



Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

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SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna: On the Practice of Devotion to God

Man suffers so much simply for want of devotion to God. One should therefore adopt such means as would help the thought of God to arise in the mind at the last moment of one's life. The means is practice of devotion to God.

Source: *Great Sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; (Kolkata: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2013), 1.

Sri Sarada Devi: Forbearance

One suffers as a result of one's own actions. So, instead of blaming others for such suffering, one should pray to the Lord and depending entirely on His grace, try to bear them patiently and with forbearance under all circumstances.

Source: *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1982), 4

Swami Vivekananda: Freedom and Mukti

We say that it is freedom that we are to seek, and that that freedom is God. It is the same happiness as in everything else; but when man seeks it in something, which is finite, he gets only a spark of it. The thief when he steals gets the same happiness as the man who finds it in God; but the thief gets only a spark with a mass of misery. The real happiness is God. Love is God, freedom is God; and everything that is bondage is not God.

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 74.

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We welcome you all to the Vedanta Movement in Australia, as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and invite you to involve yourselves and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal Message of Vedanta.

1. NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN CENTRES — JANUARY TO MARCH 2017

ADELAIDE

506 Glynburn Road, Burnside, SA 5066

Email: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com

Contact: Dr Raman Sharma on (08) 8431 9775

Mrs Pathma Iswaran on (08) 8379 5336

URL: <http://vedantaadelaide.org>

Daily Activities:

- The Centre is open every evening from 6:45pm for *aratrikam* starting at 7:00pm which is undertaken by the local devotees.

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda visited the Centre and delivered discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* for three days in February and in March. A dedicated group of devotees attended his talks, which are recorded.
- Reading of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, including discussion on relevant points, was held on the first and third Sunday of the month.
- Some devotees have been providing community based support for meeting the educational needs of children from under-privileged backgrounds on a weekly basis at the Centre.

Other Activities:

- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was celebrated at the Centre on Tuesday, 28 February, 2017 with chanting in the morning, and *bhajans* and reading of *The Gospel of Si Ramakrishna* after the evening *aratrikam*.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday's public celebration was held on Saturday, 11 March 2017, from 8:30am-1:00pm. A group of devotees sang *bhajans* while Br Sridhar performed the traditional worship. Swami Sridharananda spoke on 'The Holy Trinity— Sri Ramakrishna, Ma Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda'. Many devotees participated in

the function, offered *pushpanjali* and were served the *prasad*. In the evening, a number of devotees also attended *aratrikam* and offered *pushpanjali*.



Public Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday on 11 March 2017

BRISBANE

12 Greenwood Street, Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300

Email: info@vedantabrisbane.org

Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

URL: <http://vedantabrisbane.org>

Daily Activities:

- Meditation and the chanting of hymns were conducted between 6.15 am and 7.15 am on all days except on Sundays when it is held from 8 a.m. to 8.30 a.m.
- *Vesper service (aratrikam)*, *bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were held between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.
- Members were encouraged to visit the Centre and discuss topics concerning spiritual life.

Regular Activities:

- Sunday mornings:- a) *Yoga class* (8:30am—9:45 am). b) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā Class* (10:00 am—11:00 am). (c) *Bala Sangha or children's classes* (10:00 am—11:00 am during school term).
- A discussion group met on the first Monday of the month at Sunnybank Hills (7:00 pm — 8:30 pm).
- Sanskrit classes were held every Tuesday (6:00 pm — 7:00 pm).
- Religious classes were held every Wednesday at West End Primary School for children (3:00 pm — 4:00 pm).
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* (7:00 pm — 8:00 pm at 134 Fleming Rd, Chapel Hill, QLD 4069) and the *Ramayana* (7:15 pm — 8:15 pm) were held on alternate Fridays.
- *Chanting of the Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days (7:30 pm — 8:15 pm).
- *Prayer meeting (satsangs)* were held on the first Saturday of every month.
- Devotees took turns in decorating and worshipping Sri Ramakrishna's image every week at the Sri Selva Vinayakar temple, South Maclean, QLD.
- Swami Atmeshananda conducted *Vivekachudamani* classes at Toowoomba on the first Thursday of every month.

Other Activities:

- Dr. Majumdar, Vice President of the Centre, participated in the World Religion Day on Sunday, 22 January 2017, and gave a short talk on peace. The event was organised by the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the City of Brisbane.



Dr. Majumdar, Vice President VCB, at the World Religion Day on Sunday, 22 January 2017

- A prayer session was officiated by Swami Atmeshananda on 24 January 2017 at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Sunnybank Hills, to commemorate the life of Andre Das, son of Shyam Das, the Hon. Secretary of the Brisbane Centre,
- Swami Atmeshananda was invited to give a talk at the Sri Laxminarayan Mandir in Brisbane on 12 February 2017.
- Swami Atmeshananda participated in a meeting of community leaders from different Indian organisations in Brisbane and Gold Coast on 25 February 2017 at the Indooroopilly library. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss strategies to bridge the gap between youth and parents. This will be done by holding workshops/seminars by organisations, which will have access to resources from the government and private service providers. This meeting was necessitated on account of the alarming number of self-harm committed by youth in the community.
- Swami Atmeshananda met the High Commissioner of India, His Excellency, Dr. A.M. Gondane on 20 March 2017 at the Springfield Towers offices and appraised him of the Vedanta Centre's activities. Later, the Swami participated in the inauguration of the Ayurveda Awareness Week officiated by the High Commissioner, held at the Brisbane City Council Library, Carindale. Swami Atmeshananda was invited to chant the invocatory prayers and give a short talk.



Swami Atmeshananda at the inauguration of the Ayurveda Awareness Week with His Excellency Dr. A.M. Gondane, the High Commissioner of India (5th from Right)

Celebrations:

- The Public Celebration of Holy Mother's birth-

day and Kalpataru Day was celebrated by the Centre at the Indooroopilly Senior Citizens' club on 1 January 2017. Chanting by the children of the Bala Sangha, talks on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother by young devotees Meet Naik and Menaka Thomas, formal worship, devotional music, flower offering (*pushpanjali*), *aratrikam* and partaking of lunch *prasad* were the highlights of this event. A large number of devotees participated in this event.

- The birthday of Swami Vivekananda according to the Hindu calendar was celebrated at the Centre on 19 January 2017 with worship.
- *Shivaratri* worship was conducted on 24 February 2017 at the Centre. The *puja* began at 7 pm and concluded at 9.30 pm with the performance of *abhishekam* by devotees.



