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Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna: On Sincerity

Be not a traitor to your thoughts. Be sincere; act according to your thoughts; and you shall surely succeed. Pray with a sincere and simple heart, and your prayers will be heard.

Source: *Great Sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; (Kolkata: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2013), 3.

Sri Sarada Devi: On Self Effort and Divine Grace

If you practise spiritual discipline for some time in a solitary place, you will find that your mind has become strong, and then you can live in any place and society without being in the least affected by it. When the plant is tender, it should be hedged around. But when it has grown big, not even cows and goats can injure it. Spiritual practices in a solitary place are essential.

Source: *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1982), 55

Swami Vivekananda: On Freedom and Mukti

We are ever free if we would believe it, only have faith enough. You are the soul, free and eternal, ever free, ever blessed. Have faith enough and you will be free in a minute.

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 75.

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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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Mrs Pathma Iswaran on (08) 8379 5336

URL: <http://vedantaadelaide.org>

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 November. 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.

Other Activities:

- The Centre organised a special reception on Tuesday, 14 November 2017, to warmly welcome Drs Kala and Raman Bhaskar, whose property was purchased for the Centre. About 60 devotees and friends attended the evening *aratrikam* and sang a few *bhajans*, after which



Reception to Drs Kala and Raman Bhaskar

Swami Sridharananda formally welcomed and thanked Drs Raman and Kala Bhaskar. Br. Swatmachaitanya of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney was also present. The evening concluded with a dinner prasada.

Obituary:

Janan Iswaran, affectionately known as Papa, passed away on 13 July 2016 due to kidney failure. Prior to this, he had had a few strokes. Towards the end, he was still communicating, his memory was good and he was able to recognize people when they spoke to him. He seemed to have foreknowledge of his passing away by his actions on the day. Janan Iswaran, a disciple of Swami Sridharananda and a veterinary surgeon, was intimately connected with the Adelaide Chapter of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney. Before that he was connected with the Ramakrishna Mission in Singapore. While in Adelaide, the Iswarans hosted a number of Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order including Swami Bhuteshananda, the 12th President of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Gahanananda, the 14th President of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Damodarananda then head of the Fiji Centre, Swami Sridharananda as the President of the Ramakrishna Math in Lucknow and later as the President of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney among others. After the founding of the Adelaide Chapter of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney, on the deputation of Swami Sridharananda to Sydney, Janan Iswaran became its patron member and was also a member of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney.

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 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).
- A study of the *Ashtavakra Gita* was conducted on the second Thursday of every month at 101 Sharpless Drive, Springfield, Qld. (7.30 pm. to 8.30 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.

Other Activities:

- A workshop on 'Youth Mental Illness: Signs, Symptoms, Support' was held on 2 September

2017 at the Kenmore Library. It was conducted by Ms. Shuktika Bose, a Psychologist. The workshop was very much appreciated by all the participants.

- Devotees, accompanied by Swami Atmeshananda, performed a prayer ceremony on 3 September 2017 at the Vedanta Precinct before the start of building works for a multipurpose building at Vedanta Drive, Springfield lakes, Qld. The building works by James Trowse Constructions began on the 4 September 2017.



Aerial View of the Beginning of Construction

- Swami Atmeshananda was invited to join a Multi-Faith Prayer for World Peace at King George Square, Brisbane, on Sunday 17 September 2017.
- Swami Atmeshananda attended a Psychological First Aid Training workshop on 23 September 2017 organized by Australian Red Cross.
- The Bengali Society of Queensland invited Swami Atmeshananda to deliver a talk during the Durga puja festival, which was organised on 30 September 2017.
- On 6 October 2017 the Centre participated in the Diwali fair held at King George Square, Brisbane. The Centre organized a book stall at the venue.
- Swami Atmeshananda participated in a programme to celebrate 200 years of the establishment of Bahai Faith on 21 October 2017. The venue for the event was the Griffith University Multifaith Centre.
- *Diwali* was celebrated at the Queensland Parliament House on 24 October 2017. Swami Atmeshananda participated in the event organ-

ised by the Sri Swaminarayan Mandir.

- Swami Atmeshananda attended a Dinner Forum on 'Peace, Nonviolence and Inclusiveness: Are Gandhi Values Relevant in 21st Century?' at the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, on Saturday 28 October 2017.
- On Sunday, 29 October 2017 members of the Centre, along with Swami Atmeshananda participated in the 'Power of Peace Festival' which included prayer and a walk through the Mahatma Gandhi Inspiration Bridge, Springfield, attending a Cultural Program at Robelle Domain, re-enactment of Gandhi Salt March, Power of Peace Train Ride, Peace Parade in Springfield and finally Roma St Gardens (Brisbane).
- The Kannada Sangha, Queensland, invited Swami Atmeshananda to give a talk during its *diwali* and Kannada Rajyotsava celebrations on 4 November 2017.
- A few members of the Centre, along with Swami Atmeshananda, attended a meeting on 16 November 2017, organised by the Wesley Mission, to discuss strategies for organising suicide prevention programmes.
- The Queensland Men's Interfaith Forum conducted a Seminar on Prevention of Domestic Violence. Swami Atmeshananda, who was invited, spoke on the subject 'The Message of Non Violence in Combating Violence' from a spiritual perspective. The Seminar was held at the Griffith University Interfaith Forum on 28 November 2017. There was a lively Question and Answer session after the talk by the panel.



Seminar on Prevention of Domestic Violence, Griffith University

- The Centre's Annual Retreat and AGM was

held on 2 December 2017. Swami Sridharananda conducted the Retreat.

Celebrations

- The *Durga Saptashati* (Sri Sri Chandi) was chanted at the Centre every day from 21 to 29 September 2017 in the morning. *Mahishamardini Stotram* and other hymns were sung in the evening on those days. A few devotees attended both events every day.



Durga ashtami puja was celebrated on 28 September 2017

- *Durga ashtami puja* was celebrated on 28 September 2017 at the Oxley Senior citizens Club, Oxley, Qld. A large number of people attended the programme.
- The birth anniversary of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, was celebrated on Saturday, 9 December 2017, at the Centre. The main activities included special worship, *homa*, chanting, *bhajans* and distribution of lunch *prasad*.



