



REACH

Newsletter of Vedanta Centres of Australia

Motto:

*Atmano mokshartham
jagad hitaya cha,*

**“For one’s own
liberation and for the
welfare of the world.”**

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Sayings and Teachings

Shun reasoning and cultivate love

“One should not reason too much; it is enough if one loves the Lotus Feet of the Mother. Too much reasoning throws the mind into confusion. You get clear water if you drink from the surface of a pool. Put your hand deeper and stir the water, and it becomes muddy. Therefore pray to God for devotion.”

--- Sri Ramakrishna.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by Mahendranath Gupta, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, India, page 186.

Leading an erring person

“To err is human; but how few know to lead an erring man?”

--- Sri Sarada Devi.

Great Sayings: The Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Kolkata, page 23.

Strengthen your own Ideal

“The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.”

--- Swami Vivekananda.

Great Sayings: The Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda by Ramakrishna Mission Institution of Culture, Golpark, Kolkata, page 35.



**Swami Vivekananda
Temple at the
Ramakrishna Math,
Belur Math**

**The headquarters of
the Ramakrishna
Math and Ramakrishna
Mission, Howrah
(West Bengal), India.**

**Inset : Bas Relief of Swamiji
at the temple basement.**

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FROM DECEMBER 2008 TO MARCH 2009

Function	Centre	Date
Birth Anniversary of Holy Mother	Brisbane	Saturday, 20 December 2008
	Melbourne	Sunday 21st December 2008
	Perth	Sunday 21st December 2008
	Sydney	Thursday, 18 December 2008
Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda	Melbourne	Saturday, 17th January 2009
	Perth	Saturday, 17th January 2009
	Sydney	Saturday, 17th January 2009
Shivaratri	Sydney	Monday, 23rd February 2009
Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna and Annual Celebration for Adelaide and Melbourne Centres	Brisbane	Saturday, 7th March 2009
	Melbourne	Saturday, 28th February 2009
	Sydney	Friday, 27th February 2009
	Adelaide A.C.	Saturday, 21st March 2009
	Melbourne A. C.	Saturday, 14th March 2009

Welcome

We welcome you all to the Ramakrishna - Vedanta Movement and invite you to attend our functions and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal message of Vedanta as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda.

News and activities of Vedanta Centres of Australia and New Zealand

For the period From August 2008 to November 2008

ADELAIDE CENTRE

Monthly activities:

Swami Sridharananda continued his three days a month visit to Adelaide and delivered discourses on the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. The talks are held at Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich SA 5065. The lectures are being recorded. For details of the ongoing monthly programmes please contact Mr. Raman Sharma, Secretary, on 08- 8431 9775 or Mrs. Pathma Iswaran on 08-8379 5336.

Other Activities:

A day-long spiritual retreat was organised at the Monastery, 15 Cross Road, Glen Osmond, SA, 5064 on Saturday, the 22nd of November 2008. About 25 devotees including two devotees from Sydney attended the retreat. After registration at about 9 a.m. the programme started with *Shanti mantras* and *bhajans* followed by a talk on Swami Vivekananda by Swami Sridharananda, then a short meditation session. Later in the day group discussion, readings from the Gospels of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother and question and answer sessions were held followed by a talk on the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. The retreat concluded with *arati* and *bhajans*. Swami Atmeshananda led the *bhajans* and chanting.



Spiritual Retreat in Adelaide



BRISBANE CENTRE

Daily activities:

Morning worship, evening *arati*, *bhajans*, and a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are the regular activities at the Centre at **181 Burbong Street, Chapel Hill, QLD 4073**, (Phone no. 07-3720 0228). A resident volunteer

looks after the day-to-day activities at the Centre.

Monthly and Annual activities:

Swami Atmeshananda visited Brisbane once every month and delivered talks on *Bhagavad-Gita* and other spiritual topics. Swami Chandrashekharaananda visited the Centre during Navaratri from the 2nd to the 5th of October and conducted the monthly *satsang*.

Celebrations:

CANBERRA CENTRE

Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the *Bhagavad-Gita* twice a month at the Majura community Centre, Canberra. Also once a month Parlour talks based on *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* were given by him. Contacts: Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary - 02-6258 7612 and Dr. Ian Doherty, Treasurer - 02-6247 8519.

Other Activities:

The Annual General Meeting was held on the 19th November 2008. It was presided by Swami Sridharananda. An annual celebration held on the 16th of November 2008 at Tuggeranong Arts Centre, Canberra. The function started with *bhajans* by a group of devotees, then Ms. Karunya Prasad and Ms. Cheryl Khurana presented Bharat Natyam and Kathak classical dances respectively. The celebration was concluded with a talk on 'Vedanta Movement and Its Relevance Today' by Swami Sridharananda and the vote of thanks.

