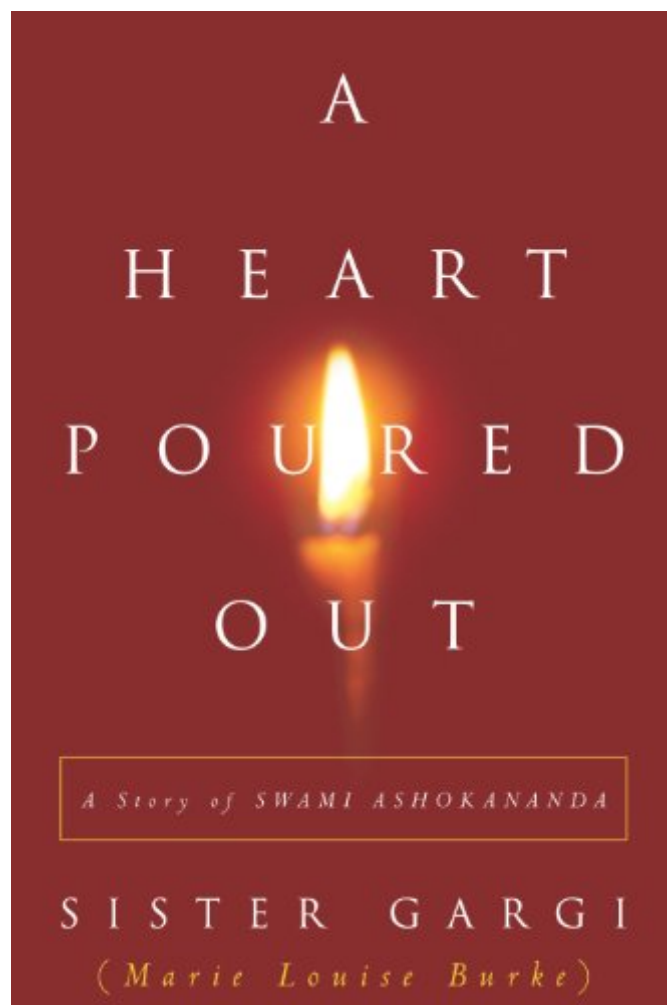


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A Heart Poured Out: A Story Of Swami Ashokananda



Synopsis

This popular book is now available in its first paperback edition. A Heart Poured Out is the fascinating biography of Swami Ashokananda (1893-1969), an illustrious teacher of the Ramakrishna Order who spent most of his life expanding the Vedanta movement in northern California while training his American students to lead authentic spiritual lives. Award-winning author Marie Louise Burke (Sister Gargi), his famed disciple, recounts the Swami's life and conversations in a personal style that is eloquent, witty, and wise. His powerful guidance—here brought to light for the first time—will help readers of all faiths deepen their spiritual practice. Soul-stirring account ... reveals the Swami's extraordinary spiritual stature with candor, integrity, and wit. -HUSTON SMITH, author of The World's Religions Rapturously written biography of an intrinsically fascinating man ... highly recommended. -MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW Compelling remembrance of a saintly life. -LIBRARY JOURNAL Exhaustive et engaging ... this rare account is well worth the wait. -YOGA JOURNAL

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Customer Reviews

I was bowled over by this biography of a man of God who walked among us for a time. If you have never met a living saint, you have no idea how such a one combines power and love and humor in such a way as to make you KNOW your own divinity. Swami Ashokananda was one such man of God, and if you read "A heart poured out" you cannot fail to be blessed by his uncommon presence and enlightened by his remarkable teachings. Sister Gargi's book is a masterpiece of spiritual literature.

A Heart Poured Out is the biography of Swami Ashokananda (1893-1969), who was a prominent monk of the Ramakrishna Order and a man who devoted most of his life to developing the Vedanta Society in San Francisco. Knowledgeably written by Sister Gargi, a disciple of Swami Ashokananda since 1948, A Heart Poured Out deftly covers the breadth of Ashokananda's life ranging from his childhood in India, to his enthusiastic dedication to personal spirituality, to his independence in daring to refute some of Mahatma Gandhi's political viewpoints. A Heart Poured Out is highly recommended as being a unique and rapturously written biography of an intrinsically fascinating man.

Sister Gargi (also known as Marie Louise Burke) will always be remembered for the two volume study of Swami Vivekananda published in 1958 and 1973 and expanded several times since. The latest edition is called Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries Volumes 1- 6. This belongs in the core collection of any complete library on Swami Vivekananda. Sister Gargi's A Heart Poured Out is a personal biography, with anecdotes, of her guru Swami Ashokananda (1893-1969); from his early life, training and work in India to his mission at the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco starting in 1931 to 1969. Her guru set the standard, "If the work is to succeed," he would later say to a young monastic disciple, "the heart must be poured out--poured out!" And pour out his heart he would--in full." (page 161) Even though most of the book is about Swami Ashokananda, Sister Gargi masterfully describes her timid request for an interview with Swami Ashokananda. These 8 pages in the Prologue are beautifully written that captures her state of mind. Fortunately this is not a formal history otherwise the everyday concerns of devotees might never come to light. The reader can draw strength from the devotees whether they made short or long term commitments to the Vedanta movement. There is a ring of authenticity with tidbits that reveal how Swami Ashokananda taught and spoke to people. And major issues come to light such as building a new San Francisco Temple, starting other Vedanta centers, protecting the retreat

property at Olema and internal disagreement over the Society's constitution and by-laws. Long term Vedanta devotees will reread many passages that strike a sympathetic cord while others may note the growth of the Vivekananda Vedanta movement in northern California. Book has glossary, photos and index.

Roughly about 30% of the book contains anecdotes about the Swami's early days and his unique spiritual experiences. The rest of the book contains details about how the Swami worked relentlessly as a Karma Yogi in southern California; how he "poured his heart out" into the work of building ashrams, delivering lectures, creating a retreat, etc. The author provides a lot of details about organizational matters, legal tussles, administrative challenges and so on, that form the backdrop of a lot of Swami Ashokananda's life journey. A brilliant real-life example of the "bulldog tenacity" Swami Vivekananda talks about.

The bio of Swami Ashokananda is beautifully written, and fascinating on many different levels, the enormous appeal of Vedanta in the 20th century. I thought it amazing that Meher Baba and S. Ashokananda had no communication even though they inhabited the same city and were both from India. I was also stunned by the parallels to the life of Swami Paramananda (d. ~1940) of Boston and Cohasset, "Bridge of Dreams", by Sara Ann Levinski. I think this is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand Vedanta in America.

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