



# REACH

Newsletter of 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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“Oum tryambakam yajamahe sugandhim pushti  
vardhanam urvarukamiva bandhanat mrtymuk-  
shiya ma’mrtat .” We worship Thou, O Sweet  
Lord of transcendental vision. O giver of  
prosperity to all, may I be free from the bondage  
of death, like a ripe fruit dropping from the tree.  
May I never again forget my Immortal nature.

## Sayings and Teachings

### Devotion to God

“In this age work without devotion to  
God has no legs to stand upon. It is  
like a foundation on sand. First cultivate  
devotion. All other things – schools,  
dispensaries, etc, - will, if you like,  
be added to you. First devotion, then  
work. Work, apart from devotion or  
love of God, is helpless and cannot  
stand.”

— **Sri Ramakrishna**

*Great sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna,  
Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda; page 5,  
The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of  
Culture, Kolkata.*

### God’s Will

“Everything, no doubt, happens by  
God’s will, yet man must work  
because God expresses His will  
through man’s action. Do not relax  
your spiritual practices.”

— **Sri Sarada Devi**

*Ibid; page 23.*

### Worship God in man

“The moment I have realized God  
sitting in the temple of every human  
body, the moment I stand in reverence  
before every human being and see  
God in him - that moment I am free  
from bondage, everything that binds  
vanishes, and I am free.”

— **Swami Vivekananda**

*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,  
Vol 2, page 321, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.*



**Above - Holy Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva, in the Himalayas, stands out majestically. Manas Sarovar is seen in front of the Mount. Below - Gauri Kunda and Golden Mt. Kailash are seen separately. Inset - ‘Om Parvat’.**

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS FROM JUNE TO OCTOBER 2010

Function	Centre	Date
Guru Purnima	Melbourne	Monday, 26 July 2010
Guru Purnima	Sydney	Monday, 26 July 2010
Sri Krishna Janmastami	Sydney	Wednesday, 1 September 2010
Raffle and Cultural Programme	Sydney	Saturday, 14 August 2010
Durga Puja	Sydney	Friday, 15 October 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 from and activities of the Vedanta Centres of Australia and New Zealand

### For the period: January 2010 to May 2010

#### ADELAIDE CENTRE

##### Monthly activities:

Swami Sridharananda continued his three-days-a-month visit to Adelaide and delivered discourses on the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. The talks are held at Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich S.A. 5065. 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.

##### Annual activities/ Celebrations:

Swami Sridharananda delivered two public talks, “*Sri Ramakrishna as Swami Vivekananda saw him*” and “*Swami Vivekananda as Sri Ramakrishna made him*” on 16th and 17th of April 2010 respectively, at the hall of Theosophical Society, Adelaide.

The **Annual Celebration** of the Centre was held on Saturday the 18th of April 2010 from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Dulwich Community Centre. Swami Chandrashekhara performed the traditional worship of Sri Ramakrishna and a group of devotees sang *Bhajans* during the worship. The Swami spoke on “*The Spirituality - a tangible experience of life*” after the worship. About 50 devotees participated in the Celebration and later enjoyed the *prasada*. The Swami also gave a parlour talk on “*Rediscovering awareness*” in the evening after rendering *Bhajans*.

#### BRISBANE CENTRE

##### Daily activities:

Morning worship, evening *arati*, *Bhajans*, and 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 Gita* as well as on other spiritual topics.

##### Celebrations:

The **birth anniversaries** of **Swami Vivekananda** and **Sri Ramakrishna** were observed on the 2nd of January and 6th of March 2010 respectively.

On the 29th of May 2010 the Centre held its **Anniversary Celebrations** at the Indooroopilly State High School. Mr. Shayne Neumann, MP, Federal Member for Blair, with his wife, attended the programme as the Guest of Honour. Dr. Ashim Majumdar welcomed the gathering and this was followed by a talk by the Guest of Honour. Swami Sridharananda, in his benedictory address, emphasised the concept of a Universal Religion as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. A number of children from various dance schools and a few adults presented dance and music programmes on the occasion. The programme was attended by about 450 people. Dinner *prasada* was served to everyone after the programme.

#### 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. For details of the ongoing programmes please contact

Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary - 02-6258 7612 or 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 resident volunteer looks after the services in the mornings and on all other occasions.

The bookstall had 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 and Mr. Mohana Krishnan on 03-9801 6174.

##### 2. Weekly/Monthly Activities:

Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 8, from Thursdays to Saturdays of a prescheduled week at Monash University Clayton Campus of Law, Wellington Road (L. Theatre L1). The recordings of these discourses are available in Audio, Video and MP3 formats.

On the **second Sunday** of every month, meetings were conducted from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. These regular meetings included prayer, recitation of sacred mantras, singing of *kirtans* and *Bhajans*, followed by selected readings from the scriptures with discussions by the participants. The meetings concluded with an *arati* and the distribution of *prasada*. **Group study** of the *Bhagavad Gita* continues every alternate Saturday



Talk by Swami Sridharananda at the Theosophical Society, Adelaide.



Worship and talk during the Annual Celebration in Adelaide.



