



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.”**

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Sayings and Teachings

The quest for the Lord

There are pearls in the deep sea, but you must hazard all perils to get them. If you fail to get at them by a single dive, do not conclude that the sea is without them. Dive again and again, and you are sure to be rewarded in the end. So also in the quest for the Lord, if your first attempt to see Him proves fruitless, do not lose heart.

--- Sri Ramakrishna.

Great sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda; The R.M.I.C.; Kolkata; page 2.

Grief, a gift from God

People complain about their grief and sorrows and how they pray to God but find no relief from pain. But grief itself is a gift from God. It is the symbol of His compassion... Tell me, who is there in the world that has not had to bear sorrow? Vrinda once said to Krishna, ‘Who said you are merciful? As Rama you filled Sita’s life with sorrow; as Krishna you fill Radha’s life with sorrow. In Kamsa’s prison your parents weep for you night and day. Yet we call upon you, because he who takes your Name has no fear of death.’

--- Sri Sarada Devi.

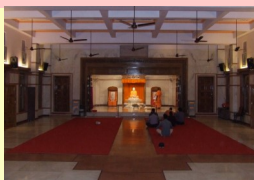
Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai p. 6.

The nature of Atman

Within there is the lion – the eternally pure, illumined and ever free Atman; and directly one realises It through meditation and concentration, this world of Maya vanishes. It is equally present in all, and the more one practises, the quicker does the Kundalini (the “coiled-up” power) awaken in one. When this power reaches the head, one’s vision is unobstructed – one realises the Atman.

--- Swami Vivekananda.

Teachings of Swami Vivekananda by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas, p. 4-5.



Sri Ramakrishna Temple, Jaipur, Rajsthan, India, (inset: the shrine)

FORTHCOMING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Function	Centre	Date
Maha Shivaratri	Brisbane, Melbourne & Sydney	Saturday, 21 February 2015
Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna	Adelaide	TBA
	Brisbane	TBA
	Melbourne	Saturday, 21 February 2015
	Perth	TBA
	Sydney	Friday, 20 February 2015
	Auckland	TBA
Ram Navami	Brisbane & Sydney	Saturday, 28 March 2015
Buddha Jayanti	Sydney	Monday, 4 May 2015

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 September to December 2014.

ADELAIDE CENTRE

Monthly activities:

a) Swami Sridharananda continued his three-days-a-month visit to Adelaide and delivered discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* at the Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich SA 5065. A dedicated group of devotees attended his talks. These talks have also been recorded. For details of the programmes organized by the Adelaide Chapter please contact Dr. Raman Sharma on 08 - 8431 9775 or e-mail: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com or Mrs. Pathma Iswaran on 08-8379 5336.

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

Other activities:

a) A **Seminar** on 'The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's teachings in modern times' was co-organised by the Vedanta Centre of Sydney - Adelaide Chapter and the Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party (FOBJP), Adelaide Chapter. The seminar was held on Sunday November 2, 2014 from 3 to 6:30 p.m. at the Burnside Community Centre, 401 Greenhill Road Tasmore SA 5065. Swami Sunishthananda and local speakers presented their views on the topic.

b) The Annual **Spiritual Retreat** was held on Saturday 15th of November 2014 at the Monastery, 15 Cross Road, Urrbrae SA 5064 for which Swami Sridharananda and Swami Sunishthananda were present. The day long retreat included chanting of Vedic mantras, bhajans, a question-answer session and readings

from The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and the Gospel of Holy Mother. Swami Sridharananda gave two talks on 'Four Paths to God Realisation'. The retreat concluded with singing of *bhajans* and *ārati*.

Celebrations:

a) The Birthday of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated to remember her life and teachings. This was held on Saturday December 20, 2014 from 6:00-7:30PM at 33 Woodhouse Crescent, Wattle Park SA 5066. The prayer included Sri Sarada Devi *Stotram*, *bhajans*, readings from the Gospel of the Holy Mother and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.

BRISBANE CENTRE

Daily activities:

Regular worship was conducted at the Centre daily in the morning. *Arati* (vesper service), singing of *bhajans*, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* constituted the evening programme at the Centre at **181 Burbong Street, Chapel Hill, QLD 4069. Contact person:** Swami Atmeshananda 0421 765 416, 07-3720 0228, e-mail: vedantabrisbane@gmail.com

Monthly Activities:

Swami Atmeshananda conducted the following programmes in Brisbane:

a) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* classes at the Centre on Sundays.

b) Religious Instruction classes at two schools in Brisbane on Mondays and Wednesdays.

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

d) A class on *Ashtavakra Samhita* on alternate Thursdays at Springfield.

e) A class on Meditation and Spiritual Life on alternate Fridays.

f) **Prayer meetings** on the First Saturday of every month.

g) A class on *Viveka Chudamani* at Toowoomba during alternate months.

h) **Satsang** at Deception Bay on a prescheduled Friday of every alternate month.

i) Singing of *Rāmanāma* on Ekadashi days that occur every fortnight.

j) Weekly **Sanskrit** class for Beginners at the Centre.

k) **Bala Sangha** – Children's classes on every Sunday (except during school holidays).

Other activities:

a) Swami Atmeshananda participated in the *Durga Puja* celebrations held by the Bengali Association in Cairns, North Qld on the 4th October 2014.

b) On the occasion of *Deepavali*, on the 10th of October 2014, a book stall was organised by the Centre at King George Square, Brisbane city.

c) A food stall at Robelle Domain, Springfield, was organised by devotees on Sunday the 12th October to raise funds for our building fund. The stall was part of a festival called 'Rocktoberfest' organised by the youth group in Springfield.

d) Swami Atmeshananda visited Fiji from the 23rd November to the 1st of December to take part in the inaugural celebrations of the newly built Meditation Centre at the Ramakrishna Mission, Nadi.



Adelaide Centre— Seminar and the spiritual retreat.



Melbourne Centre— Devotees at Satsang and Durga Puja at Bengali Association Victoria.

Celebrations:

a) The Centre conducted the Durga Puja on the 2nd October with special worship, devotional songs and distribution of consecrated food (prasada). Around 120 devotees took part in the event. On each of the nine days of the Navaratri festival, in which a few devotees participated, the hymn 'Durga Saptashati' was recited.

b) The birthday of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated at the Centre on the 13th of December 2014 as per the Hindu calendar. A special worship was conducted on the occasion followed by talks on the life and teachings of Holy Mother. Devotees sang devotional songs and partook of Prasad, the consecrated food.

