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Reach

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SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna: On Curbing Passions and Propensities

He is a true man who is dead even in this life—that is, whose passions and propensities have been curbed to extinction as in a dead body.

Source: *Great Sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; (Kolkata: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2013), 4.

Sri Sarada Devi: On Self Effort and Divine Grace

The mind is rendered pure as the result of many austerities. God who is purity itself cannot be attained without austerities. What else does one obtain by the realization of God? Does he grow two horns? No, his mind becomes pure, and through a pure mind one attains knowledge and spiritual awakening.

Source: *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1982), 54

Swami Vivekananda: On Faith

Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God – this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological Gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need.

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 65.

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Obituary

We are sorry to record the passing away of Sri Tapeshe Gangopadhyaya on 3 September 2017. Sri Tapeshe was the main pillar of the Vedanta work in Melbourne and right hand man of Swami Damodharananda. He had the honour of hosting many senior Swamis like Swamis Bhuteshananda and Ranganathananda. He was the President of the Melbourne Chapter of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney until it was handed over to the representative of the Ramakrishna Order. It was at his home in the 1970s that devotees would gather to meet and discuss about Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. May his soul rest in peace.

We 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 involve yourselves and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal Message of Vedanta.

1. NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN CENTRES — JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2017

ADELAIDE

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Contact: Dr Raman Sharma on (08) 8431 9775

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Daily Activities:

- The Centre is open every evening from 6:45pm for *aratrikam* starting at 7:00pm which is undertaken by the local devotees.

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda visited the Centre and delivered discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* for three days in July, August and September. A dedicated group of devotees attended his talks.
- Reading of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, including discussion on relevant points, was held on the first and third Sunday of the month.
- Some devotees have been providing community based support for meeting the educational needs of children from under-privileged backgrounds on a weekly basis at the Centre.



First Annual Day of the Vedanta Centre of Adelaide

Other Activities:

- A cultural program marking the 1st Anniversary of the Centre was held at the Goodwood Institute Hall, 166 Goodwood Road, Goodwood, SA, on Friday, 14 July 2017. The programme was attended by over 200 people. Mr David Parkin, Mayor of the City of Burnside was also present. The programme included classical vocal, instrumental, and Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi and Mohini-atam folk dances by the local artists.
- Swami Supriyananda, Head of the Ramakrishna Mission, Malaysia and Swami Mahabodhananda of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney visited Adelaide from 7-9 September 2017. Swami Supriyananda delivered a talk on 8 September 2017 on, "Swami Subodhananda - Synonym for Simplicity", as this year marks the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Subodhananda.



Swami Supriyananda

BRISBANE

12 Greenwood Street, Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300

Email: info@vedantabrisbane.org

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 on all days except on Sundays when it is held from 8 am. to 8:30 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 (8:30am—9:45 am)*. b) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā Class (10:00 am—11:00 am)*. (c) *Bala Sangha or children's classes (10:00 am—11:00 am during school term)*.
- A discussion group met on the first Monday of the month at Sunnybank Hills (7:00 pm — 8:30 pm).
- Sanskrit classes were held every Tuesday (6:00 pm — 7:00 pm).
- Religious classes were held every Wednesday at West End Primary School for children (3:00 pm — 4:00 pm).
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* (7:00 pm — 8:00 pm at 134 Fleming Rd, Chapel Hill, QLD 4069) and the *Ramayana* (7:15 pm — 8:15 pm) were held on alternate Fridays.
- *Chanting of the Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days (7:30 pm — 8:15 pm).
- *Prayer meeting (satsangs)* were held on the first Saturday of every month.
- Devotees took turns in decorating and worshipping Sri Ramakrishna's image every week at the Sri Selva Vinayakar temple, South Maclean, QLD.
- Swami Atmeshananda conducted *Vivekachudamani* classes at Toowoomba on the first Thursday of every month.
- Yoga, meditation and a bush walk was held on the third weekend of every month at the Vedanta Precinct, Vedanta Drive, Springfield Lakes.

Other Activities:

- Swami Atmeshananda, accompanied by others, participated in a meeting organized by Wesley Mission at the Indooroopilly library on 29 July 2017. Wesley Mission offered to provide resources to the Vedanta Centre to organize regular activities, workshops and talks on mental health.

- The 'Turning of the Sod' ceremony to start the construction of a multipurpose building at 96 Vedanta Drive, Springfield Lakes, was conducted on Wednesday, 16 August 2017. The building will house a monastery, a shrine and meditation hall, a basement hall for events, a commercial kitchen, office, library, meeting room and guest accommodation. Swami Sridharananda, Councillor Paul Tully, Acting Mayor of Ipswich; Councillor Cheryl Bromage, Acting Deputy Mayor of Ipswich; Hon. Jim Madden, MP, Hon Steve Minnikin, MP, Archana Singh, Indian Consul in Brisbane, Dr. Mahalingam Sinnathamby, Chairman Springfield Land Corporation and other dignitaries were present. A large number of devotees and members of the public were present on the occasion. The building is expected to be completed in 12 months time.



(L to R) Archana Singh, Swami Sridharananda, Swami Atmeshananda, Cr. Paul Tully and Dr Mahalingam Sinnathamby

- Swami Atmeshananda was invited to participate in the Indian Independence Day celebrations on 19 August 2017 at the Roma Street Parklands, Brisbane.
- The Queensland Transcultural Mental Health, invited Swami Atmeshananda and committee members to discuss ways and means to improve the mental health of the Indian Community in Brisbane. The meeting was held on 23 August 2017.
- Swami Supriyananda, President, Ramakrishna Mission, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, visited Brisbane from 28 August to 3 September 2017. Apart from visiting various places of interest in and around Brisbane, he participated in a

discussion class on 'Meditation and Spiritual Life' on 1 September. The Swami left for Melbourne on 3 September.

Celebrations

- *Guru Purnima* was celebrated on 9 July 2017 with worship, devotional songs and a talk on the qualifications of the Guru and Disciple by Swami Atmeshananda. The programme concluded with the distribution of *prasad*.



Guru Purnima Celebrations

- *Sri Krishna Janmashtami* worship was conducted on Monday, 14 August 2017, at the Ashrama. Formal worship, reading from the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, devotional singing and distribution of *prasad* were the components of this celebration.
- On 25 August 2017, *Ganesha Chaturthi* was celebrated at the Ashrama with worship, singing of devotional songs and distribution of *prasad*.

Forthcoming Programmes:

- A mental health workshop for the benefit of parents and carers will be organized on 2 September at the Kenmore Library, Kenmore.
- *Sri Durga saptashati* (*Sri Sri Chandī*) will be recited at the Centre from 20 to 29 September in the mornings from 5:30 am to 8:00 am. It will be broadcast live on Facebook@brisbanevedanta. Singing of the *Mahisha Mardini Stotram* will take place on these days in the evenings from 7 pm after vesper service.
- *Durga puja ashtami* will be held on 28 September 2017 at the Oxley Senior Citizens' club, Oxley.