Cultural Programme and a talk by Swami Sridharananda during the annual celebration at the Brisbane Centre







**Dance Festival by Ms. Joyoti Das and her disciples, inset— shrine and participants**

**Sri Ramakrishna birth anniversary, Perth**



**Sri Ramakrishna birth anniversary, Melbourne**

from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Further **studies** of the Bhagavad Gita based on recorded discourses were held on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Viewing** of the **Mundaka Upanishad** lecture series continued to be held every Sunday from 4 to 5 p.m.

A programme has been initiated for the **Children** of the age groups from four to six and from seven to twelve. This includes prayer, recitations and singing etc. It is conducted on every Wednesday and Friday from 5:45 to 6:45 p.m. respectively.

#### **Celebrations:**

The **Kalpaturu** Day was observed on the 1st of January 2010 with reading of the relevant section of *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*.

The **birth anniversary** of **Swami Vivekananda** was observed on the 9th of January 2010. Dr. Shelly Brown from U.S.A. spoke on 'The Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Its Relevance in The Modern Age'. **Shivaratri** was celebrated on the 12th of February 2010 from 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. with puja and offerings following the evening *arati*.

The **birth anniversary** of **Sri Ramakrishna** was observed along with the annual celebrations on the 20th of February 2010. A formal worship with *Havan* was performed from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. by Swami Chandrashekhara. *Bhajans* were sung during the worship and concluded with *arati*, and floral offerings. This was

followed by distribution of lunch *prasada*. In the evening session, devotional singing accompanied by *arati* was conducted which concluded with the distribution of dinner *prasada*. A talk on 'The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna' was presented by Swami Chandrashekhara on 21st of February 2010 after evening *arati*.

In collaboration with the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Victoria Ms. **Joyoti** Das of Kalamandir School of dances presented the **Odissi Dance** Festival of 2010 on Saturday, the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, at the Alexander Theatre, Monash University, Clayton Campus. This was part of a major fundraising event. The programme was well received.

#### **Other Activities:**

**Meditation sessions** were held from 6:30 to 7:30 a.m. from Friday, the 19th to Sunday, the 21st of February 2010, by Swami Chandrashekhara. During this period he also conducted evening *arati* followed by the rendering of *Bhajans* and readings from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

#### **PERTH CENTRE**

##### **1. Daily Activities:**

The Centre located at **51 Golf View Street, Yokine W.A. 6060** holds vesper service daily at 7 p.m. with *arati*, a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and meditation. The Centre maintains a small bookstall and a library. Contacts: Mr. Unni Krishnan - Assistant Secretary, 0430 391 369, Mr. K.P. Basu Mallick,

Secretary, - 0422 370 066.

##### **2. Weekly/Monthly Activities:**

Swami Sridharananda visited the Centre every month from Thursdays to Saturdays on a prescheduled week and conducted discourses on the *Bhagavad Gita*. About 50 devotees attend the discourses. Monthly *satsangs* were conducted on the first Sunday of every month from 11:00 a.m. which includes the singing of *Bhajans* and reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and other inspiring books.

#### **Celebrations:**

The **birth anniversaries** of **Swami Vivekananda** and **Sri Ramakrishna** were observed on 3rd January 2010 and 20th of February 2010 respectively. A formal worship with *Havan* was performed during the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Atmeshananda. He also delivered a talk on Sri Ramakrishna. *Ashtottarashatanama* of Sri Ramakrishna was recited and *Bhajans* were sung during the celebration. About 150 devotees participated in the function.

#### **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 that includes devotional singing and a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is conducted in the evening at 7 p.m. Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees are also conducted as and when it is needed. 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 *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanisad*, and other topics are also available in various media.



Photo feature:

## The newly built Shrine and Classroom at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney

A photo album is given below of the day-long Inauguration Ceremony of the New Shrine at 2 Stewart Street, Ermington, N.S.W. 2115 held on the 28th of March 2010.



Holy Relics are brought and installed in the Shrine.



Navagraha Homam in progress.



The worship of Sri Ramakrishna and a section of devotees.



Senior Swamis of the Centre



Devotees during the worship.



Arati being performed after the worship of Sri Ramakrishna.



Recitation of Sri Chandi





Vedanta Centre of Sydney North view from Stewart Street



South-east view of the Shrine Hall

Devotees enjoying Lunch Prasada



The Shrine

View from the Shrine facing south



Bookstall

Veena Recital by Mrs. Malati Nagarajan

Amrita, an Olympic champion in Artistic-Gymnastics meets Swamiji



Volunteers in the Kitchen

Devotees enjoying dinner Prasada





Various activities in the Children's Retreat at Vedanta Centre of Sydney

A group photo at the Retreat

## 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 *spiritual subjects* during Swami Sridharananda's travels.
- b) 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.
- 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) 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 **Children's Retreat** was organised from the 6th to 8th of April 2010. About 32 children took part in it. Clay modeling, recitation of mantras and other activities were organized to stimulate their creativity.
- f) Classes on moral and spiritual lessons were also conducted **for children** at **Eastwood Public School** on Wednesdays from 9:15 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
- g) **Yogasana** Classes for adults has been resumed from 29th of May 2010 and conducted from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. on every Saturday.

