

## **Their Power and Their Love**

### **Swami Vijayananda**

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*Swami Vijayananda joined the movement in 1919 and was privileged to meet several of the first disciples of Sir Ramakrishna. After doing pioneering work in Argentina from 1932 he passed away aged 75 on 1st September 1973. The following are some of his reminiscences.*

### **Swami Brahmananda**

One day at Belur Math, while Maharaj (as Swami Brahmananda was known) was out for his walk, I happened to pass by with a copy of the Gita, containing Shankara's commentary, in my possession. 'What is it you have in your hand, my boy?' he asked, seeing me. I told him. 'Bhagavad Gita', he said. 'Well, let me tell you one thing: your first and second readings of the Gita should be with the help of a dictionary. Know the text first. You see, these great commentators like Shankara, Nimbarka and others, had very powerful minds. Their thoughts have great drawing power. Be sure, therefore, that you understand what the text says. Do you think that when Shri Krishna spoke the Gita to Arjuna he had Shankara or anybody in mind?'

Maharaj could scold terribly and could also be very caustic. At the Math he once gave me an assignment. There were two plants which were growing, one on either side of the entrance to a building. Taking me there he said, 'Look; you see these two plants: they need to be watered every morning at six o'clock and every evening at six. Can you do just this one thing for me?' 'Of course, Maharaj,' I replied. And I did pour buckets of water on them at the stated times. It happened, one afternoon, that I had to go out to Calcutta on business, and neglected to arrange with anyone to do this watering. When six o'clock arrived, my duty came to mind, but I thought to myself, 'I will water them when I return; that will not be too late.' It was about nine o'clock when I got back to the Math and was able to water them. But Maharaj tackled me the very next day. 'Did those plants have water last night at the proper time?' he asked. I told him. Then he began to scold and castigate me. 'Could you not have arranged with someone? You are faithless. The disciple who is disobedient does not love his guru'. And on he went in this way, until I was nearly weeping and had to say, 'Stop, stop, Maharaj!' Then he at once became more tender and remarked, 'You see, the plants get thirsty at just certain times. Six o'clock was the time to water these - not nine or any other time.' The following incident took place in Varanasi in 1919. It was Christmas Eve, and the occasion was being celebrated as usual in the Math, with the worship of Christ. Maharaj, Swami Shivananda (Mahapurush Maharaj), Swami Shuddhananda and others were present, including myself. Swami Brahmananda was deep in meditation. Swami Shuddhananda was reading from the Bible, and another swami singing Girish Ghosh's song of the divine nativity, with Mahapurush Maharaj accompanying on the tabla. Near the end of the song, but before it was over, everything suddenly stopped. All eyes were on Maharaj, who sat before the shrine. I noticed that his head was swaying a little,

forward and back. All was silence for some time. Then the great Swamis prostrated and got up.

'Did you see Him, Tarak-da?' asked Maharaj.

'Yes, Maharaj, I saw Him come,' Swami Shivananda replied.

'Yes,' said Maharaj, 'He came with a blue tunic and talked with me. Did you see Him, Sudhir?'

'No,' said Swami Shuddhananda, a bit wistfully, 'but I felt such a peace of mind as I have never felt in my life.'

Late that evening we saw, walking outside, three Roman Catholic Fathers. 'Go, my child,' Maharaj commanded, 'and ask the Fathers if they can stay and join us in the sacred food that we have offered to Christ.' I delivered the message, but angrily I was told, 'What right have you to put our Christ with everybody there?' 'I do not know about these things,' I replied, 'but this is the message sent by the President of our Order. Will you not come and partake of the offered food?' 'No,' was the terse response and the Fathers went away. When I returned and told Maharaj, all he said was, 'Unfortunate people!'

