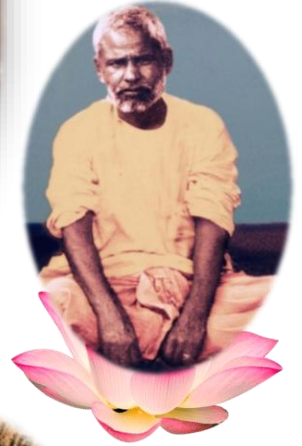


# CHICAGO CALLING



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## Purification of the Mind



Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Swami Vivekananda in his famous statement mentioned, “Each soul is potentially Divine”. What do they mean by Pure Heart and Divinity of Soul?

A fundamental question arises from here, is this world Pure? Or the living Being, having a mind, do they mean that the mind should be pure and divine, and not the body? Or in a greater sense this world?

From the Vedantic point of view, they indicated something which is neither the body, nor the mind but beyond these both without which the body and mind cannot function. From our daily experience we know in this world, we have two things:

(1) Unconscious and (2) Conscious

Conscious residing in the Unconscious making the whole thing function. Some people, they consider this consciousness as Mind. But the Vedantin through their 3-step experiment – Awaken, Dream and Dreamless condition prove that there is something which is neither the body nor the mind and that is the real consciousness and that’s why they say about this manifested world.

सत्ये अनृते मिथुनी कृत्ये जगत् -- This manifested universe is a mixture of Truth and Untruth.

Truth means that which is Eternal.

Untruth means that which changes all the time.

If we look at us, who am a product of this world having 3 things combined.

Body + Mind + Consciousness

Ordinary people thing, this body is which is “I”. Some with not clear conception, think that mixture of body-mind is which is “I”. But a true Vedantin will say, Body is temporary, because it is changing.

Mind is also constantly changing. Hence not permanent.

Therefore, that which is observed there changes, which has been termed as Atman or Self if I.

Then what is Mind?

According to Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1-5-3), ...अन्यत्रमना अभूवम्, नादर्शम्, ‘अन्यत्रमना अभूवम्, नाश्रीषम्’ इति, मनसा ह्येव पश्यति, मनसा सृणोति । कामः संकल्पो विचिकित्सा श्रद्धाऽश्रद्धा धृतिरधृतिर्हीर्षोर्भीरित्येतद्सर्वं मन एव...|| 1-5-3 ||

... anyatramanā abhūvam, nāśrauṣam’ iti, manasā hyeva paśyati, manasā sṛṇoti. Kāmaḥ saṁkalpo vicikitsā śraddhā’śraddhā dhṛtiradhṛtirhrīr-dhūrbhīr-ityetadsarvaṁ

mana eva... (Br.Up. 1-5-3)

Doubt, positive and negative thoughts, firmness, doubtfulness, shame, wisdom, fear and so forth are known as mind.

Vivekachudamani of Adi Shankara’s also supporting the view of the Upanishad mentioned, there is no other ignorance that the mind which is the cause of suffering.

न ह्यस्यविद्या मनसोऽतिरिक्ता मनो ह्यविद्या भवबन्धहेतुः ।

Immediately after that, the Great Acharya tells us how to go beyond the suffering which is in his term as ‘Bondage’.

तस्मिन्विनष्टे सकलं विनष्टं वजिम्भितेऽस्मिनसकलं विजृम्भते ॥ 169 |

When the mind is destroyed, everything ceases to be.

After knowing this, we can say: to be a blessed person whose heart should be pure, we have to stop the functioning of the mind.

How does the mind function? By eating. How does the mind eat? Through five different ways.

We have five organs of knowledge:

Eye, Ear, Nose, Tongue and Skin.

रूप, शब्द, गंध, रस, स्पर्श

If we stop eating, that means, providing the worldly objects to these organs, the mind will be calm and the moment the mind becomes calm, it reflects the purity which is consciousness.

It says, the pure consciousness which is पर ब्रम्ह or the Supreme Brahma, or परम आत्मा or Supreme Self is reflecting on the subtle part of our mind which is बुद्धि or intelligence.

According to Vedantic terminology, it is called जीवात्मा or the Individual Self.

To realize that is the goal of the Human Life and after the realization, one becomes the source of happiness by merging in the Eternal Bliss.

Therefore, the Shankaracharya urged, Viveka Chudamani (181)

तत्तनःशोधनं कार्ये प्रयत्नेन मुमुक्षुरणा  
विशुद्धे सति चैतस्मीन्मुक्तिः करफलायते ॥

In this new year, 2025, let us try to purify our mind and become free.



# Baha'i Temples

## History, Architecture, and Spiritual Significance

Shayda Safapour and John Safapour

The Baha'i community

*This article is prepared based on the lecture that was delivered on September 21, 2024 at the Home of Harmony*

### Who the Baha'is Are

The Baha'i Faith is a world religion founded in the mid-19th century, making it relatively young at just 180 years old. It was established by Baha'u'llah, whom Baha'is believe to be a manifestation of God and a Divine messenger. The Faith emerged from Iran, then known as Persia, and brought teachings that Baha'is consider relevant to the modern era.

Baha'is are actively engaged in numerous social and economic development projects, promoting education, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. Currently, there are approximately six million Baha'is living in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide. Despite being a young religion, its global presence is remarkable. In nearly any village around the world, one can find members of the Baha'i community. This widespread presence reflects the Faith's emphasis on unity, particularly the concept of "unity in diversity." This principle also influences the design of the Baha'i Houses of Worship, which will be discussed in detail.

### Key Concepts of the Baha'i Faith

Several key concepts are foundational to the Baha'i Faith. These include the unity of humanity, equality, and progressive revelation. Often, these principles are referred to as the "Three Onenesses": the Oneness of Humanity, the Oneness of Religion, and the Oneness of God. Baha'is believe that all religions and all people originate from the same

divine source, emphasizing equality among men and women and across all races.

Another unique aspect of the Faith is the harmony between science and religion. Baha'is believe that just as science evolves over time, religion also evolves to address the needs of each era. The principle of progressive revelation highlights that divine teachers and prophets have appeared throughout history, offering guidance relevant to the times in which they lived. This harmony is reflected in the design and construction of Baha'i Houses of Worship, which integrate contemporary architectural methods with spiritual symbolism.

For example, Baha'is often say that science without religion can lead to materialism and a lack of ethical consideration, while religion without science can devolve into superstition and fanaticism. Both are essential for a balanced and meaningful approach to life.

