

See God in every face and then do your service as worship offered to God who is within all beings.

God does not desire costly ingredients for His worship. He delights, rejoices and finds pleasure when He is offered the flowers of truthfulness, forgiveness, compassion, simplicity and guilelessness.

When man empties himself, God fills his entire being. When God enters man and fills man's entire being, man is no more man but becomes the Light Itself.

Swami Bhidananda
ॐ



A DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY PUBLICATION



SACRED MEMORIES



**SACRED
MEMORIES**

SACRED MEMORIES

English Translation of
Sri Omprakash Thakur's Hindi Book
'Par Hit Saris Dharma Nahin Bhai'



Translator
Neelmani Khaturia

Published by

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

P.O. SHIVANANDANAGAR—249 192

Distt. Tehri-Garhwal, Uttarakhand, Himalayas, India

www.sivanandaonline.org, www.dlshq.org

First Edition: 2014
[10,000 Copies]

©The Divine Life Trust Society

Swami Chidananda Birth Centenary Series—10

FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION

Published by Swami Padmanabhananda for
The Divine Life Society, Shivanandanagar, and
printed by him at the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy
Press, P.O. Shivanandanagar, Distt. Tehri-Garhwal,
Uttarakhand, Himalayas, India
For online orders and Catalogue visit : dlsbooks.org

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

We are happy to publish 'Sacred Memories' – English translation of Sri Omprakash Thakur's Hindi book 'Par Hit Saris Dharma Nahin Bhai'.

It is the great good fortune of Sri Omprakashji Thakur that right from his childhood, he has been blessed with the holy company of Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj and has received their love and grace in abundance. At the request of some devotees, Sri Omprakashji has made a humble effort to record his sacred memories with these two great saints in his Hindi book 'Par Hit Saris Dharma Nahin Bhai'. The book presents his numerous inspiring and sublime experiences with them and also gives a deep insight into their glorious divine personalities. The Hindi book has already been published by us. We hope that the English translation of this inspiring narrative will be welcomed by the English knowing devotees of Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj.

May the abundant blessings of Lord Almighty, Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Param Pujya Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj be upon all.

—The Divine Life Society

**DIVINITY INCARNATE—
SRI SWAMI SIVANANDAJI MAHARAJ
AND SIVANANDA ASHRAM**

Mysterious are the ways of the Lord. Nobody can say when He will take away something from someone or bestow graciously something on another unasked. About 78 years ago, our family had come to Haridwar for a few days' stay; but my grandmother loved the serene and beautiful atmosphere of Haridwar so much that she refused to leave Haridwar. She wished to spend her entire life at this holy place and since then our family has been living at Haridwar.

We are engaged in the work of marble inscription for earning our livelihood and work especially for the Ashrams, Dharmashalas and temples to inscribe the names of the donors on marble plates. Therefore, our family has been in close contact with many Ashrams and Mathas and has also got the blessed opportunity to meet many renowned saints and Mahants.

As far as I can remember, Sri Lakshman Singh (elder brother of Sri Palji) first came to my father with the order of making marble plates of the donors' names for the Yoga Sadhana Kutir of Sivananda Ashram. This was the beginning of our relation with Sivananda Ashram. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was so pleased with the work of my father that he invited him to

Rishikesh. The Bhajan Hall had been constructed at that time. Sri Swamiji Maharaj asked my father to make a marble plate inscribing the activities of the Society to be engraved outside the wall of the Bhajan Hall and also discussed about marble floor for Sri Vishwanath Mandir which was being constructed then.

When father returned home, he shared with us many things about Maharaj Sri, especially about his simple, loving and compassionate nature. In his own words, “Today, I have got Darshan of a Divine Personality. Though I have met many revered saints and Mahants of different Ashrams, Mathas and religious organisations, but Swamiji is different from all of them. What he is - it cannot be described in words; one has to experience it oneself.” The more my father described about Maharaj, the intenser my desire grew to have his Darshan. I requested my father to take me along with him to meet Sri Swamiji, he readily agreed telling that soon we all would go to the Ashram.

After finishing the work of marble plate for Bhajan Hall and marble floor for Sri Vishwanath Mandir, my father arranged for a bullock cart to take the material to the Ashram as at that time, Tonga or bullock cart was the only means of transportation between Haridwar and Rishikesh. Our Ashram was a part of Tehri Garhwal State then and the boundary of the State began from Kailash Gate.

I have heard that Sri Narendra Shah, Maharaja of Tehri State, was not even aware that one great saint was living in his State. Once when he was on a visit to London, one of his friends showing him 'The Divine Life' magazine asked about Sri Swamiji Maharaj. His friend was greatly surprised to know that he was unaware of the presence of a great saint in his own State. On his return from London, Sri Narendra Shah came to Ananda Kutir to have Darshan of Maharaj Sri. He was given warm welcome by Sri Swamiji. Before taking leave from Swamiji, he asked if he could do any Seva for Swamiji. Maharaj Sri didn't say anything but Tehri Maharaja himself donated the land over the hill where now Sri Vishwanath Mandir, Bhajan Hall, Samadhi Mandir and Press etc are situated. After receiving this land, Sri Swamiji got prepared Z shaped way to climb over the hill and also initiated the construction work. The present stairs, that we see today, were constructed after many years.

It was nearly 2 a.m., when my father along with the aforesaid material, reached at the border of Tehri Garhwal State. He was stopped by the police officer at the Kailash Gate and was told that due to the visit of the Viceroy, the road was closed for the public. But when he informed them that this material was for Sivananda Ashram; the officer, being aware of Tehri Maharaja's reverence for Sri Swamiji allowed him to go on a condition to return before 4 a.m. My father reached the

Ashram at midnight, the Sannyasins and Brahmacharins were roused to unload the cart immediately.

After some days my father took me, my uncle Sri Khem Singhji and my younger sister to the Ashram and we all were blessed with Darshan of Maharaj Sri. On knowing that we had lost our mother just one year ago, Sri Swamiji Maharaj was very much moved. He instructed all his attendants and also one of his reliable workers Sri Santram to take good care of us. We were given room in Yoga Sadhana Kutir and my father and uncle started their work in the vacant area opposite the Kutir. It was here, we met one white-clothed Brahmachari who later was known as Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj.

The preparation of consecration ceremony of Sri Vishwanath Mandir was going on; the idols of Lord Sri Ram, Mother Sita, Lakshaman, Hanuman and Lord Sri Krishna had been brought to the Ashram and were kept in the Bhajan Hall. But Swamiji Maharaj did not want the idols to be kept like this; so it was decided to conduct Akhanda Mahamantra Kirtan until the consecration ceremony. Thus with Maharaj Sri's instructions, the Akhand Kirtan of 'Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare; Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare' commenced on 3rd December 1943 at the Bhajan Hall. And when the idols had been installed in the temple, Maharaj Sri did not ask to stop the Kirtan.

Instead he said, “O ji when once it has started, why to stop it.” The Akhanda Mahamantra Kirtan continues till today at the Bhajan Hall.

Maharaj sent my uncle Thakur Sri Khem Singh to Jaipur to bring the statues of Lord Ganesha, Mother Parvati, Nandi and the Jalhari where the Sivalinga was to be installed. The consecration ceremony was organised with great enthusiasm and the Maharaja of Tehri State graced the ceremony. Many other distinguished guests and scholars had come to attend the ceremony at the invitation of Maharaj. There was a big Bhandara wherein invited and uninvited guests, sitting in a long line from Sri Vishwanath temple to the banks of Mother Ganga partook the sacred Prasad.

Maharaj Sri Swami Sivanandaji performed many great tasks in his life, but he never planned for them. He would start the work at his inner inspiration and never worried how the work would be completed or from where the money and manpower would be arranged. He would say, “This is the work of God. God will complete it.”

Seeing that there was no arrangement for the education of children, Maharaj started Sivananda Primary School in the building where we have Press now-a-days. With the blessings of Maharaj and the sincere efforts of Sri Satchidanandaji Maithani, the school was being run efficiently and the students from Muni ki Reti, Lakshman Jhoola and Tapovan used to come to get education. Sri

Swamiji Maharaj also gave the order for the arrangement of the books for all the students. The students had to arrange only for copies. It was compulsory for all the students to learn Gita by heart.

At that time, Sri Swamiji Maharaj's divine message was being spread through the monthly organ 'The Divine Life' magazine. All the Ashramites contributed despatching the magazine. Seeing the popularity of English magazine, Hindi magazine 'Yoga Vedanta' was started. By the grace of God, one Hindi knowing person from Almora came to the Ashram. His name was Dharmendra Singh and later he was known as Swami Satyananda.

