

**A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF GURU DEV**  
**Swami Brahmananda Saraswati**  
**Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath**



**By ROBERT C. SANDERS**

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Swami Brahmanand Saraswati

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## Preface

The great religions speak of a state of happiness that is unlimited, of a peace that passes all understanding. They urge us to awake, to experience this state, to cast off the heavy cloak of sorrow and distress, to live in perpetual freedom and fulfillment.

This clarion call is heard with particular beauty in the oldest scriptures, the ancient Vedic texts of India. Composed in Sanskrit, these texts are lyrical masterpieces and, at the same time, textbooks of spiritual enlightenment. They are treasures of immense value that have guided seekers for millennia and continue to do so today.

The philosophical teaching of the Vedic texts is sometimes referred to as *Vedanta*. This word literally means “the end of knowledge” (*veda* = knowledge; *anta* = end). Although *Vedanta* is the name of a system of philosophy, it is more generally understood to mean the culmination or essence of spiritual truth. The teaching of *Vedanta* is found throughout the vast array of Vedic texts, but reaches its full flowering in the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Brahma Sutras*, referred to collectively by Vedantists as the *Prasthanatrayi* (literally, “three sources”).

*Vedanta* teaches that our innermost nature or soul, the Self or *Atman*, is *sat* (true, eternal), *chit* (consciousness) and *ananda* (bliss). Spiritual awakening, we learn, is not becoming something we are not, but realising what we are. This realisation requires both intellectual understanding and direct experience. *Vedanta* provides the intellectual understanding and the various techniques of *yoga* provide the direct experience. Although *yoga* is commonly understood to mean the physical postures of *hatha yoga*, the classical meaning is broader. Derived from the root “*yug*” (from which we have the English “yoke”), *yoga* is the means by which we yoke, or join, the limited aspect of our nature with the unlimited, the changing with the unchanging, the relative with the absolute, the material with the spiritual, the temporal with the eternal.

There have been many great teachers of *Vedanta*. The most influential is Adi Shankara, believed by most historians to have lived in the eighth century CE. Shankara is credited with reviving spiritual knowledge at a time when religious life had become largely ritualistic. During his short life of thirty-three years, Shankara traveled the length and breadth of India teaching *Advaita Vedanta*, the school of *Vedanta* that holds that reality is ultimately non-dual (*a* = non; *dvaita* = dual). A prolific writer, Shankara is credited with hundreds of works, most notably his brilliant commentaries on the *Prasthanatrayi*. To ensure the continuity of his

teaching, Shankara established four *maths*, or seats of learning, one each in the north, south, east and west of India and placed his four closest disciples as the head of each. These disciples and their successors are known to this day as Shankaracharyas (*Shankar* = Shankara; *acharya* = teacher).

In modern times, the seat of the northern *math*, Jyotirmath, was vacant for almost 150 years until, in 1941, the leaders of all the major religious institutions in India persuaded the great Indian saint Swami Brahmanand Saraswati (1871-1953) to occupy the seat. Like Shankara before him, Brahmanand revived spiritual truth in all its simplicity and purity, teaching with freshness, clarity and profound insight. He dispelled many unfortunate misunderstandings, the foremost being that spiritual realisation is difficult to achieve and is attainable, if at all, only by the recluse living apart from society and only after years of arduous practices and austerity. He taught that spiritual enlightenment is a natural state that can be attained by anyone, regardless of background or walk of life. To sincere seekers he imparted those ancient yogic techniques that allow one to rise to those lofty states described in the Vedic texts but which, for too long, were largely inaccessible. Universally revered, he was seen as the harmoniser and unifier of all schools of belief, and was heralded by the president of India as “*Vedanta Incarnate*,” the very embodiment of Supreme Truth.

Brahmanand’s followers sometimes took notes of his discourses. In 1947, the *ashram* published some of these discourses in a book titled *Shri Shankaracharya Vaksudha*. During the years 1951-1953, the *ashram* published approximately seventy twice-monthly newsletters titled *Shri Shankaracharya Upadesha* that included additional discourses. Shortly before Brahmanand’s passing in 1953, the *ashram* published a selection of 108 discourses titled *Amrita Kana*. In addition, a stenographer made careful transcriptions of a series of discourses given by Brahmanand in Mumbai. Finally, two Hindi books by Rameshwar Prasad Tiwari, a disciple of Brahmanand, were published in the 1960s. The first, published in 1965, is a biography of Brahmanand titled *Shri Jyotishoithodaraka*. The second, published in 1969, is a collection of 108 of Brahmanand’s discourses titled *Shri Shankaracharya Upadesh Amrita*.

In his discourses, Brahmanand expressed supreme truth in simple words like these:

You are surrounded on all four sides by suffering and anxiety because you have forgotten the treasure in your own home. The storehouse of happiness is really inside oneself. The greatness of a *mahatma* (great soul) lies within you. You are the soul, you are *satchit-ananda*, pure Truth, Consciousness and Bliss.

*Paramatma* (the Universal Self) pervades inside. He is shining in the hearts of all. When the mind gets to *Paramatma* it becomes still. This all-Pervasive *Paramatma* is the real form of happiness. Seek inside yourself and quickly you will meet him.

Every day engage in the holy practice of *dhyana* (meditation). When a pool of water is calm without a ripple, one can see one's own face. When the fluctuations of consciousness subside, one sees the imperishable Self with the instrument of inner vision. This is the *darshan* (sight) of *Atman*. On knowing *Atman*, *duhkha* (pain, suffering) is destroyed forever.

As Shankaracharya, Brahmanand was seen as a great unifier of all the different schools of philosophy and religious thought. One of his leading disciples, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, wrote:

His Policy of *Dharma-prachar* (preacher of Eternal Truth) was all-embracing. He inspired all alike and gave a lift to everybody in their religious, virtuous, moral and spiritual life. He was never a leader of any one party. All parties found a common leader in Him. All the differences and dissensions of various castes, creeds and *sampradayas* (religious traditions) dissolved in His presence. Every party felt to be a thread in the warp and woof of society, with all threads making the cloth and none to be removed to any advantage. Such was His Universality and all-embracing nature.

Wherever Brahmanand traveled, his natural lustre and radiance attracted throngs of people. It is said that the very sight (*darshan*) of Brahmanand filled the heart with happiness. Maharishi wrote:

His entire personality exhaled the serene perfume of spirituality. His face radiated that rare light that comprises love, authority, serenity and self-assuredness, the state that comes only by righteous living and Divine realisation. His *darshan* made the people feel as if some ancient Maharishi (great seer) of Upanishadic fame had assumed human form again, and that it is worthwhile to lead a good life and strive for realisation of the Divine. His simple words charmed the child and the old alike. Whatever he spoke was heard and enjoyed with undivided attention by one and all. His moving lips were the one point of focus for a million eyes of those gathered to listen to his evening discourses. Spellbound sat the audience with captivated mind and heart.

