

Reminiscences of Most Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj

We heard these reminiscences of Most Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj from Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj in Ponampet, Bangalore, Ulsoor, Pune & Belgaum Ashramas between July 1998 & March 2004. Some of the events, we heard more than once and we have written them as we had heard. Some of the events are therefore mentioned twice, with some variances in details. There are some points of deep significance in both versions, due to which we have retained both the versions, in these cases of repetition.

In general, Purushottamanandaji Maharaj was reticent to talk about Swami Yatishwaranandaji. If anyone asked him to, like Sri H P Ramesh once did, and Sri Gautam Kadagathur once did [both were Balaka Sangha members & we were present on both occasions] he would tell that when the right moment came, he would speak about him!

Whatever little information we could collect from the inmates of the Ponampet & Belgaum Ashrama, who had joined under him, we have given below. We have classified them into three parts. The 1st Part contains mainly recollections of Swami Yatishwaranandaji's personality. The 2nd Part contains some of the personal advice that Purushottamanandaji received from Yatishwaranandaji. The 3rd Part contains some personal incidents concerning the two Swamijis, which Swami Purushottamanandaji cherished as invaluable and would recount them with great feeling.

Part - I

- We once asked Swami Purushottamanandaji what sort of a person was Swami Yatishwaranandaji. He said, "He was a person full of spiritual dignity. There was something of the royalty around him. He was always clean shaven. He had a strange habit – when he would sit in the Night Classes or in a public meeting, he would keep on rubbing the back of his right hand fingers on his clean-shaven chin. I noticed him do this quite often. When I joined Bangalore Ashrama, he was around 70 years. But physically he was very good-looking. He had developed BP problem. He would take regular exercises. He was quite tall and sort of hefty. I think he also had some kind of problem with his back or lumbar region. Although he was heavy-built, he had a wonderful grace in his movements. He spoke with a heavy Bengali accent. I noticed that he would say 'Ong' while saying *Om*. He would call me Raamchandro."

"He was a very deep person. He was a man of very few words. He was a spiritual person with the best-rounded personality I ever came across. He was smooth all over, no rough edges anywhere at all. He was sweetness personified. Whichever way you approached him, you would invariably get a taste of that divine sweetness. He was most kind. He was the kindest person I have ever seen. He was a Yogi of the highest order. He always stayed in the state of the highest Yoga. He was acclaimed as a spiritual giant by many Swamijis of our Order at that time. I have heard one Swamiji in Belur Math say that Swami Yatishwaranandaji was no less than the Direct Disciples! You see, such acclaim from one's own initiated disciples is quite natural. But here in Swami Yatishwaranandaji's case, such estimates came from his contemporaries. Now, that is something!"

- Comparing the Night Classes for monastics that he conducted at Ponampet, with the Night Classes conducted by Swami Yatishwaranandaji in Bangalore Ashrama, he said, “You see, I speak so much. But, Yatishwaranandaji spoke very little. And he used to tell us, ‘Sri Maharaj used to speak less than me.’ Now imagine! Swami Yatishwaranandaji would only deal with people having great spiritual sensitivity.”
- Swami Purushottamanandaji once told us, “He was very liberal with the things that monastic members would require. During that period, most of our Ashramas were quite poor and frugal habits were therefore institutionalized. I have heard that Bangalore Ashrama too was no exception. But under him, Bangalore Ashrama prospered in every way. Not that there was luxury or opulence. But there was sufficient resource and enough for everyone. He would often say, ‘Just as you must avoid the love of luxury, similarly you must avoid causing inconvenience to yourself!’ He used to highly appreciate if someone had such a sense of proportion.”
- Once while describing something in the afternoon Mundaka Upanishad Class in Ponampet, Purushottamanandaji said, “Swami Yatishwaranandaji used to always live in an exalted mood. I saw him when he was already an old man, nearing 70. Yet, his face had a glow; his facial skin had a reddish hue, always fresh.”
- “I have often felt that Swami Yatishwaranandaji didn’t get the right kind of workers, the ones that could clearly understand him. Else, he could have achieved so much more for this world.”
- “You know, he used to remove his shirt when inside his room. But whenever he had to enter the adjacent visitor’s room, even to meet a monastic member or a very close devotee like Kitti Master, he would invariably wear his shirt and drape his chuddar around himself. I never saw him outside his room without his shirt & chuddar. He would insist that every monastic member would wear his chuddar whenever he was to appear in public.”
- Once we asked Swami Purushottamanandaji, “Swamiji, when Yatishwaranandaji said that you would be an asset to the Order, do you think he had foreseen all this that you have done now?” When we asked him this [sometime in 1998], Purushottamanandaji was already a power to reckon with in the Karnataka State. He had resuscitated the dying Ponampet Ashrama and hordes of brahmacharins were joining the Ponampet Ashrama and this unprecedented joining had already created a sensation in the entire Order. When we asked him this, he very calmly replied, “Well...I am not very sure, you see. He might have had. He was a very deep person. It was difficult to understand the depth of his vision. Yes. He might have foreseen. Again, all this that you see here, you are attributing to me personally. But I don’t have much to do with all this. These things are happening. I am not bringing these people here. They come on their own. So...I don’t know if he actually foresaw things with such details. But then, he was a marvel. That’s for sure.”