CANBERRA CENTRE

Swami Sridharananda conducted monthly classes on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* at the Belconnen Community Centre, 2 Chandler Street Belconnen, Canberra. The Annual General meeting was held on the 9th of November 2014. **Contact person:** Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary mobile-0433 593 860. email: jaishankar_venkataraman@hotmail.com.

MELBOURNE CENTRE

Daily Activities:

Daily Worship in the morning at 7:30 a.m. and Vesper service from 7 to 8 p.m. were held in the Centre at **5-7 Angus Avenue, Ringwood, Vic 3135**. This included the chanting of regular hymns, devotional singing and a reading from *The Gospel of Sri*

Ramakrishna, and meditation. **Contact persons:** Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary - 0413 040 599, e-mail: vedanta.melb@gmail.com, Swami Chandrashekharananda 0422 904 824.

The **bookstall** has for sale various 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 at the Centre, monthly **discourses** on the *Bhagavad-Gītā* from the Thursday to the Saturday of a prescheduled week. The Thursday and Friday sessions were held from 7:45 to 9 p.m. and the Saturdays sessions were held from 10 to 11 a.m. The recordings of these discourses are available in audio, video and MP3 formats.

b) **Group study** through the viewing of the *Bhagavad-Gita* lecture series on video were held on Sundays from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Swami Chandrashekharananda conducted the following programmes in Melbourne:

c) **Classes** on the *Kathopanishad* on Sundays from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. at the Centre.

d) **Classes** on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*

twice a month from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. at Clayton Community Hall but have now been shifted to Sankat Mochan Temple in Huntingdale.

e) **Meditation** sessions at the Centre on Sundays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

f) **Sanskrit** classes for beginners and advanced students on Saturdays.

g) Singing of *Rāmanāma* on Ekadashi days and *Vishnu Sahashranama* and *Rudram /Chamakam* chanting occasionally.

h) A class on **Yoga** exercises were conducted by Dr. P. Aneja on Sundays from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.

h) *Bhagavad-Gītā* revision and discussions by a Study group through Video/audio from 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Other activities:

a) **Satsangs** were conducted from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Sunday the 7th September and on Sunday the 2nd of November 2014.

b) A discourse on *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* was conducted by Swami Chandrashekharananda from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. on Sunday the 16th of November, 2014 at Glen Waverley Community Centre. Some bhajans were also sung by him.

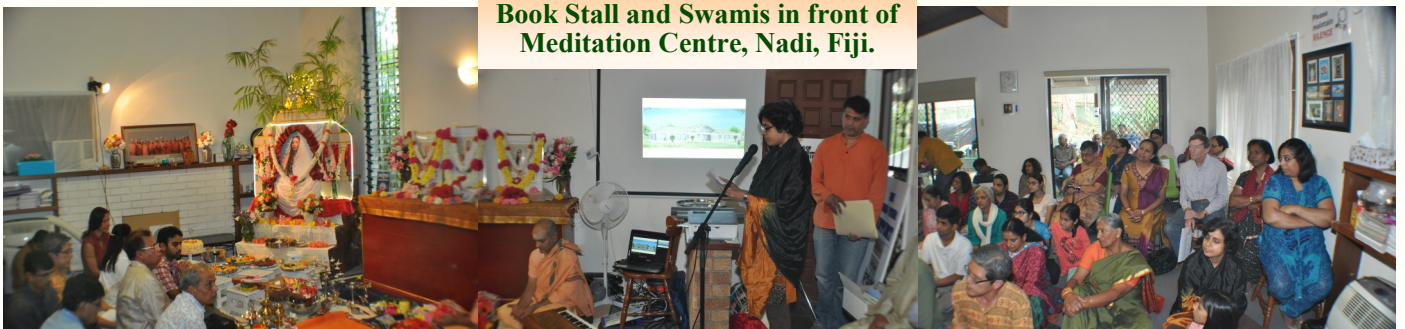
c) *Mahisasuramardini Stotram* and other *bhajans* were sung by Swami Chandrashekharananda at the Bengali Association of Victoria on Sunday the 5th of October from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Celebrations:

a) During *Navaratri*, from September 24th to 3rd October, the *Durgasaptasati* was recited starting



Book Stall and Swamis in front of Meditation Centre, Nadi, Fiji.



Brisbane Centre— Birthday Celebration of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.

from 9 a.m. to about 12 noon. Sri Sri Lalitashashranama was recited on 3rd of October from 5:45 to 6:45 p.m. and on 4th of October a special worship was performed with the ten specified objects.

b) The birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated on 13th December 2014 from 9 a.m. and concluded at about 1:30 p.m. The programme included formal worship, homam, singing of bhajans, offering of flowers and Prasad distribution.

c) Christmas Eve was celebrated on 24th of December from 6:15 p.m. The programme included singing of bhajans and carols and reading from the Bible.

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, e-mail: vedantaperth@gmail.com.

Monthly Activities:

The following monthly activities were held at the Centre:

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 **satsanga** was conducted on the first Sunday of every month from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. It included the singing of *bhajans* and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and readings from other inspiring books.

Other Activities:

a) Swami Sunishthananda delivered

a lecture on 4th of November in a seminar organised by Theosophical Society of Perth on the topic "The Synthesis of Various Schools of Vedanta". Around 40-50 people took part in the seminar and question answer session.

Celebrations:

a) Deepavali celebration was celebrated on 23rd of October 2014 with *ārati* and a Special Short talk by Rev Swami Sridharananda on the historical and spiritual importance of celebrating Deepavali - the festival of lights.

b) Holy mother Sri Sarada Devi's birth anniversary was celebrated on 13th of December 2014 with *ārati* followed by an Audio talk by Swami Sridharananda on Holy Mother and distribution of dinner *prasad*.

c) Christmas eve was celebrated on 24th of December 2014 with the worship of Christ and Devotional Music, a reading about the life of Christ and distribution of *prasad*.

SYDNEY CENTRE

Daily Activities:

Daily worship 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, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation.

Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees were conducted on a daily basis. The **library** was available to devotees for reference and research. The Centre maintains 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 Upanisad*, 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) **Parlour talks** were conducted by Swami Sridharananda at 1/11 Boyle Street, Balgowlah, NSW 2093 **Manly Beach** on Tuesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

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

d) *Kena Upanisad* **classes** were conducted on Wednesdays after evening *ārati* by Swami Sunishthananda.

e) **Meditation** sessions were held at the Centre on Sundays from 5 p.m. to 6:15 p.m.

