



REACH

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

Motto:

*Atmano mokshartham
jagad hitaya cha,*

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

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Sayings and Teachings

Nurturing the love for God

The young bamboo can be easily bent, but the full grown bamboo breaks when it is bent with force. It is easy to bend the young heart towards God, but the untrained heart of the old escapes the hold whenever it is so drawn.

- - - Sri Ramakrishna

Source: Great sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, page 13.

Repeating the name of God

Repeat the Name of God in the innermost core of your heart, and in all sincerity take refuge in the Master. Do not bother to know how your mind is reacting to things around. And do not waste time in calculating and worrying whether or not you are progressing in the path of spirituality. It is Ahankara to judge progress for oneself. Have faith in the grace of your Guru and Isthā.

- - - Sri Sarada Devi

Source: Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai, page 68.

True love for God

We accept God not because we really want Him, but because we have need of him for selfish purposes. Love is something absolutely unselfish, and which has no thought beyond the glorification and adoration of the object upon which our affection are bestowed. It is a quality, which bows down and worships and asks nothing in return. Merely to love is the sole request that true love has to ask.

- - - Swami Vivekananda

Source: Teachings of Swami Vivekananda by Swami Mumukshananda, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas, page 17.



View from Vedanta Centre of Sydney—Melbourne Chapter, 5-7 Angus Avenue, Ringwood East, Vic. 3135. (Inset Melbourne Centre)

FORTHCOMING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Function	Centre	Date
Guru Purnima	Brisbane	Saturday, 12 July 2014
	Melbourne	Saturday, 12 July 2014
	Sydney	Saturday, 12 July 2014
	Auckland	Saturday, 12 July 2014
Sri Krishna Janmashtami	Brisbane	Sunday, 17 August 2014
	Melbourne	Sunday, 17 August 2014
	Sydney	Sunday, 17 August 2014
	Auckland	Sunday, 17 August 2014
Durga Puja	Brisbane	Saturday, 4 October 2014
	Melbourne	Saturday, 4 October 2014
	Sydney	Thursday, 2 October 2014
	Auckland	Saturday, 4 October 2014

Welcome

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

News from and activities of the Vedanta Centres of Australia and New Zealand for the period from January to April 2014.



Adelaide Centre— on annual Day



ADELAIDE CENTRE

Monthly activities:

- a) Swami Sridharananda continued his three-days-a-month visit to Adelaide and delivered discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* at the Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich SA 5065. A dedicated group of devotees attends his talks. These talks have also been recorded. For details of the programmes organized by the Adelaide Chapter please contact Mrs. Pathma Iswaran on 08-8379 5336 or Dr. Raman Sharma on 08 - 8431 9775 or e-mail: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com.
- b) Every month on a prescheduled Sunday the reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* including discussion on relevant points were conducted at devotees' homes.

Celebration:

- a) The **Annual Celebration** of the Adelaide Chapter was held on Saturday March 8 at the Dulwich Community Centre from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. A group of devotees sang *bhajans* while Swami Sunishthananda performed the traditional worship. Swami Sridharananda spoke on the topic titled "What is the unique character of the spiritual personality Sri Ramakrishna". Many devotees participated in the function and later partook of the *prasāda*.

BRISBANE CENTRE

Daily activities:

Worship was conducted daily in the morning. In the evening *ārati*, including *bhajans*, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was conducted at the Centre at **181 Burbong Street, Chapel Hill, QLD 4069**. **Contact person:** Swami Atmeshananda 0421 765 416, 07-3720 0228, e-mail: vedantabrisbane@gmail.com

Monthly Activities:

Swami Atmeshananda conducted the following programmes in Brisbane;

- a) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* classes at the Centre on alternate Sundays.
- b) Religious Instruction classes at two schools in Brisbane, on Mondays and Wednesdays.
- c) **Discussion** groups on the first Monday of every month in Sunnybank Hills, QLD.
- d) A class on *Ashtavakra Samhita* on alternate Wednesdays at Springfield, QLD.
- e) A class on Meditation and Spiritual Life on alternate Fridays.
- f) Prayer meetings on the First Saturday of every month.
- g) A class on *Viveka Chudamani* at Toowoomba on alternate months.
- h) A class on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* at Bridgeman Downs on a Friday every alternate month.
- i) *Satsang* at Deception Bay on a prescheduled Friday every alternate month.
- j) *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was sung every fortnight on Ekadashi days.
- k) Sanskrit class for beginners was held every week at the Centre.

Other activities:

- a) On the occasion of UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, Swami



Brisbane Centre— on the Kalpataru Day celebration.

Atmeshananda attended a Multifaith meeting at the Griffith University on the 6th of February 2014.

b) A public lecture was organised on the 11th of April at the Sunnybank Hills Shopping-town Library on the subject 'Harmony within'. There were various speakers who provided their perspectives based on the theme of 'Body, Mind and Spirit'.

Celebrations:

- a) **Kalpataru Day** and the birth anniversary of the Holy Mother Sri Saradadevi were celebrated on the 1st of January 2014 at the Indooroopilly Senior Citizens' club.
- b) The birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated on the 25th of February at the Indooroopilly Senior Citizens' Club.
- c) Worship on the occasion of Sri Maha Shivaratri was performed at the Centre on the 27th of February 2014.
- d) The birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated on 2nd of March 2014 at the Indooroopilly Senior Citizens' Club.

