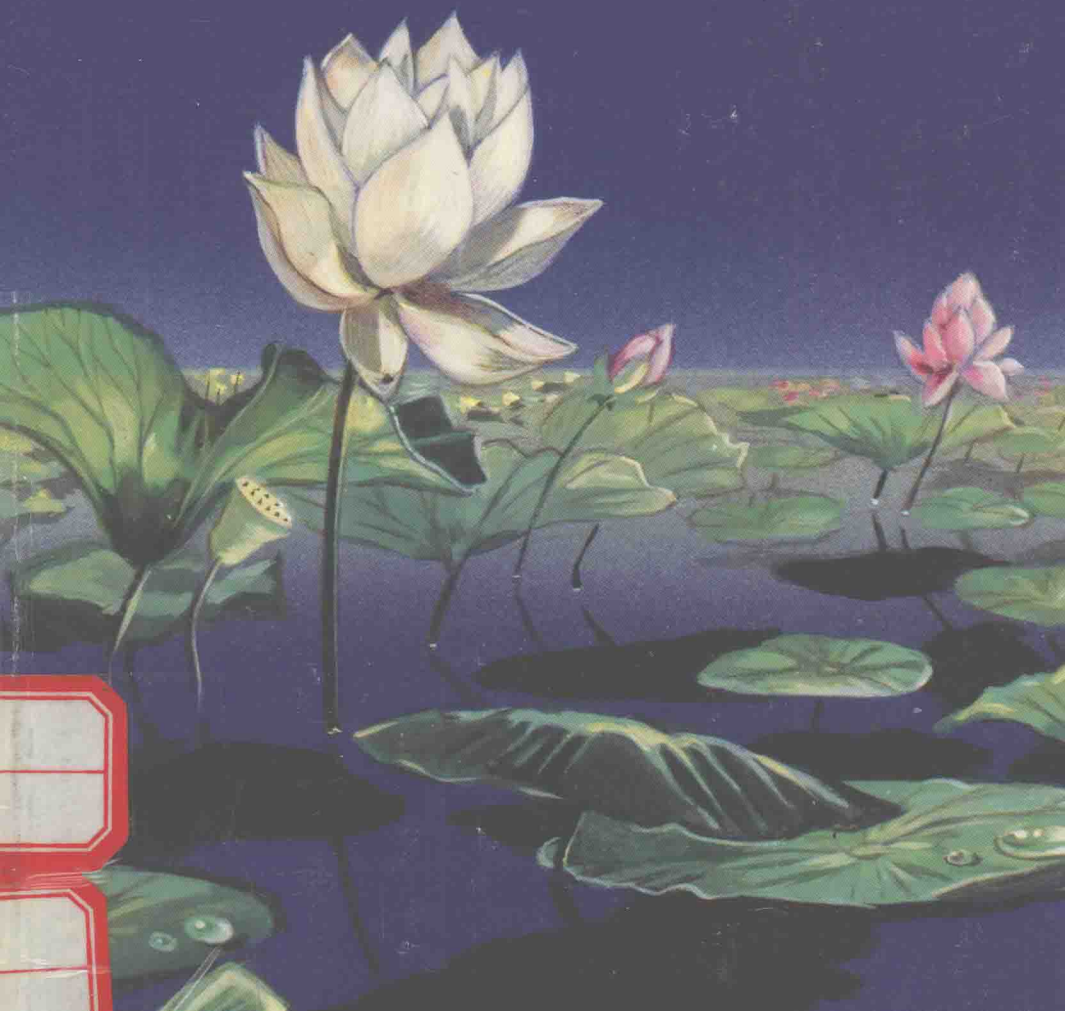


IN THE COMPANY OF THE WISE

*REMEMBERING MY TEACHERS,
REFLECTING THE LIGHT*

SWAMI SIVANANDA RADHA



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I am grateful for having had an excellent team. My first collaborators and editors, Swami Padmananda, Margaret Gray, and Jim Spencer not only edited the original manuscript for *Gods Who Walk the Rainbow*, but it was due to their constant encouragement that I finally was convinced to share these most personal experiences with a wider circle of seekers. Joe Gnilka and Swami Saradananda took the many photographs included here, and Danita Holldorson spent many hours painstakingly restoring the old negatives. These photographs bring back fond memories of a life that seems to belong to another world.

