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Sri Ramakrishna Worshipped Across the World

Once, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, pointing to his own photograph, remarked that one day this very image would be worshipped in households across the world. On another occasion, he said to the Divine Mother Sarada Moni, "I see in my vision that people with fair skin are coming to me."

At that time, these words would have seemed almost impossible to believe.

Sri Ramakrishna was then an unknown priest in a small temple garden at Dakshineswar, near Kolkata. Only a handful of devotees knew him. Occasionally, he would visit homes in Calcutta, where small gatherings would listen to his divine words. India was under British rule, yet even then, it was rare for ordinary people to encounter Europeans. Only a small number of affluent and educated Indians had such interactions.

Against this backdrop, how extraordinary—and seemingly improbable—were his words: that people from distant lands would come to worship him, and that his image would be revered across the globe.

Today, however, we are witnessing the fulfilment of that vision.

Friends and devotees, I have recently been travelling across Europe, and I invite you to journey with me in spirit.

In the Netherlands, I visited the



Vedanta Society, where Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna is enshrined and worshipped. This is a land known for its windmills and its remarkable mastery over nature—reclaiming land below sea level. Yet here too, Sri Ramakrishna's presence is deeply felt. Though I arrived late and stayed near the airport, many devotees came to meet me, eager to hear about his life and teachings.

They are striving to live his ideals. In that distant land, I saw his words coming true.

From there, I travelled to Berlin, Germany. At the Vedanta Centre, as one enters, one is greeted by the serene presence of Sri Ramakrishna, seated as though waiting for each visitor. It is deeply moving to witness this in a city that once witnessed unimaginable suffering during the Second World War and the horrors of the Holocaust. The Berlin Wall, which once divided families and nations, has fallen—leaving behind only a fragment as a reminder of the past. And now, in that very place, people sit in silence, meditating before the image of divine love and compassion. I saw Germans, with deep reverence, offering their prayers to Sri Ramakrishna.

In Switzerland and France, I witnessed similar devotion. People gather to sing his glory, chant his name, and walk the spiritual path. French devotees compose and sing songs in his praise with heartfelt joy. Guided by dedicated swamis, they are moving steadily towards a higher spiritual ideal.

In Great Britain—once the ruling power over India—the transformation is particularly striking. Where once there was division and misunderstanding, today there is reverence and devotion. At the beautiful Vedanta Centre in Bourne End near

London, the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna radiates peace. Visitors come from across the country to pray, reflect, and immerse themselves in spiritual discussions. In Ireland, too, I witnessed sincere devotion among the people.

Across the United States, Vedanta centres and devotees are actively spreading the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. What is especially remarkable is the growing reverence for Goddess Kali. Once misunderstood and even criticized by Europeans—and sometimes by educated Indians themselves—she is now worshipped with deep devotion in the West. In places like Southern California, I have seen temples dedicated to Kali, where devotees sing kirtans by the seaside temple of Laguna Beach with profound joy. At Skanda Vale in the UK, groups of Western devotees

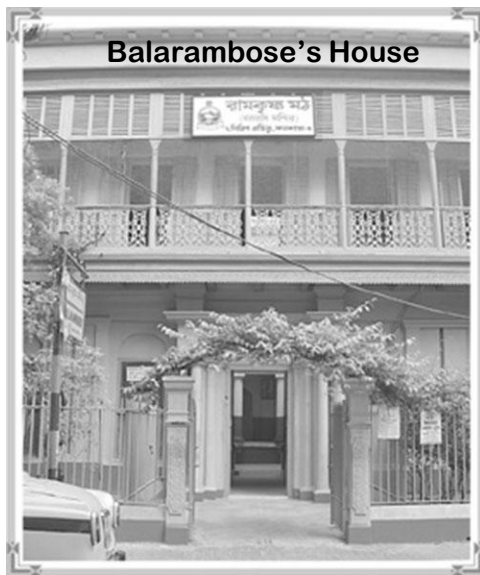
worship Her with equal fervor.

Sri Ramakrishna, who worshipped Kali as the Supreme Brahman, is now himself worshipped across cultures and continents.

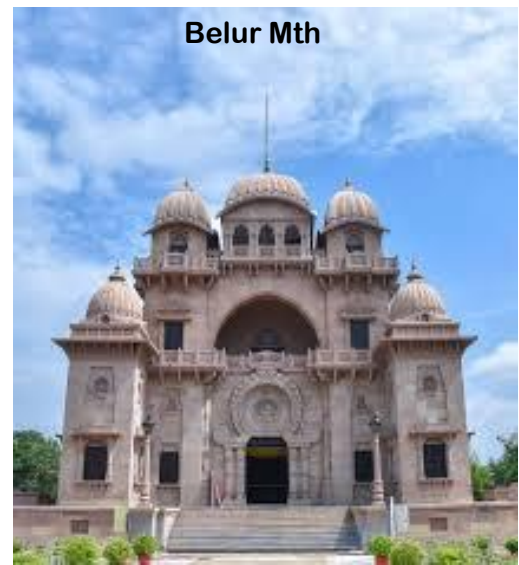
My travels have taken me further—to Japan, Australia, Fiji, Singapore, and New Zealand. Everywhere I go, I see the same truth unfolding: Sri Ramakrishna's message has transcended all boundaries of race, culture, and geography. His image is worshipped, and his teachings are lived.

What once seemed impossible has now become a living reality.

Let us, therefore, come together in gratitude and humility. Let us pray to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna to guide us on the path of truth, spirituality, and God-realisation.



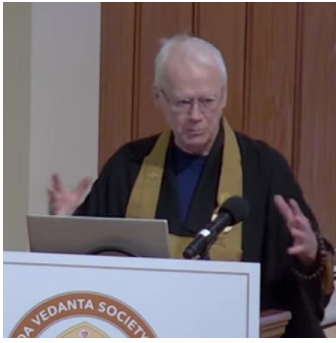
Ramakrishna
Mission was
founded on
Saturday,
May 1, 1897



At the meeting, that was held at the house of Balaram Bose, a lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Swami Vivekananda said,

“Let this association be named after him in whose name, indeed, we have embraced the monastic life, with whom as your Ideal in life you all toil on the field of work from your station in family-life, within twenty years of whose passing away a wonderful diffusion of his holy name and extraordinary life has taken place both in the East and the West. We are the servants of the Lord. Be you all helpers in this cause.”

Swami Vivekananda enunciated that the motto of the Ramakrishna Order is Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha or 'For personal spiritual emancipation and collective well being'. This motto is rooted in the Vedanta philosophy which declares the divinity of man and the oneness of existence.



The World Needs Our Spiritual Practice More Than Ever

Rev. Tessen Stuart Ericksen
Spiritual Teacher the Zen Buddhist Temple of Chicago

*This article is prepared based on the lecture that was delivered on
September 20, 2025, at the Home of Harmony*

Thank you for having this place and supporting it, so that people can truly come together from multiple paths and share with each other. I hope this is an auspicious sign for the future, because, as I mentioned in the title, if ever the world has needed our spiritual practice to bring us together, it is now.

It just so happens that my first teacher, Kongo Roshi, started his spiritual path with a member of the Vedanta Society. This would have been in the 1950s, roughly 1955–1960. He would go to Hyde Park and attend teachings on Yoga. This is interesting. We could say, “Oh, this is just some coincidence, right? Everything happens by coincidence.” Or could we say by karma? I think our paths were meant to cross. And again, thank you for the invitation.

I would like to emphasize that I am not a scholar. I am here not to discuss philosophy or the formal aspects of Buddhism, nor to speak about Buddhism in general, because, as with Hinduism, there are many different traditions and schools. The same thing is true in Buddhism. My karma led me to Zen Buddhism, and I would like to talk with you about that.

Continuing with my teacher, I also had a second teacher. The first teacher, Kongo Roshi, passed away. After his involvement with the Vedanta Society and its teachings, he continued with a second teacher, another yogi from India named Shri Nirod, a kundalini teacher. I have with me a small book by a teacher named Swami Mukerji, which he would give to each of his disciples when they became his student. He said, “I want you to read this. It is the doctrine and practice of yoga.” I

have a copy of that to share with you.

So, the word Zen—what does it mean? In popular society, it has taken on a certain atmosphere. There seems to be a cachet around the word “Zen.” It conjures something mysterious, cool, or fashionable. Sometimes this is taken too far. As I was driving here, we stopped at a light, and I looked over and saw a Zen Nail Spa. There was also a book long ago, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, and so forth. But there is quite a bit more to it than pop culture.

Zen has everything to do with Buddhism. As Swami Ishatmananda mentioned in his beautiful lecture, Buddhism is really the offspring of Hinduism. The Buddha grew up in a Hindu family in what is now northeastern India, near Nepal. Our roots are there.

As Buddhism developed, it traveled north into Tibet, west into Afghanistan—hard to imagine, as Afghanistan was once part of the heartland of Buddhist practice—and southeast into Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam, and north into China, Korea, and Japan. It was from Japan that Zen was brought to the United States.

Our founding teacher, Matsuoka Roshi, came to the United States specifically to teach Americans about Zen, to help them learn meditation and develop spirituality. Most other priests were focused on supporting Japanese communities on the West Coast, caring for local congregations rather than teaching Americans.

We use the Japanese term Zen. Zen is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word *chan* or *son*, which itself was an attempt to pronounce the original Sanskrit word *dhyāna*, meaning

meditation. We are what you could call the meditation sect of Buddhism.

I will not go deeply into the history of the Buddha's upbringing and life, as it has been well documented. What is most important is that he grew up as a very privileged individual. His father was the king of the country where he resided. When he finally encountered the suffering of people around him, he resolved to find a way to address it. How do we resolve suffering? How do we relieve what is so endemic to human existence?

When we see suffering, we often think of great tragedies. But there are also many small things that happen during the day—disappointments that slowly chip away at us—as well as things of great import: sickness, old age, and death.

He followed a number of yoga teachers for some time, trying to resolve this question, but did not make progress. So he sat under a tree and decided, "Enough of this. I am going to sit here. I will die sitting here if necessary, but I want to penetrate this deep question."

He meditated, taking only simple nourishment and rest to meet basic needs. He stayed in meditation and finally had a great awakening—a transformative awakening—penetrating and understanding the interrelationship of everything in the universe, including ourselves, other people, and the whole of existence.

Rather than saying, "I have achieved this and can now enjoy a carefree life," he said, "No, but I promised." He took this teaching to as many people as possible. He lived for another forty to forty-five years, teaching and explaining different dimensions of the insights he had gained through practice and experience.

As a result, many sermons were delivered, and he met with various groups. He was extremely adept at tuning his message to the people he was addressing. When speaking with highly educated people, he used one approach; with farmers or merchants, another. He always tried to help people on their own terms and, wherever possible, in their own language. He emphasized to his disciples:

Speak to people in their own language. Do not use Sanskrit or elevated language unnecessarily. Help people on their own level.