### History of the Baha'i Houses of Worship

The institution of the Baha'i House of Worship, also referred to as Mashriqu'l-Adhkár (an Arabic term meaning "the dawning place of the mention of God"), was established by Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Faith. It was first mentioned in his most holy book.

The first Baha'i House of Worship was built in the early 1900s in Ashgabat, a city in what is now Turkmenistan, but was then part of the Russian Empire. Since then, Baha'i Houses of Worship have been constructed across the continents at continental, national, and, more recently, regional levels.

## **Design of Baha'i Houses of Worship**

The design of each Baha'i House of Worship serves a spiritual purpose, reflecting many of the principles cherished by the Baha'i community. For instance, the House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, near Chicago, features nine sides, symbolizing that people from all paths of life are welcome and equal in the sight of God. The dome, a common feature across Baha'i Houses of Worship, represents a connection to the heavens, akin to clasped hands in prayer.

The balance between organic and inorganic forms, linear and nonlinear lines, reflects the harmony of science and religion. Gardens are an integral part of every Baha'i House of Worship, providing a serene environment for prayer and meditation. This aligns with the Baha'i teaching that "The Earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." Each House of Worship incorporates unique architectural elements and materials reflective of the local culture, while also maintaining a consistent theme of unity in diversity.

### **The Samoan Baha'i House of Worship**

Samoa is located in the South Pacific Ocean, between Hawaii and New Zealand. The Samoan Baha'i House of Worship, completed in 1984, reflects the culture and natural environment of the region. Its design incorporates elements that honor the traditional architecture of the Pacific islands while maintaining the universal principles of Baha'i architecture, such as nine-sided symmetry, a dome, and surrounding gardens.

Interestingly, the temple's construction had the enthusiastic support of the Samoan community, including local leaders and artisans. It was built with an emphasis on locally sourced materials, including beautiful timber and stone from the islands. The dome, a prominent feature, is supported by striking columns, and the temple is surrounded by lush, tropical gardens that enhance its reflective and meditative ambiance. This house of worship remains a significant cultural and spiritual landmark in Samoa.

## **The Indian Baha'i House of Worship**

One of the most iconic Baha'i temples is the Lotus Temple in New Delhi, India, completed in 1986. Its unique design, inspired by the lotus flower, has made it an architectural marvel and a widely recognized symbol of unity and spirituality. The temple is composed of 27 free-standing marble-clad petals arranged in clusters of three to form nine sides. Surrounding the temple are nine reflecting pools that add to its serene atmosphere.

The Lotus Temple was designed by Iranian-Canadian architect Fariborz Sahba and constructed using marble from Greece. It is open to people of all religions and has become one of the most visited buildings in the world. Its design, emphasizing light, symmetry, and openness, embodies the Baha'i ideals of unity and harmony.

### **The Chilean Baha'i House of Worship**

The most recent continental Baha'i House of Worship is located in Santiago, Chile. Completed in 2016, it is celebrated for its modern and innovative architecture. The temple was designed by Canadian architect Siamak Hariri and is constructed from cast glass and marble. Its design resembles a flower with nine translucent petals that glow with natural light during the day and radiate an ethereal light at night.

The temple is situated at the base of the Andes Mountains, offering stunning panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. Its construction involved the collaboration of artisans and engineers from around the world. The design reflects the themes of light and openness, and the temple serves as a place of prayer, meditation, and community for people of all faiths.

## **Regional and National Baha'i Houses of Worship**

In addition to the continental temples, Baha'i Houses of Worship have been constructed on national and regional levels. Recent examples include the House of Worship in Papua New

Guinea, inaugurated in 2024, and others in locations such as Cambodia, Colombia, and Kenya. These temples are often simpler in design compared to their continental counterparts but still emphasize the principles of unity and inclusivity. They serve as focal points for community life, fostering a spirit of devotion and service.

### **Purpose of Baha'i Houses of Worship**

Baha'i Houses of Worship, also known as Mashriqu'l-Adhkars (Arabic for "Dawning Place of the Mention of God"), are unique spaces dedicated to the spiritual upliftment of humanity. These temples are open to everyone, regardless of religion, race, or nationality, reflecting the Baha'i principle of the oneness of humanity. Their purpose transcends mere architectural or religious symbolism; they are designed to foster a sense of unity and communal service.

### **A Space for Worship and Prayer**

At the heart of each Baha'i temple is the concept of worship through prayer and meditation. Services include readings from the sacred scriptures of the world's major religions, set to music or spoken without any sermons, clergy, or rituals. This practice underscores the belief in the harmony of all religions and the universality of spiritual truths.

### **A Hub for Community Life**

Beyond being places of prayer, Baha'i Houses of Worship are envisioned as hubs of community life. They often have associated institutions such as schools, clinics, or social service centers. These facilities embody the Baha'i commitment to social and economic development and emphasize the harmony between spiritual and material progress.

### **Fostering Unity and Service**

The ultimate aim of Baha'i Houses of Worship is to promote the unity of humanity. By bringing people of diverse backgrounds together in a spirit of devotion and collaboration, these temples

exemplify the Baha'i teaching that worship of God should inspire service to humanity. Visitors are encouraged not only to pray but also to actively contribute to the betterment of their communities.

### **A Universal Symbol of Peace**

The inclusive design and open-door policy of these temples make them symbols of peace and reconciliation. They offer a space where people from all walks of life can find common ground, share spiritual experiences, and reflect on ways to advance collective well-being.

### **Collective Center for Worship and Service**

The conceptual framework of Baha'i Houses of Worship intertwines the purpose of religion with the purpose of the House of Worship itself. There is a profound quote from the Baha'i writings that defines faith in this age as "conscious knowledge and the performance of goodly deeds." This highlights that as individuals become aware and connect with the Divine, the aim is to find inspiration, agency, and venues for action. This transformative process helps individuals grow spiritually and physically, reflecting a balance and harmony of all aspects of life.

Similarly, Baha'i Houses of Worship are envisioned as places where individuals and communities come together to draw inspiration. These institutions are designed to become hubs of activity, offering services that contribute to the betterment of society. In the future, a House of Worship is not merely a building but a center for associated services and activities, such as health centers, schools, cultural institutions, science centers, and educational facilities. This vision creates a space where people gather for personal inspiration and collective outlets for service, fostering advancement in all aspects of life.

### **Interesting Features of the House of Worship**

One notable feature of the Baha'i Houses of Worship is their method of funding. For example, the construction of the House of Worship in



Wilmette, Illinois, was delayed due to events like the Great Depression and World Wars I and II. However, the temple was entirely funded by the Baha'is themselves—an intentional decision.