For helping to reveal the new “secrets” in *In the Company of the Wise*, I have to thank Linda Anne Seville, my publisher, who showed great enthusiasm for all the new material and offered her continuing cooperation, which was always appreciated. My extremely conscientious editor and research assistant, Julie McKay, had her own great patience and insight, and an outstanding dedication to the Work. Ian MacKenzie fastidiously reviewed the final manuscript to ensure that the finer points of the English language were in place. Norman MacKenzie, always aware that I was looking for evidence, skimmed the right bookshelves and discovered many new translations of Kashmiri texts. And Tom Weaver went still further and traced, by computer, a series of manuscripts whose contents have provided a scriptural confirmation of some very personal experiences.

I am grateful to Timeless Books for the production of this book, and will feel much rewarded if it helps and inspires others.

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

When it came time to reprint *Gods Who Walk the Rainbow*, it seemed a perfect opportunity to expand upon it, and the result is this new edition, *In the Company of the Wise*. I have added three new chapters to Part One, including recent reflections on my personal guru, Swami Sivananda, and the stories of my meetings with Sai Baba of Shirdi, and with the Catholic stigmatist, Padre Pio.

I have also expanded Part Two to include my current thinking on aspirants' illusions, pseudo-gurus, and the responsibilities of gurus and disciples in their relationship. New material and previously published work were woven together. For reference purposes, I have added a glossary, an expanded bibliography, and a directory to the centers of each teacher I write about. When all the proposed changes were assembled it seemed best to rename the book and publish it on its own merit.

My interest has recently been ignited by a new perspective on my relationship with Swami Sivananda. For the first time I have attempted to let something of our past be known, in the hope of helping others understand the possibility of dimensions beyond those we normally accept.

When I first went to India I had only an intellectual concept of space and time, with a few glimpses of a very “other” dimension. I was surprised when Swami Sivananda would introduce me to people as “my friend from Kashmir,” or would sometimes call me “auntie.” Only when I was leaving India did he state in his farewell address that “we had lived together and worked together in the field of spirituality in a past life.”

Now in this book, I explore not only space and time—many good scientific works will do that—but also the possibility of a personal relationship between the same “consciousnesses” that once inhabited different bodies and lived in different cultures in quite another time. I pursue a thread that seems to lead into the distance, where there are only resting places but there is never an end.

Although I have felt cautious about presenting what the rational mind might find irrational, the facts of my experience will have to speak for themselves. Sometimes we have to trust in the Light so firmly that hesitations and doubts roll off like beads of water from a lotus leaf.

FOREWORD

As I read this book I was interested to find out *how* Swami Radha learned from these spiritual teachers and saints, not just *what* she learned. She brought to each encounter a lively curiosity, an openness to the guru, and an awareness of her own heart and mind. The curiosity came from a sincere and deep desire to find out what she could learn from the teacher. The openness was a willingness to put aside presuppositions, and to receive as fully as possible the teachings and spiritual wisdom.

The awareness of her own heart and mind allowed her to be honest with questions, doubts, concerns. She acknowledged her fears rather than dismiss them or suppress them. She asked questions, even foolish or “ignorant” ones. She wondered about her ability to believe without reason or logic to support her. It is useful to know that these thoughts are natural even in a spiritually experienced person.

We can learn from her example. One must develop discernment in selecting a spiritual guru, just as with any other teacher or mentor. One must learn to recognize the authentic teachers among the many who have only emotional enthusiasm or who serve their own egos rather than the Higher Self. The respected Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh

was Swami Radha's own guru, and she was ordained by him into the order of sanyas. Her guidelines on how to choose a guru come from her work with him and her meetings with the many teachers described in this book.