Many traditions grew out of this. Buddhism is like a great tree with many branches. But, as my teacher emphasized, the tree depends on its roots. Without the roots, there is no nourishment to feed the tree.

Zen Buddhism can be understood as the root of Buddhism. Why? Because before one word was spoken, before one sermon was given, before anything was written down, one man sat down and made a decision: "I am going to sit here." He did, and the result is incredible. We are still feeling the effects of that one decision, motivated by the desire to help others.

One of the first things he stated after his great awakening was that, from the beginning, all beings are Buddha. We might expect something different: that if we live a good life, we might someday gain enough merit to become a Buddha. Or if we do the right actions and say the right words, we might obtain something external. In fact, this is our truest, most original nature, which we simply need to awaken to.

We do not experience life this way. We do not see everyone as fully enlightened and kind. Why? Because the mind is clouded by self-involved, self-centric preoccupations. The ego drives much of what we say and do, shaping our entire lives.

These points directly point to the causes of suffering: anger, greed, and illusion. We see something and want it. If it is not given, we take it. On a larger scale, nations desire resources and resort to violence. Greed operates on both small and large scales and amplifies across humanity.

Anger is something we hold onto. If we worked as hard to hold onto happiness and joy—and to share that joy—it might bring benefit.

There is also the illusion that we are separate individuals, that what happens to me has nothing to do with you. In that view, only my own concerns matter. This clouds thinking and obscures our true nature.

What, then, do we suggest? There are many beautiful books and much philosophy.

As my teacher would say, to the extent that what you read leads you to action—to sitting down and working on your spiritual practice, which for us is meditation—it is useful.

As we sit, various thoughts arise. We let them go. We practice letting go and create the conditions to see and experience the truth that the historical Buddha taught.

If it is all about letting go, then what do we gain? There is nothing to gain and nothing to acquire. In meditation, we drop habitual ways of thinking and preoccupations—the internal tapes we replay—and create the conditions to see our original nature.

The Buddha himself, when asked about the meaning of life or what happens after death, did not answer such questions. He said, “Pour your attention into your practice.”

He illustrated this with a parable: “Often we are like a man who has been struck by an arrow dipped in poison.” Friends and family rush to help him, but the man insists on knowing who shot the arrow, what the person looked like, and what the arrow was made of. If all those questions must be answered before help is given, the result is obvious.

The Buddha never referred to himself as a holy being, but as a physician, a physician trying to cure suffering. Meditation is the core of our practice. Whatever the core of your practice is, dive into it.

When sitting in meditation, insights may arise, and we may think we have achieved something. My teacher used the phrase *neti neti*—“not this, not this.” When something arises, let it go. Keep letting it go. *Neti, neti, neti.*

Meditation is often thought of as passive. It is only outwardly quiet. Inside, there is great engagement. Our founder called this *mōrai*, which means “silent thunder.”

We have spoken enough words. It is time for some silent thunder, to sit quietly for a few minutes.

(The author leads the audience into a guided meditation session for a few minutes):

Sit comfortably, but keep your back straight so your body aligns naturally. When you breathe, the lungs can fill with energy—*prāṇa*. Let the eyes be downcast, half closed. Relax the body and breathe from the lower abdomen, allowing the breath to rise and fall naturally. Some breaths will be short, some long. This is not a breathing exercise.

Let the mind be clear and alert, not preoccupied. When thoughts arise, let them pass away.

Place your hands together, palm to palm. This is called *gasshō*; *namaste* is the same gesture.

(After the guided meditation session, the author continues):

In this Home of Harmony, we practice loving-kindness in meditation, moving away from self-centered wants and needs, turning down the volume of the ego in silent illumination. The natural outcome of this practice, and of all true spiritual practices, is a deep arising of compassion for all beings—not as a commandment, but as an intuitive expression of who we truly are.

That expression is to share compassion with all beings in loving-kindness.



Kennin-ji was founded in 1202 CE and claims to be the oldest Zen temple in Kyoto. The temple was a replica of public Chinese monasteries found Zhejiang Province, which Japanese monks often frequented during the thirteenth century.

Photo & caption courtesy: Wikipedia

We will recite the mettā sutta, the teaching of loving-kindness:

This is what should be accomplished by those who are wise,
who seek the good and have obtained peace.

Let one be energetic, upright, and sincere,
without pride, easily contented, and joyous.

Let not one be submerged by the things of the world.

Let one not take upon oneself the burden of riches.

Let one's senses be controlled. Let one be wise, but not puffed up, and let one not desire great
possessions, even for one's family.

Let one do nothing that is mean or that the wise would reprove.

May all beings be happy.

May they be joyous and live in safety.

All beings,

whether weak or strong, in high or middle or low realms of existence,
small or great, visible or invisible, near or far,

born or yet to be born.

May all beings be happy.

Let no one deceive another, nor despise any being in any state. Let none by anger or hatred wish
harm to another.

Even as a mother, at the risk of her life, watches over and protects her only child,

So with a boundless mind should one cherish all living things,

suffusing love over the entire world,

above and below and all around, without any limit.

In such a way, let one cultivate infinite goodwill toward the entire world.

Standing or walking, sitting or lying down, during all one's waking hours,

let one cherish the thought that this way of living is the best in the world,
abandoning idle discussions, having a clear vision free from craving for self-satisfaction.

Such a person will never again know rebirth in the cycle of suffering,

for the benefit of all living beings.



The "Seated Buddha" from Gandhara is an early surviving statue of the "enlightened one". Buddha statues were not made until the 1st century CE. Photo Courtesy: Wikipedia

In the Buddha Incarnation the Lord says that the root of the *Adhibhautika* misery or, misery arising from other terrestrial beings, is the formation of classes (*Jati*); in other words, every form of class-distinction, whether based on birth, or acquirements, or wealth is at the bottom of this misery. In the Atman there is no distinction of sex, or Varna or Ashrama, or anything of the kind, and as mud cannot be washed away by mud, it is likewise impossible to bring about oneness by means of separative ideas.

-- Swami Vivekananda



The History of the Methodist Movement in Chicago

David Foster and Vicci Rodgers
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*This article is prepared based on the lecture that was delivered on
November 15, 2025, at the Home of Harmony*



Presenter: David Foster

It is an honor to be invited here by the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, and I really appreciate this opportunity. Vicci and I have a lot of history in this building, as you will hear today during this presentation. It's been a beautiful experience to walk around and see the facility as it's used now, and that's very heartwarming. I just want to say thank you. This is a beautiful invitation and a beautiful opportunity as well.

As I get started, let me say that I am not a professional historian. I have spent most of my life as a United Methodist and have worked for the United Methodist Church, where I spent many years working for the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of the United Methodist Church, and I was very deeply involved in the historical research work at the Chicago Temple—or, more correctly, the First United Methodist Church of Chicago—as we were preparing to celebrate our centennial as a building just last year.

Before we jump into the discussion, I want to say that my plan is to begin with a few words about the origins of Methodism, or the Methodist movement. This may be familiar to some of you, but perhaps not to others. Then I would like to say a few words about how the church actually started here in what we now know as the United States. That is an interesting story in its own right. Finally, I want to finish by discussing how Methodism developed in Chicago, specifically how the congregation we now know as the Chicago Temple reflected its growth in the 1800s and early 1900s.

Methodism, of course, is a broad term, and I use it to describe the movement that was begun by John Wesley in the 18th century. The church that I

am a part of, and that this particular congregation represented many years ago, is part of the United Methodist Church. But there are other Methodist churches around the world. In the United States, the United Methodist Church is the oldest and largest Methodist denomination, but there are other Methodist churches. So if I refer to the Methodist Church, I am probably really referring to the United Methodist Church. It is very common for folks to simplify and simply say, "I belong to the Methodist Church," but technically, it is the United Methodist Church.

I would like to begin with just a few words about John Wesley. John Wesley, as you probably know, was an 18th-century clergyman of the Church of England. I think it is safe to say that probably every Methodist church anywhere in the world traces its origins to John Wesley.

The Methodist movement began in earnest, I would say, in 1738, when John Wesley embarked on what we might call an itinerant preaching mission throughout the British Isles, mostly in England. He started a major revival movement within the Church of England. It is important to know that John Wesley was an ordained clergyman. A typical ordained clergy person would have served an individual church, just as this was once an individual church, with a pastor who preached every Sunday, baptized folks, married folks, buried folks, and visited the sick in the hospital.

John Wesley might have done that if he had been a parish priest, as they would have said in England in those days, but he was not comfortable doing that. He felt that the Church of England had not reached everyone very well, so he literally took

to the streets to spread the Gospel. Do not think of him as a street preacher as we might think of one today, but he really was out of the ordinary in his time. He went to coal mines and preached to coal miners. He went to prisons and preached to prisoners. His whole point was to bring the Gospel's message to those places where he thought it had not been preached very well.

His efforts were very successful. In most places where he preached, people came in droves, listened to his preaching, and were converted—if you want to use that word—to Wesley's style of the Church of England. It was not Methodism, really, in those days, but rather the message Wesley was giving as part of the Church of England's ministry to the people.

From the beginning of his preaching, Wesley organized people into societies. These were people who were touched by his preaching, and he wanted to organize them. He did not feel it was fair to preach a sermon and then walk away, leaving people to their own devices. He wanted to keep an eye on those who came to hear him preach. So a number of societies were created—Methodist societies, as we would call them today—and these societies became the bedrock of the Methodist movement.

Wesley's own preaching pretty much followed a triangle in England, from London to Bristol, then to Newcastle, and back. Throughout that triangle, he created these societies, and he called the people who belonged to them "the Methodists."

Wesley's whole point was not to start a new church. Like many reformers, he insisted that he had no intention of doing that. Wesley would never have called himself a reformer, but rather someone interested in reviving the faith as he knew it in the Church of England. He expected the members of his societies to remain faithful members of the Church of England. To his death, John Wesley was a member of the Church of England. Now, many members of the Church of England might not say he was as faithful to it as he thought he was, but nonetheless, he died as a member of that church.

Over the years, however, his followers drifted apart from the Church of England. As a result, the Methodist Church as we know it today was organized largely after Wesley's death. Wesley's work was not directed toward creating a new theology or a new faith. His purpose, in his own words, was to "spread scriptural holiness across the land." That was his phrase. What exactly he meant by "scriptural holiness" is not always entirely clear, but that was his aim.

This ministry began in 1738 and continued until Wesley's death in 1791.

Let us say a word about Charles Wesley. Charles Wesley, John Wesley's brother, was also an ordained clergyman in the Church of England. He was very active with John in the Methodist revival movement, and the two worked closely together. Many people know John Wesley, but if you have worshiped in a Christian church of almost any denomination, you probably know Charles Wesley. He wrote many famous hymns that Christians around the world—at least in the English-speaking world—still sing today. At Christmas time, for example, you may hear "Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Glory to the Newborn King," which is a Charles Wesley hymn. One of many famous and well-known hymns sung not just by Methodists, but by many congregations. Charles Wesley deserves his due in the Methodist movement.

