



REACH

Newsletter of Vedanta Centres of Australia

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Motto:

*Atmano mokshartham
jagad hitaya cha,*

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

Sayings and Teachings

Simplicity pays

“One should not reason too much; it is enough if one loves the Lotus Feet of the Mother. Too much reasoning throws the mind into confusion. You get clear water if you drink from the surface of a pool. Put your hand deeper and stir the water and it becomes muddy. Therefore pray to God for devotion.”

--- Sri Ramakrishna.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna;
Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, India,
page 186.

Epitome of Motherhood

“My son, you know the Master looked upon everyone as the Divine Mother. This time he has left me behind to develop the ideal of Motherhood on earth.”

--- Sri Sarada Devi.

The Message of Holy Mother;
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, Page 1.

Demand divinity

“There must be no fear. No begging, but demanding—*demanding* the Highest. The true devotees of the Mother are as hard, as adamant and as fearless as lions. They are not the least upset if the whole universe suddenly crumbles into dust at their feet. *Make Her* listen to you. None of that *cringing* to Mother! Remember, She is all-powerful. She can make heroes even out of *stone*”

--- Swami Vivekananda.

The Message of Vivekananda;
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, Page 4.



**Temple of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi at the Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math
The headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission,
Howrah (West Bengal), India.**

CALENDAR OF FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Function	Centre	Date
Birth Anniversary of Holy Mother	Brisbane	Tuesday, 1st January 2008
	Melbourne	Tuesday, 1st January 2008
	Perth	Sunday 30th December 2007
	Sydney	Sunday 30th December 2007
Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda	Brisbane	Saturday, 2nd February 2008
	Melbourne	Saturday, 26th January 2008
	Perth	Tuesday, 29th January 2008
	Sydney	Tuesday, 29th January 2008
Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna and Annual Celebration for Adelaide and Melbourne centres	Adelaide	Saturday, 15th March 2008
	Brisbane	Sunday, 2nd March 2008
	Melbourne	Saturday, 29th March 2008
	Perth	Sunday, 9th March 2008
	Sydney	Sunday, 9th March 2008

Welcome

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

In Memoriam

Sadly, we announce the passing away of our dear Revered President, Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj on 4th of November 2007.

News and activities of Vedanta Centres of Australia and New Zealand

For the period From August 2007 to November 2007

ADELAIDE CENTRE

Monthly activities:

Swami Sridharananda continued to visit Adelaide three days a month to deliver discourses on the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. The talks are held at Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich SA 5065. The lectures are recorded and being used by devotees to augment their studies. For details of the ongoing monthly programmes please contact Mr. Raman Sharma, Secretary, on 08 8431 9775 or Mrs. Pathma Iswaran on 08-8379 5336.

Annual activities/ Celebrations:

The AGM was held on 11th of August 2007 at the Dulwich Community Centre.

An *Evening of Devotional music* was organised to raise funds for the Adelaide Chapter on Saturday, December 1, 2007 at the Burnside Community Centre, 401, Greenhill Road, Tasmore, SA. Mr. Avijit Sarkar and Mrs. Pushpa Jagadish from Sydney were the singers for the evening. The audience enjoyed the environment created by the devotional music. The programme was well-attended by over 150 devotees. Swami Atmешananda participated in the function.

Visiting Monks:

Swami Damodaranandaji visited Adelaide from 23rd to 26th of November 2007. He held a prayer meeting at a devotee's residence on Sunday, the 25th November 2007.

BRISBANE CENTRE

Daily activities:

Morning worship, evening *arati*, *bhajans*, and reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are the regular activities at the Centre in **181 Burbong Street, Chapel Hill, QLD 4073**, (phone no. 07-3720 0228). A resident volunteer looks after the day-to-day activities at the Centre.