- “He was so meticulous in everything he did. Even till the very end, if he had to deliver a public address, he would systematically write out detailed notes and then speak in public. I have heard from Shastranandaji & Prabuddhanandaji [both of whom were his Secretaries] that he never went unprepared for any public address! That is why you see so many of his notes in his archives here [in Bangalore Ashrama].”
- “When I was in TC, Rev Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj attained Mahasamadhi. Most Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj was elected as the next President. But his health broke down and he refused to accept the role of President. He was brought to Belur Math for better medical treatment. The day he was to arrive, I went to his room and arranged things the way he wanted them around him. Then he arrived. I did not go to meet him thinking he would be tired after the journey & meeting all the monks, Brahmacharins & doctors. At night, Swami Samjnanandaji, who was his Secretary then, sent for me, asking me why, being a Brahmacharin from his Center and his initiated disciple, I had not met him. So I went to his room and saw him. He had a beatific smile on his face. I felt like a calf feels when it goes to its mother. His face was flushed, glowing, bright as a fresh fruit. I did pranams and went back. That was the last time I saw him.”
- “He gave lot of importance to using the local language Kannada with respect to Ramakrishna – Vivekananda literature. I remember there was a rush to learn and sing Bengali Bhajans in the Bangalore Ashrama in the early days of my joining. Once he heard Tadrupanandaji singing a very nice Bengali song of Ram Prasad in the Prayer Hall. After the session ended, he strongly objected. He said, ‘Only Kannada devotional songs must be sung here.’ He got the Gospel of Ramakrishna translated into Kannada by Kuvempu & a team of other great poets and litterateurs. It is due to his initiative that Guru Maharaj’s message has penetrated Karnataka’s society so deeply.”
- “He lived in Europe & America for many years. So his lifestyle was a bit different compared to most of us here. He would always wear pressed clothes, use a gold-plated walking stick, wear polished shoes and carry a pocket watch. Unlike Rev Swami Vireshwaranandaji Maharaj who had only three sets of clothes with him, he would have a full wardrobe. But none of these ever diminished his exalted spiritual stature! That amazed me. In fact, he himself would often say, ‘Do not imitate me. If you imitate me, you will be ruined!’”
- “One evening, he wanted Prabuddhanandaji [he was called Raghunandan Maharaj] for some correspondence work. He saw that Prabuddhanandaji was doing his Japa. I was nearby. He said, ‘Raghunandan is a struggling soul.’ Another day, he was analyzing the way his monastic members worked in the Ashrama. At that time, there were many titans in the Bangalore Ashrama. All of us thought Swami Shastranandaji’s name would come up as the best worker, for he was an all-rounder and marvelously efficient. But what was our surprise when he finally said, ‘It is Raghunandan alone who really works here!’ You see, actually Prabuddhanandaji was a very silent worker. No one ever knew when he would complete his allotted duties. He was always a laid-back sort of a person. But Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj made this public remark!”

- “He would look at the *Vidyarthi Mandiram* and say often, ‘Look at that! What an eye-sore it is!’”
- “He had started the *Vivekananda Balaka Sangha* when I had joined the Bangalore Ashrama. The boys were all generally the refuse of the local Gavipuram area, all of them very naughty. They would always play and create a lot of noise. At that time, there was no *Sabhangana*. That was the playground. I was able to realize that Yatishwaranandaji’s vision for the Balaka Sangha was something else and it was taking shape in a totally different way. After working as the Bhandari for over a year, I was made Shastranandaji’s assistant in looking after the *Balaka Sangha*. Slowly, I started experimenting and was able to curtail the play hours. Yatishwaranandaji appreciated it very much. Again & again he said, ‘Raamchandro has a sense of proportion.’ When the boys would climb up and come down the stairs beside his room, they would make a thumping noise. This was quite disturbing to him. I have often noticed him softly humming to himself the song ‘*Dosh karo noi go maa*’, under such circumstances!”
- “I have heard that Yatishwaranandaji has had to face lot of jealousies from those around him in his life. I have heard that when he was a newcomer in America, he had gone to one of our established Centers. He was exploring the possibility of starting a new Center in a neighboring city. The Head of the Center where he stayed, one of his own brother-disciples, simply couldn’t digest the fact that Yatishwaranandaji could be more popular with the devotees than himself. One fine day, he directly told him to leave the Center, alleging that Yatishwaranandaji was ‘stealing’ his devotees from him! This particular brother-monk made Swami Yatishwaranandaji weep! Such is the mean-mindedness you find in this world.”
- Once we asked Purushottamanandaji about the famous excuse that Yatishwaranandaji had given for not accepting the post of President of the Order. [He had said that Swami Brahmananda had taken back all the powers from him & hence he would not accept the President-ship of the Order!] In reply, Purushottamanandaji said, “To tell you the truth, I do not understand it. He knew he was old. He perhaps even knew that his end was very near. In fact he did not survive more than six months thereafter. This could be the reason. Now, who would understand him if he said these most common, but very true & practical things? So he said the same things in those words, that Swami Brahmananda had taken back his powers. You see, he must have felt that then the authorities would perhaps not disturb him with the office of the President, leaving him free to cope with his geriatric ailments. May be, this was the actual thing. May be. But then, I really don’t know.”
- “One day, as usual I took his lunch to his room. He sat down at his table. As I was serving him the items one by one, the hot Sāmbhar cup suddenly slipped from my hands and the entire content emptied itself on his body! I was frozen with fear & shame! I stood there petrified. He didn’t say a single word. He simply got up, changed his dress and came back to the table once again and started eating his lunch!”