We are seeing increased interest in personal spiritual development in the West. Many persons seek an integration of body, mind, and spirit, whether through joining traditional religious groups, exploring new spiritual movements, or engaging in individual study. Some people may find that they are called to study with a guru, others may choose a different path. These stories by Swami Radha expand our understanding of gurus—what kinds of persons they are, how we can relate to them, and what we can learn from such teachers. There are many ways to move toward the Divine in ourselves and in others, and as we do so we learn to respond to the Divine in any form.

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INTRODUCTION

During my two trips to the East, I was fortunate to meet a number of exceptional teachers who helped me in my personal development and in laying the groundwork for my own teachings. In the first part of this book, I describe my encounters with these sages. Each guru whom I met demonstrated a different approach by which he or she reached a high level of spiritual attainment. From my own efforts over the past thirty-five years to put these teachings into action, I also want to offer a realistic foundation for others who are sincerely seeking enlightenment. So in Part II I explore the nature of spiritual learning, describe the relationship between guru and disciple, and give some guidelines to distinguish true gurus from false ones.

My first journey to the Orient in 1955 was primarily to Rishikesh, India, in the foothills of the Himalayas, where I received initiation into *sanyas*¹ from Swami Sivananda. In my book *Radha: Diary of a Woman's Search*, I describe this intensive spiritual journey. In the present work I complete the picture of my first trip to India by writing about others I

¹ Sanyas is the renunciation of action based on desire. It also refers to a formal initiation of a disciple into a life of selfless service.

met at the time, including my music and dance gurus, and the Tibetan guru who was to have such an impact on my future work.

My return to the West was very difficult. I needed to find a place to assess my experiences, clear my thinking, and somehow prepare to live once again in the Western culture with its very different demands. Existing *ashrams*² were few and I was refused refuge even as a temporary guest. Christian communities seemed to be afraid of me because I was a *sanyasi*.³ Not only did I wear a bright orange sari, but I had been trained in a “heathen” tradition. I was amazed at the arrogance of those who presumed to know the will of the immeasurable power that created the cosmos, the galaxies, and our little planet Earth. When we cannot fathom even the distance of a few billion light years between two stars, how can we dare to define precisely what this Divine Power is and what it wants?

Although I wanted no more responsibility than I felt able to handle, my unusual way of living and my orange robe attracted a number of people. They found a place to meet and hold *satsang*.⁴ When our meeting place became too small, we moved into an old house that became our first ashram. In this way I began to fulfil my guru’s instructions to start ashrams and centers throughout North America. I found that even with the blessings of my guru, it was not easy to carry out his commands. There were a number of difficulties that I had to learn to deal with entirely through my own experience. To run an ashram from a sense of duty was not enough. Love had to become my motivation, and it tended to fluctuate.

In 1958 I returned to Sivananda Ashram and to my guru, Swami Sivananda. I also had the opportunity to meet the many other spiritual teachers I describe here, and to make a pilgrimage to several Buddhist temples and monasteries throughout the Orient. The additional contact helped me clarify the immense amount of learning that had been so compressed in my first trip, and helped me to re-establish balance.

Certain practices that I participated in, such as walking for sixty hours without sleep or a proper meal, were very vigorous and brought me to a point of near collapse, clearly showing me my physical and

² An ashram is a spiritual center created when disciples, who are attracted to a guru, begin to gather and live around him or her.

³ A sanyasi is a renunciate whose life is devoted to the service of humanity.

⁴ Satsang refers to a time when seekers gather to chant, meditate, or worship together. Literally it means “the company of the wise.”

emotional limits. That I survived these and other intense practices was due to the preparation of enduring six and a half years of war, when sleep had to be snatched standing upright in the shelters during air attacks; and to the fact that Swami Sivananda, before my first visit, had demanded that I learn to sit for five hours motionless. That discipline, as well as reciting a four-line mantra a thousand times a day for forty-five days, was certainly training that saved me from physical and emotional collapse during the practices I was given on this second visit to the East.

We cannot really understand the mind until we reach its limits of physical and emotional resistance, and recognize its creative powers. Under stress the mind will conjure up strange visions that we in the West call psychic phenomena, although my various disciplinarian monks did not call them that. When all the wheels have turned, all the emotions spilled over—fear, despair, hopelessness—the mind reaches a point where it cannot create solutions, even impossible or ridiculous ones. That moment, when there is nothing left to think or do, is the moment of surrender. (Winston Churchill experienced this state when England was under air attack and had no protection. In the instant of complete surrender, when he forgot even to suck on his cigar, the idea of the radar system came to him.) The yogi intentionally creates this state of mind and emotions to allow intuitive perceptions to emerge.

