

Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhananda

Part 2



Taken in 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.

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Some Memories of Swami Prabuddhananda

From the beginning Swami Prabuddhananda would take walks for exercise and also, I think, to give his companions an opportunity to talk. I once walked with him and another nun to the Old Temple where he was to give a memorial service for an old devotee. He didn't know her and he asked me if I did. I didn't remember her by hearing her name. He talked about giving memorial services, he said it was mostly for the family. I said that once Swami Ashokananda said that if the departed person was still attached to this world it would help the person to hear good talks about him or her so the attachment could be broken. At that memorial service Swami read the "speed forth, O soul" poem and perhaps some Sanskrit verses. No one spoke about her.

Later on at the request of members Swami would himself speak about the person if he knew that devotee, and ahead of time he would ask other members to give a little talk at the memorial about the person, if they happened to know them.

Swami was always changing as he got to know people in order to improve the programs of the Society. He always was interested in people, whether they were guest swamis or new students. He had interviews with all the members when he first came in order to get to know them and their affairs. Another way he showed an interest in people was on walks. After his heart surgery he would walk up and down the driveway of the New Temple garden. A bunch of devotees would be there and he'd ask about each one. After his recovery he thanked everyone for being so supportive when he was recovering.

At the end of his life he would come over from the monastery and walk in a circle around Vivekananda Hall. Some few would walk along with him. Others would stand around the circle, and he would talk to them as he passed by. I recall him talking and walking

with Swami Tyagananda, discussing the young swami's writings about Swami Vivekananda's works. Another time I remember was when he was walking with Dr. Sudarshan asking details about the doctor's center in South India. At this time I got the opportunity to tell Swami Prabuddhananda about a phone call I had with Swami Bhaskarananda of Seattle, who had just had surgery. He asked me about my surgery, over the phone, and asked me how long I thought it would take him to recover. I said four months. I told Swami Prabuddhananda this, and he remarked, dryly, "When you're desperate you'll take anybody's advice." Everybody laughed loudly at this; including me.

People I knew always came away from an interview with Swami Prabuddhananda inspired or happy. The subject matter must have been uplifting. My friend Mary Smith and her mother were pleased with their talk with Swami. They were Eastbay people so would go to the Berkeley center to work and attend lectures there. But Swami remembered them many years later when I spoke of them. My sister Mary also was an Eastbay person. After her interview Swami said that she told him she got a great deal of help from Swami Ashokananda; that pleased Swami. The nicest thing anyone told me about their first interview with Swami Prabuddhananda came from Ruth Shahinian. She said, simply, "He's the real thing."

I was two years older than Swami and he would always call me his older sister. He was around 40 when he first came to this center and he would ask me about how the previous swami and Vedanta Society members would do things. He would also tell me some of the things that happened to him. He once told me something I'd never heard of before. Some old devotee came to him and wanted to give Swami his mantra because he couldn't use it any more. Swami said he took it, what to do? In later years I would tell him I was older so I got to die first. Swami would say, "We're all standing in that line."

Swami was very philosophical about death. It was clear he was living in a realm where he knew he was never going to die. Once over the phone I was apologizing for a mistake

and I mindlessly said, “I’ll do better next life.” He told me, firmly, “Never say that. Know for certain this is your last birth!”

I have told this story before but it bears repeating because it demonstrates Swami Prabuddhananda’s natural state and where he saw we all should be, and, actually, were in his vision. Rekha Dutt and I were visiting him in the hospital and I said, as I usually did, “I am older than you, Swami, so I get to go first, and I’ll save a place for you in Sri Ramakrishna Loka.” He replied, “Aren’t we already there?”

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Swami Prabuddhananda

As many who had the opportunity and privilege to be in close contact with Swami Prabuddhananda can surely attest, he made a profound impact on one's life. He entered my life as it was about to make a difficult transition from a feeling of having a pitcher of bliss in my heart, as Holy Mother once said, to a situation akin to a line in Swamiji's poem "The Cup": "This is your road – a painful road and drear."

My earliest memory of Swami Prabuddhananda is when he visited the Seattle center in January 1980. One of the many advantages of a small center is the opportunity to mix rather closely with visiting swamis. Since I had first come to the Seattle center in May 1976, I had met quite a few swamis, and, while all swamis are memorable, Swami Prabuddhananda stood out in many ways. He was a model of calmness, thoughtfulness, self-control and dignity, intelligence and cordiality. He was a keen observer of everyone and everything in his quiet way. I was very impressed with this swami and drawn to him as well.

I remember one of the outings that Swami Bhaskarananda, the swami in charge of the Seattle center, arranged was a trip to Mount Rainier. One of the brahmacharis was the driver and the two swamis, Bhaskarananda and Prabuddhananda, sat on the front bench seat with him. I was in the backseat along with my mother and Devra, a close devotee, and throughout the trip to the mountain Swami Prabuddhananda was most gracious in accepting my repeated proffered candies, which I offered to both of the swamis. Even though it was cold at the mountain, with snow on the ground, Swami Prabuddhananda was like a stitha prajna, not reacting to the cold in his lightweight wool coat. I took a

photo of him there, which I still have (pictured below); it was at a spot called Paradise and that is how things seemed to me at the time.



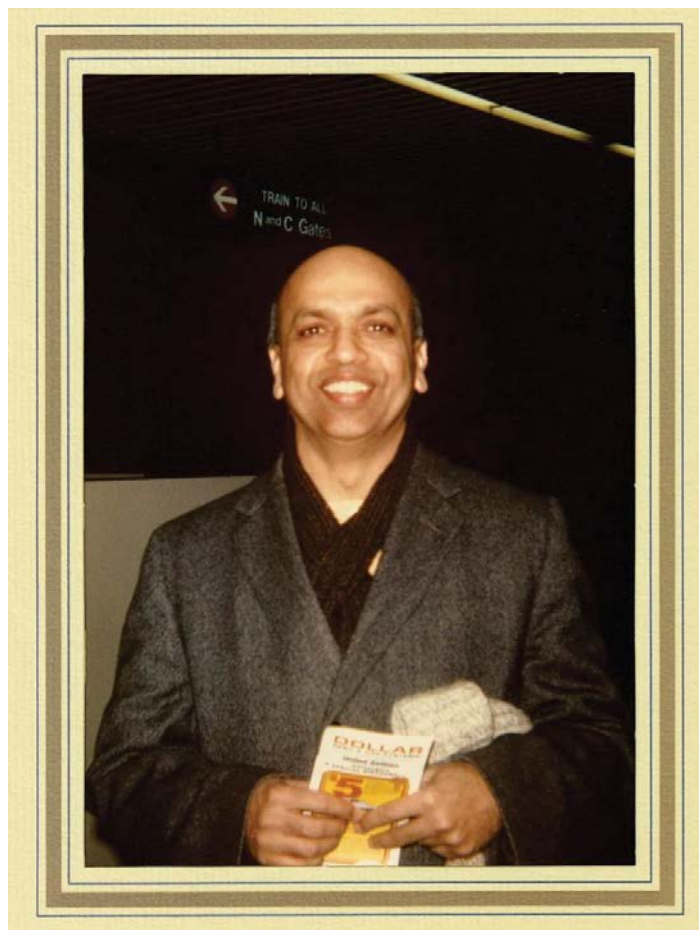
On the way back we stopped for hot chocolate at Wendy's, a fast food restaurant. Looking back at these incidents, and in light of how Swami Prabuddhananda was at his own center, these were indeed unusual occurrences, but I took them in stride at the time.

In the fall I met Swami Prabuddhananda again when he came for the memorial service for Swami Vividishananda, the previous swami in charge of the Seattle center who had been in a coma for quite some time and had passed away at the end of September 1980. When I came to the center in the evening the day of Swami Prabuddhananda's arrival, I remember that someone had given Swamiji several large German marzipan bars, and

when I entered the center and greeted him, he gave me one — a tangible demonstration of his generosity and thoughtfulness.

On one of Swamiji's visits I remember going to the center for lunch on the day he was to leave. I had to go back to work afterwards, and I remember someone asking me if I was going to go to the airport to see him off. We were all outside on the sidewalk at the time ready to leave for the airport and I remember answering that I had to get back to work, but I wanted to go very much and I was vacillating. Swamiji said to me very pointedly that one should never vacillate; a proper decision should be made and adhered to. Needless to say, I did not go to the airport. (At right is the photo of Swamiji, which I took on his next visit to Seattle in the fall of 1980 at the Seattle-Tacoma Airport.)

Swamiji invited my mother and me to visit the San Francisco center and we did so the summer of 1981. That is when I first saw Swamiji in his own domain and noted the difference in behavior his role demanded there. He



was extremely cordial, welcoming, and gracious in meeting with us every day. But one thing struck me, and for which I was extremely grateful, Swamiji insisted on meeting my mother and me separately. I had become a person in my own right and no longer someone in the shade of a formidable and impressive tree — my mother, which had become my accustomed place.

I remember Swamiji arranged for us to have supper at the convent while we stayed with Vijaya, a close devotee, who often accommodated visiting women devotees, since the convent had no guest accommodations for women devotees at the time. He would call us every day at Vijaya's and inquire how we were and set up appointment times for our meetings with him that day. These were the first of my many interviews with Swamiji over a period of more than thirty years. I often didn't have a lot to say or ask, and I remember that it didn't matter. Swamiji was very kind and patient. After some conversation, we would sit there quietly and he might ask me a question or two, but I never felt that it was mandatory to talk, and he didn't cut the appointment short because of it. I remember over the years that I would sometimes have some pressing issue to discuss with him at my weekly meeting but when I would enter his office often the issue or problem would just evaporate, or, sometimes before I could voice my question or concern, Swamiji would just start talking about the very thing which was uppermost in my mind. The meeting would invariably end with him rolling over in his chair from his desk to the cupboard where prasad was kept and hand me something or ask me to make a selection from a small tray with a variety of prasad items on it. After that I would thank and pranam him, and he would usually tap me on the head by way of blessing, which was what I was hoping for.

When I was living in Seattle, Swami Prabuddhananda sometimes would call me and inquire how I was. By his questions or comments I could tell that he had an uncanny way of knowing what was happening in my life. While I was living in Seattle, he advised me to take up a hobby and we decided that I would take up the piano, which was an excellent suggestion. My mother had become very depressed and had moved in with me, and the music, as well as the friendship of my piano teacher, helped me in dealing with this new, demanding, and most upsetting situation.

Swamiji knew that I was living under very trying circumstances and that I needed a break now and then and suggested that I visit the San Francisco center several times a year,

which I did as much as possible. I don't know how I would have kept my equilibrium without those precious visits and Swamiji's support and encouragement.

Before those visits commenced, I remember once I was staying at Holy Mother's House in Portland for a while during one summer when Swami Prabuddhananda visited. My mother had recently moved to Portland to go to the center there. However, because she was not well, Swami Aseshananda had me take her to a hospital shortly before Swami Prabuddhananda's visit. In the hospital they gave my mother some medication, which she became allergic to, and she developed hepatitis. I remember that Swami Prabuddhananda wanted to go visit her and brought a prasad flower and blessed her with it as well as giving her some prasad. Swami Aseshananda seemed quite surprised at Swami Prabuddhananda's desire to visit my mother in the hospital, but I can't tell you how grateful my mother and I were for his visit. The day Swami Prabuddhananda left Portland I went to the airport with Joan Fox, a close Portland devotee, to see him off. Swami Aseshananda was there with a brahmachari and some close men devotees and said goodbye to Swami Prabuddhananda at the gate and left. This was in the 1980s when airport security was not an issue. Joan and I waited till Swamiji had to board and we watched him go down the jetway by himself and at the end of it he stopped, turned around, and saluted. We were overwhelmed as we saluted him in return. I don't believe he was saluting us, but perhaps saying a prayer or offering up his Portland trip or something else. But it was a powerful and remarkable moment – and imagery. Even now, when I remember it, I am moved.

After my mother became ill, she was not able to benefit anymore by attending either the Seattle or Portland centers. I had been very happy at both centers but felt that perhaps a change would be helpful to her, as well as to me, under the circumstances. I was, therefore, very interested in moving to San Francisco to be near Swami Prabuddhananda. Swamiji was open to the idea but he did not want me to accept a job which was not commensurate with the one I had in the Seattle area. Shortly thereafter I was offered a job

in the Bay Area, but when I asked Swamiji about accepting it, he said no since the pay was not high enough. He said that I should not take a job unless it paid me “x” dollars. Well, I was already getting a good salary and this would be \$14,000 more than I was making. I remember thinking how am I going to find a job in my exact line of work that will pay me so much money. It took me three years to find a job that met those criteria.

I moved to the Bay Area in September 1986 and worked until December 1988, when I joined the convent on Holy Mother’s birthday. This was Swamiji’s greatest gift to me. Previous to joining the convent, for a long time I had felt that I was living the life of an imposter in the world and I longed to be true to myself, to sanctify my life, and live a life of meaning and spiritual purpose. However, for various reasons, I had had no intention of joining the convent, but the Divine Mother had her own plans. I remember the Sunday in June 1988 when I was driven from within to ask Swamiji after the lecture if I could see him that day, and I did not mention that I was going to ask him if I could join the convent. He right away said yes emphatically. That was unusual since Swamiji usually only saw people who came from a distance on Sundays and would put off the regulars. After speaking with him, he was very open and encouraging to my joining the convent even though I was past the age limit. However, he asked me to get the permission of Swamis Bhaskarananda and Aseshananda, which I did.

I never heard Swamiji criticize anyone. When someone was confounded by the behavior of another person and would tell him, he would say, “She/he is like that.” When I first heard that, I thought to myself that is pretty lame; it doesn’t really say or explain anything. But later I discovered that that is really the only thing one can fairly say. Who knows why people are the way they are and, furthermore, if we knew their stories, we would certainly understand their behavior and, most likely, be sympathetic, and Swamiji knew that all along. Who knows how we would behave under those circumstances, perhaps much worse. Since then I have taken to using that expression myself at times.

At one time I was having an interpersonal issue with someone, which somehow Swamiji knew about. I remember he came early to our New Temple convent class one day when only I was there at the time. When he entered and saw me, he told me Buddha's story of if one does not accept a gift which is offered then to whom does the gift belong? That was a powerful and helpful lesson which allowed me to ride that situation out as well as to remember it for the future.

Another incident comes to mind. Around 10 p.m. one night, I received a call from Swamiji asking me if I spoke German. I had studied it in school and said I remembered a little. He then asked me to come up to the temple from the convent. When I arrived he was in the lobby of the temple with a young German man. This young man was quite distraught and started speaking rapidly to me in German. The best I could make out was that he had been in the hospital and he needed money to go to the airport to return to Germany. Swamiji took this information in very seriously. At that moment Vishuddhaprana, who was the caretaker at the temple, emerged from her apartment and Swamiji asked her for some money. Vishuddhaprana gave him the \$20 she had on hand, and Swamiji handed the money to the young man and told Vishuddhaprana he would reimburse her. How it was that that young man came to the temple and Swamiji was the one to interact with him and at that hour was most unusual, as was the whole scenario. The best interpretation I could venture about this incident and Swamiji's heightened interest in all the proceedings was that the Lord comes in various disguises.

Swami Prabuddhananda was a monk through and through. He believed greatly in monasticism — that it was the ideal way of life, and he wanted whoever was genuinely interested in leading this way of life to have a chance to do so. However, he never ever encouraged anyone to lean on him. If he thought that someone could stand on his or her own two feet, however wobbly, that was what they had to do. He threw almost all of us on our own inner resources. Oftentimes it was very difficult but eventually it would have its own and lasting rewards. Those whose lives became predicated on their chosen ideal

were most fortunate, and that was the direction that Swamiji pushed us towards repeatedly.

Swamiji was solicitous about the well-being of the monastics and devotees. I recall once I had no plans for Thanksgiving and was intending to come to the temple and spend some time there. At my weekly meeting with Swamiji beforehand, he had inquired about my plans for Thanksgiving. When I told him, he was concerned that I would not have a special meal that day. He kindly said that he would send over a plate from the monastery for me on that day, which he did in the late afternoon. He also sent over a plate for another devotee, an older lady, and the two of us had our Thanksgiving meal together in the temple kitchenette. Because of Swamiji's concern, thoughtfulness, and generosity, that Thanksgiving memory has remained with me unlike many others that have faded.

Swamiji also had a practice of sending birthday cards to devotees. One of the pravrajikas was in charge of this project and would discreetly find out various devotees' birthdays. At the appropriate time, she would present Swamiji with several cards to select from and he would personally write in the card and address it. He would then ask someone to mail it. He also would give gifts from time to time. These were not birthday gifts, but just a gift out of the blue, so to speak. On one of my visits to San Francisco, I remember coming into the auditorium to salute the deities and one of the pravrajikas saw me and came over and presented me with a beautifully wrapped package. She said that the gift was from Swamiji. It was a lovely embroidered wool chaddar. Later, when I moved to the Bay Area, someone else presented me with some gifts from Swamiji: a large, attractive vase; some brass deer figurines; and an intricately-carved beautiful ivory letter opener. Swamiji had a wise way of showing people he cared about them without being very overt about it.

Unlike how I witnessed Swamiji at other centers, smiling and relaxed, at his own center, he was quite serious and sober most of the time. At least that is what I saw and experienced. He had immense responsibilities and he took them to heart. He was the steward of so many and so much. He had to supervise the functioning of the Society with

all of its branches, etc. It was a big responsibility. Added to that, he was in charge of the convent and the monastery. A year after I joined the convent we numbered twenty-three. It is not easy to be in charge of a convent when you don't live there and, thereby, don't witness events and people interacting firsthand.

Whatever Swamiji did, he did in a most thoughtful and considered manner. I never heard or saw him act impulsively. He was always measured – in his speech, in his walk, in reaching decisions. He was unobtrusive, calm and quiet, and thoughtful. Whenever someone asked him something, he always took his time in answering. He never hurried or seemed to feel rushed. He was very circumspect and one knew that confidences shared with him would remain with him. I rarely heard him raise his voice, except now and then when he privately scolded someone in his office. I never saw him laugh with exuberance. Even in very funny situations, he would keep himself in check. We would see his eyes crinkle with abundant good humor and that wonderful broad smile spread over his face, but he would never let himself go and really laugh with gusto. He had a wonderful sense of humor though – it was very dry and understated. You could sometimes see that something humorous was seemingly on Swamiji's mind but he rarely gave voice to it, and when he did it was succinct, right on target, and full of wit. I have never seen anyone who was so controlled.

Swamiji demanded perfection in our work. I had the privilege of working closely with him for twenty years on the monthly bulletin, special invitations, and various other projects. He liked to have all the reins in his hands and for a long time would make the final decision even extending to the color of paper, the design of the project, and, sometimes, even the font to be used. He did not tolerate mistakes easily and would ask me repeatedly if I had proofed something and also if I had run it by another person or two. I always told him that he was my best proofreader – and he was! Every now and then something would slip by me and others, and when I sat down and handed Swamiji his copy to look at and I would look at my copy and, of course, see the glaring mistake

right away, I could count on Swamiji to see it too, and he would. He almost seemed to delight in finding the error, but he never made me feel bad about it.

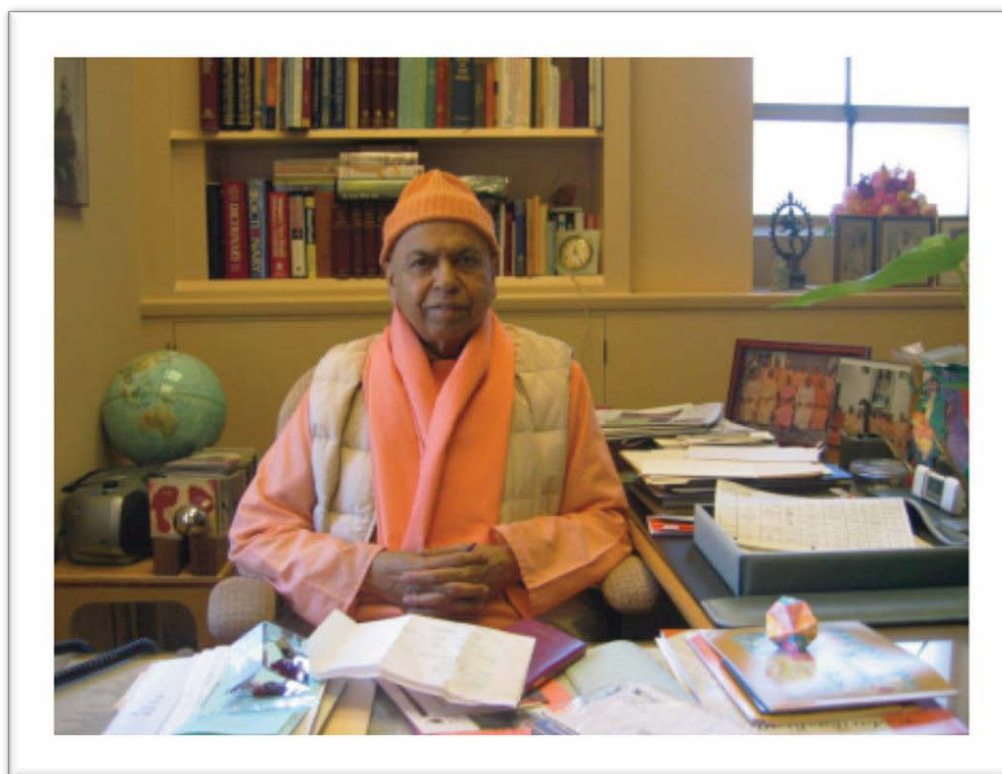
When working with Swamiji, he was very particular about using the correct words in an announcement, letter, or invitation. Over the years he would have me repeatedly go to the large American Heritage Dictionary and other dictionaries shelved in his office and read him the definition of the word in question. We would discuss the various options and the nuances in meaning between them. We would also explore the thesaurus in order to get just the right word to convey what Swamiji wanted. And he did not want a word to be repeated. Additionally, Swamiji did not like negative expressions. We always had to find a way to state something negative in as positive a manner as possible. He once told me that he majored in chemistry, but he said he was torn between chemistry and English literature.

Working on the computer can be very tiring day after day, and I remember Swamiji telling me that I should stop and close my eyes periodically for a few minutes and rest them. He said one uses up much energy through the eyes and this is a good way to conserve energy in general.

Swamiji gave of himself always. One could see that his life was wholly dedicated to the Lord and to serving the Lord's children. He lived up to Swamiji's ideal: "He alone lives who lives for others." Swami Prabuddhananda lived by example. Since the temple is open almost twelve hours every day, it is often a challenge to find enough people to serve as receptionists—to cover the temple, as we say. In that regard, Swamiji endeavored to set an example, as well as to do his part, and took a two-hour slot covering the temple at the receptionist counter in the lobby every Friday morning—something he kept up for many years. When he took a decision, he did so with firm determination, dedication, and steadfastness. In fact, he thought twice or thrice before initiating some new course of action. If he started something, he would see to it that it would be carried out regularly. Therefore, he was very careful about setting new precedents.

I remember witnessing an interesting play of events one day in the lobby when Swamiji was standing in front of the receptionist's counter after returning from his daily walk. The receptionist on duty handed him an envelope which had just arrived for him in the mail. He took it and held it as though one would handle a lab mouse, holding it by the tail, as it were. He held it up in the air by its corner and looked at it and said, "I will give this an appointment in a few days." This was so unlike how most people regard incoming mail. However, I don't think every letter sent to him got this treatment.

Every day Swamiji spent several hours in his office in the temple (pictured below).



He would meet with many people, one after the other, scan the newspaper briefly, dictate some letters or make phone calls, or do whatever work he needed to, and he would provide a presence there. We knew that we could poke our heads in and greet him at times, or call him, if we needed to ask something, or he would call on one or another of us to do something. In addition to the deities in the auditorium, he lent his presence to the

temple as well, and we felt it and it served an important purpose — someone cared, was available and easily accessible, and, furthermore, was in charge. He was also readily available by phone for many years while his health allowed. I remember once, before I joined the convent, when I unexpectedly came home from work early to discover a dire emergency. I called Swamiji right away and he answered and was there for me. Then I called 911.

Another memorable incident from pre-convent days was that, since I lived close to the San Francisco airport, I would go to the airport to see Swamiji off or to welcome him back as I often as I could. One time I was there at the gate waiting for him to arrive and then accompanied him to baggage claim, helped him retrieve his luggage, and then waited with him there. The devotee who was to pick up him up was forty-five minutes late and right before he arrived Swamiji told me, “A friend in need is a friend indeed.”

He had an incredible memory. He had met so many people and he remembered their names and things about them, sometimes after only meeting them once. He was in frequent contact with the monastics and close devotees and would see to it that they would be usefully occupied in serving at the temple. We all had our duties, assigned by him, for the most part, and he was very aware of what they were and what we were doing. He would also ask various people to do different things which came up. He often would get things that swamis in India had asked him for, and he would use convent members as his procurers. I was among several who, over the years, bought various things in this regard. They ranged from compression stockings, stethoscopes, and folding canes to books, fountain pens, lotions, etc. Sometimes a number of years would elapse since one had purchased a particular type of item but Swamiji would always remember who it was whom he had asked to get that for him. Once I had almost forgotten that I had procured a certain item but Swamiji hadn't. It was most remarkable!

That brings me to the fact that Swamiji was so restrained. He was so self-contained and never displayed his knowledge and learning unless necessary. Because of it, every now

and then, I was taken aback at the breadth of how much he knew! By way of example, in our convent class one day, he used the German expression “Weltanschauung,” which means one’s conception of the universe and of life, in explaining something, and he asked if anyone knew that word. Also, often he would quickly find a relevant quotation in the Gospel or in Swamiji’s works to provide the exact wording for a point he wanted to make. He knew many of Swamiji’s poems by heart and encouraged us to memorize them as well. He also knew the words to many songs. He never felt a need to show how intelligent he was. He knew what he knew and expressed it only when necessary and for the good of others. It was a good object lesson on being egoless and a reminder that these things or abilities are not who we really are. They have their place and necessity but they are only tools in a larger sense of serving the Lord and others. I remember that now and then the word “humility” would enter in our discussion with him and he would stress that it didn’t mean a false modesty, or obsequiousness, but rather a correct measure of oneself. To me Swamiji was the living embodiment of humility.

He taught us so many things – directly by telling us, and indirectly, which was even more potent, by his example. I could write pages and pages. Because it hit a resonant chord, over the years, I remember him mentioning that a spiritual aspirant often has a deep sadness inside. And he would add that that sadness has to go – and it goes by realizing God. Another thing he would often say is that we have problems because we cling to them and don’t really want to solve them. And problems arise because of our likes and dislikes, which give rise to egocentricity or self-centeredness. He would say that the way to get rid of problems is to accept the situation calmly and then to transcend it. “Accept and transcend” were some of his watchwords. He would say: “When you accept a challenge and don’t run away from it, you become strong.” He would stress strength as the antidote for problems. He would also point out that the importance of karma is not so much what happens to one but rather how one responds to it. Another thing he would often say is that we need to be able to absorb more and more. Just absorb things as much as we can and our capacity and ability to handle people and untoward events will grow

and grow, and we will become closer to the Lord and feel more peaceful. When asked how to tell if one was progressing spiritually, he would often say that one of the signs is that after one becomes upset or loses one composure in some way one then recovers one's equilibrium faster and faster over time.

Often Swamiji would get his point across in some situation when he was trying to correct someone on some wrong course of action by pointedly remaining silent until the person understood his or her mistake. Seldom did he berate someone. Rather his method was one of silently pointing out the error, but his silence was eloquent and hard to ignore.

Swamiji was very dedicated to Holy Mother. I recall once I had been advised to keep Sri Ramakrishna uppermost in my mind and I had told Swamiji that I was specially drawn to Holy Mother and wanted to keep her there primarily. He said that was fine – I could keep Mother there; Mother and Sri Ramakrishna were the same, and Mother was no less than Sri Ramakrishna.

Swamiji was very fond of chanting. His chants at the Sunday and Wednesday lectures as well as the Friday evening class made an indelible impression on many of us. His signature chants were so heartfelt, uplifting, meaningful, and soothing. Swamiji also started a chant class. He had a keen ear and was very faithful in overseeing our weekly class for several decades. Because of him the chant group has been able to chant respectably at special occasions for many years now.

