



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



Sri Ramakrishna in Samadhi

Shun Vanity

“Water is dried up at once if poured on a heap of ashes. Vanity is like this heap of ashes. Prayer and contemplation produce no effect upon the heart puffed up with vanity.”

— Sri Ramakrishna

*Great sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna,
Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda;
The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of
Culture, Kolkata; page 9.*

Renounce fleeting world for God

“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.”

— Sri Sarada Devi

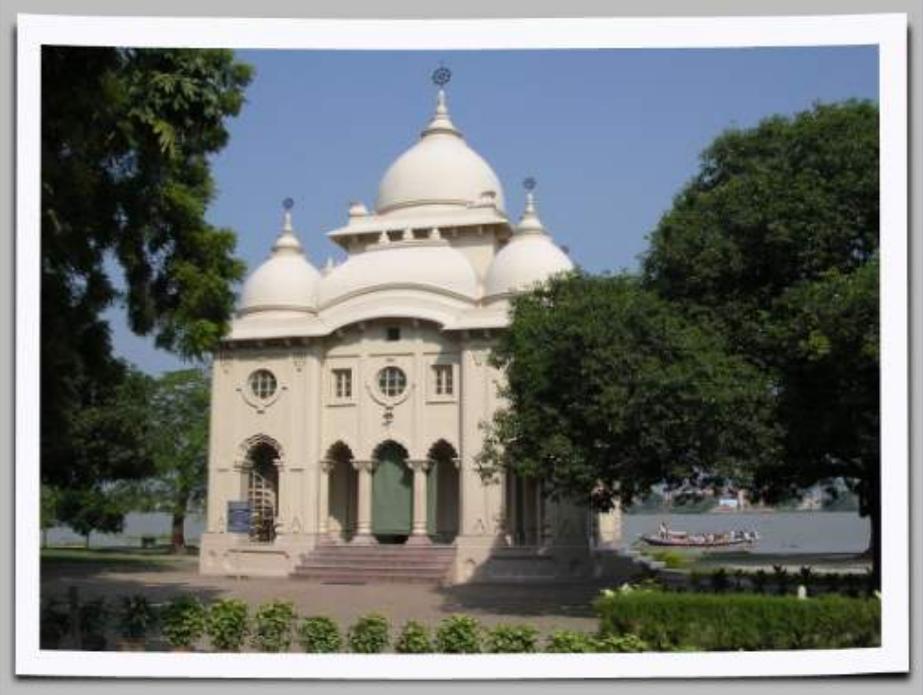
Ibid; page 31.

Rouse yourself for greater cause

“Rouse yourself, therefore, for life is short. There are greater works to be done than aspiring to become lawyers, and picking quarrels, and such things. A far greater work is this sacrifice of yourselves for the benefit of your race, for the welfare of humanity.”

— Swami Vivekananda

Ibid; page 31.



Swami Brahmananda Temple at the Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Howrah, West Bengal, India.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FROM MAY TO AUGUST 2009

Function	Centre	Date
Buddha Purnima	Sydney	Saturday, 9 May 2009
Guru Purnima	Sydney	Tuesday, 7 July 2009
Sri Krishna Janmastami	Sydney	Thursday, 13 August 2009
Cultural/Fund raising Programme	Adelaide	Saturday, 18 July 2009
Annual Celebration	Brisbane	Saturday, 13 June 2009
Raffle and Cultural Programme	Sydney	Saturday, 1 August 2009

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.

Shirk this infatuation! Forward! ‘Be fearless’!

“Behold, how men are already in the jaws of the shark of infatuation! Oh, listen to their piteous heart-rending wails. Advance! Forward! O ye brave souls, to set free those that are in fetters, to lessen the burden of woe of the miserable, and to illumine the abysmal darkness of ignorant hearts. Look, how the Vedanta proclaims by beat of drums, ‘Be fearless’!”

— Swami Vivekananda.

News and activities of Vedanta Centres of Australia and New Zealand

For the period From December 2008 to April 2009

ADELAIDE CENTRE

Monthly activities:

Swami Sridharananda continued his three days a month visit to Adelaide and delivered 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 being recorded. 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 **annual celebration** of the Centre was held on Saturday 15th of March 2009 at the Dulwich Community Centre. A group of devotees sang bhajans while Swami Chandrashekharananda



Bhajans and formal worship during the annual celebration at the Adelaide Centre

performed the formal worship. Swami Sridharananda spoke on “*The message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*”. Many devotees participated in the worship and later enjoyed the *prasada*.

