the world is by holding on to God with one hand and work with the other. God is your pillar. If you hold fast on to that pillar, no matter how hard the world twirls you around, you will not lose balance or get lost”. Sacred and secular must go hand in hand. Work must become worship like how Br. Lawrence illustrates in “Practice of the Presence of God”, by being in constant communion with the Lord. He also strongly recommended a compilation of spiritual tit bits of his own Guru, Swami Virajananda’s “Towards the Goal Supreme” and Sw. Yatishwarananda’s “Meditation and Spiritual Life”.

Watch and Learn

Swami was openly pleased about my decision to remain single. He supported by saying that he knew several women in Bangalore living by themselves who are seriously dedicated to their spiritual goal. He wanted me to be inspired by them. These women were the living proof to show that it is possible to lead such a life in India. On one occasion I told him about how some people accosted me about my choice. They claimed: “how can you assume you don’t want to get married? Unless you experience something how would know that it is not for you? etc.” When I told Swami about this he got annoyed and said: “Who told you this nonsense? You see, it is like this: let us say you have to go through a small door and you standing in line. The person ahead of you does not notice the low door frame, fails to duck and bumps his head while going through. Will you do the same when it is your turn? Will you not duck your head to avoid bumping against the door frame? You do not necessarily have to bump your head just because others do. You learn from watching others ahead of you. You don’t have to experience everything others experience. You can watch and learn! “

Guardian

Here is another instance to illustrate how protective he was of me. He defended me like how a parent would if somebody undermined their child. One of my well wisher's visited Swami. He hardly knew Swami but was aware of my close acquaintance to the Center and Swami. He took the liberty to tell Swami to advise me to get married. He told Swami "she is too young to decide what she wants in life. She does not know anything and not mature enough. But she listens to what you have to say. So you should guide her and advise her to get married and settle down. If you tell her to get married, she will"

Swami's response to this as narrated by another person who accompanied this well wisher goes thus: Swami told this well wisher with much displeasure: "how do you know what she knows or what does not know? Do you claim to know her that well? Moreover, I am a monk and I am here for anybody who needs spiritual counsel. My job is not to influence somebody to get married or not to get married. She is old enough to decide what she wants to do and I have no say in it what so ever".

Amusingly, Swami himself shared this instance with me when I visited him a few months later. With much annoyance he said "by the way, who is that well wisher who came to visit me? He had the audacity to tell me what is good for you in life and how I should influence you to do so. I told him that is none of my business what you decide and that you are independent to make your own decisions." It just made my day and boosted my confidence to be backed up by Swami himself.

Special Blessings

Swami was conservative in all aspects. Most of the time would hold a composed, dignified, indrawn demeanor and it seemed like he never let his guard down. However, he would loosen up a bit when he reminisced about his days in Bangalore. His face would light up with a beaming smile when he indulged in talking about the good old times in India or when he related a funny incident from the past about a

common acquaintance. I had reached a comfort zone with him that gave me the liberty to be myself around him in all respects. Sometimes I offered suggestions about his personal things (diet or an assistive aid/s to help around etc.) unsolicited and he would curiously listen just to humor me. Like a stubborn child sometimes, I would argue, demand, and speak my mind without the least hesitation.

At the end of the visits he would break into half a smile and say “alright, let’s see what we have here, what kind of Prasadam would you like? Candy? Nuts? Trail Mix?” and he would open the credenza where the pre-packed prasadam bags were stashed and give me what I wished for. Sometimes he would give me an additional bag of savories saying “you should try this, it is very good”. Swami rarely expressed his affection outwardly and when he did, it was unique. The best part was when I made Pranams to him. After a few years of acquaintance one fine day when I made pranams to him, he blessed me with an unexpected brisk pat on my head ! I was ecstatic and my joy knew no bounds. Ever since, I refused to budge without this kind of special blessing. In case he forgot to or didn’t pat, I would unabashedly bend my head towards him and demand one! He would grin and pat my head a quick couple of times saying “alright, alright !”

Oversees

It finally happened and I moved back to the East. I was in constant touch with Swami after I moved back to India. He was anxious about me and was particular that I keep him abreast of my news. He was always happy to receive my calls and encouraged me to keep in constant touch with him. He continued to be my pillar of support 14,000 miles away and held my hand through rough times. “Stagnation?” Take a hike! Challenges galore! I could now clearly comprehend what Swami had mentioned about growth!

I visited him whenever I came to the USA. One of the primary reasons of my wanting to come to America was to spend some time with Swami. Each time he would spend as

much time as possible with me. He would ask me all the details, advised and emphasized what my goal should be, how I should handle etc.

Swami's Visit to India (Sept 2010)

I couldn't believe my ears when I heard Swami decided to visit India and was thrilled that his itinerary included Mysore! As mentioned earlier, Swami continued to watch over me like a mother hen and was anxious about my all round welfare in my new life. I kept him posted of every little detail as he wished. This included moving to our new house which (by Sri Thakur and Ma's grace) is literally around the corner from the Mysore Ramakrishna Ashram. He was pleased about this prospect and had openly expressed. I was there to receive him when he arrived from Bangalore with his entourage and spent every minute I was permitted to be around. Luckily, I got to meet with him briefly the very afternoon he arrived and took that opportunity to invite him to grace our house next door. His response was "Of course, of course, why not? I am eager to visit your house after hearing so much from you on the phone". This was the first, easy step. To make my dream come true took more than just Swami and I wishing for it to happen. Ashram authorities and Swami's coordinators had to approve and check his schedule etc. However, by Mother's grace it fell through and it was agreed he would have Tea at our place late afternoon. As much as I wished to have him over for a meal, I had to accept what was offered.

Five or six monks accompanied Swami for Tea. A short Arati was performed in our family Shrine downstairs. My deepest desire was for Swami to bless my personal Shrine situated on the first floor. After all, Sri Thakur's, Sri Ma's and Swamiji's pictures in my shrine were from SFO Bookstore carefully picked out by caring nuns and blessed by Swami himself when I moved to the East Coast. If he could only step into this shrine and sanctify the place would mean the world to me! I prayed it would materialize but was dubious as it required Swami to climb up the stairs to the first floor. Weak and

tired from traveling, he may not choose to do so or other's may prohibit in his best interests.

I tried my luck anyway. I asked him if he would please come upstairs if possible and bless my personal shrine too. With no hesitation what so ever, without giving anybody a chance to say anything, he snapped: "Of course ! why not?, Why not? " I meekly said "but Swami, you have to climb up a flight of stairs and you may get tired" to which he said "who said I cannot go up the stairs? I can do that without any issues. This is good exercise. Come on! Come on, let's go". This was THE Ultimate blessing for me, the icing on the cake! All the other monks followed him except Sw. Sureshanandaji who was unable due to his bad knees. Another quick Arati was performed in my shrine and Swami offered flowers and prayed for a couple of minutes. This was the highlight of the visit needless to say and I was in Seventh Heaven!

After a light snack and tea was served, on his way out, he paused a minute on the driveway to assess the vicinity to the Ashram. The Ashram's auditorium and our house is separated by our neighbor's house. It is literally at an arm's length. He exclaimed "oh, you don't even have to go to the ashram, it is so close by as if you are a part of it! Very nice, very nice!" He made my day, rather year or better yet, my "Life" by this short visit to our humble abode. He acknowledged the visit upon his return to SFO via email:

Dear Poornima,

It was so nice to meet you and your parents in Mysore. You are all devotees of Sri Guru Maharaj, Mother, and Swamiji, so you make your home an ashrama. It was refreshing to visit your house and also take some prasad.

With my best wishes to you and your parents,

Yours in the Mother,

Prabuddhananda

Concluding Visits

My last two visits were very intense and special. His health was getting precarious and he was in and out of the hospital frequently. I was anxious to see him in Sept 2011 and had made all the arrangements. He assured me on the phone that he would see me no matter what and would give me some time. As feared, he was hospitalized around that time but luckily came home the previous day of my visit. In the midst of all his complex health issues, even when he was in the hospital, he remembered my upcoming visit and had instructed the in charge person to bring me to the hospital in the event he was not discharged from the hospital when I arrived. I was overwhelmed by his thoughtfulness and compassion even under those dire circumstances! Such was his magnanimity! I was after all a devotee just like any other devotee. All I ever did was receive from him throughout. And yet, here he was making sure I don't return disappointed by not seeing him even when he was in the hospital! It is easy to be congenial and considerate under favorable circumstances. But to put others interests above their own, at the cost of their own convenience when things are not favorable, is a remarkable characteristic of a great soul. It made me count my blessings that day and felt humbled to be a recipient of his pure, unconditional love and affection.

In one meeting I expressed how deeply indebted I was to him for all that he has done for me, for his genuine care, concern, mentorship, unconditional love and affection. I told him how his guidance had shaped my life, how deeply it has impacted me, and thanked him sincerely for treating me as his own. He quietly listened, shook his head and said "I don't know what you are talking about. I am the same with everybody and do the same things for everybody. I have not done anything special for you." Yet, I feel special that he chose to take me under his wings and gave me a taste of pure, untainted love. That was his specialty, to make whoever came to him feel special! I might be just one amongst many, but I still feel humbled and eternally grateful to have received his mentorship and care.

Face it !

I called him once about a serious medical issue that was on the brink of diagnosis which could go either way. After he heard my story patiently, he was apparently taken aback to some extent, empathized a bit but calmly said: "Well, what to do? We have to take things as they come. Whatever the diagnosis is, you have to face it. There is no other choice but to face it. Take Mother's name, surrender and pray for strength to face whatever comes. Keep me posted about your situation".

It is a given that we have to face whatever comes, etc. we know that and those around us might have said the same sentence several times. But when Swami uttered those words, it made a deep impact. It was effective immediately as it gave me a sense of serenity and confidence to face the test results and diagnosis. My situation paled in comparison to what he was going through and at that, what a trooper he was! Whatever he uttered made a deep impression because he walked the talk. Despite undergoing so much himself, he demonstrated extraordinary strength and equipoise. His suggestions were from direct experience and not just clichés.

My last visit was in Sept 2013. This health ordeal had debilitated me to some degree, but I was back on my feet and ready to travel as I was anxious to see him. This was to be my last visit with him. Again, he committed to see me at least once a day in his office. He spent 30 - 45 mins each day I was there. He could hardly speak for a while without starting a bout of cough. Despite coaxing him to end the meeting, he insisted to stay for a while more, asking me to help him with a glass of water every time the spell started. It was heart wrenching to see him like that. Only his physical frame was weak. Not so his spirit! I sat at his feet silently with a heavy heart. Nothing need be said. It was a silent conversation. He could read my thoughts. Out of the blue he said quietly "you see, it is like this, all these ailments may disable us physically, it may limit our function physically but internally, I am at peace. It has made me stronger inside. I am at a much better place inside. All these things are lessons to improve our inner life. It helps

us to progress. Externally, it may cause inconvenience, I may be at loss and dependent, but internally I have gained so much, independent, and feel free without limitations.”

When I expressed my dissatisfaction about certain things in my spiritual life, he paused for a while and said “this is the same question you asked me 7 years ago. Your question now is similar to that question. You are who you are and must follow what is appropriate for you. There is no need to imitate anybody. Each of our paths is cut out for us and we need to tread what’s best suited to us. What is the use of comparison?” I was wonderstruck with his sharp memory! I myself did not remember that I had posed a similar question in the past and Swami did! He has hundreds of disciples, and so many look up to him for spiritual counsel but still he remembered my specific question put to him 7 years ago? Astounding for him but pitiful for me as obviously I had not learnt what I am supposed to. Later he assured me that I am on the right track and encouraged me to continue whatever I was doing.

Final Instruction

As much as I wanted to sit at his feet a little longer I was equally anxious for him to return and rest in his room. When the time came, he slowly said “alright, alright....so what time do you leave? etc. ” which was a sign to end the meeting. He wanted to give prasadam and gave me a few apples from Olema’s orchard. I made sastang pranams to him, knelt up and bent down my head in front of him eagerly waiting for the last pat. He smiled sweetly and patted my head a couple of times. I got up and started for the door not daring to look back....when he suddenly caught me by surprise and said solemnly with his head bent down (without looking at me): “***Do Not Depend on Anybody.***” These were his last words to me in the physical sense.

In Conclusion

It was difficult for me to accept the loss. Commiserating and reminiscing with fellow devotees helped some. Over time, I came to realize that he has not gone anywhere but in fact, he is much closer and easily accessible more so now than before.

Whatever had to be asked has been asked, and whatever counsel he had to give has been given, blessings sought have been received in abundance. Now the ball is in my court to implement, to prove worthy of his sublime acquaintance and prepare myself to be able to plunge in headlong! I am at peace as I am convinced that he is watching over and continuing to guide/assist me every step of the way. He adopted me spiritually and I am certain that he will not abandon me.

Supposedly there are two types of Gurus: Deeksha Guru (one who initiates by giving the mantra) and Siksha Guru (one who teaches and mentors). Swami undeniably is my Siksha Guru. I am forever indebted to him for accepting me and for providing me shelter under his loving care. My prayer to Mother is to make me worthy of this invaluable gift I received and that I may not forfeit Her unbounded grace. I conclude with grateful salutations to Swami with a verse from Guru Stotram:

**Ajnaana-Timira-Andhasya Jnaana-[Aanjana-Shaalaakayaa |
Chakssur-Unmiilitam Yena Tasmai Shrii-Gurave Namah | | 3 | |**

(Salutations to the Guru)

Who Removes the Darkness of Ignorance from our Blind (Inner) Eye by applying the Collyrium of the Light of Knowledge. By whom our (Inner) Eye is opened; Salutations to that Guru.

Poornima (continued)

Tips on Service

Vedanta Society of Northern California, SFO

26th December 1996

Significance of Service

Service is very important. It will purify the mind. All the impurities of the mind will be washed away through service. Once some of our boys in the ashrama in India complained about having disturbed minds, not able to concentrate, spiritual dryness, etc. immediately they were sent to do relief work. After a few days they became perfectly alright and their concerns were resolved. Everything can be cured through service. One gets thoughts such as “I am good, I am bad, I can’t concentrate, I cannot do this, do that etc., because one is ego centric. Service helps one to forget about one self and think about something and somebody else. When you have to solve other’s problems you will see that your own is nothing compared to theirs and you will learn to count your blessings. When you forget yourself all the problems will be solved. Anything can be cured through service. The concept of service is the basis of our Math (organization). Swamiji emphasized the importance of service of God in man.

Work (Service) is Worship

One should feel that one is serving God through a human being while doing service. Develop an attitude to see the divine in a person. While you are serving, use all your imagination to realize God in a mentally retarded child or any other person you are working with. Feel that every time you serve somebody, it is literally Thakur or Mother that has come to you. This attitude will help you to do your best and also keep your mind on God constantly. Then work/service becomes worship.

Dangers involved in Service - Precautions

Unless there is total detachment, one is subjected to various pitfalls while doing service. Service should be done to realize God and not to gain any other satisfaction through it. If one is not careful enough, one may confront many dangers through this path. The first danger is attachment. You may get so involved with the person you are serving that both of you may get attached to each other. This will bring uncalled bondage and misery to both. Instead of alleviating the problems of the person, now you will be

responsible for causing misery too! One should be very cautious with such relationships. For instance, doctors and nurses in hospitals are extremely strict these days. They do not accept gifts or do not get close to the patient because of these reasons. A strict business relationship must be maintained at all times. It is like taking part in a drama. You get all dressed up like the character, go play your part, and when you come back to the green room and undress, it is all over. You are not that part anymore. Just like how a nurse takes care of a patient but is not attached, you too must work like that. You should feel that the whole cosmos is ruled by God and we are just instruments. We play according to His will. This whole life is a drama and we are mere actors and actresses. This attitude helps in developing detachment.

Other dangers include becoming very ambitious and money minded. All the time think about money and means to procure it. A lot of professionals working in the same field often tend to attract each other and have affairs and end up getting married. In a worldly sense, this is normal and accepted. But if your goal is realizing God, this is a pitfall as you get deviated from your goal.

Finally, beware of name and fame. While the other problems are obvious, this danger is very subtle. You have to be alert not to be affected by this. You may be praised one day and you will feel a deep sense of satisfaction. Oh! Look how well I have done etc. and your ego will go up. You have to be careful about ego boosters. And then, another day you will be blamed for something and you will feel dejected and depressed etc. you should learn to go beyond praise and blame.

Your attitude of service should be that you are doing service to realize God, to get purified, and not because you want name or fame or money or recognition, or any such thing. So, when somebody praises or blames you, you must feel "it does not bother me as it is Thakur's work. I am just His employee, an instrument" and you will remain unaffected under any circumstance. It is like working for your company right now. If somebody praises your boss sky high, will it matter to you? No. Likewise, if somebody

blames your boss it does not affect you one bit. How does it matter to a worker in a grove how much crop the trees yielded this year? It does not matter if it is more than last year or less than last year. The master or owner worries about those things. His job is to just work. Similarly, if you think that you are just an instrument, an employee of God working in this cosmos of His, then you can remain detached and unaffected from the dangers. Constant remembrance of God throughout the day and offering all the results to Him will protect you from such pitfalls. You should do service because it pleases Thakur. You should do service because it pleases Swamiji and not because of anything else. Then, nothing will affect you.

Team Work

When working with a group of people or a team, many conflicts arise. One has to be very compromising. This is where the ego battle starts. This problem is common everywhere. Even Sister Nivedita had such problems. Sister Nivedita was such a great person but her colleagues could not get along with her. They respected her and acknowledged her greatness but could not work with her as she was too independent-minded. So compromise is very important. This is facilitated if all the team players are working towards the same goal and are like minded. They can support each other and form a support group. If one is behind, the one who is alert can bring him up. The whole process should be spiritualized. Service should be blended with Japa, meditation, and other spiritually elevating thoughts and practices. Being good and doing good is alright. It is just a means but not the end. Most people can be good. So what of that? It becomes of value only if the spiritual aspect is present in that person. Giving it a spiritual turn is extremely essential to achieve what you are striving for. Service should be a spiritual experience.

Spiritualizing Service

Swami Brahmananda used to say: Salute the Lord before beginning your work and offer the fruits or results after the task is completed. In between too, when you find a minute

or two, pray to God and Salute to God. In this way you can develop a sense of detachment to your work. The habit of constantly remembering God must be cultivated. You should develop a relationship with God and talk to Him constantly throughout the day like how Brother Lawrence did (Practice in the Presence of God). During work, your mind should be with work and God and at the time of meditation, only you and God. If this is practiced, it promotes concentration during meditation. Do everything and offer everything at the feet of Sri Thakur. Every time say “Sri Ramakrishna arpanamastu”. Pray sincerely “Oh God, I have given up everything for you. You are my sole refuge. Show me the way, show me the right path, make my understanding clear, guide me, etc.” Offer your ALL to Him and He will take care of the rest. Our path is of devotion and surrender. So, pray earnestly and surrender completely to Him and He will take care from there. Do your best in whatever you are doing and leave the rest to Him.

Dealing with negative thoughts

Concentration and controlling our mind is very difficult to achieve. We are not Raja Yoga candidates to fight and control our mind. Our path is devotion and surrender. Pray for purity and completely surrender yourself to Him. Maintaining the mood or Bhava throughout the day (as mentioned above) will help concentration. Our minds are very fickle. Various vicious thoughts and emotions arise. In order to control this, we need to think of an opposite or contradictory thought or emotion. For instance, when a mother gets angry at her husband, she looks at her child and she gets swept away with love and affection for her child. Her anger gets neutralized by her love for her child. so, when you get angry, feel love. When dejected think of happy thoughts, when feeling dry and insipid, think and imagine of an incident that touched your heart in the life of Mother or Thakur, etc. Swamiji says “Vitarka Baadane pratipaksha bhaavanam” in his Raja Yoga book. Negative thoughts and emotions should be neutralized with contradictory positive thoughts.

Poornima (continued)

Churning of the Ocean

(from Bhagavatam)

Olema Retreat – 28th December 1996

If we look at ourselves and the world, we notice that we are always struggling for something. All the living beings including the smallest creature to the largest is desperately after something. We are always on the look out for something that will bring us fulfillment and contentment. You see the deer outside, they are so restless moving from here to there and there to here as if in search of some treasure or something valuable. You see children, they are so restless, running around here and there aimlessly, etc. Adults are the same. Some of us want to attend college and think if we graduated with a Master's or a Ph.D, our lives will be complete. Some of us want to excel in arts or science, business, etc., and think that will make us complete. You see all the travelers exploring the corners of the world who think that will make them complete. An individual feels that maybe if he gets married I shall feel complete, and then maybe having kids, etc. it is no different with us the monastic members who feel that joining the convent or monastery will make us feel complete or those who want to do service etc. everybody is struggling. The good and the bad, the rich and the poor, for one thing or the other.

So, what is the struggle for? What are we searching? It cannot be just the material things that we are after as that does not seem to satisfy us completely. There is something in us searching for that which will make us feel complete. A lot of people are well to do, intellectual, etc. but still have problems. They go to the modern Rishi – a Psychologist for help. They say “I have achieved everything but still feel insecure, depressed, etc.” Somebody once asked a psychologist to explain the problems of all his patients in one line and the psychologist replied “they are all lost”. After accomplishing some things,

we are content to an extent but still not happy. We go after something else thinking that will make us complete.

So what we are all after cannot be what is worldly. It is Love. Pure, selfless, unconditional love or Prema. In English language Love is interpreted in several ways and the whole meaning of love is degenerated. There is only one word for all kinds of love. To avoid confusion, let us define this “Love” as the highest, sweetest love which is “Prema” and call it “Amrita”. Amrita literally means the nectar or elixir of life with which one can attain immortality. We are all looking for Amrita but sadly, in perishable things, transitory things. This Amrita can be found within ourselves eventually. It can be defined as “Self”. We are all in search of ourselves. We are now lost and are in search of ourselves. We have forgotten our true nature and identity and hopelessly looking for it everywhere but in ourselves. It is like keeping a key in our pocket and looking for it everywhere but in the pocket.

Why does this happen? Because of ignorance or Maya. If God’s Maya can be so sweet, just imagine how sweet can God be! Too often we settle for just His Maya. That is the play of the Diving Mother. She gets bored if we did not do this drama. Today’s topic is on how to obtain this Amrita. The chapter “Churning of the Ocean” from Bhagavatam explains how the Devas and Asuras worked hard to get it from the bottom of the ocean.

Like the saying goes, “Every dog has his day”, this time around the Asuras (demons) had gained control of the Devas (gods). As usual the king of Devas, Indra approached Lord Vishnu and prayed for help. Vishnu advised that the only way to become stronger and immortal is by drinking the Amrita which is at the bottom of the ocean. In order to procure this, he advised the Devas to make alliance with the Asuras as they would need their man power to help churn the ocean. The mountain would act as the churning pole and Vasuki the huge serpent as rope to churn. Politically here in this world and other worlds it is the same principle – make alliances with the enemies until the job is done and later abandon them. That’s what the Devas did too. The Asuras agreed to cooperate

on the condition that the Amrita be shared with them equally. The job began and Vishnu took hold of Vasuki's hood and the Devas followed him. The Asuras felt it was not befitting for them to hold the tail end and claimed to hold the hood. The Devas gladly exchanged as they were now protected from the poisonous fumes from Vasuki's hood. Before the churning began, the Lord advised the Devas not to get distracted by anything that comes out of the ocean regardless if they are good or bad things. He warned them not to be attracted to any of them. Their goal must be focused on procuring Amrita and Amrita only.

After churning for some time, the Devas and Asuras could not continue as the mountain pole began to sink due to lack of support at the bottom of the ocean. A lot of them perish by getting caught under the sinking mountain. Again they pray to the Lord who rescues them in the form of a huge turtle and supports the mountain at the bottom of the ocean. He rescues the wounded and cures their ailments in a flash. Vishnu out of His grace grants both the parties and Vasuki, the serpent tremendous strength required to perform the job. They continue to churn but not for long as the mountain needed to be held down. Vishnu again comes to the rescue by sending his vehicle Garuda for help. The churning continues.

After churning for a while deadly and poisonous fumes called Kalakuta start coming from Vasuki's hood. The participants fall down with this poison and the work comes to a halt. Indra seeks Vishnu for redemption who sends him to Lord Shiva – the doer of good and takes care of the welfare of his devotees and the world. Shiva compassionately solves the problem by consuming all the poison. He remains unaffected by it but the deadly poison leaves a blue mark on his throat (hence he is known as Neelakanta). As the churning continues the good things start coming out of the ocean. Apsaras, Airwawat, Kamadhenu, Parijata the wish fulfilling tree, the celestial horse, the goddess of intoxicants and so on and so forth. The Devas remembering Vishnu's advice do not get attracted by these things but accept a few of them for the good of the world. Goddess Lakshmi also comes out and looks for a suitable partner.

Her intentions were to find a perfect individual who lacks nothing and who is independent. The Devas and Asuras were all dependent on something or the other or lacked something. Finally she offers the garland to Vishnu and finds her place in His heart. Vishnu did not lack anything and was certainly not dependent on anything. He would not be her slave but vice-versa. Goddess of wealth goes after those who do not seek her or become her slave, those who are not dependent of her.

In the end comes Dhanvantri with a pot of Amrita. The Asuras not waiting for the Devas just snatch the pot. In due time they begin fighting with one another as to who should get it first and how much. Again Vishnu comes to the rescue in the form of a beautiful maiden called Mohini. The Asuras get distracted by her and trusts her to distribute the Amrita. She accepts on the condition to go by her rules. She does that in such a way that all the Devas get a portion of Amrita but none of the Asuras get any. Rahu a demon gets a portion under the guise of a Deva but later his true identity gets revealed and the Devas chop his head off making only his head remain immortal as the elixir did not reach below his throat. Thus with hard work and struggle, with the help of Lord Vishnu the Devas accomplish their goal of attaining immortality.

Allegorically speaking, this churning occurs in each of us. The struggle is nothing but churning. Even the Devas and Asuras had to work hard for Amrita. Similarly we need to work hard too. We all have Devas and Asuras in ourselves – the good and bad qualities in us are at constant war all the time. There is victory and defeat for both. When the bad wins we should run to the Lord for help. Prayer will lead us to solutions. The Lord will guide us to do things. Even after implementing the plan, the Devas and Asuras could not do the job by themselves. They need the Lord's help to hold down the mountain. Likewise, we need to constantly seek His help through prayer.

When an individual begins doing his sadhana his introspection improves. He will be able to see within himself clearly. The poison gets aroused first and starts to come out. This discovery comes as a shock to many for they always think they are pious and

religious and now they see so much dirt in themselves. They say “I was never like this. Only after doing spiritual practices I have become like this, etc.” does that mean one becomes bad by spiritual practices? No! All these bad things are always there hidden within ourselves accrued from thousands of births. Only now we can see them. When bad things begin to come out the aspirant gets scared. There is nothing to be frightened. Just hold on to the Lord. This is a process of purification. Let all the dirt be eliminated, let it all come out. Just ignore it and strive towards purification. Only the pure can obtain Amrita.

One of our senior monks used to say – bad qualities such as anger, lust, jealousy, hatred, etc. will get stronger and will come to bother and distract you. But you should not yield. Just say “Oh! It is you? Alright, come on, sit with me as you please but outside the room and not inside. You are under my control and not vice-versa. They should be under your command and not you in their command. As long as you are in this world of dualities, good and evil will always be there and you must learn to let them co-exist. The secret is not to get affected by them.

When a serious spiritual aspirant experiences such things, it means that he is progressing spiritually. In such events one should seek advice from seniors, wise people, gurus etc. instead of giving into them. If the aspirant is not ready, these vices get concentrated and lead them astray. They become more self centered, impatient, more lustful, more jealous, etc. one should be prepared by performing sadhana, prayer, satsang, etc. when you see people doing bad things and yet appear to be religious (they come to the ashram regularly but act very worldly outside), do not criticize or shun them. Pity them and pray for them for they are struggling to be good and their actions may be unintentional due to their bad samskaras. Moreover, nobody is perfect. It is all relative and we are all in the same boat. Like how the Devas, made alliance with the Asuras, we too must make alliance with our evil part in order to obtain Amrita. Evil and good co-exist. Making alliance with evil has the advantage of us becoming stronger.

Following this phase comes the good things like visions, occult powers, ESP, etc. This could be equally dangerous to spiritual life. Like the Devas, one should not get distracted by any of these as that is not our goal. By obtaining the good things we do not become complete or gain fulfillment. They may be good but they are not Amrita and can lead the aspirant astray. We ought to trust in the Lord to help us lead in the right path - “Dhiyo yo hah prachodayaat” – “guide me in my understanding, let me perceive things accurately, understand things properly” says the Gayarti Mantra.

Just being good is not enough. Many can be like that – pious, selfless, generous, truthful, etc. so what of that? These virtues are valid only if the individual is spiritually oriented. Good qualities are valuable no doubt for realizing God. Otherwise it is a waste. In certain cases externally everything will be favorable to the candidate. Good health, wealth, education, spiritual resources, etc., but still the person remains unaffected. Therefore, it is necessary to make the internal conditions favorable too. Just external factors alone do not count. One must be ready for spiritual life without which nothing will be of avail. This readiness is termed as “Grace of the mind”. Grace of God is necessary but can be obtained only through grace of the mind, yearning, and readiness. Otherwise, no progress is seen in that aspirant.

Pray, pray sincerely to Sri Thakur and Mother. Talk to them constantly and tell them you have given up everything for them and that they should take care of you. Pray to them to show you the way and to protect you. Dhyana, Japa, reading good books, and company of holy people is necessary. Without sadhana or spiritual practices nothing is possible.

Poornima (continued) From an email 7.22.'14

Regarding Swami's Memorial Service in Mysore

Photos: The third pic has all of them. And the others are close-ups

3rd Picture - Standing from Left to Right

1. Narendra (Sw.P's nephew)
2. Sw. Bodhaswarupananda (Mukund Mj. Ponnempet Ashrama, President)
3. Sw. Bhavananda (retired monk - ex- Bhopal Ashram President)
4. Sw. Muktidananda, President Mysore Ashrama
5. Prabhu Shankar (Swami's very close friend since his college days)
6. Keerti Kumar (RK Vidyashala Staff)
7. Srikantaiah (Ex-principal - RK Vidyashala)
8. Swami at the Podium - MC (New Correspondent Swami at RK Vidyashala)

I really wanted to attend a service, memorial or something to help me come to terms with this and to get some closure (with the grief aspect - there is no such thing as a closure with respect to my relationship with the Swami - it is eternal I feel.). Since he headed the Bangalore Ashrama for 4 yrs they held a one hour memorial service on 14th July. It was too taxing on me under my given circumstances (at home) to travel to Bangalore for a one hour service. I was wondering what to do when our President Sw. Muktidanandaji called me and said that they too decided to hold a memorial service for Swami as he was very fond of Mysore and has helped extensively towards both RK Vidyashala and RK Ashrama, Mysore. I was not aware that Swami's own brother was the second principal / correspondent of RK Vidyashala and that his son is Mr. Narendra. I knew Narendra as Swami's nephew that's it. Anyway, I helped Sw. Muktidananda come up with a list of people who Swami knew and was to be invited. the service was the very next day - 15th July.

About 150 people gathered. There was a short prayer including chanting of the Vedas and some bhajans after which we assembled in the auditorium - the pics attached are all

taken in the auditorium. It was a very well planned event. Several senior monks attended, Narendra's entire family attended and those who knew Swami came over. All those on the stage spoke for a few mins sharing their views, experiences with Swami. It was very nice and touching. I tried hard not to get so emotional but couldn't stop crying... while I was battling with that, suddenly, one Brahmachari came up to where I was sitting and said that Sw. Muktidananda wanted me to say a few words.. well... I was totally unprepared and not ready - this was too personal for me and I was quite overwhelmed but they insisted that I speak and wouldn't take no for an answer and I was next one to go on the stage ! Well, so I did. I had a few moments to gather my thoughts as Narendra was speaking and then I was introduced. Since it was so sudden, I felt I should just be myself and to honor my beloved Swami, I would do this for him. So, I shared how I got to know him 24 years ago. What a tremendous influence he has been in my life. In fact, he was my very first friend in United States when I arrived in Sacramento as a student, etc. Said that there wasn't enough time to share everything but one incident I wanted to share and related that. Swami was very anxious for me to return to India and each time I visited him he kept asking me when I would go back. On one visit I asked him why he was pushing me so hard. He knew it was a matter of time and I would definitely return. To that he said, "You see, you are very comfortable here. You like your job, friends, satsang group, everything is cozy. There is no challenge hence no growth. You are stagnated here and so you should return. No challenge - no growth, " etc. Later I thanked him and sought for his blessings and mentorship to continue and ended my talk.

Sw. Sureshanandaji also talked - was very emotional but this was so necessary for all of us who were so close to Swami. What was to be like an hour's program ended up being more than 2 hours with so many sharing their thoughts on Swami.

Thought I would share this with you as you might be pleased with the Mysore Ashrama's efforts to honor our Swami.

May Mother give us strength to cope through this dreadful loss.

Five photos from the Memorial Service in Mysore











BILL MACAN

If one was to say "who is God" I now know. Friend, teacher and the ultimate essence of "Love." Thank you Thakur, Mother! I'm eternally grateful.

In creating an on-going not so boring exercise program for Sw., I would have to come up with "new and creative" ideas to maintain our program. For balance, and core strength, I brought an "exercise ball" into Swami's room. With great "curiosity" which Swami always had (studied) everything, visually. Proceeded to watch Rathnakar inflate this ball for us.

When the time came to explain what the purpose of this exercise was for; as usual, Swami's timing was always on que, "You don't expect me to stand on this"? I of course roared! But Swami always knew how to make me laugh!

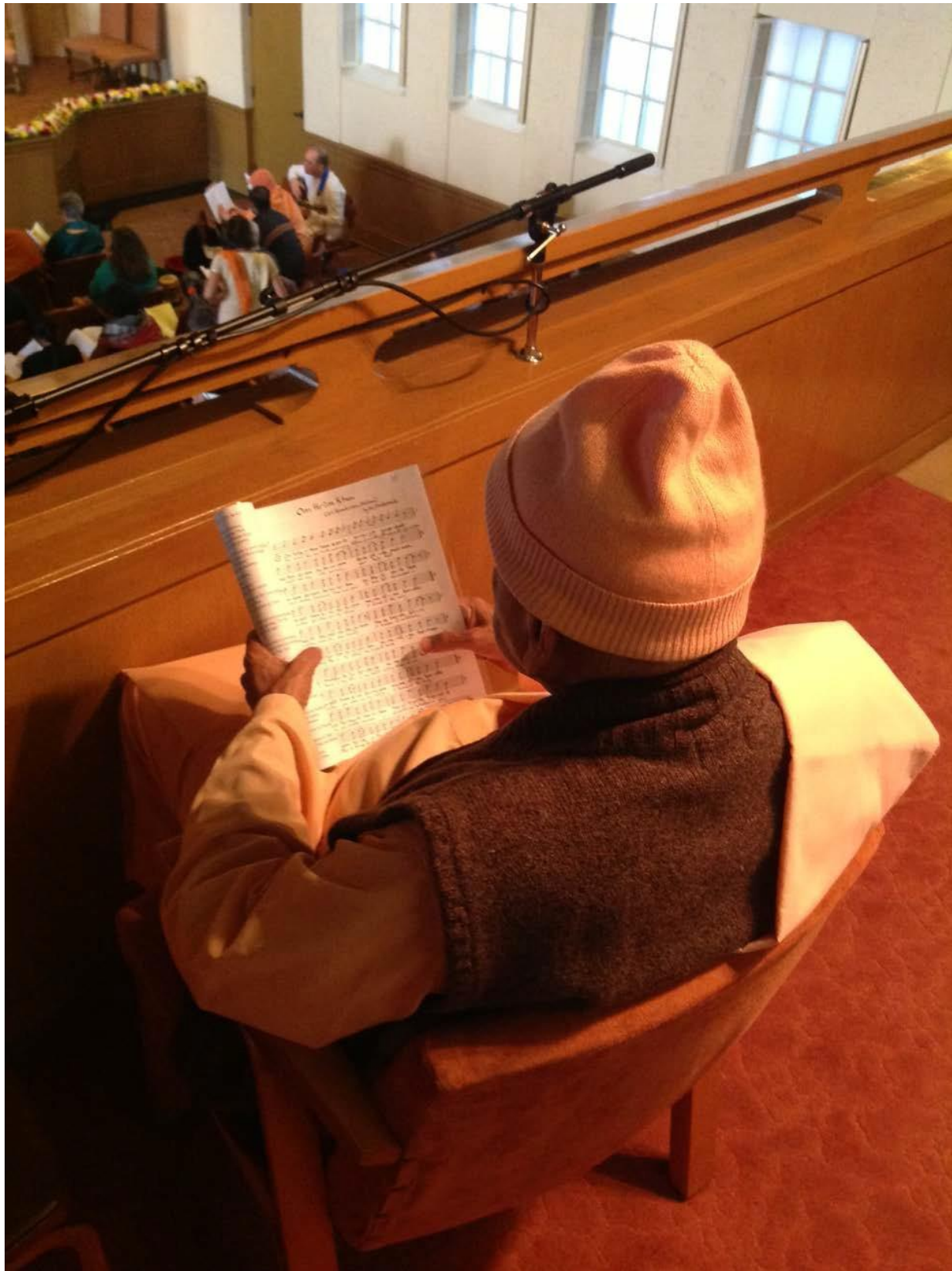
Another memory: Once I had a presentation to do for an assignment. This required a demonstration in front of the class. I elected demonstrate how "blood pressure" was taken, of course, with a student as my subject.

Of Swami, was aware of this at the time. The day of the presentation, I became very nervous, with panic. 10-mins, prior to my demonstration, I called Sw. and explained how I was nervous. At first there was a pause, and Sw. proceeded to explain: look at your audience as "Rhamakrshna and Holy mother" so I did, subsequently, this resulted in an A+. I went to monastrary to share this with Sw,P, Sw. Chidbramananda, Sw. Vedananda. The 4 of us were in the kitchen, and I told Sw.P what happened. His response was, what was the project: I explained and reminded him of what he said: He then laughed, stating, Oh sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. All of us just roared.

One day I had a surgery or dental procedure, because I was sedated for the procedure, Marjore, was my drop off and pick up person. as you know she herself was dealing with her own cancer. It was a friday, because at that time Swami P. was still lecturing

at the Old Temple. As weak and ill as he was. As the lecture or class was going on I was in my room resting on the 3rd floor. Suddenly, I hear Swami's voice, I opened the door and looked down the stairs, he was climbing the stairs to see how I was doing. I said Swami, let me come down to you, he said, "That's OK" his response was how are you? and said good, just tired. Swami, replied with get some rest, and if you need anything, let me know.





JACQUIE FABER

Swami Prabuddhananda was my spiritual teacher for forty-two years. I met him when I joined the San Francisco Vedanta Society of Northern California in 1973. I was thirty, divorced from my husband of eight years, and raising an eleven-year-old daughter. I was a speedboat stuck in mud, with a broken compass.

I would meet with Swami twice a month. His calling was to guide spiritual seekers along their path, and then step aside. I was an ex-hippy who had crashed upon the shore of life. I was working three jobs — teaching, catering, and making jewelry — barely scraping together an existence for myself, and my daughter, Anya. For six years, from her age eleven to seventeen, I never dated, went to shows, or did anything but be a full-time mom, spiritual seeker, and provider.

I remember Swami's eyes were sparkling, aware, clear brown entrances to his pure soul. His lips were full, with perfect expressions of happiness. When he smiled his straight white teeth glowed. A South Indian, his skin was golden bronze. He had a high forehead, and brown hair turning grey.

Swami viewed me as a rough amethyst that, if polished, could become a many-faceted gem. I knew he viewed me as a child of God. As spiritual seekers in the Vedanta tradition, we were taught that we were all the Lord's children.

When I first started my spiritual training, I didn't understand about visiting a holy person. I learned it was a spiritual tradition to bring some gift or *Prasad*. One time I brought him a full-bloomed yellow rose trimmed with pink edges — a peace rose. When I arrived Swami was speaking on the phone, so I took a huge whiff of the fragrant rose.

He hung up the phone, turned to me, smiled, and said with twinkling eyes, "One must never smell the Prasad before it is offered." There was no rebuke or sternness in his voice; I was merely a child being lovingly corrected.

Meeting with Swami required me to drive to 2323 Vallejo Street in San Francisco. I'd find a place to park, usually on a steep hill, truck down the hill, then up two more blocks until I reached the temple. My feet hitting the sidewalk, propelling me down the hill, the Lord's name rang in my ears each time my foot touched the pavement. Keeping moving I warded off tormenting thoughts—how I was going to raise my daughter, Anya, alone? My heart would pound fiercely from both the fast pace of the walk and the anxiety. Often I ended up rushing down the hill, chanting and clinging to my gift of Prasad and my notes. My worst fear was whether I was worthy of this saintly teacher's time. I had sought him out because I knew there must be more meaning to life than what I had found on my own.

He taught me how to chant, and gave me my own mantra and prayer beads. My Christian experience as a Methodist did not include mantras and chanting. This was all very new to me. At first I was skeptical. But when I tried chanting, I found it calmed and steadied my mind. Swami explained that chanting was like a vacuum to clean and purify your mind. It connects you to Supreme Spirit, by whatever name you choose to call it. I started chanting every time the negative thoughts assailed me. It's a useful practice I still use today.

Every time I visited Swami he'd be sitting behind his desk in a sun-filled office with a view of the Marin hills. His mail was in neat piles, and his pencils were like soldiers standing in an Oak pencil holder. There was a red and green lacquered box with an orange dove on it that I always admired. Inside he had three stones: an egg-shaped amethyst, a marble with a spiral crystal inside it, and a cream-and-white agate. This special box with the three stones came to me after he died.

On the wall were pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, and Jesus, looking out from their simple black frames. The room smelled of sandalwood incense. Swami would look up from his San Francisco Chronicle, then put it down, folding it neatly.

“How is everything?” he would ask. “How is Anya? How is your teaching job?”

He would sit and give me his full attention while I spoke from the heart.

Now, as I reflect back, I have no idea how I could have lived a purposeful, balanced life without these visits. Every week I’d go to the services at the church, take notes, copy them over, and make a list of questions ranging from the mundane to the ridiculous. Why do negative things happen in this world? Why does the Supreme Spirit let good people suffer? How can I hasten my spiritual progress? Swami would smile and give me a serious answer for each question. He never made me feel ignorant.

“The world is like a dog’s curly tail,” he would say. “You can straighten it out, but as soon as you let go, it will curl back up again.” He would recite this simple teaching of Sri Ramakrishna – a great avatar who lived one hundred thirty years ago. Ramakrishna said, “God is the teacher, but he has many gurus.” He practiced all the branches of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. His message was the unity of all faiths.

I continually feel the great loss of my spiritual teacher who passed away July 2, 2014. I would still be in a rudderless boat, banging against the rocks, if not for him. He gave me my own spiritual toolkit that contains meditation, prayers, and chanting. He taught me to live a moment-to-moment life where every single one is important. “Live like there is an emergency at every moment. Call it holy helplessness. Pray! Prayer is all one can do. Give yourself over to the Divine at every step.”

He introduced me to Swami Vivekananda – Ramakrishna’s first disciple – who said, “You do not have to believe in God. In this age the greatest sin is not to believe in your Self. In that Self of All, in each of us, there resides divine perfection.”

There is not one day I don’t miss Swami. He’s in my heart, and has forever transformed my spirit.

* * * * *

“A Saint Has a Past – A Sinner a Future”

You could say that I had huge future when I met Swami Prabuddhananda. I met Swami when I was thirty years old and my marriage to Richard, my husband of eight years, had crumbled.

We had purchased a beautiful home with a stream running through the property, and a giant old tree fern. I was paying the mortgage and wanted to keep the house, but, Swami advised me to, “let it all go!” I listened to him and walked away from everything with only my daughter, my books, and my clothes.

At thirty I found myself raising an eleven year old daughter, and supporting both of us. From thirty to thirty-five years old, I would see Swami Prabuddhananda sometimes twice a month. He gave me instructions on how to live a spiritual life, and develop my love for God.

I took Prasad whenever I went to see Swami in San Francisco: See’s Candy, sesame sticks, fruit, cookies, Dahl, and often books. Once I brought him a rose. He sat behind his desk in his saffron-colored robe, reading the paper for a moment while I settled on the chair in front of his desk. I gazed at the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, and asked for strength.

I had brought a rose, so while I was waiting for him to look up, I took a big fragrant whiff of it. Startled, looking up, Swami said, “An offering must never be enjoyed before it is offered.” “Oh Swami, I’m so sorry!” “You didn’t know before – so you know now,” he said smiling. As usual, he had no wish to make me feel ashamed. His guidance was always truthful, gentle, and useful for every moment of life.

Sometimes his office would have the fragrance of sandalwood wafting through the air. I would sit before him with my questions written in a notebook. I’d take notes during his services, but also had my own questions. I had so many: Does God hear our prayers;

How may we hasten our spiritual growth; How could I make my work as a teacher a worship?

Swami answered all my questions. He would look up with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes as I rambled on about the challenges of my life as a single mom and a teacher. Sometimes, when I would tell him something painful, his serene face would contort in pain for me, for a moment. It made me sorry, I had told him! “If you teach children anything,” he would say, “Teach them how to earn things.”

I followed his advice and, by the Lord’s grace, was able to teach children to earn things. With his teaching I could see my students not just as bodies and minds, but pure spirit too.

One time my mother and father were on a cruise to Hawaii, the first vacation they’d had in years. My brother Robert, only thirty-five, while on a company trip to Amsterdam died unexpectedly. His company phoned me and asked what I wanted to do with his body. Did I want it sent home? I didn’t know what to do! My main concern was how to tell my parents. So I phoned Swami. “Swami, my brother has died in Amsterdam from a drug overdose. My parents are on the first vacation they’ve taken in years—a cruise to Hawaii. Should I phone them on the boat and tell them of his death, or should I wait until they come home?” “You must tell them now,” he said. So I phoned my parents on the cruise ship and told them. Swami’s advice was the right thing to do, but I was still devastated. I hadn’t been able to think it out on my own without him. My parents were heartbroken, but they decided to finish their vacation. My brother’s body brought home.

Being in Swami’s presence was a rare privilege. My heart would be pounding as I worried about whether I was a worthy student. Would I be worth his time? Was I pure enough? These were my immediate concerns. I went to the Vedanta Temple on Vallejo St. for forty-two years, taking prodigious notes and rereading them over again every week. I could feel my life changing. Swami had always said: “Put God first. He is like

the ONE at the first of a huge number. If you put God first, all those following zeros will mean something.”

Swami taught us, “God being pleased – the whole world is pleased; God being satisfied – the whole world is satisfied.” I used everything I learned to serve the children I taught in elementary school for thirty-seven years. Later, I used these same teachings, seeing God-in-all-people, to serve my mother for the five years she was bed-ridden.

After two years under Swami’s tutelage, he was ready to initiate me. In front of the temple’s statues, he officially offered me to God and allowed me to become his devotee and a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. I knew I was being directly connected to God. My old life was over. Tears streamed down my face. I never cried so much in my life! I felt my life was just beginning. It was an extreme form of purification. I could feel my crown chakra opening like a beam of light coming down through the top of my head.

Once when I was meditating after my initiation, I felt and saw Sri Ramakrishna in a vision before me. What is my spiritual name, I asked him? “Prema”, he said. “You have given up the world to serve me. You will see God in all people and serve them.” I told Swami of my experience, of how I thought Sri Ramakrishna had given me the name “Prema.” From that day on, Swami called me “Prema.” I have often felt unworthy of such a great name. I would say to myself: “I’m only “Prem.” I have not yet earned the “a!” But recently, one of my spiritual friends, Tunisiog, said, “Don’t feel that way. You are Prema! A spiritual name is something we grow into.” I am growing into Prema. Maybe it will take lifetimes!

I once asked Swami for a quote I could hold onto for life. This is what he wrote in an antique leather notebook I gave him:

“Children in their play swing round a pillar, knowing that if they loosen their grip, they will fall and be injured. We also must hold fast to God and know him

to be the pillar of life. Hold fast to Him and there will be no danger. Your life on earth will be blessed, and you will be a blessing to mankind.”

I hold fast to God and thank Him for my having Swami Prabuddhananda in my life. He was my teacher and dear friend.

* * * * *

Swami Prabuddhananda

“Dream truer dreams – eternal love and service – free”

Because he left us, we keep him

in our hearts like a heartbeat.

We remember his words:

his Vedanta services in S.F. and Olema;

his one-on-one in his office in the city.

He would sit behind his desk and listen.

Sometimes, as we told our sad stories,

his face would contort in pain

for us.

He taught us to see the Divine in all;

about Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus.

He was like, God—the center of our lives,

another great mentor and teacher.

His words linger and echo, informing

our own still small, voice.

The Lord is like “the ‘one’

in a huge line of zeros,”

he would say.

“Put the ‘one’ first

and the number will be worth something.”

Or, “Children in their play,

Swinging around a pillar,

know that if they loosen their grip

they will fall and be injured.

Hold fast to your indwelling spirit.

Know it to be God, the pillar,

of your life. There will be no

danger. Your life will be blessed

and you will be a blessing to mankind.”

Then he would tap us on our third eye

and give us a chocolate or a nut,

hoping to awake us to whom

we really are: instruments of the Divine.

ALIZA ALLEN

I was pretty new to San Francisco and the Bay Area, arriving in 2000 and living in San Mateo the first year. Eric and I would often drive to the City for a Sunday lecture. I remember the first time I met Sw. P ... I looked into his face and all of a sudden his beautiful eyes completely enveloped my whole being, it felt like his eyes drew me into his heart and his soul. I was astonished that this could possibly happen, to me. To an adult woman who always has thought of myself as sophisticated, saavy, in control. But I wasn't in control of this moment, meeting Swami P and peering into those eyes made me feel like a child who had come upon an unexpected treasure. And I think that for a second I actually felt like I wanted that treasure for myself, not wanting to share it with anyone!

The morning Swami P came back to the temple after having cataract surgery, I was at the front desk on phone duty. He was by himself for a moment and I was alone at the front desk, reading. It was just the two of us for a few moments. Swami looked at me, got a big smile on his face, and said hello in a cheery voice. I asked him how it had gone. He looked around at the room with a wonderous and amused smile and said, "Everything is so clean and beautiful, the streets are clean and beautiful, the cars are clean and beautiful ..." He looked into my face and smiled, and then asked if he could take a look at the book I was reading. He turned it around so that he was not looking at it upside down, and again he smiled and said "I can read this!"

One night after an evening lecture by the visiting Swami Shantarupananda of Portland, Swami P was greeting us and telling us goodnight as he was heading up the stairs to his room. At one point, he turned toward us all and said to us in a very loving and motherly tone "I love you, now go home." It was a moment that is so clear in my mind because I had never heard him say I love you. I was so touched that he said I love you on that particular occasion because the visiting swami was my first Vedanta teacher and

who had initiated me in Portland, and he may have visited the San Francisco temple that night as a rare occasion.

BEVERLY DEBOLSKI

What a joy it is to reflect on Swami Prabuddhananda and I'm humbled to share my memories with you. They are the most precious experiences of my life. I was hesitant to share them and wanted them "all to myself", but I know how much I've valued hearing others' experiences and so am sharing them with my Vedanta Family.

Even though I lived only a few blocks down on Vallejo Street, it took me two years to find my way to Swami Prabuddhananda by way of a friend. This would not be the first time Swami would be patiently waiting for me. Patience is the prevailing characteristic that comes to mind when I think of him. That and Dynamic Calmness, which was something he discussed with me many times over the decades. He moved through the world with a calm, poised, unhurried and undisturbed manner, and yet was so powerful and effective, thus showing me what that concept looked like in the day to day world. He was so graceful. I had an intimidating father who towered over me much of my life. Swami showed me what true power was. The power of love to conquer everything and I have been truly amazed to see how he was able to wield that power so calmly, gracefully and ultimately so very responsibly. He changed my understanding of what a father can be – how was a spiritual father. It brings tears to my eyes when I think of the loving kindness that he gave me in so many subtle ways with no strings attached. I think it's the purest relationship I've ever had. He showed me what true love is – that love without attachment is the greatest love.

I first met Swami Prabuddhananda when my friend came to visit. She attended the center in Vancouver and wanted to see the San Francisco center. I was dressed up for "church" with a skirt and high heels. When Swami and I were introduced, he said "Ah, Beverly Hills!" It was a sign of his sense of humor, which we have all noticed and enjoyed.

I didn't back for awhile, but I would see Swami walking in the evenings around the neighborhood when I was out for a run. I would wave at him, but he saw often deep in

thought. Eventually I started going to Sunday services and would see him when we stood in line after service to greet him. He would remember me, which would make me really happy. And I was honored when one time he asked me to wait so that he could schedule an appointment with me. It meant so much to me that he took an interest in me. I was very alone in San Francisco, dealing with some big things and having no friends in my new city. I recall our first meetings were quite simple and short and he was basically getting to know me. I started helping out doing with flowers with Madhavaprana, Karen Hirsch and Preetiprana. Swami would sometimes call me up after service to check in. The first time we had a more meaningful conversation, I shared some very difficult things I was dealing with. The first counsel he ever gave me and, if that is all he had said, it would have served me for a lifetime: “Be bigger than all that happened to you. If you are your big Self, then all of that becomes very small and it doesn’t touch you. Nothing can touch your real Self.” It was a breakthrough—it was easier to let tragedy fall away instead of clinging to it and identifying with it. In just a few words, he started to show me the way to freedom.

