

[Lotus Temple of Light - Consummation of a Spiritual Life](#)

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Lotus Temple of Light - Consummation of a Spiritual Life

Beard, snowy white; black, shoulder-length hair, streaked with grey; calm eyes in a line-etched face. Swami Satchidananda (71) is the picture of a rishi. For years he has in his own unique, humorous and personable way conveyed the ecumenical teachings of "Integral Yoga," the yoga of synthesis," as taught to him by his Guru. Thousands have come to know and love him for this. Yet, he has just accomplished - with the talented help of some loving and dedicated devotees - what could be the culmination of his life's work: the construction of LOTUS.

"My highest experience was the experience of Advaita or Oneness or Enlightenment. I had that in 1949, a few months after my Sannyas initiation. It was in mid-winter, when I visited Vasishta Cave. Vasishta was a great rishi, a sage who lived hundreds of years ago. There is a legend that it was in this cave he performed his austerities. I went into the cave, bending down until, after 25 feet, I reached a large room-like place with a seat. As I sat there and meditated, I had the experience of transcending my body and mind, realizing myself as the Omnipresent. 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, OM chanting, coming from a long distance away. Slowly, slowly, it became louder. As it neared, I became aware of my mind and body. I stood up and went out of the cave. For some time, I couldn't see anything in the normal way. All over I saw light, light, light. The whole world appeared to be a mass of light."

Swamiji gave this description of his illumination over fifteen years ago. Yet, the same account of such a timeless experience could have been given yesterday. For Swami Satchidananda the spiritual experience of light has become a central teaching focus through the years. It's no small wonder that he has just built a temple dedicated to light.

"Light is built into everything in the universe," said Swami. "Everything has that

light...We all have that light in common. Nobody rejects the light. All faiths honor it. Every altar has light. Every religion has a festival for light. That means that, at least once a year, most people think of light. If only we could think of it always..."

Through the years the Swami's "universal" vision has been expressed in the form of numerous interfaith programs and worship services. Careful not to limit himself to any one organization, religion or country, Swamiji lectures and serves as advisor to international yoga and ecumenical organizations around the world. He has dedicated his life to the cause of peace - both individual and universal - and to religious harmony among all people.

Born on December 22, 1914, in the Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu, Swami received diksha in Rishikesh on July 10, 1949, from His Holiness Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, founder of Divine Life Society. He served in Sri Lanka from 1953 to 1966 and it was during this time that he started formulating ideas for the LOTUS temple. In 1965 Swami came West.

Swami Satchidananda is considered to be a master of yoga and the spiritual preceptor for the students of Integral Yoga. He is dedicated to the ecumenical movement and his motto is: "Truth is One, paths are many." His main residence is in Buckingham, Virginia, although he travels widely. His broad-based teaching touches education, religion, health and yoga.

What is the source of his inspiration? "Faith makes everything possible," he says. "Faith itself is God. Let us march on and on. Let us not stop till the goal is reached. Let us set examples."

The Dedication

By Rev. Saraswati B. Epstein of IYI

The dedication of the LOTUS, in this year of World Peace, is most timely. Thousands

of devotees from every continent gathered together to celebrate on the weekend, July 20-21.

The dedication was preceded by a day-long All Faiths symposium at which about forty leaders of different religions and peace activists, such as Barbara Marx Hubbard, shared their deeply held convictions and paid tribute to the LOTUS as a monument to humanity's underlying unity and shared concern for world peace.

The Dedication itself begins with an ecumenical service following the same idea as Swami Satchidananda's early celebrations in Sri Lanka. Celebrants from all the world's religions participate in a candle-lighting ceremony honoring the one source from which all the different paths emanate. Representatives of each religion make offerings to the light, quoting an appropriate scripture, and adding inspirational words of their own.

The ceremony is richly diverse: Tibetan gongs resound, shaman drums throb, Vedic hymns resonate through the still air, blessing the thousands who sit under the tent's shade. Hebrew, Latin, Sioux, Japanese cadences build up the vibration.

The celebrants form a procession from the temporary tent which has been put up to shelter 3,000 people from the summer sun, and go to the temple, followed by honored guests and dignitaries. Near the entrance they pour libations into an urn before proceeding to the still unlit temple.

At exactly 12:00 PM Swami Satchidananda offers incense and rose petals to the beautiful central yantra that is the base of the central light of LOTUS. More prayers are said, some in Sanskrit, in Tamil, and in English: "Help us experience the one light in all. Let us live harmoniously as your beautiful children," invokes Swamiji. And with these words a column of fluid light soars toward the ceiling. Reaching its apex, it breaks into twelve rays which form a six-pointed star as they lead to each one of the twelve altars.

Beneath the shrine is All Faiths Hall. Here are found bookcases, ritual articles, pictures and scriptures from the world's religions. A sculpture representing the

races of humanity dancing in harmony is the central focus of this chamber. Its base swings aside to reveal the descent to the vault, the holy of holies where crystals, stones, gems and a bit of moon rock were mixed together with earth and water from holy places all over the planet and embedded in the center of the floor during the temple's groundbreaking in 1982.

More ribbons are cut, statuary unveiled. But the real coup de grace occurs when Swamiji blesses the entire LOTUS temple by circling the clearstory by helicopter, pouring the offerings of holy water and rose petals.

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