



REACH

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

Motto:

*Atmano mokshartham
jagad hitaya cha,*

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

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Sayings and Teachings

All religions are true

“All religions are true. God can be reached by different religions. Many rivers flow by many ways but they fall into the sea. There all are one.”

--- Sri Ramakrishna

Great sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta; page 18.

True value

“Is the value of a thing to be gauged by its price? It is the love and devotion with which a thing is offered that really counts.”

--- Sri Sarada Devi

Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother: Life and Teachings by Swami Tapasyananda; Sri Ramakrishna Math; Mylapore, Madras, page 127.

Religion

“Religion is realisation; not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.”

“The ultimate goal of all mankind, the aim and end of all religions, is but one — re-union with God, or, what amounts to the same, with the divinity which is every man's true nature.”

--- Swami Vivekananda

Teachings of Swami Vivekananda; Advaita Ashrama; Mayavati; Himalayas, page 244 and from a lecture ‘The goals and methods of realisation’.



Statue of Swami Vivekananda at the Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education, Mysore, Karnataka, India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FROM JANUARY TO MAY 2012

Function	Centre	Date
B. Ann. Swami Vivekananda	Brisbane	Sunday, 5 February 2012
Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna	Brisbane	Sunday, 26 February 2012
	Melbourne	Sunday, 26 February 2012
	Perth	Sunday, 26 February 2012
	Sydney & Auckland	Thursday, 23 February 2012
Shivaratri	Sydney & Auckland	Monday, 20 February 2012
Dol Purnima	Sydney	Thursday, 8 March 2012
Ram Navami	Sydney	Sunday, 1 April 2012
Shankar Panchami	Sydney	Thursday, 26 April 2012
Buddha Purnima	Sydney	Sunday, 6 May 2012

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 from and activities of the Vedanta Centres of Australia and New Zealand for the period from October 2011 to December 2011

ADELAIDE CENTRE

Monthly activities:

a) Swami Sridharananda continued his three-days-a-month visit to Adelaide and delivered discourses on the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali* at the Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich SA 5065. The lectures are being recorded. For details of the ongoing monthly programmes please contact Dr. Raman Sharma, Secretary, on 08- 8431 9775 or Mrs. Pathma Iswaran on 08-8379 5336.

b) A 'reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*' is held every month on a prescheduled Sunday from 2:30 p.m. at 33 Woodhouse Crescent, Wattle Park, SA 5066.

Annual Activity:

a) The Annual Spiritual Retreat was held on Saturday 19 November 2011 at the Monastery, on 15 Cross Road, Urrbrae SA 5064. Swami Sridharananda and Swami Chandrashekharaṇanda Conducted the retreat which included chanting of Vedic mantras, guided meditation, *bhajans*, a question-answer session and readings from the Gospel of the Holy Mother and the Letters of Swami Vivekananda. Swami Sridharananda gave two talks on '*Spiritual Practices in Daily Life*', which is the theme for this year. The retreat concluded with *bhajans* and *ārti*. The participants thoroughly enjoyed the atmosphere of peace and the information gained through the question-answer session.

Other Activities:

Swami Damodarananda, one of the pioneers of the Vedanta Movement in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, visited Adelaide from the 5th to the 7th of November en route to his

return to India. He was accompanied by Swami Atmeshananda. A special prayer meeting was held on Sunday, the 6th of November 2011 at the Dulwich Community Centre. He gave a talk on 'Ramakrishna and Vedanta'. This was a rare opportunity for the local devotees to seek the blessings of Revered Swamiji.

BRISBANE CENTRE

Daily activities:

Morning worship, evening *ārti*, *bhajans*, and readings 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 other activities:

a) Swami Atmeshananda conducted the *Bhagavad-Gītā* class in October 2011. He and Swami Damodarananda visited Brisbane from the 6th to the 10th of October 2011. There was a prayer meeting on the 9th of October 2011.

b) Swami Sridharananda chaired the AGM on 16th of October 2011.

CANBERRA CENTRE

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

MELBOURNE CENTRE

Daily Activities:

Vesper service is held daily at the

Centre at **7 Judy Court, Vermont, Vic 3133** from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. It includes set hymns, scriptural readings and meditation and occasional devotional singing.

The bookstall made available literature on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta philosophy, and other spiritual topics in print, audio, and visual media throughout the period. For further information please contact Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary, on 03-9803 6154 or Mr. Mohana Krishnan on 03-9801 6174.

Weekly/Monthly Activities:

a) Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly **discourses** on the *Bhagavad-Gītā* from Thursday to Saturday of a prescheduled week at Monash University Clayton Campus of Law, Wellington Road (L. Theatre L1). The Thursday and Friday sessions were from 7:45 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. and the sessions on Saturdays were from 11 a.m. to 12 noon. The recordings of these discourses are available in Audio, Video and MP3 formats.

b) **Prayer Meetings** were conducted on the first Sunday of every month, from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. which included prayer, recitation of sacred mantras, singing of *kirtan* and *bhajans*, followed by selected readings from the scriptures and discussions on them by the participants. The meetings concluded with an *ārati* and the distribution of *prasād*.

c) A **Group study** on *Bhagavad-Gītā* continued every alternate Sunday from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.

d) **Group study** through viewing of the '*Mundaka Upanishad*' lecture series on Video is held every Sunday from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. and the '*Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali*' lecture series



Swami Damodarananda addressed Adelaide devotees



Devotees at the Spiritual Retreat



Swami Damodarananda in a prayer meeting at the Melbourne Centre on 3rd November 2011. (inset Swami Damodarananda)

every Friday from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Celebrations:

a) The **birth anniversary** of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was observed on the 15th of December 2011. The programme started at 5 p.m. and concluded at about 7:30 p.m.

Other Activities:

Swami Damodarananda accompanied by Swami Atmeshananda, visited Melbourne Centre from the 2nd to the 5th of November 2011. A special meeting was conducted on the 3rd of November 2011.

PERTH CENTRE

Daily Activities:

The Centre located at **51 Golf View Street, Yokine W.A. 6060** holds vesper service daily at 7 p.m. with *arati*, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and meditation. The Centre maintains a small book-

stall and a library. Contacts: Mr. Unni Krishnan - Secretary - 0430 391 369, Mr. K.P. Basu Mallick - 0422 370 066.

Monthly Activities:

a) Swami Sridharananda visited the Centre every month from Thursday to Saturday on prescheduled weeks and conducted discourses on *Bhagavad Gitā*. About 50 devotees attend the discourses.

b) Monthly *satsang* which includes the singing of *bhajans* and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and other inspiring books were conducted on the first Sunday of every month from 11 a.m.

Celebrations:

a) The **birth anniversary** of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was held on the 17th December 2011. The programme which comprised of reading from the *Gospel of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* and singing of *Bhajans*,

started at 11 a.m. and concluded at about 12 noon.

b) **Christmas** Day was celebrated on the 25th of December 2011 from 11 a.m. to 12 noon with a reading from the life of Jesus Christ and singing of carols.

Other activities:

Swami Damodarananda accompanied by Swami Atmeshananda, visited the Perth Centre from the 7th to the 10th of November 2011. A special prayer meeting was conducted on the 9th of November 2011.

SYDNEY CENTRE

Daily Activities:

Daily worship, chanting and meditation are held every morning from 6 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. at 2 Stewart Street, Ermington. The vesper service starts at 7 p.m. in the evening which includes devotional singing, a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation. Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees are also conducted on a daily basis. The library is available to devotees for reference and research. The Centre maintains a bookstall which has a range of books on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, Yoga, and other spiritual literature. Devotional songs, discourses on the *Bhagavad Gitā*, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanisad*, and other topics are also available in various media.

Weekly/ Monthly Activities:

The Centre conducted the following activities in Sydney:

a) Swami Sridharananda conducted **classes** on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* every



The worship of the Divine Mother Sri Durga and Prasad distribution



Swami Damodarananda and the Audience in the Prayer Meeting at the Sydney Centre

Sunday morning from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at the Centre.

b) Classes on *Bhagavad Gitā* were also conducted by Swami Sridharananda at 1/11 Boyle Street, Balgowlah, NSW 2093 **Manly Beach** on Tuesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

c) Some devotees availed themselves of **spiritual counselling** and guidance. The Swamis also visited the homes of devotees when required.

d) Meditation sessions were held at the Ermington Centre on Sundays from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

e) Classes on **Sanskrit language** were held on Saturdays and Sundays for various levels of elderly students.

f) Bala Sangha Classes on moral and spiritual lessons and drama and movement were conducted for children every Saturday from 4:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. at the Centre during the academic term.

g) Classes on **moral and spiritual lessons** were also conducted for children at Carlingford West Primary School and Eastwood Public School on Wednesdays from 9:15 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. during the academic term.

h) For the benefit of students the Centre provided **English Language tutoring** on Tuesdays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. during the school term.

