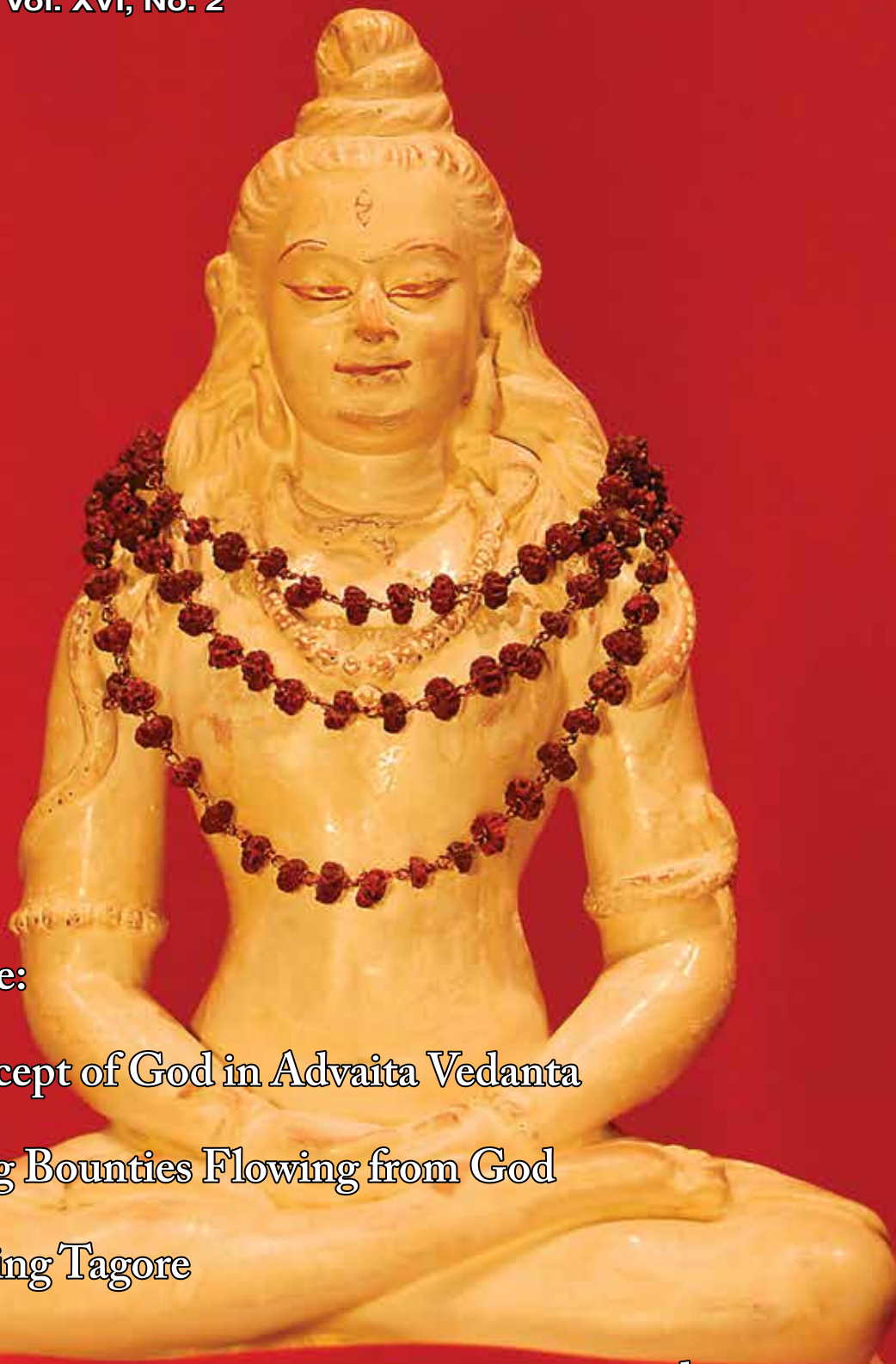


Voice of the Worldwide Vedanta Movement

GLOBAL VEDANTA

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In this Issue:

- The Concept of God in Advaita Vedanta
- Receiving Bounties Flowing from God
- Celebrating Tagore

and more...

The 176th Birthday of Sri Ramakrishna Celebrated in Vedanta Centers in the United States



