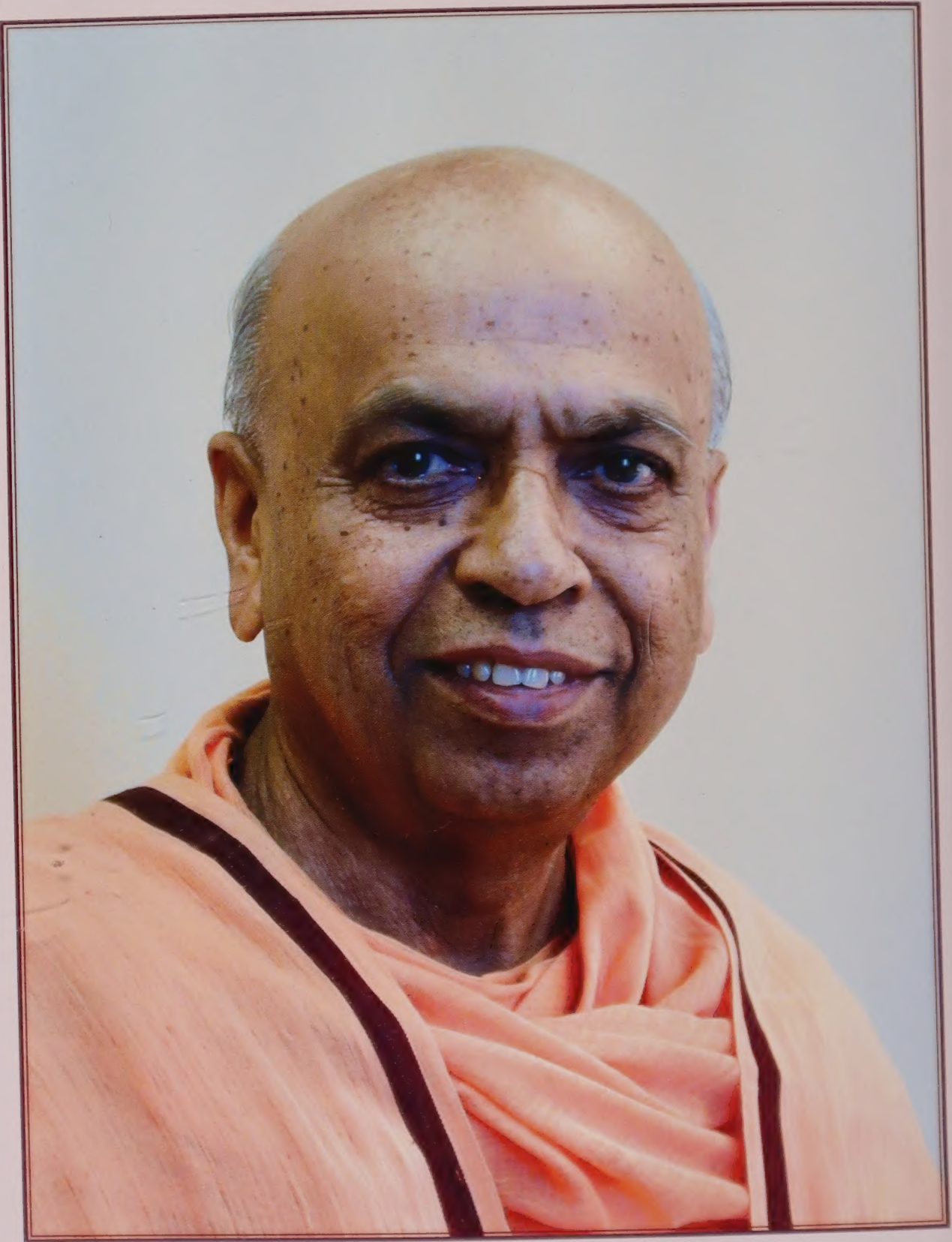


Swami Prabuddhananda: A Remembrance



1929 ~ 2014



Swami Prabuddhananda, San Francisco



*Salutations to Thee, the existence absolute,
the support of all the worlds.*

*Salutations to Thee, the intelligence absolute,
who dost appear as the universe.*

*Salutations to Thee, the one reality without a second,
the giver of salvation.*

*Salutations to Thee, the Brahman, the all-pervading, the absolute.
Thou art the only refuge, the only object of adoration,
the one cause of the universe.*

Thou dost manifest thyself in manifold forms.

Thou alone art the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe.

Thou art the highest, the immovable, the absolute.

*Thou art the dread of even the dreadful, the terror of the terrible,
the refuge of all beings, the purifier of all purifiers.*

Thou alone art the ruler of even the high-placed ones.

Thou art the supreme over the supreme, the protector of the protectors.

On Thee, the one alone, we meditate.

To Thee, the one alone, we offer our worship.