This approach underscores the idea that the House of Worship is a gift from the Baha'is to the world, offering a space for all people to find unity, serenity, and purpose. External funds were not accepted, nor will they be in the future. This policy symbolizes an act of love and hospitality, akin to inviting someone into one's home and ensuring they feel welcome without expectation of payment. It reflects the Baha'i community's dedication and voluntary stewardship, demonstrating collective effort and unity on both local and global scales.

### Other Unique Features

Baha'i Houses of Worship are distinct from many other religious spaces due to several unique features:

- **Inclusivity of Sacred Texts:** Readings during services include texts from all major religions, such as the Torah, Quran, and Baha'i scriptures. This practice is intentional, fostering a sense of inclusivity and welcoming for people of diverse faiths.

- **Absence of Sermons or Rituals:** There are no sermons, rituals, or clergy in the Baha'i faith. Services involve readings from the Word of God, without commentary or lecturing, maintaining a focus on the sacred texts themselves.

- **Music Without Instruments:** While music is cherished in Baha'i worship, only the human voice is used in Houses of Worship. This results in beautiful, a cappella choral performances, often heard during services, such as those held on Sundays in Wilmette.

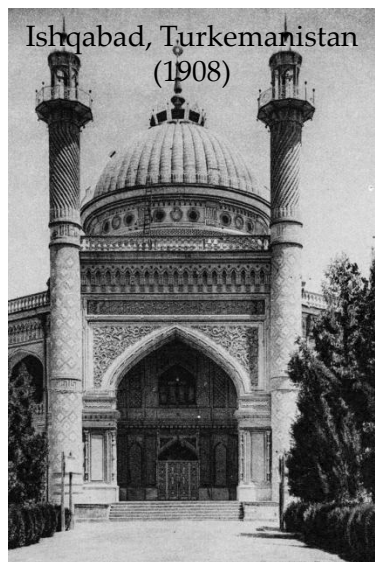
### Blessed Is the Spot

To conclude, we reflect on a brief but profound prayer revealed by Baha'u'llah:

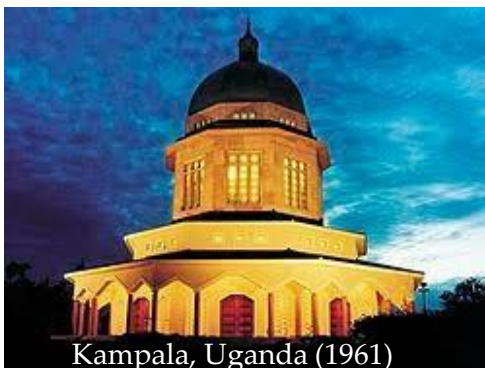
Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island, and the meadow where mention of God hath been made, and His praise glorified.

This prayer emphasizes the sanctity of any place where the Divine is sought and service is inspired. It is our hope that if you visit a Baha'i House of Worship, you will find it to be a place where you can connect with your inner Divine and be inspired to lead a life full of purpose and service.

### Baha'i Houses of Worship



Ishqabad, Turkmenistan  
(1908)



Kampala, Uganda (1961)



Chicago (1912  
started,  
1953  
completed)



Sydney, Australia (1961)



Bihar Sharif, India  
(under  
construction)



## A Taste of Sufi Practices and Psychology (2)

Dr. Marcia Hermansen

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*This article is prepared based on the lecture that was delivered on  
November 02, 2024 at the Home of Harmony*

### What is Sufism?

This presentation focuses on Sufi practices and psychology. Initially, I will provide a brief overview of Sufism, its origins, and its practices. Sufism is the mystical path within the Islamic tradition. Mysticism, broadly speaking, involves a direct experience of the ultimate or divine being, often in theistic terms, in the here and now.

For context, Muslims believe that mysticism was introduced alongside Islam by the Prophet Muhammad and that the Quran, the Islamic holy book, offers guidance on the mystical path. For instance, the Quran states, "We are closer to you than your jugular vein," emphasizing divine immanence. Another verse mentions, "The signs of God are on the horizons and in yourself," suggesting the presence of the divine both externally and internally. Sufism, therefore, involves seeking God not only in the world but also within oneself, following an inner spiritual path.

### Sources of Sufi Practices and Psychology

The Quran is the primary source of Sufi practices, complemented by the teachings and personal example of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet modeled the mystical path through acts such as retreating to the Cave of Hira for revelation and experiencing a mystical ascension, known as the Mi'raj. These foundational elements provide the core framework for Sufism.

Sufi psychology also draws from external influences, particularly the Greek philosophical tradition, including the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Neoplatonism. Early Islamic scholars engaged with this heritage, incorporating its wisdom into

Islamic thought. Additionally, Sufism has been shaped by the spiritual traditions of the regions it encountered, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Turkish Shamanism, blending these influences into its practices.

### The Spread of Sufism

Sufism spread alongside the expansion of Islamic territories. Within 30 years of the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 CE, Islam had spread across North Africa, Central Asia, Iran, and parts of the Byzantine Empire. Sufism engaged deeply with the spiritual traditions of these regions, including India, Southeast Asia, and Africa, fostering a synthesis with local monastic and mystical traditions.

This integration allowed Sufism to resonate with diverse cultures, emphasizing unity and the pervasive presence of the divine. Sufi mystics played a central role in introducing Islamic spirituality to new populations, often adapting their practices to align with the spiritual sensibilities of these cultures.

### Sufi Theorists of the 10th and 11th Centuries

Sufi psychology began to develop into a structured system during the 10th and 11th centuries, thanks to the intellectual efforts of scholars like Al-Ghazali. These theorists formulated detailed guides on Sufi practices and psychological concepts. Sufism became organized into "orders" or tariqas, each representing a distinct path or method to God, akin to the margas in Hinduism.

The Sufi path involves stages and states. For example, the journey might begin with fear of God, progress to being overwhelmed by divine love, and culminate in annihilation in the divine



consciousness (fana) and returning to the world with that awareness (baqa). These teachings emphasize both the personal and communal transmission of spiritual insights through discipleship.

### **Eight Naqshbandi Sufi Rules**

The Naqshbandi Sufi order, originating in Central Asia, offers specific practices to cultivate mindfulness and spirituality. These include awareness of breath, attentiveness to one's steps, and continuous remembrance of the divine. While not identical to the Buddhist Eightfold Path, the similarity highlights cultural exchanges between Islamic Sufism and the Buddhist traditions of Central Asia.