CANBERRA

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Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda conducted monthly classes on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gitā* at the Belconnen Community Centre, 2 Chandler Street, Belconnen, Canberra. Gita talks are now held regularly on the last Sunday of every month, and the next talk has been scheduled for 24 September 2017.
- The Annual General Meeting for the Canberra chapter was held on 27 August 2017 after the Gita class.

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* at the Centre from the Thursday to the Saturday of a prescheduled week. The Thursday and Friday sessions were held from 7:45 pm to 9 pm and the Saturdays sessions were held from 10 am to 11 am.

Celebrations:

- To mark the holy occasion of *Janmashtami* (Lord Sri Krishna's birthday), a *satsanga* (Prayer meeting) was held on Sunday 13 August 2017 at 10.30 am at the Centre. The program included chanting, *bhajans*, flower offerings and readings.

Other Activities:

- We were happy to host Swami Supriyananda President, Ramakrishna Mission, Kaula Lumpur, Malaysia. A special program was held on 3 September 2017 at 6pm to meet and greet Swami Supriyananda. On this occasion, Swami Supriyananda addressed the gathering and gave a highly motivational talk on 'Practical Spiritual Tips for Householders'.



Swami Supriyananda and Swami Mahabodhananda

- The Centre held its first spiritual retreat for this year on the 9 September 2017 from 9am till 4pm. The topic discussed was 'Living a Life with God'. Swami Sridharananda and Swami Sunisthanananda conducted the retreat, and it was well received by the participants.
- Swami Sunisthananandaji gave a talk on 'Significance of Durga Puja' on 10 September 2017 from 11am to 12 noon.
- At a gathering of all the members, devotees and friends held on 10 September 2017, Swami Sridharananda formally announced that Swami Sunisthanananda will soon take over charge of the Melbourne centre as its resident monk. This was heartily welcomed by all present and all assured Swami Sunisthanananda of their help and support.

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 con-

ducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.

Regular Activities:

- *Satsangas* 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 every month.
- The Vedanta Multipurpose hall is used about 5 days a week by Prana Yoga which is led by an acclaimed yoga teacher who is a member of Yoga Australia.
- A *satsanga* and prayer meeting was held on 2 July 2017 in observance of the passing away of Swami Atmasthananda.
- Swami Supriyananda, President, Ramakrishna Mission, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, delivered a talk on "Swami Subodhananda—Synonym for Simplicity" on Sunday, 10 September 2017. The *satsanga* was followed by a few *bhajans*, *aratrikam* and *prasad* distribution. Around 25 people attended the talk.

Celebrations:

- *Guru purnima* was celebrated on Saturday, 8 July 2017 from 10:00 am. Swami Sridharananda delivered a talk on "The Essence of a Guru". Nearly 40 people attended the event

SYDNEY

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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.

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda conducted his chapter-wise study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* on Sundays 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 *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*.
 - *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 school 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 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 *Vivekachudāmani* were conducted by Swami Sunishthananda every Wednesday between 7:30 pm and 8:30 pm.
 - Classes on the *Bhāgavata* 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.
 - Sanatan Satsang Sabha sang *Ram Katha*, once every month.
 - Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.
 - 'Yoga for Everybody' was conducted by qualified Yoga Teachers on Tuesdays and Saturdays.
 - Broadband for Seniors, under the auspices of Adult Learning Australia, was conducted with training and advice to those who sought help.
- recitation of Swami Vivekananda's Chicago address by Rishab Mukherjee, veena recital by Suchitha Rao, *bhajans* by Uma Srinivasan and a talk by Swami Mahabodhananda. There were around 220 people who attended and had prasad.
- *Sri Krishna Janmashtami* was held on 14 August 2017. The programme included *aratrikam*, chanting of shyam nama, and the depiction of some incidents of Sri Krishna's life. There were 180 people who partook of prasad.

Other Activities

- There was a special worship of Sri Ramakrishna on 2 July 2016 in honour of Swami Atmasthanandaji, the 15th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. A total of 130 people attended the function which included the distribution of *prasad*.
- Francis X. Clooney, S.J, Parkman Professor of Divinity and Professor of Comparative Theology, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University, gave a talk at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 28 July 2017. In his talk Professor Clooney extracted the deeper meanings and significance from the parables of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna. Around 90 people attended.
- The second spiritual retreat for the year was held at the VCS on 29 July 2017. The topic of the retreat was 'Living a Life with God', which was discussed by Swami Sridharananda, Swami Sunishthananda and Swami Mahabodhananda. The group discussions focused on the challenges that people face in different life situations. The group leaders also made short presentations on their respective topics.
- Swami Supriyananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, delivered a lecture on 'Swami Subodhananda - Synonym for Simplicity' on 25 August 2017.

Forthcoming Programme:

- Sri Sarada Devi's tithipuja (birth anniversary) on 9 December 2017.
- Christmas eve on 24 December 2017.
- Swami Vivekananda's tithipuja (birth anniversary) on 8 January 2018.

Celebrations:

- *Guru Purnima* was observed on 9 July 2016. The programme included special worship,

2. FEATURE ARTICLES

A. Sri Sarada Devi: In Undying Union

It was fast becoming clear from the steady deterioration in the health of Sri Ramakrishna that after entrusting the task of spiritual regeneration to the worthy hands of the Holy Mother and the chosen disciples, he was fast approaching the day of final departure. But the Mother could not accept this as inevitable. She had experienced the grace of Simhavadini in her own life, had seen the economic conditions of her father's family improve through the favour of Jagaddhatri, and had received signs of the Lord's mercy in many ways and many a time in the days of stress and strain. After long deliberation, the Mother decided to go to Tarakeshwar and lie there fasting day and night at the temple of Siva who is known as the fulfiller of all wishes; for once, at least, she must stay and see if the inexorable Divine law had not an exception, if Providence could not be moved by the piteous wail of a creature in distress.

Experiences at Cossipore

Five years earlier Sri Ramakrishna had indicated the omens that would precede his passing way – he would accept food indiscriminately from any one, would spend the night in Calcutta, and would eat food a part of which he had been given to somebody earlier – which had all come true even before he left Dakshineswar. On his return to Dakshineswar after spending the night at Balaram Babu's house during the car festival (*ratha-yātrā*) of 1885, he told her of another sign, 'When you find many people accepting, honouring and adoring this (pointing to himself) as the Deity, you will know that the time of disappearance is near at hand.' That portent too, the Mother might have taken as having been already fulfilled; for there were quite a number of devout souls who looked upon the Master as God incarnate. And while at Cossipore, she got a concrete illustration too.

A few devotees went with some sweets one day to meet Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar.



Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, (1853-1920)

But to their dismay they learned that he had gone to Calcutta for treatment; so they offered the sweets to Sri Ramakrishna's picture and took the *prasāda*. When the news reached Sri Ramakrishna, he said, 'Why did they make the offering to the picture instead of to the

Mother?' The Holy Mother and others became upset at the news of this offering to a picture of Sri Ramakrishna while the Master was in flesh and blood; for such adoration of a living person augured ill for him. But Sri Ramakrishna removed their consternation by emphatically assert-

ing, 'Don't you be worried, my dear! I shall be worshipped in every house hereafter; I say this upon oath, so help me God.' Therefore it became clear that not only was destiny against her but that Sri Ramakrishna was also determined to bid adieu. From that point of view, in fact, there was nothing to cheer her. And yet hope lingers though belief passes away; and nobody can keep silent without calling on God who is the only source of solace amid blank despair.