CANBERRA CENTRE

Swami Sridharananda conducted monthly classes on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gītā* at the Belconnen Community Centre, 2 Chandler Street in Canberra. **Contact person:** Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary on 02-6258 7612, e-mail: jaishankar_venkataraman@hotmail.com.

MELBOURNE CENTRE

Daily Activities:

Worship in the morning at 7:30 a.m. and Vesper service from 7 to 8 p.m. were held daily in the Centre at **5-7 Angus Avenue, Ringwood, Vic 3135**. It included regular hymns, devotional singing, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and

meditation. **Contact persons:** Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary - 0413 040 599, e-mail: vedanta.melb@gmail.com, Swami Chandrashekharananda 0422 904 824.

The **bookstall** keeps literature on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta philosophy, and other spiritual topics in print, audio, and visual media.

Weekly/Monthly Activities:

a) 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 10 to 11 a.m. The recordings of these discourses are available in audio, video and MP3 formats.

b) **Group study** through the viewing of the *Bhagavad-Gita* lecture series on video were held on Sundays from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m.

c) Swami Chandrashekharananda conducted the following programmes in Melbourne;

i) **Classes** on the *Kathopanishad* on Sundays from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. at the Centre.

ii) **Classes** on the *Bhagavad-Gitā* twice a month from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. at Clayton.

iii) **Meditation** sessions held at the Centre on Sundays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

iv) A talk on “Practical Vedanta as taught by Swami Vivekananda” on 1st of February from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. at 69 Innisfail Drive, Point Cook., Vic.

v) Addressed a group of about 200 students on Friday, the 4th of April at Aquinas College, Great Ryrie Street, Ringwood, Vic. from 9:30 a.m. to 10:15 a.m.

Other Activities:

Swami Chandrashekharananda attended the following programmes -

i) The World Interfaith Harmony Luncheon on Wednesday the 12th February, 2014 in Queen's Hall, Parliament House, Vic.

ii) Interfaith Service at the Shrine of Remembrance on Sunday, the 16th of February conducted by the Order of Australia Association.

iii) The Maroondah Interfaith Network's monthly meetings as a member of the Steering Committee.

iv) The National Neighbour Day at the Centre on 30th of March 2014.

Celebrations:

a) **Kalpataru Day** was observed on the 1st of January 2014. The programme started at 6 p.m. and included singing of bhajans, reading. It concluded with evening Arati.

b) A special talk was delivered on “The Life and Teachings of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Sridharananda on 18th January 2014.

c) The birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated on 25th of January 2014 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and concluded with the distribution of *prasād*. A special worship was offered by Swami Chandrashekharananda on the occasion amidst the singing of *bhajans*. He also gave a short talk on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda. Devotional and instrumental music were presented by budding artists in the evening after *ārati*.

d) The Maha Shivaratri worship was conducted with the Vedic chanting of Rudram, Chamakam etc. on Sunday, the 27th of February 2014 from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

e) The birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated on 15th of March 2014. A special worship was offered on the occasion amidst the singing of *bhajans*. Swami Sridharananda gave a talk on “Sri Ramakrishna's Divine Play”. Swami Chandrashekharananda offered the worship. The function concluded at 1 p.m. with *prasād* distribution. Devotional folk music by various groups was presented in the evening after *ārati*.

PERTH CENTRE

Daily Activities:

The Centre, located at **51 Golf View Street, Yokine W.A. 6060**, held vesper service daily at 7 p.m. with *ārati*, readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation. The Centre maintains a small bookstall and a library. **Contact persons:** Mr. Hiren Mukhopadhyay, Secretary - 0411 478 244 and Mr. Parthiv Parekh, Asstt. Secretary - 0430 511 699, e-mail: vedantaperth@gmail.com.

Monthly Activities:

The following monthly activities were held:

a) Swami Sridharananda visited the Centre from the Wednesday to the Saturday of a prescheduled week every month and conducted **discourses** on *Bhagavad-Gitā*.

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

c) **Revision** sessions based on playing the audio recordings of talks on *Bhagavad-Gitā* delivered in the previous month, were conducted on prescheduled Sundays.



Melbourne Centre— on the birth anniversaries of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna.

Celebrations:

a) The **birth anniversary** of Swami Vivekananda was observed on Sunday, the 26th of January 2014 from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. The formal worship was performed by Swami Sunishthananda who also delivered a talk on *Katha Upanishad*. Prasad was distributed after flower offerings.

b) The **birth anniversary** of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated on Sunday, the 29th of March 2014 from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Devotees offered bhajans during the formal worship and homa by Swami Sunishthananda. Swami Sridharananda delivered a talk on "The life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna". The function concluded with *Arati* offering and *prasad* distribution.

SYDNEY CENTRE

Daily Activities:

Daily worship and meditation was held every morning from 6:45 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. at 2 Stewart Street, Ermington. The vesper service was conducted in the evening from 7 p.m. and this included devotional singing, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation.

Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees were also conducted on a daily basis. The library was available to devotees for reference and research. The Centre maintained a **bookstall** which has a range of books on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, Yoga, and other spiritual literature. Devotional songs, discourses on the *Bhagavad Gitā*, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanisad*, and other topics are also available in various media.

Weekly/ Monthly Activities:

The Centre conducted the following activities in Sydney:

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

Sunday morning from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Centre.

