



Issue 36

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# Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

<http://peterpans.com.au/>

## SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

### SRI RAMAKRISHNA: ON THE INFLUENCE OF MAYA

"The cat catches her kitten with her teeth and they are not hurt; but when a mouse is so caught, it dies. Thus *maya* never kills the devotee, though it destroys others."

Source: *Great Sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*. (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; 2013), 15.

### SRI SARADA DEVI: ON WORLDLY EXISTENCE

"What is there in worldly life? What an inordinate attachment people have for it. See how out of one so many come out, and how one's attention and energies are all dissipated. Is it possible for a person placed under such conditions to attain to spiritual greatness? Have you not seen crabs? The mother crab peeps out of her hole again and again, and then goes down. It struggles hard repeatedly to free itself, but fails. And why? This is due to her attraction for her numerous progeny living in the hole. This attraction drags her into the hole in spite of all her efforts. Such is the case of those who are immersed in worldly life."

Source: *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother*. (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1982), 70-71.

### SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: ON ALL KNOWLEDGE COMING FROM THE MIND

All knowledge that the world has ever received comes from the mind; the infinite library of the universe is in your mind. The external world is simply the suggestion, the occasion, which sets you to study your own mind, but the object of your study is always your own mind.

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama), 54-55.

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**W**e welcome you all to the Vedanta Movement in Australia, as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and invite you to attend our programmes and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal Message of Vedanta.



## 1. NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN CENTRES — 1 MAY TO 15 AUGUST 2016

### ADELAIDE

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#### Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda continued his monthly visits and delivered discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā*.

#### Celebrations:

The Vedanta Centre of Adelaide celebrated the auspicious Buddha *purnima*, inaugurating their own premises at 506 Glynburn Road, Burnside, SA 5066. The inauguration celebrations took place over two days (20-21 May) and were attended by local and interstate devotees.



anda and Swami Vedamritananda were present. Over 120 devotees attended the *puja*.



The inauguration began with *Bhoomi Puja*, *Vastu Puja* and *Ganesha Puja* by Sri Skandarajah Kurukkal, Priest of the Ganesha Temple of Adelaide on the morning of Friday 20 May. The *puja* was attended by 60-70 devotees and concluded with distribution of *prasad*. In the evening, over 50 devotees gathered for *bhajans* and *aratrikam*, which was followed by *prasad*.

On the 21 May, Br. Sridhar, assisted by Br. Swatmachaitanya as *tantra dharaka*, performed *dashopachar puja* and *havan* in the morning by invoking the Divine Trinity, Buddha and Christ. The *puja* was accompanied by *bhajans* by devotees and concluded with *pushpanjali* and the distribution of *prasad*. Swami Sridharananda, Swami Atmeshan-

The two-day inauguration ceremony concluded with a Cultural Programme on Saturday 21 May in



the evening, at the Goodwood Institute Hall, 166 Goodwood Road, Goodwood SA. The programme was well received and attended by over 200 people including many VIPs. The programme included classical vocal, instrumental music and dance performances by local and interstate artistes.



## BRISBANE

12 Greenwood Street, Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300

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Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

URL: <http://vedantabrisbane.org>

### Daily Activities:

- *Meditation and the chanting of hymns* were conducted between 6.15 am and 7.15 am.
- *Vesper service (aratrikam), bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were held between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.
- Members were encouraged to visit the Centre and discuss topics concerning spiritual life.

### Regular Activities:

- Sunday mornings:- a) *yoga class* b) *class on Sri-mad-Bhagavad Gitā* c) *bala sangha or children's classes*.
- A discussion group met on the first Monday of every month at Sunnybank Hills.
- Sanskrit classes were held every Tuesday in the evening.
- Religious classes were held every Wednesday at West End primary school.



At Toowoomba on the first Wednesday of Every Month

- A *Vivekachudamani class* was held on the first Wednesday of every month at Toowoomba.
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* and the *Ramayana* were held on alternate Fridays.
- *Chanting of the Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days.
- *Prayer meeting (satsangs)* were held on the first Saturday of every month.

- Maintenance and worship of the image of Sri Ramakrishna at the Sri Ganesha temple, North Mclean, is undertaken once a week.

### Other Activities:

- A *satsang* was held at the new residence of Shankar Kotha, in Springfield, on Saturday 25 June 2016 from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm. Devotional music and a talk on 'Significance of Prayer' were the highlights of the event.
- A *satsang* was held at the residence of Dr. Bram Singh at Deception Bay. Devotees sang *bhajans* and Swami Atmeshananda delivered a talk on 'Facing Challenges in Life' on Saturday, 9 July 2016.



At Deception Bay on 9 July 2016



'Yogawalk' programme at Bellbird grove in the Walkabout Creek area on 26 June 2016

- A 'Yogawalk' programme was conducted at Bellbird grove in the Walkabout Creek area on 26 June 2016 from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm. The programme consisted of yoga exercises, guided meditation, bushwalk and the sharing of snacks. Around 25 people participated.

### Celebrations:

- The birthday celebration of Sri Sankaracharya was held at the Centre on Wednesday 11 May 2016 with worship, devotional music and a talk from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm.
- The Annual Day celebrations were held at the Indooroopilly State High School on Saturday 14 May 2016 from 6:00pm to 9:00 pm. Around 300 persons attended the programme. The Hon. Grace Grace, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Queensland Government, was the guest of honour and gave a speech. Swami Sridharananda also addressed the gathering. Children from the *Bala Sangha* of the Centre performed a skit. The programme also comprised of devotional music, classical dances and dinner.



The Annual Day Celebrations on 14 May 2016 at Brisbane (The Hon Grace Grace (2nd from Left), Cr. Shella Ireland (5th from Left) with some of the Committee Members

- Buddha *puṇnima* was celebrated with worship, talk and potluck dinner on Saturday 21 May 2016 from 6:30pm to 8:00 pm.
- Guru *puṇnima* was celebrated with *puja*, a talk and potluck dinner on 19 July 2016 from 6:30pm to 8:00 pm.

### Special Announcements:

- The construction of the Centre's new building on Vedanta Drive at Springfield Lakes will commence very soon.

### Forthcoming Programmes:

- Sri Krishna *janmashtami* will be celebrated with *puja* and *bhajans* on 25 August 2016 from 6:30pm to 8:00 pm.
- The children of *bala sangha* will celebrate Sri

Krishna *janmashtami* on 28 August 2016 from 10:00 am to 11:30 am.

### CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: [vedacanberra@gmail.com](mailto:vedacanberra@gmail.com)

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkatraman 0433 593 860

### Regular Activities:

- Regular monthly talks on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* were conducted by Swami Sridharananda on 29 May, 12 June and 24 July 2016.

### Other Activities:

- Mrs Geeta Kirpalani promoted the International Yoga Conference being organized by the VCS and distributed brochures at old Parliament House on 19 June 2016 in connection with the International Day of Yoga.

### Forthcoming Programmes:

- Lectures on the *Srimad Bhagavad Gitā* will continue.

### MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

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Contact: Mr Suresh Ravinutala 0413 040 599

### Daily Activities:

- Vesper service (*aratrikam*) and reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.

### Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the *Srimad Bhagavad-Gitā* from the Thursday to the Saturday of a prescheduled week at the Centre.



### Celebrations:

- Buddha *purnima* was celebrated on 21 May 2016 from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm with Vedic chanting, *bhajans*, a reading and *aratrikam*.

### Other Activities:

- The Annual General Meeting was held at the Centre on 16 July 2016 from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm. The meeting comprised of the Secretary's report, Treasurer's account presentation, and a review of the ashrama development activities.

## PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yokine, WA 6060

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Contact: Hiren Mukhopadhyay 0411 478 244

Parthiv Parekh 0430 511 699

### Daily Activities:

- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.

### Regular Activities:

- *Satsangs* were conducted on the first Sunday of every month. The programme included chanting, *Gita dhyanam*, *bhajans*, readings and *prasad* distribution.
- Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the *Srimad Bhagavad-Gitā*.

### Other Activities:

- A working Bee session was held once a month.
- A part of the premises of the Vedanta Centre of Perth, the seminar hall, was used as a polling centre for the State and Federal elections. The members of the Vedanta group of Perth organized a books stall and food stall for the people who came to vote on 2 July 2016 during the federal elections.

### Celebrations:

- Buddha *purnima* was celebrated on 22 May 2016 from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm. The programme consisted of chanting, *Gita dhyanam*, *bhajans*, readings and *prasad* distribution.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was observed on 11 June 2016 from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. The programme comprised of a *puja* by Swami Sunishthananda, *bhajans* by devotees, a talk on Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Sridharananda, *bhoga* and *aratrikam*, *pushpanjali*, and *prasad* distribution.



Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebrations on  
11 June 2016

- Guru *Purnima* was celebrated on 19 July 2016 from 7:00 pm to 8:45 pm. The programme consisted of *aratrikam*, *bhajans*, playing a recorded talk on *Gurupurnima* by Swami Sunishthananda, followed by *prasad* distribution.

## SYDNEY

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115

144A Marsden Road, Ermington, NSW 2115 (Entry)

Email: [vedasydney@vedantasydney.org](mailto:vedasydney@vedantasydney.org)

Contact: 02 8197 7351

URL: [www.vedantaaustralia.org](http://www.vedantaaustralia.org)

### Daily Activities:

- The shrine was open from 6:30 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:30 pm seven days a week.
- Meditation from 6:30 am to 7:30 am and chanting from 7:30 am to 8:00 am.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The times change on special occasions.

- Counselling, interviews and discussions are also held.

### Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda again began classes on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* on Sunday, 24 July 2016. The classes were held every Sunday between 9.30 am and 10.30 am.
- A *Class for Ladies* was held every Monday between 10.30 am and 12.30 pm. Swami Sunishthananda initiated discussion on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* and the *Katha Upanishad*.
- *Bala sangha classes* which include moral and spiritual lessons, drama and movement were conducted for children every Saturday between 4.45 pm and 6.45 pm during the academic term.
- *Meditation sessions* were conducted by Swami Sunishthananda on Sundays between 5.00 pm and 5.30 pm.
- Classes on *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* were conducted by Swami Sunishthananda on Sundays between 5.30 pm and 6.15 pm.
- Parlour talks were conducted by Swami Sridharananda at 1/98 Condamine Street, Balgowlah, NSW 2093, near Manly Beach on Tuesdays between 7.30 pm and 8.30 pm.
- Classes on the *Katha Upanishad* were conducted by Swami Sunishthananda every Wednesday between 7.30 pm and 8.30 pm.
- Classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* were conducted by Swami Sunishthananda every Friday between 7.30 pm and 8.30 pm.
- Sri Rāmanāma Sankirtanam was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.

### Other Activities:

- The Annual Day of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney was observed on 30 April 2016 at Roselea Community Centre, 645-671 Pennant Hills Road, Carlingford, NSW, from 5.30 pm. to 9.30 pm. The variety cultural programme featured instrumental music, *bhajans* and classical vocal, and classical and regional dances. Instrumental music took the form of a sitar recital by Jyoti



VCS Annual Day Swami Sridharananda, JP Abood, Dr. Geoff Lee, Swami Vedamritananda and Swami Mahabodhananda

Thakar who was accompanied on tabla by Aravind Paranjape. *Bhajans* and classical vocal by Chandana Ganguly, accompanied by Aravind Paranjape on table, singing Tagore songs. Srijani



Sitar recital by Jyoti Thakar with Aravind Paranjape on tabla

Dan, Joytee Ghosh and Srijani's Group singing *bhajans* in solo and chorus. Classical and regional dances were staged by Anjana Chandran of Mohini Attam, Ajanta Bhattacharya of Rabindra Nritya and Nirmal Jena's troupe of Odissi Dance. The Chief Guests were Dr. Geoff Lee, Member of the NSW Parliament Legislative Assembly and MP for Parramatta and Mr. J. P. Abood, Councillor, City of Parramatta Council. Around 400 people attended.

- Jyoti Thakar, accompanied on tabla by Aravind Paranjape, performed a sitar recital on Monday, 2 May 2016 at the VCS after the evening *aratrikam* from 7.30 pm to 8.30 pm.
- The Consul General of India in Sydney, Mr. B. Vanlalvawna visited the Vedanta Centre of Syd-



The Consul General of India in Sydney B. Vanlalvawna with the other members of VCS on 31 May 2016



ney on 31 May 2016. The International Yoga Conference and the participation of the VCS in the International Day of Yoga on and around 21 June 2016 were discussed.

- Dr Geoff Lee, Member of the NSW Parliament



Dr Geoff Lee with Swami Sridharananda and some of the other devotees at VCS on 20 June 2016

Legislative Assembly and Member for Parramatta, visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 20 June 2016 and interacted with some of the devotees and had lunch.

- A group of students, who had been attending the *Bhagavad Gitā* classes at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney, celebrated a special day of thanksgiving to the Divine Trinity to mark the completion of their study. The programme was held on Sunday, 19 June 2016 from 8.45 am to 12.00 noon in the shrine of Vedanta Centre of Sydney. The programme included special worship of Sri Ramakrishna with *aratrikam*, chanting from the Vedas, and talks by devotees on the benefit they derived from the study of the Gita. The programme concluded with the distribution of *prasad*. About 200 people attended the function.



A Group of devotees at Acharya Vandana function at the VCS on 19 June 2016

- The VCS sold books, distributed brochures and spoke to yoga enthusiasts about the International Yoga Conference at the Bondi Pavilion on 19 June 2016 in connection with the United Nations' World Yoga Day.

- The VCS attended the International Day of Yoga that was organized by the Indian Consulate in Sydney at the Taronga Zoo Function Centre on 26 June 2016 to distribute brochures and speak to the attendees to promote the International Yoga Conference.

