



# REACH

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

**Motto:**

Atmano mokshartham  
jagad hitaya cha,

**“For one’s own  
liberation and for the  
welfare of the world.”**

**Vedanta Centre of Sydney, 2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115, Australia.**

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## Sayings and Teachings

### The pure in heart

The soiled mirror never reflects the rays of the sun; similarly those who are impure and unclean at heart and are deluded by Maya never perceive the glory of the Lord. But the pure in heart see the Lord just as the clear mirror reflects the sun.

**--- Sri Ramakrishna**

*Great Sayings Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, The RMIC, Gol Park, Kolkata, p. 12.*

### Sincerity in practice

Be sincere in your practice, words and deeds. You will feel blessed! His blessings are always showered on all creatures on the earth. It is needless to ask for it. Practise meditation sincerely and you will understand His infinite grace. God wants sincerity, truthfulness and love. Outward verbal effusions do not touch Him.

**--- Sri Sarada Devi**

*Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, p. 65.*

### The word ‘God’

I have been asked many times, “Why do you use that word, God?” Because it is the best word for our purpose; you cannot find a better word than that, because all the hopes, aspirations and happiness of humanity have been centred in that word. It is impossible now to change the word. Words like these were first coined by great saints, who realised their import and understood their meaning. But as they become current in society, ignorant people take these words and the result is that they lose their spirit and glory. The word ‘God’ has been used from time immemorial, and the idea of this cosmic intelligence, and all that is great and holy is associated with it.

**--- Swami Vivekananda**

*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas, p. 95.*



**Vedanta Centre of Sydney—Brisbane Chapter  
181 Burbong Street Chapel Hill, QLD 4073.**

## FORTHCOMING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Function	Centre	Date
<b>Seminars on the 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration of Swami Vivekananda</b>	Adelaide	Friday, 20 September 2013
	Brisbane	Friday, 6 September 2013
	Melbourne	Thur&Sat.day, 12 & 14 Sept. 2013
	Perth	Sunday, 22 September 2013
	Sydney	Monday, 16 September 2013
	Townsville	Sat. & Sunday, 7 & 8 Sept. 2013
<b>Play: Oneness—Voice Without Form</b>	Brisbane	Sunday, 22 September 2013
	Sydney	Tues. & Wed. 17, 18 Sept. 2013
<b>Durga Puja</b>	Sydney	Saturday, 12 October 2013
<b>Birth Anniversary of Holy Mother and Christmas Eve</b>	Sydney	Tuesday, 24 December 2013
	Other Centres	TBA
	All Centres	Tuesday, 24 December 2013

## Welcome

We welcome you all to the Ramakrishna - Vedanta Movement and invite you to attend our programmes and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal message of Vedanta as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda.

## News from and activities of the Vedanta Centres of Australia and New Zealand for the period from May 2013 to August 2013.

### ADELAIDE CENTRE

#### Monthly activities:

a) Swami Sridharananda continued his three-days-a-month visit and delivered discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* and *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* at the Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich SA 5065. A dedicated group of devotees attend his talks. These talks have also been recorded. Swami Chandrashekaranda visited Adelaide from the 8th to 10th of August 2013 and delivered talks on the *Narada Bhakti Sutra (The Aphorisms of Narada on Devotion)* at the same venue. For details of the programmes organized by the Adelaide Chapter please contact Dr. Raman Sharma on 08 - 8431 9775 or Mrs. Pathma Iswaran on 08-8379 5336 or E-mail: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com.

b) Every month on prescheduled Sundays the reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* including discussion on relevant points was conducted at devotees' homes.

### BRISBANE CENTRE

#### Daily activities:

Worship was conducted daily in the morning and *ārati*, including *bhajans*, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was conducted every evening in the Centre at **181 Burbong Street, Chapel Hill, QLD 4073**, (Phone no. 07-3720 0228). A resident volunteer looked after the day-to-day activities of the Centre.

#### Monthly Activities:

Swami Atmeshananda conducted the following programmes in Brisbane -

a) Scripture **classes** at the Centre on the first Saturday and Sunday, and second Friday and Sunday of every month.

b) Prayer **meetings** on the first Friday of every month in Deception Bay, QLD.

c) **Discussion** groups on the first Monday and Tuesday of every month in Sunnybank Hills, QLD.

d) A **class** on the first Wednesday of every month at Springfield, QLD.

#### Other activities:

##### a) Annual Programme

On the 1st of June 2013, the Brisbane

centre held its Annual Programme at the Indooroopilly State High School. Hon. Glen Elmes, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander & Multicultural Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Premier was the Guest of Honour on the occasion. The programme began with a procession of about 50 ladies carrying lamps in their hands which they placed on the stage of the hall. Following this, the Hon. Minister lit an oil lamp symbolising the start of the programme. The programme consisted of Vocal and Instrumental music by 3rd Space Cultural forum, an energetic band, dance items by students of Eshwaralaya Kalaikoodam and Nadananjali school of Dance, a skit 'The rise of the Paragon' - a brief life story of Swami Vivekananda by the children of the Vedanta centre and a song 'Heal the world' by Anjali Raj. The Honourable Minister, Swami Atmeshananda and Dr. Maha Sinnathamby addressed the audience. Dr. Ashim Majumdar welcomed the audience and Dr. Naidu Bodapati gave the vote of thanks. The programme was very well acclaimed for its quality performances and brevity.

### CANBERRA CENTRE

Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the *Bhagavad-Gītā* once in May and once in July at the Belconnen Community Centre, 2 Chandler Street in Canberra. Contact person: Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary on 02-6258 7612.

#### Other activities:

##### Movie on Swami Vivekananda

To commemorate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the Vedanta Centre of Sydney - Canberra Chapter screened a film titled "Swami Vivekananda's life in his own words" for the interested general public. The full length movie produced by the Ramakrishna Mission Chennai, depicted the life of Swami Vivekananda and his teachings as enacted and told in his own words. The film which screened on Sunday the 16th of June 2013 at the Mary MacKillop House & Conference Centre in Canberra, was

introduced by Swami Atmeshananda. There was a large turnout and the film was very much appreciated by all.