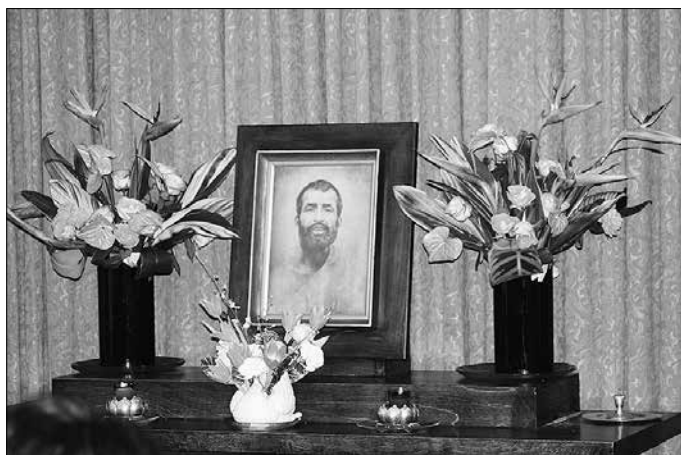
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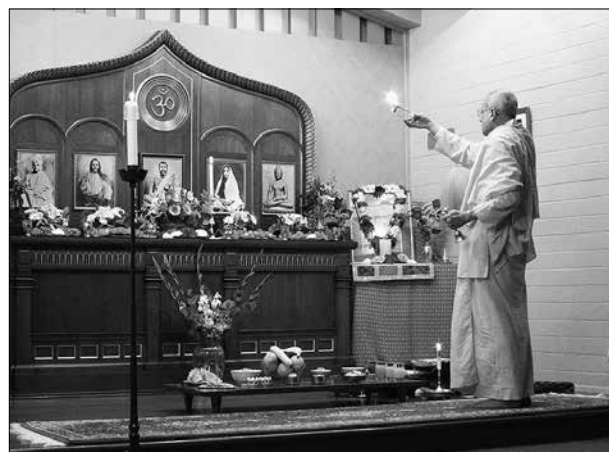
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Cover: *A Statue of Lord Siva. Additional artwork: Swami Avikarananda*

LETTERS

The article *Sarada Devi—The Symbol of God's Motherhood* (GV WINTER 2010-11) is the best I have read so far. The way it beautifully explains how God appears as a human being is not available anywhere else.

—Dr. R. Roychoudhury, Austin TX

Thank you for printing Swami Bhaskarananda's article *Yoga in the Eyes of Vivekananda* (GV FALL 2010). It was so comforting to be reminded of the origins of Karma yoga, that it came from Sri

Krishna, and was modeled for us by Sri Ramakrishna. In our culture, giving up the fruit of one's actions is a very worthy goal, and the Swami gives us gentle reminders of why this is so.

—Nancy Siegenthaler, Kasson, MN

[Regarding Marion Lee's article about the hunt for a lemon (GV WINTER 2010-11).] I enjoyed reading her funny article in the latest issue of *Global Vedanta*. To think I was in a similar helpless situation at the border in Niagara Falls almost five

decades ago.

—Deva Guru Prasad, Ph.D.
Lake Forest Park, WA

Like many regular readers of *Global Vedanta* I like reading the articles in each issue. In the winter 2010 issue of the *Global Vedanta* the three articles mentioned on the cover immediately caught my attention. I read the article on Holy Mother, *Sarada Devi—The Symbol*

See **Letters**...page 17

THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN ADVAITA VEDANTA

BY SWAMI BHASKARANANDA

Philosophical articles often tend to be soporific. I will not bring into my discussion too many intricate philosophical points—I don't want to put any of the readers to sleep. Also, to further prevent that undesirable possibility, I shall take the liberty of using some jokes and stories whenever and wherever convenient.

As one story goes, an elderly lady brought her little grandson to church to attend the Sunday service. During the boring sermon given by the minister she fell asleep and started snoring.

The minister felt greatly disturbed. He stopped his sermon and said to the little boy, "Wake up your grandma!"

The boy replied, "You put her to sleep. You wake her up!"



One characteristic of philosophers is that they do not take anything for granted. They are seekers after truth and want to arrive at the truth by rational thinking. They cannot accept things simply on belief or faith. To them, unexamined faith is no other than superstition. Belief in something which has not been proved to be true is superstition.

But can they give up faith or belief altogether? Obviously not. Let us discuss this point a little with the help of two stories.

First let me tell you a story that I read many years ago in a Honolulu newspaper.

According to the story, a preacher got up in a village church and told the congregation that there were only two kinds of people in the world: those who believe in God and those who make believe that there is a God.

After he finished, his son got up and told the congregation, "What my father

said is not true. There are only two kinds of people in the world: those who believe that there are only two kinds of people in the world, and those who know better."

Referring to this story the editor of the newspaper wrote, "Belief and unbelief are two sides of the same sandwich. You cannot separate the sides without destroying the integrity of the sandwich." He further wrote, "Blind belief in God will turn believers into zombies and blind unbelief in God will turn skeptics into idiots."

Unbelief in one thing does not necessarily mean unbelief in everything else. A person who does not believe in the unseen and intangible God surely believes in what he sees, such as the tangible world. His belief in the tangible world coexists with his unbelief in the intangible and unseen God. In other words, belief and unbelief go hand in hand. That's why Hindu philosophers call this perceptual world of time and space a *world of pairs of opposites*. For example, light and darkness form a pair of opposites. Without the knowledge of one we cannot know the other. Everything in this world, including our thoughts and concepts, belong to such pairs of opposites.

There is another story relevant to our discussion. In India there were some hedonist philosophers called Charvakas. Charvakas were atheists and preached that the sole purpose of human life was to have sense enjoyment. According to them there is no God, no soul, no after-life, no other world.

Once a Charvaka philosopher came to a village in India and gave a long discourse. He used many elaborate arguments to prove that there was no God.

When he finished giving his discourse, a young boy came up to the philosopher and saluted him.

The Charvaka philosopher asked the boy, "What's your name? Where do you live? Who is your father?"

The boy replied, "Sir, don't you already know all about me—who I am, where I live, and who my father is?"

The philosopher exclaimed with surprise, "How shall I know? I never met you before! I've yet to know you."