BRISBANE CENTRE

Daily activities:

Morning worship, evening *arati*, *bhajans*, and a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are the regular activities at the Centre at **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.



Bhajans and formal worship during the annual celebration at the Brisbane Centre

Monthly and Annual activities:

Swami Atmeshananda visited Brisbane once a month and delivered talks on the Bhagavad Gita as well as other spiritual topics. Swami Chandrashekharananda visited Brisbane from the 19th to the 21st of February 2009. He conducted satsang at the Centre and also delivered a talk on ‘Cultivating Inner Peace’ at the Interfaith Summit organized by Griffith University, Brisbane.

Celebrations:

The **birth anniversaries** of **Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi** and **Swami Vivekananda** were observed on the 20th of December 2008 and 7th of February 2009 respectively.

The Centre celebrated the 177th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna on the



7th of March 2009 at the Indooroopilly Senior Citizen Hall in Brisbane. The ceremony attracted well over a hundred devotees. It was inaugurated by Swami Atmeshananda with formal worship to Sri Ramakrishna and prayers which was participated by all devotees. This was followed by devotional songs by the Swami and various other devotees ending with a brief recital on the life of Sri Ramakrishna. The ceremony was concluded with a highly motivating discourse on Sri Ramakrishna and the Vedanta movement by revered Swami Sridharananda.

A vote of thanks was given by the president Mr. Mahalingam Sinnathamby

while the programme was conducted by Dr. Ashim Majumdar who also hosted the ceremony. The programme was concluded with lunch prasada prepared by the devotees.

CANBERRA CENTRE

Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the Bhagavad Gita twice a month at the Majura Community Centre in Canberra. He also gave parlour talks based on the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* once a month. Contacts: Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary - 02-6258 7612 and Dr. Ian Doherty, Treasurer - 02-6247 8519.

MELBOURNE CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

The vesper service is held daily at the Centre at **7 Judy Court, Vermont, Vic 3133** from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. It includes set hymns, scriptural readings and meditation and occasional devotional singing. A resident volunteer looks after the services in the mornings and on other occasions.

The bookstall had available literature on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta philosophy, and other spiritual topics in print, audio, and visual media throughout the period. For further information please contact Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary, on 03-9803 6154 and Mr. Mohana Krishnan on 03-9801 6174.

2. Weekly/Monthly Activities:

Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the Bhagavad Gita from Thursday to Saturday of a prescheduled week at Monash University Claton Campus of Law, Wellington Road (L. Theatre L1). The recordings of these discourses are available in Audio, Video and MP3 formats.

On the **second Sunday** of every month, meetings were conducted from 5 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. These regular meetings included prayer, recitation of sacred mantras, singing of *kirtan* and *bhajans*, followed by selected readings from the scriptures





Arati in progress in the shrine at the Melbourne Centre

with discussions by the participants. The meetings concluded with an *arati* and the distribution of *prasada*.

Celebrations:

The **birth anniversaries** of **Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi** and **Swami Vivekananda** were observed on the 21st of December 2008 and 17th of January 2009. Swami Sridharananda spoke on their Lives and Teachings on these occasions. The **Kalpataru** Day was observed on the 1st of January 2009 in a humble manner.

The **birth anniversary** of **Sri Ramakrishna** was observed along with the annual celebrations on the 28th of February 2009. A special formal worship with *Havan* was conducted by Swami Atmeshananda. *Bhajans* were sung during the worship which concluded with *arati*, and floral offerings. This was followed by distribution of lunch *prasada*. A talk on 'The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna' was delivered by Swami Sridharananda. In the evening session, devotional singing accompanied by *Arati* was conducted by Swami Atmeshananda and this concluded with the distribution of dinner *prasada*.

Other Activities:

Group study of the Bhagavad Gita continues every alternate Saturday from 9.30 a.m. to 11.00 a.m.

