



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.”**

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, The R. M. Institute of Culture, Kolkata, p. 5

Faith and Devotion to the Lord

The world is the Lord’s. He created it for His own play. We are mere pawns in His game. Wherever he keeps us and in whatever way he does so, we have to abide by it contentedly. We suffer as a result of our own actions; it is unfair to blame anybody for it. We have to surrender ourselves completely to the Lord with faith and devotion in Him, serve others to the best of our capacity, and never be a source of sorrow to anybody.

— **Sri Sarada Devi**

Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai, p. 1

Light of Love

We all begin with love for ourselves and the unfair claims of the little self make even love selfish; at last, however, comes the full blaze of light, in which this little self is seen to have become one with the Infinite. Man himself is transfigured in the presence of this Light of Love, and he realises at last the beautiful and inspiring truth that love, the Lover, and the Beloved are one.

— **Swami Vivekananda**

Teachings of Swami Vivekananda by Swami Mumukshananda Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas, p. 11



The newly constructed water feature at the entrance of the Perth Centre

IN THIS ISSUE

◆ News from the various Centres:

- ◆ Adelaide
- ◆ Auckland
- ◆ Brisbane
- ◆ Canberra
- ◆ Melbourne
- ◆ Perth
- ◆ Sydney

◆ *Feature article* — The Life of the Holy Mother Sri Ma Sarada Devi

◆ *Feature article* — Swami Vivekananda establishes the Vedanta Movement in the West

◆ Swami Vivekananda’s article “What we Believe In”

We welcome you all to the Ramakrishna - Vedanta Movement and invite you to attend our programs 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 the Centres

September to December 2015

Adelaide

email: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com

Contact: Dr Raman Sharma – (08) 8431 9775
Mrs Pathma Iswaran – (08) 8379 5336

<http://vedantaadelaide.org/>

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda continued his three-days-a-month visit and delivered discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* at the Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich SA 5065. A dedicated group of devotees attended his talks, which have been recorded.
- Every month on a prescheduled Sunday readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, including discussion, were conducted at devotees' homes.

Celebrations:

- The Annual Spiritual Retreat was held on 12-Dec-2015 at the Monastery, 15 Cross Road, Urrbrae SA5064 for which Swami Sridharananda and Swami Sunishthananda were present. The Retreat included chanting of Vedic mantras, bhajans, a question-answer session on *Practical Vedanta* by Swami Vivekananda. Swami Sridharananda gave talks on 'Life without fear' and 'How to live with endless joy?' The Retreat concluded with singing of bhajans and āraṭi.



Annual Spiritual Retreat held in December 2015

Auckland

27 Arawa Street, New Lynn, Auckland

Contact: Mr M. Kumar

Email: monnay@ihug.co.nz

<http://rkvc.org.nz/>

Daily Activities:

- The Vesper Service was held daily from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in the Centre. It included the singing of hymns and readings from *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* followed by meditation.

Regular Activities:

- On the second Sunday of every month satsang programmes which include bhajans, discourse on the Ramayana, readings and discussions on the lives of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* and meditation were conducted from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
- On the last Sunday of every month readings and discussions on the Bhagavad Gitā, *The Gospel of Sri*

Ramakrishna and the life and teachings of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi were conducted. The program started at 11:00 a.m. and concluded at 1:00 p.m. with Prasad distribution.

Celebrations:

- Durga Puja was celebrated on 20-Oct-2015 from 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. after the evening vesper services. The program started with bhajans. Devotees talked on the importance of Navaratri and Mother Worship and Durga Devi. The program concluded with Prasad distribution.
- Devotees celebrated Christmas Eve on 24-Dec-2015 from 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. after the evening Arati. The program started with bhajans. Discussions were based on the parables of Jesus Christ and their importance and Sermon on the Mount.

Scheduled events for the period Jan-Apr 2016:

- 31-Jan-2016: Swami Vivekananda's Birthday celebrations
- 7-Mar-2016: Maha Shivaratri
- 10-Mar-2016: Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday celebrations

Brisbane

12 Greenwood Street, Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300

Email: info@vedantabrisbane.org

Contact: Swami Atmeshananda 07 3818 9986

<http://vedantabrisbane.org/>

Daily activities:

Meditation and chanting of hymns- 6:15 a.m. to 7:15 a.m.

Vesper service and Readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* - 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Members are encouraged to visit the Centre during the day and discuss topics concerning spiritual life.

The Book shop is also open from 8:30 a.m to 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Regular Activities:

The Centre conducted the following programmes:

- Yoga classes run by Dr. Unnikrishnan was held on Sundays from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.
- Classes on *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* was held on Sundays from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. by Swami Atmeshananda
- Value education classes for children (bala sangha) were coordinated by Ms. Menaka Thomas and Atul Deshpande on Sundays from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- A discussion group at the residence of Som Parkash in the southern suburbs of Brisbane (Sunnybank Hills) was moderated by Swami Atmeshananda during the first Monday of every month.
- A class on *Viveka Chudamani* was conducted by Swami Atmeshananda at Toowomba at the residence of Dr and Mrs. Venugopal.
- Religious education classes were held by Jeyamala Ariaratnam on Wednesdays at the West End Primary School
- Guided meditation and classes on Meditation and Spiritual life were conducted by Swami Atmeshananda on Fridays
- Chanting of the *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held every fortnight at the Centre on Eka-dashi days.
- A monthly satsang programme was conducted at the ashram during the first Saturday of every



Spiritual Retreat at Bridgeman Downs, QLD November 2015

month. Meditation, chanting, bhajans and a talk on a chosen spiritual topic were the components of the programme.

- Once every weekend, devotees took turn to clean, decorate and worship the image of Sri Ramakrishna at the Sri Ganesha Temple, North Maclean, Queensland.

The Centre has embarked upon a project to build an ashram at Vedanta Drive, Springfield lakes, QLD 4300. A donation drive is ongoing to aid the construction of the ashram building. Tax deductible donations are sought after to achieve a target of One Million Dollars by April 2016.

For more details please visit:
www.vedantabrisbane.org

Other activities:

Swami Atmeshananda conducted the following talks:-

- a) Theory and law of Karma at the residence of Prof. Kamal Puri at Chapel Hill, Queensland on 12-Sep-2015.
- b) Meditation and its practice at the residence of Dipesh Kapadia in Coomera on 2-Oct-2015
- c) The Centre organised a book stall at the King George Square, Brisbane on 16-Oct-2015.
- d) 'The Significance of Culture' on the occasion of Durga puja festival organised by the Bengali association of Queensland at the Aspley State High School on 17-Oct-2015.



Bush Walk at Mount Coot-tha Gap Creek Road



Meditation session at Mount Coot-tha Gap Creek Road



Sri Durga Puja at Springfield Lakes, QLD



Sri Krishna Janmashtami at the Brisbane Centre

e) 'The Significance of death and dying according to Hinduism' at a symposium organised on 22-Oct-2015 by Bluecare Multicultural service and the Metro South Equity & Access Unit (HEAU). Nurses, health care professionals and health service providers were participants in this symposium.

The Centre organised a Yoga and Bushwalk session at the Mount Coot-tha Gap Creek road reserve on 22-Nov-2015. After a yoga and meditation session, members went hiking for a couple of hours and shared a lunch afterwards.

A spiritual retreat was held on 28-Nov-2015 at the residence of Dr. & Mrs. Krishna Majumdar in Bridgeman Downs, QLD. Guided meditation, chanting, bhajans and two talks by Swami Sridharanandaji as well as a question and answer session formed the different components of the Retreat.

The Annual General Meeting of the Centre was held on the 28-Nov-2015 at Bridgeman Downs. New members were inducted into the management committee.