## Annual Activities/ Celebrations:

The **birth anniversaries** of **Swami Vivekananda** and **Sri Ramakrishna** were celebrated on the 6th of January and 16th of February 2010, respectively. Special worship was performed on these occasions. Devotees participated in the singing of *Bhajans* and in the offering of flowers on the completion of worship. In the evening devotees sang *Bhajans* and

after the *arati* Swami Sridharananda delivered talks on the life and teachings of the Holy Trinity. **Shivaratri** was celebrated on 12th February 2010.

## Spiritual Retreat:

A spiritual retreat was organised during the Easter holidays from the evening of 1st April to the afternoon of 4th April 2010 at the Govinda Valley in the picturesque and sylvan surrounding of Otford near Stanwell Park, about 50 k.m. south of Sydney. The programme included detailed discourses by Swami Sridharananda about spiritual practices based on the Mundaka Upanishad. The programme included Vedic chanting and meditation, singing of *Bhajans*, video show of great lives, bush-walking, Karma Yoga, Yoga Exercises and *Yoga-Nidra*. The question and answer session was very lively. There were 41 participants at the retreat.

## Overseas Visit:

On invitation from the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Hong Kong, Swami Sridharananda visited Hong Kong from the 29th of April to the 5th of May 2010 and delivered talks on spiritual subjects.

## New Monastic Members:

Br. Sivaramakrishna and Br. Harshal have been posted at the Sydney Centre by the headquarters on completion of their pre-probationer's training of one year at Belur Math. They reached Sydney on 27th of March 2010.

## Our New Shrine Hall:

The newly built Shrine and Classroom was inaugurated on 28th of March 2010. The programme started at 6:30 a.m. with Vastupuja and Navagraha puja and Ganapati homam. The special worship to Sri Ramakrishna and recitation of Chandi started at 8:45 a.m. After the homam the worship concluded with *arati* and flower offering followed by *prasada* distribution. *Bhajans* were sung during the worship. In the evening, devotional songs were sung after *arati*. The programme concluded with the Veena recital by one of our devotees, Mrs. Malati Nagarajan. About 250 devotees participated in the function.

## AUCKLAND CENTRE

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 *Gospel of The Holy Mother* and meditation.

On the **second Sunday** of every month *Satsang* programmes were conducted from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. These included singing of *Bhajans*, reading from *Eternal Companion*, discourse on *Ram Charit Manas* and meditation.

On the last Sunday of every month readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* and *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* are held. On these days music and chanting classes were also conducted.

**Kalpataru** day was celebrated at the ashram on 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2010. The programme started at 10:30 a.m. with *Kirtans*. The significance of the Kalpataru day was explained to the devotees as mentioned in the book *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*. It also included reading from *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. *arati* was conducted at 12:30 p.m. and *prasada* was distributed to the devotees who attended the function.

The birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated on 6th of January 2010. It included a reading from *Life of Swamiji*, *Address to the Parliament of Religions*, *Sayings of Swami Vivekananda* and *Inspired talks*. The Vivekananda Youth Group (V.Y.G.) took an active part in the programme.

The birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated in the evening of 16th of February 2010 at the Ashram. The programme included *Bhajans*, and reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, *What the direct Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna say about him*. *Prasada* was distributed to the devotees.

Buddha Purnima was celebrated on 27th of May from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. Besides singing of *Bhajans* a talk on 'Life and teachings of *Bhagawan Buddha*' was also held.

## Sri Ramakrishna: Sadhana and Ecstasy

*Sri Ramakrishna was quite young when his father died, and he was raised by the loving care of his mother, Chandramani, and his elder brother, Ramkumar, who was thirty one years older than the Master. He was extremely sad when his elder brother suddenly died. From that point on he concentrated more on the worship service of the Divine Mother and longed to know whether a person could truly see Her. After the worship was completed, he would sit near the image of the Mother in an absorbed mood. When he sang the devotional songs of Ramprasad, Kamalakanta, and other mystics he would lose himself in overwhelming love. When the door of the temple was closed at night, he would abandon all company and enter the jungle near the Panchavati to meditate on the Divine Mother.*

### Master's longing for Mother's vision

One day Sri Ramakrishna was singing to the Divine Mother and praying and crying bitterly. He implored piteously, "Mother, I have been praying to You so long! Why don't You listen to me? You showed yourself to Ramprasad. Why won't You show Yourself to me?" The Master described what happened then:

"There was an unbearable pain in my heart because I could not have a vision of Mother. Just as a man wrings out a towel with all his strength to get the water out of it, so I felt as if my heart were being wrung out. I began to think I should never see Mother. I was dying of despair. In my agony, I asked myself, 'What's the use of living this life?'" Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that hangs in the Mother's shrine. I decided to end my life then and there. Like a madman, I ran to the sword and seized it. Then I had a marvellous vision of the Mother and fell down unconscious. Afterwards, what happened in the external world, or how that day and the next passed, I don't know. But within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss that I had never before experienced, and I felt the immediate presence of the Divine Mother.