- “When Swami Yatishwaranandaji was in the Hospital in Calcutta, there were attendants round the clock with him. I have heard that Samjnanandaji one day informed this to Yatishwaranandaji. He then smiled and said, ‘Well, you may try your best, but when I leave this body, there will be no one around me.’ And that is exactly how it happened. Even though there was some attendant always around him, on the fateful day, for a trivial reason, the attendant had gone out for just a few minutes and when he came back, he had attained Mahasamadhi!”
- “I stayed with Swami Yatishwaranandaji for 4 years before going to TC. Then 2 years I spent in TC. He used to visit Belur Math on & off during those 2 years. Thus I spent a total of 6 years with him. Never was he wont to give any spiritual instruction or message to us. He simply lived a great life. A night class was held every Monday night for about half an hour during which some reading was done and there it ended. Absolutely no discussions. There used to be some who used to ask him to speak about his spiritual achievements. At such times, he used to scratch his chin and peer through his soft sweet eyes for about 15 to 20 minutes and then time would be up and all would disperse. Then there used to be his weekly public lectures. All on spiritual topics. But it was meant mainly for the lay devotees. Since they used to sit on the floor, Brahmacharins and young monks never used to go and share the floor and listen to the lectures. Of course, they were all recorded on tape, but those tapes were never replayed to us inmates. Then again, there used to be regular meetings of inmates where topics of various hues were discussed. But then nothing of the spiritual ministrations in words was given. Even after prolonged stay with him, people remained what they were. This I now find by hindsight. Many novices left. Troublesome inmates stayed as troublesome as ever. Lazy fellows stayed the same. And so on. So, now I understand one thing, even as I understood then. Each takes and absorbs the Guru’s words according to his own *svabhava & samskara*. Period. End of case.” [From Night Class on 12th June 1999]
- “He was so thorough-going in everything. A small piece of cloth for wiping dry his shaving blade too had a definite place in his table-drawer!”
- “He used to refer to a book on jokes & anecdotes to liven up his public lectures. He could be very humorous at times. I remember, once for some days, one of his foreign initiated disciples, Mr Brown used to stay in the Ashrama. He would wear a hat. While taking Mr Brown to the dining hall, Yatishwaranandaji would invariably say, ‘Well, Mr. Brown, where is your crown? We must go to the dining hall.’”
- “I vividly remember one particular incident. It was late afternoon. Everyone had already finished their lunch and I had wound up the kitchen, getting ready to go to my room for a little rest. A Bengali couple came to meet Swami Yatishwaranandaji. I took them to him. He met them. He said they must be fed since they had come from a long distance. I took them to the dining hall. When I was getting the plates & other things ready, I saw Maharaj himself come to the dining hall. He put his seat right in front of the couple and sat down. I served them food. As they were eating, Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj distinctly said, ‘Ah! Lakshmi & Narayana are eating here today.’ I was wonder struck by this utterance! This is what is called ‘Purity of vision’.” [As recorded in a Night Class in Ponampet.]

- It was the year 1961. A year back I had joined the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore, as a Brahmacharin. Most Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj was the President of the Ashrama. He was my Guru. This background is necessary to set the incident I am going to narrate now.

One day, afternoon, around 1.30 pm. It is needless to mention that we had all finished our lunch by then. By that time, a couple arrived at the Ashrama. I recall they were a Bengali couple. They were initiated devotees of Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj. So, I duly informed him of their arrival. When he came out of his room and spoke to them, he learnt that they hadn't had their lunch yet. Swamiji asked me if any food was still left in the kitchen. I said "Yes". I was able to readily answer in the affirmative because I was the Bhandari in the Ashrama then. [Bhandari means the inmate who looks after the cooking & serving in the Ashrama.] I led to guests to the dining hall. I laid their plates and served them the dishes. Revered Swamiji too had come along. He too sat on the floor in front of them and was speaking to them. It was summer. The dining hall used to have innumerable house-flies during summer. Revered Swamiji asked me to fetch him a hand fan. I did. He started fanning the couple with his own hands. While driving away the flies, once in a while, he would fan the couple too, since it was quite hot. I said, "Swamiji, kindly give me the fan. I will fan them." But he didn't give it to me. He himself went on fanning them. They finished their lunch. After speaking to him for some more time, the couple left, blessed by their Guru.

By this time, my mind was slowly going into turmoil. I couldn't help but think in this way: 'This is such a great monk. Moreover he is a Guru who initiates aspirants into the spiritual path. Why did he sit in front of that couple and fan them while they had lunch? Why did he have to drive away the flies himself? What could this mean?' This question started tormenting me. Since I had grown up in a traditional household of South India, this doubt along with some other associated questions arose in my mind. But I still didn't have the courage to openly ask them to him. But, there was in fact no need for me to ask them, after all! Revered Swamiji himself made a statement at that juncture. He merely uttered, 'Veritable *Lakshmi & Narayana!*' That was it. Not one more word came out of his mouth. Isn't that enough? What more can words convey?

It's been over 40 years since these words fell out of Revered Swamiji's mouth. But, their impact has grown to gigantic proportions in my mind now, and is still growing! That couple was not just a man & woman! Not even a husband and wife, as the cultured people say! Veritable God & Goddess! Wasn't this the paradigm of the ancient Rishis?

What a pure vision, indeed!

[From 'Pavitrare', a kannada booklet written by Swami Purushottamananda].

- "There was a Brahmachari in the Ashrama. He must have stayed for some months. One fine day, he went up to Swami Yatishwaranandaji and told him, 'Swamiji, my idea has changed. I am afraid I must leave this Ashrama now.' The thing is – he had some very rigid ideologies. While reading Swami Vivekananda's works, he came across some of Swamiji's new ideas and couldn't reconcile himself to them. Now, what interested me was that when he said this, I saw Yatishwaranandaji didn't make any effort to convince him. He simply blessed him and let him go! There was no discussion or argument or anything of the kind. It was a most smooth incident

and I was impressed by what I saw. His entire demeanor was loudly saying, as it were, ‘If my life has not made any impact on you, my words won’t. Hence I would reason with your decision.’”

- “Regarding another new Brahmacharin, one day Swami Yatishwaranandaji said that he would have to live in the society in order to realize the actual value of the rigors of monastic life. He was actually a hyper-critic. He would have a strong negative comment about everything related to the Ashrama & the inmates. Those of us who heard this utterance from Revered Swamiji’s mouth were taken aback! Things that such persons say actually become real! Many years later, we witnessed the strange turn of events. This inmate decided to leave the Order and started living outside. I was in touch with him for a long time after that. I clearly observed that gradually he did realize that he was very wrong in his outlook regarding life.”
- “He was very fond of the song ‘*Natha, Tumi sarvasva amaar...*’ I have often heard him softly hum it to himself.”
- “He was a thorough gentleman even in his smallest actions. I used to observe him burp after his food. He would take great care to see that there would be no sound at all! And it was only me & him in the room, most of those times!”
- “He like *Sāmbhar*. He used to pronounce it as ‘*Huli*’. Since Bengali doesn’t have the harsh ‘li’ sound, the way he used to pronounce it, seemed to sound like the Kannada word for tiger!”
- “He was very prompt in his correspondence by letters. He had innumerable initiated disciples all over the world. Many of them constantly wrote letters to him seeking spiritual advice & consolation. And he wouldn’t keep those replies pending. His high-tuned sensitivity to human problems made him respond almost immediately. Swami Prabuddhanandaji assisted him for many years in this work.”
- “It would be wrong to say that he was extravagant. Sometimes I hear that being said about him. I have seen him keep a shaving blade that he had used, very safely & carefully in a small box. He would explain that even inanimate things like that had life in them and would rejuvenate themselves in time. After many months, he would again use them!”
- “He visited Sringeri. I have heard that he was in ecstasy when he saw the Mother Sharada there. When I joined the Ashrama, he used to eat in his own room, most of the days. In front of the table where he sat for food, there were two photos. One of Sringeri Sharada and the other of Holy Mother. His sight would be fixed on these two photos as he quietly took his food.”
- “He used to work very late into the night, sometimes even up to 2.00 am or 3.00 am! He had a devoted secretary who used to assist him in correspondence till the wee hours of morning. Yatishwaranandaji would wake up around 6.00 am.”
- “Swami Yatishwaranandaji was a very, very deep personality. I am afraid there is none like him now in our Order. Head and heart were equally developed in him. Such a balanced person, such a