Celebrations:

a) Worship of the **Divine Mother Sri Durga** was held on the 4th of October, the *Mahā-astami* (eighth lunar day). About 700 devotees participated in the day long function.

b) The **birth anniversary** of Holy

Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated on the 15th of December 2011. The programme started at 9 a.m. and concluded at about 12:30 p.m. It included formal worship, *havan*, *bhajans*, floral offering followed by *ārati* and *prasād* distribution. The programme was attended by about 300 devotees. Swami Sridharananda delivered a talk on 'The life and teachings of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi' after the evening *ārati*.

c) Christmas Eve was celebrated after *ārati* on the 24th of December 2011 with singing of carols and reading from the Bible.

Other Activities:

a) A special **farewell** meeting was held for Swami Damodarananda at 10:30 a.m. on the 30th of October 2011. Various devotees highlighted many aspects of his loving nature, care for devotees and his pioneering services for the Vedanta movement in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. He also addressed the devotees.

Overseas Visit:

Swami Sridharananda visited Auckland, New Zealand from the 31st of October to the 7th of November 2011.

AUCKLAND CENTRE

Daily activities:

A vesper service is held daily at the Centre at 27 Arawa Street, New Lynn, Auckland from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. It includes the singing of hymns and readings from the text *Portait of Sri Ramakrishna* followed by meditation.

Monthly and annual activities:

a) On the **second Sunday** of every

month *satsang* programmes, which include singing of *bhajans*, discourse on the *Ramayana*, reading and discussion about the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and meditation were conducted from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

b) On the **last Sunday** of every month reading and discussion on the *Bhagavad Gitā*, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the life and teachings of Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda were conducted in addition to the above. Music and chanting classes were also held on these days.

c) Swami Sridharananda conducted *Bhagavad Gita* **classes** from the 3rd to the 6th of November 2011.

Celebrations:

a) Durga Puja was celebrated on the 3rd of October 2011. The programme started after evening *ārati* at 8 p.m. and included *bhajans* and talks on Divine Mother Durga. The programme ended at 9 p.m. with *prasād* distribution.

b) Holy Mother's **birth anniversary** was celebrated on 17th December 2011. The programme started at 8 p.m. after the evening *ārati* and included *bhajans* and talks on Holy Mother's life and teachings. The programme concluded with the distribution of *prasad* after 9 p.m.

c) Christmas eve was celebrated on the 24th of December 2011. The programme started at 8 p.m. and ended at 9 p.m. and included *bhajans* and talks on Jesus Christ and his teachings. *Prasād* was distributed at 9 p.m.

Gist of speeches given in the Prayer meeting at the Perth Centre

By Srilakshmi

Dear Swamiji,

My brother Vignesh and I first met you in 2003 when we were ten and eight years old. At each of your *satsangs*, we were the only two children and so we were petrified and scared of you. Each time at the *satsang*, we sang *bhajans*. At one of the *satsangs*, half way through our singing, you stopped us and told us to sing louder than you. We were embarrassed and upset, but we kept our chins up. As soon as we got into the car, we were in tears the whole way home, which was an hour away! My brother and I then decided that we were not going to go to anymore *satsangs* and so we told our mother this, hoping she would be on our side. Instead, she told us that we should be thankful to Swamiji for giving us an opportunity to improve ourselves and our singing. Nevertheless, my brother and I made a pact that we weren't going to go anymore.

But not long after that, we found out that Swamiji was returning to Sydney. While you were in Sydney, we continued to attend the monthly *satsangs*. However, in 2007, we found out that you were coming back to the Bull-Creek Ashram and so my brother and I decided to renew our pact of not going to the Ashram. But we went and got to know you better. You did not scold us and we enjoyed the Saturday children's classes you conducted. We were the only two children.

So, on behalf of my brother and I, I would like to thank you very much for your good teachings, blessings and most importantly, the love you showed us. We will both never forget this. Even though you will be going to India, your love, blessings and presence will definitely be here always.

By Janet Waghray

It was quite difficult for me when I first wanted to come to Ramakrishna Mission because I didn't really know anyone and it was held in people's own private houses and I was a little shy, but anyway, I came, and Swami Damodaranandaji was there who made me feel very welcome.



Swami Damodarananda

He was the first Swami I got to know. So later, when I heard that a new Centre was to be established, and also that he was to be in charge there, I was in Seventh Heaven! And he gave me my spiritual name, Janaki Amma, at Bull Creek.

When I brought flowers for the altar, he would strip off the leaves and just put them straight into the vase and suddenly there was a most beautiful flower arrangement! Then when I cleared up, I think he knew every speckle in that carpet, because he noticed any bits of leaves that I had left. Also when I swept the outside, he knew where every speck of dust and cobwebs were!

I used to attend the Upanishad classes that he held. One day he was explaining something very lofty and intricate to us, when he suddenly broke off, and after a moment's silence, he said sharply, "Why don't you cut your toenails?" I explained how I had once banged and hurt my big toe and the nail had partly come away, which is why so much white was showing, and indeed it was trimmed. "Oh, alright," he said.

But all this was to ensure that we take care to pay attention to details in all things, to be meticulous, and it showed his concern to make vases out of raw flowers so also with our personalities. Swamiji has taught me very many things and I am very grateful indeed, and all I can say is "Thank you."

Address by

Swami Damodarananda
(edited and reworded)

Dear Swami Sridharanandaji, Swami Atmeshanandaji and other devotees,

I am glad you have all come here in the name of a few good words of instruction and a few deeds of service that I have been able to offer to all of you by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda. It is by their grace that this has all happened and even now it is by their grace that we are all gathered here and I am going to the headquarters to be living with our brother monks there during the last part of my life in the Ramakrishna Mission.

God's Grace

All of you have heard enough praises (drum biting) of all the noble deeds that have happened through me.

Perhaps one of the greatest deeds that has happened is, that by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, I was able to invite Swami Sridharanandaji here in 1993, and then in 1997, and finally, Sri Ramakrishna blessed you all by sending him here to look after you.

That is the greatest blessing of Sri Guru Maharaj here – the service that I started in a humble way has been properly crowned by Sri Ramakrishna by sending a Swami, one of the best children of Sri Ramakrishna, well versed in scriptures and very capable of expressing it with all love and concern, concern for the devotees and I am very happy about that.

Accumulated Tendencies

Apart from that, what is to be known by all of you is that, everything that happens is, by the grace of God and the accumulated tendencies that we have, and according to that dharma we are led forward.

Bhagawan Sri Ramana – my first source of inspiration

As you all know, it is because of some good karma that I have, that when I was a boy I was inspired by Bhagawan Ramana Maharishi when I came to know about him through the pictorial booklet Bhagawan Sri

Ramana. It came to our hostel, and the carried-forward tendency of my past lives immediately aroused me and inspired me, and from within told me that this was the best thing that had happened in my life. I had not known until then anybody who had attained 'that highest spiritual joy and peace that passeth all understanding'.

I thought to myself that my first duty was to go and offer myself at his feet and to start my spiritual life. I knew that it was very difficult to get an opportunity to have such a person who had reached illumination and therefore felt that I had to go there and see Bhagawan.

Within two or three days, when I went to the hall in his ashram, and saw that he was with a few devotees, I just offered my salutations and leaned against the wall about six feet away from where he was sitting, as I was so exhausted from not having partaken any food just with the joy of going to meet him. Sri Ramana just looked at me when I went in, and he continued staring at me. He never asked 'who are you, where do you come from, what is the matter...' nothing! He just stared at me with his very open eyes, continuously gazing at me and I was so happy that the face of the great saint looked at me, that I also began staring at him. In this manner, he was looking at me, and I was looking at him, and I was so happy from within, for getting the blessings from a great spiritual illumined person and feeling holy vibrations as soon as I went in the presence of the great man.

Gradually his eyes became half-closed and with half closed eyes in natural absorption into the spiritual bliss within (in his natural Samadhi), he continued to stay there. In that manner, my spiritual life started and I began living there in the ashrama. I was allotted to be one of the workers assisting in the kitchen and while I stayed there in that capacity, every time I had some time to spare, I would go down to the hall to have what inspirational words of wisdom Bhagawan was giving to the devotees. I participated in such meets and tried to understand more about spiritual matters. In that manner, my time there went on.

