



REACH

Newsletter of Vedanta Centres of Australia

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Motto:

*Atmano mokshartham
jagad hitaya cha,*

**“For one’s own
liberation and for the
welfare of the world.”**



Sayings and Teachings

Diverse ways of approaching God

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

— **Sri Ramakrishna**

*Great sayings: Words of
Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and
Swami Vivekananda;*

The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of
Culture; Kolkata; page 5.

Truthfulness

“The Master used to say that truthfulness alone is the austerity of the present age. One attains to God by holding to the truth.”

— **Sri Sarada Devi**

Ibid, page 24.

All power is within you

“All power is within you, you can do anything and everything. Believe in that. Do not believe that you are weak. You can do anything and everything, without even the guidance of any one. All power is there. Stand up and express the divinity within you...Arise, Awake, Sleep no more. Within each of you there is the power to remove all wants and all miseries. Believe in this, and that power will be manifested.”

— **Swami Vivekananda**

Ibid, page 34



**Panchavati, the place of spiritual practices (Sadhana Peetha) of
Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa at Dakshineswar Temple Garden
in Kolkata (West Bengal), India.**

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FROM JANUARY 2010 TO APRIL 2010

Function	Centre	Date
Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda	Melbourne	Saturday, 2nd January 2010
	Perth	Sunday, 3rd January 2010
	Sydney	Wednesday, 6th January 2010
Shivaratri	Sydney	Friday, 12th February 2010
Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna	Brisbane	Saturday, 6th February 2010
	Melbourne	Saturday, 20th February 2010
	Perth	Saturday, 20th February 2010
	Sydney	Tuesday, 16th February 2010
Cultural Programme	Melbourne	Saturday, 6th February 2010
Annual Celebrations	Adelaide	Saturday, 17th April 2010
	Melbourne	Saturday, 13th March 2010

Welcome

We welcome you all to the Ramakrishna - Vedanta Movement and invite you to attend our functions and actively participate in the propagation of the universal message of Vedanta as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda.

News and activities of Vedanta Centres of Australia and New Zealand

For the period from September to December 2009

ADELAIDE CENTRE

Monthly activities:

Swami Sridharananda continued his three days-a-month visit to Adelaide and delivered discourses on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* and *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Swami Atmeshananda delivered talks on "Thought, Strength and Rtam (cosmic order)" during October and November 2009. The talks were held at **Dulwich Community Centre**, 14 Union Street, Dulwich SA 5065. The lectures were recorded as usual. For details of the ongoing monthly programmes please contact Mr. Raman Sharma, Secretary, on 08- 8431 9775 or Mrs. Pathma Iswaran on 08-8379 5336.

Other Activities:

A day-long **spiritual retreat** was organised at the Monastery, 15 Cross Road, Glen Osmond, SA, 5064 on Saturday, the 28th of November 2009. About 20 devotees attended the retreat. The programme started with *Shanti mantras* and *bhajans*. Swami Sridharananda delivered two talks on the "Eightfold Disciplines in Spiritual Life", one in the forenoon and another in the afternoon. Guided meditation, a group discussion, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and the *Gospel of Holy Mother*, and question and answer sessions were other programmes conducted during the day. The retreat concluded with *arati* and *bhajans* led by Swami Atmeshananda. Swami Atmatattwananda of Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood was present at the retreat.



Spiritual Retreat in Adelaide

BRISBANE CENTRE

Daily activities:

Morning worship, evening *arati*, *bhajans*, and a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are the regular activities at the Centre at **181 Burbong Street, Chapel Hill, QLD 4073**, (Phone no. 07-3720 0228). A resident volunteer looks after the day-to-day activities at the Centre.

Monthly and Annual activities:

Swami Atmeshananda visited Brisbane once a month and delivered talks on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* as well as other spiritual topics. Swami Chandrashekharananda conducted a *satsang* on the 21st of September. Swami Atmapriyananda, Vice Chancellor, Vivekananda University, Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal, India visited the Centre from the 15th to the 17th of December and delivered a talk at Indoorpilly Senior Citizen's Hall on "Science and Religion".

Celebrations:

The **birth anniversary** of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated on the 16th of December 2009.

CANBERRA CENTRE

Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the Bhagavad Gita twice a month at the Majura Community Centre in Canberra. He also gave parlour talks based on the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* once a month. Contacts: Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary - 02-6258 7612 and Dr. Ian Doherty, Treasurer - 02-6247 8519.

MELBOURNE CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

The vesper service is held daily at the Centre at **7 Judy Court, Vermont, Vic 3133** from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. It includes set hymns, scriptural readings and meditation and occasional devotional singing. A volunteer looks after the services in the mornings. Literature on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, and

other spiritual topics in print, audio, and visual media were made available for the interested people through the bookstall. For further information please contact Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary, on 03-9803 6154 and Mr. Mohana Krishna on 03-9801 6174.

2. Weekly/Monthly Activities:

Swami Sridharananda continued his monthly discourses on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* from Thursday to Saturday of a prescheduled week at Monash University **Clayton Campus of Law**, Wellington Road (Lecture Theatre L1). The recordings of these discourses are available in Audio, Video and MP3 formats.

Swami Chandrashekharananda visited the Centre from the 10th to the 14th of September and again from the 8th to the 12th of October 2009 and delivered talks based on *Prashnottara-Ratna-Malika* by Shankaracharya after conducting *arati*. He also held hour-long meditation sessions from Friday to Sunday at 6:30 a.m.

On the **second Sunday** of every month, prayer meetings were conducted from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. These regular meetings included prayer, recitation of sacred mantras, singing of *kirtan* and *bhajans*, followed by selected readings from the scriptures with discussions by the participants. In the September and October meetings two talks were delivered on "The Divine Mother" by Swami Chandrashekharananda. The meetings concluded with an *arati* and the distribution of *prasad*.

The Centre had also organised a special *satsanga* on the occasions of **Durga Puja** on the 27th of September and also on Gita Jayanti day on the 28th of November.

The Centre has started regular weekly **classes for children**. Currently there are 8 children in the age group of 5 to 10 years.

Other Activities:

The city of Melbourne hosted the 5th



Birth Anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi at the Melbourne Centre on the 8th of December 2009

World's Parliament of Religions from the 3rd of December to the 9th of December 2009. As a precursor to the PWR, the city of Whitehorse organised an **interfaith programme** on Sunday, the 15th of November 2009 wherein a visit was planned to various places of worship by representatives from various religious affiliations. Swami Atmeshananda visited the Centre from Thursday 12th to 15th of November to organise this programme as also to organise a bookstall and other logistics during the PWR. About 15 representatives attended the interfaith programme. Swami Atmeshananda briefed them about the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement and made a video presentation on Sri Ramakrishna.



Interfaith group at the Melbourne Centre

The Centre organised to receive and accommodate 22 guests, mostly from overseas, who attended the PWR. Swamis Sridharananda, Amarananda (Geneva), Varadananda (Chicago), Atmatattwananda (Hollywood), Atmapriyananda, (Belur Math, India) Atmeshananda, Chandrashekhara, 9 devotees from the U.S. and one devotee each from New Zealand, Singapore, India and Brisbane and 2 from Sydney were the 22 guests. Please see the photo album on page nos. 5 and 6.

The Annual General Meeting was held at the Centre on Saturday the 8th of August 2009 from 3:45 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Swami Sridharananda presided.

Group study of the *Bhagavad-Gitā* continued every alternate Sunday from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Viewing of lecture series on the *Patanjali Yoga Sutras* delivered in Sydney by Swami Sridharananda continued on Fridays from 10:30 a.m. for an hour.

During this period, several '**working bee**' sessions were organised by the committee members for the development and upkeep of the Centre.

Celebrations:

The birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated on the 8th of December 2009 after arati.

Swami Atmapriyananda performed the worship and Swami Atmeshananda led the group singing. About 100 devotees including all the guest Swamis and devotees from overseas participated in it.

PERTH CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

A vesper service with *arati*, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and meditation is being conducted every day. The centre has moved to its new premises at **51 Golf View Street, Yokine, W.A 6060** from its old location at **2B Roe Close, Bull Creek, W.A. 6149**. The Centre maintains a small bookstall and library. Contacts: Mr. K.P. Basu Mallick, Secretary, - 0422



Vedanta Church of Universal Religion, Perth

370 066, Mr. Unni Krishnan 08 9206 0853.

2. Weekly/Monthly Activities:

Monthly *satsangs* were conducted on the first Sunday of every month from 11:00 a.m. This included singing of bhajans and reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and other inspiring books.

Celebrations:

A two day Inauguration Ceremony was organised on the 19th and the 20th of December 2009 to consecrate the newly acquired Church (renamed as Vedanta Church of Universal Religion) at 51 Golf View Street, Yokine, W.A 6060. The programme on the 19th of December included *Vastu Puja*, *Ganapati Puja*, *Navagraha Homam*, worship of Sri Ramakrishna, and *Ramanam Sankirtan*. A multifait prayer meeting was held on the 20th of December at 10:30 a.m. in which religious leaders from various faiths offered their prayers and also welcomed the Vedanta Centre to Perth appreciating its liberal and universal view. Swamis Damodarananda, Sridharananda, Atmapriyananda, Atmeshananda, Chandrashekhara, and a few devotees from overseas attended the function. Over 150 local devotees and dignitaries participated in it. The photo album and the proceeding of the meeting are given on page nos. 7 and 8.

The centre celebrated **Christmas Eve** on the 24th of December 2009.

SYDNEY CENTRE

Daily Activities:

At 2 Stewart Street, Ermington, chanting, meditation and daily worship are held every morning from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and a vesper service is conducted in the evening at 7 p.m. that includes devotional singing and a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* since completion of reading *the Gospel of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* in December 2009. Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees are also conducted on a daily basis. The library is available to devotees for reference and research.



Multi-faith Meeting in progress

The Centre maintains a bookstall which has a range of books on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, Yoga, and other spiritual literature. Devotional songs, discourses on *Bhagavad-Gitā*, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanisad*, and other topics are also available in various media.