At one time I suffered very much from a peculiar kind of pain near the heart. It would just double me up with a sort of twisting sensation in the chest. It was unbearable. Sometimes Swami Omkarananda would have to hold me tight and squeeze till I felt some relief. On this occasion it was so bad that Maharaj had me carried inside to a bed, and the doctor called. But the doctors were unable to find any physical ailment. The heart was sound, the lungs, and so on it went. Then Maharaj came and sat down on the side of my bed. 'My boy,' he said, 'are you afraid to die? But you will not die. No, you will not die.' Then he told me that the trouble was caused by emotion and that they (the Master's disciples) had had it too, but far worse; 'but in your case,' he said, 'it happens to have taken this physical form.'

I was once witness of a heavenly scene. In Maharaj's time, during a celebration of the Master's Birthday at Belur Math, I had been appointed to guard the passage to Maharaj's room. This sort of precaution was necessary because of the presence of a large crowd of persons of all sorts. All of a sudden there came up to me an old lady, well dressed, and attended by nine other women who followed behind. There was something about her bearing and manner which made me sit up and take notice. She spoke to me softly, saying, 'Well, my child, will you just tell your Rakhai that Annapurnama is here? Just tell him that.' Something made me feel I ought simply to stand aside; I said, 'Go, Mother, go...' but before she could get to the steps of Maharaj's room, he came rushing out to meet her. 'Have you got it? Have you got it? Have you got it?' he was crying. Impatiently he waited for her to lift the corner of her cloth and from it take some ordinary brown sugar candy made with coconut. Maharaj just began to eat it avidly. Then up came Swami Shivananda, seemingly from nowhere, and said, 'Don't eat it alone, please, Maharaj; let me have some too.' When they had finished it, the old lady went away, and the Swamis went back to their rooms.

Only the next day did I learn what it was all about. Maharaj said to me, 'You saw that

yesterday?'

'Yes, Maharaj,' I answered.

'Why did you not ask what it means?'

'Well, Maharaj, I do not concern myself; I was content just to see.'

Then he told me that Annapurnama had been a devotee of Shri Ramakrishna, and she had now had a vision. The Master appeared to her and told her to make this sweet and take it to Maharaj. He showed the same vision to Maharaj, so he knew that she was coming and why. 'But how did Swami Shivananda come to know about it?' I asked. 'Well, Tarakda is a very great soul, perhaps he also had the vision,' was Maharaji's reply.

### **Swami Shivananda**

The monks used to gather in Mahapurush Maharaj's room and soak up the blissful atmosphere of his presence. One day when we had been doing this for some time, and he had given the signal for dismissal, I happened to be the last to file out. He stopped me, saying, 'Where are you going?'

'Well, Maharaj, you gave the sign for everyone to go.' The Swami glared at me. 'Are you everyone?' Then he said, 'The Lord, in there (pointing to the temple) ... I am His dog. And you are my dog.' Then he went on to tell me how the dog behaves at his master's feet, about his faithfulness and so on. 'We are all the Master's dogs. And one day he will come, and he will look into your eyes - and take away everything.' It was Swami Shivananda that I knew first. But he had always told us that for initiation we must go to Swami Brahmananda. Before that took place, however, the time for taking the vows of brahmacharya was approaching fast. Swami Shivananda wrote to Maharaj, 'There are several young men here, waiting to be given their vows by you. When are you coming back to the Math?' Maharaj had written in reply, 'How long will you keep your hand closed? Why do you not give it to them yourself?' Shortly thereafter I happened to be meditating in the outer part of the Math shrine-room. Then I noticed that Mahapurush Maharaj was there, in the inner enclosure; and what should he be doing, of all things, but cleaning a portion of the floor with a large handkerchief. As he cleaned, tears fell in torrents; they were running all down his face, his clothes, and onto the floor, as he tried to wipe them up. Then he got up like a drunken man and made ready to leave. I must have stirred, making a noise, for he called out gruffly, 'Who is there?' I answered him. 'Oh, all right. Just stay, stay,' said he. But as he started to walk out of the hall, I saw him rocking drunkenly, and, fearing he might fall, went up to him and walked along his side. He laughed a little, and said, 'Oh no, it is not so much as that...'