##### Seminar on Swami Vivekananda

On the 23rd of August, the Canberra Chapter in conjunction with the Australian National University (ANU) held a free public lecture and forum to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. Titled "**Bridging East and West - From Individuals to Global Organisations**", the lectures focussed on the teachings of Swami Vivekananda with a special emphasis on the universal teachings that bridged the gap between the East and the West, and also thereby encouraging the humanistic approach of economic development. The keynote speaker was Swami Tyagananda, and there were lectures by several other noted academic staff from ANU. The event was well attended by both the general public as well as university staff and students.

### MELBOURNE CENTRE

#### Daily Activities:

Vesper service was held daily from 7 to 8 p.m. in the Centre at **5-7 Angus Avenue, Ringwood, Vic 3135**. It included set hymns, scriptural readings, meditation and occasional devotional singing. **Contact persons:** Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary - 03-9803 6154, Mr. Mohana Krishnan on 03-9801 6174.

The **bookstall** holds literature on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta philosophy, and other spiritual topics in print, audio, and visual media.

#### Weekly/Monthly Activities:

a) Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly **discourses** on the *Bhagavad-Gītā* from the Thursday to the Saturday of a prescheduled week at the Ringwood Community Hall, Knaith Road. The Thursday and Friday sessions were held from 7:45 to 9 p.m. and on Saturdays the sessions were held from 10 to 11 a.m. The recordings of these discourses are available in Audio, Video and MP3 formats.

b) Regular monthly *satsangas*



(prayer meetings) were held on the first Sunday of every month. The program includes readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and other books and followed by discussions there on, *bhajans* and *ārati*.

c) Swami Chandrashekharananda visited the Centre from 12th to 24th of August and conducted classes on *Kenopanishad* after the daily vesper service. He also conducted monthly classes on *Bhagavad-Gītā* from 15th to 17th of August and sang *Shyama-nama Sankirtana* on 21st of August 2013.

d) **Group studies** through the viewing of (i) the *Mundaka Upanishad* lecture series on video were held every Sunday from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. and (ii) The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* lecture series on video were held every Friday from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (iii) The *Bhagavad-Gītā* study group met on alternate Sundays from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.

#### Celebrations:

a) **Guru Purnima** was celebrated on 22nd of July 2013.

b) **Sri Krishna Janmashtami** was celebrated on 24th of August 2013.

#### PERTH CENTRE

##### Daily Activities:

The Centre, located at **51 Golf View Street, Yokine W.A. 6060**, held vesper service daily at 7 p.m. with *ārati*, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation. The Centre maintains a small bookstall and a library. Contact persons: Mr. Hiren Mukhopadhyay, Secretary - 0411 478 244 and Mr. Parthiv Parekh, Asstt. Secretary - 0430 511 699.

##### Monthly Activities:

The following monthly activities were held:

a) Swami Sridharananda visited the Centre from the Wednesday to the Saturday of a prescheduled week every month and conducted **discourses** on *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

b) Monthly **satsangas** including the singing of *bhajans* and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and other inspiring books were conducted on the first Sunday of every month from 11 a.m.

c) **Revision** sessions through playing the audio recording on *Bhagavat-*

*Gītā* talks that were delivered in the previous month were conducted on one prescheduled Sunday.

#### Celebrations:

a) **Buddha Purnima** was celebrated on 2nd of June during Sunday Satsang with a reading from Dhammapada, chanting and bhajans.

b) **Guru Purnima** was celebrated on 22 July 2013 after evening prayer. A few *bhajans* were sung on the occasion. The pre-recorded talk on the "Importance of Guru" by Swami Sridharanandaji delivered in Sydney earlier in the day was played and this was followed by the *ārati* and *prasad* distribution.

#### SYDNEY CENTRE

##### Daily Activities:

Daily worship including chanting and meditation was held every morning from 6:45 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. at 2 Stewart Street, Ermington. The vesper service was conducted in the evening from 7 p.m. and this included devotional singing, a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation.

Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees were also conducted on a daily basis. The library was available to devotees for reference and research. The Centre maintained a **bookstall** which has a range of books on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, Yoga, and other spiritual literature. Devotional songs, discourses on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanishad*, and other topics are also available in various media.

##### Weekly/ Monthly Activities:

The Centre conducted the following activities in Sydney:

a) Swami Sridharananda conducted **classes** on the *Bhagavad-Gītā* every Sunday morning from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Centre.

b) **Classes** on *Bhagavad Gītā* were also conducted by Swami Sridharananda at 1/11 Boyle Street, Balgowlah, NSW 2093 **Mainly Beach** on Tuesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

c) Some devotees availed themselves **spiritual counselling** and guidance. The Swamis also visited the homes of devotees when required.

d) **Meditation** sessions were held at the Centre on Sundays from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

e) **Sanskrit language** classes were held on Saturdays and Sundays at varying levels for adult students.

f) **Bala Sangha** Classes on **moral and spiritual lessons and drama and movement** were conducted for children every Saturday from 4:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. at the Centre during the academic term.

g) Classes on **moral and spiritual lessons** were also conducted for children at Eastwood Public School on Wednesdays from 9:45 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. during the academic term.

h) The Centre provided **English Language tutoring** on Tuesdays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. during the school term.

i) **Rāmanām Sankirtana** was sung on *Ekadashi* days after the vesper service.

j) A **class** for ladies was held every Monday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Swami Atmeshananda discussed from the book *Meditation and Spiritual Life* when he was in Sydney and in his absence Swami Sunisthananda discussed the text from *Katha Upanishad*.

k) The meetings of the **Viveka Youth Group** were held on Sundays from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. The Karma Yoga of Swami Vivekananda was read and discussed. For details please visit the Facebook page : <https://www.facebook.com/VYGSydney>

l) A group of devotees offered their musical tribute in commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda on 29th of June 2013.

j) Swami Sunisthananda attended a meeting as the guest of honour on 14th of July at the Bhai Centre organised by the Hindu Council of Australia and HSS to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

#### Celebrations:

a) **Sri Sankaracharya Jayanti** was celebrated on 15th of May 2013.

b) **Buddha Purnima** was celebrated on 25th May 2013.

c) **Guru Purnima** was celebrated on 22nd of July 2013 after the evening vesper service. A formal worship was performed amid *bhajans*. Swami

Sridharananda delivered a talk on the importance of the Guru.