Taken to The Trinity

While there, fortunately, by the grace of

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna I happened to read about the life of Sri Ramakrishna for the very first time. Until then, I had never known that there had been great spiritual giants before Ramana Maharishi. However, in this manner, I came to know about Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. Once again I was inspired and I thought that again the voice spoke to me to move forward... Oh! And with these thoughts I stayed there till the time when my grandmother and my uncle came from Madras with a car to take me away to Madras, I had to go with them. . . And some time later, I got one more chance to get away from Maya. It was the attraction for higher life and these thoughts made my goal of life higher and I came to join the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

After going to Madras with my grandmother, I was enrolled in an Engineering College. I cycled to and fro and also went to the Madras Math, to meet the monks, and also to go to the temple and meditate there and all my spiritual pursuits started again. And thus I was so happy to continue to be in the company of the monks and the Brahmacharis of the Ramakrishna Order, and began tasting the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda in his text, 'The Complete Works' says things to the effect of: 'You have led the ordinary way of life of eating drinking marrying and settling down. In that way so many lives have passed. Can you not offer one life completely to the Lord, renouncing everything?' ... , And again by studying him couple of years I was inspired, Oh That's the thing! ... and the family said, "What now? We have spent money on his studies of engineering". However, I thought, "My life isn't to be wasted, my life would be finished in this ordinary way of life. No, I do not want this!" and I wanted to offer myself to the joy of the service and spirituality alone and nothing else.

Fortunately around that time, I happened to meet one of Holy Mother's disciples, Swami Aseshanandaji and he inspired me so much as well. Then my family came for me again, but, they then thought that I would take myself off again and the situation was irreparable for they thought that

I would run away from them again and again and so then they left me to myself! Thus I was saved!

Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj – the second source of inspiration

My good fortune took me to my own Gurudev: Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, in Belur Math, who happens to be the guru of Swami Sridharananda. He was Holy Mother's disciple, and Swami Vivekananda gave him sannyasa. Such was my Guru. In 1946, I could take diksha and brahmacharya from him. And then, when I stayed for a few months at Belur Math I used to go almost daily to my Gurudeva and talk to him and get his blessings.

So that was the second man of realisation. The third one was the Chandrashekhara Bharati who was a man of realisation that I got the blessings of him also. . . In this manner, from the man of realisation Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi who first inspired me, I was then offered to the Ramakrishna Mission because of my past carried forward tendencies.

Swami Chandrashekhara Bharati – the third source of inspiration

In this manner, as I was moving forward in spiritual life in my own way - by my practices and efforts, I happened to meet another great man of realisation Swami Chandrashekhara Bharathi of Sringeri, a disciple of Nrisimha Bharati, another great man of spiritual realisation at Sringeri.

He used to be in his own divine, spiritual absorption, and he wouldn't know whether he was even wearing clothes or not. Such a man of spiritual realisation, such a noble and spiritually illumined person.

The day when I went to see him, he came in as scheduled to visit his Guru's temple where there was an image of Nrisingha Bharati at about 11 o'clock. All of us devotees were there, and he was standing and receiving our offerings of pranams from all of us. When my turn came he asked me, "Where are you from?" I was a brahmachari at that time, and I told him "I am from the Ramakrishna Mission in Bangalore." The moment he heard the name 'Ramakrishna' he exclaimed, "Oh!" He had such great respect for Sri Ramakrishna, the organisation and the spiritual movement. Then afterwards, of course, I was able to get some more

inspiration from that divine person. He had spiritual powers in him to not only know what was happening, but also knew what was going to happen in the future as well, so much so, that one day when a person of political importance was still coming near the gate to meet him, he requested his assistant to kindly inform the visitor that due to some prior commitments, he would not be able to meet the visitor. Swami Chandrashekhara Bharati was a spiritually illumined person.

Swami Shankharanandaji Maharaj – another source of inspiration

Yet another source of such inspiration to me was Swami Shankharanandaji Maharaj whom Swami Sridharanandaji knows very well. I didn't have that much of contact with him, but I used to meet him when I was at Belur Math and offer my salutations, and then he used to bless me.

Swami Jagadanandaji Maharaj – another source of inspiration

Then finally, I met another man, another sage of renunciation, Swami Jagadanandaji Maharaj who translated the book about the life of Sri Ramakrishna written by Swami Saradananda: *The Great Master Sri Ramakrishna* into English. He used to come from Almora in the Himalayas to our Vrindavan Sevashram to stay during the winter time, and he used to hold the Upanishad class for all the monks in the morning from 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. He used to inspire us. He was a man of realisation and of supreme knowledge, bliss and love.

At Vrindavan, I was pujari, - the priest at the old temple, not the new one. The old one was near the river just in front of the river, and of course every year we had the joy of receiving the Yamuna: She used to flood her waters in the hospital and all surrounding places, we had to take all the patients up, and had to face other problems. Nowadays we don't have that problem, now it's built on the main road itself.

Coming back to the topic, Swami Jagadanandaji Maharaj used to come to the temple, at about 11 a.m., after his bath, and he used to come with so much of holy vibration - a man of complete absorption and I used to have his *darshan* while he was in that mood, completely absorbed in joy. He'd fall at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna

like a stick and then stay for a while like that, and again get up, and again completely get absorbed spiritually.

In the evening he used to walk along the Yamuna on the roadside. There used to be sannyasins and brahmacharins surrounding Swami Jagadananda Maharaj and like a child he used to eat the fresh groundnuts that were being sold by the children, all the while speaking about spiritual life, the Ramakrishna Mission, Thakur, Swamiji and all such spiritual matters. Every day passed in that manner.

When Swami Jagadanandaji Maharaj was giving up his body, in Vrindavan, one of our monks, was massaging his legs as they were becoming cold, and we were chanting during his last moments, when Swamiji spoke up loudly saying: "Hey, what are you doing? Do you remember Satyam Jnanam Anandam Brahma!" And in that manner, speaking loudly about the divine, he gave up his body in Vrindavan.

Sri Ramakrishna - the greatest incarnation of the modern age

These are some of the great incidents about men of spiritual realisation with whom I happened to spend some time. My life was thus truly inspired by being with these great souls progressed spiritually towards that great ideal of the Shruti evolution of which Sri Ramakrishna happens to be the greatest incarnation of the modern age.

Quite naturally I would like to tell you devotees, that it is a very rare opportunity that we have, to know about Sri Ramakrishna's communion with the divine.

The pictures of Sri Ramakrishna were taken when he was not conscious of his body. This picture which we see here was taken by a photographer when he was completely absorbed, sitting at one of the temples in Dakshineswar, without any body consciousness. When he was conscious about the body, he never used to allow anyone to take photos of him. He said, "What! This body is going to be burned away, and you are taking photos!" Like that, he used to scare away the people.

In the great photo that was taken when he was with the Brahmo Samaj leader, Keshab Chandra Sen, he was

completely absorbed with that peace and joy that passeth all understanding, as Jesus said, and he was about to fall down, and from behind him, his assistant, Hridayram was holding him. In that photo, when you see his face, you'll understand what a beautiful photo the photographer has taken, for, you can see the peace and joy that beamed from Sri Ramakrishna's face. That picture has really taken me over as it were, and so I distribute this to the devotees, to know what is peace and bliss in the human form, the divine incarnation in this modern age.

People hadn't taken photos during the times of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna or Buddha or Christ, and so all the pictures that we have of these incarnations are from the imaginations of the artists.

However, the real photograph, actually were taken when Sri Ramakrishna was communing with the divine, we can get so very inspired with that!

So these are some of the spiritual inspirations that I got from the great spiritual leaders from outside and from our own Mission, the great leaders of our organisation.

My humble suggestions to you devotees

I would like all of you, if you don't mind, to try to commune with the great Guru Maharaj of Dakshineswar, and Swami Vivekananda by reading the great books which are very important.

"God Lived With Them" – which tells us about all the direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and how he inspired them, and what needs to be the daily spiritual practices and what is spirituality. The book reveals that Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual power was so great, by thought and by touch, Sri Ramakrishna used to inspire the devotees. Similarly, the book, "They Lived With God." tells us about householder devotees.

Please note these books and you can purchase those books and read! You'll be helped so much to commune with the divine, about how Ramakrishna was trying to help them towards spiritual illumination and in turn you will get inspiration.

Nistarini Ghosh – a householder devotee

"They Lived With God." tells us one incident about Nistarini Ghosh, a great householder who went to Sri

Ramakrishna one day along with her husband and she requested, "I want to have the vision of my chosen ideal, Sri Ramachandra."