Visit to Tarakeshwar

The Mother went to Tarakeshwar; the Master did not object. It is not known who were her companions. Perhaps Lakshmi Devi and her maid-servant accompanied her but she lay down there for two days without food and water – but there was no sign of Siva's blessing. On the second night, the Mother continued there as before, craving the Lord's mercy, when she heard a crackling sound much resembling the sound of some earthen jars piled up together being broken with a stick. That woke her up, and the thought took possession of her mind, 'Who is a husband in the world and of whom? Who is related to whom here? For whom am I sacrificing my life here?' It was as though a distant rumbling of the horn of Rudra, the great Destroyer, was ushering in the dissolution of the world, rending asunder all earthly ties, and creating in

It became quite evident to the Mother that that was the real explanation of the Master's

martyrdom; otherwise why should such a sinless body have undergone such torture?

every heart an incomprehensible vacuum. The Mother got up from her bed and somehow felt her way to the basin behind the



Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886)

temple where the holy water offered to Siva had accumulated, and taking up a little of it in her hand she quenched her thirst. Then she felt relieved. Thus foiled in her attempt to save the Master, she left next day for Cossipore. The finite human mind sometimes shoots upward through some divine inspiration to lose itself in the infinitude of the cosmic mind getting thereby a new and all encompassing outlook, as a result of which the old worldly ties look ephemeral and meaningless and are, therefore, automatically discarded. This immersion of the microcosm into the macrocosm is referred to as renunciation. Through the influence of that overpowering self – abnegation the Mother deflected

from her resolve and returned disappointed to Cossipore. The Master knew all this, and in good humour he said, 'How now, my dear? Did you get anything? Nothing at all!'

The Master's Explanation to Holy Mother about his Condition

The time of the Master's passing away was fast approaching – to prevent it was beyond human capacity. Mother had a premonition of this in various ways. She said, 'The Master too saw in a dream an elephant going out to get medicine. Just as the elephant began digging the earth for the medicine, Gopal came and woke him up. He asked me, "Do you have any dream?" I saw Mother Kali with her neck turned aside, and asked Her, "Mother, why are you in this posture?" Mother Kali replied, "Because of that thing there (pointing to the Master's sore in the throat) I too have it." 'The Mother at once realized that if Mother Kali could not or would not cure the Master in spite of her suffering equally with him, then what could mere human beings do? Moreover, the Master also gave an explanation of his disease, which was calculated to raise the Mother's mind above worldly considerations to a level of universal compassion. He said, 'I am being subjected to all the sufferings that there can be; none of you need have it again. I have suffered for all in the world.' It became quite evident to the Mother that that was the real explanation of the Master's martyrdom; otherwise why should such a sinless body have

undergone such torture?

The month of August (1886) was well advanced. Through words and deeds the Master went on dropping hints that the day of final departure was at hand. But human hearts recoil from contemplating the poignant. Hence the devotees refused to believe their eyes and ears; and the Lord too lifted the veil of that mortifying future momentarily and then covered up the devotee's minds in a shroud of mystery. One day the Master sent for the Mother through Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda), remarking that she was intelligent and would, therefore, understand his condition. On her arrival, he said, 'Look here, my dear, I don't know why thoughts of Brahman are ever stirring my mind.' What answer could the Mother make? The sight of that frail, emaciated body was too heartbreaking for her; hence she uttered a few consoling words and then turned her face round to wipe off her tears. How helpless she felt. It was impossible to hold back the Master's mind in its headlong rush to the quietude of Brahman.

On the day of passing way, the Master sat on his bed leaning against the pillows. It was a sick-bed, and the light of hope had been extinguished; and so all around there was a dark pall of sadness. All thought that the power of speech had left him; but when the Mother and Lakshmi Devi came, he said, 'So

here you are? Look here, it seems I am going somewhere – all through water to a far – off place.' The Mother began weeping. But the Master continued, 'You need have no anxiety; you will be just as you have been so long; and they (meaning Narendra and others) will look after you and do for you as much as they have done for me. Do have an eye on dear Lakshmi.'

The sub-conscious of the Mother had been fluttering with trepidation at the black shadows of the imminent calamity passing over it. Everything around her seemed to be out of hinges and full of evil portent. She had been cooking some *kichudi* for her sons engaged in the Master's service; the bottom portion of it got burned. She served the upper portion to the boys and ate the lower portion herself. She had spread a piece of cloth



on the roof for drying; it was not to be found. There was an earthen goblet; it fell and broke

into pieces in the process of being lifted up.

Sri Ramakrishna Immersed in *Samādhi*

Then came the midnight of the 15th August; and midnight passed into the small hours of the 16th. It was two minutes past one o'clock. That garden house dotted with shrubs and trees, on the outskirts of the city, was steeped in absolute silence; only the devotees sitting by the bed of Sri Ramakrishna kept a helpless vigil as they found him immersed in *Samādhi*, which lengthened into hours till there was no possibility of a reawakening. The physician came to announce that all hope had been shattered. Next day the holy body was consigned to a sacred fire at the cremation ground on the Ganges at Cossipore; and when all was over, the ashes were gathered in a copper vessel which was carried to the garden house and placed on the Master's bed.

In the evening the Mother sat to remove her ornaments one by one; and when at last she was about to take off her gold bracelets, the Master suddenly appeared in his body just as it was before he had the disease, and taking hold of her hand said, 'Have I died that you are removing the signs of a married woman from your wrists?' She then desisted from doing so. Balaram Babu had brought a white piece of cloth without any coloured border, to be worn by

her as a sign of widowhood. When he gave this to Golap – Ma to be passed on to the Mother, Golap – Ma said with a start, ‘By Jove! Who is going to hand over to her the white cloth without coloured borders?’ Later, when she went to the Mother, she found she had torn a portion of the broad border of her own cloth to make it very thin. From that day she wore clothes with thin red borders and not the absolutely white ones. For, there is really no end to the everlasting play of the Master; and there is really no separation of the Mother from him.

On the third day, food was offered before the reliquary. Now, the older devotees decided that after the Master had shuffled off his mortal coil, there was no meaning in retaining the garden house. But the young devotees like Narendra wanted to continue the lease for sometime more, so as to allow sufficient time to the Mother to get over the shock and to have a place for keeping the Master’s ashes. But as they had no monetary backing they could not stand up before the older people. Therefore the final decision was that the house would be given up on the expiry of the lease, the urn containing the ashes would be removed before then to the Kankurgachhi garden of Ram Babu, which the Master had once made holy by a visit, and the Holy Mother would go elsewhere. But some of the young devotees did not readily agree to part with the ashes. For both the lay and the monastic devotees had settled at first by common consent that the copper urn would be interred in a plot of

land to be purchased on the sacred Ganges. Considering, however, the great expenditure involved and for other reasons, the householders changed their view afterwards. As this new decision did not appeal to the young devotees, they removed more than half of the ashes and the pieces of bone to a separate vessel, which was then sent to the house of Balaram Babu. Then they heartily cooperated in interring the first copper jar at Kankurgachhi on the 23rd August, which was the holy birthday of Sri Krishna.