The place, where we have post office now, was the main office of Maharaj. He used to come to the office daily. Sri Swami Vishuddhanandaji, Sri Swami Poornabodhaji and Narayana Swamiji were the organisers of the office and Ashram activities. The Cash office was nearby Swamiji's office. There was a little garden full of flowers in front of the cash office and Swamiji's office. Adjacent to the cash office, there was an open area and also some rooms wherein one room was used as store and one as kitchen while in another, Sri Swami Vishweshvaranandaji, Langar In-charge lived. The next room served as Ashram dispensary with one cupboard in it and the last room was post office where post office In-charge lived and worked. This post office was known as Ananda

Kutir; afterwards it was renamed as Shivanandanagar post office. The open area in front of these rooms was later converted into Langar (dining- hall).

Maharaj Sri used to come regularly to his office and met the visitors. In the evening, there was the Satsanga after the dinner. As per the time and weather, the Satsanga was conducted in the open area near Maharaj's Kutia, Bhajan Hall or Dharmashala of Ram Ashram. For many years, Durga puja was organised in the Dharmashala of Ram Ashram. Every year two Sadhana weeks were organised - one during the Christmas holidays in December and the during Easter holidays. The third main programme was conducted on the birthday of Sri Swamiji. Throughout the year, there were some or other festivals and Pujas conducted in the Ashram. During both the Sadhana weeks, Boat- Kirtan was the highlighting feature. In those days, the boats of Kali Kamali Kshetra provided free service of taking people across the Ganga. Sri Swamiji along with the devotees used to go across Ganga through these boats and would meet Sri Narayana Swami, do Satsanga and afterwards doing Kirtan, would return to the Ashram. On the last day of Sadhana Week, a drama 'Divya Jeevan' was enacted wherein Ashramites, visitors and guests would participate. My father got the blessed opportunity to play the role of Sri Swamiji Maharaj. Maharaj liked his performance very much. Once when

'Sivananda Vijay' drama was to be enacted, Sri Swamiji instructed Sri Shyam Sunder, the writer and the director of the drama, "O ji, I present the name of Thakur Prabhu Singh to play the role of Swami Sivananda, you can select people for other characters." I, my father and sister were fortunate to play different roles in this drama. Sri Swamiji Maharaj awarded me with a silver medal as second prize and first was Sri Suresh. Many times Swamiji Maharaj would stand up and danced on the stage singing his favourite Bhajan 'Agad Bum Agad Bum Baje Damaru'. Maharaj always encouraged the children to play. He used to say to our teacher, "O ji never beat the children." But our teacher would beat us saying that without fear, we can't learn.

Our teacher Satchidanandaji Maithaniji used to go to Ayurvedic Vidyalaya Dhanvantari Bhavan in Rishikesh for his studies in Ayurveda. After getting the degree of Ayurvedacharya, he came to Swamiji with my father and said, "My studies have been completed and I want to go for earning my livelihood. I need your permission and blessings." Swamiji asked, "Can you prepare Chyavanaprash? Do you know about Shilajit medicine?" Masterji replied in affirmative. Then Maharaj Sri said, "O ji, why to go anywhere else, start your work here, all the material will be provided to you." Swamiji also discussed with my father regarding preparation of Shilajit. And thus, this conversation resulted into the inauguration

of 'Sivananda Ayurvedic Pharmacy'. My father was also instrumental along with Swami Vishuddhanandaji in establishment of Go-shala and Viswanatha Bag (garden) at Rishikesh.

Day by day, my father's relationship with the Maharaj Sri grew closer. Sri Swamiji Maharaj bestowed His special grace upon him by listening to his Bhajan whenever he was in the Ashram. Once Maharaj Sri was going to Mumbai for recording of His Bhajans and Kirtans. As the train for Mumbai was to start from Haridwar at night, He came to Haridwar in the evening. At the Haridwar railway station, He asked my father, "There is much time in the departure of the train. Tell me where we can go." Father replied that they could go to Mahant Shantanandaji as he had requested many times for Swamiji's visit. Immediately came Maharajji's reponse, "O ji, why should we not visit your house?" My father was speechless – such a great saint at my small house, what should I say? He could not say 'No' and didn't have enough courage to say 'Yes'. Then Sri Swamiji Himself said, "O ji, we will visit your house." And thus Sri Swamiji blessed our small rented house near Har-ki-Pauri. Sri Swamiji was very much delighted to see the location of the house as it presented a beautiful view of Mother Ganga.

Before departing for Mumbai, Maharaj Sri asked the father what He could bring for him from Mumbai. My father requested for a special kind of

paper, black pencil and some other necessary items for drawing. Sri Swamiji brought all those items and my father made a beautiful and magnificent picture of Maharaj wherein Swamiji was shown sitting in deep meditation at the bank of Mother Ganga and Sivalaya of Swargashram was visible in the background. For many years, this picture has adorned the walls of the Bhajan Hall.

Once it so happened that Sri Swamiji Maharaj left the Ashram without telling anything to anyone. He felt that he had built a new home in the form of an Ashram therefore he should renounce this home also as he had renounced the previous one. When Ashramites came to know about Swamiji's sudden disappearance, they made an intensive search. Where could a glorious personality like Swamiji hide? It was soon found that Sri Swamiji was staying with a poor farmer in Jagjitpur village near Haridwar. This poor farmer known as Bhaktaji was a noble and sweet natured person. We were introduced to such saintly soul by the grace of Maharaj. At the humble prayers and requests of all, Sri Swamiji returned to the Ashram. Afterwards, whenever Bhaktaji came to the Ashram, he brought something produced in his own fields. Sri Swamiji Maharaj felt immensely happy to meet him. He had served Swamiji with intense love and devotion without being aware of the truth that Swamiji was the head of such a big institution. Maharajji always expressed his gratitude towards him for his loving service. I also

got the blessed opportunity to visit his home twice or thrice with Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj.

Saints, Sadhus and Fakirs have their own Mauja (sweet will) sometimes. One day, Maharaj Sri also expressed his Mauja to go to Devaprayaga to have Darshan of Lord Raghunath along with the Ashramites and the families living near the Ashram. Immediately, two buses were arranged and we all reached Devaprayaga under the leadership of Swami Paramanandaji Maharaj. As per Maharaj Sri's instructions, we did Kirtan throughout our journey. We had Darshan of Lord Sri Raghunath and sang Bhajan-kirtan in the temple. We also went to have the Darshan of the confluence of the sacred rivers namely Bhagirathi and Alaknanda. At this meeting point, these sacred rivers get their new name Ganga. Afterwards, Maharajji sat with us all and had lunch. We returned to the Ashram in the evening. Maharaj Sri used to organise such programmes many times at Vishwanath Bagh in Rishikesh.

Swamiji Maharaj followed religiously the principle of 'Forget and Forgive'. Once a boy, living nearby the Ashram, was trying to hit a monkey with his catapult. Maharaj Sri was going to his office then. The boy missed the mark and the stone, instead of hitting the monkey, injured Maharajji's foot. That boy was very much frightened. Maharaj Sri called him and said, "Don't do this. Monkey is also a living being like you. If the stone had hit it, how much pain it

would have felt.” The boy realised his mistake and touched the feet of Maharaj seeking forgiveness. Many such occasions came where we thought that Maharajji would be angry or upset knowing this or that but it never happened.

‘Bear insult, bear injury- highest Sadhana’ was not just an instruction by Maharaj Sri but was an integral part of his own nature. In 1953, The Parliament of Religions was convened. Swami Paramanandaji was the chief convenor of the Parliament. I also got the opportunity to offer my services for the programme along with Sri Ramratanji. Our Seva was to receive the guests at the Rishikesh railway station and take care of their boarding and lodging. The Parliament was organised for three days with two sessions each day. It was the third day of the Parliament; the scholars representing all religions were seated on the platform. They were being invited one by one to deliver discourses and each was being garlanded by Maharaj Sri. Among them, one scholar introducing himself as the Guru of the king of Nepal, started criticising Swamiji in his discourse. He condemned Swamiji’s way of living, dressing and conversing in English in derogatory words. Sri Swamiji, instead of being angry, was smiling and also applauding his oratory skills. At the end of the discourse, Maharaj Sri garlanded him again and expressed his gratitude towards him for pointing out his faults while the entire

gathering and Maharajji's disciples were very much annoyed.