Monthly and Annual activities:

Swami Atmешananda visited Brisbane once every month. He gave talks on *Srimad-Bhagavad Gita* and other spiritual topics. Swami Sridharananda also visited Brisbane from 5th to 8th of October 2007. He presided over the AGM which was held on 6th of October 2007. Swamis Bhaktirupananda and Krishnarupananda visited the Centre from 19th to 22nd and from 25th to 29th of November respectively.

CANBERRA CENTRE

Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita* twice a month at the Majura community Centre, Canberra. Parlour talks were given by him on *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* once a month. The AGM was held on the 4th of November 2007. Contacts: Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary - 02-6258 7612 and Mr. Ian Doherty, Treasurer - 02-6247 8519.

MELBOURNE CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

A daily vesper service is held at the Centre at **7 Judy Court, Vermont, Vic 3133** from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Vedic chanting; hymns and songs, scriptural readings and meditation are conducted after the vesper service. A resident volunteer looks after the services in the morning hours and on other occasions.

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta and other spiritual literature are made available in print, audio and visual media through the bookstall during this period. For further information please contact Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary, on 03-9803 6154 and Mr. Govindan Iyer, Treasurer, on 03-9543 4091.

2. Monthly/Annual Activities:

The monthly discourses continued to be held on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita* delivered by Swami Sridharananda from Thursday to Saturday of a prescheduled week at Holmsglen TAFE. The lecture series were based on Chapter Four, the

Jnana Karma Sannyasa Yoga of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The recordings of these discourses are available in Audio, Video and MP3 formats.

Sunday Meetings were conducted on every second Sunday of each month from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. These entail prayer, recitation of sacred mantras, rendering of *kirtan* and *bhajans* as well as selected readings from relevant scriptures and discussions thereon. The meetings conclude with an *arati* and distribution of *prasada*.

Swami Sridharananda presided over the AGM which was held on 15th of July 2007 at the Holmsglen TAFE.

Visiting Monks:

The following swamis visited the centre during the period mentioned. They conducted prayer meetings during their stay.

Swami Medhasananda from 14/11/07 to 15/11/07, Swami Damodarananda from 20/11/07 to 22/11/07, Swami Bhaktirupananda from 22/11/07 to 25/11/07, Swami Rajeswarananda from 26/11/07 to 7/12/07, Swami Krishnarupananda from 11/12/07 to 18/12/07.

PERTH CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

Worship in the morning and vesper service at 7 p.m. are being conducted daily at the Centre located at **2B Roe Close, Bull Creek W.A. 6149**. The Centre maintains a small bookstall and Library. Contacts: Centre - 08 9313 8796, Mr. K.P.Basu Mallick, Secretary, - 0411 791 058.

2. Weekly/Monthly Activities:

Every Saturday the **Bala Bodhi** evening classes for children and youth is being conducted from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. On Sundays, *satsangs* for the devotees start at 11:00 a.m. followed by a simple lunch-*prasada* for all. Swami Damodaranandaji conducts the above activities and meets the devotees and visitors, and, on invitation, delivers talks at various places in Perth.

SYDNEY CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

Worship and meditation in the morning and vesper service followed by devotional singing at 7 p.m. form the main focus of the daily activities. Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees are also conducted on a daily basis. The library facility is available to devotees for reference and research. The Centre maintains a bookstall which has a range of books on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, Yoga and other spiritual literature. Devotional songs, discourses on *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanisad*, etc. are also available in various media.

2. Weekly/ Monthly Activities:

a) The centre conducted the following activities in Sydney:

Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gitā* every Sunday morning from 9:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. at the South Strathfield Bowling Club, Augusta Street, Strathfield. In his absence, Swamis Tadananda and Atmeshananda spoke on various topics.