Then the boy said, "Sir, just as you've yet to know me, it is quite possible that God really exists, and you've yet to know Him."



This second story teaches us that reasoning can be used both ways. While it can be used by some to prove the nonexistence of God, it can also be used by others to prove that God does exist.

In fact, reasoning is like so many stabilizing props. When we feel that our faith is being shaken, we use arguments and reasoning to stabilize our shaky faith. On the other hand, we cannot exist even for a moment without depending on faith. Even our day-to-day living would be impossible had we not had faith. For example, when I breathe I have the faith that the air I am breathing is breathable; it is not poisonous. When I eat or drink in a restaurant I have the faith that my food and drink have not been deliberately poisoned. When I am riding on a bus I have the faith that the driver will drive properly; he will not suddenly go berserk and plunge the bus into a gorge.

But there is a difference between ordinary faith and what we call *conviction*. Experiential knowledge is conviction. Ordinary faith can be shaken, but not conviction. For example, I have the experiential knowledge that I exist. This knowledge of my own existence is a conviction. It can never be shaken. All the great debaters of the world may come and argue with me and silence all my arguments that I have used to prove my

own existence, yet my conviction will not be shaken.

At the same time it is possible to arrive at valid knowledge through reasoning. For example, I have never seen my great-great-great grandfather, nor will I ever be able to see him. Nevertheless, I am sure that he existed in the past. Even though it is not experiential knowledge, just by reasoning I acquired this irrefutable knowledge.

To acquire the knowledge of God, Advaita Vedanta uses both experiential conviction and valid reasoning. In addition, it takes the help of reliable testimony.

Advaita Vedanta accepts God as real because one can have experiential knowledge of God. God-experience can be had only by a mind that has been purified through spiritual disciplines. Advaita Vedanta also allows all knowledge to be tested by valid reasoning. Truth has the inherent ability to withstand the challenge of reason and survive.

Advaita Vedanta accepts reliable testimony also as a valid means of knowledge. *The Veda*—the Bible of Hinduism—contains truths experienced by the pure-minded sages of India. Over the years these truths have been verified again and again through the experiences of different sages. The testimony of the *Veda* is therefore considered reliable. Advaita Vedanta accepts the testimony of the *Veda*.

Hinduism—to which the school of Advaita Vedanta belongs—allows its followers to ask any question about religion as long as it is sincere. No question is considered blasphemous. In fact, the word blasphemy is absent in Hinduism. Therefore, over the years all possible questions about God have been asked and valid answers that have been given to those questions are available in Hinduism.

Nirguna Brahman.

Let us consider the question, “Who was there before creation?” The logical reply to this question will be that before creation the creator, or God, must have been there.

But if we ask, “What was God like before creation?” then Hinduism’s reply will be that God was in a *transcendental* state of existence before creation. The

word *transcendental* means that God’s existence was beyond time, space and causation. It is philosophically accepted that when this world was created, time and space pertaining to this world were created along with it. They were not there before creation. Therefore, God, before creation, was beyond time and space. Causation and change can happen only in time and space. In the absence of time and space there cannot be any causation. Therefore God was beyond causation. It is interesting that when Alexander Friedmann presented the Big Bang theory of creation, he also proposed that time and space came along with the Big Bang.

God in this transcendental state of existence is called in Sanskrit *Nirguna Brahman*, meaning *attributeless* God. It is also called Supreme Spirit or Impersonal God.

Transcending space, Nirguna Brahman is infinite. Transcending time, Nirguna Brahman is timeless or eternal. Free from the ceaseless change generated by causation, Nirguna Brahman is changeless. Attribute or quality is a factor of separation. For example, the power of burning is a quality of fire. It separates fire from water, which lacks that quality. As Nirguna Brahman is one, indivisible and infinite, It cannot accommodate any kind of separation within Itself. Therefore, Nirguna Brahman must be attributeless, or free from all qualities.

Nirguna Brahman cannot have a *personality*. Personality is a limitation. Being devoid of a personality, Nirguna Brahman is also beyond sex. Neither the pronoun *He* nor *She* can be used to denote Nirguna Brahman. The *Veda*—the most authoritative holy book of Hinduism—uses the Sanskrit neuter pronoun *Tat*, the English counterpart of *that*, indicating that Nirguna Brahman is neither male nor female.

Hinduism also uses the expressions *absolute truth*, *consciousness*, and *infinite bliss* to mean Nirguna Brahman. But no matter what epithets are used, Nirguna Brahman can never be adequately described by the finite words and expressions of our world of limitations. Nirguna Brahman is indescribable. The great Hindu saint and nondualistic philosopher Sankaracharya says that Vedic statements such as “Brahman is eternal existence, absolute

knowledge and infinite bliss” are only hints about the nature of Nirguna Brahman. They are never the description of Nirguna Brahman.

Saguna Brahman or Ishwara.

When we try to think of the Infinite Brahman with our finite minds, we unknowingly project the limitations of our finite minds on Nirguna Brahman. As a result, Nirguna Brahman *appears* to become finite to us. The human mind can never think other than in human terms. It unknowingly projects human characteristics or qualities on Nirguna Brahman. Thus impersonal Nirguna Brahman acquires a personality very much resembling a human personality, no matter how glorified. Impersonal Nirguna Brahman appears to become Personal Brahman, also called *Saguna Brahman*.