Swamiji also loved music very much. He introduced group devotional singing at the worships and at many other occasions. He encouraged both monastics and devotees to contribute to the music by taking up various instruments and even composing music. Music became an important part of our activities and it also provided a good outlet for self-expression, in addition to serving as a spiritual practice. Now and then, between interviews and his other duties, Swamiji would listen to some devotional music in his office for a short while. I know he listened to music in his room in the monastery because

he asked me to organize and label his many cassette tapes to aid him in the selection process.

For the last three years of his life, Swamiji's health worsened dramatically and he had to be taken to the hospital every now and then. Since he was then in a wheelchair, a handicapped-accessible van would be called to take him when an ambulance wasn't necessary. Whoever would be working at the temple at that time would go outside, stand on the sidewalk, and watch Swamiji be rolled out to the van and onto the van's platform in his wheelchair. One time I was there to witness this, and I was concerned that Swamiji's wheelchair would roll while the van driver was securing it to the platform, and so I went over to the van and held on to his wheelchair, plus I wanted to keep him company also. I didn't know what Swamiji thought about my being there. Once the driver finished, he left to enter the van to move the platform up and into the back, and Swamiji then kindly patted my hand which was holding onto the wheelchair. I had my answer.

If I go on thinking deeply about Swamiji, I can come up with many other incidents and observations I could share in this kaleidoscopic way, but I would like to conclude now with the following. When he was in the hospital for the final time, I remember how eloquent he was with just a word here and there, but mainly he let his hand gesture speak for him. When he raised his right hand in a certain way, it meant no or stop what you are doing. In this quiet way, he was in control to the end. He was calm, serene actually, totally resigned to the situation yet emanating strength of character and self- possession.

He allowed various people to massage his legs, including women, myself included. It was so hot in the room because it was summer and because of all the people there that some of us took turns fanning him until we arranged to borrow a fan from the hospital. We would stand in his room for hours at a time and be able to do so without undue discomfort. It was a blessing to serve Swamiji in these small ways. He would often look at the photos of Thakur and Ma and salute them. There was a very elevating atmosphere in that room. I

cannot stress how much it touched me that in his final days, there in the hospital, he permitted all those monastics and devotees who wanted to come and see him and be with him to do so – and the room was very, very full, almost all the time. A holy man, so private and so reserved, such a consummate monk, gave us this precious gift and rare privilege of being with him and watching him in his final moments on this plane. What a blessing! He was an example to the end!

Glory be to Thakur and Ma, and also to Swami Prabuddhanandaji! Jai Ma!

SWAMI MANGALANANDA, BADARIKASHRAMA

Memories of Srimat Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj

(With comments by Swami Omkaranandaji)

Prabuddhanandaji and Badarikashrama have a long history of positive interchanges. Our president and founder, Swami Omkaranandaji met Prabuddhanandaji in the 1960's when he was at the Ramakrishna Math in Bangaluru. Their friendship evolved over the years when they were both working in California. Omkaranandaji appreciated Prabuddhanandaji's quiet, strong personality and through him felt the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna. Prabuddhanandaji's support of Badarikashrama's efforts in both America and Karnataka, India were heartily appreciated. Whenever he came to India he visited the ashrama in Karnataka.

Because of this endearing association Omkaranandaji sent me to meet Prabuddhanandaji when I first came to Badarikashrama and was considering joining the ashrama and taking brahmacharya. I was a little overwhelmed with my spiritual experiences and doubting them sometimes. As instructed I went to meet Prabuddhanandaji to have an interview with him so I could have a spiritual retreat at the Olema ashrama. His deep presence, his welcoming, affectionate nature, light radiating from him, assured me that I was on a true path. In large part, because of this meeting I took the vows of brahmacharya .

Throughout the years he always encouraged me. I often took his counsel when Omkaranandaji was away in India. He never failed in strengthening my resolve and dedication. I will always appreciate how he encouraged me to continuing working for humanity when my resolve sometimes faltered. We are fortunate to have known him all these years and received his blessings.



Vedanta Retreat, Olema

SWAMI BHASKARANANDA, SEATTLE

Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhananda

Transcribed by a devotee from talks given by Swami Bhaskarananda and Swami Sarvadevananda during Swami Prabuddhananda's memorial service in 2014.

I knew Swami Prabuddhananda for about 50 years and I know one of his wonderful qualities. It is that he was considerate among other things. I will also be considerate in regard to the other speakers. I will cut my talk as short as I can. I am supposed to give my reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhanada, but I don't know if I should start doing it. Because if I start doing it, I don't know when I'll end. I have lost count of how many times I have been to San Francisco. In the last 40 years, I have been here at least 30 times.

This morning's event reminds me of another similar event that took place in India at the headquarters of Ramakrishna Order i.e., at Belur Math. It was in 1965. That event was to remember the passing away of Swami Madhavanandaji who was the 9th president of the Ramakrishna Order. I was then a young monk and different speakers spoke about Swami Madhavanandaji. Then, the turn came for one very famous historian of India, R.C. Mazumdar, to speak. He stood up and he could not speak anything, could not say anything. He was wiping tears from his eyes and then in a choking voice, he said, "Some of you have lost your president. Others have lost their guru. But I have lost one who can never be replaced. We have been friends for so many years. And at my age, I can't hope to have another friend like him." That was the brief speech he gave and his voice became choked with emotion and he started wiping his tears. I have a similar feeling, but I have been in America for 40 years. Here, the men are not supposed to shed tears. I have a mixed feeling of sadness at his demise and at the same time I have a feeling of pride. Why this feeling of pride mingled with sadness? I remember why I am here in this country. It is because Swami Vivekananda came to this country that I am here. And why did he

come? He came at the behest of Sri Ramakrishna. While he was in India, before coming to this country, Swami Vivekananda had a dream. In that dream, he saw Sri Ramakrishna walking on the ocean and beckoning him to go to the west. Still he could not make up his mind. He wrote to the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, and she blessed him and asked him to go and do the lord's work. So, here we are to do the lord's work. What is that Lord's work? Swami Vivekananda has told us, "A wave of spirituality centering around Sri Ramakrishna has been rising while the waves of materialism has been rising higher and higher in the West and mostly in America". He predicted that a day would come when these two waves will meet each other. The wave of spirituality will contract the wave of materialism and a new world society will be created here. I don't know how long it will take. I don't have a prophetic vision. But I guess that it would be a few hundred years. Until then, the monks of our order will have to come and serve in this country following Swami Vivekananda's example. I look upon Swami Vivekananda as our general and I am one of his foot soldiers. When the day will come that I have to depart from this world, I'll be happy because I've tried to serve a great cause. Swami Vivekananda said to the young monks once, "I love you all so much. Yet, I wish that you die serving others. That will make me happy." I am sure that on the other side of the world, Swami Vivekananda will be waiting for us with a happy face. I am proud of Swami Prabuddhananda because he worked for 45 or 46 years like a good soldier of Swami Vivekananda and now he has fallen in battle. That is why, for this fallen comrade, I feel a sense of pride.

Among his other sterling qualities was his keen sense of humor. Let me talk about that for two minutes. It was the time when emails had just invaded the world. We started getting email greetings from our Vedanta centers in India. They were very strange. "Dear Swami / Dear Brother or Revered Swami / Dear Swami". This is how the emails would start. The touch of heart that was present in the letters before was gone. I thought it was funny. Swami Prabuddhananda was only one year and one month older than me and I felt very close to him. I drafted a universal annual email greeting to be sent to all our monks and

friends. I sent a copy to him. I am reading a little bit of that out to you : “Dear and Revered Maharaj / Dear Maharaj / Dear Chaitanya Brahmacharis / Dear probationers / Dear devotees, Please accept my reverential pranams / namaskars / modern best wishes / hearty greetings for Vijay / Kali Puja / Lakshmi Puja [and I put the names of all the celebrations that we have. And then...] and all other possible religious celebrations.” Swami Prabuddhananda got that draft email and he added some words to that. I had ended writing “all other possible religious celebrations”. He added, “for this year / for every year till the end of your life / till the end of my life.” Then he emailed back to me and said, “How do you like the additions? - Prabuddhananda”. I wrote back, “Dear and Revered Maharaj, I have got your email. The additions are excellent. They have added more punch to this satirical email greeting. Now I must send this email to some of my monastic brothers who I hope have a sense of humor.” I hope all of you also have a sense of humor.

SWAMI SARVADEVANANDA, HOLLYWOOD

My Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhananda

My salutations to Swami Prabuddhanandaji. My respectful pranams to the senior Swamis on the platform and the senior nuns. My love and greetings to all the brothers and sisters and all the dear devotees. It is a special occasion. We are here together to offer our salutations, to offer our love and regard for a person who lived the life of an ideal monk, who lived the life of an ideal spiritual personality, who never criticized people, who loved everyone whatever maybe their condition, but was a very strict disciplinarian. Once he told me when I asked him a question regarding institutions, “Be strong and firm when a question of principle comes. When other things come, be loving, be caring and be giving”. His is a wonderful life. I have not had much opportunity to see him except when I came to USA. I had been to a retreat in Lake Tahoe where I saw him intimately. He is a very giving person and totally dedicated to serving the children of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. I saw that after taking care of everyone and making sure they have what they need, he takes care and goes to his room. “Me already gone, you first”, whereas we do “I first, me first. And all are secondary to that”.

Sri Ramakrishna came to establish a new model before the modern age. Living a life and establishing an order of monks and devotees. This order is the Ramakrishna Order. Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda are true apostles of this Order. Sri Ramakrishna established this organization and his purpose was to present to the world a new way of thinking. Spirituality is nothing new, it is always present and incarnations come time and again to reestablish it. Sri Ramakrishna gave a new direction to it. In starting this organization, the philosophy has been “Atmano mokshartham, jagat hitayaca”. It is for our own spiritual development and for the good of humanity. I have heard from some of our senior monks that “jagat hitayaca” is not the primary point. The primary point is

“Atmano mokshartham” i.e., liberation from our own ignorance and clouded mind. Swamiji gave a better picture. He wanted a life which will be cast in the mold of Sri Ramakrishna. That mold is a perfect blending of all the yogas: equally devotional, equally being men of wisdom and intelligence, equally loving, equally engaged in the work and equally meditative. We find in Swami Prabuddhanandaji’s life this wonderful characteristic. His work is not work. How we can bring that spirit of work to get self-liberation? This is a new model. Previously, people knew to go to solitude in the high Himalayan ranges, think about God and be absorbed in the thought of divinity. But, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda created a new organization where the spirit is to serve God in the human being. It is very easy to talk and give long lectures. But, we have to present it in our life; we have to apply and manifest it in our life. Here is one, Swami Prabuddhanandaji, who did this. There is theory, but demonstration in life is very rare.

It is based on this grand ideal of Sri Ramakrishna, the ideal of dedicating your own ego for the service of others, that this organization has been started. Monks, nuns and young people joined this order. This truth which has been seen and experienced in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananada, Shivananda and their disciples, is it an end there? Or is there a continuum of it? Spiritual science is called a science because it has been verified and is verifiable. So, what has been taught in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, the direct demonstration of spirituality, that has been handed down to his disciples and their disciples and it is still continuing. So we are proud that in the recent past we have seen such wonderful lives and in the life of Swami Prabuddhananda we can get a glimpse of that.

One of our Swamis used to call Ramakrishna Order a Brahmailidya Research Institute. This is an institute where we come here raw from our old life, getting out of school / college education with all our ego, angularities, meanness and other things. This organization is a mechanism where we learn how to become selfless, how to love others, how to see less faults in others and a few of them become glorious manifestations of the

truth. The monks and devotees are here to do this research. Truth within us has to be revealed and manifested. The process is to follow in the footsteps of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and all who we respect and love. And also, it is possible. A saintly person is one who has manifested his saintly nature. We are all hidden saints. It is the glory of some swamis who have manifested their saintliness.

I was really overwhelmed when I met Swami Prabuddhananda last time before his departure. Swami told me, "It is Mother. I see Mother. Mother is holding me like a child. She is serving me. She is taking care of me. Physically, I see her taking care of me, holding me, serving me, nursing me." This is called a tangible experience. This is called saintliness. This is the purpose of this holy organization. It is to research on Brahmagyda.

Once I asked Swami, "How do you lecture? All the topics are heavy topics. Where do you get the time? You go on working all day long". Swami replied, "You know, I have managed so many years by this. Mother gets it done." I persisted, "What is the trick ? Please tell us." Swami said, "You know, one part of my mind thinks on the topic. Ideas get accumulated over the course of the week. On the day of the lecture, I spend my time to jot down all these ideas." This is called spiritual life. One way to give a lecture is to do a Google Search and collect various ideas on the topic. But a good lecture is a spiritual sadhana. He is constantly thinking on the topic. Irrespective of what he is doing, he is always keeping a part of his mind on the topic. Brahmagyda is that wisdom to keep the mind at the lofty level of Divinity. This is the way he lived his life.

Swami's contribution in this Order is tremendous. One of our brother monks said, "If I had found one defect in the life of Swami Prabuddhananda, I would have gone away." He stayed back because of Swami Prabuddhananda. His is a perfect life: a life of self-discipline, a life of self-effacement. How he could negate himself and put everyone in the front? He had a wonderful spirit of poverty and used to live with minimum things. His chaddar was sometimes torn but he still used it. This was not to show off to others, but that was his spirit, his inner call of poverty. He had a relentless dedication, disregarding

his own needs, to serve others, to be of any service to anyone. Swami had some problem and I had some problem too. When he came back from the hospital, I called him to ask how he was. Before I could inquire, he started asking how I was and if I was taking the prescribed medicines. I said, "Maharaj, I called to inquire about you, not to talk about me." It had become a spontaneous thing in the life of a great soul to not think of their problem. Usually, we spend our time complaining of our problems. Here is a person who, despite needing care himself, was inquiring regarding my welfare and asking "How are you? I have sent you some medicine, are you taking that?"

This is a life to be built up. It takes a long time to build such a life. To be a real research student of Vedanta is to find what is within. A very simple formula for that is to forget oneself, to forget "myself", my needs, my demands, forget me and mine and give value for others' life, others' welfare, others' necessities and keep on dedicating. His life was one of relentless service till the end.

Last time I came, I saluted and said, "You are not doing justice to some of the nuns. They are serving you so much and you are not allowing them to enter and salute you". Swami said, "No, no, no. I am thinking of that." I said, "They are crying and weeping and you don't allow them to enter into this area." Then, he said, "Yes, it has almost become like a hospital. Now, I can do that. I will allow them to come at some fixed times." I said, "Ok, Maharaj, whatever it is, please allow them to come. They will be very happy to come and do pranams." He never changed that principle except just before his death and that too out of love and compassion for all.

Our Salutations to him again. Thank you!

SWAMI CHETANANANDA, ST. LOUIS

Swami Prabuddhananda: A Monk

As far as my memory goes, I first saw Swami Prabuddhananda on Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, on 28 February 1960, when he came for sannyasa at Belur Math. I also joined the Ramakrishna Order on the same day. I remember when he was the head of Bangalore Ashrama, he purchased 10,000 copies of *Vivekananda: His Call to the Nation*, which I compiled for the younger generation. I next met Swami Prabuddhananda briefly at Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta in 1970, before he left for San Francisco. He came to San Francisco in June 1970 and I came to Hollywood in June 1971. It was really a challenge for a monk to succeed Swami Ashokananda as head of the San Francisco Vedanta Society. Swami Ashokananda was a great orator, thinker, and had a dynamic personality.

It was amazing how Swami Prabuddhananda calmly and steadily served the center for 44 years and did some wonderful constructive work. In 1972, the Women's Retreat House in Olema was inaugurated and the swami invited all other swamis in this country to the event. It was a wonderful function. Then the Men's Retreat House was purchased in Olema. In 1996, Swami Vivekananda centenary building was added to the new temple, which was a great achievement. During his lifetime, the Old Temple renovation was planned, but it was finished after his passing away in 2014. He started the Memorial Day Retreat in Olema, which provides great exposure of Vedanta to the people of Marin County and the Bay Area. It was one of his great legacies.

He was always very kind and affectionate towards me. When he was not well, I visited him every year. I had a wonderful relationship with him. He invited me on many occasions to lecture and he also came to St. Louis many times to attend our functions. We took him to Mark Twain's place in Hannibal, Missouri, and Lincoln's place in Springfield, Illinois. He had a great interest to know American history.

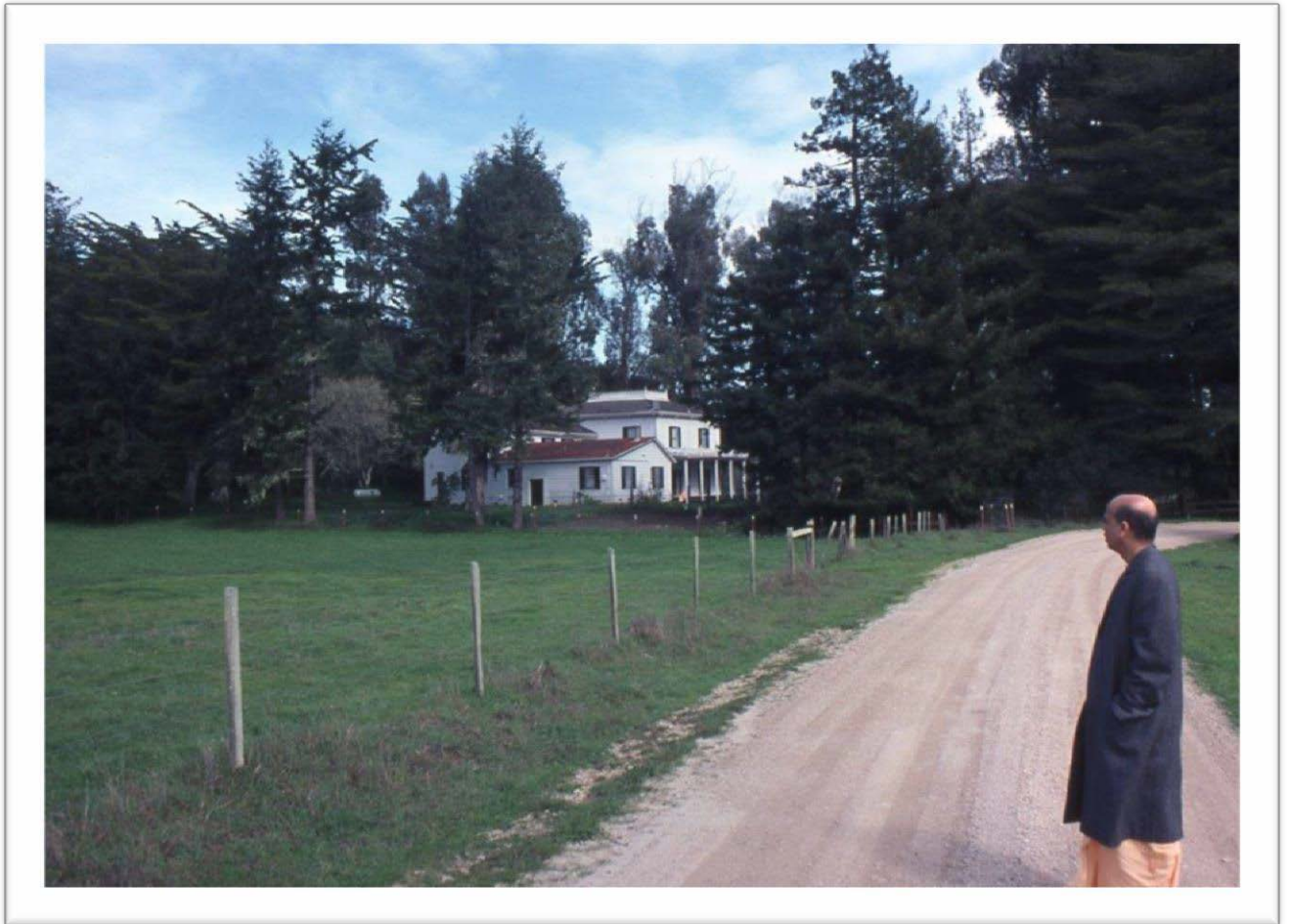
He was a good host. As long as his health permitted, he always came to the airport to receive the swamis and to see them off. He kept watch over my food, as my stomach was delicate. He allowed me to take some Bengali magazines and books from Olema for my research and writing projects. He always appreciated my writing, saying, “Your books are helping us to know many things about the Master, Mother, and the disciples, which are in Bengali. We have no access there.”

He took me two times to Lake Tahoe and Shanti Ashrama. In 1978, when I was transferred from Hollywood to St. Louis, I sometimes stayed in Olema in summer. He always welcomed the swamis. He was a routine-oriented person, gave lectures and classes regularly and preserved the tradition of the San Francisco Vedanta Society, which was started by Swami Vivekananda in 1900.

Swami Prabuddhananda was helpful and humble, loving and caring, steady and selfless, dutiful and dependable, and above all, a man of character and integrity. The Master and Mother endowed him with some wonderful qualities, which made him a true monk.

Chetanananda

Kali Puja, 19 October 2017



Swami at Olema in the early 1970s

SWAMI VEDANANDA, SAN FRANCISCO

Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhanandaji

It was my good fortune to be able to be present during the whole of Revered Swami Prabuddhananda's tenure as the leader of the Vedanta Society of Northern California from the day of his arrival at San Francisco airport, June 25, 1970, until the day of his passing away forty-four years later, on July 2, 2014. During that time, I had the opportunity to learn the main lessons in monastic life from him. I saw him as a totally dedicated personality, living only to serve Sri Ramakrishna and the Divine Mother, manifested here as Sri Sarada Devi. There was nothing else in his life.

He was generally seen as genial but severe, demanding the highest from everyone including himself. If he went with some senior guest swami on an outing to show him the attractions of the local area, still one had the distinct feeling that this was only another way to serve God in man, another form of worship, and not merely an occasion for enjoyment or even for relaxation. As such, I do not think that he ever really relaxed. He was ever conscious of the greatness of the life of Sannyasa, the monastic life, and he demanded that those whom he had recommended for taking those vows should be ever mindful in their daily life of the grandeur and sublimity of the life that they had adopted. He was full of good humor and fun, but always combined with the highest dignity and self-restraint.

In his first American automobile ride, of which I was then the driver, when told that I had just joined the Ramakrishna Order a few weeks previously, he quoted the Upanishad "A ma brahmacharinah swaha", "May brahmacharins (those aspiring to the monastic life) come unto me." And indeed they came, both prospective monks and prospective nuns. Not all could, however, in practice, live up to the life expected of them; but, nevertheless, he did not on that account, change his expectations or lower his requirements.

For the first six months, Swami Prabuddhananda served as assistant to Swami Shantaswarupananda and thereafter, in December 1970, upon the latter's departure for India, he assumed charge of the San Francisco center.

It was not easy for him to assume this controlling position in a long established center with its own history and roots. The membership had been attracted and trained for many years by swamis very much senior to him in age and experience. Patterns of work and procedure had been developed over a whole generation and were therefore not easily adaptable. And yet, one could not expect that the new swami-in-charge would exactly follow the methods of his predecessors, and, as could also be expected there was resistance. In this respect, however, I noticed that Swami Prabuddhananda exhibited his usual and proverbial deliberation and restraint. He seemed to follow the advice given long before by Swami Vivekananda to a monk under similar circumstances: At first do not change anything. Feel your ground and, then, slowly, as needed, make changes as necessary.

I was, from the beginning of monastic life, associated with the Olema retreat, which was at that time managed by two very senior brahmacharins, who had been developing the facilities at the retreat since its very beginning in 1946. All facilities at the retreat including the original conversion of the dairy ranch, in its rustic state, to a viable retreat, were facilitated by their labor. They had acquired, through diligent effort, all the needed abilities and training. When Swami Prabuddhananda was planning to organize the management of the retreat, he felt, however, that it would not be appropriate to give charge of the work to them. In fact, they seemed to refuse that role. Rather he determined that someone brand new, who had just joined the Order six months previously -- and had no experience whatsoever -- should be tasked with the complicated role of coordinating the various projects and personnel there! Everyone was very much more senior in all respects, and it seemed utterly inappropriate for me to step into such a fearsome role. So I refused! I thought that the problem was thus thankfully passed on to someone else. But I

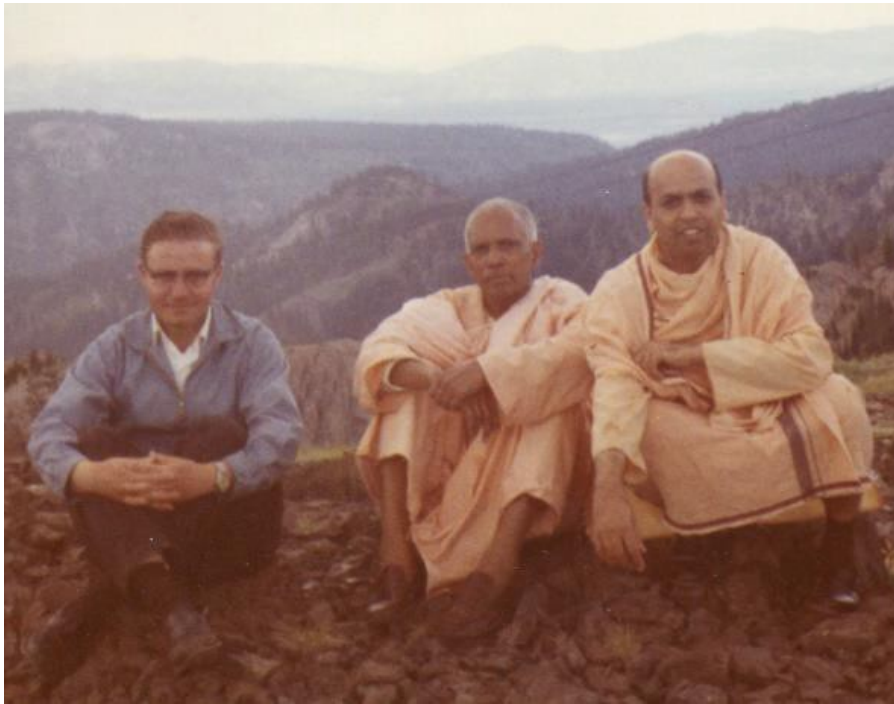
was not prepared for Swami's simple rebuke: "So, you too refuse me!" Apparently the others had not wanted to entangle themselves in that way. Anyhow, I shall be forever grateful to him for that simple remark which changed my view on life and gave me a glimpse into what a life of renunciation and awareness of God's presence can mean. No, I could not refuse him and I feel that many blessings have come through the years because of this.



Swami Vedananda on far right

Another characteristic of Swami Prabuddhananda was his refusal to be hurried in any way. This at times caused us (in this case, I think that "us" includes all or nearly all who knew and admired him)...caused us to grumble at times. His decisions came when he was ready to decide and under no conditions sooner. But when he felt that the proper time for a decision had come, then it had to be carried out immediately: "Have you finished it? Why the delay?"

As regards monastic life, he was insistent on fulfillment of certain conditions, which included usually a much longer probationary period than is customary. This was not always appreciated, but his insistence on it remained unchanged, and one therefore knew that his support, when it finally did come, would give one a great boost of confidence. He knew that one was then ready for leaving this multiplicity behind without a backward glance, and turned toward God and God alone. In fact, that simple phrase seemed to be the music of his whole life, perhaps phrased as "Mother and Mother alone."



He did feel and also express that when a person has once started monastic life, a certain unwavering dedication is expected that will enable that person to deal with all challenges with an unwavering grasp on the reality of God and the conviction that these challenges of monastic life are only to gather strength for this journey.

As regards small incidents in his life that remain as memories, there is the only time that he actually operated a piece of machinery. He never wanted to learn driving, and none of us suggested that he should. But, someone once gave us an electric golf cart. One day he asked me to introduce him to this mechanism, which I hesitatingly did, because it was a rather flimsy piece of equipment. Anyhow we went over the method of operation, and he wanted to drive it on the road from the barn area toward the West Field. He handled it rather fast and I, sitting beside him, began to feel somewhat concerned for our safety. Fortunately, that small desire having been somewhat fulfilled, he drove us back into the area in front of the monastery barn and, God be praised, never asked to handle any machinery subsequently!



When we started the series of public functions on the Memorial Day weekend, it was at times felt that the expense for this event was too considerable. It was suggested that perhaps we should aim for a reduced attendance. In reply he firmly stated that even if ten

thousand people should want to attend, it was our responsibility to accommodate them, the implication clearly being that this was our obligation to fulfill a need for inter-religious dialogue and interfaith harmony.