Classes on *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* were held on Wednesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Centre in Ashfield, NSW.

b) **Children's classes** on moral and spiritual teachings were suspended due to preparation of the Inauguration celebration of the new centre at Ermington.

c) Many devotees have availed themselves of **spiritual counselling and guidance**. The swamis also visited the homes of devotees when required.

d) **Yogasana Classes** for adults continued to be held every Tuesday at the Centre from 7:30 p.m.

e) **Career guidance** sessions were conducted on the second Saturday of every month from 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. for new migrants to Australia to help them find suitable jobs. Mr. Abhijit Guha and his dedicated band of volunteers, conducted the sessions.

3. Annual Activities/ Celebrations:

The centre held its AGM on Sunday the 11th of November 2007 at 10:30 a.m. at the Strathfield Bowling Club, Augusta Street, Strathfield.

Durga Puja was celebrated on 19th of October 2007, the Mahastami Day, by a formal worship of the Divine Mother Sri Durga. More than 500 devotees participated in the day long function.

Swami Atmeshananda delivered a talk at the **Ganesha Chaturthi** function, organized by the 'Friends of India' in Liverpool on 15th of September.

The **Deepavali** Celebration Committee of NSW in partnership with Govt of NSW, celebrated Deepavali at the Parliament House of NSW. A



Plaque unveiling

plaque was erected on 29th of August 2007 at the lawn of Parliament House of NSW depicting "As Many Faiths, So Many Paths." Swami Chandrashekharananda participated in the function.

4. Other Activities:

The Centre inaugurated its newly acquired premises on the 17th of November 2007, the Jagaddhatri Puja day, at its location on 2 Stewart St., Ermington, Sydney, overlooking the whole of Parramatta valley. It is a heritage-listed property and is being renovated currently to its original glory in order to cater to the growing needs of people interested in participating in the various



Formal worship of Sri Ramakrishna in progress in the new centre at Ermington



The New Centre at Ermington



Invocation of blessing by swamis and vote of thanks by Swami Sridharanandaji

activities of the Vedanta Centre. Being centrally located in greater Sydney it is easily reachable from various suburbs and is a larger place to accommodate Australia-wide activities of the Centre.



A glimpse of cultural programme held

The three day long inauguration celebration started on Friday, the 16th of November at 8:30 a.m. with traditional worship and concluded after a Vesper service followed by the serving of consecrated food.

The second session of the celebrations was conducted on Saturday, the 17th of November to invoke the blessings of the Holy Trinity. Following the



Presentation of Bhajans by devotees from Sydney and Japan



Swamis addressed the devotees on 18th November 2007



Group Photo taken on the 17th of November 2007 L to R Swamis Medhasananda, Sridharananda, Mr. Alan Croker (Architect), Swami Damodarananda, Mrs. Kanaka and Mr. B.Ramakrishna and Swami Bhaktirupananda in the front row and Swamis Atmeshananda, Chandrashekharananda, Rajeshwarananda, Krishnarupananda, Virabhadrananda, Tadananda among other devotees in the back row.

worship, special sanctified food was served by the devotees in the nearby Scout Hall. In the evening there was a cultural programme with the rendition of devotional music and dance at the Eastwood Public School.

On the 18th of November 2007 a convention of devotees was organized at the Ryde Civic Centre from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. where representative of branch Centres from Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Auckland spoke about the history and activities of their Centres. Swamis Bhaktirupananda, Medhasananda and Virabhadrananda spoke on Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda respectively highlighting their contribution to the Ramakrishna Movement.

In the three day long celebration, around 350 devotees attended the functions everyday, including 80 devotees from both interstate and overseas. Ten monks of the Ramakrishna Order, one each from Fiji, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Perth and four resident swamis of Sydney attended the celebration. A large number of devotees, with the zeal of service to the Holy Trinity, were united in putting their efforts to make the celebration a success. The devotees enjoyed the programmes very much specially the inspiring talks on the Holy Trinity.

Overseas Visit:

On invitation, Swami Sridharananda visited various Vedanta Centres of USA and Canada from the 14th of

August to 30th of September 2007. He delivered talks on spiritual subjects and conducted spiritual retreat in those places. He is currently visiting India from 28th of November and is expected to return to Sydney on the 19th of January 2008 via Perth and Adelaide.