Sivaratri Puja on 24 February 2017

- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday according to the Hindu calendar was observed at the Centre on 28 February 2017. Worship, *homa* (fire worship), offerings of flowers and distribution of *prasad* were the main components of this programme.
- On 4 March 2017, the Centre held the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday at the Indooroopilly Senior Citizens' club. Worship, prayers by children of the Bala Sangha, talks on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda by two youngsters - Srilakshmi Unnikrishnan and Tulika Das and a devotee- Ashneel Padarath were very much appreciated by the audience. Devotional music was rendered by talented devotees. Prasad was served after *aratrikam* and flower offerings.



Children of the Bala Sangha at the Public Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday on 4 March 2017

Forthcoming Programmes:

- *Sri Ramanavami* will be celebrated on 5 April 2017 at the Centre in the evening with worship and the singing of *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam*.
- *Sri Sankaracharya Jayanti* will be celebrated on 30 April 2017 at the Centre.
- The Annual Programme of the Centre will be held on 27 May 2017 at the Indooroopilly State High school. This year it will feature classical and semi-classical dances by local artistes and *Klassical Rhythms*, a dance troupe from Dubai who are specially invited to participate in the event. The troupe will also hold a concert at the Gold Coast on 27 May and another at Toowoomba on 28 May 2017.

Other News

- The Centre has received tenders from builders for construction of a multipurpose facility at Springfield Lakes. We are hopeful that by the end of May the contract for construction would be signed and the building process would begin soon after.

CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 6258 7612 / 0433 593 860

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda conducted monthly classes on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gita* at the Belconnen Community Centre, 2 Chandler Street, Belconnen, Canberra. Gita talks were held on

29 January, 19 February, and 12 March 2017.



Swami Sridharananda delivering his lecture on the *Bhagavad Gita* in Canberra

MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

Email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Suresh Ravinutala 0413 040 599

Daily Activities:

- Vesper service (*aratrikam*) and reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita* at the Centre from the Thursday to the Saturday of a prescheduled week

Celebrations:

- A special *satsang* was held at the ashram to celebrate *Kalpataru* day on 1 January 2017 from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The programme included Vedic chanting, *bhajans* and readings about the event/significance of *Kalpataru* Day.
- Swami Vivekananda's birthday was observed on 21 January 2017 from 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm. The programme included *bhajans*, flower offerings, readings and *aratrikam* followed by *prasad* distribution.
- *Sivaratri* was celebrated on 24 February 2017 from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm. The programme commenced with the evening vesper service followed by chanting of *Rudram* (Namakam/Chamkam) and *abhishekam*, flower offerings with *Ashtotaranamavali*, *Shiva Mahima* and bha-

jans. The programme concluded with light refreshments.

- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was observed on 28 February 2017, from 7:00pm to 9:00pm. Devotees gathered to mark the holy occasion for an evening of *bhajans* and readings.
- The formal celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday took place on 18 March 2017. The annual event included *puja* conducted by Br. Swatmachaitanya, Vedic chanting and *bhajans* followed by a talk by Swami Sridharananda on the 'Significance of Sri Ramakrishna'. The programme concluded with *pushpanjali* followed by *prasad* distribution. In the evening, a special Veena recital was performed by Manikya Veena Group led by Mrs Ramani Bommakanti and supported by Puvana and Anita - They performed a series of Carnatic pieces. They were accompanied by Vignesh on the mridangam. Later, Puloma Mukerjee presented a solo of Hindustani classical ragas on her sitar. All present enjoyed the music. The musical programme concluded with the evening vesper services and *pushpanjali* followed by *prasad* distribution.

Forthcoming Programmes:



Above: The altar at Melbourne

Below: Veena recital by Manikya Veena Group

- *Ramnavami* on 9 April 2017.
- *Satsang* with Swami Sarvarupananda on 4 May 2017.

PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yokine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact: Hiren Mukhopadyay 0411 478 244

Parthiv Parekh 0430 511 699

Daily Activities:

- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.

Regular Activities:

- *Satsangs* were conducted on the first Sunday of every month. The programme included chanting, *Gita dhyanam*, *bhajans*, readings and *prasad* distribution.
- Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gitā*.

Other Activities:

- A working bee session was held once a month.
- The Vedanta Multipurpose hall was hired by the Electoral Commission of Australia as a polling booth for the state election on 11 March 2017

Celebrations:

- Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary was celebrated on 22 January 2017 from 11:00 am to 12:00 noon with readings from Swami Vivekananda's life, followed by *bhajans* and *aratrikam*.

SYDNEY

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115

144A Marsden Road, Ermington, NSW 2115 (Entry)

Email: vedasydney@vedantasydney.org

Contact: 02 8197 7351

URL: www.vedantaaustralia.org

Daily Activities:

- The shrine was open from 6:30 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:30 pm seven days a week.
- Meditation from 6:30 am to 7:30 am and chanting from 7:30 am to 8:00 am.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The times change on special occasions.

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda conducted his chapter-wise study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* on Sundays between 9.30 am and 10.30 am.
- *A Class for Ladies* was held every Monday between 10.30 am and 12.30 pm. Swami Sunishthananda initiated discussion on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* and the *Katha Upanishad*.
- *Bala sangha classes* which include moral and spiritual lessons, drama and movement were conducted for children every Saturday between 4.45 pm and 6.45 pm during the school term.
- *Meditation sessions* were conducted by Swami Sunishthananda on Sundays between 5.00 pm and 5.30 pm.
- Classes on *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* were conducted by Swami Sunishthananda on Sundays between 5.30 pm and 6.15 pm.
- Parlour talks were conducted by Swami Sridharananda at 1/98 Condamine Street, Balgowlah, NSW 2093, near Manly Beach on Tuesdays between 7.30 pm and 8.30 pm.
- Classes on the *Katha Upanishad* were conducted by Swami Sunishthananda every Wednesday between 7.30 pm and 8.30 pm.
- Classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* were conducted by Swami Sunishthananda every Friday between 7.30 pm and 8.30 pm.
- Sri Rāmanāma Sankirtanam was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- Sanatan Satsang Sabha sang *Ram Katha*, once every month.
- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.

Other Activities:

- Debapriya Adhykary and Samanwaya Sarkar performed a Jugalbandi performance at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 21 March 2017. Their rendition included various forms of Indian classical music like *tappa*, *khyal* etc.



Debapriya Adhykary and Samanwaya Sarkar performed a Jugalbandi at the VCS on 21 March 2017.