During our stay at the Ashram, many a times we have received Maharaj Sri's blessings and divine grace. Once during Sadhana Week, there was demonstration of Yogasanas by the children. Maharaj Sri liked my performance and rewarded me with his two silken clothes, biscuits and chocolates. In those days especially in rainy season, Malaria was widespread; therefore quinine mixture was always kept ready for the Ashramites and the residents of Muni-Ki-Reti. Once it so happened, my father, sister and myself got Malaria fever on the same day and we suffered a lot for many days. Swamiji Maharaj blessed us with medicines as well as his gracious words. Every day while going to the Bhajan Hall, he would stop at our Kutir and saying 'Hari Om' would enquire about our health.

With the sincere efforts of Swami Paramanandaji, the construction of Guru Mandir was completed during Maharaj Sri's lifetime. The marble work inside the Mandir was done by father under the supervision of Swami Vishnudevanandaji. The place just below the Guru Mandir was chosen by Maharaj Sri himself for the construction of His Samadhi. The designing and marble work for Sivananda Pillar was also accomplished by father with the support and suggestions of Swami Madhavanandaji. After the completion of Sivananda Pillar, Maharajji got

himself photographed with my father and his co-workers. The photograph is treasured till today in the Ashram's collection of rare photographs.

Before partaking the Prasad in the Ashram Langar, there used to be the recitation of the fifteenth chapter of Srimad Bhagavad Gita. Swamiji would be very much delighted to see the small children reciting Gita. Though there was a separate kitchen for Swamiji in his Kutir, but many a times he would sit with us to have Prasad. Once at the request of Mahant Shantananda Nathji of Haridwar, Sri Swamiji sent Ashram's children to his place under the guidance of Swami Shashwatanandaji and Satchidanandaji Maithani to participate in a special programme. We all won prizes in that programme. When Maharaj Sri came to know of it, he was very much pleased and immediately ordered the In-charge of Ashram Langar to get prepared special food for all of us and he also partook the Prasad with us. To appreciate and encourage the good work was one of the unique traits of Maharaj Sri's nature. And when someone did anything wrong, he would never become angry; he would just scold the person lovingly. But his loving rebuke was of such nature that it pierced into the heart of the wrong-doer and he would then and there decide never to repeat that mistake.

One day, I and my friend Sureshchandra were climbing down the Ashram stairs very fast. As the stairs were made of wood, our fast

movement was creating loud noise. Maharaj Sri was sitting in his office in Diamond Jubilee Hall. Being disturbed with this rattling sound, he sent one of the Brahmacharins to call us. He tenderly reprimanded us thus, “O ji, these are wooden stairs and can break with such fast movement and the people working in the office also get disturbed by the noise. So, be slow while climbing up or down. Achhaji, never repeat it again. Now chant ‘Om Namah Sivaya’ ten times. Be a good boy.” Thus we have been blessed with the constant flow of Maharaj Sri’s Grace- Ganga.

By the grace of Maharajji, I was engaged to the sister of Sri Trilok Singhji who had been personal attendant of Maharaj for some time. The august presence of Swami Chidanandaji in my wedding ceremony was a great blessing for us. Knowing about his arrival, Sri Sundarprakashji and Harnamprakashji, Mahants of Kali Kamali Swargashram also attended the wedding from bride’s side and welcomed Sri Swamiji. My father was overwhelmed with feelings of gratitude towards Maharaj Sri who had showered his grace upon ordinary persons like us. After the marriage, my father took us all to Maharaj to offer our Pranams and to seek his blessings. Maharajji called Swami Sharadanandaji to take our photograph with him and also blessed us with special Prasad.

On 14th July 1963, the news of the passing away of this great soul was broadcasted on All

India Radio. In spite of hearing the news, we could not believe it. My father made a phone call to the Ashram to confirm this tragic news. After being confirmed about the authenticity of the news, we started for the Ashram. On reaching the Ashram, we rushed towards Maharaj Sri's Kutir to have the last Darshan of His divine form and offer our floral tributes. My father had been a person of great patience and fortitude and I had seen him firm and unshaken in such circumstances where an ordinary person could lose his patience. Even at the untimely death of my mother, he was calm and serene. But that day, he could not keep his patience and wept bitterly as if his most beloved and precious possession had been snatched away from him. He was gazing at Maharaj Sri's mortal frame and tears were constantly streaming through his eyes. As per the desire of Maharajji, his mortal remains were interred in the place which he himself had chosen. Within three days, Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj gave a definite shape and design to the Samadhi Shrine; he asked my father to carve foot prints of Maharaj on the marble surface and blessed me with the Seva of bringing a Narmadeshwar Sivalinga along with a small Jalhari to be installed on the upper surface of the Samadhi. The marble work inside the shrine was also done by my father.

Thus, we have been constantly blessed by Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj. The divine grace of these

two saints has made our family foremost in many important works of the Ashram. Apart from the marble work in the Ashram, my father has been instrumental in the inauguration of Sivananda Ayurvedic Pharmacy and organising of the first Sri Satyanarayana Vrata Katha in the Ashram wherein Maharaj Sri himself listened to the Katha narrated by Sri Satchidanandaji. I was the first student of Sivananda Primary School and I also got the blessed Seva of bringing Narmadeshwar Sivalinga for Samadhi Mandir.

This is the fourth generation of our family and we all have been fortunate enough to receive the loving grace and blessings of Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj and Sri Swami Vimalanandaji Maharaj for the last sixty years. We all will be ever grateful for this supreme grace. May their abundant grace be ever upon us and upon all, is the humble prayer of this servant at their lotus feet.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

DIVINITY INCARNATE— SRI SWAMI CHIDANANDAJI MAHARAJ

As I have mentioned earlier, when my father was engaged in his work outside Yoga Sadhana Kutir, one saint in white robes used to visit him to enquire about his wellbeing and also the progress of the work. He was addressed as Raoji by all the Ashramites and the guests. His full name was Sri Sridhar Raoji and today he is known as Sri Swami Chidanandaji.

ARRIVAL IN THE ASHRAM AND SERVICES

Sri Swamiji Maharaj came to the Ashram in the year 1943. Seeing his intense zeal for selfless service, Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj gave him the responsibility of the Ashram dispensary. At that time, the dispensary was being run in a room with a single cupboard wherein medicines, bandages and all other necessary articles were kept. During the rainy season, the Ashramites generally suffered from Malaria and in summer, scorpion bite was a great menace. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj knew the healing Mantra for scorpion bite. The person who had been stung by a scorpion would come crying and writhing in pain to Maharaj and would return smiling. Maharaj Sri taught this Mantra to Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj also.

The last week of December 1943 was the week of joyous festivities as the consecration of Sri Vishwanath Mandir was to take place on 31st December. After the consecration ceremony, Sridhar Raoji was made the first Pujari (priest) of the temple. Sridhar Raoji along with Sri Poornabodha Swamiji performed worships in the temple. They both used to go to the forest to collect Bael leaves and flowers for worship and also made big and beautiful flower-garlands for the Lord.

Sri Swamiji has also competently discharged his duties as an English teacher in Sivananda Primary School. His wonderful teaching method and his loving nature endeared him to all the students and they wished that he should continue teaching them even after the class was over. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was not in favour of punishing the students but in spite of that other teachers used to punish them. Sri Swami Chidanandaji never punished anyone.

Sri Swamiji Maharaj established Yoga Museum in the Ashram wherein he had kept pictures and charts depicting salient features and stages of all the principal Yogas. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was so much impressed with his Yoga Museum that he would bring all the distinguished guests of the Ashram there and ask Sri Swami Chidanandaji to explain the details. When Sarvapalli Radhakrishnanji, President of India and a great philosopher, visited the Ashram,

our Swamiji Maharaj also took him to the Museum and he himself explained everything.

MESSIAH OF THE MISERABLE

Sri Swamiji Maharaj came to the Ashram on Buddha Purnima day; it was his first meeting with Gurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. While coming to the Ashram, he saw lepers sitting on the roadsides. Their open wounds and heart-rending way of begging aroused the deep feelings of compassion in Sri Swamiji and he decided that there should be a respectable way of living for these miserable brethren. He thought if God willed and he would be in some position to do something for them, he would definitely do. And the grace of God brought that day when he became General Secretary of the Ashram. With the generous donations from the Ashram, Kali Kamali Khetra and government, he made suitable arrangements for their boarding and lodging to ensure that they need not beg on the roadsides. He also showed them the path to respectful living. It is the fruit of the untiring efforts of Sri Swamiji that today the residents of Brahmपुरi Leper Colony are not only free from this wretched disease and but also have become useful members of the society by weaving carpets and Asanas etc. Similarly, rooms have been constructed in Lakshman Jhula and Dhalwala Leper colonies for them and adequate medical facilities have also been provided.