All projects started that way, as small, almost imperceptible events. The Memorial Weekend event started as a meeting in the Women's Retreat House. Swami and several available monastic and lay members spent the previous night redecorating and arranging the living/ dining area of the Women's Retreat House and about 100 devotees attended the next day along with the swamis in the Bay Area.

One day Swami told me that our monastic shrine in the barn at Olema needed to be painted and that he would help me to do this. So a few days later the two of us moved the altar and curtains out and set up a shrine in the library next door, and then got paint brushes, rollers, etc., and got the job done and had a good time doing it too!

Swami's love of heated rooms was well known in the Society. Once I came up into his room and the thermometer must have stood at over 90 degrees. I was gasping for breath and he seemingly not noticing my discomfiture, said with great satisfaction: "Oh, this is so nice!" Whenever he got into an automobile, his almost invariable order rang out: "Give heat!"

The end, when it came, was so predictable. He used to do exercises, and he used to walk regularly. When he could no longer walk outside, he used to walk in Vivekananda Hall, ten, twelve, fifteen times around the hall at a good speed. Then the number decreased. Then he began walking around the monastery dining room ten, six, five times. Over the months the sad reduction in energy could be seen to tend to an inevitable end. The magnificent team of doctors tried all possible revitalization measures, but slowly the inevitable trend continued. But he knew and he prepared. He said his farewells in an almost unnoticed way toward the end. On the day before his passing, as I came into his room, he was lying almost unmoving, but he grasped my hand for some time and then let

go. He never shook hands like that, and I felt that this was a farewell, even though we were still hoping. His last actual words may have been his approval requested by the doctors for a last injection as an attempt to strengthen the heart a little. Many devotees were constantly in his room chanting the names of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. Swami Tattwamayanda, who had been to St. Louis, returned quickly after I sent word that time was running out, and the St. Louis swamis arranged an earlier flight for him.

With all of us in the room, some twenty or more devotees, loudly chanting the names of Sri Ramakrishna and of our Holy Mother, all of us caring for him in so many little ways, his spirit gently departed, and the doctor, who was called in for the final verdict when breathing was no longer perceptible, that doctor, after a brief examination said these most amazing words to be heard from a doctor: "He has passed." Indeed, we all felt that he had indeed passed to a different and more divine realm.

SWAMI CHIDBRAHMANANDA, WASHINGTON, D.C.

It is hard to separate my memory of Swami Prabuddhananda out from the fabric of my life. His lessons to me, mostly in the form of the way he lived, have shaped me so completely and so subtly over the 15 years that I lived in his company. He had a hard face toward the monastery; in his own explanation it was to keep the monks from depending on him and not on God. It was the same reason he never allowed his photo on the website. It was his greatest gift to me in the end...my relationship and dependence on the divine.

The most obvious of stories that taught me this happened shortly after the only other brahmacary left the monastery. I rattled around that large monastery alone for a few months and slowly grew lonely and doubtful about being able to stay myself. I was standing at the top of the stairs one day feeling quite depressed, lonely and perhaps a bit self-absorbed. Swami came to the bottom of the stairs and looked up and saw me leaning on the railing above. "What is this?" he asked, meaning my apparent mood. As he began to climb the stairs, I answered, "I'm feeling quite lonely, Maharaj." I was anticipating a touch of sympathy and some comfort from him. But, as he reached the top of the stairs, he continued past me to his room without a word. As he closed the door to his room he glanced my way and said, "So, go to the shrine." The door closed and left me feeling angry and more alone. "He doesn't care for me at all," I thought. But I went to the shrine as instructed and learned the lesson that carries me through to this day. "Take refuge in God alone," Thakur says. And that day God became real to me and my problems. It was he alone that I was to go to for my loneliness, for my anger, for my joy. Swami has left me as He knew he would, but left me with a relationship that has carried me forward.

I made Swami breakfast for 12 years. Oatmeal, one dry toast and five soaked almonds. It might be a statement of my lack of service to admit it took me 10 years to ask him if he

wanted anything different. But I ultimately got around to it. "Would you ever like anything in your oatmeal, Maharaj? Some apples or nuts or something?" He looked up at me and smiled a small smile and said simply, "See, those things have dropped off long ago." I knew I was a child at his feet. I can attest that when he turned away from something, he never looked back. There was once a rather spicy email advertisement in his email account. He never touched his email account after that day. Not once. The doctor took him off of many foods over the years as his heart grew more fragile. Cheese, salt, oil, sweets etc. As each one fell, he absolutely never touched it again. Never betrayed even the slightest inkling that he ever desired it to begin with. His renunciation was absolute.

There were three times that I was awoken in the middle of the night with Swami having a conversation with someone in his room. He and I were the only people living in the monastery. The first time I ignored it with excuses and went back to sleep. The second time I went quietly to his door. He was still in bed and the conversation stopped, so I went back to bed. The third time I heard enough of the conversation to know he was addressing the Mother. A complete conversation, though I could only hear his half. I went back to my room stunned. The next morning I was driving him to the Olema retreat and told him, "I heard you conversing with Mother last night." He looked at me quietly for a moment and smiled. He replied, "If only she would come when I was awake," and said nothing more about it.

One Sunday, after a large meal at the monastery with about 15 guests, all the men were in the kitchen cleaning up the mess. One of the men told me he would like to pay for an automatic dishwasher for the monastery. I, being the usual man at the sink, was delighted. But, I said, you have to get Maharaj's approval first. So, when Swami walked into the kitchen with all of us hard at work, the devotee announced, "Maharaj, I would

like to buy a dishwasher for the monastery." Swami stood there for a moment and looked around at us all and said simply, "Why? we have so many."

Swami had a few phrases that were so exact, so precise and pregnant with meaning that they were humorous. I made an attempt at scalloped potatoes in my early days in the monastery. Swami took a bite and said, "see, this need not be repeated." Quite often I would be working on a project for the monastery and would need a decision from Swami about something. He never answered immediately; I actually don't think he ever answered before my perceived deadlines. It was always, "let us see." I would wait in exasperation, sometimes for weeks. He would never forget, but timing was not a concern for him. When his answer came, however, it was absolute and unmovable like a mountain. He never said no to an offering of food, but if he did not want something he would simply say "later," which now I know meant "not before I die."

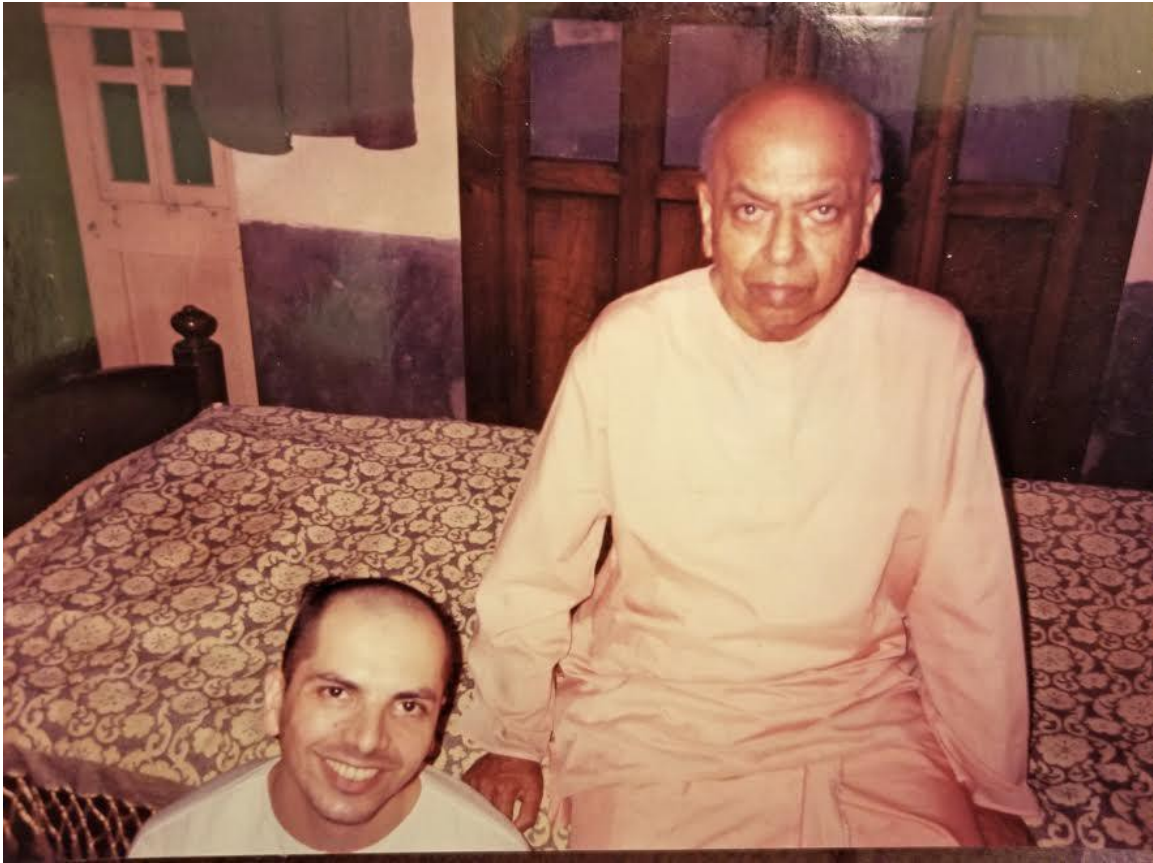
I was once dissatisfied that my monastic life was going to be nothing but cleaning toilets, weeding gardens, washing dishes and vacuuming. I complained to Maharaj at the lunch table, "Swami, I am disappointed that being a monk is nothing more than being a glorified maintenance engineer." He took a pensive spoonful of dahl and thought for a moment. "Isn't everything?"

SWAMI DHYANAYOGANANDA, HOLLYWOOD

Reminiscences of Revered Swami Prabuddhananda

“You pray for me and I will pray for you...”

I met Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj in 2005 in Belur Math, India, during the first year of my monastic training. He was visiting from the United States. It was a tradition then to go to the visiting Swamis rooms’ right after dinner and seek not just their blessings but also their advice on monastic life.



A group of brahmacharis (novices) decided to go to his room. I remember the brothers I was with were suddenly very shy. We had to engage in conversation somehow but no one wanted to put the questions to Maharaj and they kept pushing me to pursue the difficult task on behalf of the group. I did not blame them of course. Swami

Prabuddhananda's presence could easily make one feel timid. One naturally feels the need to give proper respect always and no one dares to fail in the attempt. He exuded authority. Even though I felt it, I wasn't thrown by it. There was something very sweet and approachable coming out of his eyes that made me feel safe and secure. I was putting all the questions, and he would look at me right in the eye with his answers. I think that was the beginning of our monastic bond. We didn't know then possibly how life would bring us together and make that force stronger.

We met again in 2010, during his last trip to India. I was serving at Vivekananda University, one of our Mission centers located very close to Belur Math, where he was staying. He had been invited to give a talk for a group of monastic brothers and then have dinner together. As part of our monastic protocol, I was asked to escort him from Belur Math to the University building right after evening Arati (vespers). Although it was just a few blocks distance, we decided to take the car and drive him to the University. The protocol we follow among monks, particularly between juniors and seniors, sometimes can make one feel a little inhibited, unable to be spontaneous and respectful at the same time. But that wasn't the case between Swami Prabuddhananda and me. When I knocked at his door to announce myself it felt as if I was picking up an old friend and taking him out for dinner. He was always so welcoming, always so loving like a Mother.

I had the same feeling, when I saw him waiting for me at the San Francisco airport on October 6th, 2013. I had been transferred to the Vedanta Society of Northern California then, not just to serve the center but also to personally assist him during the process of his recovery. He was very sick then. It was such a surprise, such an honor to see him there sitting on a bench, waiting for me like one does when you are expecting a close friend or a loved relative. I felt honored, I felt welcomed, I felt loved.

I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity to serve intimately Swami Prabuddhanandaji. His health had taken a turn from worse to worst. All the same he was so enthusiastic, so full of life. Together with Pravrajika Virajaprana and the help of other

monastic and devotees, we learned to work as a team making sure he was well taken care of, making sure he had taken all his pills and vitamins. To be able to serve Maharaj, was an enormous pleasure for me.

Accompanying Maharaj to the doctor, helping him get dressed, taking him for short walks and working out with him every day were some of the many things I was so fortunate to do. How could this bond not grow exponentially day after day? I couldn't wait to go to his room in the morning just to make pranams to him and greet him with a "Good Morning Maharaj!" and his eyes; his eyes would light up with a sweet smile like a child.

As days went by Maharaj was progressively turning more and more fragile and weak. Nonetheless, we wouldn't give up. I was always there encouraging him to do his daily walk. He was spending most of the day sitting or lying on his bed. His legs were swollen. He needed to move. We would walk around the dining table and count the rounds. Six was the number, but I would always add one more for the Lord and he would gladly agree to it.

As a young monk it is so important to feel the care and protection of our seniors. Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj made me feel his brother, his friend. I remember once on a summer day, when the sun sets really late, I went shopping for groceries. I didn't know then that supermarkets in our neighborhood could get so busy at that particular time. It was loaded with people. It took a while for me to check out. I wasn't aware of the time and when I walked out the sun had already set. It was late and by the time I reached the Monastery even later.

The next day he called me aside and said, "Please don't be late when you go shopping". He gave me a stern look but at the same time I could tell he was struggling to keep up his tone. He didn't want to do it. He didn't want to criticize me and yet he felt he had to. I felt

fortunate for he clearly cared about me. He cared about his younger brother. I took it as a blessing.

On another occasion I felt myself afflicted by the sense of responsibility associated with a difficult, complex and potentially compromising situation. I went to Swami Prabuddhananda's room to express my concern; he suddenly stopped me and said: "We all make mistakes, don't bother yourself too much. Make sure things get done according to what you have promised". That was indeed a great lesson to me.

When there was still time to change the course of action he didn't want me to, he asked me to keep up my word instead.

In May 2014 I was requested to move to our retreat center in Olema, some 36 miles away from San Francisco. A 24/7 nurse had been hired. Every time I had the chance or find an excuse to go to San Francisco, I could not wait to go to his room to see him, take the dust of his feet and sit by his holy presence. His eyes glowing, his shaking the chair in excitement, "You are here, you are here" he would say, "How are you? How is everything in Olema?" and at last, like a kid trying to conspire against the then circumstances he would say, "Stay here, don't go." We both knew that wasn't our call and yet he would playfully play those cards just for the sake of fun.

Late in the month of June 2014, on a Sunday morning, I got a phone call informing me that Swami Prabuddhanandaji had been taken to the hospital urgently. I cannot remember how I happened to be in San Francisco on that day. A friend devotee gave me a ride to the Hospital and somehow I was authorized to get access to his room in the ER. The moment we looked at each other, I will never forget. His reaction was so unexpected to me. "You are here! You are here!" He grabbed my hand and wouldn't let it go for long minutes. He was so happy to see me. It touched my heart deeply.

From then on many of us knew there was no coming back to the Monastery. We used to take turns to comfort him. He loved to get his feet massaged, as is customary in India, and it was a pleasure for me to provide such service during his last days.

He had a glorious departure. On July 2nd, 2014 his room at Kaiser Hospital was filled with monastic brothers and sisters, his disciples, devotees and friends. We were all chanting the name of Mother. He loved Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi so much. Her picture in front of him and her name vibrating all around his room, he finally merged in her presence. It was a sublime transition. He gave nothing but love and care to his disciples and in return, it was all given back to him. He was surrounded by people who loved him deeply.

“You pray for me and I will pray for you...”

Those were the last words I remember him saying before he decided to reunite with The Divine Mother forever. I still keep him in my prayers and remember those words with fondness as if we had sealed a deal.

Most Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj,

It was an honor to have met you. It was an honor to have served you. Glory to Sri Ramakrishna! Glory to Mother!



Swami Dhyanayogananda with Swamiji

SAUMYA BAJADA



“One should discriminate and hold onto certain moods and attitudes.” This was in regards to my saying I was so tense and it was continuing even at time of meditation.

“When you sit to meditate, think there is no convent, no Vedanta Society even. Surround yourself with that first.”

Four important things: japa, prayer, dedication and practice of the presence.

I asked how to keep certain things in mind, like not finding fault with others. “Think about principles. You don’t have to prepare by keeping it in mind. You just think about these things and use at the proper times.”

Bea and Edna told me something Swami said at Tuesday meeting at Olema. Swami said his grandfather was very brave. One day his grandfather and Swami and his sister (Swami’s sister) were driving in a carriage where these highwaymen were. The highwaymen pulled their horses to a stop and the grandfather said to the sister: Give me

the pistol! Give me the pistol! And they fled. Of course, the grandfather did not have a pistol.

If you do something wrong, feel the presence, visualize and ask for forgiveness.

Every once in a while you should pause in your work throughout the day. When you have to make a decision, be quiet and pray for guidance. You have to do something at that time. Why not do this?...when I was young, junior high school or so, I was not even interested in spiritual things. I used to sit on the roof (or porch?) ...we lived in a kind of forest area. I would just think how temporary everything is. I did not know why I would do it. But the Lord has guided me. Pulled. He is a power. Now I do it purposely. They may say, he is not working, reading or even meditating. He is just sitting. I tell you because it has helped me. On Sunday evenings or other times - sit and muse on how fleeting everything is.

Saw Swami for about a half hour or so. The whole talk seemed to be on coffee.

Swami: How come you are tired?

Me: I don't know.

Swami: How many cups of coffee do you take a day? 3-4-5?

Me: Yes, sometimes I take that many.

Swami: No - I would suggest you take only two. Try to bring it down to that.

When I was in junior high school I had this typhoid fever. You can not take anything hot or stimulating. When I was getting over it I started having hot chocolate twice, sometimes thrice a day. And I started having coffee two- three times a day. (He had been having since very young. They start at about 2-3 years old.) Then I thought I did not like it psychologically. So I stopped abruptly. For about 8-10 days I got the reaction. I did not feel like doing anything. I would sit on the river bank. No interest in anything. But after that time it was all right. It has been over 30 years since I have had coffee. But I was not such an addict. Do something else to get more energy.

October 5, 1977

I said, if I take up an idea, like Timelessness, after a short while I have exhausted corresponding ideas.

Swami: That's all right. You keep doing. Try to become absorbed. There is a saying, "A poet sees what the sun doesn't. Try to become absorbed. Mantra is like a drill.

Do every day - sometimes becomes dull. Not only dull and dry, bitter too! Doesn't matter. Keep doing.

December 4, 1977

I came for my appointment. Swami was on the phone for more than a half hour. After he got off~ Swami: I am so happy. I had prayed and prayed for it.

Apparently Nancy Jackman had given a large amount of money to send to India for the flood relief. There was a cyclone near Calcutta, a very bad one, with villages wiped out and lacs of people killed. He was so happy that so much money could be sent to help.

Swami: We should not think in such a small way. We should think in a big way.

January 20, 1978

We are studying Kena in the a.m. class. (probably convent class) Swami asked how I liked it.

Me: I'm not getting so much out of it.

Swami: This one, especially the first part is theme for meditation. "He is the eye of the eye." Go on reflecting. What is He really? At the same time repeating the Name.

Actually the Name is all this.

I asked Swami how to forgive.

Swami: 1 is you think: I too, must have hurt the person so many times, even unknowingly. Another is you make it smaller. Sometimes it does not work to say, it is small, it is small. You bring something bigger there. He/ she is the child of Sri

Ramakrishna too. You bring these ideas there, especially when you see the person. That is your saddhana, not only sitting and meditating.

January 25, 1978

Swami asked what I was reading and what were my favorite quotes. I said I liked the three verses on austerity.

Swami: Yes. Sri Krishna really defines what is austerity. It is good to have these ready at hand. They are very helpful. But for meditating, it is better to have verses and ideas directly on Reality. And try often to merge yourself in Brahman.

April 1978

Swami: Two things are needed to live in a monastery: A hide like a rhinoceros and a sense of humor. If steadiness is there, you can achieve anything. Be regular. Be steady.

June 21, 1978

Me: How to pray for others?

Swami: You try to feel the presence and then you picture that person and ask for what you want for him. We don't tell you 1-2-3-4. Main thing is to feel the presence, and imagine the person wholeheartedly, asking the best for him.

August 1978

Me: Should I meditate on death and when? Swami: Not at time of meditation. During the day. What is meditation? Thinking deeply. Everything in this life has these things: birth, growth, decay and death. At one university, when you walk in there is a fetus, little baby, in a jar. Then there was a mirror. And then a dead body. They were labelled: yesterday, today and tomorrow. Meditate on the death of your own body. Why do it to another? Because from that all attachment comes.

March 21, 1979

I asked Swami how to study, what to look for. (I'm on the Gita.)

Swami: Look for connections. Think: are there any connections between this and Sri Ramakrishna's or Swamiji's life. Make an effort to find them. Go through the book like that. You will develop your own study methods.

March 1979

Me: How to get over hurt feelings?

Swami: You reason about it. It is just a small thing. How many times have I done the same thing to her? Quickly I forget it, but only remember her wrongdoing. After all, it has only happened to the mind - not me! Like sometimes they say, thank

— — I'm not the monitor when such and such a thing happens. Like that. Thank — I'm not the mind.

April 19, 1979

Me: If one questions whether or not something will help me called discriminating?

Swami: Yes. Any kind of analysis like that is discrimination. You ask yourself: Will it help me? What good is it?

May 30, 1979

Me: Sometimes I feel these ideas are so high. I want something more handleable.

Though this can be a mood too.

Swami: If they are too high just go through once as an exercise. You can take all of these - variety. It is nibbling the Infinite. But take it easy. Don't feel you must stick to one and get anxious there.

Me: When I do the worship, I think of the verse and then try to feel the presence.

Swami: Yes, but emphasize the second more. At other times when working and can't

work plus think of God at the same time – you should offer work at the beginning and end and now and then in the middle. No, you can't think of two things at once. But, you can, by intensely thinking in the beginning, etc. create a mood. The intensity of these thoughts now and again can carry on. Just thinking, as Holy Mother said - You have a Mother. Just that. Or, he is with me.

One time I was going in a car in Bangalore. I saw something and it triggered off so many associations. But I did some spiritual practice and it was suppressed (? or whatever). Next day it came up again and I remembered what had happened the day before. Yes, they may come back again, but each time you have to deal with them. It is not that these thoughts will disappear completely. A person who was a thief, will always remember that. But, it, - they - lose their power. You will become more careless, not so attached to them.

March 19, 1980

Swami: Vichara is necessary. You should do that.

When I was in Bangalore I was involved in so many things. As happens to anyone around a place for a long time. Working in the garden and so many things. But now I look back and say, Where has it all gone? It is all gone. Even the vegetables have long been eaten. The only common thing is Sri Ramakrishna.

May 7, 1980

I told Swami I was to present the Gita verses at class and he gave me some hints.

Swami: Before you do you should meditate a few minutes. Think of Gayatri: May that spiritual light shine through us. Think Sri Ramakrishna is speaking through you and you are speaking to Him. That Shakti or Divine Mother is working through me. That power is working through the throat, working through the tongue and it is called speech.

August 19, 1981

Atman is a name. That which is called Brahman outside is Atman inside. Names don't matter much. Atman is that light of consciousness. One should meditate on Atman as the Beloved. Like jellybeans, you concentrate on first one color. You suck the juice, then go to another. It permeates all the koshas. Without It, there is no ego or anything. It is the eye of the eye, life of life, etc. You think Atman has taken the qualities of Sri Ramakrishna. First quality is, He is the guide.

What is needed is insight. They do not love us for this reason or that reason. They just love us. Unconditional. No reason there. Especially in Holy Mother we can see.

They have come to uplift us. Think of that power. It is spreading everywhere, bringing so many into its orbit.

Think of a Girish Ghosh. When Sri Ramakrishna accepts one, it means He accepts all. Not that this is a big exception. You take that for granted. How many did he accept? How little is recorded.

I know for myself how I was going headlong in one direction but I was turned. I can not find out on what basis I have come here. Except by Sri Ramakrishna's power. On my own I don't know what I would have done.

This Atman should permeate everyday life. Otherwise what is the use? Like an apple, you want to eat it. You have the knife and peeler. For Atman there is the will, feelings...You can try experiments. Practice different attitudes. Try things that are in the Gita.

October 28, 1981

Swami: It is good, better, to do various disciplines. Go on doing one after the other. Then you will see which ones are specially meant for you. No one can tell you the best ones for you. You have to find out. At a meal you eat everything, but one or two items

you specially like and eat more of. You go on continually doing. One will help the other. You should try to get absorbed in whichever one you are doing. He quoted from the Bhagavatam: Somehow or other think of God (yena kena)

September 16, 1982

Kumari told me something the other night. It seems when she was on the New Temple worship she couldn't handle the kitchen scene Sunday mornings, so wouldn't eat breakfast. She told this to Swami. He said, "Oh, you should ignore everything going on around you." But at the same time, he would provide cheese and a piece of fruit for her every Sunday morning. He would put it in a bag for her Sunday mornings.

June 22, 1983

Swami: No acceptance or rejection; the idea is to be free. If it comes, I will do it. But not because I asked for it. That is the freedom. You need not blame yourself. Of course you do the very best you can.

When I just came to the monastery I was so green and raw. I didn't know anything - either about worldly life or spiritual. I had gone to school. That was all. I didn't take up a job. At home I didn't do anything. There was nothing for me to do. There were servants, and others were hired for all the work to be done. So I had no experience.

When I came to the monastery, one day Swami Yatiswarananda, who was new there, called everyone and asked them what they like to do. They all said this or that. I thought maybe I would do something in the kitchen, so I said so. Actually I was never in charge, just assistant there. I did the shopping. Nothing special. Go here and there. Ask around. After some time others would do the marketing and I was considered the expert. When something very special, like a rug or some vessels for the shrine were needed, I would be asked to go for that. And I would get some medicines and other things for Swami Yatiswarananda. That was very sweet.

Once he asked me to get his plane ticket. That was a big thing, especially for me. I only

got one way! I had to go all the way back and get a round trip ticket. I was asked to get a money order or something from the post office. I didn't know anything! In my village our house used to be the post office. The mailman would drop off a bundle at our house and others would come and get their letters from there.

Once I was asked to get something (PVV or VPP or?) equivalent to C.O.D. So I went and thought they would give me the cash on delivery! They really laughed.

When I was at school I had heard of bookkeeping but I couldn't understand why a course was needed just to keep books. I did not know it meant accounting. I thought it meant to keep books.

Swami was asked to do the bookkeeping and he did the best he could. But when the auditor came, he said, What is this entry? What is this? And there was a bundle of cash from, no one knew where. He very kindly showed me what to do. I was so innocent. That was probably what saved me.

And I did accounting for 8 or 10 years. My roommate would kid me: That is what you will do for the rest of your life. And that is what I felt too. But somehow it dropped off.

Many jobs would come due to circumstances. Someone would get sick and I would do the worship. I never did for a long period. But the worship can not be postponed. And my health was good. Many would get sick again and again. Just like here.

Swami Sastrananda would write letters for Swami Yatiswarananda. (I think I got this right.) He came as a finished product, having worked for ten years and also took care of his father. He knew English very well. Then he got sick. So I was asked. I said I would try. So I did letters for some time.

Then at another center the Swami was very sick. They needed someone to be practically in charge. He didn't want this person or that person. So I was suggested. He said, all right, all right, let's see. I was asked to be in charge of a monastery where there were 85

college students. And they were having trouble there. I just trembled at the thought. Though I didn't tell others I was trembling. There, we eat... everything with them. The first day there were four there and we were eating. I couldn't even look at them! But after two years I had many friends there. That is, there was co-operation. (I think he said he was there for four years.)

Because of this I am convinced anyone can do just about anything. I did not have any special skills. I think someone who has talents should be able to do much better than me. It should be easier for them. If one goes on just doing what is on hand, taking what comes, they will not have time, except for a little day-dreaming, to think of so many other things. I would go on like that, not liking to ask for much help. Maybe it was a little pride too. As I look back, I feel good about having done like that. It is not anything that others can see, but I feel happy inside.

October 1984

Swami: When I went to Niagara Falls, for the second time, I was watching how I felt about it. There was nothing. I asked the little girl we were with how she liked it. She said, "It's boring! Boring! Boring!" Yosemite - there was nothing. For most of the people it is all mechanical. Unless something within is awakened, or there is an artistic sense, it is all mechanical. Of course we wanted to show the Swami. There the talk was the thing for me.