2. Weekly/ Monthly Activities:

The Centre conducted the following activities in Sydney:

a) Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* every Sunday morning from 9:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. at the South Strathfield Bowling Club, Augusta Street, Strathfield. Swami Damodarananda gave talks on *Vivekachudamani* during September and October 2009 and during Swami Sridharananda's travels.

b) The classes on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* were also conducted by Swami Sridharananda at 1 Edwin Street, Fairlight, **Manly Beach** on Tuesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. In his absence Swami Atmeshananda held classes on *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*.

c) Special **meditation** sessions were held at the Ermington Centre on Sundays from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

d) Many devotees have availed themselves of **spiritual counselling**

and guidance. The Swamis also visited the homes of devotees when required.

e) **Yogasana** Classes for adults were conducted every Tuesday at the Centre from 7:30 p.m. until October 2009.

f) Classes on moral and spiritual lessons were conducted **for children** every Saturday from 4:15 p.m. to 5:15 p.m. at 85 Bland street, Ashfield. In addition, drama and movement classes were held from 5:15 to 6:15. A three day **Summer Retreat** was organized for them from the 6th to the 8th of October 2009. About 25 children took part in it. Clay modeling, recitation of mantras and other activities were organized to stimulate their creativity.

g) Classes on **Bengali** language were conducted on Saturdays from 4 p.m. to

5 p.m. until October 2009.

Annual Activities/ Celebrations:

The Buddha Purnima, Guru Purnima and Sri Krishna **Jannmastami** were celebrated on the 9th of May, the 7th of July and the 13th of August 2009 respectively.

Special worship was offered to the Divine Mother **Durga** on Saturday, the 26th of September, the Mahastami day, amid devotional singing. About 500 devotees attended the function.

Swami Atmeshananda attended the **Deepavali** celebration on the 3rd of November 2009 at the Parliament House of New South Wales.

A **bookstall** was organised at the Parliament of World's Religions held in Melbourne from the 3rd of December to the 9th of December 2009.

The **birth anniversary** of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated on the 8th of December 2009 at the Ermington Centre. Swami Sridharananda spoke on the Life and Teachings of the Holy Mother.

Christmas Eve was celebrated on the 24th of December 09 after vesper service with singing of carols and reading about the nativity and the Sermon on the Mount from the Bible.

Overseas Visit:

On a special invitation from the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago, and other centres of U.S.A. Swami Sridharananda visited United States of America from the 24th of August 2009 to the 28th of October 2009. He was the guest speaker at many spiritual retreats throughout the U.S. and Canada, including Vancouver. He also delivered lectures at the Vedanta Centres in the U.S. and Canada.

Swami Sridharananda visited New Zealand from the 19th of November to the 23rd of November 2009 and delivered talks on spiritual subjects.

Visiting Monastics:

After attending the World Parliament of Religions Swamis Amarananda, Atmapriyananda and Varadananda reached Sydney on the 10th of December and

left Sydney on the 12th, 15th and 17th of December respectively. Swami Atmatattwananda reached Sydney on the 17th of November and visited New Zealand, Melbourne, Hobart and Cairns and finally left for California on the 16th of December 2009.

AUCKLAND, NZ CENTRE

Daily activities:

A vesper service is held daily at the Centre at 27 Arawa Street, New Lynn, Auckland from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. It includes singing of hymns, readings from *Inspired Talks* by Swami Vivekananda and meditation.

Monthly activities:

On the **second Sunday** of every month *Satsang* programmes were conducted from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. These included singing of Bhajans, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, teachings of *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, *Eternal Companion*, discourse on *Ram Charit Manas* and meditation.

Celebrations:

Durga Puja was celebrated on the 25th of September 09 at 10:30 a.m. There were singing of kirtans, reading from *Srimad Bhagavad-Gitā*, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and talk on Sri Durga. The programme ended with pushpanjali at 12:45 p.m.

Swami Sridharananda visited Auckland Centre from the 19th to the 22nd of November 09 and conducted classes on *Srimad Bhagavad-Gitā* in the evening on these days.

The **birth anniversary** of the Holy Mother was celebrated on the 8th of December 09 after arati with singing of kirtan and reading from the Life and Teachings of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and reminiscences of Holy Mother by the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Christmas Eve was celebrated on the 24th of December 09 after vesper service. It included singing of kirtans and readings from the *Sermon on the Mount according to Vedanta*, *Christ the Messenger*, and Life of Jesus Christ.



Summer Retreat for Children at Ashfield Centre



Bhajan in progress during the visit of Swami Sridharananda and Prasad distribution at the Auckland Centre

Birth Ann. of the Holy Mother 2009

Photo feature:

The Parliament of World's Religions

The modern day Parliament of World's Religions was revived in 1993 in Chicago, USA., to commemorate the centenary of the first PWR. The first PWR had been held in the same city in the year 1893 along with the World's Colombian Exposition to celebrate the 400th year of discovery of America. Observing the immense response and success in 1993 and also to extend the spirit and legacy of that historic event the Council for the PWR decided to organize such a Parliament every 5 years in sequel.

The legacy promotes the interfaith dialogues which in turn facilitates harmony in society and consequent human progress. After the centennial celebration the PWR was then organized in Cape Town, South Africa in 1999 and Barcelona, Spain in 2004.

Melbourne had the honour of hosting the 5th PWR from the 3rd of December to the 9th of December 2009.

The theme of the PWR in Melbourne was: **'Make a world of difference: hearing each other, healing the earth.'** The venue chosen was fitting – the brand new Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre on the banks of the Yarra river. Approximately 5500 delegates from 80 countries representing nearly 250 religious groups attended the PWR including around 1250 speakers and presenters. There were 640 odd sessions during this week-long Convention, some of them unique in the subject matter and presentation, including talks, group discussions, dialogues, Yoga, meditation, worship sessions, art appreciation, dances, music and a variety of performances.



The Opening Plenary session on the 3rd of December 2009



Bookstall of the Vedanta Centre and the Stall Area

Zoroastrian Prayer in the Opening Plenary

Melbourne Convention Centre at night



Buddhist Monks

A Lion Dance

Flags of Participating Countries

A delegate



Swamis Amarananda, Varadananda, Sridharananda, Atmapriyananda, Atmeshananda.

Swamis Chandrashekarhananda and Atmatattwananda .

Various religious leaders at the Hindu Conference.



Registration on the 2nd of December 2009



Trustees of the PWR in the opening plenary



A collage



Viewing a documentary on Swami Vivekananda



Melbourne Convention Hall



The "Gathering the Mind" meditation



Alan Croker speaking on Vastu



Gyoto Monks



A Panel Discussion



Flutist Dr. Ramani



Dada Vaswani



Video on Swami Vivekananda



Sound of Didgeridoo



Worship by Balinese



Buddhist Monks at prayer



Enjoying lunch



Buddhist Monks at an intricate Manadala painting and a completed one



Iranian delegates and a Television Channel interviewing Swamis



Closing Plenary with Dalai Lama



Gathering for a call to save the Earth



Swamis and devotees at the PWR

Photo feature:

Inauguration Celebration of Vedanta Church of Universal Religion

A photo Album is given below of the two-day Inauguration Ceremony of the Vedanta Church of Universal Religion held on the 19th and the 20th of December 2009 at 51 Golf View Street, Yokine, W.A.



A group photo in front of the Church



Vedanta Church of Universal Religion



A section of the audience



Worship and Chandi recitation in progress



Shrine



Havan in progress



In meditation



Ramnama Sankirtanam



Group singing: God is by your side



Worship of Ganesha and Havan



Sprinkling consecrated water



Celebrating the occasion



Lunch time



A special treat



Bookstall



A gift shop



Light decoration at night

Very Special Event:

Inauguration of Vedanta Church of Universal Religion

An multi-faith prayer meeting was held at 51 Golf View Street, Yokine, W.A. on the 20th of December 2009. Excerpts from and also, complete talks of various speakers are given below. The transcript of the talks may not be absolutely verbatim for the audio recording is not totally clear at times and also due to occasional discord in the syntax of some spoken texts. It has been, however, tried to represent the spirit of the talks as far as it could be apprehended.

Welcome to the Country – Mr. Ben Taylor, an Indigenous elder from South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council

I will speak in my language and then I will explain ceremonial things we have in our culture to you. I welcome you to our land, the aboriginal people, the Noongar (Nyungar) people, the dreaming tribe. The spirits above the aboriginal people, the first people of this land. For thousands of years, spirituality, religion and culture have been always part of the Noongar ceremony, ... the rainbow ceremony. Right from my boyhood my father and grand father taught me about our and other cultures and spirituality. (As a result, we identify ourselves with other cultures also.) Like Vedanta, your spiritual beliefs, culture, religion and whatever is required, we know, have been here for thousands of years. We knew this before the Europeans came to our land. My father and grand father told me and I always respected that. When I go to a certain place I say in my language. When I go to a fresh spring to take water. I say "I come to you in peace to draw your water from the sacred spring". This has been the prayer with my father, his father, for thousands of years. As I look back, I have travelled to Africa, United States, South America, and seen American Indian, Indian and other indigenous people. All identify with their own strong cultures. I respect like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela. They were parts of indigenous people throughout the world as they knew. ... William ... brought ... Salvador came in 1938..... Smoking ceremony and the water are all part of our aboriginal culture and spirituality. Today as the spirits look down upon us and the God ... we welcome you.

Welcome to the Country - Mr. Daniel Garlett, grandson of Mr. Ben Taylor

It is important for aboriginal people to welcome others to our country. Protocol for welcoming to the country ran for fifty or sixty thousand years. Every time we were given this wonderful opportunity to welcome other races, religions, cultures of the world (we have welcomed them whole-heartedly) ...I am a Catholic Basically, as my

grandfather said, just we acknowledge all faiths, all religions. That has always been my personal view that "There is not many but One". Many wonderful opportunities have been granted to the human kind. We need to know find strength to fight ways to severe ties with a lot of ignorant ways of today. We only have to look around the world to see a lot of the times religion is often based on (something which create) a lot of trouble. We need to educate a lot of people about wherever it is and where they truly stand. Religion to me is a unified thing, it encompasses all people but it is not just that. Very strong and positive attitude is to have religion behind our own personal beliefs within our aboriginal culture because a lot of people do not have the opportunity to be enriched with the culture. So, therefore, they need something of significant stability. Whilst they re-connect with themselves, whoever they are. This has been the common goal, I think, of aboriginal people. On one hand we are grateful to adopt religions from other countries, in particular, from the Catholics for myself and my grand father. But, then, out of that, what does that mean to us as a group of people. I think, that's what we are here today for. We have our own beliefs and that is a freedom in every single man, woman and child. That it is up to you to believe in whatever it is that you like. And, I strongly am part of that belief that we want to leave the freedom to choose these things and not to be dictated. I still think in the common way that we traverse today that we still need to do all the work and that is not just for ourselves but also with the people that govern countries that they understand this. We need to work together within a common goal and understanding of moving forward.