Visiting Monks:

Swamis Medhasananda of Vedanta Kyokai, Japan, Bhaktirupananda of Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji, Krishnarupananda of Ramakrishna Mission, Mauritius, Rajeshwarananda of Ramakrishna Mission, Sri Lanka, Virabhadrananda of Persatuan Ramakrishna Sarada, Malaysia visited the Centre and took part in the Inauguration of the new centre at Ermington.

(Continued from page 8)

On Meditation

“Meditation means complete self-abandonment. Meditation requires complete annihilation of self-consciousness. You know that before a great light, lesser lights disappear; so before the effulgent glory of God, the little glory of the ego will completely vanish, as stars vanish when the sun rises. You must therefore practise the presence of God inside you.”

Last days

Ramakrishnananda's life was short but eventful. For fourteen years he worked hard to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in South India. He burnt his energy quickly. In April 1911, shortly after the Holy

Mother's departure for Calcutta, Ramakrishnananda became seriously ill with diabetes and tuberculosis. At the request of devotees, Ramakrishnananda moved to Bangalore Ashrama for a change in climate and rest. Unfortunately the bracing climate of Bangalore failed to improve his health, and the local doctors diagnosed his disease as galloping tuberculosis. Brahmananda and Saradananda asked him to go to Calcutta for better treatment. On 10 June 1911 Ramakrishnananda arrived in Calcutta. He was accommodated in the Udbodhan Office and placed under the treatment of noted physicians. In spite of the best treatment possible and careful nursing his condition gradually deteriorated. But Ramakrishnananda's mind dwelt on his guru.

When the news of his death reached Holy Mother, she remarked with tearful eyes, “Alas, Shashi is gone. My back is broken.” After receiving the sad news at Puri, the grief-stricken Brahmananda exclaimed, “The guardian angel of the South has passed away. The southern side is, as it were, covered with darkness.” The Hindu community of Madras convened a memorial meeting and paid their homage to Ramakrishnananda, who had sacrificed his life for their spiritual development.

References:

God lived with them: Life stories of sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Chetananda. Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1997.

Ramakrishna and His Disciples by Christopher Isherwood. Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1965.

HOLY MOTHER SRI SARADA DEVI: A Guiding Force

The following excerpt has been derived from an inspiring book entitled Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi written by Swami Gambhirananda. It depicts some of Holy Mother's special attributes in her role as a guide, a spiritual mentor and a mother. The book has encapsulated myriads of anecdotes and illustrations a few of which have been included in the excerpt below.

The Mother visited Bodh Gaya at the end of March 1980. On that occasion the contrast between the wealth of the monastery there on the one hand, and on the other hand the absence of any permanent residence, the indescribable want of food and raiment, and the hard physical labour for running the monastery on the part of her world-renouncing sons, moved very much the Mother of the Order. She prayed to Sri Ramakrishna, "...“My prayer is that those who leave the world in your name may never be in need of bare subsistence. They will all live together holding to your ideas and ideals; and the people afflicted with the worries of the world will resort to them and be solaced by hearing about you. That's why you came. My heart is pained to see them wandering about.” After that, Naren (Swami Vivekananda) began gradually building up all this.’

Mother of the Order

Her prayers reveal her infinite motherly love and solicitude for the Order, her firm grasp of and conviction about the uniqueness of the Master's message and its future possibilities and her eagerness for having a permanent habitation for her children. As long as she was on this earth, she did her utmost to see the Order well established and ably managed. Love, according to her, was the life-force of the Order. As every member thereof looked up to her for her benign blessing, so also she wanted each of its units to be tied to others by the bond of affection, so that a solid brotherhood might emerge defying all disruptive tendencies.

