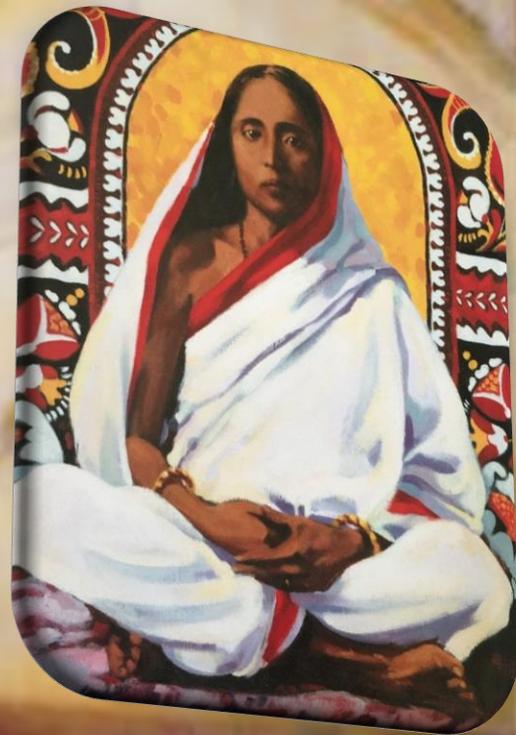


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सर्वस्तरतु दुर्गाणि, सर्वो भद्राणि पश्यतु ।
सर्वः सद्-बुद्धिम्वाप्नोतु, सर्वः सर्वत्र नन्दतु । ।

Sarvas-taratu Durgaani, Sarvo Bhadraani Pashyatu.
Sarvas-sat-buddhim-aapnotu, Sarvaha Sarvatra
Nandatu

“Let everyone be free from miseries. Let everyone see good in others. Let everyone have positive thoughts and let everyone everywhere be happy.” This is a wonderful prayer. Many, many thousands of years ago the Hindus used to pray for the happiness of each and everyone.

There was another 9/11, but it was the opening day of the first Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, and I am proud that I am from Chicago. Swami Vivekananda, a young monk from India, stood before a gathering of more than four thousand people and addressed them with the words, “Sisters and Brothers of America”. No sooner had he pronounced these five words, than a great wave of joy and enthusiasm went through the audience. They rose to their feet; they cheered and cheered for a full 2 minutes. But, the question is why? These are just simple English words, but with them Vivekananda introduced Vedanta, the gem of Indian spirituality, to America.

VEDA means “knowledge”, ANTA means “end”, and the end of all knowledge is that unity and harmony, which are the basis of peace, happiness and joy. Vivekananda, the harbinger of Vedanta to the West, announced the arrival of Vedanta in this blessed country, where freedom of speech and thought are appreciated and accepted. Vedanta speaks of freedom, and Swami Vivekananda said in his own words, “freedom, freedom, freedom is the song of the Soul”. Freedom is the first condition for growth. That was the proclamation of Swami Vivekananda. This freedom is not merely political or economical or social. Vedanta’s freedom is freedom from ignorance, freedom from ego, freedom from thought of me and mine; it is eternal freedom.

When one achieves this freedom, one becomes the source of joy. In Sanskrit they call it Sat-Chit-Ananda Svarupa. One becomes Brahman, the Creator, itself. Vedanta teaches us to go back to the source, which is one and without a second. It is the one from which the many have appeared. As the Mundaka Upanishad says:

Yah sarvajnah sarva-vid yasya jnanamayam tapah,
tasmad etad brahma nama-rupam annam ca jayate.

In two lines the Mundaka Upanishad describes that One which is the source of all knowledge.

Why are we always talking about the One? Because the One is the source of peace and happiness. The moment we think that we are two, there is conflict—the clash of thoughts, the clash of egos. But, when we go back to the source, it is One. From that One, which is the source of all knowledge, all these names and forms came, and the universe was created. There are so many varieties of names and forms. This can be explained by a modern example. We see so many varieties of light bulbs—some yellow, some green, some red, some white. We say, “Oh, so many different bulbs are there.” But, inside those bulbs are filaments, which all use the same electricity. If the electricity is not there, nothing is going to work, and that is what the Hindus say. Nothing is going work without the presence of Brahman, which is the one source from which everything has come. That is what Swami Vivekananda wanted to explain, and, like a prophet, he said, “I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East.” And, what was that message? “Each soul is potentially Divine; know that Divinity and be free, immortal and Blissful.” These were not mere words. They were packed with the divine power of Brahman. As Swami Vivekananda said, “What is in a word unless it has power behind?” So, when he said, “Sisters and Brothers of America”, the words were packed with divine power, and the audience could sense that we are all One.



Vivekananda had received this unique power sitting at the feet of his Master, his Guru, Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of all spiritual knowledge. Vivekananda was always protected by a great power. He said, “I see a great power more powerful than man or God or devil at my back”. One can assume that that great power was no other than Bhagwan Sri Ramakrishna, who engaged his beloved disciple, Vivekananda, in teaching spiritual knowledge to the masses for their salvation. In Bengali Sri Ramakrishna had said Naren Sikhe dev (“Naren will teach”). What he taught to the world was Vedanta. Vivekananda obeyed the command of his guru by spreading Vedanta. He transformed the abstract philosophy into a practical application—service to man is service to God. Swamiji urged us to see God in the poor, the downtrodden, the illiterate, the oppressed. He didn’t just talk; he organized a wonderful unique organization, the Ramakrishna

Mission and the Vedanta Societies, to translate that thought into action.

Friends, many famous organizations came up after Vivekananda with his service attitude. In 1905 Rotary International was established with the motto, “Service Above Self”. Again, in 1903 John D. Rockefeller founded the general education board to aid US education without distinction of race, sex, or creed. In 1917 Lyons International was founded with the motto, “We Serve.” Maybe they were not aware of Vivekananda, maybe they didn’t come in contact with Vivekananda or his philosophy, but the power that Swami Vivekananda left behind is surely influencing all good hearted people. Vivekananda is a patriot saint of India, but he is also a spiritual awakener of the West. Here the people were hard working and broad minded, but they needed spiritual upliftment, and Vivekananda gave them the highest knowledge—Vedanta.

