

# CHICAGO CALLING



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## MA SARADA: *The Embodiment of Purity*

'Pavitrata Swarupini' (the embodiment of purity) — Swami Abhedananda, a disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, wrote that about Ma Sarada. Purity was her natural bent of mind. "Purity was her motto."

Purity is the foundation rock of spiritual life.

No other profession or walk of life takes purity as seriously as religious life. A doctor, an engineer, a professor or an administrator, for example, may be very successful in their respective professions without being pure. But a devotee, an aspirant, a seeker of God must have purity as the core of his/her character. The effort to realize God without purity is futile—can never be successful. Every religious school lays stress on purity.

In Buddhism, mental purification is a must to attain Nirvana. Both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism state that the 'kleshas', i.e., anger, ignorance and lust must be completely uprooted from the mind. Self-purification is absolutely vital for attaining Nirvana!

In Christianity we find absolute importance has been placed on purity to receive the grace of God. The Bible (Matthew 5:8) says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Genesis (1:27) states, "God created human beings to reflect His image and to live in pure unbroken communion with Him."

St John of the Cross says, "Love consists not in feeling things, but in having great detachment and in suffering for the Beloved. The purest suffering develops the purest understanding."

He that with pure love works for God not only doesn't care whether or not people know it, but does not even do those things that God Himself may know it.

Purity means service with gladness and love.

In Christianity the "dove" is considered the symbol of purity.

In Judaism Purity or 'Taharah', physical purity is important. Similarly, in Islam 'Tahara' or purity

means ritual or physical purity.

In Hinduism purity, both external and internal, is of the utmost importance. Spiritual life begins with the purification of the mind.

Acharya Shankara in his "Vivekachudamani" (verse 181) says,

tan-manah-shodhana karyam prayatnena Mumukshuna...

"Therefore, the duty of one who desires liberation should be to purify the mind..."

How can we purify the mind? To answer this question Shankara prescribed (Verse 18)

Sadhanayatra catvaari kathitani manisibhih, yasu satsevaa san-nithad yad abhave na Siddhyati..."

"In this connection, for the realization of God the sages have spoken of four spiritual practices— with these one can realize the truth, without these practices there is no chance of success."

These four practices are:

1. Discrimination between the eternal and the temporary
2. Renunciation of the results of action
3. Practicing the six treasures of virtue
4. Longing for liberation

Each of these virtues Discrimination (Viveka) follows from the preceding one in succession. The previous one is the basis of the next one.

The six virtues begin with Sama and Dama.

'Sama' (tranquility) is control of the mind— internal purity. Even in thought one should not have anything other than God.

'Dama' (Self-Control) is the control of the senses like eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin, so that these organs cannot become attached to the sense objects, like form, sound, smell, taste and touch, and bring impressions of worldly things.

When Sama and Dama are perfectly performed, the human mind becomes completely free from worldly thoughts and automatically becomes tranquil. This tranquil, unperturbed mind

is known as 'Pure Mind'. In that pure mind a reflection of the Creator, the Self, or God can be realized. That is the goal of religion. As Swami Vivekananda said, "Religion is Realization."

Scripture says there are three types of purity—and all should be practiced to become pure. These three are:

Sthula Pavitrata, Gross Purity—the mind of the aspirant should be free from any desires, like name, fame, appreciation, physical comfort.

Sukshma Pavitrata, Subtle Purity—the mind should be free from hidden desires in the mind, thoughts about desired objects and enjoying those in the mind.

Karana Pavitrata, Causal Purity—understanding the cause of enjoyments and attachments. An aspirant of religious life should destroy the Mula-avidya, the root cause of ignorance about the truth, through knowledge.

Every human has an innate urge for spirituality. Scriptures give guidance, no doubt, but still a living example serves as a lighthouse. Ma Sarada's peerless life is the example for every aspirant of all religious denominations for all times, for all places. We like to see the result of spiritual practices. What are the results of these practices? Purity. How to recognize Purity? Love and unselfishness!

All religious disciplines, all spiritual practices, all austerities for God-realization culminate in purity. And Purity manifests in a holy life as love and unselfishness.

All the biographies of Ma Sarada Devi contain incidents of Mother's love that embraced everyone without any discrimination. That proves that she was absolutely free from selfishness.

The Mother's boundless unflinching love for all transcended all limitations and touched people of all realms.

Her motherly love and care for a so-called lowly person (even a robber) and that for Swami Saradananda were no different. They were all her

children.

She shared a mother-child relation with Amzad, a mulberry-robber, from a neighboring village of Jayrambati. She had all the care and love for him.

On different occasions Amzad used to get fruits and offerings for Her, lending a hand in building the walls of Her nud-house. And Mother used to give loving care for him and his wife without any discrimination, ignoring all social norms and prejudices of the time.

Mother chose to use the power of Her motherly love that softened even the hardest criminals.

In Her own words: "I know who is good and who is not." She could see through the heart of a robber! She continued, "Amzad is as truly my son as my Sarat himself."

And as seen through different anecdotes in her life She meant all of that and more.

A very different case was Holy Mother's relationship with Sister Nivedita, an Irish-born schoolteacher. Their relationship was sweet and touching, yet awe-inspiring. Sister Nivedita occupied a special place in Mother's heart. The background of the two women couldn't have been more diverse.

Holy Mother was born and brought up in an orthodox rural brahmin family. She knew nothing of Western etiquette—not even the language. And yet, she endearingly greeted her in the most affectionate way possible.

Mother didn't concern herself with calling Sister Nivedita, "Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble". Instead she blessed her with, "My child, I shall not be able to utter such a long name. I will call you Khooki (baby)."

She assured us with her indubitable message, "I am the mother of the wicked, as I am the mother of the virtuous. Never fear! Whenever you are in distress, say to yourself, "I have a mother."

Ma Sarada is the embodiment of Purity and Purity is God.

## To Die Before Death

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This article is based on a 2010 spiritual retreat in Japan.

To begin, I would like to tell you an interesting story which has relevance to today's discourse. You may have heard the name of Jalal ad-Din Balkhi-Rumi, a very famous Sufi saint and poet of Afghanistan. Sufism is the most liberal and open minded among the different Muslim sects. It is particularly focused on philosophy and has many things in common with the Upanishads. That is why many Sufi saints have followers both from Hindus and the Muslims. He wrote the very famous 'Masnavi' books in the Persian language. This book series is formed by poetic lyrics related to God, but in some parts these are presented in the form of a story.

### The Merchant and the Parrot

In one such story a Persian businessman had purchased an Indian pet parrot, a special parrot indeed, as it could speak like a human being. The parrot looked beautiful and was also wise, so the businessman was quite happy about it. Every now and then he liked to have some religious chats with the parrot, and he would also ask his advice when he had a problem. Despite liking the parrot very much, the businessman kept it in a cage where it had no freedom of movement.

Once the man decided to go to India for business and before leaving he asked his friends and relatives what gifts they would like to receive from India upon his return. While collecting this information he also asked his Indian parrot. The bird told him that, as a gift, he only asked one favor from the businessman: he should ask its Indian relatives how he could get free from his cage. So the businessman went to India, attended to his business matters and remembered to

purchase gifts for his friends and relatives. But he totally forgot about the request of the parrot.

On the road back, however, he saw several parrots flying and remembered what his pet had asked him to do. So he asked these parrots how his own parrot could get its freedom. All the parrots but one would not listen to this question, and the one who actually did listen suddenly dropped dead. The businessman concluded that the dead parrot must have been deeply saddened by the thought of his parrot relative confined in a cage in some far off land and, thus, had suffered heart failure.