A man known in his later life as Swami Srikanta Bharathi had a similar recollection:

In 1952 when I was in Lucknow on business, I had the opportunity to have the *darshan* of Guru Dev, Brahmananda Saraswati Swamiji. That evening he was addressing a public gathering on the lawns of the bungalow where he was put up. Nearly a thousand people had gathered to hear his message, consisting of farmers, workers, students, officers, etc. Mahaswamiji spontaneously spoke for an hour in chaste but simple Hindi, expressing thoughts on philosophical principles with useful hints for adoption in daily life, keeping in view the goal of human birth — the gaining of salvation by one and all irrespective of status or station in life. People absorbed his wise words avidly and in pin-drop silence. A whole hour passed like fifteen minutes with joy on every face.

Another disciple, Dr. Raj Varma, wrote:

When Swamiji was enthroned as Shankaracharya his natural grandeur was matchless. His face radiated natural softness, simplicity, purity and calmness. Every word uttered by him had wonderful magnetic power that made a great and deep impression on the hearts of his listeners.

Another disciple, Jugal Kishor Shrivastava, wrote:

When he spoke it was like the sunrise of wisdom! Within moments I experienced amazing thoughts and feelings never experienced before. His words were a nectar of divine sound that awakened the soul. They carried the essence of *Vedas* and scriptures in deep, meaningful, soothing language that was expressed so simply that it could be easily absorbed and accepted without hesitation. The flow of the divine lecture by Guru Dev — delivered with a pleasing fatherly smile — was like the constant, peaceful stream of Mother Ganga, carrying authoritative, blissful and invigorating wisdom.

Brahmanand's revival was continued after his passing by his two principal disciples, Swami Shantanand Saraswati (1913-1997), chosen by Brahmanand to succeed him as the Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918-2008), who spread Brahmanand's teaching throughout the world for over sixty years. Shantanand, whose name means "the bliss of peace," radiated serenity and wisdom. He was dignified, yet always natural and gracious. Never hurried, he moved

and spoke with the simplicity of a true saint. Maharishi, as his name aptly states, was a great seer (*Maha* = great; *rishi* = seer). He was ever filled with bliss, laughing freely and often. His heart so overflowed with love that it embraced all mankind. Endowed with seemingly limitless energy, he traveled tirelessly for over sixty years to bring Brahmanand's teaching to all parts of the world.

This short biography of Brahmanand draws on various materials, including the Tiwari biography published in Hindi in 1965 (of which there are three English translations, the most accurate by Paul Mason), the personal recollections of many of Brahmanand's followers, and various other source materials collected and archived by The Guru Dev Legacy Trust. The author expresses his gratitude to the many compilers of these source materials and to his fellow board members of The Guru Dev Legacy Trust for their invaluable assistance.

Robert C. Sanders



## A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF GURU DEV

Swami Brahmanand Saraswati was born in 1871 into a respected Mishra Brahman family in the village of Gana, near Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh. His family named him Rajaram. As a child, he displayed unusual maturity and serenity. At age eight, his family sent him to study at Benares, an ancient center of learning. There he immersed himself in the study of Sanskrit and the Vedic scriptures.

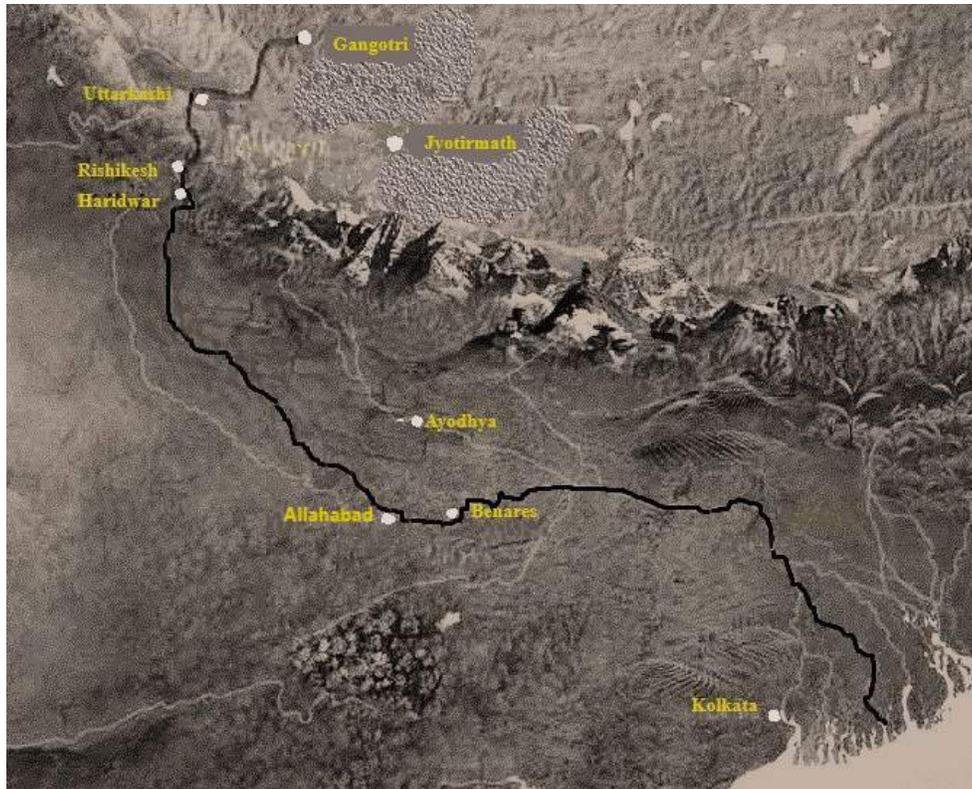


Benares in the 1880s

While at Benares, Rajaram resolved to enter the renounced order of life. As Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, one of his disciples, later wrote:

At the tender age of nine, when the other children of the world were mostly busy in playgrounds, he had matured to the idea of renunciation. By continuous and deep thinking he was convinced of the futility and evanescence of worldly pleasures. He realised that real and lasting happiness cannot be had without the realisation of the Divine. The joys and pleasures that are obtained from the phenomenal world are mere shadows and smudged images of the ideal happiness and bliss that are not far from man but exist in his own heart, enveloped by the dark clouds of ignorance and illusion.

While studying at Benares, Rajaram learned that his family was arranging for his marriage. Although he fervently protested, the family proceeded with its plans. Confronted with having to obey his family or follow his heart, he chose the latter. He resolved to leave school and go to the Himalayas in search of a *guru* and spiritual enlightenment. Without notice, he quietly walked from the school grounds and began trekking westward along the Ganges toward Prayag (Allahabad), Hardiwar, Rishikesh and points beyond.



