

CHICAGO CALLING



Shanti Ashrama



Pasadena
Vivekananda House



Thousand
Island Park

Ridgeley,
Vivekananda Retreat



A Spiritual & Cultural Quarterly eZine of the
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

No. 27, 2020



Table of Contents



	Page
EDITORIAL: BACK TO GOD	3
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND SPIRITUAL RETREAT SWAMI SARVADEVANANDA	5
SANATANA DHARMA AND SPIRITUAL RETREAT SWAMI BRAHMARUPANANDA	9
GANGES RETREAT : AS WE SAW IT DEVOTEES' REMINISCENCES	11
HISTORY OF GANGES SWAMI VARADANANDA	13
BHAGAVATA (2): RESPECTED RISHIS LEARN FROM A HUMBLE SUTA SWAMI ISHATMANANDA	15
INTRODUCTION TO THE COVER PAGE	17
ADVERTISEMENTS	28

Editor: Swami Ishatmananda
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago
14630 Lemont Road, Homer Glen. 60491

email: ezine@chicagovedanta.org
chicagovedanta.org

©Copyright:
Swami-in-Charge
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

EDITORIAL: BACK TO GOD

One feeling is common in every human without any exception and that is dissatisfaction.

A king is dissatisfied because he can't become an emperor, an emperor is dissatisfied because he cannot rule the whole world. A singer is dissatisfied seeing the popularity of another singer. A lady is dissatisfied seeing another lady wearing jewelry costlier than hers. Each and every human is dissatisfied.

Why this dissatisfaction? Is this a defect in the human character?

No. Dissatisfaction is an indication given to the human mind to think and analyze and go beyond it.

What is the cause of dissatisfaction?

The source of creation is the ultimate, Bhuma. Hence, being created from Bhuma, a human can never be satisfied until he reaches the ultimate Bhuma. "Bhumai-va-Sukham."

Vedanta calls the creator or Bhuma, "Brahman", but others call it by different names, like God, Jehovah, Allah, Buddha, etc.

To Reach God one should

1st, listen and learn about it from those who have already realized Brahman, God. It is called Sat-Sanga or holy company and 2nd, go into solitude and contemplate on the teachings of the holy people.

Holy company and pondering on the teachings learned from holy persons in a secluded place are necessary to achieve the goal of every human. In the words of Bhagavvan Sri Ramakrishna, "God realization is the goal of every human life." Then he suggested four steps:

1. Holy Company (Sat-Sanga)
2. Living in Solitude (nirjan-bas)
3. Discrimination (Vichara)
4. Prayer (Prathana)

The monastic followers of Sri Ramakrishna follow these practices in their personal lives and as far as possible provide the opportunity for lay

devotees to follow them also. Pilgrim centers like Belur Math, Jayrambati (Holy Mother's birthplace) and Kamarpukur (Sri Ramakrishna's birthplace) have elaborate arrangements for the devotees.

Most Vedanta Societies (Branches of the Ramakrishna Mission) in Northern America have spiritual retreat centers. Devotees get both holy guidance and a secluded place to meditate on the ideals.

This year, 2020, on 11th September the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago celebrated the 50th anniversary of its retreat center in Ganges, MI.

Some spiritual advice from advanced souls is necessary for the spiritual journey — that we can understand. But why did Sri Ramakrishna recommend spending time in solitude? What is the benefit of living in solitude? Moreover, does solitude mean completely alone? Can't there be a close friend or relative? How long should one have to stay in solitude?

Before we try to give the answers to these questions, let us imagine that we are standing on the threshold of a room—if we take one step inside we are in the room—saved from the scorching sun and hot dusty wind. But if we take one step outside, we are blatantly exposed to heat and cold, happiness and suffering, success and failure — in one word — in the middle of the pairs of opposites.

Every one of us has had these experiences. Now, when we go to a holy person and learn about God and His creation, learn that God is the real, eternal source of peace and happiness, we also learn that His creation, this phenomenal world, with all its attractions and apparent beauties is temporary and hence ends up in misery.

Now, the choice is ours. It's like standing on the threshold of spirituality and worldly life. Our decision will take us either to eternity or to temporal life.

Who is going to take the decision?

Me. I'm going to take the decision? Which part of me — hands, feet, belly, back, head is going to take the decision. Of course, my mind.

The mind has a part call Buddhi or Intellect. This faculty of the mind has the capacity to judge the pros and cons, good and bad, and then decide.

Vedantins think that this part, buddhi or intellect, reflects the real consciousness—hence it feels it is conscious.

When one wants to see one's own mind, one must go to a secluded place away from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Then left to oneself, one can judge and take the right decision.

Hence, we find ancient scriptures like the Shiva-Samhita (verse 5/184) says through the mouth of Lord Shiva — one should avoid

company (not only persons but worldly thoughts). Otherwise, mukti or liberation is impossible.

The *Kularnava Tantra* also supports this view — *nisanga-eva muktasyat* —Only detachment can give liberation—because concentration is developed in loneliness.

Does it mean that just by living alone one can realize God? Surely not. One must have holy company and therefore scriptures teach, *satam sango hi veshajam*, "Holy company is like medicine."

To be satisfied eternally, one must go back to God.

To go back to God we need:

1. Holy company to learn
2. A holy secluded place to ponder the teachings and make the right decision.

M: "Is it possible to see God?"

MASTER: "Yes, certainly. Living in solitude now and then, repeating God's name and singing

His glories, and discriminating between the Real and the unreal - these are the means to employ to see Him."

M: "Under what conditions does one see God?"

MASTER: "Cry to the Lord with an intensely yearning heart and you will certainly see Him. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. They swim in tears for money. But who weeps for God? Cry to Him with a real cry."

The Master sang:

Cry to your Mother Syama , with a real cry, mind! And how can She hold Herself from you? How can Syama stay away? How can your Mother Kali hold Herself away? ...

Continuing, he said: "Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.

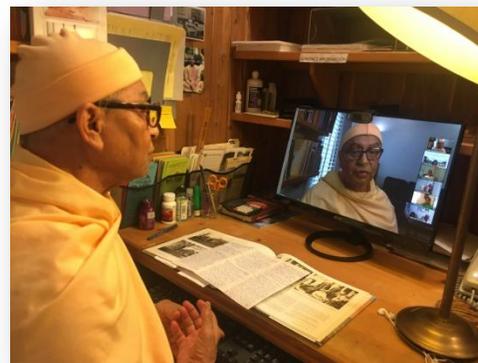
"God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife. If one feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions, then through it one can attain Him".

An excerpt from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*
Translated by Swami Nikhilananda

Swami Vivekananda and Spiritual Retreat

Swami Sarvadevananda
Vedanta Society of Southern California

This article is based on the talk delivered during Ganges Golden Jubilee celebration (online) in September 2020.



*OM namaḥ śrī yatirājāya vivekānanda sūryaye
sat-chit sukha svarūpāya svāmīne tāpa-hāriṇe.*

Om, Salutations to the king of Monks, (Who is) Swami Vivekananda, blazing like the Sun, Who is of the nature of the bliss of *Sat-chit* (Brahman); and is the remover of sorrows

My loving regards to the Swamis, dear brothers and all the devotees,

Today we have gathered together through Zoom to celebrate the wonderful occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Ganges retreat. It is such a joy to see so many devotees together. The Ganges Retreat has attracted so many devotees for such a length of time and inspired them to withdraw their minds from the world and enter into the inner chamber of their hearts. If we look at the Ganges retreat from this perspective, its contribution is tremendous. It is also joyful to see that the retreat is continually giving its service till now.

Today I shall reflect on: “Swami Vivekananda and Spiritual Retreats”.

When we read the Upanishads, we see that from ancient times, sages used to go to the retired life of Vanaprashtha, and contemplate on the ultimate Reality being there. In the scheme of life there were 4 stages: student life, married life, retired life, and the life of total renunciation. During Vanaprashtha stage, they used to go away from their homes detaching themselves from worldly associations and devote their life to the realization of God in solitude.

In the modern age, Sri Ramakrishna lived a retreatant’s life at Dakshineswar. We find him to

live a secluded life away from his friends, family, and relatives. He forgot the whole world and dedicated his heart and soul to having the vision of the Divine Mother.

Swami Vivekananda also left his home for the purpose of God-realization in a secluded spiritual atmosphere at Dakshineswar. Swamiji in his lecture “Maya and Illusion”, given in London, says, “I see before me as it were that in some of those forest retreats this question of freedom is being discussed by those ancient sages of India and one of them, where even the oldest and the holiest fail to reach the solutions, a young man stands up in the midst of them and declares, ‘hear ye children of immortality, hear ye who live in the highest heavens, I have found the way that by knowing him who is beyond the darkness we can go beyond death!’” So this was Swamiji’s idea about a retreat which will lead us to this realization of that absolute truth beyond all duality and all material identification. We find that Swami Vivekananda, being the second image of Sri Ramakrishna, promoted this retreat idea all over the US. Returning to India Swami Vivekananda writes on May 6th, 1895 to Alasinga: “I am taking several of my disciples to a summer retreat to finish their training in Yoga and Bhakti and Jnana, and then they will be able to help carry the work on”. While staying on a boat in the valley of Kashmir, Swamiji promised Sister Nivedita, Dheera Mata, and Jaya that before the end of the summer he would take them for a retreat and teach them to meditate. In those quotations we find that Swamiji is emphasizing the importance of retreat.

In the Gospel, we find that Sri Ramakrishna

spoke so many times about retreat and secluded life. He said that one should pray to God in solitude every now and then. In another place he said that for meditation a little solitude is necessary. Therefore, one must have to find a place for meditation. It has to be a little away from one's own residence. Sri Ramakrishna said that a man must pursue some spiritual discipline in order to be able to lead a detached life in the world. It is necessary to spend some time in solitude — be it a year, six months, three months, or even one month. In that solitude he should fix his mind on God and pray with a longing heart for the love of God. He should also say: O Lord, there is nobody in this world who is my own! How shall I realize You!