MELBOURNE CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

The vesper service is held daily at the Centre at **7 Judy Court, Vermont, Vic 3133** from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. It includes set hymns, scriptural readings and meditation and occasional devotional singing. A resident volunteer looks after the services in the mornings and on other occasions.

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta and other spiritual literature were made available in print, audio and visual media through the bookstall during the period. For further information please contact Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary, on 03-9803 6154 and Mr. Govindan Iyer, Treasurer, on 03-9543 4091.

2. Weekly/Monthly Activities:

The monthly discourses on the *Bhagavad-Gita* continued to be delivered by

Swami Sridharananda from Thursday to Saturday of a prescheduled week at Monash University Claton Campus of Law, Wellington Road (Lecture Theatre L1). The lecture series were based on the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The recordings of these discourses are available in Audio, Video and MP3 formats.

On the **second Sundays** of every month, meetings were conducted from 5 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. These regular meetings include prayer, recitation of sacred mantras, rendering of *kirtan* and *bhajans* followed by selected readings from relevant scriptures and discussions thereon. The meetings conclude with an *arati* and distribution of *prasad*.

Yoga for beginners is being conducted by Dr. P.L. Aneja, on Sundays from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Other Activities:

The Annual General Meeting was held at the Centre on Saturday 9th of August from 3.45 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. Swami Sridharananda, presided over and conducted the meeting.

Group study of the *Bhagavad-Gita* has been held every alternate Saturday from 9.30 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. A further study of the recorded discourses has been held on Wednesdays from 10.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

The DVD presentations of lecture series on the *Patanjali Yoga Sutras* **delivered in Sydney by Swami Sridharananda** have been organised for viewing on Fridays from 7.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. following the *arati* service.

In the absence of Swami Sridharananda, Swami Chandrasekharaananda visited the Melbourne Centre from Friday, the 12th of September to Tuesday, the 16th of September 2008. During his stay in the mornings he conducted guided meditation and in the evening after *arati* and *bhajans* delivered talks based on the *Ishopanishad*.

PERTH CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

Worship followed by Vedic chanting in the morning and vesper service at 7 p.m. followed by a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation are being held daily at the Centre located at **2B Roe Close, Bull Creek W.A. 6149**. In addition, a class on *Ishopanishad* is held daily in the afternoon. The Centre maintains a small bookstall

and Library. Contacts: Centre - 08 9313 8796, Mr. K.P. Basu Mallick, Secretary, - 0411 791 058.

2. Weekly/Monthly Activities:

Weekly *satsangs* were conducted on Sundays at 11:00 a.m., and the classes on *Kathopanishad* were held on Wednesdays from 6:15 p.m. to 7 p.m. The **Bala Bodhi** classes for children and youth are being conducted on Saturdays from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Swami Damodarananda conducts the above classes, meets the devotees and visitors, and, delivers talks at various places in Perth upon request.

Celebrations:

A special prayer meeting was held on 5th of October 2008 to celebrate the worship of the Divine Mother. Devotional songs were sung by the devotees and Swami Damodarananda elaborated on the significance of the worship of the Divine Mother.

SYDNEY CENTRE

Daily Activities:

Worship and meditation in the morning, and vesper service in the evening from 7 p.m. followed by devotional singing form the main focus of the daily activities at the Centre at Ermington. Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees are also conducted on a daily basis. The library facility is available to devotees for reference and research. The Centre maintains a bookstall which has a range of books on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, Yoga and other spiritual literature. Devotional songs, discourses on *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanishad*, etc. are also available in various media.

2. Weekly/ Monthly Activities:

The Centre conducted the following activities in Sydney:

a) Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the ***Bhagavad-Gitā*** every Sunday morning from 9:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. at the South Strathfield Bowling Club, Augusta Street, Strathfield.

b) Classes on ***Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*** were held on Wednesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Centre in Ashfield.

c) Many devotees have availed themselves of **spiritual counselling** and guidance. The Swamis also visited the homes of devotees when required.

d) **Yogasana Classes** for adults continued to be held every Tuesday at the Centre from 7:30 p.m.

e) **Career guidance** sessions to help new Australian migrants to find suitable jobs



Aradhana in progress in Samanvaya programme, Deity and part of the audience.

were conducted on the second Saturday of every month from 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Mr. Abhijit Guha and his dedicated band of volunteers conducted the sessions.

f) Special **meditation** sessions were held at the Ermington Centre on Sundays from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Annual Activities/ Celebrations:

Sri Krishna **Janmastami** was celebrated on 24th August 2008.

Swami Chandrashekaranda attended the **Ganeshotsava** on 7th of September 2008 organised by the Friends of India in Liverpool and delivered a talk.

Special worship was offered to the Divine Mother **Durga** on Tuesday, the 7th October, the Mahastami day, amid devotional singing. About 700 devotees attended the function.