Swami Atmешananda was invited to participate in the Blessing ceremony of the newly built Mater Private Hospital in Springfield on 11-Dec-2015.

Celebrations:

- Sri Krishna Janmashtami was celebrated on the 6-Sep-2015 at the centre. Children from the Sunday class (bala sangha) chanted hymns and sang bhajans. Atul Deshpande performed the worship and conducted the programme. Prasad was distributed after the programme.

- Sri Durga puja was performed on the 21-Oct-2015 (Ashtami) at the YMCA community centre in Springfield Lakes. Swami Atmешananda performed the worship and a large number of devotees participated in the programme.

Scheduled Events for the period Jan-Apr 2016:

- 1-Jan-2016: Birthday of Holy Mother Saradadevi and Kalpataru day at Indooroopilly Senior citizens' hall, Indooroopilly from 5:45 p.m. to 8.30 p.m.
- 31-Jan-2016: Birthday of Swami Vivekananda at the ashram from 10.00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
- A fortnightly class on the significance of Sri Ramayana will begin from the 12-Feb-2016 on alternate Fridays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
- 7-Mar-2016: Shivaratri puja will be conducted at the centre from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.
- 10-Mar-2016: Sri Ramakrishna's birthday puja will be conducted at the ashram from 10:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. A public programme will be held at the Indooroopilly Senior Citizens' Club on 12-Mar-2016 from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m.
- 16-Apr-2016: Sri Ramanavami will be held at the Centre from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Canberra

Registered Address:

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT - 2617

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman - 0433 593 860
email: jaishankar_venkataraman@hotmail.com

Regular activities:

- a) Regular monthly talks on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* were conducted by Swami Sridharananda during the months of Oct,ober November and December. These lectures were held at the Belconnen Communi-

ty Meeting Room (directly above Belconnen ACT Library) at 12 Chandler St, Belconnen - Time: 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.

Other Activities:

- The Annual General Meeting of the Canberra Chapter was held on the 15-Nov-2015. The audited financial report, and the Secretary's report were presented. Swamiji advised the members of the developments that were underway at the various centres.

Scheduled events for the period Jan-Apr 2016: Monthly *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* lectures will continue in this period.

Melbourne

5-7 Angus Avenue, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

Contact: Mr Suresh Ravinutala – 0413 040 599
email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

The Centre maintains a bookstall with various literature for sale in print, audio, and visual media on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta philosophy and relevant topics.

Daily activities:

Vesper service was conducted in the evening from 7 p.m. and followed by the chanting of hymns, devotional singing and reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* from the Thursday to the Saturday of a prescheduled week at the Centre. The Thursday and Friday sessions were held from 7:45 to 9 p.m. and the Saturdays sessions were held from 11:00 a.m to 12:15 p.m. The recordings of these discourses are available in audio, video and MP3 formats for purchase.
- Regular satsanga was held on the first Sunday of every month which included bhajans and readings from the *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

The occasion of Durga Puja at the Melbourne Centre



Other activities:

- The Centre is actively involved in the Maroondah Interfaith Network which provides an opportunity to showcase programmes and events to members of other faiths and also in promoting understanding, awareness and respect for the values and practices of all faith communities

Celebrations:

- During the Navaratri celebrations, a special Satsanga was held on 17-Oct-2015 at 5:00 p.m. The program consisted of the recital of Lalitha Sahasranamam archana by devotees followed by bhajans and evening Arati.
- Durga Puja was celebrated on 31-Oct-2015: The program included Formal Durga Puja including Havan and Pushpananjali. Swami Sridharananda gave an informative talk on 'The Motherhood of the Divine'. Prasad was served to all present. A special evening program of dance/music/bhajans was organised whereby many local artists performed to an audience of nearly 100 devotees/friends.

Scheduled events for the period Jan-Apr 2016:

- 01-Jan-2016: Kalpataru day /Holy Mother's Thithi birthday celebrations
- 23-Jan-2016: Holy Mother's formal birthday celebration
- 20-Feb-2016: Swami Vivekananda Birthday celebration.
- 19-Mar-2016: Sri Ramakrishna Birthday celebration.
- 16-Apr-2016: Ramanavami.

Perth

51 Golf View Street, Yokine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact:

Hiren Mukhopadyay Secretary 0411 478 244
Parthiv Parekh Asst. Secretary 0430 511 699

The Centre maintains a library available to devotees for reference and research. The bookstall has a range of books on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, Yoga, and other relevant literature. Devotional songs, discourses on the Bhagavad Gitā, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Mundaka Upanisad, and other topics are also available in various media format.

Daily activities:

The Vesper service is held daily at 7:00 p.m. at the Centre. It includes *arati*, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* followed by meditation.

Regular Activities:

- a) Monthly Satsang on first Sunday of every month from 11:00 am to 12:00 noon. It also entails chanting, Gita Dhyanam, bhajans and readings on relevant topics followed by Prasad distribution.



Holy Mother's birthday function.

Celebrations:

- 06-Sep-2015- Sri Krishna Janmashtami celebration: Shri Krishna worship, Bhajans and some readings from the Bhagavad Gita and Prasad distribution
- 24-Dec-2015 - Christmas Eve Celebration : Worship of Christ & Devotional Music, Readings on the life of Christ and Prasad distribution.

Other Activities:

- The Centre had arranged a working group session on the 3-Jan-2016 that contributed to the maintenance of the Centre.
- The Centre has had a structural addition of a water pond and a pergola. The project was the culmination of the work of the Lalji Raghavani family.



The newly constructed water feature at the entrance of the Perth Centre

Scheduled events for the period Jan-Apr 2016:

- 09-Jan-2016: Holy Mother Birth Anniversary Celebrations
- 06-Feb-2016 to 08-Feb-2016 : Swami Nirmalatmananda (from the Brazil Centre) will be visiting Perth Centre -
- 07-Feb-2016 : There will be a special programme that will include devotional music, a presentation by Swami Sri Nirmalatmananda followed by Prasad distribution.
- 13-Feb-2016: Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary Celebrations.

Sydney

144A Marsden Road, Ermington, NSW 2115

Tel:- 02 8197 7351

Email: vedasydney@gmail.com

www.vedantaaustralia.org/

www.spiritualbookstore.org.au

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

The Centre's library is available to devotees.

Daily activities:

- Worship and meditation were held every morning from 6:45 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.
- Vesper service was conducted in the evening from 7 p.m. and included devotional singing, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation.
- Counselling, interviews and discussions were conducted with devotees.

Regular Activities:

The Centre conducted the following programmes:

- a) Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* every Sunday morning from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m..
- b) Parlour talks were 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 conducted by Swami Sunishthananda were held on Sundays from 5:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. followed by a class on Patanjali Yoga Sutras from 5:30 p.m. to 6.15 p.m.
- e) Bala Sangha Classes on moral and spiritual lessons and drama and movement were conducted for children every Saturday from 4:45 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. during the academic term.
- f) *Sri Rāmanāma* was sung on *Ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- g) A class for ladies was held every Monday from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Swami Sunishthananda facilitated discussions based on a reading titled *Meditation and Spritual Life* and from Katha Upanishad.



- h) Swami Sunishthananda conducted classes on Katha Upanishad every Wednesday evening from 7.30 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. at the Centre.
- i) Swami Sunishthananda conducted classes on Narada Bhakti Sutras every Friday evening from 7.30 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. at the Centre.