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

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

d) **Meditation** sessions were held at the Centre on Sundays from 5 p.m. to 6 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. at the Centre during the academic term.

f) The Centre provided **English Language tutoring** on Tuesdays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. during

the school term.

g) **Rāmanām Sankirtana** was sung on *Ekadashi* days after the vesper service.

h) A **class** on *Katha Upanishad* for ladies was held every Monday from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. by Swami Sunishthananda.

i) The meetings of the **Viveka Youth Group** were held on Sundays from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. The Karma Yoga of Swami Vivekananda was read and discussed. For details please visit the Facebook page : <https://www.facebook.com/VYGSydney>.

j) Every Wednesday after evening *Arati*, classes on *Isha Upanisad* were conducted by Swami Sunishthananda.

k) A session on **Yoga Exercise** continued to be held on Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Other activities:

a) A **Youth Convention** was organised at the Centre on 12th of



Speakers at the Youth Convention



Youth Convention at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 12th of January 2014.

January 2014 from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The participants registered themselves in the morning and after Inaugural session participated in various programmes such as Elocution competition, Quiz Competition, Open house Discussion, Skit Show on the life of Swami Vivekananda, Question and Answer etc. The programme ended with prize distribution in the closing Session. Prior to this date an Essay Competition was held on; ‘**Swami Vivekananda Inspires Us to Build Our Character**’. The subject of the Elocution Competition was ‘**The ideals advocated by Swami Vivekananda.**’ Certificates and prizes were given to all the participants including the winners of competitions. About 150 people participated in the function and were provided with lunch *prasada* and tea.

In the evening, Sri Ananda Dixit presented some devotional songs on Bhagavan Sri Krishna composed by Saint Sri Annamacharya, a bhajan on Panduranga Vitthala and other classical-based songs. He was accompanied by Sri Sivakumar Sethupati on *mridangam*.

Celebrations:

a) The **birth anniversary** of Swami Vivekananda was observed on Thursday, the 23rd of January 2014. A special worship was offered to the Holy Trinity amidst the chanting of mantras and *bhajans*. Swami Sridharananda gave a talk on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda after evening *ārati*.

b) The **Maha Shivaratri** worship was conducted on Sunday, the 27th of February 2014 from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.. A large number of devotees assembled to worship Lord Shiva. Devotional songs were sung by the devotees during and after the worship.

c) The **birth anniversary** of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated on Wednesday, the 3rd of March 2014.

In the morning, elaborate worship, havan, chanting of hymns from various scriptures, devotional songs, and aratrikam were conducted. In the evening, Swami Sridharananda gave a talk on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Devotees partook of *prasadam* both after the morning worship and in the evening.

d) **Ramanavami** was celebrated on the 8th of April 2014 with the singing of *Rāmanām* and other *bhajans*.

Overseas Visit:

Swami Sridharananda visited **New Zealand** from the 29th of January to the 2nd of February 2014.

Visiting monastics:

Br. Nirvanachaitanya of Hollywood arrived at the Centre on the 13th of April and is scheduled to return on 24th of May 2014.

AUCKLAND CENTRE

Daily activities:

A vesper service was held daily from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Centre at **27 Arawa Street, New Lynn, Auckland**. It included the singing of hymns and readings from the *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, followed by meditation. **Contact Person:** M. Kumar, Secretary e-mail: monnay@ihug.co.nz

Monthly activities:

a) The first bi-monthly *Satsang* was conducted on second Sundays of every month from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Singing of *bhajans*, discourse on the *Ramayana*, readings and discussion on the lives of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and meditation were some of the activities.

b) The second bi-monthly *Satsang* was conducted on the last Sunday of every month from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The programme included **reading** and discussion on the *Bhagavad Gitā*, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the life and teachings of Holy Mother and *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*.

Visit of Swami Sridharananda:

a) Swami Sridharananda conducted *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* classes from the 30th of January 2014 to the 1st of February 2014. Classes were held from 7:45 p.m. to 9 p.m. after the *ārati*.

b) On 2nd of February 2014, Swami Sridharananda delivered a lecture on “Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekanada” from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The program started with *bhajans* at 11 a.m. and concluded at 1 p.m. with Prasad distribution.

Celebrations:

a) The **Kalpataru Day** was celebrated on the 1st of January 2014 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. It started with *bhajans* followed by readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, talks on Sri Ramakrishna followed by meditation and *Arati*. *Prasāda* was distributed at the end of the programme.

b) The **birth anniversary** of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated after the evening *ārati* on the 23rd of January 2014 from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. The programme started with *bhajans* followed by talk and readings on Swami Vivekananda. *Prasāda* was distributed at the end of the programme.

c) The **birth anniversary** of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated on the 3rd of March 2014. The program started at 8 p.m. after the evening *ārati*. It included *bhajans*, reading and a talk on Sri Ramakrishna. The program ended at 9 p.m. with *prasāda* distribution.



Auckland Centre— Its activities.

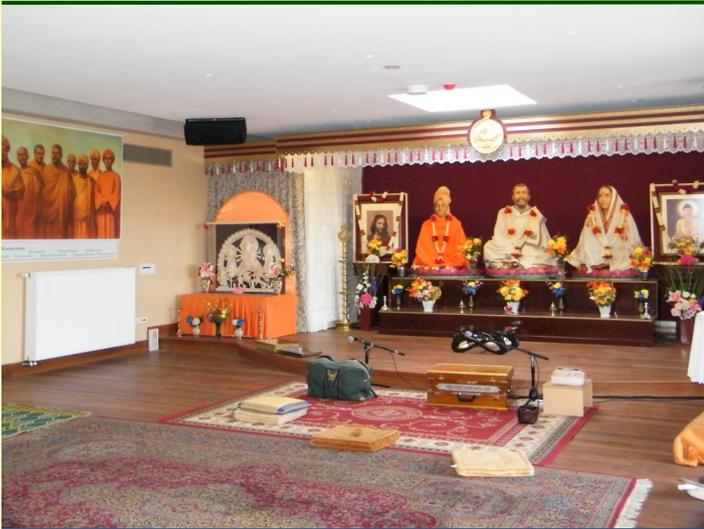
Photo Feature :

The Vedanta Centre of Sydney

The Construction of the Vivekananda Memorial Multi-Purpose Community Facility at 2 Stewart Street, Ermington 2115.