Celebrations:

- Swami Vivekananda's birthday according to the lunar calendar was held on 19 January 2017. The celebration included *puja*, *pushpanjali* and *prasad* in the morning and *aratrikam*, songs by the children of the Bala Sangha, Parth Upadhyay, Sindhuja Ganapathy and others and finally a talk by Swami Sridharananda on Swami Vivekananda's universal ideas and ended with *prasad* in the evening. There were a total of 110 people who attended.
- *Shivaratri* was held on 24 February 2017. The



Swami Sridharananda during his talk on Swami Vivekananda's Birthday on 19 January 2017

puja was accompanied with chanting and singing, which ended with the *abhishekam* by the devotees. There were 220 people who attended.



Children of the Bala Sangha perform at the VCS on Swami Vivekananda's Birthday on 19 January 2017

- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was observed on 28 February 2017. In the morning, worship was offered to Sri Ramakrishna which included *homa*. In the evening there was *aratrikam* followed by a song by the children of the Bala Sangha, *bhajans* by Pushpa Jagadish and a talk by Swami Sridharananda on Sri Ramakrishna which dwelt, among other things, on the *pranam* mantra composed by Swami Vivekananda beginning with '*Sthapakaya ca dharmasaya...*'



Morning Puja on Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday Celebration on 28 February 2017



Ms. Pushpa Jagadish performs at the VCS on Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday on 28 February 2017

Forthcoming Programme:

- *Ramnavami* 5 April 2017.
- *Ram Katha* 15 April 2017
- *Buddha Jayanti* 10 May 2017
- *Annual Day* 20 May 2017



VEDANTA CENTRE OF SYDNEY
144A Marsden Road, Ermington, NSW

“SAMANWAYA”

ANNUAL DAY CELEBRATION: 2017

VENUE: Redgum Function Centre,
2 Lane Street, Wentworthville, NSW.
(Corner of Lane and Veron Streets)

DATE: SATURDAY 20th MAY 2017

TIME: 6.00 pm to 9.30 pm

CULTURAL PROGRAM

(5.45 pm for a 6.00 pm start)

INVOCATION

Through a classical dance by Ms. Isha Deodhar

DRAMA: “Bhaktā Prahlada”

The epic story of Prahlada, the iconic devotee of the Lord will be portrayed by the children of Vedanta Centre’s Bala Sangha, assisted by the members of the Ananya Samarpana Drama Group.

The drama is facilitated by the Vedanta Centre devotees.

SAROD RECITAL

Rendition of instrumental music by Mr. Sandipan Ganguly accompanied by Mr. Murtaza Damoon on Tabla .

DANCE: “MANY PATHS, ONE GOAL”

A sequence of Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi and Kathak classical dances depicting the synthesis of *Karma, Inana, Bhakti* and *Raja Yoga* as symbolised in the Ramakrishna Mission logo. The dances will be performed by students from Mayura Academy, Ruchi Sanghi Dance Company, Samarpana School of Indian Fine Arts and Samskriti School of Dance.

The dance sequence is co-ordinated by Ms. Hamsa Venkat.

TICKETS: \$20 per person including a food pack.

FREE ENTRY for children below 5 years of age.

Email: vedasydney@vedantasydney.org

Phone: 02 8197 7351

2. FEATURE ARTICLES

A. REAL MAHATMAN BY MAX MULLER

The current article entitled 'Real Mahatman' is an edited version of Max Muller's original article entitled the same, which was published in the journal *Nineteenth Century* in August 1896. Max Muller seems to have written the Real Mahatman before he met Swami Vivekananda at his residence at Oxford on 28 May 1896, because there is no reference to Swami Vivekananda in the article, even though there is reference to Pratap Chundra Mazoomdar. Swami Vivekananda met him and was enamoured by him, his interest in Ramakrishna and India. Later Swami Vivekananda requested one of his brother monks—Swami Saradananda—to supply Max Muller with further material on Sri Ramakrishna, which was and continues to be published by Advaita Ashrama as *Ramakrishna His Life and Sayings*. According to Swami Vivekananda, in a report published in the *Brahmavadin* of 6 June 1896, Max Muller is the foremost of Indologists who had been working on India's spiritual and religious thought for over 50 years. To quote Swami Vivekananda: 'What an extraordinary man is Professor Max Muller! I paid a visit to him a few days ago. . . for whosoever loves Shri Ramakrishna, whatever be his or her sect, or creed, or nationality, my visit to that person I hold as a pilgrimage.' Max Muller translated the Rig Veda into English and edited the Sacred Books of the East Series, in 50 volumes, which are an English translation of the spiritual treasures of India in the Sanskrit literature. In this article he positions Sri Ramakrishna as a *sannyasin par excellence* who upheld this ancient form of life to the letter. The article also presents a Westerner's perspective on Ramakrishna.

Many times the question has been asked of late, what is a *mahatman* and what is a *sannyasin*? *Mahatman* is a very common Sanskrit word, and means literally great-souled, high-minded, noble. It is used as a complimentary term, much as we use noble or revered; but has been accepted also as a technical term, applied to what are called *sannyasins* in the ancient language of India. *Sannyasin* means one who has surrendered and laid down everything—that is, who has abandoned all worldly affections. "He is to be known as a *sannyasin*," we read in the *Bhagavad-Gita* 5.3, "who does not hate and does not desire." As the life of a *brahmin* was, according to the laws of Manu, divided into four periods, or *ashramas*—that of a pu-



pil, of a householder, of a hermit and of an independent sage—those who had reached the fourth stage were called *sannyasins*, a word difficult to render in English but perfectly

familiar to everybody in India.... It has sometimes been denied that there are any *sannyasins* left in India, and in one sense this is true. If the scheme of life traced out by Manu was ever a reality,

it has long since ceased to be so....[But] we meet at all times, both before and after the Buddhist reform, with men who had shaken off all social fetters; who had retired from their families and from society at large, lived by themselves in forests or in caves, abstained from all enjoyments, restricted their food and drink to the very utmost, and often underwent tortures which makes us creep when we read of them or see them represented in pictures and photographs. Such men were naturally surrounded by a halo of holiness, and they received the little they wanted from those who visited them or who profited by their teachings.

Some of these saints—but not many—were scholars, and became teachers of their ancient lore. Some of course, were impostors and hypocrites, and have brought disgrace on the whole profession. But that there were *sannyasins*, and that there are even now, who have really shaken off the fetters of passion, who have disciplined their body and subdued their mind to a perfectly marvellous extent, cannot be doubted....It is generally supposed that these same persons, these so-called *sannyasins*, are also very learned and wise persons....[But] in the case of *sannyasins* of the present generation we look in vain either for great learning, even learning by heart, or for original thought

and profound wisdom....There was, for instance, Dayananda Sarasvati, who tried to introduce some reforms among the Brahmans. He was a scholar in a certain sense. He actually published a commentary in Sanskrit on the *Rig Veda*, and was able to speak Sanskrit with great fluency. It is supposed that he was poisoned because his reforms threatened to become dangerous to the *brahmans*. But in all his writings there is nothing that could be quoted as original beyond his somewhat strange interpretations of words and whole passages of the Veda.

