



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.”**

Sayings and Teachings

Attainment of the Supreme Self

A man who spends his time in discussing the good and bad qualities of others simply wastes his own time. For it is time spent neither in thinking about one’s own self nor about the Supreme Self, but in fruitless thinking of others’ selves

— **Sri Ramakrishna**

Great sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, The R. M. Institute of Culture, Kolkata, p. 2-3

Concentration of the mind

A disciple had written “I cannot calm my mind and concentrate” and so on. Mother became agitated at these words and said, “It can be done if one repeats the Name fifteen or twenty thousand times each day. I have seen it actually happen. Let him do that first and talk afterwards if it fails. One must put one’s mind to it. But no, no one will do that. They only complain, “Why does nothing come of it?”

— **Sri Sarada Devi**

Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai, p. 42

Unity amidst the variation

The work of ethics has been, and will be in the future, not the destruction of variation and the establishment of sameness in the external world, which is impossible, for it would bring death and annihilation-but to recognise the unity in spite of all these variations, to recognise the God within, in spite of everything that frightens us, to recognise that infinite strength as the property of everyone in spite of all apparent weakness, and to recognise the eternal, infinite, essential purity of the soul in spite of everything to the contrary that appears on the surface.

— **Swami Vivekananda**

Teachings of Swami Vivekananda by Swami Mumukshananda Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas, p. 89



Durga Puja

Worship of God as Mother has prevailed from prehistoric times. Worship of the Divine Mother is prevalent all over India - from Kanyakumari (famous for its Kanyakumari temple) to Kashmir (Kshirbhavani temple) and from Rajasthan (Amba temple) to Kolkata (Kalighat temple). Although the Divine Mother is only one, Her manifestations are many.

The Divine Mother is regarded as having "Ten Great Wisdom Forms". These ten Goddesses are:

Kali, Tara, Tripura Sundari Bhuvaneshwari, Bhairavi Chhinnamasta, Dhumavati Bagalamukhi, Saraswati (Matangi) and Lakshmi.

Navaratri and Durga Puja

The nine days from the first day after the new moon (known as Mahalaya) in the Indian month of Ashwin to the 9th day constitute

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Welcome

We welcome you all to the Ramakrishna - Vedanta Movement and invite you to attend our programs 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.

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News from the Centres

May to August 2015

Adelaide

email: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com

Contact: Dr Raman Sharma – (08) 8431 9775
Mrs Pathma Iswaran – (08) 8379 5336

Regular Activities:

- a) Swami Sridharanandaji visited Adelaide from April 2-4, May 7-9, June 11-13 and July 23-25 and continued with his 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, which have been recorded.
- b) Every month on a prescheduled Sunday readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, including discussion on relevant points, were conducted at devotees' homes.

Other Activities:

- a) The Annual Celebration of the Adelaide Chapter was held on Saturday May 9 at the Dulwich Community Centre from 9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m. A group of devotees sang bhajans while Swami Sunishthananda performed the traditional worship. Swami Sunishthananda also spoke on *The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*. Swami Sridharananda was also present. Many devotees participated in the function and later enjoyed the prasada.



- b) The Annual General Meeting of the Vedanta Centres of Sydney-Adelaide Chapter was held on Saturday July 25 from 1:00 p.m. in the Coopers Room, Burnside Community Centre, 401 Greenhill Road, Tasmore SA 5065.

Auckland

27 Arawa Street, New Lynn, Auckland

<http://www.rkvc.org.nz/>

Email: monnay@ihug.co.nz

Contact: Mr M. Kumar

Activities:

- a) Vesper service was held daily from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in the Centre. It included the singing of hymns and readings from *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* followed by meditation.
- b) On the second Sunday of every month satsang programmes which include the singing of bhajans, discourse on the Ramayana, readings and discussions on the lives of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, reading and discussion on *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* and meditation were conducted from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

- c) On the last Sunday of every month readings and discussions on the Bhagavad Gītā, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and the life and teachings of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi were conducted. The program started at 11:00 a.m. and concluded at 1:00 p.m. with Prasad distribution.

Celebrations:

- a) Buddha **Purnima** was celebrated on 4 May 2015. The program started at 8:00 p.m. with bhajans, after arati. Devotees talked on the life and teachings of Bhagavan Buddha. The program concluded at 9:00 p.m. with prasada distribution.
- b) Guru **Purnima** was celebrated on 31 July 2015. The program began at 8:00 p.m. after evening arati. The Program started with bhajans and included a talk on Sri Ramakrishna as Guru and a talk on the parallels between Lord Dakshinamoorthy and Sri Ramakrishna. The program ended at 9:00 p.m. with prasada distribution.

Upcoming Celebrations:

- a) Durga Puja 20 October 2015,
- b) Christmas Eve 24 December 2015

Brisbane

12 Greenwood Street, Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300

Tel:- 07 3818 9986

Email: info@vedantabrisbane.org

Contact: Swami Atmeshananda

Daily activities:

Worship was conducted daily in the morning.

In the evening *ārati* including bhajans and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted at the Centre.

Regular Activities:

The Centre conducted the following programmes:

- Yoga Classes on Sunday mornings by Dr. Unnikrishnan Pillai.
- Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* classes on Sundays.
- 'Bala Sangha' - moral and spiritual classes for children on Sundays
- Religious Instruction classes at a school in Brisbane held every Wednesday
- A satsang was held on the first Saturday of every month.
- Discussion groups on the first Monday of every month in Sunnybank Hills, Qld
- A class on *Ashtavakra Samhita* on alternate Thursdays at Springfield, Qld
- A class on Meditation and Spiritual Life on alternate Fridays
- A class on *Viveka Chudamani* at Toowoomba held monthly
- Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was sung every fortnight on Ekadashi days.
- A Sanskrit class for beginners was conducted on Tuesdays.