When this vision ended, an incessant and violent urge for a constant, uninterrupted vision of the Divine Mother's luminous form arose in the Master's heart. Although this longing did not always manifest itself externally through signs such as weeping, it remained in his heart all the time. Sometimes it would increase to such a point that he could not contain it anymore. Restlessly rolling on the ground



Sri Ramakrishna in Samadhi

with agony, he would pray to the Divine Mother to reveal Herself to him. He later said, "Sometimes I would lose outer consciousness from that unbearable agony. Immediately after that I would see the Mother's luminous form bestowing boons and fearlessness! I used to see Her smiling, talking, consoling, or teaching me in various ways."

### Restlessness after the first vision

After his first vision of the Divine Mother, the Master was so absorbed in bliss that he was incapable of doing any work. It became impossible for him to conduct worship in the temple on a regular basis. On the days when the Master was not uncontrollably restless for God-vision or did not lose consciousness, he attempted to perform the worship as usual.

### Recount of Master's experiences

The Master said of his thoughts and experiences in those days during worship and meditation:

"There is an image of Bhairava [a form of Shiva] in meditation on the parapet of the natmandir in front of the Kali temple. While going to the temple to meditate, I would point to

the image and tell my mind, 'You must meditate on the Mother like that motionless statue.' No sooner did I sit down to meditate than I would hear clattering sounds in all of my joints, beginning in my legs. It was as if someone inside me were turning keys to lock me up, joint by joint. I was powerless to move my body or change my posture, even slightly. I couldn't stop meditating, or leave the temple, or do anything else I wanted. I was forced to sit in that posture until my joints began clattering again and were unlocked, this time beginning at my neck and ending in my legs.

When I sat to meditate, at first I would see particles of light like swarms of fireflies. Sometimes I would see masses of light on all sides, covering everything like a mist; at other times I would see that everything was pervaded by bright waves of light like molten silver. I would see those things sometimes with eyes closed and sometimes with eyes open. I didn't understand what I saw; nor did I know if it was good or bad to be having such visions. So I prayed anxiously to Mother, 'I don't understand what's happening to me. I don't know any mantras and incantations to call You. Please teach me how to know You. Mother, if You won't teach me, who will? I have no refuge or guide except you.' Thus I used to pray with a one-pointed mind and cry profusely with a longing heart."

### Changes in Master's behaviour

During this period the Master's method of worship and meditation underwent phenomenal changes. It is hard to explain his wonderful ecstatic mood, his simple and child-like reliance upon the Divine



Mother, and the beauty of his self-surrender. In his behaviour there was no hint of an adult's seriousness, nor any effort to follow the customary rules of appropriate behaviour, nor any attempt to consider the future and conduct his activities accordingly. The Master wholeheartedly adopted this attitude, "Mother, I have taken refuge in You. I am your child. Teach me what to do and say." Thus, he plunged his little ego into the will of the Divine Mother and performed all of his actions as Her instrument. His conduct therefore became significantly different from that of other people. The Master was then **in** the world but not **of** it. The external world now appeared to be a dream. He could not make it appear real as it had seemed before, despite his efforts to do so. The conscious and blissful form of the Divine Mother was his only reality.

### **Modes of worship and visions**

Previously, during worship and meditation the Master would see the Mother's hands, or Her shining delicate feet, or Her beautiful, loving, and smiling face. But now – even when it was not time for worship and meditation – the Master would see the complete form of the luminous Divine Mother smiling, talking, accompanying him, and guiding him by saying, "Do this; don't do that." Earlier in his sadhana, while offering food to the Mother, the Master would see a flashing ray of light emanate from the Mother's eyes, touch the food articles, gather their essence, and then withdraw back into Her eyes. But now as soon as he offered food, and sometimes even before that, he would see the Mother Herself seated to eat the food, the lustre of Her body pervading the whole temple. Hriday said that one day he went to the shrine and watched as the Master took a hibiscus flower and a bel leaf in his hand to offer at the feet of the Mother. He held them and meditated, but then he suddenly cried out, "Wait, Wait! Let me say the mantra first, and then You can eat." He then offered food to the Mother before using the ritual.

### **Hriday's testimony**

Hriday recalled, "When one entered the Kali temple in those days one could perceive an ineffable divine presence and feel an eerie sensation, even when Uncle wasn't there – and much more so when he was. I couldn't resist the temptation of seeing how he acted when he was performing the worship. As long as I was actually watching him, my heart was full of reverence and devotion. But when I left the temple, I would begin to have doubts and ask myself, 'Has uncle really gone mad? Why else would he do such strange things?' I was afraid of what the Rani and Mathur Babu would say when they came to hear of it. But uncle was unconcerned and paid no heed to my warnings. So I just looked after him in silence, as best I could."