The late Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a far more interesting specimen of a *sannyasin*. He seems to have been, not only a high-souled man, a *real mahatman* but a man of original thought. Indian literature is full of wise saws and sayings, and by merely quoting them a man may easily gain a reputation for profound wisdom. But it was not so with Ramakrishna. He seems to have deeply meditated on the world from his solitary retreat. Whether he was a man of extensive reading is difficult to say, but he was certainly thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Vedanta philosophy. His utterances which have been published breathe the spirit of that philosophy; in fact are only intelligible as products of a Vedantic soil. And yet it is very



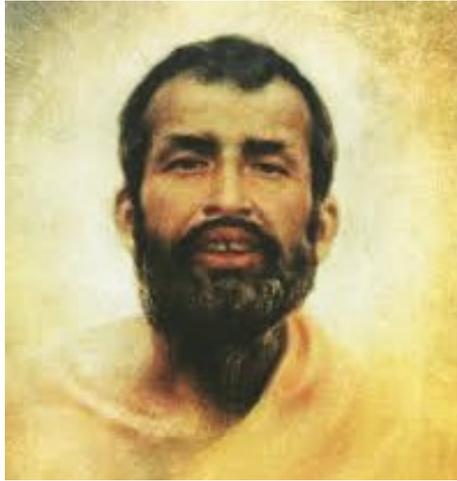
Max Muller

curious to see how European thought, nay a certain European style, quite different from that of native thinkers, has found an entrance into the oracular sayings of this Indian saint....

In the extracts from Ramakrishna's teachings, some of which have been published by his pupils in their journal, the *Brahmavadin*, these ancient metaphors have for the first time been blended with European thought; and from all that we learn of his personal influence, this blending had a most powerful effect on the large audiences that came to listen to him. He has left a number of pupils behind who after his recent death are carrying on the work which he began, and who are trying to secure, not only in India, but in Europe also a sympathetic interest in the ancient philosophy of India, which it deserves as fully

as the philosophy of Plato or Kant...

It was not easy to obtain any trustworthy information about the *mahatman's* life, a life singularly uneventful in his relations with the outer world, though full of stirring events in the inner world of his mind....Pratap Chunder Mazoomdar, the leader of the Bramho Samaj, and well known to many people in England, tells me of the extraordinary influence which the Mahatman exercised on Keshab Chunder Sen, on himself, and on a large number of highly educated men in Calcutta. A score of young men who were more closely attached to him have become ascetics after his death. They follow his teachings by giving up the enjoyment of wealth and carnal pleasure, living together in a neighbouring *matha* (College), and retiring at times to holy and solitary places all over India even-as far as the Himalayan mountains. Besides these holy men, we are told that a great number of men with their families are ardently devoted to his cause. But what is most interesting is the fact that it was the *mahatman* who exercised the greatest influence on Keshab Chunder Sen during the last phase of his career. It was a surprise to many of Keshab Chunder's friends and admirers to observe a sudden



change of the sober reformer into the mystic and ecstatic saint, that took place towards the end of his life. But although this later development of the New Dispensation, and more particularly the doctrine of the motherhood of God, may have alienated many of Keshab Chunder Sen's European friends, it seems to have considerably increased his popularity with Hindu Society. At all events we are now enabled to understand the hidden influences which caused so sudden a change, and produced so marked a deviation in the career of the famous founder of the Brahmo Samaj, which has sometimes been ascribed to the breakdown of an over-excited brain.

It is different with a man like Ramakrishna. He never moved in the world, or was a man of the world, even in the sense in which Keshab Chunder Sen was. He seems from the very first to have practised that very

severe kind of asceticism (yoga) which is intended to produce trances (*samadhi*) and ecstatic utterances. We cannot quite understand them but in the case of our *mahatman* we cannot doubt their reality, and can only stand by and wonder, particularly when so much that seems to us the outcome of a broken frame of body and overwrought state of mind, contains nevertheless so much that is true and wise and beautiful....

The state of [his] religious exaltation...has been witnessed again and again by serious observers of exceptional psychic states. It is in its essence something like our talking in sleep, only that with a mind saturated with religious thoughts and with the sublimest ideas of goodness and purity the result is what we find in the case of Ramakrishna, no mere senseless hypnotic jabbering, but a spontaneous outburst of profound wisdom clothed in beautiful poetic language. His mind seems like a kaleidoscope of pearls, diamonds, and sapphires shaken together at random but always producing precious thoughts in regular, beautiful outlines. To our ears, no doubt, much of his teaching and preaching sounds strange, but not to Oriental ears, or to ears accustomed to the perfervid poetry of the East. Everything

seems to become purified in his mind. Nothing, I believe, is so hideous as the popular worship of Kali in India. To Ramakrishna all that is repulsive in her character is, as it were, non-existent, and there remains but the motherhood of the goddess. Her adoration with him is a childlike, whole-souled, rapturous self-consecration to the motherhood of God, as represented by the power and influence of woman. Woman in her natural material character had long been renounced by the saint. He had a wife, but never associated with her. "Woman" he said, "fascinates and keeps the world from the love of God." For long years he made the utmost efforts to be delivered from the influence of woman. His heart rending supplications and prayers for such deliverance, sometimes uttered aloud in his retreat on the riverside, brought crowds of people, who bitterly cried when he cried, and could not help blessing him and wishing him success with their hearts. And he succeeded, so that his mother to whom he prayed, that is the goddess Kali, made him recognise every woman as her incarnation, and honour each member of the other sex, whether young or old, as his mother. In one of his prayers he exclaims: "O Mother Divine, I want no honour from man, I want no

pleasure of the flesh; only let my soul flow into Thee as the permanent confluence of the Ganga and Jamuna. Mother I am without *bhakti* (devotion), without yoga (concentration); I am poor and friendless. I want no one's praise, only let my mind always dwell in the lotus of Thy feet." But what is most extraordinary of all, his religion was not confined to the worship of Hindu deities and the purification of Hindu customs. For long days he subjected himself to various kinds of discipline to realize—the Mohammedan idea of an all-powerful Allah. He let his beard grow, he fed himself on Moslem diet, he continually repeated sentences from the Koran. For Christ his reverence was deep and genuine. He bowed his head at the name of Jesus, honoured the doctrine of his sonship, and once or twice attended Christian places of worship. He declared that each form of worship was to him a living and most enthusiastic principle of personal religion; he showed, in fact, how it was possible to unify all the religions of the world by seeing only what is good in every one of them, and showing sincere reverence to everyone who has suffered for the truth, for their faith in God, and for their love of men. He seems to have left nothing in writing, but his sayings live in the memory of his friends. He

would not be a master or the founder of a new sect. "I float a frail half-sunk log of wood through the stream of the troublous world. If men come to hold me to save their lives, the result will be that they will drown me without being able to save themselves. Beware of Gurus!"