So these are the inspirations from which we find the idea of retreat. In spiritual life a retreat is distancing ourselves from our places of attachment. This moving away is very necessary because our mind is always drawn into the problems and associations where we live or objects we love. So solitude means going on a retreat and living in a solitary place especially if that place is sanctified by the holy association of people like the men of realization.

In the Narada Bhakti Sutras it is said that tirthas, the places of pilgrimage, are created by those special people of God realization, who are tirthis by themselves.

We also see that Swamiji himself is going to take his serious disciples for meditation and retreat wherever he goes. Listening to lectures and talks about spiritual life is merely a preparation to dive deep in one's own Self. This diving deep becomes impossible in the day to day busy hustles and bustles of life. Under these circumstances there arises a need for going to a solitary retreat place. Vivekananda's every movement in this country and in the world shows us the way to prepare our minds for a spiritual retreat. He was a living retreat. Through his talks and lectures he used to uplift the minds of his audience from the most mundane plane to the highest plane of non-dual truth. But to remain in that lofty level, mere

listening to lectures and concentrating on the topics are not sufficient. It needs serious spiritual practice to make our mind free from worldly entanglements. That is why we find that Swamiji himself took his disciples to different retreat places to give them the taste of true spirituality. We can recollect the incidents of one or two retreat places.

At the Greenacre conference in the summer of 1894, Swami Vivekananda took some of the devotees with him. In his letter to the Hale sisters on 31st July, Swamiji gave a beautiful description of the retreat atmosphere and the fulfilment of the retreat as God-absorption: *"The other night the camp people went to sleep beneath a pine tree under which I sit every morning a la Hindu and talk to them. Of course I went with them, and we had a nice night under the stars, sleeping on the lap of mother earth, and I enjoyed every bit of it. I cannot describe to you that night's glories — after a year of the brutal life that I have led, to sleep on the ground, to meditate under the tree in the forest! The inn people are more or less well-to-do, and the camp people are healthy, young, sincere, and holy men and women. I teach them Shivo'ham, Shivo'ham, and they all repeat it, innocent and pure as they are and brave beyond all bounds"*. Here he speaks about the spirit in which the retreatants should spend their time enjoying the silence and bliss and tuning themselves to the Divine.

One morning Swami Vivekananda came out with the Gita in his hand, and Josephine Mcleod was behind Swamiji. Swamiji said, "Joe I am going to sit under the pine", pointing to a nearby pine tree, "and read the Bhagavad Gita. See that the breakfast is sumptuous today". Half an hour later Josephine says, "I went over to the tree and saw Swami Vivekananda sitting there motionless. The Gita had fallen from his hand and the front of his robe was wet with the tears. I went nearer and saw that his breathing had stopped altogether. I trembled in fear -- Swamiji must be dead. I did not shout but ran to Francis Leggett and told him come quick, 'Swami Vivekananda has left us'. My sister Betty ran to the spot with loud cries and my future brother-in-law came in with tears in the

eyes. By now seven eight minutes had passed and Swamiji was still in the same position. My brother-in-law said, 'he is in trance and I will shake him out of it'. I stopped him shouting 'never do that' because I remembered Swamiji had once said that when he would be in deep meditation one should not touch him. Another five minutes or so passed, then we saw the signs of breathing. Now slowly his eyes opened and then Swamiji said to himself, 'Who am I? Where am I?' Thrice he spoke like that and then wide awake he saw us and was very much embarrassed. He stood up and said, 'Oh! I am very sorry to have frightened you all. But I have this state of consciousness now and then. I shall not leave my body in your country. Betty, I'm hungry let us hurry.'" We can now understand what the end result of a retreat could be. It is direct communion with God, total tuning with the Divine within. How fortunate were those devotees who witnessed Swami Vivekananda in that state beyond consciousness!

The point is, how one can attune oneself to the Divine! The retreat is attuning oneself to this divine consciousness with one-pointed focus on the love for God. The deep absorption in God is what we need in our life. Swamiji's retreat takes him into deep Samadhi! Retreat means retreating from the world and entering into the realm of inner chamber of the heart. When we go away from all the hustles and bustles of life, we all feel that 90 percent of our problems also leave us. The mind becomes a little relaxed. In a relaxed mood one can concentrate and keep his awareness to reach this goal of realization or of attuning oneself to the deepest consciousness alive. That pine tree has become sacred to all of us—blessed Swamiji's Pine.

Let us imagine that we are with Swamiji, and he is asking us to follow him and to go to solitude and spend time under the sky where the broadness of the vision opens up. Our petty things and thoughts will surely leave us, and we can identify ourselves with the Divine-- vast, limitless dimension of our real nature. Even if we remember

this type of retreat story, it will give us inspiration and direction about how to spend our time in a retreat.

When Swamiji went to Thousand Island Park, a similar incident of his going to samadhi happened. After continuous talks and lectures Swamiji went to Thousand Island Park at the request of Ms. Dutcher, to take a little rest in her summer home. Some of his devotees accompanied him and some joined him later. Sometimes Swamiji was tired with the crowds of people. He did not like that so many people should come all the time. sometimes he used to say, "I don't care for the number of people. I want those people who will be more serious and dive deep into the inner experience of life".

When in Thousand Island Park, Swami Vivekananda gave many teachings to the small group. One such powerful message is : "In the world take always the position of the giver. Don't cling to the old superstitions but be ever ready for new truth. Fools are they who drink blackish water from a well that their forefathers have dug and do not drink pure water from a well that others have. Until we realize God ourselves we can know nothing about him. How can we understand that Moses saw God unless we also see Him. If God ever came to anyone, he will come to me. I will go to God directly".

Let us now remember the great incident while Swamiji was meditating on the rock in Thousand Island Park. He was sitting under a tree for meditation and lost his outer consciousness--even when rain came and totally drenched him.

So Swamiji was going everywhere showing the ideal of the retreat. It is total self-abnegation and to be absorbed in the Self, the Divine, forgetting the world and everything worldly. Those blessed days transformed the life of the devotees like Sara Waldo and others who were living with Swamiji, a God-man in Thousand Island Park. The gift to the world is the words of inspiration available in the book form now: Inspired Talks of Swami Vivekananda. Thousand Island Park was the place

where Swamiji wrote the famous poem Song of the Sannyasin describing the lofty spirit of an all renouncing monk aspiring for life of freedom and absolute bliss.

Next, Swamiji came to New York and from New York he went to Ridgely Manor on the 28th of August in 1899. Swami Turiyananda followed him and visited the town house of Mr. and Mrs. Francis Leggett. While in Ridgely McLeod talks about another friend of hers, who was an atheist and met Swami Vivekananda there. After meeting him she remarked, "That man has given me eternal life. I never wish to hear him again" and was totally fulfilled.

He stayed there in the retreat at Ridgely more than ten weeks on three different occasions. Then we find that Swamiji came first to Mrs. Blodgett's house in Los Angeles. Afterwards he moved to and stayed with the Mead sisters in South Pasadena. Though it was not his retreat, it has now become a retreat center because of his hallowed stay at there. He raised the consciousness of people here lecturing at the Shakespeare Club, Unity Church and other places. Then he went for a retreat to Camp Taylor in San Francisco.

Swamiji went to Camp Taylor in Marin County near Olema. One morning when other students have gathered in the tent for classes, Swami Vivekananda went to see Mrs. Hansbrough on his way to the class. She was busy with cooking. She said that, "I cannot come, Swami to your class now. I will go later". But Swamiji was so pleased, he said, "That's all right. You do not need to meditate; I will meditate for you". That was his blessing to Mrs. Hansbrough.

Wherever Swamiji went, that place became a place of retreat because people flocked around him and they received a deeper touch of spiritual life and got the taste of God intoxication.

The purpose of retreat according to the ancient sages, according to Sri Ramakrishna, and according to Swami Vivekananda is to create an environment where devotees can come away out of their regular routine, can listen to the scriptures

and holy people and spend their time in meditation and prayer. Intense and focused practice is necessary to intensify the spiritual life that can lead to God realization.

Following Swamiji's footsteps, this Ganges was also created by Swami Bhashyananda. Vivekananda was Vivekananda — he could bless the retreatants with deep absorption or even confer Samadhi by a mere touch. But, our retreat centers have created the atmosphere that gave an opportunity to innumerable devotees to receive a glimpse of true spirituality at least, if not full illumination. I have attended quite a few retreats at Ganges (Chicago), Marshfield (which is no more but was under Providence and Boston) Scappoose (Portland), Olema and Lake Tahoe (Northern California), San Jose (Berkeley), and Tapovan (Seattle). Everywhere I have noticed spiritual joy in the faces the retreatants, being in the presence of the Swamis.

The Retreat is Swamiji's idea. The purpose of a retreat, as mentioned before, is to unveil our inner potential divinity by intensifying our spiritual practices moving to a serene, calm spiritual atmosphere. To find time from the busy life and its demands of duties and responsibilities, it is not an easy task to take advantage of the spiritual atmosphere of a retreat center. To receive the loving guidance monks, and have the support of fellow similar minded devotees who are also sincerely leading a life of detachment, and love for God and to become absorbed in the Divine — is a rare fortune indeed. A retreat center like Ganges has been providing that wonderful opportunity for last 50 years to the earnest devotees to help to purify their hearts like Mother Ganga, who purifies anyone whoever comes to her. May Swamiji bless the Ganges!

My thanks go to Swami Ishatmananda for giving me this chance to participate in the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Ganges Retreat. May Swami Vivekananda, the embodiment of the retreat-principle, inspire us and bless us to attain our goal of life -- is my humble prayer.