I stopped doing the flower service after a few years, got called back to regular duty, this time covering the reception desk on Saturday mornings which I do to this day. This was another chance to see Dynamic Calmness in motion. There were so many people who wanted to talk to Swami—phone calls from around the world, lots of in-person visitors, both individuals and large groups—and everyone seemed to feel their call or appointment was the most important one and he treated each one as if they were. He often used the analogy of a nurse caring for babies. She will tend to each one as if it’s her own, but when the day is done she gladly puts them down and goes home. This is working in an unattached manner. He was the nurse tending to each one and then moved onto the next one when it was time. His instructions to me were short and sweet: “show them to the waiting room”, “let them wait”, bring them up”, “I’ll take the call”, “call me when they come.” It was often Grand Central Station, but he kept moving along undisturbed handling each person as they came with whatever they

brought. I would get so annoyed when people would be late to their appointments and felt it was disrespectful, but he never did, and he showed me through the power of his example that I was only upsetting my mind. I wasn't teaching anyone a lesson or making anyone be more punctual.

There were two times in all the years that Swami Prabuddhananda called me directly. Both times I had been scarce around the Vedanta Center and he wanted to check in on me. Again, it was so deeply touching to me that with all his responsibilities and all the people he was responsible for, that he would notice I was absent, much less call. This endeared me to him even more and he showed me in these ways and so many others how trustworthy he was. It was a short gentle message. No formalities—just a simple “This is Prabuddhananana. I have not seen you for a long time. Don't wait for a Saturday. I have not seen you for along time. Come see me. In the meantime, may Sri Ramakrishna bless you.” He was the Good Shepherd collecting the stray sheep and bringing them back into the fold. When I miss him, I play his message. I think he's still calling me to follow the Lord and do my practice.

Most of my memories with Swami Prabuddhananda consist of sitting in his office on Saturday after doing my service. He would ask the usual questions regarding my taking care of myself: was I doing my practice, was I walking, was I eating healthy food, getting rest, etc. I would bring him one of my problems I was struggling with, which usually centered around work and how to handle the stresses, increasing responsibilities and corporate politics. His advice always took the form of the various aspects of Karma Yoga—do my best, offer it up, be non attached, strive to operate from dynamic calmness, be a silent witness and do no enter the fray. Those last three were big themes and are a life long practice. And after we'd discussed the latest topic we'd sit in silence and I would just feel the love I had for him, how grateful I was to him and feel Love which is the gift of being in his presence. And at the end of our meetings, I'd kneel down and touch his feet and he'd bonk me on the head and say a blessing. This always made me laugh and something that I hold dearest of all. He didn't gently tap me on the

head or lay his hands on my head, but he'd kind of bonk me in a playful way and say "alright." I'm actually laughing out loud as I write this. I think it was his way of letting me know not to take it all too seriously and that everything was going to be alright.

When my husband Tom and I were dating and ready to get married he inquired if I wanted him to ask my father for permission as is the custom in many cultures. I told him no, but that I did want him to meet Swami Prabuddhananda. He agreed and I was very excited about them meeting after all this time. The two of us met with Swami and Swami did his usual friendly and kind inquiry to get to know Tom. He asked him about his beliefs. My husband is not particularly religious and when he answered Swami that he just tries to be the best person he can be every day, Swami's eyes lit up and he said very enthusiastically, "Yes, this is God. Excellence is God! That excellence inside is God!" I had not seen Swami so emotive before. I think he saw what a good man Tom is. Swami also talked to us about marriage making us both stronger – that we will test each other and help each other grow. He said specifically "She is your treadmill." Tom and I have gotten a lot of laughs about that! When I'm particularly difficult, Tom pats me on the head and says, "You're my treadmill." This is so typical of Swami – he was a man of few words and their simplicity broke through and served as deep and lasting lessons and insights. With that one comment, he has guided our marriage and we come back to it again and again understanding it at a deeper and deeper level. After that meeting, he often checked in about Tom, growing the flock of sheep he cared for.

A few times over the years I had some very stressful situations to discuss with him, and a couple in particular were a result of things I felt I had done wrongly. I fully expected him to scold me, point out what I had done wrong, or otherwise correct me. To my complete surprise, in each case he he showed compassion and remarked how the other person had behaved wrongly. He in no way assigned fault to me, not even one percent. This is when I really felt what having a Father was supposed to be like. I don't think he was coddling me – that would not be like him to enable wrong behavior. I think he really was in my corner and helped me to see that while unfortunate things had

happened to me, it was not my fault. It still brings tears to my eyes when I think of how gentle and kind he was. And it was all his giving to others. I gave him nothing in return.

This is when I have a glimpse into the Lord's love for us all and brings to mind
Matthew 10:29-31

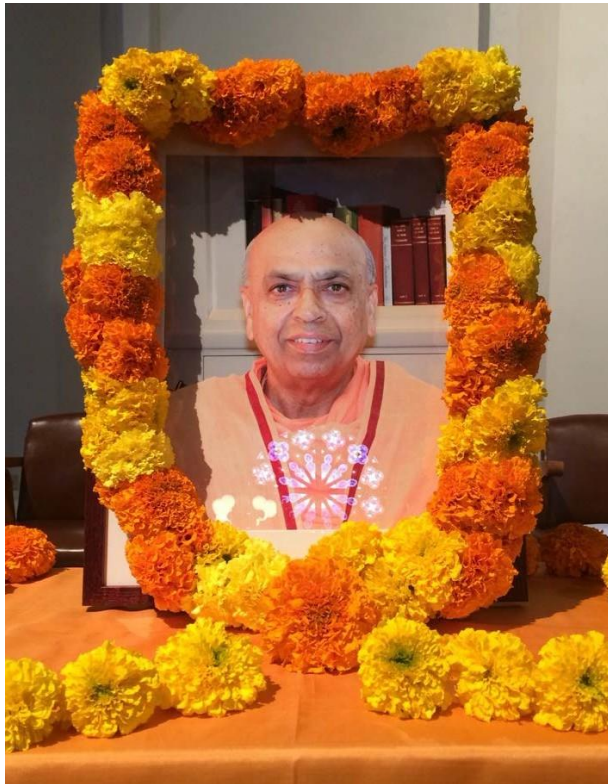
Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Swami cared about every single one of us. And he often talked to me about God as a friend within. That if I can be a friend to myself, this alone is a worthy spiritual practice for a lifetime. He showed me how to be a Friend the way God is our eternal companion. He often told me "Smuggle God in. Smuggle thoughts of God into your day in any way. God is always happy to be remembered in any way, even for a moment. Constantly be communicating with God."

I asked Swami if I could be initiated in 2009, a good sixteen year after I met him. I didn't hear from him anything like "what took you so long!?", rather he said, "it was wise of you to take your time and know you could trust this [Vedanta]." Nevertheless, I guess he wasn't interested in waiting anymore because he initiated me three days later! After he initiated me, he told me I was welcome to touch his feet anytime I wanted. I'm overjoyed to be a part of this ancient tradition and it was truly a special experience to kneel and touch his feet....and get bonked on the head!

I am deeply grateful that I got to see him for a few minutes every few days the last weeks he was alive. I had the good fortune to be on sabbatical from work so I could leave at a moments's notice when I got the word from Virajaprana that Swami was seeing people. Even when he was dying he was the embodiment of Dynamic Calmness. The last time we spoke and he asked how I was doing and I said, "I wish I could be more graceful" as I was thinking about how graceful he was. He replied like he always

did with such piercing simplicity, “start by being graceful with yourself.” Every encounter I ever had with Swami Prabuddhananda, he demonstrated how one is graceful in the world and when we met together he specifically demonstrated how to be graceful towards me. Showing me once again that no one fell outside this Father’s care. Om Shanti Shanti Shanti!



Here is a photo I took of Swami’s Photo on the “Altar” at his Memorial Service at the Unitarian Church. A reflection of the stained glass rose window appears on his heart.

SHASHIKALA SREEDHAR

I am Shashikala Sreedhar initiated disciple of President Rev. Sw. Vireshwaranandaji Maharaj. I received this great blessing from president Maharaj on 15.12.1969 in Bangalore RK Math (Basavanagudi). I have been in regular contact with Ramakrishna math from past 50 years. I am 61 now. Revered Sw. Prabuddhanandaji was my first Guru who guided me with lot of love and affection from my young age of 12 until his sad demise on 02.07.2014. He was my spiritual father who used to address me as 'Little daughter of Ramakrishna and Holy Mother'.

I am herewith attaching a brief note which explains my association with Ramakrishna math, Bangalore and Sw. Prabuddhanandaji and how Swamiji helped me to start my spiritual journey, preparing me at each & every step. The enclosed article on Sw. Prabuddhanandaji is self-explanatory. I have also given the excerpts from his letters (more than 85 letters which I have preserved safely) in various subjects. Since he knew me from my childhood he always considered me as 'Little daughter' and used to fulfill all my demands telling me that since I am Ramakrishna & Holy Mother's daughter I have every right to demand. Swamiji, please review the attachments which gives a clear picture of my intimacy with Sw. Prabuddhanandaji.

My entire family is devoted to Ramakrishna, Holy Mother & Swami Vivekananda. Many monks from RK Math have visited our home 'Sucharita' in Rajarajeswarinagar, Bangalore and blessed us. Sw. Prabuddhanandaji had visited our home thrice. He used to feel very comfortable and relaxed in our home and would say 'Your home is like an ashrama', perform Arati to Lord in our shrine, partake prasadam and bless us.

Sw. Prabuddhanandaji introduced me to Ramakrishna & Sw. Vivekananda literature at my very early age. Since then, I started reading many books commencing with 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'. With this background I started writing articles to many spiritual magazines such as *Viveka Prabha* of Mysore RK Math, *Viveka Hamsa* of Bangalore,

Bhakthi Vedanta Darshana of ISKCON temple, *Basava journal* of Basava Samithi, *Bharatha darshana* and others.

I was 10 years old then (1964), my parents used to take me to Sri Ramakrishna Math (Basavanagudi, Bangalore) on every Sunday to attend the special prayers & bhajans in the evening. The pure and holy atmosphere of ashram attracted me, and slowly it started dragging me to Guru Maharaj. The beautiful heart-shape pond in front of prayer hall was a centre of attraction to my young mind. The beautiful Lotus flowers (Bhakthi) were abloom in the pond (heart) and the fish in the pond were swimming with joy (bliss). After the prayers, I too used to offer pranams to Sw. Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj alongwith other devotees. The coconut sweet ball (prasadam) was the main attraction for me which was given by Swamiji to all of us.

In 1965, Sw. Prabuddhanandaji became the president of this centre. Since he knew Kannada I started to go to him, offer my pranams and then partake the prasadam. During summer vacation, I used to go to ashram both morning & evening. Though I was very young and was unaware of spiritual matters, Sw. Prabuddhanandaji with lot of affection started guiding me step by step, putting me on the right path to god realization. Prayers, bhajans, satsang, reading of scriptures occupied the major part of my mind without which, I felt, I could not survive. I read the life histories of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi & Sw. Vivekananda. I started to feel that Sri Ramakrishna & Sri Sarada Devi are my real parents, and Sw. Vivekananda my most dear brother.

Sw. Prabuddhanandaji asked me to start my spiritual studies with the book 'The Eternal Companion' of Sw. Brahmananda and later it continued with 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'. He had arranged for the books from library and I was permitted to carry them to Holy mother's rock to read. Swamiji used to monitor my studies and with lot of patience would clarify the doubts that arose in my mind. The encouragement that I was getting from Sw. Prabuddhanandaji filled my life with strength and self confidence.

At the same time he warned me that those who are coming to ashram for spiritual studies, should never lag behind in their academics. He used to monitor my studies in School also. I was supposed to show him my progress report every time after the exams, both Midterm and Annual Exams and Swamiji used to feel very happy because I always stood first in the class.

Our (girls from Sarada Balikamandali in which I was also a member) service in the ashram started with lot of enthusiasm. During 'Jayanti' (birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna , Sri Sarada Devi, Sw. Vivekananda and Durga Puja) days we were permitted to clean the prayer hall, sweep and wipe floor and pillars, cleaning Holy Mother's rock 'Matrushyla' and decorate the Mantap and Picture of Holy Mother with flowers and mango leaves. We used to perform all these with full of joy & devotion. Swami Prabuddhanandaji used to inspect our work and express his satisfaction too. Those were the most memorable days in my life!

During Festivals and Annual Celebrations some of us were being selected for Volunteer work. Swami Prabuddhanandaji used to conduct meeting and allot the work to each one of us. At the same time our food, coffee, paayasam prasadam were also taken care of. While cutting vegetables he used to warn us not to talk lest it would contaminate the prasadam which will be served to all devotees next day. He was expecting such discipline and dedication from us.

Prayer and bhajans were very grand in those days. During jayanti festivals, Vedic chanting by Ram Maharaj & Lakshman Maharaj, Sacred Homa, special bhajans by Ramachandra Maharaj (Swami Purushottamanandaji) and our dear Kitty Master with Rajagopala Maharaj on Tabla, Vijayendra Maharaj on Khol, Ananda Maharaj on Veena, Cymbal by brother Vishwanath as accompaniments. Members of Ramakrishna Yuvaka Sangha used sing with sincere devotion and dedication to Sri GuruMaharaj. We all participated in these programmes and felt extremely happy and blessed.

To enter into the spiritual path, one should receive the blessings of the president Ramakrishna Math & Mission through 'Initiation' – mantradiksha. To receive this Diksha the qualification required are :

- 1) One should be familiar with Sri Ramakrishna & Sw. Vivekananda literature
- 2) Responsibility and tremendous faith in spiritual practice
- 3) Intense devotion to Lord

Training me in all these fields, Sw. Prabuddhanandaji prepared me for this 'Initiation'.

15.12.1969- A great day in my life! The auspicious day on which I received Initiation from our most revered President Sw. Vireswaranandaji Maharaj. I was given Sri Rama taaraka mantram because of my inclination to Sri Rama my deity. To obtain this great blessing Sw. Prabuddhanandaji had prepared me well by giving me strict instructions regarding the significance of Diksha and the responsibilities of the recipient. He had also taught me how to count japam using fingers. Hence I was fully prepared for the same and revered president Maharaj also felt extremely happy about me and blessed me with lot of affection. I knew very little English, but still I managed to communicate my longing for god with revered president Maharaj. Later I started writing letters to him and received prompt replies which carried his blessing to me and which are being preserved carefully by me.

Next year in 1970, I had written a letter to Sw. Vireswaranandaji demanding two things from him, (1) a sweet to my birthday (2) a gift for my spiritual birthday. My Guruji had given so much importance to my letter that when he came to Bangalore, he called me to his cabin and gave me Sandesh (Bengali sweet) and made me eat in front of him and told "This is for your birthday". Same day after evening Arati and prayers he called me and took me near Mother's shrine and asked the Pujari Maharaj to bring the Rosary (Japa maala) which was kept at Holy Mother's feet. My Guruji gave it to me and told "this is for your spiritual birthday". He also showed how to perform japam using the Rosary. I fell at his feet for fulfilling my wishes. He blessed me with a beautiful naughty

smile on his face. My joy knew no bounds ! Sw. Prabuddhanandaji was also standing next to my Guruji. He also felt extremely happy to see me over-flowing with joy and later he told me “you are lucky! You have been blessed a lot by revered president Maharaj”.

It was on one evening. It started raining heavily after the prayers and meditation. I was waiting for the rain to subside. It was getting late, as I had to reach home early lest get scoldings at home. Sw. Prabuddhanandaji was going towards kitchen for dinner. Just after few seconds he came back holding an umbrella and gave it to me saying “you use this today and return it tomorrow”. I was literally stunned for this concern towards me.

From a very young age, my intimacy, fearlessness, forward nature with Sw.

Prabuddhanandaji continued in the same manner as I grew. Swamiji was also treating me as the same little daughter of Bangalore. Many times I have commanded things, not just demanded! But of course he knew that it was full of respect and regards towards him and RK Math. Many times I used to take things for granted. Even then he used to fulfill my demands with affection and concern.

In 1970 when Sw. Prabuddhanandaji was transferred to San Francisco centre, it was a big shock and I just couldn't digest it. When Sw. Adidevanandaji occupied his place, I was so angry that I didn't even go to him to offer pranams thinking that he is responsible for Sw. Prabuddhanandaji's transfer. It was childish no doubt. Sw.

Prabuddhanandaji in one of his letters made me understand the fact that transfers are inevitable in RK Math and mission, and each and every inmate should obey Head Quarters' Orders and move from one centre to another wherever they are asked to work. After this I started going to Sw. Adidevanandaji and came to know that he was a great scholar and swami of implicit faith and tremendous will power. He too had lot of affection towards me. When I completed my graduation, he presented me with the Mylapore edition of 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' and blessed. That is how Sw. Prabuddhanandaji used to correct me and convince me when I was wrong.

Sw. Prabuddhanandaji was holding a responsible post – Minister in Charge of Vedanta Society of San Francisco. But for me he was my spiritual father and the same loving swamiji of Bangalore math. He showed immense patience when I was impatient, affectionate when I was angry and dignified when I was credulous and childish. By nature he was simple, calm, unperturbed and patience personified !

I had regular correspondence, both through airmail and email with swamiji. He used to enjoy my lengthy letters written in Kannada. I used to talk to him over phone at times and meet him in Bangalore math whenever he came down to Bangalore, speak to him personally when I could get an opportunity. He visited our home Sucharita thrice and on 16.09.2010 was his last visit. In spite of his ill health, while returning from Mysore he came to our house, stayed for around 45 minutes. He asked me to prepare apple juice without milk and sugar. He was in a relaxed mood and told 'This house is like an Ashrama'. Sw. Rajeshwaranandaji (Colombo centre) and brother Ramprasad had come with him. Sw. Prabuddhanandaji accepted our offerings and blessed us.

Swamiji had accepted me as his spiritual daughter. He used to write "You belong to me and I belong to you and through Sri Ramakrishna we are all related".

So far I have received more than 85 letters from swamiji. Every year he has sent New Year Greetings card alongwith his blessings. Whenever I demanded, he has sent beautiful books and articles in the form of Gifts. Whenever he visited Bangalore he always remembered to bring some gifts for me. Even though I am now a mother of 2 children, he still used to consider me as 'A Little daughter'. All these letters, books and articles have been preserved as they are my spiritual treasures.

Sw. Prabuddhanandaji's majestic look used to attract many people from different walks of life to him both in India and abroad. Whoever has moved closely with him will definitely know about his friendly nature, compassion and generosity. He was a swami with simple living and high thinking 'Be noble and act global' was his inborn character. Hence devotees and others who are not devotees used to go for counseling and derive

great benefits out of it. He had solutions for every problem and people in US were able to get their problems solved (without spending much!) after the personal interviews with swamiji. Without expecting anything in written this great saint continued to serve in San Francisco and other places in US with the motto 'God in mind and service in hand'

Dear friends, you can see to yourselves all these qualities of Sw. Prabuddhanandaji explained above reflected very clearly in the letters written by him to me, the excerpts of which are given herewith. Please read them with reverence. Even though the love, affection, sympathy, compassion, concern and intimacy appearing in these letters are addressed to me, Sw. Prabuddhanandaji's blessings pertain to each and every individual who knew swamiji intimately and whom swamiji knew intimately.

Today, Sw. Prabuddhanandaji is not with us physically, but as Sri Kittu master rightly puts it, he has left San Francisco and has joined us in Bangalore to be with us always guiding and blessing.

Further reflections from Shashikala Sreedhar:

I was the only person who demanded and sometimes commanded and got, whatever I wanted, fulfilled from swamiji. Swamiji, who had seen me and guided me from my very young age (12 years girl), never used to feel bad or angry instead he used to encourage me saying that I belong to Ramakrishna family and I have every right to get whatever I wanted. I am sure you can understand a loving father's affection towards the daughter!

When I received the news of his passing away, I just could not control my feelings. Swamiji used to say "don't be sentimental. Control your feelings and be firm". But I failed. Tears rolled down continuously and I lost interest in everything and a vacuum created in my heart. This continued for few months and as you know "time is the greatest healer" slowly I tried to come back and started giving attention to my

household duties. But who can fill that place in my heart vacated by Sw. Prabuddhanandaji? Later on I started feeling that I should stick to the guidance given by swamiji and lead the life accordingly. His letters are my spiritual treasures and very often I keep reading them and find solace. I watch the videos taken during his visit to our house and listen to the audio tape, “a speaking letter” sent by him as per my demand! He used to fulfill my petty wishes also and feel satisfied (I used to trouble him a lot during my younger days yet he was very happy about me and used to encourage me and entertain my small trivial achievements).

During my school days, I used to carry a big list of questions, sometimes very silly questions, for which he used to solve them with lots of love and concern. He was very much concerned about my education. I was supposed to show him my school progress report every time after the exams (of course I stood first in my class) and feel happy about my all-round development.

After he left Bangalore to San Francisco, I was writing to him regularly in detail. The letters were pretty lengthy but never once did he feel bored to read them. He was asking me to give me details in homey Kannada language.

I am very sorry for the lengthy scribblings. If I think of my dear father in swamiji, words flow fast without control. Please pardon me.

— — — — —

“MARGADARSHI”

Sw. Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj

Smt. Shashikala Sreedhar

93, 5th Main, 3rd Stage

BEML Layout, Rajarajeswarinagar

Bangalore – 560098

080 28604321

9902879311

1. GURU:

If your mental peace is not disturbed – that means the Lord’s grace is on you. You are also doing your meditation etc. regularly according to the instructions you received from our Rev. President Maharaj. May he grant you more and more inspiration to call on Him always and draw you closer and closer to Him. (03.04.1971) – 2

Yes, you are fortunate really. You are able to meet and talk to Rev. President Maharaj and receive his blessings so often almost every year (24.07.1972) – 5

It is very good that you are getting letters from Rev Guru Swami Vireshwaranandaji Maharaj. I am sure that you are preserving them all very carefully. They are very valuable and will give you more and more light, inspiration and confidence and strength as days pass by. (14.09.1971) – 3

2. ಭಗವತೇವೇ:

ಭಗವತ್ತೇವೇ ಮಾಡುವಾಗ ಉತ್ಸಾಹ ಅನಂದಗಳಿರಬೇಕು. ಸಂತೋಷವಾಗಿ ಸೌಹಾರ್ದದಿಂದ ಸೇವೆ ಸಲ್ಲಿಸಬೇಕು. |
ನಿರುತ್ಸಾಹವಾದರೆ ಅದಕ್ಕೆ ಕಾರಣವನ್ನು ತಿಳಿದು ಸರಿಪಡಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳಬೇಕು. (02.10.1970) – 1

3. Divine Mother's Grace:

Trust your prayer, meditation as well as reading of scriptures are continuing. I wish and pray that the Divine Mother may grant you more and more enthusiasm and capacity in all these. May She draw you closer and closer to Herself (09.02.1973) – 6

May the Divine Mother guide you in all your endeavors and bless you in every way.
(25.04.1974) – 7

Do all the work as worship of the Mother. Each day's activity should be a flower offered to the Mother. You are a devotee since your childhood. Take refuge in the Mother, dedicating all praise and blame to Her. That alone can give peace and comfort. In this *kurukshetra* now and then we get hurt. Mother is the healer. May she soothe your aching heart and grant you fresh enthusiasm to server Her in different ways.
(13.06.1978) -9

Yes, chapter after chapter in life passes leaving behind sweet and bitter impressions. In and through all these let us learn to hold on to the Mother more and more and turn to Her at every step. (13.06.1978) – 9

4. Yearning for GOD – Emotions >< Devotion:

I was much impressed by your sincere longing for light. You are also struggling hard in that direction. Surely through His grace your efforts will be crowned with success.

(28.12.1978) – 10

You are a devotee, so that is why you yearn to feel the presence of the Lord. You have been specially blessed by our Rev President Maharaj (Swami Vireshwaranandaji). From your very young age you have been growing in the atmosphere of the Ashrama and devotees. You are constantly gathering and assimilating Spiritual ideas. What more should I say? I simply pray to the Mother that you may realize the Light in this very life.

(26.11.1976) – 8

Your yearning for God is commendable. I wish I could have such intense longing. You are doing very well in placing your yearning heart before the Lord. May you do it in a deeper way is my prayer to Sri Guru Maharaj. You see, devotion is Grand but we should be careful about emotions. If devotion becomes deeper and broader you go inward more and more, and into depths of your being you will find your dearest and nearest. What is needed is 'Active Patience' like that of Madam Curie or a good sportsman (vigorously playing but calmly and steadily). That is the saatvik way of life.

(See Gita 18th Chapter – 26)

26.03.1993) – 27

We belong to the family of our Holy Mother. Let us follow Her Advice. As written by one of her disciples (In 'Mother as I saw her' Page 232, last paragraph). "Neither in Her nor in her children, would there be found any trace of excessive emotionalism.

Everyone of them would be found gentle, quite, serene and calm". Please meditate on her Majestic, Calm and Profound yet simple character. Your dear Rama was also always serene, steady and firm. (26.03.1993) – 27

I was very happy to read the latter part of your letter – about your yearning for God. He has been very gracious to you all along. Even when you were a little girl, He brought you into the magic circle of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, the Swamis and devotees. You are soaked in their inspiration and the lofty ideas of Vedanta. You started your spiritual life early in age. So many blessings in such a short time. I wish and pray through His grace you will reach the fulfillment of this life.

(26.04.1990) – 19

Your words come straight from your heart and so are very touching. Being a sincere devotee of the Lord, you yearn for contact with Him. However be like Shabari, patiently but always eagerly waiting for Rama. (07.12.1994) – 30

You are indefatigable, incorrigible and articulate. Your feelings and expressions seem to make me also sentimental! It is good you are crying before Lord Rama. That will take you closer to Him. I am glad I have become instrumental in that. (09.03.2000) – 40

Regarding the meaning of Life: Long back you have found it, even when you were a little girl; that is, God Realization is the only goal of life. Without that everything is a waste. There will be no joy in life. “Vanity of Vanities, and all is Vanity, except to Love God and serve Him only” (The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a’Kempis) (08.12.2002) – 46

5. Take Refuge in Sri Ramakrishna:

We have to take refuge in Sri Ramakrishna and play our part to the best of our capacity as His playmate and join Him ultimately. There is no other way. Very graciously He took you in his fold even when you were a little girl and is nourishing you spiritually all along. Everything has worked very well in your case. Try to dive deep in Him, in

and through all your daily chores, duties and responsibilities. May He be ever with you protecting and blessing (04.12.1983) – 13

You have a deep desire to attain God realization in this very life. Don't forget we have come into the magic circle of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. Their Guru Power will surely remove all the obstacles in our spiritual path and lead us to the highest. Let us offer ourselves to Them more and more and see for ourselves what happens.

(14.12.1984) – 15

Always believe that when once you have come in the orbit of Sri Ramakrishna, through his grace you will surely realize the goal. He is *khandana bhava bandhana* and *yogasahay*. Through his guru shakti *goshpada vaariyathaay*. You will see they are all true. (14.03.1994) – 28

6. Self Surrender to the Real and Reliable:

After you do your prayer, meditation, study, service to others, daily chores etc. offer them all at the feet of the Lord and be free and happy like a little girl in His presence. Why should you carry the burden of your Sadhana, the burden of all psychological gymnastics? Constantly offer yourself to Him. That will bring you all the spiritual benefits. (07.12.1994) – 30

I am much satisfied to learn that you feel fulfillment in your life of devotion and service. That is why you are without any worry. You know the song *chinta naasti kila* . May your beloved Rama continue to bless you and keep you under his benign protection is my prayer to Him. (27.04.1192) – 24

Want to realize God soon? After doing our best we have to unconditionally surrender to the Lord. We can't put any conditions! If we are earnest about our Sadhana, surely Lord knows about our *vyakulata* (08.12.2002) – 46

If you give yourself to the Lord, the Lord will give Himself to you. That seems to be the contract. If you give everything to Him except yourself, He also seems to give everything except Himself. You do not need any recommendation to go the Lord. Maintain a 'Hotline' to Him. (08.12.2002) – 46

To be more practical, take refuge in the Lord and Him alone. He alone is real and reliable. All others come and go. Letters and swamis are good but not good enough. This is what I tell myself and my own people of whom you are one. (09.03.2000) – 40

Always know that the Lord alone is your father, mother, friend and everything, *naatha tumi sarvasva amaar*. Human relations come and go. May the Lord keep you under His benign protection and lead you onto His Lotus feet. He alone is our refuge in this turbulent world. (09.12.1997) – 35&50

It was so refreshing to learn of your worships, Japa, swadhyaya and your literary activities. By doing all these sadhanas intensely, you are accumulating spiritual samskaras, which open the door to your chosen Ideal. As Sri Krishna says in Gita, even spiritual practices have to be undertaken with a spirit of self surrender and dedication. Then only you'll feel the sense of freedom and joy. (24.11.2006) – 52

[We find this self surrender and dedication in Swami Prabuddhanandaji's life throughout. He had offered his entire life at Holy Mother's feet. Even in the crucial moment of his life when doctors had left hope while treating his ill health, Swami Prabuddhanandaji, attaching doctor's report wrote to me like this:]

This is the update of my health condition. I am herewith attaching the doctor's report. It speaks for itself. That's where we stand; the rest depends on the will of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. Hari Om Tat Sat. Jai Maa ! (14.092011) – 59

[Preaching is easy but practising what we preach is very difficult. Swami Prabuddhanandaji lived a practical life of spirituality showing love and affection to everyone, consoling every soul who approached him for counseling, dedicating it entirely at Holy Mother's feet. He was a Swami with simple living and high thinking]

7. Regarding Next Birth:

Don't think of next birth and all that. When you have come under the Guru power of Sri Ramakrishna be assured that you will reach illumination in this birth itself. Always feel that you have been offered at his feet at the time of 'Initiation' and he has accepted you. Like a happy little girl in the presence of her loving father, go on doing your duties, always feeling His presence. (24.11.1990) – 20

Don't you know you are already blessed? Even from your young age you have been soaked in a spiritual atmosphere. Your mind has been fed with spiritual ideas and now you are leading the life of a devotee. Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, are always with you, guiding and protecting. How can there be any other birth for you? (18.12.0185) – 16

8. Heartfelt intimacy:

I was much touched by your sincere feelings. A devotee that you are, you have love and admiration for poor swamis like me. You have my prayers and as a little daughter, my blessings too. (14.03.1194) – 28

You write beautifully – so much familiarity, so much devotion and so much poetry.
Your kopa novu penalty are all sweet. I greatly appreciate your patience and affection.
We are all children of Sri Ramakrishna, that is the reason for your heartfelt intimacy
(17.12.1995) – 32

Certainly you can take liberty with me. After all through Sri Ramakrishna, I belong to
you and you belong to me. So, letter or no letter, you are in my thoughts; I admire your
patience (25.11.1996) – 33

‘Daughter’ is very tenacious and invariably wins. She does not rest until she gets what
she wants! May Lord Sri Rama give you all you need now and always. What more?
(25.12.1998) – 37

You are dear daughter of Sri Rama and through Him you are dear to me too. I know
you are not just sentimental, there is more to it. Keep it up.
Humanly speaking, I feel happy that you are there wishing well of me. I was glad to
learn of your one-pointed dedication to Lord and His remembrance under all
conditions. Let us soak ourselves in His presence and carry on life. The more the better.
(13.05.1999) – 38

Lord Rama has endowed you with loving patience in abundance. That is why you are
able to write to me letter after letter before hearing from me. You are my own. So I take
liberty (30.01.2000) – 39

I was much moved by your beautiful feeling towards our brotherhood (other monks of
RK order). It is pure and uplifting. (30.01.2000) – 39

I love to read your *taleharate*, your occasional impatience with me. I mean your *kopa*.
Please keep in touch (30.01.2000) – 39

Certainly you are a daughter full of sentiments for the Lord, not a 'sentimental fool'.
Such sentiments always lead to freedom (08.12.2002) – 46

You should make Lord Sri Rama the target of all your feelings. In the process, if I am of any service to you, you can make use of me and throw me also at His feet. (08.12.2002) – 46

I always like to read your letters. You express yourself so clearly. *Aadare kelavu sala* 'emotional' that's all. Emotion is good but it should become devotion (Bhakthi). From *bhakti* comes *shakti* like Hanuman. I silently pray for you. May you come closer to your dear Rama every moment. (05.05.1998) – 36

Thank you very much for your repeated 'hearty' prayers in different ways for me. They are all very touching. Who else can offer such sincere prayers but good hearted children of the Mother like you? I don't know how to reciprocate yours except by placing you at the feet your Lord Sri Rama and pray for His grace (03.07.2003) – 49

Never think that you are distancing yourself from us. We belong to one another through Sri Ramakrishna. Letter or no letter we are always connected through Him, you know this.

You have very affectionately asked me to take good rest when needed..... it is so soothing to think that at such a distance, there is a true well wisher in you.

Without getting angry or tired, keep in touch. I always like to get your news written in your simple, clear, homey Kannada (09.03.2005) – 51

9. Little daughter's happy family:

Yes, you are always a little daughter of the holy Mother. May you always feel like that. Through the Mother we are all related.

I was glad to know that everything is going on very well with you through the grace of the Mother. Give my special greetings to 'Vivek'. May Sri Ramakrishna bless him now and always. Through his grace, may he become a devotee of God in letter and in spirit (26.11.1980) – 12

It is always a joy to see a happy family with love and understanding amongst one another. If every member of the family is devoted to God and is interested in others, naturally there will be peace and harmony. You are lucky. You have such a family. Through His grace may it continue like that bringing more and more joy, fulfillment and strength to each one of you amidst all the ups and downs of life (07.05.1984) – 14

I especially liked the positive and enthusiastic tone of your letter. You say that inspite of problems and responsibilities as a housewife, you are trying hard to remain in God Consciousness and also in the company of holy people. Congratulations! That is just the thing needed. May Sri Ramakrishna fill your whole being and whole life with His presence and enable you to radiate love, peace and strength within your family and also wherever you may be. (18.12.1985) – 16

So 'Vinaya' has joined 'Viveka'. These two can bring a revolution in ones spiritual life. (18.12.1985) – 16

When you have Vivek & Vinay in your home, you need not worry about anything. They will make your life meaningful and joyful. Please give them my love (15.12.1986) – 17

10. Appreciation for the letter writing style:

I was glad to receive your letter. I read it more than once and again today. I enjoyed reading it. It is so full of feeling. How many can feel like that for a poor swami who is living thousands of miles away. Thank you. After all we are all Mother's children. We are intimately related through Her. (24.11.1980) – 20

You are a writer, poet and devotee. Thoughts flow in an artistic way in your letter. I can't reply to them promptly. However I enjoyed reading your letters . Please continue to write in a selfless way without expecting prompt reply. You have been very good at this arrangement. Keep it up. (22.04.2002) – 44

I have before me your letter dt..... as usual they are heartfelt out-pourings. I greatly admire your sincerity and depth of feeling. But I can't possibly match your feelings. So, bear with my comparatively stereo- type language. However, you please continue to express yourself in your own unique way. I like your homely, lively Kannada. I read your letters quite a few times . You are our dear ' young prasad devotee' who is yearning for God. (27.8.2001) – 42

Though I liked your letter, I wish you had included a little bit of your *taleharate* and *hudugaata* written in your beautiful homely Kannada. It is interesting to read such letters now and then. (03.07.2003) – 49

Please continue your good habit of writing in your beautiful, simple but forceful kannada and send it by airmail, not email (24.04.2008) – 55

11. Appreciating articles written to various magazines:

(Reply to Vivek's letter) I read your mother's article in 'Viveka Prabha'. I never knew that she was so well versed in the technicalities of music. Being a non-musician, it's over my head. However Shashi has very nicely integrated music with spiritual life (09.07.2001) – 41

It is good that you are continuing your literary work. Whatever you write will be a good offering to the Lord. Please continue (05.12.2001) – 43

Please continue your literary activities. It gives very good food both for your mind and soul and will enrich your spiritual life (08.12.2002) – 46

(After reading the articles sent by me)

I am very glad to learn that you are now able to share whatever you have acquired through your spiritual studies. All of your thought-provoking and uplifting articles are very good offerings to the Lord. May He continue to inspire you in this direction. Humanly speaking I am proud to see how our “young” devotees are taking part in this service program (16.04.2004) – 50

Your article (in BVD) “call of Krishna’s flute” (ಕೃಷ್ಣನ ಕೊಳಲಿನ ಕರೆಯೆ) is very informative, interesting and inspiring. You have made quite a lot of research and gathered information from different sources and put it all in a cogent way. That shows you should write more. The article is very good (01.12.2006) – 53

I was amazed to learn of your literary adventures. It is an excellent way to keep the mind on the Lord. Continue with all your heart and soul and whenever possible send me copies. I enjoy reading them (24.04.2008) – 55

12. Regarding our pilgrimage tours:

Thank you for your blow by blow (detailed) description of your pilgrimage to Chennai, Chidambaram & Mysore. Your description is very poetic and also devotional (27.11.2000) – 45

I was delighted to get your legal-size 5 and 1/2 page letter. I was so happy to read it that I wanted to acknowledge it almost immediately. (13.03.2007) – 54

I share with you your joy on these: 1) you have given me a grand tour of Holy Belur Math, Kamarpukur, Jayrambati, Dakshineswar and other places associated with the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda. I felt as though I was moving about these sacred places and meeting some of our swamis. Thank you. 2) again it is a very satisfying news that Sreedhar had his 'Initiation' at Belur Math: all the four of you belong to Sri Ramakrishna and through Him to all of us already. Now one more stamp was put to that relationship. Well, the right thing has been done. (13.03.2007) – 54

I was very glad to read your long letter regarding your pilgrimage in North India. By reading the letter, I felt I was also travelling; you are such a good letter writer. Thank you so much for giving me a tour.
(31.05.2013) 62

[This letter was written by swamiji after our pilgrimage to Delhi, Amritsar, Jammu, Srinagar, Rishikesh & Haridwar]

13. Wit and humour:

Received your letter and liked reading it again and again. I am sorry for your NOVU, but your KOPA made me laugh! (09.12.1994) – 31

You are good letter writer, you express yourself clearly. So you feel that the Lord is fulfilling all your prayers, even trivial ones. Yes, there are some 'spoiled children' of the Lord. Such devotees go to the Lord for everything, small or big, *iha* or *para*. They don't want to take a 'No' from Him. They pester him, quarrel with Him. They don't allow any baby sitter. They want Him alone to be with them. The Lord seems to enjoy this relationship. You seem to belong to this group of 'spoiled children' ! well go ahead. He is our all in all. Let us say: "Lord, be with me always, day and night, watching over me.

I maybe careless sometimes but you should take care of me anyway". May He ever bless you with His presence. ಅಲ್ಲಿ ನೋಡಲು ರಾಮ ಇಲ್ಲಿನೋಡಲು ರಾಮ.

(27.01.1993) – 26

I have before me your beautiful letter. You express very well through letters.

ವಾತ್ಸಲ್ಯ, ಕೋಪ, ಹಾಸ್ಯ, ಗೌರವ, ಭಕ್ತಿ, ವ್ಯಂಗ್ಯ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಸೇರಿವೆ

(25.11.1996) – 33

Inspite of my best efforts, I postpone writing personal letters. I like to write to you in my own hand. The result is a disaster! (30.01.2000) – 39

Glad to receive your long letter. You have sent so many 'thank you's'. it is very difficult to digest all of them. Anyway accept my one 'thank you'! (10.03.2003) – 47

Trust you received my letter. Your reply is due !! you see sometimes things happen like that ! [Note on Olema retreat Bulletin] (24.05.2003) – 48

At last the time has arrived. I am sitting to write to you. I wanted to write to you myself in my own hand and hence all this delay! knowing me all these years how I am, I am sure you will understand (09.03.2005) – 51

14. All appreciations – and rare blessings:

I liked your reference to 'prasad devotees' etc. I wonder how vividly you remember the old days! It gives me a lot on encouragement and joy. (27.11.2000) – 45

My heart swelled with pride to learn of your performance in your Bank and management of your family as a true devotee of God, trying to put into practice what you have heard from our teachers and scriptures. Dear S, keep it up ! Through his grace you will do still better and better (9.3.2005) – 51

It's certainly a great relief to know that you have retired from service at the Canara Bank. You have done just the right thing. I am very glad to know that you left the bank with such good feelings everywhere. Very few people are fortunate enough to leave an office like that. Now you have entered the *vaanaprastha* stage though living in the city, in the family. However, it's a modern *vaanaprastha* life. Along with your meditation, pooja, writing and holy company, you will add service of God in man as another dimension to your spiritual practice. You know all this (13.03.2007) – 54

I was delighted to receive your long, juicy, inspiring letter. Your sadhana, your routine, your literary activities, are all so systematic and disciplined. It is very inspiring to hear that. It is all due to His grace. (24.04.2008) – 55

The long awaited time to reply to your letter has come. Thank you for giving me all the news off your sadhana in different areas. You have made your entire life a long continuous sadhana. Work and worship seem to be going together. Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother will be pleased to have such a sincere devotee. Humanly speaking, I am so happy to see the intensity of your life. May you grow from strength to strength until the goal is reached. (18.12.2009) – 56

It was so nice that I could meet you many times during my recent visit to Bangalore. Your persistence, affection and consideration were responsible for our multiple meetings, I wish I had had more time to talk to you all more leisurely. That was partially satisfied by my visit to your house which is like an Ashrama. The credit for maintaining the spiritual atmosphere in the family naturally goes to you. May you all come closer and closer to the Lord is my prayer.

Your description of the celebrations of various festivals was very inspiring. Sri Rangapriya Swami has really done a great service to Hindus by writing a book on festivals and their observances. I hope all religious Hindus will celebrate festivals more meaningfully. (18.11.2010) – 58

15. Accepting his mistakes/Procrastination:

[In 1994 New Year Greetings card did not reach us due to the irresponsibility of the person through whom Swami Prabuddhanandaji had sent. Swamiji told me that he had written a long letter to me alongwith the New Year Greetings. I felt it was my bad luck]

Trust you will understand the situation and forgive me. Card or No Card you are in my thoughts and your loving admonishing letters now and then keep me alert. (14.03.1994)

– 28

I was expecting your letter too, but it didn't come! Don't be too angry. Be kind to swamis like me who are getting older every day! You have referred to Swami Mukhyanandaji who replies to your letters very promptly. You are right – I have to learn to be prompt. I should not keep people in suspense. The old habit of procrastination doesn't go easily, you have to pray for me. (05.12.2001) – 43

[When I didn't receive any letter from him for quite some time, I had written a lengthy letter to him. In reply to this, Swami Prabuddhanandaji wrote]

May Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna bless you in every way and also pardon me for keeping his dear devotee S in suspense all these months. (24.04.2008) – 55

Please don't mind my getting my letters typed. It is to save time. However privacy is maintained. Only the typist who is a close devotee knows. She is very reliable. I am sure as a daughter of the Ramakrishna family you will understand. (18.12.2009)- 57

I was glad to receive your e-mail and also your letter. As usual my procrastination came in the way and you did not get any reply from me. Please excuse me. (20.10.2013)-63

16. Celebrations in San Francisco Vedanta Temple:

After Christmas, on New Year 's Eve we are going to have an hour's meditation at midnight. On the first of January we propose to have a special worship, meditation, reading and discussion. Thus we want to begin the year with the thought of the Lord and hope to continue in the same way .(28.12.1978) – 11

In continuation of our observance of Swamiji's (Sw. Vivekananda) centennial, we will have a function at Samuel Taylor Park (near Olema Retreat) where Swamiji camped for about 2 weeks in May 1900
(6.5.1994) – 29

17. Call from Sri Ramakrishna Loka to Senior Monks of Ramakrishna Order:

There seems to be an emergency in Sri Ramakrishna Loka, so He is recalling some of His trusted, seasoned servants to work in that region. During the past year five of our dedicated Senior Swamis in this country have passed away. One of them was Swami Aseshanandaji, a disciple of the Holy Mother. He was nearly 97 and perhaps the last monastic disciple of Holy Mother to go. He was overflowing with Mother's awareness all along. We all miss his inspiring presence. (25.11.1996) – 34

We were all much distressed to learn of the sudden demise of our dear Sw. Purushottamanandaji. What a contribution he has made in bringing people to the Lord.
(09.03.2005) – 63

I have received your e-mail of Oct 13 giving me the sad news of the demise of Rev Swami Mukhyanandaji Maharaj. I got the news from Belur Math also. No doubt it is a loss for us all. What can be done? He lived a full life serving Sri Gurumaharaj in various

ways. Is it not a great blessing? May we also serve Him to the last moment of our lives and continue in His presence eternally. (20.10.2013) – 63

18. Swami Prabuddhanandaji's blessings from past 44 years:

Apply more hard and concentrated efforts in your studies. After BA you should study for your MA and even one more degree if possible. I pray to Sri Ramakrishna that He may remove all the obstacles from your way and enable you to progress more and more spiritually and in other fields' too. (24.07.1972) – 4

To be more frank, within my heart I feel proud of you. I silently offer my prayers to Sri Ramakrishna for you. Trust your Japa meditation, prayer and holy reading are continuing without any hindrance. May Holy Mother bless each one of us with purity, love, strength and wisdom. (28.11.1987) – 18

[Blessings from Sw. Prabuddhanandaji for the House warming ceremony of our newly built house in RajaRajeshwarinagar, Bangalore and also upanayanam of our children Vivek and Vijay (cousin)]

“May Sri Ramakrishna fill your new house with His presence, bless the little brahmacharins Vivek and Vijay and you all ” (04.03.1991) – 21

It is very good that the Swamis and devotees came and sang bhajans blessed the house and also the new brahmacharins. A true devotee that you are, you welcome people whole heartedly and so everyone is happy. May the Supreme Lord continue to bless you to be a true mother not only to your own children but to everyone is my prayer to Him.

I want to see your new house. Sri Ramakrishna alone knows when that auspicious day will arrive! (17.05.1991) – 22

You are a blessed soul having come under the shelter of your dear Rama at a very early age. You can never be unfortunate. ಅಧ್ಯಾತ್ಮ ಪುತ್ರಿ! ಪುತ್ರಿ is always a ಪುತ್ರಿ . May you feel His presence more and more. (09.12.1994) – 31

I was very glad to learn of the installation of Sri Rama Sita Lakshmana Hanuman Image in your house. May that Image – blissful, luminous, loving (*Anandamaya, Tejomaya, Prememaya*) enter into your heart and remain there forever. (7.12.1995) – 32

Know it for certain my hearty prayers and best wishes are always there for you. Really speaking you are already blessed by your dear Rama. You don't need any one else's. May you feel His presence more and more inside and outside is my prayer. (27.08.2001) – 42

I received your e-mail of March 30 giving me the sad news of the passing away of Rev. Swami Rangapriya. What can be done? After finishing his mission in life, he went back to his abode. Let us take refuge in the Lord and do the best we can. Well that's all that I can say now. (3.04.2012) – 60

I was very sorry to learn of the sad demise of your dear mother. It is the special grace of the Lord that she lived her full life, fulfilled her mission and left. It is so nice to know that she did not suffer at the end. May the supreme Lord shower His blessings on her wherever she may be now give you all the strength to bear the loss. Now probably you'll have to take the position of your mother in the family. She has prepared you very well for that position. It's a great responsibility, no doubt, but you will be able to handle it through His grace. (Jan-2013) – 61

You are in my thoughts and prayers .May Lord Sri Ramachandra continue to shower His blessings on you and all the members of your family. (20.10.2013) – 63

These simple but beautiful letters depict a clear picture of Swami Prabuddhanandaji, projecting his love and affection and above all his concern towards all of us who belonged to his enchanting circle. Distance does not matter at all when souls are close to each other. Every person who is lucky to have his company surely feels that he / she belongs to Swamiji and Swamiji belongs to him / her. It is a very rare quality. He was able to mix well with the people with lots of intimacy and concern and at the same time he could get himself detached from everyone when his personal life of *sanyasa* was concerned. His *sadhana* level was so high that he was always merged deep in the thoughts of Holy Mother.

Since you are all my good friends, I would like to share my personal talk with Swamiji in this context:

It was on 16th Sep 2005, auspicious day of Anantha chaturdashi, Friday evening at Ramakrishna centenary building (President's Room):

There was a very long queue in Sharada Block to meet Swami Prabuddhanandaji, who had to leave Bangalore the next day morning for San Francisco. I was in the queue waiting eagerly to meet him. Seeing the crowd I was feeling sad also because of the fact that I may not be able to talk to him personally. Silently I started praying Gurumaharaj. Just few minutes after this one of the volunteers came near the queue called my name and told me that Swamiji wants me to see him in Ramakrishna centenary building. Ramakrishna had heard my prayers. I ran to centenary block and entered the room where Swamiji was waiting for me. He asked the volunteer boy to close the door and not to allow anyone inside. I did pranam and Swamiji offered me a chair to sit. I told him "this is my place" and sat at his feet. With lots of love and affection he enquired"

So, everything is going on well isn't it?" and enquired about my family and office. The talks between us followed thus:

S. How was your Belgaum trip Swamiji?

Sw. P. Because the flight was cancelled, while returning we had some problem. I had to return by train and car. They all tried a lot to make me feel comfortable, it was ok. Actually I wanted to attend the opening ceremony of Belgaum Ashram last time. Swami Purushottamanandaji had also invited me with love and Rev President Maharaj (Sw. Ranganathanandaji) was also here at that time and I wanted to meet him also. But when I could come this year, both of them are not there. (his voice was choked for sometime but immediately he controlled his feelings) Because of the sincere requests made by Vidyarthi Mandiram brother monks I planned to come to Bangalore this time.

S. So we should be grateful to Mandiram Swamiji.

Sw. P. Yes really. Also, Belur Math has acquired the property of Swami Vivekananda's ancestral home in Calcutta which will be converted into a great monument. I had been to Calcutta to see this place.

Now how is your spiritual practices going on ?

S. I am practising Japa, meditation and reading of scriptures regularly. In different stages of my life I have experienced God's timely help which shows that He is always with me. But why I am not able to see Him? Swamiji, please give me your special blessings today so that I will realize His presence and experience the bliss.

Sw. P. You are already blessed by many great people. All these blessings will surely help you. Continue your sadhana as directed by your Guru. You can see God within

your heart with the inner eyes. Do you remember how Nag Mahashay used to pray God? He prayed “ O God, please open my inner eyes “.

S. Swamiji, Tulasidas, Thyagaraja Swamy and many other saints could see God outside also through their physical eyes, why can't I see Him outside also?

(Swamiji became introvert for some time and started looking at sky, sitting motionless, his eyes open with little drops of water. In the same mood he looked at me and I could see the love and affection overflowing through his eyes)

Sw. P. Yes, these saints had seen God outside also. Remember what Sri Ramakrishna was saying? Ramakrishna said “I am seeing God when my eyes are closed and I am seeing Him when my eyes are opened also”.

S. Swamiji, please bless me so that on one fine day I should come to you and say that “I have seen God and experienced the bliss”

Sw. P. (with full of compassion) Be brave and always remember the sayings of Swami Vivekananda. You know what he says in one of his poems which reads like this. “Hold on yet a while, brave heart.....the victory is sure to come.”. Continue your sadhana with lot of courage like this. Come what may, we should remain, as what we are, without shaking a bit.

[This was a poem written by Swami Vivekananda to the Maharaja of Khetri]

S. Swamiji, to know about these great ideas and ideals, I keep writing to you lengthy letters and I am sure you are not feeling bored to read them.

Sw. P. Not at all. Please keep writing to me. I like them. Write in Kannada. I enjoy reading Kannada in US

S. Swamiji, with whom should I share all these feelings of my mind and heart?

Sw. P. (pointing to himself) You share everything with me. Whether I am staying in Bangalore or in San Francisco, my blessings are always there for you. Alright, come on let us go to Sharada Block, people are waiting for me.

(After offering the kaanike I bowed to him, touched his sacred feet and did pranam and offered my prayers to him. With lot of compassion he placed his holy palm on my head and blessed me tapping thrice. I felt extremely happy and blessed. He also gave me an apple and prasad packet. I was literally in tears and I controlled my feelings as early as I could and started walking with him to Sharada Block. Later I went to the shrine and offered my heartfelt prayers to Sharada Ramakrishna for granting me this blessed evening with Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj.)

I have also included other articles and photos to share. Translations by Mrs. Shashikala Sreedhar

Interview of Kittu master (Video transcript and photos)

Swami Prabuddhananda

Prof. N Krishnaswami (Kitty Master)

It was in 1940. Myself and a few other young boys were coming to Ramakrishna Ashrama Basavanagudi, Bangalore from Malleswaram by walk. We were eager to listen to the lectures on scriptures in the ascetic voice of Swami Tyagishanandaji Maharaj.

Gradually we started participating in the celebrations of the Ashrama. During the functions I used to sing with my friend Srinivasa Murthy. Among the group of volunteers of the Ashrama, Jagannath had an attractive personality with an impressive voice, with face that resembled to that of Vivekananda. He was a college student. I was

still a High School student. All of us were expecting that Jagannath would join the Order and become a monk because he had deep devotion and dedication. But this did not happen. He joined *grihastaashramaa* (became house holder) But when he served as the chief of Ramakrishna Vidyashala of Mysore, he rendered yeoman service to the Institution. His younger brother Raghunandan received Sanyasa and was called as Swami Prabuddhananda and became a distinguished Monk in the Order.