### Celebrations:

- *Buddha purnima* was celebrated at VCS on 21 May 2016. The programme began at 6:15 pm and ended at 9:30 pm and included *aratrikam*, a talk by Swami Sunishthananda and two musical recitals. The first was a sitar recital by Sri R. Nagaraj, accompanied on tabla by Sri. Nikhil Harishchandrarakar, and the second was a rendition of Rabindra Sangeet by Sudeshna Sanyal Rudra. There were about 85 people who attended the programme.
- Smt Vijaya Sankar sang some *bhajans* at the VCS in commemoration of *Guru purnima* on 19 July 2016. The programme also included *aratri-*



Vijaya Sankar at the VCS on *Guru purnima* 19 July 2016

*kam* and a lecture by Swami Sunishthananda. There were around 170 people who attended.

### Forthcoming Programme:

- *Sri Krishna janmastami* will be observed on 25 August 2016.
- The 5th International Conference on *Yoga: Science of Infinite Possibilities* will be held from 1-3 October 2016 at the Western Sydney University, Parramatta South Campus. For further information and registration, please visit <http://www.yogavedanta.org.au/>
- *Sri Durga Puja* will be celebrated at VCS on 9 October 2016 (*astami puja*).

## 2. ARTICLES

### A. FEATURE ARTICLE:

#### Life of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi (continued from January 2016)

##### A Collage of Sri Sarada Devi's Pilgrimages

*Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, was extraordinarily ordinary. But appearances are deceiving. It is important that we do not allow the external veneer of her life and circumstances to deceive us about the state of her mind and the depths of her realization. In this instalment of the Holy Mother's life, which focuses on her pilgrimage to South India, we get a glimpse behind the veil of the ordinary. While on pilgrimage to Kothar, the Mother revealed her identification with the whole of humanity and the universe: 'Do I eat through one mouth? Don't be silly.' This statement of the Holy Mother tallies with the other statements of the Holy Mother, especially her last teaching of not seeing the fault of others, but making the whole world one's own, where no one is a stranger. Apart from this statement, this instalment of the Holy Mother's life will also show the way She identified with people from diverse cultures, communicating and empathizing with them to the extent of guiding them spiritually, in spite of being unfamiliar about their language and customs. This happened not only at Madras, but also in Bangalore.*



##### South Indian Pilgrimage

Balaram's wife, Krishnabhavini Devi entertained the hope of taking the Holy Mother to their estate in Orissa. The Mother and her women companions travelled second-class between November and December 1910. At Bhadrak station Tulasiram, brother of Swami Premananda, was present with men and pal-

anquins and conducted them to Ramakrishna Babu's estate office. After a period of rest, they went to Kothar, about eighteen miles away. Swami Achalananda joined them there in a few days. The whole party felt immensely happy at this place.

##### Pilgrimage to Kothar

One member of the Mother's party had adopted a very strict regimen for himself for a couple of months, his argument being that he was following the Mother in her austerity. But the Mother one day served plenty of good food on his plate despite his protest and advised him to eat it all. The devotee obeyed for the time being; but in the afternoon he asked the Mother in the course of a discussion, 'Why do you deny yourself the things you serve me so plentifully?' The Mother

replied, 'Do I eat through one mouth? Don't be silly. I tell you, you shall eat.' From that day his hesitation was over.

Because of the Mother's presence, the worship of Saraswati was performed that year with great éclat. On that occasion, Ramakrishna Babu and his wife took *mantra* from the Mother. Three devotees from Shillong were initiated on the same day. On the night of the worship there was an opera in which there was no dialogue but only music, dance, and a little acting. Two boys, who played the leading roles of Radha and Krishna, had such sweet voices and charming poses, that the Mother was highly attracted and wanted the performance to be repeated the next day. Ramakrishna Babu gladly complied. The immersion of the Devi's image was also put off to the third



day, worship being performed again on the second.

One incident at Kothar is highly illuminating. The Mother used to take some rest after the mid-day meal, and then she sat in the rear of the house with an attendant, to have her letters written. A few days after the above incidents, the attendant found on going there, for his duty that the Mother sat absent-mindedly with her legs outstretched and eyes looking vacantly at something at a distance. After spending about a quarter of an hour in this mood she woke up to her surroundings and finding the attendant there, asked, 'How long have you been here?' 'Not long,' he replied. The Mother then went on in her own mood, 'To come down again and again! Is there no respite? Siva and Sakti move together; where there is Siva, there is Sakti – there's no escape! Yet people don't understand.' The talk continued in this strain for a pretty long time. Among other things the Mother said that the Master has to incarnate from age to age for the good of his creatures; for they are his to be sure. In this connection she alluded to one of her personal experiences. She once saw that the Master had become everything – the blind, the maimed, all were he; the miseries of the creatures were his; and so the Mother too had to share in the alleviation of their sufferings. When her heart was caught up in this flow of infinite compassion, she had to forego her rest and sleep, and it seemed to her then that the only rational course to follow was to give up

personal comfort and think out means for the welfare of all creatures. As a consequence, when all were resting, she knew no repose. As the talk flowed on thus on a transcendental level, the vesper bells of the temple appraised her of the time of day, and she rose hurriedly for the evening service.

### Pilgrimage to Rameshwaram

It was arranged that from Kothar the Mother would go on a pilgrimage to Rameshwaram in the extreme south. When the proposal was first mooted, the Mother said, 'I shall go; my father-in-law went there.' When the final decision had been taken, Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras and Swami Saradananda in Calcutta were



informed. Swami Saradananda heartily approved of it, and Swami Ramakrishnananda extended a cordial invitation, intimating at the same time his willingness to shoulder all responsibility. So it was settled that the pilgrims would start in the middle of February. The party included Holy Mother, Brahmacharis Shukul and Krishnalal and Golap-Ma amongst others. They started by the southbound Madras rail, Ramakrishna Babu accompanying them up to the Khurda Road junction, from

where he went to Puri.

Leaving Khurda Road behind, the train proceeded southwest and steamed along the shores of the vast soft morning breeze. Here and there, cranes waking with the dawn were searching for food in shallow water or darting across the blue sky in formation. Round the small islands that dotted the lake flew various kinds of birds such as the blue-necked jays. At the sight of the birds, the Mother became overjoyed like a girl and saluted with folded hands, for such a sight of the birds augured well. With the appearance of the sun, white masses of vapour of various shapes began to rise up and lend an eerie atmosphere to the scene. The train speeded on, and the passengers

looked out through the windows towards the fast changing landscape, the vast expanse of the lake, giving place to wooded undulating land. Gradually, at eight in the morning the train reached Berhampore, the headquarters of the Ganjam district. The Bengali Manager of Messrs Kelner and Company was present at the platform in accordance with Swami Ramakrishnananda's request; and he took the whole party to his house with great courtesy. In the afternoon, a great number of people



Swami Ramakrishnananda

gathered to pay their respects to the Mother. They prostrated themselves before her after offering her plantains, coconuts, and such other fruit. The pilgrims resumed their journey the next day and passed by Vishakhapatnam in the afternoon. This health resort and port town, hanging on the side of a hillock, attracted the Mother by its beauty; and she said with joy, 'See, see, it looks just like a picture.' They reached Madras next day at about noon.