Further **studies** of the Bhagavad Gita were held based on recorded discourses on Wednesdays from 10.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

PERTH CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

The Centre located at **2B Roe Close, Bull Creek, W.A. 6149** holds daily worship in the morning followed by Vedic chanting. In the evening at 7 p.m. there is a vesper service with *arati*, a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and meditation. In addition, a class on *Ishopanishad* was held daily in the afternoon. 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:

Weekly *satsangs* were conducted on

Sundays at 11:00 a.m., and the classes on *Kathopanisad* were held on Wednesdays from 6:15 p.m. to 7 p.m. The **Bala Bodhi** classes for children and youth were conducted on Saturdays from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Celebrations:

The **birth anniversaries** of **Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi**, **Swami Vivekananda** and **Sri Ramakrishna** were observed on 21th December 2008, 17th January 2009 and 28th of February 2009 respectively. *Bhajans* were sung by devotees and Swami Damodarananda delivered talks on the lives and teachings of the Holy Trinity. Swami Damodarananda conducted the above activities.

Other News: Swami Damodarananda has returned to the Sydney Centre on the 2nd of March 2009.

SYDNEY CENTRE

Daily Activities:

At the Centre at Ermington there is worship and meditation every morning, and a vesper service in the evening starting at 7 p.m. that includes devotional singing and a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees are also conducted on a daily basis. The library is available to devotees for reference and research. The Centre maintains a book-stall which has a range of books on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, Yoga, and other spiritual literature. Devotional songs, discourses on Bhagavad Gita, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanisad*, and other topics are also available in various media.

2. Weekly/ Monthly Activities:

The Centre conducted the following

activities in Sydney:

a) Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the Bhagavad Gitā every Sunday morning from 9:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. at the South Strathfield Bowling Club, Augusta Street, Strathfield.

b) 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.

c) A new class on spiritual subjects started at 1 Edwin Street, Fairlight, **Manly** Beaches from 27th of January 2009. Swami Sridharananda conducted these classes on Tuesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

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

e) *Yogasana* Classes for adults continued every Tuesday at the Centre from 7:30 p.m.

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

g) Special **meditation** sessions were held at the Ermington Centre on Sundays from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Annual Activities/ Celebrations:

The **birth anniversaries** of **Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi**, **Swami Vivekananda** and **Sri Ramakrishna** were celebrated on the 18th of December 2008, 17th of January and 27th of February 2009, respectively. Special worship was performed on these occasions. Devotees participated in the singing of *bhajans* and in the offering of flowers on the completion of worship. In the evening devotees sang *bhajans* and after the *arati* Swami Sridharananda delivered talks on the life and teachings of the Holy Trinity. **Shivaratri** was celebrated on 23rd February 2009.

Spiritual Retreat:

A spiritual retreat was organised during the Easter holidays from the evening of 9th April to the afternoon of 12th April 2009 at the Satyananda Yoga Centre in the serene atmosphere of the Mangrove Mountain. The programme included detailed

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Birth Anniversary Celebration at the Bland Street Centre in Sydney

Bhakti Yoga : The need of the Guru

The subject of Bhakti Yoga is carefully expounded by Swami Vivekananda in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* Volume 3. The topic 'The Need of the Guru' as one aspect of the subject explored provides a careful analysis of the role and attributes of a spiritual teacher or 'guru' in spiritual life.

"No one was ever really taught by another; each of us has to teach himself. The external teacher offers only the suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to work to understand things."

— Swami Vivekananda: *Great Sayings*; Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; page 44.



Introduction

Each soul is destined to be perfect, and every being, in the end, will attain the state of perfection. Whatever we are now is the result of our acts and thoughts in the past; and whatever we shall be in the future will be the result of what we think and do now. But this, the shaping of our own destinies, does not preclude our receiving help from outside; nay, in the vast majority of cases such help is absolutely necessary. When it comes, the higher powers and possibilities of the soul are quickened, spiritual life is awakened, growth is animated, and man becomes holy and perfect in the end.

To quicken the spirit, the impulse must come from another soul. The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the Guru - the teacher; and the person to whose soul the impulse is conveyed is called the Shishya - the student. To convey such an impulse to any soul, in the first place, the soul from which it proceeds must possess the power of transmitting it, as it were, to another; and in the second place, the soul to which it is transmitted must be fit to receive it. The seed must be a living seed, and the field must be ready ploughed; and when both these conditions are fulfilled, a wonderful growth of genuine religion takes place.

How to know a teacher, then?

The sun requires no torch to make him visible, we need not light a candle in order to see him. When the sun rises, we instinctively become aware of the fact, and when a teacher of men comes to help us, the soul will instinctively know that truth has already begun to shine upon it. Truth stands on its own evidence, it does not require any other testimony to prove it true, it is self-effulgent. It penetrates into the innermost corners



of our nature, and in its presence the whole universe stands up and says, "This is truth." The teachers whose wisdom and truth shine like the light of the sun are the very greatest the world has known, and they are worshipped as God by the major portion of mankind.