SHUKA MUNI : (Sage Shuka) When I was discussing some similar incidence with Swami Vimalananda, who was a well known scholar in Ramakrishna Order, he said “Grandfather did not become a sanyasi, not even his son but his grandson became greatest among the monks.” Here he was referring to Sage Parashara, his son Sage Vedavyasa and his grandson Sage Shuka. Swami Prabuddhananda naturally belonged to the lineage of Sage Shuka.

AS A STUDENT: In 1948 I started working as a lecturer in Vijaya College. I was visiting Ashrama almost every day. I was also going to the Vidyarthi Mandiram (Student Home) of the Ashrama to sing bhajans. Many a times I had acted as a judge for the debates and other competitions held in Vidyarthi Mandiram. During that time I came to know about Raghunandan who was a student then. Raghunandan was talking less compared to his brother Jagannath. He would not mingle with people much, and was a boy of dignified personality. Swami Tyagishananda knowing well that this boy would become a monk, had permitted him to stay in the Ashrama. After graduation Raghunandan joined Ashrama as a brahmachari in 1950. Many students were greatly influenced by Swami Tyagishananda. Raghunandan while studying in college study of scriptures and disciplines followed in Ashrama were of great importance to him than his academics.

AS A BRAHMACHARI: Raghunandan involved himself with interest in all the activities of the Ashrama. Staying with a great Monk like Swami Tyagishananda and serving him was itself a penance. He even had the great opportunity of serving Swamiji

during his last days. In 1951 Swami Tyagishanandaji passed away. Raghunandan received Mantra Deeksha (Initiation) from Swami Virajananda. After Swami Tyagishananda, in 1951 Swami Yatishwaranandaji became the President of the Ashrama. The activities of the Ashrama increased day by day. A separate building was constructed for Vidyarthi Mandiram. Brahmachari Raghunandan had to take over the responsibilities of the Office Work of the Ashrama. Brahmachari Satyanarayan (Swami Shastrananda) took over the role as a secretary to Swami Yatishwarananda. Brahmachari Hari (Swami Sureshananda) took the responsibilities of works related to kitchen and garden.

Swami Ritatmananda was then the warden of Ramakrishna Vidyarthi Mandiram. As he was getting old Brahmachari Raghunandan went to Vidhyarthi Mandiram to assist him. Later he himself became the warden of the hostel. Under the guidance of Swami Yatishwarananda the field of activities of the hostel increased. Inter Hostel Debate competitions, Essay Competitions, Volleyball Tournaments etc were introduced. Brahmachari Raghunandan had taken the entire responsibility with efficiency and dedication and thus he won the hearts of the students.

AS A SANNYASI:

Brahmachari Raghunandan received his Sannyasa Deeksha (Monastic Vows) in the year 1960 and was given the name Swami Prabuddhananda. However all the activities went on as usual. In 1964 after Swami Shastrananda left for America Swami Prabuddhananda came back to Ashrama to hold the Manager's responsibility. This was the most responsible job since Swami Yatishwarananda was travelling frequently to different places in India and abroad, Swami Prabuddhananda had to shoulder the entire responsibilities of the Ashrama which he handled with utmost efficiency.

In 1963 Ashrama celebrated Birth Centenary of Swami Vivekananda with Grandeur. Observing the increase in the number of devotees coming to Ashrama Swami Yatishwarananda, to meet the requirement extended the prayer hall to accommodate

them. Book publication work also continued. The Lectures in Kannada on Saturday's and in English on Sunday's continued. Vivekananda Balaka Sangha for boys and Sharada Balika Mandali for girls attracted children.

Inspite of these there was still a dearth of rooms for Sadhus. There was also a necessity of a suitable building for the office, book stall and library. For this Swami Yatishwarananda took up the construction of a new building. The foundation stone was laid to commence the construction of this building which was named as Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial building. Swami Prabuddhananda and Swami Sureshananda worked hard without taking rest for the completion of the building work. But unfortunately Swami Yatishwarananda was not present during the Inaugural function. After Swami Prabuddhananda became the President of the Ashrama, the opening ceremony of the new block was performed. After a few years an auditorium was also constructed adjoining to this building.

AS A PRESIDENT : Swami Yatishwaranandaji passed away in Kolkata on 27th January 1966. After this Swami Prabuddhananda was appointed as the President of the Bangalore Centre. In the beginning Swamiji felt bit anxious as to how to handle the great responsibility, which was being administered earlier by the great monks like Swami Tyagishananda and Swami Yatishwarananda. But Swamiji knew very well how to manage the entire administration work. Whenever Swami Yatishwarananda was travelling in India and abroad on missionary work, Swami Prabuddhananda was handling the entire administration of the Ashrama. Hence he found it easy to take over the new responsibility. Swami Prabuddhananda continued various activities of the Ashrama, without modifying any, as they were earlier. For this he had immense support of Swami Sureshananda.

The Pooja, Bhajans, Lectures in Kannada and English, Library work, Bookstall work and Balaka Sangha activities went on as usual. Swami Prabuddhananda and Swami Sureshananda together continued the construction work of Vivekananda Centenary

Memorial building. After the opening ceremony it provided place for Office, Library, book stall and a spacious hall for Balaka sangha and also 4-5 living rooms for the monastics.

After many decades the Ashrama got a Kannada speaking president. Way back in 1926 Swami Srivasananda, a Kannada speaking monk was the president of this Ashrama for 2 years. Similar to this after many years now we had one Kannadiga (Kannada speaking) monk. This was very beneficial for the common man, who could converse in his own language with the President of the Ashrama. Earlier, Swami Srivasananda covered many corners of Mysore State for spreading the message of Ramakrishna & Vivekananda. He published the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna in kannada language and distributed them. In the same manner Swami Prabuddhananda also started the preaching work and travelled from place to place. A bhajan group and volunteers carrying books for sale were accompanying him. He gave many lectures to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. These messages attracted many students. Some students from Indian Institute of Science (Tata Institute) came to meet swamiji on Sundays for discussions and exchange of thoughts. They had even started a Study circle centre in their campus.

Thus when Swami Prabuddhananda was performing in an excellent and successful way, he was transferred to SanFrancisco centre of America as Minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Society: A loss to Bangalore (India) was a gain to America! The *Shastra Jnana* (knowledge of scriptures), *Viveka* (discrimination), *Vairagya* (Renunciation) which he has received from Swami Tyagishananda and practical knowledge in day to day life, contacts with people, intelligence, trust and faith all these qualities received from Swami Yatishwarananda helped him a lot in America also.

In 1970 Swami Prabuddhananda went to America and served for 45 years till 2014. More than half of his lifetime (1929-2014) he has served in America with dedication.

VEDANTA SOCIETY OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA :

Swami Prabuddhananda came to San Francisco centre as Minister-in-charge. His adorable personality attracted many and his soft nature and gentle talk won the hearts of many. Managing this centre was not that easy. Previously Swami Ashokanandaji was running this centre. He was as powerful as Swami Vivekananda. One or two senior monks who came after Swami Ashokananda felt it very difficult and had to return back. But now Swami Prabuddhananda won the hearts of the members in his unique way. His soft voice, dignified behaviour, self control, his association with the people, tremendous faith in Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, all these helped him in his work. His Talks became popular. Many people were benefitted by his spiritual guidance. Many received Initiation from him and became his disciples. Gradually his fame spread to other parts of America. He was invited to deliver lectures in many other Vedanta Centres and other private institutions. He had to work continuously without taking rest. He was counselling many spiritual aspirants and others in his office 5-6 hours a day in the interviews.

OLEMA: There is sub centre called Olema covering 2000 acres of forest land and about 100 kms of distance from the main centre. Every weekend the members of the Society gather in this place and employ themselves in different activities. There is a separate building for Women devotees. This is being managed by the Sanyasini's (Nuns) of Vedanta centre. These Nuns involve themselves in the work at San Francisco centre also.

There are 2 buildings in the San Francisco Vedanta centre. Old temple was built by Swami Trigunatitananda. The building constructed by Swami Ashokananda is quite spacious. Publishing books and their sales are done here. The music troupe of the Society performs very well with melodious devotional songs. Hundreds of people participate in the Vedanta Retreat which is conducted for 2-3 days every year in the Olema centre. Guest speakers are also invited in this Vedanta retreat.

My Personal Experience:

I have travelled 4 times to America to perform Bhajan programmes. In San Francisco, during my every visit, I spent a few days happily with Swami Prabuddhananda as his guest.

First Visit: In 1987

My first journey was in the year 1987. As soon as I got down from the aircraft, Swami Prabuddhananda himself welcomed me with a smiling face. Dr. Carte, the President of the Vedanta Society had also accompanied him. One of the Brahmacharis of the centre drove us straight to the new temple. We had our food. We get pure vegetarian food in this centre. None of the Sadhus (Monks) of this centre were non-vegetarian. This made me feel comfortable.

My stay was in the Old Temple, which was quite nearby. Swamiji came and checked my room, bed and bathroom. So much of concern for me! In the evening Swamiji took for a walk near Sea Shore. He explained me the specialities of the place on our way to the beach. There were no public functions everyday in this centre, except weekly once or twice with Pooja, Bhajans, lectures etc.

Next day my Bhajans were organised in a devotee's residence. I sang playing Harmonium myself. Tabla accompaniment was given by a Brahmachari of Ashrama. Dr. Carte had also come who recorded my songs. Wherever I sang he used to carry his recorder to record my songs. Later it was very useful to many. The third day was Krishna Janmashtami (Lord Krishna's Birthday celebrations) After Swamiji's lecture, my special bhajans for 45 minutes was being organized. I sang with Tanpura (string instrument). One Bengali youth played Tabla. I gave the meanings of the songs in English. It was a gathering of more than 100 people in which most of them were Americans. I sang more of Kannada devotionals and a few songs of Surdas and Meera in Hindi. Mrs. Virginia Varrentzoff, the secretary of Vedanta Society told me later "I

could imagine how Sri Ramakrishna would sing after I listened to your songs.” Do I require any better compliment ?

One day my stay was in Olema. My younger brother Papu (S N Subbarao) was organizing a Childrens’ Camp for one week. Swamiji spoke to the children advising them in a simple and hearty way. Papu and I sang together. The forest area of Olema Centre was rejuvenating. Next day Swamiji took me to Camp Taylor, the place which has been sanctified by Swami Vivekananda’s stay.

While having food in Vedanta Centre or Olema centre most of the times Swamiji was making me sit next to him. One fine day I entered the kitchen and prepared lady’s finger gojju (a sweet gravy type dish). Swami Prabuddhananda relished it because the food prepared in America were less spicy! He told me, “your gojju is good for my body, mind and soul!” 4 – 5 times I had my food in devotees’ house. 1 or 2 days I ate the food sent by devotees, and on another day food from the Convent. Thus I had variety of food. I loved that.

There is a large lake called Lake Tahoe. Near this lake is the sub centre of SanFrancisco society. There are 3 buildings, sadhus live in the 1st, in the 2nd Sanyasinis (Nuns) and in the 3rd devotees. These living places are utilised only during special programmes and rest of the days it would be vacant. Sanyasinis (nuns) are looking after this centre. We had morning prayers and bhajan programmes here. American Brahmacharis were pronouncing Sanskrit in a flawless manner! Swamiji had trained them so well!

One day Swamiji took me to Yosemite red wood forest, a forest with huge trees which were more than thousand years old. It was a Nature’s wonder! On another day I went to Sacramento Vedanta Society with Swamiji. I performed bhajan programme for one hour. It was a great wonder to swamis of Sacramento centre when they saw that the president of SanFrancisco centre himself had come to record my songs. The head of the centre was Sw. Shraddhanandaji, a disciple of Sw. Shivananda. Our Sw. Ritatmanandaji

was also a disciple of Sw. Shivananda. Sw. Shraddhananda enquired about Sw. Ritatamanandaji. Bhajan programme went on very well in this centre.

We had finished seeing the places of attraction & importance (worth seeing) surrounding the Vedanta Society SF. I liked Olema very much. We had to spend a night in a hotel while on our way to Lake Tahoe. After finishing our morning prayer and breakfast we had continued our journey. It was a most memorable experience. I expressed my wish to record my bhajans in an American studio. Swamiji immediately fulfilled my wish. My bhajans were recorded in Two C60 cassettes. When I told him that the profit gained after selling these cassettes would be made available to our school, all expenses incurred were borne by swamiji through the Vedanta Society. This fetched more than \$10000 to our school.

Second visit in 1989:

On reaching America with my younger brother Ganesha (Tabla), Mr. Ramprasad (Cymbals), we were agonised to hear that swamiji underwent bypass surgery of the heart. When we reached SanFrancisco he was feeling better. He was feeling very happy to talk to us. The devotees felt happy to see Swamiji feeling active and delightful in our company, chatting in Kannada.

Third visit in 1993:

I travelled again in 1993 with Mr Shankar, the Head master of our School. Again Swamiji took Shankar to show him places of importance and worth seeing.

This is how swamiji used to take care of his guests. He used to observe, with lot of care and concern, about our welfare and comfortable stay in SF. When I went for the first time to America, he told me “In SanFrancisco the climate is very cold and you have to wear warm clothes “ and he gave me one woollen cap to wear. I used this cap in SF and I am using the same in India also. Apart from this he gave me one heavy overcoat for my use when I go outside the Centre. Swamiji said “This coat is yours till your stay

here. While leaving this place you return the same back to me. I am keeping this for the use of guests". He informed me that Swami Ranganathananda has also used it!

ACTIVITIES:

Swamiji had too many activities, hardly he used to find time for rest. His disciples were staying in different cities in America. They used to invite Swamiji to their places and receive his guidance. He was being invited by other Vedanta Centres and other religious Institutions in America. Once when I was going to perform bhajans in the Venkateshwara Temple in Pittsburgh, Swamiji had also come to the same place with his devotees to speak to a group there. I was happy and wonderstruck.

HIS VISIT TO INDIA : After establishing everything in his field of work in San Francisco, Swami Prabuddhananda started visiting India once in 2-3 years along with a few disciples. Commencing from Belur Math he used to visit many other centres of RK Math and Mission. Visit to Bangalore was a must. In Bangalore he was visiting many Institutions and devotees group and feel happy. I was inviting him to our home. During his every visit to Bangalore he was coming to our home with a few other Swamis, have breakfast with us and make us feel happy. Many of our friends and relatives were making use of this opportunity to have free talks with him.

He would visit our school which was started and developed by Swamiji himself without fail and advise and bless the members of the school. He also felt happy to see the activities of Vivekananda Sevashrama.

While in America Swamiji was enquiring about the welfare of all of us over phone almost every month. He was also sending Christmas/New Year Cards to all his well wishers every year.

HELP TO INDIAN INSTITUTIONS: Even though Swamiji was in America he had not forgotten India. He was extending his help graciously by way of money or material to many institutions. The money which we required to buy a site for our Vivekananda

Vidyashala came through him only. He also helped us for the construction of the school building. During my visits to America he had also helped me to collect money to our school when I conducted bhajan programmes. In Total he has helped our school by sending Rs.37 Lakhs INR. We came to know from the President of Bhopal Centre of RK Math that he had sent Rs.19 Lakhs INR when the Ashrama was badly in need of money. It is very difficult to keep the count of the help that many of us have received from him.

DECLINING HEALTH CONDITIONS:

In 1989, I heard that Swamiji had to undergo heart surgery and a pacemaker was fixed to his heart. In spite of this he was continuing his regular services in the SF centre. Unfortunately his health condition declined because of Lung cancer. Though in the beginning he had achieved some control over it, after a few months his health conditions worsened and turned serious. He spent his last days in the Vedanta Centre of San Francisco. On 2nd July 2014 Wednesday morning 5.30 hrs in San Francisco (Evening 4.30 in India) when the Sannyasins, Brahmacharis, Nuns were all present, he made pranams to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda, and breathed his last peacefully saying 'Ma Ma'.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji's life was an extraordinarily wonderful with full of faith in God. He lived his entire life for the service of Sri Gurumaharaj. In his ideal life how much concerned was he about others' welfare! He was a great man with an attractive personality, grace and dignity! He led a life that would befit a role model of an Ideal Monk (Sadhu)

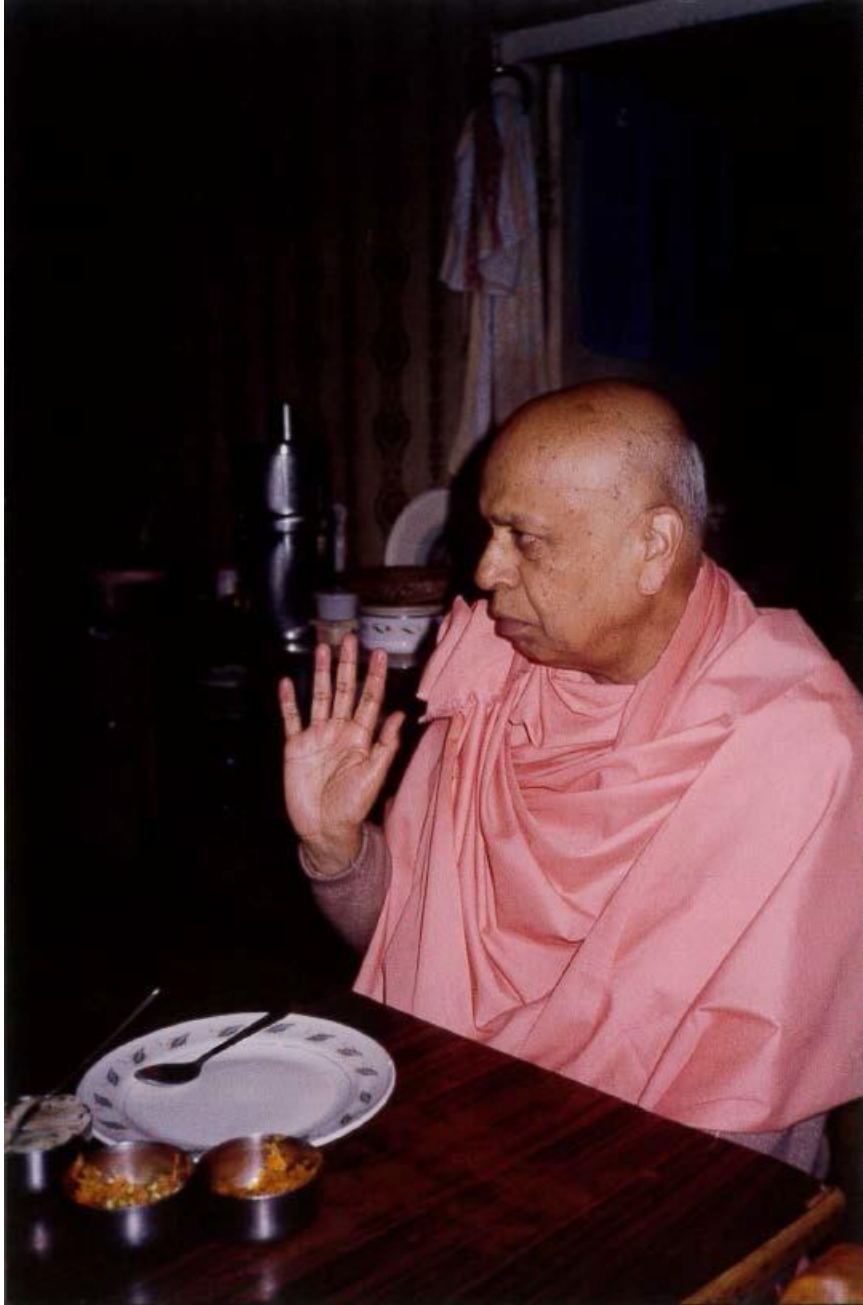
Our heartfelt Pranams to Him!

Sw. Prabuddhanandaji in Kitti's house in 2002

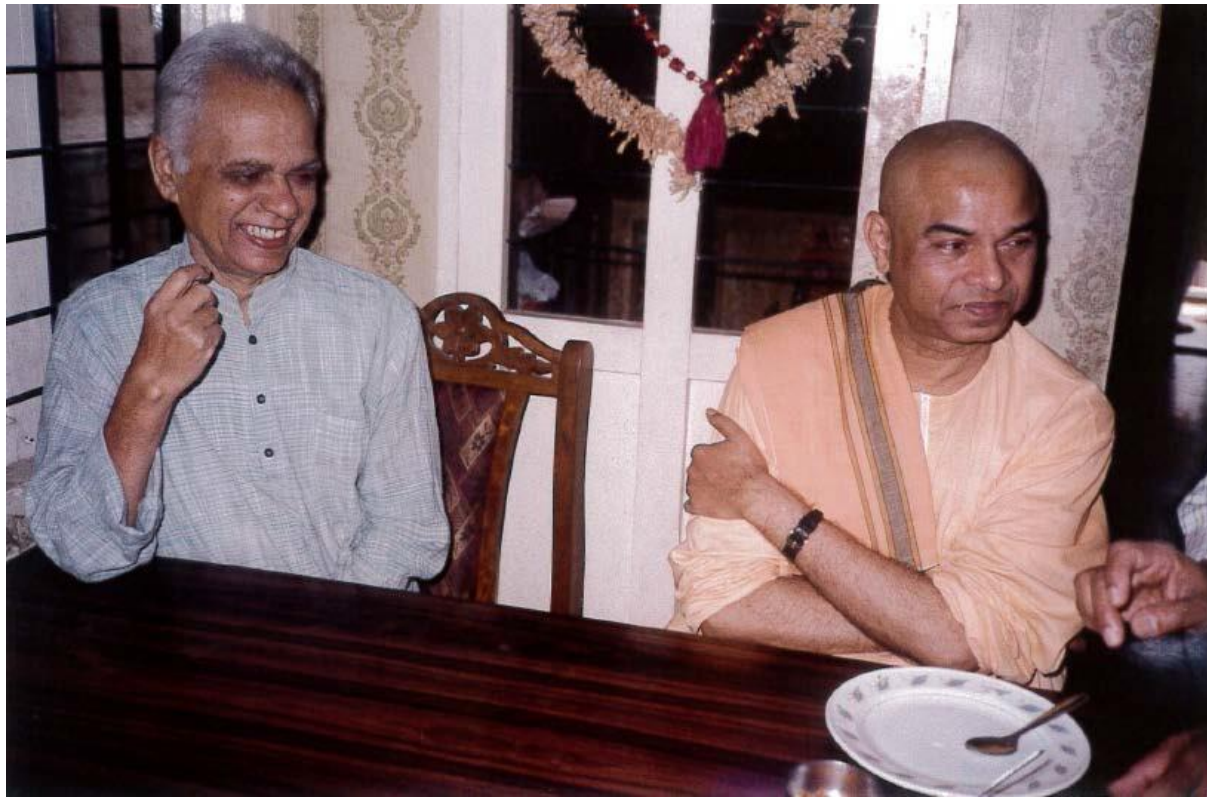


Sw. Prabuddhanandaji with Kumar Maharaj & Sw. Bhavarupanandaji (Rudra Maharaj)

I welcomed Prabuddhanandaji to our home whenever he visited Bangalore, which was maybe 5 - 6 times during his stay in SF. those days were like a festival in our house. He came and had breakfast with us. Generally he brought a couple of other sadhus with him. In 2002 he brought Kumar maharaj who is working amongst the tribals of Orissa state and Bhavarupanandaji who is in Ulsoor Ashram currently.



Swamiji had told us that he would have food without chillies and would drink Horlicks with Skimmed milk and he liked the food that we gave him.



Kitti and Rudra maharaj (Sw. Bhavarupanandaji) talking to Sw. Prabuddhanandaji.



Kitti, Sw. Prabuddhanandaji and Chandrashekar (Kitti's brother). Chandru passed away last year. Chandru was also a disciple of Sw. Yatishwarananda. He was a journalist, art critic and knew Sw. Prabuddhanandaji from his brahmachari days.



Kumar maharaj, Rudra maharaj talking with Prabha (a devotee of Bangalore ashram).

My friends and relatives used this opportunity to meet Prabuddhanandaji in a free and informal manner.



1st person from left Subrahmani was the secretary of the Vivekananda School which was supported by Sw. Prabuddhananda from its inception. 2nd is Seetaram who was the executive trustee of Vivekananda Sevashrama, the medical aid programme which was also supported by Sw. Prabuddhananda. 3rd is my eldest brother Shivaswamy. And then Ramprasad who was very close to all the swamis of the ashrama from his childhood. Ramprasad took delight in taking swamiji from place to place by car. All these 4 are no more.



This picture has probably Nivedita (Daughter of Prabha). 2nd person is my younger brother Lakshmana, an engineer who is also no more. 3rd friend is Shankar the present secretary of Vivekananda School. And the 4th person is Chandru again.



1st person from left Mythili a dedicated devotee of Bangalore ashrama. 2nd person is Shashi Ganesh (my sister in law). 3rd person is Rajam Shivaswamy my sister in law. 4th person is Savitri my elder sister. 5th person is Prabha again. Rajam & Savitri are no more with us.

Translations by Mrs. Shashikala Sreedhar

Newsletters of Sw. Vivekananda Educational institutes (Translated from Kannada newsletters published by Sw. Vivekananda Educational institutes)

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (R)

Banashankari I stage, Bangalore-50, INDIA

SPECIAL NEWS LETTER – (No 59)

Bangalore

4th July 2014

Dear Brethren,

The sad news came from Swami Swatmaramananda! He said one hour before Swamiji passed away. (2.7.2014 evening 5.15) Felt extremely sad.

The news was not an unexpected one.

His love and affection was enormous. I knew him since his student days. His acquaintance is from 1950.

There was a rare opportunity to work with him when he was engrossed in the activities of Bangalore Ashram.

Later he left for America. There he earned a good name as an eminent orator and a good spiritual guide. He travelled to different places in America and delivered lectures.

He had great reverence towards our school. The young men who received inspiration from him had started the school. So also is Sri Vivekananda Sevashrama.

I had been to America for four times. Every time, after knowing the details of my programme, he gave me his guidance. During my visits to various places, he was enquiring about my health and details of the activities over phone. His affection is invaluable.

My younger brother Subba Rao is conducting a retreat programme in America for young people every year from past 25 years. Swamiji was taking initiative in arranging a retreat programme in his centre and intermingle with children.

He was coming to our house during his every visit to Bangalore. This was an opportunity for him to meet our relatives and friends and for us, was a blessing.

Memories are innumerable and sweet.

Yours dear brother

Kitti (N. Krishnaswami)

Dear Members,

With great sorrow we had to publish this News letter. It is painful to inform you that our most beloved, guide and guru (master) Swami Prabuddhananda left us on 2.7.2014 and reached Sri Ramakrishna's Abode.

Revered Swami Prabuddhananda had joined Ramakrishna Mission in 1950 and in 1966 he became the President of Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore. In the year 1970 he was transferred to Vedanta Centre of San Francisco as Minister-in-charge. It was beyond words to explain the heartfelt sorrow of the devotees gathered during his farewell ceremony. Rev. Swamiji used to remember the names of devotees as well as their friends and relatives and other details from very young children to aged ones. If a person comes to Swamiji and introduces himself, Swamiji would himself give every detail of the person and enquire his welfare with lot of concern in a way which would pacify the devotee's soul. We can never forget our association with Rev. Swamiji when we were members of Vivekananda Balaka Sangha and Ramakrishna Yuvaka Sangha. He was enquiring about our personal problems and details about our studies and was

giving valuable guidance. In the same way if someone is facing financial or any other problem he would help him and boost his morale. Even after he left for America, till recent days he was sending his blessings through Christmas /New Year Cards every year without fail. At the same time, he was enquiring about the welfare of each one of us through his letters. As far as our School is concerned his contribution and guidance are enormous. Every year once or twice, he was sending the amount collected by the members of Vedanta Society to our School in the form of contribution. Recently that is just 15 days back, his last contribution of us \$ 8840 was sent by him is an illustrative example. The total amount of Rs.38.75 lacs sent by Swamiji covered the major portion of the expenses required for the construction and other expenses of the school building.

In 1993, when I went to America with Sri Kitty Master, Swamiji himself came to Airport to give us a warm welcome. He checked our schedule and gave us proper instructions. We stayed for 10 days in San Francisco. Our stay was arranged for few days in the Old Temple building and remaining days in the Olema centre. During this time he had also arranged for our visits to various Vedanta Centres located in the surroundings of San Francisco Centre. He also sent me to Yosemite National Park by purchasing a special ticket. While returning back to India he gifted me with a wrist watch.

Swamiji gave us financial support specially while constructing an Auditorium in memory of Swami Tyagishananda in our School. Apart from this he had also arranged for our bhajan programmes in various places to collect money in the leadership of Dr. Carte. Thus Rev Swamiji had lot of interest and concern about us and our School and partook in our days of happiness and difficulties. Every time when he came to India he was visiting our school without fail. Scarcely do we find such a monk of rare qualities. In future remembering him itself is the source of Inspiration to us.

Sri H V Shankar

Secretary,

Vivekananda Educational Institutions, BSK I stage, Bangalore- 560 050

Friends,

There is a close relationship between the most revered Swami Prabuddhananda and our Vivekananda Vidyashala from its dawn. The affection he showed and the assistance he gave both were enormous. After we decided a land for our school, the site registration was done by the financial assistance that we received from Swamiji. Even though he was physically far away from us, his divine self was guiding us in every step we took. His contribution in every stage was invaluable. In his every visit to India he was monitoring the growth and development of our School. He was a personification of love and affection who resided always in our hearts. The financial help that he rendered through devotees/members of Vedanta centre was beyond our expectation. Starting from the year 1980, the total amount that he provided to our School in 17 instalments is Rs.37.57 lacs. Our heartfelt pranams to this great soul who won the hearts of all and who stays eternally in the hearts of all.

Mr. C N Prasanna Kumar

Vivekananda Educational Institutions (R) Bangalore, INDIA

Translation by Mrs. Shashikala Sreedhar

Sw. Prabuddhananda by Kitty master (Translated article from Kannada published in Vivekahamsa a Kannada periodicals)

Interview of Sri N Krishna Swamy (Kitty Master)

Interviewed by Sri Karthik Saragur

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Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhananda

Karthik: Your basic introduction to Sw. Prabuddhananda please.

Kitty Master: First I was introduced to his brother. Brother was called Jagannath. Jagannath was a wonderful person. First I started coming to the Ramakrishna Ashrama in the year 1940 like. Before that I was connected with the Ramakrishna Vedanta College in Malleswaram about 6 miles from Basavanagudi where the present Ashrama is located here. I used to come here by walk with a few other friends. There was no other means of contact in those days. I used to come by walk from Malleswaram to Ashrama sometimes, not very often once in a week and once in a few days at a time to listen to the lectures of Sw. Tyagishananda who was a great scholar in the whole of the Ramakrishna Mission. He was one of the rare scholars of our Hindu scriptures. To listen to his talks I used to walk all the way from Malleswaram. And then amongst the inmates of the Ashrama, 'inmates' is not a good word in America, one of the members of the students Hostel, there was no official hostel like that in those days, a few students were also living in the Ashrama and going to their college, the outstanding personality amongst them was this Jagannath.

Karthik: Ok!

Kitty Master: Jagannath was a very outgoing person, very pleasant person, knowledgeable and a sort of a role model for young people like me.

Karthik: Was he elder to you?

Kitty Master: Yes, elder to me by about 4, 5 years.

Karthik: What was he studying and where was he studying?

Kitty Master: He was studying, I think B.Sc. in Central College.

Karthik: In Bangalore?

Kitty Master: Yes in Bangalore. He was the brother of Raghunandan, the future Sw. Prabuddhananda. So I came into touch with Jagannath first. Jagannath had a dream of becoming a sadhu, a sanyasi and work in the Ramakrishna Mission. He had a dream that was shattered by the compulsion of his family and he was forced into marry. But then his dream was fulfilled in other way. He became the Head Master of Ramakrishna Vidyashala in Mysore and became a great Head Master. He built this Ramakrishna Vidyashala in Mysore into a very wonderful Institution.

Karthik: An Institution of repute. I was a part of that Institution.

Kitty Master: Yes, repute. You know that better than me because I was only a Visitor. You have lived in that Institution. He became the first Head Master, probably the 2nd Head Master of that Institution, built into a beautiful institution. And then it was a contrast between Jagannath and Raghunandan. Jagannath was outgoing, pleasant and then what a wonderful face he had, the face itself was reminding us of Vivekananda. His eyes were like Vivekananda's eyes. His talk was sweet and very attractive. Raghunandan on the other hand was a reserved type of person. He did not mix with people. He was not outgoing but he was an introvert.

Karthik: How old was he when you met him first?

Kitty Master: He was a college student like me. He was little younger than me and then I became a college teacher here in Basavanagudi area near the Ashrama and then I used to visit the Vidyarthi Mandiram which became a hostel belonging to the Ramakrishna

Ashrama, run by Sw. Ritatmananda as a warden and Raghunandan was a member of that hostel. He also had one leg in the Ashrama and one leg in the hostel because he was a brahmachari student like. He had already made up his mind to give up the world. But then he was a college student because Sw. Tyagishananda told him “you should finish your graduation before you become a member of the Ramakrishna Mission. I don’t want to admit you before you finish your BA or BSc whatever degree” and then he encouraged him to do an engineering degree also after that. Only Raghunandan did not care for that. He left the education after getting his degree and became a brahmachari in the Ramakrishna Ashrama. Even before that as a student he used to be a brahmachari and then go to college also at the same time. And those days I was also teaching singing bhajans in the Ashrama hostel. One day in the week I would not go to Ashrama for the evening prayer and would go to Vidyarthi Mandiram and sing with the children, I mean young men, and then, those days I used to have interactions with them in different ways. One of the things was if there were an essay competition or a speaking competition I was available there. Therefore Sw. Ritatmananda would ask me, “You be the judge”. And so I would be the judge and those young men though they were very similar in age to me were the competitors and I was the judge. So it was a funny situation for me in those days. Anyway I knew Raghunandan as a student and he was not a very brilliant student but good student and then more than his college he was interested in studying Vedanta from Sw. Tyagishananda. This he did.

Karthik: I wanted to ask you that a boy of around 17 to 18 years old, deciding to renounce the world and take up and live for an ideal for the rest of his life, it is a huge challenge. Had he discussed those moments with you, did he have any interaction with you?

Kitty Master: I told you he was not an outgoing person. He must have discussed with only Sw. Tyagishananda and Sw. Tyagishananda encouraged him in that.

Karthik: Was he very close to Sw. Tyagishananda?

Kitty Master: Yes, very close. But unfortunately he came to the Ashrama only a couple of years before the Swami passed away. So only about 2 years or so, he was with him and then attended his lectures and all. And then he served him during his last days. He had cancer. A terrible disease. Raghunandan Maharaj those days served him. All the brahmacharis in the Ashrama had occasion to do that service. So, that service also must have helped him.

Karthik: The other question is like Raghunandan Maharaj would have seen a great ideal in Sw. Tyagishananda. Other than his scholarly the social revolution that Sw. Tyagishananda brought before joining the Ashrama and also after joining the Ashrama and starting the Vidyarthi Mandiram. Can you throw a light on that?

Kitty Master: Swami Tyagishananda as his name says was a 'Tyagisha' a great renunciate. He lived very austere life with voluntary poverty as the basis and would not care for money at all, not for him, not for the Ashrama also. He did not mind the Ashrama being a poor institution. He did not mind the Ashrama being dependent on others for its sustenance and he did everything in the Ashrama, be it cooking or things like that. Washing vessels, cooking, worship everything. So Tyagishananda did that. Naturally other members of the Ashrama also had to do that, did that gladly. They grew their own vegetables and things like that and then they had their own cows. They would get milk from that and then they could sell some of the milk to make a little money for the Ashrama and that was the type of institution that Tyagishananda was thinking of and building. Before that as you mentioned, he was in Thrissur in a school that he himself built and in that school he introduced Gandhiji's ideas of Swadeshi and of non-untouchability. Hinduism has these codes of untouchability. In society there was a class of a few castes who were considered to be unholy and untouchable. So Tyagishananda wanted to remove that untouchability after Gandhiji's ideal and he allowed those children from those communities also to study in his school is one thing. Another thing is, Gandhiji proposed that we in India must do our work with our own hands. India has got this phobia of doing work. So he introduced the charka the

spinning wheel. He should spin yarn from that spinning wheel and weave it into a cloth and use only that cloth, (swadeshi) cloth made in India. Those days the British were ruling India. Therefore they would buy all the cotton grown in India, take it to England and convert it into cloth in Manchester and send it back to India and make money out of our own produce. Gandhiji wanted to stop that flow of money from India to England. So he stopped that and then he had to introduce this Indian handmade, hand-spun yarn and that cloth used to be very rough but people were provoked to wear that cloth. Sw. Tyagishananda also produced his own cloth. He wore the cloth that he himself produced and that sort of ideal was inculcated in all his Ashrama members also.

Karthik: So Ramakrishna Movement in Bangalore was a part of greater National movement of India?

Kitty Master: Yes, very much. So those days the Ramakrishna Mission was a sort of sanctuary for some of the freedom fighters of India. Dr. Narasimhaiah, you must have heard his name who became the Vice-chancellor of Bangalore University. He was a jail bird in the freedom movement and he was sent into jail. After he was released from jail no hostel would admit him. Swami Tyagishananda sent word to him and told him, "It seems you are having trouble with other hostels not admitting you because you are jailed bird. Our Ashrama is open to you. Come and stay in our Ashrama and continue your studies. So that is the type of man Sw. Tyagishananda was.

Karthik: I have seen an old photograph of not H.N.Sir, there was this Bhima.

Kitty Master: Yes, one of the members of the Ashrama Hostel.

Karthik: And Raghunandan Maharaj was a very young boy standing together, and being the first group of the Vidyarthi Mandiram, can you just throw light on it?

Kitty Master: Bhima was a boy from that community, the untouchable community and in Ashrama they were just friends, just colleagues studying together. He was in a junior

class, possibly in High School and he was a friend of Raghunandan and Raghunandan was a democrat at heart. For him everybody was equal.

Karthik : Because that is what I wanted to ask. Since in pre-independent India there was a very clear class divide and Raghunandan Maharaj having come from a very upper class, brahmanical family, to share space, food with an untouchable it was a kind of not less than a taboo for a traditional man.

Kitty Master: True.

Karthik: Was it because of the exposure towards challenge? Sw. Tyagishanandaji broadened the people and the spirit of nationalism was imbibed.

Kitty Master: Yes, a spirit of nationalism was all pervading. Not only from Sw. Tyagishananda, Raghunandan had direct contact with Gandhiji's ideas and ideals also. Through Newspaper and other media, he knew about Gandhiji and had great respect and regard for Gandhiji. I remember one incident. Gandhiji's disciple Vinoba Bhave has written a wonderful commentary on the Gita called 'The Gita Pravachana', 'Lectures on Gita' I think it is called in English. I was talking in the San Francisco Ashrama. Sw. Prabuddhananda told me "you start talking about your life, your experiences, your memories and all that, no boundary conditions, you can talk about anything that comes into your mind." One of the things I spoke about was Vinoba and his lectures on Gita. When I talked about that Sw. Prabuddhananda intervened and said: "We have copies of that in our Book Sales section. Anybody interested may buy that." So he did that, a little 'commercial' in between my lecture about Vinoba's book and so you can see Sw. Prabuddhananda was interested in Gandhi and Vinoba and stuff like that even after he went to America. And after he went to America, he wanted to encourage the institution that grew up in India. Because of his influence the Vivekananda Vidyashala and the Vivekananda Sevashrama, institutions of service were engineered by Sw. Prabuddhananda because at that time he was the Head of the Bangalore Ashrama. These children who had graduated from Vivekananda Balaka

Sangha, they were looking for avenues of service. Sw. Prabuddhananda encouraged them in starting this Institution, the Vivekananda Vidyashala which was having its ideal to take education to the poorest children in the country, not the rich. There are many schools for teaching the rich children. He wanted to have an institution where poor children coming from an economical background of poverty to come and have education, free education. That type of idealism Sw. Prabuddhananda instilled in these young men. And then these young men started the Vivekananda Sevashrama and the Vivekananda Vidyashala. He was involved in the starting of these institutions and even after he went to San Francisco he supported them in various ways. Of course he had blessings for them. His blessings are always there. Apart from that he gave the money for running the institutions.

Karthik: Sir, you said, as a brahmachari he was to assist Sw. Ritatmananda to take care of the hostel also.

Kitty Master: No, that was not there. At the beginning he was in the Ashrama Office. He was incharge of the Office. He would do mostly office purchases and things like that and the public relations business all that. And he didn't have much to do with Vidyarthi Mandiram. At that time Sw. Ritatmananda was the warden and he looked after the whole show. And then the Vidyarthi Mandiram got its own building. Even then Sw. Ritatmananda continued as the warden. After some time Sw. Ritatmananda was too old to run the institution, he needed some help. That is when Sw. Prabuddhananda was sent to assist Sw. Ritatmananda. Later he became the warden himself. And then another situation arose. Sw. Shastrananda went to America.

Karthik : No I will come to that. Before we go into that I want to interrupt to go as per the chronology.

Kitty Master: Do that.

Karthik: After ordaining to Brahmacharya, there was a change in our Ashrama also. Sw. Tyagishananda passed away (1950) and, during that time Sw. Yatiswarananda came.

Please tell us about how Sw. Yatiswarananda groomed young monks, young brahmacharis because there were most of them who became legends later in the Ramakrishna Order and they were all young brahmacharis and Raghunandan Maharaj is being one of them. What was the approach of Sw. Tyagishanandaji Maharaj and what was the approach of Sw. Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj ?

Kitty Master: Ideally it was the same. Because they were both, whatever their outward appearances may be, were intensely devoted to Ramakrishna. So they both instilled the devotion to Ramakrishna and the devotion to the Ramakrishna Mission ideals. So they both propagated that. And they lived that type of life. They did not have anything in life excepting Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna. So that type of living and that type of personalities living with them made them also similar institutions in personalities. So Sw. Tyagishananda was poverty oriented and Sw. Yatiswarananda also lead a very simple life. Though he looked very aristocratic in appearance he also lived a very selfless life. He did not want anything for himself. He wanted everything for Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission. He did not have any other idea, any other ideals.

Karthik : But Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore had a face-lift during Sw. Yatiswarananda's time.

Kitty Master: Yes, indeed.

Karthik: And brahmacharis were driven to take up new challenges and Sw.

Prabuddhananda was made Office incharge. What was the kind of lessons that he learnt from Sw. Yatiswarananda? Has he shared anything with you?

Kitty Master: No he was not a very outgoing type of a person. Therefore I don't have much of that type of feedback from him. But then I could see what was happening in him, what was happening to him. Initially when Sw. Tyagishananda was there we did not have much to do with organisation and work and things like that. Simple living

was the only thing that was there at that time. And then when Sw. Yatiswarananda came, first came this Balaka Sangha. For that he had to do so many things like giving them a little milk, biscuits and things like that. We had to acquire all those things and then we had to do a little help to them also, some times in their education and things like that. So that type of thing was there. And then Sw. Yatiswarananda attracted a lot of devotees to the Ashrama. Infact some of the devotees turned away also because of Sw. Yatiswarananda. Because of the children coming to the Ashrama, there was a lot of noise and activity going on in the Ashrama and therefore many of the older devotees who liked the Ashrama for its quietness and meditateness they were turned away. Then Sw. Yatiswarananda told them "I am not interested in you. I am interested in your son and your grandson because they are going to be the future India. Your days are over. I am not interested in you." He would tell them that, "so let the children be there, let there be that noise also. We want these children to grow up with their background changed to become ideal institutions and ideal human beings.

Raghunandan was also influenced by this type of talking, thinking and then when he became President after Sw. Yatiswarananda, there was a certain change in the attitude of Ashrama and the devotees. Because here was a swami who knew Kannada. Sw. Yatiswarananda did not know kannada, practically not a word of kannada. So he had to have an interpreter when he talked to devotees who did not know English, plenty of them. So after Sw. Yatiswarananda's departure, Raghunandan was very much sought after because he could talk in kannada. He could directly go into the hearts of devotees of Karnataka. He took this Ramakrishna Mission into the corners of old Mysore rather than Karnataka as a whole. He took Ramakrishna to different townships, different villages. I remember once when he came from America, some devotees took him to a place called Mulukunte near Tumkur, a small village. Sw. Prabuddhananda was there, he was possibly going in a car, then a bus load of his admirers and devotees of the Ashrama went to that village about 40-50 miles from this place. A small village- living in the India of a few hundred years ago, same situation, same type of life going on even today. So he went there with this group. He took Ramakrishna there. We sang songs of

Ramakrishna. We took literature of Ramakrishna there. We interacted with the villagers and gave them all these things. We participated in the worship in the temple of that village. So Raghunandan Maharaj was interested in taking Ramakrishna all over the Karnataka area. Not only that he was interested in the students of the Indian Institute of Science.

Karthik : Oh !

Kitty Master : Yes, half a dozen of students with the I.I.Sc. research scholars and they would regularly come to the Ashrama in the evenings on Sundays, discuss with him and because of this influence they started a Study Circle in the I.I.Sc. to study Vedanta, Hinduism and religion. Sw. Prabuddhananda would sometimes go there and talk to them. So villages and institutions like the I.I.Sc. were also influenced by Sw. Prabuddhananda.

Karthik: Sir, just going back, you said that Raghunandan Maharaj was an introvert. But when Sw. Yatiswarananda came Raghunandan Maharaj was asked to open up.

Kitty Master: Yes, he had to open up. No need to ask him. He had to open up because he was in the Office. He had to go to the market, go to do the shopping he had to do all these.

Karthik: Was he willing or was it forced upon him?

Kitty Master: No forcing at all. It was all part of the work, part of the game.

Karthik: In one of the reminiscences of Sw. Yatiswarananda, Sw. Prabuddhananda says that Sw. Yatiswarananda invites him to address a gathering, there he denies him saying that he does not have much of the knowledge. Sw. Yatiswarananda says, “in future there would be a day where you have to interact with people” and it turned out to be very true. Were you a witness to them?

Kitty Master: I was not a witness. But then I heard Sw. Prabuddhananda also say that. He was asked to take charge of the hostel after Sw. Ritatmananda became too old and possibly he shifted to Ulsoor where he would live a quiet life. Sw. Prabuddhananda was asked to go and take charge of the Hostel he had to do that. He asked Sw. Yatiswarananda 'what can I do?' like that. Then Sw. Yatiswarananda told him, "See, you make the students understand that you are their well-wisher. Make them understand that you are something like their parent make them understand that. Then everything else will be alright." He also told him "Meditation and prayer- that will look after everything." So that was the Sw. Yatiswarananda's way.

Karthik : Was he a sadhaka like Sw. Yatiswarananda ?

Kitty Master: Yes, he was a great sadhaka and all these was a sadhana that is Ramakrishna Movement. Work is worship. So while working if we have a few moments left, think of Ramakrishna. So a little interval in the work, you do a little japa. So that is the type. Work and worship should go on hand in hand and he was exposed to that type of philosophy of Sw. Yatiswarananda who also practised that. His was a very intensely active life. He would go to sleep only about 12 in the night and wakeup at about 7 in the morning. Short stretches of sleep in the afternoon also. There was no limit to the work that he would do, mostly letter writing, correspondence and preparing articles things like that. When Sw. Prabuddhananda took charge, he had to do lot of speaking outside the Ashrama also. Sw. Yatiswarananda did not encourage people to invite him to go out much but Sw. Prabuddhananda being younger, he could easily travel and go to places and talk to people and all that.

Karthik: Sir, there were inmates in the Ashrama, brahmacharis of Sw.

Prabuddhanandaji's age also and there must have been a lot of pranks played. Can you share his and Hari maharaj's pranks and Sw. Harshanandaji maharaj's ?

Kitty Master: Sw. Harshananda told me one day, not only me infact, it was in a lecture I think, he said, two of the other brahmacharis, older than him would just throw him

from one end to the other end and play him as if he was a foot ball. So that type of pranks they would play with Sw. Harshananda who was a victim of some of these activities.

Karthik: Was he humorous like?

Kitty Master: No he tolerated it that's all.

Karthik: No not Sw. Harshananda, Sw. Prabuddhananda ?

Kitty Master: Sw. Prabuddhananda had a sense of humour also.

Karthik: Again I heard that there was a great bonding between him and Sw. Sureshanandaji Maharaj.

Kitty Master: Great because they were two types of personalities. Sw. Sureshananda had a great capacity to interact with people. Sw. Prabuddhananda had to learn that later. Sw. Sureshananda was born with that. He was a great man at public relations and then when the two of them took up the challenge of building a Vivekananda Memorial building in which there would be the Ashrama's sales department, the publication department and a few rooms for the living quarters of the sadhus. So they took up that project because living space was very scarce in the ashrama at that time for number of sadhus. Who was to start raising money for that? The ashrama office was incharge of Sw. Prabuddhananda. Sw. Sureshananda made it his job to go out and raise funds for the Ashrama building. He would catch hold of one of the influential people of the locality and then go to different shops and institutions in that area. I remember Ramappa, a man running a press in Chickpet area, a business area. So Ramappa and Sw. Sureshananda would go. There was another Gupta, electrician, electrical shop owner. So Sw. Sureshananda would catch Gupta the electrical's man and would go from shop to shop and then collect. And then Kasturi Ranga Shetty, big shetty and big merchant. He would go to merchant's class with this man. So like this he would catch hold of the right people and then go from door to door, shop to shop and raise money

for this building. So that was matched by Sw. Prabuddhananda who would look after all the accounts, the engineering aspect, the procurement of materials and all that. Sw. Sureshananda would do all the fund raising and then would help in running the Ashrama, in the kitchen and those areas also. He was a very good organizer and a very good cook himself. And then that lasted till the lost moments of Sw. Prabuddhananda. He would keep in touch with Sw. Sureshananda may be on a weekly basis. He would ring him up and talk to him all the time.

Karthik: In 1963 or 65, when Sw. Yatiswarananda's health started failing Sw. Prabuddhananda was asked to take up the President-ship of Bangalore ashrama. He was relatively young to take up such a huge responsibility, did he do to the best of his abilities?

Kitty Master: He had the experience of that because Sw. Yatiswarananda did a lot of travelling. Then as office manager Sw. Prabuddhananda had to look after the affairs of the ashrama for months on end sometimes. So Sw. Yatiswarananda would go abroad, south-east Asia and all that and he was busy in the Head Quarters also. And so those days Sw. Prabuddhananda would be incharge of the ashrama. So he had got that training automatically. So it was not a big thing for him to take charge of the ashrama. He knew all the ropes. He knew how to run the institution, he knew all the in's and out's of the organization.

Karthik: To be a subordinate is easy but to make somebody your subordinate, to be a leader is a difficult task. Was there any change in the attitude of Sw. Prabuddhananda after he became the president ?

Kitty Master: He was a remarkable person that way. No change in him at all. He continued the same quiet, efficient, quietly efficient personality and always with a beaming face. Never a long face and then always helping people in every way, spiritual way some times, even helping them in personal life, counselling and things like that. He was a perfect guide in that way.

Karthik: Was he a good orator sir, when he was in Bangalore ?

Kitty Master: He did not like oratory at all. I don't think he was a orator even to the end of his life. But then the way he spoke, it went right into your hearts. Very ordinary type of conversation and then he could talk to different levels of people. I have heard him talk to a group of High school children in America and then I was amazed at the way he was able to talk to them at their level. He would tell them what is the nature of maaya, "this stupid maaya" he would say. That is the American language, this stupid maaya it does like this. So he would talk their language and then they could understand them easily that way. I remember another instance, his sense of humour. When I first went to America, first I went to England. I went to the London centre of Ramakrishna Mission. It is called Bourne, a small village outside London. So when we went there, there was a retreat session going on. That time I saw that Sw. Prabuddhananda is there. He had come from America to speak to the retreat inmates/ members. So we met there. We were very happy. We could talk in Kannada because the head of the centre was also a Kannada man, Sw. Bhavyananda. So I and my brother Subba Rao Papu and then Sw. Bhavyananda and Sw. Prabuddhananda and few other friends also, all from Bangalore. We could sit and chat in Kannada happily. Sw. Prabuddhananda still had that love for Kannada, so till the end he would encourage me to write in Kannada rather than in English. He would enjoy that.

Karthik: But would he reply back in Kannada ?

Kitty Master: No. Because he did reply mostly by his secretariat. He had a number of secretaries. So they would type the letter. Probably he would dictate to them and maybe he would add a line in kannada that's all.

Karthik: So, I think in 1967 or 1968 he was asked to go to West. It was a huge responsibility for any monk to go off-shore and to start a life afresh in a foreign land. Had he any apprehensions of going to America? Did he discuss anything with you?

Kitty Master: No he did not discuss with me. But I could see that he did not take it easily. He must have found it very difficult to adjust to the new conditions. And then for a young man who was grown in Bangalore all his life to go to San Francisco was a huge challenge. To adjust to American conditions it must have been a difficult thing. And to put on western dress. Those days you had to put on western dress. Sw. Shastrananda also had to do that and Sw. Prabuddhananda also had to do that. After Sw. Ranganathananda started going to the west he never changed his dress. He would always have his dhoti and jubba. And then that influenced the American sadhus also. So they all gradually started using the Indian dress everywhere. First only in the ashrama they would wear Indian dress. When they went out they put on western dress. After Sw. Ranganathananda's visit to foreign countries, this Indian dress became a hall mark of the American sadhus. Though some of the American sadhus continued to put on their working clothes even throughout their lives. Only very occasionally they would wear the Indian dress.