I followed him to his room, and by that time Mahapurush Maharaj was saying 'Yes...

yes.' (He had this habit of saying 'yes... yes'). Now he said, 'Yes, I will do it.' Then he flung himself in his chair, and said to me, 'All right. You will have it. You will have what you want. You will all have what you want.' I could not think of anything I wanted, so I asked, 'What will I have?' 'Your brahmacharya and all that.' My eyes opened wide and I ran out to the other young monks to tell them the news. Later, after meeting Swami Brahmananda, I approached him for my spiritual initiation. I was told, 'No, you go to Mahapurush for it. You love him much more than you do me.' 'Look, Maharaji,' I said, 'I do not carry a pair of scales around in my pocket. I cannot say whom I love more than whom. Nor do I care to know. I say to you only this one thing: if you do not initiate me, I go without initiation in this life - that is all.' So Maharaj did it. That is how, only after getting brahmacharya from Mahapurush Maharaj, did I get my initiation from Maharaj. By the time I was ready for sannyasa, that too came from Swami Shivananda, because Maharaj had gone.

After Mahapurush Maharaj had become the President of the Order, I was sent out on some relief work of the Mission. On the day I returned, I brought back with me several of the newer devotees who had become interested through this relief work. They were accompanying me to the President's room when we met Khoka Maharaj (Swami Subhodhananda), who told me, 'There is fire and brimstone waiting for you up there.' I wondered what he meant, but went on upstairs. Swami Shivananda immediately began upbraiding me for failing to date a cheque I had signed in connection with my financial administration. I turned to the persons who were with me and told them this was a private matter, and as it did not concern them, they might as well wait outside. Unfortunately they failed to take the hint, and sat down. For about twenty-five minutes Mahapurush Maharaj went on abusing me vehemently. I had never been scolded in such a manner before. Those Swamis knew words that are not to be found in any dictionary, and terms of reproach which I had never heard.

Finally I was dismissed. Shortly I went to Swami Vivekananda's room, which was then a shrine, of course, and did japa for the remainder of the day - no food, no break. Towards evening I heard the attendant of Mahapurush Maharaj calling my name in various places. But I did not answer. The attendant reported back to the Swami that I was not to be found. Swami Shivananda replied that he knew I was in Swamiji's room, and I was to be brought from there. The attendant, finding me, asked why I had not answered him; I said I hadn't felt like it, and even now did not want to face Mahapurush Maharaj. But I went. At once the Swami asked me for the Hindi equivalent of a Bengali word. I gave it.

'Are you sure?' he asked.

'Well, almost sure.'

'Hup! Almost sure!' He glared. Pointing to a huge book he said: 'Look it up in that dictionary.' I had been standing at a safe distance; now I had to approach and look up the word. I verified it. Swami Shivananda told me, 'Now put the dictionary on the floor.'

Wonderingly I obeyed. 'Sit on the dictionary and close your eyes.' Then Mahapurush popped into my mouth a huge rasagolla<sup>1</sup>; whereupon I burst into tears. He told me, 'You have not eaten all day; and I have not eaten all day... You see, my boy, the undated cheque was merely an excuse. I saw, materializing, a great disaster for you, and I had to head it off. By my doing what I had to do today, it will be prevented. Now go and eat a meal.'

I was overcome to think that the Swami had not eaten also. Later I came to realize what that disaster was: Vanity. 'I am a great worker etc.' - this could have taken possession of me.

### **Swami Adbhutananda**

While living in Varanasi I used to go to see Lata Maharaj every day for an hour and a half. He would be lying there, in the room where he stayed, and, sitting up a little, would ask, 'Who has come? Ah, Pashupati.' Then he might say, 'Would you like to drink a little hemp?'

'No, thank you, Maharaj.' He would go on coaxing.

'I will fix it up, with almond flavour, sugar, and so on, and you can take just a little.' But I always politely refused. Finally he said, 'Well! You are not afraid of me?'

'No, Maharaj.'

'Why are you not afraid of me?'

'I am not afraid of you because I love you,' I replied.