This editorial is based on the talk that Swami Ishatmananda gave at the Parliament of World Religions in October 2015 at Salt Lake City, Utah.

VIVEKANANDA: A HINDU YOGI AND HIS LEGACY

SWAMI SUHITANANDA

Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, India

Arnold Toynbee, the famous British historian, used the term “Creative Minority”. I find that in contrast to yesterday’s audience, this is that minority. Undoubtedly, a minority, but this minority is a creative minority. You can have some impact on society; this is the most important factor. Here each of you has the potential to influence that society. That is the power you are having. That is the reason I am using the phrase “Creative Minority”.

Swamiji, himself, said, “What I am is written on my forehead. If you have the power to realize it, then you can read it, but if you cannot, the loss is yours not mine.” That was Swamiji’s strength! That was Swamiji’s capacity! So, those who can appreciate Swami Vivekananda are the fortunate souls present here.

Sister Nivedita wrote an introduction to the “Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda”. There she mentioned that Swamiji came to the Parliament of Religions to talk on Hinduism, but when he finished, Hinduism was created. That means that he planned to talk on Hinduism following the old trails, but when he finished, he had brought it to a new dimension. It became a “Universal Religion”. That Universal Religion was the voice of Swami Vivekananda. Josephine MacLeod wrote, “The thing that held me in Swamiji was his unlimitedness. I could never touch the bottom or top or sides.”

Swamiji moved with equal ease in the two worlds of the late 19th century—the East and the West. When visiting America he grew to love the American people and appreciate the ideals of this new and great nation. Simultaneously, he saw the political, social and spiritual problems facing America and Europe, and how Vedanta could help with its ancient and rich spiritual wisdom. Seventy years later, Arnold Toynbee wrote, “It is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western

beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race.”

The testimony of the two world wars has already become a proof of that statement. The essence of Swami Vivekananda’s message is undoubtedly the “Divinity of the Self”. He declared that each Soul is potentially divine. This radical declaration of the divinity of man naturally gives rise to questions. If I and you and everyone else are truly God, then why are we subject to so much suffering? If perfection is truly within us, then why are we so imperfect? These questions come.

Swami Vivekananda gave a sophisticated concept of the plan of creation. He did not say outright that the world is false or illusory, but he found that wherever there is good, there is also evil. Wherever there is evil, there must also be good. Wherever there is life, there is death, and everyone who smiles will have to weep and vice versa. Nor can this state of things be changed. This was a bold message to give to Americans. In those days many of them hoped for a heaven on earth. We have heard that some philosophy came up with the idea of eternal progression, which means that things will always continue to get better and better. That cannot be so—a hope for a heaven on earth through worldly perfection accomplished by social reform and progress in science and technology. Swamiji was fully aware that what he said was not at all fashionable and would prove unpopular at first. He wrote, “One must work as the dictate comes from within and then, if it is right and good, society is bound to come around, perhaps centuries after one is dead and gone.”

Perhaps, it is Swami Vivekananda’s teaching on the harmony of religions, so much in tune with the ideals of the Parliament of Religions, which is urgently relevant today, when we are beset with

religious fanaticism, violence and terror. In teaching the harmony of religions, Swami Vivekananda drew upon the experiences of his master, Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna practiced various approaches to God as found in different religions and reached the same divinity through all the paths, leading him to conclude that the great religions of the world are all true and valid paths to the same God. Addressing the final session of the Parliament of religions in 1893, he said, "Do I wish that the Christian would become a Hindu? God forbid! Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become a Christian? God forbid! The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or Buddhist to become a Christian, but each must assimilate the spirit of others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth." Today, when religious hatred is flaring up in different parts of the world, when terrorism is justified on religious grounds, Swami Vivekananda's teachings on the harmony of religions are clearly more relevant than ever before.

Now, I would like to talk about spiritual humanism. This is the age of the common man. Everywhere we see that the masses are rising.

Swamiji intensely sympathized with the suffering of the masses of the whole world. This suffering of men and women would drive him to weep and shed tears. He proclaimed, "I do not believe in such a God who cannot wipe out the tears of widows and cannot give a morsel of food to hungry mouth." He preached a religion of self-confidence and exhorted men to have faith in themselves. He declared, "The greatest religion is to be true to your own nature. Have faith in yourselves!"

We divide our lives into the secular and the sacred. Work is supposed to be secular, while worship is sacred. Swamiji taught us to transcend this difference by spiritualizing the whole of life. For Swamiji the workshop and the office, the classroom and the business place are as true and fit places for God realization as the monastery, church or temple. But how can secular work be spiritualized? By Seva or Service. Service of the divine in the human. "They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive." Service is also the basis of modern life. Swamiji equated morality with unselfishness. That which is selfish is immoral and that, which is unselfish is moral.





A recent book, "American Veda" by Philip Goldberg, traces how this concept of spirituality has changed the West. From the pioneering efforts of Swami Vivekananda, through the establishment of the Vedanta societies, to the waves of the Gurus of various Hindu and Buddhist orders who have come here to teach and share their wisdom, the author shows that American and, by extension, Western European culture has absorbed, assimilated, and sympathized with Indian spirituality. He has shown how leading intellectuals, like Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley, Joseph Campbell, and J. D. Salinger absorbed the teachings of the Swamis of the Vedanta Societies and then transmitted the Vedantic concepts in their own terms through their writings to a larger public. An article in Newsweek was even titled, "We Are All Hindus Now". The author, Lisa Miller, wrote that even though 76% of Americans identify themselves as Christians, Americans are slowly becoming more like Hindus and less like traditional Christians in the ways they think about God, about themselves, and about eternity.

Swamiji's influence is not obvious. Few people in America know of him, but his influence is surely working. He is a voice without a name and without a form. In 1905, three years after Swamiji's passing away, Sister Nivedita wrote to Josephine

MacLeod, "You see, when we who understood Swamiji and remember him are dead, there will come a long period of obscurity and silence for the work that he did. It will seem to be forgotten, until suddenly in 150 or 200 years it will be found to have transformed the West. There is no doubt that Swami Vivekananda profoundly changed both India and America, both the East and the West."