The **A.G.M.** commenced at 11 a.m. on 2nd November 2008 at the South Strathfield Bowling Club. Swami Sridharananda presided over the meeting.

Swami Atmeshananda attended the **Deepavali** celebration on 13th November 2008 at the Parliament House of NSW.

Other Activities:

On the 6th of August 2008, the Holy relics were brought from Ashfield Ashrama and installed in the new Centre at Stewart Street and short worship was performed.

Book Stalls were put up in the Sydney Olympic Grounds during both at 'India Australia Friendship Fair' on Sunday, the 10th August 2008, organised by the United India Association and in the 'Deepavali Fair' organised by the

Deepavali Fair Committee.

Vasant, a musical treat, was organised by **Sur O Dhvani** to raise funds for Vedanta Centre of Sydney on the 13th of September 2008. Mr. Debashis Bhattacharjee played the Sarod, Mr. Supriya Ganguli and Mrs. Chandana Ganguli presented classical numbers and Mr. Abhijit Dan played on Tabla.

On the 1st of November 2008 another musical programme '**Samanvaya**' was presented at the Bankstown Town Hall. Mrs. Uma Ayyar and Mrs. Srijani Dan sang in the programme and Mr. Abhijit Dan and other artists presented their skills on Tabla and other musical instruments.

Overseas Visit:

On a special invitation from the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago, Swami Sridharananda visited United States of America from the 14 of August 2008 to the 6th of October 2008. He was the guest speaker in the spiritual retreat organised by them. He also conducted a spiritual retreat in Vancouver, Canada and delivered lecture in various Vedanta Centres of the U.S. and Canada.

Swami Sridharananda visited Hong Kong from the 6th of November to the 11th of November 2008 and delivered talks on spiritual subjects. He visited Auckland, New Zealand from the 27th of November to the 1st of December 2008.

Visiting Monastics:

Swamis Aparokshananda and Tadananda visited the Centre en route to Fiji from the 4th to 6th of August 2008. Swami Adibhavananda visited the Centre from



Worship of the Divine Mother Durga in progress

the 24th of November to the 27th of November 2008 en route to New Zealand.

(Continued on page 8)

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi: Her Spiritual Ministrations

*Sri Saradamani Devi is conceived as the mother, the guru, and the Deity. All these aspects are finely blended and harmoniously integrated in her life. Whenever we look at her she is seen as the real and universal mother. When we come closer and delve in her 'life and teachings' we get true knowledge which dispels our ignorance. When we approach her to recognise her as mother and guru, she draws us to her lap as a mother and at the same time we get a glimpse of her transcendental image seated in her divine abode with divine grace and glory. To us, then, she is the **Mother**, full of unquestioning affection; **Sarada**, Saraswati, the compassionate bestower of the highest wisdom; and the **Devi**, Deity, the embodiment of purity, glory, and supreme power, who is granting salvation to all. The following article highlights salient aspects of Mother's Gurubhav, the 'spiritual ministrations':*

Mother as true guru

The true guru is a saviour, who through his unbounded love accepts the entire responsibility of his disciple. Not only this, often enough, he transfers to himself the disciple's sins and physical maladies and suffers vicariously. He does this consciously, and though he suffers in consequences, he does not give it up. Such instances are plentiful in the Mother's life. During her last illness at the 'Udbodhan', the Mother communicated her inner feelings to a devotee thus, "Do you think that even though the Master does not spare this body, I can have any respite till any of the souls whose responsibility I have accepted is left unredeemed? I shall have to be by their side. I have accepted the burden of all their merits and demerits. It is no fun to impart initiation. What a burden one has to take upon one's shoulders, and how much thought one has to bestow upon them...I can't possibly leave those whom I have accepted as my own."

Mother's constant mental japa

The relationship between guru and the disciple is not established by any formal process; it is an obligation voluntarily undertaken by the guru out of his compassion and lasts for all eternity. The Mother carried on a constant mental *japa*. In old age, when owing to physical weakness, she had to spend longer hours in her bed the attendant noticed that she was doing *japa* even while in bed. At night her sleep was very light, so much so, that she responded to the first call. The attendant might ask in wonder, 'Are you not asleep', or 'Don't you get sleep?' The Mother would reply, 'What can I do, my son? The boys come and entreat me eagerly. They take the mantra and go home. But nobody does any *japa* regularly. Some don't do it even once. Yet, as I have shouldered the burden, should I not look after them? That's why I do *japa* and pray to the Master, "O, Master, grant them enlightenment, grant them emancipation, and do take on yourself their care in every way here and hereafter.



**Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi
(1853-1920)**

This world is full of trials and tribulations. May they never have to come back again."