Birth anniversary of Holy Mother on Saturday, 9 December 2017

Forthcoming Programmes:

- The public celebration of the birthday of Holy

Mother and Kalpataru Day will be celebrated on 1 January 2018 at the Indooroopilly Senior Citizens' club, Indooroopilly from 10 am to 1 pm

- Swami Vivekananda's birthday puja will be conducted at the Centre on 8 January 2018. Subsequently, a public celebration of Swamiji's birthday will be held on 14 January 2018.
- *Sri Mahashivaratri* puja will be conducted on 14 February 2018 at the Centre from 6.30 pm to 9pm
- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday puja will be conducted on 17 February 2018 at the Centre from 9.30 am to 1 pm

CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 6258 7612 / 0433 593 860

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda conducted monthly classes on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gitā* at the Belconnen Community Centre, 2 Chandler Street, Belconnen, Canberra. The next Gita talk will be held on 10 December 2017. From February 2018 we are hoping to hold bi-monthly classes on the Bhagavad Gita.

MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

Email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

Contact: Swami Sunishthananda

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sunishthananda arrived at the Melbourne Chapter of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney as its resident monk on 2 October 2017.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), bhajans, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation were conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm daily.
- Swami Sunishthananda conducts a class on the *Isavasya Upanishad* on Sundays from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm at the Centre. The topics covered

include the philosophy of non dualism, knowledge of the Self, oneness of the Soul and God.

- On Wednesdays, from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm, Swami Sunishthananda conducts a class on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*. Topics covered include supreme love towards God, significance of bhakti yoga etc.
- *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* are discussed every Friday by Swami Sunishthananda from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm. Concepts covered include nature of the mind, mindful living, and living a meaningful and purposeful life among other topics.

Celebrations:

- *Durga puja* was celebrated on 29 October 2017. In the morning there was special worship of Mother Durga. In the evening there was a cultural programme featuring the Manikkya Veena Music Group followed by a talk by Swami Sunishthananda on 'The Significance of Durga Puja'. There were 70 people who attended the worship.



Sri Sri Durga Puja in Melbourne

- The Holy Mother's birth anniversary was celebrated on 9 December 2017. The programme included special worship accompanied by *homa*, chanting, *bhajans* and *pushpanjali*. The following day, there was a talk on 'Holy Mother and Sister Nivedita' in commemoration of Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary which is being celebrated in 2017.

Forthcoming Programme

- Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary on 8 January 2018.



Holy Mother's worship on 9 December 2017

- Shivaratri will be observed on 14 February 2018 at the Centre.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday anniversary will be held on 17 February 2018 from 8:45 am.

PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yokine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

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:

- *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.

Celebrations:

- The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi's birth anniversary was observed on 10 December 2017 between 10:30 am and 12:00 pm. The function included *aratrikam*, *bhajans*, and the distribution of *prasad*.



Celebration of Holy Mother's Birth Anniversary on 10 December 2017

SYDNEY

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115

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

Email: vedasydney@vedantasydney.org

Contact: 02 8197 7351

URL: 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.

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda conducted his chapter-wise study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* on Sundays between 9:30 am and 10:30 am.
- Swami Sridharananda began the *Mundaka Upanishad* on Wednesday 8 November 2017

from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm. These classes will continue every Wednesday when Swami Sridharananda is in Sydney.

- A Class for Mothers was held every Monday between 11:00 am and 12:30 pm. Swami Mahabodhananda initiated discussion on *Meditation and Spiritual Life*.
- Swami Mahabodhananda began a class on the 'Evolution of the Spiritual Ideas in India', based on the transcripts of Swami Sridharananda's lectures on Friday, 3 November 2017 from 7:45 pm to 8:30 pm. These classes will continue every Friday from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.
- *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.
- 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 once a month.
- *Sri Rāmanāma Sankirtanam* was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.
- 'Yoga for Everybody' was conducted by qualified Yoga Teachers on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Celebrations:

- The *shashti* and *saptami* days of the Sri Sri Durga puja or *navaratri* celebrations were observed at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 26 and 27 September 2017. On the *shashti* day, the Bharatiya Sangeet Academy sang in praise of the Divine Mother. On the *saptami* day, Sangeetha and Westmead Group performed in honour of the Divine Mother.
- The *ashtami* day of the Sri Sri Durga puja or *navaratri* was observed at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 28 September 2017. In the morning, the puja began at around 8:30 am and included *homa*, *bhog aratrikam*, *bhajans* and *pushpanjali*. In the evening the programme began with the Temple of Arts performing 'Shantirupena Sansthitha', which was followed by *aratrikam*, the children of the Balak Sangha



Bharatiya Sangeet Academy performed at the VCS on the shasti day



Maha Ashtami Puja



Devotees at VCS on the Ashtami Day

singing the 'Bhavani Ashtakam', and Dattatreya Velankar singing some *bhajans*. He was accompanied on the tabla by Shalaka. The programme ended with *pushpanjali* and *prasad* distribution. There were 800 people who attended

in the morning and 500 in the evening.

- The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi's birth anniversary was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 9 December 2017. The function included *puja*, *homa*, chanting, singing of *bhajans*, *aratrikam* and *prasad* distribution in the morning. In the evening, after the *aratrikam*, there was a *bhajan* dedicated to the Holy Mother by the children of the Bala Sangha, followed by others. After this there was a talk by Swami Sridharananda on 'Holy Mother: Who is She?' The celebration ended with the distribution of *prasad*. In the morning there were 180 people who attended and 220 at night.



Children of the Bala Sangha Singing a Song on Holy Mother's Birth Anniversary



Swami Sridharananda delivering his talk on Holy Mother's Birth Anniversary

Other Activities

- The First Ermington Venturer Group visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 20 September 2017. As a part of their Scouting Award Scheme, they have to visit community organizations to know about their core beliefs and

community service activities.



Visit of the First Ermington Venturer Group on 20 September 2017.

- A farewell was accorded to Swami Sunishthananda on 1 October 2017 who is heading to the Melbourne Chapter of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney. Swami Sridharananda in his address mentioned the importance of responsibility being transferred from the older generation to the younger generation. Swami Sunishthananda in his reply said that he will keep coming back to Sydney, since Sydney was the headquarters. Swami Sunishthananda left Sydney on 2 October 2017.