Once I went to Guru Niwas to meet Maharaj and on reaching there, I found that Maharajji was about to go somewhere. Seeing me, he said, "Om! You come with us." Happily, I sat inside the car with Swamiji. The car stopped at Dhalwala Leper Colony where the residents of the colony and some Ashramites had already been waiting for Maharajji. They all heartily welcomed Swamiji and showed him the newly constructed and renovated rooms. There was also a beautiful place for Satsanga. Maharajji sat there and conducted Kirtan. Thereafter, he listened to their problems and also gave instructions to the concerned members regarding suitable solutions. One leper was very happy; he participated in the Kirtan enthusiastically and did not put up any demand or problem before Swamiji. When Swamiji was leaving the colony, he started repeating 'Maharaj Ki Jai' expressing his great delight. Swamiji asked him, "What is the matter, brother? You look very happy? He replied, "Yes, Maharaj, it is a matter of great rejoicing that today our Lord has come to our house. All the arrangements for our food, clothing and shelter have been made. What else do we need? And Maharaj, this disease is the fruit of our own actions which we ourselves have to bear." Maharaj was glad to hear his answer and said to him, "You have learnt the art of living."

Meanwhile, a Bidi (small roll of tobacco for smoking) seller reached there on his bi-cycle and started telling about the qualities of his product.

Maharajji said, "Why are you singing the glories of Bidis, sell some good thing." Immediately he retorted, "Maharaj, I earn my livelihood by selling Bidis; I do not beg." Maharajji wondered why he replied in such a rude manner and then he watched him closely. Actually that Bidi seller was handicapped; he was doing all his work through one hand only. Then Maharajji asked him where he would go next. "Swargashram," he replied. He was asked by Maharajji to stop for a while at Guru Niwas while going to Swargashram. He came to Guru Niwas and Maharajji sent a packet for him with the message – "This is the Prasad from Guru Maharaj Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj." Maharaj had never met him and there were rare chances of meeting him again but the happiness Maharaj gave to that stranger is unimaginable. It is an innate part of Swamiji's nature to be constantly striving to give happiness to others and to bring smile on the sorrow-stricken faces. There are uncountable examples of his noble deeds of such kind.

And if anyone has rendered any service to Swamiji, he not only gives him his due payment but also expresses his gratitude towards him. Presently, where we have Garhwal Vikas Nigam near Kailash Gate, a river used to flow there during rainy seasons. Sometimes, the services of the elephants of the Tehri Maharaja would be needed to go across the river. Tonga was the only means of transport to go to Rishikesh from the

Ashram and that also was of no use in rainy season due to the swift current of this river. During such times, bringing necessary articles and especially vegetables for the Ashram from Rishikesh was the most arduous task. And this Herculean task was performed with great ease by one Nepali porter. Perhaps his name was Manbahadur but he was addressed Bahadur by one and all. He used to cross the river carrying vegetables and other necessary things on his back from the Rishikesh market. Swamiji Maharaj would not only pay him his due wages but always expressed his heartfelt gratitude towards him for rendering such great service to the Ashram. With the passage of time, this courageous man Bahadur fell ill; Swamiji always used to take care of his health, medicines and other requirements. I have read that letter which Maharaj Sri wrote from America to Sri Swami Vimalanandaji seeking information about the health of Bahadur. In that letter, he had also given instructions to him go to Bahadur and touch his feet; ask about his well being on Swamiji's behalf and give the Prasad saying that this was Prasad for him from Guru Maharaj Sri Sivanandaji. The Prasad included money along with many other things. Now-a-days, people do not care for their own relatives whereas our Maharaj treats strangers as his own. Actually, for him there is no stranger; all are his very own.

Once Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, observing the self-sacrificing service of Sri Swami

Chidanandaji, had remarked, “Chidanandaji is equivalent to ten doctors.” It is an old incident when private buses used to ply from Haridwar to Lakshman Jhula. Once a bus going to Lakshman Jhula, while taking a turn near Tapovan, fell into deep ditch; all the passengers excluding one little child were injured. As soon as the news of the accident reached the Ashram, Sannyasins and Brahmacharins rushed towards the accident site. All the injured passengers were brought to the Ashram for necessary medical aid. The Ashramites offered their services in different ways to them under the guidance of Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. Someone was doing bandage; the other was giving medicine and while someone else was bringing tea from the Ashram Langar and another one was preparing beds for them. Sri Swami Sharadanandaji, the head of Ashram studio, was busy in taking photographs. On that day, observing Sri Swami Chidanandaji’s spirit of service and diligent efforts, Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj had made that glorious remark.

In 1953, Sri Swami Paramanandaji organised Parliament of Religions under the guidance of Guru Maharaj Sri Sivanandaji Maharaj. The dignitaries representing various religions had participated in the event. The contribution of Sri Swami Chidanandaji in this momentous programme was indeed praiseworthy.

MAST (EVER-REJOICING) FAKIR

In earlier days, Maharaj Sri lived in the first two rooms of Yoga Sadhana Kutir. I also got the blessed opportunity to live with him in those rooms. It is said that great intimacy leads to the end of all formalities. Once I committed a blunder due to my so called intimacy or ignorance; I cannot say. I was a student of class tenth then and used to go to a school in Rishikesh. One day as I was getting ready for the school, I found that one of my sandals had given way. As there was no cobbler nearby the Ashram, I was upset thinking how I would go to school. Then all of a sudden, an idea flashed into my mind that I should borrow Swamiji's sandals for one day. I knew that Swamiji mostly remained in his room and worked and moreover, the size of my feet was also same as that of Swamiji's. Being happy at my brilliant idea, I rushed to Maharaj Sri's room and said, "Swamiji, one of my sandals has broken and I have to go to school. Can I borrow yours for one day? I will get my sandals repaired while returning from the school." Maharajji lovingly smiled and gave his permission. Little did I realise then what I was doing. When I returned from the school, I informed Swamiji that I had got my sandals repaired and had kept his sandals at their place. Maharajji said, "No, no, now onwards they are yours; you can use these both." And from that day, he started moving barefoot not only in the Ashram but even when he went outside the

Ashram. He would go to Delhi or to any other place barefooted. I could not understand much at that time.

Once when Swamiji was planning to come to the Ashram from Delhi, he invited many devotees of Delhi including my father to attend the Sivaratri celebration at the Ashram. Most of them got ready to come along with him but he sent them all to the Ashram saying that he would come afterwards. There is one saying in Hindi 'Aayi Mauj Fakir Ki, Diya Jhopra Phoonka'— You cannot imagine what a God-intoxicated saint can do in his ecstatic mood; he can even burn his hut and laugh. In such an exalted mood, Maharaj Sri started travelling from Delhi on foot. He would stop at the villages on the way; beg for food and again resumed his journey singing the name of the Lord. Walking continuously barefooted caused blisters in his feet and it became very painful to walk but he kept on walking slowly. And see the grace of the Compassionate Lord, one truck driver stopped his vehicle on his own and asked him if he was going to Haridwar. As Maharajji nodded his head, he asked Maharaj to sit near his seat. Before sitting, Maharajji informed him that he had nothing to pay to him. He said, "Maharaj, do not worry. Please sit comfortably." Thus, Maharaj Sri reached Haridwar and rested for a while at my uncle's house. He refreshed himself by taking a dip in Gangaji; took some money from my uncle and

came to the Ashram. On our frequent queries, he narrated this whole incident. Maharaj Sri Sivanandaji also came to know that now-a-days Sri Chidanandaji moved without shoes or sandals but he did not say anything. Once, Maharaj Sri received an invitation from Allahabad University to deliver a lecture. He called Swami Chidanandaji and asked him to go to Allahabad and also advised not to go barefoot. It was then, his severe Tapas (austerity) of moving barefoot came to an end.