**c) Sri Krishna Janmastami** was celebrated on 28th of August 2013. A formal worship of Sri Krishna, singing of *bhajans* and reading from the Bhagavatam regarding the nativity of Sri Krishna were the highlights of the celebration.

#### Other activities:

Sangamam, a cultural programme, was organised by the friends of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 18th of May 2013 at the Bahai Cultural Centre, Silverwater. The dance groups of M/s. Hamsa Venkat, Manjula Viswanathan, Janakan Suthanthiraraj, Aruna Gandhimathinathan, Ruchi Sanghi, Mridula Viswanathan, Padma Balakumar and Geetanjali School of Dance charmed the audience with

their colourful presentations. Swami Atmeshananda thanked the organisers, artists and the audience.

#### Visiting monastics:

**a)** Br. Nirvanachaitanya (Bob Maharaj) of Hollywood Centre visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney from 3rd of May to 13th of June 2013.

**b)** Swamis Tyagananda, Sarvapriyananda and Baneshananda arrived at the Centre on 16th, 24th and 25th of August respectively. They were invited to tour a number of cities in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji in order to deliver talks on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

#### Overseas Visits:

Swami Sridharananda visited **Auckland, NZ** from the 7th to 11th May and **Malaysia and Europe** from the 3rd to 28th of June 2013.

### AUCKLAND CENTRE

#### Daily activities:

A vesper service was held daily from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Centre at 27 Arawa Street, New Lynn, Auckland. It includes the singing of hymns and readings from the text *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, followed by meditation.

#### Monthly and annual activities:

**a)** On the second Sunday of every month *satsang* programmes, which include the singing of *bhajans*, discourse on the *Ramayana*, readings and discussion on the lives of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and meditation, were conducted from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**b)** On the last Sunday of every month *reading* and discussion on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and, the life and



Musical Tribute



Br. Nirvanachaitanya



Guru Purnima



Sydney Centre— Sangamam Cultural Programme depicting the Emblame of RKM. (inset Swami Atmeshananda).



teachings of Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda were conducted in addition to the above. Music and chanting classes were also held on these days.

c) Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* on 9th and 10th May 2013 from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. and on 11th of May from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

d) Swami Sunisthananda visited the Auckland Centre and delivered talks from 26th to 28th July from 7:45 p.m. till 9 p.m. on 'The Significance of Guru in our lives, Importance of Guru-Shishya Tradition and the reason for *Guru Purnima* Celebration' and on 'The Lives and Teachings of Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda'.

#### Celebrations:

a) The **Buddha Purnima** was celebrated on the 25th of May 2013 from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. The programme included *bhajans*, talks and readings from the life of Bhagavan Buddha followed by *prasad* distribution.

The **Guru Purnima** was celebrated on the 22nd July 2013 from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. The programme included *bhajans*, talks and readings on the significance of Guru, meditation and *arati* followed by *prasad* distribution.

#### Other activities:

a) The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on 9th of June from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

b) On the 31st of August, Swami Baneshananda of Germany, Swami Tyagananada of Boston, Swami Sarvapriyananda of Belur Math and Swami Atmeshananda of Sydney centre arrived in Auckland to participate in Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary celebrations. In the evening a *satsanga* was held at the Ashram. Swami Atmeshananda sang *bhajans* after the *ārati*, and the other three swamis delivered informal talks on 'The Spiritual life and Sri Ramakrishna'.

#### Please visit our websites:

<https://www.facebook.com/VYGSydney>  
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Oneness-Voice-Without-Form/641511535859854>  
<http://oneness.org.au/>

**For Indian news of 150th birth anniversary functions of Swami Vivekananda** [belurmath.org](http://belurmath.org)  
**Some other websites:**  
<http://www.rkmdelhi.org/>  
<http://rkmath.org/>  
<http://vivekanandahouse.org/>  
<http://shashwatabharata.in/>

#### Continued from Page 9

sits besides the Ganges and says, "I will ford the river when all the water has run into the ocean." The way is not with Maya, but against it. This is another fact to learn. We are not born as helpers of nature, but competitors with nature. We are its bond-masters but we bind ourselves down. Why is this house here? Nature did not build it. Nature says, go and live in the forest. Man says, I will build a house and fight with nature, and he does so. The whole history of humanity is a continuous fight against the so-called laws of nature, and man gains in the end. Coming to the internal world, there too the same fight is going on, this fight between the animal man and the spiritual man, between light and darkness; and here too man becomes victorious. He, as it were, cuts his way out of nature to freedom.

We see, then, that beyond this Maya the Vedantic philosophers find something that is not bound by Maya; and if we can get there, we shall not be bound by Maya. This idea is in some form or other the common property of all religions. But, with the Vedanta, it is only the beginning of religion and not the end. The idea of a Personal God, the Ruler and Creator of this universe, as He has been styled, the Ruler of Maya, or nature, is not the end of those Vedantic ideas; it is only the beginning. The idea grows and grows until the Vedantist finds that He, who he thought was standing outside, is he himself, and is in reality within. He is the one who is free, but who through limitation thought he was bound.