The head of the Koalpara Ashrama expected work from the Brahmacharis under him; but in return he showed



Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

neither active love for them, nor concern for their welfare; and there was no proper arrangement for their food and clothing. Hence many left to live with the Mother or with Swami Saradananda. The Head beseeched the Mother not to keep them on her generous hospitality but to rather teach them obedience and send them back to the Ashrama. Holy Mother, Love incarnate as she was, said, "... Love is our forte. It's through love that the Master's family has taken shape. And I am a mother ...”

The head of the Ashrama did not take adequate care of even the health of the inmates, though they suffered from malaria. When the Mother came to know of this, she had nourishing food arranged for them. She also expressed disapproval of the authoritarianism of the head. Though the Mother corrected the head when the need arose, she also advised the inmates to be disciplined and forbearing.

Spiritual mentor: selfless work

About *japa* and meditation the Holy Mother once said, “How many can carry on *japa* and meditation all the time? It's much better to work,

keeping the mind fixed and without letting it wander about. The mind creates trouble whenever it is loose. It's because Narendra realised this that he started selfless work.”

Unwavering faith in the Master

The Mother had not a shadow of doubt that the Master would work out his new message through his Order. One day a certain head of a monastery expressed concerns about the practical public sympathy hence work was not progressing satisfactorily. To this the Mother replied with conviction, “My son, the Master said, ‘When the southern breeze blows, all trees that have developed hard-wood get transformed into sandal.’ The southern breeze has blown; now all will be turned into sandal – except bamboos and bananas.”

Showering grace herself

With heart and soul Holy Mother wished for the good of all her children. Once, at Jayrambati, at the time of the worship of Durga, when all had departed after offering flowers at her sacred feet at the most sacred moment of the juncture of the eighth and ninth days of the moon, Holy Mother requested flowers be offered in the name of all her known and unknown children. Accepting the worship, she sat silently for a long time with folded hands before the Master and then prayed, ‘Let all prosper, here and hereafter.’

On another occasion during her birthday at the ‘Udbodhan’ in 1918, when all went away, after adoring her with flowers, she directed the offering of flowers be made in the name of all at Jayrambati and Koalpara regarding it as a special day to do so. When this was done she prayed to the Master for the weal of all.

Caring mother: two incidents

Brahmachari Jnan (Swami Jnanananda) suffered at Jayrambati from itches which became so pervasive and painful that he could not eat with his hands; and so the Mother mixed the rice and curries for him and put them morsel by morsel into his mouth.

Brahmachari Rashbihari, while busy in connection with the work of the new house of the Mother at Jayrambati, had to go on an errand to a distant village from which he could not return in time for his noon-day meal. It was winter when days were short. Returning only a few hours before sunset, he was taken aback to learn that the Mother waited for his return and would not sit for her meal. He remonstrated, 'Mother, your health is bad, yet why have you kept fasting till this hour?' The Mother replied, 'My son, how can I eat so long as you have not done so?'

Compassion and firmness

Someone was leaving the Order. As he came to bid farewell, the mother began to weep and so also did the devotee. A little later she wiped her tears with the edge of her cloth and asked the devotee to wash his face in the bathroom. Then she said, 'Don't forget me. I know you won't; still I say so.' 'What about you, Mother?' asked the devotee. "Can a mother forget?" replied the Mother and she added, "Believe me, I shall be with you. Don't be afraid." When the devotee got down on the road, the Mother kept on looking at him from the window till he could be seen no more.

Humility and reverence

The Mother was present at a birthday celebration of the Master at the Belur Math. After the midday meal Brahmachari Rashbihari poured water on her hands for cleaning them and as it was her custom to wash the feet also on such occasions, the Brahmachari poured water on her feet and proceeded to clean them with his hands, when the Mother said, 'No, no, my son, not you! You are worthy to be worshipped by

gods.' And she wiped her feet with her own hands. Rashbihari was then only a novice.