Farewell to Swami Sunishthananda on 1 October 2017

- Swami Suhitananda, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney from Friday, 27 October, to Tuesday, 31 October 2017. He was accompanied by his Secretary, Swami Chandrakantananda. Swami Suhitananda addressed the devotees in Sydney on the 'Holy Mother', on Sunday, 29 October 2017, which happened to be *Jagaddhatri puja*.
- Dr Geoff Lee, State MP for Parramatta and Mr.



Visit of Swami Suhitananda, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission with Swami Sridharananda



Swami Suhitananda, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission with the monks of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney

Benjamin Barrack, Councillor, Parramatta Council visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 19 November 2017 and shared a meal with the members of the managing committee of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney. Dr Lee was instrumental in the Vedanta Centre of Sydney securing some State Government grants and was pleased with the latest developments.

Forthcoming Programme:

- Swami Vivekananda's *tithipuja* (birth anniversary) on 8 January 2018.
- *Shivaratri* will be observed on 14 February 2018 at the Centre.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday anniversary will be held on 17 February 2018 from 8:45 am.



(Left to right) Mr and Mrs Ramakrishnan, Dr Geoff Lee, Member for Parramatta, NSW State Parliament, Swami Sridharananda, Mr. Benjamin Barrack, Councillor, Parramatta Council, Swami Mahabodhananda and Br. Swatmachaitanya

Obituary

Sri. Shivprasad (Kanti) Bhatt, a tireless social and religious supporter in Sydney, passed away on 3 September 2017. He arrived in Australia with his wife and two daughters in 1969. He then worked as a high school maths teacher for the next 25 years. During the early days of Indian migration, when no Hindu priests was available in this country, Mr. Bhatt made a significant contribution by performing many Hindu rites, including funeral services. He continued this important community service to the Hindu community till the age of 88.

He was a strong believer in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which he studied and recited daily till his last days. He was devoted to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda and was a respected committee member.

He was thinking of his Guru, Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj of Divine Life Society, while taking his last breath. Sri. Shivprasad Bhatt passed away aged 92, surrounded by his loving family.

2. FEATURE ARTICLES

A.Holy Mother: Her Universal Dimension

—Swami Suhitananda

Swami Suhitananda, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, visited Sydney between 27 October 2017 and 31 October 2017. This is the transcript of the talk he delivered on Sunday, 29 October 2017, which happened to be Jagaddhatri puja.

Dear friends, first of all I offer my *bhakti purna*, that means respectful pranams, to Revered Swami Sridharanandaji Maharaj. I am here because he gave me an invitation. I was supposed to visit Fiji and New Zealand. When he came to know that I was coming this side, he again sent an email and rang me and asked: 'When are you coming this side? Why don't you come again and meet me, your old friend?' It was sincerely an attraction, as a few months back, I was here. I had a little reservation of repeating the same course and there was also the pressure of time. He wanted that I stay here for 15 days, or something like that, so that both of us would have been able to visit Tasmania. He had all sorts of rosy programmes in his mind. But, anyhow, this time, this crunch of time, did not allow me to take this up. But anyhow, I told Maharaj (Sridharanandaji) that 'I would also like to meet you, because henceforth my assignment has changed (from being General Secretary to Vice President). 'I also don't know when I will

again get an opportunity and you are also ageing', so I felt I should take this opportunity at least and see our respectful and loving Sridharanandaji Maharaj. And for that I am here today. Since I was coming, he suggested to me that I address you. Then I said, 'This day is coinciding with *Jagaddhatri Puja*. I said, 'Alright I will speak on Holy Mother because Holy Mother herself was *Jagaddhatri*.'

The history of *Jagaddhatri puja* in the Ramakrishna Order is that once on this particular date (or tithi), the *Jagaddhatri* festival was being arranged at Jayrambati. During the worship, the Holy Mother was also seated. Now, one of the relatives of Holy Mother was puzzled to see that on one side was a clay image of *Jagaddhatri* besides which was Sarada Devi or Saradamani, who was seated in deep meditation. To that relative, Sarada Devi had taken the form of *Jagaddhatri*, whereas the clay image remained as a clay image. So they ask, 'Who was actually *Jagaddhatri*?' This was revealed to that fortunate relative of the family.



You may all know how *Jagaddhatri Puja* was introduced in that family in Jayrambati. There was the system of Kali Puja in the family initially. During the Kali Puja, every member of the family would contribute something. And at that time, in this way Kali Puja was observed. Now there was a family feud or something. But the Holy Mother's mother, Shyama Sundari Devi had kept some rice reserved for Goddess Kali. But due to the family feud the other party did not accept the share which was reserved for Kali. So Shyama Sundari, the Holy Mother's mother, became very much upset. She thought, 'I have kept this reserved for Goddess Kali. This rice cannot be

consumed by any human being. What shall I do?' That night she had a dream in which *Jagaddhatri* appeared before her and said, 'Why I shall eat it. You worship me. I shall take that rice.' Getting up that morning, Shyama Sundari asked Sarada Devi who that deity was (who she had seen in a dream). 'I have seen her in this position, she is of this colour, red colour, what is that deity, she came to me and asked me to do puja.' Coincidentally, Holy Mother had also had the same type of dream. That *Jagaddhatri* had wanted to be worshipped. And the *Jagaddhatri* puja was started and it is still continuing at Jayrambati for, not only one day, but three days. This is the only place, where *Jagaddhatri* is being worshipped for three days. Generally it is done only on one day. In the morning it starts and in the evening it finishes. The pujas of all the four days, *saptami*, *ashtami*, *navami*, *dasami*, the rituals of the four days (that are usually observed individually during the Durga Puja) are to be closed and finished in one day, in one go. So today we have had an opportunity to have some recapitulation on Holy Mother, who herself was *Jagaddhatri*. And not only did she expressed that 'you can worship me as *Jagaddhatri*', but so many people had the opportunity and privilege to see different Gods and Goddesses

in Holy Mother.