Ganges River Basin

The boy soon reached Prayag, the point of the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati rivers. In the meantime, his panicked family raised the alarm that he had gone missing and offered a reward for his return. A policeman at Prayag recognised him from a photo in a flyer but, impressed with the boy's demeanour and noble aspirations, allowed him to proceed, and even purchased him a railway ticket to Hardiwar. At Hardiwar, the boy was stopped by a second policeman. Unlike the first, this one returned him to his family.

Overjoyed at the boy's return, the family elders tried to persuade him to embrace the comforts of householder life and abandon his desire for a life of renunciation. The boy did not waver, however. Desperate, the family summoned the

family *guru* and asked him to persuade the boy. The *guru*, however, could see that the boy was destined for greatness. He turned to the family and said, “In this family has been born a Dhruva (a boy saint in the Vedic literature). He will make your faces radiant with pride.” In a final effort, they implored his mother to order him to stay. The mother had been moved by the words of the family *guru*, however, and declined to intervene. Turning to the boy, she said, “*jaao bhajana karo*,” meaning “go do *bhajan*” (sing God’s name; live in worship). With this blessing, the boy departed never to return.

In time, he arrived at Rishikesh, a holy place in the foothills of the Himalayas where *sadhus* (ascetics) and *yogis* have performed *sadhana* (spiritual practices) for thousands of years. It was there that Rajaram began his search for a *guru*.



Rishikesh

The Vedic texts state that one’s teacher should be *shrotriyam brahmanishtham* (versed in the *Vedas* and fully realised). Rajaram added two more requirements: his teacher must be free of *krodha* (anger) and a *bal brahmachari* (life celibate). Finding no teacher at Rishikesh that met these four stringent requirements, the boy pressed on. He travelled from place to place meeting many teachers, but none met his qualifications. Finally, at age fourteen, he found his teacher in the remote Himalayan valley of Uttarkashi. This teacher was Swami Krishnanand Saraswati.



Swami Krishnanand Saraswati



Uttarkashi

Krishnanand accepted the boy as a disciple, giving him the monastic name Brahma Chaitanya Brahmachari. Although the boy was the youngest student in Krishnanand's *ashram*, he progressed quickly. In time, he was ready to learn those ancient practices of meditation that lead to Self Realisation. Knowing the older students would be jealous if they knew the boy was receiving advanced instruction, Krishnanand devised a way to teach the boy without the others knowing. He told him that he would feign anger and expel him from the *ashram*, order him to relocate to an area of caves nearby, but allow him to return once a week for provisions. During these visits he would provide further instructions. The plan was implemented. Under Krishnanand's guidance the boy steadily progressed. By age twenty-five he became *atmanishsth* (self-contained, fully realised). With his master's blessing, he left the *ashram*. From that time on he lived in seclusion in remote places in north and central India, fully immersed in *atmananda* (the bliss of Self).

In 1906, when Brahma Chaitanya was thirty-six, he reunited with Krishnanand at the Kumbh Mela, the great spiritual gathering held every twelve years at the *sangam* (confluence) of the Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers at Prayag. There Brahma Chaitanya asked Krishnanand to initiate him into *sanyas*, the renounced order of life. Krishnanand granted the request, giving him the *sanyasi* name Swami Brahma Chaitanya Saraswati.



Kumbh Mela, Prayag

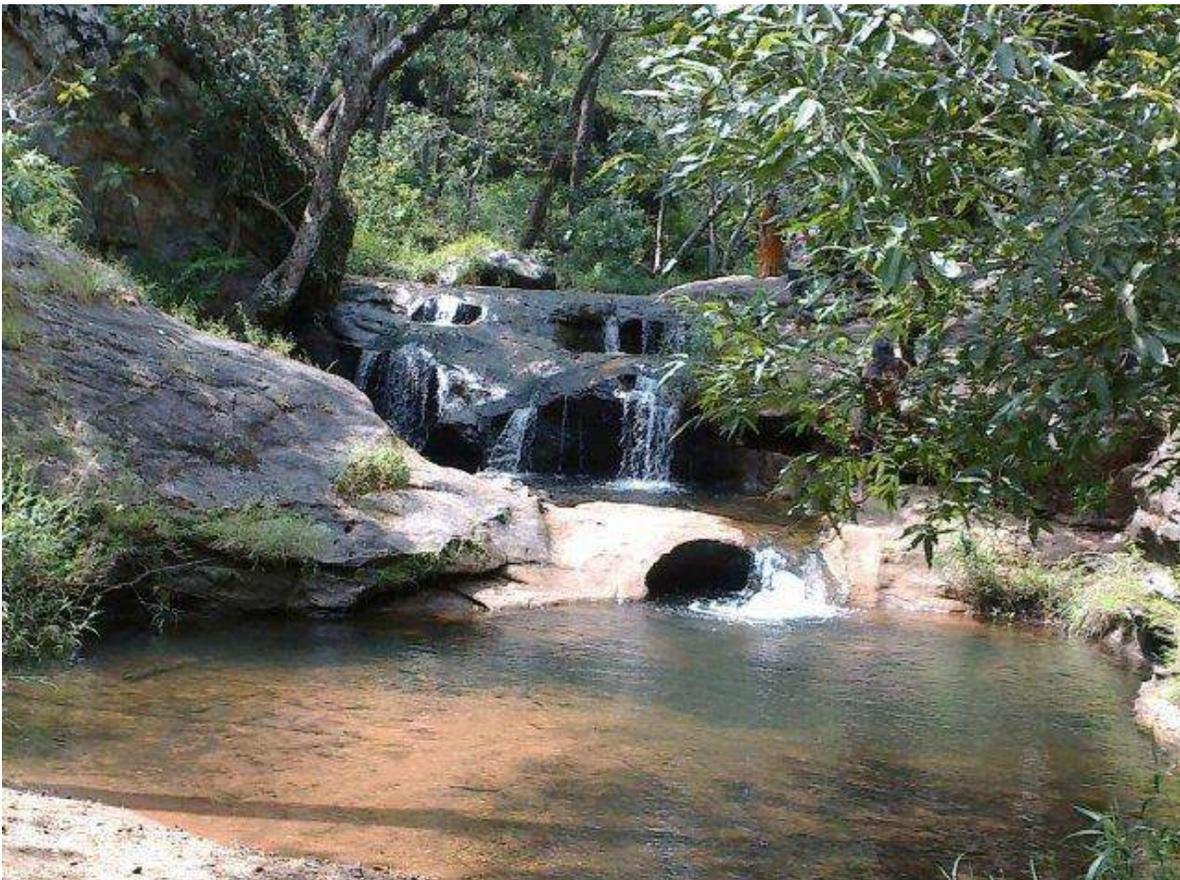


Swami Brahmanand Saraswati

After taking *sanyas*, Brahmanand continued to live in solitude in remote places. This time he went to the Amarkantakas mountains, the source of the holy Narmada river in Rewa State (now part of Madhya Pradesh). When Swami Rama, an Indian teacher, travelled across India to interview famous *swamis*, he came to that area and learned that Brahmanand was living in nearby jungles. Swami Rama later wrote of meeting Brahmanand.