Mr. Ben Taylor and D. Garlett with Didgeridoo

Thanks for giving this opportunity to speak. I would like to be involved in a group like this because it is one that stands by its beliefs firmly. To be a part of that which encompasses 'whatever it is that you would like to believe in' is the best thing, the bottom line of what I like. I like to congratulate you on behalf of Noongar people for your beliefs and also to educate people in our country. The main thing is 'acceptance'.

I wrote a song, I would like to recite it. It is food for thought. It has concepts that go through the minds of aboriginal people.

*When will be love for who really are
How long will it take before you guys
are put to shame*

*Over the ways you play the game
Lied and cheated all the way*

*Yet you find reason to stay
Wandering love with this place*

*Can't you see we are free
Open your eyes wider please
Then you truly see what's been hap-
pening to me*

*I want my anger .. question be
Honourable symmetry and lovable be
We have come together ever and ever
Finding ways for own endeavour
Finding ways for better tomorrow
Learning to fight Spiteful sorrow
Let us start the future is here
Life is so precious and we are here
Let us not wait for another day or year
Make our choices and make it clear.*

Welcome to the Vedanta Centre – Mr Mahalingam Sinnathamby, Chairman, Vedanta Centres of Australia

I am delighted to be here today with all of you witnessing a very historic moment in the journey of Vedanta in Australia. Work of Vedanta movement is very subtle but very powerful. Swami Vivekananda said "Like the gentle dew



Address by Mr. Mahalingam Sinnathamby

that falls unseen and unheard and yet brings into blossom the fairest of roses”.

Swami Sridharanandaji made this event happen. Events like this, happen with foresight and vision. with the help of many friends and of course with our friend Sri Ramakrishna behind this. This is why it is a historic moment and will be remembered by generations to come. Friends, in the early days my brother used to conduct Vedanta meetings every fortnight and three or four families used to turn up. He always asked me to attend but I always had an excuse, “I am working on a deal, a Big deal!” He once grabbed me and said “Brother, this is the biggest deal, coming to the Vedanta meeting is the biggest deal”. I thank my brother for this advice. For the last 35 years I have grabbed that deal. Experience for yourself, find the joy and benefit. ..

Friends, as Christ said, “Knock the door, and it shall be opened unto you”. So keep knocking Sri Ramakrishna, don’t let Him off and He will answer.

During the early days of Vedanta movement various meetings were organized by us and a few swamis came. One committed and active swami was Swami Ranganathanandaji. ... He used to come every year starting in 1971. In 1972 my brother gave me and my wife another gift. He asked us to look after Ranganathanandaji. Swami Ranganathanandaji stayed with us for ten to fourteen days each year for twelve years. We introduced him to people. If we had three to five people, it was good. Sometimes we had twenty people. We worked very hard. For some reason Swami Ranganathanandaji chose Perth as his headquarters, not Sydney, not Melbourne, not Adelaide.

Another annual visitor was by Swami Damodaranandaji. He was introduced to me by my parents in 1967. He stayed seven to ten days each year. He used to come and ring people and ask “Why aren’t you here?” He is loveable and very much liked by everyone here in Perth. He attracted considerable audience. He continued until he became the first resident swami from 2007 to 2009.

(Pr. Ajayaprana) Mataji came in 1983 but later moved to Sydney. She regularly visited Perth until 2002.

Swami Ranganathanandaji was a very powerful speaker. His positive thinking influenced me, my wife and very many other people. He asked me to read Swami Vivekananda’s works. Friends,

I read that about three or four days a week.

Friends, this will be the headquarters of Perth for many generations. Thanks to very many devotees who helped the swamis. It is team work. Our friend Sri Ramakrishna has his own ways. I am confident that this centre will go from strength to strength with the support of so many devotees and surely this will add joy and happiness in their lives. You have to experience joy and happiness. You will experience it if you keep ringing our friend.

Invocation and Blessings – Swami Damodarananda, Senior Monk of the Ramakrishna Order

Om, all of us started with Om. The aboriginal elder started with the sound of Didgeridoo. The Indian conch shell also sounds Om. The evolution of the whole creation starts with that sound “Om” filled with all capacity and energy thus the whole universe starts.

“*Oum Ekam Sat, viprah vahudha vadanti*”. The Supreme Truth, the Existence, Knowledge and Bliss absolute, is One; spiritually enlightened ones, pray and explain it, in various ways.

Oum! O Shining Divine Lord, we offer our loving prayers to Thee for getting rid of our negative tendencies from all areas—physical, mental, moral and environmental; and Thou graciously bless us with positive, noble qualities such as faith in and love of God, purity in thought, word and deed, and desire to offer always loving service to all living beings with all kindness and humility.”

O Lord! May we move forward in harmony, in harmony shall we speak, in harmony shall our minds apprehend; so the shining ones of ancient times with united minds achieve their noble goals. We pray that united be our deliberations, united be our assembly, united be our minds in harmonious understanding; united be our resolutions through friendly deliberations, make our offerings in perfect harmony, and united be our wills, united be our hearts, united be our thoughts, so that we may all be perfectly united for the wellbeing of all and everything concerned for the progress in this planet.

We pray that by the grace of the Lord, let noble, invigorating thoughts may come to us from all directions based on which blazing human characters could be built for the good and welfare of all nations of the world.

So, the theme of all religions and teachings is love, love supreme. Swami Vivekananda put it very nicely,

*From the highest Brahman to the yonder worm,
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.
These are His manifold forms before thee,
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?
Who loves all beings without distinction;
He indeed is worshipping best his God.*

Love is the best approach. Buddha says “Never, hatred is conquered by hatred. It is by love and love alone that hatred is conquered”. Therefore, center your attention on love and love alone.

This is echoed by the child of Christ, St Francis of Assisi. “*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace....*”

Love is the theme of all religions. Hari Om.

History of the Church and Prayer – Rev Dr Ian Tozer, Joint Associate General Secretary, Uniting Church in Australia, W.A.

...The Methodist Church was established sometime in late 1920s as Sunday School. By 1930 they had a wooden building. That time the Congregation was served from North Perth Church. Ministers came in the afternoon for service and Sunday classes ran for children. As that building was too small for their needs, this land was donated. The church was built in 1957. This hall was added in 1958. Members of Lockwood family were members of this church. Church had many successful years. Till 1960/1970s it had activities for children, Sunday school, activities for young people and adults. Twenty years ago additions were added to allow for a wet



Prayer by Swami Damodarananda and a section of the audience

weather. Members of the congregation themselves built that.

This church has a history of helping to establish other congregations. It helped Girraween Uniting Church. For many years it had a vision of helping others. The Kindergarten at the corner of Royal & Lockwood Streets was used for this congregation as it would not fit many activities of this church. ... In recent years, the activities were circle of friends, fellowship activity for community and retired groups and Yokine Book Club. It remained very busy till 1980. In hindsight, we can see it began to decline. Congregation could not maintain a full time minister. It co-operated and shared ministers. Decision was made to sell the building. People of this congregation have dispersed and joined another church.

One special activity of this church was to care for people in special need. Twenty five years ago the Uniting Aid, a welfare centre, was established. This is still continuing. This church has been primarily a place of worship. A place where God has been glorified and honoured and people have found it to support one another. As people moved away, congregation reluctantly closed. Yokine congregation is sad to go but happy to see that the church will remain here and will not be demolished.

In a world where faith is used to divide people, Uniting Church seems to be one of these voices which promote unity and bridge building between people, building understanding and building relationship, building respect across differences. In this instance when Christians come so close to remembering and celebrating the birth of Jesus, I think, of one of those songs, sung as recorded in our Gospels "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth! Emmanuel!" That is my prayer for this place, for all of you and my prayer for every home and family represented here today. Let us pray:

Wonderful God, we thank you that you have made us. We thank you that you are good and that your steadfast love endures forever. Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you call us to love one

another and we pray that we might learn what it means to truly do to others what we would have them to do to us. Holy Spirit, God, come very close to us and bear with us with our spirits that we are your children. God of Grace and Love, bless this place. Bless all who come here that as you are honoured and people are drawn closer to you, that your light of love might be evident in this world. Amen.

Taoism – Ms Heather Williams, Regional President, Taoist Tai Chi Society of Australia Inc.

I am honoured to be here today on this occasion which has drawn together so many people that share the values that we as members of Taoist Tai Chi Society share. Taoist Society, Vedanta Church, and all who are here, share the common purpose of harmony; cultivation of harmony within and cultivation of harmony in the world. To that end, may this building, the new home of Vedanta Church become a strong base for cultivation of that common purpose - harmony.

Buddhism – Dr. Jake Mitra, President of the Buddhist Council of W.A.

I am so happy to see the way that Hinduism is growing here in the very Australian flavour. We see a Cross, we see a Christmas tree. I think it is all wonderful signs. I myself wasn't sure whether I would be asked to remove my shoes. I came in sandals. I am not feeling uncomfortable now as I am seeing people bare footed.

(He then extended warm welcome and congratulated Vedanta Centre on behalf of the Buddhist community and recited the Maha-mangala Sutra of Buddha. This is the highest blessing in Buddhism. Translation of the Sutra in English.)

Hanging out with the wise; avoiding fools. Respecting those worthy of respect, this is a great blessing;

Living in a peaceful country, having done good deeds in the past and possessing self discipline, this is a great blessing;

Being learned, skilled, well trained and well spoken, this is a great blessing;

Looking after one's mother and father, caring for one's partner and children and supporting one's family, this is a great blessing;

Generosity, virtuous living, good friendship, blameless livelihood, this is a great blessing;

Avoiding anger and bad actions, not taking intoxicants and being heedful, this is a great blessing;

To be reverent and humble, content and grateful and to hear teachings of truths, this is a great blessing;

Being patient and easy to instruct, visiting monks and nuns and discussing their teachings, this is a great blessing;

Living simply, seeing the noble truths and realising nirvana this is a great blessing;

Having a mind unshaken by things of the world beyond sorrow, stainless and secure, this is a great blessing.

Judaism – Rabbi Dr. Shalom Coleman, Emeritus Chief Rabbi, Perth Hebrew Congregation.

We are here to witness and share the magnificent words that we already have and I am sure more are coming. It is one of the great privileges of life not only in Australia but in the free world. We are living in a world of turmoil. What we need are not only words but also the realisation in the manner in which we live in respect with one another. What I have heard this morning, the prayers, gives me great hope that we have in the world today men and women who are responsible for the spirit of welfare of the inhabitants and welfare and happiness of this great country. The belief in the sense of harmony not just a word, but trying to understand we are one family...To remember that we all come from Adam...We all come from one source and we must understand that we are brothers and sisters. We shall play the principles of a unified family in a manner that will bring about a greater sense of universal brotherhood and in that way greater safety and security for our children and generations to come. I say with great pleasure that I will recite a prayer which I have specifically composed for the benefit of the building in which we are today sharing the prayers.

