

Swami's early devotion

I have known Swami Vishwananda since he was a child, as he is my cousin. The earliest memory I have of Swami is when I was seven years old and I went on holiday to Mauritius.

I remember Swami as being a very hard working boy. Everyday he would wake up very early in the morning and pray with our grandmother. He would then do all his household chores before going to school in the morning and continued them upon his return from school.

When I visited Mauritius, we would always have a lot of fun and get into a lot of mischief and play games. One of my earliest recollections was enacting the *Ramayana*. Swami would play the role *Rama*, his sister Tina was *Sita* and I was *Lakshmana*. We would make bows and arrows from branches and try to recreate the special effects from the *Ramayana* television series! Together we would fire the arrows with a fire cracker attached to the end and would pretend to attack demons in my grandparents' garden.

On the different occasions that I visited Mauritius, I would leave with new fond memories. When I was eleven years old and I returned to Mauritius after a longer period, I found that Swami had changed quite a bit. He was no longer known as Papou and was called Visham. He had also grown a lot taller. Along with the exterior changes, Swami had also changed his interests.

Generally teenagers of his age had posters of football players or movie stars on their walls. However, Swami's bedroom walls were completely covered in pictures of different Hindu deities. I found that when we went to the shops together, he would spend all his pocket money on pictures of Gods.

On one occasion Swami saw a huge black 20-25 kg marble *Shiva lingam* in a shop window that he really wanted. However, it was too expensive and he had to save his pocket money in order

to buy it. He was unable to ask his parents for the money, as it was such a large sum just to pay for a lingam. Therefore Swami starved himself and saved his lunch money towards the *lingam*, until he had enough to pay for it. Swami then secretly brought the *lingam* home in a trolley and hid it at the back of the garden and would do *puja* to it every morning before leaving the house.

Whenever I went to Mauritius, I would sleep in Swami's room with him. At first I found it really scary with the pictures of different deities on the wall at night; however, Swami would tell me stories of the different deities to put my mind at ease. I was amazed that at fourteen years of age, he was able to tell me these stories in so much detail. His devotion to God was so apparent and inspiring even at that age. Within a couple of days I was aspiring to be like my older brother, asking my mum for money so I could buy pictures of deities for myself!

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