In reality Nirguna Brahman does not undergo any change or modification whatsoever. Personal Saguna Brahman is no other than Impersonal Nirguna Brahman experienced through the veil of time, space and causation. It is like a person looking at the blue sky through three pairs of glasses—red, green and pink. When he uses red glasses, the sky looks reddish; when he uses green glasses, the sky looks greenish; and when he looks through pink glasses, the sky appears pinkish. In reality these colors are projected by the viewer’s colored glasses on the sky. The sky does not change its own color at all. Similarly, the finite minds of people, like so many colored glasses, project their limitations on Nirguna Brahman. Thus, the changeless, impersonal and infinite Nirguna Brahman appears to acquire limitations like personality.

In reality Nirguna Brahman does not undergo any change whatsoever. From Nirguna Brahman’s standpoint Nirguna Brahman remains changeless. The idea of Personal God or Saguna Brahman is therefore not the ultimate truth about God. It is a relatively lower concept of God. Saguna Brahman is also called *Ishwara*. Nevertheless, Personal Saguna Brahman and Impersonal Nirguna Brahman are not essentially different from each other. Just as the reddish sky and the greenish sky are really the same blue sky, so also Personal God is no other than

Impersonal God. They are essentially one and the same.

From our standpoint, posited in the world of time, space and causation, Ishwara or Saguna Brahman is the creator of this world. He is omnipotent, omniscient and all pervading. By His mere will He manifests Himself as the manifold universe. Although formless, by His divine magical power, *maya*, He assumes various forms. By His *maya* He has created the world with good and evil in it. Even though the world is in Ishwara, He is beyond the good and evil of the world. He is like a cobra, which is not affected by the poison in its mouth. Its poison only affects others.

Ishwara is not only the creator, but the preserver and destroyer as well. Creation, preservation and destruction go hand in hand in this world. Ishwara, therefore, has three basic aspects: (1) the creator aspect, (2) the preserver aspect and (3) the destroyer aspect. These three basic aspects of Ishwara are given the names *Brahmā*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* respectively. When Ishwara creates, He is called *Brahmā*. When He preserves, He is called *Vishnu*; and when He destroys, He is called *Shiva*.

The nondualistic school of Vedanta accommodates both these concepts of God. Yet it says that the highest concept of God is the concept of Nirguna Brahman or Impersonal God. The concept of Saguna Brahman or Personal God is a lower concept only.

Advaita Vedanta declares that Nirguna Brahman alone is real. The world is unreal and illusory.

To understand this position held by Advaita Vedanta, one should know the meaning of the word *real* as it is understood in Hindu philosophy.

According to Hindu philosophy, whatever is real must be *eternal* and *changeless*. In other words, *perpetuity* and *changelessness* are the two criteria with the help of which we can judge what is real.

Someone may say, "What the Hindu philosophers say does not make any sense! Look at me. I'm surely not eternal. I'm not going to live forever! Yet am I not real? Then again, I'm not changeless. Mentally and physically I've undergone many changes. I used to be a little child and

would think like a child then; now I'm fully grown and think like an adult. Surely I'm not changeless, yet am I not real?"

In reply, the Hindu philosophers say, "You may not be aware of it, but in your day-to-day life you also judge reality in terms of *perpetuity* and *changelessness*. For instance, if you saw a UFO land in your backyard, stay there for ten minutes, and then suddenly vanish into thin air, you would realize that what you saw was not real. You would realize that the sighting of the UFO must have been caused by either an optical illusion or your heightened imagination. On the other hand, had the UFO existed forever, it would be considered real by you. In that case your judgment of the *reality* of the UFO would be based on its perpetuity or eternal nature.

Now consider a hypothetical creature. Let us suppose it changes its form every ten seconds. The first ten seconds it is a dog, then it becomes a weasel, then a raccoon, then a rabbit, and then something else. If we ask, "What's this creature really?," you will say, "It has been changing every ten seconds, that's why I don't know what it really is."

Due to its ever-changing nature you are not able to determine the true identity of the creature; you cannot know what it *really* is. Had the creature not changed at all, there would be no difficulty for you in ascertaining the true or *real* identity of the creature. You will know its reality in terms of its *changelessness*.

The unreality of the world can also be determined by its eternally changing character. Other than that, the world, which has a beginning in time, cannot be eternal; it must be transitory. Being transitory it cannot be real.

According to Advaita Vedanta, Nirguna Brahman alone is real because It is eternal and changeless.

A doubting Hindu may ask: What is God's motive for creation?

Every action is prompted by a sense of want. By definition, God cannot be wanting in anything. Why then should He act?—Or create the world?

To this question Advaita Vedanta gives a very startling reply. It says that God has not *really* created this world.

This view is supported by very reliable testimony. *The Nasadiya Sukta* or the *Creation Hymn* of the *Rig-Veda* supports this view. This hymn ends with the following stanza:

*This world—from where it came,
whether it was made
or whether not—*

*He who is the overseer in the Highest
Heavens
surely knows
or perhaps knows not.*

In this hymn doubts have been raised about the *real* creation of the world. The "overseer in the Highest Heavens" is no other than God or Saguna Brahman. He is all knowing. He must know that the world has been created by Him. If He does not know, then it may mean that from His point of view no world has really been created. For what is not really there, the question of knowing its existence cannot arise.