There ought to be certain tests, certain conditions, for the teacher to satisfy as there are also for the taught.

The Student

The conditions necessary for the taught are *purity, a real thirst after knowledge, and perseverance*. No impure soul can be really religious. Purity in thought, speech and act is absolutely necessary for anyone to be religious. To pant for religion truly is a very difficult thing. Hearing religious talks or reading religious books is no proof yet of a real want felt in the heart; there must be a continuous struggle, a constant fight, an unremitting grappling with our lower nature, till the higher want is actually felt and the victory is achieved. The student who sets out with such a spirit of perseverance will surely find success and realisation at last.

The Teacher

Knowledge of the Scriptures

The teacher needs to know the spirit of the scriptures. The teacher who deals too much in words and allows the mind to be carried away by the force of words loses the spirit. It is the knowledge of the *spirit* of the scriptures alone that constitutes the true religious teacher. The network of the words of the scriptures is like a huge forest in which the human mind often loses itself and finds no way out. "The network of words is a big forest; it is the cause of a curious wandering of the mind." The various methods of joining words, of speaking in beautiful language, of explaining the diction of the scriptures do not necessarily lead to the 'development of spiritual perception.' According to Swami Vivekananda, the great teachers did not exhibit this method of 'text-torturing' as it were; there was no eternal playing upon the meaning of words and their roots. Yet they nobly taught.

Bhagavan Ramakrishna used to tell a story of some men who went into a mango orchard and busied themselves in counting the leaves, the twigs, and the branches, examining their colour, comparing their size, and noting down everything most carefully, and then got up a learned discussion on each of these topics. But one of them, more sensible than the others, did not care for all these things and instead thereof, began to eat the mango fruit. And was he not wise? So leave this counting of leaves and twigs and note-taking to others. You never see a strong spiritual man among these 'leaf counters.' Religion, the highest aim, the highest glory of man, does not require so much labour. If you want to be a bhakta, it is not at all necessary for you to know whether Krishna was born in Mathura or in

Vraja, what he was doing, or just the exact date on which he pronounced the teachings of the Gita. You only require to *feel* the craving for the beautiful lessons of duty and love in the Gita. All the other particulars about it and its author are for the enjoyment of the learned. Say 'Shantih, Shantih' to their learned controversies, and let *us* 'eat the mangoes.'

Sinlessness of a teacher

The second condition necessary in the teacher is sinlessness. The question is often asked, 'Why should we look into the character and personality of a teacher? We have only to judge what he says and take that up.' This is not right. If a man wants to teach something of dynamics, or chemistry, or any other physical science, he may be anything he likes, because what the physical sciences require is merely an intellectual equipment; but in the spiritual sciences it is impossible from first to last that there can be any spiritual light in the soul that is impure. What religion can an impure man teach? The *sine qua non* of acquiring spiritual truth for one's self or for imparting it to others is the purity of heart and soul. A vision of God or a glimpse of the beyond never comes until the soul is pure. Hence with the teacher of religion we must first see what he *is*, and then what he says. He must be perfectly pure, and then alone comes the value of his words, because he is only then the true 'transmitter'. What can he transmit if he does not have spiritual powers in himself? There must be the worthy vibration of spirituality in the mind of the teacher, so that it may be sympathetically conveyed to the mind of the taught. The function of the teacher is indeed an affair of the transference of something, and not one of mere stimulation of the existing intellectual or other faculties in the taught. Something real and appreciable as an influence comes from the teacher and goes to the taught. Therefore the teacher must be pure.

Motive of a teacher

The third condition is in regard to the motive. The teacher must not teach with any ulterior selfish motive-for money, name, or fame; his work must be simply out of love, out of

pure love for mankind at large. The only medium through which spiritual force can be transmitted is love. Any selfish motive, such as the desire for gain or for name, will immediately destroy this conveying medium. God is love, and only he who has known God as love can be a teacher of godliness and God to man.

When you see that in your teacher these conditions are all fulfilled, you are safe; if they are not, it is unsafe to allow yourself to be taught by him, for there is the great danger that, if he cannot convey goodness to your heart, he may convey wickedness. This danger must by all means be guarded against. "He who is learned in the scriptures, sinless, unpolluted by lust, and is the greatest knower of the Brahman" is the real teacher.