He never fully swallowed the idea of monks living and working at the Varanasi Sevashrama. He called it the 'ospital'. 'Why did Naren start that?... But Naren did start it, so it is all right. But why did he start it?' In this way he would muse. To a friend of mine Lata Maharaj once said. 'Who sent you to that 'ospital?' On being told that Swami Brahmananda had, he said, 'Oh, Raja sent you... then it is all right.' One day he asked me, 'Do you have bath in the Ganga every day, and then go to the temple of Vishwanath?'

'No, Maharaj,' I answered; 'this is the rainy season and the Ganga is very dirty in the rainy season.' And Vishwanath? 'Well, Vishwanath to me is just a black stone.' 'Don't say that!' he cried, jumping up in vehement protest. Then eyeing me appraisingly he said, 'Well, you are strong, you are bold. You are simple. May Vishwanath be gracious to you.' So I went to the temple. Then some days later when I was sitting by the river on an embankment, with a friend, I saw... something... just walking there. Vishwanath was gracious to me.

Swami Adbhutananda's death was wonderful. We arrived an hour too late, but there was still about his face the greatest beauty. Not beauty in the ordinary physical sense - Latu Maharaj was not beautiful - but some radiance, some kind of glory was evident there. Previously I had seen the hairs of the arm standing on end; but before that day I had never seen the beard and moustache standing out horizontal from the face in ecstasy. One of his devotees was sitting there just weeping and weeping. Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda), who was present, said to him, 'Hush up. Stop weeping.' But as soon as he had said this, Hari Maharaj himself began weeping just unbelievably. How he wept! 'Ladu (so he pronounced it), why have you left us?' And he went on weeping. I, who had thought him the very image of jnana, was astounded to see him so moved. I knew I could not cry like that... Then they carried the body to Manikarnika Ghat. Once Latu Maharaj asked me, 'Don't you know who I am? Do you know who Raja (Swami Brahmananda) is? Do you know who we all are?'

'No, Maharaj, I do not know and I do not want to know.'

'What! You are an upstart!' he shouted.

'No, I don't want to know,' I repeated; 'I have a yardstick just this long (showing a short length), and you want me to measure what you are, and what they are?'

### **Swami Turiyananda**

I visited Hari Maharaj often, and always found him sitting bolt upright, with the greatest dignity. He could always see everything in me, just like looking in a glass, and he said so. So I thought that before going to him. I would do 10,000 repetitions of the Lord's name, just to 'coat the mind' against that experience. Then I went to him and prostrated. Raising me up he said, 'No, it is not enough; I still see right through you!' And both of us laughed.

### **Swami Abhedananda**

Kali Maharaj treated me like his own son, I felt. It was he who told me how to throw my voice while lecturing, and never to become hoarse. 'Look at the persons in the very last row,' he said, 'and speak to them. Then everyone will hear. It is very simple.' Next to Swamiji, he was the greatest lecturer, the fiercest.

Once the Swami's attendant had taken the silver service (which Kali Maharaj used, after returning from America) for washing in the Ganges. When it was brought back, Swami

Abhedananda found that one silver spoon was missing. I heard him muttering aloud in his room, 'These rascals! They are unfit for sannyasa. I will take away their gerrua... kick them all out... etc.' But I did not know what it was all about. Later I heard that he had accused the attendant of stealing, and that all of them around him had suffered from his resentment and indictment. I took it upon myself to become spokesman for them, and went to the Swami's room. After prostrating, I took the bull by the horns and said, 'Maharaj, I have a charge to make against you. I am sorry, but as your own son, I speak it: that you have made a great mistake.'

'What, Pashupati! You don't say such a thing!'

'Yes, Maharaj, I say it. Just hear me. Every day I come; I write down in the ledger so much spent for this, so much for that, and you never question it. Here you have given me charge of the Math expenses and accounts, and have put so much trust in me. Not a word of doubt have you expressed. I take and leave the money, and you don't so much as look at it. And now, for a spoon, you are accusing us all. Perhaps he was careless, or has kept it somewhere forgetfully; the Ganga itself may give it back. Should you not wait to see?' Swami Abhedananda drew himself up to his full height and said shortly, 'You are right, Pashupati. I ask your pardon. Go now and tell them all, I ask them to forgive me.' The spoon was subsequently discovered on the river beach at low tide, in the sand of the ghat.