I am quite aware that some of his sayings may sound strange to our ears, nay even offensive. Thus the conception of the Deity as the Divine Mother is apt to startle us, but we can understand what Ramakrishna really meant by it, when we read his saying:

"Why does the God-lover find such pleasure in addressing the Deity as Mother? Because the child is more free with its mother, and consequently she is dearer to the child than any one else."

How deep Ramakrishna has seen into the mysteries of knowledge and the love of God, we see from the next saying:

"Knowledge and love of God are ultimately one and the same. There is no difference between pure knowledge and pure love."

The following utterances also show the exalted nature of his faith:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, that he who yearns for God, finds Him."

“He who has faith has all, and he who wants faith wants all.”

“So long as one does not become simple like a child, one does not get Divine illumination. Forget all the worldly knowledge that thou hast acquired and become as ignorant about it as a child, and then thou wilt get the knowledge of the True.”

Where does the strength of an aspirant lie? It is in his tears. As a mother gives her consent to fulfill the desire of her importunately weeping child, God vouchsafes to His weeping son whatever he is crying for.

“As a lamp does not burn without oil, so a man cannot live without God.”

“God is in all men, but all men are not in God: that is the reason why they suffer.”

From such sayings we learn that though the real presence of the Divine in nature and in the human soul was nowhere felt so strongly and so universally as in India, and though the fervent love of God, nay the sense of complete absorption in the Godhead, has nowhere found a stronger and more eloquent expression than in the utterances of Ramakrishna, yet he perfectly knew the barriers that separate Divine and human nature.

If we remember that these utterances of Ramakrishna reveal to us not only his own thoughts,

but the faith and hope of millions of human beings, we may indeed feel hopeful about the future of that country. The consciousness of the Divine in man is there, and is shared by all, even by those who seem to worship idols. The constant sense of the presence of God is indeed the common ground on which we may hope that in time not too distant the great temple of the future will be erected, in which Hindus and non-Hindus may join hands and hearts in worshipping the same Supreme Spirit—who is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being.

Source:

Reprinted from *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Prophet of Harmony* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1986)

Unpublished Spiritual Counsel from Respected Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order

To Sri Ramachandran by Swami Yatiswarananda on 1 July 1963

“This life is a vast drama; and one must leave the stage of this world as soon (as) one’s part is over. Those of us who are left behind must find solace in the thought of the Lord and pray to Him for the welfare of the departed soul. Only He can console us in our deep sorrow.”



Swami Yatiswarananda

An Ode to Sri Ramakrishna by a Devotee

You have bought to my life love.
You have made of that love,
strength.

Within that strength I have
found compassion.

Within compassion I have found
patience.

Within that patience I have
found wisdom.

Within that wisdom I have
found myself.

Be it true I have made an effort
to grow, yet be it still a more
evident truth that without your
prayers, your stealth hand of
guidance, your commitment to
my being, this journey home
that I travel would be an even
longer task.

You truly are my friend.

—Marc L. Atkinson

B. DIRECT DISCIPLES: SWAMI BRAHMANANDA, SWAMI SARADANANDA, SWAMI TURIYANANDA AND SWAMI TRIGUNATITANANDA

The Master was a friend, companion, and playmate to those who became his intimate disciples. Even the chore of religious discipline would be lightened in his presence. The devotees would be so inebriated with pure joy in his company that they would have no time to ask themselves whether he was an Incarnation, a perfect soul, or a yogi. His very presence was a great teaching; words were superfluous. In later years his disciples remarked that while they were with him they would regard him as a comrade, but afterwards they would tremble to think of their frivolities in the presence of such a great person. They had convincing proof that the Master could, by his mere wish, kindle in their hearts the love of God and give them His vision.

Through all this fun and frolic, this merriment and frivolity, he always kept before them the shining ideal of God-Consciousness and the path of renunciation. He prescribed ascents, steep or graded, according to the powers of the climber. He permitted no compromise with the basic principles of purity. An aspirant had to keep his body, mind, senses, and soul unspotted; had to have a sincere love for God and an ever-mounting spirit of yearning. The Mother would do the rest. His disciples were of two kinds: the householders, and the young men, some of whom were later to become monks.

Swami Brahmananda (Rakhal Chandra Ghosh)

The birthday of Swami Brahmananda was observed on the 29 January 2017.

Even before Rakhal's coming to Dakshineswar, the Master had had visions of him as his spiritual son and as a playmate of Krishna at Vrindavan. Rakhal was born of wealthy parents. During his childhood he developed wonderful spiritual traits and used to play at worshipping gods and goddesses. In his teens he was married to a sister of Manmohan Mitra, from whom he first heard of the Master. His father objected to his association with Sri Ramakrishna but afterwards he was reassured to find that many celebrated people were visitors at Dakshineswar.

The relationship between the Master and his beloved disciple



Swami Brahmananda

was that of mother and child. Sri Ramakrishna allowed Rakhal many liberties denied to others. But he would not hesitate to chastise the boy for improper actions. At one time Rakhal felt a childlike jealousy because he found that other boys were receiving the Master's affections. He soon overcame it and realised his guru as the Guru of the

whole universe. The Master was worried to hear of his marriage, but was relieved to find that his wife was a spiritual soul who would not be a hindrance to his progress.

Cleansing of the mind-lake

Brahmananda was a man of few words. His life was his teaching. Rather than preaching religion he demonstrated it. Swami Basudevananda recalled:

"It was 2.00 or 3.00pm on a summer day. Swami Brahmananda was seated in his room at the Belur Monastery. His attendant was fanning him. As soon as I entered the room he said, "Welcome. It is very hot today. Let us meditate on the snow-clad Himalayas; then the whole atmosphere will be cool. Do you know this mystery? First empty the mind completely. There should not be any *samskaras* (impressions). Then the mind will automatically fill itself with

God-consciousness. When water is poured out of a pitcher, does the pitcher remain empty? At once it is filled with space. Didn't space exist in the pitcher before? Yes, it did. It existed mixed with water. We see only the gross water (and not the subtle space), so we think only the water exists. Similarly, although the impressions of external objects and Pure Consciousness are both in the mind, we perceive only the mind's gross impressions because they are within the reach of our senses. We do not see the Pure Consciousness, which is also in the mind.