Other activities:

- Swami Atmeshananda visited Townsville from the 26th to 28th June 2015 for talks organised by the local group. He spoke on three occasions including one at the University of Central Queensland.
- The centre moved its premises from Chapel Hill to Springfield Lakes, Qld on the 1st August 2015. A special worship was conducted on the occasion which also coincided with Guru Purnima. Swami Sridharanandaji attended the programme and gave a talk.



New premises at Springfield Lakes

- A bookstall was organised by the devotees at the India fair held at Roma Street, Parklands in Brisbane on the 15th August 2015. Another stall was organised on the 29th August 2015 at the Pacifica fair at Goodna, Qld (a suburb of Ipswich).

Celebrations:

- Buddha Purnima was celebrated at the Centre on Saturday, 9th May. Chanting of hymns from the Dhammapada and other Buddhist texts, bhajans and a talk on the significance of the life of Lord Buddha were the important aspects of the programme.



Annual Day program— guest of honour lighting lamp

- The Centre held its Annual programme on Saturday, 20th June 2015. The event consisted of cultural programmes (classical dance, music etc), a talk by Revered Swami Sridharanandaji, a presentation about the Vedanta Centre in Springfield Lakes by Richard Weingarten and a speech by Tarnya Smith, MP and Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs. More than 450 persons attended the event.

Forthcoming programmes:

- Sri Krishna Janmashtami 5th September 2015
- Sri Sri Durga Puja 8th October 2015
- Christmas Eve 24th December 2015

Canberra

Registered Address:

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT - 2617

Email: jaishankar_venkataraman@hotmail.com

Contact: Jaishankar Venkataraman 0433 59 3860

Regular activities:

The Centre conducted the following programmes:

- Regular monthly talks on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* were conducted by Swami Sridharananda during the months of May, June and July. Lectures will be continued in October once Swamiji returns from the US lecture tour.

Forthcoming programmes:

- The Chapter will hold its AGM in November.

Melbourne

5-7 Angus Avenue, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Suresh Ravinutala – 0413 040 599

The Centre maintains a bookstall with various literature for sale in print, audio, and visual media on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta philosophy and other spiritual topics.

Daily activities:

Worship was held every morning at 7:30 a.m.

Vesper service was conducted in the evening from 7 p.m. and this included the chanting of hymns, devotional singing, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation.

Weekly-Monthly Activities:

The Centre conducted the following programmes:

- Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the *Bhagavad-Gītā* from the Thursday to the Saturday of a prescheduled week at the Centre. The Thursday and Friday sessions were held from 7:45 to 9 p.m. and the Saturdays sessions were held from 11:00 a.m to 12:15 p.m. The recordings of these discourses are available in audio, video and MP3 formats for purchase.
- Group study through the viewing of the *Bhagavad-Gita* lecture series on video were held on Sundays from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Regular satsanga was held on the first Sunday of every month and conducted by Swami Chandrashekharananda.

Swami Chandrashekharananda conducted the following programmes in Melbourne:

- Classes on the *Kathopanishad* on Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.
- Meditation sessions on Sundays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
- Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* revision and discussions through video/audio on Tuesdays from 2:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Other activities:

- A Spiritual Retreat was held on Saturday 27th of June 2015 from 9:15 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Apart from chanting, *bhajans* and group discussions, Swami Sridharananda delivered two talks on the topic “*Spiritual Practices in our daily Lives*” followed by an interactive question-answer session. Thirty spiritual seekers attended the Spiritual Retreat.
- Farewell to Swami Chandrashekharananda: The Melbourne centre had the privilege of having Swami Chandrashekharananda as the resident monk for the past almost two years. Swamiji has now been posted to the Vedanta Centre at Portland, USA and he left Melbourne on 1st July 2015 to Belur Math India on his way to USA. The Society hosted a special satsanga on 28th June 2015 to bid him farewell. A large number of devotees attended the event and Swamiji spoke about the importance of Satsanga (prayer meetings) in our spiritual development. Many devotees spoke warmly about Swamiji’s contributions to the Society and his spiritual guidance during this period.

Forthcoming programmes:

- Sri Krishna Janmashtami: 5th September 2015
- Christmas Eve: 24th December 2015

Perth

51 Golf View Street, Yokine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact:

Hiren Mukhopadhyay Secretary 0411 478 244
Parthiv Parekh Asst. Secretary 0430 511 699

Daily activities:

A vesper service is held daily at 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Centre. It includes *arati*, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* followed by meditation

Regular Activities:

- Discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* were held on 1st–2nd May, 4th–6th June and 9th–11th July at the Centre
- Monthly satsangas including Dhyanam and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were held at the Centre followed by prasad distribution.
- Revision Classes of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* talk was held on 16th July

Forthcoming programmes:

- Sunday satsang will be held on 6th September 2015

Sydney

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115
www.vedantaaustralia.org/

Tel:- 02 8197 7351

Email: vedasydney@gmail.com

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 Gitā*, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanisad*, and other topics are also available in various media.

The centre's library is available to devotees for reference and research.

Daily activities:

- Worship and meditation were held every morning from 6:45 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.
- Vesper service was conducted in the evening from 7 p.m. and included devotional singing, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation.
- Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees were conducted on a daily basis.

Regular Activities:

The Centre conducted the following programmes:

- Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* every Sunday morning from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Centre.
- 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.
- Some devotees availed themselves of spiritual counselling and guidance. The Swamis also visited the homes of devotees when required.
- Katha Upanisad* classes were conducted on Wednesdays after evening *ārati* by Swami Sunishthananda.