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

g) Sri *Rāmanāma* was sung on *Ekadashi* days after the vesper service.

h) A **class** on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* and *Katha Upanishad* for ladies was held every Monday from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. by Swami Sunishthananda.

i) 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



Sydney Centre— Durga Puja, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's Birth Anniversary and Christmas Eve.

visit the Facebook page : <https://www.facebook.com/VYGSydney>.

j) A session on **Yoga Exercise** continued to be held on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Other activities:

a) A **Spiritual Retreat** was held on Saturday 8th of November 2014 from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Apart from chanting, singing *bhajans*, reading inspiring texts and following these with discussions, Swami Sridharananda delivered a talk on the topic "Sri Ramakrishna as Swami Vivekananda saw Him" in two sessions followed by an interactive question-answer session. 40 delegates attended the Spiritual Retreat.

b) The **Annual General Meeting** was held on Sunday, 21st December 2014 at 11:15 a.m. at Vedanta Centre premises.

Celebrations:

a) On all the days of **Navaratri** from 25th September to 3rd October 2014, Musical Performances and singing of devotional *bhajans* were organised after the vesper services from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. On 1st of October 2014, Swami Sunishthananda delivered a talk on 'The Significance of Durga Puja'. Around 30 - 50 devotees attended the programme each day.

b) **Durga Puja** was celebrated on Thursday, 2nd of October 2014 with formal worship, singing of hymns and *bhajans*. About 1100 devotees attended the function.

c) On Saturday, 18th October 2014, Vedanta Centre of Sydney in association with Shri Raghavan Nair's Indian Centre presented a **Dance Drama: "Ramayana"**, at Sydney Baha'i Centre at 6:30 p.m. The performance of the troupe was attended by about 500 persons.

d) Swami Sunishthananda represented the Vedanta Centre of Sydney at the **Interfaith Conference** at Parliament House of New South Wales held at 6 p.m. on 12th of November 2014.

e) The **birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi** was celebrated on Saturday, 13th of December 2014 from 8:30 a.m. with formal worship, singing of *bhajans*, floral offering etc. Swami Sridharananda spoke on 'The Life and Teachings of Holy Mother' in the evening. About 350 devotees attended the celebration.

f) **Christmas Eve** was celebrated on the 24th of December with a reading followed by discussion from the Bible by Swami Atmesananda. About 60 devotees attended the celebration.

Overseas Visit:

Swami Sridharananda visited New Zealand from the 29th of October to 2nd of November 2014.

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 included the singing of hymns and readings from the *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, followed by meditation. **Contact Person:** M. Kumar, Secretary e-mail: monnay@ihug.co.nz

Monthly activities:

a) The first monthly **Satsang** was conducted on the second Sunday of every month from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. It included singing of *bhajans*, discourse on the *Rāmāyana*, readings and discussion on the lives of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and meditation.

b) The second monthly **Satsang** was conducted on the last Sunday of every month from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The programme included **reading and discussion** on the *Bhagavad Gitā*, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the *Life and Teachings of Holy Mother* and the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*.

Visit of Swami Sridharananda:

a) Swami Sridharananda conducted

Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā classes from the 30th October to 2nd November 2014. Classes were held from 7:45 p.m. to 9 p.m. after the *ārati* and on Sundays from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Visit of General Secretary Maharaj:

The General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, **Swami Suhitananda Maharaj**, visited Auckland from 20th to 22nd of November 2014. Swami Shubhakarananda accompanied him. They visited the ashram on 21st and addressed the devotees in the evening after vesper service. During his visit a cultural program was organized on the 22nd of November from 7 p.m. to 9:15 p.m. General Secretary Maharaj addressed the public on this occasion.

Celebrations:

a) **Durga Puja** was celebrated on 1st of October 2014. The programme started at 8 p.m. after vesper service with *bhajans*. This was followed by talks and readings on Durga and Navaratri celebrations. Program ended with Prasad distribution at 9 p.m.

b) **Birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi** was celebrated on 13th of December 2014. The programme started at 8 p.m. with *bhajans*, followed by talks and readings on Holy Mother. It concluded at 9 p.m. Prasad was distributed after the programme.

c) **Christmas Eve** was celebrated on 24th of December 2014. The programme started after vesper Service at 8 p.m. with *bhajans*. This was followed by a talk on 'The Lives of Jesus Christ and St. Francis of Assisi'. *Prasada* was distributed after the programme.



Auckland Centre— Cultural Programme and Public Meeting during the visit of Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Introduction

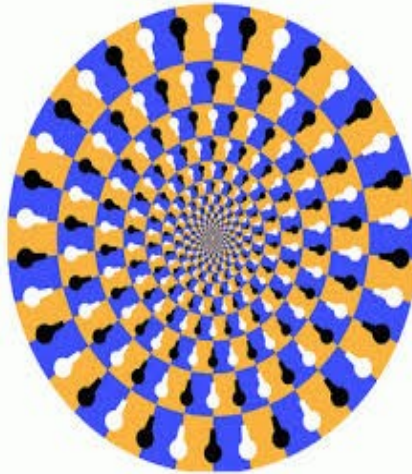
"Trailing clouds of glory we come," says the poet. Not all of us come as trailing clouds of glory however; some of us come as trailing black fogs; there can be no question about that. But every one of us comes into this world to fight, as on a battlefield. We come here weeping to fight our way, as well as we can, and to make a path for ourselves through this infinite ocean of life; forward we go, having long ages behind us and an immense expanse beyond. So, on we go, till death comes and takes us off the field – victorious or defeated, we do not know. And this is Maya.

Hope in childhood and Maya

Hope is dominant in the heart of childhood. The whole world is a golden vision to the opening eyes of the child; he thinks his will is supreme. As he moves onwards, at every step nature stands as an adamant wall, barring his future progress. He may hurl himself against it again and again, striving to break through. The further he goes, the further recedes the ideal, till death comes, and there is release, perhaps. And this is Maya.