Sermon of the Universe



Prayers by Dr. Ian Tozer, Ms. Heather Williams, Dr. Jake Mitra and Rabbi Dr. Shalom Coleman,

Look down from Thy holy habitation and in mercy and favour accept the prayer and supplication of all that are assembled here to consecrate this house of worship and to offer the thanks giving unto them for all the loving kindness and truth that are shown to them. We beseech Thee that not Thy loving kindness depart, nor the covenant of Thy peace be removed from them. Shield all who enter therein, grant them Thy being of peace and tranquillity in their prayers for universal love and fellowship, that mankind may dwell together in unity. Meditate in Thy holy book and be prayerful ... May the work of all who built this place of worship dedicate to the universal understanding and interfaith relations be blessed with the fulfilment of their heart's desires, that we are permitted to share in this ceremony of consecration so may we be permitted to witness the dawn of a new horizon of rescue and relief for all human suffering. In the words of the prophet, nations shall not lift up swords against nations, nor than they are of God any more. Amen

Islam – Dr Ameer Ali, Vice President of the Regional Islamic Dawa Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Om. Swami, that's the sound of silence. That was there before the creation. That will be there after the end of the creation. ... I always tell my students if you want to seek knowledge, go to the West. If you want to seek wisdom, go to India. India is the treasure-house of wisdom. The Vedanta philosophy comes from that blessed land. I have 25 years of contact with Ramakrishna Mission. In fact, if there is any discipline in my life, that little discipline came from Ramakrishna Mission. I have been involved in the interfaith dialogue for the last 5 years. When it started in Jakarta 5 years ago, we met in Jakarta, we met in Philippines, we met in New Zealand, we met in Kampuchea, we are meeting in Perth this year. One of the problems that always rises in my mind is that we meet as different religions but there is a lack of common language. In what language do we talk about peace? As a Muslim I can quote from Koran in Arabic. As a Christian they can quote from the Bible, Buddhists from the Tripitakas and Hindus from their scriptures but what is the common language that can unite us? With my humble knowledge about Vedanta (I can say), the Vedanta philosophy is that language. I would appeal to various religious leaders to look into this philosophy to get that common lan-

guage that will unite our hearts. When I came here and sat on my seat I saw this bit of paper from the Ramakrishna Mission. The title is "God is there by your side". Immediately I remembered Jalaluddin Rumi, the greatest Muslim mystic ever lived in this world. He wrote the Persian Koran. I want to quote four lines from that Koran: "Don't look for God, look for the one who looks for God, because He is here closer to you".

Let me say my prayers in Arabic and then in English.

In the name of God, the most merciful, most compassionate. All places belong to God, the most merciful, the most compassionate, the king or the lord of the day of judgement. Thee, who we seek for guidance and Thee, who we worship. Guide us from the path of those who seek and receive your blessings. Not from the path of those who bring wrath Not from the path of those who went astray. Amen.

I see in the pictures various saints here. Surely there won't be one of Islam because Islam does not believe in these paintings, pictures. If you think there should be one I recommend the picture of Jalaluddin Rumi, the greatest mystic, the essence of Ramakrishna Mission's Vedanta philosophy.

Sikhism – Daljeet Singh Dhillon, Sikh Association of Western Australia.

Sat Sri Akal – The lord is truth. God is one, God is truth.

Today, in the company of learned and respected in this congregation of people for various faiths I am a humble man as far as my knowledge goes. Still, as the representative of the Sikh community it gives me great pleasure to be part of the inaugural ceremony of the Vedanta Centre. After listening to the various thoughts, various swamis from various communities it has given me some sublime thoughts to carry.

The ancient civilisations and cultures of the Indian subcontinent has produced great sages, saints and those saints have given us various philosophies of life to this world and especially Vedas. Nobody can deny wisdom of Vedas and Upanishads. They are big treasure of knowledge. I went to a D.A.Vedic school for five years. I had been participating in homam ceremonies at the school level.

At one stage I learnt many mantras also.

Vedanta, as I understand, is the essence of all the knowledge of ancient Hindu scriptures. Instead of ritualism, we need some good moral values are necessary. What are these values? Meditation and self-discipline. Self-discipline is very important for uplifting your body and mind and spiritual connectivity with the nature. Sikh religion is hardly five hundred years old. It collected all the knowledge from various faiths; Muslim, Christian, Jewish; all the faiths. Like the aboriginal culture, Sikh religion is very close to nature. The Aryans wrote the scriptures praising the gods and nature. Nature was their God - water, sun, earth, fire, God - as they gave them sustenance of life. That's how this whole philosophy of life in India started. So that's much older than any of the current religions.

The hallmark of Sikh religion, pillars of the religion are, prayers, service to the community where they live and humility. Unless you have humility you cannot attain salvation. You cannot find real truth without humility. There were some priestly classes, people went to them only to get knowledge and salvation. This faith says everybody can do it on their own, we don't need a mediator to communicate with God. That is the first principle of Sikhism. We have a prayer book and that contains writings from thirty six saints from various faiths, not just Sikh gurus and Sikh saints. Thirty six saints from other faiths, from down south, north and east of India. This knowledge is a combination of various faiths.

I will read the opening verse of The Gurugranth Sahib.

Ek Omkar Satnam Karta purukh Nirbhay Nirvair Akal murat Ajoni sambhav Gur Prasad Jap, Aad Sach, Jugaad sach, Haibhee Sach Nanak hose Bhee sach.

There is only one God. The name is Truth, Creative Being personified; He is the creator, preserver and destroyer. He is everything for this world. He doesn't have any fears. He doesn't have any enmity, animosity



Prayers by Dr. Ameer Ali, Mr. Daljit Singh Dhillon

with anyone. That is in itself eternal. There is no beginning or end of that Truth. It was Truth in the past, Truth in the present and will be Truth in the future. Selfexistent. Guru's grace.

The common language of religion is love of humanity. We should not try to put down each other's religion.

I pray for Vedanta, I feel Vedanta is very close to Sikh philosophy. I am proud to be here and will carry memories of this inaugural celebration.

Bahai – Dr Rafie Mavaddat, Bahai Community in Western Australia

Abdul Baha was only nine years old when he accompanied his father on his exile from Teheran to Baghdad. Travelling for three months on foot, or on the back of a mule in bitter winter through the snow covered mountains of Western Iraq. Although previously a noble man in the court of the ruler, Abdul Baha, the founder of the Bahai faith was stripped of his wealth and imprisoned in an underground dungeon and then exiled from Iran for promotion of the new faith in the middle of 19th century. This exile was followed by sixty years of imprisonment and dreadful suffering and persecution for Abdul Baha. When he was finally freed and able to travel, Abdul Baha visited Europe and America to promote Bahauallah's message of universal peace, the oneness of human kind and the fundamental unity of all religions. During these visits he gave many sermons and talks in small and large congregations.

Excerpt from prayer sighted on two different occasions:

O Divine Providence! This assemblage is composed of Thy friends who are attracted to Thy beauty and are set ablaze by the fire of Thy love. Turn these souls into heavenly angels, resuscitate them through the breath of Thy holy spirit, grant them eloquent tongues and resolute hearts, bestow upon them heavenly power and merciful susceptibilities, cause them to be promulgators of oneness of mankind and the cause of love and concord in the world of humanity, so that the perilous darkness of ignorant

prejudice may vanish through the light of Thy Sun of Truth. This dreary world may become illumined. This material realm may absorb the rays of the world of spirit. These different colours may merge into one colour and the melody of praise may rise to the kingdom of Thy sanctity.

O thou kind Lord! These are Thy servants who have gathered in this meeting, have turned unto Thy kingdom and are in need of thy bestowal and blessing. O Thou God! Manifest and make this evident, signs of Thy oneness which has been deposited in all the realities of life. Reveal and unfold the virtues which Thou hast made latent and concealed in these human realities.

O God! We are plants and Thy bounty is as rain; refresh and cause these plants to grow through Thy bestowal. We are Thy servants, free us from the fetters of material existence. We are ignorant; make us wise. We are dead; make us alive. We are material; endow us with spirit. We are deprived; make us the inmates of Thy mysteries. We are needy; enrich and bless us from Thy boundless treasury. O God! Resuscitate us; give us sight; give us hearing; familiarise us with the mysteries of life so that the secrets of Thy kingdom may become revealed to us in this world of existence and we may confess Thy oneness. Every bestowal emanates from Thee; every benediction is Thine. Thou art mighty, Thou art powerful, thou art the Giver and Thou art the Ever Bounteous. Amen

Quaker – Mrs. Julie Bethell.

Friends, we've heard much this morning. We heard wonderful, encouraging remarks. I feel as though this marks the beginning of a new start. Perhaps, we, all of us will move forward. Looking and working for peace, compassion with others, for others and generally respecting each other's beliefs. I feel in a way that my husband should have come up here. He was the one who introduced me to many faiths and ideas through Vedanta and his own broad experience with visiting similar groups

in ashrams. At times it was difficult because one feels sometimes instead of giving and receiving something, you are actually losing something (your faith) which is so familiar to you. But here I have found that we have far more in common. In Quaker, it is quite easy to see this because we do have this concern for the world around us. We should have a non-violent society and this is a very strong point. I don't want to say more because I feel a unity here. We are really blessed to have so many (religious leaders) different faiths. I would like you really to go into silence for a minutes and bring light. Imagine, lovely light coming on this gathering and bringing peace and good will to all the little churches in the district and elsewhere. We need to really spread out to the world. So, if you would kindly be in silence for a minute.

Hinduism: Swami Atmapriyananda, Vice Chancellor, Vivekananda University, Kolkata, India.

Let me begin with the customary prayer from the Vedanta which is chanted by the guru and the disciple; teacher and the student together for peace.

Oum saha na vavatu.

May the Supreme Being protect us both the teacher and the disciple by revealing to us the true nature of knowledge.

May the Supreme Being protect us both the teacher and the disciple by revealing to us the application of the knowledge for the welfare of human kind.

May we, the teacher and the disciple together acquire knowledge and wisdom.

May the knowledge and wisdom that we acquire be effective and illuminative

May there be no disharmony within us.

Oum peace, peace, peace!