- Meditation sessions conducted by Swami Sunishthananda were held at the Centre on Sundays from 5 p.m. to 6.15 p.m.
- 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.
- Sri Rāmanāma* was sung on *Ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- A class on *Meditation and Scriptural Studies* for ladies was held every Monday from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. by Swami Sunishthananda.
- The meetings of the Vivekananda Study Circle were held on Saturdays from 5:00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
- A session on Yoga Exercise continued to be held on Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Other activities:

- A Spiritual Retreat was held on Saturday 4th of July 2015 from 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Apart from chanting, bhajans, reading inspiring texts and following these with discussions, Swami Sridharananda delivered two talks on the topics "The Attainment of Real Freedom and Happiness" and "How Illumined Souls Live in the World" followed by an interactive question-answer session. Forty five delegates attended the Spiritual Retreat

Celebrations:

- On Saturday, 31st of July 2015, **Guru Purnima** was celebrated in the evening. The programme started with special worship after the evening aratrikam followed by rendering of bhajans by Ms. Chirasmitta Chakraborty, a talk on the topic 'Significance of Guru Purnima' delivered by Swami Sunishthananda and a Skit by the children of the Bala Sangha. About two hundred and fifty people attended the celebration.

Forthcoming programmes:

- Sri Krishna Janmashthami: , 5th September 2015
- Durga Puja: Wednesday, 21st October 2015
- Annual Day : Saturday, 7th November 2015
- Christmas Eve: Thursday, 24th December 2015

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the festival of Navaratri which is observed all over India. During this period, the Divine Mother is worshipped in some form or other. The tenth day is known as Dassera. In the northern parts of India, on this day the life of Rama (known as *Ramlila*) is enacted in public. In many parts of India, on this day weapons, implements, instruments, etc are worshipped.

The most striking aspect of Durga Puja is the image of the Divine Mother as Mahishasura-mardini. Here the Divine Mother is seen as



having ten arms, each wielding a weapon. [Hence She is described as Dasha-prahara-dharini.] Once the image is consecrated, and the Deity is invoked in it, it undergoes a

transfiguration. It is no longer a clay image but the living Goddess, radiating power, knowledge, love and joy, the benign Mother of the Universe who has come to bless Her children and to assure them of Her love, help and protection.

Navaratri 2015 dates are from October 13 to October 22, 2015 .

Source

http://www.belurmath.org/durga_puja/article_on_durga_puja.htm

The divine relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi

Introduction

When Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother came to Dakshineswar, on the instruction of Sri Ramakrishna, her life of sadhana improved steadily and she became absorbed in it. Holy Mother has narrated her feelings at that time:

How the days passed. In the moonlit night, looking at the moon with folded hands, I would pray, 'Make my mind pure like your cooling grace!' When the moon appeared in the sky at night, seeing the reflection of the moon in the water of the Ganges, I would pray to the Lord with tearful eyes, 'There is a little blemish even in the moon. But let there not be anything in my mind.'

Holy Mother's mantras

Sri Ramakrishna instructed Mother about the mantras of many Gods and Goddesses whom he had worshipped in his life and Mother had practised all these mantras in her own life. Sri Ramakrishna had made Mother conversant with the intricacies of spiritual life in various ways. He had drawn on paper the kundalini and the six chakras and had given it to Mother. The amount of 'japa' and 'purashcharana' (taking a vow to repeat the mantra a certain number of times for a fixed period) Mother had done is shown from the lakhs of 'japas' she had performed without completing which she would not take anything in the morning for breakfast. Even in the later days of her life, she was very particular in performing japa and meditation daily. Even during her sickness, Mother would get up very early in the morning and finish her morning ablutions in the open field. After that, seated on the bed itself, with legs stretched and a blanket on her, she would begin performing japa.

Mother had a tulsi mala and a rudraksha mala for japa. Usually she would perform japa once early in the morning during Brahma-Muhurta, the next at the time of puja, the third during the afternoon and the final one at night. This had become her



Sri Ramakrishna - Sri Sarada Devi

regular habit and she rarely skipped it. One evening, when she started doing japa while she was not well, an attendant told her, "Mother, this is not good for you. What is the necessity for you to practise? You have achieved everything. Why are you taxing your body unnecessarily?" At this Mother replied, "My dear child, what are my disciples doing? Whether they perform their japa or not, I do not know. For their sake, I do something." On another day another attendant told her, "Mother, you do not sleep at night. Whenever I come out of my room, you ask, 'Who is it?' From this we understand you don't have a good sleep at night." To this, Mother would say, "My child, how can I sleep? Many have taken diksha from me. They are not able to do anything. All my time is spent in doing something for them."

Bhava and Samadhi

When Mother first came to Dakshineswar, she did not know anything about bhava and Samadhi. Hence, whenever she saw Sri Ramakrishna in Samadhi or bhava, she would become frightened. She too had to pass all these stages and finally had the experience of 'Nirvikalpa' Samadhi. Yogen-Ma, the long-standing companion of the Holy Mother told us, "...I came to the Nahabat...I opened the door a little and saw the Mother laughing heartily. Now she was laughing and a little after she was weeping. Tears were

flowing continuously from her eyes. After some time, she became calm and steady- she was in Samadhi."

"Somebody was playing the flute one night. Mother entered into bhava on hearing the flute recital-she was laughing continuously."

"In Nilambar Babu's house in Belur, one evening, Mother, Golap-Ma, and I were seated side by side on the terrace meditating. When my meditation was over, I saw that the Mother was completely absorbed without any movement-no breathing even-she was in Samadhi. When she came to consciousness at long last, she said, 'Oh Yogen! Where are my hands? Where are my feet?' We pressed Mother's hands and feet and showed her...Even then she could not feel her body and got back her senses only after a long time."