Karthik: I heard Sw. Ashokananda used to wear western clothes. Sw. Yatiswarananda himself used to have western dress.

Kitty Master: Yes. Sw. Nikhilananda and Sw. Prabhavananda also wore western dress.

Karthik: Do you remember the kind of farewell that you gave to a younger friend whom you had seen as a boy and going off-shore for a very long time?

Kitty Master: I was there in that farewell meeting. I was asked to make a speech. I said, if I remember right, "I had known Raghunandan from a young man and then I was thinking of him as a small boy, like any other college boy and then before my eyes that Vamana has become a Trivikrama. From that small young man he has grown into a huge personality, wonderful personality. He was having so much power in his personality. I am sure that he would do well in the west as he did here." That proved to be true. When he left to San Francisco, it was a very difficult situation. Sw.

Ashokananda had passed away. Sw. Ashokananda was a great man. He was considered to be another Vivekananda. He had a powerful personality.

Karthik: To fill in his shoes would be very difficult.

Kitty Master: Very difficult. Before Sw. Prabuddhananda went there, they tried some of the senior swamis of the ashrama to take charge of San Francisco centre, they could not cope with it. They could not manage it. Then that difficult hot seat Sw.

Prabuddhananda was put. He possibly did the same thing what Sw. Yatiswarananda told him to do here. That is lead a life of prayer and meditation and everything would be alright. He started that. Some changes also he had to make. Some of the devotees of Sw. Ashokananda did not like that also. But then basically his personality and his spiritual approach to things helped him I think. His calm and quiet demeanour also must have helped him. He gradually tuned himself to San Francisco. He took lessons in talking American ease. American language is different, pronunciation is different. So he had to take lessons in doing that. He did that. He talked like an American afterwards. For the word 'laugh' we say laugh, they say 'laff'!

Karthik: Did you have any correspondence with him when he went to America ?

Kitty Master: Not immediately. Afterwards we started corresponding, particularly after I took charge of the Vivekananda Vidyashala. I became the secretary first and later the president. Then I had to write to him often. He used to support us financially in a big way. Infact we bought the land for the vidyashala from the money that he sent, from the devotees of the Vedanta society of Northern California. So we owe a lot to Sw. Prabuddhananda.

Karthik: His sanyasa name was Prabuddhananda. 'Prabuddha' means matured or realised. Very few people, in kannada they say, there is a 'ankita' and there is a 'anwartha'. Was the 'ankita' became 'anwartha' in Sw. Prabuddhananda's case?

Kitty Master: It looks like that. First they gave him that, and then he became that. I remember one thing. I saw him in London. From there I went to America and before going to San Francisco I went to few other cities to visit people. Pittsburgh temple I went. There I see the notice: "Sw. Prabuddhananda will speak in the temple today". I was amazed to see that. I had no idea at all. I had just gone to the temple and then Sw. Prabuddhananda was there. He said in Kannada "Hai, what is the matter? You are coming wherever I go. First in London, then in Toronto, now in Pittsburgh!" But I had another bhajan programme in another temple. So I could not listen to his lecture there. He went to the lecture and I went to my bhajan programme. And then when I went to San Francisco, I had a great surprise when I get down at the airport, I see Sw. Prabuddhananda himself there to receive me. A small man like Kitty, the great Sw. Prabuddhananda, the head of the Vedanta Society of San Francisco himself comes with the President of that centre also, Dr kart. I did not expect him to come. I thought he would send some friend to receive me. No, he himself had to come and then a brahmachari drove the car. In America that was very common. Many of the swamis knew driving. Everybody drive themselves in America. Otherwise you can't live there. Sw. Prabuddhananda himself did not learn driving because there were so many people to drive for him. He looked after me so nicely. It was amazing. We went directly to the Vedanta new temple and then he took me to the living quarters. I saw how he had changed after going there. He had personally checked my bedding, bathroom, pillow, water, heating circuit to see that everything is alright. He had checked every little thing. See, for a head of a centre to look after all these small details for a small man who is going from India, it was unimaginable to me. I thought he would ask somebody to look after that or as we do it here, we just forget, we do things casually. No! That is not Prabuddhananda way! He had to look into every detail to see that you are comfortable. Then he took me to every place that has to be visited in the neighbourhood of San Francisco Vedanta centre. And then he took me to Tahoe Lake. The Tahoe which has got a sub-centre of this Vedanta Society and there it is a sort of monastery, a retreat, Rishi ashrama. So that type of ashrama was there. He took me there and showed me

around the neighbouring areas. Tahoe is a very big lake. Then he took me to the great trees of America, huge trees going back to 2000 years and ago. Trees which have grown seeing the whole of the world civilization. They lived in the time of Jesus Christ himself! Red wood forest of America. He took me to another ashrama for a retreat / satsanga. I had to go and sing there. On the way we had to stay in a Hotel. In that hotel he took a sort of villa, we were two or three people and we would hold prayers there. Early morning we would have a prayer and meditation and everything as if we are having a life in the ashrama itself, here also!

Karthik: So, he never deterred away from those two ideas of tyaga & vairagya.

Kitty Master: Yes, everything integrated. Tyaga & vairagya go together integrated.

Karthik: Having seen him as a boy, how did the Americans accept him? and what was your view?

Kitty Master: When I saw the same type of burning affection that they had for Sw. Ashokananda, that group of devotees and that type of affection the later crop of devotees developed towards Sw. Prabuddhananda. I told you about Dr. Karte, the president of Vedanta society. His wife was Inga Karte. She collected all the lectures of Sw. Prabuddhananda. She recorded them first, audio recording, then sat down and typed them, volumes of his lectures. They were all at their home. I don't know what happened to them. It must be with them. Inga is not there anymore. I hope Karte is still well.

Karthik: After going to America, after some time, he used to visit India. Was he happy to come back to India?

Kitty Master: Very very much. As Sw. Vivekananda said, "before I left India and went abroad, India was a holy place for me. Now the very dust of India is very holy." So he held that type of attitude. He loved India even after he went there.

Karthik: What would be usually the routine after he comes back to India, comes back to Bangalore?

Kitty Master: Oh! He had a very very busy time. He had to visit so many homes and he did that gladly. And then every time he came here, he should come here and have breakfast in our house one day. That would be an occasion when all my relations and other friends who were very dear to him, whether invited them or not, they would all come to my house for breakfast that day. When Prabuddhananda came he would bring another sadhu also with him. So it was a happy time for all of us to get together and talk to him.

Karthik: The sadhus who go and stay in US, their life style their food habits everything changed because of their long association to that particular land. But he enjoyed the kind of cuisines that you used to make?

Kitty Master: Oh yes. I tell you one incident. One day I saw some sour apple in the kitchen in San Francisco, I said "Swamiji, shall I prepare some gojju for you? He said "certainly do it" and then I prepared some gojju with sour apple. I am not a great cook but I know a little cooking. Gojju is a sour dish with a little sweet added to it, something like the Chinese sweet & sour, not a pickle. So that type of thing I prepared.

Karthik: Did he relish it?

Kitty Master: He ate it and then said "Kitty, this is good for my body, mind and soul!" ha! The American devotees heard that and they said "please give us the recipe" ha! I am not a great cook and I could not give them the proper recipe. It did not turn out very well when they prepared it ha! On another day he said "Today we shall have pasta for lunch". For pasta he had got the macaroni and then he himself cooked that day. Pasta not to be cooked by anybody else, the brahmacharis or the convent women. He used macaroni, put water and boiled it. He prepared tomato sauce for that and it was a wonderful thing. Pasta became a favourite dish with me also for the rest of my life. It was again good for my body, mind and soul also ha! ha!

Karthik: Sir, have you read his lectures or heard his lectures?

Kitty Master: I told you about his lecture for children. On Krishna Janmashtami he spoke on Krishna and that day I had to sing afterwards. I selected mostly Kannada songs because the audience were mostly Americans. For them any Indian language was the same, Kannada, Telugu or Bengali they would have no difference. On the other hand, Prabuddhananda liked to hear Kannada songs. So I sang some Devara namas, the songs of Purandara Dasa and Kanaka Dasa and all. He enjoyed that. Then I sang a couple of songs of Ramakrishna himself and that the Americans enjoyed because it was the songs of Ramakrishna. In fact one of the secretaries of the Vedanta Society, she told me, “Thank you for singing those songs of Ramakrishna. Now we know how Ramakrishna sang. That boosted my ego like anything ha! ha!

Karthik: The other important thing is like, age catches up with everybody and at last it caught up with Sw. Prabuddhananda also. In the end he had this Parkinson problem. How did he take up old age and how did he take up physical inability?

Kitty Master: With a sense of resignation. Resignation in the hands of Mother. It would all be ‘Mother’ with him. He would say “Let Mother do it”. So it was a total self-surrender.

Karthik: Would he talk to you during his illness?

Kitty Master: Oh yes, yes.

Karthik: What was the kind of conversation you could share with us?

Kitty Master: When we asked him how is his health, he would say “this cancer is growing and then they have given up all hopes. We are doing some new type of naturopathy. That seems to be working and the allopaths were little amazed at the way this naturopathy is working with me” and so he would give all those details. And till

the end it was all 'Mother' 'Mother'. When he died all the members of the Vedanta Society were near him. He spoke to all of them and then he passed away quietly, quietly.

Karthik: How many years of association with him, for you personally?

Kitty Master: Say, starting from 1950 onwards till the end.

Karthik: Seven decades?

Kitty Master: yes.

Karthik: You would cherish those moments Sir?

Kitty Master: All memories only now.

Karthik: Would you like to add anything more to it?

Kitty Master: I think that is good enough, we have taken enough of your time also.

Karthik: It's ok, I am fine as long as you are able to contribute to with all the memories that you had.

Kitty Master: Very very good memories. And then what a wonderful personality! As I remember myself talking about it, he started like a Vamana and became a Trivikrama. Trivikrama, a man who grew occupying the whole of the world, a great personality. It is amazing what Ramakrishna does to you, out of dust he made us into men. It is a title of a book on Gandhi. So Ramakrishna does it: out of dust he made us into men and gods, men and gods.

KRISHNASWAMY

Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhananda

1 WOLLEN CAP:

1987, when I first visited San Francisco as Sw.Prabuddhanandaji's guest, he gave me a woolen cap. Hemi spherical in shape, it protected the skull from the cold of SFO.

Later when it became a little dirty, being used without washing, he gently admonished me by saying "Do you want me to wash it for you also?" I made haste to wash and iron it soon.

I have it with me even now and use it, though it has lost its shape and snugness, became a little larger in size.

It was thoughtful of SP to give me the cap for SFO was very cold then. SP used a similar cap himself. They called it a hat in the U.S



S.P. gave me a cap to protect me from the cold of SFO.

2. GRAY COAT

Another thing he gave me was an overcoat. The heavy coat was to be used by me during my stay there and was to be returned when I left SFO. It was very useful. It was very chilly outside in SFO.

When giving it to me he told me this coat has been used by many great men like Swami Ranganathanandaji during their stay in our center.

I felt awed by the thought!

3. THE FIRST BOOK

The first book SP sent to me was a big paperback volume. Title “The Encyclopedia of Ignorance” written by eminent scientists and philosophers about the peripheral areas of current science and philosophy, about human knowledge. It was tough reading, but I read it and told Swamiji that I was vastly benefited by it.

It has articles like the unify field theory in Physics. It was received in 1980 or thereabouts.

I am unable to locate this book in my disorganized, scattered library.

Then he sent to me some great works of Swami Chetananandaji of St. Louis as and when they were published. Each of them a gem, I devoured them hungrily. It certainly added to my knowledge.

My late brother Chandrasekhar also read all the books of Swami Chetanananda. And vastly loved them, even as I did. Now it is the turn of my younger brother Ganesh who is reading those volumes. Let me list those books in the following pages.

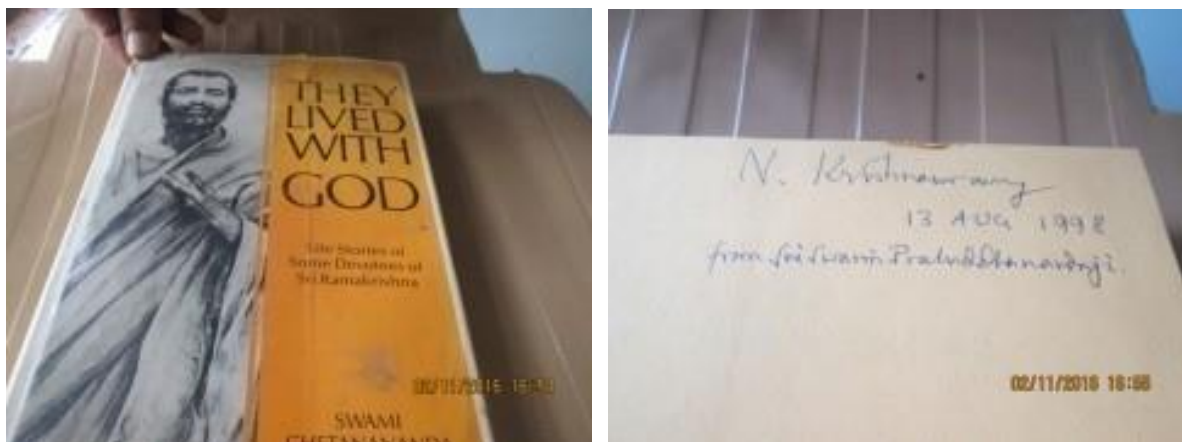
4. GOD LIVED WITH THEM

God lived with them published in 1997 gives life sketches of sanyasi disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

This was the first book of the St. Louis series that SP sent for me. I looked for the book he sent to me, in vain. Unfortunately the book is not with me now. Some kind friend has borrowed it and forgot to return. I have to buy another copy of the book now.

5. THEY LIVED WITH GOD

SP sent this book to me on 13th August 1998, as soon as it was published in the US. The Indian edition came a little later. This book gives the life sketches of some house holder devotees of the Master. Every one of them is a great man or woman. It is a fascinating book. The specialty of Sw. Chetanandaji's books is that they provide many details available only in Bengali source books not available in English.

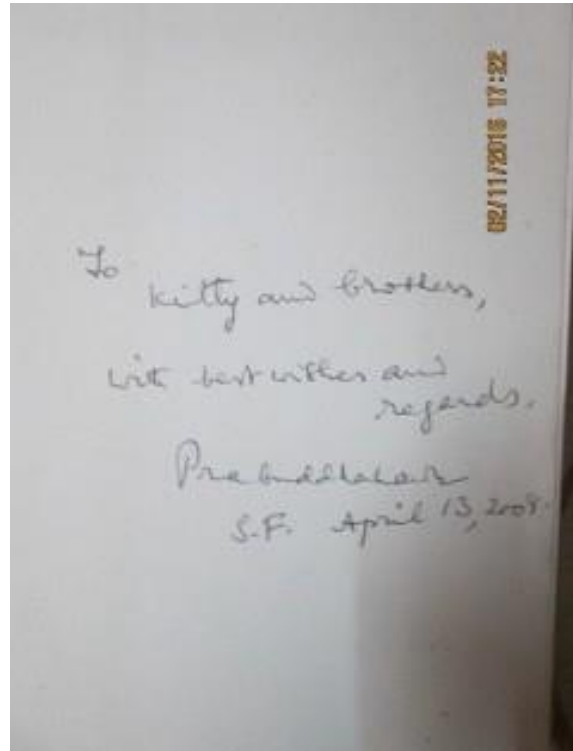
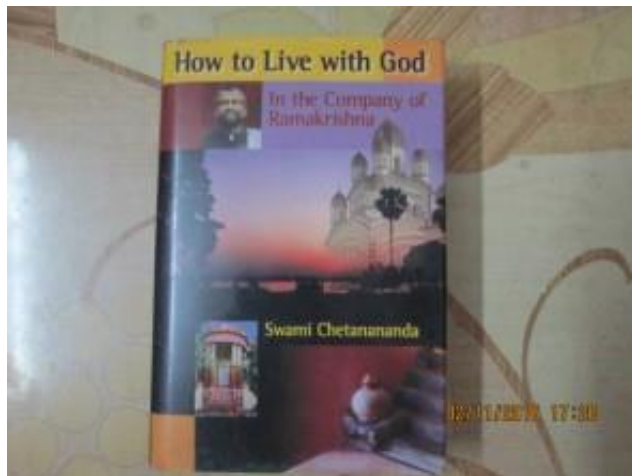


6. HOW TO LIVE WITH GOD

The third book he sent to me in the St Louis series is How to live with god in the company of Sri Ramakrishna, published in 2008

SP has inscribed it: To Kitty and brothers, With best wishes and regards,
Prabuddhananda, SF 13 APR 2008

This book has many details of the life of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples found in no other books on Sri Ramakrishna. It gives a fine picture of Calcutta and its people in those days, the time of Sri Ramakrishna.



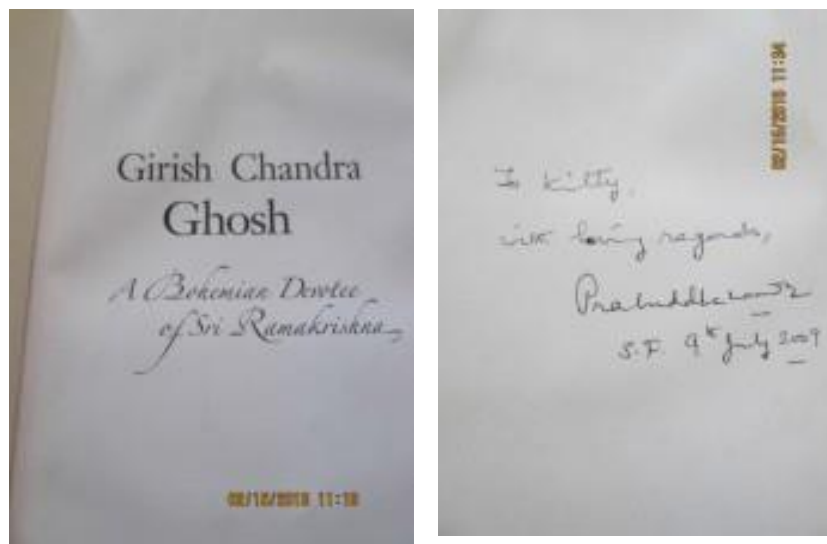
7. GIRISH CHANDRA GHOSH

The fourth book of St Louis sent by SP to me is Girish Chandra Ghosh, A Bohemian devotee of Sri Ramakrishna published in 2009.

It is inscribed as: To Kitty, With loving regards, Prabuddhananda SF 9th July 2009

The colorful life of the great dramatist, poet Girish whom Sri Ramakrishna transformed into a divine personality is described in great detail. His life is fascinating in many ways. His talents are so astonishing.

The book was sent to me from a Calcutta address evidently from a devotee who brought it from SF to Calcutta.



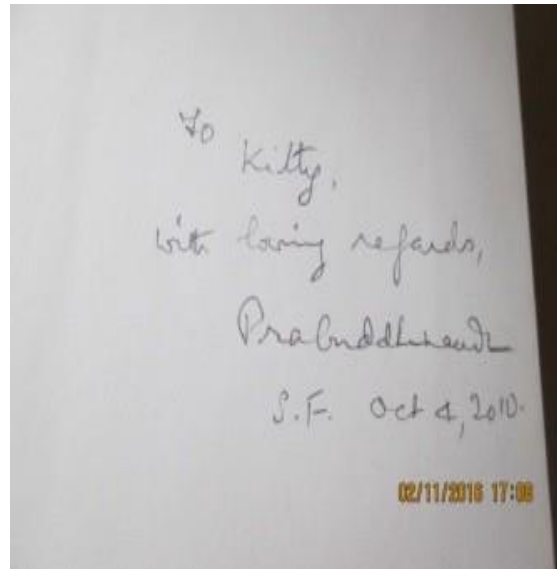
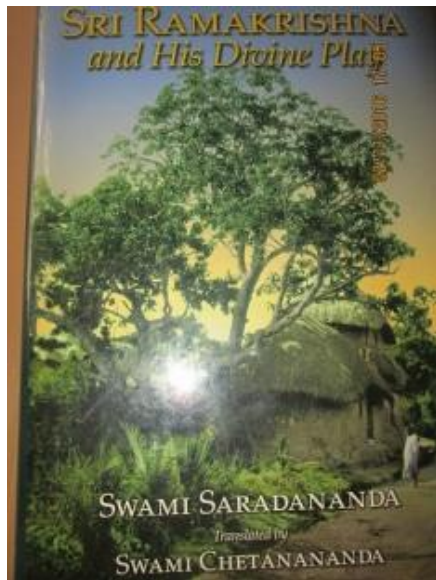
8. LEELA PRASANGA

The next book SP sent to me: Sri Ramakrishna and his divine play, first edition 2003; second printing 2006.

SP has inscribed it: To Kitty, With loving regards, Prabuddhananda, SF Oct 4th 2010

This is a big volume on the life and times of the Master.

It is the translation of Swami Saradananda's Bengali book "Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga"

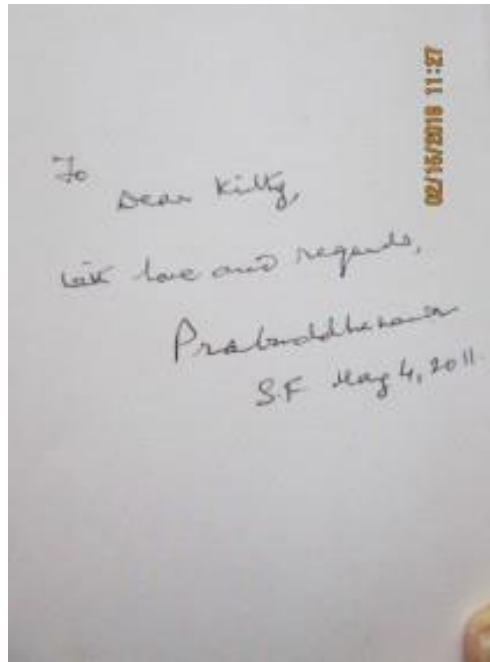
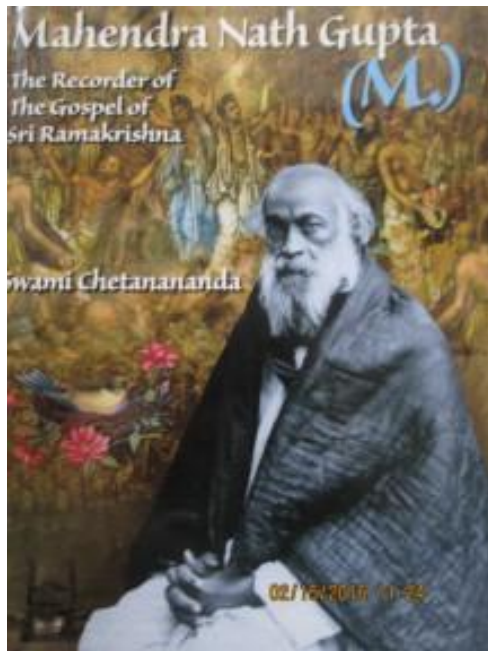


9. MAHENDRA NATH GUPTA

The 6th book in this series is Mahendra Nath Gupta (M) the recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, published in 2011.

It is inscribed: To Dear Kitty, With love and regards, Prabuddhananda, SF May 4 2011

It's a detailed biography of great diarist, with so many details not available anywhere else. His life is full of renunciation and dedication to the teachings of his teacher.

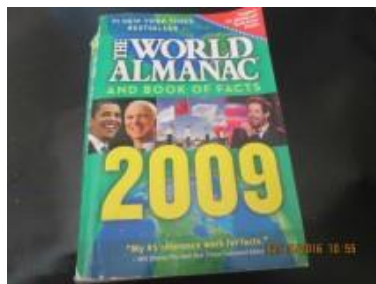


10. WORLD ALMANAC

Swami Prabuddhanandaji often asked me if I needed anything that he could send me from the US when he called me or wrote to me. Usually I couldn't think of anything I wanted, which I could not get here in India.

I had with me an old Almanac which I bought in America, may be in 1990. In 2009 I asked SP to send me the latest edition of the book world almanac, and the book of facts.

He sent a copy immediately; I am still using it for reference.



11. GLOBAL VEDANTA

SP took out a gift subscription for me when Global Vedanta started its publication in 1996 in Seattle, Washington by the Viveka press, the publishing arm of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington, USA.

The beautiful magazine started coming to me regularly four times a year, bringing memories of the donor, SP. The magazine published articles on Vedanta and other religious subjects. It has a humor section as well as a poetry column. News from various centers of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India and abroad is also covered, with suitable illustration. We have some fine cartoons also. Sometimes even I discussed with SP the articles in GV.

I know that my friend V.Srinivas Rao also gets Global Vedanta, thanks to the generosity of SP. I think Sw.Sureshananda in Mysore also gets the gift copy of GV.

I just now have the fall 2015 issue with me. The spring issue of 2016 will be the last issue from the gift subscription.

For the last 20 years GV has brought much knowledge and entertainment to me along with the memory of SP.

Now I will have to buy a subscription for myself



In continuation to my previous mail am adding 2 more items to the Reminiscences of Swamiji

12. This is another fond memory of Sw. Prabuddhananda. He sent this to me when he had just started his work in S.F. Mataji Virajaprana may throw light on the origin of this picture, [Chicago pose, 1893] I hope.

13. About twenty years back I was bed ridden after an accident. S.P.sent me a wonderful morale booster. A big box about 12"X12" and 2" thick arrived by mail. Inside I found some 20 dates sitting in twenty pigeon holes each of them a big, black, juicy date. I shared them with my visitors also. So tasty and health-giving. Such a gift may be common for Americans but in India I had never even dreamt of this.

14. THE DIGITAL WRISTWATCH

Another gift from the swami I remember. Received around 1980. Digital watches were not common then. It was a curio. With steel strap. It had a red, opaque dial. Nothing you can see! When you pressed a button it displayed bright digital time. Date also, if I remember right. I showed it around.

One day I was attending a music concert in Pune, where I lived then. The boy sitting next to me asked "But how do you get the time in our watch?" He was happy when I showed him!

15. THE TALKING WATCH

This was a gift to Sw Ritatmananda, whom SP loved and revered. Sw.

Ritatmananda was old, had eye trouble. Couldn't get to see the time in night. SP solved the problem by sending him a speaking wristwatch. On pressing a button the watch said what was the time! It said, eg. "It is two thirty now!" SR was delighted with the

very useful gift. He showed it to all his visitors in Ulsoor asrama where he lived at that time.

This is not a reminiscence but a revelation:

16.

On 15h Aug friends celebrated my 90th birthday. One of the greetings was from Kyatssandra Narendra, a facebook friend, whom I dont know well.. It would have ended there if he had not added and Sita Jagannath! for I know only one SJ, that is the wife of Jagannath, the elder brother of Raghunandanl, the future Swami Prabuddhananda.

I had never thought about the initial K of Raghunandan or Jagannath .
So the full premonastic name of Swami Prabuddhananda is
Kyatdasandra Raghunandan.

Now I have a know Kyatasandra Narendra is my friend from his childhood who lives with his family in Mysuru.

From Kitty

Krishnaswamy

RITA MELLEEM

I experienced profound sadness and loss in April 2005 when my revered Gurudev left his body. I wanted some solace and therefore called revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji in San Francisco. He was as usual calm and reassuring. His advice on that day has left a deep impression on my mind. With great conviction he said,

“Yes, your Gurudev was like a huge redwood tree. Now you hold onto Sri Ramakrishna. Initially pain and sadness will be there, but keep on thinking of him and your attachment will bring detachment later on; keep on thinking of him.”

Over ten years have passed since this meaningful conversation. The invaluable advice Swamiji gave that day has proved to be very beneficial. It somehow freed me to think of revered Gurudev without moping about missing his physical presence. In August of 2011, while visiting Swamiji in San Francisco i asked him the source of this most practical teaching. Without hesitation he said, “Oh, it’s from the famous Bhaja Govindam Stotra, verse nine, by Sri Shankaracharya:

‘Good association breeds detachment;

Detachment leads to freedom from delusion;

Undeluded, one contacts changeless Reality;

Contact with Reality bestows Liberation-while-alive.’”

I felt overjoyed to hear this verse from revered Swamiji’s lips. It was as thou the words had come alive at that moment. And, he gave profound meaning to” association with the good” for me.

The first part of revered Swami Prabuddhananda’s advice was “hold on to Sri Ramakrishna.”

In 2012 by God's grace I had the joyful privilege to spend some time in revered Swamiji's holy company, during those precious moments I started to understand the practical interpretation of this terse statement. Revered Swamiji repeatedly said,

"Hold on to Sri Ramakrishna. He is the continuity while living, dying, and rebirth. Every thing else changes. Some stay with you a few days, a few months, a few years. He is with you all the time. Meditate on this – that is what I do."

S. PRASANNA KUMAR

"Light of Asia" Said Sir Edwin Arnold about Bhagwan Buddha.

1. "Light of My soul" , is always revered Swamiji, My Swami, Our Swami, Swami Sri Prabuddhanandaji. Cherished forever, till I walk on this lovely earth.

2. Raghunandan in premonastic days, the Swami was like a shadow to the Rev. Swami Yathishwaranandaji, premonastic days, the Swami was like a shadow to the Rev. Swami Yatishwaranandaji, President then of Bangalore Centre- A senior beloved monk.

3. After sanyas diksha, flux of time, Swami Prabuddhanandaji was sent to Ramakrishna Vidhyarthi Mandiram, a boys hostel of the mission.

4. Posted as an Asst. Warden to assist (Almost totally in charge) Swami Ritatmanandaji, another great soul, who struggled and built Sri Ramakrishna Vidhyarthi Mandiram, Swami Prabuddhanandaji was simple, ever so little smiling, sometimes knitted eyebrows, his front ever so beautifully protruding tooth (!) His both palms in his waist coat pockets! Charming and magnetic, he was, the Swami. Described as above , I encountered him in 1961, when I went to Sri Ramakrishna Vidhyarthi Mandiram to join there in my first B. Com., course. My mother (Bless her soul) and me standing near steps to first floor , saw Swami Prabuddhanandaji descending , halt before the last 4 or 5 steps , deeply looking , assessing me straight (and me , stunned, looking at his steady eyes) and after a few seconds, came down and told in our language meaning "O, so you are Prasanna?" Yes, that was something like "Love at first sight"! Sannyasi in the order, that was my first meeting with him. Room No. 25, prayer hall in between and room number 27, was Swami's room! The hostel stay. Swami's everyday touch during routine, prayers, games , dining hall utilities etc., The Swami is always there, always, eternally with us silently observing, silently instructing through his eyes; less words, words issuing from his soul as it were, least gestures, knit eye brows, initially creating fear, transforming to love , respect, to clasp him to my breast for permanent embrace, even to date! (My opinion)

Words fall to describe the Rapport the transport of mine to the realm of the indescribable! O, Sri Gurumaharaj, Mahamayi and the Swamiji Maharaj- Divya Thraya, the Divine trio, like the holy confluence of Ganga, Yamuna Saraswathi rivers! Sri Ramkrishna Vidyarthi Mandiram, was is, around us, within us, will be our 'Prayag', the theertharaj the holiest Allahabad!. At least I percieve forever.

Suffice it so say and summarise as follows;

1. Firmness with gentleness.
2. Strict but could radiate effective kindness
3. Prayer time, meal time, free time, games time, other times, nightly visits to rooms where he felt to spend a few moments with his "Favourites"(?!). He was our mother, none else!
4. Kindness proved in every word, action, extended help physically, financially, religiously, spiritually (the most felt, understood, after years of thought process!)
5. Being not a poet, not a writer, nor a lecturer, but only the one beloved of Swami Prabuddhanandaji. One beloved among the hundreds, but still beloved by his blessings,

I can recall various gifts, letters, cards, photos (precious jewels, nay, only jewels in my physical and mental custody), the various meeting during his Bangalore days which were to us very little, luckily to American sisters and brothers more than forty glorious years!

Whenever in Bangalore I used to meet him among a dozen or so persons for many years, a beaming beautiful, hallowed spiritually, strong, awe inspiring Swami Prabuddhanandaji. Of his visits to Sri Ramakrishna Vidyarthi Mandiram as its former Asst Warden during special days was always for us very joyous, (for me just to look at him non stop as Aradhya Devatha and to get his cupped hand descending on my back

as I bend for pranam was life giving, excellent experience(None so far in my life excepting Sri Prabuddhanandaji).

His visits to Vivekananda school, his contribution was immense; I always used to be there, without fail because my beloved Swami Prabuddhanandaji used to be there. Coming to the last part of my narration of life's most thrilling, my style, exhilarating spiritual experiences, it happened in simple words as described by me, a simple man of 71 years now! The Swamy was ailing, in pain, tired, of great determination, during the Mandiram function that eventful day, my most privileged God sent chance to be with beloved Swami Prabuddhanandaji, absolutely with nobody else, none with him. How? Ask Sri Gurumaharaj!!

Function begins, 'He comes. I follow him, no sanyasis no brahmacharis, in front lines. No old students, none sir, no one; he sits on sofa, beats space next to him, and says "Koothko";, meaning to sit. I say, tears in my eyes, No Swamiji I am behind you on a chair. We were together with none to disturb us- the twosome!

In between his 2 visits to washroom all the way to ground floor, people doing pranam, and he suffering from pain, sitting with all will power and finally finishing his small, softly rendered observations. I suggested to him to return to Ashrama for rest (after 4 pm or so). He gets up, we descend, car arrives, I do my pranam (My last reverence to him in Physical form) He touches my back , utters "Yeno Prasanna, Innu Yawaga Nodthino Ninna" meaning "what Prasanna, again when will I see you?" I replied I reply with tears in my eyes and heart, "

"Even Gurumaharaj may not know"!

The End or The Beginning?

KALAVATIVALLABH

We first met Swami Prabuddhanadaji in Ellicottville in 1976 at a retreat. Little did we know then that he was going to be our guru.

Swamiji had come to Canada for many years in the summer to conduct our retreats which was held at different venues, mainly Weskin Easkin near the Fenlon Falls. A group of us including the Datta family, Raha family and others made preparations weeks ahead of time for these retreats. We cooked all the meals ourselves. Breakfast, lunch and dinner menus were arranged beforehand and cooking, cleaning allocated to different devotees. Swamiji's quarters were especially well taken care of with the utmost detail. We were so charged during this period to be amidst Swamiji's presence. Swamiji never tired. He gave talks in the morning, afternoon and evening after the gospel reading. One year we were so sad as it was the last day of the retreat, we could barely sing Ramakrishna charone Saroje So Swamiji sang by himself.

Swamiji taught us how to sing the Hymn Bhaja Govindam step step, so that we sang it correctly. He also taught us the prayer to be sung at the end of every class. Sarva starta durganee ... and the English translation followed.

We had the great fortune of having Swamiji stay in our house following the retreat in 1988 or maybe 1989. How blessed we were to have this great privilege. At that time we were almost in the process of securing a house for our activities on Meadows Blvd in Mississauga.

Swamiji was clearly a man of God. He did everything perfect in our eyes. His speech, his dignified walk, the way he ate. He was very loving and caring.

For the times we stayed at Apt 101, everything was organized so meticulously with the utmost of detail, and care. Swamiji always enquired whether we ate well, slept properly, caring for everything.

Whenever we visited SF, Swamji always made a special point of seeing us, even though he was extremely busy.... And he was always punctual. He always enquired about our spiritual practices, our health, work and the family.

In Dec of 2002 I had the great privilege of making halwa with Swamiji in the kitchen (SF) for puja offering. It turned out perfect. I will always cherish this precious moment.

If there was a time where we had not spoken to swami for a while, then he would phone and enquire how we were doing.

Swamiji was our spiritual guide and teacher. He gave us all his unconditional love and support and we will always remember him dearly.

VINAY MAMIDI

I had an amazing experience with Swami which I thought I should not share but after thinking about it, I thought I should. Here it goes.

Last Tuesday, when I was on duty - Swami was getting up every 5 to 10 minutes and asking me to press his back or legs. After 3 hours of doing this, I was groggy and tired. I also felt that Swami is also tied up with the body like the rest of us. Maybe he is not so special. Immediately, within 1 second, Swami in his sleep started speaking for 20 mins.

The contents of the talk were:

- Mother, Swami Yatishwarananda and Sri Ramakrishna would advise getting up in the morning and meditating.

- He said "You remind me of Mother and I remind you of Mother" and that's how we should lead our lives. That is Sarada and That is Ramakrishna

- He also repeated "atmane vindate viryam" and said Atman is the very source of strength. We need to live in the Turiya state and attain to the level.

- He referred to the Turiya state as always awake. I think he indicated that meditating in the morning hours is a good way to attain the Turiya state.

- He repeated the "Ya Devi Sarva Bhuteshu " song and stopped at chetanabhidyate..(consciousness) and talked about Atman.

- He repeated Amma, Amma , Amma with every sentence.. It was just indescribable.

After all this was happening, I was rubbing his back and my whole body was filled with bliss and all my lethargy was gone, mind was uplifted (without any effort from my part). I felt a little alarmed because he never speaks to me and he spoke so eloquently from 2:40 to 3:05am. It was very evident that my first doubt that Swami lives in the

body was squashed to bits (Again, this doubt came up due to the monkey mind not because of what I think of Swami).

This was my last experience with Swami, exactly 1 week before he passed away. I was so sure he wouldn't pass away that the day he passed away (it was my duty) that when Sankar asked me I gave him my duty and when Balki said Swami is not doing well..I said that can't be.. He will live. It was so sad to see him pass away for me personally because I was supposed to take care of him that day.

Did you find this interesting ? I remember my experience very fondly that Swami always had his mind in the spirit always and he had immense spiritual power to lift minds.

RINA CHAKRAVARTI

Guiding Light

It was July 1984 in Canada, we were enjoying our summer vacation when we decided to spend a few days in the cottage country to refresh our energy. We rented a cottage for a few days in the Buckhorn area. As we were getting ready, a family friend informed us about a spiritual retreat in Eganville to be conducted by a very fine Swami from the Ramakrishna order. It was around the same time and in the same geographical location, about a couple of hour's drive from where we were going. My association with Sri Ramakrishna Mission School in a village near Kolkata transported my thoughts to those days, my husband thought I will be happy to attend that retreat.

My experiences in life at that point was quite overwhelming for various reasons, the meaning of existence of God, Self or higher power was not available to me. I was quite exhausted and tired and just needed some rest, retreat would be a serious matter where God or spiritual life would be the focus. Simply the mood was not there for the retreat. After arriving at Buckhorn I was very happy at the beauty of natural surroundings in the wilderness as it reminded me of my childhood familiarity with the wilderness in India. Following morning my husband convinced me to pay a short visit to Eganville retreat after lunch, which was only a couple of hours drive.

We arrived in the afternoon and attended the afternoon session where Rev. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was taking a class on Kathopanishad. Beautiful surrounding of the retreat impressed me. Swami's talk was quite enlightening for me and I was drawn to it immediately. Swami was explaining the difference between 'sreyas (what is good)' and 'preyas (what is pleasant)'. He was reflecting on the events from the Upanishad, Nachiketa's early life to his meeting with Yama. I was listening to every single expression of him in a very convincing manner and tried to understand how we see things in a way convenient to ourselves. My understanding was becoming clearer and focussed, it helped me to be introspective in identifying human problems. It seemed to

me that all these years I have never really distinguished between what is pleasant and what is good. It was just like being warmed up before the real lesson.

After the evening prayer my husband was getting ready to return to Buckhorn, now it was my turn to ask if we could stay till the next day. I had some questions, he had too, so we ended up attending the entire retreat. We never went back to the cottage in Buckhorn. It was like a new beginning. That was my first meeting with Swami Prabuddhananda that eventually resulted in my closeness to San Francisco.

My first visit to San Francisco was in the same year in December 1984. Since then, I had the opportunity of attending many retreats and classes in Toronto, San Francisco or Lake Tahoe along with opportunities for personal instructions and guidance. So many thoughts are rushing to my mind from all these years that it is hard to decide what was most important, most effective. His general and specific advice to us had been very effective in carrying on our daily activities even in a trying situation.

His graceful and kindly compassion touched many of us, directly or indirectly. Once, in San Francisco I asked him whether he would speak to a distressed friend of mine who had lost two of her children in a plane crash. She was quite an integrated person, always calm and poised, who took her spiritual life very seriously. He did not know her, he kept very quiet for a while then he asked me a few questions. Then he said, "What can I say to a mother who has just lost her children. It is very painful. What can I say that will bring her comfort?" Later, he agreed to speak to her and welcomed her to call him whenever she had any questions. Eventually she went to San Francisco to meet him. After a few years, I was watching an interview she gave on a television show in Toronto, it was about the incident of the plane crash. The interviewer was amazed to see her dignity and integrity in the way she was responding, with no bitterness on the perpetrators, who were responsible to bring the plane down. In course of conversation they asked her about the source of her strength that helped her face such a tragedy as though nothing had happened. She mentioned how a few conversations with a Swami

had cleared all her thoughts and helped her understand the truth. She did not mention Swami's name for his privacy, she told me.

Another incident comes to my mind about another close friend of mine in Toronto. She also on various occasions had spoken to Swami on the phone. She was a great devotee belonging to a spiritual and used to organize many group prayer meetings in her house. She knew I went to San Francisco frequently, so whenever she had a question she would ask me to convey them to Swami Prabuddhananda and I would convey them back to her. She was very rational and mentally strong but at the same time had many concerns about various rituals.

After a few years she became terminally ill with intestinal cancer and started to deteriorate very quickly. She wanted me to ask Swami re the rituals after giving up her body. She was divorced, and had two grown up daughters who were busy with their lives. She lived with one of them but did not want to impose any ritualistic responsibilities on them but time was running out. It was May 2002. She needed to arrange for her last days and forwarded her questions to Swamiji by email seeking his advice for her through me to which Swamiji responded to my email almost immediately, from which I quote below:

'Please give her my best wishes. My prayer is that through His grace she will feel His presence in the depth of her being not caring much for her body at this stage. Let His will be done. Please give this message to her.....

Please also tell her that once she gives up her body, she is free from everything connected with her old body. As far as she is concerned, it does not matter how she is cremated or buried. Actually the funeral is the problem for those who live, not hers'.

I was able to convey this message to her the day before she left her body.

It was my privilege to see Swami off in his last journey. I am remembering his advice to my friend as I conclude a few words about Swami.

ANNA MONDAY

Swam Prabuddhananda's admirable qualities were obvious: his calm steadiness, firmness, and habit of hard work are well known. But not far beneath the formidable and sometimes forbidding exterior he put up, one found a reservoir of love. Rather than let things take their own course, Swami Prabuddhananda expressed his devotion to the Lord and love for the devotees by the toil of the relentless grip with which he steered the life of the Center and the development of the monastic and lay devotees.

He played his role as disciplinarian Head of Center quite well, but on occasion let his underlying sense of humor break through. Once on the day before a Puja, I was alone in the puja service area setting up for the next day's food service. This had traditionally been a 2-person job, but it was manageable by one, which I preferred. When Swami found out I had no helper, instead of praising my fortitude, he exclaimed, "You're cheating!" Then he proceeded to act out two people at work, with one insisting this goes here and the other countering no it goes there, back and forth until one of them says, "If it doesn't go here, I'm going home!" He was laughing.

RAMANIRAMAKRISHNAN

The first thought that comes across when one thinks of Swami Prabuddhananda is his positive outlook for your spiritual well-being through his motherly affection. He was kind and never harsh. If you tell him that you were able to meditate for 15 minutes only, he would never reproach you, but gently prod you to meditate for 20 minutes the next time.

He was an unassuming gentle monk. I always thought that Lord Buddha would have dealt with you the way Swami Prabuddhananda's interactions were with his disciples and the disciples of the Ramakrishna order, even if you didn't take *mantra diksha* from him.

Two anecdotes narrated by him, *ad infinitum*, stay in my memory. The story about the fireman protecting himself from the fire before attempting to save others. Similarly, the safety instruction during a flight that you wear your own oxygen mask first before trying to help your seat mates to wear their masks.

PURABI DAS

I met Swami Prabuddhanandaji for the first time as a young monk in Seattle ashrama. The ashrama was called “Ramakrishna Vedanta Center” then. In 1971 Swami Prabuddhanandaji came to visit Revered Swami Vividishanandaji, who was the head of the center at the time. When I first saw him I was very much impressed with his special spiritual presence which I felt at the time! We spent some time with both the Swamis at the center. There was a special reception for him on the Friday evening. Swami Vividishanandaji introduced him. We came to know that he came from the Bangalore ashrama and he was the head of that center there before he was sent to head the San Francisco ashrama by Belur Math.

We saw him again during the dedication of the “Women’s Retreat House” at Olema. There were 11 swamis from other ashramas and many devotees from all over North America. The dedication day was the thrice blessed day of Buddha. To me he appeared like a living Buddha with his calm and spiritual demeanor. I remember attending the evening function at the New Temple where all the invited Swamis spoke and a beautiful function was held.

After that we visited him in San Francisco ashrama many times. He always made arrangements for our stay and was very gracious and affectionate. I used to stay with Vijaya, a long time devotee and a disciple of Swami Ashokanandaji. Swamiji would call every morning there to make enquiries about my well-being. He would even ask me what I had for breakfast!

He stayed in our house when we invited him to visit the group of devotees in Vancouver, Canada. Our group did not have its own place at the time. Those were some wonderful days in close contact with him! After our group bought the Society’s own place he came and blessed the place with his presence in that house. He conducted retreats for our group in Vancouver a few times. Other devotees from American centers

and other Canadian centers attended those retreats too. We all had the opportunity to be in his spiritual presence!

Vancouver is a special place of pilgrimage for us devotees because Swami Vivekananda landed here first on the way to his historical journey to Chicago Parliament of Religion in 1893. In 1993 the Vancouver group of devotees celebrated the centenary of that momentous occasion by arranging a special three-day function inviting Swami Gahananandaji from India, the General Secretary of the Order at the time, Swami Swahanandaji of Southern California, Swami Prabuddhanandaji and Swami Pramathanandaji of Toronto, Canada. We and the other devotees attended their lectures, went sight-seeing and picnicking with them!

Whenever Swami Prabuddhanandaji would visit Seattle ashrama we always would go there and never miss the opportunity to have his holy company! To me he was one of those special souls who could lift our minds just by his presence!

The last time I went to San Francisco to see him was in 2014, before he left for the Ramakrishna Loka. I visited him every day while I was there and cooked his food one day. Even in his suffering he never lost his patience and calmness – a real “Sthitaprajna” as always! Just to see him is to see a soul very close to Sri Sri Thakur and Sri Sri Ma! I feel it is my great privilege to have known and seen such a great soul!

ANADI JIBAN DAS

I had the opportunity to meet Swami Prabuddhanandaji for the first time in the year 1971. He was visiting the Ramakrishna Vedanta Center of Seattle. We were attending his talk in the chapel. Revered Swami Vividishanandaji introduced this young monk, new from India, to the participating audience. I was struck by the spiritual atmosphere that pervaded the congregation that day.

In 1972, the newly built Women's Retreat House in Olema was dedicated. In that occasion, many Swamis and hundreds of devotees assembled. It was a spiritually uplifting wonderful event. I was astonished by the organizational capacity of the young monk Swami Prabuddhananda.

Later on, we visited many times the Vedanta Society of Northern California and the Olema Retreat. Swami Prabuddhanandaji always treated us with great warmth and affection. We can never forget that love and hospitality.

In 1993, we organized and celebrated the centenary of "Swami Vivekananda's Arrival to Vancouver on July 25, 1893". Many Swamis were invited in Vancouver to participate on that momentous occasion. Swami Prabuddhanandaji, among others, delivered inspiring talks to hundred of participants.

In 1998, the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of British Columbia acquired a condominium unit in Vancouver. Swami Prabuddhanandaji visited and blessed the place.

Our Vedanta Society organizes yearly retreats either in the greater Vancouver area or in a scenic sea-side resort Sechelt, BC. Swami Prabuddhanandaji conducted several of these retreats in Sechelt and as well as in Vancouver. Devotees and admirers of Vedanta from all over North America attended the discourses of Swami Prabuddhanandaji.. Swami Prabuddhanandaji's spiritual wisdom and blessings touched me personally and many other devotees of the greater Vancouver. I consider

Swami Prabuddhanandaji as a very special spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sarada Devi.

GREG FIELDS

I first met Swami when I was 17 years old. I was deeply hankering for some sort of idealistic philosophy and lifestyle and had been exploring various spiritual writings and groups. After visiting some ashrama and taking some Hatha Yoga classes I came across “Vedanta for the Modern Man” published by the Vedanta Society of Southern California and made a bus trip to Los Angeles from San Francisco to visit the Temple there. However, I did not meet any of the monks at that time. When I returned my mother mentioned there was a Vedanta Society in our neighborhood. It turned out it was only eight blocks from our house and I had walked by it many times when going to middle school. I had even once delivered the newspaper there when doing my friend’s paper route when he was sick.

I first visited the New Temple in late 1976 or early 1977; Swami Chidrupananda was reading a lecture of Swami Ashokananda’s. I was struck by the spiritual atmosphere in the Temple and was a little mystified by all the old ladies in the audience with their long overcoats and the somberness of the ushers. I came for the next lecture and was fascinated by Swami Prabuddhananda’s talk and his personal presence. I felt my heart pounding when I went up to shake his hand afterwards. He held my hand and looked in my eyes for a long time and asked me a few questions. It felt as if he could see parts of me that I had no access to, that he could see and understand my entire character with all its flaws and potential. I had never met anyone like him and I felt a mixture of love and awe and fascination. It was a little scary but I wanted to return as soon as I could.

Within a few months after having spent some time with swami and the other brothers, I wanted to join the monastery. Swami, however, asked me to finish my college degree first. My heart sank but I knew I had to do what he asked if I wanted to join the Order. I studied like a madman and completed the four year program in three years. With swami’s encouragement I took a wide variety of subjects, including physics and mathematics which I would never have studied on my own. When swami saw a “B”

grade on my first report card, he said, “What is this B doing here?” I had to work very hard to get “A’s” after that. I studied Sanskrit with a professor at the university. Swami wanted to hear my grammar recitation and encouraged me to memorize parts of the Gita. I remember walking with him on the busy streets of San Francisco reciting chapters of the Gita in Sanskrit out loud at his request. He wanted me to memorize the entire book; I was able to do half of it before I started forgetting the first chapters.

When I completed my BA, swami surprisingly asked me what my plans were. I said I wanted to join the monastery, which he knew full well, as many times during my time in school he had told me to “finish and come quickly.” He then said, “what about a Master’s degree?” I almost gagged and he immediately said, “no, we cannot ask you to do that.” Within a month I joined the monastery in June 1980.

I lived with Swami for 22 years. In all those years I never saw him even once do a selfish act, never saw him get angry at anyone unless it was for that person’s benefit, never once heard him say anything critical of anyone behind their back. He was the personification of the serene, allrenouncing monk, always serving the spiritual needs of others with deep steadiness and love. He could be extremely aloof and retiring, but I always felt that his times of silence were necessary for him to recharge so he could handle the intense schedule of giving spiritual interviews, lectures, and classes, and overseeing the daily operations of Society. He told me that his nature all his life was indrawn and not socially inclined and that it was a challenge for him to be talking with people so much. But he did it cheerfully with love and in the service of Sri Ramakrishna. He was so indrawn that even when he could look out his window and watch the 4th of July fireworks blazing over the San Francisco Bay, he would close his blinds, dim the lights and sit meditating in his chair. One time there was a car crash right outside the monastery around midnight. A man ran into the monastery garden chased by many police. There were sirens and flashlights and several hours later a helicopter flew just a few hundred feet over the monastery roof with a bright searchlight and tremendous noise. In the morning swami said he had not heard a thing.

Swami was able to detach his mind from anything almost instantly. I could hear him talking on the phone with a devotee about intense issues and at times raising his voice to get his point across. Then I would see him come out of the room looking as if he had just come from the deepest meditation.

Swami never let anyone get attached to him personally even though he was their spiritual guide. Once I drove him to the Integral Yoga Center in San Francisco for a talk. The devotees there took him to the top floor where they had a huge easy chair lit up by a spotlight. He was to sit there to talk while everyone else sat on the floor – this made him uncomfortable. Everywhere in the ashrama were pictures of their leader Swami Satchidananda. After the talk as we were all slowly walking downstairs Swami said to the devotees (paraphrased) “Don’t put too much emphasis on the human guru. Human gurus come and go and eventually the body drops. See Brahman in the human teacher; know that God alone comes in the form of the guru.”

He wanted his students to learn to stand on their own feet and to depend on God alone in their hearts. He attracted me to join the monastery with his other-worldly love and affection but gradually he gave less and less of that to me externally. The love was there but he would display it infrequently. He wanted my monastic and spiritual life to depend on my interior yearning for God and not on the desire for his personal affection. He was a true teacher who put the disciple’s connection with the spirit first before any human ties. On a human level this made swami very difficult to live with because there could be months without any sign of affection from him. But I always understood why he was like that. It is so easy to get personally attached to the guru. With him, it was always about Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji. Nothing else mattered.

Swami was very reticent about his family life. Very occasionally he would mention something about his pre-monastic days. I recall him saying that his grandfather was a very prominent person in the agricultural department of Karnataka in south India. He said that if his grandfather had lived longer that he would not have been able to join the

order due his grandfather's very powerful personality and influence in the family. As it was, swami's father was never reconciled to swami joining the Order; his mother later on came around in her views and ultimately approved of it.