Around that time in the temple garden at Dakshineswar there was a mother cat and her few kitten, whom the servants used to drive away from every place, and the mother cat used to carry her kitten through every part of the temple garden. The servants used to even beat them. Finally it came to Sri Ramakrishna's room and took shelter there. Ramakrishna allowed the mother cat and the kitten to stay there. So Sri Ramakrishna told her, "Certainly you will have it, but one thing you'll have to do. Will you please take this mother cat and kitten home and look after them?" Nistarini agreed. "Is that all? That I can do but I want to have the vision of my deity." "That you definitely will have," Sri Ramakrishna replied. "Just look after these kittens and you'll have peace" Therefore, Nistarini stayed at home, and looking after the cat and the kitten. Soon, one day, when she was meditating after offering her pranams to Sri Ramachandra, she suddenly looked up and Sri Ramachandra appeared to her, and she was so happy! Again she did pranam, and again she looked up, and she found Sri Ramakrishna there. First it was Sri Ramachandra, then it was Sri Ramakrishna! Then Sri Ramakrishna smiled and blessed her, "Now you know who Sri Ramachandra and Ramakrishna are".

In such a manner, the blessings that Sri Ramakrishna gave to the householders and sannyasins, is full of spiritual illumination. It is okay to carry on with the external activities that we do, but, the spiritual blessings that we get from these pages is a different matter – they are really very inspiring.

Therefore do read those books. They will simply change your life; so much of spiritual capacity was gained by the householders with the interaction with Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda and the direct disciples.

Latu Maharaj

Latu Maharaj used to be a servant somewhere and when Sri Ramakrishna saw him bringing flowers and fruits from Ramchandra Datta, he knew that this young boy was a spiritually oriented person. Latu was also very

anxious to be with Sri Ramakrishna. So one day Sri Ramakrishna asked him, "Would you like to stay with me?". 'Yes', was the reply. So Sri Ramakrishna asked Ram Chandra Datta, "Can you give your servant to me?" and he was readily given. And as a result, what happened was that boy became Swami Adbhutananda. One day when Latu Maharaj was sleeping in Sri Ramakrishna's room, Sri Ramakrishna said to him, "Get up! Don't just sleep at night! When are you going to meditate and spiritualise yourself if you sleep now? Get up!" Sri Ramakrishna then gave him a mantra and guided him to spiritual illumination. The servant boy became a spiritual giant, and Swami Vivekananda named him Swami Adbhutananda.

He did prove to be a wonderful creation of Sri Ramakrishna, and though he had just been a servant boy, he became a spiritual giant. One day somebody asked Latu Maharaj, Swami Adbhutananda, "That supreme being which is everywhere, how can it be in every living being and everything?"

Then Latu Maharaj answered, "That supreme sun, that one sun, who is blazing in the sky also can be seen in all drops of water? Early in the morning when you go out and see in every leaf there are drops and the same sun is blazing in every drop of water that it gets in the morning. Similarly, every name and form is just blazing with that supreme being, only we have to move forwards spiritually to realise that". So the purpose of life is spiritualising oneself by the help of the great spiritual giants; they are the first ones to be with.

My request to you therefore is to be in tune with the spiritual life of these great incarnations;

Four other very important books are there by Swami Vivekananda. The Four Yogas: Karma yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and then the path of meditation, Raja Yoga and the path of philosophy, Jnana Yoga. These 4 small books, are very important and will be easy for you to go through and understand as well.

Also, our Swami Sridharananda, fortunately comes regularly to all of you, despite all his problems of health. You can always ask questions to him. He is also continually explaining

the *Bhagavad Gita* so beautifully, to all of you and in this way you can spiritualise yourself – that is my request to all of you. Be in touch with this holy literature and the Swamis who are coming regularly - you ask them and they will all help you to spiritualise yourself.

Thank you very much for having come here today, to make this day in which we meet together and say Bye bye to one another. And those of you who happen to come to Belur Math, I will be glad to meet you by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna and how long it will happen to be there, I don't know, anyway . . . By the grace of Sri Guru Maharaj we will meet and will be able to move forward in spiritual life by His grace. Thank you very much.

Gist of an article by
Dr. Yatendra Sharma

It is 10th November 2011 - Purnamasi day. Swami Damodarananda is bidding farewell to the Perth devotees as he prepares to leave for India after several decades of selfless service to the community in Australia and surrounding regions.

My thoughts go back to that day in 1991 when Swami Damodarananda kept us engrossed with his *bhajans* and satsang at the Siva Temple in Perth. He talked about Sri Ramakrishna as the embodiment of Lord Rama in Ayodhya and Lord Krishna in Mathura. Swami Damodarananda, with his sweet voice and deep insight gave us a glimpse of the great Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual message. Although he was based in Fiji at that time, he travelled all around Australia and continued to visit Perth twice a year. His practical words of wisdom were sought after by many devotees and never failed to dispel the doubts and anxieties in their minds.

I recall the day when his presence and words changed my whole life. It was 1993 – a disastrous year of recession – and like many Australians I too was looking out for a job. When I met Swami Damodaranandaji at that time, he noticed my anxious face and remarked "You look anxious ! What happened?" And I tried to be casual.

Continued at page 16

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi as a true Sahadharmini

Introduction: Mother's wise advice to one complaining of work

A disciple-son of the Mother was married and was earning his livelihood as a teacher in a village school. His earnings were just enough to provide the family with food and clothing. From his boyhood his interests were all directed towards spiritual life. Later as he came to know of Sri Ramakrishna and got the grace of the Mother, he had a great desire for spending the rest of his days in spiritual practice. So he gave up family life to become a Sadhu, and joined an Ashrama. In the Ashrama there were too many kinds of jobs to be done. Gradually he found the work assigned to him increasing in volume. Every inmate there had to work day and night. So, how could he sit quiet and spend his time in Japa and Dhyana? After some time he completely lost his peace of mind. He had abandoned his life as a householder so that he could engage himself in spiritual practices undisturbed. But he found that conditions in that Ashrama were even worse. One day he came to the Mother and narrated to her his tale of woe. Hearing everything, the Mother said, "Well, my child, it is like moving from the frying pan to the fire. It is not an Ashrama but a second household for you!" The mother advised him to bear everything patiently, always remembering the Master. "If you really have a passionate desire for spiritual practices," she said, "the Master will arrange for the needed facilities at the right time."

A true Sahadharmini

The Master took pains to make the Holy Mother efficient in both spiritual and secular matters, and prepared her for the great mission that he was to entrust to her at the close of his life. By careful education he helped to make her a true Sahadharmini, a fellow-seeker in the higher values of life. It was the resuscitation of the Vedic ideal of the Pativrata, according to which man and woman got fused into a common ideal and purpose in life. The man and the woman, brought together as husband and wife, are



Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi
(1853 -1920)

like two wheels moving together on a common track towards a common ideal. Dharma is that part of higher evolution, and the discharge of one's social and spiritual duties in the scripture-ordained way is the way of progress along it. The Sahadharmini of a spiritually oriented personage like Sri Ramakrishna must necessarily be one with that same outlook, if the objective of that ideal is to be fulfilled. It was because of this mutually complementary nature of their characters, that they have become perfect ideals of both the married state and the monastic values.

An examination of several incidents of the Master's life would amply prove that this idea was always in his mind. The Master had prayed to the Divine Mother to free Sarada from all bodily passions and make her a suitable mate for himself. His prayer was amply answered when, after Sarada Devi's arrival at Dakshineswar, the Master pointedly put her a question: "Do you want to drag me down into Maya?" Sarada Devi's answer was equally prompt and to the point. She replied, "Why should I do so? I have come only to help you in the path of religious life." A noble answer indeed for a Pativrata and a true Sahadharmini. Only a woman of immaculate purity of mind could give such a reply. There was no artifice in it, no hypocrisy or attempt to please anybody. It was the spontaneous expression of her lofty nature, of the lofty ideal of life

that had unconsciously become hers as much as her husband's.

The seriousness and sincerity behind this challenging reply she proved before long when Sri Ramakrishna decided to subject himself to what may be called a fiery ordeal. His teacher Totapuri had told him on knowing him to be married, that this was not much of a risk for him. For a sincere Sadhaka, an earnest aspirant struggling in the spiritual path, it is highly necessary to keep aloof from the company of women. But if and when he attains to realisation, his moral purity will not be of the cloistered type based on difference, but on the apprehension of the one Self in man and woman alike—an apprehension which helps one to surmount the identification of the self with the body.

The Master therefore utilised the presence of Sarada Devi at Dakshineswar to allow her the 'right' of a wife in the fullest sense as well as to test how far his Brahman-knowledge had raised him above the bodily sense. For a period of about six months this ascetic of ascetics had his wife sleep in his own room and the spiritual awareness of them both put to the acid test. They stood it wonderfully well. The Master's mind went only into deep Samadhi and never to the bodily passion. He also gave equal credit to Sarada Devi when he said, "Had she not been so pure, who knows whether I would not have lost my self-control from her inducement. After marriage I had prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother! Remove even the least trace of carnality from the mind of my wife.' When I lived with her, I understood that the Mother had really granted my prayer."