Sanatana Dharma and Spiritual Retreat

Swami Brahmarupananda

Vedanta Society of Greater Washington, DC

This article is based on the talk delivered during Ganges Golden Jubilee celebration (online) in September 2020.



Revered Ishatmanandaji Maharaj, Revered Chetananandaji Maharaj, Revered Sarvadevanandaji Maharaj, Swami Varadanandaji Maharaj, and dear Vedanta friends, who are watching this program, I am very happy and thankful to be participating in this historic event. I have a very personal connection with Ganges. My first visit to Ganges was in April 1972, when I was a student at the University of Pittsburgh. I went to Chicago by overnight Greyhound bus, and Rev. Bhashyanandaji Maharaj took me to Ganges. At that time, Swami Kalikananda (then known as Sharada Chaitanya or simply "John" and two or three other brahmacharins were living there. All were staying in what became known as Ganesh Dham, the house near the entrance on the left side. Wherever I happen to be, Ganges is my spiritual home. It is here in Ganges that my spiritual journey began as a full-time resident of this glorious Retreat Center, under the benevolent guidance of Revered Bhashyanandaji Maharaj. I have very many fond memories of my early days in Ganges as a novice in spiritual life. For now, I have to refrain from nostalgia and talk for a few minutes on the topic assigned to me: Sanatana Dharma and Retreat.

1. What is Dharma?

The word Dharma comes from the Sanskrit root धृ धरणे, to uphold, to support and sustain. Sanatana means ancient. Sanatana Dharma, upon which Hinduism is based, is a set of principles, which, when practiced, sustain a society and its members, including animals, plants, and nature. These principles are based on an understanding of the value of life, and the universal quest for peace and well-being here and hereafter.

An old adage says, धर्म एव हतो हन्ति धर्मो रक्षति

रक्षितः। If dharma is protected, it protects us; if dharma is abandoned, it will not protect us. Dharma is the foundation for both happiness in this life (अभ्युदय) and the ultimate good of man (निःश्रेयस) or liberation.

Dharma has a global or cosmic aspect and an individual aspect. There is an ordinary or सामान्य धर्म, and there is a विशेष धर्म, to be followed under special circumstances. The word Dharma has other meanings: Dharma means "intrinsic property," as in "It is the Dharma of Sun to shine," or "It is the Dharma of fire to burn." Dharma also means "duty". We will not go into these details now.

2. Sanatana Dharma is of Divine Origin

Numerous treatises on Dharma such as Gautama Dharma Shastra and other codes of conduct such as Manu Smriti, Parashara Smriti, Yagnyavalkya Smriti, etc. exist. Very many sages have taught Dharma through the ages. The origin of Sanatana Dharma cannot be traced to any one particular teacher or book. I remember once Swami Chetananandaji Maharaj referred to Hinduism as a "non-prophet" religion. We believe that Sanatana Dharma is अपौरुषेय; that means, not of human origin; it is of Divine origin.

There is a passage in In the Br. U. that describes the Divine origin of Dharma:

धर्मात् परं नास्ति । यो वै स धर्मं सत्यम् वै तत् । तस्मात् सत्यं वदन्तं आहुः धर्मं वदतीति, धर्मं वा वदन्तं सत्यं वदतीति। एतद् हि एव एतद् उभयं भवति॥ (Br. U. 1.4.14)

"Dharma is Supreme. There is nothing higher than Dharma. In the beginning, there was only Brahman, and Brahman projected Dharma. One who speaks Dharma, speaks the truth; and one who speaks truth, speaks Dharma. Dharma is same as truth."

These basic principles of Sanatana Dharma are of universal relevance and eternal validity, and form the bedrock of all civilized societies and faiths.

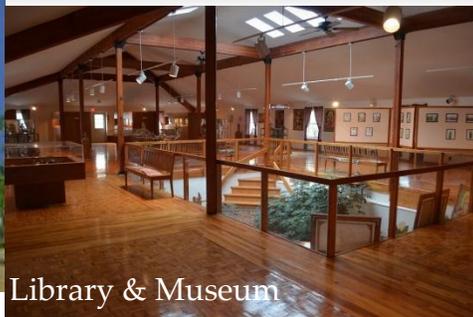
5. Retreats at Ganges

Swami Varadanandaji Maharaj will speak on Ganges retreats. I shall mention just a couple of points.

The tradition of retreats at the Ganges Monastery started in the 1970's during Revered Bhashyanandaji Maharaj's time. Some of the earlier retreats were grand Vedanta festivals, extending over a period of three days. Hundreds of devotees used to participate in these festivals. Many Swamis gave discourses on a variety of topics, all bearing on various aspects of Sanatana Dharma, yoga and Vedanta. Revered Chidanandaji Maharaj continued that tradition, and started conducting five or six retreats every year. The

emphasis shifted to study retreats in which one swami gave an in-depth presentation on a chosen topic. Revered Ishatmanandaji Maharaj has continued and strengthened that tradition of Vedanta retreats, by inviting learned Swamis from far and wide. Such retreats are of immense benefit to students of Vedanta. Unfortunately, due to the COVID 19 virus problem, it has not been possible for devotees to gather in Ganges in person this year. I hope and pray that this global problem will soon recede, and it becomes possible for all of us to gather in Ganges in person, and continue the tradition of retreats for the benefit of all students of Vedanta.

Personally, I consider myself very fortunate for conducting and attending many of these retreats. I am deeply beholden to Rev. Swami Ishatmanandaji Maharaj for giving me an opportunity to be a part of this historic event. And I thank all of you.



Ganges Retreat: As We Saw It

On September 11, 2020, the very first day of the Ganges Golden Jubilee Celebration, some friends of Ganges, who were there almost from the beginning of its creation shared their reminiscences. Portions of their precious memories are here.

Mr. Roland Olson, an initiated disciple of Swami Bhasyananda, was associated with Ganges since its purchase. He briefly stayed at Ganges in the 1970s and started an organic vegetable garden. Mr. Olson shared an interesting encounter at Ganges with a Protestant minister from Pennsylvania. Swami Bhasyananda briefly met the minister in Pennsylvania and sensing the minister's reluctance to ask a question, invited him to Chicago. During his meeting at the Hyde Park Center in response to the minister's question if he should convert to Hinduism, Swami Bhasyananda told him, "Continue doing your work as a minister, please come to Ganges every summer. You'll find what you are searching for". Inspired by these words, the minister continued to visit Ganges from Pennsylvania every summer and that inspired Mr. Olson as well to continue visiting Ganges every summer.

Drs. Betty and Abraham Koshy are an active part of Ganges who participated and volunteered in almost all the retreats and major functions held at Ganges. They have seen the retreat center grow over the decades. They shared that by mere happenstance they chanced upon Ganges Retreat Center, heard Swami Ranganathanandaji's talk on Vedanta and have been hooked ever since.

Mr. Arun Bhatia was came to attend children's camp in Ganges with his parents in the 1990s, Mrs. Raj and Dr. Shyam Bhatia who were associated with Ganges from the late 1970s. Arun said at the children's camp they participated in meditation classes and fondly remembered how lovingly children were taught the process and significance of arati.

Mr. Sarv Nayyar, a structural engineer by profession, mentioned that he started coming to Ganges in the late 1970s. That is when he met members of the future design team, a group of monastics and devotees of diverse skills and temperament assembled by Swami Bhasyananda to be part of the expansion of the Ganges Retreat Center. The dedicated team did most of the construction themselves from plumbing to wood work to excavation to electrical work. On one occasion the team took time to come to an agreement. Swami Bhasyananda who was listening to the discussion from a distance then affirmatively told the group, "If you can do it and want to do it, then let's get going. It is Thakur's work. It will get done eventually, with or without the team's help." Swami Bhasyananda had a strong conviction that Mother will take care of things and that is the attitude that was instilled in the entire group.

Mr. Fred Richardson lived as Brahmachari Shankar at Ganges and Chicago between 1972 and 1978. He said, "Swami Bhasyananda was a man of great energy and great inspiration. I was a farmer when I visited Ganges for the first time, I used to pick pears which were sent over to Allegan, MI for baby food. First two years, we started concentrating on how we are going to bring Swami's dream of a retreat center. Though there was a monastery, he always dreamed of a place for devotees. Many of us, came there with little or no abilities or skills in terms of doing construction work. However, the Swami used to encourage us saying that we were all smart. hard working people; so we could figure out things and could do it. We used work 10 to 12 hrs a day, weather permitting. I helped build Brahmananda Dham with Ram. I also worked on the shrine construction, for which we used to go into the woods to cut the oak trees. All of us used to put our hearts and souls in building Ganges".

Mr. Herb Hoster, *South Haven, MI* reminisced, “I was a commercial pilot in the 1970s, flying out of South Haven. I frequently used to flyover the Monastery grounds and noticed the gradual changes and developments that were taking place there like removal of the orchards, clearing of the whole area etc. I saw the construction of the temple and it was interesting to see a unique pointed arch roof coming up, which intrigued me to go find out what’s happening there. I got my opportunity in 1978, as I found it was a Monastery and Retreat in a newspaper. I was very impressed by the place when I visited the place on a Sunday. Swamis there, Baba, Peter, and some of the other monks of that time, showed me around the place that eventually became my spiritual home.

Having no spiritual background it was a big leap for me to get into something like Vedanta. It was like trying to drink from a firehose all the information I was trying to absorb. Pretty soon I was able to appreciate the lectures and other things there. When I first visited the monastery, the temple was already built and complete but the bookstore, entrance and bathroom portions of it were not fully completed. We used to set up picnic tables for book sales during Sunday services. It was a great time, especially for those who didn’t have a background, to interact with Swamis. I spent a lot of time working there building two lower guestrooms, bathrooms, guestroom behind the Shrine, wiring on the women’s side and I enjoyed it. I attended many functions and had a chance to listen to and meet with many great Swamis and rare personalities. It was a transformative experience for me”.