I can communicate to you one incident about one soul. His name was Swami Premeshanandaji Maharaj. He was a disciple of the Holy Mother. And he had his initiation in the old thatched house in which the Holy Mother used to live. In around 1905, Swami Premeshanandaji Maharaj went to Jayrambati. After reading books, he had come to know that Sri Ramakrishna's consort or wife was still living in Jayambati. So he went there to get some spiritual instruction from the Holy Mother. On the first day when he went to meet the Holy Mother, he found her to be veiled or covered. So when he touched her feet, he was not satisfied because he could not see the face of Mother. So he peeped or looked at her face from beneath the veil. When he did this he was surprised to see that it was not a human figure, but the figure of a goddess. It was the goddess Durga's figure, Goddess Durga. I asked Swami Premeshanandaji Maharaj, 'Maharaj, why did you see Durga instead of Holy Mother?' Then he said, 'I had my initiation in the name of Durga, so my mantra was Durga's name. So I had achieved the goal of the Durga mantra.' So the Holy Mother appeared to him in the form of Durga. But Premeshanandaji Maharaj was not satisfied. So he said, 'Mother, I have

come here to get some spiritual instruction from you.' Then she said, 'No, No, why should you? You have already got it.' Then Swami Premeshanandaji Maharaj said, 'I am still not satisfied. Please do something.' Then Mother said, 'Alright, you come tomorrow.' At that time he was given a mantra and the mantra was in the name of Ramakrishna. This was the thing.

Now today the topic is about Holy Mother, her universal dimension. Before I start my topic, I want to communicate to you one interesting incident that happened in my life. This incident happened more than 35 years back. At that time I was in India in one residential school. I was in charge of an English medium residential school (Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Deoghar). One student was admitted from a neighbouring country. One afternoon, after my strolling and walking, I went to my room when the phone was ringing. I picked it up.

At the other end was a boy's mother ringing me. She asked, 'Maharaj, how is my Rahul?' The boy's name was Rahul. 'How is my Rahul?' I said, 'Yes, he is alright'. She said, 'Are you sure?' 'Yes, I have just seen him playing football'. 'Are you sure?' 'Yes', I said, 'I myself have seen him. He is playing football and he is in the position

of the goal keeper'. 'Are you sure?' she asked. What was I to say? I had to say yes. Then I put down the phone. Immediately, the phone again rang. This time the phone was coming from our Indoor hospital. On the other end the voice said, 'Maharaj, Rahul is seriously injured. He has to be admitted into a hospital'. Now, how do you account for that? How do you account for that? This is in the mother's heart. It happens. How does it happen? The mother also does not know. The baby also does



not know. But it happens. I have been witness to so many of these cases, these sorts of identical incidents. In your case also, for those of you who are mothers especially, you may have also had these types of experiences. Now if this concern of the earthly mother, like Rahul's mother had, if all the different

concerns of all the mothers in the world are combined, then that will take the shape of our Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. This is Holy Mother.

Swami Premeshanandaji Maharaj, about whom I was talking, had composed a song. The song is in Bengali. I shall mention simply one sentence and I will give you the English translation afterwards. 'Nihila matri hridaya sagara mantana suddha murati'. Your figure, this figure which I see, what is it? It is composed of the summation, the accumulation of the motherhood as prevailing in all living creatures. This is the thing. So Holy Mother, her expression, in this physical form, that itself is a manifestation of Universal Motherhood.

Holy Mother was asked one day, 'Mother, why did Thakur keep you behind? What was the purpose of Thakur?' Mother said, 'To give expression to the concept of motherhood in God. For that I have been left behind.' When we hear this, we feel a little confused because this motherhood of God is nothing new. It is a very age old thing. We know about Kali, Durga, and Jagaddhatri. When I was in Argentina and Brazil, I have seen how many believe in Mother Goddess. So this Godhood of Mother is nothing new.

And so many sadhakas in India and other countries also had the vision of Durga or Kali or Radha or Saraswati or Lakshmi. They have visions of different forms. And in recent times we know that Sri Ramakrishna himself had seen Goddess Kali. So where is the newness in Holy Mother's expression. Certainly there is something. Mother meant something. She gave a new dimension to this motherhood concept. That will be the topic to today's discussion.

I shall share with you two funny incidents. One is regarding Prabhu Maharaj, Swami Vireshwaranandaji Maharaj. He was the President of our Order. He came from Chennai, Tamil Nadu. His mother tongue was Tamil. He joined Belur Math in Bengal. There the people talk in Bengali. He wanted to have initiation from the Holy Mother. He was sent to Jayrambati to have his initiation. He did not know Bengali. And the Holy Mother did not know Tamil. They were inside the room. He had his initiation and Prabhu Maharaj came out. Then others inquired, could you follow what Holy Mother said. 'Yes, I could follow. I could follow everything.' And did she understand, what you said? 'Yes.'

The other incident is of Guru Das Maharaj who was from

Holland. He gave a far better expression than this. He came from Holland to India. He was sent to Jayrambati for initiation, because Holy Mother was there. In the same room they were locked together. And afterwards when they opened, he came out and then people asked him Guru Das, Atulananda Maharaj from Holland. 'How could you communicate?' Then Atulanandaji replied, 'In what language does a baby communicate? I also communicated in the same language.' So you can come in touch with the Holy Mother through any form, through any language, or any expression because Mother is sincerely Mother. How could she come down to this level from the level of a Goddess? That is our concern today. How was it possible to come down to this level of human motherhood? If we analyse her life, we can divide it into four parts.

For the first fourteen years she was in a remote village. She had no access to a school or exposure to education or books. She got her training from sitting on the lap of nature and from her parents, only this much. Her innate goodness, innate beauty, innate holiness, all these things trained her. Then she was married to Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna, according to the custom, used to come occasionally to Jayrambati and Kamarpukur. Sri Ramakrishna's house was in Kamarpu-

kur and Holy Mother's house was in Jayrambati. The distance is about 5 to 6 kilometres. Occasionally he would come, and Sarada Devi used to look after Sri Ramakrishna in the usual fashion. Sri Ramakrishna also took care of Sarada Devi as a father takes care of a small girl. With that concern, Sri Ramakrishna used to train Sarada Devi not only in these worldly manners and behaviour, but also through spiritual instructions.