#### Source:

*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, page. 88-104.



Auckland Centre— Gita discourse



Auckland Centre— Satsanga conducted by Swamis on the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.



**Photo Feature :**

**The Vedanta Centre of Sydney**

*The Construction of the Vivekananda Memorial Multi-Purpose Community Facility at 2 Stewart Street, Ermington 2115.*

*We earnestly request generous persons not to miss this opportunity to get actively involved in this noble venture. Any contribution towards the construction of this institution will be thankfully accepted and acknowledged.*





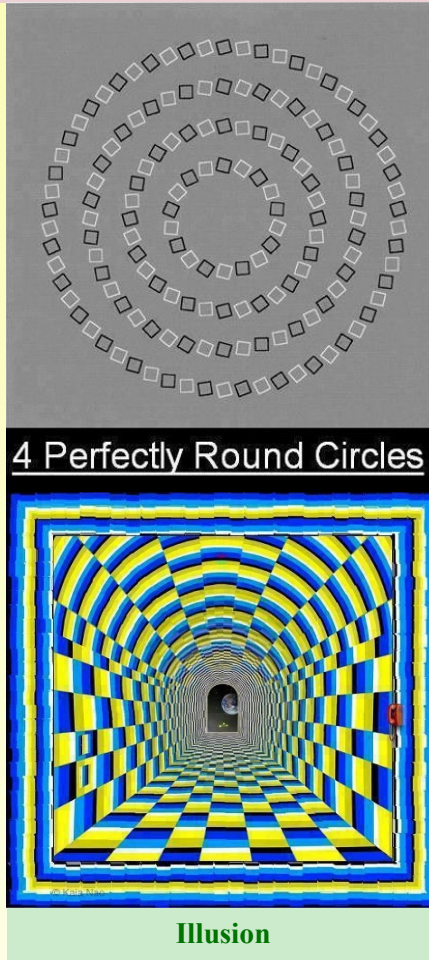
## Maya and Illusion

Talk delivered by Swami Vivekananda in London

### Introduction: Defining 'Maya'

Almost all of you have heard of the word Maya. Generally it is used, though incorrectly, to denote illusion, or delusion, or some such thing. But the theory of Maya forms one of the pillars upon which the Vedanta rests; it is, therefore, necessary that it should be properly understood. The oldest idea of Maya in Vedic literature is the sense of delusion. We find such passages as "Indra through his Maya assumed various forms." Here it is true the word Maya means something like magic. Later, the question was raised, "Why can't we know this secret of the universe?" The answer given was very significant: "Because we talk in vain, and because we are satisfied with the things of the senses, and because we are running after desires; therefore, we, as it were, cover the Reality with a mist." Here the word Maya is not used at all, but the idea conveyed is that the cause of our ignorance is a kind of mist that has come between us and the Truth.

Much later, in one of the new Upanishads, the word Maya reappears, but this time a transformation has taken place in it, and a mass of new meaning has attached itself to the word. Theories had been propounded and repeated, others had been taken up, until at last the idea of Maya became fixed. The Shvetashvatara Upanishad states, "Know nature to be Maya and the Ruler of this Maya is the Lord Himself." Coming to our philosophers, we find that this word Maya has been manipulated in various fashions, until we come to the great Shankaracharya. The theory of Maya was manipulated a little by the Buddhists too, but in the hands of the Buddhists it became very much like what is called Idealism, and that is the meaning that is now generally given to the word Maya. When the Hindus state the world is Maya, at once people get the idea that the world is an illusion. This interpretation has some basis,



as coming through the Buddhistic philosophers, because there was one section of philosophers who did not believe in the external world at all. But the Maya of the Vedanta, in its last developed form, is neither Idealism nor Realism, nor is it a theory. It is a simple statement of facts - what we are and what we see around us.

### The mind is limited

The Vedantist has proved beyond all doubt that the mind is limited, that it cannot go beyond certain limits - beyond time, space, and causation. As no man can jump out of his own self, so no man can go beyond the limits that have been put upon him by the laws of time and space. Every attempt to solve the laws of causation, time, and space would be futile, because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three. What does the statement of the

existence of the world mean, then? "This world has no existence." It thus means that it has no absolute existence. It exists only in relation to my mind, to your mind, and to the mind of everyone else. We see this world with the five senses but if we had another sense, we would see in it something more. If we had yet another sense, it would appear as something still different. It has, therefore, no real existence; it has no unchangeable, immovable, infinite existence. Nor can it be called non-existence; seeing that it exists, and we have to work in and through it. It is a mixture of existence and non-existence.

### Oscillating between optimism and pessimism

Coming from abstractions to the common, everyday details of our lives, we find that our whole life is a contradiction, a mixture of existence and non-existence. There is this contradiction in knowledge. It seems that man can know everything, if he only wants to know; but before he has gone a few steps, he finds an adamant wall, which he cannot pass. All his work is in a circle, and he cannot go beyond that circle. The problems, which are nearest and dearest to him, are impelling him on and calling, day and night, for a solution, but he cannot solve them, because he cannot go beyond his intellect. And yet that desire is implanted strongly in him. Still we know that the only good is to be obtained by controlling and checking it. With every breath, every impulse of our heart asks us to be selfish. At the same time, there is some power beyond us, which says that it is unselfishness alone which is good. Every child is a born optimist; he dreams golden dreams. In youth he becomes still more optimistic. It is hard for a young man to believe that there is such a thing as death, such a thing as defeat or degradation. Old age comes, and life is a mass of ruins. Dreams have vanished into the air, and the man becomes a pessimist. Thus we go from one

extreme to another, buffeted by nature, without knowing where we are.