"Yes, they are brothers." The Wesley family was quite large. John and Charles were among nineteen children, many of whom did not survive into adulthood. Their father was also a clergyman in the Church of England, and their mother, Susanna, was deeply religious. John and Charles learned a great deal about their Christian faith from their mother, perhaps more so than from their father, who was the parish priest in Epworth where they grew up.

We have already talked about societies. Wesley founded religious societies and called them that on purpose, because they were not separate from the Church of England. Today, we might call a society a congregation, but Wesley was careful not to do that. He expected members of his societies to

worship in their parish church, to take communion every week, and to hear the sermon there. Methodist meetings, therefore, often took place very early in the morning, perhaps at five o'clock on Sunday, so everyone could attend the parish church later in the day. That was Wesley's expectation.

What did Wesley himself call one of these societies? He described it as "a company of men and women having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation." There is not much theology here, but rather a focus on how we treat one another as fellow Christians on our pilgrimage of faith.

Wesley also said this about the people who belonged to the society: "A Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him. God is the joy of his heart and the desire of his soul." That was Wesley's definition of who a Methodist is.

Wesley had clear expectations for members of these societies. He expected them to turn their lives around in specific ways: to do no harm, to do good, and to attend upon all the ordinances of God. Attending upon the ordinances of God meant going to church on Sunday, listening to the sermon, taking communion, praying during the week, and fasting regularly. Wesley was a firm believer in the power of fasting and abstinence.

"Do no harm" included many practical rules—do not use profanity, do not drink excessively, do not work on the Sabbath. "Do good" was easier to understand. Wesley expected Methodists to be active members of their communities: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting people in prison, and helping those in need. Methodists were expected to be deeply involved in doing good where they lived.

One of Wesley's more famous quotations is this: "But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think." This statement can be misunderstood, but Wesley was

essentially saying that he was not interested in arguing over fine points of theology or doctrine. He held certain bedrock beliefs, but beyond that, he believed differences did not matter. People could still love one another and work on their spiritual lives together. In that sense, Wesley was somewhat ahead of his time.

Finally, let me say a word about the organization of Methodism. John Wesley considered all of the societies he founded to be "in connection" with him. He saw himself as a kind of parent figure, and that language of connection continues in Methodism today. Our churches, conferences, boards, and agencies are all connected, a concept that goes back to Wesley himself.

Another important concept is itinerancy. Wesley appointed lay preachers to oversee societies and controlled where they went. He believed a preacher did not need to remain in one place too long. This practice continues today. Methodist pastors are appointed by church leaders and move where they are needed. That is the theory, at least.

The final concept is conference. Wesley brought his lay preachers together once or twice a year to meet, discuss how the revival was going, and talk about problems and challenges. This practice also continues and remains central to the Methodist organization.

The conference would make decisions—"Okay, let's try a different approach this way or that way." In this way, the conference became very important in Methodism's growth. To this day, especially in the United Methodist Church, the conference is the center of control in the church.

A local church has a charge conference. The entire church has a General Conference. The annual conference meets every year. Each conference has certain authority that it alone has and no one else has. The conference continues to operate today just as Wesley started it himself back in the 18th century. It is a very essential part of the Methodist story.

Those of you who are familiar with the United Methodist Church may have a variety of opinions

about the various conferences that we hold, but they remain a very important way the church governs itself at many different levels.

Now I would like to shift to Methodism in the United States. We are not starting in Chicago, but with John Street United Methodist Church in New York City. This church still exists. If you are ever in New York, do visit—it is a great place, right in the Wall Street area. This is the oldest Methodist religious building in the United States.

When I say “oldest building,” the picture you may see is not the original one. That image is from the middle of the 1800s, but it replaced the first Methodist building in the United States, which dated from 1768. So it really gets the credit as being the first Methodist church in what would become the United States.

Remember that 1768 predates the Declaration of Independence in 1776. The American Revolution did not end until the Treaty of Paris in 1783. So the colonies were still very much English colonies when that building was established.

Methodists, whether they liked it or not, were connected with the Church of England. The Church of England is a national church, and its head is the monarch—today Charles III, and in those days the infamous George III. As the American Revolution unfolded, people connected with the Church of England and the king were considered dangerous traitors, Tories, and worse. Many Anglican priests went underground, many went to Canada, and many returned to England.

Methodists, who were supposed to receive the sacraments at their local Church of England parish, suddenly had nowhere to go. Many Methodist pastors also went underground or left the colonies. Wesley recognized this as a serious problem. The Methodists in America needed sacraments.

So how was he going to fill the void when there were no functioning Church of England parishes in the United States? In 1784, Wesley took a very extraordinary step, for which he received considerable criticism. He ordained a couple of laypeople. As a clergyman himself, he technically

did not have the authority to ordain anyone—bishops ordained clergy, not other clergy. But Wesley said, “The situation demands radical action. So, I’m going to ordain a couple of people.”

He sent them to the United States and told them, “You can start a church and begin providing the sacraments.” That is exactly what happened. These men arrived in the United States toward the end of 1784, and at a famous meeting known as the Christmas Conference, held in Baltimore that year, all the remaining Methodist lay preachers gathered and formed the church we belong to today.

At that time, it was called the Methodist Episcopal Church, a name it retained until 1939. We will talk about that change later. The truth is that the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States is older than the Methodist Church in Great Britain. That may sound strange, since Methodism began in Britain, but Wesley was still alive and did not want to break with the Church of England. His followers there were technically still Anglicans until his death. Only after Wesley died did Anglicans and Methodists fully part ways and form a separate church in England.

As a result, the church in the United States claims to be the oldest independent Methodist church in the world, having been organized in 1784.

Now, let us jump ahead to Methodism in Illinois and Chicago. You see images of what we commonly call the Chicago Temple. Technically, that is not the church's name, but it is what everyone calls it. Its official name is the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Chicago.

The church itself was organized in 1831. The first building dates from 1834. So the congregation will be 200 years old in just a few years. In 1845, the church built a more conventional church building downtown. Then, in the 1920s, it built what we now know as the Chicago Temple.

The illustration you may see is not exactly how the Chicago Temple was built; it was an early design and does not reflect the final structure.

Before we look more closely at the Chicago church, it is important to note that the first

Methodist church in Illinois dates to 1805. Illinois was not even a state at that time. That church was located in southern Illinois near Edwardsville, which today might be considered a suburb of St. Louis. That was the first Methodist building in Illinois.

In 1828, McKendree College was founded in Lebanon, southern Illinois. It was originally founded not strictly as a college, but it became one very quickly. It is one of the oldest Methodist institutions of higher learning in the United States. There is a school in Kentucky that also claims that title, so let us simply say it is among the oldest.

Returning to the downtown church, if you look closely at an image from 1858, you might ask, "Where is the church?" It is there, but it looks like an office building. And that is exactly what it was. Church leaders decided that, since they were downtown and surrounded by business activity, they would build an office building, keep a few floors for themselves, and rent the rest. The rental income could then support other Methodist churches. It was a great idea.

That building, constructed in 1858, burned to the ground in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. In 1872, church leaders built a fourth church building, which lasted for about 50 years, until 1922.

If you look at the surrounding buildings, you can see why church leaders became concerned. Nearby skyscrapers, like the old Chicago Title and Trust Building, dwarfed the four-story Methodist building. Church leaders realized that if they wanted to continue renting space, they needed a much larger structure. They spent the next 30 years figuring out how to do that—and eventually succeeded with the Chicago Temple we know today.

These downtown church buildings were the center of extensive Methodist activity in the 1800s. Methodists were deeply interested in education, health care, and social reform. They created schools, hospitals, and other institutions with remarkable success.

One of these was Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, still an active United Methodist seminary located in Evanston. Members of the downtown church were instrumental in founding Garrett in the early 1850s. Mrs. Garrett left most of her estate to endow the seminary. Garrett remains a significant theological institution today.

Another institution founded by the same group was Northwestern University. It began as a Methodist institution and remained so well into the 20th century. While the church no longer controls Northwestern, Garrett Seminary still stands on Northwestern's campus, showing that some connection remains.

Methodists founded many major universities across the country, including Boston University, the University of Southern California, Southern Methodist University, and Vanderbilt University, all of which began as Methodist institutions.

Another important institution was Wesley Memorial Hospital, organized in 1888. In 1941, it moved into a striking building at Fairbanks and Superior Streets, designed by an architect who was a member of the downtown church. That hospital later became part of the Northwestern Medical Complex. While the original building no longer exists, its legacy continues.

The Chicago Training School was another institution founded by members of the downtown church. It began as a school for training women deaconesses in the 1800s and later became a major educational institution for women. By the 1930s, it merged with Garrett Seminary.

There was also the Lake Bluff Orphanage, founded in the 1880s by members of the downtown church. Although the orphanage no longer exists, its successor organization does. You may know it today as Kids Above All, formerly ChildServ, a very active children's advocacy organization in our area.

One other major issue Methodists were deeply involved in was temperance. When I was growing up, temperance was still emphasized in the.

Methodist Church. In the late 1800s & early 1900s, it was a nationwide movement that culminated in Prohibition and the Volstead Act in 1920

Perhaps the most famous Methodist associated with the temperance movement was Frances Willard, president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. She was also deeply involved in women's suffrage and other women's issues. Her influence was so great that when Illinois submitted its statues to Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol, one of them was Frances Willard. She lived in Evanston, and her home there is now a museum.

This reminds us how deeply Methodism was involved in social reform movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Finally, let me say just a word about the Chicago Temple itself. As a member, I may talk about it more than I should. This is the Chicago Temple building as it looked when it was completed in the 1920s.

The important thing to know is that, when this building opened in 1924, it was the tallest building in Chicago. It's pretty amazing.

You can see the distinctive tower and spire on the top of the building. Church leaders wanted that tower and spire because they didn't

want people to think it was just an office building. They wanted people to think, "Oh, wow. This must also be a church," which it is. So they said that in a very big way with that huge tower. And since it was the tallest building in Chicago, everybody saw it. You couldn't miss it. Today, every building is taller than the temple, so you're very hard-pressed to see the tower and steeple now. But in the 1920s, when the building opened, it absolutely cast a very big shadow in downtown Chicago.

I'm going to conclude my comments here, because I've talked too long and Vicci has some important things to say about this particular building, we're in right now. Just last year, the temple building celebrated its 100th anniversary, and we had this beautiful logo. Vicci was instrumental in helping the temple develop this logo.



First Methodist building in the United States, New York City



H-3327 THE CHICAGO TEMPLE CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



First Methodist Episcopal Church
Being Erected at
Clark and Washington Streets
ALL CHICAGO FIRST CHURCH DAY
June 4, 1922
(Approved by Methodist Preachers Meeting)
Let Every Methodist embrace the opportunity on that day of making a contribution to the erection of this great new "Temple" which is
Chicago Methodism's Mother Church

We had a big celebration last September to remember our 100th anniversary as a building.

