



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

Diverse ways of approaching God

One can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo or a staircase or a rope; so too, diverse are the ways of approaching God and each religion in the world shows one of the ways.

- - - Sri Ramakrishna.

Source: *Great sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta, p. 5.

To love all equally

Let me tell you how to love all equally. Do not demand anything of those you love. If you make demands, some will give you more and some less. In that case you will love more those who give you more and less those who give you less. Thus your love will not be the same for all. You will not be able to love all impartially.

- - - Sri Sarada Devi.

Source: *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore*, p. 101

God and man

Man is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but the centre is located in one spot; and God is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is everywhere.

- - - Swami Vivekananda.

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas, p. 93-4.



Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, 27 Arawa St. New Lynn, Auckland, NZ.

FORTHCOMING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Function	Centre	Date
Birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda	Brisbane	Saturday, 25 January 2014
	Melbourne	Saturday, 25 January 2014
	Perth	Sunday, 26 January 2014
	Sydney	Thursday, 23 January 2014
Shivaratri	Melb. & Syd.	Thursday, 27 February 2014
Birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna	Brisbane	Sunday, 2 March 2014
	Melbourne	Saturday, 8 March 2014
	Perth	Saturday, 8 March 2014
	Sydney	Monday, 3 March 2014
Ram Navami	Sydney	Tuesday, 8 April 2014
Shankar Jayanti	All Centres	Sunday, 4 May 2014
Buddha Jayanti	All Centres	Wednesday, 14 May 2014

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 2013 to December 2013.

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 attend 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 Mrs. Pathma Iswaran on 08-8379 5336 or E-mail: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com.

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

Other Activities:

a) The **Annual General Meeting** was held on 10th of August 2013 from 2:30 p.m. at the Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich S.A. 5065.

b) Swami Sridharananda delivered a public lecture on Hinduism at the Art Gallery of South Australia, North Terrace, Adelaide at 2 p.m. on 30th November 2013. It was organised as a part of Wonder Exhibition at the Art Gallery.

c) A day-long **Annual Spiritual**

Retreat was held on Saturday, the 1st of December 2013 at the Monastery, 15 Cross Road, Urrbrae SA5064 for which Swami Sridharananda and Swami Sunishthananda were present. The 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 this year's theme "*Can spiritual wisdom make us a better human?*". The retreat concluded with singing of *bhajans* and *ārati*.

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).

Monthly Activities:

Swami Atmeshananda conducted the following programmes in Brisbane -

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

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

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

Other activities:

a) The **Annual General Meeting** of the Centre was held at the residence of Dr. Ashim Majumdar. Swami Sridharananda chaired the meeting. The meeting began with a prayer by Swami Atmeshananda followed by the dissolution of the old committee and election of the new committee. 16 committee members were elected in addition to the Office bearers. Mr. Shyam Das, the Hon. Secretary read the annual report of the centre and Mrs. Jayshree Kapadia, Treasurer, presented the Financial accounts for the year ending 2013. Swami Sridharananda addressed the members and urged them to help in the activities of the centre.

b) A day-long **spiritual retreat** was organised at the residence of Dr. Ashim Majumdar at Bridgeman Downs, Queensland. The programme began at 10 a.m. with the chanting of Om and verses from the Vedas. Mrs. Varsha Mohan rendered a soul stirring recitation from the Nirvana Shatakam of Sri Shankaracharya. Swami Sridharanandaji spoke on the importance of mind control in spiritual life with the topic being 'Mind - the cause of both bondage and freedom'. Mrs. Smita Nagpurkar brought a peaceful ambience to the programme with



Adelaide Centre— Spiritual Retreat—a group photo.



Brisbane Centre— Spiritual Retreat—a group photo.

her melodious devotional music. Meditation, question-answer session and group *bhajans* made the whole day into a memorable experience for all.

CANBERRA CENTRE

Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* twice a month at the Belconnen Community Centre, 2 Chandler Street in Canberra.

a) The Annual General Meeting was held on 3rd of November after the Gita discourse. Contact person: Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary on 02-6258 7612.

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 regular hymns, devotional singing, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and meditation. **Contact persons:** Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary - 0413040599, Swami Chandrashekharananda 0422 904 824.

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-Gitā* from the Thursday to the Saturday of a prescheduled week at the Ringwood Community Hall, Knaith Road up to November 2013. In December the discourses were held at the Centre. 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) Regular monthly **satsangas** (prayer meetings) were held on the first Sunday of every month except

during the months wherein the Trinity Birthday functions are held. The programme includes readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and other books followed by discussions there on, *bhajans* and *ārati*.

c) 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 to 11:30 a.m.

d) Swami Chandrashekharananda arrived at the Centre on 25th of September for an extended period of stay to consolidate Melbourne activities. He started classes on *Prashna Upanishad*, *Karma Yoga* from the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Guided Meditation Sessions in addition to the regular vesper services and Readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Other Activities:

a) The society conducted its Annual general body meeting on Saturday the 17th of August 2013 wherein the accounts were passed and a new managing committee was formed.

b) Swami Chandrashekharananda attended a Tour of Places of Worship organised by the **Whitehorse Interfaith Network** on 17th of November 2013. He also attended the **2013 Victorian Interfaith Networks Conference** on Sunday the 24th of November at Flemington Community Centre, 25 Alexander Road, Flemington.

Celebrations:

a) Navaratri was celebrated with the chanting of *Sri Devimahatmyam* daily, hymns and singing of bhajans. A special satsanga was also organised on Saturday, the 12th of October. It included group chanting of *Mahishasura*

Mardini Stotram and *bhajans*, a talk by Swami Chandrasekharananda on the 'Significance of the Worship of the Divine Mother' and offering of flowers, Pushpanjali.

b) Deepavali was celebrated with the chanting of hymns, the singing of *bhajans* and submission of offerings.

c) The Bhagavad-Gita was chanted on the 13th of December to celebrate **Gita Jayanti**.

d) The birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated on 24th of December 2013 from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. with formal worship, chanting of Vedic hymns and singing of bhajans and a short talk by Swami Chandrashekharananda.

e) Christmas Eve was celebrated on the 24th of December with reading from the Bible, singing of carols and sacramental offering.

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-Gitā*.

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 the playing of audio recordings on *Bhagavad-Gitā* talks that were delivered in the previous month, were conducted on prescheduled Sundays.

Celebrations:

The birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated on 24th of December 2013 after Arati. Christmas Eve was also



Melbourne Centre— Group photo of Interfaith group.

celebrated on the same day with the reading from Bible.