June 12, 1987

Swami: The first time I ate in the monastery was on Swami Virajananda's birthday. It was 1949-38 years ago. I had come to the monastery - it was all new to me. Swamis, monks, - it was all unusual to me. (He gave the picture he was looking around wide-eyed.) Someone said, "Come, take prasad." I thought it was sugar candy. But it was a meal. There had been some special something for Swami Virajananda. I had heard of him but didn't really know him then.

June 29th, 1988

Vedaprana told me Swami told Vani before he first came here he had heard so much about so many strong-willed women here (SF). He had never been anywhere besides Bangalore. He said he made his mind a blank. He didn't expect anything.

February 6, 1990

(I think this was said at the OT but was not recorded.) Swami told a story about himself, the beginning of which we've heard many times. He had a friend in college whom he had not seen for some time. He was sick. Swami wavered with the thought of seeing him, and it was a few miles away. Then he remembered how Swamiji visited people even in the rain. So he went. He was happy he did as his friend was sick and alone and needed help. Swami got him into a hospital. Then Swami visited him and brought him some juices, thinking the nurses didn't know how to take care of him. Then the boy got released and came back to class.

When they were at class Swami would think: why doesn't he sit by my side? And why is he talking to someone else! Then I realized: This is what Sri Krishna means by attachment.

September 22, 1991

At chant class we asked Swami about his favorite Gita verses. One was about the sattvica worker. He said he had been thinking how he would ask the Swami (in charge when he was young) for a change of jobs for a long time. He used to milk the cows - perhaps for a few years. It was hard work. He had to get up early. Specific times they had to be milked. It hurts your hands. Dangerous work as the cows might kick you. And you had your own schedule - at least part of the time. When he was coming back from this work the others would be coming back from meditating and having eaten, etc. So this was going on and on, and he was going to ask for a change. In fact he may have

been on his way to talk to the Swami when the verse regarding a sattvica worker doesn't hate certain work and desire other work came to his mind. (Gita ch 18 v 10)

February 2, 1995

Swami: I remember when once I was going out to dinner in Honolulu with Swami Vividishananda. He always went out. But my temperament is different. (I have never eaten in a restaurant in San Francisco.) We went to this restaurant. First you have to go through the bar. Then in the restaurant it was weird. They had stuffed animals - heads. There was a cow and some stuffed bird. I was uncomfortable. And they all ordered fish or chicken or something. I had some toast and fruit salad. And I was thinking: I should be eating under a tree or some such thing. I have renounced everything. And then I felt ok.

You should have something like a thermostat inside. Temperature goes too low and something clicks on and fan goes on and furnace comes on. It should be automatic.

NANDINI M. BANERJEE

Reminiscences of blessed moments with Swami Prabuddhanandaji of San Francisco, USA

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INTRODUCTION

When unasked blessings get showered on a naïve soul, the soul flows along in the current of bliss little realizing the value of penning these priceless experiences! Almost twenty years hence I am trying to recall only the few that has remained in the fading memory.

The events are not in chronological order and some maybe juxtaposed but here I would like to bring forth the immense love he had for the devotees.

Sometime during 1999 most probably, the Vedanta Society of North Texas (Dallas) under the able guidance of one of the founders, Mr. Mahendra Roychoudhury, invited Swami Prabuddhanandaji (head of Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, CA) for a retreat. We (my husband Tirthankar and myself) had the privilege of hosting the venerable soul in our home. From now on I will refer to Prabuddhanandaji as “Maharaj” which is the typical Ramakrishna Mission terminology when addressing a sadhu (monk).

So we went to the airport to pick him up. With eager anticipation we were waiting, wondering if we would be able to recognize him and then comes the saffron-clad, clean-shaven, hazel-eyed septuagenarian gentleman, with a slight smile playing on his lips and a deep resounding base voice that nobody would forget ever..! That was the first time when I got the tap on my bowed head while doing the pranam (Indian courtesy of touching the feet of the elder) and little did I know that there would be many mores to follow. The little tap on the head was Maharaj’s typical loving way of acknowledging the obeisance. Maharaj was a grave person, a man of few words and his deep resounding voice and slow drawl was apparently quite intimidating. However, the moment I saw him, I felt like a little girl (I was in mid-thirties then) and I was very free and frank with him! So we drove home amidst many chatters (me vocalizing 90% of the time of course) while he enquired about our society (founded by Mahendrababu, Tirthankar and myself meeting once a month in the only Hindu Temple of Dallas and then had shifted to our

newly bought home to be met on weekly basis for some months), about us (jobs, association with RKM, initiation, etc.) etc.

ATTENTION to EVERYTHING

MANY FACETS of SERVING

By this time I had acquired a little experience on hosting and serving the swamis of Ramakrishna order but obviously not completely as I didn't know that Swamis need a writing desk with shelves and the fact that I should maintain a soft quiet distance and not prattle on whenever I wish to. When I showed him his room/suite (there was a big window in the secluded room with a walk-in closet and attached bath with separate wash area) he was pleased and commented in his deep voice: *"Oh! It's very nice. You have made all the arrangements..!"* However, I did press him if there is anything missing that would make it better as I was quite new to hosting. To this he graciously replied that a drawer/shelf was required. I regret not asking the purpose and so I ended up getting a chest of drawers but never the writing desk with drawers. Sometimes it is not very convenient to put the suitcase on the floor and in those days luggage rack was not available. A chest of drawers was a convenient alternative or even a writing desk with a set of drawers was of course better.

Another time Maharaj commented: *"Since you are asking, the towel rack in the wash area is quite high. It would be convenient if it is within easy reach."* None of the swamis will ever complain about anything. Only when asked they might divulge these out of their compassion to help the spiritual aspirant be better. My purpose for sharing these valuable personal lessons are a reminder to myself that if one is "meticulous" in serving one's guest, the same meticulous mind would be equally watchful while serving God or in its spiritual practice.

VIKRAMADITYA's SINGHASAN

Out of exuberance to serve the best to the swamis, without a thought of their advanced age, we had bought a four poster high rise majestic looking bed that required a couple of steps to ascend. In one of the mornings, I needed to enquire of him and I walked into his room through the open door. I beheld this majestic figure sitting regally on the bed with stretched out legs pouring over some books. "Maharaj, you look like a king!" I blurted out. He laughed "*Heeh, yes, what to do? You have provided Vikramaditya's simhasan!*"

He never ever made a negative comment. Later I realized, all the swamis wear socks which can prove to be pretty slippery on the polished steps. Thankfully the bed was replaced soon.

PLANTS ARE ALIVE

In those days I was very much into gardening and I had an affinity for roses and flowering shrubs. I was never into veggie gardening. However I tried growing okra and the shrub grew 6 ft tall bearing 6-8 inches of solid-hard okras. So Maharaj along with the devotees went out into the garden and enquired after each and every plant and tree, their names, flowering times etc...!! I never knew the swamis were this meticulous..! Lesson learnt was "*Attention to Everything.*" Of course he was astounded with the okras and that was the first and last of my okra plantation...!!





Maharaj was quite pleased with the garden and the flowers and as usual commented in his deep voice: *"Oh, your garden is very nice. You have kept them (plants) well!"* My very good friend Alpana gleefully reported to Maharaj: "Maharaj, she talks to the plants! Hee, hee." Immediately Maharaj said: *"Plants have life too! They too respond."* In those days, my conversation with the plants used to be the subject of joke in my friend's circle. But after this of course I continued my apparent soliloquy and strange occurrences happened.

OUR EARLY SESSIONS

During the sessions all the devotees came and a mart of joy flowed. Dollydi and Kalyanda (Kalyan & Dolly Basu), Aniruddha Dutttagupta-mashima and Pat, Souri (Bhattacharya) da and Animadi, Dr. Debosmita and Ruby mashi, Rekha and Avi Nangea, Mahendrababu, Alope Das, Alpana and Monidip Sengupta etc. Initially the sessions used to be in Sarada Cottage (our home) and later sessions were distributed in different devotee's homes.

In the following picture from L-R: Arundhati (Houston) in blue, Kantaswamy behind her, myself behind maharaj, Pat, Devosmita, Dollydi and Uday.



REFLECTION of STATE of MIND

In those (early days) our attention used to be on how many items we can cook and to the best of our ability. While cooking we used to end up using lots of utensils unnecessarily and thereby the kitchen would be piled with dirty dishes. Thus inspite of having a huge kitchen we had not yet learnt to utilize it properly. The day maharaj went to check out the garden, instead through the front he walked into the house through the kitchen and glanced at the piles of dirty dishes. It was so embarrassing that, that very day all of us learnt a very valuable lesson. Use just what is needed and cleanup immediately afterwards. I realized at any given point, what we do reflects the state of our mind. Scattered environment reflects a scattered mind.

From then on the food used to be served on the kitchen counters and devotees would sit around the swami at the table.

OTHER INCIDENTS

WAITING to MANIFEST

Once when Tirthankar and I went to drop him off at the DFW airport, we still had some time on hand and we started strolling through the airport. Maharaj always liked strolling for a bit. In those days, one was allowed to be near the gate and press their nose on the glass windows to bid the goodbye. Just then we chanced upon a young mother with about a four month old child in a stroller. We all looked at the quiet child with big blue eyes. I blurted: "Look Maharaj, how innocent..!" Immediately came the grave reply in the deep voice: "No, Not innocent, waiting to manifest!"

GURU

Quite a few years later, maybe in 2002, Monidip and Alpana Sengupta along with Ranjana had taken initiation from Revd Swami Swahanadaji Maharaj of Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood. Right after this event, within couple of months, Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj came to Dallas for a retreat. Alpana, newly initiated, keeping in mind Swahanandaji's advanced age, very emotionally asked Maharaj: "Maharaj, what will happen if guru leaves his body?" Immediately came the thunderous reply: "Discard that guru who dies!" Perceiving the stunned faces, he continued on a softer note: "Who is Guru? Guru is Satchidananda and no one else!"

CAUGHT !

One funny incident I am going to narrate here. Usually Tirthankar would drive him and I would sit at the back. Sometimes I did seize my chance too☺. Once I was driving Maharaj back in my own car and Tirthankar was bringing other devotees back home in his car. This is when I was talking about Dallas traffic, its speed limits and complained that Tirthankar drives fast and breaks the rules. Maharaj heard patiently but didn't comment. Next day with Tirthankar in the driver seat, the following conversation happened:

Maharaj: *"Look Nandini, he is driving so properly. Yesterday you were complaining he doesn't obey the rules and drives fast."*

Me: "Oh that's because you are sitting next to him Maharaj!"

Next day I brought some devotees back in my own car and Maharaj came with Tirthankar. I had reached a tad bit early and just as I was opening the door lock, Maharaj got out of the car and called out: *"Nandini, Nandini.. I have caught him. You were right. He did not stop at the stop sign..!"*

Till today we haven't been able to stop recounting this childlike innocence!

UK RETREAT Aug 2000

Once, I was supposed to attend Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj's retreat in UK Vedanta Center. Tirthankar could not attend and I was supposed to be there for the whole week. So I connived with our Gurudev, Revd Swami Dayatmanandaji Maharaj (Head of UK Vedanta Center) that we will keep my being there a secret and surprise Prabuddhanandaji. So, I reached a day early and Dayatmanadaji Maharaj went with Shivarupanandaji to the airport to pick up Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj. They were supposed to arrive around 7:30am. I eagerly waited at the center and hid behind the main door, watched the three swamis get down from the car, come inside the center and start walking towards the dining room. I followed silently behind. As soon as they reached the dining entrance, Dayatmanandaji noticed and exclaimed: "Maharaj look Dallas is here!" and Prabuddhanandaji swung around to find me with a huge grin! He was shocked! *"You? What are you doing here?"* He was so shocked that he forgot to acknowledge my pranam with his signature tap on the head. "Oh I came to attend your retreat Maharaj!" was my happy chirpy reply. *"Where is Tirthankar?"* bewilderedly he asked peering into the kitchen and behind half closed doors. "Tirthankar is in Dallas, he is working Maharaj. Only I came!" He could hardly believe it. After he settled down a little, he was having breakfast and Dayatmanandaji was serving him. I was chattering as usual and he

suddenly pointed to the wall behind me. There was a notice: "Please maintain silence during lunch." Immediately I retorted: "Maharaj, it's only for lunch this is breakfast!" And he started calling out loudly "**Dayatmananda, Dayatmananda!**" I got worried if I was in real trouble. Dayatmananda Maharaj was looking for some pickles for Maharaj and he came rushing. As soon as he arrived maharaj complained like a child:

"Dayatmanandaji, Look at this. She was chattering and I showed her the note and she said it's only for lunch; its breakfast now!" Poor Dayatmanandaji; what could he say! He mumbled: "yes, she is very intelligent!" I was supremely happy. Of course maharaj was not done so after sometime he started: "**Poor Tirthankar. He is all alone by himself. He has to cook for himself.**" And I got livid: "What about me, poor me? I am all alone in a foreign land; I have to cook for myself!" He was so happy having scored finally. He loved teasing me.

The topic of the UK retreat was IsaVashya Upanishad and he gave us homework to study from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol 2; Jnana Yoga Chapter Title: 'God in Everything'. This is where he explained that just as the substratum of gold jewelry is gold similarly the entire universe that we perceive is actually Brahman. So once Brahman is known (perceived) entire manifestation becomes known.

2002

That year, from Jan – June I was stationed in Oslo, Norway. Those were the happy Telecomm Ericsson Inc. days. I was enjoying my Nirjan-vaas. Meanwhile, Tirthankar was sent to San Jose on an assignment from his company Cisco. Of course he chose to visit maharaj at his center. We always visit any center that happens to be in the place of our current trip. The following incident is Tirthankar's narration. Maharaj was very happy to see him and enquired after me. He was told I was stationed in Norway for 6 months. Maharaj was silent for some moments.

Maharaj: "**So, can you drive in the mountains?**"

Until then Nandini had driven the winding curves and not Tirthankar. However he mustered up enough courage and said: "Yes Maharaj."

"Can you drive myself, Deepak (now swami Chidekananda) and Ishtananandaji to Shanti Ashram tomorrow?"

It so happened to be Saturday and Tirthankar was planning to stay over in SF anyway.

His overjoyed response was: "Yes, of course Maharaj!"

"Where is Nandini now?"

"In Oslo, Norway Maharaj."

"Hmm.. do you call her?"

"Yes maharaj" was the timid reply. He used to call twice a day.

"Okay, let's call and tease her. Can you call her now?"

Since it was Friday afternoon my time and right after work I used to go walking in the mountain trails in Songsvaen. It is a beautiful 11km walk amongst the tall green trees on the mountains. I used to have my headphones on and a small backpack with water, mobile etc. In those days, I had a small tape recorder in which I had a few audio cassettes of bhajans (naam sankirtanams, stotras etc.), and various retreat recordings. While walking alone through the green trees with the waning sun's warm rays on my back, I used to listen to these. Incidentally, that is where I learnt all the 5 naam-sankirtanams. So, here I was trudging along living in my own world of lectures and nature... feeling almost like I am in the Vedic times of gurukula when my mobile rings a shriek. Knowing it to be Tirthankar I almost barked a "hello" and I heard this deep voice: *"Nandini! Where are you?"*

"Maharaj..! It's so wonderful you called..! Pronam Maharaj..!" Was my ecstatic cry amidst the quiet serene mountains.

"What are you doing?" was the indulgent question.

"Oh! I am walking in the mountains Maharaj!"

"Oh, so they pay you to walk in the mountains!"

“Maharaj, its weekend now, the office is over! Plus I was listening to some spiritual lecture!”

“Oh, so you are having your own retreat.”

“Yes Maharaj..!” was the self-satisfied smug reply.

“Well, tomorrow Tirthankar is driving 3 of us to Shanti Ashram!”

All my euphoria evaporated instantly. In an anguished voice I almost shouted: “Why? Why Shanti Ashram? Take him to Olema, I have been there. I have not been to Shanti Ashram... it’s not fair!”

“Ha, ha, Well, keep well, May Sri Ramakrishna bless you”; click.

So, next day Tirthankar has the blessed opportunity to drive all 3 of them to Shanti Ashram. Usually it takes about 2 hours but while the long drive lulled the swamis, Tirthankar sped habitually. Suddenly Maharaj woke up with a start and was very surprised to be so close to the destination.

“How did you reach so quickly? Did you speed?”

“Yes maharaj” was the sheepish answer.

BREAKFAST with Maharaj at SF Vedanta Center

We had the good fortune of visiting him at his center in San Francisco quite a number of times. The first time we went from Dallas, we were supposed to arrive around 8:00pm. Maharaj had asked Kantaswamy (a wonderful dedicated devotee) to receive as we didn’t know the way around. So, while the rain poured on, we finally reached the main entrance of the old temple by shared taxi. We found Kantaswamy right outside under an umbrella patiently waiting for us a good full hour! The Old Temple was the monastery and Tirthankar was whisked upstairs, shown his room and all comfort was assured. Maharaj was giving a talk there and after it was over he met with Tirthankar, went upstairs to the room Tirthankar was allotted (quite a bit of flight actually), ensured everything is according to Tirthankar’s liking and also delegated Mohan to attend on Tirthankar..!

After this we went to the main temple where Maharaj met us in his office. There we met Pravrajika Virajaprana Mataji and Rina Mashi (Maharaj's initiated from Toronto) who was to be my chaperone to the convent where I will be staying.

Men devotees are privileged to have breakfast with the swami. Next morning after breakfast, Maharaj asked if Tirthankar wanted any tea or coffee to which the answer was tea but later. Now Kantaswamy happen to be present then. Then Tirthankar forgot all about tea and busied himself in the book store. Almost around 10:30am Kantaswamy got him a steaming hot cup of tea and reminded him of the conversation with maharaj..! This is how a steadfast devotee helps others to become devotees. What reverence Kantaswamy had for Maharaj..! All the swamis wanted Kantaswamy to stay at their center.

The ladies guest room at the ground floor of the convent had a spectacular view of the SF Bay with the tramline running down the famous steep road but still had a quiet meditative atmosphere. The room was huge with large windows and with 4 beds to house 4 female devotees with a common kitchen and bathroom. Usually the ladies would fix their meals or be invited by the nuns of the convent for a lunch. I was fortunate that not only I was invited by the nuns for a lunch but maharaj invited Rina mashi, Tirthankar and myself to breakfast. There Pravrajika Virajaprana Mataji made all the arrangements and served us. We did not realize what a privilege we were experiencing!





Tirthankar once got the opportunity to cook the lunch for maharaj and serve him. The time allotted was 30mins and Brahmachari Vans (Swami Chidbrahmananda) helped him out. This was the first time in our life we learnt that one must not spend too much time on cooking..! Tirthankar was making an eggplant dish but the eggplants were not completely done. So maharaj tasted the gravy only and remarked that it tasted quite alright.

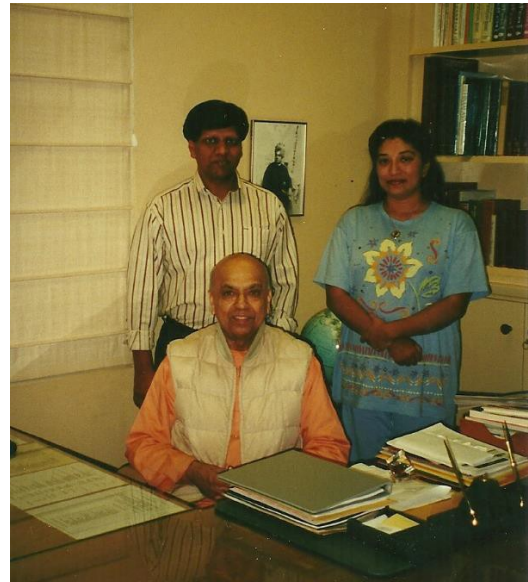
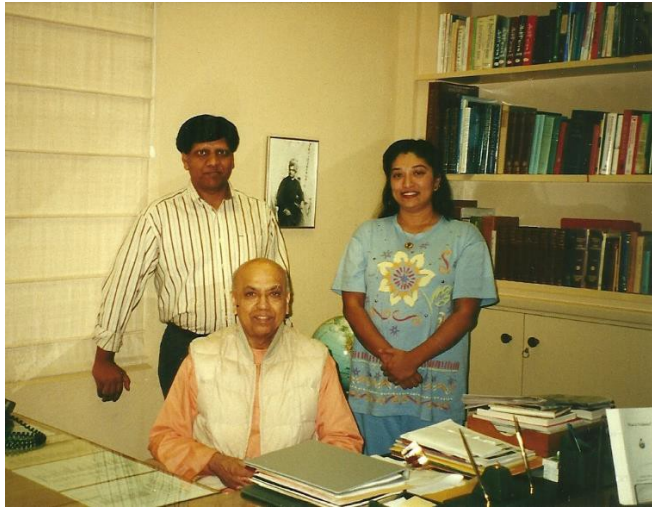
Once I had brought something cooked for maharaj which he relished during lunch with the fortunate monks and male devotees. I sent most part of the dish to the nuns as Maharaj could not take spicy food by then. The nuns later told me that they enjoyed it very much. I felt so blessed..!

There used to be great bakery, couple streets down the Vallejo Street. Tirthankar and myself discovered it during our SF-checkout. They used to carry wonderful pastries... of course we tasted them first. My guru had asked me to taste the dishes first before offering just to make sure it tastes alright as I should offer only the best to the Lord. So we ended up getting 2 full cakes one for the monks and one for the nuns. They were relished and Maharaj commented on the cake being so fancy..!

CONTINUED BLESSING

Every morning and evening maharaj met with us. He always liked Q&A sessions. His typical conversation opener was: *“say something!”* I wish I had recorded those conversations. Usually he enquired after all the devotees, the way our then Dallas Vedanta society was running with the above mentioned devotees. He always reminded us to take refuge in Thakur and Ma and encouraged us in our Society activities. He used to tell us as well as other devotees that “Nandini and Tirthankar are missionaries”. That blessing has become a part of my nature and always has been a beacon against adversities. But I always remember without fail the blessing everytime: *“May Sri Ramakrishna bless you, May Holy Mother bless you”; “give my love to all the Dallas devotees, Mahendra and others”* (“*especially to Aniruddha*” was sometimes added) along with the familiar tap on the head.

On the last day of our stay, I always asked for prasad for the devotees to carry back and he would happily oblige with blessings for all. He also included our name in their roster such that after every Puja, without fail, we would receive a box of puja flowers and prasad which we would share with our devotees. The prasad boxes kept on coming after we moved to Cedar Rapids also..!



Maharaj in his full majesty... in his office..!

OLEMA TRIP

We were privileged to be in Olema quite a number of times. The first time Maharaj took us to Olema, we took a nice walk around the property (the new ladies cottages were not done then). We met Vedanandaji Maharaj and I think Amaraprana(?) Mataji was our guide. We visited the orchards and it was apple-picking season. We also got to see the camelia orchard and heard stories about wildlife. We came to know that some evening classes are held and a meditative, quiet atmosphere is maintained.

In one of those visits we finally arrived at a surreal place in the forest. There is a circular clearing with tall trees. At one time Revd Ashokanandaji was contemplating building a Mother Kali's Temple but it did not come to fruition. I was overjoyed at this.

I objected: "Maharaj, this is a perfect place for meditation! A temple would spoil this wonderful atmosphere."

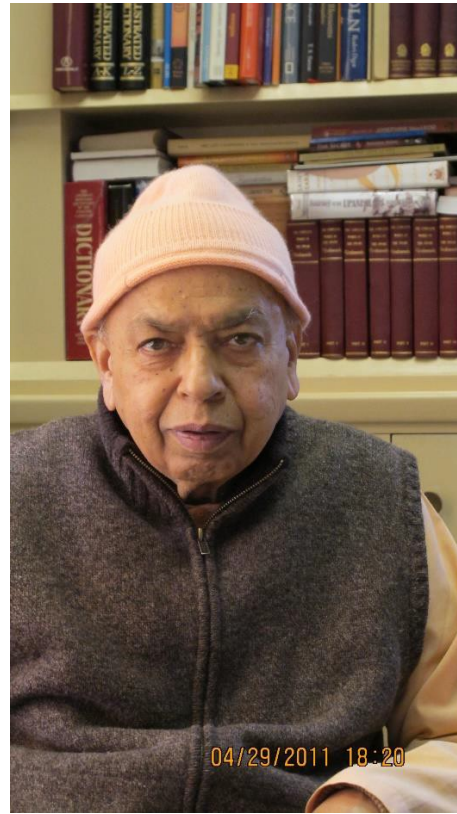
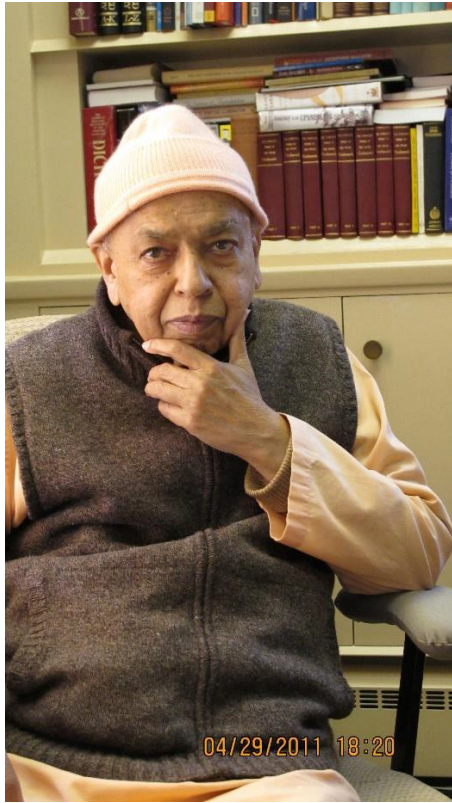
Immediately maharaj said: *"Alright, you come and stay in the ladies cottage. No Tirthankar, no swami."*

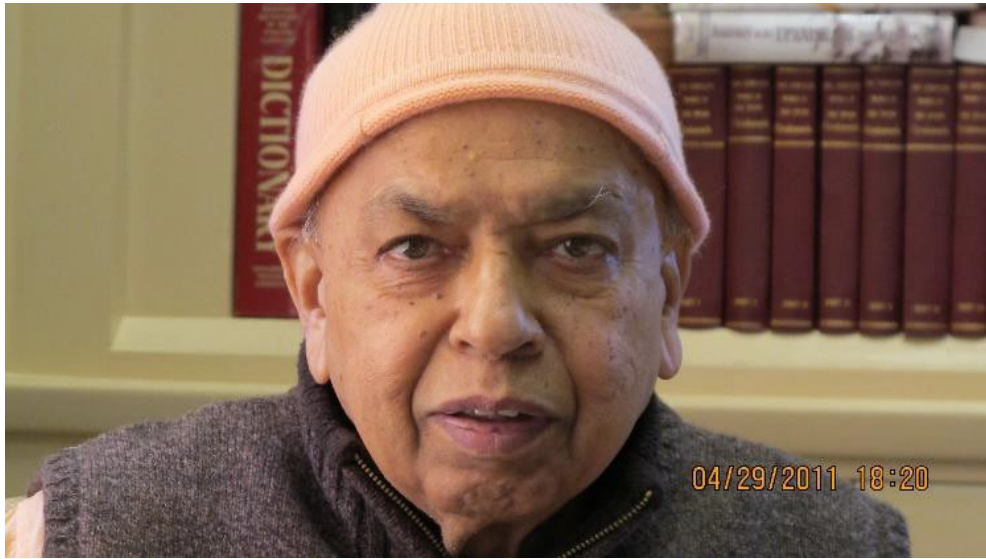
"That would be fabulous maharaj!" I happily chirped.

Unfortunately that never materialized.

SHANTI ASHRAM

Somehow I was blessed to attend the Shanti Ashram retreat in 2011 which was the second time for Tirthankar and mine, one and only. As usual, we went to the center first and met with Maharaj. Next day we started for the Shanti Ashram.







At Shanti Ashram, Maharaj gave the opening address. Revd Swamis, Tyaganandaji, Prasannatmanandaji and Prapannanandaji maharaj were the other swamis attending besides Swami Vedanandaji.