This gives you a picture of the inside of the church. If you've never been inside, you can see some pretty impressive stained-glass windows and a very impressive roof on the top of the sanctuary. This view is a bit skewed from this vantage point, but it does give you a sense of what the sanctuary looks like.

We also have a chapel at the very top of the building, right in the tower. In fact, this is the highest place of worship in the world. It's quite a claim, but apparently it's true. We are in the Guinness Book of World Records as having the highest place of worship in the world. There it is—the Sky Chapel, 400 feet above street level. Come down to the temple someday and take a tour. There are tours every day except Monday, so please feel free to stop in and see the Sky Chapel.

Remember, I said the church leaders in the 1850s wanted an office building, thinking they could rent space, make some money, and turn that money back into other Methodist churches. Believe it or not, that's exactly what they did. In 1860, there were seven Methodist churches in Chicago. In 1920, there were ninety. Almost every single one of those ninety churches received money from the first church downtown, including this church when it was a church. The Irving Park Methodist Church received funds from the first downtown church, which were used to help fledgling churches buy property or begin building new facilities.

Today, the number of Methodist churches has shrunk. We now have just a little more than fifty in the entire city of Chicago. But in 1920, there were ninety.

You may recognize the United Methodist Church's symbol today. When we say "United Methodist Church," that name dates to 1968, when the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church, often known as EUB. That merger took place in 1968, and we've been the United Methodist Church ever since.

To give you a sense of Methodism's connection to the man in the upper photograph, Chicago Calling

is the Reverend Martin Deppy. He served Gresham Church in the 1960s, and in the 1990s, he was appointed to the First Methodist Church, Irving Park (now the Home of Harmony site), and served as pastor from 1990 to 1999. He was instrumental in remodeling the upstairs area as the church became the headquarters of the Reconciling Congregation Program, as it was called in those days. This is another example of a church that received support from the church downtown.

Speaker: Vicci Rodgers

I am not the historian that David is, so I really appreciate that he was able to provide so much of the detail that I think is news, even to some of us who are lifelong Methodists.

His reference to Martin Deppy in the 1960s reinforces the idea that he was one of the few white pastors on the south side of Chicago who were very involved in the civil rights movement. He was specifically asked to go down and join that movement with Martin Luther King Jr. Then, in the 1990s, he was asked to come to the First Methodist Church, Irving Park. When David talked about pastors being moved around within the Methodist Church to where they're needed, this was where he was needed in the 1990s.

For those of us who have been part of this church at Irving Park, the history of Methodism, and the history of what happens within a building, within a place, and within the people who come together—whether in one building or another as they move on—is very important. I think it dates back to Wesley, bringing people together in small groups on the streets. Wherever we are, we come together. Whatever our faith is, we come together in love. That's what we have here today.

I'd like to give you a little history of why this happened here. The little wooden church you see was right here in this space. Before that, a group of people decided they wanted to form a church, and eventually they built the wooden structure. Those are the streets out front—mostly dirt, with some wood.

As the area grew substantially in the early 1900s, they decided to build what they called the chapel, also referred to as the education building. That's the building behind us. If you go through the church on a tour, you'll see that it's the back part of this building. They needed space for all the children and families coming to church, and they dedicated that building in 1908.

Growth continued, so they expanded again. Part of what we're sitting in today comes from that expansion. At that time, the congregation had 390 adults and over 550 children in Sunday school. That was true of these neighborhoods—Avondale, Irving Park, and Portage Park. These were growing areas, once farmland, where everybody went to church. The fellowship hall downstairs was full.

During the war years, churches were deeply connected to people serving the country. This church once had a large display honoring service men and women, and newsletters were an important means of communication for those at home and their loved ones overseas.

This sketch shows what was envisioned for a new part of the chapel. The next image shows what was actually built earlier. You can see the pews arranged diagonally. You would have entered from the back and faced that direction. This entire wall was open. If you go to the third

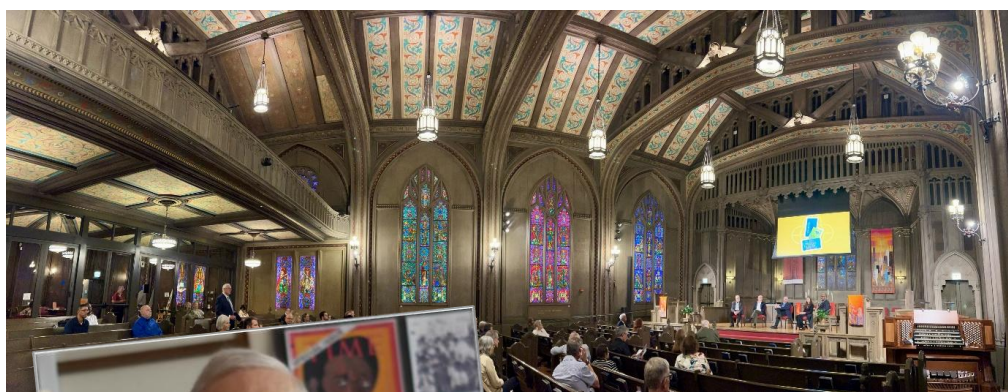
floor of the building that has been expanded to the east, the ceiling you see there is from the original chapel. The wood is part of that original structure.

In the 1960s, the church expanded again and turned the sanctuary to face the direction you see today. The mortgage was paid off, and the pews were full.

Then the city of Chicago built the Kennedy Expressway. It cut through these neighborhoods, separating them. People moved to the suburbs. Church attendance declined—not just here, but throughout the area. The expressway disrupted communities that once walked to church and were deeply connected to their neighborhoods.

This building has been here a long time. The towers on the Keeler side were once used as Sunday school rooms. Children went up and down those towers. I'll say that my own children grew up here and know all the tunnels and secret passageways. There's a lot to discover.

One of the most important ministries to begin here, in collaboration with other faith communities, was the Irving Park Community Food Pantry, now one of the most successful in Chicago. When this building was sold, the pantry moved to another Methodist church, but its roots are here.



A picture of the inside of the church



NO 49, 2026



the Sky Chapel, 400 feet above street level

It was started by a tiny woman named Leila Duncan. She saw hungry people on the streets and began filling grocery bags and riding the bus to deliver food. Her passion grew into the Irving Park Community Food Pantry as churches came together in this building's basement. Until 2018, people lined up here for food, especially during the holidays.

Phil Sheets, a retired pastor who is here today, was instrumental in its founding and returned for the pantry's 40-year anniversary. John Sarus remains the director. Today, the pantry has over two million dollars in grants and is building a new facility on Pulaski, continuing its mission of service. I know Leila would be very happy, and those of us who grew up here are deeply proud.

This building also housed Mission Hispana and many other ministries. Different congregations worshiped here, much like what you are doing now by opening your doors to all faith communities. Ministries came together on many fronts.

The top floor of the building, which now serves world religions educational programming, was reconstructed in the 1990s to house the Reconciling Ministries network and Sunday school classes. We're so happy it continues to be used in such a

meaningful way.

In November 2019, we said goodbye to this building. That's David there carrying our Bible, and Kathy is here today as well. We didn't want to sell the building to someone who would tear it down. We wanted the outreach and work that happened here on the corner of Grace and Keeler to continue. We were very blessed to see what's happening here today.

This is where we are now, in a church building in Albany Park. Faith continues. You find new space, new neighborhoods, and new callings. We joined with Berry United Methodist Church from Lincoln Square to form Renewed Hope. One of our major missions remains the Irving Park Community Food Pantry.

We also preserved a quilt found in a box from this building, made of patchwork from churches across the country. It told stories, and we felt called to continue that storytelling. The quilt is now in a museum.

Our Albany Park Ministry Center, though more contemporary, was once destroyed by fire and water and had to be rebuilt. We now share that space with First Vietnamese, again showing how communities come together.

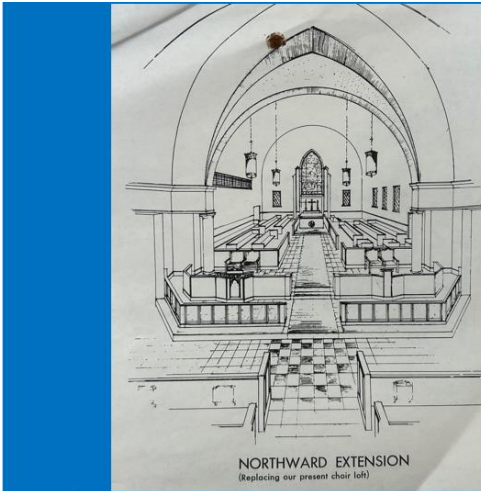
That is how faith lives on.



**Little wooden church on the corner,
1892 (north Forty-First Court)**



**New Church Dedicated 1913 (North
Forty-second Avenue & Grace Street)**



The Chapel Building was remodeled and enlarged 1952-1954. Another expansion followed, around the same time the opening of the Kennedy Expressway divided the Avondale and Irving Park neighborhoods.

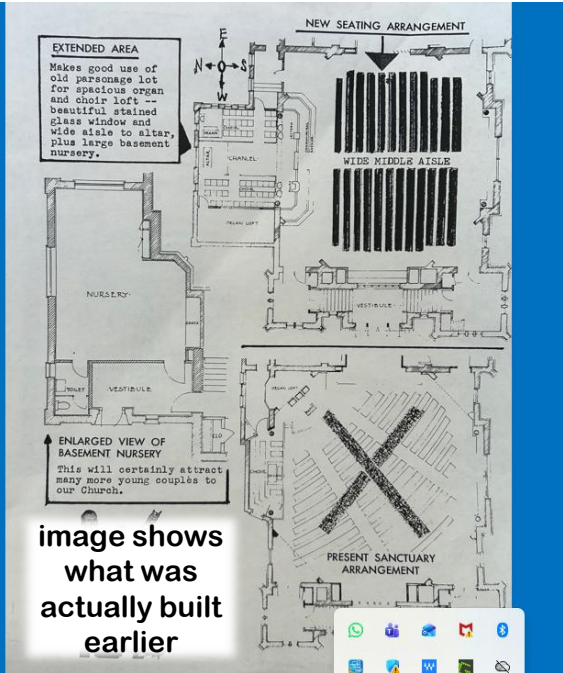


image shows what was actually built earlier



Leila Duncan: The mother of the Irving Park Community Food Pantry



In November 2019 the Church moved to Albany Park and David there carrying our Bible to the new place



Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago is continuing to serve through interfaith dialogues.

Pilgrimage Reflections (2): Karnataka and West Bengal

Brian VandenBos

Photo: Kris Bass, Anup Pan, and Arup Patranabish

Introduction

This article continues the reflections begun in Part 1, following the second major phase of a seventeen-day pilgrimage through India and England centered on a lecture tour of my guru, Swami Ishatmananda (Swamiji). If the earlier portion of the journey introduced me to India through movement, adjustment, and steady inner recalibration, this segment carried the pilgrimage into deeper layers of encounter, service, and assimilation.