Knowledge and Maya

A man of science rises, he is thirsting after knowledge. No sacrifice is too great, no struggle too hopeless for him. He moves onward discovering secret after secret of nature, searching out the secrets from her innermost heart, and what for? What is it all for? Why should we give him glory? Why should he acquire fame? Does not nature do infinitely more than any human being can do? – and nature is dull, insentient. Why should it be glory to imitate the dull, the insentient? Nature can hurl a thunderbolt of any magnitude to any distance. If a man can do one small part as much, we praise him and laud him to the skies. Why? Why should we praise him for imitating nature, imitating death, imitating dullness, and imitating insentience? The force of gravitation can pull to pieces the biggest mass that ever existed; yet it is insentient. What glory is there in imitating the insentient? Yet we are all struggling after that. And this is Maya.



Though static but it seems it is moving.

The senses and Maya

The senses drag the human soul out. Man is seeking for pleasure and for happiness where it can never be found. For countless ages we are all taught that this is futile and vain, there is no happiness here. But we cannot learn; it is impossible for us to do so, except through our own experiences. We try them, and a blow comes. Do we learn then? Not even then. Like moths hurling themselves against the flame, we are hurling ourselves again and again into sense-pleasures, hoping to find satisfaction there. We return again and again with freshened energy; thus we go on, till crippled and cheated we die. And this is Maya.

So with our intellect. In our desire to solve the mysteries of the universe, we cannot stop our questioning, we feel we must know and cannot believe that no knowledge is to be gained. A few steps, and there arises the wall of beginningless and endless time which we cannot surmount. A few steps, and there appears a wall of boundless space which cannot be surmounted, and the whole is irrevocably bound in by the walls of cause and effect. We cannot go beyond them. Yet we struggle, and still have to struggle. And this is Maya.

With every breath, with every pulsation of the heart, with every one of our movements, we think we are free, and the very same moment we are shown that we are not. Bound slaves, nature's bond-slaves, in body, in mind, in all our thoughts, in all our feelings. And this is Maya.

A mother's unselfish love

There was never a mother who did not think her child was a born genius, the most extraordinary child that was ever born; she dotes upon her child. Her whole soul is in the child. The child grows up, perhaps becomes a drunkard, a brute, ill – treats the mother, and the more he ill – treats her, the more her love increases. The world lauds it as the unselfish love of the mother, little dreaming that the mother is a born slave, she cannot help it. She would a thousand times rather throw off the burden, but she cannot. So she covers it with a mass of flowers, which she calls wonderful love. And this is Maya.

Legend: "Lord, show me Maya."

We are all like this in the world. A legend tells how once Narada said to Krishna, "Lord, show me Maya." A few days passed away, and Krishna asked Narada to make a trip with him towards a desert, and after walking for several miles, Krishna said, "Narada, I am thirsty; can you fetch some water for me?" "I will go at once, Sir, and get you water." So Narada went. At a little distance there was a village; he entered the village in search of water and knocked at a door, which was opened by a most beautiful young girl. At the sight of her he immediately forgot that his Master was waiting for water, perhaps dying for the want of it. He forgot everything and began to talk to the girl. All that day he did not return to his Master. The next day, he was again at the house, talking to the girl. That talk ripened into love; he asked the father for the daughter, and they were married and lived there and had children. Thus twelve years passed. His father-in-law died, he inherited his property. He lived, as he seemed to think, a very happy life with his wife and children, his fields and his cattle and so forth.

Then came a flood. One night the river rose until it overflowed its banks and flooded the whole village. Houses fell, men and animals were swept away and drowned, and everything was floating in the rush of the stream. Narada had to escape. With one hand he held his wife, and with the other two of his children; another child was on his shoulder,

and he was trying to ford this tremendous flood.

After a few steps he found the current was too strong, and the child on his shoulders fell and was borne away. A cry of despair came from Narada. In trying to save that child, he lost his grasp upon one of the others, and it also was lost. At last his wife, whom he clasped with all his might, was torn away by the current, and he was thrown on the bank, weeping and wailing in bitter lamentation. Behind him there came a gentle voice, "My child, where is the water? You went to fetch a pitcher of water, and I am waiting for you; and you have gone for quite half an hour." "Half an hour!" Narada exclaimed. Twelve whole years had passed through his mind, and all these scenes had happened in half an hour. And this is Maya.

Time: The avenger of everything

In one form or another, we are all in it. It is a most difficult and intricate state of things to understand. It has been preached in every country, taught everywhere, but only believed in by a few, because until we get the experiences ourselves we cannot believe in it. What does it show? Something very terrible. For it is all futile. Time, the avenger of everything, comes, and nothing is left. He swallows up the saint and the sinner, the king and the peasant, the beautiful and the ugly; he leaves nothing. Everything is rushing towards that one goal, destruction. Our knowledge, our arts, our sciences, everything is rushing towards it. None can stem the tide, none can hold it back for a minute. We may try to forget it, in the same way that persons in a plague-stricken city try to create oblivion by drinking, dancing, and other vain attempts, and so becoming paralysed. So we are trying to forget, trying to create oblivion by all sorts of sense pleasures. And this is Maya.

Two ways have been proposed. One method, which everyone knows, is very common, and that is: "It may be very true, but do not think of it. 'Make hay while the sun shines,' as the proverb says. It is all true, it is a fact, but do not mind it. Seize the few pleasures you can, do what little you can do, do not look at the dark side of the picture, but always towards the hopeful, the positive side." There is some truth in this, but there is also a

danger. The truth is that it is a good motive power. Hope and a positive ideal are very good motive powers for our lives, but there is a certain danger in them. The danger lies in our giving up the struggle in despair. Such is the case with those who preach, "Take the world as it is; sit down as calmly and comfortably as you can and be contented with all those miseries. When you receive blows, say they are not blows but flowers; and when you are driven about like slaves, say that you are free. Day and night tell lies to others and to your own souls, because that is the only way to live happily". This is what is called practical wisdom, and never was it more prevalent in the world than in this nineteenth century; because never were harder blows hit than at the present time, never was competition keener, never were men so cruel to their fellow-men as now; and, therefore, must this consolation be offered? It is put forward in the strongest way at the present time; but it fails, as it always must fail. We cannot hide a carrion with roses; it is impossible. It would not avail long; for soon the roses would fade, and the carrion would be worse than ever before. So with our lives. We may try to cover our old and festering sores with cloth of gold, but there comes a day when the cloth of gold is removed, and the sore in all its ugliness is revealed.

Is there no hope then?