The good and wise teacher

From what has been said, it naturally follows that we cannot be taught to love, appreciate, and assimilate religion everywhere and by everybody. The 'books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything' is all very true as a poetical figure; but nothing can impart to a man a single grain of truth unless he has the undeveloped germs of it in himself. To whom do the stories and books preach sermons? To the human soul, the lotus of whose inner holy shrine is already quick with life. And the light which causes the beautiful opening out of this lotus comes always from the good and wise teacher. When the heart has thus been opened, it becomes fit to receive teaching from the stones or the brooks, the stars, or the sun, or the moon, or from anything which has its existence in our divine universe; but the unopened heart will see in them nothing but mere stones or mere brooks. A blind man may go to a museum, but he will not profit by it in any way; his eyes must be opened first, and then alone he will be able to learn what the things in the museum can teach.

The teacher – the eye-opener

The eye-opener of the aspirant after religion is the teacher. With the teacher, therefore, our relationship is the same as that between an ancestor and his descendents. Without faith,

humility, submission, and veneration in our hearts towards our religious teacher, there cannot be any growth of religion in us; and it is a significant fact that, where this kind of relation between the teacher and the taught prevails, there alone gigantic spiritual men are growing; while in places which have neglected to keep up this kind of relation the religious teacher has become a mere lecturer, the teacher expecting his five dollars and the person taught expecting his brain to be filled with the teacher's words, and each going his own way after this much has been done. Under such circumstances spirituality becomes almost an unknown quantity. There is none to transmit it and none to have it transmitted to. Religion with such people becomes business; they think they can obtain it with their dollars. Would to God that religion could be obtained so easily! But unfortunately it cannot be.

Conclusion

Religion, which is the highest knowledge and the highest wisdom, cannot be bought, nor can it be acquired from books. You may thrust your head into all the corners of the world, you may explore the Himalayas, the Alps, and the Caucasus, you may sound the bottom of the sea and pry into every nook of Tibet and the desert of Gobi, you will not find it anywhere until your heart is ready for receiving it and your teacher has come. And when that divinely appointed teacher comes, serve him with child-like confidence and simplicity, freely open your heart to his influence, and see in him God manifested. Those who come to seek truth with such a spirit of love and veneration, to them the Lord of Truth reveals the most wonderful things regarding truth, goodness, and beauty.



Love is the law of life

"All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction. Love is therefore the only law of life. He who loves lives, he who is selfish is dying. Therefore love for love's sake, because it is law of life, just as you breathe to live.

— Swami Vivekananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

Pilgrimage

A couple of weeks after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, the grief-stricken Holy Mother left for a pilgrimage accompanied by Golap-Ma, Lakshmi, M's wife, Kali, Jogin, and Latu. They first stopped at Deoghar and then, after visiting Varanasi and Ayodhya, arrived at Vrindaban. Once Sri Ramakrishna had told Kali, "There is a particular manifestation of Krishna in you." During his stay in Vrindaban, Kali visited many temples and meditated on Krishna. Kali was very austere and adventurous.

At the Baranagore Monastery

Narendra and the other disciples rented a house in Baranagore at ten rupees per month and established the first Ramakrishna monastery. As soon as Kali heard about the Baranagore Monastery he returned to Calcutta and joined the brotherhood. The southern-most room of the second floor was used for meditation and study, and was known as Kali Tapasvi's Room since Kali secluded himself there during most of the day. An ascetic by nature, he ate vegetarian food, wore no shoes, and shunned people's company. He spent his time in meditation, studying the scriptures, and composing some Sanskrit hymns on Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. One day Kali visited Holy Mother at her residence at Nilambar Babu's house in Belur, and read a hymn that he had composed about her: *Prakritim paramam abhyam varadam*, etc. After listening to the hymn, Holy Mother blessed him, saying, "May Saraswati, the Goddess of learning, sit on your tongue."

When someone in the Baranagore Monastery complained that Kali was not taking any responsibility for the household work, Narendra said, "Let one of the brothers be a scholar and I'll do the dishes myself." One day Mahendranath Datta, one of Narendra's brothers, was shocked when he saw Kali lying like a dead person in the sun on the dusty floor of the veranda. Jogin told him with a smile, "He is not dead. The rascal meditates that way." Sometimes the disciples would tease and make fun with each other. Ramakrishna had given them the taste of true spirituality; he did not care for 'dry monks.'