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 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 Gitā*, 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-Gitā* every Sunday morning from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Centre.
- b) **Parlour talks** were also 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) **Meditation** sessions were held at the Centre on Sundays from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.
- e) **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.
- f) The Centre provided **English Language tutoring** on Tuesdays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. during the school term.
- g) *Rāmanām Sankirtana* was sung on *Ekadashi* days after the vesper service.

h) A class for ladies was held every Monday from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Swami Atmeshananda discussed from the book *Meditation and Spiritual Life* when he was in Sydney and in his absence Swami Sunishthananda discussed the text from Katha Upanishad.

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

Other activities:

- a) Swami Sridharananda delivered a talk at the Parliament of NSW, on the occasion of Bhagavad-Gita presentation ceremony, on the 27th of August 2013.
- b) Swami Sridharananda delivered a talk on Vedanta at *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* organized by the Government of India, in Sydney, on the 11th of November 2013.
- c) Swami Sunishthananda launched the Hindu Climate Action Kit published by the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) and the Hindu Council of Australia at the Diwali Festival in Sydney Olympic Park on Saturday, the 26th of October 2013 at 4:30 p.m. and addressed the audience on 'Multiculturalism and Eco-sustainability'.
- d) Swami Sunishthananda was the Chief Guest of the 29th Convocation of the Yoga students who graduated in various courses conducted by Spirit of India (NSW), Inc., Sydney, at Banksia Hall, Wentworthville, NSW on Saturday, 7th December, 2013 at 10 a.m. and addressed the gathering on the topic 'Yoga for Personal and Community Development'.
- e) **A Yoga Conference** and workshop on Mental Health was organized in collaboration with the Vivekananda Yoga Research Foundation (VYASA), Bangalore, India on 16th and 17th November 2013 at Santa Sabina College, 90 The Boulevard, Strathfield, NSW.
- f) The **Annual General Meeting** was held on Sunday, the 22nd December 2013 at 11:15 a.m. at the Centre.

Celebrations:

a) Durga Puja was celebrated on 12th of October 2013 with formal worship, singing of hymns and bhajans. Many devotees attended the function.

b) The birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated with formal worship, singing of *bhajan*, floral offering etc. on 24th of December 2013 from 8:30 a.m. Swami Sridharanandaji spoke on 'the Life and Teachings of Holy Mother'.

c) Christmas Eve was also celebrated on the 24th of December with the reading from the Bible.

Visiting monastics:

a) Swami Tadananda of Fiji visited Sydney Centre from 16th to 22nd of December and returned to Fiji on 4th via Brisbane.

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 Gitā*, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and, the life and teachings of Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda were conducted in addition to the above.

Other Activities:

The **Annual General Meeting** was held in June 2013.

Celebrations:

a) The birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated on 24th of December 2013 after Arati.

Christmas Eve also was observed on the same day with a talk on the Bible.

150th
Birth Anniversary of
Swami Vivekananda
1863 - 2013

My ideal, indeed,
can be put into a few words,
and that is: to preach unto mankind
their divinity, and how to make it
manifest in every movement of life.

Celebrated in Australia and New Zealand - A Report



To commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda the following programmes were organised in Australia and New Zealand with the help of dedicated devotees of the local Vedanta Centres.

Swami Tyagananda the head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Boston and the Hindu Chaplain at MIT and Harvard University, Swami Baneshananda, the head of the Vedanta-Gesellschaft in Germany and Swami Sarvapriyananda, Educationist, erstwhile Rector of the Vivekananda University and now teacher at the Probationer's Training Centre, Ramakrishna Math Belur Math, Kolkata, India, and Dr. Shelly Brown, Oncologist and a long standing devotee from New York were invited as speakers for the seminars and workshops organised in a number of places in Australia and New Zealand. They visited these places jointly or severally and delivered talks.

Seminars & talks held in New Zealand Wellington

The Centre, in collaboration with the Victoria University, Society for

Philosophy and Culture, Wellington, conducted a Seminar on the theme 'Concept of Self' with particular reference to Swami Vivekananda's ideas on the subject. It was held at the University on the 26th of August 2013. The audience of around 120 persons, mainly consisted of students of philosophy.

The seminar started with a welcome address by Piripi Whaanga, local elder, followed by Councillor Bryan Pepperell of the Wellington City Council.

Dr J. L. Shaw of the Victoria University, Wellington, welcomed the Swamis Tyagananda, Baneshananda, Sarvapriyananda and Atmeshananda and the audience, and introduced the subject. He emphasised the importance of both Vedanta philosophy and the great work of Swami Vivekananda, particularly for possessing insights into alleviating global suffering and disharmony.

Swami Sarvapriyananda, in the first talk, presented a very tangible and logical talk on the 'Unity of Self in Advaita Vedanta' which highlights the unity of all in spite of the illusion of separation, elucidated in the

saying "the entire world is your relation."

Swami Baneshananda, the second speaker, discussed the mind, epistemology (the theory of knowledge) and levels of awareness.

Swami Tyagananda concluded the evening with an enlightening presentation about the 'Concepts of Self and identity in relation to the mind, body and spirit'.

This presentation can be watched at the following Youtube link -

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?feature=edit_ok&list=PLTq3JFzZJ8cpsFFumk1YCanVfJBa9nRDl

Auckland

In collaboration with the University of Auckland the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Auckland conducted a day-long workshop at the University on 1st of September 2013 on the subject "Women's Role in the Modern Society: An Analysis Based on the Teachings of Swami Vivekananda."

The program started at 10:30 a.m. with the president of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Auckland, Mr. Harish Kumar Sundarji, welcoming the gathering. A Member of the



Seminar at the Victoria University, Wellington, NZ.



Seminar at the University of Auckland, Auckland, NZ.

Parliament Mr. Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi also addressed the audience.

Swami Baneshananda, in his speech on the allocated topic, touched upon the social issues regarding women and how those ills could be reduced or eliminated following the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Tyagananda spoke on "Swami Vivekananda and Women: Mutual Influences." He explained how Swami Vivekananda was influenced by women, namely his mother, Bhuvaneshwari Devi, Sri Sarada Devi and his disciple, Sister Nivedita. He also informed the audience about the influences he had on Mrs. Ole Bull, Mrs. Sevier and other women he encountered.

Swami Sarvapriyananda speaking on "Women's role in modern society – a Vedantic Approach to Identity and the Philosophy of Feminism" brought out different aspects of feminism with the help of stories told by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Dr. Debasis Bandyopadhyay of the University of Auckland presented a paper on "Violence against Women and Economic Wellbeing of a society". He spoke on the reasons for violence against women and how to avoid it by empowering women of different cultures.

Professor Manying Ip of the University of Auckland presented a paper on "Taoism: the tenets of a

Chinese Philosophy and some of its modern implications – Echoes in Vedanta Philosophy."