True it is that we are all slaves of Maya, born in Maya, and live in Maya. Is there then no way out, no hope? That we are all miserable, that this world is really a prison, that even our so-called trailing beauty is but a prison-house, and that even our intellects and minds are prison-houses, have been known for ages upon ages. There has never been a man, there has never been a human soul, who has not felt this some time or other, however he may talk. And the old people feel it most, because in them is the accumulated experience of a whole life, because they cannot be easily cheated by the lies of nature. Is there no way out? We find that with all this, with this terrible fact before us, in the midst of sorrow and suffering, even in this world where life and death are synonymous, even here, there is a still small voice that is ringing through all ages, through every country, and in every heart: This My

Maya is divine, made up of qualities, and very difficult to cross. Yet those that come unto me, cross the river of life." "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This is the voice that is leading us forward. Man has heard it, and is hearing it all through the ages. This voice comes to men when everything seems to be lost and hope has fled, when man's dependence on his own strength has been crushed down, and everything seems to melt away between his fingers, and life is a hopeless ruin. Then he hears it. This is called religion.

(To be continued in the next edition of Reach).



Peace

A poem titled **Peace** composed by Swami Vivekananda at Ridgely Manor, New York, 1899:

Behold, in comes in might,
The power that is not power,
The light that is in darkness,
The shade in dazzling light.

It is joy that never spoke,
And grief unfelt, profound,
Immortal life unliv'd,
Eternal death unmourn'd.

It is not joy nor sorrow,
But that which is between,
It is not night nor morrow,
But that which joins them in.

It is sweet rest in music;
And pause in sacred art;
The silence between speaking;
Between two fits of passion-
It is the calm of heart.

It is beauty never seen,
And love that stands alone,
It is song that lives unsung,
And knowledge never known.

It is death between two lives,
And lull between two storms,
The void whence rose creation,
And that where it returns.

To it the teardrop goes,
To spread the smiling form
It is the Goal of Life,
And Peace – its only home!*

Source:

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Volume II Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Pithoragarh, Himalayas, India. September 1992, PP. 118-129.

* *Ibid Volume IV PP. 394-5.*



The training of Narendra

Only a good student can be a good teacher. Ramakrishna was an avatar, an incarnation of God who came to the world to establish the eternal religion; he made Narendra a vehicle to carry out his mission. In the parable of the four blind men and the elephant, Ramakrishna recounted how each man touched a different part of the elephant, declared his particular understanding, and then they began to quarrel among themselves. But one with clear vision sees the whole elephant and does not quarrel. People with only partial realization form sects; but those who have full realisation cannot form sects. Ramakrishna therefore trained Narendra to have full realization and carry his message of the harmony of religions to the modern world.

God dwells in all beings

On the 5th of March 1882, the Master asked Narendra, "How do you feel about it? Worldly people say all kinds of things about the spiritually minded. But look here! When an elephant moves along the street any number of curs and other small animals may bark and cry after it; but the elephant doesn't even look back at them. If people speak ill of you, what will you think of them?"

Narendra said, "I shall think that dogs are barking at me."

The Master smiled and said, "Oh, no! You mustn't go that far, my child. God dwells in all beings. But you may be intimate only with good people; you must keep away from the evil-minded. God is even in the tiger, but you cannot embrace the tiger on that account. You may say, 'Why run away from a tiger, which is also a manifestation of God?' The answer to that is: Those who tell you to run away are also manifestations of God.- and why shouldn't you listen to them?"

On the 19th of August 1883, Ramakrishna went to the veranda and saw Narendra talking to Hazra, who often indulged in dry philosophical discussions. Hazra would say that the world is unreal, like a dream: worship, food offerings to the deity, and so forth, are only hallucinations of the mind. He would repeat, "I am



Swami Vivekananda
(1863—1902)

He." When the Master asked Narendra what they were talking about, Narendra replied with a smile, "Oh, we are discussing a great many things. They are rather too deep for others."

Ramakrishna replied, "But pure love and pure knowledge are one and the same thing. Both lead the aspirants to the same goal. The path of love is much easier."

Diving deep in the Ocean of God

On the 25th of June 1884, Ramakrishna advised his disciples to dive deep in God-consciousness, and then sang a song: "Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's beauty. If you descend to the uttermost depths, there you will find the gem of love." Then he continued, "One does not die if one sinks in this Ocean. This is the ocean of immortality." Once he said to Narendra, "God is the Ocean of Bliss. Tell me if you want to plunge into It. Just imagine there is some syrup in a cup and that you have become a fly. Now tell me where you will sit to sip the syrup." Narendra answered, "I will sit on the edge of the cup and stretch out my neck to drink, because I am sure to die if I go far into the cup." Then Ramakrishna said to him, "But my child, this is the Ocean of *Satchidananda*. There is no fear of death in It. This is the Ocean of Immortality."

"God is Infinity. How is it possible for us to comprehend Him?"

Many of his devotees were in Ramakrishna's room. Narendra did not believe that God could incarnate Himself in a human body. But Girish (a devotee) differed with him; he had the burning faith that from time to time the Almighty Lord, through His inscrutable Power, assumes a human body and descends to earth to serve a divine purpose. The Master said to Girish, "I should like to hear you and Narendra argue in English." The discussion began; but they talked in Bengali.

Narendra stated, "God is Infinity. How is it possible for us to comprehend Him? He dwells in every human being. It is not the case that he manifests Himself through one person only."

Master (tenderly), "I quite agree with Narendra. God is everywhere. But then you must remember that there are different manifestations of His power in different beings. At some places there is a manifestation of His *avidyashakti* (God's power manifesting as ignorance), at others' manifestation of His *vidyashakti* (God's power manifesting as knowledge). Through different instruments, God's Power is manifest in different degrees, greater or smaller. Therefore all men are not equal."

Ram, "What is the use of these futile arguments?"

Master (*sharply*), "No! No! There is a meaning in all this."

Girish (*to Narendra*), "How do you know that God does not assume a human body?"

Narendra, "God is 'beyond words or thoughts'."

Master, "No, that is not true. He can be known by pure *buddhi* (intellect), which is the same as the Pure Self. The seers of old directly perceived the Pure Self through their pure *buddhi*."

Girish (*to Narendra*), "Unless God Himself teaches men through His human Incarnation, who else will teach them spiritual mysteries?"

Narendra, "Why, God dwells in our own heart; He will certainly teach us from within the heart."

Master (*tenderly*), "Yes, yes. He will teach us as our Inner Guide...I

clearly see that God is everything; He Himself has become all...I cannot utter a word unless I come down at least two steps from the plane of Samadhi. Shankara's nondualistic explanation of Vedanta is true, and so is the qualified-nondualistic interpretation of Ramanuja."