And as for the Holy Mother herself, we have her statement regarding her experiences of those memorable nights, "The divine state in which the Master used to be absorbed, passes all description. In an ecstatic mood, he would smile or weep, or at times remain perfectly still in Samadhi. This would sometimes continue throughout the night. In that divine

presence, my whole body would tremble with awe that I would anxiously await the dawn. For I knew nothing of ecstasy in those days. One night his Samadhi continued for a very long time. Greatly frightened, I sent for Hriday. He came and began to repeat the name of the Lord in the Master's ears. When he had done this for a little while, external consciousness reappeared. After this incident, the Master came to know of my difficulty and taught me the appropriate divine names that should be uttered in the ear in particular states of Samadhi. Thenceforth my fear was very much lessened, as he would invariably come to earthly consciousness on the utterance of the particular divine names. But even after this I sometimes kept awake the whole night, as there was no knowing when he would fall into Samadhi. In course of time he came to know of my difficulty. He learnt that even after the lapse of a considerable length of time I could not adjust myself to his Samadhi temperament. So he asked me to sleep separately at the Nahabat."

The Shodasi Pooja

Another memorable event in the life of this holy couple that took place about this time was the Shodasi Pooja, in which the Master offered actual ceremonial worship to the Holy Mother, seating her on the pedestal of the deity. It took place during her first visit to Dakshineswar when she stayed there continuously from March, 1872 to October 1873, for more than a year and a half. It took place on the night of Phalaharini Kali Pooja day, when the Divine mother is worshipped as a consumer of the karmas of the devotee. Arrangements for the worship were made in the Master's room, and Sarada was requested to be present at the worship. After the Master had gone through the preliminary rites of worship, he beckoned to Sarada Devi to sit on the seat set apart for the Deity. He then invoked the presence of the Divine Mother in her with the Mantra, "O Divine Mother! The mistress of all powers, and the abode of all beauty! Deign to unlock for me the gate to perfection. Sanctifying the body and mind of this woman, do thou manifest Thyself through her and do what is

auspicious." Then he went through the procedures of a full ritualistic worship with sixteen ingredients. He first performed the Nyasa which consists in touching the different parts of one's body with appropriate Mantras and identifying them in meditation with the corresponding parts of the Deity. After that he offered worship with sixteen items with appropriate Mantras. In the course of it he applied red paint to the soles of Sarada Devi, put vermilion mark on her forehead, put on her new cloth, put a little of sweets and betel-leaf in her mouth, and performed the Arati (light-waving ceremony) before her. The bashful Sarada received all these acts of adoration without the least feeling of hesitation. The sense of identification with the Deity must have come on her. Both the Master and the Mother were in a state of ecstatic and semi-conscious absorption in the course of the worship, and by the time it came to an end they were in complete Samadhi in which the worshipper and the worshipped realised the identity of their being as Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. After a considerable length of time, when the second watch of the night had fairly advanced, the Master regained external consciousness. Then he resigned himself completely to the Divine Mother, and in a supreme act of consecration, offered to the Deity manifest before him, the fruits of his austerities, his rosary, himself and everything that was his. He then uttered the following Mantra, "O Goddess, I prostrate myself before Thee again and again—before Thee, the eternal consort of Siva, the three-eyed, golden-hued, the indwelling spirit in all, the giver of refuge, the accomplisher of every end, and the most auspicious among all auspicious objects."

The significance of this rite in the lives of these two great personages can hardly ever be estimated. For Sri Ramakrishna it signified the final triumph of the spirit over the body, and the recognition of Divinity in all. It marked the successful conclusion of his spiritual strivings, and his establishment in the state of the 'divine man.' In the life of Sri Sarada Devi, too, it had a deep significance. When

Sri Ramakrishna, the Divine Incarnation of the age, invoked the presence of the Divine Mother in her, and worshipped her as such, she was elevated in truth and in reality from Sarada, the daughter of Ramachandra, to Sarada, the Holy Mother, the manifestation of the Eternal Mother of the Universe, for all of humanity to worship. The Master had from the time of his marriage been praying to the Mother of the Universe to divinise the person of his wife, and her answer to a leading question he put to her as a test proved that the transformation was largely effected, and that she was in all respects a partner in life well-matched with him in all respects. And now by the performance of this rite of Shodasi Pooja, in which he identified the Deity with Sarada, and surrendered all his spiritual practices and their fruits to her, he virtually made her a participant of all his austerities and spiritual attainments. It is sometimes asked why the Holy Mother did not perform Sadhanas like the Master. She did perform much in this field, but the real answer is in the Shodasi Pooja, by virtue of which the Holy Mother became a full sharer in the spiritual glory of the Master. As the spiritual counterpart of the great world-teacher Sri Ramakrishna, she had no need to re-enact the same scenes of the one common drama which they were together staging before mankind. She had other parts to play by way of fulfilling and supplementing the Master's work.

In another sense also the Shodasi Pooja was a landmark in her life. It made her a vital part of Sri Ramakrishna's Mission. In that rite the Master invoked in her the presence of the Divine Mother, the same Supreme Energy that was manifesting in him. Henceforth, just as in the Master's case, her body and mind became the venue of expression for that Energy. For the rest of her life she served the Master and helped in his Mission, and after his passing away, his mantle fell on her, and through a long period of spiritual ministry, she completed what he had left unfinished.

Mutual Love and Respect

The Master's life combined in itself the highest ideals of the monastic life and those of the householder. The

Master always taught man the gospel of renunciation of Kamini-Kanchana (translated literally as 'Woman and Gold', but meaning 'lust and greed'), and had it not been for the advent of the Holy Mother into his life, he would have been taken to be only a hard-baked ascetic and nothing more. But his very cordial and affectionate relationship with the Mother, treating her as the first and foremost of his disciples and attendants, has lifted married life above the level of the physical aspects and made it a potent spiritual relationship. The crusader against 'Kamini-Kanchana' showed the highest consideration and respect to the Holy Mother. The welcome he extended to her on her first appearance was in itself an unexpected mark of cordiality. Not only was he particular about keeping her in comfort, he even thought of providing something for her future. Calculating the minimum amount required monthly for her maintenance as Rupees six, he had six hundred rupees deposited with the Zamindari Office of Balaram Bose, the interest of which was to go for her maintenance. He divined her liking to wear ornaments and spent three hundred rupees to have a pair of bracelets, made for her. This is a tradition according to which Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of Sita at the Panchavati. He found her wearing a pair of bracelets with many tiny facets like diamonds. It was in imitation of these that he made for her golden bracelets which she wore till the last. Yogin-ma, describing her appearance in those early days, says, "She wore a piece of cloth with broad red borders and put vermillion at the parting of her hair. Her thick black tresses almost touched her knees. She wore a gold necklace, a big nose ring, ear rings and bracelets. Most of these were what Mathur Babu made for the Master when he practised spiritual disciplines assuming the role of a handmaid of the Divine Mother."

While receiving all of her loving services, and moving with her in all frankness and childish innocence, the Master always maintained an attitude of profound respect towards her as his spiritual counterpart and fulfiller of his life's Mission. This attitude was generally implicit, but some-

times expressed itself in striking little actions. One day the Holy Mother entered the Master's room with his meal. He thought it was his niece Lakshmi, and asked her casually to shut the door, addressing her as 'tui', an expression meaning 'thou', but used with reference to juniors or inferior persons. When the Holy Mother responded, the Master felt very embarrassed and said, "Ah! Is it you? I thought it was Lakshmi. Please pardon me." But the Holy Mother tried to pacify him, saying that there was nothing wrong in his addressing her like that. But the Master was not satisfied. Next morning he went to the Nahabat and said to the Holy Mother, "Well, I could not sleep all night. I was so worried because I spoke to you rudely." Referring to this incident, she often said in later times, especially when some of her relations behaved disrespectfully, "I was married to a husband who never addressed me as 'tui'. Ah! How he treated me! Not even once did he tell me a harsh word or wound my feelings. He did not strike me even with a bunch of flowers."

It will thus be seen that Sri Sarada Devi received from her husband all that a Hindu wife expects. Her own mother Shyamasundari Devi once lamented, "My Sarada has been married to an ascetic, she will never know the happiness of being addressed as 'mother'." The Master, who heard it, remarked, "Your daughter will have so many children that she will be tired of being addressed day and night as 'Mother'." She was a Sahadharmini, a companion in life, not of an ordinary man, but of the Incarnation of the age, who came to generate Bhakti and Jnana among men, and whose main teaching inculcated renunciation of lust and possessions. In conformity with his ideals, which was hers too, the children born of her were not physical but spiritual, and of these she had a countless number.