A GUIDE TO THE PILGRIMS

These days, Badrinath Yatra has become very easy but earlier it was not so. The pilgrims had to walk a long way enduring many hardships. During Yatra season, a large number of devotees would come to Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj to seek his permission and blessings and also guidance regarding the journey. Swamiji would apprise them of the difficulties which could beset them during the journey; the necessary articles and the medicines which they would need; the suitable places where they could stay for night halt and also the important shrines which they must visit on the way to Badrinath. He would describe some places in such an elaborate and precise manner that the listeners could actually visualise them. I had been associated with Swamiji for a long time and in my knowledge he had never been to Badrinath. Therefore, I was perplexed how he could guide the pilgrims and also describe these places with such accuracy as if

he himself had visited them. One day I asked Swamiji, “Swamiji, when did you visit Badrinath?” Then Swamiji told that he had never been to Badrinath. To clarify my doubts, he further explained that the devotees who visited him before commencing the Yatra invariably came again to him after the completion of the Yatra and used to narrate the details of their journey. Thus, he had gained so much experience that when he himself would visit Badrinath, he won't feel that he had come there first time. That day I learnt from Swamiji what it was to be benefitted by the experiences of others and also to be beneficial to others.

THE SUPREME GRACE OF ALMIGHTY LORD

The Lord has showered His grace upon us many a times by saving our beloved Swamiji's life. During my stay at the Ashram, I often got the opportunity to accompany Swamiji in his walks to nearby forest. During one such occasion, Swamiji narrated one incident how God's grace had saved his life. One day Swamiji and Ramchandra Swamiji went for a walk in the forest behind the Ashram. Walking leisurely, they covered a long distance and moved far in the forest. When they thought of returning, the evening had already set in. The sky was overcast with dense clouds intensifying the darkness. Suddenly, it started torrential rains. They decided that they should stay at the place where they were as they won't be

able to find their way in such darkness. And they spent the whole night sitting at that place in singing Lord's name. At the daybreak as they started to walk, they found that they were sitting at the edge of a deep ditch and if they had moved further even a step, they would have lost their lives. They expressed heartfelt gratitude towards that Supreme Saviour, who being the Indweller, inspired them to sit at that place and not to move further.

One another incident comes to my memory. As we all know, Swamiji's body cannot bear the extreme heat therefore summer season is little painful for him. It was the time when the construction of Sri Vishwanath Mandir had just been completed and the piles of bricks were lying around the temple. Swamiji used to go to the terrace of Sri Vishwanath Mandir to sleep at night. He used the temporary wooden stairway that was kept there during the construction of the Mandir. Once he was in deep sleep, it started raining all of a sudden. He woke up and started walking towards the stairway but due to the intense darkness and effect of the sleep, he missed the exact direction of the stairway and moved ahead. As a result, he fell upon the pile of the bricks and was severely injured. The mark of that injury is still there on one of his feet. Falling from such a height upon the pile of bricks, anything could have happened. It was only the loving grace of the Lord which protected our Swamiji.

After a few months of becoming the President of the Divine Life Society, Sri Swamiji intensely desired to have Darshan of Lord Kedarnath. He asked one of my friends Sureshanandaji to accompany him. Sureshanandaji was very happy to receive this invitation and readily agreed. They took one porter along with them and started the journey and reached Gaurikund first travelling by bus up to Rudraprayaga and afterwards walking on foot. From Gaurikund, the journey was to be more arduous. Suddenly the weather changed for the worse; dark clouds covered the whole sky and stormy winds began to blow. The porter got fever and it became difficult for him even to walk, how one could expect from him to carry the luggage. Swamiji and Sureshanandaji took the luggage from him and carrying it themselves continued walking. As it was the last day of the Yatra seasons, all the midway shops and inns had been closed and there was no one on the path except these three persons.

After sometime, snowfall began and soon the whole path was covered with the thick layer of the snow. They were not able to locate the way with their torch light as only white expanse all around was visible. They were in great difficulty as how to move further. By the grace of God, the postman of Kedarnath met them there. He was going to Kedarnath to deliver the last post of the season. He told them that they themselves won't be able to find the way and might fall in some ditch.

Therefore, they should follow him as he was much familiar with the way due to his regular visits. Walking behind him, they reached Kedarnath safely in the night. The postman went towards his destination after showing them the way to the Shrine.

Their bodies were almost frozen due to walking in icy cold winds and rain and now they were not able to walk a step further. They stood there looking all around for night-shelter. Some houses were visible but all of them were closed. Somehow summoning courage, they knocked at one door and asked for shelter. One priest opened the door and took them inside his house. They all hastily moved towards the fireplace but the priest forbade them to do so and gave them warm Ghee for massaging the whole body. After the massage, he gave them tea and only then he allowed them to go near the fire. Swamiji was very much delighted to see his spirit of selfless service. He had served them with so much love without knowing who they were. Swamiji expressed his gratitude and also offered him some other things. And later on, whenever anyone from the Ashram went to Kedarnath, Swamiji always sent some special Prasad for this priest. Thus, Lord Kedarnath saved His devotees and also showered His grace upon us all.

Once, during his South India tour, Swamiji was going to the airport by his car. Due to the sudden brake failure of the car, the driver had to

stop it striking it against a tree. The acute pain which it caused to Maharaj Sri's frail body persisted for many years. Again and again, we express our heartiest gratitude to the Compassionate Lord for saving our beloved Swamiji's life.

BRIMMING WITH MOTHERLY LOVE

All the Ashram children were fortunate enough to receive Swamiji's motherly love. He took care of all of us with such love and affection that everyone missed him a lot when he went to America. One of us was Sri Ramrakshpalji whom Swamiji had given a new name Nadchitswarupaji in appreciation of his musical talents. Whenever Sri Palji used to write a letter to Maharaj, he would address him as Ma (Mother). And this is indeed true. Sadguru also is our mother. As a mother gives birth to a child, a Sadguru gives us a new life in the spiritual world. In our Hindu culture, we first remember and offer our salutations to the mother aspect of the Supreme Reality when we chant Tvameva Mata or Sitaram or Radhakrishna or Umashankara.

The readers today may not believe that Swamiji Maharaj has fed us many a times with his own hands as a mother feeds her babies. Sri Ramratanji, one of my companions, loved Swamiji very much but also quarrelled with him sometimes on certain matters. Whenever he used to quarrel with Maharaj, Maharajji would listen

patiently to his arguments and simultaneously would spread butter on the toast and offer him lovingly in a plate. Then Ramratanji used to retort thus, "I am not Suresh or Omprakash that I would be happy eating toast or rusk. I am very angry with you." He had an intense desire to organise an All India Tour for Swamiji Maharaj on the similar lines as that of All India Tour of Gurudev organised in 1950. Swamiji had also acceded to his request but unfortunately, Sri Ramratanji was called by the Lord to His feet at the very early age. However, his desire was fulfilled and our Maharajji not only visited all India but went all around the world with the sublime mission of propagating Gurudev's Divine Life message. He endeared himself to everyone and made the whole world his family by his loving and compassionate nature.

THE EMBODIMENT OF RENUNCIATION AND TAPAS

Sri Swamiji Maharaj hails from an affluent Jamindar family but he renounced the comforts and luxuries of that life to walk on the path of dispassion. Sri Swami Vimalanandaji Maharaj has seen his Poorvashram house. It is a palatial building having a tennis court wherein Europeans also came to play tennis. But that luxurious life could not allure Maharaj Sri and renouncing it, he joined Gurudev's Ashram. And here in the Ashram, when Guru Maharaj asked him to take

the post of General Secretary, he tried his level best to decline the proposal but ultimately he accepted the Guru Ajna (order) with great humility. Similarly, when he was invited to visit America, he expressed his unwillingness saying that he wished to go to Badrinath instead of going to America but here also Guru Ajna and the noble aim of the service of the humanity made him submit. After returning from America, Sri Swamiji Maharaj spent 14 months as a wandering mendicant. I believe, he intended to live an austere life after living amongst the comforts and luxuries of America. It has been usual practice with Swamiji to live in a hut or an ordinary Kutir for sometime if he has been made to live in a palace or a big bungalow.

Pundit Chiranjilalji, one of my friends, is a resident of a village Banali near Narendranagar. Once I saw him extremely worried over some issue. On being asked, he told that Swamiji Maharaj had called him and said, “O ji Chiranjilal, we will go to your house.” And his problem was – he could not say ‘no’ to Swamiji and the condition of his house was such that he could not even offer a suitable place to him to sit comfortably. Then, I told him that he should not worry about it at all as the Lord who had expressed his desire to go there, would also make all the arrangements for it. He should just surrender to the will of the Lord. Maharajji went there and he himself made all the arrangements for his sitting and having

refreshment as if he was in his own house not in someone else's place. Due to the grace of Maharaj, today Chiranjilalji is owner of three houses.