We are just beginning to understand and appreciate the dimensions of Swami Vivekananda's legacy. Future generations will undoubtedly have a better grasp of the vastness and profundity of the legacy of the Hindu Yogi who came to these shores in the last decade of the 19th century. Swami Vivekananda gave a new dimension and concept to religion, a new dimension and concept to science, a new dimension and concept to our work, a new dimension and concept to our morality, a new dimension and concept to our purity, a new dimension and concept to politics, a new dimension and concept to our societies, a new dimension and concept to our international understanding.



What has he left? Once, Swami Vivekananda was invited to see the Alps while he was travelling in Switzerland, and at that time he said, "Why do you want to show me the Alps. I have seen the Himalayas. But, I am ready to walk 200 miles if you can show me a Man."

This article is based on the talk that Swami Suhitananda, (then General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, Belur Math India) gave at the Parliament of World Religions in October 2015 at Salt Lake City, Utah.

SPIRITUALITY AND THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY

SWAMI SARVADEVANANDA

Minister-in-Charge
Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood

We have gathered here today in this wonderful place to join the conference of the World's Parliament of Religions, where all the religions are trying to bond together, think together, and bridge the gap of misunderstanding amongst them. This great task can be accomplished only through spirituality. That is why our topic today is very important: "Spirituality and the Future of Humanity."

The future of humanity depends upon the adoption of spiritual values and not on rituals and doctrines, nor on the materialistic approach to which we adhere. Indeed, it needs great effort and struggle to rise above the materialistic approach to life and uphold the spiritual approach.

Humanity is a collection of individuals. If individual beings can become spiritual, then the future humanity will be in bliss. If each individual tries to become more loving, caring, self-sacrificing, and compassionate, and tries to develop his or her innate divine potentiality, then the community, the country, and ultimately entire humanity will benefit. Therefore, special attention is to be given on the individuals. Individual beings, starting from even one who is of a very base nature, are always moving unconsciously towards perfection, purity, and love—maybe little by little every day, till the journey ends, when one becomes perfectly spiritual and one with the Divine. On this onward journey of the soul to reach perfection's goal, great spiritual giants are produced. Future humanity depends upon the manifestation of this spirituality in the lives of many individuals. When a large number of spiritual people or spiritually developed persons are found in the society at one time, we call that the blessed moment of humanity. The Prosperous,

bright, and shining future of humanity depends on the number of spiritual people in the world. Spirituality is life-transforming. It is character-changing force. Spirituality has the potential, the power, to transform an ordinary person, a worldly-minded person—most selfish, mean in his approach to others, holding on to a materialistic view of life alone—into a saint who sees consciousness and divinity all over.



In our modern time in America a new language has become common. It is, "I am spiritual, but I am not religious." What does it mean? "Religious" means what? People young or old have the idea that organized religions have become a burden on them. They are tired of the meaningless performance of rites and rituals, do's and don'ts, the so-called religion of fanatical doctrines and dogmas devoid of character—speaking of love, and at the same time destroying the peace of all. The human mind revolts against this so-called religion. At the Parliament of Religions in 1893, Swami Vivekananda spoke about the universal Religion of love and acceptance, harmony, character-building, peace, and coexistence.

His oft-quoted words ring true: “Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one or more or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.” According to Swami Vivekananda, the major object of religion is the transformation of character from beast-nature to human nature, and then to its true Divine nature.

It is a good sign that people are turning towards spirituality. The cry to be “not religious” is a cry for real religion. Swami Vivekananda suggested that the society would greatly benefit if real religion, devoid of dust and dirt, of fanaticism, bigotry, etc., were put into practice. There is a danger in this path of total rejection of the traditional religions, which have produced in the past men and women of extraordinary character. There is a risk of mistaking a hallucination for a genuine vision, due to lack of earlier evidence of experience as is available in the time-tested religions, if an independent path is selected by an immature mind to be “spiritual” in one’s own way. Swami Vivekananda solved the problem and guided us to follow the path of realization—not to get caught in the trap of doctrines and dogmas but to follow the great tradition or path of spiritual journey of “man-making, character-building” transformation.

Sri Ramakrishna assured us that one can certainly see God, through the practice of spiritual disciplines. So spiritual disciplines are necessary. The aim of human birth is to love God. Sri Ramakrishna said, realize “that” pure love and be in peace. But how to reach this goal? Does it depend on step-by-step practice, or does it happen in a moment? In his Inspired Talks, Swami Vivekananda says, “Vedanta ... tells us that we not only have to live the life of all past humanity, but

also the future life of all humanity.” “The lower types of humanity,” Vivekananda tells us, “in all nations find pleasure in the senses, while the cultured and the educated find it in thought, in philosophy, in arts and sciences. Spirituality is a still higher plane. The subject being infinite, that plane is the highest, and the pleasure there is the highest for those who can appreciate it. So, even on the utilitarian ground that man is to seek for pleasure, he should cultivate religious thought, for it is the highest pleasure that exists.” This is a beautiful expression of spirituality experienced and taught by Swami Vivekananda.

To be spiritual, one needs to grow from the plane of consciousness where one stands. To bring prosperity at home, and in the society at large, one should cultivate spiritual wisdom. “Perfect sincerity, holiness, gigantic intellect, and an all-conquering will. Let only a handful of men work with these, and the whole world will be revolutionised. ... It is the patient upbuilding of character, the intense struggle to realise the truth, which alone will tell in the future of humanity. So ... I am hoping,” he continues, “to work along this line—training up to practical Advaita realisation a small band of men and women.” Swami Vivekananda never thought of anything less than the whole of humanity; in his eyes spirituality is the glorious future of humanity.