We have read in the books and we know that when Sri Ramakrishna went back to Dakshineswar he forgot everything. He forgot his marriage, he forgot his wife, he forgot Sarada Devi, he forgot Jayrambati and Kamarpukur. At Dakshineswar there was only the Divine Mother and sadhana. He was completely absorbed. All the people started talking that he was abnormal. They said he needed some psychological treatment and so many things like that. He was totally a madcap. The rumour passed on and it reached Jayrambati. Nowadays we can talk on the phone, mobile, we can see and go, so many means are there. But in those days there was nothing. It would take 7 to 8 days to come to Calcutta from Jayrambati, crossing so many rivers and other things. So the Holy Mother was pining. She thought, 'My husband has become mad, what should I do?' She was feeling that

now is the time for me to go and serve Sri Ramakrishna. Sincerely, if he is mad, it is my duty to go to him and to serve him. So she placed a proposal to her father. The father understood the feeling of the daughter and took the daughter to Dakshineswar. When Sarada Devi came to Dakshineswar she was surprised. 'Where is the mad man?' she thought. He is as affectionate, as fatherly as he was. And Sri Ramakrishna took all care of Sarada Devi. She was running a fever. He requested her, 'No, No you need not go anywhere else. You remain here. It will be easy for the physician to treat you.' He thereby took all possible care, with affection, love, everything, and arranged for her stay with his own mother. In that way it was arranged.

Now in the first 14 years, what was the spiritual exaltation experienced by Sarada Devi? When Sri Ramakrishna forgot Sarada Devi and was immersed in sadhana in Dakshineswar, at that time, what was her physical, mental and spiritual condition? She used to give expressions like, 'a pitcher of bliss is enshrined in me.' In the Patanjali Yoga Sutra this condition is known as '*Adhyatma Prasada*'. '*Nirvichara vaisharadye adhyatma prasada*' (1.47). That is when a person is well established in '*nirvichara samadhi*', then only this mental condition comes. This *nirvichara samadhi* is a very exalted samadhi. *Vitarka*,

vichara, ananda, asmita, savikalpa, savichara, nirvikalpa, nirvichara. This is that '*nirvichara Samadhi*', the highest form of Samadhi. Just next door is God. So Holy Mother, while she was in Jayrambati itself, at that time, she attained that exalted '*nirvichara samadhi*'. With that ground work or preparation, the Holy Mother came to Sri Ramakrishna to serve him. And she served Sri Ramakrishna for 19 long years up to 1886, continuously. Of course occasionally there were some breaks like going to Jayrambati or Kamarpukur. Holy Mother served Sri Ramakrishna continuously over 19 years. What was their relation? What was their attitude?

On one side they were husband and wife. But was their relationship of husband and wife like ours? No, it was not like ours. Holy Mother looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as her God, as her Guru. Sri Ramakrishna was her Guru. Sri Ramakrishna was also her own *ishta*. In that way the Holy Mother accepted Sri Ramakrishna. She could find that in Sri Ramakrishna, God was living because she was already established in *nirvichara samadhi*. She could automatically understand the spiritual status, the spiritual stature of Sri Ramakrishna. She could pray, observe, and enjoy the company of Sri Ramakrishna in different forms. In the Gita it has been mentioned '*Sarva*

Bhavana Bharata' (18.62). That means through all forms. Through all different forms, God can be tasted, God can be realized, whether it be the attitudes of *shanta, dasya, shakya, vatsalya*, or *madhur*. There are different forms. *shanta* is a relationship between a guru and *sisya* (disciple). That's it, the master and disciple relationship that Holy Mother had with Sri Ramakrishna. Occasionally it so happened, that for a whole month Sri Ramakrishna would not call Sarada Devi nor she did not get an opportunity to meet Sri Ramakrishna. But she was happy, because, 'my God is in front of me.'



And she used to give satisfaction to herself by saying, 'My mind what good fortune you have done. What meritorious work you must have done that you get this opportunity to see your Lord daily.' No grumbling! She did not think, 'I have a special right over my husband'. Whatever she

used to get, she used to remain satisfied. She used to worship Sri Ramakrishna by keeping a picture in her room, to pray, offer flowers and do puja. She was doing puja to no other God and Goddess, but Sri Ramakrishna in his picture, her own husband. In what exalted position she looked up to Sri Ramakrishna. One day Sri Ramakrishna, while going past the *nahabat*, where Holy Mother used to stay, peeped in and found that his picture was being worshipped. What did Sri Ramakrishna do? The same thing. He found some flowers on a tray, which he took and started worshipping. He also started worshipping his picture. The Holy Mother felt a little hesitant whether it was good to worship one's own image or will it bring on some misfortune. Something like that. Then immediately Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Don't worry. Henceforth this picture will be worshipped in every corner of the world. You don't worry.' This man, casually like a magician, makes some utterance. And he did not take it seriously and she also did not take it seriously because Sri Ramakrishna was like a madcap. He used to utter so many things and Holy Mother also accepted it in this way. Whether it had any significance or further repercussions, all these things, never struck anyone's mind.

One day Sri Ramakrishna had

gone to the shrine to see Goddess Kali. There, as usual, the moment he went there he got into a trance. He started dancing and singing, something like that. And in that trance mood, while he was coming back, he found that the Holy Mother was busy. When he had gone out, she had an opportunity to rearrange and clean everything. So the Holy Mother was busy sweeping the floor and doing all those things. All of a sudden, the Holy Mother found that someone had touched her body. She found that it was Sri Ramakrishna in an ecstatic mood. Sri Ramakrishna was saying, 'Oh *machi*', which means mother's sister. Addressing Sri Sarada Devi, he said, 'Oh *marchi* you are my mother's sister can you hear me? Yes, Yes, why am I reeling? Why can't I stand straight?' 'Because you have been in an ecstatic mood, you have drunk the nectar from Goddess Kali. So you are in that mood', replied the Holy Mother. 'Oh is it so? Then it is alright. Alright.' See this is the relation. Both were like brother and sister. Sarada Devi had to manage Sri Ramakrishna in this way. So that was the relationship between them. And Holy Mother used to look upon Sri Ramakrishna as Goddess Kali. Holy Mother was Goddess Kali to Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Ramakrishna was Goddess Kali to Sarada Devi. That was their unique spiritual relation-

ship.