Several experiences in swami's youth led him to a life of dispassion. He contracted malaria and the disease caused him to miss a year of high school. He lost several close relatives to premature deaths and he told me this greatly increased his dispassion for the world.

One day he found a book covered with paper hidden next to his father's bed. He thought it was something sexual in nature and when he opened it he found it to be the Gita! That left an impression in his teenage mind.

Swami grew up in a small village. He never wore shoes and socks until he came to the US many years later. He moved to Bangalore to go to university and he stayed in the youth hostel run by the Ramakrishna ashrama there. The first book published by the Order that he read was "With the Swamis in America" – a portent of his future life in the United States! His first major influence was Swami Tyagishanandaji; swami and several other young men nursed the swami when he was bedridden in his last days wearing a full body cast for a major back problem. Swami was initiated by Swami Virajanandaji, a disciple of Holy Mother. After Tyagishanandaji's passing, swami was trained by Swami Yatishwarananda for many years. He had photos of these three swamis in his room along with Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swamiji and Maharaj; he used to offer incense daily to them all.

Swami never talked directly about his spiritual experiences to me. However, one time when I was having a very difficult time I approached swami with tears in my eyes and asked him how he was able to live the monastic life like he did. He looked at me very deeply and slowly said, "one time I was also struggling like this, and then something happened...." He did not tell me what that "something" was but the clear implication,

at least to me, was that he was blessed with a very deep and profound spiritual experience at that time.

God was simply a reality for swami, of this I have no doubt. I have seen him come many times from meditation, with his eyes slightly red, in a state of deep inward bliss. Once I was walking through the New Temple and could hear swami talking to a class of students that had come to visit. He was asked something which I could not hear but swami responded with a powerful voice, "God is real!" To this day I have never heard someone say that phrase with such strength and authority. It was not a statement of personal belief but of conviction based upon profound experience.

In his monastic life, swami was the prototypical sannyasin. He was disciplined and restrained in everything. He had complete control over his palate. At night he hardly ate anything; at other meals he ate just the right amount, never too much nor too little. He strongly believed in Buddha's middle path, avoiding the extremes in work, sleep, food, and spiritual practices.

He was extremely clear about the ideal of sannyasa with no compromise, to the point of rigidity. Once a visiting swami arrived at the airport and swami went with one of the brothers to pick him up. The swami was traveling with two women devotees and swami would not let the ladies ride in the same car with him back to the Temple. Instead, swami made arrangements for the sisters to come all the way out to the airport to pick the ladies up. He knew that he had to set an example, even though he may not have needed it for himself.

Never saying bad things about anyone, he treated everyone with respect and love. Like the ocean that quietly absorbs all the rivers flowing into it, he took on the difficulties of others day and night, yet remained mentally free, established in the Self. Living with him for so long, I never saw him perturbed or lose his profound balance. He was like an anvil, unchanging.

As leader of the Vedanta Society, he had to make many challenging decisions. In this regard, one of his favorite phrases was “let us see”. If there were any problem or complicated issue, he would repeat that phrase and not make an immediate decision. Days or weeks or sometimes even months later he would have the answer and it was almost always the perfect solution. If he had to discipline anyone, he would not yell or raise his voice. Instead he used a quiet surgeon’s scalpel to do the ego-pruning work. Sometimes a simple glance or frown was sufficient to do the job.

Deep down, Swami was an intense devotee of Holy Mother. My room was next to his in the monastery, and many, many times in the middle of the night I would hear him call out “Amma, Amma” even as he slept. He would tell me “take refuge in the Mother.”

My contact with swami has given me the conviction that spirituality is a living reality. I may not have experienced it directly but I know it is real; I used to see its reality every day in swami’s life. The scriptures talk of the “look of grace.” I have seen those eyes of grace in swami, and that look is something I will treasure until my last breath.

ASOKE CHAKLADER

My acquaintance with Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji had been since early 1980s. I cannot remember now when I first met him. But I have a signed copy of the Bhagavat Gita from the late Revered Swami Swananda of the Berkeley Center dated August 8, 1980.

I had been very fortunate to spend with Swami Swananda at the Berkeley Ashrama quite a few times, may be 5 to 7 times, when he was living (almost alone?) with Bill Corcoron. I have a very fond memory of that period when I spent 7 to 10 days each time with Swami Swanandaji at Berkeley during summer of 1980 to 1985, till his departure for India in 1986.

I think Swami Swananda took me to the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco in 1981. We got a ride from one of the devotees of the Berkeley Center. Subsequently, Swami Swananda took me at least twice or it could be three times at Olema Retreat Center during the Interfaith Conference held there and twice to the Santi Ashrama when there had been once a year programme. These trips were done by me alone and Radha was not with me. In addition, we (Radha and I) spent a few days at the San Francisco Ashrama when Swami Prabuddhanandaji accommodated me at the old temple and Radha stayed in a devotee's house with the owner next to the old temple. Recently I found a glass paper-weight in our shrine on which it is inscribed "SWAMI VIVEKANANDA CENENTARY HALL- DEDICATION, Jan. 1, 1996", Vedanta Society - San Francisco. This indicates that we were also present during that celebration. Most likely, we stayed in a motel at the bottom of the hill on the main road during the last event. We also stayed in a motel on Hwy #101 (?) and attended twice the Interfaith conference held at Olema.

In addition, we met Swami Prabuddhanandaji on several occasions both at the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of BC (VVSBC) at Vancouver and also at the Seattle Center of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington. Swami Prabuddhanandaji also

conducted twice our yearly retreat; once at Sechelt, BC (a sea-side resort) and once or twice at the Vivekananda House of VVSBC (Vancouver Vedanta Society). During the second retreat Swamiji explained “Srimat Bhagavatam (Chapter 11- ?) and we had a lot of discussion at the end of the second retreat.

The recollection that I have about of our all encounters with the Swamiji is that he was always in a happy mood and smiling. The photograph we received after the Memorial Service, sent by Swami Tattwamayananda, “a smiling face of the Swamiji”, is exactly as I remember him. I met him during lunch on a number of occasions at his own dinning room upstairs in the new temple, and in Olema, at the new section below the library and at the Santi Ashrama.

Regarding his saintliness, I should recall two valuable lessons I have come across: one in the “Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna” where Thakur quoted “a diamond jeweller only could judge the value of a diamond” and Revered Swami Bhaskaranandaji of the Seattle Center told us, on more than one occasions, that there is no “Saintmeter” and “a saint can judge the saintliness of another saint”. The correctness of these statements can be easily found from the fact how many people recognised Lord Jesus as Avatara or Lord Rama or even Sri Ramakrishna during their life time? Whenever I met swami Prabuddhanandaji I felt he was very content with himself, which reminded me Sri Krishna’s reply to Arjuna’s question in Bhagavat Gita in Chapter 2, Shloka – 55, “Atmani eba atmana tusta”.

I also recall two discussions we had with Swamiji (one) during the Vancouver Vedanta Society retreat “what was meant of the word “Mano-nasha” during meditation. Is it destruction or elimination of mind or dissolution of mind”? Swami Prabuddhanandji quoted from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna “When a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean it disappeared or it got dissolved but not destroyed”. The second one was during a visit to the Santi Ashrama. I do not remember on which trip to the Santi Ashrama this story took place. While going up to the Dhuni Hill(?) I noticed a small

snake (may be 18 to 20 inch long), most likely non-poisonous was suffering badly as someone stepped on it and broke it's spinal cord at the middle. The top part of its body was swaying side to side but it could not move. I felt sad and asked Swami Prabuddhanandaji why the little snake was suffering so much. What prarabdha karma or samskar it had to get such a fate? He replied "it must have done some bad karma in the previous life for which it was in such a state". I was not fully satisfied or could be that I did not understand his answer properly but after reading the 16th Chapter of the Bhagavat Gita I think now that it is possible for a soul to go through a lower form of life, even as an animal, before getting into higher state.

The only thing I vividly recall about our meetings with the Revered Prabuddhanandaji was that it was always a very happy occasion. I am now 87 years old and so I lost quite a bit of old memory with aging.

In our living room on the mantle-piece we keep pictures of the Holy Trinity, Lord Christ, and also Saints and Monks that we have met, loved and respected. We have also one picture of Swami Prabuddhanandaji, (the one sent by Swami Tattwamayanda). We consider Swami Prabuddhanandaji as one of our mentors in our pursuit of spiritual life and we get inspiration from these great Spirits.

SHYAMAL & AMITA BASU

Once in a long while, one may come across someone who leaves a lifelong impression in your mind. Such an event happened to us in 1996 when we met Reverend Swami Prabuddhanandaji for the first time. It was the memorial service for Swami Bhyasyananda of Chicago where almost all the swamis of Ramakrishna Order in the United States were assembled. Although we met several great swamis that day, but only a couple felt like we were meeting our lost mothers again. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was one of them.

We used to live in Iowa at that time and Swami Prabuddhananda was quite far away in San Francisco. But who can stay away from their mother for long? So we made our resolution of visiting him as often as we could. And so it was San Francisco where we visited Swamiji numerous times and also at retreats in Olema and Lake Tahoe. The Lake Tahoe retreat is specially memorable for us considering the serene location on a hilltop with a view of the beautiful lake. The daily get-together at breakfasts, the talks and the walks along the hilly roads will stay in our memories forever. What a festive mood we had for the ten-day period of the retreat. It felt so nice to have the presence of revered Swamiji all the time who was always in a jovial mood.

We made a point to attend as many of Swamiji's retreats as we could at locations outside California also such as Ganges, Michigan and Kansas City, Kansas. Swamiji always had the loving disposition and we felt like we were in company of our mother. Other than the retreats, we felt welcome whenever we called him with questions on our spiritual journey. Swamiji was always able to put our mind to peace and we felt so refreshed after each of our conversations.

There are so many instances of Swamiji's loving nature that come to mind. We will relate just a couple of them here. When we called Swamiji before our first visit to his center, he very patiently and with utmost loving care of a mother advised us how to use the shuttle from the airport to the center emphasizing to give the address of our destination to the temple as "Vallejo Street" and not just "Vallejo" as we could end up in a wrong place altogether. That showed how caring Swamiji was about our welfare. The second incidence took place on the day of our return trip to Iowa. We had an early flight and the shuttle pick-up time was 7 a.m. Swamiji advised us to catch the shuttle from the front of the temple so that he can see us before we left. When we arrived at the temple at 6:45 a.m. we found Swamiji waiting for us with a package in his hand. That was our breakfast that he himself prepared as we did not have time for it in the morning ! That brought tears to our eyes and could only think of our mothers at home, only who would do such a thing.

We will miss our dear Swamiji for the rest of our lives. He is with Thakur now and we are sure he is still bestowing his love from above.

Respectfully submitted by Shyamal & Amita Basu, Saint Petersburg, Florida

SUKH SEHGAL

Swami Ji: Ocean of Grace

It was the early 80s. I met Swami Ji in Harper's Ferry West Virginia after my young son passed away. I was unable to get through this traumatic time. My friend, Sohini, introduced us to Swami Prabuddhananda Ji. When I met Swami Ji, I just cried and cried and cried and told him the tragic story. He said, "You have to learn how to totally surrender to Sri Ramakrishna. You are a brave girl. You are very safe". He gave me three books, one on Holy Mother, one on Sri Ramakrishna and one on Swami Vivekananda. He talked a lot to me about Holy Mother. He said "you concentrate on Holy Mother. Follow her footsteps and you will get the strength. I can see the pain in your eyes". He taught me about Meditation. "Become the master of meditation: How to concentrate on the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and go to the heart". He kept his blessed hand on my head. He taught me how to forgive, how to be kind, and how to be detached. He taught me how to remember how to surrender to Sri Ramakrishna. He gave me fatherly and motherly love. He taught me the message of Sri Krishna and how to realize the Self. He touched me with his Divine grace and made me strong. I have no fear now.

We used to host retreats each summer at our home in Jennerstown, PA. It was a delight for me to cook for Swami Ji. He taught me how to make payash, which is a south Indian version of kheer. Since I am Punjabi, I knew only how to make Kheer, not payash. Swami Ji loved jeera rice and rajma. He loved ginger recipes. One day I made fennel seed and cardamom seed soup. He said, "This must be Punjabi rasam". He loved all types of parathas and green onion and mint chutneys. As I remember those years and write these words, my heart is filled with gratitude and love. Thank you dear Swami Ji. We love you and miss you dearly.

MR. SHIV SEHGAL

The first time Swamiji visited us in Pennsylvania happened to be an experience that stays with me whenever I recall my time with Swamiji. We had just completed our move, relocating from Northern Virginia to Western Pennsylvania, and were planning to host a retreat for the devotees of the Vedanta Center of Washington, DC, at our new house. I remember the very long drive from our home in Jennerstown to the airport in Pittsburgh, Pa. In those times before 9/11, non-passengers were able to go through security at the airport...so we were waiting at the gate for Swamiji to arrive. One passenger, then 2, then 20, etc. Finally Swamiji appeared...what a joyous moment to see Swamiji in person!

As I bent to touch the feet of my guru, I noticed Gopal, who was barely 9 or 10 at the time... looking up at Swamiji...not sure what to do. Swamiji looked down at him, patted him on the head and smiled; and with a gentle nudge from me, Gopal also remembered to touch Swamiji's feet to seek his blessings.

The ride back to Jennerstown seemed to pass very quickly: it was about an hour-and-half almost.

Swamiji stayed with us for several days on that visit, spending time with other devotees and holding a retreat in the basement of our house. We took morning and evening long walks with him alongside the lake and discussed several matters pertaining to spiritual growth and worldly politics. He was very kind, humble and gracious person. He liked the location of our house and liked to roam around the grounds of our land as he would in Olema, CA, sitting under the trees and taking in the mountains of western Pennsylvania. Especially, he very much liked the peaceful environment and the surroundings of our location. Indeed, how fortunate we were to have him with us in those days! Though Swamiji would visit us again in the years to come, the first visit was so special, and it is one that I will never forget.

GOPAL SEHGAL

My comments are a recollection for both Charu & me when we went to visit Swamiji in San Francisco on and around our one year wedding anniversary in 2006.

I remember vividly that it was unseasonably hot when we left Houston, though it was Springtime....when we landed in San Francisco it was actually pleasant, almost calming.

Charu normally does not like to fly---our trip to Hawaii the year before was one where she was very nervous and held my arm tightly; however on this visit she was surprisingly ok.

We arrived into San Francisco late on a Thursday evening, and were scheduled to see Swamiji early the next morning. We were separated for the night---Charu in the women's convent and myself in the men's convent. I remember being concerned for Charu as this was a new experience for her, and I would not be able to talk with her until the next day. But again---as I left her at the door of the women's convent I felt surprisingly at ease in doing so; more than I thought that I might have. I slept peacefully that night in the men's convent -- though there was no fan or air conditioning, the open window brought in the cool bay air and kept me calm throughout the night.

I understood fully the next day how these phenomena came to be. Swamiji greeted us warmly as warmly as the sun greets the earth each morning. No words needed, just the awe inspiring presence he radiated immediately took any hesitation, anticipation, or reservation away with only the twinkle of his eye and the slightest of smile. We spoke for almost 2 hours that morning -- on a variety of topics...life, family, the future, etc. "Gopal---his voiced boomed gently---let go. Take your hands tightly that are always so tight on the wheel of life's car and trust your instincts. Allow what has to happen to happen, and don't try and influence each step before it has a chance to be taken."

The rest of the visit was a blur. We were blessed to have a meal with Swamiji in his quarters and then took part in the Sunday celebration the next morning. On our departure, I had a few last private minutes with Swamiji by myself--- not much was said, other than again the reassurance that I was on the right path, and a promise to return again soon.

Unfortunately for me, soon turned into several years later--- consumed by life, family, work, children, etc. By the time I made it back to San Francisco several years later--- Swamiji's health had deteriorated and it was clear that the end of physical time on this earth for this giant of a man was sooner rather than later in coming. Covered in sadness and remorse, as I sat now again in his office, it only took that very same twinkle of an eye and twist of a smile to remove any angst. How blessed was I?! So fortunate. Again, I was at my guru's dining table, and all he wanted to know was how our family was--- especially young Devika & Ishana – who were both born in the years between my visits. The pictures I shared seemed to remove any pain he was feeling from illness. My smallest gift offered appeared to give my dear Guru some happiness. What an absolute peace this brought to the room--- for one minute, all was as though it was almost 30 years prior when this lion of man, resplendent in bright orange, first made a lasting impression on an 8 year old boy living in northern Virginia. I promised to try and bring both my girls to San Francisco to see him, along with Charu--- as soon as I could make it happen.

Sadly, that was not to be. Swamiji passed away before we could take that trip. My grief was unbounded and my guilt was enormous....and a few months later as I found myself in San Francisco on a layover on the way to China for work... I took the trip to 2323 VallejoStreet--- I never forgot the address. Imagine my surprise – as I anticipated to be overwhelmed with grief and trepidation – instead as I got out of the cab, it was that same calming presence, the same gentle breeze, the same reassurance that I felt all

those years ago. Walking through the darkened halls and sitting in the library, I felt my friend's presence with me. The reassurance. The warmth. The peace. Swamiji had passed away, but yes he was still there. My words with the sisters were few – we shared some memories and laughed a bit. Though no longer with us in person, he will always be with us in spirit. I left with a few tears---but only in fond remembrance more than in utter grief or guilt.

Coming up on a year today, I say to my Guru, my dear friend and mentor--- I miss you. I can't say in enough words, or maybe even in the right words, what a profound impact you had on my formative years.

We didn't talk as much as we should have, or see each other as much as we should have either--- but I always knew...you were with me always, to the end, in my heart. You're still there, in heart and mind, and you always will be. I was fortunate to know you as I did, and blessed to have had you in my life for as long as I did... something my girls will learn about as they grow older. When they are of age they will take that trip to San Francisco with me--- and I will say "this is where a lion amongst men once resided, and blessed those that joined his pride". They will know the love this gentle soul had for his devotees, and will feel his presence for the first time, the same way I still do to this day.

VENKAT MANTHA

Although I knew Swamiji for only 7 years or so, he made an invaluable impact on my life. He initiated me and gave me the secret mantra, and advised me to do the japa every day, and also at other times in the day whenever possible. I found the mantra to be very powerful. Whenever I had problems, I'd talk to him on the phone. He'd greet me in a gentle, singing voice, "how are youuu?!". He'd patiently listen to my problem, and advise me to surrender everything to Sri Ramakrishna. I have no doubt that he too prayed on my behalf, because I found that the problems resolved themselves in due course.

Our annual visits (mine and Geeta's) to the San Francisco temple were special, and we looked forward to them months in advance. He always made sure we had accommodation in his convents. The men's quarters in the old temple was so quiet and peaceful, and the long-timers there made sure I had the basic necessities and comforts—bed sheets, towels, heating, etc. As soon as you entered the new temple, you were greeted by the wonderful fragrance of incense, the calming, peaceful atmosphere, and by the welcoming and cheerful nuns. One felt the presence of God there! We'd meet Swamiji in his office. We'd talk about spiritual and other topics. He always encouraged me to read the Gita. During our visits, he and I and 3 or 4 volunteers would have lunch together. I felt very privileged doing so! I once even cooked – sambar! The kitchen had all the necessary ingredients! I used to help with the dish washing. Once he came into the kitchen and told me about a certain way they washed dishes there. I was familiar with that method because that's how they do in the U.K.

Once, for Guru poornima, we all (Swamiji, the nuns and other swamis) made a day trip to their retreat in Olema, CA. It was a great spiritual experience, consisting of a peaceful atmosphere, spiritual readings and a great lunch! We took back apples grown there. Delicious!

Overall, my association with Swamiji was very spiritually uplifting. I have no doubt that his mantra and teachings will help me a great deal in my quest for God realization. We will miss him tremendously. My only consolation in not being able to physically see him or speak to him, is the thought that he is with Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother happily and permanently.

GEETA SEHGAL MANTHA

Oh, so you have come

"Oh, so you have come", his greeting to me when I made my yearly visits to San Fran

How I miss hearing those words, Swami

You were..

My Father

My Mother

My Guru

My Everything

Your Love, I feel every day through the healing power of your **Mantra**, I was so blessed to have received.

"Do your **Japa** constantly", he used to say.

Japa purifies, heals, restores.

Your gentle hand placed on my head, a direct bolt of energy giving sustenance for another year.

Now, one year has passed since you left us.

Who will place their hand on my head, Swami?

I haven't cried since your passing, but I weep today as I write these words.

I surrender to **Meditation** you so lovingly taught me at the age of 12

I can quiet the mind, IF I practice your words.

"Feel the Mother's presence", you used to say.

Kali Ma, for there are NO words to describe her Love and Leelas

"Don't be foolish and let Maya engulf you"

"Don't be foolish and think you are the doer"

"Oh...the web of confusion created by Ego"

"Surrender, Surrender, Surrender"

"You are foolish to take on the burden of the world"

"When you truly surrender, feel the Grace and Light"

“Feel Her Presence”

“You have a friend, helping you with every step you take”

“Learn to receive Her Grace”

Mantra, Japa, Meditation

Your gifts are priceless, Swami

May we always remember

May we always practice

May we be of service to the world

May we live by your example

This is how I have chosen to cope.

I don't know if the tears will one day leave

With each teardrop, I remember you face, your orange robe, your quiet presence, your smile...

Who will now say to me, “Oh, so you have come”?

Love you Swami!

BUDDHADEV GUHA

Here are some of my fondest and loving memories of our beloved and Most Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj:

Jai Ramakrishna

About twenty years ago, I had the first blessed opportunity to meet Revered Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj at the Toronto airport. As I recall vividly, Maharaj arrived on a Thursday evening from San Francisco for a weekend retreat starting on Friday. My job was simply to drive Revered Pramathanandaji Maharaj, the head of the Vedanta Society of Toronto at the time to pick up Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj.

I never met him before nor did I have any communication until then. I have had been to San Francisco many times in the past yet never visited the Northern California Vedanta centre. No sooner Maharaj arrived, an elderly man, sweet and peaceful looking Sadhu of our Ramakrishna Order, I made the customary pranam to him. He gently patted my back as I bowed down to him. It felt nice and soothing! Swami Pramathananda introduced me to Maharaj as Buddhadev, a young man who lives in our centre.

Immediately Swami Prabuddhananda gently laughed and then commented that instead of myself bowing down to Maharaj, Maharaj should bow down to me since I was named after Lord Buddha. Maharaj said pranam Buddhadev! I found this rather amusing and slightly embarrassing. Nonetheless it broke the ice of our first visit to say the least. I said Maharaj, my grandmother gave me this name but my mother calls me "Buddhu (fool)". In my amazement Maharaj replied that every person is named after their innate qualities and purposes in life. We have no authority to deny it. I couldn't quite comprehend what he meant by that except it sounded very deep and genuine.

That weekend I was supposed to go away camping with my University friends but I

decided to stay back. I am sure Swami Prabuddhanandaji's holy presence had something to do with it. Swami Pramathanandaji Maharaj was also very happy since I always avoided large gatherings of devotees and formal celebrations. During Maharaj's stay I enjoyed noticing that Swami was a man of very few words rather a great observant and a listener. At the onset, I somehow understood his tremendous sensitivity and eye contacts were enough to communicate his thoughts. This suited me just fine with my own temperament.

I recall throughout that retreat weekend Swami was extremely busy with many devotees whom he knew long back....engaged in spiritual interviews, lectures, small talks etc. etc. As per Swami Pramathanandaji's instruction my job was to serve Swami.... cleaning his room, arranging his breakfast, lunch and dinner etc. etc.....the usual domesticated chores which I was familiar with. But whenever it was time to eat...apparently Swami Prabuddhananda would ask for me by saying where is Buddha....how can I have I meal without Buddhadev! Swam Pramathananda would laugh and reply that Buddha usually avoids eating with the Swamis and guests. But this time I had no choice...I would sheepishly and reluctantly join them.

The following Monday after the retreat once again I took Swami to the Toronto airport for his return back to San Francisco. At the airport Maharaj told me that Buddha,,please come and see me at our centre and stay for few days.....May Shri Ramakrishna Bless you...pranam Lord Buddha(patting my back). Swami Pramathananda interjected and said he doesn't like going anywhere, I have asked him many times before. I simply kept quiet.

This is how it all began my uncanny and spritual relationship with Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj.

After our first meeting Swami had come to our Toronto centre many times and every

time I was there to pick him up and drop him off at the airport. I would always make sure that I took holidays from my work so I can serve him. Nothing to ask.....nothing to converse.....except just be near him. Similarly he would call upon me as Buddha...where is Buddha during food time or whenever he needed some mundane chores to be fulfilled. All the other times I would avoid him and scamper away.

I would often notice that upon Swami's arrival many devotees would gather like bunch of wildebeests on a fruited plane to have interviews with him. Swami Pramathananda would patiently try to arrange it all. One night after everyone left, I asked Swami Prabuddhanandji Maharaj, "Maharaj, what do people ask in these countless interviews". He laughingly replied, what interview Buddhadev... they do all the talking and I do the listening...sometimes I even fall asleep but I really shouldn't.....Householders have so many struggles yet they still manage to come Guru Maharaj...you are blessed to be Buddhadev...what will you understand...now please warm up some Rasam for me. It was rather late at night. But I remember Swami never turned down a hot cup of Rasam.

I remember in another occasion Swamiji was in Toronto for some spiritual festivity. After all the hoopla ended, late at night, Swami Pramathananda and Swami Prabuddhananda were sitting across from each other in our inner monastic office. My room was adjacent to the office. I took leave from the both of them around 11:00pm. All of a sudden, I heard Swami Pramathananda speaking in Bengali. This raised my curiosity since Swami Prabuddhananda wasn't a Bengali. So I got up and noticed that Swami Pramathananda is speaking in Bengali and Swami Prabuddhananda sitting across the table dozing off. I found it very funny and told them both that may be they should get some rest besides Swami Pramathananda is speaking Bengali...How can you understand Maharaj?...At once Swami Prabuddhananda replied that when it comes to discussing our beloved Guru..Revered Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj...language doesn't matter, it's a universal feeling of joy. Do you know Buddhadev we are both initiated by Swami Virajananda? I already knew who Swami Virajananda was but not the latter

part, then again I was too tired to have any further conversation with the Swamis. Afterwards I went to bed thinking how simple, how guileless, how spiritually connected are two Gurubhais. No humbug...no fancy, just pure love and joy for their Guru.

In 2003, August 12th, Swami Pramathanandaji Maharaj left his mortal body for Ramakrishna Loka. Needless to mention it left an indelible void in my life. Few months later Swami Prabuddhdanandaji Maharaj came to Toronto for his memorial event. I was rather somber and disengaged from everything. The very first night of his stay while I was in his room, Maharaj very sweetly said...Buddhadev...I understand what you are going through. No one is immune from such events and struggles....not even Shri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji....they also grieved when their loved one passed away.....that's why keep doing your japam and follow the Holy Trio's teachings....you will be okay and call me sometimes..even better come to San Francisco.

After Swami Pramathanandaji's passing, Swami Kripamayananda was deputed to take charge of our Toronto centre. Five years after garnering his US Visa, we both decided to visit the San Francisco centre....mainly Swami Prabuddhdanandaji Maharaj. It was an unofficial visit...yet Maharaj welcomed both of us with great enthusiasm over the phone. I am the one who called him since Kripamayananda didn't know him. What I found so dismaying that when we landed at the San Francisco airport around 9:00pm local time, Maharaj himself was waiting by the luggage area to receive us. I had tears in my eyes...it was shocking but heavenly for me. I said right away, Maharaj, you shouldn't have... he replied, who wouldn't come to receive Lord Buddha and a brother monk! Kripamayanandaji Maharaj was rather shocked and embarrassed and didn't know what to say considering he was so much junior to Maharaj.

Once Swami Kripamayananda and myself were late picking up Swami Prabuddhdanandaji Maharaj from the Toronto airport for an unforeseen reason. Since

Swami had no cell phone, we could not communicate with him. Both of us were very angst and deeply embarrassed. Once we got to the airport, we saw Swami Prabuddhananda quietly sitting in the waiting area. It must have been at least 40 minutes. No sooner he saw us..he got up with full of smile and eagerly approached us, we both bowed down to him and simultaneously started to apologize for our lateness. Swami instantly patted us in our backs, laughed and said it's alright...this things happen and softly mentioned that he sent a letter of complaint to Thakur.....I jokingly asked Maharaj, what did Thakur say, Swami replied, Thakur said, "I should always longingly wait to meet Buddhaddev and Murari (pre monastic name of Swami Kripamayananda)". We were both stunned by Swami's sweet and innocent humour and also felt a sense of relief.

About ten years ago while being in Toronto for our summer retreat, Swami Prabuddhananda fell rather ill all of a sudden. His condition was rather serious and needed to be hospitalized in the middle of the night. But without informing anyone when his illness first began, he silently endured excruciating pain and suffering throughout the weekend till the retreat was over. Only then he informed me late on Sunday night that he wasn't feeling well...a grand understatement to say the least. I was very shocked and saddened. He didn't even want to inform Swami Kripamayananda in the beginning. I went to the hospital with him and he remained there over three nights including one night in Emergency. I stayed with him throughout his ordeal. He didn't want any visitor during his stay not even Kripamayananda. He also instructed not to inform San Francisco until all the test results came back and he had a chance to speak to the doctor. He simply didn't want to worry anyone unnecessarily.

Swami Kripamayananda and myself were amazed to witness his steady wisdom even in the midst of all chaos, his care and consideration for others, being calm and collective yet jovial and sweet....detached from the body....a true "Sthita Pragnya", a great spiritual soul indeed!!

Throughout his stay in the hospital, Swami would frequently ask me to read from the Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna, Bhagavad Gita and Meditation and Spiritual Life by Swami Yatiswarananda . Then he would comment afterwards. We would also perform Japams. In the evening he would ask me to sing Khandana, Sarva Mangala and other holy songs. Although Swami and myself were alone in a private room for over 72 hours, I never felt any provocative urgency to ask him any spiritual question. I was simply in cloud nine just to be near him. Despite his illness, Swami did all the talking and I simply listened with rapt wonderment. He talked about various private matters such as his pre monastic life, family, education, joining the order, coming to the West and his personal experiences with many senior monks of our Order especially Swami Yatiswarananda etc. etc. Needless to mention that those three days with Swami were one of my most satisfying spiritual experience without doing a thing.

I would often call Swami in his personal line at San Francisco just to convey my pranam to him. If Swami wasn't there, I would simply leave a message. Amazingly enough, he would always call back at his earliest convenience with great joy and eagerness. He would always inquire about our Toronto Ashrama, Swamis and devotees well being. There is something to be said about his prodigious memory. Last but not least, he would sweetly ask me, when is Lord Buddha coming to San Francisco? I would say Swami, I don't want to bother you. He would jokingly reply, then please don't come if you don't want to bother me. We would both have a hearty laugh. The entire conversation would last no more than two minutes but I would walk away deeply immersed in happiness.

Later on as Swami's health was slowly deteriorating, Swami Kripamayananda and myself would visit him frequently in San Francisco. He would always welcome us with open arms. By then Swami had moved to the downstairs room across from the kitchen. Despite having a special diet, Swami would still come to the dinner table to be with us.

Later on, in his room I would privately nag him not to bother with formalities anymore. But Swami would strongly say that he wants to do death in active just like Thakur, Maa and Swamiji never led quiet lives. Then he would pat my back and say several times, 'It's like that'!

One of his favourite story he would often highlight is from the Mahabharata where Arjuna became the winner amongst his peers in a prestigious archery competition because he only managed to see the eye of the bird and should it down, not all it's surroundings. I heard Swami say many times, Be like Arjuna and as Drona would say, 'Pariksha Lokan'...be aware...be aware!! just the way Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj lived his own life.

About two months before Swami's passing away, I once again came to San Francisco to see him. I also brought an young man from Toronto who was on his way to Belur Math to join the Order hence I thought he would be nice for him to get Swami's blessings. Despite his health being quite frail, Swami welcomed the young man with a wide smile, gave him few words encouragement and told him to be fearless. He said, do not worry about anything, Thakur, Maa and Swamiji will guide you the way and take care of you. Be proud that you are going to be a monk and dedicate your life for Thakur's cause.

Next day, Swami had a doctor's appointment. When he got back around lunch, I went to his room to see him. He gently lifted his head and nodded towards me but didn't say anything. I made pranam and sat near his wheel chair. He was deeply absorbed into something. Over 30 minutes passed, but Swami remained silent.

Then all of a sudden he gently started saying, " BUDDHADEV, YOU SEE, BACK IN MY DAYS OUT OF 800 MILLION PEOPLE IN INDIA, SHRI RAMAKRISHNA CHOSE THIS BODY(HE TOUCHED HIS HEART) TO DO HIS WORK. WHAT MORE CAN I SAY!! HOW MUCH MORE BLESSED CAN A MAN BE!!! I AM VERY SATISFIED BUDDHADEV! VERY LUCKY. MY GREATEST SALUTATIONS TO SHRI RAMAKRISHNA, HOLY MOTHER AND SWAMIJI. I AM READY WHENEVER THEY

ARE. HE FOLDED HIS HANDS AND CLOSED HIS EYES. KEEP WELL LORD BUDDHA!! THEN HE PAUSED FOR ABOUT A MINUTE AND SWEETLY ASKED 'HAVE HAD YOUR LUNCH?'

I knew I had to get out of the room before I burst into tears. Swami must have knew so he kindly gave me an out and told me to have lunch. No sooner I got out of the room, I simply couldn't contain myself but also realized that most likely this will be the last time I will see Swami in mortal body and hear those pure and sweet name calling, 'Buddhadev, Lord Buddha'. I also thought how blessed can Buddhadev be!!!!

My Sastango pranam over and over again at the feet of our beloved and Most Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj. My Choicest thanks to Maharaj for allowing me in his life. I remain in his debt.

May Thakur, Ma and Swamiji bless us all.

MERYL STEINBERG

Swami Prabuddhananda had a terrifically wry sense of humor. In 2006, I met with Swami as I was preparing to move from Santa Rosa to San Francisco to be closer to the temple. Swami wanted me to have a car so I bought a 1998 Chevy Prism from a friend. A good buy. I was pleased. When I told Swami about it he asked, “How much?” “28” I replied. “28,000?” he queried. “Oh no, Swami, I don’t have that much money. It was 2800.” He remained thoughtfully silent and then we moved on to another topic. At the end of the darshan, I followed him out the door and stood silently watching as Swami turned the handle of the door to head outside to the monastery. Suddenly he stopped, turned around and said: “Did it come with tires?”

It still brings a big smile to my face.

PRAVRAJIKA ANANTAPRANA
VEDANTA CONVENT, SAN FRANCISCO

(Presented at Swami Prabuddhananda's Memorial Service)

We're lucky Americans that Swami Vivekananda blessed us with his presence and philosophy, and we're especially lucky that the monks of his Order come and live among us. Swami Prabuddhananda is one of these monks. We got the ineffable benefit of his holy company – some of us for many years – but even one-time encounters benefitted many people. Swami Adbhutananda, Latu Maharaj, told his listeners, "If one remains always in the company of the holy, desires disappear and one's mind becomes pure."

This goal demands struggle and experience, but the easiest way to get there is to have a vivid, living example in our midst. We considered Swami Prabuddhananda as the embodiment of calm, measured decision-making. When any of us presented difficulties to him, there was always a pause. Sometimes, a long pause. In fact, he often made that suggestion: "Pause." We could call it the theme of his life and work. His counsels showed the liveliest psychological insight – transcending that of a learned psychiatrist, because his perception was immersed in the most profound awareness of divine reality.

I've asked some of our Sunday School graduates and devotees for their stories of Swami's guidance, and you'll hear how universal our experiences were.

The young people felt that Swami seemed to have a penetrating view into their states of mind. Here are some of their statements:

"It felt to me as if Swami knew when I was having problems and always enquired, 'How is everything?' It was heartwarming to talk to him and I felt at peace in his presence. At times, listening to his words, I felt all my problems were solved and I didn't need to bring them up."

Another graduate said, “Swami was understanding and kind, as well as wise and peacefully strong. His answers, no matter how complex or multifaceted our questions might be, were beautifully simple. Once in a while he would close his eyes for a short time before he spoke. His responses were concise and yet took every aspect of the question into consideration. Sometimes with a smile and very quick answer to a seemingly hard question, his reply would instantly bring an ease over the room. From the first time I met him when I was six and he smiled and patted me on the forehead until the last time I saw him, Swami Prabuddhananda will always be my father and mother.”

A grown-up graduate remembers the discussions with Swami in what is now the child care area. She said, “He would meet with the older kids and his presence was just so mesmerizing. We would be quiet and listen intently. We could ask him whatever we wanted based on an agreed-upon topic. He would eventually always pick on the quietest person (me), nod, and say, ‘What do you think?’ Then I would have to come up with a clever question or comment. I and everyone else wanted to impress Swami. He always had such a warm presence and we could tell how much he loved us just by the way he looked at us.”

One of the boys remembers how Swami would review the Sunday school plays. He said, “Even if our rehearsals hadn’t been going well, everyone would put on their best show when he was watching. Swami then gave us detailed criticism—very direct and exacting. You might think he would sugarcoat his criticism in the presence of young kids, but he was honest and wanted to bring out the best in everyone. He taught me a lesson at a young age: you can always do better. He not only inspired the kids of the Sunday School, but the entire Vedanta Society.”

Another graduate remembers that when appealed to in a dilemma, Swamiji consistently gave the advice, “Go straight to the Lord.”

One of the boys said, "As a kid I was so impressed by Swami's words and the aura he had around him. I even asked him, 'Are you God?' I requested a set of ochre cloths but instead Swami gave me one of his ochre caps. I've always cherished it."

For the parents seeking Swami's help, his attentive listening and being fully present were equally evident. Here are some of those memories:

"Swami Prabuddhananda had come to our house when my daughter was five years old. I asked Maharaj a question about how will I raise my child in this different American system when I do not know anything of this culture. I am worried. He looked at me intently for thirty to forty seconds. Then he said, 'As a parent, your responsibility is to put up fences so that the cows and goats don't eat the plant. You must give water and proper nutrition and make sure that the plant has sufficient light. This is your responsibility. But do not try to turn a peach tree into a mango tree. Everyone is needed in this world; everyone is beautiful.' What he said made such a deep impression on me. I practiced his advice when I raised her, and I had very little trouble."

And the daughter remembers: "I distinctly remember Ma telling me this when I was a teenager. I was feeling upset that my personality was so different from my mother's and what came naturally to her was totally foreign to me. Then she told me, 'Can an orange tree ever be a lemon tree? You should try to be the best orange possible.' I can still remember how much comfort it gave me. Periodically I repeated that to myself: 'Be the best orange ever,' and felt so relieved that I didn't have to force myself to be a lemon."

Another mother has this account: "Since our daughter was very young, we didn't really have many worries about her, but in various ways we would constantly ask Swami how to bring her up. His answer always was: 'Follow the spiritual path sincerely and set an example. She will learn more by watching you than by what you tell her. Children are very good observers and know if you are doing something

sincerely or not.’ Also we were concerned that without ourselves having spiritual realization, how we could guide our daughter’s spiritual understanding? Swami said: ‘It will be too late if you wait for spiritual realization to guide your daughter. Read, contemplate, and understand the scriptures for yourselves. Talk about spiritual matters between the two of you and she will automatically pick them up. Answer her questions, keeping her age in mind.’ Swami would also constantly say: ‘Do your best, but always keep in mind that she will have her own samskaras. What you do for her is not the exclusive factor in molding her life.’”

Swami’s reminding us about samskaras is reassuring. As we all know, the world’s best parents can bring up good kids, but some kids, in spite of all the parents’ efforts, never live up to their expectations.

All of us remember that Swami invariably asked about our well-being whenever we met him. One mother said, “Swami always had the same question whenever I did pranams: ‘Hello, how are you? How is your family?’ Every time. It was so nice to talk to him and his inquiry would make me feel that there are no problems in life. Whenever I mentioned anything that concerned me regarding my son, he would smile and say, ‘He is still growing. Talk to him, explain, do your part, and leave the rest to Mother.’” “Easy for you to say, Swami,” I would tell him. “But when will he learn?” “All in time, he will get it.” On Sunday, then, Swami would follow up and tell my son what to do, or ask why he was not doing something.”

Swami seemed to approach every problem with a completely fresh slate. One could never guess what his advice would be, yet, as soon as he spoke, one could see the wisdom in his words. For a while in the ‘90s, young men favored single earrings, and some boys tormented their mothers by piercing their ears and showing up bedangled. When the mothers appealed to Swami, possibly expecting his concern, he would say, “I, too, had an earring once.”

One young devotee decided to join her classmates working at a casino for the summer vacation time. Her mother was naturally distressed about this. She went to Swami Prabuddhananda with her mind in turmoil, but when she told him the story, his face remained totally unchanged, completely calm. He reassured her that everything would be all right. She went away realizing that she had churned her thoughts into a froth, and his calmness gave her mind peace.

We see illustrated here what he meant when he advised, “Act – don’t react.” That’s a mantra for serious study. The first part of the advice: “act,” sounds more like the pause advice: take an action after careful consideration of all possible outcomes.

The Katha Upanisad verse says, “When all the knots of the heart are cut asunder, then the mortal becomes immortal, even in this world. This is the supreme teaching of Vedanta.” We all know too well about the knots of the heart. Just consider how amazing it is to know someone whose heart is free and open, and who is ever delighted to help us free our hearts as well. When any of us went to him with our agonizing problems, he was able to soothe and support us in just a few words. One of our friends had been working hard at the Memorial Day program, all the time feeling like her skills and ability were woefully inadequate. The following day at Olema she was taking a walk and encountered Swami on the road. He was just standing there, almost as if he were waiting for her. She poured out her anguish to him, and he said, “You see, in work, the intent of the heart is what matters. All other things are secondary. You have done very well, and next time you will do even better.”

A devotee asked Swami one day, “How does one know the will of God?” He paused, and then said, “Place the issue before God. Do not do anything to make it happen or not make it happen. Slowly things fall away so that you will not have any other choice but one.”

One of my young friends met Swami when she moved to the Bay area in 2007. She remembers that he was very welcoming and warm from the start. She said, “He was

always open for one-to-one meetings to hear my spiritual questions and problems and always supported me wholeheartedly. After I told him about a crisis in a personal relationship, he became more caring, loving and fatherly. He must have sensed my loneliness and struggle to find my ground.”

One of the things Swami did from the first was to do himself what he was asking others to do. At Olema he was seen using the chainsaw with another monk hovering behind him, and he would help prepare for the Memorial Day retreat, raking leaves and working one of the cranks for putting up the tent, wearing gleaming, school-bus yellow gloves. He helped with temple phone duty and prepared a special offering for every temple celebration. He liked to cook – he was the monastery cook on Fridays – and one time said he had made spaghetti. It turns out one of my friends had made the sauce for him, but he did boil the noodles!

Working parents have their own conflicts. One of our temple volunteers has a demanding day job, and needed to hire someone to help with housekeeping. She felt guilty that she couldn’t do everything herself, but Swami told her, “Why don’t you look at it this way, you’ve given employment to another person.”

Swami Prabuddhananda tried to make us see that all are, as he put it, “estimable people.” He would say, “Keep in mind people are changing all the time for the better. Remember that behind everybody, as well as your self, is the larger self, the real Self.”

I’d like to end with a comment Swami made when we were preparing to take our final vows: “Nothing is an issue – God alone and his service is the thing.”

SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDENTS, GRADUATES, PARENTS AND FRIENDS:

Swami in capsule:

SHAKTI/YUKTI

- Pause
- Everything is bhiksha
- Long silences in interviews
- Offer chances – don't bring up the past
- Available every day – “on call” literally
- Non-punitive
- Held the convent together – found ways to keep 20+ monastics constantly busy
- If you wait long enough, many problems go away
- Nothing is an issue – God alone and his service is the thing
- Never reacted. Told us: act – don't react
- Manage somehow

KUNAL PAI-DHUNGAT

I have lots of memories of him. He was always such a big part of our lives. I think the main part was how kind he was. It was his quite thoughtfulness that I appreciated. He also always had a good story to tell.

TRINA CHAUDHARI

[When ask to say something about Swami] Oh man, tall order I do have thoughts though. And, I agree, it seemed that every time that Chirag or I were worried about something he would address the topic and we would look at each other and laugh!

ARUN GUPTA

I can tell you some nuggets he taught me when I was younger (and later read about with Vivekandanda)

1. Work for the sake of work, not for money or gain
2. Try to learn in everything you do, even negative experiences
3. You can only control yourself and your own mind (practice this through meditation and self diagnosis/analysis)
4. Everyone has good inside them, it's like a rock that reveals a statue within.

DR. RADHA IVATURI

He was intensely practical even while touching the spiritual heights. What left a mark on me was his demonstration of self effort and surrender. Even till the very end he went along the efforts in the empirical plane even while his mind was totally absorbed in mother. I asked him one day how does one know what is the will of the God ?

He said place the issue before God. Do not do anything to make it happen or not make it happen. Slowly things fall away such that you will not have any other choice but one. This is so even with daily activities as well. "

His wisdom pierced through the cover ups and went straight to the heart of the matter.

PRANAV PRABHAKAR

Swami's presence was hard to describe—a presence that does not come from reading books. He was the example of a true leader and was charismatic. You believed whatever he said. I first met him when I was five years old. Just want to clarify, I remember him from when I was five years old, but from birth, he has been a presence in

my life. Even at that young age I could feel his presence. Also Swami was an excellent teacher. Most teachers constantly praise the children whether the kids are right or wrong. Swami truly wanted to see all succeed, but wasn't afraid to be honest. He not only inspired the kids of Sunday school, but the entire Vedanta Society. He had a really great memory, and always took the time to inquire about my life and all family members with great interest and full attention right down to the last detail. Swami was more of a mother than a father. He was very caring. He always made sure you had something to eat as prasad before you left. He truly cared for the well being of his devotees.

DR. KIDDOOR BHAT

Reminiscences of Late Sw. Prabuddhanandaji

1. Introduction:

The year was March 1990. My late wife Nalini and I had worked in the City of Thompson in the Northern part of the Province of Manitoba in Canada. We have been working at the Thompson General Hospital (Nalini as an Obstetrician & Gynecologist, and myself as a General Surgeon) from September 1973 to October 1989. We both were (as most educated people in South India would generally) quite familiar about the spiritual lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. But, in our case, getting involved with the activities of a Vedanta Society was virtually out of question. Both our professional work involved frequent emergency surgeries, and there were no Vedanta Societies or similar spiritual institutions nearby.

The likes and dislikes for Nalini and I were almost identical, and it worked beautifully for us. Our summer holidays were almost always in nature — far away from crowded cities and the holiday resorts. Even as a teenager in India, one of my prayers was: “Dear Lord, Please take me somewhere that is less crowded, less hot and less humid”.

Arriving in Canada, the vastness of the uncrowded landscape consisting mostly of mountains, valleys, waterfalls, lakes and prairie lands was an instant hit. It took us only six months to decide that Canada was going to be our permanent home.

In one year after arriving in Canada, we drove from Thompson, Manitoba to the city of Vancouver on the West Coast. At that time (in one year after arriving in Canada) the drive from the Rocky Mountains to the West Coast through the scenic province of British Columbia, made us decide that we would be retiring eventually somewhere on the West Coast of Canada. In 1982 we bought the five-acre oceanfront property in the town of Sechelt, on the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia, just a short distance away from the city of Vancouver separated by a 40-minute ferry ride.

Now a description of the unique nature of the city of Thompson in the Province of Manitoba, Canada, and the people of Thompson is essential to get the proper ambience in this article. Manitoba is to the north across the border from North Dakota. Winnipeg is the Capital City with a population of around 700,000. Thompson is the third largest city in the province of Manitoba, and is 500 miles north of the city of Winnipeg — a drive of about 8 hours. The road meanders between the countless freshwater lakes, with occasional clusters of birch trees and cottonwood. The official count of the total numbers of lakes in the province of Manitoba is just over 100,000 — all connected by small channels, rivers and streams. About 42 percent of the province is composed of fresh water lakes. There are several hydro dams around and in the neighborhood of the city of Thompson, and the main employer was the International Nickel (INCO) mine.

I was 36 year old (and Nalini 33-year-old) when we first arrived in Thompson in 1973 to work. Since the mine was by far the main employer, I had only 8 patients older than me. All the women were of childbearing age, and needless to say Nalini was the busiest among the 18 doctors we had in town. Nalini had delivered 7 babies in one 24-hour period, of which 3 were by Caesarian Section. Other than the routine surgical work like hernia, gall bladder, my surgical emergencies consisted of surgical removal of appendix, intestinal obstruction, road accidents, and mine accidents. I also used to receive many Canadian and American patients with accidental gunshot wounds and other injuries they suffered during their fishing and hunting expeditions in the north, and even a patient with severe multiple-organ injuries due to an unforeseen entanglement with a mother polar bear and the cub in the town of Churchill (the polar bear capital of the world), on the shore of Hudson Bay.

The winters were of course very cold, but it was bright and sunny almost 365 days of the year, with blue skies and white clouds. Summers were warm and even hot. Anyone who went to Thompson for a job went with an idea of working for a couple of years, and then move on to some place where it is warmer. But, curiously, even after fifteen years not even one has left the town. The people were all very friendly and helping to

each other (like people in remote communities generally are). Within six months of arriving in Thompson, Nalini and I were absolutely inundated (in a nice and enjoyable way) with our work and responsibilities. We didn't feel any need to leave. Patients were very thankful and fully appreciative of what we were doing. A heart-to-heart connection with the patients was of the paramount importance for both Nalini and I. Needless to say, the job satisfaction was great and we didn't want to leave.

2. October 22, 1989 – The Shocking News about Nalini's health

Then came the shocking news about Nalini's health. On October 22, 1989 following a dental appointment Nalini developed a large hematoma under her left jaw. A blood test showed she has been suffering from a condition called "Polycythemia Rubra Vera". In nonmedical terms that means the bone marrow was producing excess of red cells – more than twice the normal, which makes the blood thick as toothpaste. Nalini had excessive energy and showed hardly any symptoms except tendency for sudden bleeding. Though she felt well, these were indicators of catastrophe waiting just around the corner.

Though we both loved to be in nature, while we were in our profession, there was no way we could take time off and spend any time together. That made us take one of the wisest decisions ever in our entire lives. We both decided to quit our professional practices in two weeks from the date of her diagnosis. The decision shocked the whole community, but they were very empathetic too.

After undergoing the immediate emergency treatment for Nalini, we decided to visit our families in India and get them familiar with her condition, and then come to Canada to settle down at the home and property in the town of Sechelt we had bought in 1982. While in India, we visited the Ramakrishna ashrama in Bangalore and in Mysore, and had discussion with the Swamis in charge of the Centres. The specific purpose of these meetings were this: During our retired lives from now on, we wanted

to get close to the spiritual teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda.

It was from the Mysore Ashrama that we obtained the list of all the Vedanta Societies along the West Coast of Canada and USA, and the Swamis in charge of each center. Swamiji also mentioned about the Vedanta Society in San Francisco, and Swami Prabuddhanandaji in charge of the Ashrama in particular.

3. Visiting the Vedanta Centers along the West Coast of US

By the end of February 1990 Nalini and I had returned from India, and had reached the West Coast of Canada and briefly settled at our home in Sechelt. We already had a list of all the Vedanta Centers and the swamis in charge on the West Coast of USA. We were eager to visit all these places and people.

Soon after getting settled in our new home in the town of Sechelt (new for us, but the home was about 13-year-old), Nalini and I rented a motorhome from Vancouver, and set out on our journey to visit all the Vedanta Societies along the West Coast of United States. Our first stop was Seattle. Sw. Avikarananda (Ben Ciamaichella at that time) saw the motorhome pulling over in front of the Vedanta Society, and an Indian couple getting out of it. When he saw us walking towards the building, he introduced himself and led us to the presence of Swami Bhaskaranandaji, the Head of the Centre. It is interesting to mention here that Ben later on told us that he was surprised to see an Indian couple getting out of the motorhome, because it is not often that he saw people from India holidaying in a motorhome.

It was in the library (outside the chapel) that Nalini and I met Sw. Bhaskaranandaji for the first time. Swamiji was all set and ready to leave on a road trip for his monthly visit to the Vivekananda Vedanta Society in Vancouver. Our Society in Vancouver was officially registered in 1978, but the Society didn't have an official independent venue

for its activities. The monthly meetings were conducted in a rented community center in the city. After our pranams, Swami Bhaskaranandaji welcomed us warmly, and also explained to us about the Society in Vancouver and the charter members and devotees to contact if we wished to get involved with the activities of the Society. After this brief (but very informative) conversation, swami Bhaskaranandaji left for Vancouver.

After some coffee, tea and refreshments, Nalini and I were on the road again. Our next stop was the Vedanta Society of Portland. Sw. Aseshanandaji was the swami in charge at that time. A couple of hours before we were to reach Portland Centre, we pulled over and I phoned the Centre to speak to someone to let them know that we would like to meet Swami Aseshanandaji if that was convenient. Late Mr. Bush was the devotee who answered the phone. Mr. Bush told me on the phone that Swami Aseshanandaji was in his shower, and swamiji wanted me to wait on the phone, because he wanted to speak to me in person. Swamiji had a long talk with me on the phone and said he would be waiting for us.