kind man, such a deep, oceanic person, I have never seen anywhere. I wish to talk about him, but when I start to think about him, all my talk stops. My voice becomes faltering, my eyes get filled with tears and my mind goes to my head. Such was Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj!”

Part - II

- Swami Purushottamanandaji was getting ready to go to TC. He was already one year late. One day Swami Yatishwaranandaji asked him if he needed anything to take with him to TC. Purushottamanandaji [who was then Br. Ramachandra] asked for a big-red-bordered *Melkote* dhoti [which was easily available in Bangalore, but very rare in Bengal. *Melkote* dhotis are made of pure cotton and the fabric is heavy. The dhotis generally available in Bengal are all of very thin fabric and have very small borders.] Swami Yatishwaranandaji very lovingly said, “Look here my boy, you must try to blend in with the place you live in. Such dhotis are a luxury in Bengal. It won’t look good if you wear them in TC. After TC, you may use them again when you come back here.”
- “When I was taking leave of him for going to TC, he said to me ‘Be deeply rooted in Sri Ramakrishna.’”
- “One topic that he was always passionate about was *Brahmacharya*. I remember the last time I went to his room, the day before I left for TC. As usual, I arranged his food on his table and was waiting for him to enter the room. There was a big book lying open on the table. I sneaked a look. It was some kind of textbook on human physiology and it was opened at a page which had a medical diagram depicting the different parts of the male reproductive system. He was studying that, it appeared.”
- “Quite often I had heard him exhort, ‘Householders! Do you think they have blood in their veins? No. it is only a red liquid, water with red color. Only a Brahmacharin has blood in his veins. Always remember that real blood has the nourishing elements of Veerya in it!’”
- “Practicing *Brahmacharya* is a really tough job. Infinite care, infinite patience is required. Everything matters and nothing can be brushed aside as trivial. Once I had prepared a very tasty item and Swami Yatishwaranandaji appreciated it a lot. Since he liked it, I offered him a second helping. My goodness! The way he thundered! I still remember the words, ‘What do you know about food!’”
- “During the night class, every once in a while, he would ask us ‘What is your contribution to this Ashrama?’ He gave utmost importance to harmonious living. He would often remark, ‘Why is it that monks are unable to live harmoniously in this community called Ashrama?’ He would bring up this question again & again.”
- “Once, one of the monastic members was bed-ridden with some kind of sickness. After a few days, Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj went to his room and I was with him. He said, in measured tone, ‘Look here, get well soon. Use your will power and get well soon. Use your power of prayer and get well soon. Don’t you know? It is a luxury for a monk to fall ill.’”
- “Another of his favorite statements that always got to me was, ‘Work hard. Never worry that work will kill you. If you work yourself to death, we shall build a monument for you!’”

- “Yet another very popular saying of his was ‘Manifest divine qualities.’” I think it was a saying of Swami Vivekananda that he was very fond of using very often. He would also often say, ‘First of all learn to be a gentleman. Later on you may learn to be a spiritual person. You can’t bypass the 1st stage and go directly to the 2nd stage from where you are now!’”
- “One particular phrase he would use to express his utter disapproval about a person was ‘Sentimental fool!’”
- “During a Night Class, he once made a statement that struck me. He said, ‘When you face a conflict between man and money, go for the man. Forget money. Even if you lose some money, keep the man happy.’”
- “Swami Yatishwaranandaji used to live always on a very high spiritual plane. Yet there was no dearth of personal and inter-personal problems in Bangalore Ashrama. He therefore once said, ‘None of these problems can be solved on the lower plane. It has to be taken up to the higher planes and solved.’ I heard this and meditated on this. Every single inter-personal problem is caused by our own *kama, krodha, lobha, moha, dhamba, darpa, mada, matsara, ahamkara, swartha, raga & dvesha*. If you really have a spiritual ideal, you will be able to progressively chastise and sublimate these. Even National problems fall into this analysis. Hierarchy reduces our ego greatly. Honesty & sincerity – being true to our word – this is at the basis of harmonious living.” [From Night Class on 26th Nov 1998]
- “Swami Yatishwaranandaji always stressed on ‘What exactly do you want?’ Why do you do *japa, dhyana, seva, karmayoga*? What is the motive? Why have you become a Brahmacharin? If that motive is not clear and pure, someday or the other, even 10 years hence, you will leave this path and go some other way. If your *Sadhana* cannot go on smoothly, that could also indicate that your *sankalpa* is not pure. *Ihamuthraphalabhogaviraga!* Study Sri Ramakrishna’s *Sadhana* and observe this purity of motive and conviction in him. Many take to this life out of an attraction for the glory of a Sannyasi’s life, not out of wanting God. Such men cannot proceed far. While doing *Sadhana*, by the power of *Sadhana* itself, great attractions will come before the mind. Then your *sankalpa* is tested to its very foundation. If your *sankalpa* was impure, not wholehearted, then, immediately the mind will form a new conviction and a new path will be taken. Gone will be your spiritual life. Success in spiritual life is only and only by *Sat-sankalpa*. *Sadhana* does not and cannot procure success for you. *Sadhana* can of course purify your *sankalpa*, stage by stage. So, go within; find out how pure your *sankalpa* is – what exactly do you want?” [From Night Class on 7th Jan 1999]
- “Some devotees used to ask Swami Yatishwaranandaji that since God is also but a mental concept isn’t it futile to think of Him? He used to say, ‘Imagination about the Real leads you to the Real.’” [From Night Class on 11th June 1999]