An old photograph of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna (Swami Abhedananda is seen seated first from the right side)

Understanding of the brother disciples

Poverty and hardship could not dampen the spirit of the disciples. They had mutual love, respect, and deep understanding. One night Kali was shivering with cold and could not sleep, as none of them had warm clothing or sufficient blankets. When Kali told Narendra about his suffering, Narendra got up at 2 a.m. and made hot tea for his brother. He told Kali, "Enjoy this hot cup of tea and get rid of the cold." He also teased him, "This hot cup of tea seems to me more concrete than your blessed theory of Advaita, don't you think so, Kali?" Love and service bring solidarity to the Order, not rules and regulations.

Discussions with Swami Vivekananda

Kali was well versed in both Eastern and Western philosophies, and enjoyed discussions with Narendra. Latu recalled:

"Brother Kali was often busy studying the scriptures and other books. During rare leisure moments he would debate with Brother Loren [Narendra]. Loren used to silence him very easily, but one day Kali cornered Loren in an argument so well that Loren could not give a reply. Then Loren said, "Let us stop here today. Tomorrow we shall start again from this same point." Brother Kali was very happy for the time being. But the next day Loren began giving new arguments that refuted Kali's

points, and Kali had to admit he was beaten. "I couldn't defeat Loren for a single day!" he said regretfully. But I told him: "Brother, it is bound to be so. Brother Loren is our leader. How can you surpass him?"

Vows of Sannyasa

One day Narendra proposed to the brotherhood that they all take the vows of sannyasa according to scriptural injunction. All agreed. When Kali told them that he had a copy of the virajahoma mantras, which he had gotten from a monk in Gaya, his brothers were excited, knowing that this was the Master's divine grace. In the third week of January 1887, they took final monastic vows by performing the traditional viraja homa in front of the Master's picture. Narendra gave Kali the name 'Swami Abhedananda.'

From Baranagore to Alambazar

In 1892 the Ramakrishna Monastery was moved from Baranagore to Alambazar, not far from Dakshineswar temple garden. Ramakrishnananda and Saradananda cordially received Abhedananda and arranged a private room for him in the monastery. The monks and devotees named it 'Kali Vedanti's Room' because he spent most of the time there practising meditation and studying Vedanta.

In England and America

In accordance with Swami Vivekananda's request Swami Abhedananda left for London in mid-August 1896. A month

after his arrival Swami Vivekananda announced that Swami Abhedananda would speak on Hinduism. He based his lecture on the *Panchadashi*, an authoritative text on Vedanta. On 27th October 1896 he gave his maiden speech before the learned audience of the Christo-Theosophical Society at Bloomsbury Square in London. Swami Vivekananda was fully confident that even in his absence Abhedananda would be able to carry on the Vedanta work in London. Swami Vivekananda entrusted him with his classes on Vedanta and Raja Yoga and left for India in December 1896. For one year Swami Abhedananda continued to give classes and lectures in different churches and religious and philosophical societies in London and its suburbs. His eloquence, lucid exposition of Vedanta philosophy, and his depth of spiritual realization made a profound impression on his audiences.

Swami Vivekananda then requested Swami Abhedananda to carry on the Vedanta work in the United States. so on 31st July 1897 Swami Abhedananda left for New York and arrived there on 9th August, as a guest of Miss Mary Phillips, the secretary of the Vedanta Society of New York, which Swami Vivekananda had founded in 1894. The Society's activities-lectures and classes, instructions and interviews- at the centre and in the homes where Swami Abhedananda visited, were carried on for over twenty years under his able direction.

Swami Abhedananda had gathered tremendous experience from travelling and lecturing extensively in Europe and America for twenty-five years. Since his arrival in the West in 1896, he had crossed the Atlantic seventeen times and had carried the message of Vedanta to innumerable people. His writings also made a tremendous impact on the Western mind.

Back to India

On 10th November 1921 Swami Abhedananda reached Calcutta and then went to Belur Math by car. It was noon, and the shrine was closed, but a monk opened it so that Swami Abhedananda could bow down to the Master.

Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama

In 1923 the Swami established the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Calcutta and undertook the role as president. In 1924 he opened a branch

of the Society at Darjeeling under the name of Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama. The Swami remained a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission all through his life, but his organisation gradually became separated from the Ramakrishna Order.