He exhorts us to “worship the Living God, the Man-God—every being that wears a human form—God in His universal as well as individual aspect.” Hence Swami Vivekananda wanted to “Go from village to village, do good to humanity and to the world at large.” So ultimately spirituality is the change of character, to love God and to love and serve the human-God. How to do that? By service to the living God. The Gita talks about sama-darshana, to see the sameness in all:

*samaṁ paśyan hi sarvatra samavasthitam īśvaram |
na hinastyātmanātmānamṛṇṁ tato yāti parāṁ gatim | |*

He who sees the Ruling Spirit being present equally in every being everywhere cannot destroy Self by the self. He attains the Highest Goal.” (13.29) We cannot hurt others, because there is no other but we—we can not hurt ourselves. This growth and progress should first happen on the material plane and then on mental, emotional, and intellectual levels. This development in each person ultimately leads to inner peace and joy, tranquility, and absolute bliss. Then humanity will produce galaxies of men and women of unique spiritual character saturated with spiritual ideals. The future prosperous human society depends not upon the materialistic view of life but on the spiritual approach to life.

Material growth and prosperity will follow automatically if the effort is genuine, honest, and sincere. If a person is of good character, is moral and cultured, naturally he or she will develop love, feeling for others, and the spontaneous urge to do

good to others. This will surely bring a better society, better human beings. But this will not lead humanity to its highest goal of peace and perfection when the spiritual values are lacking, are not put into practice in life. On the contrary, spirituality can create an atmosphere for the growth on both planes for human beings—on both the material and divine planes. In ancient India, emphasis was given to both types of knowledge, aparā and parā. We can learn so much from that ancient India, when humanity reached its acme putting its emphasis on the all-round development of human beings—bringing prosperity on the material plane of day-to-day living as also enormous riches in the heart—making spirituality the ground.

So the future of humanity will be glorious if society can create an environment and atmosphere congenial to building men and women of noble character and positive thinking grounded on genuine spiritual ideals. We need sacrifice and dedication to build the future humanity. No civilization can withstand the test of time without the spiritual foundation of realization of the Oneness of all beings.

Let us build the future humanity—spiritual human society—bonded together with love, dedication, and sacrifice for the good of all. Unless we strive to see the Divine within and also practice to see the same Divine in the hearts of all, this goal cannot be reached. Let us take the responsibility and join our hearts to build this glorious future!



ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT



Rajesh Kumar Sharma

Every 3 minutes a speeding Metrorail kicks up a din, but the children seated below the elevated tracks near the Yamuna Bank Metro Station in New Delhi carry on with their studies unperturbed. On the faces of the children one could see a steely resolve and determination to focus on their learning and not be distracted by the surroundings.

In fact, this informal 'Under the Bridge School' situated below the railway flyover is all about defying conventions. Rajesh Kumar Sharma, a college dropout who runs a general store, teaches 200 children from poor families under a railway flyover. Located on railway land, the school has no building. Children sit on the ground on mats. There are few plastic and wooden chairs for the teachers, and a couple of steel trunk boxes for keeping the attendance registers and school records. Coats of black paint on the boundary wall make up the black boards.

Around 200 kids from nearby slums attend his school that functions from 9 am to 2 pm in two batches. The children are taught to read, write, and basics of English, Hindi, science, mathematics, history, and geography. Though the school does not follow any fixed syllabus and has no government approval, it achieves the purpose of a school, imparting education and building the confidence level in the children.

Sharma started the school back in 2007 when he first visited the place to catch a glimpse of the ongoing metro railway work. The sight of the children who not going to school and loitering around changed the course of his life. Speaking to the parents of the children, who were mostly farmers and daily wagers, he realized they were poor and there was no school in the vicinity they could send their children to. He started the classes after the parents requested him to teach their children.

Sharma always encourages the children who attend

his classes to join some nearby government school. Some children go to regular school in the afternoon after attending his classes. Sharma could not complete his degree from Aligarh University due to financial constraints in his family. His own inability to finish college became his inspiration to educate other poor children. "Knowledge increases when it is shared," he declares.

A volunteer teacher, studying law at Amity University, teaches English and science at the open air school. Another volunteer teacher, devotes 4 hours daily at the school. "It gives immense me satisfaction to teach these kids. Initially, I devoted 2 hours in 3 days, but now I stretched it to 4 hours daily," he reveals.

Sharma says they are badly in need of toilets, especially for grown up girls who attend the second batch from 12 noon to 2 pm. He has sought the help of the local Member of Parliament in this regard. Metro authorities have extended their support. "They constructed the platform for the teachers to stand on and teach, and gave the coats of black paint on the wall to create five blackboards for our school," he says. There are few well-wishers who donate footwear and snacks for the children.

For Sharma, life does not end with the school. After 2 pm, he goes to the shop and relieves his younger brother and remains there till 10 in the night. He has 2 sons and a daughter. His elder son, who is in class 11, often volunteers at his school as a teacher. His wife, who takes care of the home used to object to his work earlier, but has become supportive now.

(Adapted from:
<http://www.theweekendleader.com/Heroism/2108/educator-extraordinaire.html>)



MA SARADA DEVI: THE EMBODIMENT OF GOD AS MOTHER

SWAMI ISHATMANANDA, Swami-in-Charge, Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

God, as a word, is known to everyone, whether primitive or advanced. God, as a Truth, is unknown to almost everyone. There are people who can speak for hours and hours on God; there are many who are ready to kill hundreds in the name of God, but there is almost no one who can say, "I have seen God."

What is God!

Every religion says that God is Merciful, Compassionate, Pure, and, above all, God is Love.

If it is so, all of us have seen glimpses of God. How? Remember those days when we used to lay on the laps of our mothers. Have we not seen that beautiful face, smiling even after bearing all the pain to give us life. Remember those days when we went on making mistakes and misbehaving, and every time she forgave us, embraced us, sacrificed all her comfort for years and years to help us to stand on our own feet. Are these not divine qualities? Is the mother not the image of God?

Now think, if all the motherly hearts of the universe are put together, what would it look like—undoubtedly, it would take the form of Ma Sarada, the embodiment of God as Mother, the Mother of the universe.