- “Swami Yatishwaranandaji used to often say, ‘Put on more weight.’ In the sense, be healthy, get into shape and be in good shape. He himself followed it all. Till the end he was regular in his timings, balanced in his food and balanced in his health. This doesn’t mean you’ve got to stuff yourself with food. Once I was serving him food. He said that a particular dish was made really well. So I tried to serve him more. He thundered on me, ‘What do you know about food!’ So, be balanced in your food. So too with sleep. It is a great responsibility to maintain good health. It is a major trouble falling sick. The fool falls sick and starts cursing every fellow that doesn’t come to check on him. Take good care of your health. Swami Yatishwaranandaji used to say, ‘To fall ill is a luxury.’” [From Night Class on 26th June 1999]
- “Swami Yatishwaranandaji used to say, ‘In order to get two square meals a day, you will have to work 8 hours outside.’”
- “Some more of his favorite usages were: ‘People who have very little body consciousness seldom fall ill.’ Whenever he saw somebody with cold he would shout ‘Kill it! Kill it!’ ‘Be merciless to yourself; be very kind to others.’ He would often ask, ‘Do you take regular exercises?’ Even as an old man he took regular exercises. His regularity was phenomenal. I have heard that he would take his exercises at the appointed hour even on a train that he would be travelling in!”
- “I remember one night, after the routine reading, Swami Yatishwaranandaji started speaking and he spoke for a long time. Among other things, he said, ‘A scientist after years of deep research and toil comes up with something which he offers to society. He has thus made his contribution to society. We also ought to ask ourselves often ‘What have I to offer for the good of many, for the welfare of many?’ Of course, you should first gain something before you can offer to society.’ Do you know? He used to say that modern day scientists are also rishis! That was new to me.”
- “One day speaking on Rabindranath Tagore’s poems & soul-stirring songs, he once said that it was indeed a result of Tagore’s awakened Kundalini Shakti. But without the strong base of austerities, that roused power would sink down to deplorable levels, wrecking havoc in the person, which perhaps explains the hordes of children that he sired. I was later able to understand the personality of Kuvempu too through this.”
- “He would insist that every monastic member should read the Dale Carnegie book ‘How to win friends & influence people’.”
- “There was once a discussion in the Night Class regarding which direction to face while meditating. Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj was listening to all the arguments put forth by the inmates. At last he quietly remarked, ‘As for myself, I just sit on my bed and start Japa, sometimes facing this side, sometimes the other. Direction, etc are non-essentials.’”
- “I remember yet another Night Class discussion. This was regarding *Akama* & *Nishkama* prayer – asking God for just *Bhakti* & *Mukti*, or asking God for anything as long as they are meant for *Sadhana* [e.g. good health for the sake of *Sadhana*]. As usual, he listened quietly to all the arguments and finally said, ‘As for me, whatever I want, I ask.’”

- “When I went to TC, I learnt Bengali and wrote a letter to Yatishwaranandaji in Bengali. He wrote back in English! I got the message. My Bengali was too rudimentary and needed a lot of improvement. So I applied myself to learning Bengali with great earnest. After a couple of months, I again wrote in Bengali. This time, he too replied in Bengali!”

Part - III

- “Being in charge of the kitchen and stores was a special blessing for me. In Bangalore Ashrama cooked food is offered to Sri Ramakrishna. The usual noon offering consists of cooked rice in a brass plate, and curry, vegetables, and rice pudding in brass bowls. Small quantities of salt and sugar were offered in two small bowls, for Sri Ramakrishna to use if necessary. The evening offering at 8 p.m. consists of semolina milk pudding and luchis (fried bread). These offerings are prepared in the kitchen. Though the cook prepared these items, I had to ensure quality of the offering and see that traditional rules of cleanliness were scrupulously observed. I had to wash the offering plate and bowls and wipe them clean, arrange food in them, and carry the offering to the shrine, which the Pujari (worshipper) monastic offered to Sri Ramakrishna. I had also to cut two or three kinds of fruits, arrange them neatly on a small plate, and include them in the offering. This daily service to the Lord was a great blessing to me. I had also the blessing of serving food to my guru. Every day I carried to his room his breakfast, lunch and dinner. On one of the walls in his room hung pictures of Goddess Sarada of Sringeri and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. As he partook his food, Revered Swamiji now and then would look at those forms of the Divine Mother. This scene is forever etched in my heart. I could serve him for about four years. I remember an incident that took place on Swami Brahmanandaji’s birthday. There was no special celebration that day, but Revered Swamiji appeared to be in a divine mood because it was his beloved guru’s birthday. He had invited for lunch a number of his disciples. He told me that there could be some eighty of them. Accordingly, with the help of the cook and some volunteers, I organized everything. The lunch went smoothly, and Revered Swamiji was very pleased. I had my food in the third batch, after everyone had been fed. After this I went to my room for some rest, but rest was out of the question, since I could not even lie in my bed: my hands, my back, my entire body hurt very badly. The pain subsided a little when it was time for evening prayer. As usual, I carried Swamiji’s dinner to his room. He said, “Remember Sri Ramakrishna when you work. Then work will not appear dry.” Thinking of my aching limbs, I said, “Swamiji, I understand what you say, but it is very difficult.” Immediately he got up, brought the holy sandals of his guru from a cupboard and blessed me by touching my head with them two or three times. This act of love—indeed, the whole scene—is forever imprinted in my heart. It is a source of strength for me even today. I was in charge of the kitchen for just one year. I am deeply satisfied that I could serve my monastic brothers. During this short period, I had several opportunities to do the cooking too. I did this with devotion and joy. The monastic brothers were appreciative of my cooking. My fatigue disappeared when I knew that they enjoyed their meal. All these experiences made my first year in the Ashrama very memorable.” [From email sent by Sri Sudarshan. Swami Purushottamanandaji recounted this in a public lecture during Golden Jubilee of VBS].
- “It was Swami Brahmanandaji’s Jayanti one year. I was then a new Brahmacharin in Bangalore Ashrama. Brahmanandaji’s Jayanti was not a big affair in those days. There was not even a *homa*. But Brahmanandaji was Yatishwaranandaji’s Guru. And he loved his Guru greatly. So he used to inform some devotees and there would be a lecture and some special Bhajans. I was then the *Bhandari*. The kitchen was very small. There was only one cook and myself to handle all the kitchen works and at that time there were no volunteers. Yatishwaranandaji had a highly dignified and impressive personality and moreover, apart from Bengali & English, he could not speak