At Dakshineswar, somebody would play the flute at night. "The Lord himself is playing on the flute." Thinking thus Mother would go into samadhi simply upon hearing the sound of the flute. That was bhava-samadhi or savikalpa samadhi. The samadhi, which occurred on the terrace of the house at Belur, was the state of Nirvikalpa samadhi. This could be understood as such from the words of Mother after she came out of it.

Some of Mother's statements regarding sadhana

Mother's teachings regarding sad-

hana and its results are encompassed in the following selected incidents:

“Only by long practice of austerities, the mind becomes pure. Without sadhana we can never attain the Lord. If you realize God, will you get a pair of horns on your head? No! The mind becomes pure and as a result there is an awakening of the consciousness.”

“Narendra used to tell me, ‘Mother, nowadays, everything is vanishing from my mind. I find everything is flying.’ I replied, ‘See my child, do not allow your mind to efface me.’ Narendra replied, ‘Mother, if you fly away from my mind, what will remain? He who forgets the feet of his guru when

enough, he suffered from poor digestion, and the *prasāda* of Kali did not suit him. There was cooking for the devotees too. Latu was there. The Master said, “He is a fine boy. He will knead the dough for you.” There was no end to cooking, night or day. Ram Datta, for instance, came there and called out as soon as he alighted from the carriage, “I shall take today gram soup and *chapāti*.” No sooner had I heard this, than I started cooking here. There used to be *chapātis* made out of six to eight pounds of flour. Rakhal stayed here (with the Master); very often *khichudi* was cooked for him. Surendra Mitra used to pay ten rupees every month for the expenses of the devotees. Senior Gopal used to get things from the

floor of the Nahabat and cooked below the staircase. She was too shy to come out during the day. Yogin-ma thus described the Mother’s daily routine at the Nahabat: ‘Finishing her bath before four o’clock in the morning the Holy Mother sat for meditation; for the Master used to insist on meditation. Then she commenced her worship after finishing her other duties. The worship, japa and meditation would take about an hour and a half. Then she sat for cooking under the staircase. When the cooking was over, if she got the opportunity, she would rub oil on the Master’s body before his bath. The Master sat for his dinner between half past ten and eleven. Whenever he went for his bath, the Mother hur-

“If you realise God, will you get a pair of horns? No! The mind becomes pure and as a result there is an awakening of the consciousness.”

knowledge comes, is still in a state of ignorance. If the guru’s feet are allowed to vanish, on what will knowledge stand?’” When knowledge comes, Iswar and other concepts vanish. But Mother encompasses the whole world.

“Through japa and meditation, the evil effects of your karma are removed, but you cannot feel God without ‘prema-bhakti...through japa and meditation you can control your senses...did the cowherds of Brindavan get Krishna through prayers and meditation? No! They would call Krishna formally, ‘O Krishna, Come, eat and take!’-They would address him like this and finally got him!”

The Nahabat

Apart from the few days that the Mother lived in the thatched house built by Shambu Babu, she spent the rest of her Dakshineswar days in the small Nahabat. Those days were extremely uncomfortable days and the Mother, too, felt similarly. She said, “When I was at the Nahabat for serving the Master, in what discomfort I had to live in that small room, and what a lot of things lay huddled together there! Sometimes, I was all alone...Golap, Gaur-dasi and others stayed there now and then. Extremely small though the room was, yet in it was carried on cooking, sleeping, eating, - why, everything. Cooking was done for the Master, for often

market. In the beginning my head would strike frequently against the doorframe as I entered the room; one day I even suffered a bad cut. But gradually I got used to it, and my head would bend as I approached the door. Women from Calcutta used to come to visit me, and standing at the doorway and holding the doorframe on either side with both hands, they would say, “Alas! In what a room our dear good lady is living - it’s like living in banishment.” I used to bathe at four in the morning. Whenever there was a little sunshine on the steps in the afternoon, I used to get my hair sunned. There was only one room on the ground floor of the Nahabat, and that was stacked with goods. Overhead were slings on which was hung potful of domestic titbits. The worst source of inconvenience was inadequacy of the facilities for bathing and personal cleanliness. Through forced confinement I developed physical trouble...and those fisherwomen were my companions. When they came for a bath in the Ganges, they kept their baskets on the verandah and went down for their dip. They talked a lot with me and took away their baskets when returning home. At night I heard the fishermen sing as they caught fish.”

Mother’s daily routine at the Nahabat

The Mother lived on the ground

riedly prepared betel rolls for him. When he returned, the Mother would spread a small carpet for him to sit on for his meal, and keep ready a glass of drinking water. Then she would carry to him a plate of food. As he sat for his meal, she would converse on various topics just taking care lest his meal should be spoiled by any upsurge of spiritual emotion. None but the Mother could prevent such sudden upsurges during meal time.

When the Master had finished eating, Mother would hurriedly take something herself and drink a glass of water. Then she would make betel rolls. That over, she would sing in a low tone, and that very cautiously, lest should she be overheard. Then when the mill blew the whistle at one o’clock, she sat down for her food, so that her lunch was never finished before half past one or two. After food she would take some nominal rest and then would sit down on the steps at about three for drying her hair. Then she would turn to trimming the lights and doing other odd bits of work, and then get ready for evening duties after somehow washing her body and clothes with the little water she kept in the Nahabat. When evening came, she would light the lamps and after waving the censer with the burning incense before the deities, sit for meditation. Cooking for the night usually followed this, and the Mother would have her

supper after all had finished. At last she would lie down after a little respite.