The life of Sri Saradamani Devi or the Holy Mother, as she is now known all over India and abroad, is bereft of all those things which we are apt to consider great according to our present-day standards. Judged by current standards, she looked like a common pious lady going round her daily routine household duties. Hers was a life of extreme simplicity, devoid of all events and activities, which would attract one's attention. Engrossed in feverish action, we are apt to overlook the real significance of a simple and unostentatious life.

From Heaven with Love

Her birth, itself, indicated her divine origin as reflected in the experience of her mother, Shyamasundari Devi, who, while returning from a visit to another village had occasion to sit under a bel (beliva, aegle marmelos) tree. Suddenly, she heard a jingling sound and saw a beautiful little girl dressed in a red sari come down from the branches of the tree. She laid her soft hands around Shyamasundari's neck and said in a sweet voice, "Ma, I will come to you." It was after this event that Sarada Devi was born.

Surprisingly, her father, Sri Ramachandra Mukherjee, also had a similar vision in a different place on a different day. He was a poor Brahmin. One day he fell asleep and dreamt that a little girl of incomparable beauty, decorated with ornaments, embraced him with her delicate hands. He asked, "Who are you, my child?" The girl replied in a soft voice, "Here I come to you." Ramachandra woke up and, after returning home, he heard the experience of his wife, Shyamasundari Devi. The conviction grew in them that the girl was none other than a divine goddess. The Brahmin couple lived the purest of lives with penance and prayer in expectation of the divine child. Fulfilling the prayer of the pious couple, the divine mother was born on the 8th paush, a little after Thursday evening, 22nd December 1853. She was named Saradamani.

The girlhood days of the Holy Mother were made unique by a strange combination of divinity and humanity, with a predominance of the former, as it were. Once, during the worship of the goddess, Jagad-dhatri, Sri Ramhriday Ghoshal of Haledpukur was present. Finding the Mother lost in meditation before the deity, he kept his eyes fixed on her for a long time, but he could not make

out who was the deity and who the Mother, and he left the place in fear.

In a very casual way she expressed her divinity in later days. "Mind you, my dear, as a girl I saw that another girl of my age always accompanied me, helped me in my work, and frolicked with me; but she disappeared at the approach of other people."

Union Of Shiva and Shakti

When Sarada Devi was a mere child, a strange thing happened. In those days open air country theaters were very popular. During one such performance, called a 'yatra', Sarada Devi was sitting on the lap of a lady who asked her in merriment, "Whom among the great number of people assembled here would you like to marry?" Sarada Devi at once lifted her two tiny hands and pointed to Sri Ramakrishna, sitting not far away. At that time she had no idea of what matrimony was, but the unseen power that guided those little hands saw to the fulfillment of the wishes of that unerring heart.

Strangely enough, Sri Ramakrishna Deva, also not knowing anything about her, clearly stated, when his mother was searching for a girl for him, "Go and find the bride marked out (for me) in Ramachandra Mukherjee's house at Jayrambati."

The conjugal life of these two great souls teach us that married life is a stage in the growth of the soul towards perfection. Marriage is a symbol of the union of souls and not mere physical bodies. Swami Vivekananda said, "The ideas behind our marriage system are the only ideas through which there can be a real civilization...If individual pleasure were to be allowed to run loose in society the result must be evil, evil children, wicked and demonical." Sri Ramakrishna and Ma Sarada stand as an ideal for all householders.

Divine Love Embraces All

Once a devotee had a doubt. He thought, "I am not born to Mother. Then how am I her own

child?" Mother's answer silenced him forever. "Were you not born to me? If not, to whom were you born? Are you not my children? If not, whose children are you? Do you have a mother other than me? I am present in all women. I alone am present in all mothers. You are all my children irrespective of wherefrom you come. This is the ultimate truth."

Once incident happened during one of her birthdays, while she was still in the physical body. The devotees were jubilant on that day. There was a long queue of them waiting to make obeisance to the Mother. She was sitting in her house and devotees were entering one by one and paying their respect to her. Mother took a break and went inside. But she was not coming out for a long time. Some lady attendants went inside to see what had happened. They saw to their utter bewilderment that the Mother was cooking the diet for a patient in the house, while those who were responsible for it had forgotten about it in the midst of the festive occasion! She was cooking for her sick child.

The Mother's infinite love transcended all limitations of caste or color, merit or demerit; in fact all conditions of life. Here we recount a few incidents from Her life. There were some Muslim robbers, who were a terror to the neighboring villages. Naturally, they were studiously shunned by the Hindus. But the Muslims used to look upon Sarada Devi as their mother. And Mother also, even being a Brahmin widow, used to look upon them as her children. Amzad was one of those 'mulberry-robbers', who had a hand in erecting the mud walls of the Mother's house. One day the Mother seated him on her verandah for his meal. Nalini Devi served him, but owing to caste prejudices, she stood at a distance in the courtyard and tossed the food on to the man's leaf-plate. This displeased the Mother, who said, "Can one have any relish for food if it is served in such a fashion? If you can't serve him properly, I shall do it."

When Amzad had finished his meal, the Mother cleaned the place herself. At this, Nalini Devi loudly denounced the act, saying, "O dear aunt, you will lose your caste thereby!" But the Mother cut her short, "Amzad is as truly my son as my Sarat (Saradananda) himself is."

The next incident happened soon after. The Mother was down with fever and many visited her in her sick bed. One morning, at about nine or ten o'clock, the Brahmachari in attendance saw a Mohammedan of dark appearance, emaciated body, ragged clothes, and sad looks, tottering into Mother's compound with the help of a staff. From his unhesitating movements it was apparent that the man, though unknown to the Brahmachari, was quite a familiar figure there. But, curiosity urged him to follow the man. The Mother was inside, lying on a cot in her room, and the verandah in front was covered by a thin screen of plaited bamboo slips, so that the cot was not easily visible. The man tiptoed to look over the screen. Suddenly, the Mother's eyes turned in that direction, and she accosted him in a low endearing voice, "Is that you, dear Amzad? Come in." With

beaming eyes and a happy countenance, Amzad stepped on to the verandah and, standing to one side of the door, thrust in his head to enter into an intimate conversation on matters of everyday life. Finding the Mother and her son thus engaged, the Brahmachari went about his own duties.