I hope this book will inspire others to tap their own mental resources and to keep that spark of learning alive. In Part I, you will meet me as an aspirant, travelling throughout the Orient, interacting with different gurus, questioning, struggling to overcome preconceived ideas, and to further my spiritual development. In Part II, I speak from what I have learned about the guru-disciple relationship and the process of learning. But I cannot say I was once a student and now I am a teacher. Without continuing to learn, I could not teach. As human beings we are to different degrees a student and to different degrees a teacher, at different phases in our lives. In the same way, we cannot say we are only physical beings or we are only spiritual beings. As long as we live, we move between two worlds; so throughout our lives we have to look into our mental basements, as well as into our mental heavens. Eventually, when we have come to accept both, we realize that the Power behind them is one.

SWAMI SIVANANDA RADHA

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PART ONE

*REMEMBERING
MY TEACHERS*

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS A GURU?

*I*n the general sense a guru is a teacher—teaching anything from music, to language, to the interpretation of scriptural texts. In the intimate sense, a guru is the person who awakens others to their spiritual search, helping them to keep the spiritual flame alive and to fan it to a greater intensity for Self-Realization. The guru, as spiritual teacher, has the goal of serving the Most High, being a channel of the Light, inspiring disciples to levels beyond thought. The physical manifestation of the guru—when the term *guru* is applied in its true meaning—will be only a steppingstone to the discovery of the Divine within, or what Swami Sivananda called “the guru of all gurus.”

Spiritual aspirants are persons who have recognized a higher purpose than living “the good life.” They seek a spiritual guru to help free themselves from limitations, and to help them realize their human potential and ultimately their own Self.

In the sense that a guru can be anyone or anything from whom one learns, both my father and my husband were gurus to me. My father

wisely encouraged me, from a very early age, to be an independent thinker. He patiently listened when I wrote little stories, and had an effective way of teaching a small child. I particularly remember his lesson about jealousy. My father liked dogs and had sometimes two or three at a time. One day he fed and patted one dog and showed me how the other dog was terribly jealous, growling, showing his teeth, and trying to frighten away the one he was patting. Then he fed, stroked, and patted the jealous dog, and the first one reacted in the same way.

Father looked up and said, "Sylvia, never lower yourself to the level of a dog. While animals have instincts and are not stupid, they lack a certain type of reasoning. Even though I was showing both of them my love with words and by feeding and caressing them equally, they did not realize that they had no need for jealousy. Human beings can think and reason, so there is never any excuse to display jealousy."

My husband was also a guru in this sense. From him I learned a special quality of love. One evening he invited some of his friends to our house. They brought flowers for me, in the traditional European way of showing respect to the hostess. However, my husband displayed a rather negative mood for which I felt obliged to make up. I think he had forgotten that he had invited them and somehow their coming did not suit him. I quickly placed the flowers in a very simple container so that I could give my attention to the visitors.

After they were gone, I spied a suitable vase that happened to be on top of the library shelf. I tried to reach it by standing on my toes. My husband, who was lying on the couch, got up and said, "Why didn't you ask me?" I told him that because of his bad mood I would not have dared to ask him for any favors. If he was moody in front of his own guests, I thought I would have to be very careful.

Then he asked me to sit down with him, poured a sherry, and explained that his viewpoint was quite different. He felt that one could always make new friends and acquaintances.

"But with you," he said, "I live my whole life. I can't make you the target of a mood I cannot control. Our guests will forget, and if they don't, it doesn't matter. But you are my wife and we are sharing our lives with each other, therefore I am very careful not to treat you disrespectfully or make you the target of my moods."

This lesson I have passed on to a number of couples who were having marital difficulties. A breakdown in relationships often comes from carelessness, from taking the partner for granted and not expressing love or respect. As the years have passed, I have tried more and