Last days

In the early part of May 1937 Swami Abhedananda left for Darjeeling, his favourite place. There, amidst nature's panoramic beauty and silence, he would remain absorbed in meditation, study and writing. Most of his books and profound writings were done there. He would get up early in the morning and meditate; then, facing the peaks of the Himalayas, he would take his breakfast. Afterwards he would go for a long walk, alone, and then from 9.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. he would write. After his bath, he would meditate for another hour and then have lunch. After lunch he would read a newspaper, usually the *Statesman*, and then would take some rest. Again he would write from 3.00 to 5.00 p.m., and then go for a walk. In the evening he would meet devotees and visitors and talk to them on various topics. After dedicating the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna on 29th August 1937, Swami Abhedananda left Darjeeling on 21st September. It had been his last visit.

His life's work done, he silently began to prepare himself for his final journey. On his seventy-third birthday he said to one of his disciples, "I am only an instrument in the blissful sportive play of the Master, and the moment my life's mission is over, I shall not wait even for a second longer."

Swami Abhedananda was virtually bedridden for the last year and a half of his life. Even in that condition, every night after supper his disciples would read the manuscript of his lectures and he would dictate corrections. On 14th January 1938, in spite of his severe illness, he went to Belur Math to attend the dedication ceremony of Sri Ramakrishna's marble statue in the new temple. While Swami Vijnanananda was installing the relics of the Master in the altar, Swami Abhedananda stood motionless, listening to the monks singing a hymn he had composed for the Master during his Baranagore days. It was his last visit to Belur Math.

Swami Abhedananda had played his part in the divine drama of Sri Ramakrishna. Gradually the great yogi made ready to

return to his beloved guru. Towards the end he indicated that his body should be cremated at the Cossipore cremation ground after his death. On 7th September 1939 he followed his regular routine. But in the evening he had a high temperature that continued throughout night. His disciples served him around the clock. In the morning he felt a little better, and asked his attendants to give him a glass of water. He sat on his bed and lay down. Swami Abhedananda passed away shortly after, at 8.16 a.m. on Friday, 8th September 1939.

The news of his death spread throughout the city and an announcement was broadcast by All India Radio. His body was carried in procession and cremated at Cossipore cremation ground. His disciples followed his last request: "Make a little place for me at the feet of the Master."

Final message

Towards the end of his life, this great Vedantin, Abhedananda told his disciples, "Tapasya or austerity enhances will-power. Have self-confidence. Think: I am a child of Immortal Bliss. The Infinite power is playing within me. If you have this conviction, you will conquer the world."

The hymn entitled *Sri Sarada Devi Stotram* was composed by Swami Abhedananda, A translation of this poem in English is given below:

To the Divine Sakti (Power) embodied
in a human form,
To the giver of boons and the asylum
to those afflicted with fears,
To the redresser of man's miseries
and the generator of joy in the hearts
of devotees,
To Thee my salutations! O Supreme
Being, Mother of the worlds!

Redeem Thy children by Thy mercy
worthless, sinful and deluded though
they may be,
A veritable ship ferrying them across
the ocean of Samsara, that Thou art.
To Thee my salutations, O Supreme
Being, O Mother of the worlds!

Abandoning the flowers of worldly
enjoyments, imbibe O Honeybee of
my mind!

The nectar of the lotus of Mother's
feet, the sure panacea for the disease
of worldliness.

To Thee my salutations, O Supreme
Being, O Mother of the worlds!

Bestow Thy grace, O great Divinity,
on us, Thy children,

bowing in prostration before Thee!
And grant us shelter at Thy feet, O
Compassionate One! To Thee our
salutations!

Though ever covered with the veil of
modesty, Thou, O Mother Sarada,
Art really the Power that bestows
spiritual illumination on men.
Protect us from sins evermore, O Grace
embodied! To Thee our salutations!

To Her whose life is fused into one
with Ramakrishna's,
Whose delight consists in absorption
in thoughts and talks about His glories,
Whose personality is soaked and
suffused with His spirit, to Her our
repeated salutations!

To her whose life-story is sanctifying.
To Her whose life breathes sanctity.
To Her who is verily sanctity embodied.
To Her our repeated salutations!

Perpetual salutations to the gracious
Mother Sarada,
The embodiment of mercy and the
granter of devotion and knowledge
To Her who has given a new revelation
for the present age,
And who assuages the miseries of
devotees taking refuge at her feet!

Binding our mind to Thee with the
bonds of Thy love,
Thou dost transmute our very vices
into virtues.