Mrs. Bindu Shroff’s association with the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago began from 1973 through her husband, Mr. Hukumat Shroff who did his schooling from the Ramakrishna Mission School in India. They used to visit Ganges regularly for retreats and felt it was a perfect amalgamation of “East and West”. The family got more involved as their children regularly attended the summer camp with Swami Varadananda as the counselor. Their three children have beautiful memories of those days and irreplaceable spiritual leanings. They learnt Karma Yoga with picking blueberries or milking the goats and Bhakti Yoga when the Swami showed them how to do arati and worship. A couple of the highlights were building a telescope with the renowned astronomer Mr. John Dobson and learning to play spiritual bhajans on the guitar with Bob Kindler. The children would walk away with the thought, “Ganges feels like home away from home”.

Mr. Nanak Mahanti has been associated over the past 20 years with the retreat center, He shared how many of their friends are surprised that a town named Ganges actually exists in the state of Michigan. He and many of the devotees feel like part of their extended family.

Dr. Rajani Patwari for the first time visited Ganges Retreat with her husband in the early 1970s. At that time nothing was built. They stayed in their Station Wagon and later bought a Mobile Home near Ganges. She reminisced that children used to get their own tents and would rise early at 4.30 in the morning to attend early morning prayers and would enjoy that. In Ganges, they could meet eminent Swamis like Asehanandaji and Prabuddhanandaji. She has fond memories of interaction with John Dobson, Huston Smith, and Marie Louis Burke (Sister Gargi).

Haridas is a current resident of the Ganges Retreat Center. He first came to Ganges in 1977 to associate with like minded people. He was looking for a change in life, complementary to his spiritual path but not until the 1990s did he move to Ganges and established a rapport with some of the devotees in the form of satsang and bhajan groups.

The lasting relationships, he said, were formed with many people of Indian origin who came to this country as immigrants and that gave him first hand exposure to Indian thought and culture.

History of Ganges

Swami Varadananda

Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

In 1967 Swami Bhashyananda was driving down the road when he saw a sign for Ganges. Right then he decided that Ganges was where he would build a Monastery & Retreat. A search was made, and a suitable property was found. It consisted of 80 acres of farm containing pear and apple trees, two barns and a small gray house.

Swami Kalikananda was the first person to go there. He stayed in the Gray House, which had no heat or water. I have stayed in the Gray House and during winter the cold would just radiate off the walls. The Gray House used to be right by the main gate. When it became unusable, the fire department burned it down for practice.

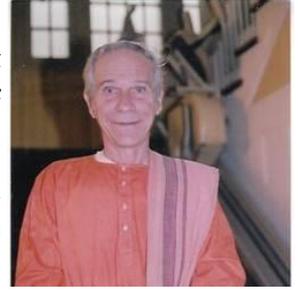
During the first winter he had to get his drinking water from melted snow and neighbors. Swami Kalikananda was at D-Day and had spent two years with Patton's army, so he was used to rough living. The first night he was there Suzie showed up at the door. Suzie was our faithful dog for

Gradually he was joined by a stream of Brahmacharis (some of whom later became swamis), who came to Ganges at that time. When I came in 1973 the following monastics were there: Prahlad, Tapas, Ram, Shankar, Narayan, Krishna, Sat, Baba, Vaman and Bruce Hilliger.

The first years were devoted to taking care of the pear orchards. The monastics used to pick 100 tons of pears a year. We had a contract with Gerber Baby Food, and they would purchase all of our pears.

They would send a tech to the monastery, who would poke the pears with a syringe and determine the sugar content. When the time was right, they would tell us to pick the pears now, and there would be a mad scramble to get the pears picked in time. Swami Bhashyananda wanted to build a temple. When I came in 1973, everybody

was making little domes and researching government manuals. I believe the design of the temple came from a picture of a Quonset hut that Swami Tapasananda found in some government manual.



I don't think we ever had any real architectural drawings for the temple.

When we started building the temple, the fruit trees had to be removed. Ganges is orchard country, and the rule is that you have to take proper care of your trees or pull them out. Otherwise, your trees get disease, which can spread to the other orchards.

Building the temple was very hard work by inexperienced people. I remember seeing Shankar carry these huge arches like they were nothing. Much of the work was done during winter in very harsh conditions. Shortly after I came to Ganges, I was transferred to Chicago, where I had a very easy job selling books.

Because the brahmacharis were working so hard, Swami Bhashyananda would arrange for us to have a two-week vacation each year. We would go to the Boundary Waters, a series of lakes between Minnesota and Canada. Ram had a blue canoe, and we would rent more canoes at the Boundary Waters. It was a very happy and spiritually uplifting experience. We would paddle across a lake then carry the canoes over to the next lake. After the first day we wouldn't see anyone else. It was my first experience of being cut off from civilization and totally in nature. There was no noise, no To Do lists, and no distractions. Time seemed endless, and the silence put me in a very serene state of mind. I realized how much the mind had changed, when we returned to civilization at the end of the vacation. All the noise and commotion came as a shock, like jumping into a cold pool.

Swami Bhashyananda would hold three retreats a year at Ganges.

Over 300 people would attend the retreats. We didn't have the facilities to accommodate them, and they would stay in motels or sleep on the floor. The cooking was done in temporary tents. I was amazed how Mrs. Pandya and the other ladies could cook for 300 people in such primitive conditions. When it rained, the brahmacharis spent all their time getting cars unstuck from the mud.

At that time there were still second generation monks, who were disciples of Holy Mother and the direct disciples. They were a special breed, and Swami Bhashyananda would invite them and other senior swamis for the retreats. There were two trailers on the property, and the guest swamis would stay in them. I got to be the attendant for Swami Aseshananda, who was Holy Mother's disciple, and also Swami Ranganathananda and Swami Bhavyananda from London. When I was the attendant for Swami Aseshananda, he wanted to go to the temple. I was standing there holding the door open for him like a good attendant, when he suddenly came zooming out of the door and went off the end of the porch. So, I picked him up and helped him get to the temple.

After the temple was completed we added an extension for the book shop, dining hall, and museum. There were also rooms in the basement for the monks and guests. For this stage we had the help of a talented architect. Br. Hemant, who later became a swami, was a professional architect and provided the technical drawings we needed for this phase.

The door to the museum is from the Indian Pavilion at the 1965 New York World's Fair. The Indian government gave the doors to Dr. Kurt Leidecker, a well-known Sanskrit scholar, and his widow gave the doors to us. You have probably noticed how intricate the metal work on the doors is. The doors had sat in the Leidecker garage for many years and were badly tarnished. One of our brahmacharis, Stephen Roth, spent six months polishing all the little doodads on the door.

Originally, the museum contained 25 original handwritten letters by Swami Vivekananda. Later on the letters were transferred to Belur Math, and we only kept copies. The museum also had a tea set that was used by Swami Vivekananda. It was given to us by Cornelia Conger. She was the granddaughter of the Lyons family and had sat on Swami Vivekananda's lap.

Swamiji stayed with the Lyons during the Parliament of Religions. Their house was only six blocks south of the Art Institute, where the Hilton Hotel is now, so Swamiji was within walking distance of the Parliament.

The Hale House was torn down in the 60's to make room for a condominium. During the destruction of the Hale House, Swami Kalikananda went to the site and salvaged some artifacts from the Hale House, which are also in the museum.

Most of the items in the museum were purchased on our behalf by Swami Vandanananda of the Delhi Ashram. The large copy of the Vedas was given to us by a blind swami, who had made the production of the book his life's work.

A special feature of the museum is the dioramas telling the story of Sri Ramakrishan, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda. The dioramas were made by Nalini Mahatre from Mumbai.

When the new temple and facilities became operational, we held an annual Children's Camp for over 20 years. Myself along with Cam and BJ Ramsay, Meera and Gita Bhushan from Cleveland, Timothy Groves from Minneapolis, and other volunteers ran the camp, which provided classes along with the usual camp activities and field trips. Cam and BJ were very close to Swami Bhashyananda and had bought a house in Ganges to be near the Monastery. Cam built all of the bookcases in our library.

The final stage of the construction was the auditorium, where we now hold our retreats. As you go down the stairs to the auditorium you notice the stained glass window depicting the two birds from the Mundaka Upanishad. It was created by Marc Bartorelli, a builder from South Haven, Michigan. Ramakrishna does his own work. Time and time again, when something was needed, somebody would just show up, do the work, and leave.

For fifty years the Ganges Retreat has provided a refuge where people can get away from the business of everyday and get back in touch with that deeper reality from which we have all come. At one time or another almost all of the major swamis of the Ramakrishna Order have conducted retreats there. There is a special group of people who have attended almost every retreat, and these retreats are an important part of their spiritual life.

BHAGAVATA (2): *Respected Rishis Learn From a Humble Suta*

Swami Ishatmananda

After giving a warm welcome to Ugarasharaba, the son of Romahorsha, expounder of the Purana, the Rishis asked, "What in your esteemed opinion is conducive to the supreme good of man, please advise us."

The Rishis themselves were learned people, they had read many scriptures, they themselves could study. Why then are they asking advice from Suta?

In the 10th verse they had explained, "In this age most people are short-lived, idle, dull, overwhelmed with adversities and afflicted with ailments. They cannot get much benefit for themselves from the study of the scriptures. Moreover, there are so many scriptures. Therefore, O Holy One, please tell us in brief the points of special merit, which will purify the soul."

In the first chapter of the Bhagavata, the Rishis asked six questions, and in the second chapter Suta replies to four of the questions. After paying respect to his teacher in wonderful language, he said, "O Sages, you have asked me very relevant questions."

Then he said, "The supreme religion of the people consists in the selfless devotion to the Lord—the Supreme Being."

Devotion to the Supreme Being begets Knowledge of the Self and aversion to the world.