### **Master's ecstatic worship**

Like Hriday, some people visited the temple during the worship service and saw the Master's unusual behaviour. They complained to the temple officials, who rushed to the Kali temple and saw everything. But when confronted by the Master's God-intoxicated form, familiar behaviour with the deity, and the fearless composure, they were stupefied with fright. They could neither say anything to him nor put a stop to his worship. The officials returned to their office and after discussion they concluded that Ramakrishna had either become mad or had been possessed by a ghost. No normal person would behave in such an unscriptural, wayward manner during worship. In fact, the worship service and food offering to Kali were not performed properly: Ramakrishna had ruined everything. The officials determined that a message should be sent to Mathur immediately.

When their complaint reached Mathur at Calcutta, he replied that he would visit Dakshineswar very soon and take whatever actions were necessary. Until he did so, however, Ramakrishna was to be allowed to continue the worship in

his own way, and none should oppose him.

### **Mathur's impression**

One day Mathur came to Dakshineswar unannounced. He entered the Kali temple during the worship service and watched the Master's activities for a long time. Being overwhelmed with devotion, the Master did not notice Mathur at all. Every day during worship he was absorbed in Mother; he did not notice who was moving in or out of the temple. Mathur realised this immediately. He further understood that the Master's childlike, importunate demands on the Divine Mother originated from his sincere devotion. Mathur asked himself, if the Mother could not be seen with such unostentatious faith and devotion, then how else could She be realised? Mathur's heart was filled with a wonderful joy when he saw how tears trickled down the Master's face during worship, and how sometimes he was filled with unbounded joy and sometimes was unconscious like an inanimate object, unperturbed and completely oblivious of external objects. Mathur experienced a tangible divine presence in the temple and became convinced that Sri Ramakrishna had been blessed by the Divine Mother. He then bowed down to the Mother and Her wonderful worshipper with heartfelt devotion and tearful eyes, saying, "Now the purpose of the Goddess's installation has been fulfilled. The Mother has truly appeared here, and Her worship has been properly performed." He returned to his Calcutta home without saying anything to the temple officials. The next day he sent an order to the temple manager, "Let Ramakrishna perform the worship in any way he chooses; please don't obstruct him."

### **Intense love for God: its effects**

During this period the Master's mind had transcended the limited bounds of vaidhi bhakti (preparatory devotion) and was moving fast towards the higher realm of raga bhakti (supreme devotion). This

(Continued at page 12)



The birth anniversary of the Swami was observed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December, Saturday 2009 at our Centres.

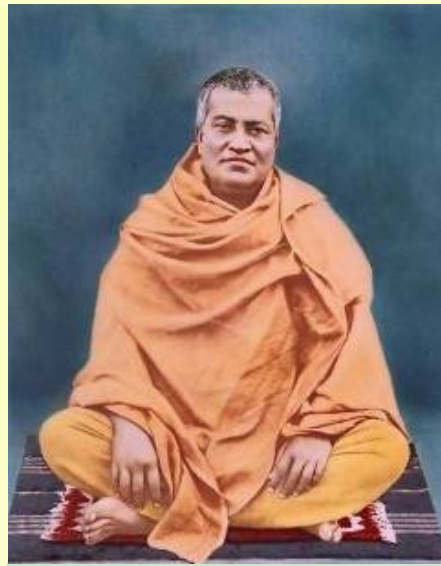
(Continued from the previous issue)

### **Ramakrishna Monastery at Baranagore**

Sri Ramakrishna passed away on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1886, and his young disciples were grief stricken. Very soon, the disciples established the Ramakrishna monastery at Baranagore, which was between Dakshineswar and Calcutta. Tarak and the elder Gopal were the first to live full time in the monastery. During December 1886, Tarak and some other disciples went to Antpur, the country home of Baburam (later Swami Premananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna). Inspired by Narendra (Swami Vivekananda), they took informal vows of monasticism during a night-long vigil around a sacred fire. Later they discovered that their vigil had taken place on Christmas Eve. A month later they took formal monastic vows, performing the traditional *viraja homa* (fire) ceremony in Baranagore. Narendra gave the name 'Swami Shivananda' to Tarak, knowing his Shiva-like nature. Sri Ramakrishna bound his disciples with a cord of love. Shivananda later remarked, "We had so much deep love for each other." From the very inception of the Ramakrishna Math, the disciples tried to create a spiritual atmosphere through their austerities, japam, meditation, devotional singing, and scriptural study. Shivananda lived at Baranagore for about two and a half years, developing his own spiritual life and helping to consolidate the monastery. He nursed the monks who fell ill, and did household work, such as cutting vegetables for cooking, carrying water from the Ganges, sweeping and dusting the rooms, and even cleaning the toilets.

### **Days of austerity and pilgrimage**

"Of the mountains I am the Himalayas," said Krishna in the Gita. On the top of this vast, panoramic mountain range, in the depth of its caves, and on the banks of its rivers, the rishis



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

of ancient India lived and discovered the truths of Vedanta. Monks therefore find great joy in visiting the holy places in the Himalayas.

In the beginning of 1889 Shivananda felt an urge to lead the free, detached life of an itinerant monk. He left for Kedarnath and Badrinarayan, two famous Himalayan holy places. It was a long and arduous journey. On the way he visited several holy places in northern India. He was overjoyed to see the perpetual snow range of the Kedar peak; the shrine itself was at 12,000 feet above sea level. After staying there a few days he left for Badrinarayan. Shivananda stayed there for a few days and attended the worship service of Lord Vishnu. After visiting Badrinath, Shivananda went to Almora, in another part of the Himalayas.