Travelling toward the forests of Rewa State, I went to the Satana forest and there met a swami who was very handsome and highly educated in the *Vedantic* and *yoga* tradition. He knew the scriptures and was a very brilliant *sadhaka* (spiritual practitioner). He used to live only on germinated gram seeds mixed with a little bit of salt. He

lived on a hillock in a small natural cave near a mountain pool. I was led by the villagers to that place, but I did not find anyone and came away disappointed. The next day I went again and found a few footprints on the edge of the pool made by his wooden sandals. I tried, but I could not track the footprints. Finally, on the fifth day of effort, early in the morning I went back to the pool and found him taking bath. I greeted him, saying “*Namo Narayan*,” which is a commonly used salutation among *swamis* meaning “I bow to the divinity in you.” He was observing silence so he motioned for me to follow him to his small cave and I did so gladly. Swami Brahmananda’s authoritative knowledge of the *Upanishads*, and especially Shankara’s commentaries, was superb. Among all the *swamis* of India, I only met a few who radiated such brilliance.



A pool in the Amarkantaka mountains of Rewa State

In 1930, when Brahmanand was age fifty-nine, he reunited with Krishnanand at the Kumbha Mela in Prayag. Krishnanand said to him, “You have stayed long enough in the jungles and mountains. Now you should stay near the towns so that the people may benefit.” Thereafter Brahmanand became more accessible, visiting towns such as Benares, Prayag and Ayodhya for religious festivals. He would often remain for a few more days so that people could have his *darshan* (sight) and hear his *upadesha* (teaching). Brahmanand’s fame soon spread widely. People throughout the country were filled with pride that once again a great sage walked the soil of India. He was thronged by masses wherever he went.



Brahmanand

In 1936, at age 64, Brahmanand arranged for the construction of an *ashram* in Benares. This *ashram*, named *Brahma Niwas*, became his principal seat. He still continued to travel widely, however, in response to the clamour of requests for his *darshan* and *upadesh*.



*Brahma Niwas* Ashram, Benares

When Brahmanand visited towns, he would usually stay on the upper floor of the building in which he was housed. Crowds invariably congregated on the street outside hoping for his *darshan*. At about nine o'clock each evening, a *brahmachari* would bring Brahmanand a list of the names of those waiting. After reviewing the list, Brahmanand would often say: “*aaj nahin milenge*” (“there will be no meeting today”). An hour or so later he would ask the *brahmachari* if any *darshan* seekers remained. When told two or three remained, he would say, “these are true seekers” and allow them to enter.

Brahmanand had a strict policy against accepting money or gifts. A wealthy merchant in Prayag once told Brahmanand that he needed to win an important court case. Brahmanand listened in silence. The merchant later won the case and attributed the success to Brahmanand. On his next visit, he placed a *dona* (leaf bowl) of jasmine flowers among the other flowers placed before Brahmanand. When a *brahmachari* cleaned the hall afterwards and lifted the *dona* he was surprised at its weight. Beneath

the flowers he discovered gold coins. When Brahmanand learned of this, he instructed his followers to block entry to the merchant if he returned. When the merchant arrived the next evening he was forced to wait outside. Several hours later Brahmanand allowed him to enter. Seeing him, Brahmanand said: “Why do you offer us money? You withhold it from those who are eager for it, but offer it to us who have no need. Give this to those who desire it. If you wish to make an offering here, then give up your *durguna* (defects, faults).”

Many followers of Brahmanand later recounted their experiences in meeting him. Dr. Raj Varma, a disciple of Brahmanand, first saw Brahmanand in Jabalpur in 1940. He had learned from a friend, Shankar Prasad, that a great *siddha yogi* (perfected *yogi*) was in the city and that *darshan* was available each evening. The next evening, the men purchased garlands and went for *darshan*. Dr. Varma later wrote:

I had no idea how to meet or behave with a *Siddha Mahatma* till then. So I thought to follow Shankar Prasad’s way of meeting him. A *brahmachari* was standing at the main doorway. Shankar Prasad told him his name and requested permission for *darshan*. The *brahmachari* took the name to Maharaj Shri [Brahmanand]. Maharaj Shri gave consent and the *brahmachari* allowed us to enter.

Maharaj Shri was seated in a hall on a comfortable chair. Shankar Prasad entered and I followed. When he saw Maharaj Shri he bowed down and then went near him to garland him. I then did the same. Beholding him, I became spellbound. Instead of moving aside to take a seat, I sat down near his sandals. Charmed by his Divine influence, I lost myself in his Grandeur. For a minute or two I sat in that spot, but then thought it might be an affront to sit so close directly in front of him, so I got up and moved aside. I looked to see if he had taken ill of my unmannered sitting at an improper place, but saw no change on his face, as though nothing had happened. I was happy that no wrong had been done on my part.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi first encountered Brahmanand during a summer vacation from the University of Allahabad. He had heard from some friends that a saint was staying at a house in a forest and that *darshan* was sometimes permitted in the evenings. Maharishi and his friends made their way to the house one night. A *brahmachari* at the door told them to wait outside. He returned in half an hour and ushered them to an upstairs veranda that was completely dark. Maharishi sensed that someone was seated on a chair. He later recalled:

We sat down quietly. We found two or three other men also sitting. No one was talking, it was all dark. Maybe fifteen, twenty minutes passed and it happened that in the far distance a car was coming and its light shone on the terrace, and that was the first sight of Guru Dev. From the flash of the car as it turned. It was just enough to have a glimpse of him. And then I thought, “Yes, it seems the time has come.”

In the days that followed, Maharishi returned to the house and on one of those visits asked Brahmanand if he could enter his service. Brahmanand told him to complete his studies first. When Maharishi asked how he would find him afterwards, Brahmanand replied, “Oh, you will find me somewhere.”

Adi Shankara, the great Indian saint and philosopher, established four *maths* or seats of learning in the north, south, east and west of India and placed his four principal disciples as the head of each *math*. These disciples and their successors came to be known as Shankaracharyas. The seat of the northern *math*, Jyotirmath had been vacant since 1833, there being no person deemed qualified. For many years the religious and political leaders of north India had discussed the need to find someone worthy to occupy the seat. The subject was discussed in 1908 at the *Bharat Dharma Mandal* (Congregation of Religious Leaders of India) and given renewed attention in the 1930s. By the end of that decade, there was a consensus that the seat should be offered to Swami Hariharananda (popularly known as Swami Karpatri). Karpatri was a respected Sanskrit scholar and the founder of the Ram Rajya Parishad, a Hindu political party. Karpatri declined, however, wishing to continue his political activities. He recommended that the seat be occupied by Brahmanand, who had been his *guru* since 1927.