*To Thee, the one alone, who art the witness of the universe,
do we tender our salutations.*

*In Thee, the one alone, who art our sole support,
and the Self-existent Lord,
the vessel of safety in the ocean of existence,
do we seek refuge.*

— Mahanirvanatantra

(Swami's Opening Chant: Sunday Lectures)

SWAMI PRABUDDHANANDA

"The whole life of an aspirant after Truth is one of continuous spiritual endeavor—and not of doing japa and meditation for an hour or two at the appointed time and remaining absorbed in sordid worldly pursuits for the rest of the day and night. That never builds up spiritual life. Only when spirituality blossoms forth in every thought, action, and circumstance of life, when it is in the very marrow of one's being, as it were, then only can one be called truly spiritual. Work with your hands, talk to different people about work and business with your mouth, but keep the mind fixed on God, and know that this alone—this living in God—is the one thing for which one comes into this world, the one thing that makes life worthwhile."

— Swami Virajananda

Towards the Goal Supreme

The above ideas and words were of great importance to Swami Prabuddhananda: he lived his life by them, and he encouraged all who sought his guidance to abide by them.

ABOUT SWAMI

Swami Prabuddhananda was born in Bhadravati, in the Shimoga District, Karnataka State, India, on October 21, 1929. In his youth, he was highly influenced by the ideas and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and later by those of Swami Vivekananda.

All along a good student and very bright, in 1949 he came to Bangalore to further his college education and was accepted by the Sri Ramakrishna Vidyarthi Mandiram, a college students' hostel, run by the Ramakrishna Order's Bangalore Ashrama. In "What Vidyarthi Mandiram Means to Me," he wrote about this experience and how it led him to monastic life:

This was practically my first trip to Bangalore; it was as though I was going to a foreign city such as London or New York. Everything was strange and new. In that bewildering situation, Swami Ritatmanandaji and the small group of twenty students living in the hostel provided a welcome home. It took some time for me to get used to living with so many people in such close quarters, following a strict routine of prayer, having meals at regular times, taking part in games, etc. One special thing I noticed was how the students and the swami interacted in an informal way—teasing, joking, arguing. I had my own idea of what a swami was like: Swamis were aloof, creating a sense of awe in their presence. However, in the case of Swami Ritatmanandaji one could freely talk to him... He had a deep affection for students, though many

didn't recognize it. We students used to have a lot of fun together. Of course, there was a serious academic atmosphere too; quite a few students passed their examinations creditably. That lively student milieu was there in the Mandiram.

Swami Ritatmanandaji also took us to Swami Tyagishanandaji, the president of the Ashrama, who used to give a weekly class on religious subjects and also gave private interviews to students. You could ask him any question and he would reply candidly. He had a special interest in students. My admiration for the ideas and ideals that resulted from my contact with the swamis and the Ashrama gradually became serious... The life of renunciation and service started attracting me. The hostel way of living became more meaningful than college studies! About six months after I came to the Mandiram, I had almost decided to join the holy Order of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Ritatmanandaji and Swami Tyagishanandaji imperceptibly facilitated this wish. The result of all this was that I started staying in the Ashrama after a year. This was the first phase of my Mandiram life. Later, after finishing college, I formally joined the Order. My grateful salutations to the venerable swamis for making this happen.

In 1950 Swami Prabuddhananda was initiated into spiritual life by the president of the Order, Swami Virajananda; and the following year, 1951, he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree and officially joined the Order.

In 1949-51, Swami Tyagishananda was seriously ill with spinal tuberculosis and Swami Prabuddhananda had the privilege of nursing him for some time. Swami Tyagishananda passed away in August 1951, and Swami Yatiswarananda was appointed as the next president of the Bangalore Ashrama.

Recommended by Swami Yatiswarananda for brahmacharya (first monastic vows) in 1956, he became Brahmachari Indra Chaitanya. Four years later, in 1960, the seventh president of the Order, Swami Shankarananda, gave him sannyasa (final) vows and the name Swami Prabuddhananda which means the bliss of being awakened or enlightened.

These two highly respected monks, Swami Tyagishananda and Swami Yatiswarananda, both disciples of Swami Brahmananda, made lasting impressions on Swami Prabuddhananda and contributed enormously to his development as a monk, a spiritual teacher, and an administrator.

During swami's early years in the Ashrama, he served as assistant manager of the Vidyarthi Mandiram, where he had stayed as a college student. Later he was appointed as the manager.

In 1963, during Swami Vivekananda's centenary celebrations, Swami Prabuddhananda traveled throughout Karnataka State to lecture and help raise funds for a new Bangalore temple. A group of devotees often accompanied him to lead bhajans (devotional group singing) as well as to make books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda available. This three-pronged outreach program—spiritual talks, group devotional singing, and making Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature easily available—became one of his trademarks, then and later. An interesting incident occurred during one of swami's visits to a village as recounted by a senior swami:

During one such program in a village, there was only one temple and, as there was no road to take the car to the village, the vehicle was left on the road with the volunteer. At the end of the program, the village-head presented an envelope containing the collected amount. Revered Prabuddhanandaji received the envelope and added to it whatever amount he had with him and presented back the total amount with a remark: 'Your village has got only this dilapidated temple, please repair it so that the temple will not fall.'