### **Sufi Psychology**

Sufi psychology is grounded in theological anthropology, exploring the human condition as a balance between matter and spirit. The Quran describes humanity as created from clay but infused with the divine spirit, reflecting this dual nature. Al-Ghazali and other Sufi scholars elaborated on this, describing the human soul as existing between angelic and animalistic tendencies.

Sufis recognize the ego (nafs) as both the self and a source of egotism, requiring discipline and cultivation. Practices such as fasting and meditation help subdue the lower drives and elevate the soul. Sufi psychology also examines emotional and spiritual fluctuations, akin to concepts like St. John of the Cross's "Dark Night of the Soul." These cycles of contraction and expansion are seen as natural phases of spiritual growth.

Through these teachings and practices, Sufism provides a comprehensive framework for spiritual development, drawing on both Islamic principles and broader philosophical and cultural influences.

### **Sufi Psychology (Levels of Nafs)**

Sufi psychologists describe various levels of the soul, terms for which are derived from the Quran. The "Nafs al-Ammarah" refers to the commanding

self, which compels individuals toward desires, comparable to the "rooster, pig, and snake" in Buddhist thought or the "id" in Freudian psychology. It represents raw, primal instincts. The next level, the "Nafs al-Lawwama," or the blaming self, is akin to Freud's superego. This level internalizes societal and parental norms, inducing feelings of guilt and self-correction, or even leading one to impose corrections on others.

Progressing beyond these initial levels, the soul reaches the states of peace, contentment, and ultimately becoming pleasing to God. These levels are also grounded in Quranic terminology. Sufis integrate practical wisdom, Greek philosophy, and Islamic concepts, illustrating an expansion of the soul through these stages. The task is to realize these levels within oneself, as all individuals possess the divine breath; the challenge lies in overcoming confusion or obfuscation to awaken this realization.

### **Sufi Philosophy: Descent and Ascent**

Sufi philosophy emphasizes a non-dualistic understanding of reality, where the Divine is not separate from existence. Among the three Abrahamic traditions, Islam is often seen as the most monistic, viewing everything as one. Sufism aligns with the idea of qualified non-dualism, asserting that while the world is not God, it is also not separate from God.

This philosophical framework draws on Neoplatonism to explain the relationship between the many and the one. In Neoplatonic thought, the "One" (God, or Ultimate Reality) emanates existence. This emanation flows through various levels, culminating in the material world. In Islamic terms, the Divine manifests through attributes and names, such as "The Merciful" or "The Compassionate," which are reflected uniquely in every soul. Through spiritual practices, individuals can awaken these attributes and ascend back toward the Divine, following a path exemplified by the prophets.

### **The Spheres of Descent**

The Islamic perspective of descent begins with

the Divine Essence, progressing through non-material existence, Divine attributes, and names, and finally manifesting in the material world. This journey reflects the Quranic concept of witnessing: "Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah." Medieval Sufi cosmology mapped this process, often incorporating elements such as the zodiac and the Divine names, providing a rich, symbolic framework for understanding the cosmos.

### **How to Ascend/Return**

The spiritual challenge lies in ascending or returning to the Divine. The Quran states, "Indeed, we come from Allah and to Allah we return." For Sufis, this return involves purification of the soul, polishing the heart, and engaging in practices like prayer, which is described as the path of ascent. By recognizing the signs of God within oneself and the world, one progresses spiritually, drawing closer to God.

### **Contemporary Psychological Interpretations**

Sufism continues to adapt, integrating contemporary psychology with traditional teachings. The book *Physicians of the Heart* exemplifies this by combining post-Freudian concepts with the 99 beautiful names of Allah. Contemplating these names serves as a spiritual practice for self-healing, addressing modern psychological challenges like family dynamics and personal traumas.

### **Lata'if (Subtle Spiritual Centers)**

The concept of Lata'if refers to subtle spiritual centers within the soul. These centers, named for attributes like the heart, spirit, and secret, form a map of spiritual development. Sufis in various regions, including Central Asia and India, spoke of these centers, drawing parallels to systems like Hindu chakras. Ascending through these centers is associated with colors, vibrations, and connections to the prophets, offering a pathway for spiritual refinement.

### **How Sufism Parallels the Hindu Margas**

Sufism shares similarities with Hindu spiritual paths (margas). The Jnana Marga (path of wisdom)

aligns with Sufi philosophy, emphasizing discernment and understanding Divine names and cosmology. The Bhakti Marga (path of devotion) parallels the Sufi devotion to Allah, the Prophet, and one's spiritual guide (murshid), facilitating a connection to the Divine. The Karma Yoga (path of action without attachment) resonates with Sufi principles of performing duties with beauty and awareness, letting go of ego while recognizing God in every action.

### **Levels and Lata'if Spiritual Centers**

Sufi practices include physical exercises and contemplative techniques that refine spiritual centers. These levels progress from the material (earth, fire, air, water) to higher dimensions of the soul, such as the heart, intelligence, and spirit. The highest levels transcend the animalistic and material, aspiring toward the angelic realm.

### **Sufi Cosmology and Dhikr**

A central Sufi practice is Dhikr (remembrance of God). Islamic theology emphasizes remembering the covenant made with Allah before birth, affirming Him as Lord. Through Dhikr, individuals awaken to this reality, reciting phrases like "There is no God but God" to cultivate a state of constant remembrance.

### **Dhikr as a Concept, Practice, and State**

Dhikr encompasses a concept, a ritual practice, and a state of being. It involves repeating sacred phrases or the shahada, with variations across Sufi orders. The ultimate goal is to achieve a continuous state of divine remembrance, becoming a person of Dhikr.

### **Chishti Tariqa and Chishti Dhikr**

The Chishti order, originating in India, emphasizes Dhikr practices. The shrine of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Rajasthan, is a central site for this lineage, reflecting its rich spiritual heritage. The practices aim to deepen the connection to the Divine, embodying the teachings of this esteemed Sufi tradition.

# Travelogue, 2025: New Zealand

Swami Ishatmananda and Hrishikesh Saigaonkar

Our eagerly anticipated journey to Auckland on the 13th of January, 2025, encountered an unexpected turn of events. Just about four days prior to our departure, we received a notification that our flight from Houston had been canceled due to unforeseen technical issues. In no time, our dedicated volunteers sprang into action, tirelessly working to secure alternative travel arrangements. A new route via Los Angeles was arranged, and though the timing remained almost identical to our original flight, we were still full of optimism.