It reminds me of a celebrated song in the *Lalita Vistara*, the biography of Buddha. Buddha was born, says the book, as the saviour of mankind, but he forgot himself in the luxuries of his palace. Some angels came and sang a song to rouse him. And the burden of the whole song is that we are floating down the river of life, which is continually changing with no stop and no rest. So are our lives, going on and on without knowing any rest. The man who has come to eat and drink is an optimist, and he avoids all mention of misery, for it frightens him. Tell not to him of the sorrows and the sufferings of the world; go to him and tell him that it is all good. "Yes, I am safe," says he. "Look at me! I have a nice house to live in. I do not fear cold and hunger therefore do not bring these horrible pictures before me." But, on the other hand, there are others dying of cold and hunger. If you go and teach *them* that it is all good, they will not hear you. How can they wish others to be happy when they are miserable? Thus we are oscillating between optimism and pessimism.

### **Death is the end of everything**

Then, there is the tremendous fact of death. The whole world is going towards death; everything dies. All our progress, our vanities, our reforms, our luxuries, our wealth, our knowledge, have that one end - **death**. That is all that is certain. Cities come and go, empires rise and fall, planets break into pieces and crumble into dust, to be blown about by the atmospheres of other planets. Thus it has been going on from time without beginning. Death is the end of everything. Death is the end of life, of beauty, of wealth, of power, of virtue too. Saints die and sinners die, kings die and beggars die. They are all going to death, and yet this tremendous clinging on to life exists. Somehow, we do not know why, we cling to life; we cannot give it up. And this is Maya.

### **This is Maya**

The mother is nursing a child with great care; all her soul, her life, is in that child. The child grows, becomes

a man, and perchance becomes a blackguard and a brute, kicks her and beats her every day; and yet the mother clings to the child; and when her reason awakes, she covers it up with the idea of love. She little thinks that it is not love, that it is something which has got hold of her nerves, which she cannot shake off; however she may try, she cannot shake off the bondage she is in. And this is Maya.

We are all after the Golden Fleece. Every one of us thinks that this will be his. Every reasonable man sees that his chance is, perhaps, one in twenty millions, yet everyone struggles for it. And this is Maya.

Death is stalking day and night over this earth of ours, but at the same time we think we shall live eternally. A question was once asked of King Yudhishtira, "What is the most wonderful thing on this earth?" And the king replied, "Every day people are dying around us, and yet men think they will never die." And this is Maya.

Maya is a statement of the fact of this universe, of how it is going on. People generally get frightened when these things are told to them. But bold we must be. Hiding facts is not the way to find the remedy. As you all know, a hare hunted by dogs puts its head down and thinks itself safe; so, when we run into optimism, we do just like the hare, but that is no remedy. There are objections against this, but you may remark that they are generally from people who possess many of the good things of life.

In every society, we often find that the ignorant, common man, when abused, does not feel much, but he feels a good thrashing. But the gentleman cannot bear a single word of abuse; he has become so finely nerved. Misery has increased with his susceptibility to happiness. As we increase our power to be happy, we also increase our power to suffer, and sometimes I am inclined to think that if we increase our power to become happy in arithmetical progression, we shall increase, on the other hand, our power to become miserable in geometrical progression. We who are progressing know that the more we progress, the more

avenues are opened to pain as well as to pleasure. And this is Maya.

Thus, Maya is not a theory for the explanation of the world; it is simply a statement of facts as they exist, that the very basis of our being is contradiction, that everywhere we have to move through this tremendous contradiction, that wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow, and everyone who smiles will have to weep, and vice versa. Nor can this state of things be remedied. We may verily imagine that there will be a place where there will be only good and no evil, where we shall only smile and never weep. This is impossible in the very nature of things; for the conditions will remain the same. Wherever there is the power of producing a smile in us, there lurks the power of producing tears. Wherever there is the power of producing happiness, there lurks somewhere the power of making us miserable.

Thus the Vedanta philosophy is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. It voices both these views and takes things as they are. It admits that this world is a mixture of good and evil, happiness and misery, and that to increase the one, one must of necessity increase the other. There will never be a perfectly good or bad world, because the very idea is a contradiction in terms. The great secret revealed by this analysis is that good and bad are not two cut-and-dried, separate existences. There is not one thing in this world of ours, which you can label as good and good alone, and there is not one thing in the universe, which you can label as bad and bad alone. The very same phenomenon that is appearing to be good now, may appear to be bad tomorrow. The same thing which is producing misery in one, may produce happiness in another. The fire that burns the child, may cook a good meal for a starving man. The same nerves that carry the sensations of misery carry also the sensation of happiness. The only way we stop evil, therefore, is to stop good also; there is no other way. To stop death,



we shall have to stop life also. Life without death and happiness without misery are contradictions, and neither can be found alone, because each of them is but a different manifestation of the same thing. What I thought to be good yesterday, I do not think to be good now. When I look back upon my life and see what were my ideals at different times, I find this to be so. At one time my ideal was to drive a strong pair of horses; at another time I thought, if I could make a certain kind of sweetmeat I should be perfectly happy; later I imagined that I should be entirely satisfied if I had a wife and children and plenty of money. Today I laugh at all these ideals as mere childish nonsense.

The Vedanta says, there must come a time when we shall look back and laugh at the ideals that make us afraid of giving up our individuality. Each one of us wants to keep this body for an indefinite time, thinking we shall be very happy, but there will come a time when we shall laugh at this idea. Now, if such be the truth, we are in a state of hopeless contradiction- neither existence nor non-existence, neither misery nor happiness, but a mixture of them. What then is the use of Vedanta and all other philosophies and religion? And, above all, what is the use of doing good work? This is a question that comes to mind. If it is true that you cannot do good without doing evil, and whenever you try to create happiness there will always be misery, the question may be posed, "What is the use of doing good?" The answer is in the first place, that we must work for lessening misery, for that is the only way to make ourselves happy. Everyone of us finds it out sooner or later in our lives. The bright ones find it out a little earlier, and the dull ones a little later. The dull ones pay very dearly for the discovery and the bright ones less dearly. In the second place, we must do our part, because that is the only way of getting out of this life of contradiction. Both the forces of good and evil will keep the universe alive for us, until we awake from our dreams and give up this building of mud pies. That lesson we shall have to learn, and it will take a long, long

time to learn it.