Traveling through Karnataka and West Bengal, I found myself increasingly aware that pilgrimage unfolds not only through sacred places, but also through sacred relationships. My companions throughout the journey were Arup Patranabish and Kris Bass, devoted volunteers of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago, whose steadiness, humor, and quiet service shaped each day in ways large and small. In Delhi and beyond, Anup Pan, a Kolkata resident and devoted follower of Swamiji, joined us and remained with us for the rest of our time in India. From Sathya Sai Grama through Kolkata, Rabbi Yoel Glick and Rabbi Adir Glick, a father and son who had lived in Kolkata and possess deep knowledge of the Ramakrishna tradition, accompanied us as well. Together, we moved through this portion of the pilgrimage as a small, diverse community, united by reverence and purpose.

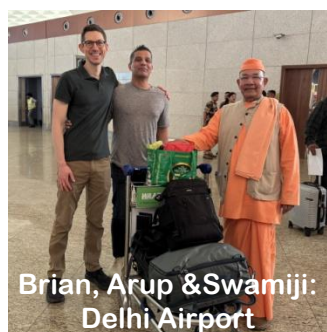
From Gurugram to Karnataka: Teaching,



Brian, Swamiji, and Kris: Chicago Airport



Brian & Kris: Mumbai



Brian, Arup & Swamiji: Delhi Airport



Brian, Anup, Kris, & Arup: Gurugram

Language, and Lineage

Our final morning in Gurugram offered a quiet threshold. Sharing breakfast with Swamiji, Swami Tattwamayanda, and Swami Shantatmananda, I noticed something that had gently repeated itself throughout the journey. In every discourse of Swamiji's that I heard in India, he spoke in Bengali.

Later, Swamiji explained that a monk's task is to return again and again to the living presence of realized souls. Listening to this, I understood that the teaching was not meant to impress, but to remain faithful to a lineage rooted in realization.

That afternoon we flew south to Bengaluru, often called India's Silicon Valley. Beneath its reputation as a modern technological hub, the city holds deep spiritual roots and long-standing connections to the Ramakrishna Order. From the airport we continued by road into the countryside of Karnataka, arriving at Sathya Sai Grama in Muddenahalli as dusk settled over the foothills of the Nandi Hills.

Sathya Sai Grama: Service as Spiritual Expression

Sathya Sai Grama revealed itself not as a conventional ashram, but as a vast and thoughtfully designed spiritual township. Founded more than fifty years ago and named by Sri Sathya Sai Baba in 1973, it now stands as the heart of a global mission centered on free healthcare, education, and nutrition. Wide roads lined with flowering trees, spotless grounds, and

carefully planned buildings gave the campus the feeling of a self-contained city devoted entirely to service. Monkeys moved freely through the trees, and the air felt notably clearer than in the cities we had left behind.

We were there for the World Religions Summit, held in conjunction with centenary celebrations honoring Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Leaders from twelve major faith traditions gathered for dialogue, prayer, and shared reflection. Swamiji spoke with characteristic clarity and discipline, first offering a brief introduction and later delivering a concise overview of Hinduism, compressing millennia of spiritual history into ten minutes without losing its essence. Watching him speak, I was struck by his precision and restraint, qualities that reflected both respect for the audience and confidence in the tradition he represented.

Throughout our days at Sathya Sai Grama, meals themselves became occasions for encounter. Conversations unfolded naturally with monks, scholars, and religious leaders from across the world. In the evenings, large cultural programs brought thousands together, culminating in a grand musical offering that celebrated unity amid diversity. Amid the scale and spectacle, what stayed with me most was Swamiji's quiet admiration for those who had dedicated their lives, even after retirement, to sustained service. Their work embodied a simple Vedantic truth, that selfless action becomes worship when offered without ego.

Mysuru and Bengaluru: Living History of the Ramakrishna Order

From Karnataka's open landscapes, we traveled to Mysuru for the centenary celebration of the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama there. Set within a lush and



At Gurugram

carefully tended campus, the ashram conveyed a sense of continuity, as though devotion itself had shaped the land over generations. During the celebrations, we met Srimat Swami Gautamananda Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and offered pranams. Even brief words exchanged in such moments carried weight, reminding me how the living tradition continues through embodied presence rather than abstraction.

Nearby, we glimpsed Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala, the renowned residential school for boys, a reminder of how the Order's spiritual ideals express themselves through education. Later, back in Bengaluru, we visited the historic Basavangudi ashram, founded in 1903. Its dense greenery and towering trees created an atmosphere of deep repose. Swami Vireshananda guided us through the grounds, showing us the Vivekananda Mantapa, where Swami Vivekananda once sat and rested during his 1892 visit, and Holy Mother's Rock, where Sri Sarada Devi meditated in 1911. These sites carried no grandeur of scale, yet they radiated an intimacy that made the presence of these towering spiritual figures feel close and accessible.

Kolkata and Belur Math: Entering the Heartland

Our arrival in Kolkata marked a profound inward turn. Once the capital of British India and a center of cultural and intellectual renaissance, the city remains inseparable from the life and work of



At Sathya Sai Grama, Bangalore

Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. Driving to Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order, I felt a sense of recognition, as though stepping into a landscape long known through books and images, now suddenly real.

Belur Math's architecture, with its harmonious blending of Hindu, Christian, and Islamic motifs, expresses the universal vision of Swami Vivekananda in stone. Swamiji graciously gave us a personal tour, guiding us along cool stone paths bordered by manicured lawns, with the Hooghly River flowing quietly nearby. In the evening, we attended arati in the Sri Ramakrishna Temple, where the rhythm of bells, chanting, and lamps drew the mind inward with remarkable ease. Sitting close to the shrine, I felt less like a visitor and more like a silent witness to an ongoing act of devotion.

The Sacred Geography of Ramakrishna's Life

The days that followed unfolded as a pilgrimage within a pilgrimage, tracing the sacred geography of Sri Ramakrishna's life and legacy. At Dakshineswar Kali Temple, with its distinctive nine-spired architecture and vibrant colors, the atmosphere was charged with devotion. Amid the crowds and incense, Sri Ramakrishna's small room offered a striking contrast, its simplicity bringing his humanity into sharp focus.

From there we moved through several centers of

the Ramakrishna Order, including Udayanbati in Cossipore, whose quiet gardens and restrained beauty conveyed an intimacy distinct from Dakshineswar's grandeur. At Udbodhan in Baghbar, Holy Mother's final residence in Kolkata, the sense of her living presence felt especially strong. When a volunteer serving prasad remarked that "Mother has been waiting," the words carried a depth that needed no elaboration.

Our journey then took us to Kamarpukur and Jayrambati, the birthplaces of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. The dusty lanes and modest homes of these villages revealed the highest spiritual truths mirrored in the humblest of settings. Standing in Sri Ramakrishna's birth cottage, the mind grew quiet without effort. Jayrambati carried a similar stillness, shaped by Holy Mother's silent grace. Together, these places embodied Sri Ramakrishna's teaching that God dwells equally in palace and hut.

At Advaita Ashrama, the intellectual and literary heart of the Order, the atmosphere shifted again. Without a conventional shrine, centered instead on the Omkara, the ashram seemed devoted to the quiet labor of thought, study, and transmission. Here, devotion expressed itself through disciplined reflection, reminding me that love of truth takes many forms.



With revered
President Maharaj
At Mysore Math

(Below) At Bangalore
Math



At Belur Math

That evening, we attended a large centenary celebration in Kolkata honoring spiritual and social service. The juxtaposition was striking. The morning had unfolded in rural villages where Sri Ramakrishna once walked barefoot, and the evening now honored his legacy in a modern hall filled with light and ceremony. When Swamiji spoke on the transformation of society through spiritual purpose, followed by Swami Sarvapriyananda's reflections on inner transformation through Vedanta, the continuity between humble origins and global influence felt unmistakable.

memory, but as active presence expressed through education, healthcare, worship, and dialogue.

I also became aware of a quiet inner shift. The journey was no longer asking me simply to adjust, but to receive. Surrounded by places saturated with devotion, and by companions whose lives reflected sincere commitment, the practice became one of attentiveness rather than effort. Swami Vivekananda once wrote that purity, patience, and perseverance overcome all obstacles. In these days, perseverance took the form of staying open, allowing each place and encounter to leave its mark without resistance.

As we departed Kolkata and concluded the India portion of the pilgrimage, I carried with me a sense of grounding and gratitude. The sacred geography we had traversed now felt inwardly mapped as well. In the next and final article, I will reflect on the concluding stage of the journey in England, where these experiences found a different, but no less meaningful, resonance.

Reflections

This portion of the pilgrimage deepened my understanding of how spiritual ideals take form through service, community, and continuity. Moving through Karnataka and West Bengal, I saw again and again how the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother live on, not as



At B.K Roy centenary celebration in Kolkata

At Udbodhan House



In front of the Cossipore Garden House



(Left side top and Bottom) At Dakshineswar Temple



Kamarpukur



Joyrambati



At the Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



Swami Vivekananda Ancestral House, Kolkata



BHAGAVATA (30):
HOW TO RECOGNIZE A REALIZED SOUL
Swami Ishatmananda

In our previous issue, number 48, we mentioned the second question of King Nimi: How to recognize a realized soul. The second brother, Sage Hari, replied -

सर्वभूतेषु यः पश्येद्भगवद्भावमात्मनः ।

भूतानि भगवत्यात्मन्येष भागवतोत्तमः ॥ ४५ ॥

*sarva-bhūteṣu yaḥ paśyed bhagavad-bhāvam ātmanah
bhūtāni bhagavati ātmanyēṣa bhāgavatottamaḥ*

He who sees the Atman in all creatures and sees all creatures in the Supreme Being (know), he is a Bhagavat – Uttama – best among the devotees.

So, how to recognize a Realized person? He must be a समदर्शि - one who sees the same everywhere, who is established in equanimity.

What does this 'Same' refer to? The Atman, the Self.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6, in Slokas 29, 30, and 31, Sri Krishna clearly explained this concept.

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि।

ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्र समदर्शनः॥२९॥

Sarvabhūtaṣṭhamātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani

Īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ ||29||

Meaning: The true yogis, uniting their consciousness with God, see with equal eye, all living beings in God and God in all living beings.

यो मां पश्यति सर्वत्र सर्वं च मयि पश्यति।

तस्याहं न प्रणश्यामि स च मे न प्रणश्यति॥३०॥

Yo mām paśyati sarvatra sarvaṁ ca mayi paśyati

Tasyāham na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati ||30||

Meaning: For those who see Me everywhere and see all things in Me, I am never lost to them, nor are they ever lost to Me.

सर्वभूतस्थितं यो मां भजत्येकत्वमास्थितः।

सर्वथा वर्तमानोऽपि स योगी मयि वर्तते॥३१॥

Sarvabhūtaṣṭhitam yo mām bhajatyekatvamāsthitaḥ

Sarvathā vartamāno'pi sa yogī mayi vartate ||31||

Meaning: The yogi who is established in union with Me, and worships Me as the Supreme Soul

residing in all beings, dwells only in Me, though engaged in all kinds of activities.