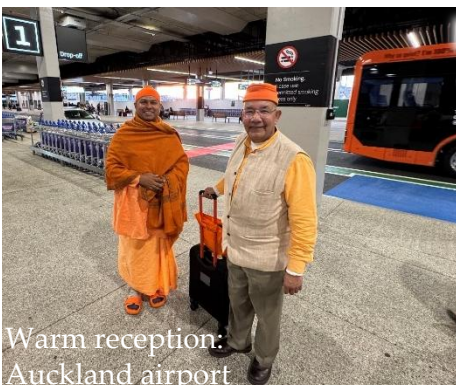
Despite Los Angeles being surrounded by raging wildfires, we remained hopeful that the flight would proceed as planned, keeping a watchful eye on developments at the airport. With a sense of anticipation, we boarded the plane from Chicago on the morning of January 13th. After a 3-hour layover at LAX, we finally took off for Auckland, marking the beginning of our 18-hour journey across the Pacific.

We landed in Auckland early in the morning, at 6:00 AM on January 15th, to be warmly greeted by Vedanta Center Auckland's minister in charge, Swami Tadananda, along with Swami Devishananda. Auckland, situated on the North Island of New Zealand, immediately revealed itself as a fascinating blend of cultures.

The city's demographic is primarily composed of both Pākehā (white New Zealanders) and

Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, who make up about 20% of the population. Over the years, intermarriage has led to a mix of features, and the growing migrant community adds further layers to the city's vibrant multicultural tapestry. Indians, the largest migrant group, are an educated and prominent presence in business, technology, and finance. New Zealand, with its two main islands—the North and South Islands—is home to a total population of approximately 5 million people. The capital, Wellington, is located on the southern end of the North Island, while Auckland lies toward the upper region. The country's economy is largely agricultural, with a political system based on the British model. The Prime Minister serves a 3-year term, and the country operates with a parliamentary government.

We spent the first day at the newly inaugurated Vedanta Farm – a 125 acre retreat center away from the city in the picturesque town of Glen Murray – about a 1hr drive from the city going along hills and ridges. It is a serene retreat center set amidst forest and open pastures, 50% of which is designated for development, remaining protected land. The guest house offers cozy accommodation for up to six people, with additional rooms available in a separate building down the road. The property is home to a variety



Warm reception:  
Auckland airport



Shrine at the retreat center with Maori inscriptions



At Glen Murray



Entrance to the retreat center at Glen Murray



Picnic with the Sada family at Auckland Botanical Gardens



of wildlife, including goats, peacocks, deer, and turkeys, making for a delightful natural experience. The Swamis generously prepared a delicious, home-cooked meal of khichuri, beans, eggplant stew, and puri-srikhand, which we savored with great appreciation. At the retreat center, silently working hard is the LUBA AI robotic lawn mower. With an all-wheel-drive design, it can mow up to 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> with excellent cut quality. Swami Tadananda programs it through an app remotely from the city and can monitor its activity from there. Luba goes about its task all day until it needs to recharge.

The following morning, on January 16th, we ventured to the Auckland Botanical Gardens for a peaceful stroll. As we drove towards the Botanical Gardens, we passed by familiar American sights like KFC and McDonald's, an intriguing blend of modernity amidst the lush greenery of New Zealand's landscape. The gardens, along with the nearby Lynn Mall, are easily accessible from the Vedanta Center by bus or train.

After soaking in the beauty of the lush surroundings, Swami Ishatmanandaji Maharaj

delivered an inspiring talk titled 'Mantra Shakti and Japam' following the evening arati ceremony. Approximately 50 devotees gathered for the talk, and the evening concluded with a communal dinner (prasada) that left everyone feeling nourished in body and spirit.

On our final day in Auckland, we visited the Auckland War Memorial Museum, which houses a remarkable collection showcasing the region's rich history. One of the highlights was the Maori Cultural Experience, a captivating performance by indigenous artists that introduced visitors to the Maori way of life, including songs and rituals.

Next, we ventured to Muriwai Beach along Auckland's western coast. The black-sand beach, with its powerful waves, is a popular spot for surfers, making it a serene yet dynamic destination. The surrounding trails of eroded scenic viewpoints of the coastline and led to a nesting habitat for a large gannet colony—coastal seabirds native to the region.

We left the ashrama the following morning, on January 18th for our next destination – Fiji.

(More photos on the next page).



The LUBA AI Robotic lawn mower



Shopping at the New Lynn mall - just a few minutes from the City Center Ashrama



Shrine at the New Lynn Ashrama





Left:  
Arati followed  
by a talk by  
Swami  
Ishatmanandaji  
Maharaj  
Right: Outside the  
Maori War  
Memorial  
Museum with the  
Pacific Ocean  
behind



Left:  
Muriwai  
Beach

Right: At  
the  
Auckland  
airport,  
next  
destination  
– Fiji.



Once disciple of Swami Vivekananda raised a question when Swami Trigunatitananda, a brother disciple of Swamiji, was struggling to sell “Udbodhan”, a Bengali magazine of the Ramakrishna Mission, in its early days. It seemed odd in the devotee's eyes that sannyasins in ochre robes should go from door to door.

Swamiji answered:

“By the spread of new ideas within the country the public at large will be benefited. Do you think this unselfish work is any way inferior to devotional practices? Our object is to do good to humanity. We have no idea of making money from the income of this paper. We have renounced everything and have no wives or children to provide for after our death. If the paper be a success, the whole of its income will be spent in the service of humanity. Its surplus money will be profitably spent in the opening of monasteries and homes of service in different places and all sorts of work of public utility. We are not certainly working like householders with the plan of filling our own pockets. Know for certain that all our movements are for the good of others.”

**BHAGAVATA (26):**  
**THE EXCHANGE OF SRI KRISHNA AND YOGAMAYA**  
**Swami Ishatmananda**

The 10<sup>th</sup> skanda, the longest section having 90 chapters in the best part of the Bhagavata Purana. Why best Part?

Because it teaches Bhakti or Divine Love.

Through the method of Bhakti, Kiva, individual being feels that the Almighty Lord as his 'Own'.

King Parikshit, the son of the young hero of the Mahabharata Arjuna, the grand son of while waiting for his death was listening the explanation of Sri Suka.

Sri Suka was telling how the One without a second, Supreme Being created the Universe, How with the help of the Manu's, the world was being populated.

How it was necessary for the Supreme Being to take the form of Maha-Vishnu to guide the devas.

Sri Suka narrated the saga of the solar and Lunar Dynasties and also about the righteous King Yadu.

And Sri Suka also mentioned that to protect His Creation Mahavishnu incarnated.