Caution against pride

Though she revered the monks, she cautioned them against pride. When Arupananda said to her, 'Mother, Sannyasa brings with it a great conceit,' the Mother corroborated him with the remark, "Yes, a great conceit – 'I haven't been saluted, I am not honoured, I have not been treated with the respect due to me!'" Compared with all that, I am much better as (pointing to her white cloth) I am (that is, with internal renunciation). In fact, she valued inner detachment more than outer trappings.

In a separate context Mother offered the following advice to a monk: 'Faith and firmness are the basic things; if faith and firmness are there, then you have it all.'

Spiritual influence to the Order

Though the Mother was not directly associated with its management, still she guided it from a distance through counsel and spiritual influence, and by strengthening the bonds of love. Her relationship with the different limbs of the Organisation under such circumstances is an interesting study. They were all junior to her, being disciples of the Master, of herself, or of the disciples of the Master. That relationship foreshadowed love on the one hand and obedience on the other.

Guidance and blessing

Although Swami Vivekananda's mind was almost decided about going to the USA in 1893, he wanted to be absolutely free from doubt and so thought, "Well, the Mother is none else than a part of the Master. Why should I not write a letter to her? I shall do as she asks me to." With this idea he wrote to her asking for her blessing. The Mother was extremely happy to hear from her beloved son after such a long time. But this presented a problem also for her – should she endorse his plans? After Narendra's real stature she had indubitable proof from a vision she had at

Kamarpukur after the Master's passing away. Still in the present context there was a conflict between affection and decision; though Narendra's future was undoubtedly bright, how could a mother permit her son to cross the ocean under the then existing uncertain conditions? When her mind oscillated thus between two alternatives, she saw one night in a dream, the Master walking over the waves and beckoning Swami Vivekananda to follow him. This removed her misgivings, and she blessed the Swami's project whole-heartedly. The Swami, on his part, was elated on receipt of this letter and said, 'Hey-day, now is everything fixed up; the Mother, too, wished me to go.'

A few years after this, Swami Saradananda went to Jayrambati seeking the Mother's benediction before starting for the USA. This time also there appeared before her the vision of the vast field of the Master's work; so she wiped her tears with one hand and with the other she blessed the Swami and said, "The Master is protecting you forever, my son; there's nothing to fear,"

Reference:

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda; Sri Ranakrishna Math; Mylapore, Chennai; PP 332-358

In a letter to the Holy Mother entitled *Beloved Mother Sister Nivedita* expressed the following sentiments to the Holy Mother:

'...Dear Mother! You are full of love! And it is not a flushed and violent love like our, and like the world's but a gentle peace that brings good to everyone and wishes ill to none. It is a golden radiance, full of play...I felt such a wonderful freedom in the blessing you gave me, and in your wonderful home.'

Divine Light Personified: Swami Ramakrishnananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramkrishnakrishna

The birth anniversary of the Swami was observed on 2nd of August 2007 in some of our centres.

Swami Ramakrishnananda was known as a great devotee. It was he who gathered the relics of Ramakrishna after the body had been cremated and made a shrine for them. He would never leave this shrine unattended, even to visit places of pilgrimage, for he regarded it as holier than any of them. In the early days of the Order he looked after his brother monks like a mother, and was even ready to support them by begging. When Naren chose their monastic names he wanted at first to take the name of Ramakrishnananda for himself, because it was the one he most desired; but he decided that Shashi's devotion gave him the better claim to it.

Birth and education

Shashi Bhusan Chakrabarty was born on Monday, 13th July 1863 in Hooghly District, West Bengal. After finishing his education in the village school, Shashi went to Calcutta for higher English education. He lived with his cousin Sharat (later Swami Saradananda). He passed the Calcutta University Entrance examination, and, as he was a brilliant student, won a scholarship. He passed his First Arts examination from Albert College, then entered the Metropolitan College for his B.A. He had a wonderful academic record in college; his special subjects of study were Sanskrit and English Literature, mathematics and philosophy.