Other activities:

- a) Swami Sunishthananda delivered a talk titled "Unity in Diversity" at a seminar hosted by the Auburn Tamil Society and held at the Auburn Community Centre on 20-Sep-2015.
- b) An Annual Day Celebration was organized at Sydney Baha'I Centre on 7th November 2015 from 6:00 p.m. to 9.30 p.m which was attended by about 450 devotees.
- c) A One Day Spiritual Retreat was conducted at the Centre on 6-Dec-2015.
- d) Ahead of the COP21 Paris UN Climate Conference, Vedanta Centre of Sydney (VCS) joined some 40,000 people in a rally in Sydney that began in the Domain down Macquarie Street to the Opera House on 29 November 2015. The march was co-ordinated into eight coloured "blocs" symbolising the diverse communities that voiced their support. VCS shared the same block with the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change and other spiritual organisations.



Navarathri function at the Sydney Centre

Celebrations:

- a) Janmashtami was celebrated on 5th September 2015 with formal worship, singing of hymns and bhajans. The children of Bala Sangha presented a skit on the life of Sri Krishna. About 200 devotees attended the function.
- b) Navaratri was celebrated from 14t-Oct-2015 to 22-Oct-2015 after the evening arati. Various renowned local artists presented vocal and instrumental musical performances on each day of the Navaratri after the evening arati.
- c) Durga Puja was celebrated on 21st of October 2015 with formal worship, singing of hymns and bhajans.

More than one thousand devotees attended the function.

- d) Christmas Eve was also celebrated on the 24th of December. Swami Sunishthananda provided a discussion on the Nativity and Life of Jesus Christ.

Scheduled events for the period Jan-Apr 2016:

- 1-Jan-2016: Birth Anniversary of Holy Mother:
- 31-Jan-2016: Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda
- 7-Mar-2016: Maha Shiva Ratri
- 10- Mar-2016: Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna
- 30-Apr-2016: Annual Day Celebration

Renaming the Street Address:

The Vedanta Centre of Sydney is at the junction of Marsden Road and Stewart Street. As the entry to the Centre is through Marsden Road, the mention of Stewart Street in its old address was often misguiding to the visitors.

The concerned Council, being requested, has renamed the street address and the address of the Centre henceforth is as follows:

***Vedanta Centre of Sydney
144A Marsden Road, Ermington, NSW- 2115***

Feature article

The Life of the Holy Mother Sri Ma Sarada Devi

God, as associated with His Power, is alone able to set in motion a new cycle of social and spiritual regeneration. When God incarnates as man, He invokes this Power and then employs Her for the good of man. When God comes down as man, Divine Power also accompanies Him most often as a woman. The descent of Sita with Ramachandra, Sri Radhika with Krishna, Yasodhara with Buddha, and Vishnupriya with Sri Chaitanya emphasises this fact. Divine Power, whether on the spiritual or on the material plane, or as the consort of an incarnation, helps Him immensely in His mission. Swami Saradananda writes, ‘...the rishis of India worshipped in all exceptionally energetic things and everywhere the Deity who dances on the prostrate body of Siva. This incomparable Deity who promises both blessing and protection with Her hands at the same time that She wears a necklace of heads, was discovered by them as a reality and as such worshipped reverentially in the guru who is the spiritual guide, in women who fascinate the world and in such elevating and degrading qualities as knowledge, forbearance, peace, delusion, torpor, error, etc.’

Again, Swami Vivekananda realized that this Shakti (Divine Power) has been awakened by Sri Ramakrishna for the rejuvenation of the present age; and hence he sent forth this clarion call: ‘Just imagine in your mind the acme of that resurgence with whose first stirrings the whole world is now resounding, and give up all vain doubt and weakness...’ That formless and eternal Power of Brahman, which inheres in everything, has again descended as the consort of the incarnation for the present age. She has on the one hand helped Him to fulfil His mission, and on the other hand has spread Her influence on various fields of human relationships, thereby removing obstacles...’

So in the present incarnation there is no clanging of weapons or the din of war; but there is an abundance of modesty, humility, purity, goodness, practical love, and spiritual experience. Moreover, the Deity has not only to remove obstacles. She has also to establish new goals and create fresh aspirations; and this is a tremendous task. God Himself need not come down for removing all hindrances from the path of His devotees. This can be accomplished by an inspired soul or by a partial divine manifestation. As the whole of humanity has to be raised to a higher pitch of realisation, Divine Power Herself takes the field.

Swami Vivekananda was convinced that India cannot prosper without revitalising her womanhood, just as a bird cannot fly with one wing: ‘And therefore it is that when God incarnated as Sri Ramakrishna, he worshipped God as Kali, the Mother, accepted a woman as his guru (spiritual guide), assumed the role of a woman in some of his spiritual strivings, took upon himself the responsibility of educating and training his own wife, and preached the Motherhood of God.’

Jayrambati: The Blessed Hamlet - The birthplace of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

Bankura, though it belongs to the fertile province of West Bengal, is comparatively barren and subject to frequent famine. But the little village of Jayrambati, lying at the south-east corner of the district, is more fortunate and ever smiles with the crops of paddy, wheat, sugar-cane, and vegetables which the industrious farmers grow in its fields. It is about three miles west of Kamarpukur, the native village of Sri Ramakrishna. From the north-western corner of the hamlet the small, perennial rivulet Amodar, with its transparent wa-

ter, meanders eastward for a mile like a playful child, demarcating the northern limits of Jayrambati; then taking a south-easterly turn it washes the boundary of Mukundapur which forms a part of Kamarpukur, and then flows southward. The narrow and shallow stream forms whirlpools here and there, which are deep and full of fish, so that small alligators are often attracted there. In the northern side of the village, the streamlet forms a beautiful peninsula, triangular in shape and raised in the centre. The green grass and tall trees, which cover it, make it a cool retreat for those who want a shelter from the day’s heat. Resounding with the chirping of birds and deco-

rated with fruit and flower trees made it a favourite place, either to take a dip in the brook, sit beneath the shade of the Amalaka tree or to meditate or read. Sri Sarada Devi in her younger days took her ceremonial bath in the stream on special days.

The natural situation of Jayrambati evokes rustic simplicity. It is surrounded almost on all sides by extensive fields. The land between the Amodar and the village is about half a mile in width and is very fertile. Such staple crops as paddy, pulses, chilli, and turmeric, as well as ordinary vegetables, are raised on this and adjacent lands by a diligent peasantry. Cotton too used to be cul-

tivated and the ponds had plenty of fish. It had then no shops; and yet the people did not depend on other villages. They were satisfied with what they got from their fields. Whenever necessity arose, they went to the market at Kamarpukur. North of Jayrambati, on the other side of the Amodar and across a vast field, is a large village called Desra. On the east, too, across a vast stretch of paddy fields, one comes to the bank of the Amodar, after crossing which one has to pass through Amarpur to reach Kamarpukur.

The Mukhopadhyaya (or briefly Mukherji) family in which the Holy Mother was born settled in this village long ago. The main road of the



Sri Sarada Devi

not lack in festivities. It has its rounds of annual celebrations. In autumn there is a three-day special worship of Simhavahini, the presid-

the spiritual, mental, and physical needs of the villagers, has also enhanced the popularity of Jayrambati, and easier accessibility is gradually converting it into a centre of attraction.

The Advent of Sri Sarada Devi

The site occupied by Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother's temple was perhaps the first place where the Mukherjis settled. Sri Sarada Devi lived here till she was nine years old, and this was also the place which witnessed her marriage. Ramchandra, a worthy descendant of the Mukherjis, whose tutelary deity was Rama, was respected at Jayrambati for his godliness, suavity of temper, and compassion for all. He married

The white dome of the temple, flying its metal pennant with the Bengali word 'mā' (mother) engraved on it, announces the glory of the village to distant passers-by.

village runs north and south by the western side of the Mother's new house and the Kali shrine. A little northwards, there stands on the left the white brick-built temple on the birthplace of Sri Sarada Devi. Here was the ancestral home of the Mukherjis who, however, spread out southwest with the growth of the family.