Each of the swamis expounded on Swami Vivekananda's 4 yogas except Raja Yoga. After all the swamis had completed their talks the audience was allowed to ask questions. I had the following question on Karma Yoga: "Yoga means union with the divine. However, in Karma Yoga, it was mentioned that one need not even believe in God. In such case, how does one connect to divine?" At the end Maharaj got up and said simply: "*One may not call it God but what else is there? They also connect to IT. They don't use the name God or Brahman.*" Simple and to the point.

How caring he was..!

There were a large number of devotees and during lunch we didn't want to disturb him as all the swamis were congregated under one tent. So we sat some ways yonder as we were almost done one lady walks up to us and enquires our name. She informed us that

Maharaj had sent her to look for us (in that large crowd) and to invite us to join him with the other swamis which we politely declined and also to make sure we had enough to eat during lunch..! Though he was not doing so well yet he did not forget us in that big event.

This left us misty eyed and a feeling of so loved..!



DICTION

Once, we presented Maharaj a home recording of our stotras in a CD asking for any corrections that were required. Promptly the next day he commented: *"How come you do not have Bengali accent? You have perfect Sanskrit diction. You are a Bengali."* We were very surprised as I did not realize until then that there was a significant difference in the way Sanskrit is pronounced by the Bengalis. I grew up in Delhi with Hindi as my second language.

MJ's FAVOURITE SONG

I had the good fortune to attend a class he conducted for the nuns once and I think it was Katha Upanishad he was teaching then. The nuns chanted the Sanskrit shlokas all together and I got so inspired. After the class was over, suddenly Maharaj asked me to sing a bhajans. Until then all I used to sing were mainly Bengali and some Hindi bhajans that Revd. Swami Dayatmananadaji was teaching me so painstakingly every year.

With no lyrics readily available, I think I sang a Bengali bhajan (all that I could remember in that flabbergasted state) which I am sure nobody could follow the meaning.

Then Maharaj asked me to sing *"NAATHA, TUMI SARVASYA AMAAR."* Unfortunately I did not know. He mentioned this song again later.

HUMILITY:

Once Maharaj in his talk in Dallas exclaimed thus: *"... That was the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna!"* Immediately in a low tone he added: *"But who am I to talk about the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna?"*

We were astounded at the humility of this septuagenarian monk..!

A VISIT THAT NEVER HAPPENED

We invited him every year and whenever time permitted he came. We all took it for granted that he would come every year and we would have this blessed time; time and again. In 2005 we had to relocate to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. By then his health had started to fail. But we would call him on the phone and invite him.

He used to ask: *"How far is it?"*

"Close to Chicago Maharaj".

"Is there any direct flight?"

"No maharaj; you have to come via Denver or Minneapolis or Chicago." Used to be our sad reply.

But he couldn't make it. He wanted to come but he couldn't do a break-journey. So we went a few times to SF to meet him. Some of our devotees also went to meet him in SF.

LAST VISIT

Maharaj's health started failing rapidly so we made an SOS trip in Oct 2011. Pravrajika Virajaprana Mataji received us and notified that Maharaj would meet with me after his breakfast. Tirthankar may see him during breakfast. So, I waited for maharaj at the new temple right early in the morning hoping to catch a few moments. Unfortunately, right after breakfast he started feeling uneasy and requested to be shifted to his room. This was in the monk's quarters where female devotees are not allowed except Pravrajika V who was attending on him. So, Tirthankar remained with Maharaj and I eagerly waited to catch a glimpse.

Doctors were notified. Morning crept onto noon and evening but no sign of betterment. Finally a call on Pr. Virajaprana mataji's cellphone comes enquiring if I was still there. Of course I was.

Maharaj's tired feeble voice comes over the air: *"Nandini, sorry I could not meet you!"*

Choking back my flowing tears I replied: "I heard your voice Maharaj that is enough for me. Please get well soon."

He continued: *"You waited all day but I could not come. I am not feeling well you see. I wanted to see you."*

"It's absolutely alright Maharaj. It's alright. I am talking to you, Maharaj. That is enough for me. Please get well. We will come again once you are well."

"Alright. May Sri Ramakrishna bless you!"

Yes, even in that situation, maharaj did not forget to bless me..! We returned on the late night flight. For me, it was a wonderful tapasya... entire day in the temple landing grateful thoughts about Maharaj, Thakur's precious child; his teachings, little events. That day I realized how much I loved this father figure, Revd. Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj.



Yes, the miracle did happen. Maharaj indeed got better and I (we both) was blessed to see him one last time in person July 6, 2013. I made some sandesh and roasted salted cashews and some south Indian style tomato rice for him which he happily accepted..! Little did I know that to be my last offering; the last goodbye the last sunbathed magnificent view in Maharaj's office in his magnanimous presence.









CONCLUSION

Now whenever I hear or think of the name 'Revd Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj', it casts a warm glow in my heart. Joyfully I rejoice at the thought that Maharaj loved me and had blessed me but at the same time my heart grieves for the lost father figure and longs for the playful tap on the head.

With grateful loving pranams maharaj remains enshrined in hearts of Nandini and Tirthankar Banerjee.

SUSAN SALM

Reading what so many senior swamis have said about Swami Prabuddhananda I hardly know where to begin. He was such a pillar of help and guidance to me and to others in my family.

My first encounter with Swami must have been very shortly after he came to the US, I had the privilege of serving his meals at our Center in New York ... he was very reserved, serious, gentle. Later I came to know that whatever he said carried great weight and that by listening carefully my life could be changed.

When I was most desperate he was able to give me solace, when I felt absolutely lost he found the way to soothe me. There were times when it seemed another day would be intolerable, insurmountable, yet he just said a few words, and everything fell into place -- I became calmer and stronger. In a lecture on spiritual strength he said: "In spiritual life we must be strong... But what if we are not strong, how can we survive? ...BECOME strong!" was his advice. That itself was a great inspiration! So pragmatic, simple, and above all: true.

Swami invited me to stay at the convent many times and let me know and feel that I was always welcome there... He made me so at ease and comfortable at the SF Center that it became a second home for me.

His kindness, hospitality, good will and gentle nature were a balm to me in some of my saddest moments -- whatever I needed to discuss, to get advice about, whenever that might be, he was ever available. Even in his last year when I came to visit San Francisco, due to his poor state of health I had been warned 'his health has declined, he is too weak, in his condition he cannot give interviews any more', but even without my asking, he gave me hours of his precious time, and then would say: "What about tomorrow? Will

you be here? Can you come again?" He had a remarkable sense of just what I needed, and he gave generously.

I found that the more I needed comfort and guidance, the more warm and loving Swami would be. When I confided and poured out my heart to him, telling him of pains and sadness I felt, he lovingly and sympathetically spoke, telling me some personal words that would inspire and support me. He never condescended or insinuated that my problems were insignificant. On the contrary -- he would, with deep feeling, say: "That is very, very sad", "That is extremely difficult", "It will be a long time before this can be resolved", etc... I knew he completely understood each matter that I brought up. He truly soothed my heart when I was in desperate need of support.

He always had time for me, and he always offered even more. Such calmness, such peacefulness, and such clear perceptions. Always reminding me of the Highest, of the ultimate goal, of the teachings of my own swami and of Thakur and Vivekananda -- Sometimes when he spoke to me, sensing just how delicate and fragile I must have been feeling, I became aware that tears were streaming down my face, but he seemed quite unfazed by that! And he would continue quietly talking, keeping me firmly comfortable in his presence, feeling protected by him and his straightforward, honest, strong and gentle words of advice and comfort. His concern and care were a true representation of practical Vedanta in action.

Now it is his memory that gives solace, and the memory of what he said to me in times of great difficulties.

I am deeply grateful for the blessing of having known him, and for the wisdom, the comfort, the love he offered me every time I was in his presence. May I find a way in my life to become deserving of that kindness and generosity, and to honor what he gave me.

SUBHASREE MAJUMDAR

Memories of Swami Prabuddhananda

It is an immense pleasure and a sense of profound joy that you have given me an opportunity to express my experience with Revered Swamiji.

My Experience:

I first met Swamiji in the year 2009. Those years were one of the hardest time in my life. I used to spend days in a new country lonely, confused, in an incalculable way of what I have learnt (values) from childhood and was being expected from me. Betrayed from my near and dear ones to some extent. I was unable to match my values, principal to what is being expected from me, and truly speaking that situation was coming back again and again leaving me exhausted and direction less.

Apprehensive by the situation I called one day to the SF centre and asked for initiation. That is the first time May/June of 2009, I heard Swamiji's sweet assuring voice over the phone.

I was to travel back to India, so he asked me to visit the center, once I come back. I did not know how to drive so my husband drove me every time for years. Later I learnt driving. I first visited the centre on the day of the lecture 'Cause and Eradication of Fear '. After the lecture I went to meet him. Very affectionately he asked me to come and sit in first few rows and to meet him everytime so that he can remember me.

I was surprised and somewhere (assured within) to get this kind of welcome. After my travel back from India he agreed to give me initiation. 'Initiation' as the name describes itself a true journey with 'Oneness, he taught me to voyage in. Then frequent meetings with Swamiji made my days joyful. His words, his Q&A sessions ,his referred books were like medicines to a broken and confused and lonely heart. I spent my weeks waiting for

next Sunday and he used to wait for me. I was so blessed to get the affection of such a great soul.

Among his numerous precious words 3 statements I think worth mentioning. He once told:

1) Good relations are silent. They never sound.

(Believe me it even came true in my personal experience with one of the most primary relation in the world.)

2) If you are not getting any direction here in this country, you are sure to get back in India, if not in India elsewhere, if nowhere then in Himalaya. (People laughing in background)

3) After earning a Degree it becomes a piece of paper with which a person can earn. It is temporary.

God is permanent.

4) Someone asked in the Q&A session 'Swamiji it is mentioned in the Gita to lead a spiritual life one must eat satvic food. What is a satvic food ?'

Swamiji replied: Food does not essentially mean what we eat only. It is also the practice we live with, what we love to hear, what we love to discuss about, what we read and so on. This one 'answer' answered all my doubts and helped me to gain confidence in me as a human being.

Later it is helping me as well to educate my near and dear ones. Only such a noble soul and say so precious words in such a simple language.

Later when I heard about his illness in 2011 I asked my husband to drive me to him. He was in Lake Tahoe at that time for the retreat. I was planning to meet him personally but

somehow it was not possible. I got for him a 'Mickey Mouse pen from Disney Land'. I gave him in front of everyone and he accepted it in front of everyone and gave me some gifts and food in return. I never mentioned to him that the very previous day I came to know about his illness and so rushed wherever he was.

I met him till 2013 end (I was last in USA). In early 2014 Jan. he showed his grace and initiated my husband.

Even in 2011 when my mother met him in SFO for the first time, he encouraged her to visit Gol Park Ramakrishna Mission as it is near to our home in Kolkata. My mother still says something was there in his words which pushed her (in spite she is in the same city for last 59 years but never felt the urge for)

Later she got initiated from Cossipore.

Once he told me personally 'The grace of Lord is always flowing. It is a true devotee who could feel it'

Swamiji left his gross body in July 2014. But he as my GURU is always one with me and one with the path he has shown me.

Pranam.

GOPA RAHA

I am sending you some sweet memories with Swami Prabuddhananda Maharajji.

1) My respectful pronam to Swami Prabuddhananda Maharajji. We are very blessed to have our initiation from him. I asked him for diksha in 1995. He was looking at me and said, "Are you not initiated yet?" Then I told him, with a shaky voice, about my dream when I was spending the night at Olema Retreat House. In that dream I was having diksha from him. Then with a smiling face he said, "Let me think, then I will tell you." My husband was with me. He said, "How about me Maharaj?" One day he called us for diksha, that was the day of Falahaarini Kalipuja.

2) Often Maharaj used to call us in his room after his talk in the hall for 5 minutes. He would ask about our sadhana. After discussion, he used to say, "Go closer and closer to Sri Ramakrishna, hold his feet with two hands. Take one line of your song and meditate on that."

3) Swamiji always used to encourage me for singing. One day at a devotee's house, after puja and singing is done, he called me and said, "Whatever God gave you, you should cultivate." With a smiling face, sometimes he used to say, "No bhojan without Bhajan". means no food without devotional singing. I always feel that he is with me and guiding me.

4) On one Sunday I was supposed to sing, he was very ill and sitting in a chair, but he could not stay. He felt bad that he would have to go to his room. When he saw me, he blessed me with his two hands keeping on my head. I was blessed. That is a great treasure for my life. Again and again, I feel my Pronam to his feet.

ANDREA WALSH

Memories of Swami Prabuddhananda

Thank you for sharing this wonderful gathering of reminiscences from Swamis and devotees. When I read the individual stories I found myself in tears because although everyone's experiences are different, there was some similarity and I could visualize the descriptions of Swami Prabuddhananda.

Having attended the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Southern California, I was searching for a Guru who was suited to me and my personal nature. I was able to get an approval to attend the Olema Retreat and met Swami Prabuddhananda for the first time there. I attended the Olema Retreat and the Lake Tahoe Retreat for several years, mainly in the later years of Swami's life. When I met Swami, I knew that he was very genuine and that he exuded all that I believe to be spiritual.

My special observations of him were that he was a perfect example of equanimity, peace, silence, love, selflessness. These characteristics I observed in everything that he did. I remember making the famous potato soup at the Memorial Day Retreat, getting up early in the morning, peeling, chopping, stirring, working with the other women as a team, in order to culminate in a most wonderful soup to share with the community. What impressed me most was the fact that whenever we got up early and worked on this project in the Women's Retreat garage, he would drop by to observe and support us in our work and to encourage us. I always felt that this was a ritual for him and that he was sending silent prayers that the project would be a success.

Another time, he asked me to give a talk on Equanimity in Spiritual life at the Memorial Day Retreat. Being rather shy about getting up in front of large gatherings, I was very surprised that he asked me but I had faith and felt that he had faith that I was capable of doing this talk.

Somehow it all came together effortlessly and as it turns out equanimity has been a quality that I have had to use consistently in my life due to various family challenges. I also am a retired Special Education teacher. The use of equanimity aided me greatly in my profession and I use it constantly as a Yoga teacher to this day.

When I need strength in my life in challenging times, I remember the sight of Swami Prabuddhananda at the Olema Retreat crossing slowly and silently in a reverent mood across the grounds from the Barn to the Men's Retreat house, the early morning sun filtering through the trees, on his way to lead the morning meditation. I remember him on the deck at the Lake Tahoe Retreat House watching very carefully as everyone stood in line to take their meal and he never ate anything until everyone was served first and when he did eat, it was always a very small portion. To me, these focused actions on his part were a symbol of selflessness, patience, equanimity and love.

Swami Prabuddhananda was a great soul who taught through his actions without too much talk. There was a lot of power and strength in his silent teachings. When I did meet with him with questions, he always answered me and comforted me with very few words but every word was very meaningful, unforgettable and helpful.

At the end of my Yoga class when we say Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti, I always send a quiet thanks to this great teacher for the profound lessons that he taught me.



ANNA MONDAY (URVASI)

Reminiscences, Part II

In keeping with the theme of the unconventional interactions with Swami Prabbuddhananda, I offer these vignettes. This is, however, not one. Rather it is an introductory caveat: One Saturday evening, we were studying a reminiscence. Swami commented on how difficult it is to write a proper reminiscence in that authors tend to write too much about themselves. He said it was “an art” to stay out of your story. He used this term, “an art,” to describe many, if not most, endeavors, reflecting a view that one must navigate through life always exercising balance in a constantly shifting world. Setting the course on autopilot to always steer by a dogmatic preconceived notion was just simply lazy. It is a reflection in action of an intriguing quote of Mother’s which Swami often repeated, but a quote I’ve heard from no one else: [paraphrase] Silence is not keeping quiet. It is saying neither too much nor too little. How much more challenging this is and requiring of diligent, unflagging attention than merely refraining from all speaking.

An aside, but also related to the appropriate reactions being an art, Swami once mentioned a youngster at a Vedanta youth gathering where certain life-questions had been posed. The youngster kept “solving” the dilemmas by answering that the problem was that we are not united with God. Swami commented that while this was ultimately true, it was necessary to delve deeper into the individual situations themselves and come up with interim practicable strategies.

All that being said, here are my vignettes. I will construct as far as possible to keep me and mine out of the picture. However, sometimes context is required. I will also not use quotation marks unless I’m sure it’s a verbatim quote.

The One Time the Magic Didn't Work

It seemed that Swami always spoke spontaneously, of course in private interview settings, but also in lectures and classes. The Q&A was particularly interesting. In lecture, he seemed to warm up slowly but gather intensity, not that it was registered in his voice. Somehow, slowly, methodically, the “magic” set in. I felt that he always delivered inspiration...except one time: I made an appointment before a Saturday evening class to talk about an extended-family problem. There was a sense that he wasn't really striking gold in his responses; I think he too was unsatisfied. He said some useful things, but there was no Eureka! moment. We went ahead to the class, read from the scripture being studied, and then suddenly in one of his responses to some questioning, he went into an inspired segment about the *sadhana* of the householder life, how the disparate family members challenge one another & smooth out each others' rough edges. After the class, as he was on his way out of the room, he turned and pointed at me and asked if I'd heard what he said.

Tuesdays with Swami

On Tuesdays Swami came out to Olema. The convent also had a work party that came out on Tuesdays (and Saturdays). After a morning session with the monks, he generally walked the property and inspected. Swami was always treated with great reverence by the convent members, but sometimes on these Tuesdays, standing around in a group, he felt at times like “one of the girls.” In the late mornings, he often hit the orchard, where nuns and women devotees, but mostly nuns, were working. He inspected everything in great detail. When the fruit was ready, we'd have vertical tastings. Amaraprana would take a little pocketknife out of her gear, rinse it and the fruit under a drip line, and cut into a piece of fruit, mostly apples, but anything that was ripe. There were a tremendous variety of very specialized apples that you don't find in stores, fruit money can't buy. The

first slice of course went to Swami, and then we'd all get slices. The fruit was more delicious there than anywhere else we ate it. Swami once commented that he didn't like Red Delicious apples because they are "insipid."

One time, we noticed a snake had been caught in the bird netting under one of the trees. Swami was very concerned for the snake, whom he referred to as "a gentleman." We worked hard to try to free the snake, whose head was caught in the fabric. We couldn't free the snake completely so cut the netting around his head and took him in a bucket down to Anantaprana who had more refined cutting tools than anything available in the orchard, where we carried all our tools. Ananta quickly cut the cord. Later that afternoon, at the end of the Tuesday class which he gave to women at the Women's Retreat House, he said that it was a good thing, rescuing the snake.

Although we were partly on the lookout for Swami's orchard visits, one time he surprised us. A live gopher was caught in one of the gopher traps. He was awfully cute and we were all aflutter around him, wondering what to do, how to save him. Swami came upon us unnoticed and we cried O, Swami! We caught a live gopher! He responded, "What did you think you were going to catch – a dead gopher?"

Unending Joy of Play

I had the most wonderful....thing. It was a kaleidoscope with a "magic wand" (a 12 inch tube filled with sequins and beads suspended in oil) inserted at the end of the mirrors with a laser plane capping it so that when you caught the sun at the correct angle, you had the holographic spectrum illuminating everything as well. You could move the wand, rotate it, or just let gravity take its course, but it made the most exquisite moving, glowing, sparking laserific mandalas. DD had some business at the temple, so I was in the choir loft, playing with the kaleidoscope. Swami appeared and asked me what I had. I showed him. We went to his office to catch more sunlight. He was quite taken with it (on top of its obvious charms, Swami also LOVED symmetry. He once told us how he

appreciates the Golden Gate Bridge's symmetry when they drive across it.) In a matter of minutes, he was showing me how to use it.

Tears, Blue Jeans, and Other Disparaged Behaviors

I've been told that people were sometimes advised that Swami didn't like crying. He often championed emotional equilibrium, pointing out that Mother's disciples were characterized by a steadiness. He did this publicly, but also instructed me personally to strive toward this. He himself personified this steadiness. However, it was my experience that at times when tears were appropriate, he was not put off.

Swami disliked blue jeans. This being California, blue jeans are practically a uniform; but he drew the line. Other colored jeans were alright. Some of the nuns speculated that his work at San Quentin where the convicts wear blue jeans had colored his view. He had also said that not dressing for religious events was tamasic. One Friday class, he said that when a group has a leader, the leader sets certain standards. The standard the leader sets may not be absolutely objectively correct, but it is the standard because the leader is the leader.

Swamis characteristically deflect birthday wishes. They say the Atman is not born, only the body is born, we are not the body, and, moreover, the one who was born on that day died at Sannyas. However, I would send a birthday card every year; and he quickly started doing the same. I cherished those cards, especially one year in my mid-60s when I had a really awful birthday, which was also on a travel day. When we got home, his card was waiting for me. It completely captured the spirit of that birthday, a lone traveler on a road whose end was hidden in a desolate hazy brown landscape. There was a body of water in the distance, but no easy path to get there and the hint of a rising (or setting?) sun. It was perfect. Inside was a message of birthday cheer & the wish for Thakur's blessing upon me.

He had a sense of fun. Often in lectures and classes, he told of the adventures of “Our Dennis.” As he also referred to the people of the Society as “Our” so-and-so, you had to listen for context to be sure he wasn’t talking about a devotee; but it was almost invariably Dennis the Menace, who he enjoyed. He once talked about a mischievous neighbor boy who was operating radio-controlled cars on the sidewalk from an upstairs window, watching people react.

There was also the “Tell X I say hello.” I found myself the conduit of saying hello to Swami on behalf of DD and vice versa. But the challenge was to say it first. So once, a friend was having an appointment with Swami, and I asked her to say “Dharmadas says hello.” When she did, he said that I had won that time.

His Family

Because such disclosures were rare, I believe, I pass along these vignettes: Once we told him about something that happened while we were playing cards with relatives. He said that his family used to play cards. I can’t exactly recall, but have the impression that he intimated that things became spirited.

Another time, we asked him to referee a difference of opinion. It concerned our post-retirement period when we were taking on projects but had different ideas about where to draw the line, i.e. that some projects may be very good, but were not really our dharma. He listened to our presentation but for whatever reason was unable to weigh in, saying we would have to feel it out for ourselves. He did, however, tell us that when his grandfather (who was a scientist) retired, he set up his experiments all over the house, and his grandmother was always grouching at him to hang it up.

How Can I Keep from Singing?

On a visit to Northern California after moving south, we had an appointment with Swami after having done a filming session with Huston Smith. We told him about how Huston

had sung a very enthusiastic off-key but unabashed *acapella* rendition of “How Can I Keep from Singing.” Swami said that oh, yes, he recognized that song. We sing it and then he did an imitation of how we sing, raising his head to howl out the “Keep.”

For the Sake of the Self

As a result of many deaths around us, we were discussing the Upanishad that says “the wife is loved for the sake of the self” and the various interpretations of that, ranging from rank selfishness to the most spiritual love possible. Just then the phone rang (we lived in Southern California at the time) with someone telling us that Swami had asked about us that day, so we determined he was the one we should discuss it with. At the same time, we learned that he had recently given a class to the convent on that topic. We arranged to see him. He spent at least 45 minutes with us on that single topic. We pulled out our slam dunk move: What is the Sanskrit, doesn’t that determine if it’s Big S Self or small self? He said no, that the word is “Atman” and that the word spans the spectrum, from small to grand. The ultimate conclusion, as I understood it, is that the passage’s meaning to the individual is dependent on the individual’s understanding of self and will develop as the individual’s understanding of the self evolves, like a self-iterating mathematical formula, as for instance the formula for fractals $f_e(z) = z^2 + c$. As “z” is both sides of the equation the value of z changes constantly, eternally. What a wonderfully elegant interpretation.

Karma Yoga

In the early 1990s Swami wanted to see our small business office, I’m assuming to see how administration was computerized with modernizing the Society administration in mind. He had been traveling, and it was arranged that we pick him up from the airport, San Francisco as I remember, in the late afternoon. He was under the weather. Of course, he wouldn’t talk about this in any detail, but he obviously had some sort of cold or

respiratory bug. We brought him to the office in Los Gatos. He examined everything and asked many of the people questions about the technical workings.

After the office tour, we went to our house for dinner. We had a houseguest at that time. After dinner, we drove Swami home to the San Francisco temple, a ride of over an hour. It was probably around 9 at night when we got there. Our houseguest came along and we took him for a little sightseeing. But as we were touring Fort point, etc., someone in the party realized they had left something in the temple, so we went to try to retrieve it. By now, it was about 10 at night. The light was on in Swami's office. Even though he was jet-lagged and ill, Swami was at work at his desk, going through the mail.

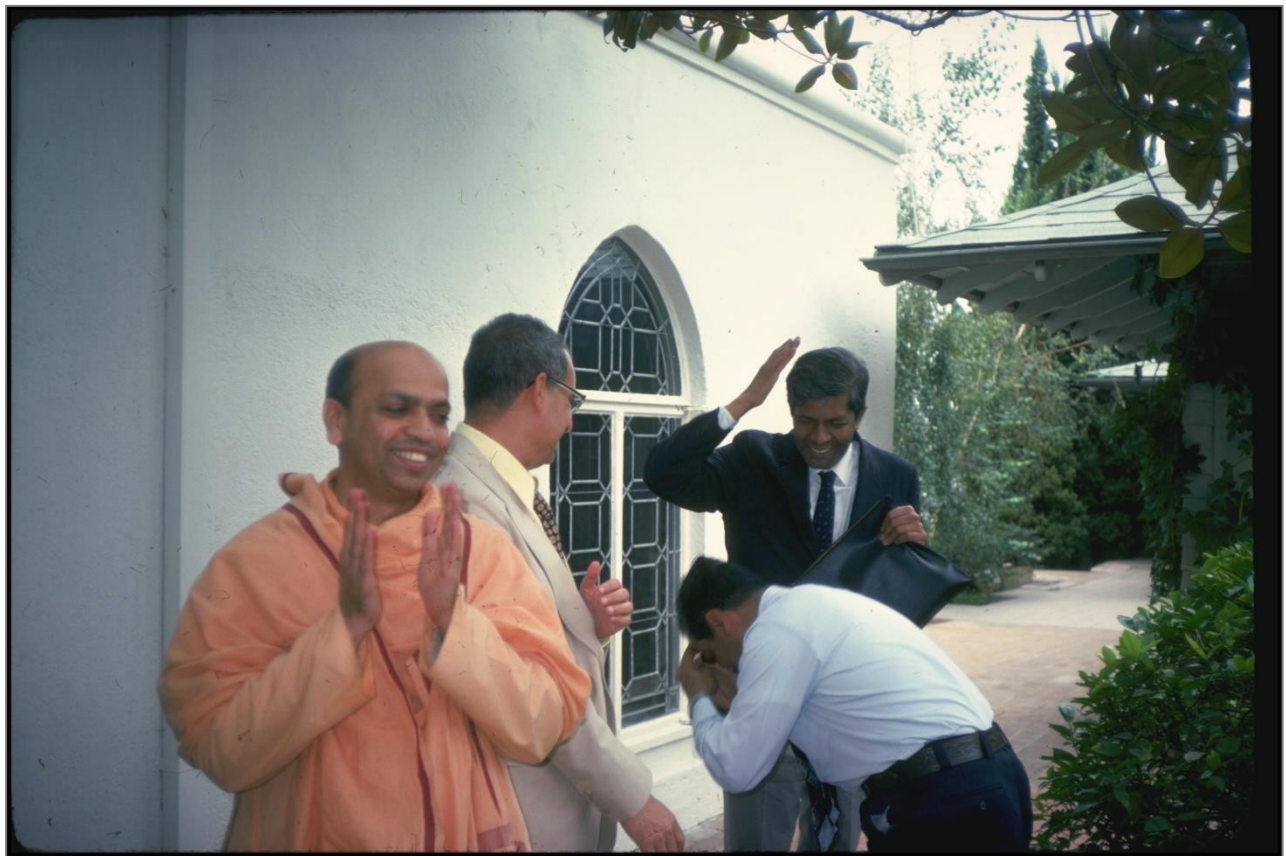
Laughing at My Lack of Shame

My favorite memory is of an incident that took place at Olema. We were assembling in the class area (meditation room) after dinner. It was not, by statute, a quiet time. I am a very shy person, but had made a friend. I was very pleased with myself and having too good a time. Eventually Swami also came in and was sitting in the audience as someone else was going to read. I was still having too much fun, so he turned around and gave me a fierce, withering look. I, however, couldn't be happier or prouder, like a dripping wet muddy golden retriever with a duck in my mouth standing on the carpet, wagging my tail. I continued to wear my big happy smile. He tried, unsuccessfully, to swallow his smile and turned back around. He sacrificed his own personality entirely to his divine assignment. Underneath the stern exterior, he had a loving Mother's heart.