Advaita Vedanta uses the analogy of a magician to explain this. The magician using hypnotic suggestion casts a spell on the audience so that its members think they see an apple tree. The audience, which is under the magician's hypnotic spell, will see the apple tree. But will the magician see the apple tree? No! Because he is not under the spell of his own magic or hypnotic power.

So also God by His magical power *maya* has created this world. From His point of view He has not really created anything. However, those under the sway of God's *maya* will think the world really exists.

To explain the illusory and unreal character of the world, Advaita Vedanta also uses the analogy of a rope, which owing to an optical illusion is being considered a snake. The reality is the rope, but it is being observed as a snake. As long as the illusion lasts, the so-called snake seems to be real. When the optical illusion is dispelled the so-called snake disappears. The observer comes to realize that even though the snake appeared to exist for a while, it was actually never there.

The rope represents Nirguna Brahman or Impersonal God, and the snake represents the world. Nirguna Brahman, being eternal and changeless, is the only reality that exists. To a person who has come to know Nirguna Brahman, the world is not

real to him anymore. He also comes to know that the world was never created. Therefore, the question about the origin or creation of an *uncreated* world cannot arise. Nor can we raise the question about Nirguna Brahman's motive for creation.

From another angle it can be said that the transformation of Nirguna Brahman into the world is not a real transformation. It is only an *apparent* transformation. This kind of apparent transformation is called *Vivarta* in Sanskrit. Real transformation is called *Parinama*. According to Advaita Vedanta, the world is a Vivarta of Nirguna Brahman. It is not the Parinama of Nirguna Brahman.

As a corollary to the first question a second question arises: How does Advaita Vedanta define maya?

In other words, what is this maya really?

According to Advaita Vedanta maya is *inexplicable*. It cannot be said that maya really exists, nor can it be said that it does not exist. Aside from that, maya is of the nature of *ignorance*. Maya, as ignorance, has created this world.

Western logic has a law called the law of excluded middle. According to this law, there cannot be anything between "Yes" and "No." Judging by this law, the definition of maya given by Advaita Vedanta appears to be a flawed definition. It is not logically sound.

But a humorous analogy can be used to indicate that this objection is refutable. Let us suppose a man saw a gangster commit a murder in broad daylight. Before the gangster was able to escape, the police arrived and arrested the gangster. The police then came to the man who had witnessed the murder and said, "Sir, you're the sole witness to this murder. You will have to give your evidence to convict this murderer. You'll be summoned to the court in course of time."

That same day at midnight the man got a phone call from a stranger who said, "We've been watching you. If you give your evidence against our boss in the court, we'll surely kill you."

The man was in a dilemma. He was scared of defying the police and at the same time he was scared of being killed by the gangsters.

Nevertheless, on the appointed day he went to the court. Pointing to the murderer the judge asked him, "Did you see this man commit murder?"

The man replied, "Your honor, I can neither say 'Yes' nor can I say 'No.'"

The judge said, "What you're saying doesn't make any sense—it goes against the law of excluded middle! You must be able to say whether you saw this man commit the murder or not!"

The witness said, "Your honor, if you permit me to ask you just one question, I'm sure you'll realize what I'm saying makes complete sense."

The judge said, "All right, go ahead."

Then the man asked the judge, "Your honor, do you *still* beat your wife?"

The judge was now in great trouble. What answer would he give? If he said "No" then it would be as good as admitting that he had been beating his wife before, but not anymore. On the other hand, if he said "Yes," that would be even worse!



The definition of maya is something like this.

The second part of the definition, which states that maya, as ignorance, has created this world, may not be considered logical by some.

You may object by saying that as *ignorance* is negative in character, it is impossible for it to create this tangible world.

Before refuting your objection it is necessary to realize that Advaita Vedanta recognizes four experiences of man—(1) the waking experience, (2) the dream experience, (3) the experience of dreamless sleep and (4) the experience of Nirguna Brahman.

The first three experiences are common to all people. Only spiritually illumined souls have the fourth experience, which is also called the *turiya* experience. The

Sanskrit word *turiya* means the *fourth*.

With the help of your dream experience, the objection that something as negative as ignorance can never create this tangible world can be refuted. When you dream, you exist in your dream world. This dream world is the creation of your own mind. But can you create your dream world while you are still experiencing the world of your waking state? Obviously not.

To be able to create your dream world first of all you must have to be *ignorant* of the world that you experience in your waking state. In other words, unless you have ignorance of the world that you experience during your waking state, it is not possible for you to create your dream world. Therefore, it won't be wrong to say that your *ignorance* creates your dream world.

In the same way it can be said that your *ignorance of Nirguna Brahman* creates the world of your waking state. When you become aware of Nirguna Brahman, the world experienced in the waking state is proved to be unreal, just as your dream world is proved to be unreal when you wake up from your sleep.

The ignorance of Nirguna Brahman is maya. That's why Advaita Vedanta says that maya as ignorance has created this world.

As long as you are aware of this world, you cannot deny the existence of maya, which is the cause of this world. Therefore during your waking experience you must admit that maya exists. But when you have the fourth experience, the experience of Nirguna Brahman, the world that you experience in the waking state ceases to exist along with its cause, maya.

