



Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna on Renunciation

Today the human body is, tomorrow it is not; even the shortest span of life is beset with pain and misery. He who is able to renounce all for God's sake is a living God

Source: *Great sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta; page 31.

Sri Sarada Devi on Faith

Is faith so cheap, my child? Faith is the last word. If one has faith, the goal is practically reached.

Source: Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, Life and Teachings*, p. 93

Swami Vivekananda on Man

No books, no scriptures, no science can ever imagine the glory of the Self that appears as man, the most glorious God that ever was, the only God that ever existed, exists, or ever will exist.

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* by Swami Mumukshananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; page 193.

Pagan Principle

Recognition of the Divine, which transcends gender, acknowledging both the male and female aspects of the deity.

Source: <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=wqEVRamswfgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=quotes+on+pagan+beliefs&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjq4MefqYrpAhXHzigGHbnnC5AQ6AEIWDAG#v=onepage&q=quotes%20on%20pagan%20beliefs&f=false>

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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 11 MARCH 2020 TO 10 SEPTEMBER 2020

ADELAIDE

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- All activities except the daily aratrikam of the Vedanta Centre of Adelaide were suspended from March to June due to COVID 19-related restrictions on gatherings.

Important News

- The Vedanta Centre of Adelaide is pleased to inform devotees all over Australia that it has purchased and moved to a bigger property located at 16 East Terrace, Kensington Gardens, SA 5068. The pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Ma Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Buddha and Christ were installed on Wednesday, 15 July.



New Building of the Vedanta Centre of Adelaide

- The Centre formally moved to the new premises on Saturday, 22 August 2020. A **Special puja** was held on Saturday, 5 September 2020, marking the beginning of regular activities at the new Centre.

Daily Activities

- The Centre functions from 7.30am-12.30pm and 4.00-8.00pm. The evening vesper service to Sri Ramakrishna is performed from 7.00-7.30



The Shrine in the new Centre

pm followed by *bhajans*, devotional reading and meditation.

Regular Activities

- Swami Manyananda conducted classes and discussions on the 'Fundamentals of Vedanta' on every Wednesdays from 22 July from 11:00 am to 12:00 noon. The classes were initially conducted in the old Centre and now continue at the new Centre.
- Swami Manyananda is also conducting classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* from Sunday, 13 September 2020 at 11:00 am.
- Every alternative Saturday, from 1 August 2020, Swami Manyananda has been conducting a reading and discussion on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* before the evening aratrikam.

Celebrations

- *Guru purnima* was celebrated (at the old Centre) on Sunday, 5 July, with a short *puja*, *bhajans*, *pushpanjali* and *prasad*.
- *Krishna janmashtami*, marking the birth of Lord Krishna, was celebrated (at the old Centre) on Tuesday, 11 August with a *puja*, *bhajans*, *pushpanjali* and *prasad*.



Guru purnima

BRISBANE

96 Vedanta Drive, (next to 2 Poppy Crescent),
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Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

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Daily Activities

- Meditation and the chanting of hymns were conducted between 6:15 am and 7:15 am on all days except Sundays when it is held from 8 am to 8:30 am.
- *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) Two Yoga class sessions were conducted online from 1st April to 30th May 2020. The classes resumed at the Centre from the 1 June (from 8 a.m to 9.15 a.m). 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 class on the *Brahma Sutras* is conducted on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 12 noon.
- A discussion group met on the first Monday of the month at Sunnybank Hills (7:30 pm — 8:45 pm).
- A Vedic Chanting class was held on Wednesdays from 8:30 am to 9:30 am online.
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* was put on hold from April to July 2020. It resumed from the third week of August 2020 (7:00 pm — 8:00 pm) at 134 Fleming Rd, Chap-

el Hill, Qld) on alternate Fridays.