We earnestly request generous contributors not to miss this opportunity to get actively involved in this noble venture. Any contribution towards the construction of this institution will be thankfully accepted and acknowledged.





Sri Sarada Devi: A Transcendental Presence

(Continued from the previous issue)

Once a monk, who had just returned from famine relief activities in the Bankura district, gave Mother an account of the work done by the Ramakrishna Mission. After hearing him through, she moved her hand in a circle around and said, "Mind you, my son, by the grace of Mother Simhavahini, there's nothing of all this (distress) within this area (Jayrambati). The monk said, "I know nothing of Simhavahini. It's because of your presence that there is nothing of that here." The Mother kept silent.

The Great Mother descends on earth to teach people love and devotion. However, She has to cover up Her divinity sufficiently to make it appealing and comprehensible to the human heart and intellect.

One day in September 1918 Nalini Devi in front of two disciples, asked the Mother, "Well, aunt, people call you the Indwelling Entity; are you really so?" The Mother only smiled a little. But when Nalini asserted her question again, she said, "They say so out of devotion. Who indeed can I be, my dear? The Master is All. You pray to the Master so that I may not fall a victim to egotism." This humility and attempt at self-concealment made one of the female devotees burst out laughing, and in the course of the conversation she remarked, "There are many who call the Mother, the Universal Mother; but the Master alone knows how deep anyone's faith is. In the mouth of unbelieving people this sounds like parrot-like repetition." The Mother joined in the laugh and said, "That's true enough my dear." The woman added that none could understand the Mother unless She made herself known out of Her mercy. And then she further added, "And yet the Master's divinity consists in this that in Her there's no trace of egoism. All mortals are full of self-conceit. See, for instance, how thousands of people prostrate themselves at Her feet calling, 'You are Lakshmi, you are the Mother of the Universe.' If the Mother were a mortal, this would puff her up with pride. Can a mere mortal digest so much of honour?" The Mother only cast a smiling glance at the devotee.



**Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi
(1853-1920)**

During the Christmas holidays of 1910, a candidate for initiation offered flowers at the Mother's feet at Kothar and then presented Her a piece of cloth and a rupee. The Mother declined the gift saying, "You are in straitened circumstances and have your own wants. Why then, this offering?" The devotee explained that the money belonged to the Mother; and if a little portion of a son's earnings could be utilized for the service of his mother, he should be thankful. At this the Mother said, "Ah! What love, my dear, what love!" The devotee had heard from others, "The Mother is Kali Herself, the Primal Energy, the deity." He wanted a confirmation of this from the Mother herself; for the Gita speaks of such a self-avowal. Hence he said to the Mother, "I believe what I have heard about you. Yet if you yourself tell me so, I can be free from any lingering doubt. I want to learn from your own words, whether that is true." The Mother said, "Yes, it is so."

Out of consideration for certain devotees the Mother seemed to unconsciously reveal her true stature. When Vaikuntha went to see the Mother at Kamarpukur, Ramlal and Lakshmi Devi were also there. When bidding goodbye to the devotee the Mother suddenly said, "Vaikuntha, call on me!" and the next moment she checked herself and said, "Call on the Master; calling on Him means calling on All." Lakshmi Devi, who heard it all, protested, "No, Mother, should you speak thus? This is very wrong

on your part. If you wheedle the boys thus, what will they do?" The Mother pleaded, "Why, what have I done?" Lakshmi Devi replied, "This very moment you told Vaikuntha, 'Call on me,' and again you say, 'Call on the Master.'" The Mother argued, "Calling on the Master is certainly as good as calling on All." Not silenced by the Mother's logic, Lakshmi Devi impressed it on Vaikuntha that what he had heard that day from the Mother was very valuable; it was a declaration as well as a direction by the Mother herself, so that Vaikuntha should call on the Mother. The Mother listened without further objection.

Certain incidents from the Mother's life as narrated by the devotees who personally witnessed them, not only provide authentic evidences of her divine power but also calculated to intensify other people's faith and devotion and thus help their spiritual development.

R. one day prayed, as he massaged the Mother's rheumatic feet with an oil, that the disease might be transferred to his body and the Mother be cured. The Mother smiled indulgently and said, "What are you thinking, my boy? May you live long. I have grown old; how much longer should I live? Should one think like that? May the Master grant you a long life." And she blessed him by touching his head.

At one time in 1918, Sri Lalitmohan Saha became so depressed in mind that, becoming angry with the Master and the Mother, he resolved not to visit the Mother anymore. But pressed by friends, he had to go to the 'Udbodhan'. That day many devotees saluted the Mother, with none of whom she talked. Last of all she saw her petulant devotee and asked him, "Are you well?" Ironically he replied, "Yes, Mother, very well, indeed!" In answer the Mother smiled benignly on him and said endearingly, "How's that, my boy! That is the nature of the mind. Should one behave like this just because of that?"