The Holy Mother, who heard much of this controversy, took no sides in it because of her extreme mood of indifference consequent on the stunning blow; and she said to Golap–Ma, ‘Look at this bickering, Golap; that precious person, worth his weight in gold, is gone, and they are quarrelling about his ashes.’ Soon she became ready to leave Cossipore. At the invitation of the great devotee Balaram Babu, she went to his house on the afternoon of the 21st August. It can be well understood that at the passing away of the Master and the thought of her helpless condition, she was very much overwhelmed. Though subsequently she had a direct vision of the Master’s permanent divine body and heard the call ‘Mother’ from the lips of her children, and though this assuaged her agony a little, yet the terrible, physical separation was not easy to forget. At every turn, and with every thought the Mother was being reminded that the Master was not there just as he used to be. The devotees too knew of this state of her mind.



And they, therefore, planned to send her on a pilgrimage to places which had been sanctified by the Lord in his previous incarnations and on which He had impressed His indelible marks, so that by coming face to face with these indubitable signs of the Lord’s undying presence she might forget the pangs of separation and by being away from the places so fresh with the Master’s memory, she might somewhat recover from that agonizing grief. Accordingly, she started for Vrindaban, on the 30th of August, 1886, accompanied by Golap–Ma, Lakshmi Devi, Master Mahashaya’s wife, Swami Yogananda, Swami Abhedananda, and Swami Adbhutananda.

Pilgrimage to Vrindaban

On the way they got down at Deoghar to worship Siva and then they proceeded to Banaras, where they stayed for some eight or ten days worshipping Siva, Goddess Annapurna, and other well known deities. The Mother climbed the tower of Venimadhava, from which could be seen the city of Banaras. One day, during the evening services at the

Viswanatha temple, her spiritual fervour was so highly enkindled that unconscious of what she was doing she walked to her dwelling place with unusually heavy steps. Questioned by this she said, 'The Master had led me by hand from the temple.' Along with others she visited Swami Bhaskarananda one day. The Swami was naked and he said to them, 'Mothers, don't you feel shy, for you are all forms of the Mother of the Universe. About her impression of the swami the Mother said, 'What a poised, great soul. In heat and cold alike he sits uncovered.'

Then the Master appeared to them one night and said, 'Well, my dears, why do you weep so much? It's just like walking from this room to that.'

From Banaras they all reached Ayodhya, the birthplace of Sri Ramachandra, where they visited places associated with his divine disport. On the way to Vrindaban from Ayodhya, the Mother got another vision of the Master, under peculiar circumstances. On her arm was the gold amulet, which the Master wore in the name of his chosen deity. She was reclining with that arm uppermost near the window of the railway compartment in which she was travelling. The Master peeped in through the window to say, 'Mind you that the amulet is with you; see that it is not lost.' She at once took it off and put it into the tin box in which was kept the picture of the Master that she worshipped daily. She



Banki Bihari Temple, Vrindaban

never wore it again, but worshipped it along with the picture. On arriving at Vrindaban they were put up at the Kala Babu's grove, belonging to Balaram Babu's family, on the Yamuna.

It was about the middle of September when the rains were over and the woods of Vrindaban looked fresh and smiling. The trees had thick green foliage; the ground was covered with grass; the air was saturated with the sweet smell of flowers; all around could be heard the cry of peacocks and the lowing of cattle; there were deer grazing fearlessly by the wayside and taking to flight with raised ears at the sound of human steps; and the Yamuna, full to the brim, was coursing down with a murmuring sound. Vrindaban had still its wonted beauty and those associations of old – the Nikunja grove, the dust made wet by Radha's tears of separation, the fields of Vraja hallowed by the longing lingering looks of the cowherd girls searching for Krishna – all these were there, and everywhere the deep indelible impres-

sion of Krishna enkindled an irresistible desire to see him; but he himself was nowhere to be found.

So after their arrival at Vrindaban, there welled forth from the heart of the Mother, an excruciating moan of agony. Before this she had visions of the Master at least three or four times. But the lack of an inalienably tangible union with him to whose feet all the strings of her heart were tied, oppressed her mind and aroused in it the endless question, 'Where is he?' After coming to Vrindaban the Mother was ever in tears, and to these were added the tears of Yogin-Ma who had preceded her there. When the two met, the Mother clasped Yogin-Ma to her heart. Having heard everything from others and having the mournful Mother before her very eyes, Yogin-Ma also began to moan the loss continually. Then the Master appeared to them one night and said, 'Well, my dears, why do you weep so much? It's just like walking from this room to that.'

Following this vision and assurance, the Mother's flow of tears lessened; but the pangs of separation were still there, and they now found expression through a different channel. In the section of the *Bhāgavata*, called the *Gopigita*, we read that when Krishna suddenly disappeared from the field of his amorous disport, the cowherd lasses, overpowered with grief and forgetful of everything around, began a long search for him; but baffled in this and therefore lost in anxious longing for Him all the more, they gradually came to identify themselves mentally with the object of their intense love, so much so that they started impersonating him in various ways. In the body and mind of the Mother also was now to be seen a similar self-absorption. Forgetful of herself she sometimes walked across the vast sandy shore to the waters of the Yamuna unknown to anybody and she had to be searched out and persuaded to return. One does not know, she might have then thought of herself as Radha, the sweetheart of Krishna, and of Sri Ramakrishna as Krishna, and was thus lost in the bliss of union in the Vrindaban of her heart. It is said that she once told a devotee, 'I, indeed, am Radha.' At times, rapt in the thoughts of the Master, she became one with him. One day she lost all outer consciousness in a deep *samādhi* from which she could not be roused, in spite of Yogin-Ma's repeating the Lord's name in her ears for a long time. Then Swami Yogananda made a similar attempt, when there appeared signs of reawakening, and she said, 'I shall eat,' just as the Master used to say after a

deep *samādhi*. When some food, water and betel were held before her, she took a little just like the Master; she chewed the betel just like him, after biting off the conical portion with her teeth. At that time Swami Yogananda put several questions to her, to which she replied in the Master's manner. In fact, all her gestures and postures at that time resembled those of the Master. After coming back to the normal plane, she herself admitted that the Master had engulfed her for the time being.

The Mother being thus occupied with the thoughts of the Master, her talks and movements ap-



Swami Yogananda (1861-1899)

peared to be unrelated to the actualities of life and rather like those of a simple child. One day, on seeing a dead body, covered with flowers and garlands, being carried to the cremation ground with music, she said with some eagerness, 'Look there, look, how the man (by dying in Vrindaban) has attained (the eternal) Vrinda-

ban. We came here to lay down our bodies; but we never had so much as fever for a day. You can well calculate how old we have grown – we have seen our fathers, and the elder brothers of our husbands.'