Professor Srikanta Chatterjee of the Massey University presented a paper on "Bengali Renaissance, Women's Emancipation and Swami Vivekananda". He spoke to the audience about Swami Vivekananda's influence on the women of Bengal.

After each talk the audience put forth their questions to the speakers and the speakers responded to the questions. There was also a panel discussion wherein many important aspects of the topic were discussed. Prof. Debes Bhattacharyya of the Auckland University and Vice President of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Auckland proposed a Vote of thanks and the programme concluded by 4:30 p.m.

Seminars & talks held in Australia Canberra

The Australian National University and the Centre organised a Public lecture and forum on 23rd August 2013. The topic of discussion was: 'Bridging East and West - Teachings of Swami Vivekananda'.

After a welcome address by Mr. Jaishankar Venkataraman, His excellency Mr. Biren Nanda, the High Commissioner of India to Australia, inaugurated the Seminar and spoke briefly about Swami

Vivekananda and his life. Swami Sridharananda and a number of other speakers followed including Dr. Peter Friedlander, Senior Lecturer in Hindi-Urdu at the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific. Swami Tyagananda delivered the key-note speech. Prof. Raghendra Jha, Professor of Economics, and Executive Director of Australia South Asia Research Centre, ANU, also spoke on the occasion.

Brisbane

The University of Queensland organised a Seminar on 'Positive Living: a Holistic Approach' on Friday, the 6th of September 2013 from 3 to 5 p.m.

After an introduction of the session by Prof. Tapan Saha of the University, Dr. Ashim Majumdar, a psychiatrist and the Vice President of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney—Brisbane Chapter, Swamis Tyagananda, Baneshananda and Sarvapriyananda spoke on the subject. Prof. Kuldip Paliwal moderated the session.

On the same day, the 6th of September, the local devotees organised a public meeting at the Kenmore Library hall from 7:30 to 9 p.m. A large number of people attended this meeting.

A play "Oneness - Voice Without Form" - A play in English on the



A Public Lecture at the National Australian University, Canberra, Australia.



Seminar at the University of Queensland and Townsville.



Multifaith Conference at the James Cook University, Townsville.



extraordinary Life of Swami Vivekananda, was staged on Sunday the 22nd of September, 2013 at the BEMAC Theatre 102 main Street, Kangaroo Point. This 2 hour drama, had two shows - a matinee from 1 to 3 p.m. and an evening show from 6 to 8 p.m. Both shows were well attended and were appreciated by the audience.

Townsville, Northern Queensland

A group of devotees organised talks by the swamis at the Riverside community centre on the 7th of September 2013.

The James Cook University Townsville, organised a multi-faith conference on 8th September 2013. The following representatives of various faiths spoke on the occasion:- Dr. Farvardin Dilari of Bahai Faith; R Mr. Ryan Faruque of Islam; Dr. Suniti Bandaranaike of Buddhism; Dr. Kalpana Singh of Sikhism; Bishop Michael Putney of Christianity and Swami Tyagananda of Hinduism.

Melbourne

In collaboration with the Monash University, the centre conducted a seminar on the theme "Paradigm Shift on Inter-Religious Studies". It was held at the Clayton Campus of the University on 12th September 2013 from 12:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. The seminar was introduced by Prof. Constant Mews of the Centre of Studies in Religion and Theology followed by presentations from Swamis Sridharananda, Tyagananda, Baneshananda and Sarvapriyananda.

In collaboration with the La Trobe University, a seminar on "Contemporary Global Crisis: A shift towards Human Wealth" was conducted on 12th September 2013 from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The seminar was chaired by Prof. Alberto Gomes of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies. A panel for discussing on the theme was represented by Swamis Sridharananda, Tyagananda, Baneshananda and Sarvapriyananda.

In collaboration with the Siva-Vishnu Temple, Melbourne, a Forum on "Swami Vivekananda and Global Culture" was organised on 14th September, 2013 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Lively discussions on the topic were contributed by Dr. Shelly Brown, Oncologist from New York followed by Swamis Tyagananda, Baneshananda and Sarvapriyananda. Swami Sridharananda delivered the concluding address.

Sydney

The South Asian Studies Group of the University of Sydney in collaboration with the Vedanta Centre of Sydney, as well as, the School of Economics and the Centre of Peace and Conflict Studies of University of Sydney, the Society of Philosophy and Culture of Victoria University, New Zealand and Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of Australia conducted a day-long International Seminar at Seymour Theatre of Sydney University on 16th September 2013 on the theme, "Swami Vivekananda and his quest for sustained human development in both East and West". The programme started at 9:30 a.m. and ended at 5:30 p.m. Prof. Stephen Garton, Provost and Deputy Vice Chancellor, the University of Sydney declared the opening of the seminar followed by a welcome address by Swami Sridharananda. The seminar was conducted in three sessions. The first phase of the first session was chaired by Prof. Colm Harmon, Head of School of Economics, University of Sydney in which Associate Prof. Dilip Dutta, Director, South Asian Studies Group & School of Economics, the University of Sydney and Dr. Shelly Brown, Editor, writer and speaker on Vedanta from New York presented their papers. The second phase of the



Seminar at the Monash University, Melbourne and group photo at Shiva Vishnu Temple after seminar.





Play 'Oneness: Voice Without Form' at Sydney Opera House.

first session was chaired by Mr. Vijay Eswaran, Executive Chairman, QI Group of Companies, Malaysia in which Pravrajika Vivekaprana, Senior nun, Sarada Math of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Sarvapriyananda and Swami Baneshananda presented their papers.

For the second session a panel discussion on the topic "Is Swami Vivekananda's contribution relevant for interfaith dialogue at an international level?" was organised. Ms Sandra Meiras, Director, International Office of the Vice Chancellor and Principal, University of Sydney chaired the session. Representatives of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and a few independent speakers including Ms. Ann Louise Bardach, a journalist from U.S A. and Prof. Stuart Rees, Chair, Sydney Peace Foundation took part in it.

The third session was chaired by Prof. Duncan Ivisor, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Sydney. Swami Tyagananda was the sole speaker of this session.

Oneness: Voice Without Form

A play on the life of Swami Vivekananda titled, "**Oneness: Voice Without Form**" directed by Alex Broun was staged at Sydney Opera House on 17th and 18th of September 2013. Mr. Saheb Chatterjee from Kolkata played the role of Swami Vivekananda. Three

shows were staged in Sydney and two in Brisbane and the response from viewers in general was overwhelming. The play at large attracted the attention and admiration of the Australian media.