From the Mysore Centre, as well as from Seattle, we had the information that Sw. Aseshanandaji was the direct disciple of the Holy Mother and the spiritual greatness that brought to him. Swamiji was very motherly, warm and kind to us, and made us very welcome. We pranaamed Swamiji, had tea and snacks and promised we would be visiting the center in future, and continued on our journey towards San Francisco.

After an overnight stay en route, we reached San Francisco around noon the next day.

4. The First Visit with Sw. Prabuddhanandaji

Our first visit to the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco — as far as I can remember — was in early March. When we arrived at the temple, parking for the motorhome was a problem. But, Swamiji had asked one of the member and devotee to come and help us. Not only that. That particular gentleman took us around in his car

first to the old temple and showed us into the room where we were going to stay over. The location of the old temple and the steep climb in the motorhome to the location of the new temple was rather unnerving at first in a new city, but very soon we got over it, and I became comfortable negotiating our way around.

Soon after we got settled in our room at the old temple, we were taken to the room where Swamiji normally interviews the new visitors. Swamiji asked us many details about our family and childhood, our connection to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda. Coming from the same province in India and speaking the same language it was very comforting to get to know Swamiji. At his request, we narrated the whole story about how from a very busy Surgical and Obstetrics Medical career, suddenly we decided to retire and take up a life connected with spirituality.

Swamiji also asked us how we got interested in the values of Ramakrishna Mission. Of course, in our school curriculum in South India the children learn about the Ramakrishna Mission at an early stage. But with Nalini and I there were two incidents worth mentioning. We narrated these to Swamiji.

Every student in the Elementary and High schools in South India knew about “Sharada Printing Press” on the Car Street, in the city of Mangalore in our district. An outdoor field trip to visit the Sharada Printing Press and help the students learn where and how their textbooks are printed is always an exciting event. I was in one of those trips too. I was under the impression that the word “Sharada” referred to Goddess Saraswathi. Later in our class we were learning from a textbook about the different religions and incarnations India is home to. Sri Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammad and Vardhaman Mahavir were included in that. While taking class about Sri Ramakrishna, my teacher mentioned that the Sharada Printing Press on Car Street Mangalore was named after the Holy mother Sri Sarada Devi.

In Nalini's case, it happened in a different way. She visited the Sharada Printing Press on one of her school field trips when she was about 10-year-old. The staff took the children through the press and showed and explained to them how the printing was done. Later the students were just getting on to the school bus for the return trip. Nalini had noticed the photo of a lady on the wall next to the table where the manager of the press was sitting. Nalini was impressed by the spiritual appearance of the lady in the photo. So, Nalini asked her teacher who was the lady in that photo. The teacher suggested to Nalini to get down from the bus, walk to the office and ask the manager herself. The manager was surprised, and with great love and tenderness he explained to Nalini (in a language appropriate to her age) about the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.

Incidentally, founded in 1900, the Sharada Press in Car Street Mangalore is a household name, and a family-owned company. It is still going strong and very prosperous and operating at the same original site. It was very comforting to have these conversations with Sw. Prabuddhanandaji during our early introductory meeting.

We also told Swamiji about our visit to Mysore Ashrama from where we got all the details of the Centres along the West Coast of United States. Swamiji gave us a very detailed description of the Society and the retreat facility at Olema in Marin County. The devotee (our guide) took us to the shrine and the gardens and the book store. We had food with the other devotees there in the dining room.

Later, during our second visit to San Francisco we were taken to a sightseeing tour of the Marin County and the Olema Retreat. We had also attended retreats in Olema three times — twice it was just Nalini and I and the last one was when I was visiting the San Francisco Society accompanying Swami Sridharanandaji from Sydney Australia to the retreat. Also, during one of the subsequent visits to San Francisco we were shown the very suitcase that Swami Vivekananda had used during his epic journey from India to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.

5. Subsequent Visits to San Francisco Center

Chanting and Singing for Swami Prabuddhanandaji

Swamiji and us (Nalini and I) came from the state of Karnataka in India and our mother tongue is the language of Kannada. Whenever Swamiji spoke with us in his room, the conversation took place interchangeably in English and Kannada.

Probably the most memorable times Nalini and I had spent with Swami Prabuddhanandaji are when we sat in front of him at his office and at his request I sang and chanted many songs and hymns for him. My father was a singer all his life, and he knew many devotional songs and hymns by heart. He would go to the temples at special occasions, and of the eight siblings, he would always take me (the fifth in line) with him. Whenever there are music and chanting occasions on the stage, my father would be invited by the organizers to take the leading role. He could go on singing and chanting for hours without ever referring to a book or paper. Somehow, I have inherited that quality from my father. Needless to say, how grateful I am to my father for his foresight to see that capability in me. I am forever grateful to my father for that.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji admired that ability in me, as do many other devotees of the Vedanta Societies who had occasions to listen to my chanting and singing. On one of these occasions, Swamiji asked me how I developed the ability to pronounce the Sanskrit words so accurately and with no reference to a sheet of paper or book.

I narrated to Swamiji how it all came about. It was my 16th birthday (1953). I approached my father for advice about two problems I was facing. In my University, as part of my curriculum, I needed to choose a “second language”. I had to choose from Hindi, Sanskrit or French. When I asked my father, his answer was: “If you have to chose between Kalidasa and Shakespeare, you should choose Kalidasa. At this stage in your life you might feel it is not fashionable to learn Sanskrit, which is an ancient language not of much use in present day, but a day will come when you will thank me for the advice I am giving you today”. How right he was!!

My other request for my father on my 16th birthday was that I wanted to buy a camera. In my whole class I was well known as the student most talented in photography, but I didn't own a camera. I always took photographs of events and nature borrowing the camera from my friends. Some of my classmates from opulent families owned their own cameras. My father said: "You have three brothers in the University, and I have to look after their needs too. I can't afford to provide you with a camera now. May be some time in future." When I told him how some of the other students in my class from rich families all have their own cameras, he said: "That is fine. But you have to wait for your turn. The world will never be perfect. But, you need to learn how to live a life as best as you can in an imperfect world."

It was a matter of great devotion and honor for me to sing for Swamiji, a Bouquet of the Choicest Sanskrit Hymns and Prayers to the Gods and Goddesses, Hymns from Bhagavad-Gita, and Hymns composed by Sri Sankaracharya as the offerings and adoration of Guru, Hymns composed by the various swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, over the years – especially the ones composed and sung and chanted by Swami Purushothamananda in Belgaum Centre. I used to sing various devotional songs in Kannada composed by the great devotees of Sri Krishna – Bhakta Purandaradasa, Bhakta Kanakadasa. I also sang many verses from the great Mahabharata composed in Kannada by poet Kumaravyasa.

At this point in time it is very essential for me to make a special reference to my great Kannada teacher the Late Kayyara Kinnhanna Rai. Of all the teachers in my high school days, he was the one I admired most. As a young man, he fought in the freedom struggle. A prolific writer, Rai has written in Kannada, and has also translated numerous works from other languages into Kannada. The long life he had lived (born on June 8, 1915, and passed away on August 9, 2015 – 100 years old) was a very productive one. He was a veteran freedom fighter, prolific writer, magnificent poet, great teacher, a very tall masculine figure and with a magnificent singing voice.

Of the many poems Mr. Rai had composed, the one forever etched in my memory is the one titled “Shree-Mukha”. It was about “Mother India” and composed at the time of intense freedom struggle and sacrifice for “Mother India”. The whole atmosphere in India was so electrified. In my formative years — I was 10 years old — if Mahatma Gandhi had asked me to come and help him out in his struggle for freedom, I would have left my family and gone with Gandhiji to help him in whatever way I could. With our Kannada teacher Mr. Rai leading, every Friday evening in our school all the students gathered together and chanted the Chapter 2 of Bhagavad-Gita (Mahatma Gandhi’s favorite).

Swamiji liked the song so much, that he would ask me to sing that at least once every time we had met at the San Francisco Center. The song expressed deep sentiments from the young, energetic and restless freedom fighters of India at that time.

The poem is about their love of their motherland, entreating for the blessings of their dear mother, which would enable them to charge forward with strength of purpose and determination, to get rid of the foreign invaders who have plundered the country for so many centuries and disgraced their dear Mother beyond forgiveness. The words are so persuasive and appealing, that even today after so many years, I find it hard to sing the song without tears welling in my eyes thinking of Mother India.

6. VVSBC Retreats – Sw. Bhaskaranandaji

The Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Vancouver was registered in 1978. Our spiritual guide, Sw. Bhaskaranandaji, Head of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington in Seattle conducted the first retreat in 1991 at Manning Park, east of the city of Vancouver. Swamiji had mentioned to us at that time, that he planned the retreat based on the model he found at the Bourne End Center in United Kingdom. It was a great success. Annual Retreats in 1991 & 1992 were conducted at the Manning Park. In 1993, there was the Celebration of the Centenary of Swami Vivekananda’s Arrival in Vancouver. Nalini

and I invited Swami Bhaskaranandaji to have a look at the Retreat facility we had in the town of Sechelt. Swamiji liked the facility. From that point on, nearly all the subsequent annual retreats were conducted in the town of Sechelt on the Sunshine Coast where Nalini and I lived.

Initially they were three-day retreats conducted by Sw. Bhaskaranandaji alone. Since it became very popular, at the request of Swami Bhaskaranandaji, they were converted into five-day retreats. Sw. Bhaskaranandaji along with another invited guest swami from one of the other Centers in North America would conduct the retreat.

At the same time, Nalini and I had made major changes in our living facilities. The original 3000 square feet home on that five-acre waterfront property we owned was pulled down and a brand new 5000 square feet home with modern design built on the same spot. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was one of the early spiritual figures that had visited us and stayed over at our home when he came for our Annual Retreat in 1998.

7. Swamiji looking out from his bedroom in our home

Our VVSBC Annual usually was a 5-day event. Participants register on a Thursday and after the retreat is over they depart on Tuesday. The guest swamis normally arrive a day before the retreat starts. The swamis arrive at our home before noon on the Wednesday before the retreat. Swamis will have lunch and supper at our home and stay overnight. Next day (Thursday) they will have breakfast and lunch at our home, and then go to the Retreat venue and register there. In 1998 when Sw.

Prabuddhanandaji was the Guest swami, he stayed overnight at our home. His accommodation was arranged in the upstairs bedroom with a large window (12' x 4') overlooking the ocean. We had requested Swamiji to get ready and come down for supper at 7:30 pm. everyone was at the table and waiting for Sw. Prabuddhanandaji. After waiting for about 15 minutes, I went upstairs to check why Swamiji was late.

When I knocked the door of his bedroom, he asked me to come in. There he was sitting on the chair close to the window. He had drawn the window curtains wide open, watching the Pacific Ocean (Georgia Strait) under full moon. The ocean was active, with many white waves lashing on the rocks on the coast. Swamiji had lost track of the time. He was thrilled by the location of the place, the width of the window and the view it provided. Facing exactly south, one can see both sunrise and sunset through the same window. That was one of the most memorable moments for him about his several visits to Vancouver and the Sunshine Coast. Nalini and I were told that he expressed that sentiment to many other swamis and devotees after he returned to San Francisco.

Later on, during one of our visit to San Francisco Center, Swamiji invited Nalini and I to his office and we talked about our involvement in the activities of the Vedanta Society in general and the Vedanta Society in Vancouver in particular. He naturally referred to his visit to the town of Sechelt on the Sunshine Coast in particular for our annual retreat. He said the view from the bedroom in the upstairs at our home was one of the most memorable moments for him. He spoke about the effect on human mind of the sounds of nature (like the ocean, water, wind, and the cries of the seagulls and eagles) from that high location, compared to the noise one is confronted with from a high-rise in an urban setting in a city.

The district in the State of Karnataka in South India where Swamiji came from, is the district that has the maximum numbers of waterfalls in whole of India. So, it was quite understandable why he was so fond of the sounds of nature.

Nalini and I spoke about our very memorable road trip to the northernmost point of Continental Europe during our years in UK (1966 – 1973). The point is located in Norway, and is called Nordkapp (North Cape). Along the route, the country of Norway is full of fjords and waterfalls.

Nalini and I had camped at the base of one of these waterfalls one night on our way to Nordkapp by road from Oslo. Linndalsfossen (I've also seen it referred to as

Linndalsfallet) was the last of the three waterfalls that we saw from the community of Åmotan (especially near the Jenstad Farm). Åmotan was a special place in our mind because it was where three or four thundering rivers all converged, and so that was probably a really big reason why we saw so many large waterfalls (including Linndalsfallet) at this spot. The roar of the waterfall (with no human being around for many miles) was like a lullaby for us sleeping inside our tent, and we had a very good restful sleep. It was so memorable. Driving north of the Arctic Circle, when we reached Nordkapp, the gravel road abruptly ends at a vast and rugged rocky cliff from where it is almost a mile straight drop into the Arctic Ocean. There is a visitor Center located at this point, which is open only for three months of the year. The travelers are presented with a certificate from there, which says "So and SoHaving Traveled in the Land of the Midnight Sun, Reached Nordkapp on such and such date."

When Nalini and I arrived at Nordkapp, we pitched our tent close to the end of the road. Exactly at midnight under the midnight sun, we wrote about 30 cards and mailed them to our friends, families and colleagues. After we went to sleep, the wind gusting from the Arctic Ocean became so powerful, that we were worried that our tents can easily get blown off the cliff. So, at the middle of the night we removed the tent, and moved it to the other side of the visitor Center. Other than the two of us, there was no one for miles around. Next day, after breakfast, after dismantling the tent as we were leaving, one young family with two children arrived at Nordkapp.

While Swamiji, Nalini and I spoke about nature and peace, I narrated to Swamiji the story of the king who invited all the artists in his Kingdom and asked them to paint a picture of "Peace".

Painting Peace:

There once was a King who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the picture of Perfect peace. Many artists tried. The King looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror, for peaceful towering mountains were all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell and in which lightening played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a roaring and foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the King looked, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest feeding her babies... perfect peace.

Which picture do you think won the prize?

The King chose the second picture. "Because," explained the King, "peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace." — like a lotus leaf that always floats in the water, but never gets wet.

8. Letter about the Health status

During one of our visits to San Francisco, Nalini and I were seated in front of Swami Prabuddhanandaji in his room, and Swamiji was asking us about our health and daily life in Sechelt, and our yearly locums (relief duties covering the Surgeons and Obstetricians when they are away on holidays), we used to do back in Thompson. Swamiji was leaving within a week for a visit out of the country. We discussed about his health insurance when he is out of the United States. He had some questions for me. He asked me if there were any particular extra precautions he should take during his trip outside the country.

I suggested to Swamiji that he should get a letter from his family physician and he should carry it always in his person whenever he travels out of San Francisco. The letter

is about his current health status — which should include his past Medical history, surgery, allergies, the medications and dosage he is on at the time, and the details of the cardiac pacemaker he had (the kind, the model and other important details). I suggested to Swamiji that in his case and with his medical history, whenever there arises an emergency when he is away from San Francisco, it can be serious and quick response would be of the essence. The person accompanying Swamiji can be distraught and confused and might not be able to give a proper description of all the details the medical staff would need to start the treatment with minimal delay. Instead, when there is a letter from his family physician, a quick glance through the letter for a couple of minutes would provide all the details the medical staff would need, and treatment can be started without delay. Swamiji later thanked me for my advice, because that came handy for him on one occasion.

9. Spanish Banks

In 1993 VVSBC celebrated the Centenary of Sw. Vivekananda's arrival in Vancouver. Five senior Swamis from USA and around the world as well as Belur Math were invited for the celebration. They were:

1. Rev. Swami Gautamanandaji,
Vice-President of Ramakrishna Math & Mission from Belur Math, India.
2. Sw. Swahanandaji,
Head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, CA
3. Sw. Prabuddhanandaji,
Head of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, CA
4. Rev. Sw. Pramathanandaji, Head of the Vedanta Society of Toronto, Canada

5. Rev. Sw. Bhaskaranandaji,
Head of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington in Seattle, WA.

The Celebration consisted of Speeches by all the revered swamis at the Fraserview Hall on the Southwest Marine Drive. After the public talk by the swamis, there was music and other entertainments. I personally had made a 90 minute long movie about Swami Vivekananda's Arrival in Vancouver in 1893 on his way to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. It covered the details how while meditating on a rock at the Southern tip of India, Swami Vivekananda experienced the advice from his Guru to go to the West and disseminate the message of Harmony of Religions to the West. The help Swamiji had received from the various sources in India for his trip, and all the difficulties he had to overcome once he landed in the Western soil, all the people — mainly all women — who helped him, were all shown in that movie with still photos.

One of the items about the celebration was an outdoor get-together on the sandy beach on the Spanish Banks at the English Bay in Vancouver City. There was a good crowd of devotees from Seattle as well as from Vancouver. Outdoor barbecue and picnic on the beach, and listening to the conversations of these esteemed spiritual figures was an unforgettable experience. People took their time to walk around and explore the area.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji was very impressed about the area. It is a beach along the English Bay surrounded by many mountain peaks and the City of Vancouver at a short distance to the right. Vancouver is a city unique in the way the ocean, mountains, city and parks all meet. For example, someone working in an office in downtown Vancouver, could get away during lunch break, and in about half an hour reach an area of Stanley Park so far removed from any urban setting, that you feel you are in the middle of wilderness.

The beauty of the whole area impressed Swamiji. He asked me many questions about the various peaks one could see from one spot. I described to him all the mountain peaks — Mount Elphinstone, Black Tusk, Whistler and Blackcomb, Cypress Bowl,

Grouse Mountain, Mt. Seymour and Mt. Golden Ears (from left to right). From certain points in the area one could even see Mt. Baker in Washington State, easily recognized, because the upper half of the mountain is always covered with snow. Nalini and I wanted to take Swamiji for a short drive along the waterfront, through the Kitsilano Beach area, but the condition wasn't right. But, we did that during one of Swamiji's subsequent visits to Vancouver.

10. Walking along Grandview Highway North at Broadway & Commercial Drive in Vancouver

One of our Annual Retreats was held at the Vivekananda House. Between the different talks, there were breaks. Nalini and I took Swamiji for a walk through the quiet walk along the Grandview Highway North. at Broadway and Commercial Drive. This is a walk that starts from a busy commercial area, but quickly disappears between hedges of greenery, with a railway track that is far below the walking trail. All along the walk there are stops and benches to take rest and beautifully manicured small gardens. Swamiji loved this trail, and Nalini and I took him through that trail three times during that retreat. Swamiji had great liking for this area.

11. Lake Tahoe Retreat (2008)

Nalini and I had attended the Lake Tahoe Retreat in 2008. We thoroughly enjoyed the beautiful setting. We had stayed at a motel on the shore of Lake Tahoe, and drove up to the retreat venue each day. The devotees and the nuns prepared all the food. The interaction and camaraderie with the other retreatants in that spiritual setting, and the ambiance was excellent. Nalini and I hiked around Lake Tahoe twice during that visit. I also chanted several hymns and songs. Vance, one of the Brahmacharis wanted to

record some of my singing and chanting. So, after the retreat was over, he asked me to come to the temple in San Francisco. There he recorded my songs and chants.

12. Conclusion

Charlie Andrews had been involved in the Christian Social Union since university, and was interested in exploring the relationship between a commitment to the Gospel and a commitment to justice, through which he was attracted to struggles for justice throughout the British Empire, especially in India.

He met a young Gujarathi lawyer, Mohandas Gandhi, who was attempting to organize the Natal Indian Congress and the Indian community in South Africa to protest against the racial discrimination and police legislation that infringed their civil liberties.

Andrews was deeply impressed with Gandhi's knowledge of Christian values and his espousal of the concept of *ahimsa* – nonviolence, something that Gandhi mixed with inspiration from elements of Christian anarchism. Andrews soon became involved in the activities of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi and Andrews became close friends, and often conversed about the Christianity and other religions.

During one of these conversations, Andrews asked Gandhi: What do you think is the best and most efficient way of disseminating the message of the Gospel?

Mahatma Gandhi replied: “The best and most efficient way to disseminate the message of the Gospel is to Live It!! A rose doesn’t need advertisement. It automatically attracts and draws people towards itself by its very fragrance”.

Another time Gandhi was asked by Andrews: “What is your message to the posterity?” Gandhi replied: “My Life is My Message”.

To conclude: Nalini and I had always felt a connection between these conversations between Gandhi and Andrews, and the life Swami Prabuddhanandaji had lived.

Swamiji had lived a spiritually exalted, yet simple, unassuming, sincere, honest, humble and unpretentious life.

The messages in the two responses Gandhi gave to Charlie Andrews equally applied to Swami Prabuddhanandaji's life as well. Nalini is there with me when I say we both were so fortunate in our lives for having known Swamiji and for his blessings.

NIRUPAMA LAKSHMIKANTHAM

I remember the first time I came to San Francisco Vedanta center with Poornima, I had no clue who Swami Prabuddhananda was or anything else for that matter.. I was so new to Vedanta especially meeting Swami's. The only other swami I new was Swami Dayatmanda who is my guru. So when I first met Swamiji, I had no clue nor did I ask Poornima much about him. To my surprise he welcomed me with open arms and a smile which is contagious. Not only him but all of you made me feel so much at home and I always appreciated that. I realized that he is a very unique swami who does not waste time talking unnecessary things and every word he says has so much meaning. At first his silence used to be very uncomfortable for me.. However as I matured I came to respect that aspect. He is a very deep thinker and without saying anything he can mold a person. Even though he does not show it openly, he is a very caring person who made sure that all the guests were taken care of. Whether I kept up with him or not, he always used to send me beautiful x-mas card and he always wrote something personal. I really am going to miss that and also it feels strange for me to come to SF and him not being there. All of you are very fortunate to have known him so dearly and be able to serve him. I will miss him definitely.

MARY ARCHANA TAMRAZ

Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji's presence was grounded in deep abiding peace and tranquility. On one occasion, he came to the Olema Women's Retreat House on a Tuesday afternoon. As the Caretaker, I saw the driver pull up in front of the house and my desire was to open the door so that Maharaj could safely get out of the car. So I ran down the front deck from the front door to the car. Swami scolded me in his gentle soft voice: "Never rush!" And then he slowly, deliberately got out of the car and walked up to the front door and entered to walk to the shrine to salute. It never felt that he was actually slow! He was so peaceful and grounded that a peaceful Presence seemed to surround him and uplift all those in his midst. Another day as he left the Olema WRH, he turned to me and said, "Oh Archana! Come whenever you can!" I felt blessed and affirmed by his encouragement.

When Ranu Pandey and Kelly Miller were married at the Presidio in San Francisco, they went to request blessings from Swami Prabuddhanandaji. As it happened, Chuck and I were invited to go there and sit with them in his office. Swami looked at them with compassionate and loving eyes and said, the only purpose of marriage is to help one another to realize God. We felt blessed to hear these words which resonated as truth.

On Memorial Day at Olema, Swami Prabuddhananda set the tone for the interfaith gatherings there. His calm, Buddha like nature seemed to quiet the hundreds of visitors sitting under the tent together. The whole outside world seemed to distance itself from the gathering and allow us all to explore spiritual topics. I especially appreciated his love for the children and his wisdom that the seeds planted through the plays and talks would sprout in later years for the benefit of their spiritual lives.

SANKARANANDA BASAK

One thing that was a common experience among Swami P's sevaks was that his presence was very calming. Mind used to become quiet, pretty quickly in his presence. This was evident when I used to be in his presence after a work day, or a morning after a work week. His presence used to demand a certain reverence.

Some holiness used to come at least temporarily in his presence.

Harsh Kumar mentioned earlier that one feels sleepy while messaging his feet due to his calming influence. I found it was true.

Someone asked Ramana Maharshi one day about how to find a true Sadhu. Ramana Maharshi answered that if one's mind becomes calm in the presence of a holy person, without any effort from the individual, that individual is true Sadhu.

It was kind of like a piece of iron temporarily acquiring magnetic properties in the presence of a magnet.

It is kind of similar to what is written in the gospel. A worldly person hides his worldliness in the presence of a holy person. Like a pigeon hiding a pea in its gullet (throat). It appears that the pea has gone, but if you touch that area in the throat, you feel its presence.

But holding on to this un-natural high state of mind is not easy. Swami P himself mentioned in a Q/A session, that it takes a special training to continuously keep mind at a high level.

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I used to be his attendant for 24 hours and I used to see the same person throughout the day. I never saw him trying to please anyone, or show special favor to anyone. I guess he used to be especially strict to people whom he liked most.

Even when he used to wake up in the middle of the night, he used to talk of God only.

####

A few weeks, before he left his body.

At this time, he used to feel a tingling sensation in his left arm, and he used to need constant massaging. One night I was massaging his arm at ~ 3 AM in the morning. I mildly suggested that it might be a good idea to get some kind of machine for this. He said that we already have a machine. It is called "Shankar."

In retrospect, it appears that he was finding some excuses to make me do some service for him in ways that I can, and in return he was giving me a lot from a domain which was inaccessible to me.

He needed foot massage when he went to sleep (maybe for some blood circulation issues). I saw him immediately fold his hands and start praying whenever I started massaging his feet.

####

I was around for 2 initiations that he conducted. He has a small box with him that has Holy Mother's foot dust. I noted during the first initiation that he took that with him during the ceremony.

During the 2nd initiation, he did not take it. While leaving his room, I indicated that to him. He noted this and then said in his usual way "not necessary." After a bit, he turned and took it. He told me that I know all his secrets. After returning from the initiation, he lightly tapped the box on my head before packing it back.

####

One day I was sitting in the room and reading some news on the mobile phone. He did not like the idea of constantly staring at the phone. He said something like "what do

you keep on seeing at the phone.” Apparently he was not happy to see me getting distracted by a phone.

####

Another day, he needed to hear to some messages on the answering machine. I kind of said that another devotee was familiar with the set up. He got a bit irritated. He said: “You didn’t even try.” Giving up, without even trying got him irritated.

####

He was a big proponent of Swamiji’s message of strength

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He used to watch Ramayana at night.

One day he asked me if I have read Ramayana and Mahabharata. I said that I have not read them in a long time. He suggested that I should read those books. He mentioned the ones written by Rajagopalachari. I read the Ramayana and told him that. He was very happy to hear that. He then gave me a long list of books to read. I don’t remember the names of all of them, but I believe Gita, Upanishads, Bhagavatam were in the list.

####

He was in a cheerful mood one night. He was walking in the Vivekananda Hall. He had a medical test the next day.

The conversation kind of veered towards the “rolls” we have at Kolkata, India. They are like burritos, fried flat bread with some fillings inside. It is a very popular fast food at Kolkata. He was showing by hand gestures how he’ll eat something like them.

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Another time, while walking in the Vivekananda hall, I was asking him about Sri Ramakrishna's room in a photo of Dakshineshwar. He showed me his room in the photo and Mother's room as well.

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During Q & A sessions

One time, he mentioned that avatars like Ramakrishna, Buddha, Jesus, are like doors to the chamber of God.

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A visitor from Austin, Texas, once asked him about the significance of staying in "Bhavamukha." He mentioned that is like standing at the door between two rooms. The person can see both rooms, depending on which direction he looks. Sri Ramakrishna stayed at the junction of self and the world. Both of these were easily accessible to him.

#####

A few weeks (or months) before Sw. P left his body, one night he was having a lot of trouble to sleep. He rested a while in the single sofa-seat that was there in the room. He needed some massaging on and off. He said that he is having the thoughts of holy company that he had when he joined the Bangalore Ashrama. In the company of Swamis like Yatishwarananda, etc. I have read earlier that elevated souls might see these holy people when they give up their body. I got pretty stressed that night.



NISHA HAZAREY

I have yet to see a person who is so composed, poised, intelligent, humorous and centered as Swami P was and I always wonder if there can be someone other than Holy Mother or Master himself. All the lofty words - detachment, single-minded devotion, seeing action in in-action, etc. that one has heard when one begins to read Vedanta books are mere words until you see them in action when you are around him. He had this peculiar quality of having his presence felt through silence which was at its peak during the Q&A session after the Sunday lectures. And if you ask me although his words were few, his silence, glances and gestures did the most of the communicating. I cannot imagine my life if I had not met him and I often complain to myself why I did not get to meet him early on.

From beginning till the end, I was and still am awed by his lectures because they took one to such depths that one could rarely fathom on his own. Its been years now, but I can still hear his voice echoing when he talked about the verses from the "Drig Drishya Viveka" or "Vivekachudamani" or other texts in his classes.

One day when I was experiencing some health issues and each moment was hard to live, he said to me: you want all the good things in life and not the bad, hmm? How can that be? One has to embrace both.

On one other occasion He told me, Nisha this (Vedanta Society) is your home, you can come here anytime and we all are your family. I have no words to express what this meant to me.

There were times when he appeared a little tough (which was much needed) and there were times when his love surpassed the tenderness of a mother. There are several such experiences and all memories about him are so precious but no matter what I write about him it still feels inadequate.

ASOKE BASU

“Remember, O Intelligence, what has been done. Remember.”

Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, V.15.3.

In 1996 the Asiatic Society had invited me to prepare a study protocol on the institutional conditions that might have influenced the rise of civil society in India. I advanced the thesis that the culture of civility sprouted from the belief that the ordinary individual’s moral code of conduct affirmed that souls are divine. I claimed that as early as the 1500s, religion and education served as primary incubators to change. I illustrated my argument with the minstrel *Chandidas*, who extolled the dignity of individual: *Sunahe manusbhai/Sabar upare manus satya/Tarpar kichu nai* (“Listen, O brother/The Truth of Man is the highest of truths/There is no other truth above it”).

I selected Greater Bengal as my study area, which was spread from the south of Benares to the delta regions, now mostly the low-lands of Bangladesh. The project required me to undertake grassroots interviews with key resource persons, collecting population data from districts, and readings original documents that are located the far-off villages, small district towns, which presently are constituted in four states of Republic of India and a foreign country in Bangladesh. They are Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal and Bangladesh. I estimated the field-work phase to be completed in ten years.

Soon, my ambitious plan met ground reality. I approached the senior-most monk of the Vedanta Society in North America, Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj for assistance. During my initial interview on the project with Prabuddhanandaji, I stressed the importance of consulting the primary archival materials and sources in order to test the intrinsic objective merit of my inquiry. My visits to the villages, towns, and districts would require a lengthy stay. I reminded him of the Mission’s schools and colleges in this historical mission.

Prabuddhanandaji not only agreed in guiding the project, but also he made sure one of his senior brother monks, Swami Prameyananda, then the manager of the Math (later vice president) would help me with the local India itinerary.

Through Swami's quiet resolve, he drew me evermore close to the order. I soon noticed that he was a principled practitioner of the order's mission of uncovering permanent ethics of humanity. This Master Teacher showed me how to view "objectivity" in an altogether new light. He would remind me that in the final analysis all objective truths are *absolute* and *intrinsic*. The purest form of inquiry will lead us to the realization, if only we are not swayed by the unsteady ripples of time and space.

His compassion, decency, honesty, and moderation have deepened my resolve in three key ways.

Primarily, Maharaj taught me how to be vigilant from asking "dumb" questions. This direct exhortation was one of his celebrated remarks.

Second, he would remind me that in the day-to-day rhythm of life, finding the magic of truth that might seem insurmountable, or that might have been blown out of context, is nothing more than a test of our spiritual resolve.

Third, he taught me the value of moving calmly through life and not to hold "ill feelings" toward others.

Tat Tvam Asi.

The editor of Viveka Hamsa, Mr. Raghu has written the following article about Swamiji.

We are inspired when we see certain people. We read about certain people, and are inspired by them. We are inspired when we hear about certain people. Swami Prabuddhanandaji is of the third kind. I have not seen him. But, I have heard a lot about him, and read a little about him. Just by this, it would be arrogance to say I know

him. Hailing from Bangalore, Raghunandan (Swami's premonastic name) joined the Ramankrishna Ashrama here, underwent his training here, and became a Swami also here, serving the Ashrama in various capacities, finally becoming its President. That verily was through Sri Ramakrishna's grace. Furthermore, he moved to San Francisco and did a yeomen service there.

Spiritual journey is a very challenging one. It is a fierce battle of the internal and external, and the manifest and unmanifest. At the outset, you have to break away your ties from family and friends, and ready your mind for a long and lonely journey. Although it is a lonely journey, your growth should come in the midst of the company of the other Sadhus. It is a trial by fire every step of the way. Swami Prabuddhanandaji came out of this trial in flying colors. He served the elderly Sadhus, treated his peer-Sadhus with respect, and was kind to the junior Sadhus, thereby gaining the respect and admiration of all. He was also judicious in his acceptance of people. Americans are discriminating and fearless and recognize only a capable person. In such an environment in San Francisco, it is no small achievement to serve as a Minister for 45 years!

Those who climb to the top do not forget the ground from which they started. So also Swami Prabuddhananda never forgot the Sadhus, devotees, and friends in Bangalore. Although he was a Minister of the San Francisco Temple, he spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda to nearby places as well. After establishing himself firmly in San Francisco, he would make trips to India. On such

visits, he would visit many places of the Ramakrishna Order, and reconnect and expand the horizon of his love. He would heartily welcome and take care of the devotees who went from Bangalore. Swami Prabuddhanandaji is an unforgettable personality to the Balaka Sangha and Yuvaka members, and also to the devotees of Bangalore. All lives have to merge in Sri Ramakrishna! Swami Prabuddhanandaji attained Sri Ramakrishna Loka on 2nd July 2014. His memory is an inspiration to us. We, from Viveka Hamsa offer our respectful salutations and pranams to Swami Prabuddhanandaji.

LALI MALY

In the 1970s I would see Swami Prabuddhanandaji often. I was a member of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento and on the special worship days, the program would be like this: 10 am puja performed by Swami Shraddhanandaji in Sacramento with flower offerings and prasad; then at one pm drive in convoys to Berkeley for a 3 pm worship performed by Swami Shraddhanandaji and Swami Swahanandaji directing all the music and devotees flower offering and again prasad. Sometimes Swami Prabuddhanandaji would also be at the Berkeley worship. Then we would hang around the temple and visit with devotees who were very friendly with us until about 6pm and then the convoy drove to San Francisco for 8 pm puja, which Swami Shraddhanada would also perform and flower offerings and prasad again. Then the devotees would drive back to Sacramento very happy, full of prasad and satisfied. Swami Shraddhanandaji was about 65 years old at this time when he was performing three worships in a day full of travel and visiting devotees and having the company of his brother monks. He usually stayed the night in the old temple and perhaps visited with devotees, monks and maybe the dentist in San Francisco. Mr. Robert Reed would stay over too and drive the swami back to Sacramento.

Since the three centers had been united only a few years prior (before 1970) the swamis and devotees were friendly and we were all curious about the other centers and devotees. I especially remember that Swami Prabuddhanandaji would walk around at the pujas and visit the devotees in Berkeley and San Francisco and speak to devotees and look at their prasad plates to make sure they were eating enough and ask after everyone. I remember trying to eat enough of my plate before he spoke to me, but also try not to have my mouth full when he spoke so that I could answer him. It was very charming and endearing how Swami Prabuddhananda would ask. I wish I could explain better how lovingly he asked after everyone -one-by-one, as it was something special.

The three swamis came together in the Sacramento Center a few times a year, so we got to see Swami Prabuddhananda at the annual meeting and the Sacramento temple anniversary celebration. Swami Prabuddhanandaji also came to Sacramento when he was escorting new or visiting swamis to Sacramento. I remember when he first brought Swami Baskaranandaji, who was so shy he practically hid behind Swami. He was so friendly with the devotees and yet he was kind of trying to shield the new swami and it had a comic element.



This photo was taken at Vandana's home in the San Francisco Bay island that the military held. Her home was on the island base and it must have been fun for all the swamis to gather for lunch with her. She would have a big feast for them.

I liked to stay at the Women's Retreat House at Olema, so I would see Swami Prabuddhanandaji there. He gave a talk and visited the House on Tuesdays so if you could manage to be at Olema then, you could see him. If you managed your schedule you might be able to attend the Sunday lecture in San Francisco too.

Devotees could visit the other centers and the swamis all treated us like their own and were very kind. It didn't seem like the centers were so very separate. The old time devotees didn't act like they were so separate and so that feeling trickled down. As I got to know some of the devotees and especially the nuns in San Francisco, I didn't feel like there was any big divisions of the centers. We all spoke and felt friendly towards devotees at all the Northern California centers. The old time San Francisco devotees and nuns were serious and loving and very good role models to bring into my spiritual life in Sacramento.

Sometimes I would get a private interview with Swami Prabuddhanandaji since I had indicated I wanted to join the nuns. Really I was trying to figure out what it was all about and the urge was so vague I couldn't even ask him a decent question. But I always felt like sitting in silence in his office was helpful to my spiritual life. He asked me questions sometimes and I usually didn't know what to say. In later years I lost my hesitation and would try to cheer him up with stories about whatever I was doing. He was always interested and kind. He could be very serious and I made it a goal to make him laugh.

After I joined the Santa Barbara Convent when Swami Swahananda was the head, Swami Prabuddhanandaji came down for a visit. Any visiting Swami would have to speak in Santa Barbara and at the other southern centers. After lunching in the convent with the nuns and devotees, Swami stopped me and asked how I was in front of the

many devotees and nuns standing around. I wanted to say I was miserable, but instead said “fine Swami.” What could I say under the circumstances? His questioning me like that almost had me crying, I was so unhappy. His kindness just amplified how awful I felt there. I am sure he could see my embarrassment. But probably I deserved his grilling me like that since he assumed I would join in San Francisco Convent. He had always been so kind to me. After a year I was back in Sacramento as a devotee. But with all the changes in my life situations, Swami Prabuddhanandaji was always the same loving person toward me.

Since I was often at the Sacramento center during the weekdays I had opportunities to see Swami Prabuddhanandaji when he stopped by Sacramento on his way to Tahoe or if he was showing a swami or group of swamis around the centers. He would be busy but would always be kind and say a few words to all the devotees present.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji was very junior to Swami Shraddhanandaji. When Swami Prabuddhanandaji was a school boy coming from South India to Calcutta for mantra diksha, Swami Shraddhananda was already a sanyasin and the secretary to the President of the Order, Swami Virajanandaji. Swami Shraddhanandaji interviewed the school boy and he got his mantra. Swami Prabuddhanandaji told me that story, but when I realized the difference in their seniority I was surprised because I never saw it in their actions with each other. To my mind they acted like peers, not senior and junior swamis.

I remember once when Swami Prabuddhanandaji came to Sacramento to ask for Swami Shraddhananda’s blessing for building the addition to the new temple. He was collecting funds and wanted Swami’s prayers. I happened to be there and was touched by the shy way the Swami asked. It was one of the few times that Swami Prabuddhanandaji asked for help. But I am sure he did ask for opinions on the phone since Swami Shraddhanandaji had been an assistant swami in San Francisco for 12 years before Swami Prabuddhanandaji came to the center. Swami Shraddhananda knew all

the devotees and could give advice if asked. But the centers were now separate and each swami had to assert himself, so they did keep themselves somewhat separate. Administratively, they were very separate. But there was always an emotion for each center. The devotees and the monastics had love for the centers. It was all the Master's work after all.

INGA DATTA

What can I say about him other than that he was and is a holy man. Listening to him during our Toronto retreats, he raised our minds to a higher level of being. And ending the retreats was always most painful and I never wanted the retreats to end (ever!!!). San Francisco has become for me a city of pilgrimage, the temple a place of love and peace. Swamiji lives on in my thoughts as vibrant as ever, with much love, respect and gratefulness.

May His Soul continue to bless us all!

RAGHU ARUR

It was June 29th Sunday. I usually have Swami Service on Sunday evening to Monday morning. I had got the news that Swami Prabuddhananda had been admitted to hospital and is very weak. When I reached the hospital and his room he was very weak. I was told that his BP had dropped and he was feeling very weak.

He was in great discomfort. Yet his gaze was constantly on the Sri Ramakrishna and Sharada Devi's photo that he used to have with him wherever he went -- in his room at the monastery or in the hospital room. He had some visitors from the convent. He was too weak to speak to anyone. He would just see and answer questions in hand gestures.

As the night progressed, his discomfort increased. He was finding it very difficult to even just lay down. He asked me to rub his right hand gently. I did it for some time. Then he asked me to chant Mother's name "Ma" and rub his right hand. He asked Virajaprana to do the same thing to his left hand. Virajaprana and I were gently stroking Swami's hand and chanting Mother's name. His eyes were closed most of the time. If his eyes were open, he would just gaze at Mother's photo. He wanted to see only Mother, hear about only Mother and nothing else. The whole night passed by chanting Mother's name and softly stroking his hands. Virajaprana was seated on the left side and I on the right side. For me it felt as if he had given up all his will and was relying on Mother completely to take him to the other side.

In the morning at around 7 am, Ratnakar and Bill Macan came to attend to Swamiji. Swamiji was completely exhausted. He could not get any sleep in the night and his discomfort was increasing. I heard him tell Bill -- "Please give me comfort".

...

Yes, I now remember Swami quoting from the scriptures.

One more thing that I remember is his goodbye blessings to some people who had come to see him. He was blessing as if it was the last time he was going to bless them through words. I hadn't seen him doing this before.

Another thing that I had heard from Ratnakar uncle (he might have already shared with you) was Swami starting to quote from scriptures (I forget exactly what they were) around a week before he was admitted to the hospital.

Yes there was a lot profundity in the way he was dealing with his ending moments.

First Meeting:

My first meeting with Swamiji was at Olema as part of retreat organized by the Stanford Vedanta Study Group. As part of the retreat, we generally have a 2 hour question and answer session with Swamiji. His answers to questions were so simple and short that it all made complete sense. The immediate reaction was -- “This Swami is very deep”. It was an instant attraction to him and the unconditional love he showered bowled me over.

Training to Serve:

When I started serving Swamiji, I didn't know the ways, his preferences etc. Slowly, he trained me in how to serve him. His way of training was very unusual. It was full of love. He never said that something needs to be done this way or that way. His loving comments on what you do would be indications as to how he would prefer things to be. As part of serving him, we had to massage him. He literally trained me in how to give him the best massage. Many a times he used to tell Narayan Gowdaji who used to be his “Personal Masseur”, that I too am a good masseur. I always felt that he shaped me in every aspect. Even toasting bread for him, how to give him medicine, how to put his eye drops, everything he taught me.

Here is an instance of how to give him tablets. It was a Saturday morning, he had gotten up and I was getting myself ready to give him his tablets. While giving him the tablets, one of them fell on the ground and it had to be discarded. He immediately called Virajaprana to come over from the convent and get a replacement for that tablet. This gave me the message that every act needs to be done very meticulously and from that day I tried to follow it.

Purity :

I would always see Swamiji as an embodiment of purity. Whenever I used to serve him food or touch his body for massaging or for other reason as part of serving, it was natural for me to start doing japa. That was the way for me to feel that I am eligible to touch him or serve his food.

Another day I touched his feet to take his blessings and then proceeded to take his tablets. He asked, "Did you wash your hands after touching the feet ?". For me, he was full of purity and I never felt that I needed to wash my hands after touching his feet. But he made me throw all the tablets in my hand and made Virajaprana come from the convent to give him a new set. He told me how nurses handle tablets without touching them with their hands. And that was the last day I touched his tablets with my hand. I always used the capsule caps to give him the tablets.

Constant Remembrance of God:

He was a teacher who practiced what he taught. During many of the counselings, he would urge us to try to practice the presence of god. He also advised us to read Brother Lawrence's "Practice of Presence of God". During my time of serving, this is one thing that I could observe in him every minute. He suffered a great deal of pain as part of his illness. But he never uttered a cry or complained about it. He was constantly remembering God all the time and would try to rise above the pain. Whenever I used to fall ill seriously, I always used to compare my pain to his pain and think that he would

be going through hundreds of times the pain I am going through. Yet he bore the whole thing without a murmur.

He used to get up at least twice in the night because of uneasiness in his stomach. We would then serve him half a glass of juice or some other drink. Never have I seen him take a drop of liquid or a morsel of food without offering it to Mother. Whatever the time may be, whatever the state of his body may be, his remembrance of God would never fail him.

I was indeed very fortunate to have got a chance to serve him personally. Getting an opportunity to meditate with him was like a boon granted. I would come to serve him with loads of tensions in office and personal life. But the minute I entered his room and meditate with him, everything would just disappear in a minute.

Many people used to ask, “You spend a lot of time with Swamiji, you might be asking lots of questions and talking about spirituality a lot”. But Swami Prabuddhananda was a man of few words and never encouraged casual banter. Many a times I would have come thinking that I will get some of my questions answered. But when I would come to him, most of the times the questions didn’t make much sense or they didn’t feel important enough to be asked. One answer that I felt as though coming from his silence was “Do your practices and you will find the answers automatically”. So my time with him was mostly in silence with an exchange of only a few words during the whole day.

Adaptability :

One thing that struck me was his adaptability to different situations. There used to be a new sevak every 12 hours to attend him and each one was very different. He adapted to each individual’s service without any complaint. As his disease progressed, he had to adapt to so many things that he was not used to in his earlier life. But he always took everything as Mother’s will and adapted to the new situation. He once said to me during my service -- “ I was always proud of my health as I was very healthy during

my youth. Mother wants to break this pride of mine and hence I am going through this.” He had completely surrendered to Mother’s will.

“Team is Complete”

I used to be on the regular weekly schedule for serving Swami. I moved to India in end of May and came back in June for a two week visit. This turned out to be my last visit when I could see and serve Swamiji. As soon as I went to take Swami’s blessings, he lovingly welcomed me and said “Ha Raghu, you have come! Now the team is complete”.

Priceless Parenting Advice :

Our daughter was very young and we didn't really have many worries about her. But we always used to ask Swamiji for some advice on parenting. Though we constantly wished Swami would give us more specific instructions, we now understand the wisdom of how he answered our questions.

We would constantly ask Swami in various ways, how to bring up our daughter. His answer was always: Follow the spiritual path sincerely and set an example. Your daughter will learn more by watching than what you tell her. Children are very good observers and know if you are doing something sincerely or not. When she asks questions, answer them appropriately.

We had the concern that without ourselves having spiritual realization, how can we guide our daughter’s spiritual understanding. Swami said : It will be too late if you wait for spiritual realization to guide your daughter. Read, contemplate, understand the scriptures for yourselves. Talk about spiritual matters between the two of you and your daughter will automatically pick them up. Answer her questions keeping her age in mind.

Swami would also constantly say: Do your best, but always keep in mind that your daughter will have her own Samskaras. What you do for her is not the exclusive factor in moulding her life.

DHARMADAS (JON MONDAY)

We stayed in touch with my step-brother's ex-wife and our niece after the divorce. At one point, I invited our ex-sister-in-law to come to a SF lecture, to see if she was interested in Vedanta. We picked her up at her house, and to our surprise, both her and our niece were waiting to go. We hadn't expected our niece to be at all interested, as she was only 12 or so. The lecture was fine, but it didn't seem to click with either of them. We thought that was the end of it – and never spoke of it again.

Many years later the niece married an Indian guy – who had been her professor at San Jose State. It was a full Hindu wedding (with me filling the role of the father of the bride). The fellow and his family were very devoted traditional Hindus, but not RK Vedantists.

Once in awhile, we'd have them over to play cards and for dinner. Out of curiosity, one night I asked her if she remembered going to the lecture (wondering if it had any influence on her conversion to Hinduism). She said, "Remember! It was like I was hearing the voice of God!" We had no idea that Swami had made an impression on her.

HOPE ROLLAND

I can DO IT. It's short but the FOUNDATION of my unique relationship with swami and Vedanta. I just realized I first came to Olema in Jan. 1986 so it's 30 years this year.

The first few times I was at Olema TEJO was the caretaker. She told me you HAD TO BELIEVE IN REINCARNATION to be a Vedantin. This bothered me to the extent that one Karma Yoga day preceding the May Retreat - after a meditation period - I asked swami if I could ask him a question. He said OK and we went into the library at the MRH.

I start by asking - WHAT ARE THE 'BOTTOM LINE' BELIEFS for saying one is a Vedantin? Without awaiting an answer (so me).....I said, "because I can understand reincarnation as a concept, might be possible, BUT....."I DON'T THINK I'M COMING BACK (how's that for CONFIDENCE/IGNORANCE!)". He said, looking me straight in the eye - "Well then, HURRY UP!". Next I ranted on about GURU'S not being a good idea, maybe OK in India, but not the USofA -could be downright DANGEROUS....again - looking me right in the eye - He said, "You are your own teacher!" I closed with - MEAT, I LOVE MEAT, I'LL ALWAYS EAT MET - He said, "Eat Meat!". He closed with the suggestion I read Swami Vivekananda's GOD IN EVERYTHING (which I did) and then I said, "Thank you swami (and thought to myself - this guy's not easy to pick a fight with).

When he initiated me 25 years later (2011) in the SAME LIBRARY at the same little table - I said, "Swami do you remember when I asked you three questions many years ago?" He said, (he could not tell a lie) 'NO!' I said, "well I do - and then I repeated them with his answers and said "that's why I'm still here" - those three answers sealed my fate. I am so grateful for his initiation.

When I'd have an appointment and rag on (on the verge of tears) about how HARD IT WAS (this attempt at spiritual life) - OH SWAMI, IT'S SOOOOOO HARD, IT'S SOOOOO HARD - he said (very dismissively - NOT AS A COMPLIMENT) - YOU ARE

ALRIGHT (like GET OVER YOURSELF).....DO YOUR BEST! That "DO YOUR BEST" drove me nuts - who could believe THIS IS 'MY BEST'thinking "THIS is MY BEST" has kept me very humble!

SEEMA KAMAT

I still don't believe that he is no longer with us. I still feel his presence all the time. We used to look forward to meet him whenever we came to sf center. We made sure we saw him at least 3 to 4 times a year at least. Those visits gave us lot of inspiration & encouragement to live a spiritual life. Just to be with him was such a great experience that can't be described in words. We would feel that he could read our mind, & he could see what is going on in our mind at that time& I have felt that lot of times.

He was more like a father figure to me than a Guru, he reminded me of my father. He was very caring, loving & affectionate person. We knew him for a very long time so he treated us like his own. He would scold at us if we have done something wrong as well as give us some advice to correct it. If I bring some Indian delicacies he would personally thank me & I really admired him for that. He being such a busy person with so many responsibilities he would find time to do all these things is really incredible indeed!!!! Even during his illness he always find time to meet with us without any complaints, we will never forget that. I remember he told me one day to keep smiling & I try to follow that. He gave me lot of support during my difficult time & taught me how to handle the most difficult problems in life. And now all these teachings I have to remember & follow rest of my life!!!! We miss him a lot but I know he will be with us in spirits for the rest of our life!!!! May he rest in peace.

SANDRA MARINER

First appointment:

The appointment was held in Swami's "old" office, a small one located next to the "big" one he had later. During this appointment, Swami asked me some questions about my activities, we also sat in silence at times.

I had a desire to get an answer to a question I'd had, and saw this as an opportunity to get an answer, so I asked Swami about angels. The question was something like, what do you think of angels, who are they, how do they compare to gods? Swami gave a vague reply, which I thought was due to a lack of interest in angels. My response inside was that Swami had not been impressed with how "holy" I was in my interest of angels. I wanted to show him how "holy" I was, so I asked another question about angels with great emphasis, in an insisting way.

Swami raised his voice and very strongly said straight to me "Are you interested in **GOD**, or angels?"

I quietly said "in God". It was clear in an instant that Swami was no nonsense about deep spirituality. He could actually be very forceful without causing a feeling or residue of hurt, although maybe some ego embarrassment.

Installment two

At Tahoe Retreat:

On Swami's midday walk at Tahoe, I said to Swami, that since being on the retreat, I am feeling, "I am pure". Swami stopped and turned and said to me, "the whole retreat is worth that." He re-iterated, if you got that the whole retreat is worth it.

Installment three

Appointment with Swami:

I asked Swami how to deal with disappointment, how to handle the low mood that goes with disappointment?

Swami said there were several ways:

1. Probably it is for my own good. God has another plan for me (God's Will).
2. This is probably what I deserve (Karma).
3. Next time I will do better.
4. I did not put enough effort. For my investment, I cannot have anything better. I have unrealistic expectations for my efforts.
5. If I was unfairly treated, discuss it with the concerned person.
6. Say to the mind, "Oh, this what is called disappointment, now I know what it is."

Swami continued, the way which is **not** healthy:

1. This is all unjust.
2. Make another person responsible for my failure (normal people do this).

If you do it in the wrong way, you'll go on burning inside - that is NOT GOOD.

Somehow *neutralize* that.

I asked Swami what is the difference between "fancies", which he had mentioned in a recent lecture, and hope, aspiration for something.

Swami said that with fancies, there is **no effort** to reach it. It is a waste of time, a waste of **mind**. A hope, you **work** toward, **make effort** toward. Swami was very emphatic when he explained this.

Installment Four

Phone conversation with Swami:

During the summer recess, Swami sometimes offered an informal question and answer session in the downstairs reception room of the temple (now the childcare room).

Swami was relaxed and appeared happy to see each of us at these sessions. On one Sunday, instead of planning to go to one of these precious sessions with Swami, I made other plans. I scheduled at the very same time as Swami's session, a music rehearsal in the Old Temple with a few other temple musicians, in preparation for a musical offering at the temple. I was assured by one of the temple musicians that it would be ok, Swami wouldn't mind.