Ending at the Beginning

Toward the end of Swami's life, we had moved to Southern California and therefore rarely saw him; and when we did see him, it was usually in Northern California where he was perpetually IN CHARGE. But this time we were seeing him in Southern California. Just a few days before the event, I found out that he had been diagnosed with lung cancer

and that it was a terminal condition. I don't know how many factors played into my overall impression of him when doing the post-retreat leave-taking: his being a guest rather than the ringmaster, his feeling unwell or exhausted, my own realization that my time with him was abruptly finite. In any case, he was so very gentle and completely sweet; it was as if he had no skin. After a relationship that had played out for decades, I felt I was seeing him for the first time.



Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood

AMRITA M. SALM

Swami Prabuddhanandaji As I Remember Him

It was in 1974, after moving to Berkeley and closely associating with Swami Swahanandaji and the Vedanta Society that I met Swami Prabuddhanandaji. For the first few years, when I would see him at the pujas, at Olema, at the annual meetings or special events I was a bit scared of him. He seemed so severe, quiet and serious. I always thought of him as Buddha-like.

After Swami Swahanandaji was transferred to Hollywood and a new swami, Swami Swananda arrived in his place, some of us were learning chanting under the new swami's direction. Most of us didn't even know Sanskrit. After one of the pujas, Swami Prabuddhanandaji who always attended the Berkeley pujas, commented to us, "Why did you learn the most difficult chant?" It was obvious we had not learned it very well.

I recall several other things he said to me on earlier occasions: (1) a swami should be able to speak on any topic, pro and con, for an hour, (2) devotees believe that swamis can control the weather for retreats and special occasions. He chuckled and jokingly said, "We should do that."

In 1977 or 1978, Swami Prabuddhanandaji came to a devotee's home for the blessing of her daughter and gave a talk there. Many were not devotees and I remember clearly he telling them, "It doesn't matter how many cars you have or how many possessions, just don't be attached to them. They are not to stick to you, like scotch tape." Those few words must have affected the entire group for the clear instruction on detachment.

When I moved to Hollywood to serve my Guru I met Swami Prabuddhanandaji in San Francisco and I recall him being so very loving towards me and supportive that I was making the move. The following year, in 1979, when I was awarded my Ph.D. degree

from UC Berkeley I invited several swamis to attend a gathering at a devotee's home with many devotees. Swami Swahanandaji flew up from Hollywood, Swami Shraddhanandaji came from Sacramento, Swami Swananda from the Berkeley Center and Swami Prabuddhanandaji kindly agreed to attend. I have no idea what we devotees expected, maybe a talk on spiritual progress or something like that. Instead we saw the four swamis sitting at the dining room table completely engrossed in conversation among themselves. It was almost as if none of us were in the same room. But strangely enough, what were they talking about: the devotees – their health, where they were living, etc. Seeing and hearing their concern for the devotees was an eye-opener for all of us. It was a most joyful occasion to have the company of the four swamis. A real celebration.

In 1980, some of the Berkeley devotees traveled to India with Swami Swahanandaji and attended the Ramakrishna Math & Mission Convention at Belur Math. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was also there. I believe it was after the Convention that it was arranged for us to go in a van to visit the villages connected with Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. We had opted out of going with 10,000 other devotees. We were provided a van and a driver from Narendrapur, through Swami Asaktananda's kindness, and the four of us, along with the two swamis went to Kamarpukur and Jayrambati. While we were in Kamarpakur, I noticed that Swami Prabuddhananda came out of the inside of Sri Ramakrishna's bedroom within the small courtyard of the temple. I later asked him what he was doing there and he said, "meditating." I remembered the beautiful smile on his face when he said that and the sparkle in his eyes. The next time I went to India I requested permission to sit inside Thakur's bedroom, as Swami Prabuddhanandaji had done. It required permission of the Head of the Center and arriving before mangala arati so that no one would see me, since this was a privilege rarely given to anyone. Truly it was a blessing to meditate there and I cherish that experience and thank Swami Prabuddhananda for it.

When we went to Jayrambati Swami Prabuddhananda spent most of his time visiting the old swamis, disciples of Holy Mother and other direct disciples, and I believe going to Mother's old house and sitting in Her room. As we were leaving to return to Narendrapur I had purchased a very large, framed picture with a glass cover, containing all the small photos of Holy Mother. It was wrapped with a plastic sheet and rope and when I returned, to the van, a bit late, carrying this heavy picture Swami Prabuddhananda asked me in his practical way, "How are you going to get that back to the States?" Swami Swahanandaji reassured him, that I could manage it. End of discussion.

Decades later, while visiting the Bay Area, I attended the annual Memorial Day Retreat in Olema. Swami Prabuddhanandaji was walking around greeting devotees and saw me with a Berkeley devotee near the book stall. He knew we had been friends for years and rarely saw each other. When he saw us we were greeted with a sweet smile. He said, "Old friends, very old friends."

As the years and decades passed and I would occasionally meet Swami Prabuddhanandaji. I recognized his steady, loving and devoted nature. Whenever I spoke to him, he would talk about Holy Mother and the need to depend on Her. On one occasion he mentioned that he liked Swami Saradeshanandaji's (Revered Gopesh Maharaj) book on Holy Mother the best because it was so personal and showed her close relationships with devotees and monks. I was no longer afraid of Swami Prabuddhanandaji; I had deep respect, love and regard for him. What a privilege to have associated with him for four decades!

ANONYMOUS

Swami Prabuddhanandaji came across to me as quiet, little intimidating but same time very motherly like loving person. I still remember the very first time I experienced his tender motherly love, I had met him only once during my internship in the Bay Area. After I returned back to complete my school, I was applying for jobs and was very disappointed and fearful about not having a job and the future. I wrote to him explaining my situation and asking for some advice, and I was surprised to get a call very next day from Swami P. I don't remember exactly what he said, but his call itself made me so happy and gave me the strength to keep going. I was amazed that we met only one time and he remembered me and was so kind to call me for such a pity issue.

Another advice from him I cannot forget was, i was asking him something about what if you are an ant but you are not aware of that and you are trying to climb Mount Everest, and it is not a practical goal. In such situation, what should you aim for.

Swami said, both apple and mango have their own places in the world. If you are an apple, try to be the best apple, don't try to be the mango. I'm always trying to remind myself of this, whenever my mind jumps in to comparison with others.

Even when he was not well during the end, he was very kind to heed to my request to talk to him during my difficult health situation. I am very grateful to him for that.

And in my last meeting with him, I took my new born baby to take his blessings. He patted on my baby's head and whispered 'Be His Devotee'. That was very precious blessings.

I was not fortunate enough to have close personal interactions with him, but his presence, smile and blessings were invaluable to me.

DHARMADAS (JON MONDAY)

I wanted to contribute some nice reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhananda, but as I sit down to write, I'm finding it hard to put into words the memorable incidents and affect he had on me, that were nevertheless profound. On the one hand his influence was subtle and difficult to describe, but on the other hand his influence was steady, strong, and lasting.

I began my Vedanta endeavor in 1970 at the Hollywood Temple and lived in the Los Angeles area for nearly 15 years. But in 1984 my career took me back to the Bay Area (where I grew up in what is now Silicon Valley). I had a choice to affiliate with the Berkeley or San Francisco Temples. I got a call from Swami Swananda, then head of the Berkeley Center, asking me to become a member there as Swami Aparananda, the incoming swami, would need support. I was happy to do so as we had known Swami Aparananda for years in Hollywood and had come to love him as a true sadhu and excellent pujari. As my wife and I got to know both centers, and both head swamis, I sought out Swami Prabuddhananda as one of my three major upagurus, someone close by I could go to with spiritual problems and seek guidance. In time, my heart was with Swami Prabuddhananda and the San Francisco Center.

I had come to believe that in trying to understand the nature of the senior swamis of the Ramakrishna Order is like the Indian parable about the blind men and the elephant. They (we) are trying to describe what is experienced when feeling the shape of the beast. The opinions are subjective, just based on the individual, and their (our) limited personal experience. Another analogy is that the most senior swamis are like the black obelisk in the movie *2001 A Space Odyssey* – and I'm like the ape standing before it, trying to fathom the meaning and depth of this other-worldly object that God had placed before me. They are mysterious and profound.

My first personal interaction with Swami Prabuddhananda was awkward and took place at Shanti Ashrama during the annual gathering there. I was knocked out by the place – it felt like a kind of homecoming. It made a powerful impression on me, realizing the history that direct disciples of Ramakrishna had lived and taught there; the spiritual presence was tangible.

When I offered flowers in the shrine cabin, I noticed that there was a large old painting of Sri Ramakrishna hanging on a wall that was in terrible shape – there were rips, holes, and wrinkles in the canvas and had accumulated dirt over the decades that darkened the image. I went to Swami Swananda and offered to have the painting cleaned and restored. He told me to take it up with Swami Prabuddhananda. But instead of preparing the ground, Swami Swananda just delivered me in front of Swami Prabuddhananda, like dumping a package on the front porch, and stood back to watch the fun. It didn't go as I had hoped. Swami Prabuddhananda didn't know me at all, and here I was, a stranger asking to take the painting to have it repaired. In what I came to know over time, his response was typical when confronted with an unusual request. He seemed a bit taken aback and was non-committal, but gentle – the equivalent of, “We'll see, and let you know”.

Several days, or possibly weeks later, I got a call from the office staff of the SF Temple saying Swami had approved the idea, presumably after checking around to see who I was, and asked me how much I wanted, as in how much money I wanted, to restore the painting. I explained I wasn't a restorer looking for business but rather wanted to pay to get the painting restored.

Over the next two decades we lived in Northern California, I came to recognize some of the key aspects of Swami Prabuddhananda methods and personality. He was quiet, I never heard him raise his voice in argument, he was tireless in his work (earning him the moniker of “the hardest working swami in Vedanta”), and was gentle, yet firm in his approach to the work of the Society. At events like the annual Memorial Day gathering in

Olema, which took many days of preparation by the monks and devotees, Swami was always there, even late into the night, working alongside everyone.

I felt his guidance and patience helped me greatly as I took my questions, problems, and concerns to him in interviews.

I always thought he saw only the very best in me, even as my inner life and spiritual practices fell short, or even seemed stalled. I asked Swami how I would know if I was making spiritual progress, he directly and immediately answered, “If you’re struggling.” Seeing the best in devotees may be one of the defining qualities of senior swamis – following Holy Mother’s example of not seeing faults in others. It gave me a sense of hope and motivation.

SURABHI & INDRAJIT BHATTACHARYA

Below please find a few words from us, about our respected and loved Swami Prabuddhanandaji.

From the very first day we met Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji at the Vedanta Society in San Francisco, we felt his presence spiritually elevating, and, serene. Whenever we approached him with our mundane matters, his advice was always so practical, and, also had a spiritual aspect. In all circumstances his observation was keen. Once he noticed a little boy helping another child putting on her shoes, and, pointed out the attitude of service in the act.

We had the good fortune of having him visit our house for some spiritual gatherings. Always our friends and family were so eager to attend. Swamiji always encouraged people to discuss spiritual subjects, and, entertained diverse questions. His answers were always crisp and eye opening. He would even address some of our frivolous questions with great sincerity. Once, I remember asking him how was it that now-a-days art works are selling at such premium prices, while many of the Renaissance artists had perished in poverty. Great injustice in the realm of god. He immediately pointed out that those artists were really enjoying and loving their creations. They must have found great joy and mental satisfaction in their work.

We found him to possess a great sense of humor. Once he called our home to make an inquiry. Before listening to what he was saying, Surabhi jumped to the conclusion that it was one of our friends, and responded by saying, "What is the matter with you? You haven't called in such a long time!" Swamiji quietly mentioned that it was him. Surabhi apologized saying, "I'm sorry I thought you were one of our friends." To which Swamiji answered, "I am your friend too."

With his passing away we lost not only a great spiritual guide, but, also a friend who cared for us at all times.



VISWANATHAN RAJAGOPALAN

I first had the opportunity to see Reverend Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj in 2008 at a retreat in Olema, CA, which is regularly organized as part of Reverend Swami Vedanandaji Maharaj's classes held at the Stanford University. His composure and wisdom was striking to me. His responses to student questions were calm and clear. Subsequently, I was fortunate to meet him and receive spiritual guidance. Many who have had the opportunity to interact with him may agree that one could use some special skill to converse with him. Sometimes, there can be long pauses in his statements and responses. Just when I would attempt to fill the gap, he would elegantly continue with his past trail of focused thought and offer much-needed pieces of advice.

The peace that emanates in the Swami's presence is priceless. Swamiji was compassionate and gave appointments even when he was not physically healthy. Unquestionably, his mind was always sharp. He was so compassionate that he accommodated my preference of a certain characteristic feature of mantra japa. Only, later did I realize that that was my Mantra Dheeksha!

We are all fortunate to have lived in the physical presence of the Swami. He continues to live with us, not only in recorded lectures and documented conversations, but essentially in the highest Advaitic light!

MADHAVI MARKA

There are lot of precious memories associated with our revered Swami. I first met Swami when I went to the Olema winter retreat in December 2001. I was still a student then. I felt Swami always took special interest in whatever I did. Once he saw me driving, when I drove to the temple and said 'Ooh! You can drive!' It is similar to the feeling of parents and grandparents taking pride in their children's achievements.



I want to share one of the Swami's teaching that I often use in my daily life. Once I was assigned to do special puja service and this was in the very beginning when I started helping with the lunch service at the temple. After the puja, devotees help with cleaning the temple and Swami makes his usual rounds talking to the devotees and overlooking the activities. When he saw me, he asked me how everything went at the lunch service. I immediately replied that everything went fine. He listened to me and told everyone present there a short story.

The story goes as follows – Once upon a time, there was a wedding arranged between a camel and a donkey in a village. All the villagers came for the wedding and everyone rejoiced and went away after the ceremony. No one said a word about the weird wedding and everything went as usual.

After telling this story, Swami turned to me and said, whenever you do any work, you should always think what can be improved for the next time.

SREENIVASAN PARUTHIYIL

Self-surrender

Of all the practices, self-surrender is the hardest to do. It is the last phase of the spiritual journey. It will be great situation if the spiritual aspirant can do the self-surrender at the outset. Then the spiritual journey will be peaceful.

Pride due to knowledge

Question: Swamiji, is the pride due to knowledge a modern phenomenon?

Answer: No. It is very ancient. Ravana was the best example for pride due to knowledge.

All spiritual practices can be summarized into two: Thyaga (renunciation) and Yoga (union with God).

Renunciation means getting away from anything that is not god or anything that will take one away from god. In one sense there is nothing but god. But that knowledge comes after realization of ultimate truth. Till then one has to keep oneself on the pathway to god.

Yoga is union with god. Once renunciation is practiced and built into daily actions, attaching oneself to god becomes easier because there will be no distractions while thinking of god.

Svakarmana thamabhyarchya sidhim vindathi Manavah (Bhagavad Gita Chapter 18 verse 46)

("Through the performance of his work as worship man wins perfection")

Another way to look at yoga is doing everything as an offering to god. This idea was evident in all the everyday actions of Swami Prabhudhanandaji. He was fully present "in the moment" whatever he was doing or doing nothing while he was taking rest. No

inadvertent comment or word originated from him. He was mindful of the actions or words. He corrected devotees so that they will be mindful in their actions while attending to him. The lesson he was imparting was that when one does one's actions as an offering to god, one becomes extremely careful and watchful of one's thoughts and deeds.

Examples:

Two weeks before his Samadhi, he corrected a devotee while reading the Bhagavad Gita as the reader was carelessly omitting many verses.

On another occasion, he corrected me when the amount of water added to the medicine was more than what is required. He said " Now I have to drink all these "

He chose both occasions to correct gently and teach the principle of mindfulness.

Sthithaprajna (one established in wisdom)

Swamiji showed grace in all circumstances. He never showed irritability or impatience. Even during illness, any time of day or night, he was the personification of graceful conduct.

Spirituality

Swamiji accepted everyone. The progress depended on spiritual earnestness. He did not discriminate based on any of the worldly parameters. Those who desired only spiritual progress, benefited from his presence.

Love and concern about devotees

He loved devotees and they were in his mind. One incident which happened while he was admitted to hospital illustrates this. I was the night-time attendant serving swami on that night He woke me up and informed that he will take some of the payasam brought by a devotee. I warmed up the payasam and served him. He just took one spoon and

went back to bed. He remembered that a certain devotee had brought the food and when he woke up decided to take it. That action demonstrated his love for the devotee.



DR. KASINATH BALAKUNTALAM

Swami Prabuddhanandaji

I was fourteen years old when I met Swami Prabuddhananda (Swamiji) for the first time in 1966. Growing up in India, we addressed all the Swamis of Ramakrishna Mission as Swamijis. I had submitted an application to stay at the Sri Ramakrishna Vidyarthi Mandiram in Bangalore (now called Bengaluru); the Vidyarthi Mandiram was a hostel for students attending various colleges in Bangalore. The competition was intense as it was reputed to be a safe and well run institution with an environment conducive to studying. Additionally, it provided sound teaching in Hinduism. It was also a place that respected all other religions similar to institutions run by Ramakrishna Mission worldwide.

At the time of our meeting, Swamiji was the President of the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Bangalore and sat on the panel that interviewed applicants to the Vidyarthi Mandiram. During the interview, I was asked if I knew about Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sharada Devi. Having been brought up by parents who were devoted to Sri Ramakrishna, I answered in the affirmative and when prompted, I sang Prakritim paramaam, a hymn to Sri Sharada Devi. I was admitted to the hostel. During that year we would see him often in our hostel functions and exchange greetings. Even though I stayed at the hostel for only one year, it made a deep impression on me that has lasted a lifetime. I fell in love with the music that permeated the prayer meetings; songs (bhajans) were set to melodies (ragas) of Indian classical music that brought out the meaning and the underlying feeling very effectively! I joined the local medical school and moved in with my family. After a few years, I heard that Swamiji had moved to California and lost touch with him.

After medical school I came to the US in 1976 and trained as a medical specialist in kidney diseases (nephrologist) in Chicago. I entered academic life and was fortunate to combine clinical practice with teaching and research in basic science related to the kidney. In 1990,

my wife, our two children and I moved to San Antonio, Texas, and I continued my career at the local medical school. In 1994 I visited San Francisco for a scientific meeting and attended the evening prayers at the Temple on Vallejo Street. At the end of the prayers, I stood in the line of devotees and surprised Swamiji by greeting him in Kannada, the language that Swamiji and I spoke. When I told him who I was, he immediately placed me although nearly 28 years had gone by since our last meeting. He was very happy that I had come and introduced me to others at the Temple. My father and his two brothers were involved with the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Mysore and Bangalore for decades and Swamiji very kindly mentioned it to the others at the Temple describing their contributions. Renewing contact with Swamiji was a watershed moment in my life.

From then on I was in touch with him on the phone frequently. He was kind in initiating me into meditation. He was always curious about not only the clinical aspects of nephrology but scientific research that we were conducting in our laboratory. He graced the anniversary of our Hindu Temple of San Antonio as the Chief Guest in 1999. We had the fortune of hosting him at our house. I visited the Swamiji and the Temple in San Francisco periodically.

During one of our phone conversations he revealed that he was diagnosed with cancer. He discussed the treatment options and allowed me to share my skepticism about some of the approaches. I visited him and accompanied him as he went for an unconventional treatment session. He did not prevent me from discussing the pros and cons of the treatment protocol with the physician. This is one of the marks of great people; they want you to be honest with them and they do not mind if you differ from them with the approach to a situation. The disease took its course. When the situation was beyond cure, with his permission, I visited him and stayed at the Temple for a few days. Even with all the difficulties he was having, he found time to talk to me about my work, family, and, how I should progress along the spiritual path. He was dispassionate in the face of adverse health and engaged fully with me when we talked.

Swamiji has made a huge difference in my life as he has in the lives of others. He made each of us feel special and bestowed his love and kindness in equal measure. He took us from wherever we were in the spiritual path and advised us on how to progress. He accepted us for who we were and facilitated our growth. He was more concerned about the effect of his passing on all of us than that his life was coming to an end. To this end, to help us endure the sorrow of the imminent departure, he exhorted us to pray to the Mother. He was the living embodiment of the spirit of verses 6 and 7 of Ishavasya Upanishad.

Yastu sarvaani bhutaani aatmanyevaanupashyati

Sarvabhuteshu chaatmaanam tato na vijugupsate

He who sees all beings in the Self itself, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred by that virtue.

Yasminsarvani bhootaanyaatmaivaabhoodvijaanatah

Tatra ko mohah kah shoka ekatvamanupashyatah

When to the man of realization all beings become the very Self, then what delusion and what sorrow can there be for that seer of oneness?

It was my fortune that I met Swamiji and received his kindness and blessings. Even though he is not with us in physical form, the example he set by his way of life and by the graceful handling of death will guide us for the rest of our lives.

B. S. Kasinath, MD

San Antonio, Texas

VASUDHA BOSE

I started coming to Ashram very late. It was usually my husband Anirban who used to go on Sundays since my kids Archit and Upasana were small and I did not want to leave kids in day care since I had never done that

I met Swamiji at the temple when we came to bring kids for Sunday school when Preetiprana was writing the play on Prahlad. After the school when we were in line to do Pranams, to Swamiji and my kids and I were introduced to him, Swamiji asked how I was doing and how I liked the place and school? Then he said "Come again".

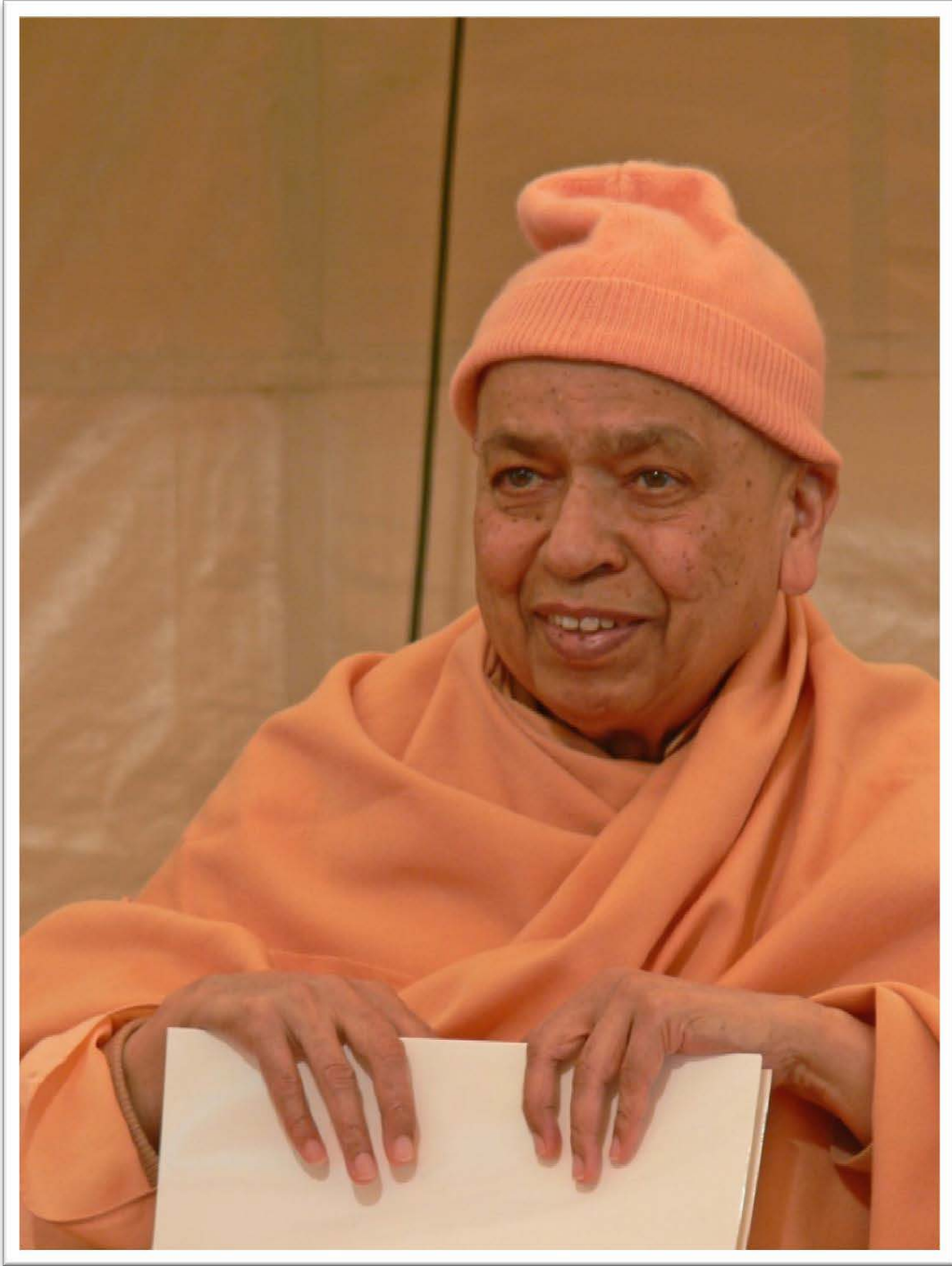
We used to meet like that for many more months and he used to talk about the kids music lessons, education and our prayers. We told him what we did and he was happy.

Archit then used to ask Swamiji for Diksha so many times and one day he called us and asked if we were sure about it and then he said once the seed is planted the plant of spiritualism would flower when the time is right.

When he used to meet he would ask us about our prayers and we would also tell about Archit and he would smile and say "All in good time with mother's will"

It was always wonderful and very soothing and calming talking to Swami Prabuddhanandaji. He would always say "Go beyond, hmmm?" His tone and the way he spoke still rings in my ears and you would feel that he can see through you and help you.

I was very fortunate to have met Swamiji with my family and will treasure the moments we had with him



ANONYMOUS



Swami conducting a retreat at Lake Tahoe

Om

Amongst all relationships that humans can have, the relation between a Sishya and the Gurur is the deepest, purest and sweetest.

I met my Gurur, Sri Swami Prabuddhananda, on December 23rd 2006 - a stormy Saturday night, at the Vivekananda hall in the new temple.

The ship of my life had run aground by that time, it was the beginning of the end of my marriage of nearly 7 years. I was in a lot of pain, remorse and needless to say sinking in an ocean of sorrow.

At that time my dad, upon hearing that I was reading the Gita, also suggested that I visit the Ramakrishna Ashram, "Right in my backyard, the largest ~~and~~ one outside India" (in his own words), in SF.

I wasted no time and promptly showed up at the next possible lecture/event which happened to be the then regular Saturday night reading of the "Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna". I was a bit late in my arrival, probably on account of having to eat dinner before the class (at the gourmet food place called Burger King).

As I walked into the room, I saw a very peaceful and kind and pure presence in an old monk wearing the garma robe. His voice was soft and kind.

I had not been ~~very much~~ in touch with religious teachers or priests or monks in my life

(3)

My only interaction was with temple poojaris, who were as worldly minded, as the ones seeking their services.

I also had the misfortune of being prejudiced against Brahmins and Brahmin men in authority of any kind (like teachers, preachers etc.) in particular. These prejudices were due to my childhood conditioning and experiences.

I could clearly tell that Swami was a south Indian Brahmin by birth.

During the Gospel reading, I sat weary eyed ~~on~~ by the right side aisle leading upto the hallway exit. After the Gospel reading, Swami slowly walked on his way out, and stopped by to ask me about my name, where I live, where I am from in India and how long I had ~~lived~~ been living in this area. Upon hearing that I had been living in the Bay area for nearly nine years, he remarked "Oh, you have waited this long to come here!".

I immediately knew that he cared for me and ~~that~~ I knew that I belonged there. He asked me to come again. I was hooked.

I started to ~~to~~ attend the Sunday lectures fairly regularly and eventually very regularly. His lectures always seemed to be specifically meant or ~~to~~ targeted to me. His opening and closing chants were like music to my ears and ~~now~~ I would eagerly

wait for Sundays to hear his ^{sweet and soothing} voice and uplifting message.

In the very first month I met him, I asked him for a private 1:1 meeting and he readily granted.

I spilled my heart and all my dark secrets including the most damning ones. Needless to say, I sensed a loving and understanding presence in him to recapitulate me with such an exposure. I felt safe with him.