Adelaide

The Vedanta Centre of Sydney—Adelaide Chapter in collaboration with the Flinders University organised a workshop on 20th of September 2013 on the theme, "Positive Living: A Holistic Approach". The workshop was held at the Flinders University City Campus located at 182, Victoria Square, Adelaide from 2:30 to 5:45 p.m. on Friday, the 20th of September 2013.

Prof. Chris Franco, the Head of Medical Biotechnology and Chair of India Focus Group, the Flinders University, welcomed the speakers. A short introduction by Swami Sridharananda was followed by a brief talk on the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's teachings by Chief guest Ms Zoe Bettison, Member for Ramsay, South Australia. The other



At Flinders University, Adelaide

speakers included Ms Virginia Pattingale, Director, International Office, Flinders University, Swamis Baneshananda, Sarvapriyananda, Dr Shelley Brown, Dr Mihir Wechalekar, Consultant Rheumatologist, Royal Adelaide Hospital, and Dr Daniela Kaleva, Lecturer, University of South Australia. The audience thoroughly enjoyed the talks and the panel discussion.

Perth

In collaboration with the Curtin University and the Consulate General of India, a seminar on the theme "The Role of Spirituality in Public Policy Department: Blending Ideas and Ideals of East and West" was held on 22nd of September 2013 from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. About 250 delegates attended the seminar in which Prof. John Phillimore, Executive Director, John Curtin Institute of Public Policy welcomed the speakers. Mr. M. Subbarayudu, the Honourable Consul-General of India in W.A. and Northern Territory, introduced the subject eloquently, and Swamis Baneshananda, Sarvapriyananda and Dr. Shelley Brown dealt with the subject from various perspectives. The closing remarks by Emeritus Professor Samir Chatterjee, Curtin Business School, aptly summarised the entire proceedings of the seminar.



Seminar at the Curtin University, Perth.

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.



Sri Sarada Devi: A Transcendental Presence

Introduction

We saw how the Master worshipped the Mother as a Goddess, how he showed reverence towards her in various ways, and how he pointed out her divinity to the devotees. Swami Vivekananda and the disciples of the Master also declared Mother's divinity.

When seated for initiating Sri Surendranath Sen, Swami Vivekananda suddenly refused to do so, saying that he had known from the Master that one mightier than himself would initiate Surendranath. A few days later, Surendranath dreamt that he was seated on the Master's lap and was receiving the mantra from a motherly woman. Long after this in 1911, Surendranath went to Jayrambati during the worship of Durga; and there the Mother initiated him. Finding the new mantra and the mantra of the dream identical and the woman of the dream the same as the Holy Mother in front of him, Surendranath almost lost his outer consciousness. Later, he told the Mother everything about his dream.

The Master spoke of the Mother as the Goddess Saraswati herself, who had come down to impart wisdom.

The Mother's sympathy and support to the deserving

On a summer evening, the Mother sat telling her rosary on the upper veranda of the 'Udbodhan' overlooking an open space across the road in front, where some people had set up some huts for their families. In one of those huts a man was beating his wife mercilessly. He started with fisticuffs and slaps; then he gave such a kick that she rolled down into the courtyard with the babe in her arms. There again came down upon her a volley of heavy kicks. The Mother's japa stopped. And though she was noted for her suavity and soft, low voice, which could hardly be heard from even close-quarters, she now stood up holding the railing and scolding the man at the top of her voice, "I say, you wretch, will



**Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi
(1853-1920)**

you kill your wife outright? Alas! What a pity!" The man had lost his balance out of extreme anger, but a look at that motherly figure acted on him like a charm on a hooded snake; he lowered his head and retreated at once. The Mother's sympathy made the woman now burst into a torrent of tears. Her fault was that she had not cooked rice at the proper time. A little later, the man's anger subsided, and he came to the woman to console her. At this, all the people who had gathered there on the Mother's veranda, moved away to their respective duties.

Her transcendental moods

Many are the devotees who were struck with wonder by the sudden expression of the Mother's transcendental moods in the midst of ordinary human preoccupations. These emerged so unaware, like flashes of lightning, and the Mother composed herself so quickly that the devotees got hardly any time to fathom them adequately. And yet the impression became irresistible that divinity was the essential component of that extraordinary character over which there was a veneer of femininity to make her life a going concern. Whenever her divine side had the upper hand, it created all around a supernatural atmosphere,

which by an irresistible magnetic force transported all within its orbit to a higher plane for that moment. One morning, at about nine o'clock, a Brahmachari sat on the Mother's veranda at Jayrambati, chewing some fried rice, while the Mother swept the veranda. Just then someone was heard calling from outside, "Mother, dear, may it please you to give me alms!" At this the Mother said aside, "I can't finish my duties, working though I am with innumerable hands." Attracted by an ethereally soft and compassionate voice, no sooner did Gagan look up at her face than she stopped her broom and bending forward with one hand on her knees she said with a beaming face, "Look at the fun; I have only two hands; and here I speak of having infinite hands!"

Motherliness and spiritual ministrations

In the Mother's life, devotees came face to face with such superhuman pity, piety, purity, protective power they instinctively offered their heartfelt devotion and allegiance at the feet of this extraordinary personage who appeared to them as none other than the Universal Mother. These expressions of love and adoration had nothing in them of deliberate formalities, but only of a spontaneous hankering for taking shelter under her and opening out their minds for her to read and to guide them as she would. Some saw the Mother as a goddess in dreams, which however appeared to them nonetheless real on that account. A woman disciple dreamed that she was worshipping the Mother as the goddess Chandi by offering her a cloth with a broad, red border. She then came to the Mother with such a piece of cloth, but as she could not express her desire out of shyness, she communicated the anecdote to the Mother through an intermediary. On hearing this the Mother smiled and said, "The Universal Mother sent you the dream, don't you agree, my dear? Well, give me the cloth; it has to be worn anyway." She wore it that very

night (third week of October 1918), as it was holy to Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune. In the evening there came an old woman with all the accessories for the worship of the goddess and with these she adored the Mother, and then saluted her after offering an anna at her feet. The Mother said to the others present, "Alas! She is in great tribulations, my dears, she is very poor." The woman's only son had become insane after graduation and was nowhere to be traced; and the husband too was as good as mad because of that shock. The Mother blessed her sincerely.