During his mendicant life, Maharaj Sri went to such places where he was asked not to go; otherwise he would have to remain hungry as people would not give alms to him. But he went there and the Almighty Lord made all arrangements for him. He returned from those places receiving love and respect of the people.

During such times, once he came to the Ashram to have Darshan of Gurudev and wanted to go next day, but he was compelled to stay due to the illness of Guru Maharaj and then on 14th July 1963, Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, one of the luminous stars of spiritual firmament left his mortal coil. There was mournful silence everywhere. Only the soft chanting of 'Hare Rama' Mantra was reverberating in the Ashram premises. All eyes were filled with tears cherishing the sacred memories with the Holy Master. But Sri Swamiji Maharaj was absolutely calm and serene and supervising all arrangements and providing guidelines for performing the Samadhi rituals.

After the sixteenth day of Mahasamadhi, there were discussions regarding the selection of the President of the Institute and all wished that Sri Swamiji should take the place of Holy Master but Swamiji strongly opposed it. During one of such discussions, I was present. Dr Kutty Mataji

was very much insistent upon Swamiji to accept the post, but Swamiji said, "I was not in the Ashram and if Gurudev had attained Mahasamadhi in my absence, you would have certainly made some other arrangement. Please do that now." Dr. Kutty Mataji replied, "Swamiji, you were now in India; even if you had been in any corner of the world, we would have brought you here and appointed you President." In spite of so much insistence and requests, Swamiji did not attend the meeting of the trustees saying they could decide anything in his absence. The decision was made to appoint him the President and he was informed in the evening when he returned to the Ashram.

He has discharged his responsibilities as the President wholeheartedly. After becoming the President, all started requesting him to come and stay in Guru Maharaj's Kutir. Swamiji would listen to their requests and smile. Once when he was being insisted again, he replied, "According to you, Guru Maharaj does not live in the Kutir but for me, he still lives there. I will not go there and I will stay in Yoga Sadhana Kutir." Maharaj Sri lived in Yoga Sadhana Kutir for many years.

Sri Ramniwas Gupta, son of Sri Kashiramji Gupta of Calcutta, got constructed one building Guru Niwas for Swamiji Maharaj. Its inauguration was done by Maharaj Sri himself. Sri Ramniwasji requested Swamiji Maharaj to live in that building but Swamiji Maharaj politely refused. He pleaded

again and again saying that he had made the upper floor only for Maharaj Sri and the ground floor for his personal use. If Swamiji did not accept his request, all his efforts would go waste. But Swamiji was unwilling to come.

Once Swamiji fell seriously ill and was taken to Dehradun for treatment. He was advised by the doctors to take complete rest in some clean and quiet place so he was brought to Guru Niwas for rest. After getting well, Swamiji insisted to go to Yoga Sadhana Kutir. Meanwhile, Sri Ramniwasji came from Calcutta hearing the news of Swamiji's ill health and reiterated his request. And ultimately, he succeeded in his efforts and Maharaj Sri started living in Guru Niwas and thus, the name of the building 'Guru Niwas' fulfilled its meaning.

PRESIDENCY PERIOD

During his Presidentship, many important decisions were taken, many beautiful buildings were constructed and nice arrangements were made for providing accommodation to the aspirants and the guests. With these developments, problems also increased. New aspirants started requesting for special rooms. Once when I was with Maharaj Sri, one Brahmachari came with a request for Kutir. Swamiji Maharaj lovingly told him that today he could see nice arrangements for everything. But he should remember those times when they came

in the Ashram. They all were asked to stay in Bhajan Hall and after staying many years in Bhajan Hall, they were allotted rooms. As there were no bathrooms, they had to go to jungle to answer the calls of nature. They had to go to Gangaji for water and had to carry woods on their shoulders for kitchen and had also to lend a helping hand in the construction work. He might think that Maharaj himself was living in a room and giving a lecture to me. But the truth is if Guru Maharaj had not entrusted him with this responsibility, he would have preferred to live in a hut under a tree. After receiving the Prasad, Brahmachari left happily. Swamiji also assured him for the arrangement of a Kutir.

BIRTH CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

The celebration of Birth Centenary of Gurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj during Swamiji's presidentship will remain memorable event for all those who attended it. Many schools and hospitals were opened at different places. To commemorate this glorious occasion, a big arch with inscription 'Be Good, Do Good' was constructed at Haridwar Badrinath highway near the Headquarters Ashram. All the Centenary programmes were organized in a big and beautiful Pandal at Govardhan Dham. Though it was rainy season, but such was the arrangement that rain-water could not enter the Pandal and the devotees could attend and enjoy all the programmes. After

the successful completion of the programme, Maharaj expressed his gratitude towards organisers, workers and volunteers and also felicitated the chief organiser Dr. Kutty Mataji. To plan the programme for Centenary Celebrations and to organise it at different places in the country and outside the country was very difficult task but Maharajji performed it in a marvellous way with the support of his disciples and devotees. Fortunately, I got the opportunity to closely observe one such event. Generally, our Ashram does not participate in Kumbha Mela (Fair) at organisational level but there is no restriction for individual participation.

KUMBHA MELA

In 1986, Kumbha Fair was to be organised at Haridwar. Maharaj Sri decided to participate in it at organisational level. The devotees were informed about it. Sri Arun Kumar Misraji, Mela Officer allotted a nice place near Har ki Pauri to put up our tents. A beautiful replica of Sivananda Ashram was created in the tent colony. The tents were erected and named as Parvati Kutir, Yoga Sadhana Kutir, Bhajan Hall and Annapurna Hall. Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj was greatly surprised to see the arrangements and the activities of the tent colony going on as per the Ashram schedule. A special tent 'Guru Niwas' was also erected for Maharaj Sri. Maharajji delighted the hearts of all the devotees by living

with them. He also participated with other saints in Shahi Sawari (Royal Procession). What a great difference between him and other saints – they all were seated in their vehicles in blessing postures and our Maharaj Sri walked with us greeting everyone with folded hands. He said that our ancestors have made such a nice arrangement that lakhs of people are coming without an invitation. This is the cosmic form of the Lord. We should bow our heads and offer salutations to His cosmic form. See the magnanimity of his soul.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Being encouraged by Birth Centenary programmes, the organisers decided to celebrate the birthday of Maharaj Sri on a grand scale and sought his permission. Maharaj politely refused saying that in the Ashram only Guru Maharaj's birthday should be celebrated. He also asked what is the birthday for a Sadhu? Every day is his birthday, so it should be celebrated daily. The organisers put forward many arguments saying that in these programs so many devotees gather together and are benefited by Kirtan-Bhajan and discourses of eminent saints. For him, his birthday has no importance, but he should grant his permission for the welfare of common people. Being pressurised, he gave the permission with an instruction to celebrate it at all places by fulfilling the needs of that particular place. Accordingly, the programme was made where there a school was needed, school was opened; where medical

facilities were required, hospital was opened. Needy women were given sewing machines and many homeless were blessed with homes. The flood-stricken victims of Rishikesh were provided clothes, bedding and food material and the earthquake victims of Garhwal were provided clothes, blankets and tin sheets. Maharajji was so considerate that he even made arrangements for Bidis for men and Bindis for women. These were also considered as their needs in such difficult times. Maharajji is very particular about the smallest as he is with the biggest thing; nothing can escape from his vision. The perfection of his thinking surprises all. One devotee from Mumbai expressed her emotions thus, “We have been to many places and have visited many Ashrams and social organisations but all are interested in taking something from others. No one knows how to give as does this Ashram.” This indicates that there is no difference between the saying and doing of Gurudev and Swamiji. They themselves follow what they preach – Serve, Love, Give. The birthday of such great saints should be celebrated daily.

Once Swamiji had to attend one spiritual retreat organised specially for the foreign devotees at Pattamadai, the birthplace of Gurudev. His birth- date also came during those retreat days. Taking advantage of that occasion, many devotees planned to come to Pattamadai. When Swamiji came to know that many devotees were planning to come to celebrate his birthday, he declared

publicly that there was no birthday celebration and he was not available on 24th of September. If any gentleman wanted to come for this purpose, he should not make any programme and cancel his railway reservation. Nobody knows where he (Swamiji) would be on 24th September and if anybody knows somehow, he should not try to meet him on that day; otherwise Swamiji would never see his face again and never talk to him. Actually, Swamiji did not want his birthday to be celebrated.