Once, before dawn, when she was getting down the steps for a bath in the Ganges she almost trod on a crocodile which, taking alarm at the Mother's approach, jumped into the river. Thenceforth, she never went for a bath without a lantern.

Numerous inconveniences and handicaps, heavy duties and troubles were there; but the Mother never really worried about them. Afterwards, when casually alluding to all these troubles, she would sum up saying, 'yet I knew no other suffering...no discomfort could touch me if it was for his (Master's) service. The day passed on joyously and quietly amidst everything'.

Living near the great Master The Holy Mother, whose life re-

Analogy of the parrots

The Master was not, of course, unmindful of her comforts; on the contrary he tried to keep her happy in every way. He called that little room a cage, surrounded as it was by bamboo chips. Lakshmi Devi, his niece, too, often stayed there. The Master called them, in fun, a pair of parrots. When Mother Kali's *prasāda* was sent from the temple to the Master's room, he said to his nephew Ramlal, 'Hullo! There is that pair of parrots in the cage. Carry to them some gram and fruits.' New-comers naturally thought that there were some real birds; even Master Mahashaya laboured long under that wrong impression. When Lakshmi Devi was not there, the thought of the rheumatism and loneliness of the Holy Mother worried the Master very much. He said to her, 'If a wild bird lives in a cage it becomes rheu-

warmly attached to the Mother as she was to him. Gauri-Ma once said, "Though these two sometimes did not see each other for six months together, in spite of being only about seventy five feet apart, how deep was their love indeed for each other." Once when the Mother had a headache the Master felt extremely anxious and went on asking Ramlal, 'O Ramlal, why does that headache trouble her?'

The Master saw to it that the Mother was not needlessly overburdened with work, busy as she was the whole day. Once, while on a walk with Rakkhal in the garden of Beni Pal of Sinthi, he came across some ghosts who implored him to leave the garden, as the holy atmosphere he diffused around him was too strong for them to bear. It had been arranged earlier that he would spend the night in the garden; but the im-

"If but I were one of the devotees over there, I would then be ever so near the Master, and would hear so many things."

involved round the Master alone, had seldom even a distant view of him. She said, "Sometimes even during as long a period as two months, I couldn't see him even once. I composed myself by saying, 'O Mind, what merit have you earned that you will get his *darshan* (sight) every day?' Standing erect (behind the screen of plaited bamboo chips, with which the veranda of the Nahabat was surrounded), I used to hear the lines that he sometimes added extempore to the *kirtana* songs. This produced rheumatism.'

Though the Mother was then physically separated from the Master her heart ever hovered around him. The number of devotees visiting the Master at that time was quite considerable, and throughout the day and till late into the night there was a continuous flow of music solo or choral, dancing, and ecstatic moods. The Mother saw and heard these and thought, "If but I were one of the devotees over there, I would then be ever so near the Master, and would hear so many things." Mother stated about this period, 'in what bliss I was! What a curiously mixed crowd of people came to see him then! Dakshineswar used then to be a mart of joy!'

matic; you should go out now and then to have a stroll in the neighbourhood'. He did not stop with this. When visitors had left the temple premises at noon, he would go to her and ask her to walk out through the backdoor to spend some time with the wife of one Sri Pandye. The Mother used to return after the evening services when the Panchavati side became quiet again.

A unique relationship

Sometimes the Master created funny situations as though to impress on others the unique intimacy of the relationship that he had with the Mother. Once when a discussion arose whether the Master or a certain devotee had a fairer skin, the Master appointed the Mother as the umpire. He told her that she would have to watch them and formulate her opinion as they walked by the Nahabat northward of the Panchavati. The Master's colour was at that time fair and bright like pure gold and could hardly be distinguished from the gold amulet on his arm. Yet, the Mother, an impartial judge, pronounced her verdict in favour of his rival.

In fact, the current of love of this divine couple was equally strong at either bank; the Master was as

portunity of the spirits made him change the plan at once. He called a carriage and returned to the temple premises at dead of night when the gate was closed. He got it opened and walked in. The Mother, whose mind was ever eager for any opportunity of service to him, got up at the sound of his steps and said to the maid servant, 'O Jadu's -mother, how shall we manage?' They were talking in the Nahabat; but the Master's careful ears caught the sound. He sized up the situation at once and said, 'Don't you worry, my dears, we have had our meal already.'

The question of the Mother's maintenance after his passing away was also present in his mind. Though detachment from worldly affairs was a point of faith with him, he asked the mother, "How much money would you require for your personal needs?" The Mother replied, "I can manage with, say, five or six rupees." Then he inquired, "How many *chapātis* do you eat in the evening?" The Mother blushed at this personal question and hung her head in shame without answering. But the Master went on repeating his question and she had to reply at last. "Say, five or six." On that basis the master calculated and said, "Then it will be quite enough if you have five

or six hundred rupees.” Afterwards he deposited that amount of money with Balaram Babu who invested it in his own estate and sent her thirty rupees every half year as the accruing income.

Sri Ramakrishna's respect and honour towards Mother

Sri Sarada Devi said, “I was fortunate to be wedded to a husband who never addressed me as thou (*tui*). The Master never hurt me even with a flower, never called me ‘thou’ in place of ‘you’ (*tumi*). One day the Mother carried to the Master’s room his scanty dishes consisting of very thin pieces of cake and semolina porridge. As she was leaving the room after placing the dishes at the proper place, the Master thought it was his niece Lakshmi and called out, “Mind, thou (*tui*) shut the door.” The Mother said, “Yes, here I close it.” Recognizing the Mother’s voice, he became greatly embarrassed and apologetic, “Ah, it’s you! I thought it was Lakshmi. Don’t you mind this.” That unintentional disrespect upset him so much that the very next morning he went to the Mother’s door and said, “Look here, my dear, I had no sleep last night, because of brooding over my rudeness to you.” As an illustration of the honour with which the Holy Mother was held by the Master who regarded all women as the veritable manifestation of the Mother of the Universe, he told the devotees that he saluted the Mother after she had rubbed his feet. On another occasion he said, “I wanted to go to a certain place. When the Mother was consulted she forbade me; I gave up the idea.”