In 1964 swami was appointed as the office manager of the Bangalore Ashrama, a position responsible for the administrative functioning of the Ashrama as a whole.

After Swami Yatiswarananda passed away in January 1966, Swami Prabuddhananda, then 36, became the president of the Bangalore Ashrama. He made a conscious effort to maintain the traditions and activities of the Ashrama as during Swami Yatiswarananda's time. He also made himself available to all, particularly to the younger generation. The first phase of the Vivekananda Centenary Memorial building, which had been initiated during Swami Yatiswarananda's time, was completed during his tenure in Bangalore.

In June 1970, Swami Prabuddhananda was transferred to San Francisco as assistant minister in preparation for taking charge of the Vedanta Society of Northern California in December 1970. Again, when he assumed leadership, he honored the established traditions and activities of the center. He also reached out to members and friends of the Society and met personally with each member in order to facilitate a smooth transition. Just as in Bangalore, he continued the practice of making himself easily accessible. For many, many years, his phone number was printed in the monthly bulletin, so that he was just a phone call away. He did not spare himself in any way and sought to serve all, monastics and nonmonastics alike.

Swami enriched the lives of innumerable spiritual seekers by his wisdom and deeply insightful, inspiring guidance, allowing each one to grow spiritually in their own

way. He was caring and compassionate and did all he could to help those who sought his aid, always referring them to the Lord, always advising them to rely on what is true and lasting.

The monastic ideal was very important to swami, and his life served as a model for monastics. He was fully engaged in his role as head of the monastery and convent and gave an appreciable amount of his time, thought, and energy to the monastics and their needs.

Highly circumspect and judicious in his speech, Swami Prabuddhananda was also a keen observer—not much missed his notice. Blessed with a prodigious memory, in a matter of seconds, he could locate a quotation, usually in *Swamiji's Complete Works*, when, during discussion, he wanted to illustrate his point. One quotation that he especially liked to use was from Swamiji's lecture "God in Everything"—"Give up the world which you have conjectured, because your conjecture was based upon a very partial experience, upon very poor reasoning, and upon your own weakness."

Along with his characteristic calm presence, Swami Prabuddhananda was also a master of understatement with a ready sense of humor and wit. He was known for his self-restraint and measured approach, his dignity and discretion, and, at all times, he was the consummate monk. Perhaps his life may be best summed up by the following words of Swami Vivekananda, which were dear to him, "He alone lives who lives for others."

Swami Prabuddhananda was especially devoted to Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, and the following passage from *The Mother as I Saw Her* was most meaningful to him:

The Mother taught her children to have strength of character, renunciation, forbearance, faith in God, steadfastness in their devotional practices, and complete dependence on the Lord under all circumstances. These, she maintained, were essential for the building up of their lives. Furthermore, there should not be any trace of excessive emotionalism, and every one of the Mother's children, like the Mother herself, should be gentle, quiet, serene, and calm.

Swami took these words of the Mother to heart, and he fashioned his life by them.

Seriously ill for his last three years, Swami Prabuddhananda, nevertheless, continued serving the Ideal and the devotees as well as directing the activities of the Society

till the very end. On Wednesday, July 2, 2014, he left this world in the same way he had lived his life—bestowing his blessings on everyone—and then with great composure, dignity, and peace, he slipped away.



*I adore the Lord, the supreme Self, the One,
the primordial seat of the universe,*

*The desireless and the formless, who is realized
through the divine mystic symbol Om,*

*From whom the universe comes into being,
by whom it is sustained, and into whom it dissolves.*

*I take refuge in him, the unborn, the eternal,
the cause of all causes, the light of all lights,
without beginning and end, the supreme purifier,
devoid of all duality.*

*Salutations to Thee, O All-pervading Being,
who appearest in the form of the universe.*

Salutations to Thee, who art of the form of knowledge and bliss.

*Salutations to Thee, who art attained through disciplines
and meditation.*

*Salutations to Thee, who art realized by the highest knowledge
revealed in the scriptures.*

— **Vedasarasivastotra**

(Swami's Opening Chant: Wednesday Lectures)

“**O**ur teachers expect a lot from us—especially Swamiji. He said in a talk to the monks that one moment you should go into deep meditation, and the next moment you should go and till the soil, and afterwards you should be able to explain the intricacies of the scriptures—make a deep study of them—and then after that you should go and sell the produce in the market. You should do all of them. So this is the ideal he places before us. We should do all...