Towards the end of 1889 Shivananda returned to the Baranagore Monastery and stayed there for two years. In October 1891 he again left on a pilgrimage and visited Prayag, at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna rivers; Omkarnath Shiva, on the bank of the river Narmada; Panchavati, on the bank

of the river Godavari; Mumbai and Pune. He practised austerities in all these places. Towards the end of March 1892, Shivananda and Ramakrishnananda went to visit Kamarpukur, the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna, and Jayrambati, the birthplace of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Hearing the sweet reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna's boyhood-days and seeing the places associated with him made him alive in their minds. Both swamis also stayed with Holy Mother at Jayrambati and cooked for her one day.

At the end of 1892, Shivananda again left the monastery and visited Kurukshetra, near Delhi, where Krishna delivered the message of the Gita to Arjuna. He later recalled, "In those days I felt great restlessness and longing to realise God. While walking I would practise the recollectedness of God and pray to Him earnestly. I disliked the company of people and avoided roads ordinarily frequented by travellers. Towards evening I found shelter somewhere and spent the night absorbed in my own thoughts. If a person lives this way, having no possessions, he develops full resignation to God. He becomes established in the idea that God alone is his protector in prosperity as well as in adversity."

The Himalayas had a special attraction for Shivananda. In the middle of 1893 he returned to Almora and stayed there several months. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1893 Shivananda left Almora for Rameswaram, which is in South India on the shore of the Indian Ocean. On his way he visited Agra, Vrindaban, Jaipur, Abu, and Mumbai, finally arriving in Chennai. In the meantime the news of Vivekananda's success at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago had reached India. Swamiji's followers were delighted to have Shivananda in Madras and showed him Swamiji's inspiring



letters written to them from America. After attending the Ramakrishna birth anniversary festival with the Chennai devotees, Shivananda returned to the Alambazar. Swamiji wrote from America praising Shivananda's work in Chennai.

Sometimes traditional monks observe a vow called *chaturmasya*: during the rainy season, they stay in one place for four months and practise intense sadhana. Shivananda decided to go to Uttar Kashi, a remote part of the Himalayas, to observe *chaturmasya*. Uttar Kashi is a lovely place on the bank of the Ganges where many hermits live, but in those days few people went to Uttar Kashi because of its inaccessibility. Shivananda found a small cottage on the Ganges and begged for food once a day. Most of the time he remained absorbed in japam and meditation. Later Shivananda recalled, "The Master stayed by me and protected me from all dangers and difficulties, and I never went hungry."

#### **Effect of Swami Shivananda's travels**

For over a decade the swami travelled in different parts of India, sometimes in the Himalayas, sometimes on the plains, and sometimes in deserts or forests, and always he lived a life worthy of a man of God.....The austerities and meditations of his itinerant period established him in the blessed state, enriching his life and giving him the necessary depth and strength to shoulder the responsibilities of the great task ahead of him. On the anvil of those years and the ones in which he began doing works of service, were forged the character and personality later adored as Mahapurush, the head of the Order, who constantly lived in God and overflowed with love and blessings to all.

#### **With Swami Vivekananda**

In February 1896 Shivananda returned to Alambazar Monastery. In the meantime Vivekananda had written from America, exhorting his brother disciples to stay together, inspiring them to spread the message



**Swami Shivananda**

of Ramakrishna all over India and to perform philanthropic activities among the impoverished masses in India. Shivananda responded accordingly. Once he explained the philosophy behind his work, "The Master does his own work. You and I are only instruments. Fix your mind on him – he will make you do what is to be done. Work done out of ego, accomplishes nothing. What good does it do to the world? He who has performed much austerity, God makes him an instrument and works through him. He only works in the right spirit. Work that lacks the spirit is a waste of energy."

On 13<sup>th</sup> February 1898 the Ramakrishna Math was moved from Alambazar to Nilambar Babu's garden house in Belur. The disciples purchased a piece of land at Belur on the bank of the Ganges on which to build the future headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order. On 27<sup>th</sup> February Swamiji carried the relics of Sri Ramakrishna to the new site and worshipped the Master. Shivananda and other disciples and devotees of the Master were present on that auspicious occasion. Finally, on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1899, the monastery was moved from the rented house to Belur Math. Swamiji announced that all monks should join in daily scripture class in the monastery. Shivananda took an active part in these classes and would answer the questions of the other monks.

