

ABHISHIKTANANDA SOCIETY

[Registered as a Charitable Society, No S/9453 under the Societies Registration Act, XXI of 1860]
Registered Office: Brotherhood House, 7 Court Lane, Delhi 110054, India

THE ABHISHIKTANANDA SOCIETY COMES TO A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION AFTER THIRTY YEARS OF CONTRIBUTION IN HINDU-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE (1978-2008). A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT.

Delhi, 8 February 2008

Dear Friends of the Abhishiktananda Society,

The Abhishiktananda Society, which for nearly thirty years has been working earnestly to fulfil its original objectives, is now arriving at a successful culmination point. The purpose of this letter is to share with Members the important decision which has been made regarding the future of the Society.

Since the year 2000, the Executive Committee has been reflecting on the continued relevance of the Society. On 7 December 2007, after considering all aspects, the General Body decided unanimously that the Abhishiktananda Society should cease to exist as a formal structure. This will come into effect on 29 February 2008. Prof. Raimon Panikkar, Founder and first President of the Society (1978-1988), had sent a letter of endorsement in this regard:

“...In 1978, few years after the mahasamadhi of Swami Abhishiktananda, we were a group of friends interested in promoting Swamiji’s message. We naturally felt driven to give an official framework to that task and so we founded the Abhishiktananda Society of which I was the first president. Now after nearly thirty years, the aims for which the Society was founded have been practically fulfilled. Swamiji is now well known and his message spread by itself and he would have agreed that there is no need to maintain an institution once it is no longer necessary. All human institutions are only temporary and should cease to exist when the time is right. The Executive Committee of the Abhishiktananda Society has had the courage and detachment to see that now it is the correct time to dissolve the Society.

(...) I send you the Blessings of an old friend of Abhishiktananda and of all of you.”

The decision to dissolve the Society by no means signifies that an end should be put to the important work of spreading the spiritual legacy of Swamiji; rather, this important task should now be allowed to continue in new and creative directions. Initiatives are now taking place to carry Swamiji’s message even further and beyond the original aims of the Society. In recognition of these initiatives and supporting structures, we can see that the work performed by the Society to date, can be securely managed moving forward.

The Works of the Society

A series of valuable and creative initiatives have been fulfilled by the Society over the years. Swami Abhishiktananda is now well known around the world. By venturing along an untrod

path, Swamiji paved a way for all who seek the Absolute beyond any particular religious path. The Society has been able to help communicate what he stood for, what he wanted to convey to us and the steps he took to live and convey his message.

“This is the culmination of the intuition that struck me in January: ‘Everything has become clear’. There is only the Awakening. All that is ‘notional’ – myths and concepts – is only its expression. There is neither heaven nor earth, there is only Purusha which I am...” (Ascent to the Depth of the Heart, Diary entry: September 11, 1973, p.386)

The principal goal of the Society was to promote the publication of Swamiji’s writings and to make available, for the first time, his spiritual diary and the articles and essays that had not been published during his lifetime. The original French version of the spiritual diary was published in 1984 and eventually in English in 1996. Another monumental task was to draw up a biography of Swamiji based essentially on his numerous letters. The considerable amount of research and translation needed for this project should not be underestimated. This was largely the work of Dr James Stuart to whom we are forever grateful.

Another goal of the Society was to encourage the dialogue and the spiritual meeting between different religious traditions - Hinduism and Christianity in particular. For that purpose, three interreligious retreat-seminars were conceived and conducted by Dr Bettina Bäumer, the former President, so that there may be increased awareness of the common spiritual ground at the heart of all religions.

Over the years, the Society has also preserved a special library consisting of Swami Abhishiktananda’s personal books as well as his papers and manuscripts. This resource has been much appreciated by scholars from around the world who have an interest in Swamiji and, more generally, in Hindu –Christian spirituality. Much academic work continues to take place making use of these archives, despite the passing of so many decades.

The efforts of the Society have been productive and rewarding. We also acknowledge that whatever has a beginning must also have an end. The Buddhist tradition gives us the story of a raft which can be used to cross a river, and once the other shore is reached, it can be left behind. The raft is useful when it carries you across the river but it becomes a burden if you decide to carry it. The Abhishiktananda Society has served as it were as an essential vehicle for Swamiji’s message over the decades.

“The structures will blow up, but what does it matter? There are plenty of tracks leading to the summit of Arunachala” (Letter to MC, 28.01.1972)

Moving Forward

New organizations already exist which will take up the torch. Regarding the written works of Swami Abhishiktananda, to date, ISPCK has always been the publisher of the English titles. We acknowledge and appreciate ISPCK’s contribution in promoting and distributing Swamiji’s books over the years, and the positive working relationship with the Abhishiktananda Society. Whilst ISPCK remains the publisher of the current English titles of Swamiji, moving forward, the task of publishing Swamiji’s writings in English will be increasingly taken up by the Delhi Brotherhood Society. This is able to occur due to the kind cooperation of ISPCK: in 2007, ISPCK relinquished the publishing rights of five titles, which were out of print, to the Abhishiktananda Society. A similar agreement will be sought by the Delhi Brotherhood Society for the remaining English titles, once the current prints run out. (The Delhi Brotherhood Society will have the World English language rights as well as Indian languages rights). The task of promoting Swamiji’s

writings abroad will be continued by DIM/MID (*Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique*/Monastic Interreligious Dialogue) in all languages except for the English language and Indian languages. We can definitely expect new re-editions and translations into new languages in the future, and a continued commitment to the distribution of Swami Abhishiktananda's books in India and abroad.

As for the retreat-seminars which have generated much interest and fruitful discussion in the past, similar meetings are sure to continue to take place, organized from a variety of sources. There are plans also to have a programme of seminars in India to commemorate the birth centenary of Swamiji in 2010.

Another new initiative which has emerged is Ajatananda Ashram, an interreligious and intermonastic community in Rishikesh, to promote dialogue on the experiential level as envisioned by Swami Abhishiktananda. The ashram was named after his principal disciple, Swami Ajatananda Saraswati (Marc Chaduc).

Moving forward, there will be a need to explore new ways and means to keep the friends of Swamiji regularly informed about publications, seminars and events in relation with his life and message. SETU (from the Sanskrit, *bridge*), which was the yearly Bulletin of the Society, has been discontinued and the official website of the Abhishiktananda Society (www.abhishiktananda.org) will no longer exist, however, there will be a new website promoting Swamiji's message (www.abhishiktananda.org.in).

Gratitude

When we look back, we see that there is a long list of people to express our deep-felt gratitude towards for the presence, support and guidance they have bestowed on us. It naturally goes back to the founders of the Society who, at that time, grasped the relevance of Swami Abhishiktananda's legacy for today's spiritually starved world, and to the present executive board which objectively ensured that the work has been accomplished.

It seems appropriate for me to mention here that it was an enriching and challenging experience to serve the Abhishiktananda Society first as an associate member since 1983 and since 2002 as an office bearer of the Executive Committee.

In the end, the Abhishiktananda Society can be proud of all it has achieved. It has fulfilled its aims and can now allow the spiritual legacy of Swamiji to be carried on, even further than it imagined thirty years ago, by organizations and people who are ready and willing to meet new challenges and go beyond what it thought was possible.

May Swamiji's message, the eternal message, continue to guide us towards the ultimate Awakening.

With OM, love and good wishes,

Swami Atmananda Udasin
President of the Abhishiktananda Society