Every day when we sit for our meditation and go into solitude—that is our Olema. That is our Kailas. That is our Vaikuntha. That is Sri Ramakrishna's room, or Jerusalem. They are all in your own heart, go there... Our scriptures and the masters all emphasize that whatever you do, whether you go into solitude, or you are active, or whether this yoga or that, or wherever you are in the world, what should come out of all of this is that we should feel closer to God—closer to God in your heart, closer to God who is in everyone... Are you feeling the presence of God? Is God becoming more and more real to you? Or, as the Bhagavatam puts it, has Divine Love awakened in you? See to that. Otherwise any one of these is not a hundred per cent successful. Solitude is not successful by itself, and karma yoga, service, and all of these things—social service and humanitarian service, work and worship—these are not successful by themselves. How about spiritual study? Same thing. Without feeling the presence of God, when doing all of these things, you will feel like you have just tired yourself, that's all. So this one common factor is given. See to that. It is that alone which can harmonize all. Otherwise, always there will be contradictions between active life and contemplative life, between one who has studied all the scriptures and one who has not studied the scriptures, or one who is a monastic and one who is not a monastic. All of these contradictions will be there. So, what is it which removes the contradictions? It is that common factor, the practice of the presence of God—that little book in which Brother Lawrence gives the solution, by which all mystics give the same solution. It is God consciousness. Active or not active, which practice or which yoga one does is immaterial. Are you feeling God conscious? Increasing our God consciousness—inside, outside, everywhere—let us try to do that."

—Extract: Annual Meeting Address, San Francisco, 1999

SWAMI'S WORDS TO LIVE BY • PROGRAMS AND SERVICES *Continued*

In this section, we present more of Swami Prabuddhananda's words as well as the services and programs he inspired and initiated during his forty-four years as head of the Society.

- In 1971-72, the Women's Retreat House at the Vedanta Society's retreat at Olema in Marin County was built and dedicated and became available to women retreatants of any spiritual path or tradition—a service that is much appreciated in the community.



May 22, 2014

Thank you for all you do to make the Women's Retreat House such an extraordinary blessing. I have come many times, and I'm always amazed that such a place as this exists. I don't know if you realize the enormity of your gift, or how it extends into the families, friends, and communities we retreatants return to.

I've come here carrying sorrow, grief, hope, joy, anger, all the emotions that living can generate. But sitting here in the silence, in this Spirit-permeated atmosphere, I'm reminded that beneath these emotions lies LOVE. This is what I carry home. This is the gift you give: God's Face to so many women. Bless you all.

A Retreatant

- In 1972, Shafter Manor, a large house dating back to the 1800s, adjoining the retreat property, was acquired and remodeled into the Men's Retreat House which also was made available to spiritual seekers of all traditions.



“Silence is not external.

Silence really means talking just enough

and reflecting on God.”

- In the early 1970s, Swami Prabuddhdhananda started a regular weekly schedule of spending certain days at the San Francisco monastery and the other days at the Olema monastery, where he oversaw the retreat work and met with monastics, both men and women, in that connection. In addition to holding a class for men at Olema, he also instituted a weekly informal meeting for women at the Women's Retreat House, which he held as long as his health permitted.

“What is the use of spiritual study and practice? It is for dispelling ignorance regarding the relationship between the individual and Brahman. Infinite love and bliss within has to be expressed in life. Deep within there is grief—that has to go. There is fear too... There is a lot of sadness inside. This sadness has to go. When the eternal relationship between the soul and God is realized, then the grief and sadness will go.”

- From his earliest years, swami heartily promoted building up a Vedanta-based music repertoire. He encouraged original music composition and also the tradition of regular group devotional singing.

- In 1973 the first Memorial Day retreat was held: a daylong program of meditation, talks, music, readings, and questions and answers. In 1977 the Memorial Day retreat was expanded into a three-day event held in a spacious tent adjacent to the Men's Retreat House. And in 1978, in order to include the local community, an annual open house, planned as an interfaith spiritual festival, was commenced on Memorial Day. In 1981 the retreat was further expanded to five days.

Swami was quietly proud of the devotees and how they were able to come together as a team and put on the Memorial Day program and other events year after year with such dedication and cheerfulness. At the 2009 Annual Meeting, he said, "I am very happy, and I can tell you privately that I am inwardly proud; I am very proud of all the work you all do at the celebrations—cooking, then serving, worship preparation, flower preparation, setting up chairs and ushering—intense activity... I'm very, very happy our teams are doing well."