After the rehearsal, I went to the New Temple and phoned Swami, who had gone to the monastery. Immediately Swami began to ask why I scheduled that rehearsal, and went on to say, with raised voice and emphasis, that no other activities are to be scheduled at the temple, at the time of temple activities. I defended myself, saying I didn't know; I was told by others that it would be ok. Swami continued to make his point with raised voice.

Soon, I began to cry and said "You are yelling at me." With a choked voice, I added "You hurt my *feelings*." Immediately Swami's voice changed, and with love and gentleness, he simply re-iterated his point in soft, soothing words. I learned the lesson about scheduling. More importantly I felt Swami's love, how he saw beyond right and wrong, and into the heart of all.

Installment five:

Appointment with Swami at Easter time:

One year at Easter time, I lovingly selected a chocolate Easter bunny for Swami from See's. The bunny was small in size, about 3 or 4 inches long and 3 inches high. It was three-dimensional and covered with brightly decorated foil paper.

At an appointment near the holiday, I gave the Easter bunny to Swami, setting it before him on his desk. Swami leaned forward looking at it closely, and exclaimed with innocent childlike glee "Easter bunny, Easter bunny!"

He was so happy. Just the thought of it fills the heart with joy. It is a reflection of the love that dwelled in Swami's heart, which he shared in all its purity.

VIJAYA KUMAR

Swami Prabuddhanandaji – An Unforgettable Monk

It was sometime in 1946 or 47 when Swami Prabuddhanandaji came to join the Bangalore Ashrama as a novice. He was only a teen-age student who wanted to embrace monastic life setting aside any worldly ambitions or achieving academic excellence. But the Swami-in-charge of the Bangalore Ashrama asked him to complete his graduation before he could be formally admitted to the Order. But the young man was reluctant to continue the academic education. The then head of the Bangalore Ashrama, Rev. Swami Tyagishanandaji suggested that he could stay in the Ashrama and render some service in the Ashrama activities and also continue his studies. Raghunandan (Swami Prabuddhanandaji's pre-monastic name) accepted this suggestion as it had a semblance to the ancient practice in India of staying in a Gurukula as a student.

This afforded him a unique opportunity to come into close contact with Rev. Swami Tyagishanandaji Maharaj, a disciple of Swami Brahmnanandaji Maharaj and a highly respected monk of the Order. The Swami was well known for his very severe austere life and had been considered a living encyclopedia of the ancient wisdom of India and world religions. During this time Rev. Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj who had just then returned from West was often visiting Bangalore Ashrama and Raghunandan had the opportunity of serving Rev. Swami Yatiswaranandaji whenever he came. Besides these two spiritual giants, Raghunandan had a good exposure to the intense holy presence of many spiritual stalwarts of the Order who used to visit the Ashrama periodically.

Shankaracharya in his *Vivekachudamani* says, it is very difficult to get the company of great and holy (*mahapurusha samshraya*). Even if one happens to get such a rare blessing, it is not always that a sadhaka utilizes their holy presence to nourish his own spiritual life. Moreover to live under the ever watchful eyes of highly advanced spiritually souls is not an easy one. A sadhaka has to face lot of rebukes, admonishments etc., which is

all done in the interest of a sadhaka only to help him spiritually. The uniqueness of Raghunandan was that he immensely absorbed the divine influence of Rev.

Tyagishanandaji and Swami Yatiswaranandaji, and evolved into a monk with uncommon spiritual wisdom and extraordinary breadth of vision with a deep compassionate heart. Though he served Tyagishanandaji Maharaj till his end, it was during the ministration of Swami Yatiswaranandaji who succeeded him, that Prabuddhanandaji imbibed some of the noblest qualities of the latter. It was during Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj's early days at Bangalore Ashrama, that he was formally ordained as a monk of the Order and was deeply involved in the various departments of Ashrama. Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj's keen spiritual eye could not fail to notice the extraordinary qualities that Prabuddhanandaji was endowed with. When rev. Yatiswaranandaji asked Prabuddhanandaji to be an important functionary of the Vidyarthi Mandiram, a hostel for college students, and Prabuddhanandaji sought guidance from him as regards how he should conduct himself in the hostel in the midst of those college boys who are by nature very turbulent, rev. Maharaj said, "live with the boys as their friend, someone really interested in their welfare, and they will automatically respect you." Though for a brief period he had to take charge of Vidyarthi Mandiram, most of period in Bangalore was spent in the main Ashrama and felt the protective care of Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj whether he was at the Ashrama or Vidyarthi Mandiram. Thus he had a strong spiritual foundation provided by extraordinary grace of spiritual giant like Swami Yatiswaranandaji during the formative years of his monastic life.

Seeing the extraordinary maturity exhibited by him in various situations, one day Yatiswaranandaji it seems remarked, "In course of time they (authorities at Belur Math) are going to make you a head of centre"

It exactly happened so. After Rev. Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj's passing away Swami Prabuddhanandaji was the obvious choice of the Headquarters to head the Bangalore Ashrama. By that time he had thorough knowledge of the various departments of the

Ashrama. During his tenure, the Ashrama bore a festive look because he was interested that people should come to the Ashrama and participate in its activities. Once noticing, that after Thakur's birthday, there are no major celebrations until Durga Puja, to fill up the long gap, he introduced the celebration Ramakrishnanandaji's Birthday on a grand scale just as major thithi puja celebrations. He would encourage volunteers, most of them young men, teenage boys, to come on Saturday noon and enjoy the blessings of monastic life at least for a day or two. For their sake he would explore some service activities like clearing the cobwebs of the prayer hall, or painting book stall etc. His objective was to build up the team spirit and give a taste of monastic life to these young people. The senior volunteers will guide the juniors and when Prabuddhanandaji used to go to dining hall a big retinue followed him. It was a sight to see. He used to say Bangalore Ashrama's activities consists of three B's – Bhajan, Book-sales and Bhashan or Pravachan (discourses). Another B –the Balaka Sangha – an innovative experiment in character-building conceived by Swami Yatiswaranandaji received special attention from Rev. Prabuddhanandaji. He continued the extension of the service activities to the far-reaching rural areas also with a team of volunteers – a programme introduced by his predecessor Rev. Swami Yatiswaranandaji, as a part of the service activity in connection with the centenary celebrations of Swami Vivekananda in 1963. So one can imagine that with a monk like Swami Prabuddhanandaji at the helm of affairs, the Ashrama was full of young men who were filled with great enthusiasm. He was the basic source of inspiration. It is important to mention that the seed of aspiration sown by Rev. Prabuddhanandaji to render selfless service and undertake activities to serve poor people bore fruits in various ways, even after he left Bangalore and India and departed for United States.

When finally in 1970, he was asked to take charge of San Francisco centre, to all these volunteers and devotees of the Bangalore Ashrama, the news was a bolt from the blue. They could not reconcile to the fact that their dear Swami is leaving them and going to a far-off place. They were so much disturbed by the news that they experienced a deep

void within themselves. It was indeed very touching to see Swami Prabuddhanandaji consoling these devotees and admirers and telling them that they should stick to the spiritual ideal should keep coming to the Ashrama and develop greater contact with Sri Sri Thakur, and such changes as this are inevitable in this world.

The fact that he was selected by the authorities of the Belur Math to succeed Swami Ashokanandaji of such spiritual eminence and divine attainments speaks volumes about the spiritual stature of Rev. Prabuddhanandaji even at that time.

To live in an environment of geographically, culturally, socially which is different in every way is not an easy task. One has to make lot of adjustments in one's personal life. Rendering spiritual service in an entirely alien culture is really challenging. But what was conspicuous in Rev. Prabuddhanandaji was that such an adjustment was so natural for him. He never felt he was living with an alien people. His personality had boundary lines – geographical, social or cultural. He felt equally at ease in relating himself to the devotees there at San Francisco, so much so that in a very short time that he endeared himself to the people there. The devotees there were feeling literally orphaned by the demise of Ashokanandaji now felt great consolation in the presence of Swami Prabuddhanandaji. For the next four decades San Francisco became the field of his spiritual sadhana and service. The devotees of San Francisco became as much dear to him as the devotees of Bangalore. He had so nicely integrated the traditional practices at the San Francisco monastery, the monastic brotherhood, the devotees and cultural ambience prevailing in the new environment. In the course of his talks in India and Bangalore during his visits later, generally the topic used to his experiences in the West. And he used to speak very highly of the devotees, the hard work of monastic inmates and discipline and some of the best aspects of American culture.

But distance could not separate him from the extraordinary concern he had for the volunteers and devotees of Bangalore Ashrama. He was constantly keeping in touch with the devotees of Bangalore Ashrama and they used to entreat him to visit India and

Bangalore at least periodically. Whenever he used to come to India once in four or five years it was a great occasion for the devotees. They used to rejoice so much at his arrival that many of them were staying in the Ashrama until the dining bell for dinner was given, when the Ashrama gates are closed for everybody except inmates.

During such visits to India and Bangalore, there was no question of his going to the houses of devotees and visiting them. Because it was literally impossible, as his circle of devotees was very vast. Of course he used to make an exception when a particular devotee was unable to come due to age or illness and bedridden. All the devotees used to gather in the campus of the Ashrama from the morning itself and a casual visitor used to wonder whether any celebration is going on in the Ashrama. A huge line of devotees and each of them used to get personal attention. He used to remember them and even their names. Devotees used to feel, that Swamiji has not forgotten us. As for fruits and gifts that they used to bring when visiting the swami, they had to be piled up in the corner of a room and it used to look like a small hillock in the room. It used to be an arduous task for the Brahmacharins to sort them out and arrange. But as for Rev. Prabuddhanandaji, he was not even concerned what anybody brought him. On the contrary he used to give away something or other to everybody who met him.

During his visits to India, as long as he stayed, for devotees and monastics it was a mart of joy. Before departing to the States, he had inspired many young men to join the Ashrama and influenced by the wonderful spiritual impact of the Swami on their life especially when they were novitiates, these Swamis who were now in their late sixties or so used to take some leave from their respective centres and accompany him throughout his visit. The devotees used to arrange a one-day spiritual get-together, with rev. Prabuddhanandaji to some far off country side where there was a temple or an Ashrama and full of lush and green.

But however much the devotees used to feel a closeness with him, one could see the swami maintaining a distance and balancing the way he related himself to them. This

was a special feature so conspicuous in his dealings that when a senior executive visited all the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centres in the States, and tried to understand the challenges involved, he had highest appreciation for Swami Prabuddhanandaji regarding the way he conducted himself with devotees and monastic brothers there and remarked, “It is Prabuddhanandaji alone who knows how to draw the devotees to the Centre and at the same time maintain the required distance.” This was an object lesson for the junior monastics.

More important was the way he was relating himself with the monastics — senior monks, juniors and brahmacharins. His dignified yet deeply endearing behavior with each one of the monastics has left a lasting impression on them. The goodness, maturity and over and above all a pure heartfelt love was so transparent that his personality held an irresistible appeal and touched the heart of those who came into contact with him.

He was an adept in dealing with people of diverse temperaments and he could carry all of them along with him, a rare trait of an able leadership. Whatever be the field of activity he was involved in whether at Bangalore or San Francisco, it was impossible to find even a single case of any person grumbling or criticizing behind him. His behavior was so dignified and his external demeanor used to bear such a stamp of royalty that it used to command respect from anyone who went to him. There was no space for pettiness or mean mindedness.

He had an extraordinary capacity to understand any problematic situation in all its complexities. His inborn goodness and tranquil nature used to make up for any deficiencies in the field of work. His human touch used to make even a most complicated situation very simple.

His face radiated an uncommon maturity, goodness and above all a clear conscience. There were no airs of superiority or artificialities in his dealings. He was totally free from all pretensions, niceties, or masks that we usually come across in the world. Wherever he went, he always carried with him an aura of all embracing friendliness

with such dignity that it attracted many people into the orbit of his holy influence. Naturally, it was no surprise that such a person's circle of friends was very vast.

There was no dearth of either contentment or happiness in his life. His face used to beam with such tranquility that it appeared as if there was a perennial spring of joy and contentment and what more it was highly contagious too!

One could never see the Swamiji morose or gloomy. His face radiated a Sattvic enthusiasm. Not only that if he found any one gloomy or having a brooding face, he knew how to help that person come out from that hard shell of morbid introversion.

Whether it was Bangalore Ashrama or a big institution like Vedanta society where problems are very common he was never seen perturbed or worried. Anxiety, confusion or nagging these were totally absent in him. Calm, peaceful, deeply thoughtful over and above all tremendous patience and forbearance was exhibited during those trying situations. He was a living example of how to manage such situations. Only a deeply thoughtful person with inner certitude could keep his cool and a clear brain with no cobwebs could attain to such tranquility.

He could never forget the brother monks who came into contact with him. Though many of them were the inmates when he was at Bangalore, there were others too. To each and everybody it was usual for him to send some pecuniary help periodically from that far off place so that it could keep them more comfortable and happy. In fact, in India, Swami Prabuddhanandaji's name is synonymous with that selfless love and concern which sought to keep others comfortable and happy as if his happiness consisted in theirs!

Of course, he entertained special love for those brother monks who had embraced monastic life during his tenure. In the letters he used to write from States to these brother-monks, he used to lay great stress on character-building. He used to exhort them to become monks of sterling character. Spiritual life built on the foundation of a sound character alone can remain stable and bring about a real transformation in the

individual. That was his firm conviction. Even in his informal talks also he used to lay stress on this point. A strong and strict moral life lived for a long time alone will prepare the inner life of the individual to that great and true transformation which alone will ensure spiritual fulfilment. And if one has to achieve anything in spiritual life one needed tremendous grit and unrelenting struggle he used to tell in the interactive sessions with monastics and others.

There is a saying that a saint is canonized by the way he encounters death. Ever since the news of Prabuddhanandaji's broken health in 1912 was heard, monastic brothers and devotees were deeply perturbed. Even if slight improvement in his health condition was noticed it brought great relief to the monks and devotees. The last moments of his life is really unforgettable. That same tranquil face. There was no trace of pain or grief in that face which radiated abiding peace within. Sri Sri Thakur's picture was held before him. In a divine atmosphere generated by the chanting of holy name of Sri Sri Thakur, he seemed to remain eternally absorbed.

When one contemplates on the great personality of Swami Prabuddhanandaji, his generosity, heart-felt selfless love, and deep concern for others which are all the hallmarks of a devout soul of high spiritual stature invariably come to one's mind. His words of hope bring a fresh inspiration to our own individual spiritual struggle and deepens our faith instilling in us the conviction that we too can find true spiritual fulfilment by following the footsteps of great spiritual masters like Rev. Prabuddhanandaji.

RADHA CHAKLADER

“Shree Ramakrishnaya Namah”

PRANAM to Late Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj!

I will start my writing by showing two Photographs of Swamijis: PHOTOGRAPH 1. Late Swami Swananda of Berkeley Vedanta Society, Swami Prabuddhananda, Radha, Anjan and Alope (two Sons). Picture was taken by Dr. Chaklader, the year was probably 1977 or so. In that year we drove down to Los Angeles to visit the Vedanta centers and meet Swamijis. Late Swami Swanandaji was the Swami in charge of the Berkeley center at that time, He was our contact Person. Swami Swanandaji took us to visit Vedanta Society of Northern California and to meet Swami Prabuddhanandaji.



PHOTOGRAPH 2. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was the Chief Guest to Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Vancouver for their Annual celebration of Swami Vivekananda's passing through Vancouver in 1893! (The year the Parliament of World Religions was held)



My Impression: Right from the beginning, Swami Prabuddhanandaji struck me as a Vedanta Teacher per Excellence, in my humble opinion. His Discourses, Retreats, Question and Answer Sessions were so very good, we always learnt so much!

Also in my imagination, I thought Swami Prabuddhanandaji was like Lord Buddha, his demeanour, his calm, quite and poised manners etc. gave me that kind of impression and feeling.

Friendship of Two Swamijis:

Swami Prabuddhanandaji visited our Vancouver Vedanta society many times.

First Swami Bhaskaranandaji and Prabuddhanandaji came together to Vancouver, afterwards Swami Prabuddhanandaji came by himself many times.

It is my understanding that Swami Bhaskaranandaji and Swami Prabuddhanandaji were good friends, Swami Bhaskaranandaji told me so. In this connection (to prove my point) I would mention the Memorial Service of Swami Prabuddhanandaji which was a very Beautiful Service. A Meeting of so many Monks, Devotees, Friends at one Place and listening to so many profound Talks was a rare occasion. I am so glad that we were able to attend the Memorial Service. Grateful Thanks to the Organizers.

Our Vancouver Vedanta Society Members and Devotees, we are very close to Swami Bhaskaranandaji, He is our Spiritual Guide and He also is my Spiritual Teacher. Back to Memorial Service, when we returned to Vancouver from San Francisco after the Memorial Service, shortly after that, one day I was talking to Bhaskaranandaji on the phone. I mentioned that how beautiful was the Service and Swamiji's Talk was very good, Swamiji was the first speaker being the Senior Most Swami. Swamiji mentioned that he was choked during the delivery of his Talk and he had difficulty. I didn't notice anything different at all. I thought it was a very good Talk.

Sage YAJNAVALKYA AND MAITREYI:

Swami Bhaskarananda and Swami Prabuddhananda were visiting Vancouver Vedanta Society on invitation. They were staying at the Vivekananda House. At the Vivekananda House, the Shrine, the Room where Swamijis give Talks, Living Room is just one Big Room. The same Room is also used for eating Prasad meals (Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner). There is closeness as everything happens in one Room. Vivekananda House is a condominium House There are 6 Units in that Building Complex, Unit 4 is Vivekananda House. Swamijis were at the Vivekananda house, it was probably 12/13 years ago or a bit longer, that they came for a visit for 3 Days or so. The occasion was some kind of celebration, I cannot remember. It was one afternoon just before lunch time, during informal conversations with Swamis, a Question was

asked – The Question was addressed to Swami Prabuddhananda and the Question was –How to understand and realize that profound Knowledge IMMORTALITY and BRAHMAN! Swami Prabuddhananda got Swami Bhaskaranandaji’s attention and told him, “You see When Maitreyi (the first wife of Rishi Yajnavalkya asked Rishi YAJNAVALKYA (Brihadaranyaka Upanisad) how to attain immortality, what Rishi Yajnavalkya replied----- material possession cannot give immortality, it can give only enjoyments.

I have to mention the context where the above Dialogue between Sage Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi took place:

Philosopher Sage Yajnavalkya had two wives---Maitreyi and Katayani.

When the Sage was going to take up the life of a Sanyasin (Monk), He called his first Wife Maitreyi and said-- before I take the life of a Sanyasin, I would like to distribute my material Possession between You two. Maitreyi addressed her husband the Sage --- BHAGABAN will material Possession bring me Immortality? Sage replied ‘No’. Material Possession meant for enjoyment only. If material Possession cannot give Immortality, what will I do with them? Sage was pleased to hear Maitreyi’s answer. Maitreyi was deeply spiritual.

The above dialogue was very helpful (spiritually) to me at that time. It happened so many years ago, but I still remember that day when that Question of Immortality was asked.

There were many other instances when Prabuddhanandaji’s comments, remarks helped me to understand deeper meaning of Spiritual life. Questions and Answers were always short and Swami Prabuddhanandaji’s Answers were always probing and to the point.

In conclusion I wish to Quote SWAMI VIVEKANANDA’S SAYING,

Swami Vivekananda , “Work unto death, I am with you, and when I am gone my Spirit will work with you”.

Swami Prabuddhanandaji is gone, but I have no doubt that his SPIRIT is working with those who were close to Him or who came close to Him.

The Two Swamijis Visit was so long ago, that I forgot the story a little (Sage Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi). So I had to look up to two Books to tell the episode correctly, though I never forgot the essence of the story and the question asked.

The Books are: 1. The episode of Rishi Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi is from Brihadaranyaka Upanisad, the Book, "THE MESSAGE OF THE UPANISADS", Author Swami Ranganathananda. 2. SAT PRASANGA, A Bengali Book, AUTHOR, SWAMI VISUDDHANANDA. The most revered SWAMIJIS were Past Presidents of Ramakrishana Math and Mission, Belur Math.

You Probably knew Swami Ranganathanandaji, Swami Visuddhanandaji was Swami Bhaskaranandaji's GURU.

GREG MELTON

My meetings with Swami Prabuddhananda could best be described as potent. He would sit very quietly, seemingly staring into the distance, while I narrated my experiences or asked my questions. Early on, I often wondered if he was listening, but I soon discovered that he was concentrating very intensely on what I was saying (probably both verbally and non-verbally). Invariably, his responses were brief, but right on target often addressing things I was not consciously aware of. He immediately intuited my chosen ideal and his instructions in that regard were clear and concise and the path he chalked out for me was simple (although not easy). Perhaps as a consequence, I did not have that many one-on-one meetings with him.

I think we both shared a love of the Ramayana (particularly Ramanand Sagar's video production) and from time to time we would have lively discussions about certain chapters or episodes particularly as it relates to Bhakti Yoga as he knew I had more of a devotional temperament.

VIJAY GUPTA

Case of aches and pains

Late 1980's or early 1990's; Tripta (Mrs. Tripta M. Gupta) was having lots of aches and pains; and Kaiser Doctors were unable to help. I was quite concerned about Tripta and was determined to find a solution inside or outside the medicine. When a person has aches and pains, it wears them down quickly. It affects their work; behavior with the family; and overall facial looks. In those days, I used to see Swami Ji on Wednesday morning for an informal chat. It occurred to me that if I can keep Tripta busy and divert her mind to other activities, perhaps her aches and pains will no longer be an issue. Those days we were short of brahamcharies and I knew in an indirect sort of way that Swami Ji was doing some chores himself just to survive. On one Wednesday morning meeting; I suggested to Swami Ji that we can cook for the monastery twice a week to help out (with the shortage of brahamcharies). It might divert Tripta's mind to the extent that her aches and pains would be forgotten. Swami Ji thought about my idea and said that there is a good chance that it may work. I wanted Swami Ji to call Tripta and ask if she could help – the idea had to originate from the Temple. Swami Ji called her in her office.

That evening an excited Tripta got into the car at City Hall; told me about Swami Ji's phone call about food and shortage of brahamcharies; and immediately asked me to help out in buying vegetables; cutting and preparing them; and be her assistant. I was delighted with her enthusiasm. We used to deliver food on Wednesdays and Sundays. Within weeks her aches and pains were gone OR forgotten. I narrated this incident at a later date in private to Mr. N. Gowda and he was not surprised about the miracle.

1989 earthquake and my inspection 2323 Vallejo

On the morning after 1989 earthquake (it took place around 5:10 p.m. the day before); I instinctively knew that I must be in field and do random inspections to keep the administrative people happy. I wandered around China Town in the morning; after

inspecting several buildings and a sandwich lunch I drove over to 2323 Vallejo and Swami Ji happened to be in the main lobby. After the greetings, I asked if the Temple and nearby Temple properties are OK and shall I do a detailed inspection. Maharaj suggested inspecting the Temple and then to go over the Convent on block down the street. During the inspection of Temple, I observed that every nook and corner was being used as storage space and some of the critical valves were blocked by storage cardboard boxes. Looking at the heavily “stored” building, I was somewhat embarrassed and managed to say something like this, “Maharaj if a real building inspector came, he will issue a citation saying building is unsafe and is being used out of its intended usage. We really need an extension.” Maharaj immediately alluded to the cost of extension and the Temple unable to afford it. Having attended annual meetings, I was quite aware of our financial health but I was not prepared to challenge my Maharaj about the cost of extension. So I said something like this, “Maharaj next time I come to the Temple, I will bring you a cheque for \$1,001 for Temple Extension Fund.

It took few years but the extension was built and we have a spacious temple.

Deepak and Swamiji (about video copy)

Arun and Deepak were in Sunday school. Arun loved it and looked forward to it. Deepak did not like it for couple of reasons including the fact that the sister who was in charge of Sunday school was extra strict for no reason and she left Vedanta Society eventually. I had argued with Deepak that since he was born a Hindu, it was our (Tripta and I) duty to educate him in our way of life. Once the education is over, he is free to pursue it or not pursue it.

Deepak was sixteen and was already driving the car to his high school. One day on a Friday he received a phone call from Swami Ji at about 4 p.m. at home. Tripta and I were still in office. Maharaj wanted a copy of a video of certain Sunday school play because he was going to Toronto. In those days, I used to get video copies made and distribute it to Sunday school parents. Deepak swung into action, called the uncle in

Fremont who had the master, and asked for a copy in a hurry. That uncle told Deepak that needs to drop a passenger at SFO airport and he will personally drop the copy in our mail box by 10 p.m. Deepak then phoned Maharaj and said something like this, “Maharaj we are going to Los Angeles tomorrow in the morning to join a cruise day after; and we will swing by the monastery around 6 a.m. to drop off the video copy.” Next morning Deepak walked up the steps of the monastery alone and gave the Maharaj the video after touching his feet. Maharaj gave us a big box of trail mix to munch in the car and while on the cruise. When Deepak was in a relaxed mood later on, I asked him (with reference to his not liking the Sunday school) why he swung into action to Swami Ji’s phone call for the video copy. He said something like this, “Swami left his family to help us and others – he has sacrificed so much for his devotees; so when he needs something, I feel I should do it right away.” Needless to say, I was pleased with his answer, and Sunday School education had its intended effect.

Swami Chetanananda was our guest speaker at a Memorial Day retreat in Olema. A devotee was bringing him to the airport. Swami Prabuddhanandaji (Swami Ji) asked me to meet him curbside at the airport and put him on the plane by entering security. I was working as a volunteer at the airport and had permission to enter security at any time. His plane departed at 2 p.m. for St. Louis. We were waiting by the gate and near boarding time, they announced that the flight has been canceled and everybody line up to get a booking on an alternate flight. Swami Chetanananda was offered two choices – a plane at 10 p.m. with a connecting flight reaching St. Louis at 10 a.m. or a nonstop flight next morning at 8 a.m. We both selected the next morning at 8 a.m. flight.

With that I brought Swami Chetanananda home in Daly City. In the car he told me that he is very tired and needs to take a nap and would gladly overnight in our home. As soon as Swami Chetanananda got into bed he promptly fell asleep. When I came upstairs to tell Tripta what was happening, she whispered, “We must inform our

Swami Ji and should have his permission to have Swami Chetanananda overnight here.” I immediately placed a phone call to the barn in Olema.

Two hours later Swami Ji called to say that Swami Chetanananda is full swami; therefore he cannot stay in a family’s home. That he was sending someone from Olema to open the monastery. Swami Ji lovingly apologized to me for the back and forth driving that I was being subjected to. I assured Maharaj that I will gladly drive back and forth. Then Tripta took the phone and asked if she could pack dinner and breakfast for two; Maharaj chuckled to acknowledge that that was a good idea.

Next morning I put Swami Chetanananda on the 8 a.m. flight without further incident. Next Sunday when we greeted Maharaj after the lecture, he especially thanked us both for taking care of Swami Chetanananda in the manner he wanted.

Swami’s humor

In San Bruno near our home there is a Hindu Temple, erected by Fijian people of Indian descent. They are mostly blue collar workers. They have brought over a priest from Varanasi, India. Tripta was somewhat of an orthodox person and would not travel without going to the San Bruno Temple; offer prayers; and have the Pandit Ji tie the sacred thread for safe travels. She was a regular devotee of the San Bruno Hindu Temple, and had Pandit Ji over to the house to do Homa worship service. She had been once in the hospital for one month due to her pancreatitis problem and her gastroenterologist Dr. Gandhi had joked, “Upon release get the Homa service done to get rid of the demons.” We had just done that and the demons did go away.

With the above background when Tripta passed away – I went to the San Bruno Temple priest to ask for help performing the last rites. I told Pandit Ji that I need him on cremation day to do the chanting for half hour and same on the day of Memorial service. Pandit Ji looked at me quizzically and without uttering word walked away towards multipurpose room and the kitchen. Pandit Ji is a kind of an odd looking person, dhoti and undershirt, practically no hair but a long tail in the centre. He came

back with his impressive looking wife clad in an equally impressive sari. She told that last rites service includes Homa and it is three hours long. I told her that lot of important people are coming from City Hall and Panasonic (Arun's bosses and colleagues); therefore after thinking it over; I have come up with the chanting plan. I also said that instead of the customary fee of \$700, I will pay \$1,000. Pandit Ji and his impressive wife never said "no" but never said "yes" either. I left the temple very disappointed.

From outside the temple, sitting in the car, feeling very dejected; I called our Maharaj and told him about not able to get hold of a priest. Swamiji right away told me that he will send the VSNC sisters to do the chanting on Cremation Day and will send Swami Tattwamayana Ji for the Memorial Service Day. So it happened. On Cremation Day and on Memorial Service Day folks pressed envelopes with donations to VSNC in Arun's, Deepak's, and my hands. After everything was done, Arun was with me in Daly City and I was playing with Karina. I asked Arun that all the envelopes are in a basket on my desk; could he count them for me. He came upstairs to tell me that there are \$4,300 dollars and suggested that we add \$700 to it. Carrying a fat envelope with \$5,000 I went to see our Maharaj. He looked at my note and with a sparkle in his eyes, he said, "Five thousand". Then he cracked a joke – maybe we should do more funerals! He had a humorous trait.

Swami from AR wanting a tour of SF

Dear Sister: You can find the name of Swami from Argentina and the year of his visit from our temple records.

We invited Swami from Argentina to our Olema retreat in the year xxxx. Maharaj and party had already moved to Olema. I was instructed to pick up Swami AR from the airport, take him home for supper, and then bring over to Olema. I did just that.

Next day in Olema, Swami AR asked me to spare 3-4 hours and give him a tour of San Francisco City. Tripta was standing next to me with her arms wrapped around my arm.

On hearing the Swami AR's request, she sort of tugged my arm gently and very quietly, alerting me to be careful in my reply. So I told Swami AR that he is essentially a guest of our Maharaj, he needs his approval, and I also need my Maharaj's permission. The permission was not granted.

Later on I learned from Maharaj that he wanted Swami AR to spend his time visiting Olema; the State Park near Olema where Swami Vivekananda had visited; Old Temple, and New Temple. Next time when he visits, a tour of San Francisco will be included.

SHANTI MEHTA

I really miss my dearest guruji. What I admired most about Swamiji was his patience, kindness, gentleness, compassion, and love. No matter how late he was running, or how many appointments he had, we never felt rushed up when it was our turn. He listened patiently with great interest to any problem we were facing, and always gave us the right advice. I miss him dearly and am lost without him.

POVINDAR K. MEHTA

Swami Prabuddhanandaji was a father like figure to me. With his passing away, the roof above my head is gone, and I miss him tremendously.

Over the years, whenever I was sick, he made it a point to visit me at my home. I remember when he came to see me after I had a serious car accident. It was so comforting and healing to see him.

I would seek guidance from Swamiji for matters related to my work profession. He would remind me that I could serve selflessly in my job, and that it was my calling. I always knew he would set me on the right path.

Shanti and I looked forward to our visits with him, and there would be many over the 30 plus years. These meetings gave us closure on conflicts, and also gave us a sense of peace and calmness. Sometimes he would give us food for thought that would help us in future decisions. These are just a few memories that come to my mind immediately.

PETER RAVAZZA

The thing for me with Swami was his uncompromised sense concerning the role of the material in the spiritual life. I once said to him in the barn how much I admired how the Society in S.F. under his leadership never asked for money at its various events, retreats, etc. and that I noted and I felt this was something lacking in many spiritual-oriented groups. His comment was "*How could it be any other way?*" Swami for me was always focused and tuned in and there for everyone.

DEVRA FREEDMAN

Allen and I were at Belur Math when Swami Prabuddhananda was there for the great convention in 1981. I had not been well that day, so didn't go with Allen and Swami Bhaskarananda to Calcutta. I was mixing closely with the Japanese devotees who had come, because I felt most comfortable and at home with them. We were going to take a ferry somewhere and Swami Prabuddhananda was with us. So we were lined up going down a very narrow walkway to the ferry when the crowds behind us began to press fast forward, almost crushing us. There were a very tiny Japanese elderly woman with us, and Swami Prabuddhananda and I had to lift her up to keep her from being crushed underfoot. Both of us exchanged very scared looks as we held her up by her armpits. It was very frightening.

SUKDEB DATTA

In the great epic of “Mahabharat”, we read the episode where ‘King Yudhisthir’, while traveling in a forest with his four brothers, felt very thirsty. He asked one of them to get some water for him. When one after another, all the four did not return, he himself went to look for them and quench his thirst. He was very much shocked and surprised to see that his four brothers were lying dead by the side of a nearby lake. When he was about to go near the lake, he heard a mysterious voice, which warned him to stop and was asked to answer few questions first before he could proceed further. When he agreed, the voice asked him a number of questions. One of the questions was: **“WHAT IS THE WAY?”** In response he said: **“To follow the path tracked by the great souls”**.

Our scriptures tell us that we are potentially divine. In order to get out of this cycle of birth and death, it mentions first three necessary conditions: (1) human birth, (2) desire for liberation, and (3) company of great souls. It also tell us that we need a lighted lamp in order to light another one. I strongly believe that Swami Prabuddhanandaji’s life was one such illustrious example just before our very eyes, following which one would definitely benefit in one's spiritual journey. Though his life was apparently simple and straight forward, it was deeply rooted in the twin ideals of the motto of R. K. Math and R. K. Mission: "Atmano mokshartham jadad hitaya cha" i.s. 'For one's own salvation, and for the welfare of the world'. That is why the devotees irrespective of their age, country of origin, background, qualifications, profession, etc.; flocked around him and found solace, inspiration and new hope to proceed forward. He bound them all with his love, consideration and affection for all of them.

I met Swami Prabuddhanandaji in one summer of early 1970’s in ‘Ganges Township’ in Michigan, where Swami Bhasyanandaji of Chicago arranged a week end program and invited several swamis from various Vedanta Societies in USA. Swami Ashesananda, Swami Shraddhananda, Swami Swahananda, Swami Prabuddhananda and few other swamis were also there.

For those who are not familiar with the history of the “Vedanta Society of Toronto”, a brief history is mentioned. "Vedanta Society of Toronto" was formed and registered in 1968 in the Province of Ontario, Canada by some devotees of the 'Holy Trio', who received inspiration and encouragement from various monks of the R. K. Order. During those days, Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj used to come to the west to preach Vedanta almost every year. In Nov. of 1968, Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the Society. Swami Bhasyanandaji was our first President. In those days, we used to have our 'sat-sang' meetings in one of our member's home. We used to invite swamis from various Vedanta societies of USA, and arrange their accommodation in one of our devotee's home. For public lectures delivered by the visiting swamis or for public celebrations, we used to rent one community hall or lecture hall of a college/university or a church. During the summer, we used to arrange a spiritual retreat for one week with a visiting swami. That is how Swami Prabuddhanandaji came to Toronto so many times and we all benefited from his visits.

During those visits we used to have a very open discussion with him regarding various Vedanta topics. We also went to meet him at San Francisco, and from there went to "Shanti Ashrama", "Memorial Day Retreat at Olema, in Marin County" and summer retreat at "Lake Tahoe", several times.

Most of his talks/discourses/public lectures were based on the lives and teachings of the 'Holy Trio'. Also, we did notice that he used to ask real spiritual seekers to make it a habit of daily reading of 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' and 'Towards the Goal Supreme' by Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj (disciple of Swami Vivekananda and the sixth president of the R. K. Order). He used to stress that one would find the answers of all the questions which devotees face in their daily activities during the spiritual quest.

While some of us took initiation from the president, or the vice president of R. K. Order at 'Belur Math', or other swamis of USA, some of our members also took initiation from

him. But all of us felt great love, admiration as well as deep sense of respect for him. He also treated all of us with same love, care and consideration.

In this connection, I did recall that I was present at San Francisco during the visit of Swami Goutamanandaji, as well as that of Swami Smarananandaji. During their visits, Swami Prabuddhanandaji arranged to take them to Lake Tahoe and other places of interest. I had the privilege to be their designated driver for some of those trips.

During the 1980's, we approached the Head Quarter at 'Belur Math', to recognize 'Vedanta Society of Toronto' as a first 'Math Centre' in Canada. We did receive valuable instructions and guidance from Swami Hiranmayanandaji the then General Secretary of the R. K. Order, as well as various swamis from USA with whom we were closely associated with, regarding the best approach to fulfil our mission.

As per Swami Hiranmayanandaji's advice, during the early part of 1988, we did purchase a two storied new home in "Mississauga" Ontario, as our first property of the society, and requested Swami Hiranmayanandaji to visit us. He accepted our invitation and came from India. He was happy to see the new building of the society. As per his suggestion, we wrote to Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, the then president of the R. K. Order to come and bless our new premises. Since, his health was not good enough to take the long journey, Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, the then vice president of the R. K. Order, was selected to visit our centre in his place.

Just after Swami Hiranmayanandaji's visit, we all wanted to use the new building for our regular weekly meetings. Since there was a gap of few months before Swami Bhuteshanandaji's visit; we decided to invite Swami Prabuddhanandaji to visit us and install the 'Holy Trio' in our new premises. He readily agreed. As per his advice, we also installed Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ in our alter along with the 'Holy Trio'. When he came to know that in order to raise the requisite fund for the building, we had to take a loan from the bank and two of our members had to mortgaged their own

homes, he refused to accept his return air fare (about \$500.00) and asked us to take that as his personal donation for our 'building fund'.

Previously we used to conclude our meeting session with a chanting : "JAY SRI GURU MAHARAJ JI KI JAY, JAY MAHAMAYEE KI JAY, JAY SWAMIJI MAHARAJ KI JAY, JAY GANGA MAYEE KI JAY". He asked us to add: "JAY BHAGABAN BUDDHA KI JAY" AND "JAY ISHA MUSHA KI JAY". He also suggested to conclude with one prayer in 'Sanskrit' " SARVAS TARATU DURGANI, SARVA BHADRANI PASYATU,", along with the English meaning: "May all be freed from dangers, may all visualize what is good, may all be actuated by noble thoughts, may all rejoice every where. Om Peace, Peace, Peace".

Swami Bhuteshanandaji came along with his personal secretary Swami Nityamuktanandaji. Swami Sarvatmanandaji, the then assistant swami of Boston and Providence was also present during the official consecration ceremony of our new building. During the end of 1988, we were informed by the R. K. Math authorities that 'Vedanta Society of Toronto' henceforth would be considered as a Branch of R. K. Order and Swami Pramathanandaji who was then assistant minister of Sacramento, would become our new Minister- in-charge. Then, in March 1989 Swami Pramathanandaji came and took charge of our Toronto Ashrama. Over thirty devotees were present at the airport for a grand reception of the swami.

But due to our deep rooted bond with Swami Prabuddhanandaji, he still continued to visit us several times during Swami Pramathanandaji's ministration, as well as when Swami Kripamayandaji took charge in 2003, after Swami Pramathanandaji.

In conclusion, I recall few lines of one Bengali poem: "Can death erase the loving memories of one's dear one? Can one forget those fond memories?"

ANONYMOUS DEVOTEE

Swami's Gaze

Swami Prabuddhananda had a very focused gaze. When he would talk to someone, his eyes would remain open throughout the conversation, especially when he was saying something of deep import – which was usually always the case. On several occasions I would observe his eyes to see when they would blink. His usually did not blink during long conversations where he might be providing spiritual guidance.

This was the same case when he raised his eyes to see the image of the Lord or Mother. His gaze would be unwavering and his eyes did not blink. However, during worship, I observed the opposite phenomenon. His eyes would be locked to those of the Lord but they would be blinking rapidly. I first observed this at a pooja he did in 2007 when he got up to wave the lights and the Chamara. His eyes were blinking rapidly, as though he was viewing something very luminous that he could not observe for long without blinking.

Swami's Teaching Style

Before going out of his room, Swami would change from his indoor clothes to his outdoor clothes. I would then put on his orange socks and sandals, which had to be tightened by pulling the Velcro straps. He would sit on his chair and observe every action of mine very steadily.

He usually said very little and did not overtly correct me – even if I made a mistake. Once when I was pulling on his socks over his swollen feet, I pulled on the sock a little too hard causing him to grimace. Although he did not say anything to me, I quickly became aware of my mistake because Swami had been observing my every action carefully.

His teaching style was for the devotee to also be observant and attentive to whatever the devotee was doing which would automatically reduce the chances of any mistakes.

Swami was an extremely patient teacher. When he observed me making a mistake, he was in no hurry to correct me explicitly. Somehow, I would become aware of the mistake in Swami's presence and I would make a mental note to never repeat it. The usual culprit in my case was a lack of mindfulness when doing some work.

There was another instance of a mistake I made which makes me shudder to this day. Once, Swami was discharged from the hospital with a Foley catheter. The nurse at the hospital provided me with some training to change from the mobile unit to the bigger unit when resting at home. That evening when I was in the process of changing the units, I used an incorrect way to clamp down one of the tubes with the result that some urine seeped on to Swami's Dhoti and his leg. I was aghast and quickly cleaned up Swami's leg and changed his Dhoti. However, the thing that stood out in my mind during this whole incident was that Swami was perfectly calm and was observing the whole chain of events as though he were an outside witness. I distinctly got the feeling that he was looking at his own body and me from an external vantage point. I immediately knew that as he was observing my actions, he had already noted that I was using the wrong technique to clamp down the tube and yet he did not correct me at that instant because he was silently watching the chain of events and that this situation, even though it would prove to be physically uncomfortable for him would yet provide me with a learning opportunity.

That day, I truly realized how a "Stitha Prajna" lives and moves about in the world – someone who is completely detached from his own likes and dislikes and who displays no aversion to seemingly unpleasant situations. Ever the Guru – sacrificing his comfort and well-being to provide an opportunity for the disciple to learn an important lesson in mindfulness. In retrospect, I realized that had Swami corrected my technique and avoided the mishap or had he expressed his irritation at the event, I as the disciple would never have gotten the space and time to absorb this lesson. By making himself completely passive and neutral, he allowed his body to be used as an instrument for my learning.

Swami's most effective mode of instruction was never verbal. Instead it was just his being – his aware-full presence. When one was around him, one could feel that his presence was distinctly different than that of the others. Swami never seemed to be in the worldly mould, instead he always seemed to be deeply centered within himself and was never hurried in any of his actions.

Vivekananda Hall

While I was rendering service to him during the nights (2012 – 2013), he would go for his walking exercise to the Swami Vivekananda Hall around 7:30pm or so. Once his sandals were on, he would get up and put on his sleeveless fleece jacket and check to make sure that his keys were in his pocket.

He would then use his walker to walk out of the room and wait at the front door for me to open the door. He would then get into the temple and wait for the elevator door to open. He would enter the elevator and slowly turn 180 degrees by which time we would have reached the 2nd floor.

When the door opened on the Auditorium floor, he would step out. Since his neck muscles were quite weak, his head would be bowed down while walking. As he exited the elevator, he would look up to see the handful of nuns who would be gathered in silent greeting. This was usually their only sighting of him for the entire day. He would cast his gaze on each person and would slowly motor his way to the shrine door in silence.

When he saw the nuns, there was usually no formal acknowledgement or smile. However, his awareness of their presence would have registered very deeply within himself and the others. There would only be a very deep silence all around.

When the shrine door was opened, his gaze would pointedly look at the Lord and Mother and he would stand for a few moments and then turn towards the Vivekananda Hall.

The one thing I remember distinctly about the way he entered the Vivekananda Hall was that as soon as the door was opened he would raise his head and gaze fixedly at Swamiji's eyes and then he would begin his walking in the hall. In that moment I felt as though Swami Vivekananda was himself present in the room and Swami Prabuddhananda would greet him in silence before entering his domain.

I meditate upon this often and yet, even today, when I enter the SV Hall, I just open the door and walk in before realizing that Swami Vivekananda is gazing down benevolently from that large picture frame. I have realized that the cultivation of the presence of God is easier said than done.

These small incidents from Swami's life have driven home the point that Swami was always present in the present moment and his thoughts were constantly tuned to the divine and that no action was mundane or ordinary to him. For him, entering the SV hall was not entering into a room, rather he was being let into the presence of Swami Vivekananda and he deeply felt the significance and holiness of that moment.

Be a Devotee

Once when the Swami assigned me some heavy responsibility I asked him what my duties were. He looked at me for a moment and said to me just 3 words: "Be a Devotee". He did not elaborate further and proceeded to some other task. After I reflected on his cryptic answer for sometime in the shrine, the significance of his answer became self evident as though a light bulb went on.

A devotee is someone who is devoted to an ideal that is larger than himself and sacrifices his all in the service of that ideal. When I considered his response in this light, I found that almost any duty that we are responsible for, if it is executed in a spirit of

offering and devotion then it will automatically yield the best results not only for those who are receiving the service but also for the one rendering that service.

As I continued to think more on this “Devotee” theme, I started recalling other stray incidents during my association with him, where he had stressed the “Devotee” term.

The first one that I recollected was when a couple came with their newborn to seek his blessings. The Swami tapped the child’s forehead and said, “Become a Devotee”. At the time I did not think too much of it. But in light of this newfound “Devotee” connection, I realized that Swami had blessed the child with the highest possible accomplishment that someone can have in his or her life – to be the Lord’s devotee and to live a life that is dedicated to his service to such an extent that one merges one’s identity with that of the Lord’s.

Another incident occurred in the monastery when someone introduced his friend as a very diligent “worker” at a Vedanta Society in another state. Swami’s immediate, but gentle rejoinder was just one word “Devotee”. I am not sure whether the person to whom it was addressed got the connection, but I definitely realized that all of us working together under the Lord’s roof are Devotees first and last. There are no workers here.

A friend of mine shared this last incident with me. While Swami was visiting another center, someone asked him, “How is it that in your center so many people come to the services and so much work gets done?” Swami stopped his walking and looking the person deep in his eyes responded – “You have to be there for the Devotees first”.

In my own observation of his life, I have noticed that no matter what difficulties or discomfort Swami might be in, he was always concerned about the other person. Whenever someone approached Swami, he would ask them how everything was at home and he had an uncanny way of sensing when someone needed his support or guidance. Whether that person was in San Francisco or in New York, Swami had a way of checking in with you via a brief phone call just when you needed him the most.

ESHA AND SRIMOYEE RAY CHAUDHURI

Both Srimoyee -our daughter and I wanted to go to San Francisco to visit Swamiji but somehow the opportunity never came. How can we ever forgive ourselves for not trying harder to make this plan come true! Swamiji had phoned us here in Calgary in 2009 November, after learning about my husband, calmly consoling us in his wonderful assuring voice and had kindly asked us to come and spend the Christmas time with you all at the Center. I pray to Holy Mother and Thakur to forgive us and also beg forgiveness from Swamiji himself for not being able to try harder to deserve the privilege of this loving order of Swamiji.

Swamiji had established a very special bond with our family. And for ever a very special place in our hearts. Following the advice of Swami Aseshanandaji at Portland Centre- from whom I had the privilege to receive initiation - I had contacted Swmai Prabuddhanandaji

from Calgary in 1985 , to seek advice on our upcoming challenging trip to San Francisco, a totally strange city where we knew no one.

In 1985, when my husband Syamal had his heart bypass done at the UCSF Moffit Hospital , Swamiji with his typical graciousness

volunteered to become both a loving mother and an assuring father to us and to our very young child. He arranged to have some devotee families

-who had children of their own - come and pick up Srimoyee (the child) while I stayed the whole day at the hospital. On the Christmas Day (we were still there)

he even arranged for Srimoyee to go and meet Santa (once again with the very kind support of some devotee families) and even get some wonderful little gifts !

During my husband's stay at the hospital, Swamiji himself came to visit him often and blessed us all with offered flower to Holy Mother !

Afterwards with the successful surgery, when we returned to Canada, Swamiji had asked us to come back at a better time especially to visit the Retreat at Olema.

Yet that dream of ours also never could be realized!

It had indeed been a privilege for us though that we did keep in touch always, through phone calls and mails.

Swamiji's kind and loving Christmas greetings always heralding the Season of Joy at our home.

Do kindly forgive me please , for sharing all these random thoughts - our most precious memories. Somehow though I feel that by this sharing I am able to seek the

grace of Thakur and Holy Mother to express our utmost gratitude to Swamiji and to you all at the San Francisco Vedanta Society.

B. SUDHAKAR PAI

I am extremely sad to know the Sad & Sudden demise of our Respected and most Loved Swami Prabuddhanandaji in San Francisco. Please accept our Heartfelt Condolences and convey the same to all in Ramakrishna Mission and Vidyarthi Mandiram. We pray to the Lord to keep His Soul in Eternal Peace and also give us all the Strength and Courage to face this Irreparable Loss boldly.

I had the good fortune to be a Mandiram Boy, when Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji was our Warden for 4 years(1960 to 1964) and before that in 1959 when Revered Swami Ritatmanandaji was our Warden. Since then, I have been in touch with Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji through e-mails till recently and he used to send us his Blessings. Personally it is a Great Loss to me.

MBS PRAKASH

I have been a devotee in Bangalore during his stay here as President Maharaj. In fact, we four friends accompanied him during 1970 June, till Calcutta Airport. That was an opportunity extended by this great Swamiji.

I wish to convey my respectful pranams to the departed Soul. He has spread Swami Vivekananda's message in US for the improvement of mankind for nearly 45 years.

We, here in Bangalore, have set up a School, named Swami Vivekananda Vidyashala, with his wholehearted support; during his tenure in San Francisco, till last month (June 2014) with a large Donation (around \$8000). We will greatly remember Swamiji's support till the school function.

SUBHASH KALE

Remembering Swami Prabuddhanandaji on Guru Purnima- July 19, 2016

Guru Purnima brings mixed emotions to me. It is hard to believe that our beloved Guru passed on to Sri Ramakrishna loka two years ago already on July 2. So, two years and more that two weeks hence, I am trying to write down some memories of our blessed association with him.

First Meeting:

We had heard about Swami Prabuddhanandaji from a fellow devotee. She was visiting San Francisco many years back. And in a weak moment, as the Swami said later, he agreed to visit our small group- Ramakrishna Vedanta Center in Houston. The visit occurred around middle of 1995. Me and Arundhati had moved to Houston in 1989. We had formed this small group and used to invite few swamis a year. We used to meet in our house and had a little portable amplifier system. I had the good fortune of putting the lapel microphone on the Swami and noticed that he was very grave. I don't remember what he spoke on but his slow measured words punctuated by a deep silence impressed everyone in the small audience we had. What was the most impressive to me was that his facial expression changed in the middle of the talk and he was as if in a different realm. Even some devotees in the audience noticed it and said this Swami may be 'Realized'.

We took him to several other devotees' houses. In one devotee Dr. Rao's house, my wife, Arundhati got to talk to him a little bit on a one-to-one basis and was deeply touched by his love and affection. She used to bug me about not spending enough time with the family and neglect our little daughter. However, after coming in contact with the Swami, she became an ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and a sincere admirer of the Swami who loved her like her father. One saint has said that one can judge a Holy man to some extent by the change he brings in others in contact with him. By that measure, he was truly holy to bring such transformation in others.

Initiation:

This is a long story and somewhat personal. However, I will try to briefly summarize it here. Vedanta Society of Northern California had a landmark occasion in December 1995 for the dedication of Swami Vivekananda hall. Swami Prabuddhanandaji had invited a number of Swamis to visit the center on this grand occasion. We thought of visiting the center then also. We heard a great deal about Swami Sarvagathananandaji of Boston and his potential visit to San Francisco for this occasion. I was interested in getting initiation from Swami Sarvagathanandaji, since he was one of the few living Swamis then, who were disciples of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. When I talked to Swami Prabuddhanandaji about in my mumbling fashion about initiation, he misunderstood me and thought I was requesting initiation from him. He invited our family to San Francisco for this occasion. When we did visit San Francisco, Swami spent considerable time in the middle of his very busy schedule to prepare for the landmark occasion. He patiently heard my ideas about getting initiation and answered my questions. I was surprised he did not refuse me for further consideration though I felt he was very close to that possibility. I think the presence of Arundhati helped him to bear with me and finally after some hesitation, I told him that we both were ready to be initiated by him. He asked me to get the request for initiation by him cleared with Swami Chidanandaji of Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago, who was guiding Ramakrishna Vedanta Center in Houston. Both Swamis Chidnanandaji and Swami Tathagathanandaji, with whom I was associated for a number of years, gave the permission for initiation from Swami Prabuddhanandaji. So, on that auspicious day of the dedication of Swam Vivekananda Hall, Swami Prabuddhanandaji initiated both me and Arundhati and also a third devotee from Houston. It was amazing for him to do this on a very busy and one the most important occasion for his center. We were overwhelmed with Swami's kindness. My wife mentioned that we did not choose him to be our Guru but rather he chose us to be his disciples.

Other Meetings:

The Swami visited Houston on two or three other occasions. Each visit was memorable. The one we especially remember was the retreat he held at Margaret Austin Center- about an hour's drive from Houston, where a few of us had the blessings to have a live in retreat with the Swami. The topic of discussion was Maya, I think. I realized then that the Swami did not speak in informal evening meetings unless some one asks a question. We had to hold our question until he finished replying a particularly interesting question. The answers come from deep within, he said. His last visit to Houston was in 2009 after which he could not visit us due to his illness. We made it a point to visit San Francisco at least once or twice each year to see and hear him during all the memorable retreats in Olema, Shanti Ashrama or Lake Tahoe. We particularly enjoyed the Lake Tahoe retreat where the Swami was much more relaxed and the ambiance was extremely scenic. I still distinctly remember his last retreat at Lake Tahoe on Chapter 18 of Bhagvad Gita, of which Swami Chidbrahmanandaji has so kindly provided video memories.

