

[Swami Krishnanand Passes at Ninety-Two](#)

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Kindly Monk Leaves a Legacy of Harmony Ana Strong institutions on Four Continents

His Holiness, Swami Krishnanandji Saraswathi, had been in Mauritius to participate in a week-long Silver Jubilee festival celebrating his profound influence on that island nation. Just two days prior, he had entered his 93rd year looking every bit the ageless, strong, dynamic swami-missionary he had always been. Then suddenly, returning from the festival's last function on August 23, he said he was not feeling well. Within five minutes, he was gone. The festival, which had drawn devotees from many nations, became a last farewell. Swamiji was buried at his ashram in the small town of Calebasses, at a spot to be eventually marked by a samadhi shrine.

His many devotees were as astounded as they were saddened by the sudden disappearance. During nearly four decades, he had been a powerful and salutary presence, ever the promoter of peace, compassion and harmony, and the protector and vivifier of Hinduism. To his very last minute, he was one of the world's most active swamis, managing and regularly visiting centers in 72 countries.

Swami Krishnanand was born to the Maharaja of Jodhpur in 1900, and grew up on the lap of wealth and power (HINDUISM TODAY, September, 1990). But he longed to live the simple and spiritual life. He became a judge and married, his wife dying soon after their union. In 1937, he was initiated into sannyas by his Guru, Swami Vishnudevanandji. He lived in a Himalayan cave for six months, and discovered his life's mission: to serve the poor and needy. He then descended into the plain to meet Mahatma Gandhi.

The great liberator suggested he abandon his saffron robes. "But why?" asked the

confounded swami. "Because those who wear this habit are not wont to serve. They expect instead to be served. It has been so for centuries." And the swami responded, "I will make this cloth the very symbol of selfless service," a vow which he spent the rest of his long life fulfilling. Gandhi's influence upon the swami was deep, and his disciples willingly referred to his vision as Gandhian.

After Gandhi's death, Krishnanand returned to the Himalayas, wandering over India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, promoting ahimsa, establishing dispensaries and libraries, helping the poor and, most notably, launching a campaign of relief for the blind. He enlisted the famous Dr. Doshi who within a few years had given free treatment to 21,476 patients, including an amazing 4,175 eye operations. Krishnanand became known as ankhen dene wale baba, "the swami who gives sight." Similar large scale medical care programs continue to this day.

In 1956, Swami answered a plea for spiritual guidance from the Indian communities of East Africa. He travelled up and down the continent, instructing, prescribing daily sadhanas, and establishing societies which soon became rehabilitation and famine relief centers, orphanages, leproseriums, etc. He softened hearts "which had too long been exclusively concerned with business," as he put it. Hindus donated of themselves and their wealth for the uplift of Africans. Later, it was the Indians who were in dire straights. Through his efforts, the UK granted asylum to the refugees from Uganda. Today, there are centers in Ghana, [see sidebar], Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana, South Africa, Kenya and Uganda.

In 1967, Dr. S. Ramogoolam, architect of the coming Mauritian independence, invited the good swami to his island. The various forces of the multicultural, multireligious, multiracial nation were raging. Dundhev Bauhadoor, the long-time Mauritian devotee whom Swami Krishnanand named as his successor a few days before his passing, reflects, "It is difficult to think what would have happened if Swamiji had not come to Mauritius!" There were riots between Christians and Muslims, and the Hindus were beset by the Christians' heavy-handed conversion tactics. The Swami covered the country like a lion, organizing relief efforts for riot victims, working closely with political and religious leaders, and contributing significantly to the making of a harmony which endures to this day. At youth camps, Swami taught Hinduism, principles of administration, social work, leadership, public speaking and even sports. Says Bauhadoor, "He inculcated in them a sense of self-respect and made them confident and fearless." Many of those first disciples are today the nation's religious and political leaders.

Swami was close to politicians, especially in Mauritius, "because, simply, they were receptive to his influence," disciple V. Deku of Ghana explains. Some, however, question the propriety of this interchange. In 1990, Swami Paramananda Bharati spoke on this matter at Moscow's Global Forum on Human Survival. According to tradition, he explained, it is the ruler's duty to promote and enforce dharma, and it falls upon the religious leaders to keep the rulers inspired and guided along the right track. Swami's disciples have done their part to make Mauritius the democratic, peaceful, relatively prosperous example that it is. It would appear that Swami's t[?]te-[?]-t[?]te with kings and rulers was as effective as it was appropriate.

After meeting him in 1991, HINDUISM TODAY'S publisher, H.H. Sivaya Subramuniyaswami concluded, "He is an extraordinary person to have done what he's done."

'Fatherly Yours'

Swami used to say, "I accept people, not as my disciples, but as my children," and signed his letters with Fatherly yours. He would watch carefully over the family life of his devotees, and would advise and comfort, sometimes traveling far to be present at key moments. Lifelong devotee Bharat Gheewala of UK [above] recalls, "Swami helped, guided and supported oar family for four generations. He knew every one of us intimately and was our mother and father."

In Africa

"We are lucky that such a soul appeared to give us something so very precious, which we will treasure for the rest of our lives," says Ghana's Vincent Deku, an African who received initiation from Swami Krishnanand in 1988 and eventually embraced Hinduism. He is one of 200 Africans who have done as he has. "We found the path to realization that we were looking for," explains Mr. Deku, "Hinduism takes you deep into the heart of spirituality - without reservation. It offers the practice, which grants the conviction, which builds into solid faith, rather than blind faith."

Since 1975, Swami Krishnanand has returned to Ghana every year to hold sixweek intensives. His disciples are virtually all highly educated professionals and, like their mentor, committed to that salutary sadhana, social work. The activities are led and inspired in different regions of the country by Krishnanand's three hard-working swami disciples. Five centers have been established in Ghana, each with its temple, including the Hindu Monastery of Accra.

Swami Krishnanand forged close and harmonious links between the African Hindus and the Indian community. It is mostly the Africans who officiate at havans and important pujas both in the temple of the monastery and at the public Hindu temple of the capital city. They also perform occasional pujas at the homes of Indians.

"The future looks wonderful," concludes Deku. "Guruji will be even more powerful now that he is no longer limited by a physical body, and Africans are well-disposed toward Hinduism, because it is very similiar to our traditional culture. We find it not at all difficult to practice."

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