- Chanting of the *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days (7:30 pm — 8:15 pm).
- Devotees took turns in decorating and worshipping Sri Ramakrishna's image every week at the Sri Selva Vinayakar temple, South Maclean.
- Swami Atmeshananda conducted *Vivekachudamani* classes online for the Vedanta Group at Too-woomba on the first Wednesday of every month.
- A class on the *Ashtavakra Gita* was conducted at 101 Sharpless Drive, Springfield Lakes, on a fixed day of the month.
- On the third Saturday of every month, the *Bhagavad Gita* was studied online by the Vedanta group at the Gold Coast from 5.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.
- The Centre began a soup kitchen from June 2020 for the benefit of the needy. An average of 100 meals per week are cooked by volunteers, packed into containers and frozen. They are distributed free of cost through the Westside Community Centre and the Goodna Street Life shop.
- Beginning from July, on every Friday, the Centre's Food bank distributes groceries to the needy. An average of 12 grocery hampers along with cooked food and free bread is distributed to the needy.
- The Maa Sarada's kitchen prepares and sells food at a reasonable cost to people. On an average, about 120 persons avail themselves of this service. The kitchen is managed efficiently by



Maa Sarada's Kitchen

volunteers efficiently.

- On Fridays, a Justice of the Peace (JP) renders their service at the Centre from 10 am to 11 a.m. People needing the service access this free service which started from the 3rd week of August 2020.

Other Activities

- On the occasion of International Yoga day, a special lecture and Yoga practice was conducted on 2 June 2020 at the Centre.
- Charis Mullen, State MP for Jordon (Qld), visited the Centre and discussed the present and future activities on 22 July 2020.



Charis Mullen, State MP for Jordon

- Children's school holiday programme was conducted at the Centre on 29 June, 3 July, 6 July and 10 July. Approximately 10 children participated.
- Swami Atmeshananda participated as a panelist in a discussion forum at a Town Hall Meeting on 12 August 2020 on the topic of *Faith in the Public Square* organised by *The Cooperative project* hosted by Wesley Mission. The forum's objective was 'to make space for dialogue from all and any members of the public and for sake of the public good'.
- Senator Paul Scarr, Federal MP, paid a visit to the Centre on 19 August 2020 and familiarized himself with the ongoing activities and future plans of the Centre.
- Senator Milton Dick, Federal MP for Oxley, visited the Centre on 21 August and was taken around and given an introduction to the services and future plans of the Centre.
- Councillor Nicole Jonic of the Ipswich Council was invited by the Centre on 26 August 2020 to introduce her to our activities and future plans.



Senator Milton Dick, Federal MP for Oxley, visited the Centre on 21 August 2020

Celebrations

- The birthday of Shankaracharya was observed on 28 April 2020. Readings from the life of the Acharya and Bhajans were conducted on the occasion (broadcast online).
- On the occasion of *Buddha purnima*, a service was conducted on 7 May with readings from the Life of Buddha, chanting from the Buddhist scriptures and worship (broadcast online).
- On 5 July *Guru purnima* was celebrated with worship, chanting, devotional music, a talk on the significance of Guru and distribution of Prasad (following COVID restrictions the event was conducted following the regulations).

Forthcoming Programmes

- During school holidays in September-October, the Centre will organise a children's vacation programme. Meditation, Yoga, Story-telling, Painting workshop, Positive affirmations, gardening, creative writing workshop etc will be conducted for the kids in this programme.
- The Annual programme of the Centre would be held on Saturday, 10 October, at the Centre from 5.30 to 8.30 p.m. The event will consist of multicultural music and dance programmes, and speeches by dignitaries. There will be a restricted number of participants but the event would be broadcast live on Facebook and Youtube.
- On the occasion of Mental Health Week, the Centre will conduct a mental health workshop 'Mind your Mind' on 18 October 2020. This half

day workshop will be conducted by a trained psychologist, a psychiatrist and other experts in the field of positive mental health service.

- Durga Puja on the Ashtami day (eighth day of Navaratri festival) will be conducted at the Centre on Saturday, 24 October 2020. Considering the COVID-19 restrictions, a limited number of participants will be allowed to attend the worship.

CANBERRA

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Regular Activities

- On account of the Covid 19 pandemic the Gita classes have been suspended temporarily. Friends and devotees are accessing the classes online. When the classes recommence they will be held at the Belconnen Community Meeting Room, 12 Chandler St, Belconnen, ACT. Monthly lectures are advertised by e-mail once scheduled.