‘Mother is Kali herself’

The Mother was once coming to Jayrambati from Kamarpukur long after the passing way of the Master. Her nephew Sivaram, who was then very young, followed her with a bundle of clothes. When they reached the field in the vicinity of Jayrambati, some ideas crossed Sivaram's mind and he stood still. The Mother, not knowing his mood, proceeded a little and then, missing the sound of his footsteps, looked back to find him motionless. She said with amazement, "What's the matter, Sivu? Come forward." "If you tell me one thing," said brother Sivaram, "Then only shall I proceed." "What's that?" inquired the Mother. "Will you tell me who you are?" asked Sivaram. "Who should I be? I am your aunt," pleaded the Mother. "Then go," said Sivaram nonchalantly. "Here you are near your house. I won't proceed further." The sun was setting; and so in a worried tone the Mother said, "Look at that! Who can I indeed be, my dear? I am a woman, your aunt." "Very good," persisted Sivaram. "You can as well go." Finding Sivaram still standing at his post, the Mother said at last, "People say, I am Kali." To be doubly sure Sivaram asked, "Kali? Truly so?" The Mother said, "Yes." That delighted Sivaram, and he said, "Now, come, let us go." Then he followed her to the village.

On hearing that the Mother would be starting for Calcutta in the middle of February 1920, Sivaram came to her one day at about eleven o'clock and told her after saluting her that he would not return that day to

Kamarpukur, as he had finished all work for the day at the shrine of Raghuvira including worship and laying Him to sleep. This displeased the Mother, and she asked him to return that very day to Kamarpukur and do those things once again according to the tradition and at the appropriate time. And she told Brahmachari Varada to pack him some fruit and vegetables. At three in the afternoon she called Varada again to instruct him to accompany Sivaram with the bundle up to the river Amodar. This he did. But a little later, Sivaram was seen crying with his head on the Mother's feet. "Mother, tell me what will be my lot? Do tell me." The Mother said, "Sivu, get up; why should you worry? You have served the Master so much, and how greatly he loved you! What anxiety need you have? You are already free even in this life." But Sivaram persisted, "No, you take over my burden, and tell me if you are really what you earlier told me you were." The more the Mother consoled him and patted him touching his head and chin, the more he cried and said, "Assure me whether you have accepted all my burden, and whether you are Mother Kali Herself." Sivaram's tears and tenacity had moved the Mother; now his yearning produced so great a change in her that it struck Varada standing by her, that she was at that moment no human being. In that elevated state she laid her hand on Sivaram's head and said solemnly, "Yes, that is so". Sivaram at once lifted his head and kneeling before her chanted with folded hands the mantra of salutation from the Chandi, 'Sarva-mangala-mangalye,' etc. The Mother kissed him by touching his chin with her hand; and he wiped away his tears and started for Kamarpukur with the bundle of fruit and vegetables under his arm and his eyes beaming with delight. At the Mother's bidding, Varada went for the second time to help him with the bundle up to the river. Outside the village Sivaram turned happily towards Varada and said, "Brother, Mother is Kali Herself. She is the wielder of people's destiny; through her grace comes freedom. Do you understand?"

Mother's unassuming nature

In her everyday dealings, the unassuming Mother claimed no higher position for herself than that of an ordinary mortal consecrated to the service of the Master; and that fact she impressed indelibly on all who came into contact with her. After initiation she pointed to the Master and said, "He it is that is the guru". In the course of conversation her divine mood might have stolen upon her surreptitiously; yet in the work-a-day world she never consciously allowed it any sway. When, one day, during her last illness, an old woman devotee began eulogizing her by saying, "You are the Mother of the Universe, you are all," there descended on the devotee this burst of harsh rebuff. "Mother of the Universe! I am what I am just because He granted me refuge at His feet through His mercy." In fact, though she was too soft to touch anyone in matters of belief, she could never tolerate flattery. One day at Jayrambati, the portion dealing with the Master's marriage was being read from the Bengali poetical work Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi before the Mother and some others, on the veranda of her house. As that portion depicted her as the Mother of the Universe and was eloquent with her praise, she left the place.

Before starting for the South, the Mother was, one noon, sitting absent-mindedly at Kothar and thinking alone about the miseries of the world and the Master's repeated incarnations for its redemption. When an attendant came there, she said to him, "So the Master comes again and again-the same moon every night. There's no escape, he's caught in it. As they say:

Coming many a time and oft,
you get sorrows upon sorrows;

And how long still would you
endure this pain?

Is that the lot only of men! Is it that
of Master as well? So I have been
thinking. I see no end to this. What
suffering for the Master! Who will
understand?"

The attendant suggested, "Why of the
Master alone, Mother? It's yours,

too. The Master and you are really one.” “Fiel!” admonished the Mother. “Should one utter such a thing, my foolish boy? I am only his servant. Did you not read, “You are the mechanic, and I am the machine; you the housewife, and I the house; I work as you make me do? The Master is all; there’s none but He.”

The real nature of the Mother

One day at the end of 1909, a monastic disciple was regretting to the Mother that even after so much of experience and experiment, he had not been able to believe her to be his own mother. The Mother assured him, “If not your own mother, why should you be coming so often?” Each belongs to his own fold and incarnates as such in every age. I am your own mother, as you will recognize in time.”

In domestic dealings or conversations with common people there were hidden disclosures of this real nature of the Mother. During her last stay at Jayrambati, the woman who served as cook, came to her one night at nine o’ clock to say that she had touched a dog. As touching a dog is polluting according to the Hindus, she would have to bathe in then winter night. The mother said, “Don’t bathe so late in the night. Wash your hands and feet and change the cloth.” But she protested, “How can that suffice?” The Mother suggested, “Then take Ganges water.” But as this was not adequately purifying according to the cook, the Holy Mother, who was holiness itself, said at last, “Then touch me.” This opened the eyes of the cook, and for the time being she was saved from her mania for purity, as also from an uncomfortable cold bath.

Self-revelation and self-concealment alternate in the unfolding of the Mother’s life. From distant parts people pour in to worship her as a goddess and yet the villagers understand nothing of this-to them she is ever their aunt, their sister, or niece, nothing more. Once a villager put the question to her, “So many people come to see you from such distant lands; and yet why can’t we understand you?” The Mother

replied, “What does it matter, if you can’t? You are my friend, and so I am yours. The village watchman Ambika said, “People call you goddess, deity, and what not; as for us, we understand nothing of that.” The Mother said, “Why need you understand? You are my brother Ambika and I am your sister Sarada.” She kept herself informed of the weal and woe of the villagers and identified herself with these.

[To be continued in the next issue of Reach].

Source: *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* By Swami Gambhirananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai. PP 426-437

How Vedanta has influenced my life

- Isha Deodhar

I would like to share with the reader some of the points Hindu philosophy and Vedanta have taught me. While the title of this article may lead you to expect words of wisdom, inspiration and advice, I must start off by acknowledging that what I know now pales in comparison to what I have yet to learn, intellectually, socially, emotionally and spiritually.

I have had a very interesting upbringing: My family is Hindu yet for most of my schooling I went to a Anglican Christian school. My parents were keen for me to explore and develop a connection with Australian culture while maintaining a connection with my Indian roots. While my school taught Christianity, most staff and students were also sincerely respectful towards my Hindu religion. Not only was I bilingual in that I spoke English and Hindi, I also gained insights into, and in a sense became bilingual with the two different religions in my life, Hinduism and Christianity.