My very respectful salutations to all the great religious leaders and representatives present here on this historic occasion: my respectful pranams to Swami Damodaranandaji Maharaj, the senior-most monk of the Ramakrishna Order



Prayers by Dr. Rafie Mavaddat, Mrs. Julie Bethell, Local Councillor John Italiano and Swami Atmapriyananda

present here, respectful salutations to Swami Sridharanandaji Maharaj, the devotees, admirers and followers of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta movement

As it was already mentioned, the Vedanta movement is not an exclusive church, but it is a universal philosophy and religion which embraces all the faiths in the world. All of us know how Swami Vivekananda introduced Vedanta to the West through his famous appearance at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. And very recently we had a Parliament of Religions in Melbourne which brought me here and I am extremely thankful to the Lord for making me participate, be a witness to a very historic beginning of the Perth Chapter of the Vedanta Movement in Australia.

The Vedanta is based on certain very universal principles; and there are two important postulates which Swami Vivekananda gave as the essence of Vedanta:

Postulate 1: The divinity of the soul.

Postulate 2: The unity of all existence or the solidarity of the universe.

When Vivekananda came on the scene in 1893, apart from the inter religious conflicts and bickering, there was a very big challenge which religions had to face that was the rise of science, the new science. All of us know how historically some of the discoveries of the modern science of that time came into direct conflict with the doctrines of the church and how there happened to be a misunderstanding between the church on the one hand and the science on the other. So, then, there was a need for a reconciliation of science and religion by which I mean the western sciences beginning from the 18-19th century and Christianity representing religion. This was a new added challenge that Vivekananda had to face. And he prophesied that Vedanta is the one universal doctrine philosophy and religion which would address the reconciliation of science and religion.

For the first time as a religious leader he spoke from the world pulpit: "Science and religion will become friends; poetry and philosophy will shake hands and that will be the religion of the future of humanity".

So, the postulate 1 and postulate 2, scientifically speaking, belong to two different aspects of reality which Vivekananda called the microcosm and the macrocosm. Swami Vivekananda had a

remarkable experience in the Himalayas in India in which he saw that the microcosm and macrocosm were both built in the same plan. He wrote to one of his brother disciples, Swami Akhandanandaji that one of his greatest problems in life was solved through this experience. He said, 'I have seen the whole universe in an atom'. So the postulate 1 which I mentioned – the divinity of the soul – is the microcosmic aspect of divinity and the unity of all existence meaning that the solidarity of the universe implies the divinity percolating and encompassing the entire universe of creative beings. So the microcosm and macrocosm are built on the same plan. It follows as a corollary of postulate 2, primarily that there is an essential spirituality of all life. It is not that life and religion are divorced with each other; it is not that you practice religion for certain fixed hours of the day and fixed days of the week: our whole life becomes a religion.

Sister Nivedita, the dear Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda, writing the introduction to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, writes that there is no difference henceforth between the secular and the sacred. To worship at the temple and work in a farmyard are equal ways of reaching God. To conquer is to renounce.

The cell of a monk and the farmyard are equal places where you can experience God. So this was a message which is very much needed in the present time where people are so busy and say that they don't have time for religion. No fixed time is necessary as stated in the very famous words of the greatest Hindu prophet Chaintanya Mahaprabhu who lived a few centuries ago in India. He said, 'Oh Lord, so great is your mercy. You have created innumerable names and poured your power into each of these names and you have not specified any fixed time or place in which to chant them. Such is your extra-ordinary mercy and such is my misfortune that I do not have taste for your name; devotion for your name'.

So they thought that it is possible for a human being to talk to God, commune with God, wherever he or she is.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa who was the inspiration behind the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta Movement all the world over was a person who practised all religions, not as an outsider but as an insider. The study of religions these days has become very famous, which is called phenomenological study of religions.

I may study Christianity or Buddhism or Islam and find commonness in each of them and condescendingly say, 'You are also equally true'. It is not a condescending acceptance, but a positive universal acceptance. Swami Vivekananda therefore said in his opening address at The Parliament of Religions, 'It is not only tolerance but universal acceptance'.

Sri Ramakrishna wanted to taste God in innumerable varieties of ways. He said, 'I am a glutton in the spiritual field'. Just like a glutton wants to taste various kinds of food not only because he is hungry, but because he wants to taste various kinds of food to satisfy his curiosity and palate, he said, 'I am a glutton in the spiritual field'. He wanted to taste God in innumerable ways. He called his nephew and said, 'Can you take me to a church, I want to see and understand and realise how Christians call upon God; how Muslims call upon God'. So he wanted to try out various religions because of the great spiritual hunger which was always with him. He became a Christian, renounced his Hindu faith in the temple completely and had a vision of Christ and it is recorded that Jesus the Christ merged into his own body. He practised Islam as an insider. All the Hindu ideas vanished from his mind. He removed all the pictures from his place, dressed like a Muslim, ate like a Muslim, prayed like a Muslim till he became so much absorbed in the thought of Allah the Merciful - the Prophet Mohammed appeared before him. Sri Ramakrishna followed one path after the other and then came back and remained as the child of his divine Mother Kali and therefore the whole spirit of Vedanta is that there is divinity present everywhere.

The fundamental doctrine of religion was spoken about just now - the path of love, self-surrender. The little "I", the ego is the most mischievous thing that God has given us. It is also a gift of God but that has made all the mischief possible. Somebody gave the interpretation of the Cross, 'You put the "I" and cross it out'. The "I" should die so that Christ can be born within **you**.

Islam, it means self surrender to the Supreme, the Merciful Allah.

Buddhism talks about it in a different way. Buddha said, "When you look for the self, ultimately you realise that there is no self at all, *anatta*". The little self is not there, but he did not choose to say what remains after that because that cannot be spoken about.

In Vedanta, the Hindu religion, self-surrender is stressed with a reason. 'Come unto me, ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give thee rest', as Christ said. Sri Krishna in the Gita also said in the same manner: "Come and surrender unto me leaving aside everything and I will release you from all fear and from all anguish and grief". *"Sarva dharmam parityajya mamekam saranam vraja aham tva sarva papebhya mokshisyami ma sucha"*

To self surrender, the little "I" has to be completely surrendered but the beauty that the Vedanta finds out in the scientific language is that although "I" is so strong, when it vanishes you become the **ALL**.

When there is a *sunya* (zero) of the "I" then the purna (complete, Absolute) of infinite God will fill you. Empty the mind so that it will receive the Immeasurable. When you empty yourself, when the emptying of the little self is complete, there is a filling in by God which is called spirituality.

Swami Vivekananda when he came to the West, saw that people were terribly afraid of losing their individualities, Swami Vivekananda sometimes used to make fun of them saying that, "You people are so afraid of losing your in-di-vi-du-al-i-ty but you are not individuals yet". And he told a beautiful story. *A water drop was falling into the ocean and the drop cried miserably and the ocean asked the water drop 'Why are you crying my child?' 'Oh, I am losing my individuality as a little drop'. The ocean told the drop, 'You were with me, one of me as the ocean, and because of the heat of the sun you went up, so you are not losing your individuality as a drop, but you are getting back your individuality as the ocean'.*

So, we are the Infinite self. Vedanta says 'You may be a small little entity with a little body, with a little mind but within you there is the infinite which is immeasurable. Realise that which is your real nature. Swami Vivekananda sometimes used to make very very bold

and powerful statements: 'I am now going to throw a few bombs, Vedantic bombs, just to shake up the old beliefs'. Once he said, 'Never forget the glory of human nature, Buddhas and Christs are but the waves of the infinite ocean which I **AM**' - the individual Self (Buddhas etc. are the mental modification of the conceiver and the conceiver is always greater than his conceptions)". Although this "I" seems small, but it has the capacity to hold God. So the gift of God comes to you when you totally annihilate your little self. Through the annihilation of the little self God fills you with the infinitude.

One more challenge that Vedanta has to face is that of the non-believers and atheists. Believers congregate and say, 'All religions are true and all of us are one and there is great love'. But what about people who do not believe in God at all? The world is slowly getting filled with people who do not believe. Vedanta says, 'You do not believe in God, good enough. Do you believe in yourself?' You can deny everything but you cannot deny your own self. By simple logic, suppose I say, 'I deny myself'. Who is it that denies it? I. I deny that also. Who is it that denies it? I. And therefore finally we get to the fallacy of *rigorous ad infinitum*. You cannot deny your own self. Now, discover the reality of this individual self and you will end up finding your Divine self. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda said that the self can be realised and we are born to realise this Truth.

I will end with the last word that Swami Vivekananda spoke at the Parliament of Religions, "If this Parliament has proved anything to the world, it is this: that holiness and purity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world. And every religion has produced men and women of the greatest character. In the face of this evidence, if anyone feels that his religion alone is right and that the others are wrong, then I pity him from the bottom of my heart. And I tell him, soon it will be written on the

banner of every religion "Help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissection."

Hon. John Kobelke, M.L.A. W.A.

I start by recognizing Ben Taylor and his grandson and thanking them for their work in the country. I also recognize the Nyungar people as the traditional owners of the land on which we stand here today. And I didn't realize I've actually got a Nyungar tie, so it is fitting that I should have that on.

To the swamis and the devotees of the Vedanta, to the other church leaders here who inspired us with their presentations this morning, to the deputy mayor of the city of Sterling, Councilor Giovanni and the other counselors—Can I, as someone who is a member in the local area, not just for any specific area, but through this area for many years—I welcome the Vedanta Church of Hindu religion to Perth with the establishment of your centre here in Yokine. As we have already had explained to us, it was previously the Uniting Church, but this is not the first time we have had the recycling of a church building through this area.

In fact, there was an Anglican-Parish down Charles Street not too far from here towards the city, and they sold that church and they moved up to Nollamara; that church is now a Greek Orthodox church. And the church they built in Manson - well, they then sold and moved, and that is now a beautiful Buddhist temple. And the new church that they built which was on Nollamara Avenue in Dianolla near the high school. After a few years they sold that, and that is now St. Mary's mosque, and they moved again. I don't know what their current church will become.

I think this illustrates for us that we are a community in change, and that we are made up of so many rich and diverse cultures and religions. While there are sometimes tensions, and we have to recognize and deal with those, we can be very proud that we have such a strong multicultural and multi-faith community.



A talk by Hon. John Kobelke, the final remarks by Swami Sridharananda and Mr. Unnikrishnan proposing the Vote of Thanks.

So what can I, as an elected Member of Parliament, say to contribute to this inspiring multi-faith service. I can not talk the teachings and realization of Vedanta. What I do know is that as I serve the people in my electorate and I try to represent them in all their many kinds and many interests, that they are all spiritual people, that they have a spiritual nature, a longing for truth. And while, as indicated by a previous speaker, many may not acknowledge God, there is a need to service that spirituality and to help it develop so that people might become more fully human and fulfill the potential that God has given them.