MELBOURNE

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Regular Activities

- The shrine was open from 7:00 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm seven days a week.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation were conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm daily.
- Rama Nama Sankirtanam on Ekadasi Days.
- A scriptural class on Sundays from 10:00 am to 11:30 am on *A Study of Swami Vivekananda's Karma Yoga* by Swami Sunishthananda which was conducted online from 5 April 2020 due to the restrictions brought on by Covid 19.
- Guided meditation followed by a class on

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* on Thursdays from 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm. This class was conducted online from 5 April 2020 due to the restrictions brought on by Covid 19.

Celebrations

- On the evening of Thursday, 07 May 2020, Buddha Purnima was celebrated online. The programme included evening vesper service followed by Guided Meditation and chanting of Pragyaparamita Stotram. Swami Sunishthananda delivered a talk on the topic "Buddha: The Rebel Child of Hinduism".
- On the morning of Sunday, 05 July 2020, Guru Purnima was celebrated online. The programme included puja, offerings, chanting and bhajans and a talk on the significance of Guru Purnima by Swami Sunishthananda.
- On the evening of Tuesday, 11 August 2020, Sri Krishna Janmashtami was celebrated online. The programme included puja, offerings, bhajans and Shyama-nama Sankirtanam.

Other Activities

- Swami Sunishthananda participated in an Indian Community Multilingual Virtual Prayer, entitled "Pray: Unite Against COVID-19" organised by Australian Bharat Brahman Samaj, Melbourne, on Friday, 24 April 2020, to pray for the front-line warriors, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, health workers, cleaners, essential commodity suppliers, posties, truck drivers, police and farmers. Swami Sunishthananda conducted the prayer in Bengali and delivered the Vote of Thanks.
- Swami Sunishthananda was one of the speakers and panellists for the final event of the "In Pursuit of Happiness" Seminar Series organized online by Maroondah Interfaith Network on Saturday, 13 June 2020.
- A small gathering was organised at Vedanta Centre premises on Friday, 19 June 2020, to bid farewell to Mr. Naren Pilaka and his family

who have returned to India. The family was long associated with the Centre and were active participants in all its events.

- The Annual General Meeting was conducted online on Sunday, 9 August 2020, at 11.15 am. Swami Sridharananda presided over the meeting.
- An online prayer meeting was conducted on Sunday, 6 September 2020, at 11.15 am in memory of the departed soul of Mrs. Durgarani Bagchi, a longstanding devotee and member of the Vedanta Centre. Swami Sridharananda presided over the prayer meeting. She passed away while Swami Sunishthananda was chanting to her online.

PERTH

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- On account of the Covid 19 pandemic, daily, regular and other activities were temporarily suspended. The congregation did get together on two occasions. These were:
- *Guru purnima*, which was celebrated on Sunday, 5 July, with *bhajans*, prayers and distribution of *prasad*.



Devotees at one of the Functions



Prayer meeting for K.P Basu Mullick

- On Sunday, 16 August 2020 there was a prayer meeting to remember Mr. K.P. Basu Mullick with his family, friends and devotees.

Short Obituary of Krishna Prosad Basu Mullick

Krishna Prosad Basu Mullick first came from India to Singapore in 1975. He started serving the Singapore Ashrama from 1983. He was initiated by Swami Butheshananda, the 12th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. K.P. Basu Mullick served the Ramakrishna Mission in Singapore as a community member, Treasurer and assisted in the establishment of the Sarada Kindergarten. After migrating to Australia he served the Vedanta Centre in Perth by working alongside Swami Sridharananda to establish the Centre at Bullcreek, Perth. He was appointed Secretary and contributed in the stewardship of the Bullcreek temple and its transition to its current address in Yokine. He was passionate about empowering men and women, building their confidence and championed them to be the future torch bearers of the Vedanta Centre. He continued as a volunteer after his tenure as Secretary until the decline of his health at the end of 2017. He passed away peacefully at his home on 16 July 2020, with his family by his side.