Vivekananda made a rule in the

monastery that all monks would have to get up at 4:00 a.m., and then after washing, meditate in the shrine; otherwise they would have to beg for alms that day. One day Shivananda did not hear the bell and, as a result, missed the morning meditation. Swamiji noticed this, and later said to him, "Tarak-da, we made the rule that those who did not come to the shrine would have to live on alms that day." Shivananda replied, "Of course, I am leaving the monastery right now for alms, and whatever I shall get that I will eat." After Shivananda left to beg for alms, the food was offered to the Master in the shrine as usual and the lunch bell was rung, but Swamiji did not go to the dining hall. Instead he waited on the western veranda. When Shivananda returned, Swamiji joyfully asked, "Tarak-da, what did you bring? I have not eaten any food obtained by begging for a long time. [It is customary in India for monks to live on food obtained by begging from door to door as bees collect honey from flower to flower.] Let us share the food and eat together." The two brother disciples happily enjoyed that pure food.

#### **At Varanasi**

From 1902 to 1909 Shivananda concentrated on establishing a permanent centre in Varanasi, with the help of Swami Brahmananda. He named the centre Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, with the idea that one can be established in Advaita (non-duality) by moulding oneself on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. He decided to preach Vedanta by practising it in daily life rather than by lecturing about it from the pulpit. He practised severe austerities in Varanasi and set an example for others. When he experienced no communion with god he would lament. One day he said to Swami Nirbharananda, "Chandra, this day is gone in vain. Neither have I seen the Master today nor have I shed tears for him."

#### **Shivananda's daily life**

A monk wrote in his diary about

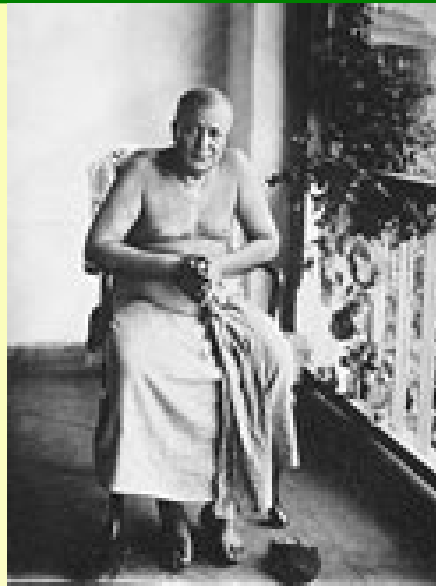


Shivananda's daily life thus:

His bed was a blanket and a tiger skin. Even in cold winter he would sleep on the floor of the hall, first spreading straw and the tiger skin over it, and then covering himself with a blanket. Sometimes at 2.00am he would sit for meditation near the fireplace. In the morning he would open the shrine, and then he would chant for a long time from the Gita, Chandi, and Upanishads. Afterwards, supervising the household work, he would take his bath and perform ritualistic worship. Whatever food was available, he would offer to the Master, and he lived on that Prasad with others. There was no arrangement for special food. He seldom would go out of the ashrama. He was absorbed in his own mood, and sometimes he would sing in a low voice. He would meditate in the afternoon also. After vespers he would remain absorbed in meditation till the food was offered to the Master. He was so grave that we were afraid to talk to him.

#### **At the Belur Math**

In 1909 Shivananda handed over the management of the Varanasi Advaita Ashrama to his assistant monk and returned to Belur Math. Although Swami Brahmananda was the president, Swami Premananda managed the monastery. When Premananda visited Calcutta or other places, Shivananda would perform ritualistic worship and manage the monastery in his place. Regarding his worship at Belur he once said, "Our worship in the shrine was more an act of love and devotion, having none of the external grandeur of ritualistic observances as is prevalent now. While doing the worship we would think of the Master as visibly present, just as we had seen him at Dakshineswar in his room seated on his cot; we would worship him, following the simplest procedure. Although we observed some of the orthodox rules and forms, we never stressed them. Sri Ramakrishna is the lord of our hearts, and what he wants from us is genuine devotion and



**Swami Shivananda**

self-dedication."

Shivananda's lifestyle was very simple. He regularly wrote letters to the monks and devotees himself. In the afternoons he would meet with devotees and answer their spiritual questions or talk about his days with the Master and Swamiji. He would attend the vesper service and afterwards meditate in the shrine. He would partake of the Master's prasada and plain food along with other monks. His clothing was also very simple. Until 1922 he had two pieces of cloth, a short-sleeved shirt, a chadar, and one pair of slippers. He had another set of clothing and shoes that he used while he visited Calcutta and other places.

#### **As President of the Order**

In 1901 Vivekananda had made Shivananda one of the trustees of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and in 1910 he became the vice-president. After Brahmananda passed away in 1922, Shivananda was elected president of the Ramakrishna Order. As president he acted as an instrument in the Master's hands. One day he remarked, "...Neither have I learning nor intellect, neither am I a speaker nor am I good looking; still the Master is using me as an instrument for doing his work." Shivananda's humility was phenomenal. Moreover, his allegiance towards, love for, and faith in the Master were exceptional.

Most of the time Shivananda lived in Belur Math, but from time to time he visited other centres of the Order and inspired the monks and devotees. During his presidency, the activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission expanded considerably. Several new centres were opened in India, Singapore, Europe, North America, and South America. He inspired the monks to carry out philanthropic activities and at the same time advised them to harmonise the four yogas in their lives so that they could realise the Atman.