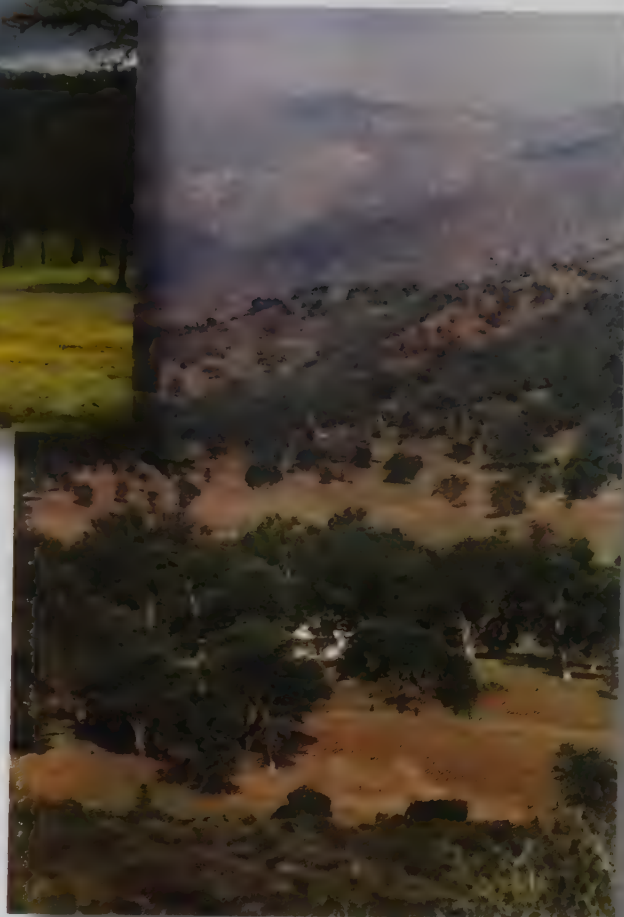
“We don’t need more rules—what we need is more love, more sincere practice.”

- In the 1970s, Swami Prabuddhananda reestablished the Sunday school; and since 1980 an annual Sunday school play has been enacted at the Memorial Day Retreat in Olema. Often swami would mention the significance of imbuing spiritual ideas into children through the powerful medium of drama and how those ideas would work on a subtle level in years to come.
- In July 1973, the first annual summer retreat was held over a three-day period at Olema; in 1984 it was extended to nine-days at Lake Tahoe. In January 1979, the tradition of holding a three-day winter retreat at Olema in conjunction with New Year's Day began, and in September a three-day retreat over the Labor Day weekend was added as well.

- In 1974 the Old Temple auditorium was repaired and some facilities in the building were modernized.
- In 1975, as part of the 75th anniversary of the Society, the first pilgrimage to the historic Shanti Ashrama took place; and in 1980 the meditation cabin was renovated and rededicated and annual pilgrimages to Shanti Ashrama commenced that year.



“Attitude is what counts, not the action itself. Even if there are imperfections in our actions, the Lord finds sweetness in the purity of our intentions.”



- Begun as a modest bookstall at the Old Temple and then in the New Temple foyer as well, a bookshop was established in the mid-1970s. Over the years, it has grown in size, as well as in holdings, and presently offers a comprehensive book collection on Eastern and Western religions and philosophies as well as many religious photographs and worship articles.
- In 1976 swami started a women's Sanskrit chant group which met with him weekly; the group continues to be active and chants at special programs.

- In 1977, at the invitation of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, the Society installed a large photograph of Swami Vivekananda (taken in San Francisco in 1900) in the vestibule of the church as well as a commemorative plaque at the podium where he spoke.



“Whatever is outside: possessions, company, etc., the equivalent is within—a far superior equivalent.”

- In 1979-80, a fruit orchard was designed and planted at the Olema retreat. Over the years, more trees have been added, and annually they provide several tons



of fruit for special events and retreats as well as for members and friends attending services at the temple and elsewhere. Swami Prabuddhananda wholeheartedly supported this project and had a keen interest in its success. He would say: “This is our offering to the devotees and through them to Sri Ramakrishna.”

- In the late 1970s, the Gift Book Project was initiated. From 1978-2000, complimentary books on Vedanta, Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda were donated to public and academic libraries throughout the U.S. as well as to some libraries in Canada.

“The cosmic scheme seems to contrive to discourage us. It makes it very difficult to continue our spiritual practice. Therefore, forbearance is very important; tapas is necessary. Maintaining seriousness in spiritual life till the end is very difficult—just maintain your enthusiasm till the end.”

- In 1992, the Vivekananda Bridge, at the entrance to the Olema retreat capable of handling a full highway-load, was constructed and dedicated, replacing the old, wooden bridge.



“Real harmony is only in God. But relative harmony comes as we relate to God more and more.”

- In 1995, an addition to the New Temple, doubling the square footage of the temple and adding much-needed facilities, was constructed and dedicated on January 1, 1996. It houses Swami Vivekananda Hall (a spacious multipurpose room), a flower room, a temple kitchen, a general-use kitchen, several offices, including a large main office, a waiting room, a women's lounge, a bindery, and a beautiful library on the top floor.



South view of Swami Vivekananda Centenary Hall.

- In 1995, in conjunction with the construction of the New Temple addition, the garden was completely reconfigured and professionally redesigned. It provides abundant flowers for the daily worship, altar vases as well as for other temple flower arrangements.