With Sri Ramakrishna

Hunger for God made young Shashi restless. Keshab Chandra Sen, leader of the Brahmo Samaj, inspired him immensely but he could not fully satiate his spiritual hunger. One day in October 1883, Shashi, Sharat and some of their friends went to Dakshineswar to visit Sri Ramakrishna. They found the Master seated on his small couch. He received the boys with a smile and asked them to sit on a



**Swami Ramakrishnananda
(one who enjoys the bliss of
Ramakrishna)
(13th July 1863— 21 August 1911)**

mat on the floor. He then asked their names and where they lived, and he was pleased to know that they belonged to Keshab's Brahmo Samaj.

After the first meeting Shashi felt an irresistible attraction for Sri Ramakrishna, and he began to visit him frequently. "After I had listened to Sri Ramakrishna", he later recalled, "I had nothing more to say. I did not have to talk. Often I would go to him with my mind full of doubts which I wished him to clear away. But when I reached the temple I would find his room full of people and would feel very much disappointed. As soon as he saw me he would say, 'Come in, sit down. Are you doing well?' Then he would return to his subject but invariably he would take up the very doubt that was troubling my mind and clear it away completely."

One day while Shashi was hurriedly passing through the Master's room looking for a particular object, Ramakrishna said to him, "Whom you are looking for, he is here – here – here." Immediately Shashi's eyes fell on the blissful form of the Master; he then realised that Sri Ramakrishna was the polestar of

his life. Gradually Shashi became acquainted with Narendra and other young disciples of the Master. One day Shashi and Sharat visited Narendra in his home and talked about the Master for many hours. Narendra told Shashi and Sharat, "He is bestowing love, devotion, divine knowledge, liberation and whatever else one may desire, on whomsoever he likes. Oh, what a wonderful power! He can do anything he likes."

Serving the Master

For almost two years Shashi regularly visited the Master at Dakshineswar and acquired great spiritual treasures from him. In the middle of 1885 Ramakrishna developed throat cancer and the devotees arranged for his treatment in Shyampukur, Calcutta. Holy Mother took the responsibility of cooking special food for the Master and some young disciples began to nurse him under Narendra's leadership. Shashi would eat at home, then serve the Master at night. Shashi was then preparing for his B.A. examination. His parents had great expectations for him because he was their eldest son and a brilliant student.

Now Shashi faced a great dilemma: Should he serve his guru or build his career through study? His discriminating mind selected the first one. He stopped going home, gave up his studies, and became a fulltime attendant of the Master.

The doctor advised the devotees to move Sri Ramakrishna from smoggy, congested Calcutta to a clean, quiet country place. Accordingly, the Master was taken to the Cossipore garden house on 11 December 1885. Shashi followed the Master like a shadow. All of the attendants were great devotees, but Shashi's devotion was special. He was the very embodiment of service. He was convinced that service to the guru was the highest form of religion. He practised no spiritual discipline, knew no other asceticism, travelled to no holy places. Forgetting his

personal comfort, food, or rest, he was always ready to serve the Master. His life's purpose was to alleviate the Master's suffering. Indeed, he would have given his life if he thought that would cure him. Every one marvelled at his indefatigable energy, his endurance and his boundless love for the Master.

Love is reciprocal. Ramakrishna poured his fountain of love into his disciples and captivated them forever. It was winter when the Master arrived at the Cossipore garden house. Once, in the middle of the night, Shashi left the Master's room to clean the commode; he wore only a thin cloth. On his return he saw that Ramakrishna, who was very sick, had somehow crawled across the room and was reaching up for a shawl that was hanging on a clotheshorse. At this painful sight Shashi thought to himself, Alas! In my hurry I forgot to cover him sufficiently, so perhaps he is cold and trying to get a shawl. Filled with love and concern, the Master held out his shawl, and then said in a feeble voice, "I felt cold as you went out almost bare-bodied on such a cold night, so I picked up this shawl for you. Please take this." Shashi was overwhelmed.