Once Sri Ramakrishna felt sick. Sick means he needed some special diet. So Holy Mother, like a mother treats her baby or small boy, arranged some special food, with his milk. She boiled the milk to make it condensed in order to give it to Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna was taking it for a few days and his health gradually improved. But one day he had a doubt. On that day somebody else had brought his food and it was served, as the Holy Mother could not come. Sri Ramakrishna asked the lady how much milk had been used? That lady replied probably about 2 litres or something. 'Why so much? Is it good for me? Can I digest it? It is not good. Call her who has prepared', said Sri Ramakrishna. So Sarada Devi was called. 'How much milk is there? Why have you prepared in this way?' He had so many queries. Sri Ramakrishna put to Sri Sarada all these questions. But Sri Sarada Devi's reply was, 'What does it matter? You need milk, *buss* (enough in Bengali) I have supplied. And you take it and accept it.' And he accepted it. This is the thing. When the Mother was asked why she adopted this method. She said 'No, No, I look upon him as my own son. I am to take care of him in that way. He is always in this sort of mood. Sometimes he forgets food, so I remind him, talk

to him, and just like a mother looks after a small baby. In the same way, I also take care of him.' So there was this mother and son relationship.

One fantastic thing: over this 19 year relationship, the most exalted relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi was when he worshipped her as the Goddess Shodasi. Shodasi is a representative of Goddess Kali. Later Holy Mother was asked a question: 'Mother, how is it that there was no body consciousness. You were there and Sri Ramakrishna was there in a locked room. Sri Ramakrishna worshipped you. Why did you not protest?' Then Holy Mother said, 'At that time, I wasn't aware of myself. I was lost in another world. I was not conscious of worldly things'. When this type of state comes, it is called in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra as '*Maha videha*'. When you are bereft of body. We have three bodies. One is our gross body which we are having here to eat. I am talking and you are listening. This is called the gross body. And there is another body, which we call the subtle body. Through the subtle body we dream, we imagine, we sometimes visualize or sometimes have some vision also. That is the subtle body. And finally the causal body. Beyond this there is only God consciousness and nothing else, only God consciousness.

So both of them, Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, on that night were in a God intoxicated mood. It was in that sense that the Holy Mother said 'I was not within myself'. She had crossed the gross body level, the subtle body level, and along with Sri Ramakrishna was in a cosmic level. This causal body, this *karana sarira*, in that stage there is spiritual existence and only spiritual exaltation. This is the state or the mood in which the Buddha dwelt, in which Christ dwelt, and in which Mohammad dwelt. In that state both of them stayed. This is Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother serving together. Holy Mother continued to serve Sri Ramakrishna for 19 years. To serve in such an exalted mood was not a matter of joke. And in that mood she served. And what did she achieve? She achieved Godhood. Why did Sri Ramakrishna worship her as a Goddess? She also realized that, 'I am Goddess'. How could she realize that, 'I am a Goddess. I have some sacred responsibility.' How?

The Holy Mother was also the mother of all. One day a woman, who had an impure mind, wanted to carry the food of Sri Ramakrishna from the Holy Mother. The moment the lady addressed Sri Sarada Devi as 'Mother' saying 'I want to take this food to Sri Ramakrishna', that very instant Sri Sarada Devi

handed over the food to her. And now the plate was placed before Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna could not touch the food, because it had been touched by an unholy person. The lady who brought the food remained silent. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'No, I won't take'. Then the Holy Mother came. She said, 'You take'. Sri Ramakrishna replied 'No, No, I cannot take this food. It has been touched by an unholy person. Why did you give it to her? You know my nature. You know my vibrations. Still, you gave it to her. I cannot take this food.' What was the Holy Mother's reply? She said, 'if somebody addresses me as 'Mother', I cannot ignore or deny them. You will have to accept it. You will have to accept. Not only for me. You are the God for each and everyone.' Sri Ramakrishna's dimension of Godhood was changed by Holy Mother's action. This is a new dimension we find.

Another example of this universal motherhood of Holy Mother was when Baburam (later Swami Premananda) came to Sri Ramakrishna for spiritual instruction. He was a young boy of 16 or 17 years old. At his night meal, he was given 5 or 6 *chapattis* (Indian bread) by the Holy Mother. But Sri Ramakrishna wanted them to practice spiritual disciplines at night. For this he had made a strict ration that not more than 2

chapattis should be eaten by his young disciples at night. But Sarada Devi was their Mother. She wanted them to take more than the amount rationed even though Sri Ramakrishna would object. But Baburam objected saying 'He will scold me'. 'No, No I shall see, you take, said the Holy Mother. It was Mother's order so Baburam had to take. When Baburam went back to Sri Ramakrishna, he asked him how many *chapattis* he had taken? What to say? He had to tell the truth. Sri Ramakrishna's response was 'So many *chapattis*. With so many how will you do spiritual practice?' Baburam replied that the Mother had given them to him. 'Then you call Mother' said Sri Ramakrishna. When Mother came, Sri Ramakrishna asked her 'Why did you give him so many *chapattis*?' The Holy Mother answered that 'What I have done is the right thing. I shall take care of the future of their spiritual life. You need not worry.' This was her command. This command she got from God. That I have become God, and that I can take the responsibility for the world is of a another dimension.

Now after this in 1886 Sri Ramakrishna left the body. And now who was to take responsibility? At that time we find that Sarada Devi was again getting engrossed in meditation, engrossed in spiritual practice. If we go through her life, she was always in the

company of Sri Ramakrishna. Sometimes she felt that there was no need of keeping this physical body. She thought, 'Let me cast it off and turn to spiritual practices. Let me go back'. That was her mood. And at those moments Sri Ramakrishna would appear again and again saying, 'No, No, you should not cast out your body. You will have to do so many things. You will have to look after so many affairs and cater to the spiritual aspiration of the world. You'll have so many responsibilities. You will have to do.' This time we find that she started opening up. For so long she was within Dakshineswar and with Sri Ramakrishna. Now she had to come up. Her sadhana for 14 years was only for the service of humanity. For that, for that time we find that she began giving initiation to Swamis Yoganandaji and Trigunatitanandaji after insistent requests from Sri Ramakrishna. She agreed and started giving initiation. That means a new chapter was to open where she would begin to give initiation.