- Encouraged by Swami Prabuddhananda, Marie Louise Burke (Sister Gargi) wrote about the first permanent Vedanta work in San Francisco in *Swami Trigunatita: His Life and Times* which was published in 1997.
- In 1999, the first youth forum was held at Olema, and, since then, a three-day interfaith retreat for young people has become a yearly event. Also, earlier in the 1990s, an annual retreat for Sunday school students and alumni was initiated at Olema.
- In 2002, with the participation of several convent members, the first edition of *The Photographs of Swami Vivekananda* was published.
- In 2013-14, in commemoration of Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary, the Vivekananda Grove at Olema was greatly expanded to include a refurbished plaque with a pavilion, a beautiful, enclosed statue of Swamiji, new meditation benches, and other improvements; these enhancements were dedicated during the 2014 Labor Day Retreat. The Vivekananda Grove was originally a project honoring Swami Vivekananda's 100th birth anniversary in 1963.



“Live a moment-to-moment life. Every moment is important. Live like there is an emergency at every moment. Call it holy helplessness; it is not a negative but a positive—a strengthening helplessness. Pray! Prayer is all one can do. Give yourself over to the Divine at every step. ”

- In July 2014, an extensive renovation and restoration of the historic Old Temple, built in 1905, was begun. Even on the eve of his final hospitalization, Swami Prabuddhananda took steps to ensure that this project would be completed in a thorough and timely manner.



In all these ways, Swami Prabuddhananda fully carried on the spiritual traditions of his predecessors and, at the same time, inspired new directions for service and dedication as well.

Vedanta Society of Northern California Swamis in Charge: 1900-2014



Swami Vivekananda, San Francisco, 1900

- Swami Vivekananda
- Swami Turiyananda
- Swami Trigunatitananda
- Swami Prakashananda
- Swami Prabhavananda
- Swami Dayananda
- Swami Madhavananda
- Swami Vividishananda
- Swami Ashokananda
- Swami Shantaswarupananda
- Swami Prabuddhananda

“Self-sacrifice, unselfishness, Swamiji says, is God. If you are unselfish, that is divine. That is why, when we work together, unselfishness is the test. I don't get anything, but still I do it—I sacrifice myself. That is real renunciation, real self-sacrifice, when I give myself a little... Giving yourself is the thing. Sometimes in a nice way we keep ourselves to ourselves. That is why in all our spiritual activities—whether monastic, nonmonastic, anywhere—it is said that for something to be spiritually beneficial, it is not how much others are benefitted, that is not the thing, but how much have you given? How much unselfishness has come? Let us say that because of my being selfish others are also helped—that is of no use to you; spiritually it is of no use. You have done like in the scriptures where it says that the shepherd feeds the sheep very well and the sheep grow fatter and fatter, and the shepherd looks after them very well. Why? Afterwards he is going to eat them. So many times our unselfishness is like that. They say we can't cheat God; we can't cheat ourselves. Real unselfishness means we give of ourselves—whether in terms of my prestige, my money, physically, mentally, or my possessions. Of all these things what I can give most easily is my money, next probably my physical work. Giving our mind is very difficult for us—to wholeheartedly give one's mind and heart. It is said that God wants that—God wants your heart, your mind, yourself. It is not like: here, God, I give you this fruit, I offer this to you. God is very kind, he will accept it, but really what God wants is yourself, your mind, your heart, all of yourself. That is our dedication. In fact, in all of our spiritual practices—karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, raja yoga—what is needed is giving ourselves completely to God, a complete offering of ourselves. External things just become the media, that's all—really behind all that is the heart. There are so many stories in our religious books illustrating how God values most the heart of a person who has given something—the attitude and the heart, not the quantity of what that person gave. It's not the quantity but the quality of heart... So let us try to give ourselves to the Lord, to the Lord's service or service to God in human beings—everywhere giving of ourselves. Instead we carefully preserve ourselves, watch over ourselves: Here, you take this, I have two cars, I only need one car, you take this, it doesn't matter, or you can take the old car, God. We give all these donations to God but carefully keep ourselves to ourselves. That is human nature... So wherever we give of ourselves that becomes spiritual practice. That is complete dedication. The whole of the Gita is that, completely dedicate yourself, don't keep anything for yourself. Even small things don't keep—give all of yourself!”

—Extract: Annual Meeting Address, San Francisco, 2003

SELECTIONS FROM SWAMI'S ARTICLE: "YOGA IN DAILY LIFE"

At the outset an aspirant should be definite about what he or she is looking for. In order to lay an unshakeable foundation in spiritual life, it is indispensable to have a clear idea of the spiritual ideal, and to base this life on the higher realities experienced in the lives of the mystics. These realities are expressed in their teachings and also in other reliable scriptures rooted in eternal verities. Mature reasoning, reflection, and meditation on the ideas contained therein strengthen one's spiritual life. They stimulate the mind, remove doubts, and reinforce convictions. This reinforcement of beliefs cannot be emphasized enough. For a long time a firm conviction is one of the main inner supports for the seeker during times of disquietude.