Once Swami Abhedananda had given a lecture in Rangoon on why Vedanta accepts Christ but not Christianity. After the lecture, two Fathers, Christian priests, came to the place where he was staying and demanded of him, 'What right have you to preach about our Christ?' Quick as a flash, and with his immense dignity, the Swami replied, 'The right of having had direct vision of Him, through His grace.' Then I saw him turn on his heel and walk up the stairs, pausing to ask an attendant to give the Fathers some good tea and toast.

## **Holy Mother**

The attendant of the Holy Mother once told me, 'Mother was the real Mother; she always stood at the back. As she was really the head of the Order after Thakur (Shri Ramakrishna), she showed by her life that she was the Mother of the monastic organization and all the rest'.

## **Swami Brahmananda**

When Maharaj came to stay at Belur Math, many of the boys used to meditate in the verandah outside his room. Some were blessed enough to be allowed to meditate inside, with Maharaj. I had just joined the Order and knew nothing about meditation, and as I

had not been initiated, it was not even possible for me to do japa. But I remember noticing that at the Math everyone had a happy face. I observed that at the time of his meditation, Maharaj's body used to become stiff; however, he had the habit of licking his lips now and then.

One day while I was sitting with Maharaj and attempting to meditate with him, I suddenly wondered what would happen if, in that holy atmosphere, I were to let worldly thoughts occupy my mind. So great was the temptation that I immediately began to think of secular things. But I found that I could not continue doing so for long; a tremendous power stopped me. However, on leaving the room I determined to try again with greater strength. The next day my secular train of thought was allowed to continue for about 11½ minutes; then I was possessed by such a severe pain in my legs that I could not stand it and had to go out. When Maharaj came down for his morning walk he called me (from the very beginning, when we were alone, he would call me by an English name; I was, he used to say, a Westerner) and said, 'Look here, my child, if you want to try me, try me in private. But if the other swamis find out, they are so powerful that they will give you a terrific whack'.

One day while I was walking with Maharaj I asked him if he would initiate me. 'I already have', he replied. 'But in front of everybody else you just told me to repeat Thakur's name,' I said; 'This is not initiation'. Maharaj said very gently, 'You keep on, and when the right time comes I will call you'.

When I came back to Belur Math, after my stay in Varanasi, I approached Maharaj one morning and again asked him to initiate me. He, in his usual way, said, 'I will give you two mantras'. And he gave me the mantras whose ideals are Jesus Christ and Lord Buddha. I protested: 'But these are not my ideals.' Then Maharaj told me, 'You love Mahapurush (Swami Shivananda) more than you love me, so go and ask him to initiate you'. I replied, 'Maharaj, hear me well; I have chosen you as my guru. If you do not initiate me, then I shall die without being initiated'. Then, with tears in my eyes I hurriedly bowed to him, touched his feet and went downstairs. Two days later Swami Omkarananda came to me with the message from Maharaj that I was to leave all my work and go to him immediately. I was very nervous. I went to Maharaj, saluted him and stood waiting for his orders. Maharaj, the most beloved human being that I ever knew, told me in his poetic sweet way, 'My child, tomorrow is an auspicious day. With Thakur's grace I shall initiate you. Have a dip in the Ganges, wear fresh clothes and sit quietly before the meditation room. I shall call you when I am ready.' The next morning I was there with others who also were to be given the ceremony on that day. At about 7 a.m. Maharaj entered the meditation room like a king. He was followed by Swami Nirvedananda, who made ready the flowers etc. for Maharaj, and then came to me and told me to go in. As I did so I saw Maharaj sitting, trembling. He made three offerings at the feet of the picture of Shri Ramakrishna and asked me to do the same. Then he gave me my mantra, told me to repeat it several times before him and then asked me to salute him. As I did so he put both his hands on my head and told me to go and sit on the verandah outside and repeat my mantra. He told me especially not to get up until I was called. After an hour or so he called me to the verandah of his living room and asked me how I was feeling. I replied, 'This is the most