That's why Advaita Vedanta holds the position that maya is *inexplicable*. It can neither be said that maya really exists nor can it be said that it does not exist.

What position is taken by Advaita Vedanta in regard to the doctrine of predestination?

This is the doctrine which claims that God has predetermined everything that is

See Advaita Vedanta...page 7

RECEIVING BOUNTIES FLOWING FROM GOD

BY DR. MITHRA SANKRITHI

Sri Ramakrishna, a shining manifestation of God in human form, said of God and his Power: “I have realized that Brahman and Śakti are identical, like water and its wetness, like fire and its power to burn.... Śakti alone is the root of the universe.... All that you see is the manifestation of God’s Power. No one can do anything without this Power” [1].

Modern-day scientists also study this Śakti or Power, though they may not acknowledge that She is the Power of God, flowing from an undiscovered root in the noumenon to and through the world of phenomenon that we dwell in.

In the International System of Units, or “SI Units” from the French “Système International d’Unités,” the standard unit for power is called a “watt,” named after the Scottish engineer James Watt. Power is energy per unit time, so one watt is equal to one joule/second. From dimensional analysis, power is also force times velocity, so one watt is equal to one newton-meter/second; and power is also mass times velocity squared per unit time, so one watt is also equal to one kilogram-meter²/sec³.

To get a feel for power units, a typical light bulb uses 60 watts of power, and a typical human uses an average power of 97 watts, corresponding to 2000 food calories (i.e., kilocalories) metabolized per day. Thus the seven billion people in the world have a collective food metabolic power consumption of 680,000,000,000 watts or 680 gigawatts, where one gigawatt (GW) is equal to a billion (1,000,000,000) watts.

According to the Energy Information Administration, humankind’s total global primary energy consumption (prior to conversion losses) for end-uses including electricity, heating and cooling, transportation, industry & commerce, etc. was 493,000,000,000,000,000 BTU or 493 quadrillion British Thermal Units in 2008 [2]. This corresponds to an average power of 16,500,000,000,000 watts (or 16,500 gigawatts, of which approximately 35% is from petroleum, 27% from coal, 23% from natural gas, 5% from nuclear fission, and 10% from hydroelectric and other renewable sources such as wind and

solar power. Since electric power is not used for many heating and transportation applications, global electric power average net production is only a fraction of primary energy consumption, and averaged 2,190,000,000,000 watts or 2,190 gigawatts in 2008 [3].

Should we be worried and concerned that the substantial majority of mankind’s power comes from limited fossil fuel sources, and that power demand is continually increasing? We can develop an answer to this question by following power flow from Surya, the Sun, as described below.

Our Sun uses a nuclear fusion reaction to continuously convert mass into energy and thereby generate power, as follows. The thermal collision of two hydrogen nuclei or protons ($^1\text{H} + ^1\text{H}$) forms a deuteron (^2H), with the simultaneous creation of a positron (e^+) and a neutrino (ν). The positron quickly encounters a free electron (e^-) in the Sun and both particles annihilate, their mass energy appearing as two gamma-ray photons. Once the deuteron has been produced, it collides with another proton and forms a helium (^3He) nucleus and another gamma ray. Two of these (^3He) combine to form one alpha particle (^4He) and two protons (^1H). Overall, this amounts to the combination of four protons and two electrons to form an alpha particle (^4He), two neutrinos, and six gamma rays with a released power of 26.7 million electron volts (MeV) or 4.28 trillionths (10^{-12}) of a Joule, from the nuclear conversion of mass into energy [4]. The Sun fuses 620,000,000 metric tons of hydrogen nuclei each second, starting with enough hydrogen to have a main sequence lifetime of 10,000,000,000 years. About 4,500,000,000 years of our Sun’s main sequence life are already complete, so there are around 5,500,000,000 years to go before our Sun becomes a red giant [5, 6].

The total solar radiation power output created by the nuclear fusion in the Sun is 410,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 watts or 410 quadrillion gigawatts [7]. Of this total solar radiation output, only 0.00000042% or 173,000,000,000,000,000 watts or 173 million gigawatts reaches our Earth [8, fig. 1.14]. Now 30% of this inci-

dent radiation, or 52,000,000,000,000,000 watts, is reflected back into space, 81,000,000,000,000,000 watts, or 47% of the incident radiation, is converted directly to heat in the atmosphere, oceans and earth, and 40,000,000,000,000,000 watts or 23% of the incident radiation, powers our world’s great hydrological cycle of evaporation and precipitation. 370,000,000,000,000 watts, or 0.2% of incident solar radiation, is converted into the great winds, currents, convection & waves that characterize our climate system. Finally, 40,000,000,000,000 watts or 0.023% of incident solar radiation, powers photosynthesis in the plant kingdom and sustains the cycle of food and life in our World [8].