Narendra, "What is qualified nondualism?"

Master, "It is the theory of Ramanuja. According to this theory, Brahman, or the Absolute, is qualified by the universe and its living beings. These three – Brahman, the world, and living beings – together constitute One."

Narendra was sitting besides the Master who touched Narendra's body and said, "As long as a man argues about God, he has not realized Him. The nearer you approach to God, the less you reason and argue. When you attain Him, then all sounds - all reasoning and disputing – come to an end. Then you go into Samadhi – into communion with God in silence."

Narendra's Struggle

In the early part of 1884, Narendra's father died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Unfortunately he left behind many unsettled debts, and the once well - to - do family was suddenly thrust into acute poverty. To add to their troubles, some relatives filed a lawsuit with the intent of depriving them of their home. Since Narendra was the eldest son, the responsibility for the family's welfare fell upon his shoulders. He had just passed his BA examination and had been admitted to law school. Many times he attended classes without having eaten and was often faint with hunger and weakness. He had no job and, moreover, no previous work experience. Forced by circumstances, Narendra began visiting business and government offices, barefooted and shabbily dressed, looking for a job. Occasionally, one of his friends, who knew the gravity of his situation, anonymously sent modest amounts of money to Narendra's mother. His friends invited him now and then to their homes and offered him food, but the thought of his hungry mother, sisters, and brothers at home, prevented him from eating. At home he would eat as little as possible in order that the others might have

enough. This first contact with the harshness of life convinced Narendra that unselfish sympathy is rare in the world. There is no place here for the weak, the poor, and the destitute.

Misfortune does not come alone. Narendra related, "Various temptations came my way. A rich woman sent me an ugly proposal to end my days of penury, which I sternly rejected with scorn. Another woman also made similar overtures to me. I said to her, 'You have wasted your life seeking the pleasures of the flesh. The dark shadows of death are before you. Have you done anything to face that? Give up these desires and remember God.'"

One day, after a futile search for a job, he sat down in the shade of the Ochterloney Monument in a large park. A friend who happened to be with him wanted to console him with a song: 'Here blows the wind, the breath of Brahman; it is His Grace we feel'. Narendra furiously blurted out, "Be quiet! That fanciful nonsense is all right for people living in the lap of luxury – people who have no idea what hunger is – people whose nearest and dearest aren't going in rags and starving. No doubt it sounds true and beautiful to them – as it did to me, in the old days. But now I've seen what life is really like. That song is just a pack of lies."

Despite what he had said to his friend in the park, Narendra did not lose his inborn faith in God and in His mercy. He used to repeat the Lord's name so he got out of bed in the morning. One day his mother overheard him and said bitterly, "Hush, you fool! You have been crying yourself hoarse for God since your childhood. Tell me what has God done for you?" These words stung Narendra to the quick. A doubt crept into his mind about God's existence and His providence.

It was not in Narendra's nature to hide his feelings. He began to tell people aggressively that God did not exist and that praying to him was also futile. The rumour soon spread that Narendra had become an atheist, and furthermore, that he was mixing with people of bad character. Gossip spreads faster than the gospel. The Master heard it, but he paid no attention. One day a friend of Narendra tearfully said to the Master, "Sir, we never dreamed that Narendra would sink so low!" Immediately the

Master said sharply, "Silence, you scoundrels! The Mother has told me that it is simply not true. I shan't look at your face if you speak to me again that way."

Narendra remembered his past spiritual experiences when he came in contact with the Master, and he was firmly convinced that he had not been born to earn money, support a family, or seek worldly enjoyments. He secretly prepared to renounce the world as his grandfather had done and even fixed a date. When he heard that the Master was visiting a devotee in Calcutta, he decided to see him before he left home forever. When they met, the Master persuaded Narendra to accompany him to Dakshineswar. After they arrived in his room, the Master went into ecstasy and sang a song, which clearly indicated that he knew Narendra's secret plan. That night he sent the others away and said to Narendra with tears, "I know you have come to the world to do Mother's work; you can never lead a worldly life. But, for my sake, stay with your family as long as I am alive."

Narendra agreed. The next day he returned home and very quickly found a temporary job in an attorney's office, which was sufficient to cover the bare existence of his family. Unable to find a permanent solution to the financial problems of his family, however, Narendra went to the Master one day and asked him to pray to the Divine Mother on his behalf, as Narendra had faith that She listened to the Master's prayers. The Master told him to go to the temple and pray to Her himself for help, assuring him that his request would be granted. Narendra went to the temple with great anticipation. But as soon as he came before the image of the Divine Mother, he saw Her as living and conscious; he forgot the world and the pitiable condition of his mother, sisters, and brothers. In ecstatic joy he prostrated before Her and prayed, "Mother, give me discrimination! Give me renunciation! Give me knowledge and devotion! Grant that I may have an uninterrupted vision of Thee!" He went back to the Master and told him what had happened. The Master sent Narendra to the temple to pray again, but the same thing

(Continued on page 12)

Sri Ramakrishna passed away in 1886 and Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1902. Few westerners know anything about their amazing lives or of the catalyzing effect they have had on world culture. Millions now honor their birthday celebrations. The Calcutta monastery founded by Vivekananda may be visited by as many as 800,000 people on Ramakrishna's birthday each year and each year the numbers grow. Perhaps the same might be true in the West, if Vivekananda had preached the divinity of Ramakrishna instead of the principles of the **Sanatana Dharma** – the Eternal Religion - also known as Vedanta.

He is recorded as saying that if he had preached Sri Ramakrishna the world would worship at Ramakrishna's feet, but he did not want to inspire another religion. Instead he blazed the trail with a brilliant interpretation and exposition of Hindu philosophy, Yoga and Vedanta, as nobody else had done before, or has done since. Sri Ramakrishna was his inspiration, his Guru, his life breath. Swami Vivekananda was a lion among men, not a meek follower.

'The power that emanated from this mysterious being was so great that one and all but shrank from it. It was overwhelming. It threatened to sweep everything before it. It was a mind so far transcending other minds, even those who rank as geniuses, that it seemed different by its very nature. Its ideas were so clear, so powerful, so transcendental that it seemed incredible that they could have emanated from the intellect of an ordinary human being...later some of us found that our minds were transformed.' Wrote Christine Greenstidel, who later became his disciple.

One of the fascinating aspects of the history of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is the radical difference in their personalities.