There comes a time when the mind awakes from this long and dreary dream-the child gives up its play and wants to go back to its mother. It finds the truth of the statement, "Desire is never satisfied by the enjoyment of desires, it only increases all the more, as fire, when butter is poured upon it."

This is true of all sense-enjoyments, of all intellectual enjoyments, and of all the enjoyments of which the human mind is capable. They are nothing, they are within Maya, within this network beyond which we cannot go. We may run therein through infinite time and find no end, and whenever we struggle to get a little enjoyment, a mass of misery falls upon us. How awful is this! And when I think of it, I cannot but consider that this theory of Maya, this statement that it is all Maya, is the best and only explanation.

Thus the Vedantic position is neither pessimism nor optimism. It does not say that the world is all evil or all good. It says that our evil is of no less value than our good, and our good of no more value than our evil. They are bound together. This is the world, and knowing this, you work with patience. What for? Why should we work? If this is the state of things, what shall we do? Why not become agnostics? The modern agnostics also know there is no solution of this problem, no getting out of this evil of Maya, as we say in our language; therefore they tell us to be satisfied and enjoy life. Here, again, is a mistake. What do you mean by life? Do you mean only the life of the senses? This present life means something more than that. Our feelings, thoughts, and aspirations are all part and parcel of our life; and is not the struggle towards the great ideal, towards perfection, one of the most important components of what we call life? According to the agnostics, we must enjoy life as it is. But this life means, above all, this search after the ideal; the essence of life is going towards perfection. We must have that, and, therefore, we cannot be agnostics or take the world as it appears. The agnostic position takes

this life, minus the ideal component, to be all that exists. And this, the agnostic claims, cannot be reached, therefore he must give up the search. This is what is called Maya-this nature, this universe.

All religions are more or less attempts to get beyond nature- the crudest or the most developed, expressed through mythology or symbology, stories of gods, angels or demons, or through stories of saints or seers, great men or prophets, or through the abstractions of philosophy-all have one object, all are trying to get beyond these limitations. In one word, they are all struggling towards freedom. Man feels, consciously or unconsciously, that he is bound; he is not what he wants to be. It was taught to him at the very moment he began to look around. That very instant he learnt that he was bound, and he also found that there was something in him which wanted to fly beyond, where the body could not follow, but which was as yet chained down by this limitation. The man who wants to worship the gods sees in them, above all things, greater freedom than in himself. If a door is closed, he thinks the gods can get through it, and that walls have no limitations for them. This idea of freedom increases until it comes to the ideal of a Personal God, of which the central concept is that he is a Being beyond the limitation of nature, of Maya. I see before me, as it were, that in some of those forest retreats this question is being discussed by those ancient sages of India; and in one of them, where even the oldest and the holiest fail to reach the solution, a young man stands up in the midst of them, and declares, "Hear, ye, children of immortality, hear, ye who live in the highest places, I have found the way. By knowing Him who is beyond darkness we can go beyond death."

### Conclusion

This Maya is everywhere. It is terrible. Yet we have to work through it. The man who says that he will work when the world has become all good and then he will enjoy bliss is as likely to succeed as the man who

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**Introduction**

Hari Prasanna Chatterjee was born in 1868. Like Hari (Turiyananda), Hari Prasanna got a glimpse of Ramakrishna during his early teens, when Ramakrishna was visiting a house in Calcutta. But it was not until Hari Prasanna was seventeen or eighteen that Sarat (Saradananda), who was a college friend of his, took him to Dakshineswar.

Swami Vijnanananda vividly narrated one of his dramatic and unconventional encounters with Ramakrishna,

I felt Sri Ramakrishna's room vibrating with a tangible atmosphere of peace, and the devotees present seemed to be listening in blissful absorption to the words that poured from the Master's lips. I don't recall what he said, but I experienced tremendous joy within. I sat there for a long time, my whole attention concentrated on Sri Ramakrishna. He did not say anything to me, nor did I ask him anything. Then one by one the devotees took their leave, and suddenly I found myself alone with him. The Master was looking at me intently. I thought it was time for me to depart, so I prostrated before him. As I stood up to go, he asked, "Can you wrestle? Come, let me see how well you wrestle!" With these words he stood up, ready to grapple with me. I was surprised at this challenge. I thought to myself, "What kind of holy man is this?" But I replied, "Yes, of course I can wrestle."

Sri Ramakrishna came closer, smiling. He caught hold of my arms and began to shove me, but I was a strong, muscular young man and I pushed him back to the wall. He was still smiling and holding me with a strong grip. Gradually I felt a sort of electric current coming out of his hands and entering into me. That touch made me completely helpless. I lost all my physical strength. I went into ecstasy, and the hair of my body stood on end. Releasing me, the Master said with a smile, "Well, you are the winner." With those words,



**Swami Vijnanananda**  
(1868 -1938)  
**(One who enjoys the bliss of the Supreme Wisdom)**

he sat down on his cot again. I was speechless. Wave after wave of bliss engulfed my whole being. I was pondering the fact that the Master had not won physically but his spiritual power had completely subdued me. Some time passed. Then the Master got up from his seat. Patting me gently on the back, he said, "Come here often. It is not enough to come once." Then he offered me some sweets as prasada, and I returned to Calcutta. For days the spell of that intoxicating joy lingered, and I realized that he had transmitted spiritual power to me.

Ramakrishna later said of Swami Vijnanananda, "He wrestled with Krishna in his previous incarnation; he is not an ordinary person."