Swami's illness:

Just like Thakur's illness brought his disciples together, Swami Prabuddhanandaji's illness brought a band of volunteers together. This dedicated volunteer team served him round the clock for almost three years, an incredible feat. I was so inspired by seeing how devotedly the volunteers took care of the Swami that I requested the person in charge of the volunteer caretaker team to let me do some service to the Swami. The volunteer lead went out of his way to help me. Swami Prabuddhanandaji's kindness was without bounds. He used to put up with my constant fidgeting around when he was trying to meditate and my overzealous attempts to serve him. He would let me massage his feet- a job I loved and tried hard to master but could not. The Swami would gently remind me to cut my nails when they used to scratch him during my strenuous attempts to massage his feet. Bill had warned all of us not to badger Swami with questions during this time since he needed quiet time to prepare for his departure.

I would curb my enthusiasm to ask questions with great difficulty but did ask him some things a few times. I used to see his lips moving when he took naps and asked him if he was doing japa all the time even during sleep. He said he did not do just the Japa but different spiritual practices like japa, prayer, worship and meditation at different times according to his mood. I used to miss retreats at Shanti Ashrama, Olema, etc. in order to be with him and cherished those quiet times. It was really touching to see him go to the altar every day and take walks later in Swami Vivekananda hall in spite of his failing health. It was incredible that he would come on Sundays after the regular service and answer questions from the devotees for an hour or two.

The Swami used to try to teach me a thing or two even in his illness. I got a sharp rebuke once for using the wrong basket for dirty and clean laundry, a system I was not aware of. He quickly mellowed later when he saw my hurt. At other times, he would comment on how regimented I was in trying to administer Swami's medicines per a predetermined schedule. He took the medicines at his own pace and did not want to be rushed into taking them at fixed times. Even though he spoke very little, he communicated his deep spirituality just by being in his company. Even the paid attendants who used to serve him later in his illness commented on this fact. One of the Tibetan attendants commented that he felt the same spirituality in the company of the Swami as he had experienced when he saw the Dalai Lama. I particularly enjoyed the time when I was with him during one Thanksgiving and enjoyed having him being all to myself for a couple of days with no constant visitors or phone calls as was the norm.

Swami's Teachings:

Swami was very subtle in giving particular instructions in his role as a Guru. I have a bad habit of carrying my tea cup with me and drinking tea while I was driving. Swami told me to give up drinking tea altogether. When I mentioned that I was addicted to it

and promised that I would not drink it while I was driving but only when I had stopped at a stop sign or traffic light he laughed.

Though the Swami was patient and loving, he always tried to inculcate some discipline in the devotees, a discipline he so rigorously practiced all his life. He used to make sure to send us Prasad and an offered flower within a few days after major worships in the new temple. This discipline is still visible in the very organized way each of the retreats and major programs of the Vedanta Society are conducted.

He wanted me to follow a regular routine and go half hour early to work. It was hard to change the total irregularity in my life. Swami used to say that if I did not listen to him, I would suffer the law of Karma. I did lose a couple of jobs due to my tardiness. Each time, I used to run to him with an SOS and miraculously by his grace would land another sometimes even better job. I find myself in between jobs again. Now that he is no longer on the physical plane, I would have to pray really hard to seek his help from his abode far above from which I am sure he is looking after all his disciples. My last sight of him was when I was departing from a visit in either late 2013 or early 2014. I bowed down and asked him to hit a tappal (mild hit) on the head that he used to do in the good old days. Even though weak, he smiled and leaned forward to give me the much coveted Prasad.

Sri Nisarga Datta Maharaj of 'I am That' fame, had commented once that initiation is like a marriage. It needs to happen only once. Even if a Guru has passed on, one should not think that one has become a widow. Another saint from India, Sri Gondawlaker Maharaj said that your parents only look after you for one life. However, a Guru looks after his disciples from life to life until they achieve liberation.

We are fortunate to have numerous audio and videos of his lectures. I wish to obtain his lectures on the Katha Upanishad, which will be treasure trove.

Final departure:

The Swami had many miraculous turn arounds in his fluctuating health situation. The doctors had given him only six months to live. By the Grace of the beloved Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, and by his sheer will power, he managed to stay around for almost three more years. I think at some point he said 'All right' as he used to say many times, which would signal the end of a conversation either on the phone or in person. He said many times that after 40+ years of service to the Holy Trio, he felt contented and had no regrets.

In July, 2014, the end for which he was eagerly waiting and praying for soon approached. I had heard of his serious condition, but could not gather the courage to rush to see him, which I often regret. Finally, on July 2, 2014, we did hear the sad news of his departure to Sri Ramakrishna loka. I am eternally grateful to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, for making him come into our lives as a Guru. I am sure the he would be around when our departure time comes to lead us to the Holy Trinity.

ARUNDHATI KALE

No words can fully describe the lives of great souls. The love and compassion they shower without expecting anything in return cannot be replicated by ordinary people. One such soul was Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj. Those who came in contact with him even for a short while would undoubtedly experience this love. His serene presence exuded calmness and any restlessness of the mind would naturally be subdued by it. If one word could describe his life, it would be “deep”; he had found the rare treasure of spiritual gems by diving deep into the ocean of spirituality and was ever ready to share them with those who sought them.

I just cannot express in words what Swami meant to me – he was my father, mother, teacher, best friend, confidante, Guru and guide. His grace was unbounded even though I was undeserving. Many times I wonder what I must have done to have such a loving and caring Guru. In the beginning, he appeared to be very serious and someone to be feared, but very soon I developed such an intimate relationship with him that I did not feel scared to ask him the stupidest questions, whether they were related to worldly life or spiritual. He would always find a way to encourage me on the spiritual path. Re: worldly problems, his advice to deal with the problems always was: 1. “Accept and transcend” and 2. “Raise your consciousness” and I have found this helpful every time. His third advice was “somehow always bring God into the picture in order to spiritualize everyday life. When I asked him about how to purify the mind, his quick reply was the same – “bring God into the picture, He is the purifying agent; don’t expect to first purify the mind and then see God”.

He was very private regarding his pre-monastic life and never divulged any information. We asked him about his birthday and he would just change the topic or say “think of more important things! Don’t think about the body too much”. Yet, he would send me birthday wishes every year! I was deeply touched when he sent me a letter of consolation after my father’s passing while I was still in India. I used to write

long letters to him and he never failed to reply; initially he sent written replies but when he developed tremors, he would call and fix a phone appointment and would clarify all my points and doubts. I would always complain to him that I was not making any spiritual progress; he would always say “Good that you are not happy and satisfied-try harder and persist - Success is sure to come!”

“Be perfect in everything you do; do not give excuses like “it’s not for me” or “we are just human beings, bound to make mistakes, etc”. His practical way of demonstrating this is evident in the activities of the San Francisco center where everything is done in such a precise and perfect manner. He would personally make sure that all activities and preparations for any event were being done at the right time and in the right manner. Spending time at the SF center has taught me so many things other than Swami’s personal guidance with spiritual development. Maintaining physical purity and cleanliness while working in the puja prep room and “pure” kitchen automatically makes us think of being pure both externally and internally. I practice that in our Houston center to the best of my ability. To him, the images in the altar were not images but living beings, so everything related to the altar is to be done with utmost respect keeping this in mind.

He used to prepare one dish every year to offer Holy Mother on her birthday. I was given the opportunity to help him a couple of times. He would follow the instructions in the recipe to the “T”, not allowing any deviations or shortcuts! What I learnt from that was to follow the instructions he gave me to the “T” as well although I’m not always successful because of the mind not cooperating, but I’ll keep trying.

One time I asked him which Gita verses were his favorites. He said “you have asked me a very difficult question”. He said he had tried to underline the best verses in the book but soon he found he was underlining so many! He said depending on his mood and what he was doing, different verses appealed to him and made practical sense. His

advice was “Make the Gita your manual for life and living”. He quoted 18:10 and said it was the most practical for a ‘*karmayogi*’ like me.

“The relinquisher endued with Sattva and steady understanding, having his doubts dispelled, neither hates disagreeable work nor is attached to agreeable work”

He told me about his own experience in Bangalore. He was given the task of milking the cows, which he did not like to do. After remembering this verse he said everything changed and he no longer found the task unpleasant. Running away from unpleasant tasks does not help! First make all actions “sattvic” by abhyasa, don’t worry about transcending the gunas, that happens automatically. I asked him about how one can work without expecting the fruit of actions, because the fruit is oftentimes the motivator of action. He said, “Alright, make God realization your fruit and work”! Don’t expect small fruits, the goal must be larger and always kept in mind. He quoted several verses that day – 18:66, 18:61, 9:18, 18:26, all of which describe the all-pervading nature of God and totally surrendering to Him, which was always the state of his own mind.

He would always tell me “make use of your *buddhi* and let not the mind dictate what you do. Constantly think of God and do your work with a prayerful attitude. Dis-identify yourself from the body and mind and stay calm. Do not worry about others – there is always “fire” in the world, so you go with a fire extinguisher! “Bring the forest home” while doing your duty, stay calm and detached, this is the psychological description of renunciation. “Make spiritual life your lifestyle, once you get a taste of truth, it is strengthening and invigorating”.

During the last 3 years of his life, his physical health was up and down and he was hospitalized several times. I visited SF for Sri Ramakrishna’s birthday and he was unfortunately hospitalized just the day before. There was worship at the convent and then at the new temple. In the afternoon, we all went to Berkeley as is the usual custom. Swami T and other men devotees visited him in the hospital but I couldn’t go with them. My heart was aching not being able to see Swami and taking his blessings that

day. After returning from Berkeley I called Swami in the hospital and asked him if I could visit. My joy knew no bounds when he said, “Yes, come”! I went to the hospital and saw him. I could not believe how thin he had become; however, his eyes were bright and full of life. After spending a few minutes talking, it was time for me to leave. I put my head on his feet and he blessed me with both hands on my head and said “May Sri Ramakrishna bless you”. My heart has been full ever since. I felt Sri Ramakrishna’s presence and perceived his direct blessings and my aching heart was soothed. When I think of that day, it still gives me goose bumps and I feel a strange contentment in my heart. It reminds me of Holy Mother’s saying that she felt “a pot of Bliss” was in her heart. Since that day, I have felt Swami’s presence with me all the time and I feel closer to him than ever.

He exhibited all qualities of a *sthitaprajna*, a man of steady wisdom. Although his physical health was failing, he never complained of the medical challenges; he never failed to visit the shrine and pray every day and presided over the Q&A session after the Sunday talks as long as he could. He would make his attendants read aloud the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother’s teachings, conveying his message in silence; he influenced even the nursing aides employed to take care of him who commented about his deep spirituality. Having never been attached to his body, he surrendered it all to Mother and merged with the Infinite on July 2, 2014. He left behind a lot of devotees, to whom he gave assurance in his own words: “your Guru never leaves; he’s always in your heart”. May his life be an inspiration to all of us!

THE SAN FRANCISCO INTERFAITH COUNCIL

Dear MIC leaders,

I forward this email, *see below*, from the San Francisco Interfaith Council.

A number of us met and knew Swami Prabuddhananda over the years, and for those of us who know Swami Vedananda, this is a loss of an important colleague and leader. We hold the Vedanta community in our thoughts and prayers and honoring of Prabuddhananda,

The Reverend Carol Hovis
Executive Director
Marin Interfaith Council
1510 Fifth Ave.

San Rafael, CA 94901

The San Francisco Interfaith Council extends its condolences and prayers to the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, on the passing of Swami Prabuddhananda. We were blessed to count this inspirational religious leader among the true luminaries of our interfaith community; a presence that added richly to the spiritual fabric of our City. May his memory be a blessing.



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May his memory be a blessing.

To view his obituary, please visit:

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/sfgate/obituary.aspx?n=swami-prabuddhananda&pid=171765397>

DR. MAKUM RAMESH

It is very difficult for me to say anything about Revered Swamiji. One incident has really made a long-lasting impression in my mind. We were still in college. Swamiji was still in Bangalore. We went to him to offer our pranams after evening prayer in the ashrama. Some pennies and quarters fell out my shirt pocket when I prostrated at his feet. He smiled and asked me what is the sweetest thing I have. I did not answer. He said you are the sweetest thing you have. That is what you have to offer to the Lord. Complete surrendering. It gives me chills each time I think about. Sweet memories!

I cannot forget his smiling and peaceful face. It is imprinted in my heart. I am extremely fortunate to get his blessings.

MOLLIE BASU

I moved to California when I was in my early 20s. It was the decade of the 60s. Being young, adventurous, and a bit rebellious, I was open to discovering new ways of thinking and living. I was inclined to be cynical about religion because of the hypocrisy I observed in the past. This cautious and somewhat critical nature actually protected me from the excesses of the drug culture, liberation movements, and the life style of “tuning in, turning on and dropping out.” Another feature of that time was the arrival of false prophets and charlatan gurus promising enlightenment. This exploitation of the vulnerable reinforced my mistrust of all things “religious.”

Several decades later after maturing and experiencing some bumps in the road of life, I began to re-evaluate what I thought was true.

Swami Prabuddhananda was the first religious person I had met who seemed to meet the qualifications of what I felt was characteristic of an authentic life of the spirit. He had a dignified, quiet countenance and did not curry favor and discouraged “cultishness”. There was no demand to believe or worship any certain way and he taught an inclusive, universal message. Over the years I observed him in different situations and this never varied. My own shyness prevented me from direct encounters. I was somewhat in awe of him and felt tongue-tied in his presence. Nevertheless, I learned so much from him- from Sunday lectures to retreats and discussions in Tahoe and Olema.

Following are some specific impressions or memories:

1. I was struck by his overview of a situation and his attention to detail. He always seemed to be managing whatever happened to be going on.

2. On Tuesdays during harvest time, he seemed to especially enjoy his time in the orchard tasting the different varieties Amaraprana selected for him.

3. I enjoyed being at the WRH when he came to talk on Tuesday afternoons. He gave each question such a thoughtful response. I could see that he was considering what would be the most helpful answer. It was here that I saw proof of how committed he was to a universal message and how skillful he was at discerning what might be the subtext of the questioner.

4. Once he remarked about choosing an “ideal” for practice. To paraphrase, he said if you want to think of God as impersonal, then you have to be impersonal. That has guided me so many times in my meditation.

5. A most cherished personal memory is that of a prasad luncheon. As he circulated among the devotees, he stopped to ask me what happened to the chocolates. I replied, “I’ve already offered them up”. It elicited a hearty laugh out loud and it was a surprising moment for me.

These are only a few of the many memories I carry with me. I will end by recounting a dream I had several months after he died. I’m at the temple in a large gathering of people from Swami’s life-devotees that I recognize and many I don’t know- family and friends from India. There is the understanding that we are all there to say good-bye, knowing that he will soon be gone. Swami circulated among the crowd and greeted everyone with good cheer and equanimity. There were no tears- no sadness. It was a party of celebration and appreciation for us, but for Swami it was just another day of his life- nothing special or different about it. And when I think of him now or feel his presence, especially in Olema, it’s as if there is no difference and there has been no separation.

SUMANA RAMAKRISHNAN

If I am at peace with myself and the world around me,
It is thanks to my Guru's divine Grace.
If I am proceeding, however tardily,
On the straight and narrow
Thorny Path of Sadhana,
It is because of Swami Prabuddhananda.

How fortunate I was when I stepped on these shores
Thirty years ago and until he passed,
With so many gifts to be bestowed.
Encouragement, consolation, praise,
Immediate rest to troubled thoughts
In just a single, succinct phrase!
So wise, Buddha-like, and serene
Perfect answers to questions keen.

What an understanding and kindly soul!
A father, no mother, to all!!
"More and more," he exhorted,
For us to do our practices.
Never reproaching, only motivating,
Gently prodding to achieve the Goal.

Deep, deep gratitude, I feel
Towards Swami Prabuddhananda,
For his compassionate address of my weal,
For his loving, patient leading
Me toward the Real.

A SAN FRANCISCO DEVOTEE

I first met Maharaj on a Wednesday evening after meditation and service. When I went up to greet, he kindly asked me about my whereabouts.

I told him that one of my ancestral family members was a monk in the Order and his face lit up. He also shared fond reminiscences about other Swamis from the town where I grew up.

He genuinely asked me to visit again during Sundays and regular programs.

Soon after the initial meeting I wanted to meet him again and took an appointment. I showed a picture of the senior Swami from the Order from whom I had taken the initiation during my student days. Maharaj asked me to hand over the instruction booklet that was given to me during my initiation and asked me to read from it though it was in a language not native to him. I realized the true purpose of his request only afterwards. During that meeting he specifically instructed me on the importance of nidhidhyasana.

He would always enquire about my family with utmost sincerity and concern. He always exhorted me to pray to Mother. I often felt that for him Mother was the go to contact and that he was constantly in Her presence. This was amply demonstrated to me in due course.

The more I visited him I was drawn to his serene and commanding presence. Once during the karma yoga at Olema I wanted to ask him about some work related detail and went looking inside the barn front side room. Only a few minutes ago I had seen him walk around the lawn near MRH and now he was seated in deep meditation. Often he would emphasize about learning to sit quietly as a preparatory step for deeper flights into inner space in due course - "Don't worry at first! Just sit and eventually you will get glimpses of that dynamic stillness!" Once he beautifully compared the steady flight of a plane at peak altitude to the sattvic mind in meditation. When I spoke to him about some personal issues, he asked me to transcend the problem on hand and reach

out to higher states of mind. At the same time he would always advise me to deal with the transactional duties and actions in a very practical manner.

Once when I told him about the turmoil that I was going through, he looked at me and said softly but firmly - 'face the brute!' There was no room for weakness in his presence. Even towards his last days when his physical frame was subject to severe onslaught one could feel the presence of his beloved Mother shining through his gentle countenance. During the last months when his physical condition deteriorated, he would not get a wink of sleep for nights together and still he would be up and ready in the morning cheerfully telling his anxious well-wishers who enquire about his condition 'feeling better and better!' and I would watch this with complete amazement. If by sheer chance he gets 3-4 hours of sleep on a Saturday night, he would be much looking forward to go down for the Q & A after Sunday lecture to meet with his students and devotees in the hall that he built.

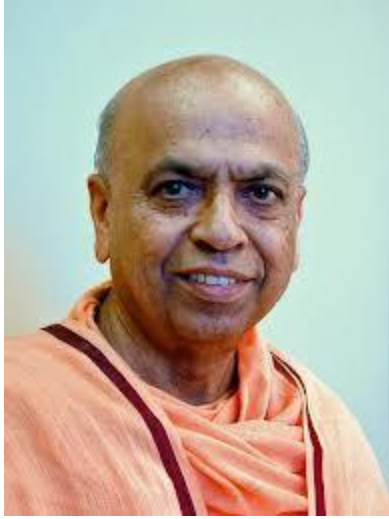
He would often ask me to read from a specific portion of the text. At first I used to tell Maharaj that we will continue from where I had previously stopped and he would not budge an inch. Then I realized that he was specifically instructing me using that text. During another time when he was resting alone after lunch and medicines, I asked him a specific doubt - instantly he looked at me and said "ask Her!" in a most natural manner possible as though She is right next to him in that room. I asked who - and then Maharaj raised his face to the portrait of Mother. The same was true during his worship when he would fervently talk to Thakur in such a yearning note - Sri Ramakrishna iha aagacha! That he was in Their constant presence was all the more evident a few hours before he passed away - his head was propped against some pillows in the hospital room and suddenly another senior Swami holding the picture of his beloved Mother uttered the words 'Holy Mother!'. Instantly he looked up and a faint smile appeared on his face.

Every year in the last lecture of the season dedicated to Swamiji, Maharaj would quote with majestic presence the words of his beloved hero - 'Call upon the sleeping soul and see how it wakes up!' That would leave most of us with enough charge to keep going

until the next opening session in September. Though he may not be physically with us, I am sure that he is guiding us in every way. This is truly the blessing from my teacher who initiated me but never had a chance to interact afterwards. That in turn is the power of the bija mantra of Sri Ramakrishna - once it is planted it will germinate, grow and blossom in due course of time. There is no need to connect the dots. I leave that to my teachers.

REMINISCENCES OF SWAMI PRABUDDHANANDA

AMERICAN VEDANTIST



Swami Prabuddhananda, Minister-in-Charge of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco since 1970, passed away on July 2, 2014 at the age of 84. He was born in Karnataka state, India, in 1929, and joined the Ramakrishna Order in his early 20s. Before coming to the United States, he had served as President of the Bangalore Ramakrishna Ashrama, a large center of the Order in South India. He was highly respected for his purity of character and unflinching dedication to the monastic ideal. He was also a loving guide to many disciples and other spiritual aspirants. During his long stewardship of the San Francisco Center, he encouraged and presided over considerable expansion of the Society's facilities and activities, including the establishment of women's and men's retreat houses at the large Olema Retreat property in Marin County, opening the retreat facilities to spiritual seekers of all traditions, and the institution of the Annual Memorial Day interfaith program at the Retreat, open to the public and drawing nearly 1,000 participants annually. The San Francisco Temple (built in the late 1950s) was nearly doubled in size to include a large multipurpose room, a beautiful new library, office space, and a new bookshop. The swami approved major renovation of the Old Temple in San Francisco, the first Hindu temple in the United States, now under way. The swami was active and highly respected in the interfaith community, and spoke at various schools and colleges in the Bay Area.

We offer our readers some reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhananda by monks and devotees.

**SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA, MINISTER-IN-CHARGE
VEDANTA SOCIETY OF NEW YORK**

Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji is no more with us. We have lost in him a real *sadhu* (*monk*) who sincerely lived a noble life. I had the opportunity to see him two or three times at the Bangalore Center when I was posted at the Mylapore Center in Madras. When I was the Head of the Baranagore Center, he kindly paid a visit to my Center, and encouraged me to accept the Headquarters' order to go to New York.

I came to New York on Feb 15, 1977. During the summer, I used to go to the West Coast every year and spend the whole summer at different Centers.

Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji invited me to visit his Center. So on July 5, 1977, I left New York and reached San Francisco. To my great surprise, Swami had arranged for a reception at the Olema Retreat along with Swami Swananda, Head of the Berkeley Center, who also reached the US in the same year. I had many occasions to know Swami Prabuddhananda. On two occasions, I spent fifteen days at the Olema Retreat. At that time, the Retreat was vibrant with many swamis and brahmacharis (novices). One time Swami Prabuddhananda took me in his car to visit a devotee's house near San Francisco. In the car, the Swami told me that initiated devotees were very dear to him.

At his invitation, I stayed at Lake Tahoe along with Revered Swami Shraddhanandaji, Swahanandaji and others. We all had a boat ride with Swami Prabuddhanandaji. Some years back I was in Texas, and came to know that Swami Prabuddhananda was staying at some devotees' house near where I was staying. I immediately went to see him and spent about an hour with him. He was going to Brazil accompanied by some devotees. That was the last time I saw him personally. Only one other time when he was at the San Francisco Center, I had a telephonic conversation for a little while.

Headquarters has issued a bulletin in August 2014. In their bulletin, Headquarters wrote that Swami Prabuddhanandaji "was highly respected for his saintly life, sterling

monastic qualities, calm demeanor and dignified manners. He served as a source of inspiration for the monks and devotees in the West. In him the Order has lost a precious member among those serving in the West.” This is the real estimation of his noble life.

The maladies of materialism are many; of them goallessness, aimlessness and purposelessness are more pronounced. What we want is a balance of material and spiritual life.

In this connection, I quote Swami Vivekananda “I remember a story told by Prof. Max Muller in one of his books, an old Greek story, of how a Brahmin visited Socrates in Athens. The Brahmin asked, “What is the highest knowledge?” And Socrates answered, “To know man is the end and aim of all knowledge.” “But how can you know man without knowing God?” replied the Brahmin (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1, page 432).

Revered Swami Prabuddhananda spent his entire life extolling the beauty of spiritual life. He was an ideal monk. His integrity of character, sympathetic behavior, and calm and quiet life have left a rich legacy of genuine spiritual life.

I humbly pay my respectful homage to the departed soul.

SWAMI CHIDBRAHMANANDA, MONK AT VEDANTA CENTER OF GREATER WASHINGTON D.C.

Swami Prabuddhananda was not a man of words; he was a man of presence. He was alone in every room he entered. He made his point by simply being and steered conversations with a glance. He never scolded or instructed me directly; but, I would be hard-pressed to find enough paper in the world to write down all that I learned from him. He was a solid among liquids and those around him were ever stronger because of it.

I lived in the San Francisco Monastery with him for nearly fifteen years. I never saw him do a single thing for his own enjoyment. If I needed to find him I never looked more than three places. He was either meditating in his chair, studying at his desk or meeting with the devotees in his office. He had two distinct sides. For the devotees he was a generous, encouraging and warm soul. For the monks he was a stern call to renunciation, intent on putting their strength in God alone lest they should grow to depend on him personally. I think he smiled at me no more than three times in a year; but the sincerity and sweetness of it made it worth the wait. As rare as it was, it is what I remember him for the most.

I was alone in the monastery with Swami for several years. I remember at the beginning of that stretch of time there was a moment when I did not think I could endure the isolation. I was standing at the top of the stairs one day, leaning on the railing and feeling sorry for myself and my situation when Swami entered the monastery from his office. Coming up the stairs he asked, "What is this?" Meaning my current mood and pose. I responded with my complaint of loneliness, expecting a response of empathy and encouragement. He, however, continued past me and walked to his room saying, without a glance, "Go to the shrine." I was furious inside and mentally abused him for his coldness, but I went to the shrine. I got a gift there that day, a lesson that has strengthened me ever since. I learned that God was a living refuge. I learned that practice could change the "real" world. I became aware of all the lesser refuges in my life that had become dependencies. I learned I had a better one.

Swami Prabuddhananda never answered a question that required a yes or a no. These questions were left to simmer in time. The first deadline would come and go; followed shortly by the second one. "Let us see," would be his response to your exasperation. In the end we would see. However, what we could have had a month to do would now be done in a day. As frustrating as that seems, it steeped the Center in a deep wisdom and steadiness. It left no regrets.

I remember sitting at a stoplight one afternoon with Swami in the passenger seat. He was watching the bustle of the city out of the window with a certain intensity. He looked at me for a moment and paused. "Where are they all going?" he asked in a playful smile. In that heartbeat I understood the temporary nature of the world...the unending twist of Maya. I laughed for a moment at the pretense of the play. I had learned again with only five words from his mouth.

It was my first week in the monastery. Evening meals were left to our own devices. In my new-monk cleverness I had filled the freezer with delectable instant dinners. They were shelved like books for my perusal after arati. Swami came into the kitchen while I was doing lunch dishes and opened that freezer. He stood there silently staring into my treasure trove of non-Indian cooking. He took his two steps to the center of the kitchen. "What is this?" he asked slowly. I knew no answer could breach what was coming. "Seeee," he said in a long drawn out emphasis that went from high to low and back to high again, "Laziness (tamas) is always trying to find its way into monastic life. We must guard our every entrance." Those beloved book-stacks of instant cooking were never replaced. Our entrances were guarded and locked.

I made breakfast for Swami every day for fifteen years. Oatmeal, one dry toast and soaked almonds with pumpkin seeds. It only took me ten years to ask him if he wanted something different. I couldn't imagine that the boredom of that combination had not yet driven him crazy. He looked at me with his toast in hand. "Seeeeee," he said only from high to low, "that dropped off long ago." Lesson witnessed and learned. His bliss never came from the taste of food.

I was struggling hard in the first years of my monasticism. I confessed it to swami one day, thinking that he might tell me monastic life was not for me. I was in tears and ashamed when he sat me down and pulled up a chair in front of me. "You are a child of the Mother. Where do tears come from in that?" he asked. "For those in the world it is enough to let things drop off over time, but you are a monk. You must burn them out

with your sadhana.” He said it as if I had already done it. His confidence was infectious. He had in one sentence picked me up, dusted me off, slapped me on the back and sent me happily on my way. I am a child of the Mother after all.

It seemed unlikely, but Thakur and Ma called me to become a monk; through Swami Prabuddhananda they made me one. Each day since his passing I am more indebted to him for his gifts. He made me wait until he was gone to open them; but one by one they are becoming apparent. I love him deeply; I saw my ideal lived through him. I have been shown how to live boldly; how to live in a steady equanimity; and how to die with Mother’s name on my lips.

SUSAN SALM, MEMBER, VEDANTA SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

In his serious, kind and gentle ways, Swami Prabuddhananda was always ready and willing to help each of us when we needed it, and particularly when we most needed it. In the many years I had contact with him it always struck me how little fuss he made about anything, how much generosity and kindness came from him, and how much wisdom and love he gave, in a very quiet and unassuming, almost in a silent way. He listened to me with great attention and focus, he encouraged, looked after and took a personal interest in whatever I discussed with him. He was, for many years, a guiding and protecting hand in the life of my whole family, and quite recently when he was lovingly advising me about coping with a problem that caused me tremendous heartache, he said something I can never forget: “This is how it becomes a yoga for us. It is the Yoga of Desperation, you see. First chapter of the Gita, Arjuna’s desperation... it was not meant just for saints and sages in ancient times. It is for you! – and for me! – and now!”

LINDA GALLAGHER

Swami Prabuddhananda pierced my life with ‘a deep call’ as I sat with him in his office, in the temple on Sunday’s with Vedic teachings, out at Olema Tuesdays for women, on

retreat at Tahoe, Olema for many years.....No matter what I shared with him there would be one basic statement that he would give: "Very good....now GO DEEPER!"

One time he reprimanded me with the deep adjustment: "You should know better!"

Also, the time I asked him this question: "When does the doubt go?" He simply replied: "When you KNOW!"

Everything he placed upon my heart has fertilized the soil of consciousness which continues to grow beautiful fruit all the time....the fruit of Love and Service. I give thanks to the Indweller for having come to my life as Swami P. May I fulfill his request.

HOPE ROLLAND, MEMBER, VEDANTA SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO:

I remember once asking Swami Prabuddhananda if Vedantins must believe in reincarnation...before he could answer I jumped in and said, "I understand it as a concept and a possibility, but I don't feel I'm coming back" ...to which he replied, "Well, then, hurry up." It's one of the many wise things he shared over the years, and I've never forgotten it. Email:

CODY CAMMBELL:

"In the battle with yourself, you must always win."

I heard Swami Prabuddhananda say this several times. Now I think about it all the time. When I think about what to prepare to eat, when I think about having an extra dessert, when I want to sleep in another hour instead of getting up and going to yoga, when I put off doing something – all those small challenges of life. I wish I could win every time, as I'm sure Swami did when he battled with himself. I'm working on it.

Occasionally when making pranams to Swami he would lightly tap some fortunate person on the head. It was a sign of affection from him and an honor to be a recipient of it. It didn't happen to me often, but I remember when it did.

For those of us who were able to attend Swami's retreats, they were all a joy. The longer they were, the more intense they became. He made us feel like we had been transported into a better place. The world and our minds, our entire beings, became calmer, saner, spiritually infused. We were in a synchronized rhythm with life, with Swami, with each other. The last day of each retreat was bittersweet: he had given us so much on the one hand; on the other, the retreat was coming to an end: how would we, on our own, be able to hold on to that elevated spirituality?

BEVERLY DEBOLSKI:

"Come on! Come on!"

Swami Prabuddhananda came into my life 20 years ago when I was at a crisis point and essentially alone in San Francisco. It's impossible to describe what he meant to me, and, after many attempts to do so, I fully recognize my limits. It's like trying to describe what fresh mountain air feels like—it's so subtle, beautiful and comforting. You can't see it, hold it, or compare it to anything else, but it's real and permeating and joy-giving unlike anything else.

Swami brought an undiminishable source of love and wisdom to my life that was a real glimpse of God's love. Many a Saturday after I finished my reception desk duties, he'd call me up to his office. I can't believe now that, at times, I didn't want him to call me up because I was embarrassed about all my flaws and failures to follow his sage counsel. Nevertheless, he found a way to make sure that I couldn't sneak out the door. I'd stand outside his office door and he'd say "Come on! Come on!" and beckon me in to take a seat. I would instantly feel and know that everything was going to be okay; that I could

try again; that I was doing better than I thought; and that God is actively operating in my life.

I can hear it so clearly: “Come on! Come on!”

When I walk by the room my altar is in, usually with the intent to keep going and skip meditation practice or prayer, I can hear him gently calling, “Come on! Come on!”

For all the words I could say about Swami Prabuddhananda, it comes down to this: I love you, Swami Prabuddhananda, and I am eternally grateful for your love and commitment to being an instrument of God’s peace. You fully and completely embodied the Saint that your American city was named for.

DEBORAH KEARNS:

In 1999, the annual business meeting was intensely focused on ways to celebrate and otherwise observe the upcoming 100th anniversary of the Vedanta Society in San Francisco in 2000. The old temple (the first Hindu temple in this country) was nearly filled with members that afternoon and the discussion was energetic as we brainstormed multiple ways to mark the auspicious date.

I particularly recall one member offering to talk with a friend of considerable stature at the San Francisco Chronicle newspaper. He thought we might well be able to secure a two page spread in that well-read publication. He noted that we had many things to showcase, accomplishments that deserved recognition, among them the Society’s generous opening of its beautiful retreat in Olema (rural Marin County) to the community at large regardless of religious denomination. This suggestion in particular was enthusiastically endorsed as its author concluded that such publicity would “bring us a lot of new members.”

All the while, Swami Prabuddhananda, who was seated at the front of the temple and facing the membership, had been silent. Finally, he spoke in his characteristic soft and calm tone. I paraphrase here, but it was something like, “You see, we don’t really want a lot of new members. What we want is a few serious spiritual seekers.” The room fell silent.

I was relatively new to Vedanta at that time, and I was stunned by Swami’s unwavering clarity of purpose. What religious organization, I thought, is not focused *above all* on increasing its membership? Swami’s focus on the priority of spiritual growth was resolute and unfaltering. I knew in that moment that by some unknown good fortune I had found Swami and Vedanta in this life.

BILL MACAN (SANTA DAS):

My experience with Swami Prabuddhananda could take a lifetime to share. Sixteen years ago, I met Swami P. for the first time. It was a foreign experience for me, coming from a Catholic background; but, in the long term, it became a blissful one.

It was four years ago that I decided to go to Nursing School with the support of my guru, Swami Swahananda. He said in his last few months of life, “go take care of the monks.” So I did. Swami Prabuddhananda was my first patient for the next 4 years. For whatever reasons Swami had, he allowed me to enter in his reserved and quiet circle to attend to his needs. I was very excited, but somewhat nervous at the beginning. As time went on, we developed a relationship that was so special on many levels.

From good days to not so good days, Swami persisted. He was determined to complete his tasks, whatever they were, for the devotees, monks, and nuns. Through his many medical challenges, he was not going to go until he accomplished all of what he needed to do.

As Swami's health became more complicated, the more devotees got more involved volunteering their time to help: giving medications, reading scriptures, or just sitting quietly. Swami would always say, "So many devotee's are helping; may Mother bless them."

Swami never complained once about the medical challenges. He always thanked everyone for anything they did for him. We all know it was from unconditional love. If anyone thanked Swami for helping him, he would be clear that it was through Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna – that it was not from him. You felt this true love, and you knew it was the truth – Atman. Swami lived the Gospel, the Upanishads, and the Gita. They were his life. He gave without expectation; he loved unconditionally.

Swami Prabuddhananda's lessons to us were nothing but spirituality, truth, discipline and true love. Swami was "the real deal"; he was an enlightened soul; he was full of blissful touches to each and every one.

My time with Swami became so much more than a Nurse's role; it became a gift – of how to surrender, of how not be attached and of how to know oneself – how to know God. He said to me many times, "Be free." For the first time in my life, I knew what it was to have a mother, a father, a brother, a sister, a friend and a teacher. What a gift!

Swami Prabuddhananda and I were together when Swami Swahananda passed. After meditating, while Swami Swahananda's life support was being terminated, Swami P. looked me and said, "emotions have their place, they can be a distraction, your Guru never leaves, he's always in your heart."

As Swami's life was coming to an end, it became more difficult physically to communicate verbally. So, his right arm was his form of communicating. By raising it up, he indicated to chant quietly in Mother's name, or no, if he did not want something. I knew time was short in coming and I whispered in his ear, "I love you," he grabbed my wrist and whispered, "I know." Finally, on the day before his passing, I came by to

give him his bath in the hospital. He reached out to me with his right arm and struggled to put his head slightly up to say, "Thank you for everything." Once again, he made sure that everyone was taken care of. This was the day he stopped, by his own decision, all food and medications. He was in transition to land in Mother's lap.

Courageous, strong-willed, humorous, comforting, peaceful, gentle, intelligent, generous, non-judgmental and full of unconditional love. When I use these words, I think of Thakur, Holy Mother; when I feel these words, I think of Swami Prabuddhananda.

My time with Swami Prabuddhananda, was and is like a precious gem. A gem that is tucked away in my heart, where the truth really is.

Posted on: December 7th, 2014

9 Responses

1. *Pravrajika Shantiprana* says:

[February 8, 2015 at 9:24 pm](#)

Dear Friends,

I am so moved by this article. Is there some way I can receive a copy?

Thank you!

Yours in the Mother,

Shantiprana

San Rafael Convent

of the Vedanta Society of Northern California

- o *A-Vedantist* says:

[February 9, 2015 at 12:12 pm](#)

Hello Shantiprana,

You can simply select the text, paste it into any text editor on your computer such as Word or Notepad, and save it. You can also save the web page by going to File then Save Page As in your browser.

2. *Nisha* says:

[February 11, 2015 at 11:44 am](#)

Thank you all for sharing such inspiring thoughts

3. *Prema* says:

[February 11, 2015 at 9:31 pm](#)

Swami Prabbuddhananda became my spiritual teacher when I was thirty years old. I was going through a crisis and he lead me out of my predicament. He initiated me, taught me, and showed me what was “real” and what wasn’t. Swami used to always say that, “God is like the ‘1’ in front of a large number. If you put God first, all the zeros after the ‘1’ will mean something.” “God alone is real,” he would say. I am thankful for the gift of our great, saintly teacher. Without him my life would have been a lot of zeros! I am still practicing what he taught me. He is in my heart forever.

4. *Mary (Archana) Tamraz* says:

[February 14, 2015 at 11:09 am](#)

This article is most wonderful and a tribute to the great soul embodied in Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj.

5. *Ivan P. Costa e Silva* says:

[February 18, 2015 at 4:18 pm](#)

Dear brothers and sisters,

Congratulations on the article. This is indeed a wonderful, touching account of a truly towering personality. Very, very inspiring.

One's feeling is beautifully summarized by one of the narrators' very declarations:

"I knew in that moment that by some unknown good fortune I had found Swami and Vedanta in this life."

Yours in Thakur, Ivan

6. [*Bethesda D Hoganson*](#) says:

[February 25, 2015 at 5:06 pm](#)

Swami Prabuddhananda was so very loving. He never said a harsh word to me. Whenever I asked him a question, he would always answer exactly the way I hoped he would, perhaps even better! I loved him so much, and I always will.

7. *Pierre Pelmont* says:

[February 26, 2015 at 4:51 pm](#)

I am glad that you have offered this column of reminiscences. The Legacy obituary site was not left open long enough to gather more than a few recollections of Swami Prabuddhananda. Thankfully, here are a lot more!

8. [Udayan Mandavia](#) (New Jersey/ Ahmedabad, India) says:

[April 26, 2015 at 11:13 pm](#)

I first met Swami Prabuddhananda in 1987 at the Vedanta Convention, Ganges, Michigan. I was very impressed with his calm, quiet and gentle nature and behavior. My parents who were visiting me then, traveled to San Francisco and were taken so much loving care by him! I kept in touch with the Swami via letters and then emails.

Once I was visiting the Bay Area for my business. I had an opportunity to visit the Society and have Swamiji's darshana. But it was getting late and I was stuck in the traffic unfortunately. However, Swamiji waited for me patiently in the office, talked to me nicely, got me some prasad and then only left the office. What a wonderful love he could communicate!

I met him several times during my trips to the Bay Area and once he allowed me to stay at the Old Temple Guest House because I desired so. He invited me to have breakfast with him in one of the mornings of my stay and talked at length about my professional endeavors of the healthcare product I worked on so passionately.

My final darshana of him was in 2012 when we were attending a large trade show, and I sought a meeting with him, on the final day of our exhibition. Again, same calm and loving face and joyful talks.

I could not believe the news of his passing away. I do plan to continue visiting the Society but it would not be the same place without the Swami being there.

Peace, peace, peace be unto all...

DIANA BETANCOURT

**Both Marc Moglen and I reflected upon his life and his teachings
and kindness of heart.**

An inspiration in memory Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj

"Sing"

Sing with joy for love is boundless and eternal

Life, has seas to run through the veins

sound, has scape the lips

warmth, the body

Light, escaping

has joined the Universe!

Do not cry!

Do not fear!

Sing with joy

for love vibrates

in universal light!

Bound to you

he is living eternally

in secret silence

and will live

there

with you

as one.

KATHARINA JEGER

I feel very thankful and blessed that I was able to meet with him last August after our retreat at Lake Tahoe. I first met the Swamiji in 2001 in San Francisco and saw him again in Bhopal [in India] a couple of years ago. He was such a great soul and a source of high spiritual qualities which influenced me greatly. May he be in the Light of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother.

PIERRE PELMONT

Swamiji was always the best counsel one could have in times of need. He could also be counted upon as a personal friend to one and all, as he was to me every time I visited the San Francisco center or joined him on retreat.

DOROTHY SEEGER

I met him [Swami Prabuddhananda] a short time ago when I applied to go to Olema for a personal retreat. I felt so at home with him and was very impressed with his kindness and purity of heart. He is a beautiful soul and he will be very much missed.

PAUL MATZNER

Swamiji was the person. Granted me an audience to give me permission to come to your magical retreat center in Olema giving me many years of spiritual sustenance. It is with great sadness and gratitude that I mourn his passing.

REV. ATINDRA GIBBS, THE INTERFAITH CIRCLE

Swami is a gentle soul and has been missed much by Sangha and this unworthy soul already. He was greeted, no doubt, by Ramakrishnaji and Mother on the other side of that doorway with love and congratulations.

NORMA NIELSON

Offering my deepest sympathy to all those who knew Prabuddhanandaji. May his peaceful attitude infuse us all in devotion and love.

SWAMI MANGALANANDA, BADARIKASHRAMA

I feel very privileged to be able to share in this auspicious time of the passing away of a great soul who somehow will always be with us. Srimat Swami Omkaranandaji also send his prayers and love and condolences. We remember with fondness and love our 30 year relationship with Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj and how much he brought to our lives.

DR. VENUS MAHER

I am so sorry to hear of the Revered Swami's passing. The peaceful end of a great man.

DHARMA

My heart cherished the time I spent with Swami.

SUSAN BETANCOURT

I met him [Swami Prabuddhananda] several times at the Olema women's house and appreciated his spirituality, kindness, and wisdom very much.

RADHA VASAM

I remembered what Swamiji told me when my mother left this world. That was in 2012. He started talking to me and said since I do my Pooja in the morning, to let my mother grow with the goddesses. Swamiji said, "Mother's loss is the biggest loss because she is

a mother.” He also said to continue my parents’ good work. He told me that I can always make an appointment to meet him and chat with him. He was so accommodating that he would want to make the time to suit my schedule not the other way round. And he gave his blessing and Prasad from Olema. That was the first time; I felt a little better after Swamiji’s talk. I started to make my mother grow to the level of a goddess. I will never forget the gems which would carry me forward with strength and courage to live life. Swamiji is now with the Supreme. His presence will always be here, like the way Ramana Maharshi said, “I am here.” Thank you, Swamiji and my pranams to you always.

MARIANNE QUINN

“How I Came to Vedanta”

Who Am I?

What is the Meaning of Life?

Who or What is God?

Perhaps you have asked yourself these very questions. I know I have, and I have done so more than once. However, I never found answers that would truly satisfy. Philosophical theories and religious doctrines did not convince me at the deepest level. There was always room for doubt or outright disagreement. But, there came a time about 30 years ago, after a series of life-changing events, that the answer to these questions meant more than life itself. I had to know. I was desperate. And, it was this desperation to know the truth that led me down the path leading to Vedanta.

It took ten years of serious investigation...including a return to college, international travel, and friendships with new people...many who expressed ideas and lines of thinking previously unknown to me. These new perspectives, plus my own curiosity, perseverance and sheer determination kept me going. I had to find my truth no matter the cost. This search became more defined after attending a meditation group focused on the teachings of India. That is when I realized I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the principles of Eastern and Western thought and how to apply them to my life.

About this time, I met a woman who had just returned from a retreat at a place where one could go and stay a few days doing spiritual practices in a beautiful facility surrounded by equally beautiful surroundings. After a few discussions about the benefits of time away from the busyness of life for meditation and contemplation, she said that this retreat would be perfect for me, that I would truly love it. She then added

the information that I would first have to meet the Swami and get permission before I could go. Happily, she offered to drive me to San Francisco for my appointment. And, she did.

It was October 1995 when I first stepped through the door of Swami Prabuddhananda's office. I don't know what I expected, but what I saw was a quietly serene being sitting behind a desk. He did not offer me a seat or bother with small talk. He merely asked me a few questions while I stood in front of him after which he said I could go to Olema. One might say that is how I came to Vedanta, but that would only be partly true. Why I stayed is more accurately my true coming to Vedanta.

When I scheduled my first retreat, I had no intention of doing anything other than just that. Take a retreat and then go back to my life. But, shortly after my arrival at the Women's Retreat House, I began reading the books in the library there. Immediately, the words resonated with my own thinking and experiences. I knew I was home at last. This was it. No more seeking a source for truth! I kept on reading. I couldn't get enough. One text led to another and another and all were consistent with the same truth as well as my own inner nature. Although my life was still very busy with family obligations and work schedules, the call back to Olema and Vedanta persisted and eventually led to the next level of commitment. I needed to find a way to become that which the teachings proclaimed because I soon realized that seeking and believing were not enough. Spiritual guidance and proper practices were essential to knowing the truth, to truly knowing who I am and the meaning underlying all life by the direct experience of That which is called God.

In retrospect, it seems my previous efforts toward this goal were merely the preparations for coming to Vedanta. The arrival happened when I realized there was no turning back, the road had narrowed and the passage had become a one-way journey. This became evident after years of dedicated effort that included sitting at the feet of Swami Prabuddhananda, both figuratively and literally. It started with the

Tuesday afternoon meetings Swami held at the Women's Retreat House. This was my first experience of interacting with an authentic spiritual teacher, one whose words of wisdom were matched by his every action. His subtle, and not so subtle, teaching style was new to me. I often felt challenged, sometimes irritated, but always inspired.

Swami became my guide, my reference point for the bumpy road ahead. However, if I tried to make him my pole star, he would not allow me to hitch my wagon to him personally. He made it clear by firmly, but gently, saying, "Go to Ramakrishna, go to Mother." This was often followed by, "Go deeper, there's more to come." So deeper and deeper I went, along the way rubbing egos and elbows with others. This rubbing was the true test of coming to understand what it meant to come to Vedanta. The struggle for self-understanding often created the need to shift some of my long-held positions, both about myself as well as my beliefs. The friction resulting from this self-analysis was not always comfortable, and I sometimes found myself plotting escapes from this path only to know there was no place to go but within. This was a major revelation, and I don't think I would have endured the upheaval of my changing self-perception from this revelation without Swami's influence. As the years go by, I realize this influence is permanently a part of my life now. It stems from my great good fortune in having a living example of the goal right in front of me. No matter the circumstances, Swami was even-minded and true in actions, words and deeds and ever faithful to the Divine, especially in the form of Mother.

All this, and more, led to the perception that coming to Vedanta is not the physical arrival. The true coming to Vedanta is coming home to the Truth of one's Self. Looking back, and looking forward, I feel that Vedanta was, and is, already my own. So, when I finally came across the actual teachings, they were familiar and felt right intuitively thus confirming my thought that Vedanta is not so much arriving at a place, but awakening to the principles already within. Of course, I wouldn't know that if I had not come to Vedanta and met Swami Prabuddhananda.

So, with all things considered, and at this point in time, I see myself as a work in progress and will continue to go deeper because 'there is more to come'. I will have finally arrived when the goal is reached ...the goal of knowing, by experience, I already am That which I seek and will no longer have to ask:

Who Am I?

What is the Meaning of Life?

Who or what is God?

All will become Self-evident.

Aum Tat Sat

Thou Art That

So, in the spirit of Swami Prabuddhandnada, "Be Joyful!"

V. SRINIVAS RAO

About 50 years of my contact with our great Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj is unforgettable. Rev Swami inspired many young devotees with his good heart at his stay in Bangalore and later in abroad too. His contact with many devotees with different age groups is really fantastic.

It is very difficult to see such a great soul in future. It is a great loss to all devotees who knows him very well. We will all miss him greatly. May his soul rest in peace, which would always be my Prayer with Guru Maharaj.

LUIZ A. S. MONTEIRO

Dear friends,

On behalf of the members of Vedanta Society Rio de Janeiro, we convey our heartfelt condolences on the passing away of Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj.

Those who had the privilege of knowing him have their lives enriched by his mere company.

Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta RJ Brazil

SREENIVASAN PARUTHIYIL

Virajaprana to Sreeni: Am trying to reconstruct Swami's last nights in the hospital. Raghu & I were with him on Sunday, June 29. I've written to him about it. I think you were there overnight with us on Monday, June 30. Correct? If so can you jot down what you remember about that evening?

From Sreeni: Virajapranaji,

I apologize for the delayed response. I wanted to check with my notes before responding.

I was with Swami on Sunday (June 29) day time when he was hospitalized and left around 7 PM the same evening from hospital. Raghu took over the night duty as he was visiting from India.

Sunday morning:

I reached monastery around 7.30 to 8 AM. I went and touched his feet. He said "Welcome"

Alex was there with Swamiji. Swamiji was not keeping well from Friday onwards with edema of the legs and according to Alex, not being conscious that morning. He was sitting on the chair facing east.

Around 9 AM or so I asked if Swami will take breakfast. He agreed and took most of what was prepared.

I am not sure when I called you: before or after breakfast. You came by and decided to take Swami to the hospital before the Sunday service and devotees arrived.

Went to hospital around 10:30 or so.

At the hospital he was very alert and conscious. He remembered that one of the nursing staff was from Kerala and introduced her to me.

I left around 7 PM.

Monday Swamiji was moved to another room.

I do not remember who was on duty for Monday (June 30) night but Balakrishna and Sundeep were there.

Monday evening Durga, Srinand and I visited Swamiji. He was alert and told Srinand to get a haircut.

Tuesday (July 1) night was originally Vinay's turn but he switched with Shankar and Shankar was there when Swamiji attained Mahasamadhi on Wednesday morning.

I remember this as I have noted down the course of events and also because Shankar called me to inform about the situation on Wednesday morning (July 2) as I was going to the Airport to drop off the Chicago swami. So I first came to hospital before going to monastery to pick up Swami Ishatmananda.

K. NARENDRA

(Swami's nephew, son of his elder brother Sri Jagannath)

Namaskara!

At the outset, we are still recovering from the thought Swamiji is no more. Though, our interactions were few and our meetings rare his endearing personality has had a effect on all of us. That he was part of our family in his premonastic life is a proud legacy we always carry.

Rev.Swamiji was born in Bhadra Colony(7kms from Bhadravathi on Channagiri Road).Bhadra Colony comprised of 9 houses .This Colony was formed in 1929 as a agricultural experiment by the then Princely State of Mysore under the leadership of the then Director of Agriculture(Leslie Coleman from Canada).

Swamiji's maternal grandfather D G Ramachandra Rao (a pious man) was the chief colonist having just retired from Service as Deputy Director of Agriculture. All these colonists were given 40 acres of wet land and 30 acres of dry land and TWO acres each on the highway road as residence. That was the first time sugarcane was introduced in Malnad area which was primarily growing plantation crops and paddy/arecanut.

Swamiji grew up in the agricultural environs under the guardianship of DGR Rao. Many of his friends from the colony are still around and recall with pride their association with swamiji.

We are all aligned to the holy trio irreversibly and interminably.

It was my father who had arranged a trip of rev. swami tyagishanandaji in 1946 to bhadra colony. It was the first meeting of swamiji with his mentor. Later a copy of the gospel which my father carried home became an object of intense study for swamiji.This

copy with swamiji's notings will be housed in the shrine library. Swamiji used to always ask for this book whenever he came this way.

**SWAMI CHIDBRAHMANANDA KINDLY POSTED EIGHT 90-MINUTE VIDEOS
FEATURING SWAMI PRABUDDHANANDA LECTURING ON THE 18TH
CHAPTER OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA AT THE 2011 TAHOE RETREAT. THE
LINKS:**

https://youtu.be/S9gn49_3cc4

<https://youtu.be/mHInF3qO7oc>

<https://youtu.be/cQk4ASg6Yvg>

<https://youtu.be/xyz5vNVDzIg>

<https://youtu.be/4GH0znmrqV0>

<https://youtu.be/9uygJ4hQ5z8>

<https://youtu.be/QSwUp7199fU>

<https://youtu.be/RVfsLEH-xY0>

This interview was done by Swami Harinamananda of our Southern California center the day after our 150th celebration of Swamiji's birth anniversary at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco in Feb. 2012. Revered Swamiji was not at all well, but graciously agreed to do it. This was filmed in the New Temple library. It's quite fascinating what Swamiji has to say about monastic life and his experiences, which are invaluable.

Part 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuvK3Z8LagI>

Part 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYRGSosKT20>