The Mother's way of life in the world

Though the Mother lived day and night amidst the various activities of her household and was as outwardly engrossed as any one of the other inmates in the works and responsibilities

of the home, she will remain completely unattached in her heart. The household was, in her view, the Master's. One had to remain in it playing the part he was allotted. Good and bad, joy and sorrow, came and passed off according to one's Karma. Without getting disturbed in mind by thinking about them, one should keep one's devotion to God steady and bear everything that came with patience. One should shake off the attachment for the worldly objects as the ducklings shake off water from their bodies. These teachings were always conveyed by the Mother's instructions, behaviour and actions.

The glories and grandeurs of the world, the wealth and possessions that one enjoys, are all transitory-this minute they are, and the next minute they may vanish. The prosperity that the Mother had seen at Kamarpukur during the first stage of her life there had all disappeared later on. There was the family of the Yugis towards the north of the Master's house in Kamarpukur. The Mother used to say about their condition in those days, "Oh, how many were the members of the family of the Yugis! But now see, everything is gone. And what about the wealth and property of the Lahas who lived towards the east! Their property was indescribable-there was the guest house, the free feeding of the poor, the temple with its adjoining structures, the large number of men and women inhabiting the house, the performance of the various festivals etc. There was hardly a month when they had not had at least one festival. And that pond at the back of the house with its deep blue water! Ah! Then think of the family of the Pines to the south! Where have they all gone now? It was a rich family with many members. But now everything is gone!" The mother would mention these so that, realising the transitoriness of worldly possessions, her sons may be saved from the snares. If one can always keep in mind that such things vanish like a dream, one can develop detachment in one's mind.

Source:

The Mother as I saw Her: Reminiscences of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Saradeshananda; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore; page 9-15.

According to the Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac Swami Akhandananda's birthday celebration was observed on Tuesday, the 27th of September, 2011.

[Continued from the previous publication of Reach]

In Northern and Western India

Akhandananda went to Delhi. While sitting on a park bench one day, he thought, "If I meet a devotee of the Master, I shall go to his house; otherwise I shall pass the night right here." A Marwari gentleman was seated on the other side of the bench. Out of respect for a monk, he saluted Akhandananda and offered him some money, but Akhandananda would not touch it. Then the Marwari said, "I have seen only one great soul – Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar – who completely renounced money." When Akhandananda inquired, he said that he was Lakshminarayan Marwari. He had once offered ten thousand rupees to Sri Ramakrishna, but the Master had refused to accept it. Akhandananda was very happy to meet another devotee of the Master, and introduced himself to him. Then Lakshminarayan joyfully took the swami to his house.

Akhandananda stopped at Agra on his way to Vrindaban, the playground of Krishna. In March 1891 Akhandananda arrived at Vrindaban and stayed for nearly four months. While at Vrindaban, he had a relapse of bronchitis. In May he moved to Etawah accompanied by Swami Nirmalananda. In Etawah, he studied Sanskrit grammar and Shridhara's commentary on the Gita. On the birthday of Krishna, Akhandananda had the vision of the Master standing near his head, saying, "Hello! Do the people know that I came?" This vision made his heart full of joy. He then learned from a letter that Swamiji was in Jaipur, so he wanted to see Swamiji again.

After visiting Abu, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Narmada, Junagad, Prabhas, Dwaraka, and Kachchha-Mandavi, Akhandananda started on another journey. He walked eighty miles to see Narayan Sarovar, a holy lake in Gujerat. He was cautioned by the local people that the path was dangerous and haunted by robbers, but Akhandananda



Swami Akhandananda
(One who enjoys the bliss of the
Undivided Existence)
(1864 -1937)

prepared himself to face them. He took a young boy as his guide and learned from him the words in Kutch dialect: "Take everything I have, but don't kill me." He had covered fifty miles when he met a pilgrim on the way, and then let the boy continue on his own journey.

That part of the country was severely afflicted by famine and sparsely populated. In the afternoon Akhandananda noticed that four men wearing red turbans were following them diagonally. As the pilgrim was an elderly man, he remained behind the swami. When the men who had been following them approached Akhandananda, he asked, "How far is it to Narayan Sarovar?" "Six miles," one of them answered. Then all of a sudden, one of them grabbed his shoulder and thrust him onto the ground. Immediately, the swami said in their language, "Take everything I have, but don't kill me." Another robber then struck his back twice with a bamboo staff; luckily, his cotton shirt and backpack cushioned the blows. Two robbers with daggers in their hands ordered Akhandananda to remove his clothes. He kept on his loin cloth and handed everything else over to them. They

searched his clothing and bundle but found no money. They then realised that the swami was a genuine, penniless monk. In the meantime, the pilgrim arrived. Upon seeing the robbers, he fell to the ground saying, "I am gone." Akhandananda asked the robbers not to hurt the old pilgrim. Knowing that the robbers were poor, the swami offered his warm clothing to the robbers. The ringleader was very touched. He took the dust of the swami's feet and begged for his blessings. He then asked Akhandananda not to tell anyone about this episode, and then all of them disappeared swiftly.

That evening Akhandananda reached Narayan Sarovar and became the guest at the local monastery. The swami had a high temperature, and his body ached terribly. As a result, he could not bathe in the sacred lake. The abbot gave Akhandananda a horse and a guide to accompany him on his journey, and at last he met Swamiji at Mandavi. Although Swamiji wanted to travel alone, they travelled together for a while in Bhuj and Porbandar. Then Swamiji left for Junagad, and Akhandananda moved towards Jamnagar via Kathiawar, Jitpur, Gondal, and Rajkot.

The service of God in man

In June 1892 Akhandananda reached Jamnagar, where he lived for a year. There he started his mission - the service of God in man. He lived with a doctor, Kaviraj Manishankar, for four months and studied ayurvedic medical science. He also went to a Vedic school and learned to chant the four Vedas. He became acquainted with an old abbot of an affluent temple, who offered the swami his position as well as all of his wealth. Akhandananda declined, quoting a Hindi couplet, "The water is pure that flows, and the monk is pure who goes."

Akhandananda then moved to the house of a banker by the name of Shankar Seth; he lived with him for four months. Shankar Seth was a devout and wealthy man, and had no children. Every day he performed worship,

practised japam and meditation, and distributed food to the poor and mendicants. He became very fond of the swami and would give to charities according to his advice. When Akhandananda wanted to leave, Shankar asked him to stay and even offered to build a Ramakrishna temple on his land. This was unbearable for Shankar's nephews, who were supposed to inherit their uncle's property.

Akhandananda then went to Khetri in Rajasthan – via Baroda, Bhavnagar (where he learned of Swamiji's success in America), Bombay, and Abu, where he became the guest of Raja Ajit Singh, Vivekananda's disciple. Akhandananda lived in Rajasthan for nearly eight months. He observed the pitiful condition of the masses. He wrote a letter to Swamiji in America, asking him for assistance.

Swamiji replied in early 1894, "Go from door to door amongst the poor and lower classes of the town of Khetri and teach them religion. Also, let them have oral lessons on geography and such other subjects. No good will come of sitting idle and having princely dishes, and saying 'Ramakrishna, O Lord' unless you can do some good to the poor...It is preferable to live on grass for the sake of doing good to others. The ochre robe is not for enjoyment. It is the banner of heroic work...The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted – let these be your God. Know that service to these alone is the highest religion."

Campaign against Poverty

Swamiji's encouragement pushed him further, and in 1894 Akhandananda began his campaign against poverty. He found that the root of all suffering was the appalling ignorance of the masses; hence, education became his prime objective. He moved from door to door impressing upon the residents of Khetri the need to educate their children. By his strenuous efforts he succeeded in raising the enrolment of the local high school from 80 to 257, as well as improving the teaching staff. He next visited the villagers around Khetri and started five primary schools for the village boys. The Maharaja of Khetri afterwards made an annual grant available for the

promotion of education in his territory. At Akhandananda's request, the Sanskrit school at Khetri was converted into a Vedic School; he also raised money to buy books for the poor students. In addition he induced Maharaja Ajit Singh to allow his poorer subjects to see him on official reception days, so that they could have direct access to their king.

