

Swami Devapriyananda

(Revered Swami Devapriyananda is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order. As a part of the 40th year celebrations of Vidyapith, Swami Girishananda and Swami Devapriyananda were invited to visit Vivekananda Vidyapith on Monday, November 16, 2016. The following writeup has been prepared for publication from a video recording of Swamiji's lecture.)

My salutations to Thakur, Maa and Swami Vivekananda and my reverence to revered Maharaj, Swami Girishananda, and of course love to you all. The love of Thakur is in your heart and you are spreading his message everywhere. I remember when a big team of Vivekananda Vidyapith came to the Belur Math, revered Girishanandaji Maharaj asked me to remain with the group. At the reception of Vivekananda Vidyapith's devotees at the Belur math, Swami Sarvapriyanandaji spoke so well. I am sure you remember that. He is here in the USA now. I never imagined that I will meet you here again, but by Thakur's grace, I have this opportunity.

When I was moving from one Vedanta society to another here in USA, I had the opportunity to see the Vedanta societies with my own eyes, which I had only heard about them in India. I see Thakur living everywhere, not only in temples but in the hearts of people. He has no boundaries. I was born and brought up in Bengal, but today I saw the house where Swami Vivekananda lived in Ridgeley and people who took care of us at Ridgeley were from Kerala. Here all of you are here from Gujarat and other places. This is an example of Thakur's love having no boundaries across India, America and other parts of the world. The message of Sri Ramakrishna is spreading everywhere. The bouquet consists of different flowers of different sizes and shapes, colors and fragrance. But put together, it is a wonderful bouquet that we are offering to the Master. Similarly we are all like the different flowers of the same bouquet.

I recall the innocent faces of the students of Vivekananda Vidyapith walking in the Belur Math with so much discipline. We heard that they are coming from America. But, we did not find them to be coming from a foreign land or from different environment. It was clear that in the Belur Math they felt as if they were in their home. I hope that these children establish in their own lives to the best of their capacity and along with it they spread the message of Swami Vivekananda and become soldiers of Swami Vivekananda. I hope that they do good to the humanity while keeping all these ideals in their head and keeping the flame alive in their heart. Thakur, Maa and Swami Vivekananda are not just for the few people of the village or the town or the country. We say "Sri Ramakrishna is 'Yugavata', " an incarnation of God to guide people of this age. Through Thakur, Maa and Swamiji, we inherit thousands of years of spirituality. We should take their teachings with us wherever we go.

People thought that religion is a set of rituals we have to perform. But Swami Vivekananda pointed out by showing the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and the direct

Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna that 'religion is the realization'. Once a devotee asked Swami Brahmananda, 'You have lived with Sri Ramakrishna and received his grace as his spiritual son, then why you need to do so much austerity and penance after passing of Sri Ramakrishna?' He told, "I know that I am a son of a rich man and I inherit huge property and wealth. But, I should know what treasury I inherited." Thus, through spiritual practices we should know what spirituality we inherited through Thakur, Maa, and Swamiji.

Swami Shivananda once said, 'Read our lives. That is Vedanta. That is Upanishad.' Through the lives of direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the ultimate truth of Upanishads and Vedanta manifest: "Divinity exists in everyone and it has to be manifested." Sri Ramakrishna taught this through an example. A wick in a lantern is burning, but the soot is darkening the glass around the flame. As more soot accumulates, the glass cover becomes so dark that no one can see the flame inside it. Once we rub off the soot a bit, we will see the traces of light from the burning wick. As we rub off soot more and more, we will gradually see more and more light from the lantern. We have dirt in our mind and so our divinity is hidden by this dirt. If we can remove the dirt from our minds, the inner divinity will be manifested. Swami Vivekananda said that everyone is potentially divine. This truth has been iterated in the Upanishads, the oldest scriptural books in this world, and it has been declared repeatedly by the sages. It will be realized in the future also. I may be a singer, a scientist, a poet, young or old, a man or a woman; If I follow the right path, I can be spiritual and manifest this divinity lying within. Before we do worship with various ingredients, we do "Manasa Puja," a mental worship in which we offer our virtues as flowers like compassion, forgiving nature, not to hurt anyone, self-control and others to God. When we develop such virtues our lives get transformed.

Vidyapith has completed 40 years of service. We pray that more and more children will come into the fold of Vidyapith. I pray to Thakur, Maa and Swami Vivekananda, may they shower their blessings on all of you and those who come in the future. Again I pay homage to Thakur, Maa and Swami Vivekananda, to you all, to Mr. and Mrs. Jani, and especially to the younger ones. Thank you.