He is survived by his wife, 2 sons, daughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law and 4 grandchildren. The kindness of Krishna Prosad is embedded in all the lives that he has helped and bettered by means of

his compassion, love, strength and leadership. He was a man who believed that anything was possible by the grace of the Holy Mother. His faith and passion for the Holy Mother was ever present in the way he thought, the way he spoke and the way he acted. He was an extraordinary man who chose to live an ordinary life.

SYDNEY

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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 7:00 am and chanting from 7:00 am to 7:30 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 study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* on Sundays between 9:30 am and 10:30 am. Due to the current restrictions owing to Covid 19, the talks were pre-recorded and uploaded to the Centre's website and Youtube Channel.
- Swami Sridharananda conducted a class on the *Mundaka Upanishad* on Saturdays from 11:00am to 12:00 noon. Due to the current restrictions owing to Covid 19, the talks were pre-recorded and uploaded to the Centre's website and Youtube Channel.
- *Sri Rāmanāma Sankirtanam* was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.

Celebrations

- Devotees and friends wishing to pay their respects in the shrine of the Vedanta Centre and to Swami Sridharananda registered online and observed social distancing on the occasion of *Guru purnima*. The function was observed on 5 July 2020 and prasad packets were distributed to all those who attended. There were around 140 to 150 people who visited.



Swamis Sridharananda, Dhanyananda and devotees on the occasion of Guru purnima

- *Krishna janmastami* was observed at the Vedanta Centre on Tuesday, 11 August 2020. Because of the current Covid 19 restrictions the worship was witnessed only by the residents of the ashrama.

2. FEATURE ARTICLES

A. Paganism

Compiled from <https://americanhumanist.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/paganism.pdf>
<https://academic.microsoft.com/topic/2777109615> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/paganism/>

The term Pagan comes from the Latin *paganus* which refers to those who lived in the country. When Christianity began to grow in the Roman Empire, it did so at first primarily in the cities. The people who lived in the country and who continued to believe in “the old ways” came to be known as pagans. Pagans have been broadly defined as anyone involved in any religious act, practice, or ceremony which is not Christian. Jews and Muslims also use the term to refer to anyone outside their religion.

Introduction

Some define paganism as a religion outside of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism; others simply define it as being without a religion. Paganism, however, often is not identified as a traditional religion *per se* because it does not have any official doctrine; however, it has some common characteristics within its variety of traditions. One of the common beliefs is the divine presence in nature and the reverence for the natural order in life.

In the strictest sense, paganism refers to the authentic religions of ancient Greece and Rome and the surrounding areas. The pagans usually had a polytheistic belief in many gods but only one, which represents the chief god and supreme godhead, is chosen to worship.

The Renaissance (the word 'Renaissance' means 'rebirth') of the 1500s reintroduced the ancient Greek concepts of Paganism. Pagan symbols and traditions entered European art, music, literature, and ethics. People in Europe became more aware of the art and philosophy of the ancient world during the Re-

naissance period. Around 1500 Documents rescued after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 introduced people to ideas from before the Middle ages. And although Europe remained Christian the Pagan gods and goddesses of Ancient Greece jostled with the patron saints of Christianity on public monument, and classical philosophy began to change the way people thought about ethics and morality.

In Britain the Reformation of the 16th century transformed England from a Catholic country to a Protestant one. The religious conflict that went along with this change led to the persecution of those who didn't fit the desired religious profile. Religious hysteria (disguised as spiritual cleansing) led to some individuals being described as 'witches'. But these people were not part of any religious movement, merely victims of local feuds and quarrels. A few of them were practitioners of herbal medicine but most were ordinary, conventional citizens.

After the enormous political and intellectual upheavals of the 1600s died away, it became pos-

sible to explore ways of thought outside Christianity without fear of instant damnation, and the study of Greek and Roman classics became part of every schoolboy's education.

The Reformation of the 16th century however, put a temporary halt to Pagan thinking. Greek and Roman classics, with their focus on Paganism, were accepted again during the Enlightenment of the 1700s.

The name 'Europe' (herself a character in Greek myth) replaced 'Christendom' in the mid-18th century. Influenced by the expansion of trade and colonies an awareness and interest in other cultures and spiritualities grew. This new age of reason during the 17th and 18th Centuries became known as the Enlightenment.