At Madras station, Swami Ramakrishnananda and a number of devotees were present to give a fitting reception to the Holy Mother. As the train



steamed in, they raised a loud cry of 'jay' meaning victory and elation. A two-storeyed house had been rented near the Ramakrishna Math at Mylapore, where the Mother and her companions were taken. Here she lived for about a month, during which period she visited the Kapalishwara and the Parthasarathi temples, the beaches, the aquarium, which was then still incomplete, and the fort. At the last place she drove in a rickshaw for the first time in her life. She used to go out every evening visiting various places of interest.

At her own temporary residence there was a continuous stream of eager souls who wanted to be sanctified by touching her feet. One day the girls of a local school came to sing religious songs in Tamil and play their violins and this pleased the Mother very much. She initiated many at this place. Whether it

was due to the basic unity of the Indian culture or the Mother's incomprehensible power of transmitting ideas, she could make the newcomers understand the *mantras* and the process of *japa* and meditation without the help of interpreters, whose assistance she took for other purposes.

In a few days, the Mother's nephew Ramlal arrived at Madras for visiting Rameshwaram, and it was decided that the whole party would start for Madurai, famous for its temple of the goddess Minakshi. But just then Ramakrishna Babu's aunt fell ill, and the departure had to be postponed but later resumed. Through Swami Ramakrishnananda's scrupulous care for providing all possible comfort, the whole party of pilgrims had second-class accommodation in the train, and he himself accompanied them to see personally to their conveniences. The train reached Madurai in the morning, and they were taken to the house of the Chairman of the local Municipality.

### Pilgrimage to Madurai

Madurai stands on the river Vaigai. The chief temple there, dedicated to the goddess Minakshi and her consort Sundareswara (Siva), holds a very high place in Indian architecture. Its tall *gopurams* or *gate-towers*, rising up in tiers, are very impressive because of their height, grandeur and sculpture. The mythological anecdotes repre-





Minakshi temple



sented in stone everywhere in the temple precincts keep the devout pilgrims spellbound for hours together. The image of the goddess appears so lifelike and inspiring that it is difficult to find a second one of its kind. For the disport of the two deities, there are a few permanent stone pavilions (*mandapas*) of which the *sahasra-stambha* (thousand pillared) and *vasanta* (spring) *mandapas* are the best. There is a small pond built in stone called the Shiva-ganga. The Mother and others bathed in it in the afternoon and then visited the deities. Then, in accordance with the local custom, they lit up lamps on the banks of the pond in each one's name before returning to their residence. During their stay at Madurai, they visited among other places the palace of Tirumal Nayaka and the large tank called Teppakulam. Once hundred and twenty five stone pillars support the extensive roof of the palace. In the centre of the tank there is a small island. All these sights made the Mother exclaim, 'How wonderful is the play of the Master.'

From Madurai they entrained for Rameshwaram and reached Mandapam at noon from where they had to cross over in a steamer to the Pamban (or Rameshwaram) island. From

Pamban, which is also the name of the port across the strait, they again boarded a train and reached Rameshwaram at about eleven in the night. As the temple was closed, they saluted the Deity from outside and went to live in the quarters arranged for them by the priest-guide. Next morning they bathed in the sea and entered the temple, which in its massiveness and extensiveness seems to be unparalleled. It is built of stone. Round the *sanctum sanctorum* there are three successive encircling corridors. At the entrance of the whole structure is a huge *gopuram*, every inch of which is full of fine sculpture. The story of Siva, the presiding deity of the temple, is told in stone pillars and walls that line the corridor. On entering the innermost corridor, one finds in front the stone image of *Nandi* (Siva's bull), which is as high as a one storied building; and near the Nandi, is a tall pillar. The emblem of Rameshwara is placed in a small basin (*kunda*). As the image is made of soft, sandy material, it is kept covered by a golden cap over which the *abishekam* (bathing) water is poured. But early in the morning, one can have a look at the uncovered image. For the daily *abishekam* and for other rites of the daily worship of Rameshwara, Ganges water alone is permitted. This is brought from North India with considerable effort, and is sold to pilgrims in small quantities to be covered over the covered emblem of Siva.

Then the Pamban Island, as also



the Rameshwaram temple, was under the administrative control of the Raja of Ramnad, who was a direct disciple of Swami Vivekananda. He had instructed the temple staff by telegram that as the guru of his guru would be visiting the shrine, all facilities should be offered to her. As a consequence, the Holy Mother and her party were taken to the *sanctum sanctorum*, contrary to the general custom, and were allowed to worship the uncovered Siva image to their heart's content with Ganges water, flowers, etc. The Mother offered one hundred and eight golden leaves shaped like the real leaves of the *bel* tree. During all the three days that they stayed there, they visited the temple every morning and evening. On the third day the Holy Mother arranged for a special worship at the temple, fed the *pandās* after hearing a recital of the glory of Rameshwaram from old scriptures; and she presented to each of the *pandās* a water-pot. It is customary to sit with betel and betel nut in hand at the time

of hearing Rameshwara's exploits and offer them to the reader at the end. The Mother faithfully observed all the customs.

The temple staff had been instructed by the Raja to show the temple jewellery to the Mother and present her any piece that she might ask for. When the Raja's wishes were communicated to the Mother she was at a loss to think out what she might really be in need of; and so she said after a pause, 'What can I need? Whatever was necessary has been arranged for by Sashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda).' And then it struck her that such a refusal might offend them; and hence she corrected herself, 'Well, if Radhu has any need of anything, she can take it.' And to Radhu she said, 'See, if you can choose anything you may have need of.' The Mother said so out of courtesy; but when the treasury was opened and the gems and diamonds glittered up, her heart began to throb and she kept on praying, 'Master, may not Radhu have any temptation.' The Master heard her. After looking at everything, Radhu said, 'What is there worth taking from all this stuff? I don't want any of these. I have lost my writing pencil; but buy one for me.' At this the Mother was immensely relieved and came out to purchase from a roadside shop a pencil worth half an anna.

Brahmachari Krishnalal, who was an attendant of the Mother and who visited Rameshwaram with her, said to Sarala Devi one day, that on looking at the un-

covered Siva image the Mother soliloquized, 'It is just as I as I left it.' The devotees who were near at hand inquired, 'What did you say, Mother?'. The Mother at once corrected herself and said, 'A meaningless something escaped out of my lips.' After the party had returned to Calcutta, one day Kedar Babu of Koalpara asked the Mother at the 'Udbodhan', 'How did you find Rameshwara?' And the Mother replied, 'He is just as I had left him, my son.' Then the ever alert Golap-Ma was passing by the veranda. As soon as these words fell on her ears, she stopped and asked with enthusiasm, 'What did you say, Mother?' Taken aback, the Mother said, 'Why, what should I say? I was only saying that I was very much delighted to see it just as I had heard from you.' But Golap-Ma was not to be put off so easily, and she said importantly, 'No, Mother, I have heard everything; it won't do you to retract your words now. Isn't it, dear Kedar?' And she whisked away without waiting for a reply to tell everyone of the good tidings. The devotees believe that the same personage who incarnated as Sita, the ever faithful consort of Ramachandra, and worshipped a Siva image made of sand on the sea coast of Rameshwaram, descended again as the all enduring and ever gracious Holy Mother, so that the sudden sight of the uncovered image carried her mind unconsciously across the vast span of thousands of years and the past appeared as a vivid present; and forgetful of her immediate environment she made that spontaneous remark.