We may mention in passing that this love of the Mother extended to dumb creatures as well. One day a calf was restlessly bleating, which made all infer that it had some pain in the stomach. The bleating brought Mother also there. She sat by the calf holding it in both arms and softly pressing its navel and patting it as though it were her own child.

In Ma Sarada Devi's life of artless simplicity, purity, piety and self-dedication, we find the presence of God as Mother.

"I am the mother of the wicked, and I am the mother of the virtuous. Never fear.

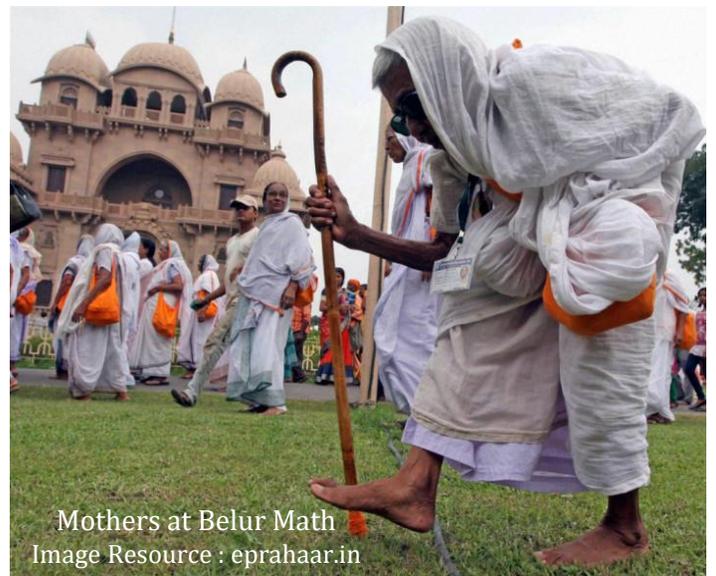
Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself, 'I have a mother.'"

—Ma Sarada Devi.



Eternal, unquestioning self - surrender to Mother alone can give us peace. Love Her for Herself, without fear or favour. Love Her because you are Her child.

Swami Vivekananda
CW8: The Worship of the Divine Mother



Introduction to the Cover Page

This year on 25th May, devotees observed *Phalahaarini Kali Puja* all around the world. According to the Hindu almanac (which is mainly based on the lunar calendar), the new moon night of *Vaishakha* is attributed as *Phalahaarini Kali Puja* day.

On this day Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna observed the end of his sadhaka-life in a special way by worshipping Sri Saradamani Devi as Goddess Shodasi. According to solar calendar the exact date of this event is debatable. The Holy Mother arrived at Dakshineswar for the first time in March, 1872. According to the version of Swami Saradananda in his biography of Sri Ramakrishna, the worship took place about one year after this, i.e, on the Phalahaarini Kali Puja of 1873, the date of it being 25th May. In the Bengali book entitled *Mayer Katha*, the Holy Mother is reported to have said that it took place about a month and a half after her arrival at Dakshineswar. In that case it would be on the occasion of the Phalahaarini Kali Puja of June, 1872.

However, the more important question is, why did Sri Ramakrishna worship Holy Mother as the Goddess Shodasi? Swami Hiranmayananda, the then General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, Belur Math answered this in an article that was published in *Prabuddha Bharata* [December 1992]. "The Ramakrishna Sangha belongs to the dasanami sampradaya of Shankaracharya. This Dasanami Sampradaya includes the ten monastic systems, holding the name of Puri, Giri, Bharati, Tirtha, Vana, Aranya, Parvat, Ashrama, Sagar and Sarasvati. The monastic organization of ours belongs to the Puri Sampradaya. Srimat Tota Puri was the Sannyasa Guru of Sri Ramakrishna. That's why we also belong to the Puri Sampradaya of Sannyasins. The original Math of this Puri Sampradaya sannyasins is the Sringeri Math. Every sampradaya has various gods and goddesses. The presiding deity of the Puri Sampradaya is Kamakshi Devi. The temple of Kamakshi Devi is at Kanchipuram in South India.

In that temple there is the Shodasi murti of the Devi. The other names of Shodasi Devi are— Rajarajeswari, Tripurasundari or Sri Vidya."

Tripurasundarī means the 'Beautiful (Goddess) of the Three Cities'. As Śoḍaśī, Tripurasundari is represented as a sixteen-year-old girl. Lalitā means 'She Who Plays' and Rājarājeśvarī is the 'Queen of Queens, Supreme Ruler'. They all are one of the group of ten Goddesses of Hindu belief, collectively called Mahavidyas. Goddess Tripura is the ultimate, primordial Shakti, the light of manifestation. She is the garland of letters of the alphabet and said to be the one who gave birth to the three worlds. She is called 'the beauty of three worlds'. At dissolution, She is the abode of all Her devotees.

Tripura's themes are religious devotion, forgiveness, relationships, kindness, truth, spirituality, patience and restoration. Her symbols are gold, silver and iron. In Jainism, Tripura is the great mother who lives in three metallic cities (gold, silver, iron) that represent the heavens, the air, and the earth (or body, mind, and spirit). She unites these three powers within us for well-balanced spiritual living that reflects good morals and proper action.

From the article by Swami Hiranmayanada, "In South India the worship of Sri Vidya is especially in vogue. The worship that is prevalent in Bengal is called the Kalikula Upasana ; and the worship that is in vogue in the South India is called Sri Kula Upasana. Acharya Shankara founded four Maths at the four corners of India, for the sannyasins. In the Sringeri Math in South India he placed Sri Yantra as the presiding deity, and arranged for its daily worship. In Kanchipuram he consecrated the temple to the Devi and named Her Kamakshi; ...

Though he [Sri Ramakrishna] started his sadhana in the Kali-Kula, he ended it after embracing Sri Kula and following its instructions. This fits squarely with the injunctions of the Tantra scriptures. In South India Tantra sadhana is attested by, and follows Parashurama-kalpa sutra.