In these verses, by the word 'मां' (Me), Sri Krishna is referring to himself.

How can He be everywhere? As the Atman.

The Atman as consciousness is present everywhere. Through अवस्था त्रय विचार, that is, reflecting on the three states of our awareness, we can prove the existence of the Atman – consciousness.

When this consciousness gets associated with 'buddhi,' the intellect, it becomes 'jivatma,' the individual self.

This individual self begins to feel a sense of doership, which develops the ego. Ego, associated with 'Maya', creates a world wherein the individual self gets bound, as it were. Bondage, which is nothing but desire for worldly things, ends up in misery. From misery again, the upward journey begins – a journey towards the Atman.

One who becomes successful in knowing the Atman naturally behaves exactly in the opposite way to an egotistic person: An egotistic person sees "many in One" whereas a Realized person sees "One in many."

The 2nd brother of the nine brothers, the sage Hari, also described different stages of realization.

1st grade sees only Atman and nothing else.

ईश्वरे तदधिनेषु बालीषेषु द्विषु च ।

प्रेम मैत्री कृपोऽपेक्शा यः करोति स मध्यमः

॥11/2/46॥

īśvare tad-adhineṣu bālīṣeṣu dviṣu ca

prema-maitrī kṛpo'pekṣā yaḥ karoti sa madhyamaḥ //

The second grade among the realized ones loves God, possess friendliness to devotees, kindness to ignorant and indifference to the antagonists.

But those who worship God, though with great devotion, only in an image alone and do not love and respect God's devotees and also other beings,

are considered as the 3rd grade spiritual seekers.

अर्चयामेव हरये पूजां यः श्रद्धयेहते ।

न तद्भक्तेषु चान्येषु स भक्तः प्राकृतः स्मृतः ॥
11/2/47

*arcāyām eva haraye pūjām yaḥ śraddhayehate
na tad-bhaktesu cānyेषु sa bhaktaḥ prākṛtaḥ smṛtaḥ*

The great sage Hari again comes back to the original question of King Nimi –

भागवत उत्तमः: The Realized Person does not react even when his five senses contact sense objects; he remains unperturbed.

His senses cannot agitate his mind because he knows, विष्णोर्मायामिदं पश्यन्

गृहीत्वापीन्द्रियैरर्थान् यो न द्वेष्टि न हृष्यति ।

विष्णोर्मायामिदं पश्यन् स वै भागवत उत्तमः ॥
11/2/48

*gṛhītāvā pīndriyair arthān yo na dveṣṭi na hrṣyati
viṣṇor māyām idaṁ paśyan sa vai bhāgavata uttamah*

Sri Ramakrishna said, if I knew this world as Real, I would have covered my birthplace with gold!!

Sage Hari also said if you find someone who, when facing – Deha (body), Indriya (the senses), Prana (vital forces), Manah (the mind), Dhi (intellect) and their actions, namely Janma (birth), Vinash (death), Skhuda (Hunger), Bhaya (Fear) and Trishna (thrust), can remain even-minded and calm due to his constant meditation on the Supreme being, know him as the Realized soul.

Swami Virajanandaji, a monastic disciple of Swami Vivekananda who received initiation from Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and later helped establish the Ramakrishna Order centers at Mayavati and Shyamlataal, mentions this in his book “Towards the Goal Supreme.”

In Bhagavatam verse 11/2/50, sage Hari says he who has no desire in his mind and always remains united with the supreme God , know him as a realized soul, the highest among the devotees.

न कामकर्मबीजानां यस्य चेतसि सम्भवः ।

वासुदेवैकनिलयः स वै भागवतोत्तमः ॥ ५० ॥

*na kāma-karma-bījānām yasya cetasi sambhavaḥ
vāsudevaika-nilayaḥ sa vai bhāgavatottamah ॥50॥*

We find a similar description in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, verses 54-71, when Arjuna asks Sri Krishna about the signs of a Sthita Prajna, one who is established in Equanimity – the Self.

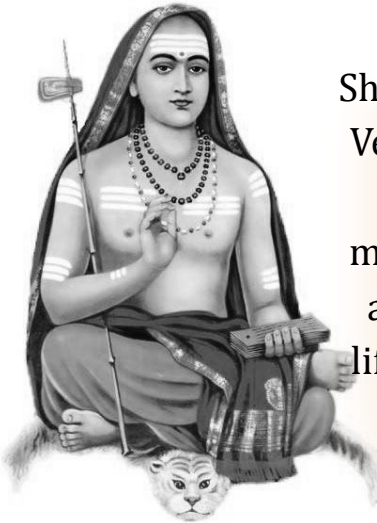
Finally, in verse 11/2/52, the Sage says that the realized soul does not and cannot differentiate between the Atman and the non-Atman, since, for him, there remains no distinction between the secular and the sacred. It is all one Atman.

न यस्य स्वः पर इति वित्तेष्वात्मनि वा भिदा ।

सर्वभूतसमः शान्तः स वै भागवतोत्तमः ॥ ५२ ॥

*na yasya svaḥ para iti vittiṣṭvātmani vā bhidā
sarva-bhūta-samah śāntaḥ sa vai bhāgavatottamah*

In the next issue, we will discuss the third question that King Nimi asked the sage.



Shankaracharya had caught the rhythm of the Vedas, the national cadence. Indeed I always imagine that he had some vision such as mine when he was young, and recovered the ancient music that way. Anyway, his whole life's work is nothing but that, the throbbing of the beauty of the Vedas and the Upanishads.



Introduction to the Cover Page: **Voyage of Sri Ramakrishna in America**

Pravrajika Matriprana
Sarada Convent
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May this story begin with two mystic visions of Sri Ramakrishna. Although these two visions may appear unrelated at first glance, there is, in fact, a deep underlying connection between them. The purpose of the cover story this time is to revisit and explore that very connection.

The first vision goes like this: “One day, while listening to a recitation of the Bhāgavata on the verandah of the Radhākānta temple, he fell into a divine mood and saw the enchanting form of Krishna. He perceived luminous rays issuing from Krishna’s lotus feet in the form of a stout rope, which first touched the Bhāgavata and then his own chest, connecting all three—God, the scripture, and the devotee. ‘After this vision,’ he used to say, ‘I came to realize that Bhagavān, Bhakta, and Bhāgavata—God, the devotee, and the scripture—are, in reality, one and the same.’” (*Introduction to the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Nikhilananda*). This realization serves as an assurance to the seeker who longs for the direct vision of God or for liberation. The assurance is this: Sri Ramakrishna himself is the embodiment of the holy scriptures.

Another vision is: “At Jayrambati, in 1906, she [the Holy Mother] said to the young Brahmachari Girija, ‘Mark you! The Master entered into spiritual trance very often. One day he came down from a long samadhi, he said, “Listen, my dear, I went to a land where people are all white. Ah! How sincere is their devotion!” ...I was at a loss to think who these white persons could be.’ (Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, pp. 389-90)

Sri Ramakrishna did not come to the West, or to the lands of the “white people,” in his physical body. However, if we examine the matter from a

philosophical standpoint, we may say that in his subtle body he came in four ways. First, through his mystic visions themselves; second, through his five direct monastic disciples, Swamis Vivekananda, Abhedananda, Turiyananda, Saradananda, and Trigunatitananda; third, through the monks of the subsequent generation, especially the founding *acharyas* of the Vedanta Societies; and most importantly, through Ramakrishna–Vivekananda Vedanta literature.

Though these four paths may appear distinct at first glance, in reality they all point in one definite direction—what Swami Vivekananda called the “message to the West.” Through this message, Swami Vivekananda revealed none other than Sri Ramakrishna as the “knower of the essence of all scriptures” (*sarva-śāstra-marma-darśī*).

This work was continued by later disciples and further propagated by the founding heads of the Vedanta Societies through their various activities. Sri Ramakrishna not only practiced and attained realization by following the paths of all religions known to him; seekers of every faith also discovered within his life and spiritual practices the essential truth of their own religions. At every level — beginner, practitioner, perfected soul, and even the “perfect of the perfected”—they perceived in him the concentrated, conscious embodiment of their respective scriptures.

Yet Sri Ramakrishna himself repeatedly cautioned that in the scriptures, sand is mixed with sugar; one must leave the sand and take the sugar. To distinguish between sand and sugar, one must properly understand the meaning of the scriptures—not merely their literal words, but their inner significance. Not only the direct meaning, but also the implied or essential meaning

must be grasped. For that, an indispensable requirement is a mind free from attachment to lust and greed.

He reminds us: "Seeing is better than hearing." Mere study or learning is not enough; it must be realized. For in Sri Ramakrishna's realization, "He (the ultimate Reality) is beyond the Vedas and Vedanta." The Vedas (that is all religious scriptures) contain only a hint of Him.

After all the ritualistic portions of the Vedas, the final word is Self-knowledge; and it is this Self-knowledge that the Vedanta, or the Upanishads, expresses. Gathering the essence of the Upanishads, Sri Krishna revealed the Truth in seven hundred verses in the Gita. Those seven hundred verses are not necessary. Adi Shankaracharya declared that not even a full verse is required; the Truth can be expressed in half a verse: "Brahman alone is real, the world is unreal; ultimately, the individual soul is none other than Brahman." Then, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, the "best and most perfect incarnation" of God, Sri Ramakrishna declared that the path to the realization of Brahman is actually built upon a single word—renunciation (*tyāga*). By repeating the word "Gita" ten times in reverse, one arrives at its essence—*tyāgī*, the renouncer. A sannyasi is a complete renouncer. Yet he advised, "*The Gita is the essence of all scriptures. A sannyasi may or may not keep another book with him, but he always carries a pocket Gita.*"

At the same time, one should remember that the Master repeatedly said that after reading a list, it is unnecessary to keep carrying the letter around. Once the essence is understood, once it has been assimilated — one must go to the marketplace to carry out the actual transaction. After study, practice is essential. Sri Ramakrishna said that the beginner reads the scriptures, but an advanced soul extracts their essence. What is needed is to know how to cross the river of worldly existence. All scriptures seek Sat-Chit-Ananda; the goal is to realize That through direct awareness.

Here, for instance, we may recall

Vaishnavcharan's saying. Sri Ramakrishna mentioned this to "M" on July 21, 1883, in the context of his visions: "*Vaishnavcharan was a great pundit. He used to say to me: 'I can find in the scriptures all the things you talk about. But do you know why I come to you? I come to hear them from your mouth.'*" (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) In other words, Vaishnavcharan came to hear about Banaras only from one who had been there and seen it. He knew that mere book learning would not do.

This is especially true at the present juncture of history in which we stand. For imparting a spiritual way of life, two kinds of teachers are needed: one who teaches the scriptures and another who transmits the power of spiritual realization. Technology has now advanced to such a level that it appears artificial intelligence is sufficient to fulfill the role of the first teacher. For that role, the need for a human being is already diminishing and may soon disappear. But the one who can infuse life into that knowledge, their necessity will always remain.