The villages neighbouring Jayrambati, with which the memories of Sri Ramakrishna or Sri Sarada Devi are specially associated, include Shihar, Koalpara, Anur and Shyambazar. Shihar was the birthplace of Shyamasundari Devi, the mother of Sri Sarada Devi. Sri Sarada Devi used to halt at Koalpara when in later days; she passed through Vishnupur on her way to and from Calcutta. Anur is known for the shrine of the goddess Vishalakshi, on the way to which Sri Ramakrishna while still a child passed into ecstasy. Jayrambati, though not very far from Calcutta, is not very easy to access, and roads were more difficult in its early period. Though shut out from modern civilisation, Jayrambati does

ing deity of the village, which draws people from all parts. On the Sivaratri day the villagers got to Shihar to offer worship at the temple of Siva. There are also kirtana songs continued for twenty-four hours at a stretch and rural dramas. And above all, Jayrambati has been blessed by the advent of Sri Sarada Devi, which has converted it into a place of pilgrimage where people from all over the world come to draw inspiration. The white dome of the temple, flying its metal pennant with the Bengali word 'mā' (mother) engraved on it, announces the glory of the village to distant passers-by. The temple was consecrated on the 19th of April 1923, which day is still observed and is made joyous by the presence of hundreds of devotees hailing from different places. The worship of the goddess Jagad-dhatri, which was initiated by the mother of Sri Sarada Devi and for which Sri Sarada Devi herself made permanent arrangements, is also performed annually and is equally popular with the devotees. The establishment of the branches of the Ramakrishna Math and of its sister institution the Ramakrishna Mission, which cater to

Shyamasundari Devi, daughter of Sri Haridas Mazumdar of Shihar. The wife, too, vied with her husband in the practice of virtue. Her purity, simplicity, and fortitude were the talk of the village. Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother was born of this pious couple. The few sentences which occasionally dropped from the Mother's lips with regard to her parents reveal how virtuous they were and in what veneration she held them. 'My parents', she said, 'were very good. My father was a devout follower of Rama. He was very orthodox and would not accept any gifts from people of other castes. How kind my mother as; how she would feed people, and how she took care of them! And how guileless she was!'

Once when Shyamasundari Devi was living with her father in the northern part of Shihar, she had occasion to sit in the dark beside a potter's oven under a Bel tree. There suddenly issued a jingling sound from the direction of the oven, and a little girl came down from the branches of the tree. She laid her soft hands round Shyamasundari's neck,

whereupon she fell down unconscious. She had no idea how long she lay there thus. Her relatives came there searching for her and carried her home. On regaining consciousness she felt as though the little girl had entered her womb.

Ramchandra was then in Calcutta in search of some means of earning money for his family. The thought of his family's poverty weighed heavily on his mind. One day, before he had decided to start for the city, he was engrossed in that thought. Then he fell asleep and dreamt that a little girl of golden complexion embraced him from behind by throwing her delicate arms around his neck. The incomparable beauty of the girl, as

lages. The harvest was over and the granaries were full. The fields around again began to smile with the shooting forth of the summer crop. The new harvest festival had just been finished, and the little children were counting the days for the festival of the month ending when they would have a feast of cakes. During such a time, a little after Thursday evening, on the 8th Paush (22nd December, 1853) when the night had spread her star-spangled cloth over the village of Jayrambati to lay it asleep after the day's labour the blowing of conch shells from Ramchandra's house announced the happy news of the advent of Sri Saradamani Devi. Soon an astrologer was

that is, in the Amodar, which was our Ganges. After finishing our holy bath, I would eat some fried rice there with them, and then bring them home. The Ganges had always an uncommon attraction for me.' As for other engagements she said, 'As a girl I would plunge into neck-deep water to cut grass for the cattle, and walk to the fields with friend rice for the labourers. During one year when locusts had nearly destroyed the crops, I went round the fields gathering paddy.' As regards her education she said, 'I sometimes accompanied Prasanna Ramnath (a cousin), and others when they went to school in their boyhood; and thus I learned a little.'

“The Ganges had always an uncommon attraction for me.”

also her invaluable ornaments, at once marked her as out of the common run. Ramchandra was greatly surprised and asked, 'Who are you, my child?' The girl replied in the softest and sweetest of voices, 'Here am I come to you.' Ramchandra woke up and the conviction grew in him that the girl was none other than Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, whose appearance implied that the time was auspicious for him to go out in quest of money. Accordingly he left for Calcutta. Once he returned home, he heard what had happened to his wife, and, spiritually minded as he himself was, he readily believed everything. Henceforth, this holy Brahmin couple lived the purest of lives in expectation of the divine child. Ramchandra had the highest regard for his wife Shyamasundari Devi was conscious of her unique fortune. Gradually the time of confinement approached. Autumn had now passed, and it was the beginning of the month of Paush when winter had just set in. This was one of the happiest times in Bengal vil-

called in and in accordance with the disposition of the stars and planets at the time, the child was ceremonially named Thakurmani. Her more popular name was, however, Saradamani.

The Early years

Sri Sarada Devi spent her early days in a poor family; but poverty was in a sense a boon and made life sweeter by providing greater opportunities for her to reveal her affection for all around. Ramchandra could not raise enough paddy from his lands to meet the expenses of the family; so he also grew some cotton. Shyamasundari Devi would carry the little girl Sarada to the cotton field where she would lay her down and go to pluck the cotton pods. When Sarada grew older she would help her mother in this work as well as spinning sacred thread with the cotton, which would fetch some cash for cloth and other family requirements. Sarada also had to look after her brothers. 'I used to go with them', she said, 'to bathe in the Ganges,

Sri Sarada Devi also had to undertake tasks such as cooking. She had to fetch pitchers of water from the tank for domestic use. When she was eleven years old (1864), the countryside was ravaged by a terrible famine. Her father had garnered some paddy; and though he was by no means affluent he was moved so much by the appalling misery around that he opened his granary and started a free canteen. Sri Sarada Devi described it thus, 'What a dire famine raged there once and how many starving people came to our house! We had stocked the previous year's produce. My father had the paddy husked into rice and got potful of khichudi (hotch-potch) cooked by mixing it with black lentils. "Everybody in this house will eat this", he said, "and offer it to whoever may come. Only for my Sarada, a little rice of good variety will be cooked and she will eat it." On some days the number of people became so great that khichudi ran short. Cooking would restart at once. No sooner were the hot food served on

the leaves than I would fan it with both hands so that it might cool quickly. For, alas, the hungry stomachs could not brook delay! One day a girl came either of the Bagdi or Dome caste. Her hair had become shaggy for want of oil and her eyes were bloodshot. She ran to the tub where some rice-dust was soaked for the cattle and began gulping that. She wouldn't heed the people who were crying out, "Come in and eat the khichudi." Only after swallowing some rice-dust did she hear that call. After learning the bitter lesson of that year, people began to garner their paddy.' The Mother's life then was like that of any other girl in the village. But in the midst of this rural simplicity, now and then a sudden divine flash dazzled. Shyamasundari Devi, mother of the Holy Mother, said in later life, 'My child, I wonder who you really may be, my dear! How can I recognise you, my daughter!' The daughter, of course, then brushed this compliment aside with apparent dislike saying, 'Who am I? Who can I be? Have I grown four hands (like any deity)? If so, why should I have come to you?'

Foretaste of Life Divine

Sri Ramakrishna's nephew Hridayaram Mukherji lived at Shihar, and the Master often went there. In the same village lived the maternal uncles of the Holy Mother. Besides, Shihar had the distinction of possessing a stone temple built after old architectural patterns and dedicated to Siva under the name Shantinatha. The annual celebrations attracted the villagers from far and near who came to hear kirtana music or to witness open-air country theatres called yātrā. During one such kirtana at Hridaya's house a strange thing happened. Sarada Devi, then a mere child, sat in the lap of a woman who asked her in merriment, after the kirtana, 'Whom among the great number of people assembled

here would you like to marry?' Sarada Devi at once lifted her two tiny hands and pointed to Sri Ramakrishna sitting not far away. At that time she had no idea of what matrimony was; but the unseen power that guided those little hands saw to the fulfilment of the wishes of that unerring heart.