"If one can make the mind free from impressions, Pure Consciousness, which is Satchidananda, will be immediately revealed. Otherwise, through discrimination one can get a little inkling of Satchidananda. One should discriminate, combining devotion and meditation, and then one will understand the real import of the scriptures, the teachings of the holy men, and Sri Ramakrishna."

"Again, when a particular *sattvic* (good) impression is established in the mind, replacing other worldly impressions, then that established impression becomes luminous by the light of Brahman. At that time the snow-clad mountain turns into an effulgent form like the living Shiva, and that radiance of Shiva makes the body-mind organism of the meditator cool and calm.

"Thus, after cleansing the mind-lake, whatever ideal, or *Ishtam* (chosen form of God), you place there will be radiant and living. Brahman, the Pure Consciousness, cannot be reflected on a pol-



Swami Brahmananda

luted, muddy, mind-lake where many worldly lakes are agitating.

"Now go ahead. I have given you a very secret teaching. Keep it secret and practise it wholeheartedly. Have you not read Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the wonderful dye? Whenever the dyer was requested to dye a cloth a particular colour, he would dip it into that miraculous tub and it would immediately be dyed that colour. This mind-lake is like that wonderful tub of dye."

Spiritual practice

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, "On one occasion, in the house of Balaram Basu, Maharaj said, 'You practise meditation and japam; you progress a little, then comes a period of dryness. It seems that the doors are entirely closed. At that time it is necessary that you stick to your spiritual practices with infinite patience; by so doing you will find one day that all of a sudden the doors are opened. What a

great joy it is then. In spiritual life many such thresholds have to be crossed.'

"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-waves, and God is standing before you ready to help you.' In Madras, while I accompanied him on a walk, Maharaj said to me, 'Just do one thing: always try to remember God. I also do that.'"

Fear and weakness

Another time Brahmananda said, "Remove 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 sinners. Of course every action bears a result, and evil actions disturb one's peace of mind."

Holy company

The effect of holy company is infallible; it may come immediately or after a period of time. Those who came 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 bumblebee 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.”

Swami Saradananda (Saratchandra Chakravarty)

The birthday of Swami Saradananda was observed on Wednesday 4 January 2017.

Sashi and Sarat were two cousins who came from a pious brahmin family of Calcutta. At an early age they had joined the Brahmo Samaj and had come under the influence of Keshab Sen. The Master said to them at their first meeting, “If bricks and tiles are burnt after the trade-mark has been stamped on them, they retain the mark for ever. Similarly, a man should be stamped with God before entering the world. Then he will not become attached to worldliness.” Fully aware of the future course of their life, he asked them not to marry. The Master asked Sashi whether he believed in God with form or in God without form. Sashi replied that he was not even sure about the existence of God; so he could not speak one way or the other. This frank answer very much pleased the Master.

Sarat’s soul longed for the all-embracing realisation of the Godhead. When the Master inquired whether there was any particular form of god he wished to see, the



Swami Saradananda

boy replied that he would like to see god in all the living beings of the world. “But”, the Master demurred, “that is the last word in realization. One cannot have it at the very outset.” Sarat stated calmly, “I won’t be satisfied with anything short of that. I shall trudge on along the path till I attain that blessed state.” Sri Ramakrishna was very pleased.

As a Spiritual Teacher

Work is worship

To Saradananda, work was worship. Once he said, “All through my life I worked, envisioning the faces of the Master and Swamiji. I had no time to pay any attention to others’ opinions.” His health began to fail partly from overwork and partly from taking on the bad karma of his disciples. Some monks asked him to refrain from giving initiation. The swami replied, “Do not say that. I consider myself blessed that people come to me to hear the Lord’s name. It is not they but I who have to be thankful for this. I am fortunate that I have been given the privilege of telling them of

the Lord”.

Truthfulness

The mark of a real teacher is that he is completely truthful. Whatever that person says, he does. Once when a young monk was going to Belur Math from Calcutta, Saradananda told him to inform Premananda that he would visit the monastery in the afternoon. A terrible thunderstorm arose in the afternoon. When it stopped, the swami left for Belur, crossing the Ganges by ferry and then walking a few miles. He arrived in the monastery after Premananda had finished his supper and was relaxing on the veranda. “Is there any emergency today that you have come to Belur in this bad weather?” asked Premananda. “No”, replied Saradananda, “but I sent word to you in the morning that I would be in the monastery, so I have come.” Premananda remarked, “Like guru like disciple. If any word comes from the lips of the Master, he always kept it.”

Doubt is a disease of the mind

Doubt is a horrible disease of the mind. An illumined teacher always tries to remove the doubts of his disciples. In 1925 two young scientists came to Calcutta to visit Saradananda at Udbodhan. One of them asked, “Does God exist?” “Yes”, replied the swami.

Scientist: “What is the proof?”

Saradananda: The words of the rishis (seers of truth). After experiencing God, they proclaimed that God exists.”

Scientist: “Is there a possibility of their making mistakes.”

Saradananda: Is it possible that all sages have made mistakes?"

Scientist: "I won't believe without experiencing God myself."

"Very well", said the swami. "Is it possible that you will only believe after seeing everything yourself? Suppose you have never been to England. You will have to know about England from those who have visited it. Although you have not seen it, you can't deny the existence of England. Likewise, God exists; you will have to trust the judgment of those who have seen Him. After seeing God, Ramakrishna said to all, 'I have seen God. You can also see Him through spiritual disciplines and longing.' In this scientific age, the Master came to dispel the doubts of the people by demonstrating religion." The young scientists were convinced and accepted Saradananda's words.

Selfless work purifies the mind

Saradananda said, "Through selfless work the mind gets purified. And when the mind becomes pure, knowledge and devotion arise in it. Knowledge is the very nature of the Self, but being covered with ignorance, it is not manifest. The object of selfless work is to remove this covering. As a matter of fact, knowledge dawns as soon as the mind becomes pure. In the *Mahabharata* you have the story of the chaste woman who attained knowledge by serving her husband and by performing her other household duties. In the *Gita* also you find, 'By work alone King Janaka and others attained perfection.' Not one but many attained perfection through work, for the text adds 'and others'".

Make the thought tally with the speech

In January 1925, when Saradananda was visiting Varanasi, some monks asked him the following questions:

Monk: "Swami, the Master has exhorted us to 'make the thought tally with speech'. What does this mean?"