"There should be no worldly interest in the religious rites practiced for the acquisition of salvation.

"The goal of life is not practice of piety for the acquisition of heaven. The real aim of life is the enquiry after Tattwa, the Truth.

Tattwa is eternal knowledge of unchangeable merit. Suta then explained this word with other synonyms so that there should not be any doubt about it, because that is the goal.

The 11th shloka of the 2nd chapter of the 1st canto of the Bhagavata states,

The Supreme Truth that humans should try to realize is described by the enlightened ones as Non-dual Consciousness.

It is variously called Brahman (by the Vedantins), Paramatma (by the yogis) and Bhagavan (by the devotees). In the Bhagavad Gita (18.15) also we find that Sri Krishna said,

"One who knows me in Truth & Reality enters into me at once."

Suta continued, "The contemplative, endowed with Faith, Renunciation, and Virtue, discovers Brahman through the Pure Mind.

The Rishis then asked Suta, "What are the essential qualities for a human being to attain liberation?"

In reply, Suta answered, "Devotion to the Supreme Being—Devotion which is motiveless, unyielding to any obstacle, and which fills the heart with peace. (1.2.6)

The Rishis 2nd question to Suta was, "What is the essence of the scriptures?"

Suta's reply was, "Devotion to Vasudeva."

Why? Because it quickly generates aversion to sensual life and develops transcendental knowledge.

"With the growth of devotion, the mind is freed from desires and established in Peace." (1.2.19).

Who is this Vasudeva? He is the Supreme Soul.

The 1st Skandha, 2nd Chapter, verses 28 & 29 explain Vasudeva.

Vasudeva is the Goal of the Vedas

Vasudeva is the Goal of the Yajna

Vasudeva is the Goal of the Yoga

Vasudeva is the Goal of the Karma

Vasudeva is the Goal of the Knowledge of Brahman

Vasudeva is the Goal of the Austerities

Vasudeva is the Goal of the Dharma

Vasudeva is the Goal of the Human Life

The third question of the Rishis was, "Why did the Supreme Lord take birth as the son of Devaki?"

The main theme of the Bhagavata is to inculcate the glory and greatness of Bhagavan Sri Krishna and the necessity of cultivating devotion to Him. The answer to this third question of the Rishis will be given by Suta in Skandha 2, Chapter 10, where the life of Krishna will be described.

Now, creation is being described: In the very first shloka of the Bhagavata it has been stated, "He from whom the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe takes place — who is both the material and the instrumental cause of it..."

The 30th and 31st shlokas describe creation. They state that Bhagavan created this universe through cause and effect and endowed it with three qualities (Maya) using his external power. Not only that, but after the creation, the Supreme God entered into it.

One View: One (Brahman) alone is true, the many are false.

2nd View: Seeing the One in the many, the whole universe of the many ceases to be unreal. The universe is real as long as that One Reality is present in it.

One God entered into many? Yes, just as one fire entering into the different pieces of wood manifests as many fires, so the Supreme Being, the Soul of all, manifests as many. (1.2.32)

He, the protector of the worlds, extends His grace and help by descending to manifest Himself as divine Incarnations among Devas, animals and men. (1.2.34)

Suta then explained the process of God's descending to the Rishis. In shlokas 1-5 of the 3rd chapter of the 1st skanda, a description of the process has been given.

"In the beginning of creation, the Lord God, desirous to create the universe, assumed by His creative will the Cosmic Form (Virat) and forming 16 creative categories, took complete human form.

Parikshit, the King, asked Shuka, the great sage:

1. How did Bhagavan create this universe?
2. How is He Present in it?

3. How will He draw it in?

4. What are His Shaktis (Powers)?

5. What are His actions?

Shaunaka and the other Rishis also wanted to know from Suta the manifestation of the Supreme Being in forms. In reply Suta said, "Being desirous of Creation, the Lord first assumed the form of Purusha, composed of Mahat (Intelligence), Egoism and the five rudiments of matter."

Mahat is also known as Virata Rupa, the grand form consisting of 16 attributes (11 senses including Mind and 5 fundamental elements).

Mahat, Ahamkara, Sattva, Rajas, Tamas, Manas, 10 Indriyas, Matter

This creation is known as Karana-Creation.

In this condition there is no further process of creation.

The Shakti of Bhagavan entered into the creation and the cosmic egg was formed. Very interestingly, this same concept of creation proceeding from an egg is also found in Babylonian, Egyptian, Persian and Greek mythologies. In the Greek concept, this huge egg, which was produced by Chronos and Adrastea, divided itself into two. The upper half became the sky, and the lower half became the earth.

The Hindus believe that in the form of the Cosmic Egg, Purusha lay asleep, locked in Self-meditation, for a thousand years. This period is known as Padma-Kalpa. Kalpa = Time and Padma = Lotus. Purusha formed a lotus and out of that Lotus came Brahma — the Creator. Brahma is Transcendent Purity.

In reality Purusha is One without a second, Indestructible, Eternal, the ultimate End of all creation — It is the eternal seed of creation.

Purusha – Kaumara -- Boar, Narada -- Nara-Narayana -- Kapila (Sankhya Philosophy) -- Duttatreya -- Jajna (his son Yama) -- Riahava (Revealed the Pious Path) -- Prithu (King - the wealth of the world) – Fish – Tortoise -- Dhanvantari (Medicine) – Mohini -- Nara-simha -- Vamana (Dwarf) – Parasurama – Vyasa – Rama – Buddha – Kalki.

Introduction to the Cover Page: Coast to Coast

Br. Panchatapa

Sarada Convent

Vedanta Society of Southern California

It is September. It is the birth month of Vedanta in North American continent. Swami Vivekananda, taught Vedanta in this continent just as Acharya Shankara did in the Indian subcontinent. The cover story of this issue, therefore, is an attempt to have a *Swami Vivekananda Pilgrimage in America*.

Adi Shankaracharya is one of the best known teachers of Advaita Vedanta. He travelled all over India and revived Sanatana Dharma, Eternal Religion by preaching the timeless message of Vedanta. To revive Sanatana Dharma, he grouped all the monastics under ten titles and brought under four Maths or monasteries. These four monasteries are located in North (Jyotir Math), South (Sarada Sringeri Math), East (Govardhana Math), and West (Dwarka Math) of India. Head of each math is supposed to be a man of realization and is known as Shankaracharya.

Tota Puri, his disciple Sri Ramakrishna and all the monks of Ramakrishna Math belong to the lineage of the Sarada Sringeri Math.

The devotees of Sri Ramakrishna look upon him both human and also divine, *God-man*, an incarnation of God that lived on earth. The life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna emphasize the Divine within each person; instead of identifying people with their body, mind, and ego, he saw people as perfect, pure, and divine. Sri Ramakrishna realized God by practicing many religions and reestablished Harmony of Religions, which is not uniformity but unity in diversity. It is not a fusion of religions, but a fellowship of religions based on their common goal.

Swami Vivekananda, the foremost and best disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was aware of the divine within each person and through devotion to Sri Ramakrishna he embraced the idea of seeing God in all living beings. From 1888 to 1893 he travelled throughout India in search of truth,

spirituality and a “real” India as a *Parivrajaka*, (“a wandering monk”).

In 1893, Swami Vivekananda came to North America for the first time to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago and that was the beginning of the history of the Vedanta movement on US soil. He taught how the lofty teachings of the Vedanta philosophy could be incorporated into the lives of Westerners. Swami Vivekananda knew his “sisters and brothers” in America and he presented, as Jackson said in book *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States*, “a Hinduism that was reasonable, philosophical, universal, and even scientific.”

His teachings became very popular among the Americans, though apparently upper-middle and upper class people responded more. In 1894 he established the first “Vedanta Society” in New York. In 1897 he organized a socially active monastic order named “Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission” in India upon his return from Chicago. The goal was to apply Vedanta teachings of Sri Ramakrishna to life, which became known as *Practical Vedanta*. Many monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who took vows to follow this path reached out to places in India and the rest of the world to establish new branches named Ramakrishna Mission (in India) and Vedanta Society (in the western countries).

All the devotees of Ramakrishna Missions and the Vedanta Societies worship Sri Ramakrishna as their Divine Teacher. Yet, Carl Jackson reasonably claimed in his book (p 35) for day to day management of the Vedanta Societies Swami Vivekananda wanted that here in the West local followers (American devotees) be responsible for financial and administrative matters, while the swami sent from the Ramakrishna Math in India will be the spiritual leader.

Swami Vivekananda himself set a model for the Vedanta Societies. For example he used to deliver the Western-style public talk or sermon at a Sunday service. Even now, modern Vedanta Societies in the West are following it. Despite feelings of brotherhood and connectedness, each Vedanta Societies operate independently of each other being linked in a direct line of authority with headquarters in India.

It is interesting to study how one specific group like the Vedanta Societies, with a history in North America, has evolved within the frame of America's religious landscape. This article is beyond the scope of discussing this huge subject but it is worth remembering that the changes in historical, economical, political, and sociological framework left deep impacts on these societies.

After Swami Vivekananda started the Vedanta movement, the aforementioned factors contributed to the growth and development of it. The number of centers and their members was unsteady in early years but grew through the 1920s. More centers opened after 1930 but growth leveled out again by the 1950s until 1965. Then four major changes happened:

- a. In 1965 the reformation of the Immigration and Nationality Act re-opened the doors of the US to the Asian countries.
- b. The third era of globalization began in 1989 and continues today
- c. the world-shaking 9/11 in 2001 created a situation to revisit the immigration rule along with a deep impact on socio-religious structure, and
- d. finally 2020 brought a huge shift from real to virtual interactions due to covid-19.

With increase in the numbers of immigrants surely the membership of Vedanta Societies had grown considerably and also demographical changes are obvious but no considerable statistical data is available, since for the Vedanta Societies counting of numbers is not important. Vedanta Societies have never attempted to recruit members for their community and leave it to the people who came as to if and when they are ready to hear the

message of Vedanta.