A sound philosophy, accompanied by love for the Ideal, and one-pointed attention toward its realization facilitate progress along the spiritual path... In order to develop this devotion, the seeker needs an undivided, dispassionate mind endowed with a lively interest in spiritual realities. A vivid imagination amplifies his or her ability to relate these subtle realities to one's workaday life. Until one has at least a glimpse of the Truth, one's only reliable instruments are a steadfast understanding, the higher imagination, and trust in the words of those who have had spiritual experience. Through continual exercise of this creative faculty and re-association of ideas, one will discover that 'today's imagination becomes tomorrow's reality.'

The prerequisite of a steady understanding is the ability to distinguish fact from fancy. Often Mother Nature tries to hoodwink a spiritual seeker. Unless one stands firm and inquires into the nature of the world, one will be a victim of her tricks. This inquiry requires full use of all mental faculties. After diligently weighing the pros and cons and assessing properly all events one encounters, one should make precise decisions based on time, place, and circumstances... However, the natural inclination in most cases is to forge ahead when things are amiable and advantageous and to procrastinate or avoid when things are complicated or troublesome... Whether the occasion is agreeable or disagreeable one should pause briefly before acting. The formula is: pause, reflect, feel one's ground—and then proceed. In this way circumspection enables the seeker to recognize gradually that all phenomena have only temporary values. In order to escape Mother Nature's spell and reclaim one's lost heritage of innate freedom and bliss, one has to scrutinize carefully and develop a correct attitude toward the relative universe. Furthermore, based on this attitude one should designate the appropriateness of all pursuits, such as building up a career, and acquisition of knowledge and wealth, as well as human relationships, events, and other things of the world, and consonantly choose one's course of action.

Through careful application of the above formula, one observes the passing nature of all phenomena, and mercilessly inquires into common sense experiences. That is to say, one asks oneself: what is the meaning of all these experiences; what do I expect to gain from them; how long will they last; and what is their worth? Through such critical inquiry one discovers why one's energies are ordinarily exhausted, one's resources drained, and one is left feeling empty inside... When various temptations rear their heads and try to drag one into false and irrelevant ways of thinking and acting, one should be able to say with conviction: 'I don't see anything worthwhile or meaningful here.'

A related way of distinguishing fact from fancy is to try to perceive the world objectively—as it actually is and not what one wishes it to be. A human being has the faculty of standing aside and viewing oneself, others, and all happenings in life as a spectator. One can gaze calmly at them and allow them to pass. This witness-consciousness is the core of one's being, and is in essence ever pure, ever free, and ever blessed. A spiritual seeker should continuously assert this fact: that one's real being is One, full of bliss, and immortal. Once in a conversation Swami Vivekananda had with Miss Josephine MacLeod, he said, 'Incidentally you are a woman, incidentally you are an American, but you are always a child of God.' The seeker thinks: If I am a pure, blissful child of God, then all others are also children of God. We are all One, Indivisible Satchidananda. How can there be any fear, insecurity, or inane competition for me once this false individuality is subdued and transcended?

Love is the expression of Oneness. This fact is beautifully exemplified in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* teaching that all beings are loved, not for their own sake, but because of the Self present in them. Love is central to man's existence... Therefore, cultivation of the heart is salient in spiritual life. Swamiji said, 'If there is conflict between the intellect and the heart, always follow the heart.' To incorporate Swamiji's suggestion properly, the aspirant has to undergo a step-by-step process of emotional refinement. Further, as Swamiji indicates, 'the various feelings in the human heart are not wrong in themselves, only they have to be carefully controlled and given a higher direction, until they attain the very highest condition of excellence.' So this process involves intensifying, purifying, and redirecting these inner forces. Such disciplines as self-control, truthfulness, kindness toward all beings, study of religious texts, etc., have been emphasized by all religious traditions with this aim in view. A strong, yet flexible character is the mainstay in spiritual life... The intelligent aspirant discerns this, and with caution and patience treads the path chalked out by the past magnanimous spiritual luminaries. One voluntarily restrains oneself and strives to imbibe their teachings in this regard.

Conscientious performance of duty is one of the significant instructions given to the seeker for the efficient channeling of one's energy in a socially beneficial way. A wholehearted and cheerful commitment to the duties and responsibilities connected with one's station in life is of prime importance... If one shirks one's responsibilities, one will have to learn later through bitter experience. There is no shortcut in this growing process. One must continue with the work at hand until higher duty calls... Apart from making group life smooth and rewarding, this commitment helps one to control and eventually outgrow one's impulses, obsessions, and prejudices, and brings one inner relief and satisfaction. How to perform one's duties? Just as while driving in rush hour traffic, one has to be cautious, courteous, and cooperative with other drivers to reach one's destination safely, similarly, one has to coordinate one's life and activities with others and build up a healthy ego which is essential for the practice of yoga. After all, the aim of yoga is to ripen the ego and gradually to shift from ego-centeredness to God-centeredness. 'I' becomes 'we,' 'we' becomes 'all.' This expansion brings peace and freedom. A student wrote to his teacher asking for his advice on acquiring peace of mind. The wise teacher replied, 'Do you know how many times you have used the word 'I' in your letter? Forty-eight times! How can you have peace of mind?' Swamiji says 'Unselfishness is God.'