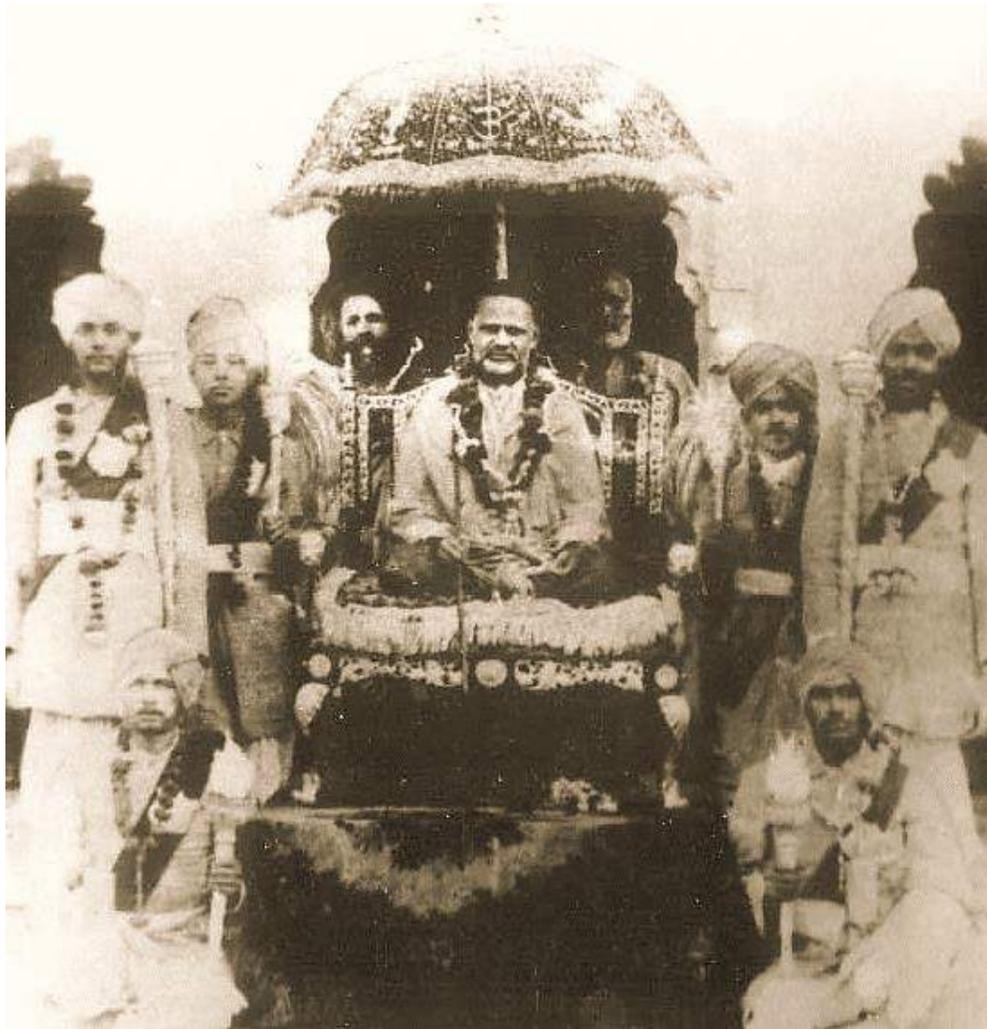
B.D. Tripathi, in his book “Sadhus of India: The Sociological View,” wrote that Karpatri was tasked with requesting Brahmanand to accept the seat. When he made the request, Brahmanand said:

You want to chain a lion who moves freely about the jungle. But if you so like, I will honour your words and shoulder the responsibilities of the *peeth* (center) management. By shouldering this responsibility, I would be serving the cause for which Adi Shankaracharya stood.

The date of Brahmanand’s installation was set for March 8, 1941 in Benares. If Brahmanand had agreed to accept the seat, it appears he changed his mind. On March 6, 1941, two days before the installation was to occur, word came that

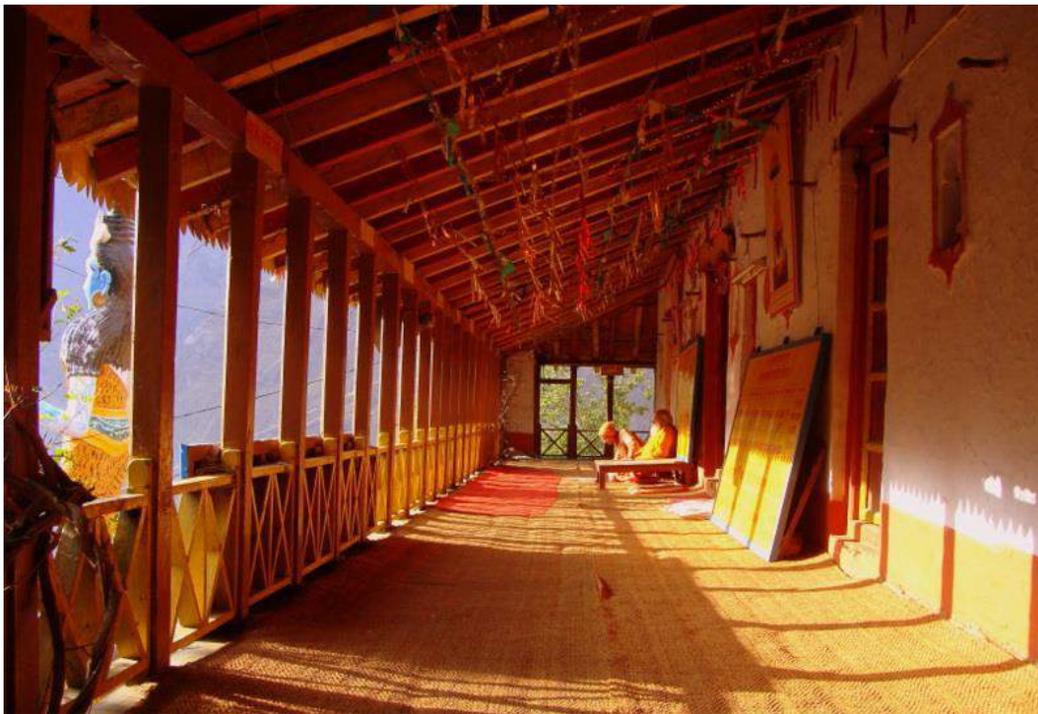
Brahmanand had left the *Brahma Niwas* and was nowhere to be found. This news caused turmoil. Some suggested that an alternate be selected and installed. Swami Gyananand, a respected member of the *Bharat Dharma Mahamandal*, advised against this, counseling that care should be taken in such an important matter. As a result, telegrams and letters were dispatched cancelling the ceremonies.

