

[Swami Radha](#)

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Swami Radha

Canadian-Based Teacher/Author Brings Sivananda's Mission to Western Shores

"The main thing I try to do is have my students bring quality into their lives," Swami Radha told Hinduism Today. "To me, people are not spiritual if this quality is not there in their lives-even if they meditate six hours a day. By quality I mean that which comes from deep inside and shows up in their actions, their treatment of others and the way they do their jobs."

Swami Radha's teachings are intensely pragmatic and full of soulful quality. She works with her students and devotees at the gut level where ideas translate into application. With her sensitive understanding of human nature she has, through the years, integrated modern Western psychology with ancient Eastern yoga to produce a unique teaching system which devotees say changed their lives.

"Swami Sivananda gave me a little booklet and told me when I heard certain important terms to write them down and study them," said Swami Radha. "I did that; it was very clarifying. Swami Sivananda was very practical."

The science of yoga is the heart of Swami Radha's teaching, but she contends that before any yoga instruction can begin, there must be a foundation of clarity. This clarity may come at first as a simple common understanding of certain often-used terms like "love," "service," "Humility," "Meditation" and "Soul."

"I have them write down what they think the meaning of a certain word is and then we discuss it," Swami Radha commented. "This then forces them to become aware of where they are. You know, you have to clear away so many of the basic things before you can even have a grasp of these teachings."

Swami Radha was trained by Swami Sivananda at Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh, India. In 1956 she received sannyas initiation from the Swami and returned West at his request to set up a series of training centers in Canada and the U.S. She promised her Guru that she would accomplish this goal. Now, at the age of 76, she is the spiritual director of Yasodhara Ashram-founded in 1962 and located in the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia, Canada-and all of its "sister centers" called Shambala Houses.

She has also published a number of books including Kundalini: Yoga for the West, Mantras: Words of Power and her own autobiography, Radha: Diary of a Woman's Search. These books are popular and distinctive because they clarify the sometimes enigmatic Eastern teachings in a way that can be understood and applied in western daily life.

"Swami Radha's genius is to have distilled the yogic ideals into practical and possible steps which I, as a Westerner, can follow," asserts Susan Oughtred, Director of the Shambhala House Calgary.

Swami Radha has accomplished a lot over the past 30 years, but it has not always been easy. She grew up in Germany through two World Wars. Her upbringing in a very wealthy family-while highly cultured-was not religious. To travel to India, receive sannyas and take the vow of renunciation was shocking for a lady of her background. To subsequently travel West on a spiritual mission, establish and sustain an ashram, take on students and successfully maintain an active teaching program for more than 30 years was both a challenge and an achievement. She describes one difficulty:

"You know, you work with someone for a long time to build up the ashram and then one day they just get up and walk away. The following 24 hours is very critical. And I ask myself: 'Will the ashram survive? Will I be able to fulfill my promise to my Guru?' Yet, in this we learn that the Divine is always there. Whatever your position is, you are only God's caretaker. Suddenly, somebody else comes along and does the job even better. I have seen this in the ashram over and over."

Then there are the wonderful moments. Swami Radha describes her greatest

fulfillment as seeing her students overcome difficulties with understanding, thus changing their lives for the better. This, too, she says, happens often.

There are currently 14 permanent residents at the Ashram. Two are swamis. Most of them have been there for five to ten years. They all travel frequently to the Shambala houses, working and studying closely with Swami Radha. They are most respectful of their Guru.

"Swami Radha has integrity," comments Lorraine Burke, Ashram resident. "Her renunciation vows are so much a part of her, they reveal a woman of impeccable character."

Speaking affectionately of her Guru, Swami Radha remembers Swami Sivananda as a man who "used every moment to teach you something." At informal times on walks or in the garden, he would share with Swami Radha, through stories and casual conversation, a philosophy of life which would become her spiritual message to the West: Truth may be found in a balanced life, use discipline to avoid extremes. When Swami Radha came to Swami Sivananda she was a dancer. When she took the vow of renunciation, he did not tell her to stop dancing. He taught her the "prayer dance," which she now teaches her students as a means of safely directing emotional and physical energies into devotion.

Nestled in the serene beauty of the Canadian Rockies on 80 acres of woodland, Yasodhara Ashram has for 25 years provided the perfect environment for people of all ages and backgrounds to pursue inner growth. Today, it is a multi-faceted operation complete with classrooms, guest and resident accommodations, a bookstore, a print shop, a recording studio and a farm.

At the Ashram they write and publish books, brochures, and their personal journal, Ascent. The print shop has recently converted over to Desktop publishing with five Macintosh computers and a Laserwriter. They now produce all of their type and graphics on these computers using the Microsoft Word and Aldus Page-Maker programs.

The Ashram is a certified educational institution offering courses on hatha yoga, kundalini yoga, dreams, dance, music and much more. These courses are taught by Swami Radha and the permanent residents and are recognized by a number of accredited colleges & universities in Canada and the U.S. as part of the prerequisites for admission into a variety of programs ranging from religion to communications.

For further information write: Yasodhara Ashram, P.O. Box 9 HT, Kootenay Bay, B.C. V0B 1X0 Canada.

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