She also started the organization. This was Belur Math. The foundation stone to Sister Nivedita's School was laid by the Holy Mother. Narendranath was sent to America with the permission of the Holy Mother. Though Narendranath got the command from Sri Ramakrishna, he was hesitating. Is it fact or not? So he

wanted this to be certified by Sarada Devi. Then only will he accept it. Let Sarada Devi endorse it. 'Yes, you go'. And immediately he jumped and went. So there are all these things. When Narendranath came back, he brought with him, Nivedita (Margaret Noble), Sara Bull, Macleod, Seviars and all these personalities. When they came what was their reaction to Sarada Devi? At that time Swamiji also had a little hesitation. He did not know whether Mother will accept them or not because Mother belonged to an orthodox Bengali Brahmin family. For them to touch any other caste, any other religion, any other person, was very much despised. It is hated and they would have been the untouchables in society. That type of social trauma was there. And against this background, when they came, mother not only accepted them, but also had food with them. Suppose if Holy Mother had not accepted Nivedita, if Holy Mother had not accepted Bull and the Seviars then there would have been no centre in Australia. This world would have been deprived of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji. This global movement began during Holy Mother's spiritual ministration.

The next stage was after 1900, from that time to 1920, or the last 19 to 20 years. The periods were the first 14 years, then 19 years

serving Sri Ramakrishna as a personal God, then 14 years doing tapasya to serve the impersonal God. Impersonal God means God in the Universe, all of humanity, to serve them for the last 19 years. That was the project of the Holy Mother. How she served them! She served them not as a Goddess, but she came down to the level of mother, just like our gross physical mother in that way. In that background I will like to relate one or two incidents which you know.

Once, the Holy Mother's birthday celebration was going on. On that occasion the *homa*, festival, worship, music, and other functions were going on. People were coming and doing pranams in lines or queues. All of a sudden Holy Mother was missing. 'Where is she? Where is she?' people asked. People began searching for her to offer their pranams. After a long search she could be found in the nook of one corner preparing something. 'What are you doing? We are all searching for you', they said. The Mother replied 'No, No, I am preparing some soup. So and so is sick. Now there is a celebration and a festive mood. Nobody will take care of her. So I am preparing this special soup for her.' This is our Holy Mother. That Goddess who was being worshipped, in whose name yagna, homa all these things were going on, she was preparing soup for

one person.

On another occasion someone requested Holy Mother, 'I want some rice which you have taken. I want your prasad. I will like to dry it and keep it so that I can occasionally take a grain or two of that rice.' Mother said, 'Alright. Whatever you want!' If anyone wanted anything and addressed her as 'Mother', Holy Mother would be ready to offer everything to him or her. So immediately, he was given Holy Mother's prasad. Jubilant, he spread it in the sun to dry it. After doing so, he came down and started chit chatting and talking with the others. Ultimately, he forgot, fell asleep and started snoring there itself. After two hours that man got up. It flashed in his mind that 'I have left that holy thing, that sacred thing (meaning Holy Mother's prasad) there. Let me go.' He rushed up on to the terrace and he found what? Holy Mother sitting there, with her legs stretched, as we find in the dining hall photograph, sitting there, guarding the rice which was to be dried. Then he said 'Mother, are you not taking rest?' 'How can I take rest my son? Your sacred prasad is here', said Holy Mother. 'Who will take care of it.' This was the Holy Mother. To which level she had brought herself down. She was as we find our mother doing and attending their babies. In the same way Holy Mother brought

herself down to the level of this servant. It became servant leadership. If we say being the servant of each and every one, she became the leader. She became the Universal Mother of all. This is the thing.

I will like to end with one incident about Swami Premeshanandaji, because I started with the song of Swami Premeshanandaji Maharaj. I will also finish with a another incident which I had got from him. I had the good fortune to serve Premeshanandaji Maharaj for 10 years, during his last 10 years. At that time I had joined as a brahmachari and I served him. In the last two or three years he became totally blind. He could not walk. He could not see. Only his hearing was there. As he could not walk, I had to take care of his bath and everything. Regular bath was not possible, so I had to sponge him. That day, as usual, he was in the habit of taking two things regularly. For the last 10 years I had observed that, daily he used to take immediately after his bath, a little bit of Ganges water and the dried rice of Puri Jagannath, which is called atke. These two things he used to take. I was daily giving him these and he was taking them. On that occasion, in the usual fashion, during the sponging, I asked him because he was blind, 'Maharaj now you open your eyes. I have to give you the Ganges water.' Normally, he would immediately



open his mouth. Immediately he used to open. But on that day, he remained silent. I thought that probably he could not hear. So I repeated, in a louder voice. Again he remained silent. Then gradually, I became impatient because I had to do so many other things. In haste, I said, 'Maharaj will you not take. Then he said, 'Why, why should I take?' I said 'You are in the habit of taking this Ganges water for so many years. Will you not take it.' 'No, I will not take.' Then I asked: 'Why not?' 'No, no, I have got something holier than that Ganges water. What can be holier than Ganges water,' I asked. I was stunned. I was waiting for him to give a reply. He said, 'Yes, don't you know: Mother (Holy Mother) has given me the name of Ramakrishna (mantra of Sri Ramakrishna). So I think, this is more holier than that.'

B. Jiva is Siva

—Romain Rolland

Romain Rolland, French Novelist and Noble Laureate for Literature, was one of the first Western Biographers of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, entitled 'Life of Sri Ramakrishna' which was published in 1929 and 'Life of Swami Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel'. Rolland had already written a biography on Mahatma Gandhi in 1923 and had read Dhan Gopal Mukherji's account of Sri Ramakrishna in 'The Face of Silence'. Material for Rolland's book was supplied by Swami Ashokananda, a former minister in charge of the Vedanta Society of San Francisco, who in turn was authorized by Swami Shivananda, a direct monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the second President of the Ramakrishna Math.