Meanwhile, close watch was kept for Brahmanand. Three weeks later, word came that he had returned to *Brahma Niwas*. Within the hour, the religious leaders arrived as a group and implored him to accept the position. Brahmanand listened, but remained silent. Taking his silence to be assent, and guided by the proverb “Do good quickly,” they moved swiftly. The next morning, April 1, 1941, Brahmanand was installed as the Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath at the age of 70.



Brahmanand in 1941, after his installation as Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath

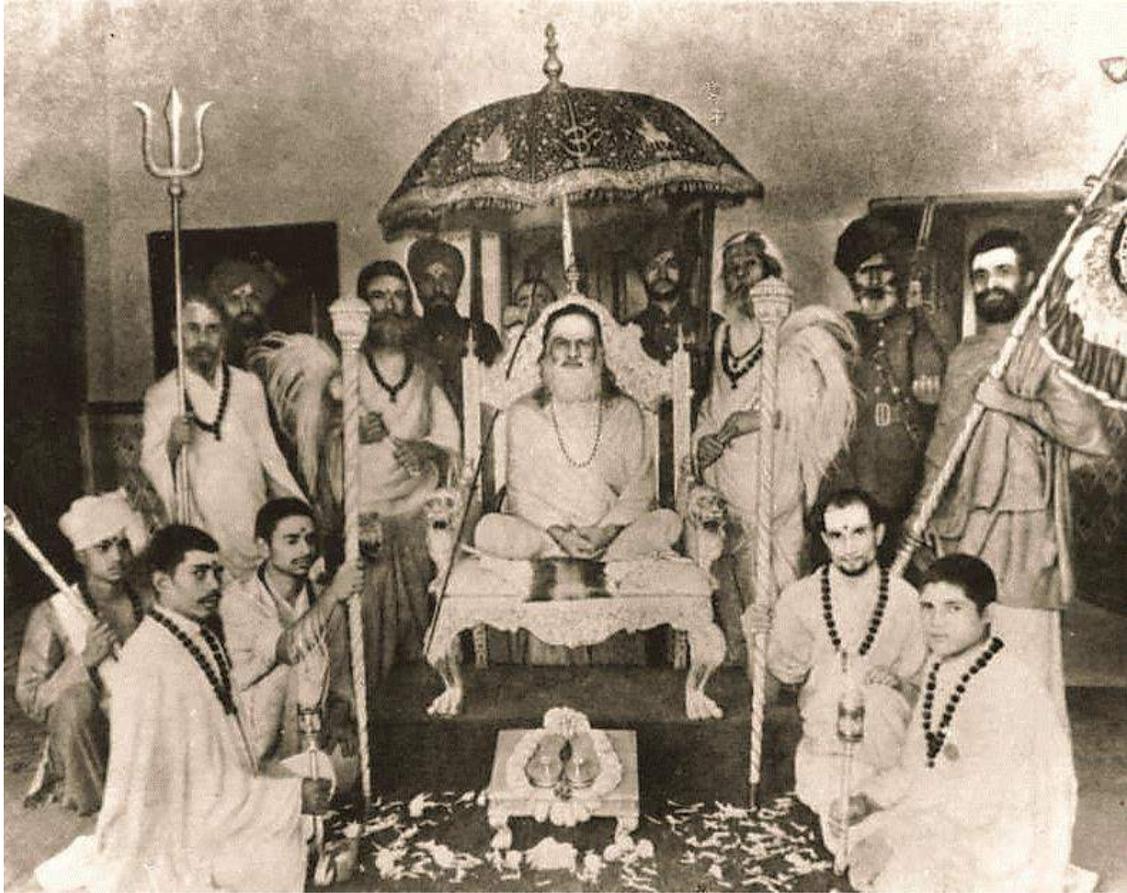
As Shankaracharya, Brahmanand oversaw the construction of an *ashram* on the site believed to be the location of Adi Shankara's *ashram* at Jyotirmath. The *ashram* constructed by Brahmanand is shown below.



In addition, in 1950 Brahmanand established an *ashram* at Prayag, the *Shri Shankaracharya Niwas Ashram* at Alopibagh. This *ashram* is pictured below, along statue of Brahmanand inside.



After Brahmanand became the Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath, Maharishi (then known as Mahesh Brahmachari) joined Brahmanand's *ashram* in Benares. In time, he became Brahmanand's secretary, handling all correspondence and scheduling.



Brahmanand at the Brahma Niwas *ashram* in Benares with Maharishi at far right

Brahmanand was always greeted with great pomp and ceremony wherever he went. The locals would decorate the streets and the air would be filled with *kirtan* (devotional song) accompanied by drums, cymbals, gongs and bells. Brahmanand accepted these greetings, as they were in accord with custom and tradition, but strictly maintained his prohibition against offerings of money or gifts. He said, however, that there was one offering he would accept:

We see that of all the things beloved by man, the most coveted are the *durguna* (defects, faults). Man is not ready to let go of them. Wealth he expends, disgrace he bears, but these defects he holds dear. Offer your best loved flaws. These are gifts we will receive.



Brahmanand

On one occasion, a man said to be wealthy told Brahmanand, “I am so happy whenever I come to see you. Would you allow me to donate something for your *ashram*?” “No,” Brahmanand answered, “I do not want your money, but what is dearest to you.” The man asked, “Do you want my estates?” “No,” Brahmanand said, “you do not truly own them because they are mortgaged.” Hearing this the man became fearful, knowing there was nothing he could conceal. Brahmanand continued:

You have a little box in your pocket. What it contains is what I want, for it is dearest to you. For that cocaine you have been spending all your money and have made your family unhappy. If you wish to make an offering, offer not your money but your defects, so that you are redeemed and made whole.

The man removed a small box from his pocket and handed it to Brahmanand. He then bowed, rose, and thanked Brahmanand for freeing him from his addiction. To this, Brahmanand said, “Now go and work and make your family happy.”

It is said that Brahmanand would often display these kinds of *siddhis* (yogic powers). Father William Cenkner, a Catholic priest, wrote in his book “A Tradition of Teachers: Shankara and the Jagadgurus Today:”

The Shankaracharyas are not public wonder-workers and are not sought out for the manifestation of yogic powers. The only exception to this was the previous guru of Jyotirmath [Brahmanand] who displayed wonders, such as lighting ritual fires and producing *prasada* (food) offerings, which disquieted the priests of the Badrinath temple.

Another display of *siddhis* was said to have occurred when Brahmanand was once camped beside the Ganges in Allahabad. Local opponents of fishing were in heated conflict with some fisherman. The two sides approached Brahmanand to settle their dispute. Brahmanand asked them to bring him a handful of pebbles. He held these for a moment and then instructed the people to throw them into the river. He then told them to go home and return in the morning. When the fisherman returned to haul in the night catch, it is said they found no fish.