Kannada at all. So, not many volunteers would come forth to work in the Ashrama. And then there was a Swamiji in charge of the *Balaka Sangha*. Because of his crooked dealings, all boys would distance themselves from the Ashrama. So I had to take care of all the cooking for that day. Food was prepared for many people that day. My health, then also, was not that good. I was very lean and skinny. And when the whole program was over, my whole body was aching very badly. There used to be a room which was meant for the guests into which I went and laid myself down for some afternoon rest. It must have been 2.30 or 3 pm. Even today, after 40 years, I can clearly recall the shooting back ache I had as a result of all that cooking, serving, cleaning the floor and vessels, etc. I tried sleeping in this way and then in that way, but the pain was persistent and I had but half an hour's broken sleep. Later that night, Yatishwaranandaji finished his dinner and returned to his room. After my dinner, I too went to his room. I had to make my pranams to him on account of Brahmanandaji Jayanti and in any case, I had to keep his washed clothes in his room. I entered his room. He was kindness incarnate. He had been all day observing me, it seems. He had clearly seen that I had set aside my own personal comfort and had literally slogged myself to the limits so that Brahmanandaji's Jayanti could be a grand affair. I had shown so much concern for his Guru and he was super-sensitive towards such fine feelings. And he recognized this feeling behind my work. So, as I entered his room, he saw me and in all kindness, told me, 'Keep remembering the Lord in the midst of your work.' I was dead tired. Totally exhausted. So, I couldn't control myself. I blurted out, 'That is not possible, Swamiji.' When I made this irreverent statement, he graciously read the feelings behind my words and he melted down in kindness. He took me behind the mosquito-curtained bed and opened his cupboard and took out the carefully preserved cloth slippers of his Guru Swami Brahmananda. He then placed them on my head and blessed me. Unfortunately, when he took me behind the bed, there was a knock on the door. It was Swami Adidevanandaji. Yatishwaranandaji asked him not to open the door and hastened to bless me. It is this blessing that has sustained me till date. It may all seem to be very, very small, but you see, the whole thing was done at such a psychological time that it entered deep into my *jiva* itself and slowly, over the years, it blossomed out."

- We never found Swami Purushottamanandaji refer to his Guru as Yatishwaranandaji or Swami Yatishwaranandaji. He would invariably say 'Most Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj' [*Parama Pujya Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharajaru*]. Sometimes, even if he had to use his name many times in a sentence, we found him use this full name. You will find this often in his recorded public lectures that are on sale now.
- Swami Purushottamanandaji once said, "One day as usual I was carrying his food to his room. He & Swami Shastranandaji were discussing about a rat that was running loose in his room. I arranged the plate and dishes on his table and he walked in. I told him, 'Swamiji, why don't we use a *'bone'* to catch the rat?' You see, I didn't know much English and he didn't know Kannada at all. [In Kannada, the common rat trap is called '*rat bone*']. The moment he heard that, he called out loudly 'Shastrananda, come here! Look at what Raamchandro is telling!' Then Shastranandaji came, heard everything & explained it to him. Both of them burst out laughing. I turned beet-red with embarrassment. Finally, a '*rat-bone*' was used to catch the rat."

- In his living room in Ponampet, Swami Purushottamanandaji had only two photographs. One was that of Holy Mother. It was a very clear, sepia photo. It was near the door of his room. The other was that of his Guru. It was on a wooden plank, fixed on the wall in between the window sill & the door, right next to his writing table. Both were sepia. The Holy Mother's photo was larger than Yatishwaranandaji's photo. There was a vermilion mark on Yatishwaranandaji's forehead. An attendant Brahmachari would place fresh flowers every day before these two photos. We once asked Swami Purushottamanandaji why he had only these two photos & not any others in his room. He said, "I do not need these photos. These have been placed by others in my room. I did not object. Do you know - whenever I need to see Guru Maharaj or Holy Mother or Swami Yatishwaranandaji, I just need to look inside and I see them."
- We once asked Swami Purushottamanandaji how often he would speak to Yatishwaranandaji. He said, "You see, I was the oldest inmate to join Bangalore Ashrama under him. I was over 28 when I joined. Moreover, I was just matric pass. Others in the Ashrama like Bhajananandaji, Sureshanandaji, Harshanandaji, Shastranandaji, Prabuddhanandaji and others were all highly qualified persons. They knew English very well. I couldn't speak English. And strangely, he never learned Kannada even though he stayed for so long in Bangalore. So I never got to speak to him much. But I had the great good fortune to serve him food in his room a couple of times every day for some time. I was the Bhandari, you see. And I would also do his clothes regularly since I was his initiated disciple."
- "Some months after I started staying in Bangalore Ashrama, I was asked to apply for formally joining the Order. My application was sent. I knew only that much, that I had applied and that my application had been sent to Belur Math. I didn't bother about those things anymore. I was blissfully engrossed in the duties allotted to me in the Ashrama Kitchen, which included preparing Food Offering for Guru Maharaj, serving food to my Guru & the monastic members and to the innumerable devotees that thronged the Bangalore Ashrama, mainly because Yatishwaranandaji was their initiation Guru. Later on, after some years I learnt from Prabuddhanandaji that my application had been rejected perfunctorily by Revered Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj, who was the General Secretary then, on grounds of my over-age. Then Yatishwaranandaji had again sent my application back with the specific note to GS Maharaj, addressing him as Dada, saying, 'Ramachandra will be an asset to the Order. So, take him.' And based on that note, I was accepted as a probationer Brahmacharin! I will tell you something very confidential. Sometimes, the way events turn out, I feel so disgusted, so fed up that I decide to leave everything & go away some place, where I can be all by myself. In my life, quite a few times I have decided like that – to leave this Order and stay alone somewhere. Do you know what holds me back? It is always Most Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj! You see, this Order did not accept me when my application was sent. A person of his stature recommended me saying, 'Accept this boy; he will be an asset to this Order.' Only out of loyalty to him, I stay back."