Solar radiation reaching Earth’s surface at noon in equatorial sunny regions carries power of 1,000,000,000 watts or 1 gigawatt per square kilometer [8]. If one or two axis tracking solar powerplant receivers are used with a receiver area that is 25% of land area, if electric power conversion efficiency is 20% and if cloud-free time is 80% of daylight hours, then 50 square kilometers of land or water powerplant site area could yield a average continuous output of 1,000,000,000 watts or 1 gigawatt of electric power. We assume that solar powerplants could very reasonably be constructed in 10% of world non-polar desert areas (which have an area of 7,247,000 sq.mi. or 18,770,000 sq.km. [9], and half again of that area added over high insolation parts of the seas and oceans. This assumption corresponds to solar powerplants covering 2,815,500 sq.km. or half a percent of the world surface area of 510,072,000 square kilometers [10]. These solar powerplants would yield an average of 56,300,000,000,000 watts of easily harvestable solar electricity. This solar electric power yield potential far exceeds current and future needs, representing 2570% of 2008 global electric power average net production of 2,190,000,000,000 watts or 1400% of year 2035 anticipated global electric power average net production of 4,030,000,000,000 watts [3]. Solar power is also more than sufficient to fully replace

fossil fuels for heating and transportation, optionally using solar powered electrolysis of water to produce hydrogen that is subsequently used as a non-carbon-based fuel.

Aside from direct harvest of solar power, wind, ocean current, tidal current and wave powerplants could be feasibly constructed to harvest 7,400,000,000,000 watts or 2% of the 370,000,000,000,000 watts of winds, currents, convection & waves that characterize our global climate system. Thus wind and hydrokinetic renewable energy systems could also more than fulfill all of the year 2035 anticipated global electric power average net production of 4,030,000,000,000 watts [3], even without any direct solar power harvesting systems.

The numbers from the analysis above give us every hope and expectation that the growing power needs for our children, grandchildren and hundreds of human generations to come over thousands of years, can be fully satisfied by the tremendous abundance of sustainable, zero-carbon-footprint power flowing from our Sun. The challenge to our scientists and engineers is to apply technology and innovation to improve the cost-effectiveness of these “green” renewable energy systems to a level as good or better than the very low cost of dirty fossil fuels such as coal. The challenge to our policy makers of all the nations of the world is to cooperate to accelerate the power sourcing transition from fossil fuels to renewables before carbon emission driven climate change causes severe harm that includes global warming; melting in glaciers, ice caps and sea ice; and sea level rise that will submerge many coastal cities and communities around the world. For global warming leading to a temperature rise of between 1.4 deg C and 5.8 deg C by 2100 as estimated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), scientists think the oceans could rise between half a meter and 1.4 meters [11]. However, Dennis Bushnell, the Chief Scientist at NASA Langley, has pointed out that there is a significant nonlinearity in sea level rise versus temperature rise, and that if global warming results in a temperature rise of 10 to 12 deg C, which is quite possible, the Kalaallit Nunaat and Antarctic ice caps would fully melt, the oceans would rise 75 meters. In this scenario 100% of all coastal and low elevation cities would

be substantially underwater, including Honolulu, Anchorage, Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Lima, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Houston, New Orleans, Miami, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Halifax, Reykjavik, St. Petersburg, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo, Hamburg, Amsterdam, London, Paris, Lisbon, Barcelona, Marseilles, Rome, Naples, Venice, Athens, Istanbul, Odessa, Beirut, Tel Aviv, Alexandria, Tunis, Algiers, Casablanca, Dakar, Abidjan, Accra, Lagos, Cape Town, Durban, Dar Es Salaam, Mombasa, Jeddah, Dubai, Kuwait, Karachi, Ahmadabad, Mumbai, Goa, Mangalore, Kozhikode, Kochi, Thiruvananthapuram, Colombo, Chennai, Rajahmundry, Vishakhapatnam, Puri, most of West Bengal from Kolkata up to Jalpaiguri, almost all of Bangladesh, Yangon, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Taipei, Manila, Shanghai, Tianjin, Beijing, Shenyang, Seoul, Osaka, Nagoya, Tokyo, Melbourne, Sydney and Auckland. In fact, in this dire scenario the dwellings of one third of human civilization would be submerged [12].

By applying our God-given intelligence, creativity and abilities to work together for the common good, we should be able to transition within just two or three decades to a Sun, wind and ocean powered civilization that frees future generations from the dual threats of fossil fuel exhaustion and disastrous sea level rise associated with climate change.

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Advaita Vedanta...from page 5

going to happen in the future.

According to the doctrine of predestination, all future events have already been determined by God. Advaita Vedanta does not accept this position due to the following considerations:

Our concept of time is compartmentalized into past, present and future.

The *present* is the only segment of time when we can know things. The past has already slipped away and the future is yet to come. In regard to the *past* we cannot have any direct knowledge. Our knowledge of the past is based only on recollections. What about the *future*? Our sense of future is associated with ignorance. We are ignorant of everything about the future, even about what is going to happen the next moment.

Is God's concept of time similar to ours? Does God's time also accommodate past, present and future as our sense of time does? Is God's sense of future similar to our sense of future? If so, God must also have ignorance. But this idea is not acceptable. By definition, God has to be all-knowing. The omniscience of God is only possible on one condition: God's time has to be the *eternal present*. Therefore, it is not acceptable that in the absence of a sense of future God can predestine future events.

Is God good?

Advaita Vedanta replies by saying that good and evil exist only in the world of time, space and causation. Nirguna Brahman is beyond the world of time, space

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CELEBRATING TAGORE

BY DR. SANTIBRATA GHOSH

This year happens to be the 150th anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, and is being celebrated in India and abroad in a big way. A train exhibit of the achievements and ideas of Tagore is going around the whole of India.