Words of courage and assurance

Into a devotee's mind the Mother instilled these words of courage and assurance, 'What fear need you have, my son? Your thought comes to me well enough. You need not do anything; I am doing everything for you.' The devotee enquired, 'Do you have to work for all your sons wherever they may be?' The Mother replied, 'For all I have to work.' The devotee further asked, 'You have so many children; do you remember them all?' The Mother first admitted that she could not recollect all; and then she explained, 'I do *japa* for those whom I can recollect. And for those that I don't remember I pray to the Master thus, "Master, I have many sons in many places. Do please look after those whose names I can't remember, and graciously grant that they may prosper."

The power of mantra and compassion

About the power of mantra and the taking over of sin, the Mother on one occasion (February 1913) said, 'Energy is transferred through a mantra – the guru's goes to the disciple and the disciple's

comes to the guru. That's how sin is accepted through the imparting of mantra and the body gets so many diseases. It's a hard task to be a guru; one has to take over the disciples' sins. The guru has to take a share of a sin that is committed by a disciple. If the disciple is good, the guru is also benefited.'

Although the Mother thus suffered for her disciples' sins, her outlook on sinners was one of pity rather than of hatred. A devotee was apprehensive that even after getting a mother like the Holy Mother he might not have his life's objective fulfilled. The Mother encouraged him saying, 'Why are you afraid, son? Know that the Master is ever behind you. And I am there. Don't fear so long as I am your Mother. For the Master has truly promised me, "At the last moment I shall lead by the hand all those who will come to you." Whatsoever anyone of you may do, and howsoever any one may behave, the Master will have to come at last to take you. The Lord has given (men) hands and feet (the senses); and sure enough, they will have their play.'

Mother's glorious compassion

Mother used to say, 'I impart mantra out of pity. They become importunate, they weep, their sight fills me with mercy. Out of compassion, I grant initiation. Else what do I gain? One has to take over sins by giving initiation. I think thus, "The body will go anyhow: still let them have something."

One morning three devotees came to Jayrambati with a letter of introduction from Swami Brahmananda. The Mother heard the letter read out and called in the devotees; but she sat with her legs folded, though it was usual for her, because of her rheumatism, to keep them stretched out even in the presence of devotees. She refused to initiate them and directed them to go to the Belur Math. The devotees obeyed her for the time being and went to the outer apartment. But their disappointment was too great to be assuaged; and hence they approached her for the second time

to be more propitious. She however was inflexible and spoke to the Master thus, 'Master, I prayed to you yesterday that the day might not pass uselessly. And at long last you too bring these!' Inexorability was, however, against her grain; and she yielded at last saying, 'Master. Let me carry on your work so long as the body lasts.' The initiation was duly completed.

A few days later Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Shivananda and Saradananda heard the whole incident sitting on the upper verandah of the Belur Math on the Ganges side. The narration over, Swami Brahmananda sat without a word for a pretty long time. Swami Premananda heaved a long sigh and said with folded hands, 'Mercy, mercy! It's by this glorious compassion that the Mother is protecting us forever. We can't express in words the poison that she has accepted. If we had done so, we would have been burnt down to ashes.'

Accession of strength, courage and faith

A devotee, however weak he might be, would have an accession of strength, courage and faith, if he could but come to the Mother. A devotee could not have peace of mind although he practised *japa*. The Mother told him encouragingly that the mind would be pacified by practice. But this could hardly comfort him. He had heard that if a disciple failed to practise *japa*, it harmed the guru; hence he wanted to return the mantra to the mother. At this she said, 'Now see, how he talks. I lose my sleep in thought of you all; and the Master has blessed you long ago.' Tears rolled down her cheeks as she spoke; and with emotions she continued, 'Well, you need not practise any *japa* of the mantra anymore.' The devotee became very upset and felt 'condemned to hell.' The Mother at once uttered these heartening words, 'What! You, who are my son, will be damned! Whoever has come here, whoever is my son is already redeemed. Destiny dare not throw my children into hell. Free yourself of all anxiety by entrusting your future to me. And remember this always, that there's one behind you who will come to you at the right moment and lead you to the everlasting domain.'

Advice on *japa* and meditation

To a devotee the Mother said, 'How can one do without *japa* and meditation? These have got to be done. 'When the devotee complained that the impurities of his mind were not being removed in spite of these, she said, 'Through the practice of *japa* they will go. How can one afford

to do without these practices?' Another devotee asked the Mother (1907) about initiation, 'Well, Mother, what's the need of taking a mantra? If instead of doing *japa* of a particular mantra, one simply goes on repeating "Mother Kali", "Mother Kali", (for instance), will that not be sufficient? The Mother replied, 'The mantra purifies the body. A man becomes holy by doing *japa* of the Lord's mantra...The mantra is necessary for purification of the body, if not for anything else.'