There came a time in high school life, when the teaching that belief in Jesus leads to eternal blissful life in heaven and failure to do so leads to an eternal torturous existence in hell, was difficult to ignore. What made it even more confusing was that many

religions claimed something similar. They couldn’t be all right. The easiest option for me to take was that they were all wrong. Detaching myself from all forms of religion became a real possibility. This was until Vedanta introduced me to the concept of pluralism. Religious pluralism encompasses the idea that while our spiritual pathways may vary, they lead to the same goal.

Of course, some have criticised pluralism to be a naïve attempt to avoid religious arguments and thus ignore the true details of each religion and how this makes each religion different from others. Why are some religions monotheistic and some polytheistic? Why then does one religion claim suffering to be the result of desire while another claims it to be caused by Adam and Eve’s original sin? Why do some believe in heaven and hell while others simple reach for a state of spiritual enlightenment? Why do Abrahamic religions differentiate between creator and creation while Hinduism merges creator and creation as one concept claiming creation to be a manifestation of the Divine? The wisdom encompassed within the Vedanta philosophy triggered me to come to the conclusion that individuals had different spiritual needs as a result of their life circumstances and emotional and intellectual dispositions and the variation in religious beliefs merely catered for these differences. Finally, with intellectual and emotional conviction I could feel that the Hindu philosophy was the most compatible with my mindset and do this without any fear of an excruciating afterlife.

Extending upon this thinking, I realised something else about religion in general. I believe that all religions have four distinct ‘layers’. The first layer is the heart or the core of the religion; that is, a set of truths upon which the entire religion is founded. Applying my Vedantic pluralist thinking, I believe this foundation is common to all world religions and belief systems. This basic truth consists of two parts. First, that there is something in this world which created and controls the universe, which is omnipresent and

serves as the building blocks of the universe, nurtures and cares for the universe by providing resources and also had no beginning and will never have an end. In science, this is known as energy as energy controls everything, gives life to living beings, condenses into matter to form the universe and, as the law of conservation of energy states 'energy can never be created nor destroyed'. For those who are not satisfied with this definition alone, there is what we know as 'religion' where this entity is known as 'God' and is personified to make it easier to understand and more compatible with the human mindset. To give you an analogy, the transcendental decimal 'pi' 3.14159... is given the symbol π as it is impossible to write its true value and impractical to write 3.1415926535 whenever wanting to refer to it. Thus the symbol is used when working with pi in mathematics.

The second basic truth is simply an implication of the first. If the world is seen as a single entity full of interdependent components, this means that our actions need to be good for us, and more importantly, for the good of this entire entity. It also means that we need to respect and love everything as though it was us we were interacting with. In basic terms, this means changing our behaviour for the better.

Therefore, religions are all about spiritual development. As spiritual development can seem like a broad and 'woolly' term to some, let me just define it. For the purposes of my thoughts and explanations, spiritual development is the gradual increase in understanding of the fundamental truths I mentioned before, their implications on our lives and how we must put our acceptance of them into practice. Thus spirituality also applies to atheists. Atheism is just like any other religion except atheists are satisfied with the concept of energy and science. For them, belief in a personal God is irrational. I believe that Atheism is as true as other religions and is as rewarding. It is essential for them to choose the belief system that is the most compatible with their inborn mindset as it will ensure their spiritual

development and will occur in the most feasible and beneficial manner. For some, this may be the path of Atheism and having no personification of energy.

I now come to the second layer. This layer is a set of beliefs and concepts which help people to develop spiritually. This layer is when one starts seeing the differences between the religions and what would appear to be contradictions. As I mentioned before, religions have to be different as different people have different spiritual needs and each religion is designed to cater to the varying spiritual needs. Therefore what may appear as contradictions are in fact the different ways that religions aim to guide and help people. This is in the same way teachers have to teach students differently based on whether the students are kinaesthetic, visual or aural learners. For example, although the apparent polytheism of Hinduism and the monotheism of Judaism may seem as a contradiction, in Hindu scripture, it clearly states that the 'many Gods' are just representations of the large number of roles that single Divine being plays in our lives. Thus, each of the Gods are not separate entities and therefore, although Hinduism may appear to be polytheistic, it is also monotheistic. To explain this mathematically; although it would seem as though one of something cannot equal to many of that something, the best way to represent God in numbers would be the concept of infinity or ∞ . No matter if you multiply infinity three times or five times, it will still equate to infinity.

The third layer of a belief system is its stories, mythology, parables, hymns, customs and rituals which are not essential but are advisable as they remind people of the second layer and make it easier to understand. For example, in Christianity, there is the ritual of the bread and wine. Although it is not essential, it is advisable as it reminds people of the true meaning of Easter and serves as a symbolic representation of Jesus and his actions so that people can gain a better understanding of the components of

the second layer of Christianity.

Up till now, all these layers have been 'good' but now I come to the fourth and final layer. This is the layer which causes destruction in our society and makes people forget about the true teachings of their religion. This layer, which is present in each religion, consists of all the beliefs, customs, rituals and actions which are the result of people misunderstanding their own religion and perverting it. These include traditions such as Sati (where a widow would have to burn and die during the cremation of her husband) and organisations such as Ku Klux Klan and Islamic fundamentalist groups. Compared to the depth of the other three layers, this layer is quite thin, except it impacts humanity in a much greater way. Therefore when describing the features of a particular religion one must not include the aspects of its fourth layer as it is not the religion itself but a perverted version of it. To give you an example, it would be unfair and ignorant to generalise and describe Germans and German culture based on the actions of Hitler. I am not saying that we must ignore and deny the existence of such perverted beliefs. In fact, I am saying we must admit their existence and must strive to eradicate them from this world. This can only be done when we first make a clear distinction between religions and their perverted forms and make sure that we do not teach ourselves about a religion based on its perverted form.

Now I come to what Vedanta has taught me more recently. I have learnt about liberating oneself from expectations by dedicating every action to the Divine. As a year 12 student who has been through intensive studying and learning and the associated sweat and tears, and is now waiting for her HSC results on the 18th of December, detachment from expectations is proving extremely difficult. Despite Swamiji's weekly reminders at the Bhagavat Gita classes on Sundays and my parents' daily reminders, I doubt I am in for a spiritual growth spurt any time soon so I think I will be in for either smiles or tears on 18th December.