After his stay in Khetri, Swami Akhandananda visited Jaipur, Chittor, Udaipur and many other villages of Rajasthan. He asked the local leaders to start schools, distribute food among the poor, and support cottage industries. Some rich landlords would lend money to the farmers and then demand high interest. They did not like the swami's revolutionary ideas. Even the king of Udaipur became upset when Akhandananda refused to take food from the royal priest unless the poor people were fed first. Akhandananda was undaunted, however, and continued his mission. He succeeded in starting several schools and performing other philanthropic activities in Rajasthan. Akhandananda wanted to lead an austere and contemplative life, but divine providence ordained that under his monastic garb, he would instead become a patriot, statesman, and philanthropist. In September 1894 Swamiji wrote to his Madras disciples from America regarding the pioneering spirit of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples.

Back to Alambazar Monastery

Towards the end of 1895 swami Akhandananda returned to the Alambazar Monastery via Delhi, Etawah, Allahabad, and Varanasi. In 1892, the Ramakrishna Math had been moved from Baranagore to Alambazar, which is very close to Dakshineswar. The brother disciples were happy to have Akhandananda with them again after five years. The monastery was in poor financial condition. Akhandananda later recalled, "In the monastery we ate rice, lentils, and a hotchpotch vegetable curry. At night we ate chapattis [flattened bread] without butter." But because their minds were filled with divine bliss, the hardships did not disturb them.

Akhandananda was a man of action. He had so much energy and so much

love for the Master that he travelled for nearly three weeks in remote villages to collect 'nageswar champā', a favourite flower of Sri Ramakrishna. During this trip he taught the villagers about matters such as health-care and sanitation. Akhandananda's gigantic heart cried for the poor, the destitute and the sick.

Akhandananda was a great organiser. While in Bengal, he met many pandits, educators and political leaders and consulted them about starting a Vedic school. In 1897, when Swami Vivekananda returned from the West, Swami Akhandananda worked hard to arrange a reception for him. In March 1897 Swami Vivekananda went to Darjeeling for a period of rest and Akhandananda left for Navadwip – the birthplace of Chaitanya – and Murshidabad, an important historical site. He was thinking of returning to the Himalayas for the remainder of his days after seeing some of the notable places in Bengal, however, in Murshidabad district, the Swami encountered a terrible famine. A teacher of the Bhabta school invited the swami to attend the Annapurna (goddess of food) worship in Mahula, an adjacent village. While there, he fervently prayed to the Mother to save the lives of the poor people. Akhandananda was then offered a room in the temple complex, and thought deeply about his future plans. He began giving classes on the Gita to the villagers, and they fed him. Akhandananda later wrote, "I carried a picture of Sri Ramakrishna with me. Every day after my bath in the Ganges, I would offer some flowers before it and pray to the Master with tears for the famine-stricken people. Thus I prayed every morning and evening. One day there was a response. I heard the Master's voice say: 'Wait and see what happens.'"

On the 15th of May 1897 Swami Akhandananda started famine relief work in Mahula and several other villages in the Murshidabad district. It was the first organised relief work of the Ramakrishna Mission which had been started by Swami Vivekananda on the 1st of May 1897 in Calcutta. Akhandananda wrote letters to his brother disciples in Calcutta and Madras requesting financial help.

The response was immediate: Swamiji sent two monks to help him. Seeing the appeal for relief in the newspapers, The Mahabodhi Society and some generous people of Madras and Calcutta sent money to him.

On the 15th of June 1897 Vivekananda wrote to him from Almora: "I am getting detailed reports of you and getting more and more delighted. It is that sort of work which can conquer the world...work, work, work, even unto death! Those that are weak must make themselves great workers, great heroes – never mind money, it will drop from the heavens...it is the heart, the heart that conquers, not the brain. Books and learning, yoga and meditation and illumination – all are but dust compared with love. It is love that gives you the supernatural powers, love that gives you bhakti [devotion], love that gives illumination, and love again, that leads to emancipation. This indeed is worship, worship of the Lord in the human tabernacle."

Swami Vivekananda's letter increased Akhandananda's spirit of service a thousandfold. He later reminisced, "I read his letters over and over again and gained fresh strength within me. – I shall either carry out my purpose or lay down my body – this mantram filled my heart. Oh, into what a current of activity did I then submerge myself."

At Shivanagar and Sargachi

When the relief operation in Mahula was over, Akhandananda decided to open a permanent orphanage. The Murshidabad district magistrate promised to give him financial help for this project. Madhusundari Barman, a rich landowner, was impressed with Akhandananda's work, so she donated one and a half acres of land to him for the ashrama, and offered him her office building in Shivanagar, near Sargachi, to use temporarily.

In 1898 the Ramakrishna Monastery had been moved from Alambazar to Nilambar Babu's garden house at Belur. On Tuesday, 22nd of February 1898, Akhandananda arrived at the monastery to attend the festival of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary. He carried from Behrampur two 'pantuas' [a sweet made of cheese fried with butter and soaked in syrup] which weighed sixty pounds and had

been presented by a rich devotee. Swamiji saw those large sweets and asked him to offer them to the Master in the shrine.

The disciples of the Master lived together in the monastery with much joy and amusement. Akhandananda later narrated this one incident: "One day in Belur, Swamiji was telling the stories of his itinerant days and I was supplying the forgotten events to him. He scolded me, 'Don't talk too much. Keep quiet and meditate. 'So I obeyed him. In the meantime, he talked about a fish in the Himalayas, and asked me, 'Hello, how big was the fish?' With my eyes closed, I raised my two hands and showed the size of that fish. All burst out laughing."

Akhandananda also recounted another incident that illustrates how strict Swamiji was about the monastery routine: "One night there was a discussion on various topics of Vedanta, such as reincarnation and whether a human soul is born in the subhuman plane or not. The brothers took sides in the debate and Swamiji became the umpire. He was smiling and listening, and sometime he supplied points to the losing side. It continued till 2 a.m. Everybody went to sleep. Then at 4 a.m. Swamiji asked me to ring the bell so that the monks could go to the shrine for meditation. I said that they had gone to sleep only a couple of hours earlier, and that he should let them sleep. Swamiji then firmly said, 'What! Because they have gone to sleep at 2 o' clock should they get up at 6 o' clock? Give me the bell. I will ring it. Did we start this monastery for sleeping?' When I rang the bell loudly, all got up yelling at me. But when they saw Swamiji smiling behind me, they silently followed the routine."

After working hard for a year, Akhandananda fell sick at Belur Monastery. On the 30th of March 1898, after he had recovered, he went with Swamiji to Darjeeling for a change. While they were gone a plague broke out in Calcutta. In the first week of May, Swamiji and Akhandananda returned to Calcutta. In an attempt to comfort the people and plague victims, Swamiji wrote a pamphlet; Akhandananda distributed copies at the risk of his life. Sister

Nivedita, Swamiji's Irish disciple, and Swami Sadananda also did extensive relief work in Calcutta. When the epidemic subsided, Swamiji left for Almora and Akhandananda returned to Sargachi. Akhandananda faced terrible poverty in Sargachi. He wrote letters to some of his old acquaintances asking for financial help. Pramadas Mitra of Varanasi wrote back to him mentioning that it is better for a monk to travel, study and practise meditation and japam than to get involved in social service. A few large-hearted local people came forward to help Akhandananda build a permanent ashrama and orphanage. Akhandananda was a silent and unpretentious worker, so without caring for the city's fanfare, he continued to worship his living gods in the remote village. Putting aside the monastic ochre cloth, he put on knee-length pants and tied his head with a handkerchief, and tilled the ground like other farmers. He lived on a farmer's diet - mixing lime and salt with rice soaked in water. He grew fruits, flowers, vegetables and even cotton. Like Gandhi, he started to weave cloth on a spinning wheel. He arranged regular, practical schooling for his orphan boys, and at night he taught the illiterate adult villagers and he gave medicine to the sick people. When one of his orphans died, he cried like a loving mother who had lost her son.

The Passing Events

In October 1899 Akhandananda was invited by Raja Yogendranarayan, the ruler of Lalgola, to attend Durga Puja in his palace and also to distribute pieces of cloth among the poor. On the second day of Mother's worship, Akhandananda learnt of a devastating flood in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar. He immediately left for Bhagalpur, reaching it the next day. He was impressed by the relief work of Mr Caming, the district magistrate of Bhagalpur. Mr Caming asked Akhandananda to conduct relief work in the Ghogha area. The swami organised the local landlords, lawyers, teachers and students to face the catastrophe. Swami Sadananda was sent from Belur Math, and the public generously helped the effort with money, food and clothing. Akhandananda

operated the relief work for two and a half months, serving fifty villages.

Akhandananda wrote to Swamiji, who was in America, mentioning the relief work. On the 21st of February 1990 Swamiji replied from California: "... Learning and wisdom are superfluities, the surface glitter merely, but it is the heart that is the seat of power. It is not in the brain but in the heart that the Atman, possessed of knowledge, power and activity, has Its seat. The nerves of the heart are a hundred and one. The chief nerve centre near the heart, called the sympathetic ganglia, is where the Atman has Its citadel. The more heart you will be able to manifest, the greater will be the victory you achieve."