Yogin-Ma and others burst out laughing at this and said, 'What a strange thing you say Mother: you have seen your father. Whoever does not see one's father?'

The Mother lived at Vrindaban for about a year. A month later Master Mahashaya's wife was attacked with malaria and she had to leave for Calcutta with Swami Abhedananda. Swami Adbhutananda also went to Calcutta after six months on getting some sad news from Ramachandra Datta's house.

One day she lost all outer consciousness in a deep samādhi from which she could not be roused, in spite of Yogin-Ma's repeating the Lord's name in her ears for a long time.

The long stay at Vrindaban had the effect of bringing to some extent the Mother's mind down to the normal plane. The Master ultimately granted her a continuous flow of bliss in proportion as he had previously given her grief. She went round the temples daily, seeing the different images and sitting for meditation at suitable places. She must have been blessed with many visions at that time, though she never gave them out. Only of one of

these incidents did she tell Yogin-Ma. That day she had been to the temple of Radharamana where she had a vision of the wife of Navagopal Ghosh (both husband and wife being devotees of the Master), standing by the deity and fanning Him. On her return home she said, 'Yogen, Navagopal's wife is very pure. I had such and such a vision.'

Some time during their stay there the Mother and her party undertook a ceremonial circumambulation of Vrindaban for more than a fortnight. During this walk, the Mother seemed to be looking at the roads, fields, and forests of the place with intense interest; at times she stopped altogether lost in her reverie. To Yogin-Ma and others it was clear that she was in a spiritual mood and was having some visions too. So now and then they put questions to her out of curiosity. But the Mother put them off with a simple answer, 'No, that's nothing. Move on.'

Here the Master got one of his unfinished tasks accomplished through the Mother; and in the Mother's life too a new chapter opened. The Master appeared before the Mother and said, 'Give this *mantra* to Yogin.' On the first day the Mother thought that it was a mere fantasy and so did nothing. Besides, she felt ashamed, thinking, 'People will say, "Mother has begun to have disciples within such a short period (of her mourning)."' She did not also pay heed to a second vision of this kind. On the third day she remonstrated with the Master, 'I don't so much as talk

with him (Yogin); how can I impart the *mantra*?' The Master suggested, 'You tell daughter Yogin; she will be present.' He also told her the *mantra*. The Mother inquired of Swami Yogananda through Yogin-Ma whether he had his initiation. He said, 'No, Mother, the Master didn't give me any particular *mantra* of any special deity. I repeat one according to my own choice.' He further let her know that he too had been asked by the Master to be initiated by the Mother, but he could not make the request because of his natural modesty. At last the Mother agreed to initiate him. On the appointed day, the Mother had an onset of spiritual fervour as she sat in worship before the picture and the physical remains of the Master. She called in Swami Yogananda and, while still in that ecstatic mood, imparted the *mantra*, which was uttered so loudly that Yogin - Ma could hear it from the adjoining room. Swami Yogananda was the Mother's first disciple.

Towards the end of this period of stay at Vrindaban, the Mother once went to Hardwar with Swami Yogananda, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and Lakshmi Devi. On the way Swami Yogananda was suddenly attacked with high fever in the train. When Yogin-Ma was giving him pomegranate seeds, the Mother saw as though the Master himself was being fed. In a state of unconsciousness resulting from high temperature, Swami Yogananda saw a terrible form standing in front of him and telling him, 'I would have seen you but I am helpless. There's the order of Paramahansa Deva (Sri Ramakrishna),

and I have to quit at once.' When departing, the figure pointed to a deity with red clothes and directed him to offer some *rasagollas* to her. The fever abated at once. At Hardwar the Mother bathed at the Brahma-kunda and visited the temples. She had with her some nail-parings and hair of the Master, a portion of which she intended to offer in the holy water of the Ganges at Hardwar. This she did at the Brahma-Kunda. Besides, she crossed the Ganges to climb the Chandi hill and worship the goddess Chandi there.

Then with her companions she went to Jaipur. After they had seen the main deity Govindaji, they went on visiting the other deities, when suddenly they came to a Goddess, on seeing whom Swami Yogananda cried out that this was the very deity he had seen during his last fever. She was Sitala, the Goddess of small pox. The Goddess was offered half a rupee worth of *rasagollas*, which were fortunately available near the temple gate. From Jaipur they went to Pushkar where the Mother climbed the Savitri hill. Though her right leg had become rheumatic at Dakshineswar, she could still move about freely, so that it was not too strenuous for her to ascend the Savitri and the Chandi hills and walk a round Vrindaban for a fortnight.

Return to Calcutta

After spending a year in the holy places of the north, they proceeded to Calcutta by way of Allahabad, where at the sacred con-

fluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, the Mother offered the remaining portion of the Master's nails and hair. Of this the Mother said, 'Is the Master's hair an ordinary thing? When I went to Prayag (Allahabad) after his demise, I carried with me his hair for immersion in the holy water. As I took up the hair in hand with a view to offering it in the placid water of the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, a wave leaped up unawares and took away the hair from my hand and hid itself again in the placid water around. That holy place snatched away that thing from my hand for its own sanctification'.

At this place Lakshmi Devi, a widow as she was, had her head shaved clean according to the custom of the place; the Mother did not do so. Before her mind's eye was being played then the drama of her constant union with the Master and through the physical eyes, too, she was having frequent visions of him. Accordingly, she could not remove her hair just as she could not take off her ornaments earlier. Thus brimming with the happiness born of visiting the most sacred places and the repeated visions of the Master, she returned to Calcutta, where she stayed in the house of Balaram Bose.

Conclusion: Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi

Mother: "The creation itself is full of grief. How can one understand joy if there is no sorrow? And how can everyone be happy at

the same time? There is a story that once Sita said to Rama, 'Why do you not remove everybody's miseries? Make everyone in your kingdom - all your subjects - happy. You can do it if you like.' Rama answered, 'Can everyone be happy at the same time?' 'Well, they can, if you so desire. Why not satisfy all their needs from the royal treasury?' 'Just as you wish.'

Then Rama called Lakshmana and said, 'Go and tell everyone in my kingdom that all their needs will be supplied from my treasury.' When the people heard this, they came and explained their needs. The treasury was laid open. But such was the dispensation of Rama that soon the roof of the royal palace showed cracks and water seeped through. Masons were sent for to repair the cracks. But there were none to be found. Where was any labourer to be found? The subjects also came and complained that because there were no masons or workmen, their houses and buildings were falling to pieces. Then, seeing no other way, Sita said to Rama, 'We cannot suffer in the wet like this. Let everything be as it was. Then we can get workmen again. Everybody cannot be happy at the same time.' 'So be it,' answered Rama. In the twinkling of an eye everything was as it used to be. One could get workmen again. 'Lord, it is true that this life is only a game of yours,' said Sita.