Once Gurudev decided to celebrate the birthdays of his senior Sannyasins disciples. As Swami Chidanandaji's birthday came in the same month as that of Gurudev himself, our compassionate Gurudev thought about the difficulty of the devotees who would have to come twice in the same month for these celebrations. Beloved Gurudev decided to celebrate Swami Chidanandaji's birthday on 24th June instead of 24th September. Thus, Swamiji's 39th birthday was celebrated with great spiritual fervour on 24th June 1954 and Swamiji attended it following his Holy Master's instruction. Apart from other speakers, Gurudev and Swamiji Maharaj himself gave inspiring lectures on the sacred occasion. When this news was published in 'The Divine Life' magazine, devotees also started celebrating his birthday on 24th June every year in their respective areas. It was in 1965 that his birthday was celebrated on his true birth date. I have

observed that whenever his birthday was celebrated in his presence, it seemed he was bearing it all unwillingly.

FLOWER GARLANDS

Similarly, I used to observe that he did not like it when people garlanded him. His face expressed his displeasure as if some injustice was being done to him. I was immensely moved to see his reactions therefore I decided not to offer him garland and also advised my friends to do the same. After sometime, Swamiji himself declared publically that nobody should bring flower garlands for him as it caused him great pain. The flowers blooming in the gardens beautify the environment and also keep it pure. So let them bloom and blossom in the gardens. I was very happy as Maharaj Sri revealed in our hearts what he wished to say.

HAPPY IN MAKING OTHERS HAPPY

Maharaj Sri's compassionate heart always goes out to help others. His happiness lies in making others happy and he is always ready to undergo any amount of pain to bring joy in the lives of others. It is his innate nature to give love and respect to his younger ones especially children. Sri Uttam Singh Rana, former chairman of Municipal Corporation of Muni-ki Reti is one of those children of the Ashram on whom Maharaj Sri has showered his abundant grace. When

Uttam decided to file his nomination for the post, he came to Guru Niwas to seek Maharaj's approval and blessings for his decision. Fortunately, I was also present there. Maharaj smilingly said that Uttam's decision was Uttam (best) and when he sought his blessings, Maharaj looked at me and said, "Om! Ask him how he could feel that my blessings are not with him. My blessings are always with him". He advised him to remember Gurudev and start his work. When Sri Rana was married, he sought appointment with Swamiji to meet him along with his wife for blessings. Maharaj Sri agreed but on that day he had to go to Dehradun along with senior Swamis of the Ashram for some official work. At Dehradun, when he was reminded of his appointment with Sri Rana, he immediately started for the Ashram. Other people asked why he was in so much hurry. On being frequently asked, he replied that Rama and Sita were to come to his Kutir, therefore he had to reach there at the earliest. His such noble feelings and magnanimity of heart makes us bow down at his lotus feet.

Sri Sureshchandra Suman is also one of the recipients of his grace. From his education to his marriage and during other struggles of life, Swamiji's grace has always been with him. After his death, his family is receiving Swamiji's love and care. Once when Swamiji was staying with my uncle, he fell ill and suffered for many days from fever. My uncle served him during those days and

Maharaj never forgot his loving service. After getting well, they both decided to go to have Darshan of Ma Chandi Devi. After the Darshan, my uncle insisted that they should also visit the temple of Anjana Devi. Our jovial Maharaj said that though he didn't wish to have a son, but they should go to have Darshan of Anjana Devi otherwise her son Hanumanji would be angry with them. Seeing the beautiful and serene surroundings around the small shrine, Maharaj was absorbed in deep meditation and sat there for a long time. After opening his eyes, he saw that visitors were standing there in a queue waiting for Prasad. Perhaps they might have thought that Swamiji was the priest of that shrine. Swamiji asked my uncle what Prasad they could give to them. As they had nothing except their food, Maharajji gave it as Prasad and they both remained hungry.

Maharaj Sri forgets his own pain and suffering in making others happy. It is the incident of 1974 when many programmes were being organised in different parts of India. Suddenly, Maharaj Sri got ill and was admitted into Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram, Kankhal for treatment. He suffered for many days and had to remain confined to bed. Everyday someone from the Ashram came to see Maharaj. Once Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj came to enquire

about his health and seeing his condition, requested Maharajji to cancel all his programmes. But Maharaj Sri said that he would soon get well and attend all those programmes. According to Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj, even after the recovery Maharaj Sri would need complete rest for some time. Therefore, all his programmes should be cancelled with immediate effect. Then Maharaj Sri agreed to it and made a special request not to cancel 'All Ceylon Conference' as the poor devotees of Ceylon had worked very hard to organise it and he also expressed his strong determination that he would go there, come what may.

When the day of the 'All Ceylon Conference' approached near, I asked Maharajji who was accompanying him to Ceylon as Sri Swami Vimalanandaji Maharaj was in Germany at that time. He answered that he was going alone. Then, I requested to take me along with him as it was not good for him to travel alone in this fragile health condition. Maharaj Sri happily agreed and I got the opportunity to accompany him. At Jaffna, observing the great love, devotion and indefatigable spirit of service of the people, I understood the reason of Maharaj Sri's insistence on not cancelling this programme. Many dignitaries representing different religions attended this Conference and they all gave

discourses highlighting the salient features of their respective religions. But all were wonderstruck at Maharaj Sri's deep knowledge of their religions and his all embracing love and reverence towards all religions. In his simple and lucid language, Maharajji drove home the message of Divine Life into the hearts of all present. Thus in spite of his ill health, Maharaj Sri attended the Conference for the sake of devotees of Sri Lanka.

A GIFTED ARTIST

During Gurudev's time, the Satsanga on the last day of the Sadhana Week comprised of performance of a drama. Usually, 'Divya Jeevan' drama was enacted. Our Maharajsri is a talented artist and has given his brilliant performances in many dramas and has also directed many of them. Once 'Sivananda Vijay', a Hindi drama written and directed by Sri Shyam Sundar Mukut, was to be enacted. At Gurudev's instruction, my father was called from Haridwar to play the role of Swami Sivananda as he used to perform this role beautifully. In the drama of this life, Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj is the Guru of Sri Swami Chidananda but in this drama 'Sivananda Vijay', Sri Swami Chidananda played the role of Sri Swami Vishwananda, the Guru of Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. When the son will become the father or when the father will become son in this drama of eternity, only the Lord knows.

HIS UNIQUE WAY OF TEACHING AND BESTOWING GRACE

It happens sometimes that devotees seeking permission to meet Maharaj do not get the opportunity and some fortunate one receives his grace unasked. Once Maharajji was going to Dehradun from Delhi, I went to Haridwar station to have his Darshan. There, I was given some luggage to be taken to the Ashram. Immediately, I started for the Ashram and at the Ashram I was informed that Maharajji had asked me to come to Dehradun in his car along with Omprakash driver. From there I was to accompany Maharaj to Barlujanj, Mussoorie. Thus, I got the blessed opportunity to live with him for three days at Mussoorie. One day, while taking a walk with Maharaj, we reached near the tomb of a renowned Sufi saint Bulle Shah. Maharaj Sri cleaned the surrounding area of the tomb with his own hands and also asked us to do so. Then, he burnt incense and offered his loving reverence to the saint. For him, all the holy places are places of worship to whichever religion they may belong to.

One morning, we heard a vendor crying 'Take pastry, biscuit, bread, cake.' Immediately, a thought flashed into my mind that now Maharajji would call him. And lo, Maharajji said, "O ji, call this breadwala (bread seller)." Swamiji sat beside him and purchased bread, biscuits and cakes. He gave him his due payment and thanked him. Meanwhile, he noticed a group of students; he

called them and interacted with them. Then he said, “You all are on a study tour from Dehradun to Mussoorie. As you are walking continuously, you might be feeling hungry. It is the time of breakfast, have these bread, biscuits and cakes as Guru Maharaj’s Prasad.” Saying this, he gave them all those eateries. Thus, Maharaj has taught us many things, not merely by his words but by his actions. Once I was talking to a devotee in the Ashram and he, like many others, was complaining that Maharaj Sri had no time for the Ashram; he was mostly on tours and the inmates and the visitors of the Ashram were deprived of his Upadesha (teachings) and guidance. Then I asked him what kind of guidance they sought from Maharajji. Maharaj’s entire life is his Upadesha (teachings) and Sandesha (message).