- Sitting on the porch beside the Visitor's Room in Ponampet, one day, Swami Purushottamanandaji told us, "Do you know how I got my initiation? I didn't know anything about such a thing as *mantra diksha*. I used to practice strict *Brahmacharya* since my boyhood. A relative in my village observed my life and directed me to Bangalore Ramakrishna Ashrama, asking me to meet the Revered Swamiji there. She had obtained initiation from him. So I went to Bangalore Ashrama and met Most Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj. I saw him and told him that I would like to become a monk and lead a life of *Naishtika Brahmacharya*. Swami Shastranandaji was his Secretary and because of our language problem, Shastranandaji was the interpreter. Through Shastranandaji, he asked me some questions about my history and my academic qualification. Then he & Shastranandaji spoke between themselves in English for some time and then Shastranandaji told me that I would not be able to stay in the Ashrama since I was not sufficiently qualified. I was dejected, no doubt, but then I had expected it since I was unknown to anybody in the Ashrama and was not educated. Anyway, I offered pranams to Swami Yatishwaranandaji, walked out and sat on the stone plinth of the present bookstall. I liked the serene ambience of the Ashrama, so much like the forest hermitages of yore. Some 30 to 45 minutes must have passed like this. I was lost in a reverie. Then suddenly, I felt waves after waves of pure Bliss wash me away, all of a sudden, all by itself, without any effort on my part! I gave in to the experience. After sometime, Shastranandaji came looking for me. He said Swamiji had called me back to meet him. When I went back to meet him, he was still sitting on a huge chair on the portico outside his room. He said something to Shastranandaji & I was informed that I could stay! Although he himself knew absolutely no Kannada, I slowly learnt that all the other monastic members were local boys. I slowly blended in. After some days, Prabuddhanandaji told me to ask him to initiate me. I agreed that I would do so after the evening Arati. He then told me to ask him to initiate me into the Sri Ramakrishna *Mantra*. So when I finally asked him to kindly initiate me, he himself asked me if I had any preferences about the deity. As instructed by Prabuddhanandaji, I said I would prefer the Sri Ramakrishna *Mantra*. Oh! He was so pleased that his face broke into a heavenly smile, as if in divine ecstasy. He uttered 'Ramakrishna! Ramakrishna!' and he patted me thrice on my back saying, 'You are very wise.' Of course, at that point of time, I was just going with the flow of events and didn't understand anything much. Later on, I was able to grasp the significance of all that!"
- "It was *Guru Purnima*. In those days, there was no *homa* or special program on *Guru Purnima* day in Bangalore Ashrama. That system was started by Swami Prabuddhanandaji. During Swami Yatishwaranandaji's time, there used to be an extra half an hour special Bhajans, that too after evening Arati. I was leading the Bhajans as usual. After the Arati I started singing "*Bhava sagara tarana hey...*" Generally, he would sit at the far end of the Prayer Hall during the Arati time. After "*Sarva mangala mangalye...*" he would walk up front, go near the Shrine, offer pranams to Guru Maharaj and go back, some days outside, some other days staying inside the Hall. Yatishwaranandaji came into the prayer hall, with his walking stick. He walked up to the Shrine, did his pranams to Sri Ramakrishna and while coming back, he patted me on my head. He was very pleased that I had chosen a very good song. Like all great men, Yatishwaranandaji too had tremendous love for his Guru. His Guru *Bhakti* was very, very intense. He was very pleased that I had chosen the right song for *Guru Purnima*. And it is that blessing which has sustained me all through my life."

- Purushottamanandaji had a personal copy of ‘The Eternal Companion’ with Swami Yatishwaranandaji’s signature on the lower half of the 1st page. Purushottamanandaji’s own name – Br. Ramachandra – was on top of the same page. We had seen this book with him in his room in Ponampet and Hanuman Nagar Ashrama in Belgaum. We are not sure if he had it by the time he shifted to the present Belgaum Ashrama.
- Purushottamanandaji had an original Lalique crystal Swamiji’s idol with him in Bangalore and also in Ponampet. We are not sure if he had it with him when he shifted to Belgaum. This was one of the original set that Josephine Macleod had got prepared. We had seen another of the same with Swami Vagishanandaji in his Mumbai Ashrama room.
- Also, a very beautiful kitchen knife that Yatishwaranandaji used was in Purushottamanandaji’s room in Bangalore Ashrama. We had seen it when we were members of the Balaka Sangha. The knife had a sad end. One day, while decorating the Balaka Sangha Shrine, some of us used that knife which was kept on a cloth on Purushottamanandaji writing table. We didn’t know it’s great value. While cutting the stalks of the Rajanigandha flowers for a flower vase, the blade broke! Purushottamanandaji later saw it. It was only then that we learnt about its history. He didn’t scold us. He just said, ‘Fools are around me! It’s my fault that I didn’t keep it away from you.’ There it ended.
- “One night, he had finished his dinner. I would wait on him while he had dinner. That night after his dinner, as I was collecting the plate, glass, cups & dishes, he got up, closed the door of his room and beckoned me near the wooden Almirah beyond his cot. He opened it and took out the carefully preserved cloth sandals of Swami Brahmananda. He was saying something very fast in English. I couldn’t understand. I only understood that he was calling me near him. Right at that moment, there was rapid knocking on the door. He was visibly disturbed. He asked who it was and Swami Adidevanandaji answered from outside. He asked Adidevanandaji to wait for some time. Then he very slowly placed the sandals on my head and kept it there for some time. Then he kept those sandals back in the Almirah. I got up, took the dishes and left.”
- Swami Purushottamanandaji once said during a Night Class in some context, “I have never once publicly proclaimed that Swami Yatishwaranandaji was my Guru. I have always been afraid that people may look at me and measure him, which would be very wrong. Whatever I got from him, I have imbibed into myself and made myself very strong.”
- “A couple of months after I had joined the Ashrama, lust suddenly flared up inside me. I was horrified. I had tried to practice absolute continence from my childhood and now, after I had formally renounced the world, I was facing such a horrible predicament! I ran to Swami Yatishwaranandaji’s room. He was lying on his bed. I poured out my heart to him about the predicament I was in. He heard me out patiently. Then he said in his grave voice, ‘Let it all come out’. You see, ever since I had joined the Ashrama, I had never approached him for anything. It seemed as if he was saying, ‘You have never come to me for any help. Isn’t it about time? So,

don't hold back. Come on; tell me all your problems. I will help you overcome them.' That was the feeling I got."