'No one can suffer for all the time. No one will spend all his days on this earth in suffering. Every action brings its own result, and one gets one's opportu-



nities accordingly."

Disciple: "Then is everything the fruit of Karma?"

Mother: "What else, if not Karma?"

Source

Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Chennai, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1955) pp.133-146

Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother, (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1982) pp. 2-3.

B. Direct Disciples: Swami Niranjanananda

Swami Niranjanananda Jayanthi was celebrated on Monday 7 August 2017. As a good shepherd knows his sheep by sight, so Ramakrishna recognised the intimate disciples who had been born to carry his message. As soon as he met one of them, he would lovingly say, "You belong to this place." He would treat each of them as would a most loving father.



Swami Niranjanananda (1862-1904)

The Training of Niranjan

Swami Saradananda writes: Shortly after the arrival of such a devotee the Master would call him aside, ask him to meditate, and then under the influence of divine inspiration he would touch certain parts of his body like the chest or the tongue. By that potent touch the devotee's mind would become indrawn and sense objects would vanish from its perception. His accumulated impressions of the past would be activated and produce spiritual realization in him... Besides touching the devotees in that way, the Master initiated some of them with mantras.

The Master with a mantra initiated Niranjan. He later described

this experience:

I was then working in an office. One day I went to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. He wrote a mantram on my tongue and asked me to repeat it. What an experience! After returning home, even when my eyes were closed, I began to see innumerable fireflies in my room. The mantram was vibrating in my head and in every limb of my body. I wanted to sleep, but I could not stop the repetition of japam. I had previously been unaware of this phenomenon. I became scared and thought that I would go out of my mind. After three days I returned to Dakshineswar and said to the Master, "Sir, what have you done to me?" After listening to my story, he laughed and withdrew the power of the mantram. He then said, "It is called *ajapa mantram* [the repetition of japam effortlessly and unceasingly]."

Sri Ramakrishna's Instructions to Niranjan

Ramakrishna's teachings varied from person to person. For instance, he scolded the mild-tempered Yogananda because he had not protested some false accusations made against him; but the Master instructed Niranjan differently:

Niranjan was habitually good-natured, but he had a violent temper. One day, when he was going to Dakshineswar on the public ferry, he overheard some of the other passengers speaking sneeringly of Sri Ramakrishna, saying that he was not a true man of renunciation but a hypocrite who enjoyed good food and every comfort, and whose disciples were gullible schoolboys. Niranjan protested strongly, but the speakers ignored him. At this, Niranjan became enraged, jumped to his feet, and began to rock the boat, threatening to capsize it in midstream. Niranjan was a powerful swimmer, he could easily have swam ashore after carrying out his threat. The passengers were frightened and they begged to be forgiven.

When Sri Ramakrishna heard about this incident, he rebuked Niranjan severely. "Anger is a deadly sin," he said. "You ought never to let it carry you away. The seeming anger of a good man is something different. It's no more than a mark made on water. It vanishes as soon as it's made. As for those mean-minded people who talked against me, they weren't worth getting into a quarrel with – you could waste your whole life in such quarrelling. Think of them as being no more than insects. Be indifferent

to what they say. See what a great crime you were about to commit, under the influence of this anger! Think of the poor helmsman and the oarsman in that boat – you were ready to drown them too, and they had done nothing.”

Slaves of Lust and Gold

At one time Niranjan was compelled to accept a job with an indigo planter at Murshidabad, more than a hundred miles north of Calcutta. Sri Ramakrishna was aggrieved when he heard of this and remarked, “I would not have been more pained had I heard of his death.” A few days later, when he saw Niranjan, he learned that he had to accept the job to maintain his aged mother. With a sigh of relief, the Master told Niranjan, “Ah, then it is all right. It won’t contaminate your mind. But I tell you, if you had done so for your own sake, I could not have touched you. Really, it was unthinkable that you would stoop to so much humiliation. Didn’t I know that my Niranjan had not the least trace of impurity in him?”

Upon hearing this remark, a member of the audience questioned the Master, “Sir, you are condemning service; but how can we maintain our families without earning money?” The Master replied, “Let him who likes do so. I don’t forbid anyone. I say this only to these young aspirants [pointing to Niranjan and others] who form a class by themselves.” Ramakrishna did not want his intimate disciples to become slaves of lust and gold.

On 15 June 1884, M. recorded the feelings the Master had for Niranjan in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

After the music the Master sat with the devotees. Just then Niranjan arrived and prostrated himself before him. At the very sight of this beloved disciple the Master stood up, with beaming eyes and smiling face, and said, “You have come too! (to M.) You see, this boy is absolutely guileless. One cannot be guileless without a great deal of spiritual discipline in previous births. A hypocritical and calculating mind can never attain God.

(To Niranjan) “I feel as if a dark veil has covered your face. It is because you have accepted a job in an office. One must keep accounts there. Besides, one must attend to many other things, and that always keeps the mind in a state of worry. You are serving in an office like other worldly people; but there is a slight difference in that you are earning money for the sake of your mother. One must show the highest respect to one’s mother for she is the very embodiment of the Blissful Mother of the Universe. If you had accepted the job for the sake of wife and children, I should have said, ‘Fie upon you! A thousand shames.’”

“First God and then the World”

Ramakrishna had two types of teaching. One was for the householders, who are obliged to take care of their families and at the same time practise spiritual disciplines. He reminded them constantly, “First God and then the

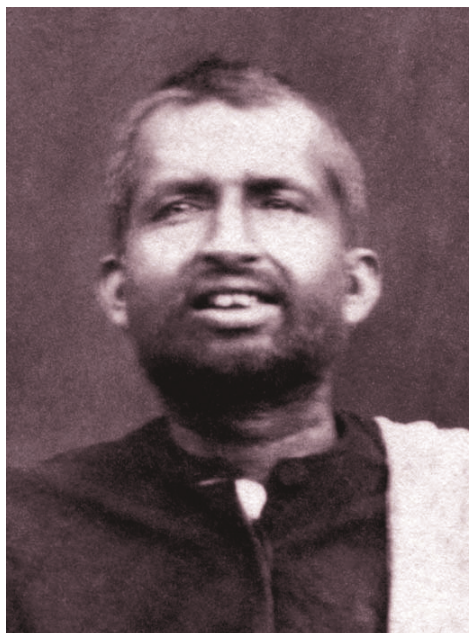
world.” Secondly, he established the monastic ideal for his would-be monastic disciples, “The sanniyasi must renounce ‘woman and gold’ for his own welfare...The sanniyasi, the man of renunciation, is a world teacher. It is his example that awakens the spiritual consciousness of men.” Ramakrishna was overjoyed to learn that Niranjan was not attached to women and would not marry. Niranjan told him, “A woman never enters my thoughts.” On 15 July 1885, like a proud father, the Master praised Niranjan to the devotees: “Look at Niranjan. He is not attached to anything. He spends money from his own pocket to take poor patients to the hospital. At the proposal of marriage he says, ‘Goodness! That is the whirlpool of the Vishalakshi [a stream near Kamarpukur]!’ I see him seated on a light.”