Though the Master honoured the Mother and treated her with utmost consideration, he knew that there was a wide difference between them in age and experience. Moreover, there was none else to instruct the Mother either about worldly matters or about spiritual practices. So he gladly shouldered the duty. For instance, he said to the Mother, “One has to work; women should not sit idle, for if one sits idle, many vain thoughts may crop up.” The Mother once said, “He brought me some raw jute and said, “Twist this and make slings for me; I shall keep in them sweets etc. for the boys. I twisted it into strings and made slings; and with the waste fibres and

a piece of thick cloth I made a pillow. I used to spread a coarse mat over a piece of hessian and put that pillow under my head. I slept as soundly on those things as I do now on these (cots etc.). I don’t feel any difference, my child.”

Domain of Motherhood

Though the Mother was very shy and effaced herself completely, subduing herself to the will of the Master, yet in one respect she maintained her independence and that was in the domain of her motherhood. The following instances are evidence of her motherhood:

There used to be an old woman - who lived a somewhat loose life in her youth- who used to come to visit the Mother. Now, like a devotee, she prayed to the Lord and often came alone to the Mother who talked in a friendly spirit. Noticing this, the Master once said, “Why is that woman here?” The Mother expostulated, “She talks now only of Hari. What’s the harm in that?” The Mother knew that human nature changes, that people repent and become good. On the other hand, the Master’s sense of duty warned him that the Holy Mother should be protected from the company of persons who may come with impure motives.

When visitors became more numerous and fruits and sweets and other offerings were placed at the feet of the Master, he used to send these to the Nahabat. It was found, however, that apart from the little needed for the Master, the Mother did not care to retain them, but gave them away freely to the women and young devotees and the children of the neighbourhood who visited her. Her Mother’s heart would not allow her to send away any visitor or devotee without giving him or her some fruit or sweet. In this she was liberal to a fault. One day when she had thus used up everything, Golap’s Mother cried out, “My dear daughter-in-law, why have you not reserved anything for my Gopal?” The Mother hung her head in shame. Just then Navagopal Babu’s wife alighted from a carriage and hand over to her some sweets and saved the situation. The Master too knew of this extravagance and argued with her one day in his room. “How can it be managed if there is such extravagance?” At this the Mother

quietly turned her back and walked way to the Nahabat. The Master now was in a quandary and said to his nephew, Ramlal, “Hullo Ramlal, go and pacify your aunt. If she gets angry, everything will be undone with this (pointing to his body).” This was a voluntary defeat of the Master before the blossoming motherhood of Sarada Devi. On reflection, the Mother said, “Well, my dear, whatever you may say, I shan’t be able to turn away anybody if he addresses me as Mother.”

This was made abundantly clear to the Master through the following incident. As the Mother felt too shy to come into the Master’s room in the presence of others, the room was cleared of people at night to enable her to serve the Master his food. One night, when she had just stepped onto the veranda of the Master’s room, a woman devotee suddenly came up and snatched away the plate of food saying, “Give it to me, Mother, give it to me.” The woman placed the plate before the Master and left as quickly. The Master sat down for his meal; the Mother too sat by him. But he could not touch the food and said looking at the Mother, “What’s this you have done? Why did you give it into her hands? Don’t you know her? She is immoral. How can I now eat what has been defiled by her?” “I know all that,” said the Mother, “but do please take this tonight.” The Master would still not touch it, but at the Mother’s importunity said, “Promise that you won’t hand it over to anybody hereafter.” With folded hands the Mother replied, “That I cannot, master! I shall certainly bring your food, but if anyone begs me by calling me ‘Mother’, I shan’t be able to contain myself. Besides, you are not my Master alone, you are for all.” That cheered up the Master and he began eating.

Source:

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, pp. 74-85.

The Compassionate Mother Sri Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Tanmayananda, Sri Sarada Sanga Malaysia, 2002, pp. 63-69.

Swami Vivekananda

Continued from the previous issue

After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away

Introduction:

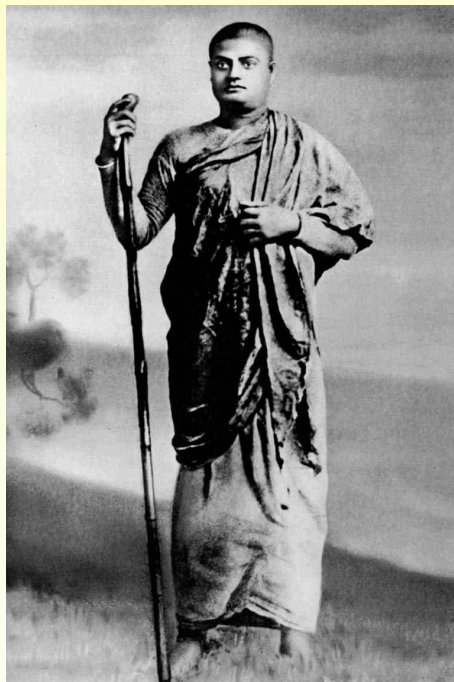
Ramakrishna passed away on Sunday, 16th August 1886, plunging his devotees into an ocean of grief. The young disciples wanted to continue worshipping Ramakrishna's relics at the Cossipore garden house, but they had no means to support themselves. The householder devotees, who had supported the Master, asked them to return home. However, three disciples had already left home forever, and they had no place to go. Narendra was helpless.