Upon hearing my story, the first remark he made was "oh, that means you have a lot of energy".

This was the beginning of many examples, throughout my years with him, where he always saw the positive and the strength, when I could only see weakness, and darkness and failure. And I knew that he was saying the truth, ~~not~~ and not for pacification alone or out of mere human kindness.

As I reflected back many times over the years on his reactions to me "spilling my guts", I am left with no other conclusion other than that he was a true Brahma-jnani, a true Stithapragne.

As the Gita says, the one who can truly ~~see~~ ^{have} one-sidedness towards a dog, a dog-eater and a Brahmin, that one is a knower of Brahman.

However in spite of how my heart felt about him in the initial few months, due to my existing prejudices and my "cautious approach" to all men of religion, I decided not to take the dust of his feet

⑦

as was customary to many of the devotees after the Sunday lecture. I would merely fold my hands in respect and say "Namaste Swami", as I thought I could afford him that basic form of respectful greeting that anyone can afford an elderly person.

I chose the cautious route as I was still not sure, a 100%, if he had any other ulterior motives or if I would find anything in him that would repulse me. Needless to say ~~it was~~ I had no capacity to judge him, but I decided to watch him very closely, lest my regards and affections be misplaced and not to be taken for a fool.

In retrospect, I now understand why Sri Ramakrishna, repeatedly urged his monastic disciples to lead a life of extremely high standards, ~~at~~ seemingly almost inhuman; as there are people like me waiting to ~~invest~~ drop their barriers and shields to receive the cool shade of a banyan tree called guru. and protective

As judgemental, skittish and deeply afraid of being vulnerable people are, the guru has to be without a blemish and is the last stop.

I attended a retreat at olama soon after my first visit to SF temple, and there I saw a Swami who not only gave classes and explained the scripture, but who exhorted the congregation to take spiritual life seriously out of genuine love and caring like a mother who cares for her children.

(9)

~~That was the~~ I physiologically and ~~the~~ psychologically felt a wave of love emerging from him, when he talked extempore on the need to practice spiritual disciplines or to take the teachings of ~~the~~ the scripture seriously, after the class ended.

That was the turning point for me, and I believed I dropped the last of my reservations about him, and I went down on my knees and took the dust of his feet.

~~I used to look forward to Sundays to hear his sweet voice coming from the lecture.~~

I would sometimes cook idli^{sambar} and make some chutney for him and take it to the monastery ~~for~~ in time for breakfast. He very much enjoyed these and ~~you~~ used to commend me on being a good cook.

Once I made upma for him, but mistakenly put too much salt. As was customary, Swami would be served first, and then the bowl was passed around the table. By the time the upma bowl came to me, Swami had already ~~been~~ ^{started} eating.

When I started eating my creation, I was flabbergasted to realize that the Upma is not really edible.

I was horrified ~~to~~ at the thought of having fed my beloved Swami and a holy man, such bad food.

When I apologized about the salt in the Upma, Swami realized how bad as I was feeling and to soothe me, he said the following -

" See, when we live in a hostel, the food cooked by the hostel cook is always consistent. But when mother makes food at home, sometimes it can be like this and some days it is like that, some days salt maybe more, some days less "

He was ~~trying to~~ equating my food to the joy of eating home cooked food ~~to~~ versus eating food in a restaurant or hostel.

Such was his deep compassion and love.

One day I cooked lunch in the monastery. Without knowing that Swami does not eat the bitter vegetable "karela" or bitter gourd, I made it for him as I thought he would like it and also because it will be good for him.

When it was served, he took a little bit and ate it although he normally refuses this vegetable dish. He did this only not to disappoint me or ~~make~~ so that I don't feel bad.

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I used to ask Swami many questions and I will try to ~~best~~ recollect ~~them~~ ~~to~~ these questions and his answers to the best of my ability.

① Swami: "There are men of realization and then there are men of realization."

This was said by him in response to my question of whether God realization is a simple binary state — You are or you are not. His answer was more pertinent to the idea that there is no end to God realization and that one can go farther and farther.

② Me: "Swami They say a knower of Brahman is verily Brahman"

Swami: Quiet — no response

I have a feeling Swami read my mind that I was trying to elicitate a response ~~of~~ out of him that I wanted to hear as I believed he is a Knower of Brahman

③ Me: I am slipping ^{falling} and sliding backwards instead of making forward progress in spiritual life. I was deeply troubled and full of worry when I said this to him —

Swami: "When are you falling? You are only falling into Mother's lap. It is the duty of the Mother to pick up her soiled child and clean him and take him into her lap."

He said this to me on more than one occasion

(4) Me: ~~Swami~~ "Will there ever be an end to this backdrop of sadness / loneliness / depression (I forget which word I used) that one feels constantly

Swami: ~~He~~ He immediately understood what exactly I was referring to and he said

"It will end only ~~when~~ with God realization, until then it will be there"

(5) Me: Why doesn't Mother grant you the ability to sleep (this was during his illness and many people prayed for him) — he would be very tired throughout the day because of sleeplessness in the night)

Swami: He very innocently and matter of factly looked at me and said — "Maybe because it is

not good for me"

⑥ Me: "I have to do all my Sadhana regularly otherwise I slide back into my old habits and life is miserable. If I have to do everything, why do I need Sri Ramakrishna? I will remove his picture from the shrine and put my own on it"

Suami: Without any shock, displeasure or anger for the stupid that I ~~was~~ am, he calmly and in a matter of fact way said - "Alright try that and see what happens"

NOTE: True mark of a guru and a deep soul. Chaitan Hindu guru - experiment it out, there is no such thing as blasphemy

Another Time
⑦ Me: "I can't ~~not~~ relate to the mantra you gave me, I don't think it will work for me"

Suami: Again - no ~~not~~ shock, anger etc.

"Alright, try something else then"

I had the opportunity to serve Swami one night a week, during his period of illness.
for three years

During this period, he was admitted to the hospital a few times and my night service was in the hospital attending on Swami.

On one such occasion, he was in a very feeble condition and constantly shivering and possibly in great discomfort too. He was constantly repeating "Amma", "Amma" audibly, even though his eyes were closed. I didn't know what to do, and I silently stood by his bed with thoughts racing through my mind, as I never saw Swami in such a state before. The only logical conclusion I came to was that ~~as~~ even though Swami is a highly evolved spiritual soul, he might be close to death and remembering his childhood and therefore calling upon his ~~own~~ mother who gave birth to him, as a child would when in great distress or need.

After this thought hung around in my mind for ~~some~~ a short time, he opened his

(15)
without any other conversation or question,

eyes and he looked at me and said, -

"You can call upon God just the way you call upon your earthly mother."

I felt that ~~as if~~ he was clarifying the doubt I had in mind and also instructing me.

On another occasion in the ~~same~~ hospital, I was attending upon him ^{and} in the room, Swami Bhyanamayogananda was also present. We both were standing by the headboard on either side of the bed and Swami was pointing the picture of Sri Ramakrishna. He said - "I pray that Sri Ramakrishna fill your heart (pointing at me) and your heart (pointing to Swami D.) and everyone's heart."

Throughout the early ~~20~~ years of my association with Swami ~~(from around)~~ up until his illness, I constantly doubted if Swami cared for me and whether he loved me. Needless to say I had those same doubts regarding Sri Ramakrishna. In my ignorance and darkness,

I would sulk and sit at home and not go to the temple; I would wait with the silent hope that somehow love would come my way and embrace me into its fold again and soothe my pain.

As mysterious as it might sound, Swami would call me without fail during these situations and leave voicemails saying that

"I haven't seen you in a long time; How are you? Hope you are doing well. Please call me back"

He would leave such a message even if I missed only one Sunday lecture or sometimes no lecture.

On one occasion, when I was deep in my darkness, I not only did not respond to his message but also did not respond to ~~anyone's~~ calls from anyone in the temple, as he would ask others also to check upon me.

After realizing my stupidity, ~~and~~ I would step out of my own self-pity and go to the temple and fall at his feet. He would ask "What happened"

I would just keep quiet with folded hands and head bowed down in front of that loving companionate soul ashamed for having caused great worry to him.

He would understand that I had been troubled by my past Samkaras, and would say "That's alright" that I was fighting against.

In the seven and half years that I was physically close to him, I have seen him in various settings, dealing with various kinds of people in different situations.

He was always calm, very measured, concise, and kind in his speech. I have never heard him utter one uncharitable word or express a poor opinion of any person, place or institution.

He once told me that his services are ~~open~~ equally available to all in response to something I said which had a hint of doubt whether he cared more for Mr. X versus me.

I have experienced that unconditional pure love from him and I once told him during his illness that only because of him I was able to see and experience purity, holiness and unconditional love. His simple response was "That's good".

~~I felt~~ I have been incredibly fortunate to have come in close contact with such a holy soul and to be initiated by him.

Without any spoken instruction, he role modeled to me, how to live and how to die.

During my India pilgrimage with Swami, some of the ^{senior} monks who come to be with him asked me how I came into his association. They told me in no uncertain words, that he is a very highly evolved soul and that I should hold on to his feet; and that I would only realize his true heights after he passed away.

Swami is my true treasure and blessing.

Jai Gurm, Jai Ma

— A devotee

ANONYMOUS

Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhananda

It was the last day of a weekend retreat at Olema. Those of us who stayed behind were cleaning and packing things up to restore the Men's Retreat House to its original condition.



As usual, Swami Prabuddhananda would walk around and see how things were progressing. Nearby, where I was working, one of the devotees approached Swami and said, "Swami, everyone is doing something, but there's no work for me to do. Should I go home?" She went on like this for a minute or two and finally asked, "What should I do?" Swami responded, "THINK OF GOD." The effect on me was as if he said it in a booming voice—it stayed with me. When I'm waiting in line at the grocery store or at other times when idle, I would hear, "THINK OF GOD," and start repeating my mantra or thinking of God in other ways.

I have no idea if this incident made any difference to the other devotee who asked him what she should do, but it sure had a significant effect on me.

One morning, I was sitting in an aisle seat in the auditorium at the Vedanta Society. I was there for meditation with my eyes closed. At some point, I felt a presence pass by. The air moved, but it was more like a breeze of spirit. When I finally opened my eyes a little later I realized it was Swami Prabuddhananda who had come to the auditorium to give pranams to the Holy Trio.

Dr. B. V. CHANDRAMOULI

Reminiscences of Prabuddhanandaji

It was back in 1970s, when I first met Swamiji, in Sri Ramakrishna Vidyarthi Mandiram, in Bangalore, India. I renewed my acquaintance with him in 1990s, in San Francisco Center, when I came to United states for cardiology research.

My visits to Vedanta Society of northern California in San Francisco were infrequent from 90s to until 2014. It was partly due to my 5 years stay in the East Coast, for my cardiology training and subsequent settling in the most northern part of California, Redding, close to Mount Shasta. It was around 2014, I had a rude awakening, when I heard the news, that Swamiji was terminally ill with lung cancer. Around the time, my visits became more frequent to the center.

Being a physician/cardiologist, initially my natural instinct was, there must be a way to take care of the problem and to cure the cancer. Swamiji was gracious enough to permit me and another cardiologist devotee, Dr. Ramesh, from Pittsburgh, to review all his medical records, to talk to his physicians, cardiologist and oncologists in Kaiser medical system. At that time, I was amazed at Pravrajika Virajaprana's devotion to Swamiji, her meticulous record-keeping, and close coordination of his ongoing medical care amongst various medical specialists. After much deliberation and talking to various specialists in Kaiser system, myself and Dr. Ramesh, came to the same conclusion, which Swamiji had already made. That was, taking more conservative approach, including building his immune system and trying alternative therapies, rather than surgical approach or chemotherapy or radiation therapy.

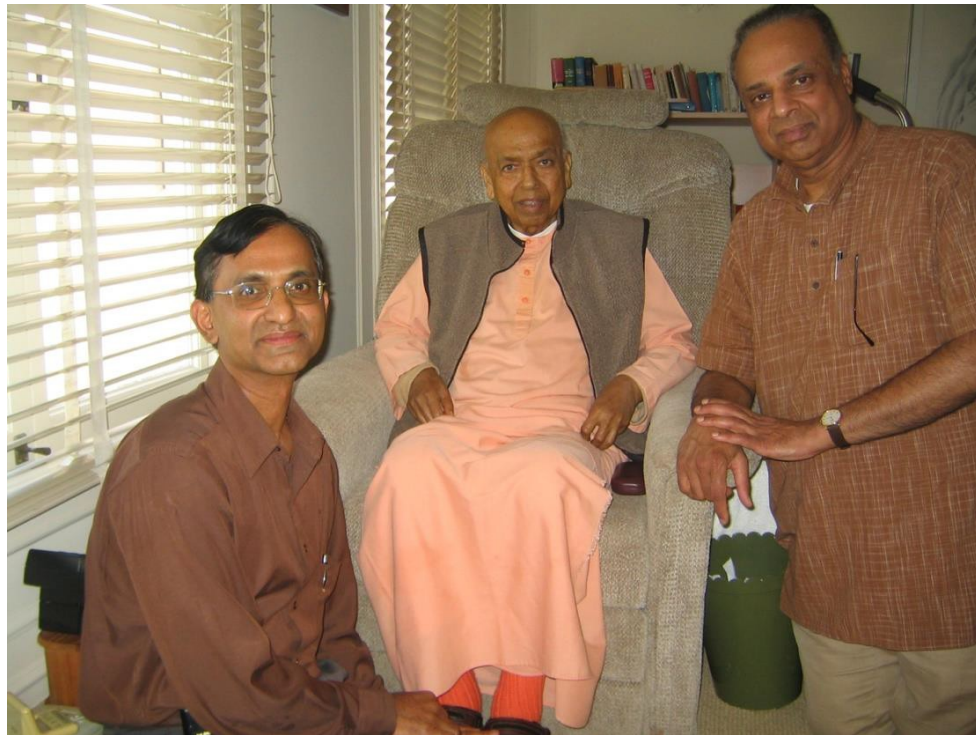
In retrospect, this approach proved to provide more quantity and quality of life to Swamiji, compared to more invasive medical therapies. It was a great learning experience, to watch a great Swami, like him, to fight the disease, from close quarters. He would painstakingly, make trips to Santa Rosa to consult non-radiation therapy

specialist and to follow through, all the recommended treatment regimens and protocols. I could see, his disciplined spiritual life in action. I could see him indirectly proclaiming that he will do anything, to continue to serve Guru Maharaj, Holy Mother and their devotee's.

I was blessed, to spend some quality time, in solitude with him during the last year his life. There were periods, when his energy used to be better. I remember one weekend, he made 13-15 rounds with his walker in the Vivekananda Hall and later on also did a question and answer session in the afternoon. His answers were always practical and very simple. Sometimes people would ask some complex appearing questions, and it was great to watch how swami would come up with most practical and simple spiritual answers. It was one of the Sunday afternoons I was alone with Swamiji. He was in his meditative mood. I asked him that since I was so far away from the center, what was his advice for me to make progress in spiritual life? He said " Chandramouli, karma yoga, you are a physician, see god in your patients and serve them well. " Those words still echo in me today.

My mother tongue is Kannada language and I am from Chickmagalur district /county in Karnataka state in South India. Swamiji's birthplace is only about 30 minutes from my native place. During my every visit, I would have great time with Swamiji, talking in Kannada, about various things back home. I was told by my fellow devotees who were serving swami at that time, those conversations lifted Swamiji's spirits on those days, when he was not feeling so great.

I missed attending, earlier Olema & Lake Tahoe retreats, when Swamiji, was healthy enough to attend them.



Dr. B. V. Chandramouli & Dr. Makum Ramesh with Swamiji

PRAKASH ASWANI

As I was reflecting upon the fourteen years (Feb 2000 through July 2014) of my association with Revered Swami Prabuddhanandaji's life one incident from Lord Buddha's life came to my mind....

Ananda, the foremost disciple of Buddha once asked him, "Sir, I have observed you all these years under all types of circumstances including while you sleep and found you to be in perfect peace and tranquility at all times. How is that possible?" Buddha very calmly replied, "You see...no matter which shore you test ocean's water from, it always tests the same"

This is not an exact quote, of course, and I have deliberately added the words, "you see" in the front because Swami Prabuddhananda would often start his answer with these words☺. And the reason this incidence in Buddha's life came to my mind is because Swami Prabuddhananda had displayed similar unshakably calm demeanor under all types of circumstances. His responses and comments would also be very brief and would leave one to ponder and get the real meaning over time. Here are some examples...

Few years back during Durga Puja time I had decided to accompany few other devotees to Hollywood Center and attend the Kali Puja ceremony there. This topic came up as we were heading to the Berkley Center. Swami Vedananda was driving, Swami Prabuddhananda was in the front passenger seat and I was in the back with another devotee. After we told him about our plans he was quiet for a while and then said, "There is a saying in Kannada, that herbs grown in ones back yard do not get used as medicine"...A profound lesson learned.

Another time, I was driving Swami back from the Sacramento Center after a long meeting. It was almost midnight. Pitch dark outside with hardly any other cars on the

road and all you could see outside were the reflectors shining brightly on the road. He was resting with eyes closed on the passenger side. Suddenly he opened his eyes and said, "Do you see how brightly the reflectors are guiding the way? It is only because the head lights are on. When the headlight of awareness is on, anything and everything will show you the way." He closed his eyes again till we reached Olema.

I had taken him to Kaiser Medical Center for some tests in the morning. He was asked to eat something and go back for further testing. We were not prepared for this so we went to the cafeteria and he asked me to get some toasted slice of bread. The cook was preparing hamburgers etc on the hot plate and he was going to put the bread slices on the same hot plate. Swami was a vegetarian and I was very uncomfortable serving Swami a slice of bread done this way. I was about to plead with the cook to see if he could clean the hot plate first before putting the slices when someone gently tapped my shoulder. I looked back and found Swami smiling. "Let him do it any way he wants", he said and walked back to his chair. When I served him the toast, he quietly prayed and started eating. He noticed I was quite disturbed for not being able to serve him properly. He looked up and said "when you offer it to God everything gets purified". I was stunned. Since then, chanting 'Brahmnarpanam' before a meal has ceased to be just a ritual for me.

Swami Prabuddhananda was not much of a preacher but every bit a practitioner. I have talked to many of his close devotees and everyone without an exception agrees that in just observing him go through his daily routine was like witnessing Bhagawat Gita in action. He was always proactive and never reactive. Always spiritualizing the secular. Always calm. The best examples of all such qualities became clear to all who were involved in serving him during his last three some years of his life. Towards the end we were serving him 24-7 and witnessed him go through sleepless nights and lot of discomfort. He would go through a painful sleepless night and I would not notice even a slight frown or irritability on his face. Instead he would calmly ask, "did you get some rest?" During the day he would ask us to read from Gita, Gospel of Sri

Ramkrishna or other texts. Thereby keeping us engaged in spiritual thoughts. I remember one night, about 15 days before his Mahasamadhi, he was in great discomfort all night and as I was massaging him he asked me to do Japa. He was barely able to talk and was quite incoherent in his communication. In such condition, he asked me to chant Hanuman Chalisa. Which I did but wondered if he did that consciously. Next morning when I was serving him breakfast I couldn't help and asked him if he remembered that. He said yes. I asked him why. He said, "Because Hanuman is your family Diety"...

I was stunned. Even in his extreme pain he was looking out for my benefit. During that time lot of Swamis across the country and abroad had come to see him. One of them remarked how pleased he was to see that we are taking good care of Maharaj, I said, "No Swami, it is Swami Prabuddhanandaji who is taking care of us". And I meant it.

CAROLYN FRENCH

I Remember Swami Prabuddhananda

More than a decade ago, my husband Frank, walked into the new temple on Vallejo Street, and asked to use the phone to find a nearby client's home. This simple request led us to Swami's door, the exploration of "existence absolute."

We started attending Swami's Sunday lectures when we moved to San Francisco in 2005, and continued until we left the area in 2014. I recall Swami's gentle, loving regard, relentless hard work, and joyful smile. And his generous admonishment: "You're just dumb!" when dealing with the ignorance of our true natures.

My lasting impression of Swami Prabuddhananda is the continuing reminder I have, every week: "The fooling agency can come from within or without. Be vigilant. Maintain a daily contact with the divine."

RAMESH KAPADIA

Memories of My Guru Shri Prabuddhanandji Maharaj

It is difficult to write about my highly advanced spiritual guru, as anything I write would limit his vast spiritual dimension. However, I feel that the best way to express my thoughts is by reflecting on the teachings and spiritual training that he provided during my association with him as a student for over forty years. I was one of his first three disciples. I have referred to him in this writing as “Swamiji.”

My spiritual journey began when I arrived in San Francisco in 1970 to pursue further education. I was traveling out of India for the first time. Although my parents provided me very sattvic and dharmic samskaras since my birth, I was too immature to grasp the real spirituality of those samskaras.

When I left India, I had decided to visit the ashrama every day from the time I arrived in San Francisco. I had gathered from reading that a Western country is vastly different from India and I would have to go through many adjustments, but the ashrama became my real comfort zone. I called Shri Prabuddhanandji Maharaj on the first day after my arrival to schedule an appointment with him. I met with him for the first time on October 6, 1970. During my thirty-minute meeting with him, I developed some deep feelings for and a strong attraction to Swamiji and the atmosphere of the ashrama. This reinforced my resolve to visit the ashrama every day. I became a regular daily visitor.

I enjoyed meditating in the auditorium because the atmosphere was so peaceful and quiet in comparison with India. I met with Swamiji whenever he was available. After a few months, my relationship with him deepened significantly and I felt that the ashrama was my home and he was both my father and mother in this country. All my anxieties for being in a Western country disappeared. I felt that he was holding my hand, leading me to a spiritual life without any reservations or conditions attached. My wife was still in India and did not arrive until eight months later. This gave me an

opportunity to visit the ashrama frequently. Day by day, I increased my contact with him and there were days that I was anxiously waiting for the time to visit him. My education became secondary at this point. My primary motivation on any given day was to visit the ashrama and meet Swamiji.

This time period also gave me an opportunity to test my cooking skills. My mother had given me some training in cooking when I was in India. I used to go to the monastery on Saturdays to cook for Swamiji. I tried to cook a variety of dishes for him. Sometimes my cooking reflected a real spirit of adventure, but it did not go unnoticed by Swamiji. He had a unique way of pointing out the result of my adventurous spirit. He would gently ask me where I acquired my cooking skills or he would say that a particular dish had a “Gujarati” touch. I accepted his comments readily and most of the time indicated to Swamiji that I would do better next time.

My strong attraction to Swamiji was the result of his large heart and deep love for me. Although I was working and going to school at the same time, my attraction to visit the ashrama and to see him was the primary motivation of each day. On the other hand, Swamiji was drawing me deeper and deeper into intense spiritual life in a very subtle unimposing manner. Swamiji asked me to visit the temple even during my lunch break since my office was close to the ashrama. He asked me to meditate during my lunch break and offer everything I had done that day at the feet of Shri Shri Thakur. He also explained to me that not possessing results relieves one from anxieties and unwarranted stress, thus keeping the mind fresh at all times. I was deeply touched by his close guidance to elevate my spiritual life.

I used to have many personal sessions with him on a regular basis. During these sessions, he taught me many things that contributed to molding my spiritual life. He was very particular in making sure that I understood his instructions properly. Many times he used to ask me to write down the spiritual instructions he had given to me

during our personal session and show it to him so that he could verify whether I had understood him correctly.

Given the personal nature of many of my experiences with him, I do not feel it appropriate to share those particular experiences. He taught me many things, but I have included here only the select experiences with my beloved guru.

He always emphasized purity of mind and a straightforward approach in forming relationships and interacting with others on every level and also explained how this would empower me with inner courage and strength. Time and time again, he impressed upon me to remove “knots” inside the mind that cause obstacles to being a straightforward person. He used to explain how the mind functions when the ego, jealousy, greed etc., take over and how these factors are negative impacts on our spiritual life. He always promoted the idea of bringing absolute purity and straightforwardness into the decision-making process, explaining to me that it makes the decision-making stress free.

Such a spiritual training was a totally new territory in my life, but I felt a powerful attraction to deepen my understanding. I readily accepted this rare opportunity. I felt that it was a divine coincidence that I traveled 13,000 miles from India to be with such a great spiritual soul. The beauty of this spiritual journey was his willingness to take such a close interest in guiding me, which increased my attraction to him as my guru as each day passed. As a result of his personal training and guidance, my inner strength, confidence, and self-esteem became stronger and stronger. I found a totally new meaning in my life.

He was a strong proponent of holy company. He indicated that spiritual seekers are likeminded people, so having each other's company promotes spiritual growth by having a mutual positive influence on each other. He made most of the special puja days into all-day programs so devotees could spend more time benefitting from the holy company in the temple.

One day he approached me with the idea of giving me initiation, a formal introduction to spiritual life in a definite and precise way. I accepted the idea immediately. As soon as he mentioned it, I felt that this is exactly what I am craving.

His teaching method was unassuming and yet very effective. This always reminded me of the discussion in the *Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna* regarding three types of doctors. If I apply that analogy to gurus, I would put my guru in the “superior” category. He always wanted to make sure that I understood his spiritual instructions properly and incorporated them in my daily life. He was very practical and I found tremendous wisdom in his teaching and training. He was a firm proponent of striking a balance everywhere. However, when it came to ongoing spiritual practices, he firmly took a non-compromising position. He mentioned to me Sri Ramakrishna’s example that spiritual life provides the value of having a “1” in front of all empirical achievements that represent merely “zeros.” He said that you could add many zeros and yet, the value will remain zero. However, when you add “1” in front of those zeros, the total value keeps on increasing. That “1” is the all-pervading supreme Spirit.

When he passed away, it was an extremely sad day in my life. I cried for months and months whenever I spoke about him with fellow devotees at the ashrama. It created a big void inside me. However, after some time something prompted me from within and guided me to meditate on his teachings with earnestness for at least a few minutes every day. I tried to apply his teachings in my everyday life and through this practice the void started to dissolve making me feel as if I continued to live with him again.

Although I have been following such practices, there are still some days that I struggle harder. My spiritual journey progresses further with a strong inner feeling that he continues to hold my hand firmly to make sure that my spiritual journey successfully reaches its goal.

This is my humble attempt to record some memories of my guru. I offer this humble attempt to reminiscence to Shri Shri Thakur as Swamiji always asked me to do. So now I

do not possess any of these remembrances, including any shortcomings in my presentation.

My *koti koti* pranam to my guru and our ultimate gurus Shri Shri Thakur, Ma and Swami Vivekananda.

HERSHA VALLABH LEUNG

As a very young girl, I was both fortunate and blessed to have parents who were followers of the Ramakrishna Mission. At the ripe age of 5 or 6 I remember attending retreats up north in Canada where Swami Prabuddhanandaji would lead and preside over a small group of devotees. I was the youngest member of the congregation, but I only ever knew it as my family and our closest friends. It was during these summers when Swami P would come up from the Northern California Centre, that I was exposed to teachings and life lessons beyond my years. At that time I didn't realize the impact he would have on my life; he was simply a man in an ochre robe who was the epitome of calmness and serenity. In fact, I was always very timid and shy around him and had the tendency to hide behind my mother's back whenever he talked to me. After every retreat I remember being the one who had to give Swamiji his gift from the group of devotees. I would nervously approach him, and he would gently gaze at me as if to let me know he wouldn't bite. Without failure he would always give me a tap on my head. Little did I know that those were thousands of blessings from the infinite being poured over me.

Over the years I would attend retreats and my family would journey to San Francisco and Lake Tahoe to be close to Swami P and the devotees. My brother would stay at the monastery and I would stay at the convent, or with my family. Our family and our close knit group of devotees who attended the Vedanta Society in Toronto would make every effort to absorb all the wisdom and blessings that this special man exuded. And every time I bent down to take the dust of his feet and pay my respects, he would give me that special tap on my head.

As my teenage years crept up, I remember many predictions in the media about the end of the world approaching; I would read or see TV shows about these ancient predictions and carvings in the pyramids or Nostradamus writings. I decided I would write a letter

to Swami P telling him of my worry - what would happen to us if the world ended, I wondered? What was the point of it all? Much to my surprise, Swamiji had the time of day for me. My small worries were not insignificant to him, and he wrote back to me and managed to put my mind at ease. He even sent me an article from the local San Francisco paper indicating a lot of the predictions were hocus and that I should live my life to the best of my ability not worrying about what is to come.