King Parikshit, then fervently requested Sri Suka to narrate the excellences of that Lord who saved him in the womb of his mother. From the dangerous weapon of Ashwatthama, the son of Drona. The king requested the sage fervently –

वीर्याणि तस्याखिलदेहभाजा-मन्तर्बहिः पूरुषकालरूपैः ।  
प्रयच्छतो मृत्युमुतामृतं चमायामनुष्यस्य वदस्व विद्वन् ॥  
*vīryāṇi tasyākhila-deha-bhājām antar bahiḥ pūruṣa-kāla-rūpaiḥ*

*prayacchato mṛtyum utāmṛtam ca māyā-manuṣyasya vadasva vidvan.* Bhagavatam 10/1/7

Bidyan O learned One (Suka) please tell me about that Supreme God appeared as Human (Maya-Manushya), who is the indwelling spirit and beyond Time.

Showering Immortality on those who take refuge in Him and Giving Death to those who go away from Him.

King Parikshit was curious to know why God took birth as the son of a sister - Devaki and then killed His mother's brother Kamsa?

Protecting the sister and punishing her brother!!  
Modern mind may say – what is going on?

God is becoming human, protecting one, killing one – Even person like Arjuna also was confused and asked , आख्याहि मे को भवानुग्ररूपो नमोऽस्तु ते देववर प्रसीद ।

विज्ञातुमिच्छामि भवन्तमाद्यं न हि प्रजानामि तव प्रवृत्तिम् ॥  
*ākhyāhi me ko bhavān ugra-rūpo namo 'stu te deva-vara prasīda*

*vijñātum ichchhāmi bhavantam ādyaṁ na hi prajānāmi tava pravṛttim* (Gita 11/31)

Krishna, Arjuna's friend suddenly took magnificent form as Vishwarupa – hence Arjuna wanted to know who are you? Tell me who are you in Fierce form – have mercy. I desire to know thee. I do not understand your purpose.

This is known as Avatara – Maya-Manushya - Appearing as human but in reality God is unborn.

Ramayana also declared (Yuddha Kanda 119/27) – वधार्थम् रावणस्य प्रविष्टो मानुशिम् तनूम् ।

To punish Ravana I have entered into human body.

About the birth of Sri Krishna we find in Bhagavata (10.1.21) – Brahma heard a message within his heart and then communicated to all the Devas – The Lord is going to be born as the son of Devaki and Vasudeva.

Adishesha will be born as his elder brother  
Lords power 'Maya' will perform two tasks:

(1) To change the unborn baby from Devaki's 7th child to Rohini - 2nd wife of Vasudeva

(2) Herself take birth as the daughter of Yashoda and Nanda

(3) Put all the prison guards to sleep and other arrangements to perform the exchange of Sri Krishna and Yogamaya.



## Introduction to the Cover Page: Colors of Love and Service

*Pravrajika Matriprana*  
*Sarada Convent*  
*Vedanta Society of Southern California*

The first issue of “Chicago Calling” usually comes out sometime in March — when it is spring in the Northern Hemisphere and autumn in the Southern. The equinox passes over the world, bringing a wonderful equilibrium between day and night, warmth and cold, and other opposing forces across this blue planet. This balance, this coexistence, is possible only through love. Many mark spring as the season of love.

The cover image (partly taken from pngtree.com) offers glimpses of the celebrations that were enjoyed during these first three months, remembered with love and joy.

The flow of joy is present at all times, but we realize it only when our minds calm down — whether through the fulfillment of wishes or prayers. Some call that wish-fulfilling tree Kalpataru — Sri Ramakrishna. Others may see it by a different name and form. Yet, whatever almighty one prays to, whatever goodwill one kneels before, it is nothing but the wish-fulfilling tree of their imagination. Various sages gathered under the Sri Ramakrishna tree, bringing with them the gifts of love, knowledge, and devotion. Foremost among them, of course, was Swami Vivekananda — the embodiment of Sri Ramakrishna himself. Standing in its shade, he gave freely to all who came under the tree with any wishes — and even to those who did not come. His gift of love extends to future generations as well. The greatest of his gifts is a new path to liberation — liberation through loving service: service to God. That God, whose finest manifestation, according to Sri Ramakrishna, is found in human beings.

Sri Ramakrishna, through Vivekananda and his brother disciples, channeled this all-devouring, all-

encompassing love. Not only for human beings, through Swamiji's love, beginning with Bagha the dog and Motru the goat, all attained immortality in the hearts of Vivekananda's devotees. Every year on January 12, lovers of Vivekananda throughout India, observe his birthday as National Youth Day in addition to celebration according to the lunar calendar. This year, ritual worship was performed on January 21. Most probably two closest brother disciples of Swamiji are Swamis Brahmananda and Saradananda. In January their birthdays were celebrated on January 31 and on January 5, respectively. The former is known as the "Spiritual Son of Sri Ramakrishna," while Sri Sarada Devi introduced the latter as "my load carrier."

Swami Saradananda was two years younger than Swamis Vivekananda and Brahmananda, though they all came to Sri Ramakrishna around the same time. They were all in their early twenties. One day, Sri Ramakrishna suddenly sat on Saradananda's lap. At the time, he was known by his pre-monastic name, Sarat. Sri Ramakrishna wanted to see how much load he could carry. In later years, it was heard from Mother Sarada Devi that the power of God was in him: 'Only Sarat can carry my load.' Of course, it would be a mistake to understand him merely as Mother's dedicated attendant; he was also the first and lifelong secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

During her final illness, the Holy Mother once said, "I shall depart with Sarat on my lap." And again, just before leaving her body, that very Mother called Sarat and entrusted him with the responsibility of those who had taken refuge in her. Saradananda had wholehearted love for Swami Vivekananda, and that same love extended to all. He took care of them for the rest of his life.

Poor widowed illiterate mothers were ill-treated and unable to carry out bank transactions. He helped them so that they could receive some monthly interest. Helpless housewives, when they felt that their jewelry—their ultimate source of security—was unsafe at home, entrusted it to him so that their family members could not cheat them. At the same time, Sarala and other completely renounced daughters of the Holy Mother received spiritual shelter from him. He was the main instrument in the making of the first president of the Sri Sarada Math. He trained Sarala, blessed her with Tantric Sannyasa, and named her Sri Bharati. At that time, Sri Sarada Math was still in the womb of the future. When the Math was officially founded, she received Vedic Sannyasa and was named Pravrajika Bharatiprana.