- "I was allowed to render personal service to Swami Yatishwaranandaji right after I joined the Ashrama. Although I was meeting him many times every day, there would not be much talk between us. And he was not wont to give any advice until it was absolutely necessary. He was keenly observing me; that was sure. About a year later, as my sadhana intensified, I started encountering problems. One day I diffidently placed my personal problems before him. He stopped whatever he was doing, turned 90^o to look intently at me, and solved my problem with utmost attention & care. Unless the disciple is ready, Guru imparts nothing."
- "Standing near Holy Mother's rock, Swami Yatishwaranandaji was once discussing something with a monastic brother. Probably he was discussing about constructing a path way or something of that sort. I happened to be there at time with him. I was a new Brahmacharin, full of idealism & vigor, and since I was fresh from the village, I lacked some sophistication. So, I energetically juttred in with a suggestion. I suggested that we could carve out a cave in the rock, which would be ideal for meditation! Swami Yatishwaranandaji turned towards me and said in a deep tone, with obvious mirth in his voice, 'Hmm....good, good.'"
- "I was initiated by Most Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj on 22nd December 1959. Brahmacharins & junior monks in the Ashrama advised me to ask him for the Sri Ramakrishna Mantra. Then I joined the Order on 26th January 1960. At that time, I did not know that Sri Ramakrishna was God. It was because of the persuasion of other Brahmacharins that I asked for the Ramakrishna Mantra."
- "A few days after I joined the Bangalore Ashrama, my mother arrived with some relatives to take me back home. She was weeping bitterly. She wanted me to at least accompany her home and then if I wished I could return to the Ashrama. That was the deal she finally placed before me. I went to Yatishwaranandaji and told him the whole situation. He silently heard and then very gravely said, 'You may go.' He was man of very few words. In fact he would often say, 'Never use more words than absolutely necessary to convey the meaning.' So, he merely said, 'You may go'. Somehow I was not satisfied with the way the situation was turning out. I didn't want to go back home with my mother, for I was attached to her and would get trapped there. I knew that. So I lingered on in Swamiji's presence for some more time. No words were exchanged. He was very keenly observing me. I was wracked by a dilemma. After a long time, I said, 'But...Swamiji...is it right for me to go home to drop my mother after I have decided to renounce?' When I said this, he smiled and said, 'Then, you may not go'. That satisfied me. I went back to my mother who was waiting outside and sent her back home."
- "It was some 6 years since I had joined the Ashrama. I had returned after finishing my TC. For more than 5 years I had been leading the Bhajans. I know all those songs by heart. Now Swami Prabuddhanandaji wanted to get these songs printed in book form. That was the genesis of *Jyoti & Kirtana Sangraha*. He called me and gave me the proof for correction of printing errors and other technical errors. And again, in record time I took the corrected proof to Swami

Prabuddhanandaji for returning. He coolly told me to show it once to Swami Tadrupanandaji also. I was sort of hurt. I thought within myself ‘Of what use is it? I know all those songs. The moment I see it, I will have recognized the mistakes. Now the proof is error-free.’ Still, I took it to Tadrupanandaji in the *Mandiram*. He saw me and asked it to be kept on the table and return the next day by which time he would have seen it. The next day when I went, I was utterly shocked, beyond description. Loads and loads of errors Tadrupanandaji pointed out to me. My ego got crushed to such an extent that till today it has not raised its head. So, there is no telling how many types of stupid complexes one may develop on the road of one’s growth. But I have learnt from all I met. I cannot tell that Most Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj alone is my Guru. Still, it was Yatishwaranandaji’s Guru Shakti that is working within me and giving me the strength to digest all such shocks, and grow into the personality which I now have.”

- “You all know Dr. ... He was an inmate in Bangalore Ashrama. He lived in the blessed presence of Most Revered Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj for many years. Yet one day he went up to Swamiji and said that he was unable to overcome his feeling for his widowed mother. Do you know what Swamiji told him then? He said, ‘Go back home and live with her. It is better to stay with your mother & think of Sri Ramakrishna than to live with Sri Ramakrishna and spend your time thinking of your mother!’”
- “You know, one thing about Swami Yatishwaranandaji that entered very deep into me – you could say, it became a part of my very vitals, so to speak – was his intense passion to spread the message of Guru Maharaj, Holy Mother and Swamiji to all people, everywhere. I sort of resonated to that when I heard him express his deep, passionate desire for doing so. Of course, I confined myself to the State of Karnataka, but I have visited every town, district and taluk in this State. I have carried the message to innumerable schools and colleges all over this State. It has become like a fever with me. And this fire, I got from him.”
- “I used to render personal service to Swami Yatishwaranandaji. One of the things included massaging his stomach daily. Once I inadvertently remarked to someone in the Ashrama that Yatishwaranandaji’s belly was very tender. The remark reached his ears. The next day, when I went to his room for massaging his stomach, he said, ‘So you think I have a soft belly? Touch & see now.’ I was totally taken by surprise to find that his belly was now rock solid! He had done *kumbhaka!*”
- “After cremation, I had collected Swami Yatishwaranandaji’s *asthi* and had started worshipping it privately. Bhav Maharaj, our TC Principal, came to know of it and gently persuaded me to offer it into the Ganga saying, ‘If you keep a *Brahmajnani*’s relics with you, you must offer complete ritualistic worship to it, including *Bhog*, without fail. This is not possible for monks of our Order, who follow Karma Yoga.’ So, I confined the *asthi* to the Ganga.”