The Mother had then completed her fifth year and entered her sixth; and there at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna, then twenty-three years old was caught in the maelstrom of a spiritual fervour. Ignorant people then thought that he had been swept off his moorings and had lost his head. When exaggerated stories of his strange behaviour reached his mother Chandramani Devi at Kamarpukur, the venerable old lady who had hardly got over the shock of losing her eldest son Ramkumar, had Ramakrishna brought home and had 'witch doctors' engaged for curing him of his malady. But although medicines and medicine men failed, Sri Ramakrishna became a little composed owing perhaps to the repeated spiritual visions that were vouchsafed to him at this time. Chandramani Devi was thereby a little reassured; but along with others she diagnosed the cause of the disease to be his apathy to worldly matters. And so with the help of here elder son Rameshwar, she set about searching for a bride for him; but their efforts were of no avail. At last Sri Ramakrishna came to know of this and, strangely enough, said with boyish acquiescence and gaiety, 'Go and find the bride marked out with a straw in Ramchandra Mukherji's house at Jayrambati.' Following this meaningful hint the bride was soon found out, and the wedding day was fixed for a suitable date in early May, 1859. On the appointed day Rameshwar went with his brother to Jayrambati and the marriage was duly celebrated. With regard to her marriage the Holy

Mother said, 'I was married when the dates ripen. When I went to Kamarpukur within ten days, I picked up dates there. Dharmadas Laha (the landlord of the village) came and said, "Is this the newly married girl?" Surya's father (her uncle Iswar Mukherji) carried me to Kamarpukur in his arms.'

On the evening after the day of marriage, the groom's party returned to Kamarpukur with the married couple. When they reached there, Chandramani Devi welcomed them home with due ceremonies. The marriage celebration ended with some observances and feeding of relatives as a matter of form. Hardly were these over when a sad thought began to oppress Chandra Devi. The Chatterjis paid three hundred rupees as bridal money; moreover, decency and honour demanded that the bride should be duly adorned, for which purpose Chandra Devi took on loan some ornaments from the Lahas, the village landlords. These had now to be returned; and yet Chandra Devi could not think of depriving the person of such a lovable and guileless child as Sarada. Sri Ramakrishna understood his mother's difficulty and assured her that during the little wife's sleep, he would imperceptibly remove the ornaments. This he did so deftly that Sarada Devi could not perceive anything. But next morning when she found her body unadorned, she said pointing to her various limbs, 'Where are the ornaments gone that were here and here?' Chandra Devi was moved to tears by these simple words of the child, and placing her on her lap consoled her saying, 'My darling, Gadai (meaning Ramakrishna) will give you better ornaments in future.' Sri Sarada Devi was consoled somewhat by this.

This time Sri Ramakrishna stayed at home for more than two years.

Some two years after his marriage, he once went to his father in law's house. About this visit Sri Sarada Devi said, 'When I was seven years old, the Master came to Jayrambati. He told me then, "If anyone asks you when you were married, say that you were married at the age of five. Don't say even." The Master perhaps warned her thus, lest she should think of this second visit together to Kamarpukur as the marriage itself. Sri Sarada Devi also remembered that the Master's nephew Hridaya, too, came with him and the latter searched out his little aunt and worshipped her feet despite her shyness. Sarada Devi, without being instructed by anybody, washed the Master's feet and fanned him. From Jayrambati the Master went to Kamarpukur with Sarada; and not long after, he returned to Dakshineswar to dive headlong into the sea of austerities for the realisation of God. Sarada, too, came to Jayrambati and resumed her life under the tender care of her mother in the midst of rural beauty and simplicity.

Sri Sarada Devi's third and fourth visits to Kamarpukur were when she was thirteen and fourteen years old. The Master was then at Dakshineswar, where his mother Chandra Devi also lived. At Kamarpukur Sri Sarada Devi found Rameshwar and his wife and other relatives. Some five or six months intervened between these two visits. During the second visit she stayed at Kamarpukur for a month and a half. After that she spent three or four months at Jayrambati till in 1867 news reached there that the Master had come home with Hridaya and Bhairavi Brahmani (the lady who guided him in his Tantrika spiritual practices), so that it became necessary for her to go there. Sri Sarada Devi went and lived there with the Master for seven months.

Conclusion:

Examples from Sri Sarada Devi's Life

Education

Though Sri Sarada Devi did not have the opportunity to learn much, through her self-efforts, she learned to read and write. She read the 'Ramayana' and other books whenever she found time. She educated her brothers' daughters in a general way. Through them she got religious books read out to her and had her letters written. Educated women who wanted to lead an exalted life had her affection and encouragement.

Art and knitting

Sri Sarada Devi encouraged art and knitting work. She herself would do all her sewing. If anybody presented her or brought to show her knitting materials or carpets or images of Gods and Goddesses, she would be delighted to see them, would appreciate and show them to others. Prafulla Mukhi Basu prepared a shrine out of wool and kept seven photographs of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda inside it. Holding them in her hands, Mother would say, 'The ladies of East Bengal are talented and devoted. What excellent things they make.'

Mother never liked to keep or use too much clothing. She would distribute to sadhus, devotees and her relatives, practically all the cloth, which the devotees brought. She never used blouse, shirt, petticoat or gown. Once, during winter, with great difficulty she was forced to use a gown to protect herself from the cold weather. Ganendra Nath bought one silk banian for ten rupees for the Mother. After using it for three days she told him, 'Baba, I have used it for three days; if women use banians, what will people say? It is not necessary for me to use it here; I shall wear it at Jayrambati.'

Music

Mother loved music. She had a good voice and sometimes sang in a low voice when the men folk were absent. At Dakshineswar, noticing her singing with Lakshmi Devi, Sri Ramakrishna would encourage her. At Jayrambati, Girish Babu sang two songs that he composed at the request of the Mother. Hearing them once only, Mother learned to sing those songs and at the repeated request of the devotees, she even sang a portion of the song. At Belur Math, on the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna, she would attentively hear Kali kirtana, seated in the room or the veranda on the second floor. If she liked any song sung by the devotees, she would have it written down and preserved.

Personification of purity

Despite being the personification of purity, in front of male members, Sri Sarada Devi kept her veil throughout her life. While prostrating, men folk could see only her two feet. Holy Mother would not appear without the veil even before the sannyasins and householder devotees who visited during the time of Sri Ramakrishna. She maintained this attitude even in later days. Only on occasions when she was in a divine mood there was an exception to this. But in later days, to those who came to her looking upon her as Mother, particularly those who had taken diksha from her, she never used a veil. One day Mother was conversing with Suren Babu and his wife at Calcutta. At that time one young man came to prostrate before the Mother. Seeing him, Mother immediately pulled on her veil and when she found out that the boy was delaying, she became impatient and told him, 'You can finish and go now-don't you see that the young lady is waiting here?'

Pitamber Nath was an oil painter. He entertained in his mind a desire to paint a portrait of Mother to sell. Mother told him, 'I hear you are able to paint pictures. My dear, would you like to paint my picture? You can do that, but do not paint the picture of your Mother to sell in the bazaar. You should not entertain even the desire to do this.'

Work

Mother cautioned everybody, particularly women not to remain without work even for a moment. 'If you are always engaged in some work, you can maintain a balanced mind and thus through work the binding nature of the work is removed.'

Source:

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, pp. 1-24.