The foundation of Sri Sarada Math is a story of a dream becoming a reality. That dream was envisioned by Swamiji. It was in his imagination that, by the Ganges, a Math would be established where women renunciates would practice Vedanta. The very thought of forming an independent organization of Vedantic Sannyasins and bringing it to fruition was undoubtedly revolutionary. It opened a whole new horizon. Otherwise, the practice of spirituality by women in India, at an individual level, is not something new. There were Brahnavadinis—women philosophers during the Vedic age. Later, many women ascetics joined Buddhist monasteries, which were controlled by monks, with Yashodhara, the divine consort of Lord Buddha, as an example. Saint Meera left her home out of love for Krishna, while Sri Vishnupriya, the divine consort of Sri Chaitanya, remained at home and lived her whole life following the ideal of Mahaprabhu.

Sri Chaitanya had a monastic organization for the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, but not for women. When Vishnupriya asked for his advice, he instructed her to stay at home, take God's name, and arrange for *nāma-sankirtan* for fellow Vaishnavas. She followed his guidance. Her spiritual journey is a unique one. Not much is known about her birth; some say she

was born on Saraswati Puja (this year it was observed on February 2), Sri Panchami day. No authentic photograph of her is available. She began her journey toward God-realization after Sri Chaitanya left home. Some say she was about sixteen years old at that time. In the path of devotion, one can engage in spiritual practices by forming five types of relationships with God: shanta (neutrality), dasya (servitorship), sakhya (friendship), vatsalya (parental affection), and madhura (conjugal love, amorous). The last one is considered the highest, as it encompasses all the other four moods. It is also meant for the most spiritually competent seekers. Following this path, *madhura-bhava*, she realized the Sri Krishna-Gauranga *Achintya-Bheda-Abheda* philosophy in its deepest sense. Sri Vishnupriya was the embodiment of devotion. Her life itself serves as a teaching for anyone who loves God and follows the Vaishnava tradition. She founded a temple with an image of Gauranga, where bhajan and kirtan were performed at all times. The chanting of the Lord's name and His glory continued unceasingly. Like Mother Saraswati, she is the bestower of the essence of devotion—"*Bhakti-Vijnāna-Dātri*."

Music and chanting are major pillars in the path of devotional practice. Swamiji sang to Thakur with total absorption, and whenever devotees heard Sri Ramakrishna sing, they forgot the world. Swami Vivekananda taught music to Saradananda and his other brother disciples. He had a particularly special relationship with Saradananda, as the Master himself had entrusted Sarat's responsibility to him. Years later, during Swamiji's birth anniversary celebrations, devotees would often see Saradananda tuning the tanpura and saying, "Today is my ustad's (music expert) birthday; I have to sing a couple of songs." The mind of Swami Brahmananda was also deeply attuned to music—both vocal and instrumental. Though he did not sing himself, he would enter a transcendental state through the words and melodies of devotional music. As the president of

the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, he often visited different centers. Along with his attendants, one or two singer-monks were also included in his group. It was Swami Brahmananda who introduced Ramanama Sankirtan in the Ramakrishna Order.

After Brahmananda left home, his wife, Vishweshwari, like Sri Vishnupriya, lived a very austere life, following in the footsteps of her husband while staying at home. When Brahmananda was in Vrindavan engaged in his spiritual practices, she had a dream that her husband had left his body, and immediately afterward, she also gave up her body.

However the story of Swami Yogananda's wife is a little different. Swami Yogananda (whose birth anniversary falls on March 18th this year, according to the lunar calendar) was one of the inner-circle members of Sri Ramakrishna and a disciple of the Holy Mother. Swami Yogananda's ancestral house was in Dakshineswar itself, and he would visit Sri Ramakrishna frequently. God-realization was the goal of his life, and he wished to remain unmarried to lead a spiritual life. However, under pressure from his parents, he was forced to marry. Unable to accept this, he abandoned the relationship, ran away to the Master, and immersed himself in a life of intense austerity. Later, he was appointed as an attendant to the Holy Mother and became the first person to be initiated by her. The Mother was pleased with his service and used to call him her "own." When the Mother stayed at Nilambar Mukherjee's house in Belur or at Udbodhan, Yogananda's wife, like other women devotees, also found shelter with the Mother and had the opportunity to serve her. However, Yogananda remained unaffected by his wife's presence. From his behavior, it was evident that he had completely erased the memory of his marriage. Beyond his service to the Mother, Swami Yogananda was always ready to serve anyone in need—physically, financially, or spiritually—regardless of the circumstances. Yogananda's wife also served while keeping herself completely

hidden.

By observing the lives of the divine consorts of God-incarnations like Sri Vishnupriya and Ma Sarada, or dedicated devotees like Vishweshwari and Yogananda's wife, one can say that when women embrace a life free from excitement or complaints—devoting themselves to loving service, austerity, and sadhana—they attain a unique spiritual elevation as human beings. This month, on the 8<sup>th</sup>, the whole world reflected on Women's Day from different perspectives. The power of love is the very cause of creation and sustenance, and in love alone, everything ultimately dissolves. February 14th is especially dedicated to the celebration of love. Though it has been greatly commercialized, it still serves a positive purpose by encouraging people to think about someone beyond one's own body-mind complex.

This year, March happens to be the month of Ramadan in Islam. For a month, devotees fast and pray. At the end comes the joyous Eid al-Fitr. That joy is not confined to food and festivities but also includes the joy of giving through Zakat al-Fitr.

Devotion to Shiva makes one aware of the difference between love and lust, helping one discern whether it is true love or mere attachment. He is known as the God of Destruction—wherever there is lust and attachment, he destroys them. Shiva is called "Madanāntaka bhakta-vatsala"—the destroyer of the god of lust and the affectionate protector of devotees. Per lunar calendar this year on February 26, devotees of Lord Shiva worshiped him with great reverence. Out of love for his devotees, Shiva himself comes as jiva—the individual soul. However, it is difficult to realize Shiva in jiva unless one first sees Shiva within. Sri Ramakrishna (his 190<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary, according to the lunar calendar, was celebrated on March 1) was the very embodiment of Shiva. Once, on his pilgrimage to Varanasi, the land of Shiva, his group halted at Baidyanath Dhām, another sacred pilgrimage site dedicated to Shiva. There, he urged the landlord Mathur Mohan, the group



leader, to arrange food, clothing, and basic necessities like soap and oil for all the famine-stricken people in the area, at least for that day. The cost was high, and the landlord was reluctant. But the Master insisted, saying that he saw no reason to move forward unless these poor people were served. Pure love alone can cure the disease of worldliness—and indeed, Vaidyanath means "Lord of the Physicians."