*(Continued from the July 2013
edition of Reach).*

As a student and an engineer

In 1887 Hari Prasanna graduated from Patna College and then went to the Poona College of Science to study civil engineering. He was a brilliant student and was greatly loved by his professors and classmates. After graduating in civil engineering in 1892, he was given the job of a district engineer at Gazipur in Uttar Pradesh. While in this position, the Varanasi-Gazipur Road was built under his supervision. During this time he met Pavhari Baba, the great yogi of Gazipur, who was highly esteemed by Swami Vivekananda. As a government engineer, Hari Prasanna worked at Etawah, Bulandsahar, Meerut, and other places in Uttar Pradesh. During his years of government service he kept in close contact with his brother disciples and donated sixty rupees every month to the Ramakrishna Monastery. Sometimes the disciples visited him and stayed with him when they were sick, and he served them with loving care.

With Swami Vivekananda

Since his father died during his childhood, Hari Prasanna had to work until his family was financially secure. He provided for his mother and also for the education of his younger brother. As time went on, however, his uncle began to pressure him to get married. He became disgusted with these attempts to tie him to a worldly life and joined the Ramakrishna Monastery at Alambazar in 1896. He lived there humbly and spent most of his time in *japa* and meditation. He was a man of few words and did not care for chatting and joking as others did.

Swami Vivekananda returned to India from the West in 1897 and took Hari Prasanna with him on his travels in western and northern India. During this tour they visited the old Hindu temples of Rajputana. Vivekananda discussed the



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

architecture of the future Ramakrishna Temple with him and expressed his own ideas as to how the temple should be built. On their return to the monastery, Hari Prasanna drew a sketch of the Ramakrishna temple using Swamiji's ideas as his guide. He also consulted with a noted architect. Swamiji was pleased when he saw the sketch and said, "This temple will certainly come up, but I may not live to see it...I will see it from high."

Consecration of the Ramakrishna Math and taking monastic vows

On 13th February 1898 the Ramakrishna Monastery was moved from Alambazar to Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house at Belur. The site for Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order, was purchased in 1898. Vivekananda entrusted Hari Prasanna with the task of remodelling the main building and constructing new buildings and the shrine for the monastery. Hari Prasanna drew up the site plan and building plans, and prepared estimates as well as supervised the construction. He did all of this single-handedly. When the construction was completed, Vivekananda consecrated the

Ramakrishna Math on 9th December 1898. On 9th May 1899 Hari Prasanna formally took sannyasa, final monastic vows. Vivekananda told him, "Do as we have done. Take your sannyasa directly from the Master." Accordingly, Hari Prasanna went to Sri Ramakrishna's shrine and took his monastic vows with the traditional viraja homa ceremony. He became known as Swami Vijnanananda.

Future plans for the Belur Monastery

One day Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda was addresses lovingly as Swamiji) expressed desire to build a ghat and an embankment on the bank of the Ganges for the Belur Monastery, so he asked Vijnanananda for an estimate. Fearing Swamiji might change his mind; Vijnanananda understated the cost and said it would be approximately three thousand rupees. This amount made Swamiji happy. He immediately consulted with Swami Brahmananda and ordered that the project be started. As the work proceeded, Vijnanananda realized that the cost would exceed his previous estimate. He humbly expressed his concern to Brahmananda who asked Vijnanananda to complete the project. Out of compassion for his younger brother, he accepted the responsibility of spending the extra money and risking a scolding from Swamiji.

Sometime later, Swamiji asked Brahmananda for the accounts. When he discovered that the expenses had already exceeded the original estimate, and the work was still unfinished, he became angry with Brahmananda and vehemently scolded him. The latter endured it calmly. When Swamiji returned to his room, Brahmananda went to his own room and closed the doors and windows. After a while Swamiji regretted his bad temper. He then called Vijnanananda and said, "Could you check on what Raja is doing?"

Vijnanananda went to Brahmananda's room and found that the doors and windows were closed. He called for him but got no response.

When he reported this to Swamiji, he said, "You are a fool! I asked you to find out what Raja was doing; and you say, 'His door and windows are closed.' Go back again and tell me what he is doing." This time Vijnanananda pushed the door open and found Brahmananda on his bed, weeping. Vijnanananda said apologetically, "Maharaj, I am sorry; today you have suffered terribly for me." Brahmananda said, "Brother, can you tell me what wrong I have done that Swamiji could scold me so harshly? Sometimes it becomes so unbearable that I feel I should go away to some place in the mountains, leaving everything."

Returning to Swamiji, Vijnanananda reported that Brahmananda was crying. At this, Swamiji rushed to the room, embraced Brahmananda, and said tearfully, "Raja, brother, please forgive me. It is my fault that my temper is short and that I scolded you. Please pardon me." Meanwhile, Brahmananda had regained his composure. Seeing Swamiji weep, he was also moved. Then he said, "What does it matter? You have scolded me because you love me—that is all." But Swamiji continued, "Brother, please forgive me. I know how much the Master loved you and never uttered a harsh word to you. And I, on the other hand, for the sake of this petty work, have verbally abused you and given you pain. I am not fit to live with you. I shall go away to the Himalayas and live alone in solitude." "Don't say that, Swamiji," said Brahmananda. Your scolding is a blessing. How can you leave us? You are our leader. How shall we function without you?" Gradually both of them became calm.

Vijnanananda later remarked, "I shall never forget that scene in my life. I never saw Swamiji weeping so bitterly. What a bond of love existed between them! Swamiji loved his brother disciples like a mother, and that is why he could not bear any

shortcomings in them. He wanted them to be as great as himself; nay, even greater than himself. His love was incomparable."

One hot summer day, while supervising the construction work of the embankment at Belur Math, Vijnanananda became thirsty. He noticed that Vivekananda was enjoying a cold drink on his upper veranda. Presently, one of Swamiji's attendants carried a glass to him and said, "Swamiji has sent this cold drink to you." Vijnanananda took the glass and found only a few drops at the bottom. He was disappointed and piqued by Swamiji's practical joke. However, he drank those few drops as prasada and, strangely enough, his thirst was instantly quenched. He was dumbfounded. In the evening, Vijnanananda saw Swamiji, who asked with a smile, "Did you drink the cold juice?" "Yes, I did," replied Vijnanananda. He then described his experience after drinking it, and Swamiji was pleased.

Vijnanananda later reminisced about his Belur Math days with Swami Vivekananda:

Swamiji used to call me "Peshan" [an abbreviation of Prasanna]. One day I was sitting on the upper veranda of Belur Math eating puffed rice when Swamiji passed by. All of a sudden he grabbed a handful of puffed rice from my bowl and began to eat it like a boy. I remonstrated, "Swamiji, why don't you take another bowl of puffed rice? By eating the food that I have defiled you are making me feel guilty." Laughing, Swamiji left.