The Compassionate Mother Sri Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Tanmayananda, Sri Sarada Sanga Malaysia, 2002, pp. 309-315.

Swami Turiyananda Letters

Varanasi 8 December 1919

Dear X,

I received your letter yesterday. I am sorry to learn that you are not feeling well.

Why do you unnecessarily make your mind restless? It is not good to be worried; it does not help, rather, it hampers the work. When a person exerts himself to the utmost capacity with self-confidence and then surrenders to God -- that is true resignation. Otherwise, he who without making any effort verbally surrenders himself to God, is harbouring nothing but laziness. Those who are enthusiastic and active, only they get help from God and not lazy people.

Kankhal 19 July 1912

Dear Sridhar [Swami Nirupamananda],

I just received your letter....

If you think a little, you will see that nobody can function for a moment without talking. If one does not converse with others, one surely talks with one's mind. Thinking is nothing but talking to oneself. There is no escape from talking. Since this is the case, is it not better to chant the name of God than to talk about rubbish? When you are engaged in conversation with someone, you will have to talk on various topics, but when you are alone, why

should you waste your thoughts on useless matters? It is better to think of the Lord. In order to be established in the recollectedness of God, one needs to practise japam.

Japam means the repetition of the Lord's name. Meditation is higher than japam. The Master used to say, "Japam is better than ritual; meditation is higher than japam; and the person who is perfect in meditation reaches the state of liberation." While practising japam one should think of God, considering the name and the person as identical. When one utters the name of a person, the form of that person manifests. The eternal One is within the heart, so one experiences bliss in meditation. Gradually when that feeling deepens, you will have realization. It comes slowly. Don't expect it in a day. It is no small thing to get joy in meditation.

If the desire for money arises in your mind, then discriminate in this way: What can money give me? Many have wealth, but are they happy? The Master used to say: "From matter comes material things. Matter cannot give you Satchidananda [Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute]. One can buy food, clothing, and other things with money, but not God." This is all for today.

With love and best wishes,

Turiyananda

Source:

Spiritual Treasures: Letters of Swami Turiyananda
-translated and edited by Swami Chetanananda

Swami Vivekananda

Continued from the previous issue

The Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893

Vivekananda left Bombay on the 31st of May 1893 and reached Chicago on the 30th of July via Colombo, Penang, Hong Kong, Canton, Nagasaki, Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo, Yokohama, Vancouver, and Winnipeg. Soon after his arrival in Chicago, he went to the information bureau of the Exposition and heard some heartrending news: The forthcoming Parliament of Religions would not open before the second week of September, no one without credentials from a bona fide organisation would be accepted as a delegate; and the date to be registered as a delegate had passed. Moreover, he knew no one in Chicago and did not have sufficient money to pay the exorbitant hotel charges.

He managed to stay in Chicago for nearly two weeks and observed the World's Fair, which had been arranged in connection with the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America. Marie Louise Burke states, 'The primary purpose of the World's Columbia Exposition of 1893 was to bring together the fruits of man's material progress. Everything imaginable was on exhibit-not only the achievements of Western civilization, but the better to show these off, life size models of the more backward cultures of the world.'

Someone suggested that Vivekananda go to Boston, where living expenses would be much lower. Earlier, on the train from Vancouver to Chicago, he had met Katherine Sanborn of Boston. She had invited him to be her guest, so he now left for Boston to stay with her. She introduced the swami to John Wright, a professor of Greek at Harvard University. He wrote some introductory letters for Vivekananda to some of his friends who were connected with the Parliament: 'Here is a man more learned than all our learned professors put together.' In addition, Professor Wright bought the swami's railroad ticket back to Chicago.

Swamiji arrives in Chicago

It was late evening when Vivekananda arrived in Chicago. Unfortunately, he had lost the address of the committee in charge of Parliament delegates. He did not know where to turn for help, and no one came forward to assist this strange-looking foreigner. Swamiji spent his first night without food, in an empty wagon that he found in the railroad station. The next morning, by divine providence, he met Mrs George W. Hale. She took him into her home and later introduced him to her personal friend, Dr J.H Barrows, the president of the Parliament. Through him, the swami was accepted as a representative of Hinduism

and was lodged with the other delegates.

The World's Parliament of Religions was one of the most significant events in the history of the world, because this was the first time all great religions of the world assembled on the same platform. On the 11th of September 1893, in the opening session of the parliament, Vivekananda reiterated the eternal message of Vedanta: "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies, various though they may appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee." Mrs S.K.

Blodgett, an American lady who first saw Vivekananda at the Parliament, said later: "I was at the Parliament of religions in 1893, and when that young man [Vivekananda] got up and said, 'Sisters and Brothers of America', seven thousand people rose to their feet as a tribute to something, they knew not what. When it was over, I saw scores of women walking over the benches to get near him, and I said to myself, 'Well, my lad, if you can resist that onslaught, you are indeed a god.'

On the 27th of September 1893, in the final session of the parliament, Vivekananda concluded his speech: "If the parliament of religions has shown anything to the

world, it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance, 'Help and not fight', 'Assimilation and not Destruction', 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension' "



Swami Vivekananda

"I have a message for the West"

The American news media gave Vivekananda a great deal of publicity, and he became widely known. The homes of some of the wealthiest people of American society were opened to him, and he was received as an honoured guest. But Swamiji never swayed from his monastic ideals or from the service he had set out to perform. He began lecturing all over the Midwest as well as on the

to make room for the harmony of all religions. It was an overwhelming message of goodwill and brotherly love. He sounded the trumpet call of glad tidings, of hope, of cheer, of salvation for all. And a new thought wave swept over America. The swami brought the gospel of the divinity of human beings. Vivekananda redefined religion for his Western audience, saying, 'You must bear in mind that religion does not consist in talk,

ifest the divinity that is within all beings. How is this done? Vivekananda described the methods in detail in his talks on the four yogas: karma yoga as the path of unselfish action; bhakti yoga, the path of devotion; jnana yoga, the path of knowledge; and raja yoga, the path of meditation. These yogas, or spiritual paths, help people to unite themselves with God, or Brahman, so they can overcome all the weaknesses and problems in their lives and attain supreme bliss and freedom.

Truth is always simple, as the teachings of all great teachers of the world demonstrate. Since Vivekananda had himself experienced the Ultimate Reality, he could make the truths of Vedanta understandable to all. He wrote to one of his disciples: 'To put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer, startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds-is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The dry, abstract Advaita must become living poetry

"I have a message for the West, as Buddha had a message to the East"

East Coast and in some southern states of the U.S.A. Vivekananda founded the Vedanta Society of New York in November 1894. On the 30th of December 1894, at the Brooklyn Ethical Society, Swamiji declared, 'I have a message to the West, as Buddha had a message to the East.'

Vivekananda taught Vedanta to the West, the universal philosophy and religion of the Upanishads, which originated thousands of years ago in India. Western audiences heard something new in his powerful words: Sectarianism, bigotry, superstition, intolerance were swept aside

or doctrines, or books, but in realisation. It is not learning but being.' Swamiji stated further, 'The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is an atheist who does not believe in himself.' He continued, 'Religion is the idea which is raising the brute unto man, and man unto god...Take religion from human society and what will remain? Nothing but a forest of brutes. Sense-happiness is not the goal of humanity. Wisdom is the goal of all life.'

The supreme goal of human life, according to Vivekananda, is to man-

in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology-and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work.'