In 1915, when Sri Mahendranath Gupta reached Jayrambati, he had it in his mind to worship the Mother's feet with flowers and sandal-paste, though he could not imagine how he could procure these in an unknown

place. Just then the Mother sent him some flowers and sandal-paste through a little niece of hers, through whom she also told him, "If that boy wants to offer flowers, he can come now to do so."

Swami Tanmayananda, while on his way from Koalpara to Jayrambati, thought within himself that if he could do some little service to the Mother he would be fortunate. Reaching there he found her sitting with her legs stretched and a pot of oil nearby. Tanmayananda began massaging Her feet with the oil, and the Mother instructed him as to how each part of the legs was to be rubbed. When the devotee had served Her in this manner to his heart's content for about twenty-five minutes, the Mother said, "I hope you are now satisfied. Let me now go in for a bath; I have to worship the Master."

One afternoon, Prafullamukhi Bose found on reaching the 'Udbodhan' that the widow of Navasan was bringing in the Mother's quilt, mattress etc. from the terrace, inserting them into the covers and then spreading the bed. She thought within herself, "If I could get this work to do!" As soon as the widow of Navasan left, the Mother entered the room and glancing at the bed said, "Do you notice, my daughter, how she has muddled everything! She has used one cover for another. You, my good girl, change the covers and do the bed over again." Prafullamukhi had her wish fulfilled.

One day, Swami Mahadevananda went to Haldi-Pukur at the Mother's bidding to purchase some kerosene, flour, etc. weighing altogether more than eighty pounds. As the Mother had not asked him to engage any bearer, he carried the load on his head. The road was slushy and slippery and the load seemed to become heavier at every step, till at last he could bear it no longer. Nevertheless, he resolved not to yield to any weakness; and then as he stepped forward with his determination and cleared a hurdle, astonishingly enough, immediately the burden became lighter, so that he covered the remaining distance without any trouble. But this sudden change set him thinking about the cause; and as he entered the Mother's house in a pensive mood, he found Her pacing up and down Her veranda with a flushed face and scared eyes, and saying to herself, "Why did I not ask him to engage a porter?" When

Mahadevananda took down the burden, she said, "You should have taken a porter. What did it matter if I had not said so? Should one walk that way?"

Sri Surendranath Roy of Barisal was once attacked with a deadly disease, which was diagnosed as tuberculosis, and his life was despaired of. But he had a strong desire to see the Mother before he left this world. Accordingly, he invited Her through a letter. In response the Mother sent him a photograph of Hers with a bound volume of the Bengali magazine Udbodhan; and She wrote that though it was not possible for Her to be personally present, he should look at Her photograph and read the volume; furthermore that he would recover from the disease. Surendranath found the real Mother there in the photograph, which he kept at his head. He soon came round.

Some reminiscences of the Holy Mother by Her devotee children

A condition of the mind

One day in 1915, I went to see the Holy Mother at the Udbodhan house. When I stood up after saluting Her, She said, "How firm was the Master's adherence to truth! How far can we follow His example? The Master used to say, 'Truthfulness alone is the austerity of the Kali Yuga. One attains to God by holding to Truth.'"

The following year at Jayrambati the Mother was once discussing a letter from a monastic disciple in which he had expressed his despondency. Suddenly the Mother began to say gravely and emphatically, "How is it, my dear? Is the Master's name a trifle that it will come to nothing? The uttering of His name can never be futile. Those who have come here remembering the Master will certainly have the vision of their Chosen Ideal. Even if one does not have it during his lifetime, he will assuredly have it at least just before his death."

One Sunday in 1918, I suffered from a mental tribulation, which made me feel offended with the Master and the Holy Mother and I resolved that I wouldn't visit the Mother any more. But my friends persuaded me to go to the Udbodhan house. There I found a large number of devotees waiting to salute the Mother. They bowed down before her one after another. The Mother didn't speak a

word to anyone. But when I made Pranam last of all, the Mother affectionately asked, "Are you keeping well?" I answered emotionally, "Yes, Mother, I am keeping very fine." At this, the Mother smiled at me and said, "How is it, my child? This is the mind's nature. Simply because of it, should you behave this way?"

Another day, when I was studying law, I made Pranam to her and asked, "Mother, you see, this is the condition of the mind. And besides, I am going to practise law. What will be my fate?" The Mother said with assurance, "Why do you fear, my child? It is nothing more than an occupation."

The mind is the first Guru

Once on Her birthday at Jayrambati, the Mother had been feeling unwell since early morning. She intended to avoid bathing, but lest Her attendants should worry on learning this, she finally decided to take Her bath. In the evening, however, She was running a high temperature. When I went to see Her, She said, "My child, obey the dictates of the mind first." The mind is the first Guru. Just see, this morning as I woke up it occurred to me that I should not bathe today, for I was not feeling well. Nevertheless considering various factors, I finally took my bath. And now I am suffering."

In another context the Mother remarked, one day, "The Master used to say, quoting a proverb: 'Eat warm food and lie on a soft bed.'

One day at the Koalpara monastery, as a distinguished devotee went to salute the Mother, he said to me, "Since touching Her feet in salutation causes much suffering to the Mother, we should rather avoid it." The Mother heard this and said, "No, my child, we are here for this purpose only. If we do not accept others' sins and sorrows and digest them, who else will? Who else will bear the responsibility for sinners and sufferers? When some noble devotee touches my feet, I feel no pain. But there are persons whose touch brings an acute burning sensation in my feet. Of course, my child, you will salute me by touching my feet."

Source:

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai, pages 426-437.