**Early life**

Swami Vijnanananda's premonastic name was Hari Prasanna Chattopadhyay. He was born on Friday, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1868 in Etawah, Uttar Pradesh, where his father, Taraknath Chattopadhyay, worked in the commissariat of the British government. Hari Prasanna was the eldest of six children, two boys and four girls. As Taraknath's job transferred him to different places, the children lived with their mother,

Nakuleswari Devi, at Varanasi, where Hari Prasanna began his primary education. In 1879 his mother moved with her children to their ancestral home at Belgharia, near Dakshineswar. Hari Prasanna entered the Hare School in Calcutta, and in 1882 he passed the Entrance examination.

From his childhood, Hari Prasanna had a religious temperament and a tremendous passion for truth. Once, when he was about fourteen, his mother falsely accused him of something and scolded him. He protested vehemently, and when he failed to convince his mother of his innocence he tore off his sacred thread and cried out, "If I tell a lie, I am not a Brahmin." Nakuleswari Devi was taken aback, and became afraid that some misfortune might befall the family. Strangely enough, the very next day a cable from Quetta (Afghanistan) brought the news of his father's death. His mother, grief-stricken, said to Hari Prasanna, "See the result of your curse."

Very little is known about his early life, however, Hari Prasanna once narrated the following incident from his boyhood: One day, he heard a gun shot in the bamboo grove behind their house in Belgharia. He rushed to the grove and found a wounded monkey lying on the ground. He distinctly heard the monkey chant twice, "Rama, Rama"; then, with folded hands it died. Hari Prasanna believed that monkeys are the devotees of Ramachandra and that they die chanting Lord Rama's name.

**Meeting with Sri Ramakrishna**

Hari Prasanna was only seven years old when he first saw Sri Ramakrishna. He later recalled:

I first saw Sri Ramakrishna in 1875 at Belgharia in the garden house of Jaygopal Sen. The Master came to visit Keshab Sen in that retreat house. I was then a little boy. I was playing with my friends and then just by chance saw the Master there. At that time the paths of the garden house were covered with red brick



dust. Many people came. The Master was seated in a room. After seeing him, I returned to my house nearby.

The second time Hari Prasanna saw him, Sri Ramakrishna was immersed in Samadhi at Dewan Govinda Mukhopadhyay's house in Belgharia. He later described the scene:

A young man [Narendra] was singing a devotional song. Sri Ramakrishna was standing in the centre of the group, and another man [Baburam] was holding him so that he would not fall. The Master was completely oblivious of his surroundings. He wore a white cloth. His face shone with a heavenly lustre and a smile played on his lips. His teeth were visible, and there was such a joyful expression on his face that it seemed as if it would crack-like a cracked melon! His eyes seemed to be gazing at something, and he appeared to be immersed in an ocean of bliss.

Another thing that struck me has remained imprinted in my memory forever. From the base of the Master's spine right up to his head the whole column had become inflated like a thick rope. And the energy that rose upward towards the brain seemed to be spreading its hood and swaying its head like a snake dancing in joy.

In 1883 Hari Prasanna entered Saint Xavier's College in Calcutta, and Sarat Chakrabarty (Later, Swami Saradananda) and Ramananda Chattopadhyay (later the editor of *Pravasi*) were his classmates. On 26<sup>th</sup> November 1883, he and Sarat went by boat to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with another classmate. Arriving in the afternoon, they saw the Master briefly as he was about to leave for Mani Mallik's house in Calcutta. However, the Master invited them to come to Mani Mallik's residence too, so they returned to Calcutta by boat. Hari Prasanna attended the festival at Mani Mallik's and returned home late that evening. He later described what happened, "My mother scolded me. When she heard that I had gone to see Sri Ramakrishna, she said, 'My goodness! You went to that crazy Brahmin! He has deranged the brains of three hundred and fifty

young men!' It was indeed mental derangement! Even now my brain is hot. I did not pay any attention to my mother's scolding."

During his college days, Hari Prasanna visited Sri Ramakrishna several times at the Dakshineswar temple garden. He later related those wonderful reminiscences to some devotees. On Krishna's birthday, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1884, Hari Prasanna went to see the Master at Dakshineswar. That evening he decided to spend the night there. He recalled his experience:

Sometime later the Master gave me some *luchis* (fried bread) and sweets, which were the Divine Mother's *prasad*. Sri Ramakrishna made a bed for me and set up the mosquito curtain. I fell asleep as soon as I lay down. At midnight I woke up and found the Master walking round my bed, saying, "Mother, Mother." I was dumbfounded and could not understand what was going on. That night Sri Ramakrishna blessed me.

The Master's disciples felt an irresistible attraction for their guru. They learned more by observing his exemplary life and listening to his talks than from books. Hari Prasanna described another night's stay with the Master:

One evening I went to Dakshineswar and expressed to the Master my desire to stay overnight. He gladly gave his consent. There was no suitable eating arrangement at night in Dakshineswar. Every night some *prasad* of the Divine Mother would be sent to the Master for his supper, and from that he would eat a little and distribute the remainder among those who stayed with him. The Master's night meal was very small-like a bird's food. He would eat a couple of *luchis*, a little *farina* pudding, and some sweets. When I saw the small quantity of *prasad*, I was upset. I realized that I would have to fast that night. I was then young with a well-built body and a large appetite. The little bit of *prasad* was not enough for me. Knowing what was in my mind, the Master asked somebody to bring some *chapatis* (flattened bread) and vegetable curry for me from the *nahabat*. Even that amount of food

was not sufficient for me. But I ate it and lay down on the floor in the Master's room.

At midnight I suddenly woke up and saw the Master pacing back and forth in his room. Sometimes he would go to the front veranda, muttering something, or he would chant the names of gods and goddesses while clapping his hands. During the day the Master talked and joked with the devotees but now, at night, he was quite different. I was scared to death. I lay in bed, quietly observing the Master's madness. I could not get back to sleep. Sometimes the Master sang and danced, and sometimes he talked with someone. At last the night passed, and I was relieved. In the morning the Master was normal again.