Vivekananda returned to India in December 1900. He passed away a year and a half later, on the 4th of July 1902. When Akhandananda heard the news, he rushed to Belur Math. He cried for Swamiji and lived in the Monastery with his brother disciples for a few days. He was depressed and felt emptiness all around. On the seventh day after Swamiji's passing away, he went to Calcutta to meet Sharat Chandra Chakrabarty, a disciple of Swamiji. Later Akhandananda told Miss Josephine MacLeod, an American devotee: "I have seen Swamiji after his passing away as clearly as I see you now, otherwise I could not live." This vision filled his heart with joy and inspiration.

Akhandananda returned to his ashrama. He managed the orphanage and the ashrama activities from the Shivnagara office building for over twelve years. The land that was donated was not sufficient for the ashrama, so in August 1912 he bought about thirteen acres of land in Sargachi village. According to the swami's plans, some rooms were constructed with thatched roofs in order to save money, and then in March 1913 the ashrama was permanently moved to the new location. Swami Akhandananda planted flowering plants and fruit trees all around and made the ashrama like an ancient hermitage. Along with education, the swami concentrated on improving the agricultural and industrial activities amongst the villagers. The ashrama ran a fully fledged industrial school, teaching weaving, sewing, carpentry



Swami Akhandananda

and sericulture, which was the pride of the locality. One room of the ashrama was allotted for a library and charitable dispensary, and another room for the shrine. In the beginning he was not in favour of building a temple, as he was convinced that he was worshipping the living gods. Later, however, at his devotees' request he gave consent to build a temple for Sri Ramakrishna.

Akhandananda was a self-made man. He was a voracious reader, a linguist, a powerful speaker, a humorous conversationalist and a good writer. His memoirs ('Smriti Katha') and travel accounts were published serially in 'Udbodhan' and 'Basumati', and later in book form. In 1906 when Abhedananda returned from America, he wanted Akhandananda to go with him to the west, but the latter declined. He preferred worshipping the poor living gods in the village rather than preaching Vedanta. He was respectful of the patriotism of Matsini and Garibaldi of Italy, and he was inspired by Florence Nightingale's and Booker T. Washington's spirit of service. He also had tremendous appreciation for the India national leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi,

Balgangadhar Tilak and Chittaranjan Das; he admired their self-sacrifice and service to the motherland. Akhandananda also learned continually and as a result he had encyclopaedic knowledge. He encouraged the monks to keep diaries.

Swami Brahmananda passed away on the 10th of April 1922. On the 2nd of May 1922 Swami Shivananda became the president, and Swami Akhandananda the vice-president of the Ramakrishna Order. In April 1926 the first convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission was held in Belur Math. Some direct disciples of the Master along with other monks and devotees discussed the past, present and future of the Order. Akhandananda gave a talk on the 7th of April during the final session of the convention. His concluding words were: "Sri Ramakrishna one day cried aloud from the rooftop for those young spiritual seekers who were to come to him and pour forth their lives' offerings on the altar of his service, and they came. But that cry has not ended there; it is still ringing through the air and shall continue for aeons. Many have come after that, many are still coming and many more will come in the future."

Towards the end

In 1934, after the passing away of Shivananda, Akhandananda became the president of the Ramakrishna Order. From then on he lived in both Belur Math and Sargachi, but he spent most of his time in Sargachi. In January 1934 there was a devastating earthquake in Bihar and many people were killed. In April Akhandananda went to inspect the Ramakrishna Mission's relief work there. His presence raised the morale of the people and he also inspired the monks to serve the afflicted as God. He returned to Belur Math on the 10th of May, and then went to Sargachi in the last week of May.

As president of the Ramakrishna Order, Akhandananda initiated a large number of people. On the 4th of November 1934 he went to Bombay and then Nagpur, where he inspired many seekers of God. At the end of November Akhandananda returned to Calcutta and then on the 3rd of December 1934 he went to Sargachi. Sri Ramakrishna's

centenary celebration was scheduled for February 1936. On the 19th of January 1936 Miss Josephine MacLeod went to the Sargachi Ashrama and said to swami, "Give me your message for the coming centenary." Swami Akhandananda replied, "I have no message of my own. But I have received this message from the Lord: 'I am Infinite and Eternal. What is my centenary?'" Miss MacLeod said, "All right, I shall take this message with me."

However, the Belur Math authorities repeatedly wrote to Akhandananda to send a message, as the celebration was only a few days off. Akhandananda later described how he wrote the centenary message: "That message was dictated by the Master...I picked up a pen and pad and wrote down the message."

On the 23rd of February 1936 Akhandananda arrived at Belur Math, and on the 24th of February he gave the inaugural message of the centenary. The following is the conclusion of the message, translated from Bengali:

The dawn of the new Age is breaking over the world – the blessed day that will illumine our hearts with the glory of its effulgence is at hand.

Knowingly or unknowingly the human race is moving forward along the path of liberation inspired by Sri Ramakrishna's message of the harmony of all religions and by his unique realisation of the essential oneness of karma [action], jnana [knowledge], bhakti [devotion], and yoga [psychic control]. The day is not far off when the whole world will witness the establishment of a universal kingdom of peace, and when in loving response to the call of the Master, all people, forgetting their religious differences, will unite together and glorify the Master's message, "As many faiths, so many paths." Then only will the meridian light of the Master's advent illumine the hearts of humanity.

May the citizens of the world, on this blessed day, understand the meaning of the Master's coming and be hallowed. This and this alone is my fervent prayer. Peace, peace and peace be unto all.

Conclusion

Akhandananda stayed in Belur Math for a month. His body was feeble and it was difficult for him to even walk. A doctor examined him and found that he had diabetes. Nevertheless, he returned to Sargachhi and continued his spiritual ministry. Akhandananda loved his village ashrama dearly and never liked to be away from it for long. However, he cherished a desire to give up his body in Belur Math, where Vivekananda had installed the relics of the Master. The swami's wish was providentially fulfilled.

On the 5th of February 1937, a cable was sent to Belur Math to inform the monks of Akhandananda's serious condition. Two monks arrived from Belur Math the next day and, with the local doctor's approval, decided to take the swami to Calcutta for treatment. The train left at 5.00 p.m.; he fell unconscious on the way. The train arrived at Calcutta at 11.00 p.m. He was first taken to Udbodhan by ambulance and then to Belur Math at midnight via Dakshineswar. His bed was made ready next to Vivekananda's room. Several doctors tried their utmost to save this great soul. At last, at 3.07 p.m. on the 7th of February, Swami Akhandananda passed away at the age of 72. His body was cremated on the banks of the Ganges, close to Swamiji's temple in Belur Math.

To see God in all beings is the culmination of the Vedantic experience. Swami Akhandananda had that experience, so he served all as God.

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In the world take always the position of the giver. Give everything and look for no return. Give love, give help, give service, give any little thing you can, but *keep out barter*. Make no conditions, and none will be imposed. Let us give out of our own bounty, just as God gives to us.

- - - Swami Vivekananda

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When I told him that I had lost my job. Swamiji immediately remarked: "Keep holding tightly the holy feet of Thakurji Maharaj (Sri Ramakrishna). When He is there, where is the need to worry? Give all your burden to him." These wise words of Swami Damodarananda stayed with me all day and night and I was moved to tears during my evening prayers. To this day, I have never forgotten the effect those words had on me. Swami Damodarananda's words inspired me and helped me in bringing about a deep sense of peace, dedication, devotion and a positive attitude towards life, dispelling all my anxieties. He did not give me a job, but his words of wisdom enabled me overcome my own mental barriers and helped me realise my potential.

This has happened time and again throughout my association with Swami Damodarananda. There was a time when I was working in Malaysia, and I had a dream directing me to go to Perth to welcome a saint. And true enough, when I reached Perth, Swami Damodarananda was there! Somehow he has been there for me to help me overcome each anxious moment of life with his presence and gentle words.

Swamiji also introduced me to other saints. I feel blessed that Swamiji was not just there to give me advice and left me on my own to follow his teachings. Through his physical and divine presence he saw to it that we continued to follow his teachings, reminding us that we are all here to respect and love each other and play out our part in this great cosmic universe.

This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.

My children, the secret of religion is not in theories but in practice. To be good and to do good---that is the whole of religion.

Always remember that we are but puppets in the Lord's hands. Remain pure always. Please take care not to become impure even in thought, as in speech and action; always try to do good to others as far as in you lies.

- - - Swami Vivekananda