Interestingly, there is also a Shakti Peeth nearby. According to Hindu mythology, different Shakti Peethas were formed wherever the body parts of the Divine Mother fell. It is believed that her heart (Hridaya) fell here. Is it possible to serve anyone without a heart full of love? That is why Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of divine love, revealed a new path of liberation—through service—from this very land of Shiva. This vision was later carried out by Swami Vivekananda, who embodied Shiva in action. The application of Seva Yoga was evident in the lives of all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

It was service alone that brought Latu, a young, illiterate teenager, to his Master. He primarily knew Hindi, while the Master's mother tongue was Bengali. Latu first visited Sri Ramakrishna with one of the Master's lay devotees, as he was working at that devotee's house at the time. Upon seeing the Master, all he desired was to serve him. The Master accepted him wholeheartedly. Not much is known about his life prior to meeting the Master. Even his birthday—according to the lunar calendar, the full moon day of Magh (which this year fell on February 12)—was assigned later out of respect. Since he was just a young boy, the Master asked him to serve the Holy Mother. However, Latu had a strong tendency to meditate. The Master once told him, "She, on whom you are meditating, is looking for helping hands to make dough for chapatis (flat bread)." At that moment, the connection between service and meditation was established. His sincerity transformed him to Swami Adbhutananda. He spent the later part of his life in Varanasi, the city of Yogi Shiva.

However, whenever seekers of God approached him, he imparted spiritual advice and helped many monks develop their spiritual lives in the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. He used to say that among the three moods—"My God," "I am God," and "I am God's"—the third one is the best. This attitude grants the joy of freedom through surrender. His love and service to the Master, the Mother, his brother disciples, and the devotees of the Master flowed as an uninterrupted stream of yoga itself.

The loving service of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna spread throughout the world, beginning in the West. Swami Turiyananda was one of them. A Jnana Yogi, he had profound knowledge of the scriptures. In August 1899, he arrived at the Vedanta Society of New York to assist Swami Vivekananda in preaching Vedanta. Swami Vivekananda introduced him by saying, "In Turiyananda, you will see Vedanta personified." A year later, on July 8, 1900, Swami Turiyananda traveled to Los Angeles. He stayed with the Mead sisters in the same house in South Pasadena, where Swami Vivekananda had been hosted for over a month. In the garden of this house, Turiyananda initiated the elder sister, Carrie, giving her the spiritual name Lalita. She later donated their farmhouse in Hollywood to Swami Prabhavananda, which became the foundation for the Vedanta Society of Los Angeles. Today, the house in South Pasadena is owned by the Vedanta Society of Southern California. The second sister, Alice, helped Swami Vivekananda establish the Vedanta Society in San Francisco. Her spiritual name was Shanti, and she also assisted Swami Turiyananda when he took charge of the Vedanta Society in San Francisco.

Swami Turiyananda later founded Shanti Ashrama, where he guided spiritual aspirants, leading them through rigorous and austere practices to develop their spiritual lives. This year, several Vedanta Societies in California are celebrating 125 years since Swami Vivekananda's arrival in the state. This year also marks 125 years

since the arrival of Swami Turiyananda -- Swamiji's comrade. He performed intense austerities at Shanti Ashrama and once remarked, the fruit of 200 years of this sadhana is stored here. He advised, "it is life that counts.... Life creates life. Serve! Serve! Serve! That is the great teching. Be humble. Be servant to all. Only he who knows how to serve is fit to rule." In late May 1902 Swami Turiyananda left for India, and Swami Trigunatitananda came to take charge of the Vedanta Society of San Francisco on January 2, 1903.

Swami Trigunatitananda was known as Saradaprasanna in his pre-monastic life. He was born just a day before Vasanta Panchami or Saraswati Puja. Another name for Saraswati is Sarada—as if he was born to please (Prasanna) Mother Sarada. Like Swami Yogananda, he was a member of Sri Ramakrishna's inner circle, received mantra initiation from Sri Sarada Devi, and served as an attendant to the Holy Mother. Swami Trigunatitananda was the editor of "Udbodhan," the Bengali magazine of the Ramakrishna Math in its formative years. It was an extremely difficult endeavor due to financial struggles, but he took it on as his sadhana.

From 1903, his service to the Divine Mother took a new course when he was assigned to spread Vedanta in the West, based at the Vedanta Society of San Francisco. The beginning was challenging. The main conflict revolved around whether the center should follow the Shanti Ashrama model or function as a city-based society. He wanted both—a Vedanta retreat centered around Shanti Ashrama, while the Society grew within the city.

Gradually, he took full control and structured the entire organization. He was the first to establish a temple in the West, initiate regular classes and lectures, publish a Vedanta magazine titled *Voice of Freedom*, and run both a monastery and a convent, creating what became a Vedanta colony. In addition, he frequently visited Los Angeles to develop another Vedanta Society in Southern California. The Mead sisters hosted him

at their South Pasadena home, just as they had hosted Swamis Vivekananda and Turiyananda. His love and dedication for Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Swamiji, his Sangha, and the devotees were unparalleled. However, it was at the moment of his death that he manifested the true heart of a Vedantin, surpassing all expectations and leaving behind an exemplary legacy. A psychologically challenged member of the Vedanta Society attacked Swami Trigunatitananda with a bomb while bowing down to him. The attacker died on the spot, and the Swami was severely injured, knowing he was going to die. In that critical moment, he asked, "How is he (attacker) doing?" This is true love.

In true love, all colors dissolve into one another. In spring, nature's colors return to nature. It is a time for the celebration of the festival of colors. In the color of consciousness, creation becomes vibrant and alive. In reality, there is nothing that can be called color. It is all about light. The color of an object is determined by how light falls on it. The color one perceives in a particular place depends on time, space, culture, and circumstances.

The full moon day of spring is celebrated as the festival of colors. This year, it is being celebrated on March 14. Sri Krishna, the most colorful character in Indian mythology, played with colors alongside the cowherd boys and the gopis of Vrindavan. On this day, Gauranga, the "Golden Incarnation" of Sri Krishna, appeared in Navadwip in 1486. Though he showed his six armed form as Rama (bow and arrow), flute (Krishna), danda and pitcher (of a sannyasi, Chaitanya), he was an embodiment of divine love of Sri Radha-Krishna. Regardless of age, caste, color, gender, or religion, anyone who took the name of the beloved Krishna became dear to him.

But it did not end there. About 400 years later, that divine love was once again personified in Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. A devotee once asked Holy Mother Sarada Devi, "Are Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna the same incarnation?" She replied, "Yes. The same moon, again and again."

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