Establishing the Vedanta Movement in the West

During his lecture tour, Vivekananda came in contact with many well-known Western personalities. Robert Ingersoll, the famous orator and agnostic, cautioned Swamiji not to be too bold because people were

intolerant of alien religious ideas. The great electrical inventor Nikola Tesla was impressed hearing Swamiji talk about the Vedantic prana (energy), akasha (space), and the modern kalpas (cycles) – which according to Tesla were the only theories modern science could entertain. Vivekananda also met John D. Rockefeller; and the swami tried to help him understand that God had given him wealth so that he might have an opportunity to do good to others. Rockefeller was annoyed that anyone would dare talk to him that way; he left the room without even saying goodbye. A week later he visited Swamiji and brought a paper that set forth his plans to donate an enormous sum of money to a public institution. ‘Well, there you are’, he said. ‘You must be satisfied now, and you can thank me for it.’ Swamiji quietly read it and said, ‘It is for you to thank me.’

Harriet Monroe and Ella Wheeler Wilcox, two famous American poets, heard Vivekananda’s lectures and became his great admirers. Swamiji also left a lasting impression on professor William James of Harvard University; Mrs Sara C. Bull, the wife of Ole Bull, the celebrated Norwegian violinist. Madame Emma Calvé wrote in her autobiography, ‘It has been my good fortune and my joy to know a man who truly “walked with God”, a noble being, a saint, a philosopher, and a true friend. His influence upon my spiritual life was profound...’

After lecturing extensively, Swamiji realised that mere talk was not enough; he needed to train some sincere souls who would continue spreading the message of Vedanta in his absence. In the summer of 1894 Swamiji was invited to speak at a “Human Conference” held at Green Acre, Maine. Christians Scientists, spiritualists, faith healers, and groups representing similar views

Swami Vivekananda composed the following poem as a memorial to J.J Goodwin, August, 1898 entitled ‘Requiescat In Pace’:

Requiescat In Pace

Speed forth, O Sou! Upon thy star-strewn path;
Speed, blissful one! Where thought is ever free,
Where time and space no longer mist the view,
Eternal peace and blessings be with thee!

Thy service true, complete thy sacrifice,
Thy home the heart of love transcendent find;
Remembrance sweet, that kills all space and time,
Like altar roses fill thy place behind!

Thy bonds are broke, thy quest in bliss is found,
And one with That which comes as Death and Life;
Thou helpful one! Unselfish e'er on earth,
Ahead! Still help with love this world of strife.

participated in the conference. On the 31st of July 1894 Vivekananda wrote to his devotees, the Hale sisters, who lived in Chicago:

The other night the camp people all went to sleep under a pine tree under which is it every morning À La India and talk to them. Of course I went with them and we had a nice night under the stars, sleeping on the lap of Mother Earth, and I enjoyed every bit of it. I cannot describe to you that night’s glories-after the year of brutal life that I have led, to sleep on the ground, to meditate under the tree in the forest! The inn people are more or less well to do, and the camp people are healthy, young, sincere, and holy men and women. I teach them all Shivoham Shivoham – ‘I am Shiva, I am Shiva’- and they all repeat it, innocent and pure as they are, and brave beyond all bounds, and I am so happy and glorified.

In the same letter, Swamiji inspired his American sisters, who sincerely helped his Western work: ‘Wealth goes, beauty vanishes, life flies, powers fly – but the Lord

abideth forever, love abideth forever...Stick to God. Who cares what comes, in the body of anywhere? Through the terrors of evil say, “My God, my Love!” Through the pangs of death say, “My God, My Love!”... Do not go for glass bead, leaving the mine of diamonds. This life is a great chance. What! Seekest thou the pleasures of this world? He is the fountain of all bliss. Seek the highest, aim for the highest, and you shall reach the highest.’

While in New York in the early part of 1895, Swamiji met Miss Josephine MacLeod and her sister Betty (who later married Francis Leggett). They not only worked for Vedanta, but also took care of Swamiji’s personal needs. In the middle of 1895, when Swamiji was exhausted from lecturing in New York, Mr Leggett invited him to his retreat cottage at camp Percy, New Hampshire. On the 7th of June 1895, Vivekananda wrote to a friend about his visit to the camp, ‘It gives me a new lease on life to be here. I go into the forest alone and read my Gita and am quite happy.’

After a short visit to camp Percy, Swamiji went to Thousand Island Park on the Saint Lawrence River in New York State. Miss Elizabeth Dutcher, a Vedanta student, gave her cottage to Swamiji so that he could rest there as well as give classes for sincere students. Swamiji stayed there nearly seven weeks and taught his American students the uplifting philosophy of Vedanta along with the lives and teachings of other great teachers of the world; these teachings were later published as *Inspired Talks*. In Thousand Island Park Swamiji initiated some of his male and female students into sannyasa and brahmacharaya, reminding them again and again, 'Find God. Nothing else matters.' He emphasised morality as the basis of spiritual life. Without truth, nonviolence, continence, noncovetousness, cleanliness, and austerity, he repeated, there could be no spirituality.

On the morning of the 7th of August 1895, Swamiji went for a walk with Sister Christine and Mrs Mary Funke. They strolled about half a mile up a hill covered with trees, and sat under a low-branched tree. Vivekananda suddenly said to them, 'Now we will meditate. We shall be like Buddha under the Bo-tree.' Vivekananda became so still that he seemed to turn to bronze. Then a thunderstorm came, and it poured rain. The swami was absorbed in meditation, oblivious to everything around him. Mrs Funke raised her umbrella and protected him as much as possible. After a while, Vivekananda regained his outer consciousness, and looking around, said, 'Once more am I in Calcutta in the rains.' That evening he left for New York.

In mid-August, Swamiji left for Paris, where Mr Francis Leggett had invited him to be his guest. Before he left, however, both Miss Henrietta Muller and E.T Sturdy invited him to London to teach Vedanta. Swamiji was also eager to do some construc-

Swami Vivekananda composed the following poem for the H.H The Maharaja of Khetri, Rajputana entitled 'Hold on yet a while, brave heart':

Hold on yet a while, brave heart

If the sun by the cloud is hidden a bit,
If the welkin shows but gloom,
Still hold on yet a while, brave heart,
The victory is sure to come.

No winter was but summer came behind,
Each hollow crests the wave,
They push each other in light and shade;
Be steady then and brave.

The duties of life are sore indeed,
And its pleasures fleeting, vain,
The goal so shadowy seems and dim,
Yet plod on through the dark, brave heart,
With all thy might and main.

Not a work will be lost, no struggle vain,
Though hopes be blighted, powers gone;
Of thy loins shall come the heirs to all,
Then hold on yet a while, brave soul,
No good is e'er undone.

Though the good and the wise in life are few,
Yet theirs are the reins to lead,
The masses know but late the worth;
Heed none and gently guide.

With thee are those who see afar,
With thee is the lord of might,
All blessings pour on thee, great soul,
To thee may all come right.

tive Vedanta work in England, and decided to establish a society there. For that purpose, he brought from India Swami Saradananda, and later Swami Abhedananda. During his first visit to the West, Vivekananda travelled to England three times: from September to November 1895, from April to July 1896, and from October to December 1896. Miss Margaret Noble (later, Sister

Nivedita) wrote in her book *The Master as I saw Him*:

It is strange to remember, and yet it was surely my good fortune, that though I heard the teachings of my master, the Swami Vivekananda, on both the occasions of his visits to England in 1895 and 1896, I yet knew little or nothing of him in private life, until I came to In-

dia in the early days of 1898.

“What the world wants today, is twenty men and women who can dare to stand in the street yonder and say that they possess nothing but God. Who will go? He [Swami Vivekananda] had risen to his feet by this time, and stood looking around his audience as if begging some of them to join him. ‘Why should one fear?’ And then, in tone of which, even now, I can hear again the thunderous conviction, ‘If this is true, what else could matter? *If it is not true, what do our lives matter?*’”

During his second visit, the swami electrified English audiences with his Jnana Yoga lectures. In addition, he gave series of lectures at the Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours in Piccadilly, in clubs, educational societies, and in private circles. The British press expressed great admiration for him. Vivekananda wrote to a disciple in Madras, ‘In England my work is really splendid.’ Vivekanan-

da attracted some sincere British followers who dedicated their lives for his mission. Two of them were J.J Goodwin, who became his stenographer and recorded many of his lectures, and Margaret Noble, who later went to India and established a school for women.