This made the businessman awfully sad as he felt responsible for the death of the parrot. Once he returned home he distributed the gifts to his friends and relatives, but he tried to avoid the parrot as he did not want to convey the sad news about the death of the parrot he had questioned in India. For this reason he avoided even entering the room where the parrot's cage was. One day, however, in a distracted mood he mistakenly entered the parrot's room. He tried to avoid unpleasantness by presenting his greetings to the parrot, but the latter immediately asked him: "Dear Sir, what about my question?" Left with little choice he related the sad story of his Indian relative to the parrot, who just as suddenly fell dead. Shattered, he now felt responsible for the death of his own parrot too.

He soon resolved to get rid of the body of the dead parrot and he opened the cage and threw it away. The parrot, once thrown out of the cage, came back to life and flew up to a branch of a tree in the courtyard. The businessman was at a loss for this incredible turn of events and it took him

some time to regain his composure. He then approached the tree where his parrot had flown and asked him about the meaning of these surprising happenings. The parrot explained that its Indian relative was not actually dead: it only feigned death in order to convey a message to the businessman's caged parrot; and the message was: "If you want to become free you have to pretend that you are dead."

### **The Suffering of Suicide**

And in fact, by feigning death, the businessman's parrot had regained its freedom. The businessman now accepted that his parrot would now freely fly away and learnt from this that if you know how to die before death, then you can get real freedom and real peace and happiness. Suicide is also a death before death, but it is an unnatural, voluntary death before the natural, involuntary death caused by old age, disease or an accident. Suicide is regarded as a way to escape from seemingly unsurmountable economic, mental, family and relationship struggles. One thinks that by committing suicide one can escape from such struggles, but in fact, one only ends up being reborn in a very difficult, painful situation.

The recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, M., lost a son who died at a young age. This loss made M.'s wife so sad that she considered committing suicide. Sri Ramakrishna warned her that if she did commit suicide she would become a ghost, a terrible condition full of suffering.

### **The Prophet and the Ghost**

Swami Vivekananda became a wandering monk for a while after Sri Ramakrishna passed away. During that period he had had no news about the health and welfare of his mother, whom he loved dearly. Becoming a monk, Swami Vivekananda had sacrificed everything for the realization of God and was not able to support her financially, but of course his love and worries for his mother did not die. Anyway, during the period when he was wandering about India he saw the spirit of his younger sister, who had committed suicide (or he saw some spirit according to a

different version of this story). Swamiji was informed by this spirit of his sister that his mother had died.

Hearing this, he became very sad and worried. The devotee with whom he was living sent a cable to Kolkata and was informed by return cable that the information was false and Swami Vivekananda's mother was keeping well. After a few days the spirit reappeared and Swamiji asked why she had given him false information. She answered that her condition was so lonely and terrible that she had hoped her brother would commit suicide hearing of his mother's death, thus becoming also a ghost and a companion for the desperate soul. Swami Vivekananda then understood the terrible condition of departed souls who commit suicide and wanted to do something for their liberation.

As a monk he was not allowed to perform the food offerings and other rituals prescribed for the liberation of spirits, so he went to the nearby beach in Madras (Chennai), offered some sand in the way that food is offered and prayed to God for the liberation of his sister. We believe that thanks to the prayer of such a great soul as Swamiji, the spirit of his sister was liberated, as he indeed did not see her ever again.

### **What Death?**

This story explains that committing suicide does not put an end to suffering; rather it creates an even worse situation. Although suicide is a most inglorious act, there are some cases when it can be a glorious, brave act. For instance when a Hindu king was defeated in a war with Muslim invaders his wives committed suicide by jumping in the fire in order to save their chastity. This was a case of a suicide with a greater purpose, not an ordinary suicide. There is also the case of realized souls, who can give up the body at will. In such cases this act of suicide does not bring about suffering.

Rabindranath Tagore, the famous Indian sage and poet, said: "All the great souls of the world taught that one must die before one's real, natural

death if one wants to become great". Jesus said that we have to be reborn in the kingdom of God. What then is the implication of dying before death, where two deaths are involved?

### **Death of the Personality**

While the second death is the death of the person, the first death is the death of the personality. What is generally meant by living? The idea of living is generated in our mind, not in the body. For instance when we are in deep sleep our mind does not work and we do not have any feeling that we are living. Real living then is the living of the mind, not of the body. In fact with death the body is destroyed, but the personality, the mind, continues to exist. So dying before death means that one death is the death of the mind, of the personality; the other death is the death of the body. What is this personality?

Personality is an image created by a person's thoughts, deeds and behaviors and projected to others. What is at the root of such thoughts, works and behaviors? It is the mind that shapes our thoughts, works and behaviors. At the back of a person's being, whether spiritual or secular, is the mind. It is the mind shaping a sattvic, rajasic or tamasic person. It is our mind determining whether we get peace or peace-less-ness. It is our mind determining whether we get temporary joy or a permanent joy, freedom or bondage, knowledge or ignorance, harmony or conflict, fearlessness or fear, strength or weakness.

So if we are stressed, unhappy, fearful, weak at this moment and we want to reverse our condition and become relaxed, happy, fearless and strong we must bring about the death of our present mind. We must give birth to a new mind. This means that we should have a second birth in this life, while still living in our present body. We should voluntarily embrace the death of our mind so that we have a second birth. And this new birth will make our life fulfilled. This is the advice of all prophets and great men, and also of the wise parrot of our story.

There is an additional interpretation of "Dying

before death". Has a dead body any feeling of honor or dishonor, pleasure or pain, jealousy, hatred, ego? As a dead body has no such feelings, we should be also like that: this should be our ideal.

There is hardly any problem in life that cannot be solved by self-effort and God's Grace, although some such solutions may not be to our liking. Moreover, behind even the greatest problem there lies a hidden, well-meaning purpose from God of which we may not be aware and not realize till much later. So if one should consider killing oneself at all over financial, relationship, physical or psychological problems, do not kill one's poor body, but consider killing the mind, the real mischief maker. After all, it is the mind that has no faith in God, no patience, and on top of that, it is the rascal mind which congers the idea of suicide, that most wicked, most dangerous and most negative of solutions which finally results in even greater suffering in another plane. This has been authenticated by realized souls who see both this world and the other and the soul's journey into them.

How then to die before death and how to have a second birth?

The different paths of Yoga and the different scriptures such as the Bible, Quran, the teachings of Buddha, the Bhagavad Gita and so on, all recommend various ways. There are however paths that are common to all the above sources - let us now discuss some common paths.

### **Understanding the Mind**

First of all let us try to understand what the mind is, what its nature is, how it works. The mind is thought, thought is mind. If we want to control the mind we should control the thought. And thoughts can be explicit or latent, conscious or unconscious. In fact our conscious mind is very small in comparison with the vast subconscious mind. So not only should we control the conscious mind, but we must also control the subconscious mind.

One may wonder at the feasibility and

difficulty of controlling the conscious mind, but how is it possible to control the subconscious mind? How does one get hold of unconscious thoughts? Suppose we hold one end of a chain and we also want to get hold of the other end. so we have to pull and pull and pull. The conscious mind is the end of the chain which we can readily get hold of. If we want to get hold of our unconscious mind, we have to use the conscious mind and “pull” with its help.