On another occasion (February 1913), a disciple showed her a tiny seed of the huge banyan tree and said, 'Do you see, Mother, how small it is – tinier even than the tiniest seed we know, and yet what a huge tree sprouts from it!' The Mother said, 'Why should it not be so? Consider, for instance, how small the seed of the Lord's name is; and yet from this sprout in time divine moods, devotion and love.'

A disciple who had developed mental aberration returned his rosary to the Mother. When a monk asked her whether he had returned the mantra also, she replied, 'Can that ever be? It's a living mantra. Can there be any giving back of it – the mantra that one has once received, the great mantra that it is? If one has but once shown love for his guru, can he ever be despoiled of it?'

Efficacy of *japa*

About the efficacy of *japa* the Mother once said, 'By *japa* and austerity is cut asunder the bondage of Karma (past action). But God can't be realised except through love and devotion. As for *japa* and such other things, do you know what they stand for? Through them the senses etc become subdued.' On another day she said, 'One should perform *japa*, meditation, etc at regular hours giving no room for laziness.' At other times she declared, 'If one can repeat the mantra fifteen to twenty thousand times every day, and then it will show results. Let him do so first, if he does not get success, let him come and say so. But one has to practise a little attentively. Doing nothing and neglecting everything, they merely complain, "Why does my *japa* not bear fruit." 'Work you have to do as a matter of course; work keeps the mind well. But *japa*, meditation, and prayer are specially needed; one should sit up at least in the morning and in the evening. That is like the helm of a boat. When one sits up for a while in the evening, there comes to one's mind for consideration what one has done throughout the day. Then one has to compare the state of mind one has

today with what one had yesterday. Then one should meditate on one's chosen Deity as one goes on doing *japa*. How can you know how you are conducting yourself unless you have *japa* and meditation every morning and evening side by side with work?'

Mother unequivocally decried *japa* as a mere mechanical process when she said, 'These mantras and the like are nothing, my daughter; devotion is all. In the Master you will find your guru and chosen Deity. He is all.' And drawing attention to divine grace she said, 'You talk of having done so much *japa*, or so much of work; but nothing will avail. Who can achieve anything unless Mahamaya opens the way? O, creatures surrender yourselves, just surrender yourselves. Then only will She be gracious and clear the way for you.' Till one attains this attitude of surrender and this passionate love, no spiritual practice is to be neglected.

The path of fervent love

Without ignoring settled norms, but rather giving allegiance to them, the Mother wanted to draw the devotees to the path of fervent love. Her process of initiation followed this middle course. In refusing initiation to a candidate she said, 'You have your ancestral guru; you can as well have it from him.' Again, there are instances where she kept intact the mantra of the family guru and, adding to it a new one, instructed the disciple to repeat first the former mantra ten times and then repeat the new one. About this double initiation Mother spoke thus, 'Sometimes, people of little faith and of unsteady mind come for initiation. I mentally read their past history from their very appearance and behaviour and ask them whether they were previously initiated by someone else. When they reply in the affirmative, I tell them, "Strange you have come again for initiation! You have no faith in the mantra already given by your guru. What is a mantra but the holy name of god? Why have you come for initiation again?" Then they beg to be forgiven and again implore me with tears in their eyes. I can't bear anybody's tears. I pray to the Master for strengthening their faith, and through his direction I give them initiation in addition to the mantra already received by them. This additional mantra is given for fresh stimulus and strength in order to increase their faith in the name of God.'

Source: Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; pages 395-425.

The birth anniversary of the Swami was observed on 23rd September 2008 at our centres.

He who has realised the Unity can not commit sin

Kali was serving his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, during his last illness at Cossipore garden house. There were two ponds in the compound, stocked with plenty of fish. Kali was a good angler. One day he caught some fish, and news of this reached the Master. In the evening when Kali was serving him, the Master asked, "Is it true that you have been catching many fish with a fishing rod?" "Yes, sir." The Master said, "It is a sin to catch fish with a fishing rod, for thereby living things are killed."

In defence Kali quoted from the Gita: "He who thinks that the Self is the slayer as well as he who thinks that the Self is slain is ignorant, for the Self neither slays nor is slain" (2.19). He further added, "So why should it be a sin to catch fish?"

Ramakrishna smiled and tried to make Kali understand through various arguments. He said, "When a person attains true knowledge, he does not take a false step." Suddenly the Master began coughing and there was a trace of blood in his sputum. Frightened by this, Kali told him: "Sir, talking will aggravate your cancer. Please do not talk anymore." But the Master said, "I consider you to be one of the most intelligent of the boys. You will understand if you meditate on what I have said."