How is this important to a secular state and to someone who is a part of that? Governments across Australia of all political persuasions very genuinely seek to improve the lives of their citizens. But the influence of the State is, by its nature, limited. We know that we live in a very affluent society. Of course, there are some who are marginalized and some who miss out, but for most of us—we benefit from that affluence.

We also recognize that with that we are a very materialistic society. We saw figures recently where we are all building bigger houses for less people to live in them. We all have the latest gadgets but there is huge spiritual poverty. We see the high suicide rates, the loneliness that so many people face, the drug dependency in our community, and on the television almost every night the alcohol-fueled violence. Clearly, there is much spiritual poverty. Money does not bring happiness; it does not bring fulfillment. These are attained by living according to values derived from religious faith and the pursuit of eternal Truth. These things are well beyond the role of government.

So while governments can sponsor wealth development and provide essential services to its people. It is not the States' role to meet the spiritual needs of its people. That commitment of people to truth, holiness, attainment of virtue, the many different ways that have been expressed to you this morning, that is of the greatest importance to the health and the good order of our whole community. A healthy and peaceful society is not something that governments can achieve.

While governments make decisions—sometimes they contribute to that health and wellbeing, sometimes we get it wrong and they detract from it—but the essence of that health, of that vitality, of that fulfillment, is given to us by

men and women of good will, people with a sense of respect for their fellow citizens who have a sense of internal integrity and character, and have that built on the universal truth. Our community functions well because of these people who are there—the heaven, the salt of the Earth—they seek to attain a truth beyond and above our common everyday understanding.

In politics and government we all too often are driven by short-term self-interest. But I personally am always uplifted when I encounter individuals in my day-to-day work through my community who you see the light of integrity shining from, who you know are people who can be trusted because they see themselves as fitting into a much bigger picture, that there is an infinite, a universal truth. Therefore they are not going to be totally dominated or always swayed by very narrow self-interest or what happens to be the particular vogue of the time. These people inspire me. They help me to hold to a strong belief that despite the many injustices that we see done, that in the end truth will win out.

I'll just comment briefly on what has dominated the news for the last two weeks in Copenhagen. And from that I draw two main things. One is that we are becoming more and more aware as a total community of the oneness of humanity; that we are all on one little planet; and that we are all interconnected. We are all in different ways responsible one for another. For me that comes through despite the failure to achieve what people might hope and despite the dissension and the fighting we can not deny we see what is happening there, that we are one humanity. We are one people right around this globe.

And the second thing is that while it is important to have strong political leadership—statesmen who will try and look to the common good of all the people of the world, we will never achieve lasting outcomes, no matter how good those leaders are, if it is just those leaders. We will make progress in looking after our fellow men, women, and children around the world when they are supported by prayer of people who understand that there is more to life than just day-to-day happenings and self-interest. When there are people who aspire to holiness, to fulfillment, and who want to share their love with their fellow citizens, and when those people pray for these leaders and their actions, then I have confidence that we can see good things happening on that

international sphere.

The humanity that we all share is fully realized when we travel down that path toward our divine destiny. We may all travel different roads, but the truth is universal and one. While our diversity may seem at times to separate us, it is richness and a strength that I think we should cherish. But we do need to realize that there is a oneness there, which must overcome all.

And if I could just finish with a small quote from English poet and writer John Dunne, who wrote this in 1624, the time I think when the plague was around with many burials and deaths, and he could hear a church bell ringing, perhaps in the village in the distance, wondering what was that bell about—was it another funeral? Obviously, he was a man of his time and perhaps European-centered, as we have been for far too long, but nonetheless it is a message that speaks to me and I share it with you. John Dunne wrote:

*No man is an island entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main;
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less, as well as if a
promontory were, as well as any man-
ner of thy friends or of thine own were;
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for
whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

Can I wish the Vedanta Centre here in Perth all the best, and joining all the blessings we have had today, I offer my wish that God's blessing will be upon the people who join this congregation and for the work they do. And I wish you all well for the future. Thank you.

John Italiano, Deputy Mayor, City of Stirling, appreciated the universal approach of Vedanta that promotes harmony in the society and welcomed it whole-heartedly.

Mr. Unnikrishnan gave a Vote of Thanks. Ms. Sharmini Lingam and Mr. Joseph Milillo compeered the meeting.

In his final remarks **Swami Sridharananda, the President of the Vedanta Centres of Australia** said that the Vedanta Centre preaches the higher values of life to wake up the divinity that is already in man and thus improve human quality, thereby improving human society. He reassured the audience that the Vedanta Centre will be true to its commitments of social harmony. He also appealed to all for co-operation and support for the Centre.

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi at Dakshineswar –the Nahabat

Sri Sarada's long years at Dakshineswar were spent in a little room in the Nahabat (music tower), about seventy-five feet north of the Master's room. The room was barely fifty square feet, the ceiling nine feet high, and the door so low that Sarada Devi knocked her head against the door-post many times before she got quite used to it. Situated on the bank of the Ganga, it commands a beautiful view of the sacred river and the spacious temple garden.

In this stuffy room, Holy Mother kept her supplies and necessities. She also worshipped, meditated and slept there. Two or three of the Master's women devotees (who later became her life-long companions) often spent the night with Sarada Devi in her room. In spite of her hardships, she would often speak about her life at Dakshineswar as the best period of her life, for there she could serve the Master and watch him sing and dance in ecstasy.

The tender plant of Sarada Devi's spiritual life, which later grew into a mighty tree, giving shelter to many a seeker of God, developed silently in the holy atmosphere of Dakshineswar.

The influence of Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna began to train Sarada Devi in the practice of spiritual disciplines. To her he was teacher, father, mother, companion, husband, and God Himself. He revealed himself to her in two ways: as the demonstration of the eternal principles of all religions, and also as her Chosen Ideal, or the Personal God. God no doubt pervades the whole creation as Sacchidananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. But He is manifest more through animate beings than through inanimate nature. He manifests Himself in the highest measure through a God-man, who, living in the world, is completely detached from it, who is constantly absorbed in God-consciousness, and who, according to Sri Ramakrishna, "sings, dances, and forgets himself in divine ecstasy."

Sarada Devi observed at first hand all the signs of divinity in Sri Ramakrishna. She witnessed his complete conquest of lust and greed. Every woman, to him, was a manifestation of the Divine Mother. He never thought of her in any other way. Money and worldly possessions never tempted him in the slightest degree. If he touched a coin he felt as if his body had been, as he would say, "Stung by a horned fish." She said later that complete renunciation was his special message to this age. Sarada Devi watched his frequent *samadhis* (spiritual ecstasies), in which he was totally absorbed in God. She loved to hear devotional songs. When Sri Ramakrishna sang and danced with the devotees in ecstasy in his room, he would ask that the door of his room facing the Nahabat be left open saying, "In this room intense feeling and love of God will be expressed. She must witness it; otherwise, how will she learn?"



Nahabat, the dwelling place of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

Sri Sarada Devi's Initiation

Sri Sarada Devi had been initiated by a monk while living at Kamarpukur. The Master again initiated her at Dakshineswar. Sarada Devi, though occupied with many household duties, spent a long time in repeating the sacred word. She said that she used to repeat it daily one hundred thousand times. Recalling an incident of that time, Sarada Devi said, "At Dakshineswar I used to get up at three o'clock in the morning and sit in meditation. Often I totally forgot my body and the world. Once, during the early hours of the morning, as I was meditating, a gentle breeze blew my red-bordered cloth off my back, but I did not know it. The Master saw me in that condition though I was unaware of it. On moonlit nights I would look at the moon and pray, 'O, Lord, there are stains even on the moon, but let my mind be absolutely stainless.' If a person is steady in meditation, he will clearly see the Lord in his heart and hear His voice. The moment an idea flashes in his mind, it will at once be fulfilled and he will be bathed in peace. Ah, what a state of mind I was in at that time! One day the maid servant dropped a metal plate in front of me. The sound hit me and penetrated, as it were, into my heart."

Sri Sarada Devi experienced great joy at Dakshineswar. She lived with one who was the embodiment of bliss. Referring to Sri Ramakrishna's blissful state she said, "What a unique man he was. How many minds he illumined! What unceasing bliss he radiated! Day and night his room echoed and re-echoed with laughter, stories, talk and music. The Master sang, and I would listen hour after hour, standing behind the screen of the Nahabat. When the singing was over I saluted him with folded hands. What joyous days we passed through. People poured in day and night, and there was no end of spiritual talk."

"I never saw him sad. He made merry with all, a boy of five or an old man."

Firmness and determination

Sri Ramakrishna closely watched Sarada Devi's spiritual practices and saw to it that she meditated regularly. At three o'clock in the morning he would go to the door of the Nahabat and say to Lakshmi, "Get up and wake up your aunt. How long will you sleep? It is going to be dawn. Begin your meditation." In wintertime Sarada Devi wanted Lakshmi to sleep a little longer. Hearing no response from inside, and thinking they were still asleep, the Master would sometimes tease them by pouring water under the door. The ladies had to get up quickly for fear of the beds getting wet (which it sometimes did). Thus Lakshmi acquired the habit of early rising.

One morning Sarada Devi felt unwell and did not leave her bed at three o'clock. This happened on several successive days. At once she understood it was a trick of the mind and forced herself to get up at the usual time. She often taught her disciples that one does not succeed in spiritual life without firmness and determination.

Spiritual Instructions

Whenever the opportunity arose Sri Ramakrishna gave Sri Sarada Devi

spiritual instruction. One evening he spoke at length to her and Lakshmi about love of God. As they were about to take leave of him he said to his niece, "Discuss what you have heard from me with your aunt tonight. You have seen the cows eating grass in the field during the daytime; at night they chew the cud. Therefore go over with your aunt what you have learnt now. Then you will not forget my words." Many years later, when someone read to Sri Sarada Devi from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, she said, "He used to give me such fine instruction. If I had only known how to write, I would have noted down his words."

Sarada Devi never allowed her meditation and other spiritual practices to interfere with her daily duties. She pursued both work and worship. During her spare time she occasionally made garlands for the image in the Kali temple. But she never made an excuse for neglecting worship.

One night she and Lakshmi were singing in a low voice. The Master heard it from outside. The next day he said to Sarada Devi, "Last night I heard you singing, and you seemed to be absorbed. That's very good."