Let us now see how many kinds of thoughts cross our mind. There are thoughts related to brooding over things or events of the past. And thoughts related to planning about the future. There are thoughts related to imaginings of things or persons or ourselves. And thoughts related to desires, desires to get or to avoid something. And also there are thoughts as various feelings. Thus we observe many different kinds of thoughts, and interesting, we do not know which thought will appear when nor how long it will continue. Moreover, thoughts are mostly disconnected. Thoughts are also hidden; they spring up when a particular situation comes, such as a temptation or a provocation. Finally, our present mind functions mostly in a negative way. Would our thoughts be positive or sattvic, we would enjoy peace, joy, harmony, but as they are mostly negative, rajasic and tamasic; we experience stress and anxiety. Since according to Vedanta philosophy our real nature is full of bliss and perfect, and our mind is composed of sattva quality, why then is it that our mind is mostly in a negative state?

#### **Four Golden Rules**

Maya, spiritual ignorance, is the cause of that, it hypnotizes our mind. Maya works in two ways: first it covers our real nature and then projects something different in its place. So it is imperative to de-hypnotize our mind, and that is dying before death. How do we accomplish that? There are four golden rules.

The first is introspection, which will give us the right understanding and motivation. It is a great pity that we take a lot of care to clean our body, our house, our car, but we do not pay the same attention to cleaning our mind, which is the most important

thing that should be kept clean. And cleaning the mind will, of course, take some effort every day, exactly the same as every day effort is necessary to clean our body, our house.

The second golden rule is to see the positive side of every person, every thing, and every situation and also to struggle for perfection. Even in Maya there is a positive side: it helps us bring about the latent power which is inside us, Kundalini. The problems that Maya sends to us make us exert and overcome the difficulties. As our mind works in a negative way creating problems for us so effectively, we have to counteract this by deliberately and consciously practice the positive side of everything. This will go a long way in transforming the present mind, leading to a new birth.

The third golden rule is to feel the presence of God in every person, in every thing, and in every situation. This will help change the secular and impure mind into a spiritual and pure mind. To generate this feeling we need meditation and repetition of God’s Holy Name. God is a symbol of infinity, perfection and bliss. Getting connected to God means connecting to infinity, perfection and bliss. In that way we can overcome the impact of secular things on us which are finite, temporary, and full of problems.

The fourth golden rule is to focus on the now. That means doing everything with mindfulness. This helps prevent negative thoughts such as unnecessary brooding about the past or planning for the future and other negative thoughts and feelings. By focusing on what we are doing now, we can command our mind and prevent it from developing random, whimsical thoughts. Thus we can hold sway over the turbulent mind and engineer it as we would like.

The aim of these golden rules is to control out thoughts, our mind; to transform our negative mind into a positive mind. Thus we can put an end to our old negative mind, put an end to our old self, our old personality and have a new personality, a new life, an ideal life; this is what is called ‘dying before death’.



## Sri Ramakrishna the Embodiment of Selfless Work

Swami Harshananda  
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This article is based on an online talk  
(during 2021 Kalpataru Day Spiritual Retreat of VVSC).

*OM Sthapakaya Cha Dharmasya,  
Sarva Dharma-Svarupne;  
Avatara-Varsthaya, Ramakrishnaya Te Namah*

Today is New Year's Day, also known as Kalpataru Day in the Ramakrishna Order. On this holy and sacred day I offer my best wishes and namaskars to all of you. Probably 3 or 4 days before his Mahasamadhi, Sri Ramakrishna declared to Narendra Nath, "He who was Rama and he who was Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body." That means Sri Ramakrishna is the combined Avatara or incarnation of Rama and Krishna.

We know that Rama and Krishna were karma yogis. They lived wonderful lives, but they lived for others. They never cared for themselves. Always thinking of the good of others, Satya and Dharma were the main guides in their lives. They lived for others, and the same thing was true of Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji says in one place, "They alone live who live for others the rest are more dead than alive." That's exactly what Sri Ramakrishna did.

Well, the subject that has been allotted to me is "Sri Ramakrishna, the Embodiment of Selfless Work" or in other words, Sri Ramakrishna the Embodiment of Karma Yoga. During his boyhood days, Sri Ramakrishna lived in the village of Kamarpukur. Once, his eldest brother, Ramkumar, came there and saw that the boy was leading a carefree life. Sri Ramakrishna never cared for formal education. Thinking that the boy would be ruined, Ramkumar took him to Calcutta where he was running a Sanskrit school. There he tried his best to put Sri Ramakrishna onto the path of worldly wisdom, worldly education, but could not succeed. Sri Ramakrishna stuck to his guns. He was not at all interested in the life of ordinary people in the world.

Ramkumar was an expert in ritualistic worship. There is a tradition even now that in the houses of many families there are small shrines. Very often the owners of these houses do not know how to perform ritualistic worship. So, they often employ a priest to do the ritualistic worship for them, and the priest is paid something in return. Ramkumar was doing the worship of the deities in some of these houses. He thought that it would be better to give this part of the work to Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna was extremely happy. He took up the work that was given to him wholeheartedly. He used to worship these deities with great fervor and devotion, and he would sing nice songs. But he did not touch money. He did not touch even a grain of rice when these things were offered to him. He did everything for the sake of God or as a part and parcel of his Sadhana life. That means the spirit of karma yoga was already there in his life, and we can now say that was probably the starting point .

Let us go to the next part of his life. Rani Rasmani was a very well known and rich lady but of a very low caste. At the instance of Mother Kali's order she had built a wonderful big campus for the Kali temple—the temple of Mother Kali. There was some technical problem because of which many of the brahmanas were not coming to take up the work of worship at the temple. But Ramkumar, who was extraordinarily intelligent and an expert in the shastras, found out the method by which this difficulty could be completely overcome. So, accordingly, the entire temple complex was given as a gift to the family guru of the Rani Rasmani, and the Brahman guru took it as his property. Once it technically became his property there was no problem in taking up the worship of the deity. After this was done Rani Rasmani requested

Ramkumar himself to do the worship.

During this period, Sri Ramakrishna was very opposed to this because he was very orthodox, and he would never agree to manage a temple built by a shudra. But, very soon the problem was solved! After some time Ramkumar found that it was difficult to continue with the worship of Mother Kali because of age and other problems—health problems. By that time Sri Ramakrishna had reconciled himself to the situation, so Ramkumar handed over the worship of Mother Kali to Sri Ramakrishna after getting him properly initiated. Just at that time, Hriday (the nephew of Sri Ramakrishna) came. He was living with Sri Ramakrishna in the temple and helping him in every way. Sri Ramakrishna was very happy to worship Mother Kali and take care of ritualistic part of it, and Hriday would do all the other work. This went on for some time.

Very soon the question came to Sri Ramakrishna of whether the image of Mother Kali—the stone image of Mother Kali— was only a stone or whether the Divine Mother was really living there. During that period of his Sadhana, almost every day in the night he would go to the forest area of the Dakshineswar garden and spend the whole night in praying and meditating on Mother Kali. There had been quite a few days in which Sri Ramakrishna used to roll on the ground on the bank of the Ganges River requesting the Mother to reveal herself. "Dēkhādina dēkhādina!" Finally, he decided there was no use in this life if it is not possible to have a vision of Mother Kali. So one day, his mind was so excited that he took the sword from the hand of Mother Kali's image and was about to cut his own throat. Just at that time he lost all consciousness of the outside world, but inside he had a wonderful vision of Mother Kali fully living and conscious. After some time Mother Kali dissolved Herself into infinite light, an all pervading infinite light—a wonderful blissful light. Thus Sri Ramakrishna had a twofold realization—saguna sakara nirguna nirakara. He had realized both aspects of God.