The Gospel of the Holy Mother, The President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai, pages 342-3.

With Swami Vivekananda

Introduction

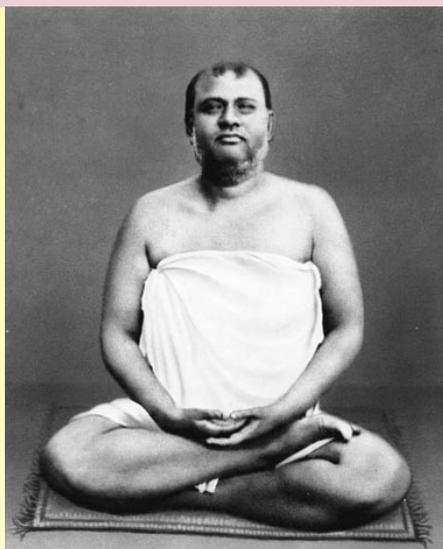
Vivekananda returned to Calcutta from the West on 19th February 1897, and received a wonderful reception from his brother disciples and the public. When Vivekananda's carriage reached Pasupati Basu's house in Baghbazar, Brahmananda came forward and garlanded their leader. Swamiji bowed down to Brahmananda and remarked with respect, "The son of the guru should be treated as the Guru himself." Brahmananda also immediately bowed down to Vivekananda, saying, "The elder brother is like one's father." Swamiji then handed over to Brahmananda all the money he had collected from the West and said, "Now I am relieved. I have handed over the sacred trust to the right person."

The Ramakrishna Mission

Because there was not enough room in the Alambazar Monastery, it was arranged that Swamiji and his Western disciples should stay in Gopal Lal Villa in Baranagore. After the civic reception in Calcutta on 28th February, Swamiji accompanied Brahmananda and others to Darjeeling to rest as well as to discuss the future of the Ramakrishna Order. On 1st May 1897, Vivekananda, Brahmananda and other disciples and devotees of Ramakrishna gathered in Balaram Basu's house, Calcutta, and formed the Ramakrishna Mission. Vivekananda became the general president and Brahmananda became the president of the Calcutta centre.

Vivekananda was the leader of the Order, and Brahmananda was his friend, philosopher, and guide. He implemented Swamiji's plans concerning the management of the Alambazar Monastery as well as the Ramakrishna Mission's philanthropic activities. Brahmananda was extremely practical and endowed with strong common sense. Sweet and loving by nature, he had above all other qualities, a tremendous spiritual power that enabled him to evaluate people's abilities.

In February 1898 the monastery was moved from Alambazar to Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house in the



Swami Brahmananda
(1863 -1922)
(One who enjoys the bliss of the Supreme Reality, Brahman)

Belur village; a plot of land was purchased there on the bank of the Ganges. Under Swamiji's direction, the brother monks took the responsibility of levelling the ground and building the living quarters and shrine. On 9th December 1898 Swamiji consecrated the relics of Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine of Belur Monastery.

Brahmananda used to handle the accounts, keep the monastery's diary, supervise the monastery, and give spiritual instructions to the novices. "Whenever you give lectures," Maharaj said to the monks, "please use Sri Ramakrishna's teachings as much as possible, because it is easy to understand the true import of the scriptures through His teachings. The Master used to say that there should not be any theft [that is, hypocrisy] in the inner chamber of the heart. He had great affection for the simple-hearted. He used to say, 'I don't care for flattery. I love the person who calls on God sincerely.' The Master also said that all impurities of the mind disappear when one calls on God with a sincere heart." Once a Western gentleman came to Swamiji with some spiritual questions. He sent the gentleman to Brahmananda, saying, "There is a dynamo working and we are all under him." Another time Swamiji said to his disciple Sharat Chakrabarty, "Even I have not

the spirituality that Rakhhal has. He is the jewel of our monastery, our king."

Brahmananda was always concerned about Swamiji's health, as he suffered from asthma and other ailments. One day Girish Ghosh came to visit Swamiji at Belur Math and heard that he was sick in bed. After a while, Girish saw Swamiji downstairs and said, "I heard you had become seriously ill." Swamiji said jokingly, "You see, when I close my eyes to sleep, I see Raja's [Brahmananda's] face full of anxiety for me. I am walking now, so that he will be happy. He wants to make me a patient. As a matter of fact I am all right." Afterwards Swamiji praised Brahmananda's administrative capacity, "I have been stunned to see Raja's work. How nicely he is running the monastery. Sri Ramakrishna used to say about Rakhhal, "He could run a kingdom."

On 20th June 1899, at the request of his Western devotees and brother disciples, Vivekananda left for the West to recover his health. He returned to Belur Math in December 1900; still his health was poor. He knew that he would not live long, so he resigned from the presidency of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and made Brahmananda president who held this paramount position until he died more than two decades later.

The relationship between Vivekananda and Brahmananda was wonderful. Both were nityasiddhas and ishwarakotis, born to fulfil the mission of Sri Ramakrishna. They had known each other from their school days and had perfect mutual trust and understanding. Whenever Vivekananda's pets disrupted Brahmananda's flower and vegetable gardens in the monastery, they would have a childish war of words that was very amusing to anyone who witnessed it. Vivekananda introduced a rule that every monk must go to the shrine very early in the morning and practise meditation; absentees would have to beg for their food that day outside the monastery. One morning Swamiji found that Brahmananda and some other monks were not in the shrine. He reminded them of the rule and left for Calcutta, because it

would have been unbearable for him to see the sad plight of his brother disciples. After his return the next day, he was overjoyed when he heard that Brahmananda had had a sumptuous meal at a rich merchant's house in an adjacent village.