Another instance occurred in Jabalpur, where Brahmanand sometimes stayed for several months at a time. Jugal Kishor Shrivastava, a householder disciple of Brahmanand who regularly visited the *ashram* for *darshan*, was fond of hearing stories of Brahmanand’s early years from the older disciples. One day he asked Pandit Kuber Dutta Ojhaji to tell him some stories. Kuber Dutta declined, saying,

“No, Bhaiyaji (dear brother), Maharaj Shri has told us that if any aspirant seeks information of his earlier years we should refuse. If I were to tell you stories he would order me to go home tonight or tomorrow.”

Jugal Kishor knew that the *pandit* had a weakness for papaya and lemons. One day he brought some of these, set them before the *pandit* and asked him to tell some stories. The *pandit* surrendered to temptation, saying “Ok, brother! If you insist. But you watch. Tomorrow I will not be found in the *ashram*.” When Jugal Kishor returned to the *ashram* the next day, the *pandit* was gone. When Jugal Kishor inquired, Brahmachari Mahesh explained that when the ashramites came before Brahmanand to *pranam* (bow in respect) the prior evening, Brahmanand said to Kuber Dutta, “You have not visited your family home for a long time. Go stay there for a while and return afterwards.”



Brahmanand in Jabalpur (1947)

In December of 1950, Brahmanand attended the convention of the Assembly of the Society of Indian Philosophers in Kolkata. There he was lauded in an address by Justice Radhabinod Pal of the Calcutta High Court, who said:

Today we are here to do homage to his Holiness, Shri Jagadguru Shankaracharya Ananta Sri Vibhushit Swami Brahmananda Saraswati of Jyotirmath, Badarikasram — the Superman, the seer, the sage, who is one of the few rare individuals amongst the billions of citizens of the world whom we would unhesitatingly choose if and when we would be called upon to describe the spiritual and cultural capital of the nation.

During the Assembly in Kolkata, the Shri Shankaracharya camp grounds were set up at Kamariya Mansion on Lake Road. The upper terrace of the mansion commanded a view of Rabindrasarovar Lake. Maharishi recalled sitting with Brahmanand one evening on the terrace of the mansion in the moonlight and feeling profound bliss in Brahmanand's presence:

My heart was leaping with happiness and overflowing with devotion in the ocean of love. It was as if my soul was bursting with bliss from the inside while outside lay the silent, bottomless ocean of Guru Dev's sweet love. Waves were splashing out of this ocean to the inside, dashing against it, and then falling back on Guru Dev's feet and beginning to dance with joy. I felt as though my hands, legs and all other parts, including my senses, mind and intellect were filled with that bliss. Every single pore of my body was brimming with from the experience of being near that great and blissful soul called Brahmananda. It was as if my senses, mind and intellect were together experiencing *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Truth, Consciousness, Bliss) at the same time. *Sat-Chit-Ananda* that was attained by my senses, accessed by my mind and comprehended by my intellect with the grace of a sidelong glance from that transcendental Supreme Being who is indescribable, imperceptible and indefinable. My physical and subtle body were absorbed in this bliss.

Maharishi recalled that this moment of communion with his teacher was disturbed when a *brahmarchari* announced that three distinguished attendees at the conference requested an audience with Brahmanand. These visitors were Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, later president of India and two western philosophers. After being ushered to the terrace and seated before Brahmanand, they asked him how the *darshan* (sight, understanding) of *Vedanta* is gained. Brahmanand responded:

The truth of *Vedanta* is spontaneously obtained by the light of the Self. No other light is necessary to discover it.

The visitors then asked: “But surely those *sadhana* (spiritual practices) given in the *Veda Shastra* (the Vedic texts) cannot be called useless?” Brahmanand answered:

Those *sadhana* are not for making *Brahman* (the Supreme Reality) apparent. Their role is only to dispel *avidya* (ignorance). The *sadhana* diminishes the *avidya*, it does not bring the light of *Brahman*. That light is spontaneous. No other light is needed to see it. No light is needed to see that which is spontaneously radiant. Before the sunrise the dawn rises, but daybreak is only to drive away the darkness of the night. It is not to make the sun evident. The sun is lighted by itself. However much *sadhana* is done, that much the *avidya* is diminished. The *Atma* (soul) is not lighted. The *Atma* is light itself.

In 1952, Maharishi went to Delhi in advance of a visit planned by Brahmanand. At a press conference announcing the visit, Maharishi said:

Swami Brahmanand Saraswati Maharaj, the present Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath Badarikashram (in the Himalayas) is a magnetic personality with a sweet amalgam of High Wisdom and Love of humanity. He combines in himself the Knowledge of the Self with the mysterious powers — the *siddhis* arising out of yogic perfection and hard penances, which he has undergone throughout his life. He is a great living *yogi* and scholar and is revered by millions of Hindus as their Supreme Religious head.

His aim of life, if the life of a realised soul can be said to possess any such aim, is to broadcast the message of the Great Divine light that he has himself realised, the Light that is the Soul of all human beings. Having himself attained the pinnacle of Self-development, he aims at transforming the worldly-minded people into the Godly-minded, and through his inner Divine touch to change the materialistic hearts of iron into spiritual hearts of gold.

His entire personality emanates the sweet perfume of spirituality. His face radiates that rare light which comprises love, authority, serenity and self-assuredness that comes only by righteous living

and Divine Realisation one feels as if some ancient *Maharishi* mentioned in the pages of the *Upanishads* has assumed human form and feels that it is worthwhile leading a pious life and to strive for the realisation of the Divine.

His Spiritual teachings are simple and clear and go straight home to heart. He strictly adheres to the course of inner development laid down by the Systems of Indian Philosophy and ethics and he raises his voice never in opposition but always in firm support of the Truths and principles contained in the Hindu Scriptures.

Brahmanand received a rousing welcome in Delhi with the cries of “*Shankaracharya ki jai ho!*” (Glory to Shankaracharya). Thousands of people came daily for his *darshan* and to listen to his discourses. The President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, requested a meeting and visited Brahmanand at 7 Canning Lane, where Brahmanand was housed. The two conversed for an hour and a half, with Brahmanand explaining how the life of the individual and society could be improved for the mutual benefit of both the ruler and the ruled. The President listened with close attention, staying beyond the allotted time, and departed only when Brahmanand indicated the meeting was concluded.



President of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad with Brahmanand (Delhi, Dec. 4, 1952)

In 1953, at the age of eighty-one, Brahmanand traveled to Kolkata. While there, his health began to fail. After a doctor's visit in the early afternoon of May 20, 1953, Brahmanand rested for several minutes, then opened his eyes and said, "Lift me up." Seated cross legged, he closed his eyes and, at 1:15 p.m., abandoned his body and entered *Mahasamadhi*.