From that day onwards Mother Kali was not a stone image to him. She was a real living mother to him. Once he came to this stage then the rest of his sadhana was comparatively easy. We know from his life that very soon Bhairavi Brahmani, Jatadhari, and Tota Puri all came to teach him. Under them he took to the spiritual practices, but as soon as he touched the first step of the spiritual practices, he would get the realization. So all these things were more or less like a confirmation for what he had already done. Or to put it in other words, he had realized God entirely by himself by his own efforts without the help of any guru like Totapuri or Jatadhari or Bhairavi Brahmani. At the same time he got these experiences a second time through them just for confirmation we can say. Now that completed his realization. Realizing Mother Kali or realizing Brahman, the all pervading spirit, through symbology or the image of Mother Kali.

Sri Ramakrishna was not an ordinary type of sadhu. Generally realized souls won't go to the world and declare that they are men of realization. They don't take up the task of teaching people. Only when people come to them will they will start teaching them. But Sri Ramakrishna was of a different type. His realization was enormous. He was actually bursting with the realization, and he was very eager to distribute the spiritual wealth that he had acquired through his Sadhanas. It is said that he used to go to the small hut where he had practiced advaitic discipline, and he would climb to the top and from there he would shout at the top of his voice asking his disciples from Calcutta and other places to come to learn about spiritual practices and spiritual wisdom. Very soon God heard his prayers, and through the medium of Kesav Chandra Sen and others, the people of Calcutta slowly started coming to know about the Paramhansa—Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the great sage who was living in Dakshineswar, a man of God, a man of supreme realization. Most of the people who were attracted by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna were young people, and Sri

Ramakrishna was happy.

Now a new life started! At Dakshineswar his own room became full of young people aspiring for spiritual life. So every day from morning till evening for hours and hours Sri Ramakrishna would be talking. He knew God and knew nothing but God. Therefore, he would always be talking and talking about God. Many times he would go into samadhi, and then he would also be singing in his sweet voice very nice beautiful songs. People use to come in large numbers. For hours and hours they would sit spellbound in his room looking at his wonderful face and listening to his songs. Sri Ramakrishna would talk to them about God, the nature of God, the various qualities of God, and also the main aim of human life. He used to say that the vision of God is the main purpose of human life. So, then what is the path to realize God? Sri Ramakrishna used to stress very much the path of devotion as taught by Narada and the path of the repetition of the Divine Name. Day and night he would be talking about God. People would be enormously benefited by these teachings. But Sri Ramakrishna did not care for the things of the world. He did not touch any money or anything that might be offered by these disciples. He completely rejected it, his teaching was completely free, absolutely free. He never cared for the things of the world—not even for name and fame. He got name and fame because of others, but he himself never actually sought for it. So in this way Sri Ramakrishna's life was one of giving and giving and giving never taking anything from others.

This is the highest spirit of karma yoga. In karma yoga work is done, but all the results are offered to God, and ultimately nothing belongs to the person who actually does the work. He does it as a worship of God Himself. It's in this spirit that Sri Ramakrishna did all work. But that doesn't mean that Sri Ramakrishna neglected the life here and now. He had a very practical mind and practical wisdom. There are various incidents in his life, which demonstrate these aspects of his life.

Now you know that he was very particular about teaching the spiritual truth to others. In that connection he use to tell a story. There was a village in which there were four friends. These four friends used to go out for a walk everyday in the evening outside the village. One day they thought why not we go a little farther and see what is there. When they did so, they found that there was a high wall by the side of the road and from inside the wall they heard beautiful music. One of them climbed the wall just to find out what was on the other side, and seeing that it was a pleasure garden, he jumped into it and never came back. The second one did it, and the third one also did the same thing, but the fourth one controlled himself. He saw that it was a pleasure garden, but he remembered the people in his village. He thought, "Let me go back to my village and tell them about this so that all of them can also come and enjoy this." This was the spirit with which people like Sri Ramakrishna used to teach and preach the essence of religion. They were called Adhikarika Purushas. They were the actual incarnations of the spiritual wisdom. In that way Sri Ramakrishna used teach people the importance of work in our everyday life either through stories or parables or through other examples.

Now as I told you earlier, just because Sri Ramakrishna was a karma yogi and used to go into Samadhi any number of times, it does not mean he neglected the work of the day-to-day life. When he was in a normal state of consciousness, he would see that everything in his room would be arranged perfectly, and whenever he went to Calcutta, he was very particular to see that he was dressed properly, because very cultured people from the other parts of the state would be coming there and they would be seeing him and listening to him. That is why he gave great importance to perfection in work.

It is said that when he was in Kamarpukur, where he stayed for nearly one year, one day in the evening or probably sometime in the night he went to the kitchen.

He wanted something, and when he went there, he found that everything was helter-skelter and all disturbed. Sarada Devi was working there. Then Sri Ramakrishna told her that this is not the way to keep things. Now, the way he said it was very interesting. He said on the amavasya day, the new moon night when there is no light at all, if I ask for the tin containing sugar for instance, you must be able to pick it up and give it to me. Things must be arranged in such a perfect manner that you should be able to automatically pick it up. That means perfection in work.

There is also another incident. Once Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra Nath were talking in their room probably something in the morning around 11 o'clock, let us say, suddenly they found that a young man came to his room and asked him for a knife. A knife was there which was used by Sri Ramakrishna right in front of him. Sri Ramakrishna refused to give that knife. Because of Narendra he finally gave the knife, but the knife was not returned to him even in the night. Sri Ramakrishna told Narendra that is why he did not give it. He told Narendra to go and search where they were sitting; the knife was probably under the piles of the fruits they had cut. So Narendra went there and searched for it and brought back the knife. Even for small little things Sri Ramakrishna was very particular.

There is one more incident all of you are aware of it. The image of Sri Krishna got broken one day because the priest, who was carrying it, slipped and fell down. Another image had to be kept there and worshipped, not this broken image. That was the idea given by the pundits. But Sri Ramakrishna solved the problem in a different way. He said, "Suppose the Rani's son-in-law breaks his hand or foot, do they bring another son-in-law? No! The injury would be treated. In the same way, let the image be repaired." He himself repaired the image so nicely that nobody could tell where it had been broken. So that means Sri Ramakrishna was very, very particular about perfection in work.

And this perfection in work has been very much stressed by Swami Vivekananda also. "One who can prepare a chillum of tobacco well can also meditate well." This was his statement. The explanation is that it is the same mind with which you do both the work and the meditation. If you are able to do a particular thing perfectly, to that extent the mind also picks up the habit of doing things perfectly. So this perfection of mind goes on slowly increasing so that whatever work you take up ultimately the same mind comes there also and sees that your work is done perfectly.

So we see that in Sri Ramakrishna's life the highest aspect of spiritual life was taught without the least consideration for any remuneration or respect or name and fame. That's why he was the best and highest type of karma yogi. But at the same time he also showed that even in day-to-day life things should be done perfectly, because there is no difference between work that is done for our spiritual practice and the work that is done for day-to-day life. Everything is God's work. If it is possible to see the divinity everywhere and in everything, then even the ordinary things of the world can lead to God as a means of Sadhana. This is how we find that Sri Ramakrishna, in spite of his great spiritual wisdom and the power he had acquired through tapas, exhibited that. He had led the people to higher levels of spiritual life and at the same time he also showed people how in day-to-day life, perfection in work should be practiced. So that means we cannot ignore our work even in day-to-day life. Whatever work we do, whether it is the work of everyday life or whether it is Sadhana, is ultimately God's work. Sri Ramakrishna actually taught us this through his own life and teachings. Let us learn this perfectly and ultimately try to practice this at every step in our life, so that our mind gradually becomes purer and purer and then we are able to see God everywhere and in everything.

Thank you.