Their wonderful relationship is part of the fascinating history of the spiritual renaissance that began with the birth of Sri Ramakrishna in 1836. This timing is one of the amazing plays in the drama of life, for it took place not far from the capital city of

British India, where Ramakrishna later lived and taught, and when scientific rationalism and materialism began to dominate the world. By the time he reached adolescence the influence of western culture looked to the destruction of almost everything the Hindu culture stood for. Few could have anticipated the cultural reversal that followed.

A salient feature of His advent is the detailed family history and the records kept of His life and teachings and the many anecdotes of contemporaries, devotees and disciples. They leave little room for speculation, fanciful interpretations, controversy or doubt. The many biographies of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and the other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are available from Vedanta centers around the world or specialty bookshops, as are the many works of Vivekananda.

This article will trace the most significant effects of the life and teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and trace the results they have had on world culture, in order to provide a better understanding of both.

But first, an introduction to the humble man who started it all. Mr. Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, a *Brahmo Samaj* leader wrote about him and it appeared in the Theistic Quarterly Review in Calcutta in 1897.

'My mind is still floating in the luminous atmosphere which that wonderful man diffuses around him whenever and wherever he goes. My mind is not yet disenchanted of the mysterious and indefinable pathos which he pours into it whenever he meets me.'

'What is there in common between him and me? I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centered, semisceptical so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller and a whole host of European scholars and divines? I who am an ardent disciple and follower of Christ, a friend and admirer of liberal-minded Christian

missionaries and preachers, a devoted adherent and worker for the rationalistic Brahmo-Samaj - why should I be spell-bound to hear him?'

'And it is not I only, but dozens like me who do the same. He has been interviewed and examined by many, crowds pour in to visit and talk with him. Some of our clever intellectual fools have found nothing in him; some contemptuous Christian missionaries would call him an imposter, or a self-deluded enthusiast. I have weighed their objections well, and what I write now, I write deliberately.'

'The Hindu saint is a man under forty. He is a Brahmana by caste, he is well formed in body naturally, but the dreadful austerities through which his character has developed appear to have disordered his system. Yet, in the midst of this emaciation his face retains fullness, a child-like tenderness, a profound, visible humbleness, an unspeakable sweetness of expression and a smile that I have seen on no other face.'

Ramakrishna Paramahansa is the worshiper of no particular Hindu God. He is not a *Saiva*, he is not a *Sakta*, he is no *Vaishnava*, and he is not a *Vedantist*. Yet he is all of these...he accepts all the doctrines, all the embodiments uses and devotional practices of every religious cult. Each in turn is infallible to him. He is an idolater, yet is a faithful and most devoted meditator of the one formless, infinite Deity whom he terms *Satchidananda* (Indivisible Existence -Knowledge- Bliss Absolute).

'Nor is his reverence confined within Hinduism. For long days he subjected himself to various disciplines to realise the Mohammedan idea of an all-powerful Allah. He let his beard grow, he fed himself on a Moslem diet, he continually repeated sentences from the Koran. His reverence for Christ is deep and genuine. He bows his head to the name of Jesus, honors the doctrine of His sonship, and we believe he once or twice attended Christian places of worship...'

'A living evidence of the depth and sweetness of Hindu religion is the good and holy man. He has wholly

controlled his flesh. He is full of soul, full of the reality of religion, full of joy, full of blessed purity...his spotless holiness, his deep unspeakable blessedness, his unstudied endless wisdom, his child-like peacefulness and affection towards all, his consuming, all absorbing love for God are his only reward.'

'Then in the intensity of that burning love of God which is in his simple heart, the poor devotee's form and features suddenly grow stiff and motionless; unconsciousness overtakes him, his eyes lose their sight and tears trickle down his fixed, pale but smiling face. There is a transcendental sense and meaning in that unconsciousness. What he perceives and enjoys in his soul when he has lost all outer perception who can say? Who can fathom that depth of that insensibility which the love of God produces? But that he sees something, hears and enjoys when he is dead to the outward world there is no doubt; why should he in the midst of that unconsciousness burst into floods of tears and break out into prayers, songs and utterances, the force and pathos of which pierce the hardest heart and bring tears to eyes that never wept before by the influence of religion'

Reading the biographies and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* – a record of the events and conversations that took place in his teaching years, it is difficult not to feel that there has never been or ever will be another such incredible human being. For in practicing all the *Yogas*, religions and forms of devotion Ramakrishna revived them. Then Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission he founded brought the knowledge of this to the world in a spirit of service.

Since Vivekananda addressed the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 Ramakrishna's teachings have spread around the world, opening the way for the influence of Hindu culture, spiritual science, philosophy, music, art and literature. The influence is easier to see in western literature which gave rise to new world-views through the works of Emerson, Whitman, Huxley, Maugham, Toynbee, Isherwood, Watts, and Durrell to name but a few of the more famous.

The spiritual experiments and experiences of Ramakrishna became

some of the most potent words spoken at the Parliament of Religions when Vivekananda said:

'May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in heaven of the Christians, give strength to you. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his own individuality and grow according to his own law of growth...The Parliament of Religions have proved...that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possession of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character...Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written in spite of resistance: 'help and not fight' 'Assimilation and not destruction' 'Harmony and peace and not dissention'.

In spite of bigotry this spirit is everywhere. All over the world there are inter-religious conventions, meetings and dialogues. The Christian Protestants are experimenting with unity as barriers built by dogma are collapsing.

In 1999 I attended a weekend retreat run by a Benedictine Monk. It was attended by novitiates, retired nuns and priests and Catholic laity, and at the first meeting each of us was asked to introduce ourselves and explain a little of our background. When my turn came I had to confess that I was not a Christian and that my spiritual background was Hindu. At lunch the officiating priest called me over to his table and asked me to sit with him. Expecting to be proselytized or patronized, I was amazed when he told me he was a *Sadhu*, initiated in India and knowledgeable in Vedanta! He also followed the mantra meditation methods started by Father John Main OSB who founded the burgeoning Christian Meditation Center in 1975. (Before joining the order John Main had been a member of the diplomatic corps in the East where a Swami introduced him to mantra meditation.) It is such a short time since Vivekananda uttered those prophetic words that there is great hope that given another few hundred

years they may become a fact of life.