The news of Brahmanand's passing spread quickly through Kolkata and across the country. All India Radio broadcast the news and announced that his mortal remains would be taken to Benares for final rites. An atmosphere of shock and grief consumed the nation. Devout people from all parts of the country began to travel to Benares. Meanwhile, in Kolkata, Brahmanand's body was placed seated on a decorated truck, transported to the railway station and placed in a specially decorated coach on the night train for Benares. At Benares, the body was taken to the Brahma Niwas *ashram* and seated in the courtyard on a decorated bier so that his disciples could have a final *darshan*. It was then transported seated in an open truck to Dashashvamedha Ghat for the *jala pravaha* (the releasing of mortal remains to the water). The truck proceeded slowly to the river, led by a police band playing *shenai* (Indian clarinet) and followed by *pandits* and *sanyasins* chanting the *Vedas* and singing *kirtan*.



Benares in the early 1950s

Awaiting at the river were tens of thousands of people. *Abhisheka* (a devotional ritual) was performed. The body was then placed on a *bajara* (barge-like boat) filled with *sanyasins*, *pundits* and devotees and brought to the Kedareshware Mahadev Mandir, a temple on the riverfront. The body, *kamandalu* (water pot) and *danda* (staff) were then placed in a stone casket on a smaller boat. As darkness fell, this boat and a flotilla of others proceeded to the center of the river. As the boats gently rocked and the pundits chanted, the casket was lowered into the river.

Brahmanand executed two wills. The first named Swami Karpatri as his successor. Karpatri, however, told Brahmanand that he wished to continue his political activities. Brahmanand therefore executed a second will in Delhi on December 18, 1952, six months before his death. The second will named Swami Shantanand as his successor, with three alternates. On June 12, 1953, three weeks after Brahmanand's passing, Shantanand was installed as the Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath at the Brahma Niwas *ashram* in Benares.



Shantanand following his installation as Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath

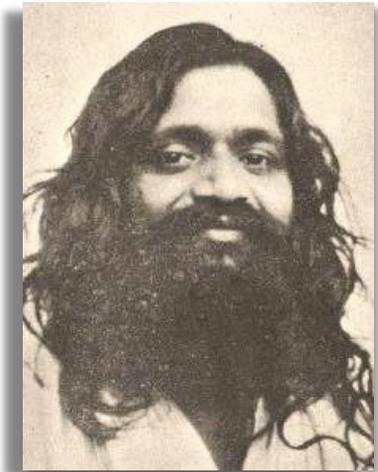
Brahmanand's revival was carried forward by Shantanand as Shankaracharya and Maharishi as an international emissary. They were well suited for their respective roles. Shantanand emanated that rare combination of dignity and disarming warmth found in great sages. Maharishi, fluent in English and blessed with seemingly boundless energy, brought Brahmanand's teaching to people the world over for over sixty years.



Shantanand



Brahmanand



Maharishi

Shantanand and Maharishi conveyed Brahmanand's teaching with the same simplicity as their teacher. Shantanand said:

The kingdom of heaven within is the reservoir of peace and bliss. Dive in with devotion and swim around gently in that blissful heaven that is within you. When we go into meditation we reach a spiritual world where quietness prevails like that of a deep, undisturbed ocean. There is no movement — no waves, no currents — everything is absolutely stationary. For two half-hour periods of meditation a day, give up all duties and obligations; surrender yourself completely to the single care and protection of *Paramatman* (the Universal Self). He will save you from all evil consequences, and therein will lie the end of all your worries.

On the same theme, Maharishi said:

Life has two parts or aspects, inner and outer. The outer is the temporary, ever-changing aspect; the inner is the

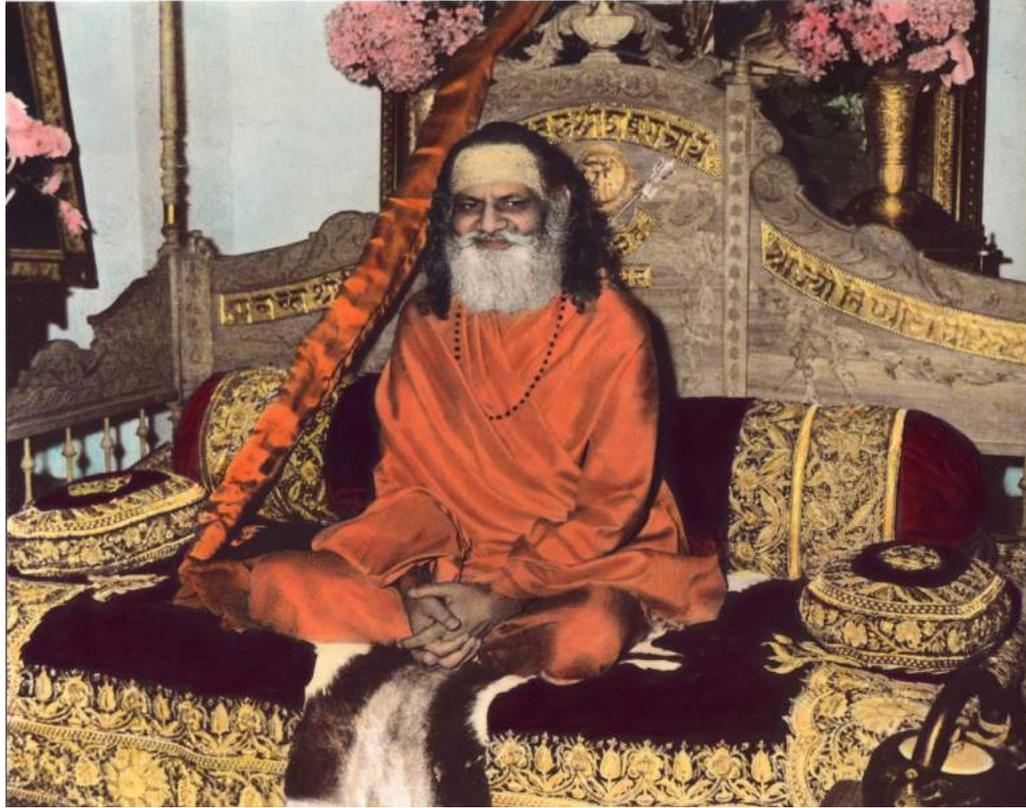
permanent, never-changing aspect. That inner, never-changing aspect is blissful.

It is easy to experience the blissful nature of inner life through the simple practice of meditation. Just half an hour sitting morning and evening daily is quite sufficient to raise you up to the high pedestal of spiritual glories and, at the same time, greatly increase your capacity of action in daily life.

Just a dip, a dip into the Self, and then come out. Thought, speech and action will be more forceful and worthwhile. When the mind is clear, there is greater creativity, wisdom, peace and happiness. You will enjoy the world, and others will enjoy it from your presence among them.

In the teaching of Brahmanand and his followers we find unlimited treasure. As the sun dispels the morning mist, it dispels all woe. It is like the fragrance of a summer garden, light sparkling on a river, the orange lustre of the evening sky. It is the highest truth, the supreme wisdom. May it radiate widely. May people everywhere live in unbounded happiness and fulfillment.





**Jai Guru Dev**