When I returned home, my sister asked, "Where did you stay last night?" "At the temple garden of Dakshineswar," I replied. Immediately she exclaimed, "Don't go to that man again. He is really mad. I go there very often to bathe in the Ganges. I have seen him and I know about his madness." I listened to her words and smiled.

Sri Ramakrishna was very concerned about his disciples' welfare. If any one of them did not visit him for a while, he would ask someone about that person. Once, when Hari Prasanna did not come to Dakshineswar for a long time, the Master sent for him. When he arrived, the Master asked why he had been absent for so long. Hari Prasanna replied truthfully, "Sir, I didn't feel like coming. Moreover, I try to meditate, but I find I cannot." "What do you mean you cannot meditate?" exclaimed the Master. After remaining silent for a few moments, he said, "Come near me." Hari Prasanna related what then happened:

As I approached the Master, he asked me to stick out my tongue. When I did, he drew a figure on it with his finger. My whole body began to tremble, and I felt an unspeakable bliss within. Then the Master said, "Go to the Panchavati and meditate there. Following his instructions, I slowly moved towards the Panchavati. I walked with difficulty,

intoxicated with joy from the Master's touch. Somehow I reached there and sat for meditation. Then I lost all outward consciousness. When I regained my ordinary state of mind, I saw the Master seated by me. He was rubbing my body with his hands. His face shone with a heavenly smile. I was still in an intoxicated mood. He asked me, "Well, how was your meditation?" "It was very good, sir," I replied. Then the Master said, "From now on you will always have deep meditation." He further asked, "Did you have a vision?"

I reported my experience to the Master as faithfully as I could. Then I followed him to his room. I was alone with him. That day he talked to me for a long time and gave me many spiritual instructions. I was overwhelmed by the Master's love and compassion for me. I had not realized before that he had so much feeling for me. Sri Ramakrishna's grace was boundless.

On that day the Master said to me, "Never get involved with women. Always be careful. Let there be no stain on your character. Never look at a woman even if she is made out of gold. Do you know why I am saying all this to you? You belong to the Divine Mother, and you will have to do a lot of work for Her. A pecked fruit cannot be offered to the Mother. So I tell you, be careful."

Hari Prasanna later recalled various episodes pertaining to his associations with Sri Ramakrishna.

On one occasion I was massaging the Master's feet when a gentleman from Konnagar came to visit him. After he had left, the Master said, "You know, I can see the inside of a man's mind just as I can see the objects inside a glass case. I thought to myself, 'Well, then he can also see everything in me. What a dangerous man he is!'" But the Master would only speak of the goodness in others, not of their evil deeds or tendencies.

Once, during my college days when I went to visit the Master at Dakshineswar, I asked him, "Is God with form or without form?" The Master replied, "God is with form as well as without form, and again he is beyond both form and formlessness."

Then I asked, "If God is all, is this cot also God?" He answered emphatically, "Yes, this cot is God, this glass, this utensil, this wall—everything is god." As he spoke, I experienced an inner transformation and was lifted beyond the realm of ordinary consciousness. My heart was illumined, and I saw the light of Brahman everywhere.

During my youth I read the philosophies of Kant, Hegel, and other great philosophers. One day I said to the Master, "Have you read the works of Kant and Hegel?" He replied, "What are you saying? Throw away all those books. Knowledge of god is not in any book. Those books are all products of ignorance." What a great statement the Master made! Later, finding no way out, I gave up arguing. In the beginning we need faith for god-realization.

Once at Dakshineswar the Master gave me an English book and asked me to read and explain it to him. It was stated in the book, "Speak the truth. Do not covet what belongs to another. Control your senses." On hearing this, the Master felt elated like a boy and expressed his great delight. The Master's joy even now is deeply impressed in my mind. I think that his expression of great delight was due to the fact that if a person attains perfection in those three disciplines, he is sure to reach god. Whenever he heard any discussion about God, he would go into ecstasy.

When the Master was blessed for the first time with the vision of the Divine Mother, he thought, "If this vision of mine is true, then let this big stone [which was in front of the nahabat] jump up thrice." Immediately, the stone did in fact jump thrice. Whatever he thought came to pass. Seeing this, the Master was fully convinced of the genuineness of his vision.

Hari Prasanna was not able to spend a great deal of time with the Master, but the unbounded grace of his guru filled his heart. Towards the end of Sri Ramakrishna's life, pointing to his own picture, he told Hari Prasanna, "Look, I dwell in this picture. Meditate on me." "Yes, I

will," replied Hari Prasanna.

In 1885 Hari Prasanna passed the First Arts examination in the first division at Saint Xavier's College. He then moved to Bankipur in the state of Bihar, and entered Patna College to study for a B.A degree. Hari Prasanna later replied, "The day the Master passed away [16<sup>th</sup> August 1886] I saw him standing in front of me. I wondered, 'How did the Master come here? What is the cause of this vision?' The next day I read of the Master's passing way in the *Basumati* newspaper." Naturally Hari Prasanna grieved, but he remembered what the Master had once said to him, "Do you know why I love you? You boys are my very own. The Divine Mother has asked me to love you." Hari Prasanna later remarked, "I cannot express how much love the Master had for us. We don't have that capacity to love others. We became intoxicated seeing the Master, and now people are intoxicated just by hearing his name. How blessed they are!"

***(To be continued in the next publication of Reach)***

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*"The earth is enjoyed by heroes"—this is the unfailing truth. Be a hero. Always say, "I have no fear."*

*A few heart-whole, sincere, and energetic men and women can do more in a year than a mob in a century.*

*A tremendous stream is flowing toward the ocean, carrying us all along with it; and though like straws and scraps of paper we may at times float aimlessly about, in the long run we are sure to join the Ocean of Life and Bliss.*

*- - - Swami Vivekananda.*