South African Hindus Lose Swami Navaler
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A cold turned to a flu, respiratory problems complicated and suddenly, on August 15, he was gone. For South African Hindus it was, and still is, a shock. Swami Sivananda Navaler, 68, was a household word. A slight, wiry man who once spent three days buried underground in a yogic demonstration, he was the spiritual master of one of the nation's largest Hindu institutions, the Saiva Sithantha Sungum. From the Sungum's headquarters in Durban, Navaler shepherded the organization into new congregational growth and construction. The question of his successor immediately rose, but the Sungum, at this writing, had no announcement.

"Be sure you get Swami Navaler as a speaker," event organizers would always here. His flair for oration as a teenager earned him the name Navaler, "great orator" from his guru, the founding leader of the Sungum. He was everything that South African Hindus needed during decades of demoralizing Christian conversions and struggling religious self-identify: a dignified religious authority, family counselor, peacemaker and defender of Hindu heritage.

Though a sectarian Saivite, Swami Navaler won admiration by opposing petty factionalism that militated against the harmony he so wanted for the spiritually and linguistically diverse Indian population.

Thousands attended his funeral. Tributes by religious and political dignitaries said eloquently what everyone felt in their hearts - Swami Navaler was a rare soul and will be missed. But Swami Shivapadananda of the Ramakrishna Center discouraged sorrow: "This is a happy day, for gurus don't die," he said and lead the whole crowd chanting "Aum Namasivaya." "It was a very stirring moment," said Morgan Yegambaram. As a yogi-guru, Swami Navaler was not cremated, but buried.

We Knew Him

In forty years I still have yet to come across a spiritual figure like Swami Navaler. Without him, we are like beggers.

- S.B. Naicker, politician

I knew him as one who selflessly solaced so many during trying times in their lives. For those of us who do the same work, he is an example to live up to.

- Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

The three heads of the Sungam - Guru Swamigal, Karunaiananda Swamigal and Swami Navaler are like Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

- J.T. Phoola, Gujarati leader

Once at Ganesha Charturchi Swamiji was called on to chant "Om Ganeshaya Namaha." He went on continuously, shedding tears, losing himself in that one mantra. The entire crowd went into rapture on the power of his chant. It really touched my heart.

- Morgan Yegambaram

I took forward to a new chapter in the history of mankind with the spirit of service and sacrifice...Today our religious denominations, which could be the variegated expressions of the universal life, are too often guarded domains of isolated thought, islands of prejudice surrounded by seas of misunderstanding. Some day

we may awaken to the wisdom of letting our souls have freedom from cages of creed and allow them to stretch their wings in their native air and beat a joyous way through the boundless blue.

LIFE AND WORKS:

At age 8 he began serving Guru Soobramania Swamigal, his guru and founder of the Saiva Sithantha Sungum (SSS). At 15, he became his personal secretary and received the name Navaler, "great orator."

* He married and continued his service.

* At 48, he was appointed successor and spiritual head of the SSS.

* Between 1972 and 1976 he established important cultural & religious ties with India.

* He catalyzed the construction of two magnificent and modern facilities - the Derby Street Center and Chatsworth Centre.

* He was the first Hindu Marriage Officer appointed in South Africa.

* He began the country's first large-scale Hindu charity program - 1,500 meals served daily to poor, irrespective of color or creed.

* He was the first Hindu chaplain to serve Hindu Navymen and visited them weekly.

* He demonstrated his amazing yogic ability to suspend breathing by remaining in an air-tight glass container for 1 hour under laboratory conditions at the University of Natal Medical College, supervised by Dr. Grant White.

* In 1980, he organized the momentous 120th anniversary of Indian arrival in South Africa.

* He was instrumental in expanding the SSS's membership to 10,000.

* He inspired all 18 branches of the SSS, to build better facilities to serve the next generation.

* In 1990 he began the Africa Edition of HINDUISM TODAY.

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