She was reticent about her spiritual experiences. Though she had many visions, she did not stress their value very much. About the essence of spiritual realisation she once said to her devotees, "Through realisation the mind becomes pure, and through that pure mind one obtains enlightenment."

A manifestation of Divinity

Sarada Devi did not outwardly practise austerities or observe rituals to the extent Sri Ramakrishna did. Her life was one of quiet prayer and meditation, and she never neglected the performance of her daily duties. She appeared to others more like a householder than a recluse or ascetic. Yet the ocean of her spiritual experience was as bottomless as Sri Ramakrishna's. This shows that she was not just a saint or a mystic, but, like her husband, a manifestation of divinity.

Sri Ramakrishna was fully aware of Sarada Devi's future. Referring to her one day, he said to a woman disciple, "She is Sarasvati (the Goddess of learning). She has assumed a human body to impart wisdom to men; but she has hidden her celestial beauty..." Both before and after his death the Master often reminded her of her future role.

He gave her detailed instructions about awakening the spiritual power of her future disciples.

Sri Ramakrishna trained Sarada Devi to fulfil a special mission, namely, demonstration of the Motherhood of God. From an early age she expressed the motherhood innate in women in many ways: by taking care of her brothers, by feeding the poor, and afterwards by looking after Sri Ramakrishna's young disciples at Dakshineswar. As is natural with women, she occasionally wished she had children. One day Sri Ramakrishna read Sarada Devi's thought and said, "Why should you worry? I shall leave you many children, as pure as gold, the like of whom women do not get even through the prayers and austerities of millions of lives. So many people will call you mother that you will find it hard to look after them all." Perhaps this assurance did not completely satisfy Sarada Devi. Still she wanted to hear the sweet word 'mother.' Sri Ramakrishna again read her thoughts and instructed some of his disciples from Calcutta to stop in front of the Nahabat, before coming to his room, and say loudly, "Mother, here we are!" Sarada Devi is thus affectionately called Holy Mother by her disciples and by the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. One day she said to a disciple, "The Master regarded all creatures as manifestations of the Divine Mother. He left me behind to give expression to this Motherhood."

The Motherhood of God

The concept of the Motherhood of God and the worship of God as the Divine Mother, form a special feature of Hinduism. Sri Ramakrishna, who had his first communion with God through worship of the Divine Mother and who cherished a life-long devotion to Her, said that to worship God as Mother is the final stage in spiritual evolution. A Hindu, worships God as Father, Friend and Beloved, but the idea of God as Mother draws him nearest to God. According to Vedanta, Ultimate Reality, which is known as Brahman, is a nameless, formless, attribute-less, and transcendental neutral entity. In the final non-dual experience, Brahman alone exists. The soul and the universe become one with It. It is Sakti, also called Maya, the inscrutable potency of Brahman that projects and preserves the universe and the animate and the inanimate beings. At the end of a cycle all names and forms return to Her and remain in seed

state, and at the beginning of the new cycle they all reappear in their tangible gross forms. Sakti is the totality of creation, with all its pairs of opposites: good and evil, pain and pleasure, life and death. She functions through both knowledge and ignorance. Both are necessary to perpetuate the creation. Through Her aspect of ignorance, Avidya-Maya, She deludes creatures, binding them to the world and lengthening their phenomenal existence. Through Her aspect of knowledge, Vidya-Maya, She gives insight to spiritual aspirants, removing their chains and finally liberating them. This Sakti controls both bondage and liberation. Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Her as Kali, the Mother, and often affectionately called Her 'my Mother.' Brahman and Kali, the Godhead and Its potency, are inseparable, like fire and its power to burn, like a gem and its lustre, like a word and its meaning. All creatures – gods and angels, prophets and saints, the worldly and the wicked – are manifestations or offsprings of Her. She resembles an earthly mother in that created beings come out of Her, and after they are born, are preserved by Her. At the time of final liberation, they enter Brahman through the portal of Her grace.

God's love for man - unselfish, unsolicited, and undeserved – has been stressed by the mystics and prophets of all religions. The nearest example of this love in human experience is the love of a mother for her children. A mother's love and sacrifice qualify her spiritually to stand above all other relatives. Sri Ramakrishna made Sarada Devi a symbol of God's Motherhood because, through Sarada Devi's immaculate body and mind, the divine Sakti manifested Herself to the fullest degree in modern times. By worshipping God as the omnipotent, compassionate, and all-forgiving Mother, an aspirant develops fearlessness and comes closer to reality.

Sri Ramakrishna once said to Sarada Devi, "I know who you are, but I shall not reveal it now." He characterised her as a cat hidden in ashes. When the ashes are shaken off, one can see the cat.

Sources:

Holy Mother: The Life of Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Nikhilananda; Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre; New York; pages 74-85.

Sri Sarada Devi: A Biography in Picture; Advaita Ashram, Mayavati, page 20.

The birth anniversary of the Swami was observed on the 12th of December 2009 at our centres.

Sri Ramakrishna married in order to demonstrate how to transcend ordinary marriage. He had no physical relationship with his wife, as he saw the Divine Mother in all women. Four of his monastic disciples were married, and Swami Shivananda was among them. Tarak (Shivananda's pre-monastic name) had to marry against his wishes. His father did not have enough money to pay the dowry for his youngest daughter's marriage, so he arranged for an exchange marriage. This meant that Tarak would have to marry his brother-in-law's sister, so that, neither party would have to pay any dowry. Tarak's wife was a highly evolved soul; unfortunately she died within a year of the marriage.

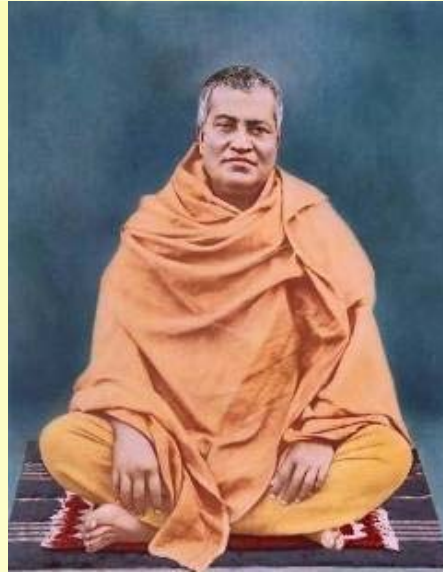
Though he was married, Shivananda maintained unbroken chastity, and became known as 'Mahapurush' (great soul) in the Ramakrishna Order. It is said that the Master touched a part of Tarak's body and said, "Dive deep in the ocean of Satchidananda," and this extinguished his lust forever.

Early Life

Tarakanath Ghosal was born on Thursday, 16 November 1854, at Barasat, a small town east of Calcutta. His father, Ramkanai Ghosal, was a devout Brahmin and a worshipper of the Divine Mother. His wife, Vamasundari, was a loving, spiritual woman. Ramkanai, a successful lawyer, was very generous to the poor and to holy people. He was the secretary of the local school and provided room and board to nearly thirty poor students in his house. Their first child was a daughter named Chandi. The holy couple prayed to Lord Tarakeshwar Shiva for a son and performed austerities for a year. One night Vamasundari had a dream in which Lord Shiva appeared before her and said, "I am pleased with your devotion. I bless you. You will be the mother of a spiritual son."

Because the child was born by the grace of Tarakeshwar Shiva, his parents called him Tarakanath. An astrologer made a horoscope, which indicated that the child either would be a monk or a king. Later, when Tarak became a monk, he threw the horoscope into the Ganges, and thus renounced the memory of his past life.

He began his education at the Barasat Missionary School and later went to



Swami Shivananda
(one who enjoys the bliss of Shiva)
(1854 — 1939)

high school. He was a good student, but did not care much for academic education. He was serious and deeply indrawn by nature, and he found delight in prayer and meditation. His headmaster remarked about him, "Tarak's character had such depth and purity that we were all charmed and impressed by it."

When he was in the tenth grade, Tarak learned that his father's income had been reduced. In order to help the family financially, he left school and looked for a job. He worked for some years for the railways in northern India. He later expressed the feelings he had during that time, "Since my boyhood I didn't care for family life, and I had a spiritual inclination in my heart. I shall never be bound to this world by getting married – this idea was deep in my mind. I had an innate desire to travel to various holy places. I used to work for the railways and call on God."

While he was working, Tarak spent long hours practising meditation. He later recalled, "Then the bliss of Samadhi would agitate my mind...I was very fond of the meditative pose of Shiva and Buddha." One day while talking about Samadhi, his roommate Prasanna mentioned the name of a person who had experienced genuine Samadhi: Sri Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar.

First meeting with Sri Ramakrishna

One Saturday in May or June 1880 Tarak met Sri Ramakrishna at the Calcutta home of Ramachandra Datta.

When Tarak arrived at Ram's house, he found Sri Ramakrishna in ecstasy. Oblivious of his surroundings, the Master asked, "Where am I?" Someone answered, "At Ram's house."

Tarak later recalled this first meeting, "That evening I went to Ram Babu's house. I found the Master sitting in a room crowded with people. The Master was in an ecstatic mood. I saluted him and sat nearby. One can well imagine my surprise when I heard him talk eloquently on a subject which I had been so eager to know about – Samadhi! I remember that he elaborated on Nirvikalpa Samadhi. He said that very few can attain it and that if one attained it, one's body dropped off in twenty-one days."

Tarak did not get a chance to talk to the Master on this occasion, but a month later he went to see him. One Saturday evening after work he and a friend took a boat to Dakshineswar. In the dim light of an oil lamp he saw the master seated cross-legged in his room, with three or four others on the floor in front of him. Ramakrishna asked affectionately, "Have you seen me before?" Tarak answered that he had recently seen him at Ram's house. Tarak bowed down to the Master, putting his head on the Master's lap, and the latter gently caressed his head. Tarak reminisced, "At once I felt a deep attachment for the Master. I felt as if I had known him a long time. My heart became filled with joy. I saw in him my tender, loving mother waiting for me. So with the confidence, faith, and certitude of a child, I surrendered myself to him, placing myself entirely under his care. I was certain that at last I had found him for whom I had been searching all these days. From then on I looked upon the Master as my mother."