Professor Max Muller, the well-known orientalist, wrote an article entitled, ‘A Real Mahatman,’ about Sri Ramakrishna (*Nineteenth Century, August 1896*). He invited Vivekananda to his Oxford residence, and they became close friends. Later, in Germany, the Swami met professor Paul Deussen, another famous Indologist, who believed the system of Vedanta to be one of the “most majestic structures and valuable products of the genius of man in his search for truth.”

Vivekananda left England on the 16th of December 1896 and travelled overland to Naples, the port of departure to India. Mr and Mrs Sevier, who later helped to establish the

Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati, accompanied him. On their way to India, the group visited Milan, Florence, and finally Rome, where they spent Christmas week. Swamiji was impressed with the magnificent art collection of Italy, as well as the grandeur of the cathedrals. At Naples, Goodwin joined the party and they left for India on the 30th of December 1896.

[*The subsequent edition of Reach will give attention to Swamiji's return to India*].

Source

God Lived With Them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Chetanananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, pp. 37-43.

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda God Lived With Them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Chetanananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, pp. 37-43.

What We Believe In

(Written to "Kidi" on March 3, 1894, from Chicago.)

I agree with you so far that faith is a wonderful insight and that it alone can save; but there is the danger in it of breeding fanaticism and barring further progress.

Jnâna is all right; but there is the danger of its becoming dry intellectualism. Love is great and noble; but it may die away in meaningless sentimentalism.

A harmony of all these is the thing required. Ramakrishna was such a harmony. Such beings are few and far between; but keeping him and his teachings as the ideal, we can move on. And if amongst us, each one may not individually attain to that perfection, still we may get it collectively by counteracting, equipoising, adjusting, and fulfilling one another. This would be harmony by a number of persons and a decided advance on all other forms and creeds.

For a religion to be effective, enthusiasm is necessary. At the same time we must try to avoid the danger of multiplying creeds. We avoid that by being a nonsectarian sect, having all the advantages of a sect and the broadness of a universal religion.

God, though everywhere, can be known to us in and

through human character. No character was ever so perfect as Ramakrishna's, and that should be the centre round which we ought to rally, at the same time allowing everybody to regard him in his own light, either as God, saviour, teacher, model, or great man, just as he pleases. We preach neither social equality nor inequality, but that every being has the same rights, and insist upon freedom of thought and action in every way.

We reject none, neither theist, nor pantheist, monist, polytheist, agnostic, nor atheist; the only condition of being a disciple is modelling a character at once the broadest and the most intense. Nor do we insist upon particular codes of morality as to conduct, or character, or eating and drinking, except so far as it injures others. Whatever retards the onward progress or helps the downward fall is vice; whatever helps in coming up and becoming harmonised is virtue.

We leave everybody free to know, select, and follow whatever suits and helps him. Thus, for example, eating meat may help one, eating fruit another. Each is welcome to his own peculiarity, but he has no right to criticise the conduct of others, because that would, if fol-

lowed by him, injure him, much less to insist that others should follow his way. A wife may help some people in this progress, to others she may be a positive injury. But the unmarried man has no right to say that the married disciple is wrong, much less to force his own ideal of morality upon his brother.

We believe that every being is divine, is God. Every soul is a sun covered over with clouds of ignorance, the difference between soul and soul is owing to the difference in density of these layers of clouds. We believe that this is the conscious or unconscious basis of all religions, and that this is the explanation of the whole history of human progress either in the material, intellectual, or spiritual plane — the same Spirit is manifesting through different planes.

We believe that this is the very essence of the Vedas.

We believe that it is the duty of every soul to treat, think of, and behave to other souls as such, i.e. as Gods, and not hate or despise, or vilify, or try to injure them by any manner or means. This is the duty not only of the Sannyasin, but of all men and women.

The soul has neither sex, nor caste, nor imperfection

We believe that nowhere throughout the Vedas, Darshanas, or Purânas, or Tantras, is it ever said that the soul has any sex, creed, or caste. Therefore we agree with those who say, "What has religion to do with social reforms?" But they must also agree with us when we tell them that religion has no business to formulate social laws and insist on the difference between beings, because its aim and end is to obliterate all such fictions and monstrosities.

If it be pleaded that through this difference we would reach the final equality and unity, we answer that the same religion has said over and over again that mud cannot be washed with mud. As if a man can be moral by being immoral!

Social laws were created by economic conditions under the sanction of religion. The terrible mistake of religion was to interfere in social matters. But how hypocritical-ly it says and thereby contradicts itself, "Social reform is not the business of religion"! True, what we want is that religion should not be a social reformer, but we insist at the same time that society has no right to become a religious law-giver. Hands off! Keep yourself to your own bounds and everything would come right.

Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.

Therefore the only duty of the teacher in both cases is to remove all obstructions from the way. Hands off! as I always say, and everything will be right. That is, our duty is to clear the way. The Lord does the rest.

Especially, therefore, you must bear in mind that religion has to do only with the soul and has no business to interfere in social matters; you must also bear in mind

that this applies completely to the mischief which has already been done. It is as if a man after forcibly taking possession of another's property cries through the nose when that man tries to regain it — and preaches the doctrine of the sanctity of human right!

What business had the priests to interfere (to the misery of millions of human beings) in every social matter?

You speak of the meat-eating Kshatriya. Meat or no meat, it is they who are the fathers of all that is noble and beautiful in Hinduism. Who wrote the Upanishads? Who was Râma? Who was Krishna? Who was Buddha? Who were the Tirthankaras of the Jains? Whenever the Kshatriyas have preached religion, they have given it to everybody; and whenever the Brahmins wrote anything, they would deny all right to others. Read the Gîtâ and the Sutras of Vyâsa, or get someone to read them to you. In the Gita the way is laid open to all men and women, to all caste and colour, but Vyasa tries to put meanings upon the Vedas to cheat the poor Shudras. Is God a nervous fool like you that the flow of His river of mercy would be dammed up by a piece of meat? If such be He, His value is not a pie!

Hope nothing from me, but I am convinced as I have written to you, and spoken to you, that India is to be saved by the Indians themselves. So you, young men of the motherland, can dozens of you become almost fanatics over this new ideal? Take thought, collect materials, write a sketch of the life of Ramakrishna, studiously avoiding all miracles. The life should be written as an illustration of the doctrines he preached. Only his — do not bring me or any living persons into that. The main aim should be to give to the world what he taught, and the life as illustrating that. I, unworthy though I am, had one commission — to bring out the casket of jewels that was placed in my charge and make it over to you. Why to you? Because the hypocrites, the jealous, the slavish, and the cowardly, those who believe in matter only, can never do anything. Jealousy is the bane of our national character, natural to slaves. Even the Lord with all His power could do nothing on account of this jealousy. Think of me as one who has done all his duty and is now dead and gone. Think that the whole work is upon your shoulders. Think that you, young men of our motherland, are destined to do this. Put yourselves to the task. Lord bless you. Leave me, throw me quite out of sight. Preach the new ideal, the new doctrine, the new life. Preach against nobody, against no custom. Preach neither for nor against caste or any other social evil. Preach to let "hands off", and everything will come right.

My blessings on you all, my brave, steadfast, and loving souls.

-Swami Vivekananda

Released by :

Vedanta Centre of Sydney

vedasydney@gmail.com

www.vedantaaustralia.org