There are many private groups, which keep in touch with the official Vedanta Societies. From the very beginning the Vedanta Societies made expanded cautiously to form unofficial groups all over the States. To keep the Vedantic ideology up, even today Swamis from official centers travel to give the teachings and visit the different centers of America.

There is always a need for maintaining a balance between the activities of the Ramakrishna Missions in India and the Vedanta Societies here. Many of the Indian-American families who are Vedanta Societies' members from India were a part of the Ramakrishna movement or have a monastic relative at the Order or were either themselves initiated disciples. Now in India the Missions offer services to the poor and needy not only as way of improving society, but also as a path to God realization. This path of service allows its follower to let go of the ego as the act of serving others is a form of devotion to the divine within each person. However, this way of service almost entirely was absent from the movement in America initially as Swami Vivekananda saw the need in the West was not a material but rather a spiritual one. As time moved forward, leaders of the movement in the States felt the need of material things such as food, clothes, and shelter in America. Based on the need many Vedanta Societies organize food drives or serve food at local soup kitchens. Two main hurdles in such services are: first, lack of man power. In most of the Vedanta Societies there is one Swami, one center and therefore Swamis are often so busy with the matters of running their centers; and second, more red tape involved in large-scale service projects, in the States where licensing, insurance, and legal matters would also have to be accommodated. But as Karma Yoga or path to God through action or service uplifts the aspirant spiritually, Vedanta Societies keep creating opportunities through various center related activities for her devotees. And this "work is worship" attitude is very popular among

aspirants from all types of background.

Beginning with Swami Vivekananda, the Vedanta Societies have a long history of interfaith dialogue in the States. In the early era since the Societies were the only one to talk about of all the 'Eastern' religions in the States, the monks of Vedanta also acted as ambassadors for Buddhism and Islam. The early Swamis in America often discussed the teachings of Vedanta in comparative terms to make them more accessible to devotees in the West, as most of them had grown up in various Christian traditions.

Though the legacy of the interfaith work of early Vedanta Societies continues today, the breadth of the dialogue has expanded with America's new religious diversity. Swamis of most of the centers are speaking at the colleges and universities, both in classes and to student groups; are also actively involved in the intra- and inter-faith communities in their areas. Having representatives in the Parliament of World Religions, Inter-Religious Council, National Hindu-Catholic dialogue, that are some of the ways through which Vedanta Societies interact with religious communities, to better understand each other and relieve social tensions. Post-1965 when other Asian religious groups started to represent themselves, more options opened up to Americans.

Vedanta Societies are serving children from both Western and Eastern families through Sunday schools and summer camps for decades. With the changing demographics Vedanta Societies take on a unique role as a cultural as well as religious connection for these youth, as they struggle to find the balance between the traditions of their parents and their contemporary American lifestyle. At the same time Vedanta Societies are the place where American youth can learn about and relate to the Vedanta teachings.

Demographic changes in members had more drastic impacts on the evolution of the Vedanta Societies that are located in big cities. For example, in Santa Barbara, it has seen their community grow

but little has changed in terms of the ethnicity, background or age of the regular membership.

Swami Vivekananda had sought to bring the message of Vedanta to Westerners that needed spiritual guidance, but that now the centers have to serve a largely Indian-American membership in parallel to the 'Westerners' whenever they come to attend in whatever numbers.

To encourage devotees, may it be Eastern or Western, community atmosphere is vital. In the early 1950s Vedanta Societies had an academic and intellectual community. Post-1965 immigration bill was passed for a few years with the increase in the numbers of Indian and Indian-Americans, and the atmosphere also became cultural in addition to academic and intellectual.

However, post third era of globalization and 9/11 a kind of "homogeneity" in the communicative mind set of people around the world is observed. Both Indian and non-Indian Americans hold positions of lay leadership at the center and there are free interactions between the two groups.

Factors that are vital in a religious community life are language, food, music, ritualistic etiquettes, and of course dealing with children. Whatever the factors, there is no denying fact that at the end of the day the Swami in charge is the center of the community, therefore a Vedanta center greatly reflects his mindset. The Swami ensures that all members of the center feel at home at his Vedanta Society. No doubt this is a very challenging task, as the nature of the community keeps changing.

Sometimes Swamis' efforts worked fully sometimes it partially alleviated the feelings of tension in the community feelings. For example from post 1965 until pre 1990s language became one of the barriers in fostering a feeling of community in some of the Vedanta Societies. Indian devotees were interested in speaking their own language around the center that made Western devotees feel uncomfortable and left out, though all the Swamis would try to speak in English in public and also tried to explain all

Sanskrit terms that come up in discussing the teachings of Vedanta. Eventually, in this post globalization period, as the world became one village where English is international language, Indians of this generation – no matter whether they are fresh from India or born in America – all feel more comfortable communicating in English.

Regarding food we see that pre-1965 through the 1980s the non-Indian female devotees used to help prepare food for the community and the Swami but their participation in this changed drastically around the 1990s as many of them did not know how to prepare Indian food and many of the Indian women in the community were feeling very passionately about cooking as a way of connecting with the Swami. To encourage everyone, whoever is interested in cooking, swamis greatly supports the idea of pot-luck. At the same time the food habits of world-citizens are getting converged and therefore second generation Indians in the States, both Swamis and devotees, have one global food habit only.

Until pre-1965 congregational music was mainly of Western style. After that for few decades Indian music came side by side in the services. Music accompanied by a piano very slowly got assimilated with bhajans accompanied by an harmonium and a tabla. Fusion music also played a major role in this transition period. Sitarist Ravishankar and other musicians started mixing Eastern and Western musical styles and adaptation of tunes of Kirtan in Western style hymn opened up a new stream in devotional music at the Vedanta Societies.

Out of all religious customs three “p”s are important – pranam, puja, and pilgrimage. The Indian customs of making pranam, or bending down to touch the feet of the Swami as a sign of respect, sometimes used to make Westerners feel uncomfortable. Swamis, whenever they saw people seeming uncomfortable or new to the community, simply stretched out his hand so that the Westerners could feel more comfortable shaking hands. Swamis are unceasingly trying to

create a unified community at their centers. Cultural differences are also diminishing with time. In this post Covid era, due to social distancing, this ritual will probably become almost obsolete.

Indian-Americans are attracted to the pujas, times where religious worship and socializing with friends come together. To attend pujas, many Indian-American families, especially who are first generation in the States, would come from far away places to celebrate, though these same families are never seen at the weekly activities of the Vedanta Society. In case of second generation, picture is a little different though.

However, howmucheever is the interest any particular group feel in socialization, Vedanta Societies will never be a substitute for a Hindu temple as the Swamis are monks and not priests, they cannot hold marriages or funerals, and maintain minimum social life. Vedanta Societies are here primarily for spiritual guidance, though from the very beginning Vedanta Societies are running pujas and will continue to do so as the part of spiritual practices.

Like puja, pilgrimage is an important aspect of Hinduism. Pilgrimage to the Hindu does not just consist of visiting the sacred place but of participating in the divine presence of the place. Since Swami Vivekananda spent a great deal of time in the States, there are many pilgrimage sites in America for the students of Vedanta. Although only four of these places have been owned and used by Vedanta Societies, there has been an increased emphasis on pilgrimage at these and other places associated with Swami Vivekananda. People go on pilgrimage to feel the presence of one’s spiritual heroes. Although these centers were used as retreats, the understanding of pilgrimage in the US has only really developed after 1965.

Spiritual retreat is of immense importance in Sanatana Dharma. We read that the great scripture Bhagavatam was first taught by Shukadeva in the *Naimisha* forest. This month the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago celebrated the Golden

Jubilee of its retreat center at Ganges, virtually.

From the very beginning Ganges retreat center would serve the children by holding summer camps as they are the future the community. When the relations between Indian and non-Indian members of the community are strained, then the children would ease these tensions by closing the gaps within the congregation.

Ganges played an important role in carrying on interfaith messages. For example in the summer of 2001, Ganges hosted a seminar on "Vedanta in the West", in September 2018 Ganges celebrated 125 Years of Swamiji's Chicago Addresses. During these events devotees could listen to Swamis from all over the States and the World and talk to them. But in general always the focus of such events was how to apply the teachings of Vedanta to the modern American context.

This issue is a tribute to the Ganges Retreat's contribution for 50 long years to the Vedanta movement at community level and also at the individual level by serving the devotees to "grow from inside out". On this occasion we remember all sister retreats of Ganges.

There are four major places of pilgrimage in America that are owned by the Vedanta Societies. The first is the Vivekananda Ridgely Retreat, in Stone Ridge, NY where Swami Vivekananda stayed as the guest of the Leggett family for what is known as the Great Summer, the summer of 1899. The second is the Vivekananda Cottage in Thousand Island Park which belongs to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York and is where Vivekananda "spent much of the summer of 1895, teaching a select group of disciples." The third is the Vivekananda House in Pasadena, CA where Swamiji spent several weeks in 1899-1900. That belongs to the Vedanta Society of Southern California. The fourth is Shanti Ashram under the Vedanta Society of Northern California. For last few decades no one stays there, and there is only one celebration a year when many people go for the one-day retreat. But in the

early 1900s it was quite an active place. Modern devotees of the movement, visit these places associated with Swami Vivekananda on pilgrimage, and feel connected as if it is their spiritual home, a sacred land.

Ridgely Manor was the country estate of Frank Leggett (the first president of the very first Vedanta Society founded by Swami Vivekananda in New York). This is located in the Catskill Mountains in New York State. On three occasions Swami Vivekananda visited Ridgely Manor from New York City.

In 1895 Swamiji stayed from 13th to 22nd April. The very next day was Easter Sunday. As he became ill and needed significant rest, quiet and fresh air, he went for a brief retreat.