According to Ramakrishna's instructions, Kali meditated for three days and realised the meaning behind his statement. He went to the Master and said, "Sir, I have now realised why it is wrong to catch fish. I shall not do it again. Please forgive me." The Master was very pleased to hear this. He said, "It is deceitful to catch fish in this way. Hiding a hook inside bait and hiding poison in food offered to an uninvited guest are sins of the same kind." Kali humbly accepted what the Master said and felt his infinite compassion. Ramakrishna continued, "It is true that the Atman does not die nor is it killed. But he who has realised the truth is the Atman himself, so why should he have the tendency to kill others? As long as the tendency to kill remains, he is not identified with the Atman nor does he have any Self-knowledge. That is why I say that when one attains true knowledge one



Swami Abhedananda
(one who enjoys the bliss of
Non-differentiation)
(1866 — 1939)

does not take any false step. You should realise that the Atman is beyond the body, the sense organs, the mind, and the intellect, and that It is the witness of phenomena." The Master's words penetrated Kali's heart and he realised the truth.

Early life and education

Kali Prasad Chandra was born on Tuesday, 2nd October 1866, at 21 Nimu Goswami Lane, AHIRITOLA, North Calcutta. His father, Rasiklal Chandra, was an English teacher in the Oriental Seminary. His first wife died, leaving a son and a daughter. His son's name was Biharilal; he later became a Christian. At the request of friends and relatives, Rasiklal married Nayantara Devi, a gentle and spiritual girl who was fourteen years old. She was an ideal wife. In the course of time she had nine children: the first five of them died at an early age; of the remaining four, Kali was the second. Before Kali was born, Nayantara prayed to the Divine Mother Kali for a son. When the child was born, she gave him the name "Kali Prasad," or the blessings of Mother Kali.

In 1871, at the age of five, Kali was admitted to Govinda Seal's nursery school, where he studied for two years. He learned the alphabet, heard stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and began to memorise Sanskrit verses on morality and ethics. He then joined Jadu Pundit's Banga Vidyalaya, and in

the evening he would go to a Sanskrit school where he studied Sanskrit grammar. Kali was a bright student and a voracious reader. During this period, along with his regular courses, he studied classical Sanskrit literature. He learned prosody and could compose verses in Sanskrit. At the age of ten Kali was admitted to the Oriental Seminary, the well-known high school where his father taught English.

Although from his boyhood Kali was more interested in developing his intellect, he did not neglect his health. He swam regularly in the Ganges with his friends and exercised daily in a neighbouring gymnasium.

Kali had studied Wilson's history of India and there had learned about Shankaracharya, the great exponent of Vedanta. Shankara's life and works inspired young Kali and thenceforth he cherished a desire to become a pundit and philosopher like him. Kali took a drawing class in school and within a year excelled. The teacher praised his skill and prophesied a bright future for him, but one day Kali told the teacher that he would not come to the drawing class anymore because he had decided to become a philosopher. Kali's teacher tried to convince him that it was better to be a painter than a philosopher. But Kali replied, "No, sir. A painter studies the surface of things but a philosopher goes below the surface and studies the causes of things. So I want to be a philosopher."

Kali had been extremely inquisitive from his boyhood. To satisfy his hunger for knowledge, he would ask his father various questions that surprised the wise English teacher. In addition, Kali would use his savings to buy books instead of refreshments. Kali had a remarkable memory and keen power of concentration. He learned to fish, shop, cook, work with wood, garden, bind books and so on. When he was fourteen he found a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* in his father's study and began reading it. But his father told him that it was too difficult a book for one so young; and so taking the book away from Kali, he hid it in his room. When his father left the house, Kali searched for the book and located it. In the dead of night when everybody was asleep, he read the *Gita* by the light of an oil lamp.

Kali's desire to learn the scriptures was phenomenal. He went to one Vedantavagisha, who was then translating Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms from Sanskrit into Bengali. Kali began to visit the pundit every morning. While he read the aphorisms, the pundit would explain them. Thus he completed his study of yoga philosophy. Kali then bought a copy of *Shiva Samhita* and learned the disciplines of hatha yoga, kundalini yoga, pranayam, and raja yoga.

Having become fascinated by the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, he was eager to find someone who could teach him to follow the methods of meditation they prescribe.

With Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar

The scriptures did not quench Kali's thirst for knowledge, so he desperately searched for a spiritual teacher. One of his classmates told him about Ramakrishna, so Kali went to visit him. In June 1884 Kali went to Dakshineswar and met Sri Ramakrishna. In his autobiography he describes their first meeting:

"One Sunday morning I started for Dakshineswar by asking directions from people on the street...Finally I reached the temple garden at 11 o'clock. When I asked about Sri Ramakrishna, a temple worker informed me that he had gone to Calcutta that morning. I was exhausted, having walked all that way barefoot in the sun. Disappointed, I sat on the steps of Sri Ramakrishna's northern veranda and wondered how I could ever go back to Calcutta. I was hungry and thirsty, I was dead tired, I had no money. I had not informed my family as to where I was going, I had no acquaintance in Dakshineswar, and moreover I had no strength to walk back to Calcutta. I began to cry...