Swamiji wanted a ghat and an embankment built on the bank of the Ganges at Belur Math; Swami Vijnanananda, an ex-engineer, was entrusted with completing the project. He underestimated the cost, but Brahmananda took the risk of finishing it. When Swamiji learned that the budget had been exceeded, he scolded Brahmananda harshly. The swami went to his room, closed the door, and cried profusely. Afterwards Swamiji tearfully apologized, "Brother, please forgive me. I know how much the Master loved you and never said a harsh word to you. And I, on the other hand, for the sake of this petty work, have verbally abused you and given you pain. I am not fit to live with you. I shall go away to the Himalayas and live in solitude." Brahmananda, also upset, said, "Don't say that, Swamiji. Your scolding is a blessing. How can you leave us? You are our leader. How shall we function without you?" Gradually both of them calmed down.

One day after lunch while Swamiji was resting at Belur Math, he asked his disciple Sharat Chakrabarty to give him a little massage. Sharat was happy for the opportunity to serve his guru; but Swamiji didn't like his massage because, out of respect, Sharat massaged him gently. Swamiji asked him to call Brahmananda, who had just then gone to rest. When Brahmananda arrived, Swamiji said, "Raja, I don't feel good today." Immediately Maharaj began to massage Swamiji vigorously, like an expert, and continued for a couple of hours. When the exhausted Brahmananda returned to his room, Sharat went to him and said, "Maharaj, I have come to you to resolve my confusion. I have heard that you are the spiritual son of the Master, and I have seen how much Swamiji respects you. I don't understand why Swamiji asked you to give him a massage." At this Brahmananda said, "What do you say? Don't you know he is Lord Shiva Himself!"

After fulfilling his mission, Vivekananda prepared to depart from this world by relinquishing his responsibilities, mainly to Brahmananda and Saradananda. When sister Nivedita asked for some advice about her school, Vivekananda wrote her back on 12th February 1902, "In a previous letter, I have written you what little I had to suggest...I recommend you none-not one-except Brahmananda. That 'Old Man's [Sri Ramakrishna's] judgement never failed-mine always do. If you have to ask my advice or to get anybody to do your business, Brahmananda is the only one I recommend, none else; with this my conscience is clear."

Vivekananda had tremendous faith in Brahmananda's loyalty. He would say, "Others may desert me, but Raja will stand by me till the last." Vivekananda passed away on 4th July 1902. Brahmananda cried like a child over his body. When Saradananda lifted him, Brahmananda said, "It is as if the whole Himalayan Mountains have disappeared from before my eyes!"

As a Guru

He or she who destroys or removes the ignorance of the disciple is a guru. Brahmananda was a real guru. He had the power to impart Samadhi, or illumination, to anybody. Once Boshi Sen, a young devotee, said to Brahmananda, "Maharaj, you are miserly." "Why do you say so?" asked the swami. Because you have the power to give the experience of god to others, but you are withholding it." Maharaj gravely said, "Who wants God?"

After becoming president of the Ramakrishna Order, Brahmananda began to initiate people, but was very selective. He strongly believed that the disciple and the guru must know and evaluate each other before initiation. Brahmananda's spiritual instructions are simple, direct, and practical. He taught mostly from his own experience rather than by quoting from the scriptures. Swami Vishuddhananda recalled, "Once Maharaj said to a devotee, 'When you meditate, you should imagine that god is standing before you like the mythical wish-fulfilling tree.' " Another day he said to the same devotee, "At the time of meditation you should imagine that you are in mid-ocean; on all sides there are

mountain-high waves, and God is standing before you ready to help you."

Girish Chandra Ghosh, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, told the following story about Swami Brahmananda's extraordinary spiritual powers:

Compared to myself, Rakhali is only a young boy. I know that the Master regarded him as his spiritual son, but that is not the only reason I respect him. Once I was suffering from asthma and various other ailments. As a result, my body became very weak and I lost faith in Sri Ramakrishna. With a view of getting rid of that dry spell, I engaged pundits to read the Gita and the Chandi to me. But still I had no peace of mind. Some brother disciples came to see me, and I told them about the unhappy state of my mind, but they only kept silent. Then one day Rakhali came and asked me, "How are you?" I replied, "Brother, I am in hell. Can you tell me the way out?" Rakhali listened to me and then burst into laughter. "Why worry about it?" he said. "As the waves of the ocean rise high, then go down again, and again rise, so does the mind. Don't be upset. Your present mood is due to the fact that it will lead you to a higher realm of spirituality. The wave of the mind is gathering strength." As soon as Rakhali left my house, my doubt and dryness disappeared and I got back my faith and devotion.

There is not much glory in making a good man better. Once Brahmananda said to a monk, "If you can't make a bad man good, why did you become a monk?" Maharaj was a friend and saviour of the fallen, the dejected, and the lowly. Another time Brahmananda said, "Remove all fear and weakness from your mind. Never debase yourself by thinking about sin. Sin, however great it may seem in the eyes of man, is nothing in the eyes of God. One glance of His can uproot the sins of millions of births in a moment. In order to divert human beings from the path of sin, the scriptures mention heavy punishments for the sinner. Of course, every action bears a result, and evil actions disturb one's peace of mind."

In 1921 at Varanasi a young monk asked, "Maharaj, I am practising japam and meditation mechanically and am not acquiring any taste for them. What should I do?"