## BHAGAVATA (3): *The Birth of Parikshit* Swami Ishatmananda

In the Bhagavata Purana the evolution of the Tattvas is described in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Skanda.

Purusha is Atman—beyond Prakriti, Eternal, All pervading and Self-luminous.

The Omniscient Lord has no bondage of action or birth, but playfully assumes mysterious birth under the cover of Maya.

The Lord creates, preserves and destroys the universe with ease.

He resides in all hearts, not being attached to anything. He is independent.

In reality Prakriti is the cause and agent of all, and Purusha is only the passive enjoyer of all pleasures and pain.

Prakriti transforms into:

Five Mahabhutas: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Ether

Five Tanmatras: Smell, Taste, Color, Touch and Sound

Ten Indriyas: Ear, Skin, Eye, Tongue, Nose, Speech, Hand, Foot, Upastha and Payu.

Antah-Karana (4): Mind, Intellect, Store house of Impressions, Ego.

The Bhagavata considers Kala or time as the 25<sup>th</sup> Tattva.

The Lord manifests Himself internally in all living beings as the Inner-Self and externally as Kala (Time).

The Bhagavata lays stress on two fundamental Tattvas: God and Maya (Prakriti).

God, with a desire to become many, reflects Himself in Prakriti or Maya (His own power) and, "It is through this impregnation of Himself in His own power that He (the Lord) appears as individual souls bound by Prakriti.

Thus Prakriti or Maya is connected with Consciousness and through His Kala (Time) the equilibrium of the gunas is disturbed, and transformation begins and the various Tattvas are evolved.

When God takes birth within His own creation

by taking a name and form, He becomes known as the Avatara.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Book, 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, of the Bhagavata, Vyasa describes the manifestation of the different Avataras and says, "Innumerable are the Avataras of Hari, the Supreme Being, who is absolutely pure in His essence."

But then he mentions in the 1<sup>st</sup> book, 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, 28<sup>th</sup> verse that these Avataras are the parts of the Supreme Being. Krishna is Bhagavan Himself.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter we find that the Rishis are eager to hear about the mighty King Parikshit. "We have heard that Parikshit, the son of Abhimanyu, was a man of exceeding devotion to the Lord. We would like to hear about the unusual circumstances attending his birth and his great achievements in life.

Why were the Rishis suddenly asking this question? We find the answer in the next shloka (1/4/10). "He was a mighty emperor, the scion of the Pandavas, then why did he suddenly give up everything and take the vow to fast till death on the bank of the Ganges?"

Keeping us in suspense, Vyasa describes his meeting with Narada. In the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> chapters of Book 1, Vyasa records the conversation between him and Narada. Here we find the story of Narada's life.

Before Narada left Vyasa he declared his life's mission: To spread the message of the Lord. Why? According to Narada, the devotees of Vishnu, "Remembering Sri Hari and His unique deeds is verily the boat to cross the ocean of samsara (1/6/35). "For those whose desires are very strong, taking the holy name of Sri Hari and remembering His divine acts helps them to very quickly progress in spiritual development through the practice of yoga". (1/6/36).

Saunaka, the wise sage, asked the Suta, the narrator, "O Suta! After Narada had left, what did

Vyasa do in fulfilling the advice of that divine sage?"

Vyasa sat on the western bank of the Saraswati and entered into samadhi. He entered into samadhi through his purified mind, which had become concentrated through divine love, and he had the vision of the Supreme Being and the power of Maya dependent on Him (1/7/5).

Although the jiva is free in reality, it considers itself to be the body, the product of the three gunas, through the influence of Maya.

Vyasa also realized that suffering is because of Avidya—ignorance. So, for the benefit of people he composed the Bhagavata—the scripture of devotion (1/7/6)

The path of devotion can be followed by anyone. Devotion to God is an easy method to realize God.

Vyasa then taught the Bhagavatam to his son, Suka, the monk of great knowledge.

Then Saunaka asked the Suta, "But Shuka is a contemplative par excellence, a perfect renouncer and not interested in anything but Atma Jnana; how then did he take to the study of devotional scriptures?"

Suta's reply is an oft-quoted shloka of the Bhagavata—"It is true that sages who are absorbed in the Self are not in need of book-learning, but the inherent attractiveness of Sri Hari makes even the Jnanis, contemplating Atman, drawn to Him."

Vyasa then narrated a very sad story, which is connected with the birth of Parikshit, and proved before everyone the divine protective power of Sri Krishna.

The Kurukshetra war was over. Bheema, to keep his promise broke the thighs of Duryodhana, who was still alive but in a very pathetic condition.

To please Duryodhana, Ashvatthama, the son of Acharya Drona, did an extremely heinous act. He stealthily entered the camp of the Pandavas and cut off the heads of the five sons of Draupadi. When he showed the heads of those young boys to Duryodhana, Duryodhana too became very displeased with Ashvatthama (1/7/15).

Overwhelmed with grief, Arjuna promised to kill Ashvatthama and chased him accompanied by Krishna (1/7/16). Seeing the fast-approaching Arjuna from a distance, Ashvatthama jumped out of his chariot and started running. Being the son a great teacher, Drona, Ashvatthama knew how to charge the Brahma missile, and without thinking of the consequences, he released that divine missile. The heroic Arjuna, observing the fierce and radiant energy, cried out, "O Krishna, the mighty armed! O Savior of devotees! To people suffering in the world, you are the only refuge."

Arjuna then described the original and real tattva of Sri Krishna. In the 1<sup>st</sup> book 7<sup>th</sup> chapter, verses 22-25, Arjuna described Sri Krishna, the personification of Brahman. "O Krishna, you are the origin of all, the all-comprehending Being. You are not affected by the Maya Shakti that remains with you. You remain unaffected in all changes. By your grace jivas attain spiritual upliftment."

Bhagavan Sri Krishna advised Arjuna to release his own Brahma Missile to stop the one released by Ashvatthama. Hearing the words of Lord Krishna, Arjuna released his own Brahma Missile to destroy his opponent's missile.

In 1/7/30 a wonderful description has been given about the reaction when the two missiles meet. Arjuna finally retracted both the missiles.

Sri Krishna asked Arjuna to kill the hateful sinner, the murderer of children, but Arjuna could not kill the son of his guru. Even Draupadi, seeing Ashvatthama tied as an animal, requested Krishna and Arjuna to release him. Because his mother, Kripa, was still living, all supported her except Bheema, who said he should be killed here and now.

Ashvatthama was truly ungrateful and a born killer. The Pandava's performed the last rights of their slain sons.

Krishna was getting ready to leave for Dwarka, when he suddenly found Abhimanyu's wife, Uttara, rushing to him in utter fright. "O Lord, save me; O Lord, save me. Except you there is no one to save me and my son." [To Be Continued]

## Introduction to the Cover Page: Handle with Prayer

Brahmacharini Jagaddhatri  
Sarada Convent  
Vedanta Society of Southern California

Usually at the time of conjunction of two Gregorian years, we celebrate Mothers – Mary and Sarada.

Mary – the Saint, Mary – the Mother of God also has the highest position not only in Christianity, but also in Islam among all women. Two of the longer chapters of the Quran are devoted to her and her family. She is ever pure, virgin.