After dedicating the Vivekananda Temple on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1924 and the Brahmananda temple on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1924 in Belur Math, Shivananda left for South India on 7<sup>th</sup> April with Swamis Sharvananda and Bodhananda.

The first convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, a momentous event for the Ramakrishna Order, took place on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1926 in Belur Math. Four direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna attended the convention. Swami Saradananda was the committee chairman and Swami Shivananda was its president.

Once a senior monk asked Shivananda to take disciplinary action against a monk and expel him from the Order. Shivananda listened to the accusations attentively and then asked the senior monk, "Does he not have one or two good qualities?" When the senior monk mentioned a couple of the monk's good qualities, Shivananda's face radiated with joy and he exclaimed, "That is enough!" That monk stayed in the Order.

#### **Some glimpses of the Swami**

Seeing God in everything and everywhere is the culmination of the Vedantic experience. Shivananda's mind was full of Ramakrishna. He once told Brahmananda in Belur Math, "Raja, I see the Master even these days. Were it not so, it would be unbearable for me to live." Pointing to the picture of Sri Ramakrishna,



he said to devotees, “Don’t think of this picture of the Master as an ordinary picture. He himself dwells in it and listens to the prayers of the devotees.”

On another occasion Shivananda said, “In this age the name of Sri Ramakrishna is the mantram for 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.”

His love seemed perennial and inexhaustible. Even animals and birds shared in his affection and care. He would regularly go to the dairy and feed the cows bananas, molasses, and barley powder. Quite often people would see the old swami stroking the cows in the monastery compound. He would ask his attendant to spread grain on the roof adjacent to his room so he could watch the birds enjoying their food. His pet dog, Kelo, would get baths and special dinners.

### Conclusion

As the days passed, Shivananda’s health failed rapidly because of high blood pressure and asthma, and finally he became bedridden. On 24<sup>th</sup> April 1933 Shivananda expressed a desire to see the monastery. His monastic disciples carried him in a chair. He bowed down to all the temples, visited the dairy, the flower and vegetable gardens, the stores and offices. At last he bowed down to the Mother Ganges. His face was beaming with joy. This was his final tour around the monastery, and his last words were, “Whatever is true will happen. Truth alone triumphs in the end. Truth alone persists. That which is false does not last. Therefore one should not regret it.” Although Shivananda did not write any books, his inspired conversations were recorded and published in *For Seekers of God*.

Many monks and devotees also left their valuable reminiscences of the swami, which were printed in Bengali in three volumes as *Shivananda Smriti Samgraha*.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1934, nine months after a stroke, Shivananda developed pneumonia. His condition slowly deteriorated. Swami Shivananda lived to see Sri Ramakrishna’s birth anniversary on 15<sup>th</sup> February and the public festival on Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> February. He passed away at 5:36 p.m. on Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1934. At the final moment Shivananda’s face beamed with joy and the hair of his head stood on end, both considered to be auspicious signs. If anyone ever asked where he would go after leaving the body, Swami Shivananda replied that his rightful place would be in Ramakrishnaloka (abode of Ramakrishna). His life is a glowing example of a person who continuously lived in God-consciousness.

### Source:

*God Lived With Them: Life Stories of sixteen monastic disciples* by Swami Chetanananda; Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata; pages 142-178.



### Sri Ramakrishna: Sadhana and Ecstasy

(Continued from page 8)

happened in such a simple and natural way that he himself could not comprehend it, much less others! This much he realised: compelled by his exuberant love for the Divine Mother, he could not desist from acting as he did. It was as if someone was forcing him to do so. He supplicated the Divine Mother with a loving heart, “Mother, I don’t understand. Why am I in this institution? Please make me do what I am supposed to do and teach me what I am supposed to learn. Hold me close to You all the time. Thus he prayed to the Divine Mother from deep within his heart. For Her part, the Divine Mother

held him, protected him under all circumstances, and fulfilled his prayers.

### Master gives up external worship

The Master’s ecstatic delight with the Divine Mother increased to such an extent that it became impossible for him to conduct the daily worship as well as the occasional special services to the Goddess. The Master thus illustrated how one’s obligations naturally fall away with spiritual progress. His inability to perform external worship and service to the Divine Mother developed naturally. He could no longer follow any regular timetable for worship services. Continually absorbed in ecstasy, he served the Divine Mother whenever and however he pleased. For example, sometimes he offered food to the deity without performing the worship. Or when he was absorbed in meditation he would forget his separate existence from the Mother and decorate his own body with the flowers and sandal paste that were intended for the worship of the Goddess. According to the Master, he acted this way because of his constant vision of the Divine Mother within and outside himself.

### Conclusion

Mathur somehow managed the worship service utilizing the Master until he was absorbed in the ecstatic state. But now Mathur decided to make separate arrangements for worship, as the Master was no longer capable of handling it. During this time a cousin of the Master’s arrived at Dakshineswar temple. Mathur engaged him to perform worship of Kali until the Master recovered. This happened in 1858.

### Source:

*Sri Ramakrishna and his Divine Play* by Swami Chetanananda; Vedanta Society of St. Louis; pages 206-223.



This issue is behind schedule. We apologize to our **readers** for the delay.