In that Parashurama Sutra the chief deity of the Sri Kula has been called Samrajni. Saiyam Samrajni. Sri Devi is the Samrajni—the queen amongst all the goddesses. Shyama or Kali is Her chief attendant. So, for worshipping Sri Vidya, Shyama is to be worshipped first. Why? Why is the chief attendant's worship first? Samrajni, the empress, should have been worshipped first. But no. To adore the King, the minister is to be pleased first. Pradhanadvarya rajaprasadanam hi kuryat. That is why a sadhaka after attaining the siddhi, fulfilment in Kali worship, also gains access to the worship of Sri Vidya or Samrajni Shodasi Devi.

Of course, Sri Ramakrishna did not consult scriptures nor did he do such sadhana after knowing fully well of its purport. His life itself comprises scriptures. As we have seen, after the realization of the Divine Mother of the universe, Kali, it is Divine Mother who led him, one after another, through various forms of sadhana. Through his life the truths of the scriptures and objectives of various sadhanas, were re-verified and revived.

Tantra is always associated with *Mantra* and *Yantra*. To talk about *mantra*: “Ṣoḍaśī mantra kevalam mokṣa sādhanam”, which means that Ṣoḍaśī mantra offers only liberation. klīm क्लीं, which is known as kāma bija. This bija draws divine energy towards the aspirant. It acts like a magnet. This bija is known as power of attraction. Kāma here does not mean lust, but means the desire to get into the state of Bliss.

Description of *Yantra*: In the center of Nagara

(city) is the Maha Padma Vana (the great lotus forest) and within it the Chintamani Griha (The house of holy thoughts). On its four gates stand the gods for watch and ward. Following are the significance of other features

1. The square called Trilokya mohanam (most beautiful in the three worlds)
2. The sixteen petaled lotus called Sarva asha paripoorakam (fulfiller of all desires)
3. The eight petaled lotus called Sarva asamkshohanam (the all cleanser)
4. The sixteen cornered figure called Sarva saubhagyam (all fortune)
5. The external ten cornered figure called Sarvartha sadhakam (giver of all assets)
6. The internal ten cornered figure called Sarva raksha karam (All protector)
7. The eight cornered figure called Sarva roga haram (cure of all diseases)
8. The triangle called Sarva siddhi pradam (giver of all powers) and
9. Finally, the dot called Sarva ananda mayam (all pleasures). Here sits the Goddess.

This Goddess is none but Mother Sri Sarada Devi. In his book, “Sri Sarada Devi: The Mother of All”, Swami Atmasthananda, President of the Ramakrishna Order says, ‘Holy Mother came to establish the ideal of universal motherhood. This is because, if man and woman live in an orderly way in the world can they be useful to house, family, country, world, and entire human family. If otherwise, misery is inevitable. So Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother came together. And they are nothing but Mother Kali Herself in two forms. Sri Ramakrishna knew that his physical mother living then at the Nahabat and the Holy Mother who was serving his feet then were one and the same. He also knew that the Mother in the temple was the same as Mother Sarada, and it was she who had come in this form to make us understand this truth.

On the occasion of *Phalaharini Kali Puja*, as a tribute to this conviction of Sri Ramakrishna, we have selected for the cover page two paintings of Swami Tadatmananda on Sri Sarada Devi and Dakshineswar temple.

From a revised entry in *Vedanta Voices*, published in February, 2008: "Swami Tadatmananda (1932-2008) joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1959 at the Hollywood center, transferring to Trabuco Monastery in 1964. He took his brahmacharya (first) vows in 1965 and his sannyasa vows (vows of renunciation) in 1971.

He was born John Markovich in Detroit, Michigan, on January 16, 1932, the first of fraternal twins. In elementary school, John often got excused from the academic schoolwork because his teachers had discovered his artistic talent. Recognized for his artistic talent, he was directed to Cass Technical High School and later received a scholarship to the Colorado Springs School of Fine Arts in 1950. He served in the Navy from 1952 to

1956, though it was 3 years before they discovered his artistic ability, after which he drew for naval publications.

It was in the Navy that John discovered books about Ramakrishna and decided he would travel to Los Angeles and enroll in a fine art school there and attend the Vedanta Society lectures. When he decided he wanted to join the monastery, he approached his spiritual teacher, the head of the center, Swami Prabhavananda. The swami [Prabhavananda] said that since he had started school he would have to finish, as one should not quit a course after beginning it.

Swami Tadatmananda's artwork quickly attracted notice. His paintings, drawings and sculpture are treasured and displayed in many locations; in particular, the central painting of Sri Ramakrishna in the Santa Barbara Temple shrine and the nearly life-size painting in the Trabuco Monastery hall which depicts all the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. "

Swami Brahmananda, in the course of his morning strolls, visited the Lakshmi-nivasa [at Benaras] and inquired about the Mother's health from Golap-Ma and sometimes made fun. One morning, as he came there, Master Mahashaya (M) came out of his room and from the upper verandah Golap-Ma said, 'Rakhal, Mother asks you, why Shakti (Divine Energy conceived as a woman) is worshipped first (before the male aspect)?' Swami Brahmananda replied, 'It is because Mother has in her keeping the key to knowledge of Brahman. There is no other way unless Mother, out of compassion, unlocks the door with the key.' And he sang a song in the *baul* tune:

O mind, remain immersed in meditating the feet of Shiva's wife;
Be immersed and avoid all misery.
All these three worlds are vain, and in vain you roam about.
Meditate within you the Coiled Energy that's of none but Brahman.
This is Kamalakanta's (poet's) message,
'Sing the glory of Mother Kali.

This indeed is a stream of bliss; and paddle on slowly.'

As the song proceeded, he fell in the grip of a divine ecstasy and danced merrily; and at the end cried out, 'Ho, ho, ho!' and dashed out of the place. The Mother enjoyed his dance and singing from above, and below were Master Mahashaya and a few other devotees who also felt stirred to the depths by it all.