Sri Ramakrishna saw the Divine Mother in the Temple and Mother Sarada are the One and same. He actually worshipped her as the Divine Mother following all rituals. The Divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna, the Lord of the universe, is also *Pavitrata Swarupini* (embodiment of purity). A portion of Sister Nivedita's letter to Sarada Devi is worth mentioning here: *"This morning, early, I went to church – to pray for Sara. All the people there were thinking of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and suddenly I thought of you. Your dear face, and your loving look and your white Sari and your bracelets. It was all there. ... Dear Mother! You are full of love! And it is not a flushed and violent love, like ours, and like the world's, but a gentle peace that brings good to everyone and wishes ill to none. It is a golden radiance, full of play. ... Dearest Mother! I wish we could send you a wonderful hymn, or a prayer. But somehow even that would seem too loud, too full of noise! Surely you are the most wonderful thing of God – Sri Ramakrishna's own chalice of His Love for the world – a token left with His children, in these lonely days, and we should be very still and quiet before you – except indeed for a little fun! Surely the 'wonderful things of God' are all quiet – stealing unnoticed into our lives – the air and the sunlight and the sweetness of gardens and of the Ganges. These are the silent things that are like you! ..."*

If one of the common aspects of Mothers Mary and Sarada is purity, then another important side is their prayerfulness. Both of them are the

embodiment of prayer itself. About Ma Sarada, Sister Nivedita stated in another place, "Her life was one long stillness of prayer."

During this auspicious time of Mother Sarada's birthday, in this cover story an attempt is made to revisit twelve important prayers of her life. The main resource of this article is the Gospel of Holy Mother as recorded by her disciples.

But why twelve? Let's come back to Mother Mary again. The Book of Revelation (12.1) describes her as: *A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.* There are many interpretations of these twelve stars. Twelve is a number of perfection; it symbolizes the twelve tribes of the Old Testament people and the twelve apostles in the New Testament. In devotion, the twelve stars are seen in reference to the graces, privileges and charisms received by Our Lady from God. Mary, the Queen of Heaven, is crowned with her perfections, one star for each one of the perfections. Here are these twelve perfections which became the object of the Twelve-Star Devotion:

1. Predestination before creation
2. Without original sin conceived
3. Overshadowed by the Holy Spirit
4. Virgin before and after giving birth
5. Birth giver of Jesus Christ
6. Fullness of grace
7. Introduced to the Mystery of the Trinity
8. Seat of Wisdom
9. Superior to the angels and humans;
10. Installed as Queen;
11. Called to be Mediatrix;
12. Revered by all creatures.



Later this circle of stars was often used to represent unity, solidarity and harmony in flags, seals and signs. During 17<sup>th</sup> century it represented the Crown of Immortality in iconographic motif related to the Woman of the Apocalypse as well as in Baroque allegoric art.

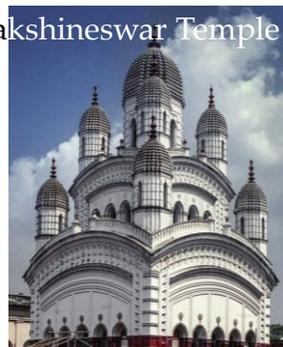
These 12 star signs also known to represent Zodiac constellations. The etymology of the term Zodiac comes from the Latin and the Greek where its meaning is "[circle] of animals". Therefore, she is the Mother of all.

Sarada began her rigorous spiritual life at Dakshineswar. Her life started there with Sri Ramakrishna's prayer. Sri Ramakrishna said, "After marriage I had prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother! Remove even the least trace of carnality from the mind of my wife.'" When she came to Sri Ramakrishna, the Master asked her: "Do you want to drag me down into Maya?" Sarada Devi answered: "Why should I do so? I have come only to help you in the path of religious life." The Master understood that "the Mother had really granted my prayer" Let us now turn to the 12 prayers of Sarada, compassionate Mother of all,

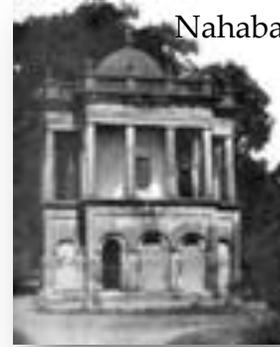
★ Sarada totally surrendered herself to Mother Bhavatarini Kali from the beginning. It was perhaps in the month of March, 1881 when Sarada came to Dakshineswar with Shyamasundari (Sarada's mother), Lakshmi (Sri Ramakrishna's niece), and some others. As soon as they arrived Hriday (Sri Ramakrishna's nephew who was taking care him at that time), for reasons best known to him, began saying, "Why have they come? What have they got to do here?" Both Hriday and Shyamasundari hailed from the same village Sihar. When he utterly ignored Shyamasundari initially Shyamasundari kept silent but finally she said, "Come, let us go back home. With whom shall I leave my daughter here?" For fear of Hriday, the Master kept mum all through. Sarada and her mother left Dakshineswar that very day. Ramlal (Sri Ramakrishna's nephew) called a boat for crossing the river. At the time of departure

Sarada mentally prayed to the Mother Kali (photo is on the cover): "*Mother, I shall come here again only if You deign to bring me back.*" Hriday had to leave the Kali Temple for doing ritual worship of Trailokya's (son of Mathurbabu) daughter in June, 1881. Few months later, upon Sri Ramakrishna's request, Sarada returned to serve him.

Dakshineswar Temple



Nahabat



Staying at Nahabat, in the campus of Dakshineswar temple garden, Sri Sarada Devi started her secular and spiritual training under the Master's care. The details of the spiritual practices she underwent is not known to anybody but in the later period of her life, she mentioned to Nalini (her niece) and other disciples how under the Master's guidance every day in the morning and at night she practiced Japa and meditation with great intensity. [*"What a lot of work I did when I was of your age! And yet I could find time to repeat my Mantra a hundred thousand times every day".*] What a tremendous performance by any exacting ascetic standard!

★ The moon and the Ganges are both associated with Shiva in his matted locks. These two have very close association with Sri Sarada Devi also. During her stay on the banks of the Ganges, Sarada Devi used to pray looking at the moon. "*During my days at Dakshineswar, I used to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and sit in meditation. Often I used to be totally absorbed in it. Once, on a moonlit night, I was performing Japa, sitting near the steps of the Nahabat. Everything was quiet. I did not even know when the Master passed that way. On other days I would hear the sound of his slippers, but on this night, I did not. I was totally absorbed in meditation.*"

*In those days I looked different. I used to put on ornaments and had a cloth with red border. On this day the cloth had slipped off from my back owing to a breeze, but I was unconscious of it. It seems 'son Yogen' went that way to give the water-jug to the Master and saw me in that condition. Ah! The ecstasy of those days! On moonlit nights I would look at the moon and pray with folded hands, 'May my heart be as pure as the rays of the yonder moon!' Or 'O Lord, there is stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind!' If one is steady in meditation, one will clearly see the Lord in one's heart and hear His voice. The moment an idea flashes in the mind of such a one, it will be fulfilled then and there. You will be bathed in peace. "*

Though apparently we see that Sarada Devi is praying to different forms, but all her prayers went to Sri Ramakrishna -- the only One behind many.