Maharaj replied, "Is it possible to get that taste in the beginning? You will have to struggle hard to attain it. Direct all your energy to that one pursuit...Every night before you go to bed think for a while about how much time you have spent in doing good deeds, how much you have frittered away doing useless things, how much you have utilized in meditating, and how much you have wasted doing nothing at all."

In the beginning it is good to make a routine and then follow it strictly. It does not matter whether your mind likes it or dislikes it. You must practise your japam and meditation as a daily routine...You have received the precious mantram from your guru. Now dive deep into the ocean of Satchitananda. You have no self-reliance. Self-effort is indispensable in spiritual life. Do something for a period of at least four years. Then if you have not made any tangible progress come back and slap my face!"

The effect of holy company is infallible; it may come immediately or after a period of time. Those who come in contact with Brahmananda experienced a definite change in their lives. Brahmananda reminded the devotees, "The holy company you keep, the spiritual talk you hear, all make an impression on your mind. In the course of time you will realise the effects of these things and the momentous changes that they will bring about in your life. A bumble bee hiding in a fragrant flower offered in the worship touches the feet of the Lord. Similarly, by the grace and association of a holy man, one surpasses even the gods and attains liberation."

Maharaj once told Swami Prabhavananda, "There are times when it becomes impossible for me to teach anyone. No matter where I look, I see only God wearing many masks. Who am I, the teacher? Who is to be taught? How can God teach God? But when my mind comes down again to a lower level, I see the ignorance in man and I try to remove it."

Some Glimpses of Brahmananda

Sri Ramakrishna once remarked about Brahmananda, "Rakhal is like the kind of mango that looks green even when ripe." He meant that within Rakhal was a great spiritual power that he kept hidden from the outside world. Behind Brahmananda's grave

exterior, he was like a frolicsome boy. He would joke and have fun with the monks and devotees. M. once told Vishwananda, a disciple of Maharaj, "Observe how Maharaj acts and you will have some idea of what Sri Ramakrishna was like. When his mind came down to the finite plane, his sense of humour was very keen." "This was also true of Maharaj", wrote Prabhavananda, "One of his favourite jokes was to have some fruits or sweets placed beside a disciple who was meditating. When the disciple had finished his meditation he would find his favourite dishes laid out before him. Later Maharaj would ask, "Well, did you get the fruits of your austerities?"

"It has been said," wrote Christopher Isherwood, "that Brahmananda was so entirely fearless that others could not feel fear in his presence. Once, when he was walking with two devotees in the woods of Bhubaneswar, a leopard appeared and came straight towards them. He stood still and confronted it calmly until it turned tail. Again, while he was going along a narrow lane in Madras, attended by two monks, a maddened bull came charging to meet them. The young men tried to protect their guru, who was already an elderly man, by standing in front of him; but he pushed them behind him with extraordinary strength and fixed his eyes upon the bull. It stopped, shook its head from side to side, and then trotted quietly away."

Like other mystics, Brahmananda loved to be in solitude; at times he had no inclination to receive visitors. In 1916 when Maharaj was staying in Bangalore, Josephine MacLeod (an American devotee of Swamiji) tried to have an interview with him. Whenever Maharaj would see her coming from a distance, he quickly disappeared into his room. He then sent Swami Nirmalananda to tell her, "Maharaj is not well today."

"After three days of trying, Miss MacLeod struck upon a plan. She put on a green dress, which blended with the lush green scenery, and thus camouflaged, crept slowly along behind the trees and bushes towards the swami's veranda. Suddenly she leapt in front of him and exclaimed, 'Naughty boy, now how will you escape?' The swami, embarrassed, stammered, 'Today I am quite alright.' Laughing, Joe said, 'What

else can you say? You have to admit it. I caught you, didn't I?'

It is amazing and amusing to observe how a knower of God lives in this world and behaves with people. Sri Ramakrishna said about such an illumined soul, "He acts like a child or a madman or an inert thing or a ghoul. While in the mood of a child, he sometimes shows childlike guilelessness, sometimes the frivolity of adolescence, and sometimes, while instructing others, the strength of a man." Unconditional love and compassion are the two main traits in the mind of an illumined soul. Brahmananda's love was completely natural and he would shower it on each and all—even the animals, trees, and plants were not deprived of it. He fed the dog of the monastery; he regularly visited the cowshed and supervised the cows. He kept his eyes on the flower and vegetable gardens of each monastery. He had a wide range of knowledge in gardening matters. He taught the monks how to water and fertilize the trees and how to control pests. Later in Bhubaneswar he said, "Trees have life. If you serve them you will feel it. Trees never become ungrateful. He who serves them will receive flowers and fruits in return." In Bangalore, when he saw the rose garden of Lalbagh, Maharaj remarked, "Look, the celestial maidens are laughing." And pointing at the green lawn, he said, "As if the Divine Mother has spread green velvet." With his mystical eyes he would see the worship of the Cosmic God all around him. One day a brahmacharin at Belur Math was picking flowers from the garden for the worship of the Master. Observing him plucking the big ones in front, Maharaj told him sharply, "What are you doing? Do you want to make that tree devoid of flowers? You think Sri Ramakrishna is seated only in the shrine and does not come to the garden. Pick those flowers for worship that are hidden under the leaves and always leave some flowers in each tree." Maharaj saw that those trees were also worshipping the Cosmic God with their blossoms.

(To be continued in the next publication of Reach)

Source:

God lived with them: Life stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Chetanananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, pp. 91-124.