-- *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, Swami Gambhirananda, pp.268-269

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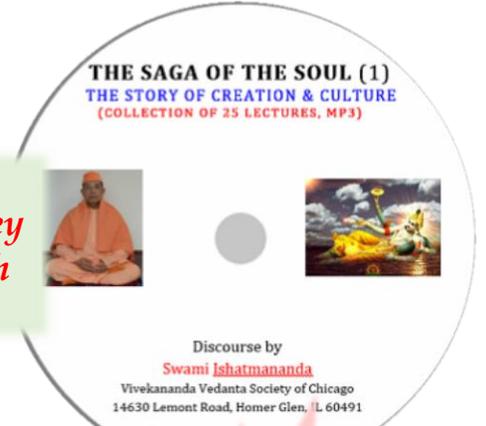
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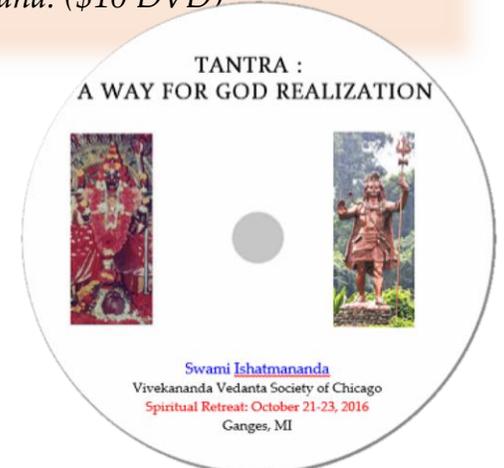
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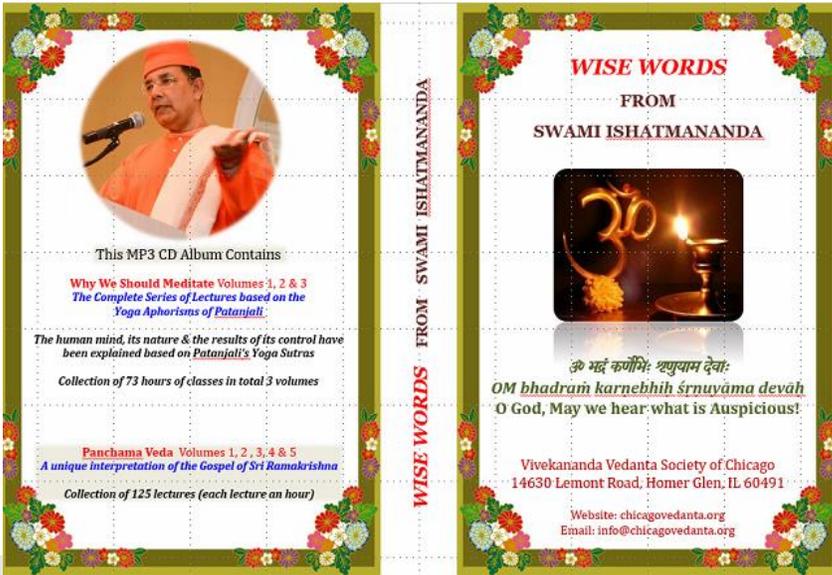
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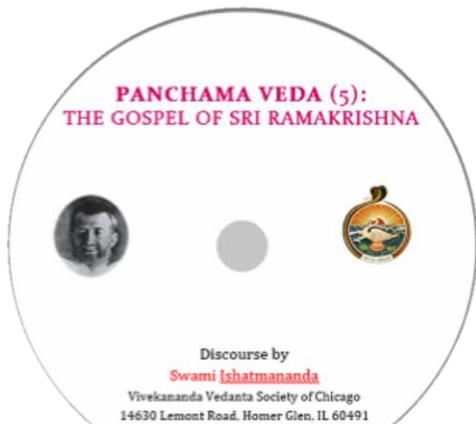
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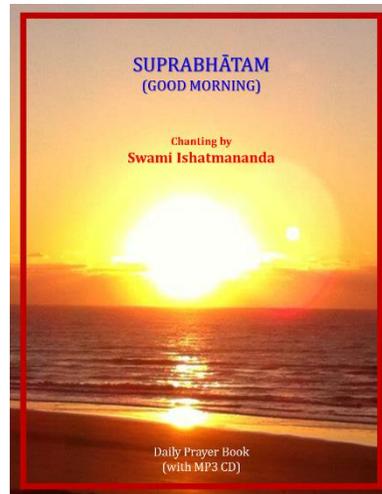
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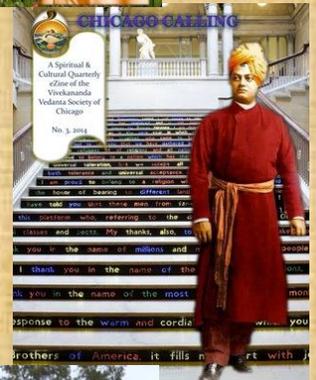
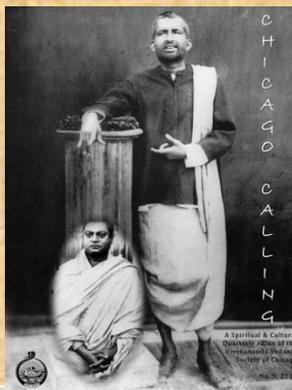
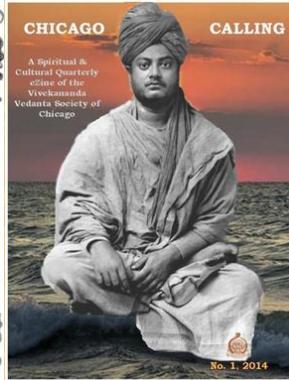
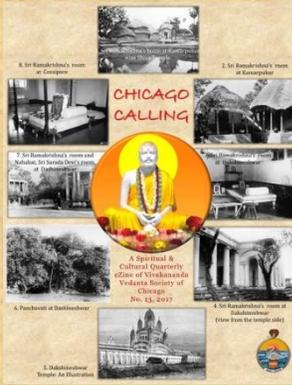


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