★ Yogin-Ma's (companion of Sarada Devi) reminiscences: *"When the Mother first came to Dakshineswar, she had not experienced Samadhi. Though she practiced meditation and Japa every day with utmost devotion, we did not hear of her going into Samadhi at that time. [But she saw the Master going to samadhi when she was sleeping near him.]... After I had been acquainted with her for some time, she said to me one day, 'Please speak to the Master that through his grace I may experience Samadhi. On account of the constant presence of devotees, I hardly get any opportunity to speak to him about it myself.' I thought it was quite right that I should convey to him her request. "Next morning Sri Ramakrishna was seated on his bed alone when I went to his room and, after saluting him in the usual way, I communicated the Mother's prayer to him. He listened to it, but did not give any reply. Suddenly he became very serious. When he was in that mood, no one dared to utter a word before him. So I left the room after sitting there silently for a while. Coming to the Nahabat, I found the Mother seated for her daily worship. I opened the door a little and peeped in. Strange to say, she was now giggling and the next moment weeping. This went on alternately for some time. Tears were rolling down her cheeks in an*

*unceasing stream. Gradually she became very much withdrawn into herself. I knew she was in Samadhi. So I closed the door and came away."*

★ Not only for spiritual experiences, but she prayed for her health also. In 1875 she had a severe attack of dysentery. When all human remedies failed, as a last and desperate act of prayer and supplication for divine intervention, she resolved to perform the rite of Hatya before the Deity Simhavahini, according to which one observes the vow of starving unto death if no divine assistance comes. Within a few days of her fast, the Goddess is said to have revealed the name of some simple



medicines, taking which she was cured. Through this the glory of Divine Mother Simhavanihi was established. Other than Goddess Simhavahini, she had

vision of Divine Mothers Kali and Jagaddhatri also. It is well known that Mother Kali was Sri Ramakrishna's chosen ideal. Sarada Devi and few other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna used to see him as the embodiment of Mother Kali. Goddess Jagaddhatri was worshipped by Shyamasundari Devi and is believed to be Sarada Devi's chosen ideal.

Once when the Holy Mother was suffering from a high fever at Jayrambati, just prior to her last illness she said to one of her attendants, *"Look, my child, I have been praying for the last few days, but there has been no response. How much I have wept! Even then, nothing happened. At last the Divine Mother Jagaddhatri came today. But Her face resembled my mother's face. Now I shall recover from my illness. Once when I was young, I was travelling to Dakshineswar. On the way I was seized with high fever. I was lying unconscious when I saw a girl with a very black complexion and feet covered with dust enter my room and sit by the bedside.*

*She began to stroke my head. Noticing that the girl's feet were covered with dust, I asked, 'Mother, didn't anybody give you water to wash your feet?' She replied, 'No, Mother, I shall be leaving immediately. I have come to see you. Why do you fear? You will get well.' From the next day I gradually recovered. This time I have suffered very much, my child. Only after much prayer did I see Jagaddhatri today. I am going to be cured this time also. Why fear, my child? If you call upon Him earnestly, He will protect you in all situations."*

However, it is important to note that she did not depend only on prayers ignoring the traditional treatment. For example some time after, she had a severe attack of malaria, with enlargement of the spleen, for which she went for countryside treatment of branding with a red hot iron in the region of the spleen. It only was available to her that time and she tried it.

★ We usually consider our prayer is answered when it fulfills our desires. But the teachings from Sri Sarada Devi's life are different; they inspire us to pray and to surrender to God's will at the end. *She had gone to Tarakeswar Shiva Temple to pray and seek Divine remedy for the Master's illness, which had been declared incurable by medical men. For two days she lay before the Deity without food or drink, supplicating for some remedy.*

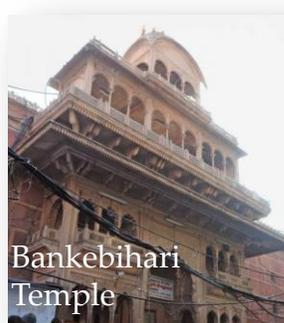


*During the night of the second day she was startled to hear a sound resembling the breaking of a pile of earthen pots at one blow.*

*She woke up from her torpor, and the idea flashed in her mind: "Who is husband and who is wife? Who is my relative in this world? Why am I about to kill myself?" Freed from all personal attachments, her mind was full of an intense spirit of renunciation.*

★ The Master's demise brought about a drastic change in the Holy Mother's life. About two weeks later on the 30th August, 1886, accompanied by Golap-Ma, Lakshmi Devi, Gospel writer M's wife,

Swami Yogananda, Swami Abhedananda, and Swami Adbhutananda Sarada Devi went on a pilgrimage to Vrindavan after visiting Banaras and Ayodhya. She stayed at Vrindaban for about a year. Yogin-Ma was already there at Vrindavan. Her life at Vrindaban was one of constant worship, meditation and spiritual experiences. One of the important temples of Vrindavan is Bankebihariji's temple. Mother prayer to that deity there was unique. Let's read in her own words: "When I was



*in Vrindaban, I used to visit Bankubihari [Krishna in a bent pose, photo on cover] and pray to him: 'Your form is bent, but your mind is straight. Lord, let there be no crookedness in my mind.'" Her sincere prayer was: "O Lord,*

*remove from me the habit of finding fault with others. May I never find fault with anybody."* Her prayer was answered.

Some people around her found a devotee not up to their mark. Mother knew that person for a while. Her response to such complaints was recorded by one of her disciples: "One day at dusk, the Holy Mother said in the course of a conversation, "I can no longer see or hear of anybody's faults, my dear. It all happens according to one's Prarabdha, the effect of past deeds. Where a ploughshare has to hit, at least a needle must prick. ... Besides, what is his fault? In earlier days I also had an eye for people's faults. Thereafter I wept and wept before the Master, praying, 'O Master! I do not wish to see anyone's faults' and finally got rid of that habit. You might have done good to a man a thousand times and harm only once; he will turn away from you for that one offence. People see only the faults. One should in fact note the merits".

★ Sarada Devi went on another pilgrimage in April 1888 to Gaya. We read in her Gospel: *On this occasion she also visited Bodh Gaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, where an event of great future significance took place. She saw there the well established monastery of Hindu Sannyasins, which*



Great Temple at Bodh Gaya, 1890

*provided the monks with good accommodation and food. The contrast between this and the poverty-stricken condition of her own 'children', the monastic disciples of the Master, evoked strong sentiments in her mind. About this incident she said as follows: "Ah! For this have I shed tears and prayed to the Master! And only through that this Math (Belur Math) came into existence now. When the Master left the body, the boys gave up the world and gathered together in a rented shelter for some days. Then they scattered about independently and went on roaming about here and there. Then I felt intensely sad and prayed to the Master, 'O Lord! You came, disported with a few and then went away. Should everything end with that? If so, what was the need for coming down and undergoing so many travails? I have seen in Banaras and Vrindaban many holy men who get their food by alms and move about from one place to another. There is no dearth of holy men of that type. I shall not be able to bear the sight of my 'sons', who have come out in your name, moving about begging for food. My prayer is that those who leave the world in your name may never be in need of bare sustenance. They will all live together holding to your ideas and ideals, and the people afflicted by the worries of the world will resort to them and be solaced by hearing from them about you."*



Belur Math

While she herself was in utter poverty and neglect, she is offering such a remarkable prayer for the monks! Her insight into the implications of the Master's advent too is profound and prophetic.

Because of that vision she is called the "Sangha Janani – Mother of this Ramakrishna Order".

Again, we are to learn from her -- not idle prayer only -- but to take actions as and when needed. For example: once in the rainy season there was an epidemic of malaria and dysentery. The Holy Mother too suffered much for a few days from blood dysentery. The food quality in Koalpara center was not up to the mark probably because the head of that center was too austere. Nearly all of the monks there got fever. Noticing that from Koalpara none of the monastics went to Jayrambati, the Holy Mother sent a maid to get news of us. She brought us a letter from the Mother to the following effect: "My dear Kedar, I have established the Master in that Ashrama. He used to take boiled rice and fish also. Therefore I say, you must offer boiled rice and fish to the Master, at least on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Do not offer fish on Sundays. By no means should you offer food to the Master without three curries. If you practice too much of austerity, how can you withstand the malaria of these parts?"

Altar at the Koalpara center. Holy Mother herself worshipped her image here placing it next to the Master.