peculiar feeling that I have experienced in my life.' Then he said, 'Ask me anything, my boy, and I will tell you.' 'Maharaj,' I said, 'I am so full of joy that I have no more desires, at least at present. I do not know what to ask you.' He told me: 'Go deep down in your mind and ask yourself if there is any favour that you want from me.' Concentrating my mind, I found what I really needed. I told him, 'Maharaj, please bless me that I can love every human being.' He became very grave and said, 'You are asking for a very difficult thing. But with the blessings of the Master, who is Love Incarnate and who gave me his love, I bless you that before you die you will be able to love all human beings without any discrimination.' He told me this while standing up, and putting his hands on my head he silently blessed me. I almost fell down at his feet. Then he asked someone to bring some sweets and ordered me to eat them before him. When I had finished them he told me to go, and repeat my mantra for some time more.

For seven days consecutively, I, who was a fault-finding moralist and critic, lost the sense of evil, and to my great astonishment and joy found that I could see only goodness in everybody.

Every day Maharaj used to sit on the bench outside the temple at Belur and smoke his hubble-bubble. He used to take a few puffs only and then go into a super-conscious state. I noticed that when in this condition he altogether stopped breathing. After a time he would draw a deep breath and say, 'After all these years these boys still cannot properly make up a hubble-bubble'.

The great love the other disciples of Ramakrishna had for Maharaj and the way they served him cannot be explained, but only felt. An incident comes to my mind. It was in Varanasi. Maharaj and Swami Turiyananda were out walking. Although their physical differences were very great, they presented a striking pair. Maharaj was tall and walked very quickly, whereas Hari Maharaj (Turiyananda) was short and walked with a limp. He had almost to run, therefore, to keep up with Maharaj. While they were thus walking a ray of the sun came and touched Maharaj's face; at once Hari Maharaj held up his umbrella to shield Maharaj. The latter made some remark to which Hari Maharaj replied, 'To whom else should I do it?' Some time later, when Maharaj went to the bathroom, Hari Maharaj stood outside waiting with a water pot and towel, and when Maharaj came out he washed his hands for him.

### **Swami Turiyananda**

When I was at Varanasi in 1920 I would accompany Swami Turiyananda on his daily walk. I would come and greet him and he would say, 'How many times have you repeated (your mantra)?' I would tell him and then the walk would begin. We would go to the ghat and he would ask me to go down and get some Ganges water and sprinkle it over him. One day I saw two swamis of another order pass by. One of them said to the other, looking at Hari Maharaj, 'There is a brahmajnani'. I listened attentively for

anything more they might say, when I heard Hari Maharaj growl, 'Have you come to walk with me or are you going to hear more nonsense?'

The day came when we had to part. Weeping, I prostrated full-length before him. The Swami came near, put his hands on my head and said, 'May Thakur bless you and give you all that you desire'. I managed to choke out that I had no desire, save the desire to love all. 'This will be fulfilled in your very life', was his wonderful blessing. Although I had the worst of scoldings, all the disciples of Ramakrishna with whom I had contact, were so very kind. Many times I would be the news bearer; others, somewhat apprehensive of them, used to send the news through to me.

### **Swami Shivananda**

Once Mahapurush Maharaj told me, 'By the blessings of the Master, Swamiji and Maharaj attained perfection. The rest of us (meaning the monastic disciples) perfected the love he gave us before we were thirty-five years old. Hurry up, my boy. Before 40 one is full of energy. Use it for one purpose, to receive the grace of the Lord and so enjoy Divine Bliss!'

The moment of my departure for South America arrived. I went to Mahapurushji to receive his blessings. He was not at all well, having very high blood pressure. He looked outside at the stormy weather and said, 'Rain before starting: that is a good omen for you'. Looking then at me he remarked, 'You will not see me again. Do not weep. You will make many mistakes, but when you suffer you will always feel me by your side, at such moments of misery'. And I have always felt his presence. Always.

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