Dhanuskoti is another sacred place in the island, from where the bridge thrown across the sea by Sri Rama commences. It is customary to worship the sea by presenting a golden or silver bow and arrow. As the Mother could not go there, she sent two of her attendants with the silver bow and arrow to perform the worship on her behalf.

From Rameshwaram they returned to Madurai, where they rested for a day, and they proceeded to Madras. Now, the birthday of the Master approached; and the devotees took advantage of the Mother's presence to make the occasion a great day of joyful celebration. She initiated some people on that day. After the celebration, she left for Bangalore by the end of March, 1911.

### At Bangalore

In those days, the surroundings of the Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bangalore were quiet and charming. And even at the present time the Ashrama with its extensive grounds continues to preserve that solitude in spite of the rapid growth of the city. The compound is dotted with valuable fruit and flower trees. In front runs the wide Bull Temple Road leading to the temple of that name, which enshrines a huge image of *Nandi* and is visited by streams of pilgrims. The Mother and her women companions were accommodated in the Ashrama building, while the monks and devotees lived in temporary tents outside. As the news of the Mother's visit

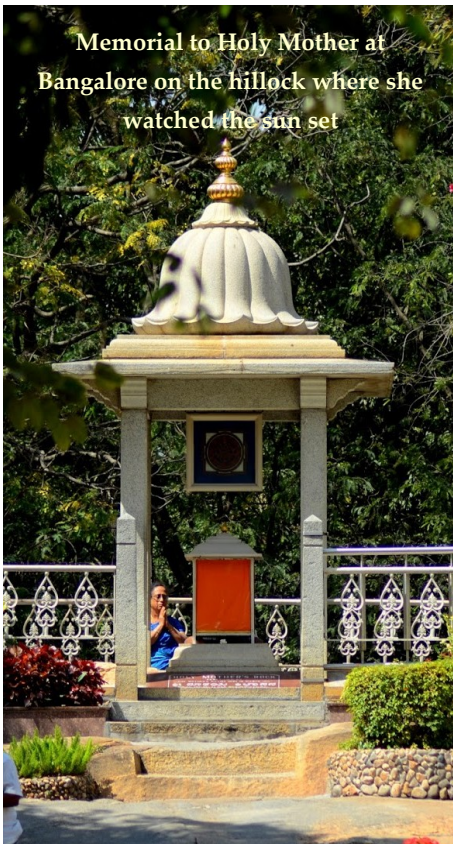


spread over the town, devotees began to come in great numbers, and the flowers they brought for offering sometimes formed big heaps.

The Mother stayed for about a week in Bangalore. One afternoon she was taken by Swami Vishuddhananda in a carriage to the cave of Gavipura, a short distance behind the Ashrama. The Mother got down and visited the temple and then returned to the Ashrama by the same carriage. The whole time spent outside was not long. But, whereas at the time of their going out, there was none there at the Ashrama besides the inmates, when they returned they found the whole compound crowded with a number of visitors. At the sound of the Mother's carriage they stood up instantaneously and then prostrated themselves on the ground. The Mother, who was visibly moved by the sight, alighted from the carriage and stood there motionless for about five minutes, extending her right arm in benediction. Perfect silence reigned all around, and the whole atmosphere was charged with awe. Then the Mother silently walked to the Ashrama and sat in the central room, where the devotees gathered. Here again was enacted that speechless transmission and imbibition of transcendental bliss that the scriptures speak of. There was no question and no answer, and yet all doubts were resolved. Breaking that tangible silence, the Mother said to Swami Vishuddhananda who was by her side, 'What a pity, I don't know their language! What solace they would derive, if I could but speak

a few words!' When Swami Vishuddhananda translated this for the devotees, they said, 'No, no; this is all right. Our hearts are full indeed. No words are needed on such an occasion.'

There is a small hillock behind the Ashrama building and within its own compound. A short while before dark, the Mother climbed the hillock along with one or two others and sat on its top enjoying



the beauty of the setting sun. When Swami Ramakrishnananda heard this, he said in amazement, 'Indeed! The Mother has become a dweller on the mountain', and hurried towards the place. He was stout, and began to pant as he began to climb that low hillock; but undaunted he went up straight to the Mother, prostrated himself there and laying his head on her feet chanted three well-known verses from the *Chandi* beginning with *Sarva-mangala-mangalye* which are used as *man-*



*tras* for the salutation of the Divine Mother. And he prayed, 'Grace! Grace!' The Mother caressed his head, as though pacifying an importunate son, till Swami Ramakrishnananda felt himself fully blessed.

There was a funny incident in Bangalore. One day the Holy Mother, dressed in her own simple way, sat at one side of the central room and women visitors came to pay their respects to her. With them came a rich woman wearing fine clothes and costly ornaments. She took her seat in the centre of the room. A little later a group of women came, and finding the wealthy woman in the centre mistook her for the Mother. Therefore, they proceeded to salute her. The lady's protests were of no avail; the newcomers pressed on to touch her feet. At this the aristocratic lady jumped up and remonstrated vehemently. By that time, however, she was completely surrounded, and there was a scamper for the first touch of her feet, so that she had to extricate herself somehow and walk out.

The Mother sat quietly at her corner all the while; and though she did not grasp one word of what the ladies spoke, she understood with a quiet smile the farce that was going on in front of her.

After spending some days at Bangalore, the Mother and her companions returned to Madras, where they spent a day or two and then returned for Calcutta. On the way they rested a day at Rajahmundry where they were guests at the house of Sri M.O. Parthasarathi Iyenger, District and Sessions Judge. The Mother bathed here in the Godavari. Their second halting place was Puri. At last they arrived at Calcutta mid - April 1911.

### Return to Belur Math

The first day that the Mother set her holy feet on the grounds of the Belur Math, after her South Indian pilgrimage, she was given a fitting reception. As a result of the long sojourn, she had returned with better health and a happier mind, which gladdened the devotees also. Moreover, the wonderful news of the enthusiasm created in the South by her inspiring presence and silent ministration had preceded her. And hence all had gathered there to express their devout gratefulness for her unbounded love for her children. The gates of the Math were decorated with plantain trees, under which were placed tastefully painted pitchers, filled with water and with green leaves on the top. On either side of the path stood more than a hundred devotees with folded hands. As the carriage of the

Swami Brahmananda



Mother came in sight a few crackers were burst, and as the Mother alighted and moved slowly with her women companions, the devotees chanted the *mantras* from the *Chandi*. The order of Swami Brahmananda, abbot of the Math, rang out that nobody should break the line to salute the Mother by touching her feet. So the Mother walked unhampered. Her whole body was covered from head to foot with a white cotton wrapper; and it seemed as though a sacred and animated white image had suddenly descended on the Math ground and was moving silently from south to north. Suddenly somebody seemed to dart out of the line and as quickly salute the Mother and disappear. 'Catch him, catch him. Who's that, who's that?' called out Swami Brahmananda in great amusement. It was none other than Swami Subodhananda, who, because of his being younger than most of the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and his simple nature, was called by the others Khoka Maharaj or the baby monk. This exploit of the Swami amused the company very much.