Paganism experienced another rise in the 1800s and 1900s when modern forms of Buddhism and Hinduism were growing in popularity. Mme Helena Blavatsky from Russia founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. Its teachings were based on Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism, Neo-

Platonic thought, and ancient Egyptian religion. Pagan philosophies, which venerated Nature and were polytheistic, began to be seen as sophisticated contributions to contemporary spirituality.

Following the interest in ancient civilizations that became popular in the 17th through to the 19th centuries, including the popularity of the Druid revivals, scholars in the early 20th century explored the ancient spirituality of the British Isles and Europe. The first Pagan tradition to be restored was that of the Druids in Britain. In the mid-1600s stone circles and other monuments built four and a half thousand years previously began to interest scholars. Some thought that the original Druids (pre-historic tribal people of Europe) had built them. In 1717 one of these scholars, the Irish theologian John Toland, became the first Chosen Chief of the Ancient Druid Order, which became known as the British Circle of the Universal Bond.

By the 19th Century a new outlook was evident as people searched for the fundamental principles of religion by looking at the faiths of different places and times.

Across Europe people were re-discovering their indigenous cultures. In northern Europe there was a growing interest in Saxon and Norse traditions. In England, William Morris translated the Icelandic sagas and Cecil Sharp collected village dances and songs.

In Germany Schlegel and Schelling in particular were attracted to the nature religion which they saw behind traditional folk customs, and at the beginning of the 20th century Guido von Liszt pioneered the study of the runes.

In north-east Europe, particularly Lithuania, nationalist movements spread and indigenous languages were reclaimed, traditional tales recorded and the old festivals celebrated. Folk music was part of this reassertion of local identity, preserving traditions which otherwise would have been forgotten.

The more current "Pagan Renaissance" grew out of a variety of sources that coalesced between the 1930s and 1950s.

Paganism represents a wide variety of traditions that emphasize reverence for nature and a revival of ancient polytheistic and animistic religious practices. Some modern forms of Paganism have their roots in the 19th century, e.g., the British Order of Druids, but most contemporary Pagan groups trace their immediate roots to the 1960s and have an emphasis on a spiritual interest in nature.

Paganism today is a movement that consists of many different perspectives. Most American pagan religions have practices that blend different traditions such as Celtic, Greco-Roman, Native American, ancient Egyptian and Norse. Pagan traditions draw from ancient beliefs as well as from modern beliefs formed in the last century. For example, Paganism found an

ally in the ecological and feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s. Pagan philosophies appealed to many eco-activists who also saw nature as sacred and recognized the Great Goddess as Mother Nature.

The Basic Beliefs of Paganism

Because of the wide diversity in Paganism, there are a variety of resources about its basic beliefs. In general, Pagans celebrate nature and spirituality and encourage an eco-friendly lifestyle. Equality of the sexes is dominant. Women play a significant role in ceremonies and goddesses are of great importance. Pagans believe that there is divinity in the living world and, through rituals, they can connect with the divine. The festivals are related to their devotion to nature; e.g., the Summer Solstice celebrates the sun and the divinity that creates life. Source: Paganism: Types of Religion (<http://www.typesofreligion.com/paganism.html>)

The following three items, taken together, provide a comprehensive overview of the basic beliefs.

Although principles vary from one pagan religion to another, most pagan religions follow the same general set of principles in some form. "The most basic tenant of paganism is that it is your own responsibility, not the responsibility of any government, institution, church or other people to choose what you believe in regards to spirituality, values, ethics, the nature of Divinity, etc." "The development of your personal beliefs, morals and eth-