Just then another man arrived and asked me about Sri Ramakrishna, and I told him that he had gone to Calcutta. The young man was also disappointed...On enquiry I learned that his name was Shashi...Understanding how I felt, Shashi said to me, "Look, brother, I have also come here without informing my parents. Don't worry. We shall stay here tonight. The Master will positively return from Calcutta by late evening, as he never stays overnight at any devotee's house in Calcutta."

Shashi showed me around and in the evening took me to the Kali Temple to attend the vesper service. I felt tremendous peace and joy. Ramlal, the mas-

ter's nephew, gave us some luchs and sweets for refreshments. We waited on the northern veranda for the Master's arrival. Finally a horse carriage arrived at the north-eastern corner of the Master's room, and Shashi and Ramlal went to receive the Master. My heart was beating hard. I stood where I was, motionless. After getting down from the carriage, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Kali, Kali, Kali," entered his room, and sat down on his small cot.

Ramlal and Shashi informed the Master about me while I waited on the veranda. Then Ramlal came out and said that the Master was waiting for me. I entered the room and bowed down to him. The Master asked about me and I told him: "I have a desire to learn yoga. Will you kindly teach me?" The Master kept quiet for a while and then said: "It is a good sign that you have a desire to learn yoga at this young age. You were a yogi in your previous life. A little was left for perfection. This will be your last birth. Yes, I will teach you yoga. Rest tonight and come to me again tomorrow morning."

The next morning Ramlal told me the Master was waiting to see me. Entering the room I bowed down to him...Then he took me to the northern veranda. He asked me to sit on a cot. When I was seated in the lotus posture, the Master asked me to stick out my tongue. As soon as I did that, he wrote a mantram on it with the middle finger of his right hand and advised me to meditate on Kali, the Divine Mother. I did what he said. Gradually I lost outer consciousness and sat in deep meditation. I felt an unspeakable joy within. I don't know how long I stayed in that condition. After some time the Master touched my chest and brought me back to outer consciousness. He then asked me what had happened, and I told him about my blissful experience during meditation. He was very pleased. Afterwards the Master instructed me on meditation and sang these lines of a mystical song:

*"When will you sleep in the divine chamber
With the clean [good] and the unclean
[evil]?"*

*When these two wives are friendly to each
other
Mother Shyama will be within your reach."*

The Master further told me to meditate every morning and again at night and to report to him my visions and spiritual experiences. Then the Master asked me to go to the Kali Temple and meditate there. When I returned from the temple

the Master gave me *prasad* and asked me to visit him again. He then offered to provide my fare if I could not get it from home. In the meantime a devotee had arrived by carriage from Calcutta to visit the Master, and the Master asked me to return home with that devotee. On my way back home I thought of the Master's overwhelming love and compassion."

Kali began to practise spiritual disciplines under the Master's guidance and through his grace was blessed with many wonderful visions of gods and goddesses. One day while meditating at home, Kali saw various gods and goddesses and divine incarnations – Krishna, Christ, Chaitanya, and others – merge one by one into the luminous form of Sri Ramakrishna...From then on, during meditation Kali's mind was absorbed in the infinite – the vastness of the Impersonal Brahman, rather than divine forms. After this vision Kali was convinced that the Master was an avatar, as he later wrote in a Sanskrit hymn to Sri Ramakrishna.

Sometime in the middle of January 1886, the elder Gopal wanted to distribute twelve pieces of ochre cloth and twelve rosaries to some monks. Pointing to his young disciples, the Master said: "You won't find better monks than these. Give your cloths and rosaries to them." Instead, Gopal offered them to the Master and he himself distributed them among his young disciples. Thus Sri Ramakrishna himself started his monastic order. Kali was among those who received an ochre cloth, the garb of a monk, from the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Centenary Celebrations — March 1937

On the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's birth centenary celebration, All India Radio in Calcutta broadcast Swami Abhedananda's five-minute talk about Sri Ramakrishna in Bengali. It is the only available recorded voice of a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and it is the most precious verbal testimony about the Master. Translated, this testimony states:

"Om, salutation to Bhagavan Ramakrishna. During the nineteenth century, Western materialism was deluging India. The Christian missionaries, through brainwashing, were trying to create confusion and hatred in the minds of the Hindus regarding their religion. It was then that Sri Ramakrishna appeared to

revive the moribund condition of the Sanatana Dharma [eternal religion].