On that same day, while sitting in his room at Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna was chanting the names of gods and goddesses. M. recorded in the *Gospel*, “Then he repeated, ‘Alekh Niranjana,’ which is a name of God. Saying ‘Niranjana’ he wept. The devotees wept too. With tears in his eyes the Master said, “O Niranjan! O my child! Come! Eat this! When shall I make my life blessed by feeding you? You have assumed this human form for my sake.’” Perhaps this sincere call of the Master reached Niranjan: He resigned from his job and came to visit the Master. In an ecstatic mood, Ramakrishna told him, “You were living in an indigo-house of such a place; on this particular day you rode on your deputy’s horse; you

stood in such a place with a bow and arrow." Niranjan realised the Master was all – knowing. With tearful eyes he surrendered himself to Ramakrishna saying, "Sir, all these days I could not recognise you." From that day Niranjan visited the Master frequently.

Free Will and Predestination

Sometimes the young disciples would discuss the various riddles of life. Once in Dakshineswar Niranjan and others had a long discussion on free will and predestination. Unable to reach any conclusion, they approached the Master. At first the Master was amused by their naïve ideas but then he commented more seriously: Does anybody have free will or anything like that? It is by God's will alone that everything has already happened and will continue to happen. Man understands this last of all. Let me give an example of man's free will: It is like a cow tied to a post with a long tether; she can stand at a distance of one cubit from the post or she can go up to the whole length of the tether according to her choice. A man ties a cow with the idea: Let her lie down, stand or move about as she likes within that area. Similarly, God has given man some power and also the freedom to utilize it as he likes. That is why man feels he is free. But the rope is fastened to the post. And remember this: If anybody prays to god earnestly, God may move him to another place and tie him there, or lengthen the tether, or even remove it completely from his neck.



Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886)

Training to be a Great Spiritual Leader

Ramakrishna kept close watch over the disciples' eating, sleeping, and day-to-day behaviour. Since only a good student can be a good teacher, the Master uncompromisingly trained his inner-circle disciples so they could become great spiritual leaders. Self-control and truthfulness are indispensable to spiritual life. Once, on seeing Niranjan take too much *ghee* (clarified butter), which was believed to create lust, the Master exclaimed, "My goodness! You take so much ghee! Are you eventually going to abduct people's daughters and wives?" Another day the Master said to a devotee (pointing at Niranjan): "Look at this boy. He is absolutely guileless. But he has one fault: he is slightly untruthful nowadays. The other day he said that he would visit me again very soon, but he didn't come." Hearing this, Niranjan immediately apologised.

In the Service of the Master

In September 1885 Sri Ramakrishna had to move to Shyampukur, Calcutta, for his cancer treatment. Niranjan left home and became the Master's gatekeeper, as he was strong and heroic by nature. Following his doctor's advice, Ramakrishna moved from the smoggy environment of Calcutta to a garden house at Cossipore on 11 December 1885. Cossipore was then a suburb of Calcutta and not very far from the Ganges. The Master was quite happy despite his terminal cancer. On the morning of 23 December Ramakrishna gave unrestrained expression of his love for the devotees. He said to Niranjan, "You are my father; I shall sit on your lap." Touching another devotee's chest, he said, "May your inner spirit be awakened." By living with the Master, the devotees' own love and devotion also grew by leaps and bounds.

Once Niranjan went back home for a visit. When he returned, the Master said, "Please tell me how you feel." Niranjan replied, "Formerly I loved you, no doubt, but now it is impossible for me to live without you." Then the Master explained to M., "This illness is showing who belongs to the inner circle and who to the outer. Those who are living here, renouncing the world, belong to the inner circle; and those who pay occasional visits and ask, 'How are you, sir?' belong to the outer circle."

The young disciples took turns around the clock serving the

Master. Moreover, they were practising spiritual disciplines according to his instructions. They renounced hearth and home and surrendered themselves to Sri Ramakrishna. The following incident reveals how the Master protected the disciples: One evening Niranjan and a few other disciples decided to get juice from a date palm near the southern boundary of the garden. The Master knew nothing about this. When it was dark, Niranjan and others walked in the direction of the tree. In the meantime, Holy Mother saw the Master running down the steps and through the door. She wondered, "How is this possible? How can anyone who needs help even to change his position in bed run like an arrow?" She could not believe her eyes, so she went to the Master's room to see if he was there. Ramakrishna was not in his room. In great consternation she looked all around, but she could not find him. At last Holy Mother returned to her room, extremely confused and with much apprehension.

After a while Holy Mother saw the Master running swiftly back to his room. She then went to him and asked about what she had seen. He replied, "Oh, you noticed that. You see, the boys who have come here are all young. They were proceeding merrily to drink the juice of a date palm in the garden. I saw a black cobra there. It is so ferocious and it might have bitten them all. The boys did not know this. So I went there by a different route to drive it away. I told the snake, "Don't enter here



Cossipore Garden House

again." The Master asked her not to divulge this account to others.

Niranjan's Steadfast Protection of the Master

After he had been at Cossipore for three or four months, Ramakrishna's body became so emaciated that it was hard to recognise him. But his devotees still hoped that he would free himself from the cancer. During this time the Master told Niranjan, "Look, I am now in such a state that whoever sees me in this condition will attain liberation in this life by the grace of the Divine Mother. But know for certain that it will shorten my life." Upon hearing this from the Master, Niranjan became more vigilant about his guard duty. He sat at the gate day and night with a turban on his head and a stick in his hand to keep outsiders from visiting the Master. Niranjan sometimes had to hurt people, but he accepted this as an unpleasant duty necessary to protect the Master's life.

A mentally – ill woman used to accompany Vijay Goswami to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar and

sing for Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was fond of her singing but was careful about her as she cherished towards him *madhura bhava*, the attitude of a wife towards her husband. Once this woman came to Cossipore at about noon and wanted to visit the Master. Niranjan stopped her at the entrance. She then became hysterical. Hearing this, the Master asked Shashi to escort her to him, and he blessed her. She then began to make more frequent visits. Niranjan adopted an unbending attitude and prevented her from visiting the Master. Most of the young disciples were very apprehensive because of her unpredictable and seemingly violent behaviour. However, when the woman was finally discouraged, she paid no further visits. Rakhal expressed his sympathy for the woman. He said, "We all feel sorry for her. She causes so much annoyance, and for that he suffers too." Immediately Niranjan remarked, "You feel that way because you have a wife at home." Rakhal replied sharply, "Such bragging. How dare you utter such words before him [Sri Ramakrishna]?" The Master remained silent. He appreciated Rakhal's love and compassion for

a suffering soul, as well as Niranjan's faithful service to the guru.