One evening early in September, while Suren Nath Mitra was meditating in his household shrine, Ramakrishna appeared to him and said, "What are you doing here? My boys are roaming about, without a place to live. Attend to that, before anything else." Hearing the Master's command, Surendra hurried to Narendra and told him everything that had happened. He promised to provide the same amount of money every month as he had given for the Cossipore house prior to Ramakrishna's passing. Immediately Narendra and the disciples began to search for a house, and found one at Baranagore, midway between Dakshineswar and Calcutta. Dreary, dilapidated, and deserted, it was a building that had a reputation of being haunted by evil spirits. It had two storeys; the lower one was infested with lizards and snakes. This house was chosen because of its low rent and proximity to the Cossipore burning-ghat, where the master's body had been cremated.

The first Ramakrishna monastery at Baranagore

Mahendranath Gupta, known as M. wrote about the first Ramakrishna monastery at Baranagore in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

na: "The members of the Math (monastery) called themselves the 'danas' and 'daityas', which means the 'ghosts' and the 'demons', the companions of Shiva. They took these names because of their utter indifference to worldly pleasures and relationships...Narendra and the other members of the Math often spent their evenings on the roof. There they had devoted a great deal of time to discussion of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Je-



Swami Vivekananda at Jaipur, 1891

sus Christ, and of Hindu philosophy, European philosophy, the Vedas, the Puranas and the Tantras."

In later years, Narendra reminisced about the early days in the monastery:

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, we underwent a lot of religious practice at the Baranagore Math (monastery). We used to get up at 3.00am and after washing our faces etc, we would sit in the shrine and become absorbed in japam and meditation. What a strong spirit of

dispassion we had in those days! We had no thought even as to whether the world existed or not...There were days when the japam and meditation continued from morning till four or five in the afternoon. Ramakrishnananda waited and waited with our meals ready, till at last he would come and snatch us from our meditation by sheer force...there were days when the monastery was without a grain of food. If rice was collected by begging, there was no salt to take with it! On some days there would be only rice and salt, but nobody cared for it in the least. We were then being carried away by a tidal wave of spiritual practice. Oh, those wonderful days!

In the middle of December 1886, Narendra and eight other disciples went to Antpur, the birthplace of Baburam (later, Swami Premananda) for a retreat. One night they made a fire in the courtyard and sat around it for meditation. Suddenly Narendra was inspired to talk about Christ's love and renunciation and his self-sacrifice for the good of humanity. In front of that sacred fire, the disciples vowed to embrace the monastic life. In a joyous mood they returned to their rooms and someone discovered after it was Christmas Eve—all felt doubly blest. After a week of retreat, they returned to Baranagore, and in the early part of 1887, took formal monastic vows. Narendra took the name of Swami Vividishananda. Later, prior to his journey to America, he changed his name to Swami Vivekananda at the request of Raja Ajit Singh of Khetri.

Many years later, Narendra said to one of his disciples, "One eye shed tears of grief when I left home, because I hated to leave my mother, grandfather, brothers, and sisters; and the other eye

shed tears of joy for my ideal". Luxury and too many material possessions take the mind away from God. That is why most mystics remove themselves from family ties and worldly possessions. This is one of the initial tests of a spiritual journey. God embraces those souls and makes everything favourable for them who are endowed with purity and renunciation, poverty and humility, devotion and longing.

As a wandering monk

There is a saying, "The monk is pure who goes, and the river is pure that flows." In 1888 Vivekananda left the monastery to live

tionmaster, whom he accepted as a disciple. When Sharat asked the swami to stay with him longer, he replied, "My son, I have a great mission to fulfil. My guru asked me to dedicate my life to the regeneration of my motherland. Spirituality has fallen to low ebb and starvation stalks the land. India must become dynamic again and earn respect of the world through her spiritual power."

One day during his travels in the Himalayas, Vivekananda sat for meditation under a pipal tree by the side of a stream. There he experienced oneness of the uni-

Baba, the famous yogi of Gazipur, and learned from him the secret of work - "Pay as much attention to the means of work as to the end." The yogi told him, "Live in the house of your guru like a cow", which means that one should cultivate the spirit of service and humility.

While at Gazipur, Vivekananda suffered from stomach trouble and lumbago. He decided to take hatha yoga initiation from Pavhari Baba in order to cure his ailment. However, that night Ramakrishna appeared before him, looking at him intently as if very grieved. This vision was repeated

"I have travelled all over India...But alas, it was agony to me, my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears! It is now my firm conviction that it is futile to preach religion amongst them without first trying to remove their poverty and sufferings..."

as a penniless wandering monk. He carried a staff, a water pot, and his two favourite books – Bhagavad Gita and *The Imitation of Christ*.

He first went to Varanasi, known as the city of light and a capital of ancient India culture. During his journey he met many holy people and scholars. One day while visiting the Durga Temple, he was attacked by a troop of monkeys. While he was running away, a monk shouted to him, "Face the brutes". Swamiji stopped and looked defiantly at the ugly beasts. They quickly disappeared. Later, as a preacher in America, he shared this experience with people and told them to face the dangers and vicissitudes of life and not run away from them. Vivekananda knew his life's mission and felt a tremendous power within him. He left the city of Varanasi with these prophetic words, "When I return here the next time, I shall burst upon society like a bomb-shell, and it will follow me like a dog."