ics is your own responsibility it is the responsibility of each individual to learn to recognize what is right from wrong, regardless of our early environment." "Most pagan religions believe that everything in the universe is sacred, but the definition and level of sacredness applied to an object will generally vary from one pagan to another. For some pagans, all parts of our universe are considered divine and, as such, sacred and worthy of our deepest respect." "In all pagan religions, it is up to the individual to determine what Deity means to them, who or what Deity is right for them and how they ultimately develop their relationship with their chosen Deity. Pagans have many different ideas about what encompasses Deity and how their Deity is represented. It is up to the individual, through study of their religion, meditation and, in some cases prayer, to determine what image of Deity is right for them." Many traditional pagans "believe that consciousness extends far beyond the restraints of human form and physical existence. All life forms contain some level of consciousness, from the smallest insect to the giant redwood trees....consciousness survives death and exists simultaneously on multiple levels of reality." "Since the term paganism is something of an 'umbrella' term, used to cover a wide range of spiritual paths, it would be virtually impossible to provide a detailed and comprehensive list of principles that apply to all pagan religions. For the most part however, these very basic principles can be found in almost all forms of pa-

ganism." Source: "What are some of the basic principles of paganism?" (<http://exotic-pets.yoexpert.com/exotic-pets-general/what-are-some-of-the-basic-principles-of-paganism-2192.html>)

What Contemporary Pagans Believe

"The central beliefs of modern Pagans differ in specifics yet share many fundamentals. Deity is seen as immanent rather than transcendent. Experience is preferred over doctrine. It is believed that there are and should be multiple paths to the Divine....While there is no set of beliefs shared by all Pagans, most would agree that similarities far outweigh differences. There are a number of beliefs held by the vast majority of modern Pagans." For example: -- Multiple paths to the divine exist as symbolized by many goddesses and gods. These are often seen as archetypes or gateways to the unconscious. -- Respect and love Mother Earth essentially as a living being.... -- The physical world, as an emanation of the divine, is good and to be enjoyed by all living beings in love and harmony. -- Ethics and morality are based on avoidance of harm to other beings, including Earth as a whole, which mandates environmental activism as a spiritual responsibility. -- Human interdependence implies the need for community cooperation. -- A strong commitment to personal and planetary growth, evolution, and balance are vital. -- One's lifestyle must be consistent with one's beliefs. -- A minimum of dogma and a maximum of individual responsibil-

ity in all things are goals to strive for. Thus a healthy skepticism is to be fostered, and ideas are not to be accepted without personal investigation of their validity. -- All beings are personal emanations of the Divine. Source: Modern Paganism (http://www.paganlibrary.com/introductory/modern_paganism.php)

The three principles of the Pagan Federation

The principles are intended "to provide a general outline of some key mainstream Pagan attitudes and beliefs concerned with how we relate to the Earth, how we relate to others, and how we relate to the divine." -- Love for and Kinship with Nature.... This principle recognized that "human beings are part of nature and that our lives are intimately interwoven with the web of life and death." -- A positive morality "in which the individual is responsible for the discovery and development of their true nature in harmony with the outer world and community. This is often expressed as 'Do what you will, as long as it harms none.'" -- Recognition of the Divine, which transcends gender, acknowledging both the female and male aspect of Deity. Source: The Pagan Federation (<http://www.paganfed.org/about-princ.shtml>) (Note: The Pagan Federation International includes members from the United States and across the world.)

2. FEATURE ARTICLES

B. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

The following excerpt are drawn from some of the conversations and interactions that Sri Ramakrishna had with his devotees. In this context, Sri Ramakrishna's salient message and teaching are about cultivating love and devotion to God.

Mere reading of the scriptures is not enough

Saturday, April 7, 1883

About four o'clock in the afternoon some members of the Brāhmo Samāj arrived. The Master began to converse with them.

A Brāhmo: "Sir, have you read the Panchadāsi?"

Master: "At first one should hear books like that and indulge in reasoning. But later on –

Cherish my precious Mother Śyāmā

Tenderly within, O mind;

May you and I alone behold Her,

Letting no one else intrude

"One should hear the scriptures during the early stages of spiritual discipline. After attaining God there is no lack of knowledge. Then the Divine Mother supplies it without fail. A child spells out every word as he writes, but later on he writes fluently. The goldsmith is up and doing while melting gold. As long as the gold hasn't melted, he works the bellows with one hand, moves the fan with the other, and blows through a pipe with his mouth. But the moment the gold melts and is poured into the mould, he

is relieved of all anxiety. Mere reading of the scriptures is not enough. A person cannot understand the true significance of the scriptures if he is attached to the world.