Saradananda: "That you must be sincere, that your inner life should tally with the outer."

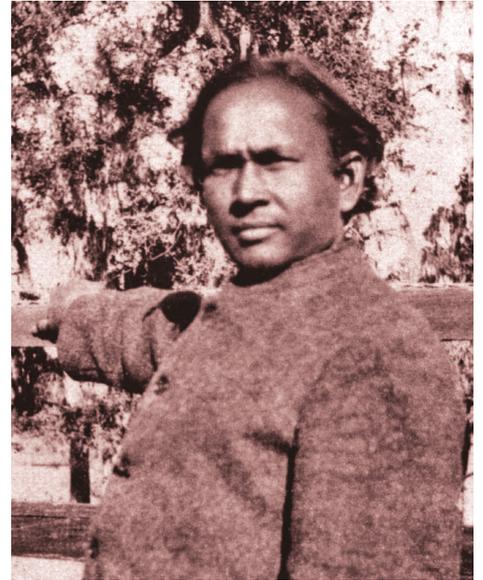
Monk: "It is naturally so. Whatever we speak we think in our mind."

Saradananda: "Do you think it is easy? We chant the name of the Lord very superficially. We say, 'Oh Lord, I am your servant and You are my Master; I have renounced everything for you; I call You, Lord, please grant me Your vision.' And at the same time we are harbouring bad thoughts in the mind. It does not work. As you speak, so you must think. In other words, while you take the name of the Lord think of Him alone."

Swami Turiyananda (Harinath Chattopadhyaya)

The birthday of Swami Turiyananda was observed on Wednesday 11 January 2017.

Harinath had led the austere life of a brahmachari even from his early boyhood—bathing in the Ganges every day, cooking his own meals, waking before sunrise, and reciting from the *Gita* from memory before leaving bed. He found in the Master the embodiment of the Vedantic scriptures. Aspiring to be a follower of the ascetic Sankara, he cherished



Swami Turiyananda

a great hatred for women. One day he said to the Master he could not allow even small girls to come near him. The Master scolded him and said, "You are talking like a fool. Why should you hate women? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Regard them as your own mother and you will never feel their evil influence. The more you hate them, the more you will fall into their snares." Hari said later that these words completely changed his attitude towards women.

The Master knew Hari's passion for Vedanta. But he did not wish any of his disciples to become a dry ascetic or a mere bookworm. So he asked Hari to practise Vedanta in life by giving up the unreal and following the Real. "But it is not easy", Sri Ramakrishna said, "to realise the illusoriness of the world. Study alone does not help one very much. The grace of God is required. Mere personal effort is futile. A man is a tiny creature after all, with very limited powers. But he can achieve

the impossible if he prays to God for his grace." Whereupon the Master sang a song in praise of grace. Hari was profoundly moved and shed tears. Later in life Hari achieved a wonderful synthesis of the ideals of the Personal God and the Impersonal Truth.

Selected teachings

Mine of spiritual wisdom

Students of the New York Vedanta Society found that Turiyananda was an inexhaustible mine of spiritual wisdom. While walking, eating, or sitting, his spiritual conversation flowed like a perennial spring. Once he was asked, "Swami, how is it possible for you to always speak of holy subjects? Don't you ever get exhausted?" Turiyananda replied, "You see, I have lived this life from my youth; it has become part and parcel of me. And Divine Mother keeps the supply filled up. Her store can never be exhausted. Whatever goes out, She at once fills up."

Living example of Vedanta

Turiyananda was a living example of Vedanta. Sometimes the students would try to find ways to give the swami a break from his rigid routine. One evening Gurudas said, "Swami, there is a fine concert tonight. It is an oratorio and you will like it. You have never heard our Western music. Let us go." "But why should you care for those things?" the swami remarked. "You have had enough of that now. Let us stay here and read something nice and have good talk. These amusements we must give up now if we want Mother." He had no curiosity for new

things or any desire for sightseeing. He was perfectly happy and contented within himself.

Correcting the shortcomings of others

Turiyananda never hesitated to correct the shortcomings of his students in a bold and straightforward way, for which he was sometimes very much misunderstood. Once, observing their discontent, the swami said, "Yes, you people in the West always try to cover up and hide your mistakes. But how can the wound be treated unless the bandages are removed? You hide your real character behind a smooth and polite exterior, but the sore festers in the heart. The guru is the physician, and once the disease is diagnosed he must not fear to apply the lancet, if necessary. Sometimes a deep, clean incision is the only remedy. You are so sensitive, always afraid of being scolded or exposed. When I flatter a little, you say, 'Swami is so wonderful', but when I utter a harsh word you run away." When the students complained that he did not understand them, the swami replied, "I know you better than you know yourself, because I can look deep into your mind. What is hidden in yourself, is revealed to me. In time you will realise that what I tell you is true."

See the Lord always in everything

Another day, someone asked the swami why there was so much evil in the world. He replied, "Tulasidas says, 'To the good the world is full of good; but to the bad the world is full of evil.' The world is neither good nor bad. What I call good, you perhaps

call bad, and the reverse. Where is the standard? The standard is in our own attitude towards life. Each one has his own standard. And with increased experience and insight, the standard changes. The pity is that we will recognise evil. When we become perfectly good ourselves, the whole world will appear good. We see only the reflection of our own minds. See the Lord always in everything, and you will see no evil. A suspicious mind sees evil everywhere; a trusting mind sees only good."

Sincerity

"Sincerity," Swami Turiyananda told the students, "is the backbone of spirituality. One should practise it in one's actions and thoughts. There should be no disagreement between what one feels and what one says; and at the same time, one should not be cruel or unkind when one adheres to truth. Make your heart and tongue one." Then he quoted a Sanskrit proverb, "Say what is kind, but not what is untrue. Say what is true, but not what is unkind." Finally, he chanted a beautiful verse from the Mundaka Upanishad, "Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood. The path by which the sages reach perfection is the path of truth. There is no other way to freedom – no other way."

The body is an illusion

Once a student versed in Christian Science asked, "Is it not our duty to keep our body healthy?" "Yes," said the swami. "But from the highest standpoint, the body itself is the great disease. We want to go beyond the idea of the body and to realise that we are Atman. It is the love for our body

that stands in the way to our realisation of that higher state where we can state, 'I am not this body. I am the Atman. The body is an illusion.' As long as we love the body we cannot realise the Self, and we shall be born again and again. But when we love the Atman then we become indifferent towards the body. And when all love for the body goes, liberation will come very soon."