Anyway, the tale was about Sri Ramakrishna, who is the scripture embodied and he reached the lands of the 'white people.' The story of this arrival in the west is fascinating. Before that, it is worth remembering that the word 'white' should not be taken in its literal sense but in its implied meaning. The adjective 'white' here refers to the ruling class of the West. At that time, India was under British rule, and the voice of the ruled rarely reached the ears of the rulers of fair complexion. Yet, in a deeper sense, Sri Ramakrishna perceived that, even among the ruling races, his spiritual message was reaching to the sincere lovers of spiritual wisdom. Although people of Caucasian origin are spread across more than half the world—Europe, North America, Australia, and beyond—for the sake of brevity, let us limit the focus of this discussion to America.

After coming through mystic vision, among the five monastic disciples through whom he came, Swami Vivekananda was undoubtedly the first

and foremost.

Following his historic speech at the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893, the message of Sri Ramakrishna began to be widely propagated through the words of Vivekananda in newspapers everywhere. Yet newspapers cannot quite be regarded as scripture in the traditional sense!

Beyond the newspapers, the proceedings published in November 1893 constituted the first appearance in the West, in book form. Though not as a standalone work, yet they bore Swamiji's lectures, which is nothing but the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna.

After the successful conclusion of the Parliament of Religions in September, the chairman of the sessions and Doctor of Divinity, Professor John Henry Barrows, sought to publish the proceedings of the lectures in two prodigious volumes. He intended to market them as gifts for the upcoming Christmas season. He also had a few competitors. For example, the Chicago Tribune also backed the volume edited by Prof. Walter Raleigh Houghton and named for its publisher, F. Tennyson Neely. Unlike Barrows, Houghton's previous work had been in politics and geography. Those versions, however, contained certain inaccuracies; for example, stating that Swamiji represented the Brahmo Samaj, and so on. On 3 December 1893, the Tribune announced the publication of Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions, stating: "Probably the largest contract ever made between a newspaper and a publishing house has just been concluded by The Tribune with F. T. Neely, thereby securing an exclusive contract for newspaper use in Chicago and the entire State of Illinois for one of the greatest works ever issued Next to the Bible." Basically, the Barrows book claimed to be official, authoritative, and of better quality. It was also more expensive. Neely's book claimed to be impartial and non-sectarian, and it was available at a bargain price (bound edition \$2.50, including fully paid postage to ship anywhere in the world).

Because two types of publications, that is,

newspapers or bulletins and books, are being discussed here, it might be helpful to briefly revisit the history of printing and publishing in America. Between 1890 and 1945 is, in fact, the story of the formation of the foundation of the American media industry. During this period, several significant changes took place in printing technology.

The impact of the Linotype machine, invented in 1884, became widespread in the 1890s. As a result, typesetting became much faster. From a business perspective, the reduced cost led to the expansion of new publishing houses and media business models. In the following decade, large-scale and rapid printing became possible through photogravure and the rotary press, which increased the popularity of newspapers and magazines.

In the 1920s, with the advent of electric ink presses and lighter machinery, smaller publishers were able to print easily at lower cost. This was especially helpful for the publication of local newspapers, magazines, and books.

In 1896, the first book of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta tradition was published by Longmans, Green & Co. Swamiji was, according to the Philadelphia Inquirer, "the favorite of all the delegates." Swamiji's immense popularity and the intense interest of Westerners in yoga attracted this renowned publishing house to bring out the book in London and New York. Swami Vivekananda's Raja Yoga, which contains his translation and commentary on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali along with lectures on spiritual techniques, is considered his first major book published in the West. The book was a seminal text for introducing Vedanta and yoga philosophy to the Western world.

Another book that was published in the same year by the University of Cambridge in 1896. It was based on a lecture that Vivekananda had delivered at a university convocation, which was subsequently published.

Although the spirituality and philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna were expressed through all the

lectures and ideas of Swami Vivekananda, he generally did not directly promote the biography of Sri Ramakrishna through speeches or writings. Instead, he encouraged others to write about Sri Ramakrishna, among whom the renowned German scholar Max Müller was especially notable. He also provided various materials to assist Max Müller in publishing a book that combined Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings. Technically, though, Swamiji did not directly assist Max Müller in writing the book in a personal way. Rather, much of the contribution in terms of information-sharing came from another monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Saradananda, who had come to New York to assist Swamiji in spreading Vedanta in the West. He was the one who primarily organized and shared research-based material about Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings in relation to various scriptures, later compiled in Bengali as *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*. It began to be published serially in 1909. This work was later translated into English as *The Great Master*."

Many years later, on one occasion, Swami Saradananda remarked: "Is it so easy to write about the Master?" Swami Saradananda never became a great orator like Vivekananda. Brooklyn Standard Union wrote on their 17 October 1896 edition: "Here, he interested large classes of students, and by his gentleness and nobility of spirit attracted all who came within the sphere of his influence. He is a master of the intricate system of philosophy expounded in the Vedanta and is capable of presenting it in terse and idiomatic English." Sri Ramakrishna manifested himself in America through Saradananda's lectures and books.

Anyway, the publishing of Max Müller's book, *The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, was undertaken by Longmans, Green & Co., influenced by Swamiji's efforts. Later, the Ramakrishna Math in Madras published its version of the *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* in 1916; a new, condensed

biography was printed in the introduction.

In the meantime, towards the end of 1800s three publishing houses of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission were established. Those departments were part of the Madras Math (1897), Udbodhan (January 1899), and Mayavati Advaita Ashrama (March 1900). However, international book-shipping service infrastructure still had many years to develop.

All publications of the Ramakrishna Mission carry its logo. It is always enthralling to revisit the time when that logo was created. Swami Vivekananda founded the Vedanta Society of New York in 1894 and left for India. After being in a couple of locations, in the spring of 1900 the Society moved from its rooms at 146 East Fifty-Fifth Street to a modest four-story house at 102 East Fifty-Eighth Street, just off Park Avenue. When Swami Vivekananda arrived on June 7, 1900, after his trip to the West Coast, he stayed at this home. During this stay, one morning at the breakfast table, he sketched on the back of an envelope a design of an emblem that was to become the official seal of the Ramakrishna Order!

On July 26, 1900, he left the USA for the last time. As long as Swami Vivekananda was in the physical body, the manifestation of the "infinitely manifold" Sri Ramakrishna in scriptural form, whether through publications or through lectures at Vedanta Societies, remained at a very high level, owing to his fiery personality. But after his Mahasamadhi in 1902, it seems that the momentum of the movement became somewhat subdued.

The case of public lectures can be considered for instance. In New York, about six thousand people would come to listen to Swami Vivekananda's talks. However, afterward, during the time of Abhedananda, one of Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples, the audience for his lectures would be around 600. Later still, during the time of Swami Bodhananda, a second-generation monastic and a disciple of Vivekananda, the number decreased

even further.

On the other hand, through these second-generation monastic teachers, new Vedanta Societies continued to be established. At the same time, the centers founded by Vivekananda in New York and San Francisco also continued their activities.

In 1900, after establishing the San Francisco center, Swami Vivekananda left America, entrusting its responsibility to Swami Turiyananda. He came with Vivekananda to America in 1899. Vivekananda introduced Turiyananda to American admirers of Vedanta, saying that the Vedanta he had spoken about in books, this Turiyananda was its living testimony. Turiyananda established the first Vedanta retreat, the Shanti Ashrama, in the San Antone Valley of Central California, inspired many through his teachings, and left for India in 1902.

People who visit the Shanti Ashrama even now find that a wonderful spiritual atmosphere still pervades the place where, for two years, Swami Turiyananda lived and inspired a group of students to devote themselves exclusively to the ideal of God-realization.

Swami Turiyananda was in America for a very short time, less than three years. Apparently, he did not choose the path of spreading the messages of Sri Ramakrishna through lectures or by writing articles and books. Instead, he was instrumental in following a unique way of manifesting the eternal Ramakrishna through his unique spiritual character and epistolary literature, or letter literature.

After leaving the USA, Turiyananda kept in touch with the group. Those who intended to realize Sri Ramakrishna through the life and teachings of Turiyananda, as well as future generations of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission followers, received countless letters in response to their various spiritual questions. Through these letters, generations of Americans are still being inspired by the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna. The letters of Swami Turiyananda were originally published in the

November–December 1959 issue of “Vedanta and the West” magazine. His letters in Bengali were translated by Swamis Prabhavananda and Pravitrnananda.

Way before this magazine, a number of attempts were made by the swamis to establish a Vedanta journal in the United States. After Turiyananda’s return to India Trigunatitananda came from Calcutta to take charge of the center. While in Calcutta, he had served as the editor of Udbodhan, which, besides being a journal, was also an important publishing house in Bengali for Ramakrishna–Vivekananda–Vedanta literature.

During the interim period, before the arrival of Trigunatitananda, the Vedanta Society of San Francisco brought out *The Pacific Vedantin* (1902) for a year. After assuming responsibility, from 1905 onward he began printing pamphlets in the name of the Society. Trigunatitananda took the initiative to publish the monthly *Voice of Freedom* (April 1909 to March 1916). This magazine was widely circulated, even reaching as far as East Bengal, India. Swami Ashokananda recounted how, when he was in high school, his teacher subscribed to the magazine and inspired his students to read it. This magazine was also for the many devotees who could not attend his lectures. His goal was to harmoniously blend the thoughts of the East and the West through the magazine.

Under the leadership of Swami Abhedananda, from 1905 onward, the Vedanta Society of New York began distributing pamphlets, and by 1906 the number exceeded 50,000. He also regularly published the *Vedanta Bulletin*, which included news of various Vedanta Societies. Later, it was renamed *Vedanta Magazine* and survived until 1909. Bodhananda in New York published the *Vedanta Darpana* for the years 1931 to 1933.

While there had been considerable enthusiasm among Western publishers to publish Swami Vivekananda’s books, the same level of interest was not seen in publishing the works of the next generation of monks of the Ramakrishna Mission. Naturally, the need was felt at that time to have

their own publishing house, their own press. But that required funds, which the Vedanta Societies of that formative period did not have.

To help disseminate the teachings of Vedanta, Trigunatitananda established an in-house press in the Vedanta temple basement and one of the monks was taking care of it. Primarily it was printing “Voice of Freedom” and in 1912, the center published *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as its first major book.

In this context, the contribution of Swami Paramananda, the youngest monastic disciple of Vivekananda, is undeniable. In 1909, he established a Vedanta Centre in Boston, and from 1912 it began publishing the journal “Message to the East”, which continued uninterrupted for the next 55 years. His center had its own press and published Ramakrishna–Vivekananda–Vedanta literature extensively.