He returned to Ridgely again for Christmas on 24th December. After New Year celebrations on 2nd January, 1896 he returned to New York. During his stay here he spent time reading Sanskrit texts, gave interviews, took walks and excursions by sleigh into the country and held eloquent talks by the fireside, met all types of people of society like Myron Phelps (attorney), Ella Wheeler Wilcox (poetess), Emma Thursby and Antoinette Sterling (singers), Laura Glenn (later Sister Devamata), and May Banks of the Rosicrucian Society.

He stayed here again from 28th August to 6th November in the Little Cottage on the property with Swami Turiyananda until 28th October. From September 8th to 17th Swami Abhedananda joined them too, and worked on a book "Modern Hindus". Swamiji kept busy yet obtained significant rest and relaxation. He wrote the poem "Peace" for Mrs. Bull, Sister Nivedita and Sister Christine, formulated new message: "All there is in life is character". While at Ridgely he took solitary walks around the grounds, played with devotees' children, and took occasional drives to a favorite place, Mt Mohonk. He often played croquet, tennis and golf on the grounds. He took drawing lessons from Maud Stumm. On 5th November Swamiji conducted a vow ceremony for Ms. Ole Bull and

Sister Nivedita and left on 6th November.

Later once Swami Turiyananda came to Ridgely by himself. His stay was arranged in Swamiji's room. The bed was perfectly made up. But he slept on the floor. The hostess asked next morning, if there was any problem with bed. Turiyananda replied that he can't sleep at the same bed-level with Swamiji! So much was the respect he had for Swamiji.

Since 1997 this center functions primarily as a retreat center for members of Vedanta Societies all over the country, especially the East Coast and Mid-Atlantic areas. The Vivekananda Retreat center also has weekly activities for the local community, both devotional services and Vedanta classes.



Usual image of Ridgely Retreat during Christmas

On 9th October 1895, when Josephine MacLeod was leaving for Los Angeles, Swamiji told her to "get up some classes and I will come". He came to LA as promised. He delivered lectures and classes and got to know the families of Mead sisters (Carrie, Helen, and Alice). They were living in Pasadena. After finishing programs in LA he went to stay with them in Pasadena. Joe accompanied him. He stayed in this house for about 6 weeks in January-February 1900. Out of three sisters Carrie and Alice became instrumental for the foundation of the Vedanta Societies of Southern and Northern California respectively. Swami Turiyananda also stayed here in the summer of 1900 and blessed Carrie with initiation here. She was known as Sister Lalita.

Years later she shared a life-transforming experience she had here. *At the house in Pasadena,*

the bedrooms were on the second floor. Steep, narrow steps connected the first and second floors"... One morning they were all coming down to breakfast, and Sister was right behind Swamiji. Suddenly, she got a little unsteady on those steep stairs, and she reached out in front of her using Swamiji's shoulder to brace herself. According to Sister, the whole world just went away. She was in another place, in another consciousness, and she never remembered getting down the rest of the stairs. But somehow he got her into the dining room and seated her, and then he took over. And he was so charming, and so entertaining, and so much fun that nobody noticed that Sister was all blanked out; that she was in another place. Just touching his shoulder had taken her there. From that moment on, Swamiji was God to Sister. [Prugh, "Sister Lalita,"18]

Sister Lalita offered her home at 1946 Vedanta Place (then Ivar Ave.) to Swami Prabhavananda, along with a hefty monthly annuity, and donated \$10,000 of the \$12,000 necessary to complete the Hollywood temple's construction.

As she knew what Swamiji would prefer for breakfast, on Swamiji puja day she used to help Swami Prabhavananda to offer those items at Hollywood temple.

During Swamiji's stay at Pasadena, after dinner until 11 pm, Swamiji would discuss a variety of subjects from philosophy and religion, to history, science, and politics, or read aloud from various books. Once to punctuate a discussion on Advaita Vedanta he read from his poem, "The Song of the Sannyasin." Another time he read from his lecture on "The Need of a Guru". In 1950s a devotee purchased this house and donated to the Vedanta Society. Swami Madhavananda, the General Secretary and future President of the Ramakrishna Order, and Swami Nirvanananda, the Treasurer and future Vice-President of the Order, dedicated this house in 1953, February.



The House remained as it was during Swamiji's time and Swamiji's bedroom is being used as shrine. The monastics and devotees assemble once a month for meditation retreat. There is no arrangement for overnight stay, but spiritual seekers can have personal day-long retreat in quiet and serene atmosphere of the House.

Around 9th May 1895, Mary Dutcher had a new wing built on her cottage at Thousand Island Park. The wing had three rooms to accommodate Swamiji and his students during his summer stay. The cottage is located about 360 miles from New York City, near the Canadian border on Wellesley Island on the St. Lawrence River.

From 18th June to 6th August in 1895 Swamiji stayed here. His classes started on 23rd June. Beginning from morning it continued throughout the day. Sarah Waldo took notes and were published as "Inspired Talks". and Ms. Waldo edited many of the talks, which were reedited by Sister Devamata in 1907. He gave 12 classes in 17 days. The topics were: the Gospel of St. John, Bhagavad Gita and Narada Bhakti Sutras, God, Sri Ramakrishna, Divine Incarnations, Path of Devotion, Divine Mother, Bible and Prophets, Shankara's commentary on Brahma Sutras, Ramanuja's Shri Bhashya. Class took a picnic and Swami spoke on various subjects. On 7th July he blessed Marie Louise (Swami Abhayananda) with sannyasa vows. In front of the altar of the cottage, many were blessed by initiation and Swami Kripananda also received Sannyasa here. Swamiji spent many evenings on the screened porch. He talked informally, reached lofty spiritual heights and meditated until late.

He left for India via New York on 6th August 1895. That last day was described by Mary Funke. In Mary's words: *"This morning there was no class. He asked C.[Christina] and me to take a walk,...We went up a hill about half a mile away. All was woods and solitude. Finally he selected a low-branched tree, and we sat under the low spreading branches. Instead of the expected talk, he suddenly said, 'Now we will*

meditate. We shall be like Buddha under the Bo tree.' He seemed to turn to bronze, so still was he. Then a thunderstorm came up, and it poured. He never noticed it. I raised my umbrella and protected him as much as possible. Completely absorbed in his meditation, he was oblivious of everything. Soon we heard shouts in the distance. The others had come out after us with raincoats and umbrellas. Swamiji looked around regretfully for we had to go, and said, "Once more am I in Calcutta in the rains".

Swamiji's host Ms. Dutcher was a follower of Methodist faith but took Swamiji's teachings by heart. At least a couple of lessons of Practical Vedanta that she received from Swamiji can be mentioned here.

1. Giving everything: One day after attending the Sunday morning services at the Tabernacle with Ms Dutcher, Swamiji, who himself was in dire need of money to serve his own motherland, offered several silver dollars — a very large donation in those days just because the minister asked the congregation to "give all they had in their purses and pockets" for their special drive for funds!

2. Serving others: In later years she gave shelter to an alcoholic man in her house for Swamiji said on the very last day of his at Thousand Island Park: *"The diabolical man is a part of my body as a wound or a burn is. We have to nurse it and get it better; so continually nurse and help the diabolical man until he 'heals' and is once more happy and healthy"*

It is at Thousand Island Park where Swamiji wrote "Song of Sannyasins" that talks about ultimate freedom and here he spent his final 4th of July in the US. There are endless stories of both of these retreats where Swamiji taught actually how to spend time in spiritual retreat. To have spiritual discussion, reading spiritual texts, meditation, silent walk, writing something, and of course reflecting on the self and Self.

In 1947 Swami Nikhilananda, a disciple of Holy Mother, purchased this property on behalf of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York.



(Left) Dedication of renovated Vivekananda Cottage, Thousand Island Park (July, 1948). Swamis Yatiswarananda, Aseshananda, Nikhilananda, & John Moffitt.



(Right) Vivekananda Cottage now.

A piece of paper from the *Voice of Freedom*, Volume 7 (April 1915 – March 1916)

A retreat center that left the Vedanta Society!

Swami Abhedananda purchased a 70-acre property at Berkshire hills, CT probably as the head of the Vedanta Society of New York and used as Vedanta Ashrama retreat. If so, this retreat might be considered as the satellite of the New York center. He sold this retreat center in 1919 before he left for India for good.



(Left) at Scappoose Swamis Vividishananda & Ganeswarananda, in 1937 and

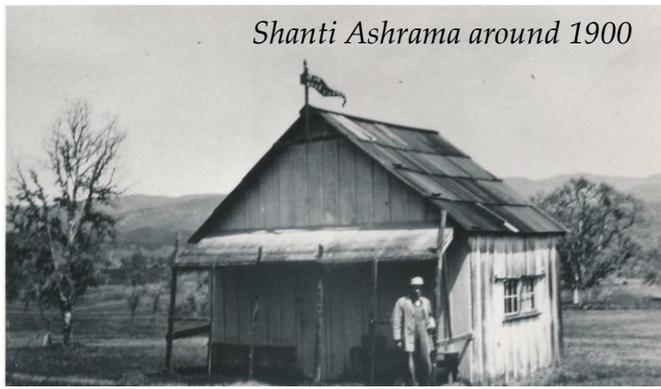


(Right) Temple

On the 100th birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna (February, 1936) the Vedanta Society of Portland purchased 120 acres of wooded land in Scappoose (20 miles from Portland) for a retreat. In 1953-1954 a temple at the Retreat was built and dedicated during the Holy Mother centenary year. This is the first Hindu Temple of its kind in the Northwestern part of the US. The retreat webpage of the Vedanta Society of Portland contains a detailed description of this retreat along with the historical photos. It is so much alive with its all

spiritual vibrations! Very recently, in April 2019, an article was published in a website that is dedicated only to bring awareness to various events within Columbia County and St. Helens, OR. Apparently the author is not a Vedantin. Even with a mind of just a passerby she felt: *“There is a gravel drive that stretches through the trees beyond the main gate where you leave your car. Almost immediately you understand that this place is different.”*

[Photo source: <https://www.vedanta-portland.org/>]



Shanti Ashrama around 1900

To give a historical overview of Shanti Ashrama the Vedanta Society of Northern California writes: *“While Swami Vivekananda was in America holding classes and delivering lectures, one of Swami Abhedananda’s students, Miss Minnie C. Boock, offered, as a gift for the work, a tract of land of 160 acres lying in the San Antonio Valley, eighteen miles southeast of Mt. Hamilton, California, the site of the well-known Lick Observatory. Swamiji accepted the offer in the name of the Ramakrishna Mission of Belur Math, the property to be held in trust as a peace retreat where those, seeking rest from the clamor of the world, could go for spiritual rejuvenation”.* However, the retreat was later founded under the guidance of Swami Turiyananda in 1900. From 1900 to 1902 he gave spiritual training to a group of students. Swami Atulananda joined him there. Turiyanandaji’s headquarters for the Northern California center was this Shanti Ashrama.