Swami Subhodhananda



The Mother was taken to the main monastery building. A *kirtana* in honour of Kali was then in progress in the courtyard below, and Swami Brahmananda sat there. Suddenly it was seen that the Swami's body had become absolutely motionless and his smoke pipe had dropped from his hand. As he did not come round from this state of divine trance, the Mother was informed, and she instructed someone to utter a *mantra* in the Swami's ears. This acted like magic, and the Swami came down to the normal plane with words of appreciation for the music, 'Bravo! Sing on, sing on,' as though he had been unmindful just for a passing moment. The Mother was now offered some *prasāda* of the Master. She took a little and sent down the rest of it, which the devotees eagerly shared amongst themselves. When in the evening she took leave, a few more crackers were burst to indicate the end of the happy day's function.

### Source

1. Swami Gambhirananda. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*. (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1955), 238-251.



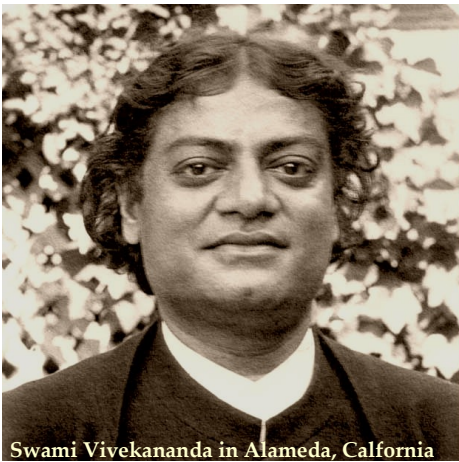
## 2. ARTICLES

### DIRECT DISCIPLES:

#### Swami Vivekananda (Continued from the May 2016 issue)

##### Second Visit to the West and the Remaining Years

**S**wami Ashokananda, who was the minister in charge of the Vedanta Society of San Francisco felt that Swami Vivekananda was at his best in his second trip to the West. This instalment of **Direct Disciples** focuses on Swami Vivekananda's second visit to the west and the remaining few years of his life. Here there are a few glimpses of the heights Swami Vivekananda's mind must have soared to ask Ralph, Mrs Wyckoff's son, "Can you see your own eyes?" Ralph answered that he could not, except in a mirror. "God is like that," the Swami told him. "He is as close as your own eyes. He is your own, even though you can't see him." This is just one example of the exalted state of his mind during this period, when he knew that his end was just around the corner.



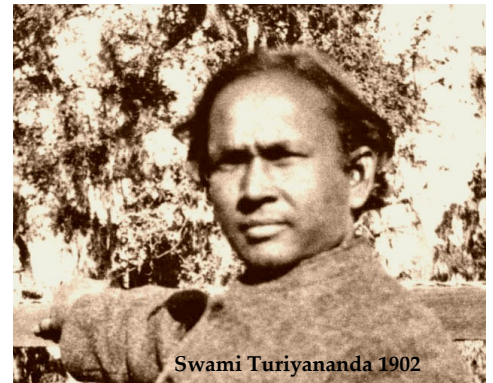
Swami Vivekananda in Alameda, California

##### Second Visit to the West

On 16 December 1898 Vivekananda announced that he would return to the West to meet his old friends and to see the progress of the Vedanta work that he had started. The monks and the devotees welcomed the idea, thinking the sea voyage would restore his failing health. Vivekananda left from Calcutta on 20 June 1899, accompanied by Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita. This journey turned into a wonderful education for both of them: Swamiji taught Turiyananda how to work in the West and Nivedita how to work in the East. Nivedita wrote, "It was while we sat chatting in the river [Ganges] on the first afternoon, he suddenly claimed, 'Yes,

the older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness.' " Another day, the swami said to Nivedita, "Social life in the West is like a peal of laughter, but underneath, it is a wail. It ends in a sob. The fun and frivolity are all on the surface: really, it is full of tragic intensity. Now here [India], it is sad and gloomy on the outside, but underneath are carelessness and merriment."

Vivekananda's belief in the effectiveness of Vedanta grew through his travels and observations, experiences and insights. He saw it not as a mere religion or philosophy, but rather as a means by which science and religion could become reconciled, and material prosperity and spirituality blended. He noticed that the East was strong in noble religious and spiritual traditions even though it suffered from grinding poverty; the West, however, for all its technological advancements and affluence, suffered from spiritual poverty. There was no reason, he thought, why East and West could not profit from each other's



Swami Turiyananda 1902

strengths by removing each other's weaknesses.

##### London to New York

Vivekananda arrived in London on 31 July 1899 and stayed there a few weeks. He met with some old friends, but his fragile health did not allow him to give lectures. He then left for New York with Turiyananda and two American devotees, and arrived there on 28 August. It was arranged that the swamis would live temporarily at Ridgely Manor, Francis Leggett's beautiful country home. The entire fall Vivekananda rested and recuperated. He was happy to see the activities of the Vedanta Society of New York (which he had founded in November 1894) under the leadership of Swami Abhedananda, and he engaged



(Left to Right Standing) Swami Vivekananda, Swami Turiyananda and Swami Abhedananda at Ridgely c. September 1898

Turiyananda to give classes in Montclair, New Jersey.

Vivekananda was in a relaxed mood at Ridgely. "There are many memories," writes Maud Stumm, an American devotee, "connected with those days at Ridgely. Nearly every day Swami was wonderful in a new way – and now it would be music that he dwelt upon, now art, and once he burst into the morning-room, declaring for 'Liberty.' 'What do I care if Mohammed was a good man, or Buddha! Does that alter *my* own goodness or evil? Let us be good for our own sake on our own responsibility!'"

Miss Macleod wrote in her reminiscences, "In the evening, sitting around the great fire in the hall of Ridgely Manor, he would talk, and once after he came out with

some of his thoughts a lady said, 'Swami, I don't agree with you there.' 'No? Then it is not for you,' he answered. Someone else said, 'O, but that is where I find you true.' 'Ah, then it was for you,' he said showing that utter respect for the other man's views. One evening, he was so eloquent, about a dozen people listening, his voice becoming so soft and seemingly far away; when the evening was over, we all separated without even saying good-night to each other. Such a holy quality pervaded. My sister, Mrs Leggett, had occasion to go to one of the rooms afterwards. There she found one of the guests, an agnostic, weeping, 'What do you mean?' my sister asked, and the lady said, 'That man has given me eternal life. I never wish to hear him again.'"