★ The Holy Mother went for pilgrimage to Rameshwaram. It is believed that Sri Rama Chandra Himself worshipped Lord Shiva here. Her prayer for Radhu's greed-free mind is very unique here. Mother recalled later, "Ah, Sashi had me perform the Puja of Rameswar with a hundred and eight golden Bel leaves. The Rajah of Ramnad, hearing that I was there, sent his minister with instructions to show me the temple treasury. If I had a fancy for any article, it was to be immediately presented to me. What could I say? Unable to decide what to say, I replied 'What do I need? Sashi is arranging for all our requirements.' Again, thinking that they would be hurt,

I said, 'All right, if Radhu needs anything, she may take it.' I told Radhu that she could take anything she liked. Then seeing all those



priceless rubies and diamonds, my heart went pit-a-pat. Anxiously I prayed to the Master, 'Oh Master, grant that no greed should arise in Radhu's mind.' And so Radhu replied, 'What of these shall I take? I do not need them. But I lost my pencil. Buy me a pencil.' Hearing these words, I heaved a sigh of relief and bought her a two pice pencil at the roadside shop."

★ Mother's love did not end just after giving advice or saying prayer, but she actually taught her children how to pray throughout her life. Let's try to remember some incidents.

One evening after the women devotees took their leave of the Mother, she asked her nieces to meditate and pray. They were late, and she said in a tone of displeasure, "It is evening. Instead of meditating, they are gossiping!" ... She bowed before the image of Sri Ramakrishna and then took her seat for meditation.

"Pray to Sri Ramakrishna" – that is her instruction. Once two young ladies came to Mother with the desire of having babies. She told them, "Lay the burden of your mind before Sri Ramakrishna. Tell him your sorrows with your tears. You will find that he will fill up your arms with the desired object."

Some came with the earnestness to have the vision of the Master and to them the Mother firmly said, "He who will pray to God eagerly will see Him". The Mother was aware that the "People come here with various selfish desires. Someone comes with a cucumber, offers it to Sri Ramakrishna, and prays for the fulfillment of selfish desires. This is the nature of average people." Still her kindness knew no bound.

We therefore see when a devotee came and

earnestly prayed to Mother, "You must cure him, Mother. Please say that he will be cured", Mother repeatedly said with utmost sincerity, "I do not know anything, my child. The Master is everything. If he wills, your husband will be all right. I shall pray to the Master for him".

She prayed for Radhu's health, with same level of sincerity she prayed for her European daughter, too. A lady came to Udbodhan on 30th September 1918 with an appeal to Sarada Devi, "I am in great difficulty. My only daughter, a very good girl, is dangerously ill; so I have come here to crave your favour and blessings. Please be gracious to her, so that she may be cured. .... Please be kind to her.". Mother assured her by saying, "I shall pray for your daughter. She will be cured". She got a flower from Sri Ramakrishna's altar, closed her eyes, prayed for a few moments; then she looked wistfully at the image of Sri Ramakrishna and gave the flower to the lady.

Karma Yogis received her blessings. In the year 1917, a devotee wrote to her a letter praying for her blessings for the successful accomplishment of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebrations at Ranchi. The Mother replied, "It is difficult to express in writing how delighted I was to receive your letter. You are all the children of the Master. In all such noble endeavors he himself will stand by you. Why do you worry on that account?"

Once a devotee offered salutation the Mother at the Udbodhan house. In his words: "When we saluted the Mother, she prayed to Sri Ramakrishna with folded palms, 'Master, kindly fulfill all their desires,' Thereupon I asked, 'How's that Mother? We shall be ruined if all our desires are fulfilled. How many bad desires are there in the heart!' The Mother laughed and said, 'You need not be afraid of that. The Master will grant only those desires which you really need and which will bring you good. Continue to practice what you are doing now. Why fear? We are with you'."

When her monastic disciple surrendered and prayed: "I don't have enough strength for doing spiritual disciplines. I have surrendered myself to your holy feet; please do as you will. With folded palms the Mother began praying to the Master, "May the Master

protect you in your vows of Sannyasa. He is looking after you; what should you be afraid of?" Along with prayer, self effort is also needed. She, therefore, reminded, "If the mind is kept engaged in some work, it doesn't indulge in silly thoughts. But if you sit idle, the mind is likely to indulge in various kinds of thoughts."

★ Mother reminded us, "What else is spiritual life besides praying to the Master, repeating his Name, and contemplating on him? (With a smile) And the Master? What is there after all in him? He is our own eternally!"

Where to pray? A disciple asked Mother, "Does the Master really live in the picture?" Mother confirmed, "Of course, he does. The body and the shadow are the same. And what is his picture but a shadow?" Again, her disciple asked, "Does he live in all the pictures?" Mother reassured, "Yes. If you pray to him constantly before his picture then he manifests himself through that picture. The place where the picture is kept becomes a shrine. Suppose a man worships the Master there (pointing to a plot of land north of the Udbodhan), then the place is associated with his presence".

But the bottom line of all discussion is: One must always remember Him and pray, 'Lord, grant me good tendencies.' How many can do Japa and meditation all the time? ... Cry and pray earnestly: 'Oh Master! Please draw me towards you. Please grant me peace.' By repeatedly doing this you will find peace of mind. Have faith in the Master and turn to him in prayer whenever you feel distraught."

★ From prayer for the worldly objects she is guiding us to pray for the divine love, gradually the Mother herself is taking us toward the prayer for desirelessness. Swami Ishanananda wrote one day during conversation the Mother asked, "Now to another question. Well, let me see if you can tell what object is to be prayed for from God?" Nalini-Didi replied, "Why, aunt; wisdom, devotion, objects that make you happy in life, all these are to be prayed for." The Holy Mother said "To say in one word, we must pray for Nirvasana, freedom from desire. Desire is at the

root of all sorrows, the cause of repeated births and deaths, and the main obstacle on the path of liberation."

She explained, "How much intelligence does a man possess? He is likely to ask for something other than what he really needs. ... It is wise to take refuge in Him. He will always give you whatever is necessary. However, one should pray for devotion and desirelessness; for such a prayer does no harm".

The uncertainty of life during this pandemic period revealed the importance the old proverb once more: "Life is precious, handle with prayer".

★ And, what is the best type of prayer? She uplifted her children to the state of total surrender using her unique way of teaching. She shared her own story, "I give the responsibility of my disciples to the Master. Every day pray to him, saying, 'Please look after the disciples wherever they may be.' Further I received these Mantras from the Master himself. Through them one is sure to achieve perfection," She admitted, "I do Japa for their sake and pray to the Master constantly, saying, 'Oh Lord! Awaken their consciousness. Give them liberation. There is a great deal of suffering in the world. May they not be born again!' "

One day the Holy Mother said, "However much of Japa you do, however much of work you perform all is for nothing. If Mahamaya does not open the way, is anything possible for anyone? Oh bound soul! Surrender, surrender. Then alone will She take compassion on you and leave your path open." Saying this, she recalled an incident in the Master's life at Kamarpukur. During the hot summer suddenly there was a heavy rain in the evening. The whole field was covered with water. There, seeing that many fish had accumulated, people were beating them to death with sticks. One fish kept going round and round the Master's feet. Noticing it, he said, 'Hey, do not kill this fish. It is going round my feet, surrendering itself to me. If anybody can, let him take this fish and set it free in the pond.' Then he himself set it free and came home and said, 'Ah, if anyone could surrender in this manner, then alone can he find protection.'"

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—Sri Ramakrishna; Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna; page 191



2021

*World religions*

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—Swami Vivekananda; Complete Works volume 2, page 374



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