The vesper service in the different temples began and the sound of bell, drums, and symbols reverberated in the temple garden. Ramakrishna was in a divine mood. Shortly after he asked Tarak, "Do you believe in God with form or without form?" "In God without form," replied Tarak. "You can't but admit the Divine Shakti [who manifests Herself in many forms] also," said the Master. He then accompanied Tarak to the Kali Temple, where the evening service was taking place. The Master prostrated before the image of the Mother. Tarak

at first hesitated to follow his example, as he was a member of the Brahmo Samaj (which did not approve of image worship). But suddenly the thought crossed his mind, "Why should I have such prejudices? Even if this image is only an image, God must still be present in it, since He is everywhere." Then Tarak prostrated before the image of the Mother. After returning from the temple, the Master asked Tarak to stay overnight with him, but Tarak declined because he had already promised to stay with his friend who lived in Dakshineswar. The Master was pleased and said, "One should keep one's words. Speaking the truth is the austerity in this Kaliyuga." After a pause the Master said, "All right, come tomorrow." When Tarak returned the next afternoon, the Master received him cordially. He talked to him about spiritual life, served Prasad that had come from the temple as supper, and arranged his bed in the southern veranda, which was adjacent to his room. That night there were no other visitors. Tarak recalled:

"Out of joy I did not sleep that night. At midnight I saw the Master was in ecstasy. He was also muttering something. Shortly he came to the veranda and asked me, 'Hello, are you sleeping?' 'No, Sir,' I replied. 'Could you chant a little of Lord Rama's name?' After I chanted Rama's name for some time, he calmed down. Thus I passed that night with joyful intoxication. In the morning while I was taking leave bowing down to the Master, 'Come again-alone.'"

During my second or third visit I was serving him when he suddenly touched my chest while in an ecstatic mood. That touch made me lose outer consciousness and sent me into a deep meditative state. I did not know how long I remained in that state. As a result, everything became revealed to me. I realised that I was the Atman, eternal and free. I realised that the Master was the Lord born as man for the good of humanity, and that I was on earth to serve him. He gave me a similar blessing another day under the banyan tree in the Panchavati.

Sri Ramakrishna recognised Tarak as one of his inner circle. On one occasion Tarak requested the Master to give him the experience of Samadhi. The Master told him, "You will get it. Don't be impatient. The Divine mother will bless you at the right time." Another day the Master took Tarak to the Panchavati and wrote a mantram on



Swami Shivananda

his tongue, which put him into deep meditation, and he lost consciousness of his body. Later the Master brought him back to normal consciousness by rubbing his chest with his fingers. This is a kind of tantric initiation in which the guru imparts spiritual power to his disciple. Swami Saradananda wrote in *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* that the Master's touch roused an upsurge of longing for God in Tarak's mind – suddenly all the knots of his heart were loosened.

Tarak recalled his wonderful experiences during his early encounters with the Master:

"When I first started visiting the Master, I often felt inclined to cry. One night I was crying uncontrollably by the riverside near the *bakul* tree. The Master was in his room, and he had inquired where I had gone. When I returned he asked me to sit down and said, 'The Lord is greatly pleased if one cries to him. Tears of joy wash away the mental impurities accumulated through the ages. It is very good to cry to God.'"

"Another day when I was meditating in the Panchavati grove, my concentration became very deep. The Master came

towards me from the pine grove, and as soon as he looked at me, I burst into tears. The Master stood still. I felt something creeping up inside my chest, and I was overcome by a fit of shaking. The Master said that my crying was not insignificant. It was a type of ecstasy. I then followed him to his room where he gave me something to eat. The awakening of the kundalini (the spiritual energy) was an easy matter for him. He could do this even without a touch, but by a mere look."

Days With Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna did not teach his disciples through books or sermons but through the example of his own life. At every moment, with every movement he demonstrated how to practise religion. Tarak was fortunate to live with and serve the Master at Dakshineswar and Cossipore. Like the other disciples, Tarak recalled his experiences and his observations of the Master. In one such instance, Tarak recalled:

"The Master's words were so impressive and instructive that I felt tempted to take notes. One day at Dakshineswar I was listening to him and looking intently at his face. He was explaining many beautiful things. Noticing my keen interest, the Master suddenly said, 'Look here! Why are you listening so attentively?' I was taken by surprise. He then added, 'You don't have to do that. Your life is different.' I felt as if the Master had divined my intention to keep notes and did not approve of it, and that was why he had spoken in that way. From that time on I gave up the idea of taking notes of his conversations, and whatever notes I already had I threw into the Ganges."

Sometime in the middle of 1883, Tarak's wife, Nityakali, fell ill and died. Tarak performed the customary ritual for his departed wife, then resigned from his job and decided to lead the life of a monk. Tarak was the first amongst the disciples to renounce worldly attachments. He lived mostly with Ramakrishna during the last three years of the Master's life. Sometimes he would live at Dakshineswar, and sometimes the Master would arrange for him to stay at Ram's house in Calcutta. Tarak cooked his own food and practised meditation in some solitary parks. He also lived for some time at Kankurgachi Yogodyana (Ram's retreat in east Calcutta).

"I was so happy there all by myself," recalled Tarak. For lunch I used to procure from the neighbourhood a little

rice and one or two simple dishes. For supper I prepared over the open 'dhuni' fire (a fire used by wandering monks) a few pieces of unleavened bread and roasted an eggplant or a couple of green bananas. Day and night I used to be absorbed in my spiritual practice beside the 'dhuni' fire, and right there snatched my sleep and rest."

From time to time Tarak would visit the Master at Dakshineswar. On the 8th of June 1883 when Tarak arrived, Ramakrishna was in the Mother's temple. He was pleased to see Tarak and showed his affection by touching his chin. In 1884 Tarak went on a short pilgrimage to Vrindaban, the childhood playground of Krishna. On 7th September 1884 he visited the Master, carrying with him some sacred dust and Prasad that he had brought from the holy city.

By the middle of 1885 Sri Ramakrishna had developed throat cancer. On 26th September 1885 Sri Ramakrishna was taken to Calcutta for treatment. He stayed a house in Shyampukur till 11th December and then was moved to the Cossipore garden house. Tarak joined the other brother disciples there to serve the Master. He later reminisced:

"One night it was my turn to cook for the household. As I was adding the final spices to the vegetables, the smell spread through the house and reached the Master upstairs. He asked the nearby attendant: 'What is cooking?' When he learned that I was the cook, he said, 'Go and bring me a little of it,' and he tasted a tiny bit of the preparation. Because of the cancer in his throat he could hardly swallow anything. With great difficulty he would eat a little farina cooked in milk, but most of the time he was not able to even swallow that."

Sometime in the middle of January 1886, the elder Gopal wanted to distribute twelve pieces of ochre cloth and rosaries to some monks. The Master pointed to his young disciples and said, "You won't find better monks than these. Give your cloths and rosaries to them." Instead, Gopal offered them to the Master and he himself distributed them among his young disciples. Tarak received an ochre cloth, the garb of a monk, directly from the Master.

Apart from serving the Master, the disciples began to practise various kinds of spiritual disciplines under his guidance. Sometimes Tarak would spend the whole night in meditation in the Panchavati grove at Dakshineswar

and would then return to Cossipore in the morning. In the early part of 1886, Narendra, Tarak, and some other disciples began to study the life and teachings of Buddha and were captivated by his renunciation, forbearance, love and compassion. One night in the early part of April, without informing anyone, Narendra, Tarak, and Kali left for Bodh Gaya, where Buddha attained nirvana. Arriving at Bodh Gaya, they spent days in meditation under the famous Bodhi tree where Buddha attained enlightenment. On the third night Narendra felt an intense longing for Buddha. He was overwhelmed by emotion and burst into tears, tenderly embracing Tarak, who was meditating next to him. It is said that Narendra saw Buddha enter into Tarak's body.

While they were in Gaya, the other disciples were worried about them, but the Master kept quiet. When the three returned to Cossipore, the Master, moving his index finger in a circle and waving his thumb, said, "No spirituality anywhere!" Then pointing to himself he said, "This time all is here. You may roam about wherever you please, but you will not find anything (spirituality) anywhere. Here all the doors are open."

Some Glimpses of Swami Shivananda

Swami Shivananda was an extraordinary teacher and a guru by divine right. His own life was a commentary on what he preached. He never stood upon a public platform or addressed large audiences. But he kept his spiritual treasures open for seekers of God. He solved their spiritual problems, and answered their questions on religion and philosophy from his own personal experience. As to his own realisation, Shivananda once exclaimed, "I am happy. I have realised the Infinite by the grace of the Master." He then joyously chanted the peace mantram of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: "All that is invisible is verily the Infinite. All that is visible is also the Infinite. The whole universe has come out of the Infinite, which is still the Infinite."

One day Swami Kamaleshwarananda told Shivananda, "I want to study the Upanishads with you." Shivananda replied, "Can you study our lives? Our lives are verily Upanishads. Here you will find the quintessence of the scriptures. The light that I received from the Master I am sharing with you. The flame of one lamp lights another – thus we are all connected."

Swami Satprakashananda recalled,

"Once during a walk at Belur Math I asked Mahapurushji, 'Maharaj, some take initiation from the Holy Mother and others from Swami Brahmananda. Is there any difference between the two?' He said in reply, 'No, I do not see any difference whatsoever – the same Ganges water is coming out of two taps. The same grace of the Master is flowing out through the Holy Mother and Maharaj; the One Substance is in two receptacles. But look here, what do you mean by 'taking initiation?' They receive it, they receive it. It is given, it is given. No sooner did I hear this than my inner eyes were opened with regard to initiation, and a great problem was resolved for me. Dependence on the Divine coupled with self-reliance ruled my heart." Seeing God in everything and everywhere is the culmination of the Vedantic experience. One night he was meditating in his room when a cat entered, crying, "mew, mew". Shivananda bowed to the cat with folded hands, and then said to his attendant: "The Master has kept me in such a state that I see everything as conscious. I see the play of consciousness in the wall, door, bed, and even in this cat." His pet dog, Kelo, would get baths and special dinners. Pointing to Kelo Shivananda would say, "Kelo is my dog and I am the dog of the Master."

Shivananda's mind was full of Ramakrishna. He once told Brahmananda in Belur Math: "Raja, I see the Master even these days. Were it is not so it would be unbearable for me to live." Pointing to the picture of Sri Ramakrishna said to the devotees: "Don't think this picture of the Master as ordinary picture. He himself dwells in it and listens to the prayers of the devotees."

On other occasion Shivananda said, "In this age the name of Sri Ramakrishna is the mantram of liberation. Rama and Krishna—the combination of these two incarnations is simultaneously manifested in Ramakrishna. If you chant the name of Ramakrishna, you will get the result of japam of the Rama mantram as well as the Krishna mantram. He was born to liberate sinners and sufferers, and showed a simple and beautiful path for God realisation."

Sources:

God Lived With Them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples by Swami Chetananda; Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; pages 129-142; 169.

Ramakrishna and his Disciples by Christopher Isherwood; Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; page 218.