The Vedanta Society of Southern California was founded by Swami Prabhavananda in 1930 and in January 1938, Swamis Prabhavananda and Ashokananda (San Francisco) initiated the jointly published magazine *Voice of India* (later called *Vedanta and the West*). It was a joint venture for three years, but in January 1941 it was turned over solely to the Southern California Center and was renamed. It contained articles dealing with all aspects of spiritual life. Contributions were made by monastics, eminent writers, philosophers, scientists, and lay members of the Society. Altogether, nearly 1,000 articles were published, including 47 by Aldous Huxley, 41 by Christopher Isherwood, 35 by Gerald Heard, and hundreds by senior swamis of the Ramakrishna Order. In short, it produced a rich discourse of practical and theoretical Vedantic articles, which later formed the basis of seven books of anthology.

This association with the Southern California publication *Vedanta and the West* inspired Swami Ghanananda to initiate the magazine *Vedanta for East and West* (later renamed *Vedanta*) in 1951 at the Vedanta Centre in the UK. For six months, from December 1947 until May 1948, Swami

Ghanananda conducted forty scheduled lectures and weekly classes in Hollywood. He then went on to found the center in London, which he directed until his passing in 1969.

With the advancement of technology, the picture was changing too. A major commercial trend emerged in the printing industry. Large organizations such as Hearst Corporation, McClure’s, and Curtis Publishing Company operated multiple platforms, including magazines and newspapers. Their aim was to reach a vast audience and generate advertising revenue. From this period onward, advertising became the primary source of income for print media. For example, *Time* (1923) and *Life* (1936) quickly gained popularity through visual content and advertising. During the decade 1929–1939, the aftermath of World War I and the Great Depression kept the printing industry active through war-related news and government advertisements.

Swami Gnaneshwarananda founded the Vedanta Society of Chicago in 1930. The Society had at least two major celebrations during his period (i.e., 1930 to 1937); the first was the World’s Fair in 1933, and the second was the Birth Centenary Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna in 1936. Swami Vivekananda attended the World’s Fair in 1893. It had a separate section for discussions on the World’s Religions. Afterwards, a few World’s Fairs were organized in the USA—for example, St. Louis (1904), San Francisco (1915), and Chicago (1933)—but none of them had a Parliament of the World’s Religions. Yet the monks of the Vedanta Societies attempted to offer symposiums at these fairs. Abhedananda attended the St. Louis Fair; Trigunatitananda was preparing for the program in San Francisco, but his sudden death prevented him; and Gnaneshwarananda organized a convention of all leaders of the American Vedanta Societies. Only two were unable to come to Chicago. The presenting swamis delivered a series of public lectures, creating great enthusiasm among the public. Swamis

Paramananda, Ashokananda, Akhilananda, Vividishananda, and Nikhilananda attended the program.

On that occasion, the Swami brought out an attractive brochure entitled "Hinduism Comes to America". This brief account of the origin, purpose, and spiritual significance of the Vedanta movement in America included photographs of all the swamis who had served in America from Swami Vivekananda onward. This was the first attempt in that direction and was highly appreciated. The message of Vedanta philosophy, presented by different swamis, attracted Chicagoans to the Vedanta movement; many joined the Society, and some even became students of Swami Gnaneshwarananda. During this time, the Vedanta Society of Chicago had the largest membership in terms of numbers.

In 1936, every Ramakrishna Mission center around the world celebrated the birth centenary of Sri Ramakrishna according to its capacity. In this connection, once again Gnaneshwarananda organized an elaborate program in Chicago. Most of the Vedanta Societies in the United States came to take part in it. There were lectures, dialogues, and a large and well-attended banquet with well-known guests, distinguished speakers, a public musical performance by members of the Vedanta Society of Chicago, and many other functions. All the discussion topics were centered on Sri Ramakrishna, as expected. For example, Paramananda spoke on "The Message of Ramakrishna," Akhilananda's topic was "Ramakrishna, the Fountain of Love," Vividishananda's subject was "Ramakrishna and His Mission," and Nikhilananda's talk was on "Ramakrishna and the Modern World." Guest speakers included Reverend George B. Lake, M.D., of the Liberal Catholic Church, and Dr. Peterson Bradley, pastor of the People's Church of Chicago. On the occasion, a small book entitled "Ramakrishna, the Man and the Power" was published. It was the first short biography of Ramakrishna to appear in English in the United

States, and it attracted a good deal of attention. However, the Vedanta Society of Chicago never owned a press.

Vedanta Press of the Vedanta Society of Southern California was established in 1947 for the purpose of publishing modern translations and commentaries of selected Indian scriptures. Their first two publications were "The Crest Jewel of Discrimination", translated from the original Sanskrit by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, and Prabhavananda's "The Wisdom of God", drawn from the Bhagavatam. Books of the Vedanta Press were distributed to the trade by Somerset Books of New York City. Swami Prabhavananda became actively involved with writers like Percy Houston, Frederick Manchester, Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley, and Christopher Isherwood. The involvement of Eugene Exman (1900–1975) played an important role in the publication service of the Vedanta Society of Southern California at the beginning.

Exman assisted Gerald Heard in the planning of Trabuco College in 1941–42. He was a trustee of the Trabuco Ranch Trust from its beginning until 1945. Exman was in the publishing business and was regarded as one of the foremost influences on religious book publishing in the U.S. He was connected to the publishing house of Harper & Brothers (which became Harper & Row Publishers, Inc. in 1962 and HarperCollins in 1990) in New York City as the manager of the religious book department and later served the company as a director, followed by its vice president. It was Harper & Brothers, largely through the influence of Exman, that played a leading role in making Ramakrishna–Vedanta books known to the general public between 1946 and 1959. In the 1950s, when Exman was revisiting Trabuco Monastery, he heard a lecture given by Swami Areshananda (then an assistant minister at the Vedanta Society of Southern California) and enjoyed becoming reacquainted with what he knew of Trabuco College. In addition, he was reportedly initiated into an Eastern religion.

The Ramakrishna–Vivekananda Center of New York was founded by Swami Nikhilananda in 1933. The most notable translation of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by Nikhilananda was published in 1942, but the center never owned its own printing press; instead, it published its authoritative literature, including Swami Nikhilananda’s translations, through professional publishing houses.

From the 1940s, the American economy started to grow in a positive direction, which led to improvements in technology and other sectors. Vedanta Societies also began to benefit from the overall improvement in the financial condition of the country. The journey that began with the printing of pamphlets is now moving forward using the most advanced technology. The use of “talking books” started in the U.S. around the 1930s to help the blind. By the late 1990s, audiobooks started to become popular, and by the early 2000s, thanks to the rapid rise of digital technology, the internet, and the introduction of portable MP3 players, they became part of everyday life. Readers of the mid-2000s found having books in electronic form convenient. In the publishing industry, alongside hardbound and

paperback books, e-books appeared. Around 2007, driven by the launch of the Amazon Kindle, access to e-books was revolutionized.

The Maitrī Upanishad states:

*Uttamā tattva-chintā eva,
madhyamaṁ śāstra-chintanam;
adhamā mantra-chintā ca,
tīrtha-bhrānti adhamādhama.*

Reflection on the highest truth (tattva) is supreme. Reflection on scriptures is of a middling level. Repetition or contemplation of mantras is lower, and wandering to places of pilgrimage is even more basic than that.

Contextually, this verse can be reread as follows: The highest truth was embodied in Sri Ramakrishna, who arrived in the West through scriptures, through spiritual teachers who initiated devotees into Vedanta through mantra, and through visits to places associated with Sri Ramakrishna and the torchbearers of his teachings. Through his subtle body, he arrived to his devotees in the West. He is their goal; he alone is also the means for his followers here. The expressions of the means have changed, but essentially it has always remained about Sri Ramakrishna, the one and only.

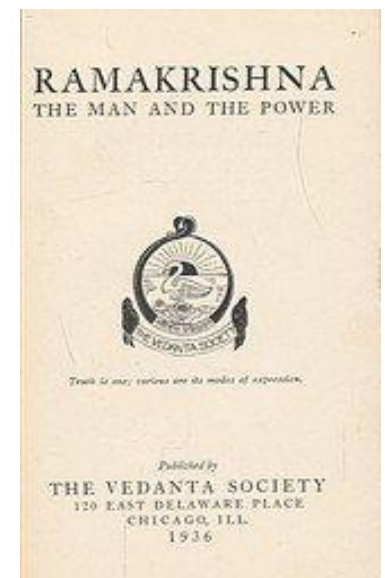
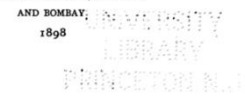
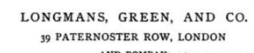
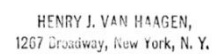
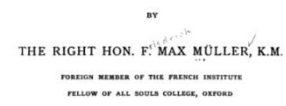
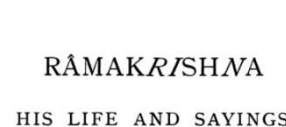
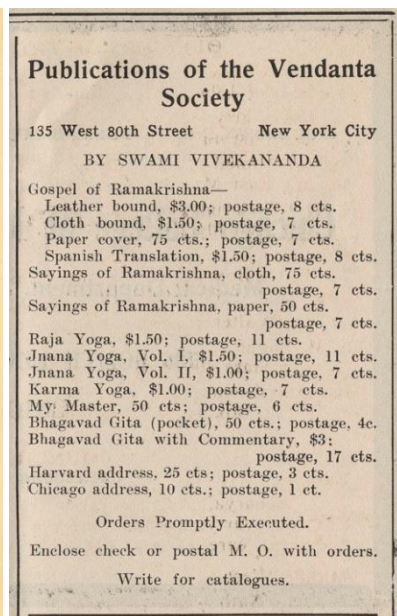
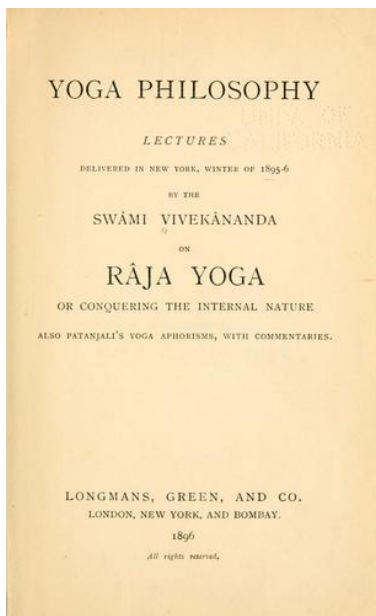
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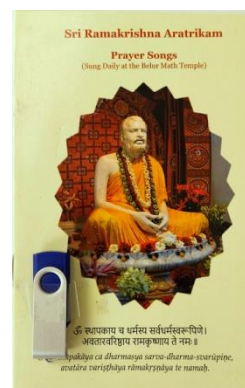
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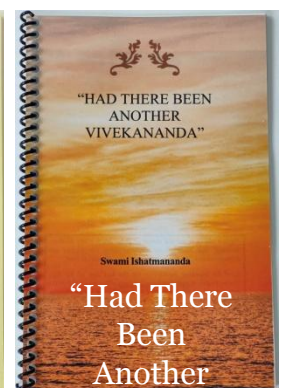
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