At their first meeting the young Vivekananda asked Ramakrishna the provocative question 'Have you seen God?' – expecting the usual non-committal response or some form of sophistry. But Ramakrishna replied with sincere enthusiasm, 'O yes! I have seen God. I see Him as I see you there but only more clearly. God can be seen. One can talk to Him. But who cares for God? ...Who weeps for the vision of God?'

Now into the 21st century, it is possible that more people of all nationalities are actively seeking God than ever before in the history of the world. Doctrines, dogmas and religious affiliation are now taking second place to methods of speeding human evolution by freeing the psyche. It is realistic to speculate that more people are now practicing some form of meditation than the monks of Europe have in the past.

Following the Parliament of Religions in 1893 Vivekananda continued to cause a stir across America. The sincere few that became disciples and other noble sympathizers were far outweighed by opportunists, entrepreneurs, con-men and religious cranks. Swami Kripananda, one of his western disciples, wrote of these times,

'This hotbed of pseudo-religious monstrosities, devoured by a morbid thirst for the abnormal, the occult, for the exceptional – whence a senseless credulity leads to the dissemination of hundreds of societies: goblins, ghosts, mahatmas, false prophets – this refuge for aliens of all colors was an abominable place for Vivekananda. He felt himself obliged to cleanse this Augean stable at the outset.'

Counteracting the fascination for the superficial, the psychic and the mysterious Vivekananda taught the philosophies of the Vedanta, especially the non-dualistic Advaita Vedanta and the mental disciplines of Raja-yoga. He had learnt from Ramakrishna that the highest most abstract realizations of spiritual truth are not inimical to reason or the life of the intellect, and that woolly thinking and airy vagueness are not indicative of spiritual endeavor. After Vivekananda's return to India he said of the west,

'Most of the cultured men and

women there are already weary of this competition, this struggle, this brutality of their commercial civilization and are looking for something better...The thoughtful people of the west find in our ancient philosophy, especially the Vedanta, the new impulse they are seeking, the very spiritual food and drink for which they are hungering and thirsting. ...The whole of western civilization will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years if there is no spiritual foundation...'

And before leaving India for the West he said, 'I go forth to preach a religion of which Buddhism is nothing but a rebel child, and Christianity with all its pretensions, only a distant echo'. In later years the ideas he taught informed deep thinkers in many different disciplines, especially psychology and theoretical physics. He was the first to see the relevance of Advaita Vedanta to physics and science. Now in the 21st century some of the greatest scientists have acknowledged the debt they owe to the insights provided by Vedanta philosophy. The dialogue started by Vivekananda culminated in the 'World Congress for the synthesis of Science and Religion' in Bombay over four days in 1986.

Ramakrishna imbued Vivekananda with the ideal of service of a new kind. Ramakrishna spurned notions of 'helping the world' as egocentric. His idea was to give whatever aid one could to individuals, serving them as manifestations of God, for work and service was a form of worship. Since Vivekananda mobilized many young Indians to apply this attitude, a revolution has taken place in Indian monastic life as evidenced by the social and cultural work undertaken by the monks and nuns of the Ramakrishna Mission. Saints and sages have also come out of forest retreats and caves to teach, help, serve and inspire.

The lives of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda have inspired the growth of these four ideas that are having such a profound effect upon the culture of the world, which they will ultimately transform. They can be summarized as:

1. God is not a religious or philosophical abstraction but our own intrinsic reality that can be experienced.

2. All religions are capable of leading to this realisation if practiced sincerely and all share the same basic principles.

3. Religious life and spiritual philosophy are not inimical to reason or intelligence but rather fulfill both.

4. Personal salvation depends upon altruistic action in love and service to all life.

As a consequence there is also a growing conviction throughout the world that individual human life is not merely a pursuit of wealth and happiness but an evolutionary struggle to manifest the imprisoned splendor of the spirit within. What we call evolution is in fact, the involution of that consciousness that Ramakrishna called *Sat-chit-ananda*, absolute existence, intelligence and bliss.

Since the introduction of Sanskrit literature to Europe in the late 18th Century the trickle had become a flood. Sir Edwin Arnold's translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* has sold millions of copies since it was published in the mid 19th century, just as Swami Prabhavananda's and Frederick Manchester's translation has in America since 1947. This classic of Vedanta philosophy has now been translated into 82 different languages, and it is estimated that about 2,000 such translations are available throughout the world today out of them about 270 are into English. There are more and more translations from the Sanskrit is being disseminated throughout the world. So the original works of the great teachers can now be read in many languages.

Because it accords with modern non-sectarian, liberal and scientific attitudes and is without dogma and narrow prejudices, Vedanta has become the most apt spirituality for the 21st Century.

The Vedanta philosophy has been greatly clarified since its spread in the New World due to the work, mainly, of the monks and nuns of the Ramakrishna Order, whose task it has been to present the ancient ideas in modern form.

Over 100 years ago the great Orientalist, Professor W. M. Muller wrote that he considered Vedanta to hold the "corrective" needed by the Greco-Roman –Judaic-Christian mind, making it "more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, more

truly human". Since then, this non-proselytizing, humble religious philosophy has spread all over the world. There is no cultural aspect of Western life in which it has not played a part, yet the influence has just begun. The next 100 years offer endless possibilities for cultural and spiritual benefits world-wide.



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happened. The third time he remembered his intention, but he felt ashamed to ask for something so small from the Mother of the Universe. At last, at Narendra's request, the Master blessed him, saying, "All right, your people at home will never be in want of plain food and clothing."

Narendra was relieved that his family would no longer suffer from starvation, and the Master was relieved that Narendra had accepted the worship of God with form. He knew that the concept of God as Mother would make Narendra's spiritual life fuller and richer. Later Narendra said to one of his Western disciples, "I used to hate Kali and all her ways. That was my six years' fight, because I would not accept Kali." "But now you have accepted Her," interjected the disciple. "I had to," said Narendra. "I had great misfortunes at that time. My father died, and so on...Ramakrishna dedicated me to Her. And you know, I believe that She guides me in everything I do, and just does what She likes with me."

Conclusion

Ramakrishna gave love and freedom to his disciples so that they could grow in their own way. Throughout the rest of his life, Narendra would frequently say, "Ever since our first meeting, it was the Master alone who always had faith in me – no one else: not even my own mother and brothers. That faith and that love of his have bound me to him forever. The Master was the only one who knew how to love and who really loved. Worldly people only feign love to gratify their own self-interest."

(To be continued in the next edition of Reach).

Source: *God Lived With Them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna* by Swami Chetananda, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, pp. 29-37.