Compassionate as Thou art without
any consideration of merit,
Thou dost, lo! Take even unworthy
ones into Thy lap!

Mother, be propitious and grant
what I in humility beseech!
May Thou be ever affectionate to us,
Thy children!

And casting even a drop of Thy love
on our long-parched heart, Render it
cool and peaceful!

Taking shelter at the feet of Sarada, the
universal Mother, and Ramakrishna
the Teacher of the world,
I salute them again and again!

Sources:

*God Lived With Them: Life Stories of sixteen
monastic disciples by Swami Chetanananda;
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata; pages 439-483.*

*Hymn Offerings to Sri Ramakrishna and
The Holy Mother (By Direct Disciples and
Devotees) by Swami Tapasyananda;
Sri Ramakrishna Math; pages 87-92.*

*Ramakrishna and his Disciples by Christopher
Isherwood; Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata;
pages 238-9.*

This issue is behind schedule. We apologize
to our readers for the delay.

Teachings of Swami Abhedananda

Self-confidence, Faith and Worship

Through self-confidence you will
accomplish everything. When you walk in
the Street, do not move as if a slave is
going or as if somebody has raised a
whip over your head. Do not be fright-
ened but walk like a man. Stand up, raise
your head and walk like a gentleman. Do
not be afraid of anything.

The higher nature is already within you.
Realise it, control your lower mind and
passions for the time being, then you will
be able to live on the spiritual plane as
the master over sense-pleasures.

Realise that the power to save yourself
will not come to you unless you have
faith in yourself, unless you know that
God is within you and unless you
become fearless.

Faith brings out the power of the mind.
Faith is always constructive while doubt
is destructive. Faith strengthens. It is an
affirmation. You say with full energy that
it will be so and it will happen so. But if you
vacillate and doubt, you would not be
able to reach the highest results.

That faith is beneficial which is founded
upon right knowledge, right reason and is
supported by proper evidence.

Intense longing, unswerving devotion
and wholehearted love of the soul draw
out from the infinite source any partic-
ular form which the devotee wishes to
see and worship; they have the power, as
it were, to condense and solidify the water
of the ocean of Reality into various forms.

If we worship God through ignorance, it
does not do any good. And that is not the
right way of worship; that is mere form.

(Continued from page 3)

discourses by Swami Sridharananda
about spiritual practices based on the
Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Some other
activities were meditation, singing of
bhajans, bush-walking, Karma Yoga,
Yoga-Nidra. There were 45 participants
at the retreat.



Group Photo at the Spiritual Retreat, Sydney



Celebrations on the Kalpataru day and the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna at the Auckland Centre

Overseas Visit:

On a special invitation from the Vedanta
International Cultural Centre, Swami
Sridharananda visited U.S.A. from the 23rd
of March 2009 to the 7th of April 2009.

AUCKLAND CENTRE

A vesper service is held daily at the
Centre at 27 Arawa Street, New Lynn,
Auckland from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
It includes singing of hymns, readings
from *the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and
meditation.

On the second Sunday of every month
Satsang programmes were conducted from
10 a.m. to 12-30 p.m. which includes
singing of Bhajans, chanting of the
Ramayana, reading and discussion about
direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and
meditation. On the last Sunday of
every month reading and discussion on
*Srimad-Bhagavad Gita, the Gospel of
Sri Ramakrishna*, the life and teachings
of Holy Mother and Swami Vivekan-
anda were also conducted in addition
to the above. On these days music and
chanting classes were also held.

Kalpataru day was celebrated at the
ashram on 1st January 2009. The
programme started at 10:30 am with
Kirtans. After Kirtans, the significance
of the Kalpataru day was explained to
the devotees as mentioned in the book
Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master.
Arati was conducted at 12:00 noon and
prasad was distributed to nearly 60
people who attended the function.

The birth anniversary of Swami
Vivekananda was celebrated on 17th
and 18th of January 2009. It included a
reading from *Swami Vivekananda on
Himself, Living at the Source and life of
Swami Vivekananda* was organised. The
Vivekananda Youth Group (V.Y.G.) took
active part in the programme. Nearly 70
people attended the function.

The Birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was
celebrated in the evening of 27th of
February 2009 at the Ashram. The
programme started with Bhajans. The
Hindi version of the Life of Ramakrishna
was read by one of the members of V.Y.G.
The programme concluded at 9:00 p.m.
and prasad was distributed to the devotees.