

[He taught the world that Truth is One, Paths are Many](#)

Category : [January/February/March 2003](#)

Published by Anonymous on Jan. 02, 2003

## TRANSITION

### He taught the world that Truth is One, Paths are Many

I transcended my body and mind,"recalled Swami Satchidananda in describing the crowning achievement of his yoga practice. "I forgot my individuality. It is impossible to explain exactly what this is. I must have spent several hours in that state. Then I heard a humming sound coming from a long distance away. Slowly, slowly, it became louder. As it neared, I became aware again of my mind and body. I came out of the cave but could not see anything in the normal way. All over, I saw light, light, light. The whole world appeared to be a mass of light. There was only peace everywhere. After that, I had this experience often."

It was most appropriate that Swami Satchidananda should be named after that experience, defined in Sanskrit as savikalpa samadhi, or satchidananda, which literally means "existence-consciousness-bliss." That samadhi experience occurred in 1949 at Palani Hills, South India, when Swami was 35. On August 19, 2002, in Chennai—just about 300 miles away—he attained

Mahasamadhi, which means "a great soul's conscious release from the physical body." Although these two life-defining experiences occurred in Swami's homeland of India, America was the stage upon which Swami Satchidananda played out the better part of his 40-year spiritual destiny.

Sri Gurudev, as Swami was affectionally referred to by his devotees, first came to the United States in 1966 as the guest of artist Peter Max and filmmaker Conrad Rooks.

Although these two men assisted him in becoming instantly popular as a messenger of peace during the turbulent 60s, it was in 1969 in an upstate New York cow pasture at the three-day Woodstock Music Festival that he gained the name and fame that would help cement him into American history. There he told 400,000 youth, "The whole world is watching you. The entire world is going to know what the American youth can do for humanity." Many credit his presence and blessings for the peaceful atmosphere that prevailed throughout that festival.

Swami became a US citizen in 1976. By then he had already established the Integral Yoga Institute (IYI), which today has ashrams and centers throughout the USA and around the world. At about this same time, he founded the Center for Spiritual Studies in collaboration with a Catholic monk, a Zen monk and a Jewish Rabbi. This affiliation featured an annual event called "The Swami and the Rabbi," which was enormously popular in New York City. The famous Yoga Ecumenical Retreats which followed attracted thousands of aspirants from all religions, bringing Swami recognition even at the Vatican in Rome.

In 1981, after establishing large residential centers in both California and Connecticut, he moved his international headquarters to a 750-acre plot of land near Buckingham, Virginia. There he formed Satchidananda Ashram, Yogaville. Although Yogaville was and is a completely self-contained town in every sense, its jewel is the Light Of Truth Universal Shrine (LOTUS).

From a beautifully crafted water world of ponds,

lakes and fountains, LOTUS rises majestically in the form of a huge, surreal, pink and white lotus flower, its petals made of Italian, glass mosaic tile. Inside, a vast, vibrant circular room contains a central altar with a three-dimensional yantra (a geometric form designed to focus spiritual energies). Above this yantra rises a 22-foot column of blue light that feeds into a radiant pink hub at the temple's highest point. From there, it splinters into twelve rays that arch gracefully to connect with twelve shrines equally spaced around the wall of the room. Each of these twelve shrines represents one of the world's major faiths. LOTUS is dedicated to the one divine light which all religions share. This central concept of the basic oneness of all things has always been at the core of Swami's teaching. In 1991, as a compliment to Swami's beautiful LOTUS and in respect for his own Hindu heritage, a glass-walled Lord Nataraja shrine, sponsored by his friend Dr. Karan Singh, was built on the hilltop overlooking Yogaville.

Born in South India not far from Coimbatore in the village of Chettipalayam, Swami enjoyed a contented childhood in a religious Hindu family.

Before his conception, his mother prayed and performed penance for a spiritual child. Her desire was fulfilled in 1914 with the birth of Ramaswamy.

It was after his wife's sudden, early death that Ramaswamy undertook serious meditative disciplines. He was initiated into sannyas (monasticism) by Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, India. This occurred in 1949, the same year as his enlightenment. Henceforth, he was known as Swami Satchidananda.

Swami's trademark method of teaching was to couch useful wisdom in practical, often humorous, examples. His devotees loved him for it and often called him "Papa." "A mother feels great joy in bringing forth a child even though it causes her great pain," he once told a small group of close devotees. "Because of her love, she accepts the pain."

Dr. Dean Ornish, nationally recognized as an authority on heart disease, is one of Swami's close disciples. His health and nutrition programs are

based on the principles and practices of Integral Yoga and are now revolutionizing the lifestyles of thousands of Americans including Bill and Hillary Clinton, who hired him during the Clinton administration to retrain the White House chefs in healthier food preparation. Among his other disciples are singer-composer Carole King, who donated 600 acres to his Virginia ashram; jazz pianist Alice Coltrane and actresses Diane Ladd, Laura Dern and Sally Kirkland.

For more than 30 years, Swami enjoyed a deep and fruitful friendship with Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, the late publisher of Hinduism Today. In 1994 he received from Hinduism Today the "Hindu of the Year" award in recognition for a lifetime of service to yoga and mankind. Swami will always be remembered as one of Hinduism's most respected and loved international ambassadors. His teachings are followed by people of nearly every religious, social and cultural background.

Active to the very end of his days, Swami attended the Global Peace Conference of South

India as its keynote speaker right before his passing. His final interment ceremony took place following his wishes on August 28, 2002, back in America at the Chidambaram Samadhi Shrine near LOTUS. The physical cause of his death was a ruptured thoracic aneurysm. Swami appointed no successors. His Institute is run by a board of trustees.