I used to take snuff. Once Swamiji went to Calcutta and bought a pice worth of snuff in a packet. Handing it to me, he said, "Here is a wonderful present for you." I opened the packet and found the snuff. Seeing me happy, he was happy. But when he became grave, it was difficult to go near him. Then only Raja could bring him back to the normal plane.

At Belur Math Vijnanananda lived in a small room close to Swamiji's room. Once at two o'clock in the morning, Vijnanananda saw Swamiji pacing on the eastern veranda. Concerned, he got up and asked

Swamiji why he could not sleep. Swamiji replied, "Peshan, I was sleeping nicely; but suddenly I felt a jolt, and my sleep broke. It seems to me that there must be a disaster somewhere and many people are suffering." That night Vijnanananda could not make sense of this statement. However, he later narrated, "The next morning I saw in the newspaper that at the same time when Swamiji had awakened, there had been a terrible volcanic eruption near the Fiji Islands, and many people were killed. I was surprised to read this news, and then I realised that Swamiji's nervous system was more responsive to human misery than a seismograph."

Once in the dead of night at Belur Math, Vijnanananda heard a pathetic cry from Vivekananda's room. He thought that perhaps Swamiji cried out because he was sick. Vijnanananda silently entered Swamiji's room and asked, "Swamiji, are you not well?" Immediately Swamiji became quiet and replied, "Oh, Peshan, I thought you were sleeping." When asked the cause of his cry, Swamiji tearfully said, "Brother, thinking of the poverty and suffering of the people, I cannot sleep. My mind is restless with pain. So I am praying to the Master, 'Let good befall our people and let their suffering go away.' " Vijnanananda then consoled Swamiji and asked him to sleep. That night Vijnanananda was deeply moved to see how intensely Swamiji felt for his countrymen.

About Swamiji's work in the West

Once while at Belur Math Vijnanananda was wondering about Swamiji's work in the West and his relationship with Western women. Seeing Swamiji alone in his room, Vijnanananda asked him frankly, "Swamiji, while you were in the West you associated with the women there; but didn't the Master teach the contrary in this respect? He used to say, 'A monk should not even look at the portrait of a woman.' He emphatically told me not to be close to women, however devoted they might be. So I am wondering why you did do."

Immediately Swamiji became very grave and his face and eyes turned crimson with anger. After a while he said, "Well, Peshan, do you think that what you have understood about the Master is all that he is? What do you know about the Master? Do you know that the Master eradicated the idea of the difference between male and female from my mind? Is there any distinction of sex in the Atman? Moreover, The Master came for the good of the entire world. Did he come to liberate only men? He will save all-both men and women. You people want to belittle the Master by measuring him with the yardstick of your own intellects. Whatever the Master told you is true; you follow that implicitly. But to me his instructions were different. He not only gave me instructions, he clearly showed me everything. He holds my hands-whatever he makes me do, I do."

Gradually Swamiji became calm. Noticing Vijnanananda's embarrassment, he said with a smile, "Can a nation rise or become great unless the primordial energy that lies dormant in women is awakened? I have travelled all over the world and found that women are neglected more or less everywhere, but this is particularly deplorable in India. That is why our nation has been degraded to such an extent. As soon as there is an awakening in women, you will see that the whole nation will rise up in its pristine glory. For that reason Holy Mother has come. With her advent there has been a stir among the women of all countries. This is just the beginning; you will see many more things later."

A great soul sees greatness in others.

In the last years of his life, Swamiji's mind was mostly absorbed in God-consciousness. One day Swamiji remarked, "I cannot say anything to Peshan because I see the Master in him." To this Vijnanananda responded, "The Master dwells in everything. It is no wonder that you see the Master in me through your divine sight." "No, Peshan," said Swamiji. "It is not like that. I see distinctly that the Master has made his habitat in you nicely."

Vijnanananda humbly replied, "Swamiji, you see whatever you want; but I don't understand it."

With Holy Mother

Vijnanananda had great love and respect for Holy Mother, but he seldom visited her in Calcutta. One day he went with Swamiji to Balaram's house in Calcutta while Holy Mother was staying there. Swamiji asked, "Peshan, did you salute Holy Mother?" "No, Swamiji, I did not." "What! Go right now and bow down to the Mother," said Swamiji. Accordingly, Vijnanananda went to Holy Mother and bowed down to her from a distance, bending his head to the floor. As soon as Vijnanananda got up, from behind he heard Swamiji say, "What is this, Peshan? Does anybody salute the Holy Mother in this way? Bow down to her by prostrating yourself on the floor. Holy Mother is the Mother of the Universe." Swamiji then prostrated himself to the Mother, and Vijnanananda did likewise. Later Vijnanananda remarked, "I could not imagine that Swamiji would follow me to the Mother."

About the Master

Another time Vijnanananda asked Swamiji, "Well, does the Master accept the food which we offer in the shrine?" "Yes, he does," replied Swamiji. "A ray comes out from his third eye and touches the food. If you want, I can show it to you today in the shrine." Vijnanananda fully believed what Swamiji said, and proceeded no further. This mutual love and trust of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples made their lives joyful.

[To be continued in the next edition of Reach]

Source:

1. *God lived with them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna* by Swami Chetanananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, pp. 596-602.



The Real Man Behind

"So, call it as Self or anything, it is our Atman. This Atman is the real man behind. It is the Atman that uses the material mind as its instrument, its Antahkarana, as is the psychological term for the mind. And the mind by means of a series of internal organs works the visible organs of the body. What is this mind? It was only the other day that Western philosophers have come to know that the eyes are not the real organs of vision, but that behind these are other organs, the Indriyas and if these are destroyed, a man may have a thousand eyes, like Indra, but there will be no sight for him. Ay, your philosophy starts with this assumption that by vision is not meant the external vision. The real vision belongs to the internal organs, the brain-centres inside. You may call them what you like, but it is not that the Indriyas are the eyes or the nose or the ears. **And the sum total of all these Indriyas plus the Manas, Buddhi, Chitta, Ahamkara, etc., is what is called the mind** and if the modern physiologist comes to tell you that the brain is what is called the mind and that the brain is formed of so many organs, you need not be afraid at all; tell him that your philosophers knew it always; it is one of the very first principles of your religion."

Perception

"A grain of sand enters into the shell of a pearl oyster and sets up an irritation there and the oyster's body reacts towards the irritation and covers the little particle with its own juice. That crystallises and forms the pearl. **So the whole universe is like that, it is the pearl which is being formed by us. What we get from the external world is simply the blow. Even to be conscious of that blow we have to react and as soon as we react, we really project a portion of our own mind towards the blow and when we come to know of it, it is really our own mind as it has been shaped by the blow.**"

- - - Swami Vivekananda