Another day, Ramchandra Datta wanted to visit the Master, but Niranjan stopped him at the gate. This hurt Ram because he was one of the Master's prominent lay devotees. He then said to Latu, "Please offer these sweets and flowers to the Master and bring a little Prasad for me." Latu was very touched and said to Niranjan, "Brother, Ram Babu is our very own; why are you putting such restrictions on him?" Still Niranjan was inexorable. Then Latu said bluntly, "At Shyampukur you allowed the actress Binodini to visit the Master and now you are stopping Ram Babu, who is such a great devotee." This pricked Niranjan's conscience, so he let Ram go to see Sri Ramakrishna. Later when Latu went upstairs, the omniscient Master said to him, "Look, never see faults in others; rather, see their good qualities." Latu was embarrassed. He came down and apologised to Niranjan, saying, "Brother, please don't mind my caustic remark. I am an illiterate person." This shows how the Master taught his disciples to develop close interpersonal relationships.

Once Atul Ghosh, Girish's brother, came to visit the Master and was stopped by Niranjan. Atul was very hurt. Piqued, he took a vow that he would not visit Ramakrishna again unless someone personally came to his house and took him there. One day the Master asked Niranjan to go to Atul's house and bring him to check his health. (Atul, though

not a doctor, knew how to check a pulse and evaluate the condition of a disease). Immediately, Niranjan rushed to Atul and brought him to the Master. Even while he was sick, the Master was training his devotees – sometimes humbling one and sometimes increasing longing in another.

During the winter Ramakrishna would bathe with hot water. One day Niranjan used a lot of firewood to heat a large vessel of water. That waste displeased the Master, but Niranjan was stubborn. He carried the whole vessel of water to the Master and said, "Sir, I don't have enough sense to know how much water you need. Since I have brought it, you will have to use it." The Master was pleased by Niranjan's simple and fearless behaviour.

It is hard for a lover to watch the suffering of his beloved. The real lover wishes he could relieve his beloved's suffering. While serving the Master, Niranjan often worried about him. The Master read his mind and one day asked him, "Niranjan, if I were cured of this disease, what would you do?" With great excitement Niranjan replied, "Master, I would uproot that date palm from the garden." Knowing his heroic nature and his overwhelming love and devotion, the Master remarked, "Yes, you could do that."

Conclusion

The disciples took care of the Master's body, and he in turn took care of their spiritual life. He silently and naturally gave

shape to this group of ideal characters. From his birth, Niranjan had been endowed with divine qualities – simplicity, purity, fearlessness, steadiness, truthfulness, and renunciation. When the elder Gopal brought twelve pieces of ochre cloth and twelve rosaries, the Master gave one of them to Niranjan and distributed the rest to the other disciples. Thus Ramakrishna sowed the seeds of his forthcoming monastic order.

When Sri Ramakrishna passed away on 16 August 1886, the disciples gathered his relics from the Cossipore cremation ground and put them into an urn. They brought the urn to the garden house and decided to continue their service. But they had no money, so Ramachandra Datta suggested installing the Master's relics at Kankurgachi Yogodyana, his retreat house. Niranjan vehemently protested against this. He, Shashi, and some others secretly transferred the major portion of the Master's relics to a separate urn, which they secretly kept at the house of Balaram Basu, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. In the beginning Narendra had yielded to Ram Babu's suggestion, but, learning how his brother disciples felt, he supported their decision. Later, he installed this second urn at Belur Math.

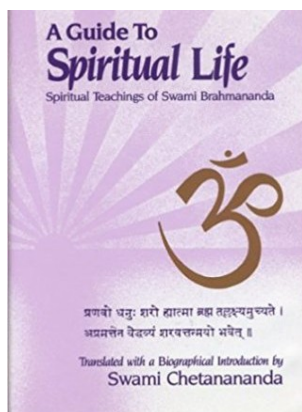
Source

Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1997) pp. 246-253.

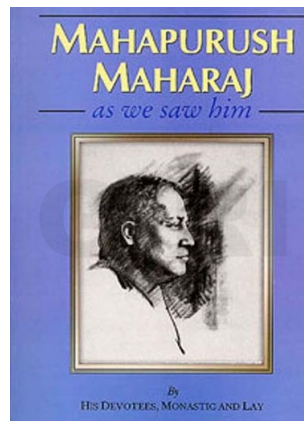


<http://spiritualbookstore.org.au/>

Ramakrishna Vivekananda Literature



Title: *A Guide to Spiritual Life*
Author: Swami Brahmananda
Translator: Swami Chetanananda
Price: \$17.00
Cover: Type: HB
Pages: 192
Language: English
Publisher: Vedanta Society of St. Louis
Weight: 76 gm

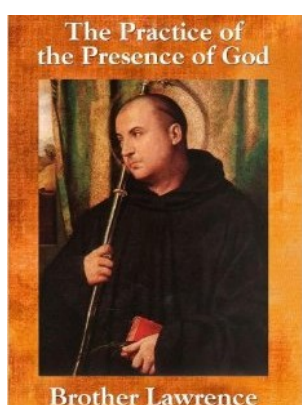


Title: *Mahapurush Maharaj as we saw Him*
Author: Monastic and Lay Devotees
Price: \$20.00
Cover: Type: HB
Pages: 496
Language: English
Publisher: Advaita Ashrama
Weight: 540 gm

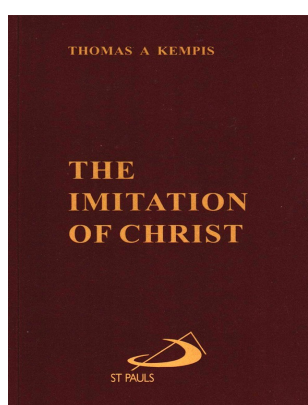
The spiritual teachings of Swami Brahmananda, the *manasa putra* of Sri Ramakrishna, are the words of a realized soul. These were initially collected and compiled into a book in Bengali with the title *Dharma-Prasanga Swami Brahmananda*. Swami Chetanananda has translated this work, which is bound to inspire those who are consumed by a passion for God and spiritual awakening.

Once Swami Shivananda, also known as Mahapurush Maharaj, told a young spiritual aspirant, study our lives, which is as good as studying the Upanishads. The lives of great souls is a lesson of spirituality in practice. This present volume is a combination of two books containing the reminiscences of Mahapurush Maharaj published by Bharati Vidya Bhavan and Hollywood Press. The reminiscences are of monastic and lay devo-

Christianity



Title: *The Practice of the Presence of God*
Author: Brother Lawrence
Price: \$10.00
Cover: Type: PB
Pages: 39
Language: English
Publisher: Wildside Press
Weight: 86gms



Title: *The Imitation of Christ*
Author: Thomas A Kempis
Price: \$5.00
Cover: Type: PB
Pages: 382
Language: English
Publisher: St Paul's Society
Weight: 107gms

The Practice of the Presence of God is a manual on practical spirituality. It records the earnest entreaties of a soul panting for spirituality and communion with his master, while engaged in the hustle and bustle of the world. This work is a manual on karma yoga for those with a leaning towards a personal God.

The Imitation of Christ, by Thomas A Kempis, was one of the two books, apart from the *Bhagavad Gita*, that Swami Vivekananda carried with him while travelling the length and breadth of India. The book contains four parts, with several chapters under each part, which dwell on the various aspects of spiritual life and spiritual living. Each chapter also contains a reflection and a prayer.