He was born in a remote village of Bengal. He had no formal education. But he experienced the Imperishable Brahman and became a great teacher. He did not care for dry scriptural arguments. He solved the problems of life through his spiritual power. He said, "The nature of all human beings cannot be the same. It is natural to be different." He respected all beings and worshipped the God of different religions. After experiencing the truth of unity in diversity, Sri Ramakrishna proclaimed, "As many faiths, so many paths. All religions are true."

The Master's renunciation was phenomenal. While living in Dakshineswar and at the Cossipore garden, we saw that he could not touch money or any metal. He perceived the manifestation of the Divine Mother in all women.

Ramakrishna told us, "He who was Rama and he who was Krishna, is now Ramakrishna in this body." Pointing to himself, the Master further said, "I will be worshipped in the homes of many people."

Salutations to Ramakrishna, the perfect embodiment of the Eternal Truth that manifests Itself in various forms to help mankind. He is an incarnation of the Supreme Lord and is worshipped by all. Peace, Peace, Peace."

Inspiring compositions

Swami Abhedananda has composed various hymns devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. They are couched in simple but mellifluous Sanskrit in various attractive metres. All of them put together give a comprehensive resume of the events of the Master's life and message. Both the touch of fervent devotion and the literary beauty of the Sanskrit diction in which they are clothed, make these hymns of Swami Abhedananda a very valuable and authoritative part of the devotional literature on Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.

The following hymn entitled *Sri Ramakrishna's* stakam is expressed in its English equivalent:

*"Thou art the Ruler of the Worlds, and the Primordial Being,
By whose imperceptible form all this is pervaded.
O Ramakrishna! Bestow merciful glance on me, thy faithless child.*

*Thou art the protector of the world and also its creator,
Thou, the Original Being, destroyest it too.
O Ramakrishna! Bestow Thy merciful glance on me, Thy faithless child.*

*The Limitless Being that Thou art, Thou dost, in order to redeem Thy devotees,
Indulge in Thy play of redemption, assuming limitation by Thy power of Maya.
O Ramakrishna! Bestow Thy merciful glance on me, Thy faithless child.*

*Assuming a form that was in appearance human,
Thou dost proclaim the sacred Law, a mystery to men in ignorance,
O Ramakrishna! Bestow Thy merciful glance on me, Thy faithless child.*

*Unparalleled anywhere, at any time, is thy practice of austerity and renunciation;
No man of wisdom can, on seeing Thy example, help bending his head to Thee in salutation.
O Ramakrishna! Bestow Thy merciful glance on me, Thy faithless child.*

*Merely hearing Thy name men become devoted to Thee,
But alas! Even seeing Thee we have not developed true devotion.
O Ramakrishna! Bestow Thy merciful glance on me, Thy faithless child.*

*Thou art the true, the good, the peaceful, the unborn
And Thy being is without a beginning and an end.
O Ramakrishna! Bestow Thy merciful glance on me, Thy faithless child.*

*I know not the truth about Thee, O World-Teacher,
Know not Thy true form, nor about Thy numerous manifestations.
O Ramakrishna! Bestow Thy merciful glance on me, Thy faithless child."*

Sources:

*God Lived with Them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Chetananda; Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata; pages 439-457.
Ramakrishna and His Disciples by Christopher*

Isherwood; Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata; pages 238-9.

Stotranjali or Hymn Offerings (By direct Disciples and Devotees); Swami Tapasyananda; Sri Ramakrishna Math; Chennai; pages 54-58.

(The life and teachings of Swami Abhedananda will be continued in the next publication of Reach)

(Continued from page no. 3 ...)

AUCKLAND CENTRE

The inauguration function of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centres of New Zealand was held on the 29th and 30th of November 2008 at its own premises at 27 Arawa Street, New Lynn, Auckland. On the morning of 29th November Vastu Puja, Navagraha Puja, Ganesha Puja and Havan etc. were performed by Mr. Debesh Bhattacharya from 8.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. amid devotional singing. A cultural programme was presented in the evening at Blockhouse Bay Primary School from 5.00 p.m. to 8-30 p.m. Swamis Sridharananda and Adibhavananda of Limbdi, Gujrat addressed the gathering. About 250 devotees attended the function.

On Sunday, the 30th of November a special worship of Sri Ramakrishna was performed by Swami Aparokshananda of Fiji and *bhajans* were sung by Swamis Atmeshananda and Chandrashekaranda. About 125 devotees attended the function.

The Ramakrishna Vedanta Centres of New Zealand Inc. was incorporated in February 2004 under the Incorporated Societies Act of NZ. By the grace of the Divine the property was acquired by the group in December 2007. Swami Sridharananda installed the deities in the Shrine on the 20th of May 2008 on Buddha Purnima Day. Now it is formally opened with a two-day-long celebration.



Inauguration of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in Auckland, NZ—Puja and Cultural function