Swami Trigunatitananda (Sarada Prasanna Mitra)

The birthday of Swami Trigunatitananda was observed on Tuesday 31 January 2017.

Sarada Prasanna Mitra was born in 1865. He belonged to a rich landowning family and was over-indulged as a child, so that he became accustomed to being waited on. He attended Mahendranath Gupta's school. When he went to take the entrance exam at the Calcutta University, it was expected that he would do brilliantly, for he was one of the school's best pupils. But, on the second day of the examination, Sarada Prasanna lost a gold watch, which was his most treasured possession; this upset him so much that he failed to do himself justice and passed in the second division only. For weeks, Sarada was in despair. M. loved the boy, and instead of laughing at him as a cry-baby, he took him to see Ramakrishna. Sarada began to visit Dakshineswar regularly.

One hot day, Ramakrishna asked Sarada to bring water and wash his feet. Sarada, regarding all kinds of work as menial, flushed with humiliation, especially as several of his friends



Swami Trigunatitananda

were present. But Ramakrishna repeated the request and he had to obey. He used to say later that this incident was the beginning of his education in the spirit of service.

Selected teachings

Teaching through maxims and singing as a devotional exercise

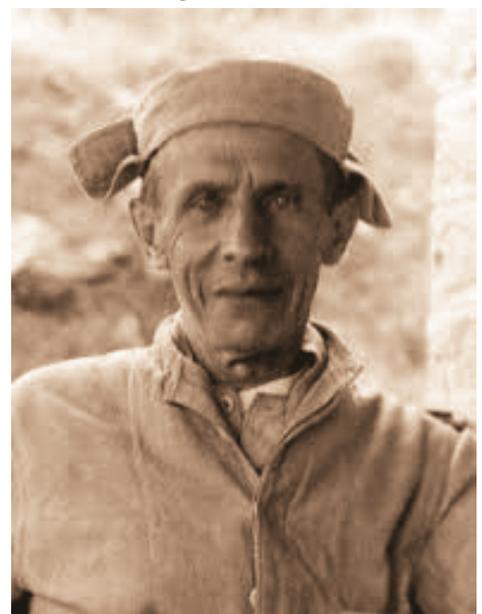
Trigunatitananda was fond of teaching by means of forceful maxims. When someone at the table recited the great watchword of the American Republic, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," he made him repeat it. Some of the mottoes hanging in every room of the monastery were, 'Live like a hermit, but work like a horse'; 'Do it now'; 'Watch and pray'; 'Do or die – but you will not die'. The swami believed in singing as a devotional exercise, and led his young male disciples in hymns and chants up on the roof of the temple, or down by the harbour in the early morning, astonishing the fisherman and sailors.

Teaching through personal example

Trigunatitananda was an uncompromising ascetic. He taught his students through personal example more than through words. He was a consistent example of regularity and punctuality. He would go to bed last and rise before any of the other members of the monastery. His office was his bedroom, and he had no bed. He would spread one blanket on the carpet, put another blanket over himself, and use the upper part of his right arm as his pillow. The swami strongly believed that through discipline one can form a strong character, which is absolutely essential as a foundation for spiritual life. To the earnest disciple he would say, I don't mind if I break every bone in your body if I can drag you up to the shores of immortality and throw you in. Then my work will be finished."

Swami Atulananda left this eyewitness account:

"Swami Trigunatitananda was a



Swami Atulananda

man of austere type. When he first came to San Francisco, he fasted once for three days – maybe to accumulate power to carry on the work. He was a strict disciplinarian. Once on Sri Ramakrishna's birthday he spent fifteen hours in worship from 6.00am to 9.00pm and delivered three lectures, all without leaving the platform...He was a very jolly type of man and very active too. He encouraged others also to follow a tight routine – meditation, study, work, and so on. At lectures there would be no chairs on the platform. He had a desk only and, when speaking, he used to lean on it.

He ran a bookstall and he himself kept the accounts. One day he found the account five dollars short. He was worried, and for days together he worked, trying to make the account balance. Then at long last he wrote at the bottom of the page, "Five dollars short. However, let it go." In that way he tallied the account. He wouldn't take anybody's advice. Once he had to purchase a suit. He went to the market and the trade people sold him a cheap suit. When he came home Mrs Peterson said, "Oh, swami, what have you done? It is the kind of thing that racetrack people wear. You cannot go out in this dress." Then a compromise was worked out in which the swami was permitted to wear the suit only at home. On another day he purchased a dark red collar, and came home all the way feeling quite proud of it. Seeing him with that collar, Mrs Peterson exclaimed, "Oh, what have you done? Gamblers use these collars.

You cannot use it. I am going to hide it."

Facing all challenges

Trigunatitananda had an undaunted personality. He boldly faced all the challenges in his life. In the anteroom next to the monastery kitchen there were several strings stretched across one end from wall to wall. Dangling from these were a number of lifelike spiders of different sizes and kinds. The young members were curious about it. First they thought they were there simply as decoration, but later Trigunatitananda revealed the mystery behind the spiders. Once while bathing in the Ganges he had been trapped by a swarm of water spiders. He had received such a shock that to overcome that phobia, or rather to make sure that it no longer existed, he hung up the artificial spiders where he could see them a number of times each day.

Expecting the best

Trigunatitananda was not a cloistered monk. He knew many distinguished people of San Francisco and neighbouring cities. They came to know him either through the business of the Society or through his lectures and classes. He was a likeable person and made friends with unknown neighbours as well as with the mayors of the city. With his students he acted like an affectionate mother as well as a chastising father. He expected the best from them and trained them to give public speeches. Trigunatitananda gave the following instructions to help his students prepare for a lecture:

The lesson or lecture is to be taken sincerely and faithfully as a spiritual service and religious practice for one's own spiritual advancement.

Sit in a sincere and prayerful mood.

Make the mind blank. Drive off all desires and thoughts of the secular side of work.

Meditate on God.

Then meditate on the subject intensely.

Then offer the lesson or lecture as a sacred sacrifice to God.

Bow down in the spirit of thankfulness to God and ask for his blessing.

Finally, when you come to the platform to speak, remember that you are talking to God. God is the only audience.

Source:

Swami Chetanananda, *God lived with Them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna* by (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1997) p.115; p.117-8; p.112; pp.344-349; p. 371; p. 376; p. 377; p. 378; p. 505; p. 506; p. 509; p. 510

Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and his Disciples* by, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, pp232-3

Mahendrananth Gupta (M) and translated by Swami Nikhilananda *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Volume 1*, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1947) pp. 47-48; p. 55; p. 61; p. 63