This is an edited article by Romain Rolland in which he discusses 'Jiva is Siva'. In Sri Ramakrishna's words this was 'Siva Jnana Jive Seva', which means serving individuals by looking upon them as God. The divinity of man is one of the central ideas of the Upanishads and the Vedas. This is also an important plank of the Ramakrishna Mission's philosophy of service which Swami Vivekananda enshrined in the motto of the Ramakrishna Mission, which is 'Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya ca', for one's spiritual unfoldment and the welfare of the world.'

It is related that when Sri Ramakrishna, in the first days following his great ecstasy in the bosom of identity – and this was after Totapuri's departure – allowed his consciousness to return to earth, he saw two boatmen quarrelling in hatred. And because of this hatred, as from a wound, his heart was bleeding; and he screamed; the sufferings of the universe were torturing him. For all the pains of the world were imprinting themselves into the tender flesh of his reawakening consciousness.

What would he have felt, what would he have suffered, in these days of the present world, when the whole humanity seems given up to hatred, when war rages or smoulders everywhere under the ashes, between nations, between races, between classes!

But the mighty Swan (Paramahansa) had wings that enabled him to hover above life. If he did not try to detach himself in life, as so many mystics do, to

avoid its sufferings, it is because universal love, which was to him a second sight, revealed to him, in a flash, in the presence of human misery, that 'Jiva is Siva' – that the living being is God – that whoever loves God must unite himself with Him in sufferings, in misery, even in errors and excesses, in the terrible aspect of human nature.

We all know that he took away his great disciple Vivekananda from the fascination of the fathomless God in order to force him into the service of men. And that is what you, following his example, have been able to accomplish, you whose monastic Ramakrishna Mission, like your emblem, the swan, covers the unhappy with its wings and helps them as brothers. You have carried out the pregnant saying of your Master: 'If you want peace of mind, serve others...if you wish to find God, serve man!'

The enfeeblement and ruin of so

many religions lies in the fact that they have forgotten this saying. They have forgotten man. And man, in his turn, forgets them. He has learned to help himself without God – (as one of our European artists, and one of the most religious too, Beethoven, proclaimed when he said to those who called upon God for help: 'O man, help thyself...')

We live in a world turned upside down. And, indeed, the masses have always been downtrodden. But they had not, up to this day, the knowledge and the consciousness of that universal oppression, which has been revealed to them by the increased means of communications and the progress of international solidarity. We may no longer remain indifferent to those peoples who are today making a desperate effort to break their chains and set up a more equitable and more human order. And this is no longer permissible especially to us, your friends in the Occident, who do not happen to possess like you the faith in surviv-

als (lives after death). Time is pressing us. The wave of men's sufferings is drawing us like a tide. We must fly to their help. Even if we had before us the eternity of 'lives after death', each one of these lives is a 'living thing' which has its own duties and its laws corresponding to the particular time of its birth and the human surroundings in which it has its course. Each single life is neither permitted to leave undone all the present good it is capable of doing, nor to decline to fight, with its total might of today, all the iniquities of the time being. The Ramakrishnite of the West that I am does not admit that for one's own salvation, one should withdraw from action, when it is urgent to act in order to help the oppressed. I remember the holy anger of the great disciple when he exclaimed to one of his brethren who was endeavouring to avoid the tragedy of the present world in order to betake himself to the sweetness of divine contemplation. "Put off to the next life the reading of the Vedanta, the practice of meditation! Let this body of today be consecrated to the service of others!"

And this immortal prayer:

'Would that I could be born and reborn again and suffer a thousand miseries, provided I might adore and serve the only God that exists, the sum total of all souls, and, above all, my God the evil doers, my God the unfortunates, my God the poor of all races!'

Oh, what an error, too common among religious God-lovers, to think that their love diminishes and that their soul is lowered in

value on account of intercourse with men. On the contrary, it expands and is revived because of embracing the whole and entire Being, the innumerable Being; with its million forms ever in motion, ever advancing as they are, like a Ganges.

Doing thus, you will serve, by being wedded to it, each one of the forms of the living God; - but without ever losing the feeling and the very presence of the all-powerful Unity, wherein these conflicting million forms find harmony. It is not doing a wrong to the unchanging Divine Peace that hovers over the storms of Existence, if one holds out a hand to those who struggle in those storms. Vivekananda did not cease repeating to his sannyasis that they had taken two vows, and that, if the first was 'to realize the truth' the second was 'to help the world'... 'To help men to stand erect, by themselves...' - Let us help them, then, those people who, 'by themselves and alone,' heroically try 'to stand erect!' Let us co-operate in their efforts! Even in this manner it will be possible for us afterwards to co-operate in the harmony of warring forces.

You are the bearers, in the storm-tossed world, of the Supreme Harmony wherein must blend and melt away all combats and opposite efforts. It is your proper role, your privilege, and your sacred duty: to radiate peace, order, and unity in the chaos in which peoples are blindly at odds with one another. Be, like Sri Ramakrishna, the wide-spreading banyan tree in whose shade thousands of souls, weary

and wounded in the fight, come for shelter and peace. Pour on them the balm of reconciliation, which is the fruit of reason, no less than of love! We know well that the most wicked are but misguided. They know not what they do. The greatest leader of the liberated peoples, Lenin of the U.S.S.R, victim of the dastardly outrage, calmed the vengeance of his friends by telling them with his intelligent smile, 'What's to be done! Everyone acts according to his knowledge.'

The misfortune of the world comes from its want of knowledge. Let us then teach it to know. Let us enlighten it, by preventing it from doing harm - from harming itself! For he who harms his neighbour, does not know that it is himself whom he is harming. Another of our great men of Europe, the inspired poet Victor Hugo, speaking of those who wanted to harm him, uttered these beautiful words, so allied to the wisdom of India:

'Oh! fool, who thinkest that thou art not I!...' It is the Supreme miracle of Sri Ramakrishna that in him 'thou' is 'I', that the whole world is not only reflected, but incarnate in a man's heart - that God is realized on earth, in His universality and His multiplicity... 'Jiva is Siva.' And Ramakrishna works in Him - in us - this divine identity.

Source:

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