On his way to Hardwar, he stopped at the Hathras Railroad Station. There he met Sharat Chandra Gupta, the assistant sta-

verse and man-that man is a universe in miniature. He realised that all that exists in the universe also exists in the body, and further, that the entire universe can be found contained in a single atom. He jotted down this experience in a notebook, "In the beginning was the Word etc. The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan. Just as the individual soul is encased in the living body, so is the Universal Soul in the living Prakriti (Nature)-the objective universe... The dual aspect of the Universal Soul is eternal. So what we perceive or feel is this combination of the Eternally Formed and the Eternally Formless."

During Vivekananda's itinerant days, he had various kinds of spiritual experiences. Once in a vision he saw an old man standing on the bank of the Indus chanting Vedic hymns: he distinctly heard the invocation of the Gayatri mantra from the Rig Veda. The swami believed that through this vision he had recovered the musical cadences of the early Aryans. He also experienced the presence of the Cosmic God in all beings.

Vivekananda visited Pavhari

for twenty-one nights. He gave up the idea of initiation, reproaching himself for lacking complete faith in the Master.

Vivekananda travelled over almost all of India, mostly on foot, visiting places of history and pilgrimage. He was thus able to gain firsthand experience of the Indian people. Seeing the poor and deplorable conditions of the masses, he was at times moved to tears. He had suffered great poverty himself and had deep compassion for the suffering of others. Once he remarked, with his usual vigour, that a God who could not in this life give a crust of bread was not to be trusted in the next for the kingdom of heaven. He observed that religion was not the crying need of India, and recalled Sri Ramakrishna's pithy saying, "Religion is not for an empty stomach."

In his travels, Vivekananda met the maharajas of Khetri, Alwar, Mysore, Ramnad and many other dignitaries. He boldly told them that the prosperity of India depended upon uplifting the masses by introducing good education, modern science, and industry. However, they did not show sufficient interest. Later, he

expressed his feelings. "May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls-and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship."

In February 1891, Vivekananda arrived in Alwar, Rajputana (western India) and met Maharaja Mangal Singh. He was very westernized, and, although a Hindu, had no faith in worshipping images that to him were nothing but clay or stone figurines. Swamiji tried in vain to explain to him that Hindus worshipped God alone, using the images as symbols. The maharaja was not convinced. Then Vivekananda asked the prime minister to take down a picture of the maharaja that was hanging on the wall; at Vivekananda's request it was handed to him. He then commanded the prime minister and others to spit on it. Everyone was horrified. He said to the audience, "Maharaja is not bodily present in the photograph. This is only a piece of paper. It does not contain his bones, flesh, and blood. It does not speak or behave or move in any way as the maharaja does; yet all of you refuse to spit on it, because you see in this photo the shadow of the maharaja. Indeed, in spitting on the photo, you feel that you insult your master, the Prince himself." Turning to the maharaja, he continued, "See, Your Highness, though this is not you in one sense, in another sense it is you. That was why your devoted servants were so perplexed when I asked them to spit on it." The maharaja realised his mistake and begged swamiji's blessings.

While travelling in western and southern India, Vivekananda heard about the Parliament of Religions that was to be held in Chicago in 1893. A group of India rulers and influential people requested that he attend in order to

represent Hinduism, the religion of Vedanta, but he refused. He was waiting for the Master's call. In December 1892, at Kanyakumari, sitting on the last bit of India rock in the India Ocean, he received his call to go to the west.

One day, while in Madras, Swamiji had a symbolic dream: He saw Sri Ramakrishna walking into the water of the ocean and beckoning him to follow. He also heard the command, "Go!" Although Swamiji was now certain of his journey, he still felt it necessary to have Holy Mother Sarada Devi's blessing. He wrote to Swami Saradananda, "I have had a vision in which the Master told me to go to the west. My mind is quite disturbed. Please tell Holy Mother everything and let me know her opinion." Saradananda went to Holy Mother and read Swamiji's letter to her. Holy Mother did not give her opinion immediately, but asked Saradananda to wait. After a couple of days, Holy Mother had a dream. She saw Ramakrishna walking over the ocean waves and asking Narendra to follow him. Then Holy Mother told Saradananda, "Please write to Naren that he should go to the west." Swamiji was overjoyed when he received Holy Mother's approval and blessing.

In Madras, Vivekananda's followers began to raise money and make the necessary arrangements for his departure. In the meantime, Raja Ajit Singh of Khetri, who was a disciple of Swamiji, asked him to come to Khetri and bless his newborn son. He also offered to provide the ticket for his passage to America. Swamiji consented and went to Khetri for the birthday function. One evening while he was there, the maharaja invited him to attend a musical performance by a dancing girl. However, Vivekananda sent word that, as a monk, he was not permitted to enjoy secular pleasures. The girl was hurt when she heard the message and sang this plaintive

song, which reached the swami's ears:

*Look not, O Lord, upon my sins
Is not same-sightedness Thy name?
One piece of iron is in the image in
the temple, and another, the knife in
the hand of the butcher;
Yet both of these are turned to gold
When touched by the philosopher's
stone.
So, Lord, look not upon my evil
qualities...*

Swamiji was deeply moved. This dancing girl, whom society condemned as impure, had taught him a great lesson: Brahman, the ever pure, ever free, ever illumined, is the essence of all beings. He immediately realised his mistake and joined the party. He later said, "That incident removed the scales from my eyes. Seeing that all are indeed the manifestation of the One, I could not condemn anybody."

Conclusion:

On his way to Bombay, Swamiji stopped at the Abu Road Station and met Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda. When he told them that he was going to America they were greatly excited. He explained to them, "I have travelled all over India... But alas, it was agony to me, my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears! It is now my firm conviction that it is futile to preach religion amongst them without first trying to remove their poverty and sufferings. It is for this reason-to find more means for the salvation of the poor in India - that I am now going to America."

(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 Chetanananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, pp. 37-43.

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