Though with intense delight I learned many poems and dramas,

I have forgotten them all, entrapped in Krishna's love

"Keshab enjoys the world and practises yoga as well. Living in the world, he directs his mind to God."

A devotee described the Convocation of Calcutta University, saying that the meeting looked like a forest of human heads.

Master: "The feeling of the Divine is awakened in me when I see a great crowd of people. Had I seen that meeting, I should have been overwhelmed with spiritual fervour."

Fully awakened souls are beyond virtue and vice

Sunday, April 8, 1883

It was Sunday morning. The Master, looking like a boy, was seated in his room, and near him was another boy, his beloved dis-

ciple Rakhāl. M. (also known as Mahendranath Gupta) entered and saluted the Master. Rakhāl was also in the room, and Kishori, Manilal Mallick, and several other devotees gathered by and by.

Manilal Mallick, a business man, had recently been to Benares, where he owned a bungalow.

Master: "So you have been to Benares. Did you see any holy men there?"

Manilal: "Yes, sir. I paid my respects to Trailanga Swami, Bhaskarananda, and others.

Master: "Tell us something about them."

Manilal: "Trailanga Swami is living in the same temple where he lived before – on the Manikarnā Ghāt, near the Benimādhav Minaret. People said he was formerly in a more exalted spiritual state. He could perform many miracles. Now he has lost much of that power."

Master: "That is the criticism of worldly people."

Manilal: Trailanga Swami keeps a strict vow of silence. Unlike him, Bhaskarananda is friendly



with all.”

Master: Did you have any conversation with Bhaskarananda?”

Manilal: “Yes, sir. We had a long talk. Among other things we discussed the problem of good and evil. He said to me, ‘Don’t follow the path of evil. Give up sinful thoughts. That is how God wants us to act. Perform only those duties that are virtuous.’ ”

Master: “Yes, that is also a path, meant for worldly-minded people. But those whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened, who have realised that God alone is real and all else illusory, cherish a different ideal. They are aware that God alone is the Doer and others are His instruments. Those whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened never make a false step. They do not have to reason in order to shun evil. They are so full of love of God that whatever action they undertake is a good action. They are fully conscious that they are

not the doers of their actions, but mere servants of God. They always feel: ‘I am the machine and He is the Operator. I do as he does through me. I speak as He speaks through me. I move as He moves in me.’ ”

“Fully awakened souls are beyond virtue and vice. They realise that it is God who does everything.

“There was a monastery in a certain place. The monks residing there went out daily to beg their food. One day a monk, while out for his alms, saw a landlord beating a man mercilessly. The compassionate monk stepped in and asked the landlord to stop. But the landlord was filled with anger and turned his wrath against the innocent monk. He beat the monk till he fell unconscious on the ground. Someone reported the matter to the monastery. The monks ran to the spot and found their brother lying there. Four or five of them carried him back and laid him on a bed. He was still unconscious. The other monks sat around him sad at heart; some were fanning him. Finally someone suggested that he should be given a little milk to drink. When it was poured into his mouth he regained consciousness. He opened his eyes and looked around. One of the monks said, ‘Let us see whether he is fully conscious and can recognise us.’ Shouting into his ear, he said, ‘Revered sir, who is giving you

milk?’ ‘Brother’, replied the holy man in a low voice, ‘He who beat me is now giving me milk.’

“But one does not attain such a state of mind without the realization of God.”

Manilal: “Sir, what you have just said applies to a man of a very lofty spiritual state. I talked on such topics in a general way with Bhaskarananda.”

Master: “Does he live in a house?”

Manilal: “Yes, sir. He lives with a devotee.”

Master: “How old is he now?”

Manilal: “About fifty-five.”

Master: “Did you talk about anything else?”

Manilal: “I asked him how to cultivate bhakti. He said, ‘Chant the name of God. Repeat the name of Rāma.’ ”

Master: “That is very good.”

Source:

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Volume 1 by Mahendranath Gupta (M), Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, pages 200-205