On 22 November Vivekananda left for Los Angeles via Chicago and stayed in southern California from 3 December 1899 to 22 February 1900. While in Southern California he gave several lectures in Los Angeles and Pasadena. During his last six weeks there he stayed with the Mead sisters (Mrs Carrie Mead Wyckoff, Mrs Alice Mead Hansbrough, and Miss Helen Mead) at their house at 309 Monterey Road in South Pasadena. (The house, now owned by the Vedanta Society of Southern California and carefully restored to its original state, is surprisingly small). Mrs Hansbrough became the Swami's private secretary



Swami Vivekananda at Pasadena c. 3 December 1899 to 22 February 1900

during his California trip. During his stay in Pasadena he often played with the Mead sisters' children, and sometimes would join them for picnics or sightseeing. After lunch Swamiji would generally recline on the couch in the living room, and there he would read or talk while Mrs Wyckoff busily pursued her various household tasks. "Madam," he said one day to her, "you work so hard that it makes me



tired. Well, there have to be some Marthas, and you are a Martha." Another day the swami asked Ralph, Mrs Wyckoff's son, "Can you see your own eyes?" Ralph answered that he could not, ex-



Swami Vivekananda in San Francisco c. 1901

cept in a mirror. "God is like that," the Swami told him. "He is as close as your own eyes. He is your own, even though you can't see him."

### **'So Learn to be the Witness.'**

Vivekananda then travelled to northern California, where in April he founded the Vedanta Society in San Francisco. Swamiji's oratory and magnetic personality overwhelmed the people. "He once told us," Mr Thomas Allan recounted, "that he had such faith in the Divine Mother that if he had to speak on a subject that he knew absolutely nothing about, he would get on his feet, for he knew that Mother would put the words into his mouth." Mrs Edith Allen wrote in her reminiscences, "Although I attended all Swamiji's public lec-

tures both in San Francisco and Alameda, it was ... close contact with Swamiji that I most deeply cherish. Once after being quiet for some time Swamiji said, 'Madame, be broadminded, always see two ways. When I am on the heights, I say, "I am he," and when I have a stomach ache, I say, "Mother, have mercy on me." Always see two ways.' On another occasion he said, 'Learn to be the witness. If there are two dogs fighting on the street and I go out there, I get mixed up in the fight; but if I stay quietly in my room, I witness the fight from the window. So learn to be the witness.'

Swamiji was bold and fearless. He never tried to please or flatter others: he told people what was good for them. Ida Ansell, Swamiji's stenographer, wrote in her memoirs, "What becomes of one's individuality when one realises his oneness with God? You people in this country are so afraid of losing your in-di-vid-u-al-i-ty!" he would exclaim. 'Why, you are not individuals yet. When you realise your whole nature, you will attain your whole nature, not before. In knowing God you cannot lose anything. There is another thing I am constantly hearing in this country, and that is that we should live in harmony with nature. Don't you know that all the progress ever made in the world was made by conquering nature? We are to resist nature at every point if we are to make any progress.' "

### **'Arise! Awake! Stand up and Fight!'**

During his second visit to America Swamiji worked mainly in California. While there, he had a premonition of his approaching end; in April 1900 he wrote to Miss Macleod, "My boat is nearing the calm harbour from which it is never more to be driven out." Before finishing his mission to the world, Swami sang his swan song; he poured out the quintessence of Vedanta:

In this country [America] the king has entered every one of you. You are all kings in this country. So with the religion of Vedanta. You are all Gods. One God is not sufficient...You want to be democratic in this country. It is the democratic God that Vedanta teaches. There is a chance of Vedanta becoming the religion of your country because of democracy.

Don't repent! Don't repent!...Spit, if you must, but go on! Don't hold yourselves down by repenting! Throw off the load of sin, if there is such a thing, by knowing your true selves – the Pure! The Ever Free!...That man alone is blasphemous who tells you that you are sinners....This world is a superstition. We are hypnotized into believing it real. The process of salvation is the process of de-hypnotization.... This universe is just the play of the Lord – that is all. It is all just for fun.

Stand up and fight! Not one step back, that is the idea. Fight it

out, whatever comes. Let the stars move from the spheres! Let the whole world stand against us! Death means only a change of garment. What of it? Thus fight! You gain nothing by becoming cowards. Taking a step backward, you do not avoid any misfortune. You have cried to all the Gods in the world. Has misery ceased? ...This bending the knee to superstitions, this selling yourself to your own mind does not befit you, my soul. You are infinite, deathless, birthless. Arise! Awake! Stand up and fight!

Enter not the door of any organised religion. Religion is only between you and your God, and no third person must come between you. Think what these organised religions have done! What Napoleon was more terrible than these religious persecutions? If you and I organize, we begin to hate every person. It is better not to love, if loving means hating others. That is no love. That is hell!

Swamiji left for New York from California on 30 May 1900; on his way he stopped in Chicago to meet his old friends and devotees. He was the guest of the Hale family and exchanged many old reminiscences. Swami Nikhilananda recorded a touching incident from this visit: "On the morning of his departure, Mary came to the Swami's room and found him sad. His bed appeared to have been untouched, and on being asked the reason, he confessed that he had spent the whole night without sleep.

'Oh,' he said, almost in a whisper, 'it is so difficult to break human bonds!' He knew that this was the last time he was to visit these devoted friends."

After arriving in New York on 7 June 1900, he sent Turiyananda to northern California to start a retreat, which later became Shanti Ashrama. Swamiji gave a few more lectures and classes in New York and then left for Paris on 26 July 1900 to attend the Congress of the History of Religions, where he spoke twice. On 24 October 1900 he left Paris for the east with Monsier and Madame Loyson, Jules Bois, Madame Calvé, and Miss Macleod. He visited Vienna, Constantinople, Athens, and Cairo. "What a pilgrimage it was!" recalled Madame Calvé. "Science, philosophy, and history had no secrets from the Swami. I listened with all my ears to the wise and learned discourse that went on around me.... One day we lost our way in Cairo. I suppose, we had been talking too intently. At any rate, we found ourselves in a squalid, ill-smelling street, where half-clad women lolled from windows and sprawled on doorsteps. The Swami noticed nothing until a particularly noisy group of women on a bench began laughing and calling to him.

" 'Poor children!' he said. 'Poor creatures! They have put their divinity in their beauty. Look at them now!' He began to weep. The women were silenced and abashed. One of them leaned forward and kissed the hem of his robe, murmuring brokenly in Spanish, 'Hombre de Dios, hom-



Mrs. Charlotte Sevier

bre de Dios! [Man of God].'

In Cairo, the Swami felt intuitively that something was wrong in India, not knowing that Mr. Sevier was on his deathbed at Mayavati. He became restless to return to India alone on the first available boat to Bombay.

## Towards the End

Vivekananda disembarked in Bombay and immediately took a train to Calcutta, arriving at Belur Math unannounced late on the evening of 9 December 1900. His brother monks and disciples were jubilant to have their leader return. Later Swamiji was given the sad news of Mr. Sevier's passing way. On 11 December he wrote to Miss Macleod, "Alas, my hurrying was of no use. Poor Captain Sevier passed away, a few days ago – thus two Englishmen [the other was Mr Goodwin] gave their lives for us – us the Hindus. This is martyrdom, if anything is."