As I got older and sat through lectures and retreats, more astute to what I was hearing; it always seemed that this calm serene man was talking directly to me. As if all of my teenage problems were somehow being answered. The biggest worry of a studious teenager is what they should do with the rest of their life - I was no different. How would I figure this out? Swami told me to imagine myself in all the things I thought I wanted to do. If I wanted to be a ballerina I should imagine what that would be like, because realistically I couldn't do it all. So I did just that - I imagined being a pianist, astronaut, engineer building robots with crazy eyes, and so on. In the end I think my career found me. He often told me how lucky I was to be born into my family. The fortune I had to be raised in this environment was beyond my comprehension. I look back on this comment now and realize that my thoughts and actions today have so much to do with that wholesome upbringing.

When I finally turned 20 I had in me a burning desire to go on a pilgrimage to India. Having been raised in Canada by parents from South Africa, India was very foreign to us. But I wanted to meet more spiritual seekers, I wanted to experience the Motherland, I wanted to 'find myself'. Luckily my family supported this desire. So I went to Swami P and I excitedly told him my intentions to travel to India and go to Belur Math. I desperately wanted to see Jayrambati and stay in all the holy places I had grown up hearing about. He was thrilled with this idea (in his calm demeanour) and offered to write me a letter to help me on this journey.

The letter was simple and stated that my family and I were disciples and I was a devotee of Holy Mother. It was neatly signed by Swami Prabuddhanandaji. The letter also said to welcome me to the centre (whichever centre I went to). I cherished this letter with all my heart and carried it in my money belt which was strapped to me under my clothes for 4 months straight. It never left my sight and it carried me through the most intense, uplifting, eye opening experience of my life. A young 20 year old girl in a foreign country with only 3 pairs of clothes, some pocket money and my most prized possession: a letter from my guru.

Who knew that every Swami and Mataji (Sarada Math) I showed this to would react with welcoming arms, followed by a place to stay, sweet conversation and tasty food. I journeyed through all of South India (Mysore, Madurai, Kanyakumari, Bangalore), made my way to Calcutta and Belur Math, Kamarpukur, Jayrambati, Haridwar, Benares, Lucknow, Delhi and Dhera Dun. Many Swamis would be alarmed to see a young lady with a letter from a revered and well respected monk in North America. The surprise would turn to interest and ultimately warmth and welcoming love.

I was never turned away and my authenticity was never questioned. I had the privilege of meditating in the mountains, participating in evening vespers at so many ashrams, meeting other seekers of truth and taking the dust of many special souls. And all this was because of a letter that Swamiji so graciously gave me. But, it was more than a letter; I would come to understand and reflect on this in my quiet moments when I had returned from India. It was so much more than a letter. It was something intangible made of blessings from beyond. Something so much bigger than my small self. I felt as though my whole being had been taken over by a powerful force. I felt protected and as though nothing could harm me. I can honestly say that I have never in my life felt this way again. It was surreal.

When I returned to Canada and met with Swami P thereafter, I remember sitting in his office and thanking him for the letter. I distinctly remember feeling brave and so I asked him to pray for me. He responded to this with “please pray for me”. Suddenly his humility was so real, as he too was a child in the lap of our Mother seeking her blessings. I agreed to pray for him; however I really didn’t think he needed it, as he was far closer to self- realization than me. This followed with him telling me to come as often as I could to their Centre. He said that even if I couldn’t afford it, he would fund my visits. My eyes welled with tears. This felt like home. Swami P felt like home.

In later years I went to Swami to seek blessings on my marriage, to which he answered that it is my decision and of course he would bless me. Then before my daughter was born I was conflicted on what to name her and I had narrowed it down to two choices. He wrote me an email and said this ...**“it is better to choose a name which is clearly positive and, of course, easy to pronounce. This is what I feel. Now you make your own decision. However, I’ll be curious to know what name you choose. Whatever you choose, I wish her all the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna”**. So we gave her a beautiful Sanskrit name which my father suggested with the meaning “having no equivalent” or “unique”. She has turned out to be exactly that!

Then when my daughter was born, I wanted Swami P to meet her. She was 1.5 years old and he gave her that familiar tap on the forehead and even held his hand pouring his blessings. This was very special and my brother was able to capture this moment on camera. Swami met with me and said to me “Remember you are you first and a mom second”. This was an important nugget of advice that has served me well as it reminds me the importance of taking care of oneself mentally, physically and spiritually.

My encounters with Swami P have a special place in my heart today and I will always carry them forward and be thankful for these blessings. He is deeply missed, but his strength and guidance continue to live on.

RAVI PRABHAKAR

Swamiji Memories

Swamiji was and is the most important person in my life; without him, I would be nobody, or perhaps even worse; everything I have sought and accomplished in my life, including having the best possible life partner, my business, I attributed to him alone.

First time I saw Swamiji was in 1976 when I was a teenager; my parents took my brothers and I to a Friday service at the Old Temple that was the point in time when a whole new world of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, opened up to me; the experience at Olema was magical, and friendships with many members of the society.

He did so much to uplift my family, brought over to our home so many great souls, the leading Swamis of the order, we were blessed with the visits of Swami Ranganathananda and Swami Aseshananda.

During the summer recess, loved all the stories he used to share including Angulimala. Many, many beautiful memories of celebrations, retreats, the Tahoe walks were the most intimate setting – in the earlier days Swamiji evening walk, from the cabin all the way down to the lake, lots of stories including ghost stories.

It was a privilege to drive Swamiji; however no traffic rules could be broken, he always knew when you are crossing over the speed limit. It seemed he was aware of every bump in the road; it was always a conflict since my driving to this day has been strongly influenced by Swami Sahajananda.

A great soul like swamiji, he was always like your mother, he cared so much, wanted to always make sure I was OK, was well fed, go out of his way to make time when I wanted to meet him.

Swamiji religion was grounded, nothing sensational, always wanting one to be practical and regular in practices...it was practice alone...he was always loving, gentle and calm. In the presence of Swamiji did not have to say a word, there was no place to hide, he knows exactly where you stood.

All the blessing I have received in my life has been due to Swamiji grace; whatever I have achieved in life has been due to his grace. Swamiji was always there to protect me; I always had a shield; this was clearly in evidence during a severe car crash several years ago. During a rally car race, I lost control and went down the side of a mountain more than 1000 feet down...with this severity of accident one is not expected to live are if you are fortunate to survive with massive and permanent injuries. Through Swamiji blessings alone; my brother and I walked away with minor scratches although the vehicle was completely destroyed...No Fear

Swamiji invested so much time on me and had very high expectations of me, he wanted me to reach for the stars and I know that so far I have let him down; he always wanted me to do something great, do something for India, help others, he wanted me to achieve the highest in human excellence...and I know so far I have not measured up but I know that this is the destination I need to get to before my story ends.

The most important thing I have I learned and try to embrace from Swamji is non-attachment this more than, this is a big word and subject; Swamiji always said to reserve the power to detach if needed; having the ability to walk away at any time; those who give up gain the universe.

In my technology business or any business for that matter in order to be successful, it's all about people, I do use different words but behind them are all of the lessons I have learned from Swamiji; it's the same principals to bring out the best in people.

Unfortunately, I stopped visiting Swamiji regularly for the last 15 years due to being overseas, and immersed with family and the technology world, I may have forgotten Swamiji but he never forgot about me, his unconditional love was always there, every

time we met he always enquired about all family members and asked me if I was “regular” with meditation...I now realize this I paid as the incredible price being away since the clock can never be reversed.

It was the ultimate privilege and blessing to occasionally serve Swamiji when I visited the Bay Area during the last year of his life. I know those treasured moments with Swamiji will always be the most precious moments in my life.

Swamiji no longer being on our plane of existence has been so hard for me; it has really hurt and is the biggest loss in my life; I really have no one to turn; I know I must and need to go much further so I don't disappoint him. Swamiji was the most important person in my life, he threw me a life raft.

AMI KAPADIA

Memories of Swami Prabuddhananda

Reminiscing about Swami Prabuddhananda will always bring tears of spiritual gratitude to my eyes. He elevated my life and the lives of my family members. My first memory of Swami Prabuddhananda dates back to the age of 4. Every Sunday, my family would stand in line to greet Swamiji after his lecture. I would experience butterflies in my stomach, a mix of shyness and intuitive sense that a sadhu is different from other people. He had a stoic, radiant presence unlike any other person I knew. As I would touch his feet to express reverence as taught by my parents, I remember squinting my eyes and shrugging my shoulders in anticipation of his firm head tap. Then I would look up and extend my arm to receive a delightful piece of fudge prasad wrapped in plastic from a brown bag that he gave to each child. For almost every week of every year of my childhood and adolescence, I had this great fortune even though I did not understand the significance at the time.

As I grew older, I found myself gravitating toward Swamiji more and more. He helped me navigate some of the toughest moments and most complex thoughts and emotions in my life by steering me inward. He always emphasized the importance of aiming for Higher goals in any work that I pursued. Then there came a point where he felt I was ready to be initiated, and I am eternally indebted to Swamiji for being my guru. How can I express in words the depth of spiritual nourishment that he showered? His Compassion, Love, Discrimination, Purity, Wisdom, and Knowledge all must be capitalized. At his memorial, I remember the interchange of his photo and the photo of Mother in the slideshow. I am not sure I can speak beyond that powerful image of what he represented in human form to all of us. Like all who knew Swamiji, I crave to experience his presence again. His firm head taps left a permanent imprint that I will cherish forever.

DR. RADHA IVATURI

Reminiscences of Swami Prabuddhananda

The first time I met swami was in Vivekananda Hall in the New Temple in San Francisco. I had just come to the USA from India. I think he had just finished a class. I distinctly remember how bright he appeared. I touched his feet and said, "Swami, I am from India." He smiled and said, "I can make that out. "

From then began my association with Swami. Eager to offer something, I asked Swami if I could make gulab jamoons for offering for Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. I did not know then what elaborate procedures went into making prasad for puja celebrations. I just simply wanted to make an offering. Swami immediately said yes. He did not even know what kind of cook I was! It was only later after coming to know how diligent and meticulous the preparations are for preparation of prasad, I realized how much trust he placed in me and how quietly he enabled my desire to serve Thakur.

Swami did not speak much but when he spoke something it touched our hearts. He noticed the smallest of acts and his small nod in acknowledgment gave us encouragement to do more.

I once asked him, "What does God want me to do?" Then he answered, "To come closer to Him." Swami had a knack of bringing back any conversation with the focus on God. No beating about the bush. No drama¾ simply and gently bringing our minds back to God. In him I noticed an unwavering attention to this goal of going closer to God.

I was pregnant with my second child; I was almost near term. I went to see my doctor for a routine visit. At that time I was given the shocking news that they could not hear the baby's heartbeat. I was being admitted to the hospital for further tests. I called Swami in a panicky state. Swami listened with deep concern. Afterwards I ended up having a still birth. I wanted to go to the temple straight from the hospital. He saw me

at the temple. He listened to me as I was pouring out my grief-stricken heart to him. I don't remember what he said. I don't think he said much. What I do remember is leaving with my heart lightened. I just felt supported. He held our joys, sorrows, fear, and anxiety in such a way that we felt supported. Not so much with words but his presence somehow made us feel safe.

Swami blessed many of us even during his illness later by giving us an opportunity to be of service. Being a physician, I was able to help navigate some of the medical issues during his illness.

One of the times when Swami was in the emergency room, we saw how one should pray. He lay in the hospital bed but his mind was drawn to prayer. To me it appeared that he was in the lap of the Mother and intensely praying and pleading with Her. He would interact with doctors and nurses when needed. But as soon as possible his mind would turn inwards. Some occasions we heard him pray and call out softly, "Mother! Mother!" He would pray in Kannada, so I did not understand what he said. But the intensity of the prayer was palpable in the room.

During one of the hospitalizations Swami was supposed to undergo a procedure. I asked him, "Swami, are you okay with undergoing the procedure? Are you in pain with so much poking? Do you feel the burden of these medical procedures?"

Swami replied, "You see, if we take the burden on to ourselves, it is too much to bear. I offer all this to God. He will bear the burden. Then I don't feel much. "

Even during illness Swami gave time to devotees and talked to them. One time Swami was sitting in chair and his walker was next to him. I asked him about how one should practice the presence of God.

He said, "You consciously try to imagine him walking next to you and being with you whatever you do. Over time His presence will be as real as holding this walker. "

During the later stage of illness I once said to him, “Swami is there anything that you want to do/ achieve now and how can we help make that happen?”

He said, “Grace! Mother’s grace! Not because of what I have done. What I have done is so little. But because it is Her very nature to shower grace. “

In my few interactions with Swami, I noticed that the needle of his mind never wavered from God. He was one pointed in his attention to God. Towards the last few months, Swami used to quote from the *Mandukya Upanishad* a lot. He referred to the turiya state often and how Atman is the source of strength.

Even towards the very end he gave the gift of his presence to many devotees. He not only showed us how to live but also showed us how to die with one-pointed attention and surrender to God.

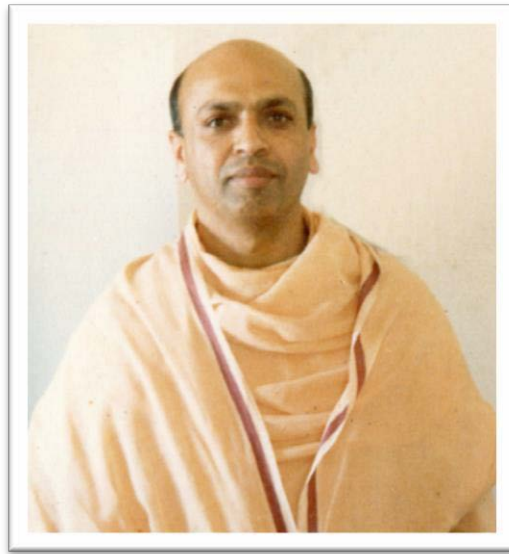
To me it appeared Swami was focused on being in the lap of the Mother. The worldly actions just happened through him somehow.

PRAVRAJIKA VIRAJAPRANA, SAN FRANCISCO

Swami Prabuddhananda

In Shankara's *Vivekachudamani* there is a verse that I feel is a perfect description of Swami Prabuddhananda. "There are good souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who, having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross the same, without any motive whatsoever." Another example that describes Swami's nature to me is given by Swami Vivekananda in *Inspired Talks*, "Give as the rose gives perfume—because it is its own nature—utterly unconscious of giving."

Swami arrived in San Francisco in June 1970; I met him in January 1971. He had just assumed the role of swami in charge. He was only forty-one then.



From the moment I saw Swami, it struck me that here was a person who was completely unselfish, joyful in a deep quiet way and whose whole being was centered in a place that I longed to be. Through long years of close association with Swami, I

never once observed that he ever said or did anything out of self-interest. In fact, that was one of his remarkable qualities—a total lack of self-importance. He was always behind the scenes. Shy and reticent by nature, Swami avoided putting himself forward in any situation. When asked for biodata for some talk or retreat, it was almost impossible to get him to say anything about himself. Monk of the Ramakrishna Order—that was about it, full stop. He was not a chit-chatter. In conversation, he avoided talking about himself or about others. One of the swamis in India once said that gossip or any meaningless conversation would freeze a few feet from him. His total focus was on God and God alone. Truly, I don't think that he had any other interest except the Mother and serving her children in all ways.

Swami had an uncanny ability to intuit a person's needs be it emotional, physical, psychological, or, of course, spiritual. He often reached out to swamis, nuns, and devotees in India as well as in the West anticipating some issue that was on their mind or fulfilling a need before it was even expressed. He would sometimes practically plead with some of our swamis, inquiring if there was something he could send them, money, some medicine, or anything else they might need and couldn't conveniently get in India. Generous to a fault, Swami would help many, many who were in need financially, be it for starting a school, a special project of some ashrama, personal expenses, medicine, food for special diets, a train ticket for a pilgrimage—whatever—the list is long. Literally his left hand never saw what his right hand gave. A song based on one of Swami Vivekananda's poems says, "Give, give, give that's the one thing." And give Swami did. He gave his whole life for others.

Swami was always concerned about other people's health and well-being. He would inquire if he hadn't seen a devotee or nun for some time; often he would send someone to check on an ailing devotee. Many were the occasions when he sent prasada to those who couldn't come for one of the worships for whatever reason. One time someone gave Swami a Swiss Army Knife that had many nifty gadgets. I was demonstrating one of them and when I opened the knife inadvertently cut my finger. I tried to hide the

bleeding victim in a Kleenex but nothing escaped Swami's eagle eyes. He remarked rather unsympathetically, "Who asked you to cut your finger?" Then he looked away saying, "It does something here (with his hand on his heart)." I realized through this simple act how much Swami identified himself with others.

He was indifferent about his own health but never about others. If asked how he was, he would reply, "Like this," which was actually the perfect answer, neither understated nor exaggerated. He was exactly how he was! Until his last breath his only thought was for the welfare of others. Even in the hospital, nurses, staff, and doctors all responded to his quiet resignation, calmness and dignity. The stateliness of his bearing always drew respect. When some of the guileless nurses would croon over his beautiful gerua caps or his long eyelashes, he would simply smile. During the last few years of his life, Swami was hospitalized practically once a month and often on different floors. So the nurses from various units got to know him; they were all extremely fond of him. So even if he wasn't on their watch, some would come and see him. If I happened to meet a nurse in the elevator, she would ask me, "How is Swami?" Once when I went for a flu shot at Kaiser, one of his nurses said to me, "Oh, how is Swami? Please tell him the nurses from floors 5 and 6 all send their best wishes." When I told Swami that he was so well known and popular all over Kaiser, he laughed. After Swami passed away, I wrote letters of thanks and appreciation to his personal physician and cardiologist who took such exquisite care of him. His personal physician paid Swami a beautiful tribute. He said regarding Swami's care: "It was a privilege to help care for Swami, way beyond the usual privilege of doing our jobs." Similarly, his cardiologist, who was always so considerate and gentle with Swami, expressed his gratitude for having the opportunity to care for such an unusual, holy person. They all felt the depth of Swami's personality and it was not simply through his words. The early morning of Swami's passing so many devotees, monks, and nuns had gathered in his room, more than is usually accepted by the hospital. When our devotees were signing in to see Swami, one of the official personnel started to indicate that the room was already full, no more. But

another staff member overrode this objection, waving everyone on whoever came. He told the other person, whoever comes let them go to the room. Merged in Mother, Swami quietly, calmly left us without the slightest fanfare just as he had lived. He taught us not only how to live a spiritual life but how to die.

Swami never took a vacation or time off for personal pursuits, or for his own benefit. I always felt that his steady joy and calm came from deep within. And when he needed to refresh or restore himself, he turned within not without as we do. So he never really needed to go anywhere or do anything other than what he routinely did. Everything that was needed, he already had. And on many occasions, especially on holy days such as Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, his large luminous eyes seem to lose their outward look. Swami was well versed in the scriptures and would often quote from some very obscure source when needed to illustrate some point he was making, but it was always appropriate and heartfelt and not just scholarly.

When three of us sannyasins went to India in 1991-92, we learned what deep respect and love the swamis and devotees had for him. The late Swami Keshavanandaji Maharaj mentioned that we were very fortunate to have such a great soul in our midst and went on to speak at length about Swami's outstanding qualities as an ideal monk, including his profound understanding of the scriptures, loving nature and generous heart. Another swami in Kankhal mentioned how lucky we were to have Swami and the late Swami Swahanandaji in the U.S. because of their deep knowledge of the scriptures. He felt that Swami was an ideal mentor and teacher for training the nuns. Wherever we went, there was a universal appreciation for Swami's loving concern for others and for his untiring service to the devotees and swamis.

Swami seemed to know when to scold, when to encourage, when to praise, when to ignore, when to sympathize, when to raise his newspaper up in front of his face blocking the person's view of him, and when to let one sink or swim. He firmly believed that everyone should stand on his or her own feet and not depend on him but

on Sri Ramakrishna. Often hidden under a rather stern exterior (but actually quite transparent) was a soft affectionate heart full of love. Swami was never effusive in expressing his inner feelings, but one always felt protected and supported under his outstretched wings. However, he discouraged having personal attachments to anyone, especially for monastics. Swami's motto seemed to be to love the Lord, and through him love all others. "Don't go on trying to love this person and that person, everyone individually. That only ends in misery." "He being pleased the whole universe becomes pleased. He being satisfied, the whole universe becomes satisfied."

Swami could be the essence of sweetness and grace, with a tap on the head, pat on the cheek, giving *prasad* in one's hand, or with a disarming smile. However, he could also assume a form that might best be described as a dark threatening cloud looming on the horizon. But always, regardless of the expression, the other person's need, what was beneficial for her/him prompted the response. It was never a personal reaction to something that someone did or said to him. Swami was evenminded; he was dispassionate yet completely engaged. He neither favored one over the other nor excluded anyone. He gave many opportunities for service to those willing to sacrifice personal time and their own convenience. Such service often required working under pressure, for long hours, meeting deadlines that could seem impossible given that they were set for the day before yesterday and not expecting anything in return except perhaps to find some fault or mistake! But he could also show his appreciation with a smile and a heartbreaking "thank you for all your help."

He also had a wry sense of humor and, like all aspects of his personality, was low-key. Years ago one of Swami Ashokananda's students Mary Lou Williams used to prepare the monthly bulletin. She was quite a character, flamboyant and smart as a whip. She always addressed Swami as "Sir." One day she was standing on the top of the stairs of the mezzanine at the New Temple, clacking her dentures she addressed Swami who was standing below outside his office. He looked up telling her that she was dwelling in Vaikuntha, the celestial abode of Vishnu, having been addressed from on high he had to

give her his undivided attention. Needless to say, she laughed uproariously at this quip. We all joined in.



One time when one of the sisters was carrying a well-worn shoulder bag, Swami asked her if she had brought it with her from her last life! In the 1980s when Prince Charles and Princess Diana were about to be married, they made headlines in all the magazines and papers. One of the headlines read: "What The Royal Wedding Means To Us." I mentioned this to Swami and remarked, "It doesn't mean anything to us!" He replied, "See, [in a tone of why spoil the fun] if you discriminate like that the whole universe will fall." Another time when I was wearing a cap he hadn't seen before, he remarked, "Where did this *avatara* come from?" When he would visit the flower garden at Olema,

often a garden hose was stretched out along one of the paths. Swami could have stood anywhere, but he would very carefully stand balanced on the hose and carry on a normal conversation. It was so funny to see him do that—like a tightrope walker.

Sometimes we sisters would deliberately use words or terms that he was unfamiliar with to provoke a startled response, which was hilarious as he repeated it after us. For example, we used to have a garden on the roof of the San Francisco convent. When someone had to water the plants, we'd just say she watering the roof. The implication was, of course, she's watering the plants. Once when he called for a sister and was mischievously told this, he replied, "She's watering the roof?" Obviously he was amazed that she would be doing this and for God's sake, why? We also have a convent in San Rafael, which in the 1970s was somewhat rural. There is a steep cliff next to the house but it is flat on top and plants were grown there. Sometimes one or the other of us would sit up there and meditate. Again, Swami called one day and was told so-and-so is meditating on the cliff. You can imagine the mental image this conjured up in his mind. What was she doing—dangling there on a lawn chair? He replied in astonishment, "She's meditating on the cliff?" We all had a good laugh over this given Patanjali's instruction about a clean firm seat required for meditation. Another incident comes to mind. We have bulk supplies of grains, rice, etc., stored in bulk containers. If not kept airtight, insects can get in or in some other way mysteriously appear there. Just to hear Swami say a word out of context, Anantaprana mentioned that a certain food item had become buggy. Swami repeated it after her emphasizing the double "g" as he would if it were Sanskrit. B-U-G-G-Y. That was just what she wanted to hear, and in addition Swami now had a new word to use.

It often seemed like Swami had been transplanted here from another century. He was always so dignified and conservatively dressed in his gerua clothes, so to see him with a straw cowboy hat on when it was hot or in his running shoes when he first got them was really a treat. It looked so incongruous.

He found childlike humor in some of the unsophisticated, innocent newspaper comic strips such as Fred Bassett, Blonde, and Dennis the Menace. He would sometimes quote from one of these comics to illustrate a point he was making during a talk to the great delight of those in the temple auditorium. Fred Basset was a Basset Hound Dog. Swami loved to relate one of the comic strips where Fred is being tormented by the neighborhood children who were teasing him, pulling his tail and ears while he lay there in a long suffering attitude of abject misery. Swami related “each box” of the cartoon and then with a chuckle came to the punchline where Fred says he can’t scare them off, snap at them, or do anything. He’s helpless because he’ll lose his reputation of being good with children.

One of his favorite Blonde cartoons was Dagwood lying on the couch on a Sunday musing, “Should I take a nap or mow the lawn?” Then laughing, Swami would relate how Dagwood, who always defaulted to a nap, would turn over and fall asleep, with “those Z-Z-Z-Zs arising from the last box.” A favorite Dennis the Menace cartoon involved Dennis and his sidekick Joey who had done something as usual to irritate his neighbor Mr. Wilson. A few minutes later Dennis wanted to go back to Mr. Wilson’s house again, but Joey reminded him that he was *really* angry with them. Dennis replied that nobody can stay mad that long!

Swami was a constant presence at the temple making himself available to all – devotees, visitors, convent members, everyone. He never spared himself, always finding time to listen, advise, consult, answer questions or resolve a conflict even when time didn’t seem to be an option. He took an interest in all aspects of the Society including the Olema retreat, the Sunday School, the bookshop, office work, just to name a few of our activities. In Bangalore they had wonderful bhajan congregational singing that would reverberate throughout the temple. He encouraged singing and chanting as important spiritual practices and led a chanting class until his health no longer permitted it. He felt there should always be something going on at the temple or at the Olema retreat for the devotees. The temple should be welcoming to one and all through its lively

atmosphere. However, Swami's attention and interest were not confined to San Francisco alone but were widespread to other centers, devotees, and swamis in this country and abroad.

Swami never struck me as a person. In fact it was hard to imagine him as an individual. In so many ways all remnants of an individual personality seemed to have been merged into something much, much larger. His presence always seemed to be on the verge of a vast reality. He was the purest of monks, a man of few words—a man of meditation. His self-restraint was phenomenal. I remember after his heart surgery in 1989, his diet was curtailed. Food was never an issue or high on his agenda, but now it became even less so. Some of the items that he used to eat and enjoy such as macadamia nuts, cashews, or fried items had to be given up. Once given up, he never turned back. One time he said, "The mind does not even go there anymore." I was amazed at his effortless self-control.

Sometimes Swami would relate some touching incidents from his early monastic life with Swami Tyagishanandaji and Swami Yatiswaranandaji. Like Swami Yatiswaranandaji, Swami believed in letting people figure out certain details in spiritual life, even if it ended up being embarrassing or painful. That was the way a person learned and also grew. He told a story once when Swami Yatiswaranandaji had scolded him for something and Swami objected saying that he should have told him beforehand. Swami Yatiswaranandaji replied, "All things cannot be told like that. You have to use your discrimination, develop your buddhi."

One of Swami's hallmarks when he wanted something done NOW was his knack of phoning during a very hectic time, such as cooking in preparation for a puja, and inquiring, "How busy are you?" Another ploy was, "You see, here is a problem only you can solve." Or even worse, "You see I have been thinking." That was the death knell. Swami was never calculating but somehow his timing for challenging one's ability to juggle many balls in the air simultaneously had been sharpened to a fine art.

Swami was always discreet, balanced and measured in his speech, movements, judgments, and decisions. He could not be hurried no matter how hard someone tried. It's as if he always moved at the pace of his ancestors—majestic and deliberate. A few days before Swami's passing, he was not doing well. I was called to his room by his caregiver. When I entered his room, it was obvious we had to go to the emergency at Kaiser. I knelt beside him and we talked about it. He finally agreed but then to my utter dismay he said in his typical fashion, "After two hours!" Fortunately, we sped up the proceedings. That was our last trip in the paramedic van.



These are but a few random memories of our dear Swami whom we all miss, but know that he is ever with us gently but firmly nudging us along the path so that we might, "Stop not until the goal is reached." My eternal gratitude and loving pranams to Swamiji, who saved my life; the best friend I could ever hope to have.

ॐ

श्रीरामकृष्णार्पणमस्तु

Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇārpaṇamastu

May this be an offering to Sri Ramakrishna