Simultaneous with this strengthening of our moral fiber and purification of heart, we should develop deep love and respect for our great spiritual teachers because it is they who compassionately inspire us to seek first the Kingdom of God. Once in response to the question, 'How can one get devotion?' Mahapurush Maharaj, Swami Shivananda, replied, 'Holy company,' and then added, 'Holy men lead one to God.' The living touch of an illumined soul infuses an immediate sense of the Divine... The environment also plays a prominent part in the healthy growth of spirituality. In a subtle way we are influenced by the mental and physical atmosphere that we are immersed in daily. The need for holy company to counteract these influences is paramount. The lives and teachings of these teachers subdue the onrushing worldly tendencies and awaken the hidden spiritual inclinations...

'Be steadfast in yoga and perform actions.' To practice this effectively the following yoga kit is recommended: Plan the day and your life always bearing in mind that there is a Higher Power who can supersede or upset your plans at any time. When you meet people cover them with God and treat them appropriately according to each one's need. Consider work as God. It is God's work you are doing as His instrument and merely for His pleasure... When work flows smoothly, offer it to Him with a grateful heart as you offer a fragrant, full-blown flower at His feet. If there is trouble, tension or heartache while working, dedicate that also to Him.

Let Him enjoy a 'hot dish' occasionally! During dry periods and 'dark nights' remember repeatedly that God is with you as your own Self, whether you are aware of it or not. When guilt-consciousness stirs, say 'Good or bad, I'm the child of the Mother.' When you feel lonely or let down, say with feeling and conviction: 'Thou art my all in all, O Lord!' When a problem or a doubt arises, first refer it to Him and pray for light and guidance, and then do whatever is humanly possible for solving it. If the Lord delays His response, create a tremendous commotion with Him. When some occasions try to unnerve you, take refuge in Him and face them boldly... Let humor spice and lighten our lives. A teacher once said, 'We need the skin of a rhinoceros and a sense of humor.' Hum a song or a hymn whenever convenient. Intersperse the activities of your day with silent repetition of the name of God. Now and then, think you are like the sky—vast, pure, and unattached to everything, and the events of this world are passing like clouds. At the completion of a job dedicate the results to Him. Just as an accountant closes his or her books at the end of the day, or a cashier deposits money in the bank and then feels relieved of the responsibility, in a similar way free yourself from the ego burden. When you rest, feel that you are lying in the lap of the Infinite Spirit as a bird in its nest. This kind of practice enables one to have a spiritual undercurrent at all times and under all circumstances.

To sum up, let us practice yoga as the mood and need come. We have certain guidelines for disciplines, but in and through those we should move freely. Let us study the different yogas—jnana, bhakti, karma, and raja—separately and understand them clearly, but always remember in daily life they blend together. The human mind does not function compartmentally. So it is advisable to practice them simultaneously, making full use of all the faculties of the mind intelligently. Let us not become one-sided by trying to squeeze ourselves into this or that mold due to pride, false humility, or any other reason. Our working ideal is to be harmoniously balanced. Here the two vital points for us to note are: First, we should practice yoga systematically by purifying and strengthening our intellect, emotions, and will. And second, we should dive deep and become absorbed in whatever practice we are engaged in and not over-emphasize its external form. From the beginning of our spiritual life let us focus our attention on the actual contact with the Supreme Spirit which is the goal of our life... In this cosmic scheme where so much help is available, can there be any doubt about reaching perfection here and now?

—Swami Prabuddhananda, "Yoga in Daily Life," *Vedanta Kesari* 11-12 (1981): 455-61



*May all be freed from danger,
May all realize what is good,
May all be actuated by noble thoughts,
May all rejoice everywhere.
May the wicked become virtuous,
May the virtuous attain tranquility,
May the tranquil be free from bonds,
May the freed make others free.
May the Lord,
the presiding deity of all sacred activities,
be satisfied.
For He being pleased,
the whole universe becomes pleased,
He being satisfied,
the whole universe feels satisfied.
Om. Peace, Peace, Peace.*

—A Traditional Prayer, Translated from Sanskrit
(Swami's Closing Chant: Sunday Lectures)



*“Before you were born, it was just you and God.
When this body goes, it will be just you and God.
Truly, it is only you and God now, too.”*

Vedanta Society of Northern California

2323 Vallejo Street
San Francisco, CA 94123-4711

415-922-2323
temple@sfvedanta.org
www.sfvedanta.org