On 27 December 1900 Vivekananda left for Mayavati to console Mrs Sevier. He arrived there on 3



January 1901. Swamiji's love and concern assuaged Mrs Sevier's grief; she loved him as her own son. He stayed there for a couple of weeks and then returned to Belur Math on 24 January. During this time the Swami received invitations for a lecture tour to East Bengal (now Bangladesh), and also his mother expressed a desire to visit holy places in that part of the country. On 26 January 1901 he wrote to Mrs Bull, "I am going to take my mother on a pilgrimage...This is the one great wish of a Hindu widow. I have only brought misery to my people [family] all my life. I am trying to fulfil this one wish of hers."

On 28 March 1901 Swamiji, in spite of his poor health, left for Dhaka with a large party. He gave two public lectures in Dhaka and exhorted the people there to cultivate manliness and the faculty of reasoning. To a sentimental young man he said, "My boy, take my advice: develop your muscles and brain by eating good food and by healthy exercise, and then you will be able to think for yourself." On another occasion, addressing the youths of Bengal who had very little physical stamina, he said, "You will be nearer to God through football than through the Bhagavad Gita."

On 5 April Vivekananda and his party left Dhaka and visited Chandranath in Chittagong, Kamakhya in Guwahati, and Shillong. Swamiji's health was failing rapidly. In addition to the diabetes from which he had been suffering, he had another severe at-

tack of asthma at Shillong. While the swami was in pain, someone overheard him murmuring to himself, "What does it matter! I have given them enough for fifteen hundred years!" on another occasion he said to a Western devotee, "The spiritual impact that has come here to Belur will last fifteen hundred years – and this will be a great university. Do you think I imagine it, I see it."

Returning from East Bengal, Vivekananda had a relaxed life in Belur Math, surrounded by his pets: his dog, Bagha; the she-goat, Hansi; and antelope; a stork; several cows, sheep, ducks, and geese; and a kid called Matru who was adorned with a collar of little bells, with whom the swami ran and played like a child. The animals adored him. Matru used to sleep in his room. When Matru died he grieved like a child and said to a disciple, "How strange! Whomsoever I love dies early."

Vivekananda had completed the mission that Ramakrishna had entrusted to him. Keeping his mind on his beloved Guru, Vivekananda waited for his own great departure. Sometimes he would talk to his disciples about the Master. Swami Shuddhananda recorded:

Swami Vivekananda was then Narendranath; he was visiting Ramakrishna regularly at Dakshineswar. Pointing to Narendra's well-combed curly hair, the Master teased him about his foppishness. Narendra was also unsparing; he pointed out to the Master his varnished shoes,

hubble-bubble, mattress, bolster, and so on. Then the Master told him, "Look here, the amount of austerity I practised for God-realization, if you can do one-sixteenth of that, I shall arrange for you to sleep on a costly bedstead putting mattress upon mattress." Swamiji practised severe austerity in his life; and then when he returned from the West, his Western disciples presented him with a spring bed and mattress [which are still preserved in his room]. While lying on that Western mattress and remembering those words of the Master, Swamiji would tell that incident to his disciples with tears.

In spite of his illness Vivekananda kept a watchful eye on the monks and the activities of the monastery. He gave regular classes on Vedanta scriptures, conducted meditation in the shrine, inspired the workers with a spirit of virile confidence in themselves, and paid strict attention to discipline and cleanliness. One day he found that Swami Shivananda had missed the morning meditation in the shrine. He said to him, "Brother, I know you do not need meditation. You have already realized the highest goal through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna. But you should meditate daily with the youngsters in order to set an example for them." Shivananda obeyed that command till his old age.

Ramakrishna had always been very particular about cleanliness and Swamiji followed his example. He would check the beds and rooms of the monks, and

asked that they be kept clean. Once the sweeper was sick and the privy was not cleaned for three to four days. Swamiji noticed this and decided to clean it himself. One morning at four o'clock, without informing anybody, he began scrubbing the privy. Some young monks saw him in the dark and rushed to him, asking that he return to his room so that they could clean it. But he did not stop until he had finished the task. An ideal teacher is the person who practises what he teaches. Swamiji thus demonstrated the role of an ideal teacher.

Sometimes he talked to the poor labourers who were levelling the ground; he also supervised cooking arrangements, and he would sing devotional songs with the monks. At other times, he imparted spiritual instructions to visitors. His fragile body did not dampen his desire to work. When urged to rest, he said to a disciple, "My son, there is no rest for me. That which Sri Ramakrishna called 'Kali' took possession of my body and soul three or four days before his passing away. That makes me work and work and never lets me keep still or look to my personal comfort." Vivekananda continued to train his disciples, "In every country, nations have their good and bad sides. Ours is to do good works in our lives and hold an example before others. No work succeeds by condemnation. It only repels people. Let anybody say what he likes, don't contradict him. In this world of maya, whatever work you take up will

be attended with some defect. 'All undertakings are beset with imperfections, as fire with smoke' (Gita, 18.48). But will you, on that account, sit inactive? As far as you can, you must go on doing good work." Later he disclosed his life's experience, "After so much tapasya, austerity, I have known that the highest truth is this: He is present in all beings. These are all the manifested forms of Him. There is no other God to seek for! He alone is worshipping God, who serves all beings."

Towards the end of 1901, Kakuzo Okakura, a famous artist, and Mr Hori came to Belur Math from Japan. Later, reverend Takuno Oda, a Buddhist abbot, came to invite Vivekananda to attend the Congress of Religions in Japan. Because of his ill health, the swami could not go; but he agreed to go with them to Bodh Gaya, where Buddha had attained illumination. Swamiji, Miss Macleod, Okakura, and others left for Gaya on 27 January 1902. Sister Nivedita wrote about this visit:

When the winter again set in, he [Vivekananda] was so ill as to be confined to bed. Yet he made one more journey, lasting through January and February 1902, when he went first to Bodh Gaya and next to Varanasi. It was a fit ending to all his wanderings. He arrived at Bodh Gaya on the morning of his last birthday [January 29], and nothing could have exceeded the courtesy and hospitality of the

Mahanta [head of the monastery]. Here, as afterwards at Varanasi, the confidence and affection of the orthodox world were brought to him in such measure and freedom that he himself stood amazed at the extent of his empire in men's hearts. Bodh Gaya, as it was now the last, had also been the first of the holy places he had set out to visit. And it had been in Varanasi, some few years back (when he was an unknown monk), that he had said farewell to one, with the words, "Till that day when I fall on society like a thunderbolt I shall visit this place no more."

The maharaja of Varanasi offered Swamiji a sum of money to establish a monastery there. He accepted the offer and later sent Shivananda to organize the work. Vivekananda also inspired a group of young men who had started a small organisation for the purpose of providing destitute pilgrims with food, shelter, and medical help. He said to them, "You have the true spirit, my boys, and you will always have my love and blessing! Go on bravely; never mind your poverty. Money will come. A great thing will grow out of it, surpassing your fondest hopes." Swamiji wrote an appeal for their support and named the institution, "Ramakrishna Home of Service."

## Source

Swami Chetanananda. *God Lived With Them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna*. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 58-65.