Years later, after having a ten day pilgrimage with Prakashananda to the Shanti Ashrama, Swami Prabhavananda wrote in a letter dated June 6, 1924 to Swami Siddheswarananda at the Madras Math: *“And the spiritual atmosphere! One could feel it tangibly. The spirit of Hari Maharaj [Turiyananda] is still vibrating. Hari Maharaj once said that the atmosphere of spirituality that he created would remain for at least a century.”*

Amazingly, including until the very recent Colossal wild fire, many times wild fire came close to Shanti Ashrama and with its vibration itself became peaceful and backed off!

In 1932 Swami Ashokananda took charge of



Swami Atulananda



Shanti Ashrama, 2020

San Francisco center and in 1938 he added a fine retreat at Lake Tahoe. Since then both devotees and monastics are coming here for both personal and group retreats.



Lake Tahoe
Carnelian Bay Cabin

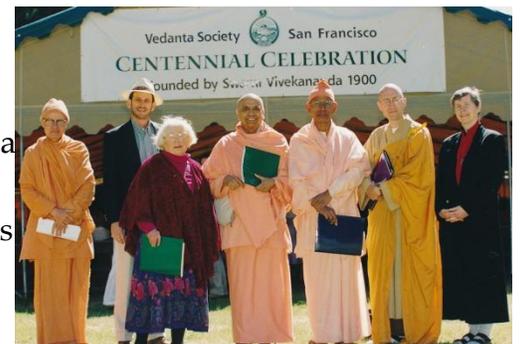
Photos: Vedanta Societies
of Northern California
and Sacramento

Swamis
Shraddhananda
& Ashokananda
in Lake Tahoe
Cabin



In September 1946 under the leadership of Swami Ashokananda the Vedanta Society of Northern California purchased a 2200 acre hilly forest land at Olema, across the bay and developed it as a retreat. Through the dedicated service of the Vedantins, (both lay and monastic) for many years, the establishment of the retreat center became possible. Since the 1970s the retreat has Women's Retreat House and also opened accommodations for people of all faiths.

Swamis
Vedananda &
Prabuddhananda
along with
interfaith leaders
at Olema



Tapovan Retreat (1975)



Swami Vividishananda in 1975 purchased a beautiful 21-acre retreat property on behalf of the Vedanta Society of Seattle in Arlington, WA. It gradually flourished here as Tapovan retreat. It is located 45 miles from Seattle. Monks are tending the grounds and gardens. The retreat center is enjoyed by visiting members as well. This retreat center accommodates many types of programs be they big or small, including Durga Puja or Swami Vivekananda 150th Birthday Celebration or any Interfaith events. Other than on busy days with big events, the spiritual seekers are welcome to have a quiet time for personal retreat.

Swami Gahanananda, then Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order and monks of the Vedanta Society in Seattle at the 1993 dedication of the Tapovan Retreat Center in Arlington, Washington



Photo sources: <http://www.vedanta-seattle.org/gallery/tapovan-retreat/>
http://t.pluralism.org/photos/ocg_slide/5166

San Jose Center (1976, Berkeley)



Swami Swahananda became the head of the Vedanta Society of Berkeley in 1970. How he started this new center? In his own words: *the first center I started was in San Jose (California). I was in Berkeley and there was no money, no money for a building. Still I gathered people and different ideas were there. So I told the interested people, we can't go for general public. Just gather a few people and give them scope. I was trying to organize people to come and stay there; for that we required at least a house. ... So, San Jose we did.... [Interview published in American Vedantist, special issue 2009, p6].* Here the shrine installation ceremony took place at the parlor of the house on Ramanavami Day, April 20, 1975.

Many activities, from interfaith programs to monthly Ramnam, are even now organized at San Jose House, a retreat center of the Vedanta Society of Berkeley.

The following year Swami Swahananda became the head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. He started numerous satellite Vedanta Societies and retreat centers all over the US. The last retreat center he started is located at Mojave desert.

Pinon Hill Retreat Center (2006)

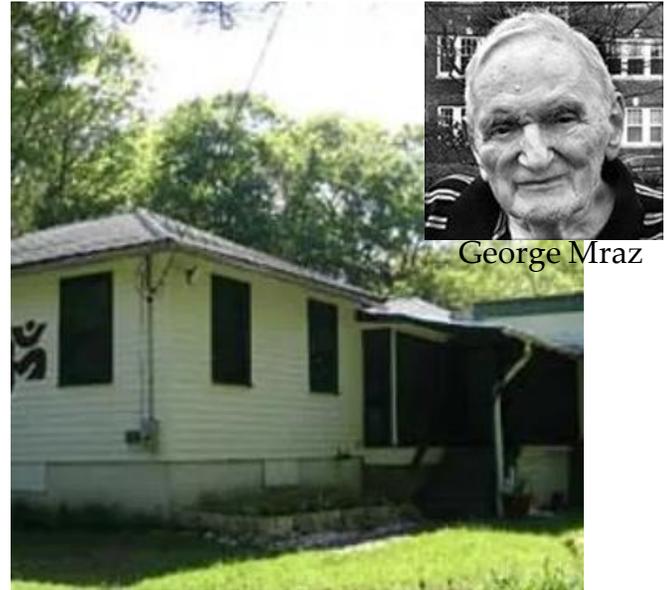


This center offers monthly retreat and also weekend classes with the resident Swami.



Swamis Akhilananda & Sarvagatananda

The Sarada Ashrama, as retreat for students of Boston and Providence centers was founded by Swami Akhilananda on an extensive plot of land at Marshfield area (about 30 miles south of Boston) in 1946. This Retreat Center was much developed under the leadership of Swami Sarvagatananda. Brother George Mraz labored hard and many devotees rendered valuable service over the years to make it a retreat center that supplied spiritual food to hundreds of people. Besides annual summer camp for the children, the most enjoyable festival that used to be celebrated there was the birthday of Sri Krishna.



George Mraz

continues for generations with a never-ending need of spiritual retreats.

This story started with Adi Shankara's contribution to the Religion Eternal. To open the fountain of a dogma-free spirituality of the most ancient religion he organized four Maths in the four corners of India. To move forward within.

Swami Vivekananda blessed four retreat places. All four of them are now the places of pilgrimage

Spiritually Guiding Society	Berkeley	Chicago	Ramakrishna Vivekananda Center, NY	Northern California	Portland	Southern California	Western Washington (Seattle)
Retreat Location	San Jose, CA	Ganges, MI	Thousand Island Park, NY	Shanti Ashrama, Lake Tahoe, Olema	Scappoose, OR	Ridgely, NY Pasadena & Pinon Hills, CA	Arlington, WA

Every summer the Sarada Ashram retreat center in Marshfield used to hold a weeklong summer camp and every year the camp had a theme from an interfaith perspective. One year the theme of the camp was Islam. During the camp, the children learned prayers in Arabic and studied about Islam as well as learning about Vedanta. This approach allowed children to fully understand Sri Ramakrishna's teachings of the Harmony of Religions, and develop tolerance and respect for all religious traditions. This retreat center also was sold within a few years of passing of Swami Sarvagatananda.

Devotees come and go. Centers also are built and get sold, but the flow of the Vedanta

that are still spreading Swamiji's message.

Humankind need spiritual retreats for solitude. Vedanta Societies can provide holy company, a stepping stone of spiritual life. Vedanta retreats take the spiritual seekers to the next step, non-attachment – an essential step to attain liberation. Adi Shankara said:

satsangatve nissangatvam, nissangatve nirmohatvam, nirmohatve nischalatattvam, nischalatattve jivanmuktiḥ.
From satsanga, company of holy people, comes non-attachment, from non-attachment comes freedom from delusion. A delusion-free mind leads to the steadfastness on the knowledge of the Self. And, from that steadfastness to the Truth comes liberation while one is still in body, *jivanmukti*.

Advertisements

Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago (VVSC) : Book Store

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda & Vedanta Literature available

Order can be placed online: <http://www.vedantabooks.com/>

Eternal Literature : The Vedas, Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavatam, Brahma Sutra, Upanishads in original Sanskrit with English translations. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta scriptures, Sanskrit texts. We are on **amazon smile** too!



Daily Prayers
(Suprabhatam)

Spiritual
Retreats,

Discourses on
the:
Panchama Veda,
Bhagavatam,
Why Should We
Meditate,
Bhagavad Gita,
Fragrance of
Vedanta.

All are available
in USB drive.

\$15 (each)

'Chicago Calling'

A Quarterly eZine of Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

Printed copies of eZine are available from VVSC bookstore

\$3 (each issue); \$10 (annual edition)

Read Offline!

Read Online!

eZine@chicagovedanta.org