EACH HAS HIS UNIQUE FAITH AND DEVOTION

One old lady devotee from Rajasthan, known as Narayani Mai, lived in a Kutir near Hanuman Mandir. This white-robed lady spent her most of the time in the remembrance of God and went on foot daily to Kali Kamali Kshetra, Rishikesh to take her Bhiksha of potato and milk. Swamiji Maharaj had great reverence for her. Narayani Mai had made a resolve and she had expressed it many times before Maharajji. She ardently desired that Maharajji should offer her dead body to Mother Ganga after performing the last rites. Swamiji always replied her thus, “Mataji, I am

mostly on tours and sometimes I am out of India too. Therefore, please don't make such resolves." Narayani Mai often came to meet Swamiji and Swamiji would fulfil all her needs unasked. Therefore she was so much assured that Swamiji would definitely fulfil her last wish. Sometimes on her arrival, when Swamiji would ask her to wait due to some urgent work in hand; she went away saying she would come again as she did not want to cause loss to her Bhajan. Such was her dedication to her Sadhana. She came to meet Maharaj for the last time just one day before her death. As Swamiji Maharaj was busy in his work, his personal attendants Sri Swami Vimalanandaji and Nagarkarji did not want to disturb him. They told Narayani Mai that Swamiji could not meet her today as he was very busy. She kept on requesting and finally went to her Kutir in a dejected mood. Next day, Swamiji Maharaj got the news that Narayani Mai had passed away. Then, he was also informed about her yesterday's visit. Swamiji Maharaj said, "O what have you done? O.K. let's accept, what was to happen has happened." Maharajji arranged for a boat and kept her body in the boat and thus fulfilling her last wish offered it to Mother Ganga with his own hands. Such was the great resolve of Narayani Mai.

Similarly, there was an old Sannyasin Swami Hariomanandaji, who lived in the Kutir adjacent to Maharaj Sri's Kutir. He did not take anything

from the Ashram, not even food. He arranged for his food on his own and himself carried water from Gangaji for his personal use. He always repeated Lord's name – Ram, Ram, Ram. As he was living in the Ashram, he considered it his duty to offer some Seva; therefore, he used to bring letters from the post office and delivered them to the Kutirs of the addressees. He had such an intense love and affection for Maharajji that he called him as his son. He used to ask others, “Where is my son? Where has he gone today? He is always on tours. I will die without meeting him?” Therefore, once he told Swamiji to meet him before going out of Rishikesh. Then onwards, whenever Swamiji was to go on a tour, he invariably went to meet Swami Hariomanandaji. Once when Swamiji felt that this was their last meeting, he met him and also garlanded him lovingly before going. Swami Hariomanandaji also understood and said that they would not meet again.

As far as I am concerned, I and four generations of my family have been blessed enough to be recipients of Maharaj Sri's perennial grace. Swamiji Maharaj has always regarded my father and uncle as his elder brothers. Many times, he has come to our house to meet them. He never thinks that people seek his permission to meet him and he himself goes to meet these ordinary persons. How kind and compassionate he is! Personally, I am highly indebted to him as I am alive today only due to his divine grace.

His blessings have been showered upon us in many ways. Our present house has been sanctified by him as he has laid its foundation stone and has also graced the auspicious occasion of House-warming ceremony by his sacred presence. It so happened that once Swamiji Maharaj was coming to Haridwar through Mussoorie Express and he had to reach the Ashram on time to lay the foundation stone of a building. When Swamiji got off the train at Haridwar, he came to know that he could not attend the ceremony as their train had reached Haridwar quite late. Then Vedaprakashaji requested to Maharaj, "Swamiji, please perform that sacred ritual here which you were to perform at the Ashram." On being asked, Vedaprakashaji clarified that today foundation stone of Omprakash's new house was to be laid at Bilkeshwar Nagar and it would be a great blessing for all of them if Maharaj Sri laid the foundation stone with his holy hands. Maharajji thought for a while and agreed saying that since it was Omprakash's work, he could give five minutes.

When the construction of house was completed, we performed the Puja on an auspicious day. But we did not get shifted to the new house, as my wife Saraswati intensely desired that first Maharaj Sri should sanctify the house by his visit. She insisted that I should request Swamiji Maharaj to visit our new house whenever he came to Haridwar but I was a bit hesitant to do

so. Maharaj Sri heard her sincere prayer and one day I got a message from Brigadier Sabbarwal that Maharaj Sri was arriving Haridwar next morning and he would visit our new house and take some refreshment after having a dip in Gangaji. Our joy knew no bounds as he had fulfilled our wish unasked.

He is an ocean of grace and his abundant blessings have been showered upon us many a times. Our heartiest gratitude towards him cannot be expressed in words.

For the last few years, Swamiji Maharaj has been going to Gangotri in summer for seclusion. Once a desire arose in my heart to spend some time with Maharaj Sri in Gangotri. I expressed my desire to one of his personal attendants requesting that during Swamiji's next visit to Gangotri, he should seek permission on my behalf too. He replied that if Swamiji Maharaj himself wished to take someone along with him, one could accompany him whereas he would not permit anyone at the behest of others. He also suggested that I should personally request to Swamiji if I had intense desire to go to Gangotri with him.

After sometime, as usual I went to Haridwar station to have Darshan of Maharaj Sri, I was told by his attendant that Swamiji was going to Gangotri next morning and I could seek his permission now. But I did not think it right to talk to Swamiji on this matter at the railway station, so I kept quiet. Then, Swamiji's personal attendant

himself said to Swamiji Maharaj, “Swamiji, Omprakash wants to come to Gangotri.” “Yes! He can come”, Swamiji replied. And then Maharaj Sri called me near to himself and explained everything in the most loving way as a father does for his little child. I was given detailed instructions regarding what things I should take, how I should live there and how I should utilise my time etc. Thus I basked in the sunshine of Maharaj Sri’s divine grace during my stay at Gangotri. I returned with him one day before Guru Purnima and also attended the Guru Purnima Mahotsava at the Ashram.

ESSENCE OF HIS TEACHINGS

Maharaj Sri’s favourite Bhajans— ‘Chidananda Chidananda Chidananda Hun, Har Hal mein Almasta Satchidananda Hun’ and ‘Jis Hal mein Jis Desh mein Jis Vesh mein Raho, Radharaman Radharaman Radharaman Kaho’ epitomise his essential teachings. He has taught us to always remember God and live blissfully amidst all the vicissitudes of life. He has never been tired of reminding us that human birth is the most precious gift of the Lord and one should utilise it in the constant remembrance of God and service of His children.

The Lord has blessed our motherland with many a great saints from time to time. Jagadguru Sankaracharya, Vallabhacharya, Ramanujacharya, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami

Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda, Swami Chidananda—all these great saints have blessed the humanity with their divine presence and illuminating teachings and have left their footprints on the sands of time. May the grace of Lord Almighty be upon us all. May we all be blessed with the loving benedictions of Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj.

Om Tat Sat.

MAHARAJ SRI'S ENTIRE LIFE IS HIS TEACHING

*I have seen Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj,
Worshipping the Lord as a priest in
Sri Vishwanath Mandir,
Bringing Bael leaves and flowers from the Jungle,
Rendering service to the patients in the
dispensary,
Dressing the wounds of an injured one,
Giving injection to other suffering brother,
Serving lovingly the forlorn lepers,
Offering reverential Pranams to Mother Ganga,
And then jumping and swimming in her
cool waters
As a child playing in the loving lap of mother.*

*I have seen Maharaj Sri
Teaching the lesson of selfless service
By himself carrying the bricks to the
construction site,
Bringing water from Gangaji
and wood from the jungle for the Ashram kitchen,*

*Packing the Divine Life magazines for despatch,
 Digging the earth with pickaxe,
 Singing fervently Lord's name in Nagar Sankirtan,
 Playing his role brilliantly in the dramas and
 Directing some dramas too,
 Performing marvellous magical tricks,
 Making the dog and cat eat from one plate,
 Calling lovingly a monkey Rishiram
 And I have also seen Rishiram
 Following Maharaj Sri's instructions.*

*I have seen beloved Maharaj Sri,
 Bowing to Mother Cow and serving her,
 Going to Vishwanath Bag (garden) riding a bicycle
 even after being the President of the Society
 and taking care of plants and flowers.
 I have seen Swamiji Maharaj
 Discussing seriously with Sri Gaurishankarji,
 A retired judge living at Swargashram,
 Sitting with great saints and conversing about
 the need to walk upon the path of righteousness,
 Talking with same love and reverence
 to a sweeper of Muni Ki Reti and the President
 of India.*

*Maharaj Sri teaches us by being and doing,
And thus his entire life is his teaching.
May the Almighty Lord bless us all
To follow his Divine Life and Teachings.*

Om