Monastic life

In December 1886 Shashi and some other disciples went to Antpur, the country home of Baburam. Inspired by Narendra, they took informal vows of monasticism during a nightlong vigil around a sacred fire. Later they discovered that their vigil had taken place on Christmas Eve. A month later they took formal monastic vows by performing the traditional 'viraja homa' ceremony in Baranagore. Narendra gave the name 'Swami Ramakrishnananda' to Shashi, knowing that his devotion to the Master was second to none.

Ramakrishnananda was learned and devotional, but he was not a gloomy ascetic. After dinner he would dramatically read Mark Twain's 'The Innocents at home' and 'The innocents abroad.' He would roar with laughter as he read them, and the others would laugh

along with him. He enjoyed solving mathematical problems; sometimes after his noon rest he would work on the mathematics on a slate or piece of paper. Often for inspiration he would read the episode of Rishabha Deva from the Bhagavata, and comment, "The spiritual state of Rishabha Deva is extraordinarily high and may be compared to that of a *paramahansa*." He also translated the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna from Bengali into Sanskrit verses and got them serially published in Vidyodaya, a Sanskrit journal. Ramakrishnananda never had an idle moment, as he had a wide range of interests.

Spreading the Message

In March 1897, Swamiji called aside Ramakrishnananda and said, "I have given my word to my friends at Madras that I shall very soon send one of my brother disciples there. I have selected you. You are to go to Madras and find a monastery there in the name of our Beloved Master." Ramakrishnananda neither raised any objection nor pleaded any excuse. In the last part of March 1897 he left for Madras by ship with Swami Sadananda, a disciple of Vivekananda, and arrived there in April. Thus came an end his vigil over the Master's remains. He was assigned to work in a new place among unknown people.

Ramakrishnananda's life exemplified the teachings of the Gita. "You are entitled to work, but never to its fruits." Swami Shankarananda recalled:

One afternoon it was drizzling and the sky was overcast with clouds. A hackney carriage came in time to take the Swami to his class. ... The carriage arrived in George Town, where the Swami used to hold one of his classes... There was no one else in the room. The swami waited for about a quarter of an hour but no one turned up. He then opened his Upanishad and began to read and explain with all ardour and amiability. After an hour he stopped, closed his book and said to the Brahmacharin, "Well, let us go." The brahmacharin

followed him to the carriage which was waiting. On the way he asked the Swami, "How is it you gave the class for fully one hour though nobody turned up?" The Swami replied, "I have not come to teach anybody. I only fulfil the vow I have taken."

Days of Hardship

One generally does not vent anger upon a stranger; during times of anguish and suffering one releases frustration and anger upon those one knows and loves. One evening a few devotees came to the monastery to meet Ramakrishnananda but he was in the shrine. They overheard him talking with someone loudly in angry tones, "You have brought me here, an old man and left me helpless. Are you testing my powers of patience and endurance? I will not go and beg hereafter for my sake or even for yours. If anything comes unasked, I will offer it to you and share the Prasad. Or, I will bring sea sand for offering to you and I shall live upon that." Later they realised that the Swami was quarrelling with his beloved Master.

Renunciation is the way

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The sannyasin, the man of renunciation, is a world teacher. It is his example that awakens the spiritual consciousness of men." Ramakrishnananda was a sannyasin of spotless character. He once said to an American devotee, "Man must give up everything to God, then alone he thrives...if you study all the personal religions, you will find that all preach renunciation. Renunciation is their fundamental teaching."

On Selfishness

Ramakrishnananda said, "So long as we are selfish our work must be fruitless. We may deliver fine lectures, we may gain name and fame, but the actual results will be nil. The moment, however, our little self disappears, at that moment our real work begins. Then we may live an obscure life and go nowhere, but we shall accomplish wonders."

(Please turn over to page 4)