Celebrating also is UNESCO. Hans d'Orville, UNESCO Deputy Director-General, lauded Tagore as the humanist who wrote "the man whose inner vision is bathed in consciousness at once realizes the spiritual union which reigns over all racial differences." Embracing dialogue, Tagore heralded the rapprochement of cultures. Tagore had extended conversations with other leading thinkers, intellectuals and scientists of his time such as Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann or Henri Bergson, who belonged to the League of Nations Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, one of UNESCO's own precursors. In that sense, Tagore is an intellectual forerunner of UNESCO. I take this opportunity to bring to the readers certain aspects of that personality that seem shining brighter with time.

I have spent almost my entire professional life in science, initially in chemistry, related to biology. In later years, as I drifted into studies of the dynamics of physiological and/or biochemical reactions cascades in living systems, and their computer modeling, I started rethinking about the meaning of it all. That is to say that I started thinking a bit philosophically (I had become old!). Some time back, I was suddenly startled by a statement in a book by Ilya Prigogine, a Nobel Laureate, one declaring that the new physics of quantum theory and the uncertainty principle are more indicative of the world view of Tagore than that of Einstein, this of course referring to the meeting between the two way back. I knew about the exchange between Tagore and Einstein on science and reality. It would be interesting

to go back to the sources to figure out what had transpired between the two.

It turns out that there were two meetings in 1930. What follow are selections from the two meetings.

TAGORE: You have been busy, hunting down with mathematics, the two

expanding on their own metaphors. This was probably not that unexpected, given their previous work and religious backgrounds. For Tagore, one has to remember that he was deeply ingrained, through his Brahmo religious background, in Vedanta-Upanishadic ideas of non-dualism including Brahman, Atman and Maya (*vide supra*). This is clearly mentioned by Tagore later. Tagore's remark (which follows) rather refers to Brahman as the ultimate reality, ontologically. Albert Einstein's religion was dualistic, with a God who can interact with the universe, with or without man.)

TAGORE: When our universe is in harmony with man, the eternal, we know it as truth, we feel it as beauty.

EINSTEIN: This is a purely human conception of the universe.

TAGORE: The world is a human world - the scientific view of it is also that of the scientific man. Therefore, the world apart from us does not exist; it is a relative

world, depending for its reality upon our consciousness. There is some standard of reason and enjoyment, which gives it truth, the standard of the eternal man whose experiences are made possible through our experiences.

EINSTEIN: This is a realization of the human entity.

TAGORE: Yes, one eternal entity.

EINSTEIN: Truth, then, or beauty, is not independent of man?

TAGORE: No, I do not say so.

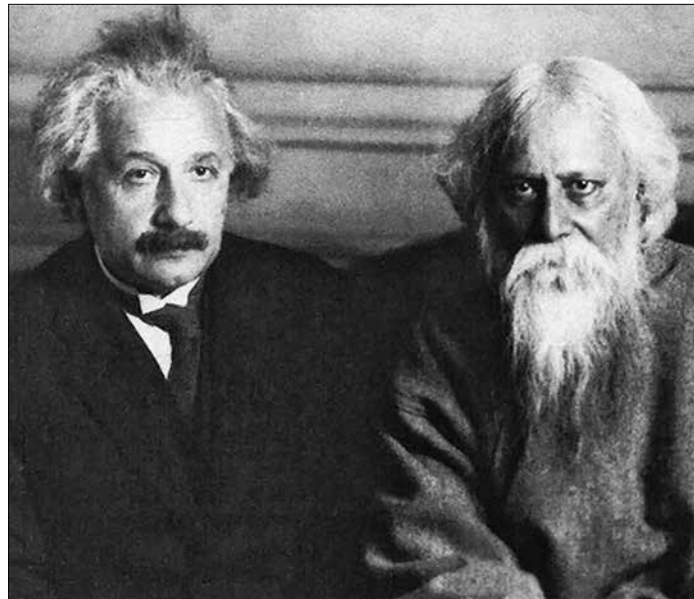
EINSTEIN: If there were no human beings any more, the Apollo Belvedere no longer would be beautiful?

TAGORE: No!

EINSTEIN: I agree with this conception of beauty, but not with regard to truth.

TAGORE: Why not? Truth is realized through men.

EINSTEIN: I cannot prove my con-



Tagore with Einstein in 1930

ancient entities, time and space, while I have been lecturing in this country on the eternal world of man, the universe of reality.

EINSTEIN: Do you believe in the divine isolated from the world?

TAGORE: Not isolated. The infinite personality of man comprehends the universe. There cannot be anything that cannot be subsumed by the human personality, and this proves that the truth of the universe is human truth.

EINSTEIN: There are two different conceptions about the nature of the universe—the world as a unity dependent on humanity, and the world as reality independent of the human factor.

(Note: Perplexed as one may be at the different ideas touched upon in their statements, there is a feeling that, as they continued, they were confining their remarks to what they themselves believed,

ception is right, but that is my religion.

TAGORE Beauty is in the ideal of perfect harmony, which is in the universal being; truth is the perfect comprehension of the universal mind. We individuals approach it through our own mistakes and blunders, through our accumulated experience, through our illumined consciousness. How otherwise can we know truth?

EINSTEIN: I cannot prove, but I believe in the Pythagorean argument, that the truth is independent of human beings. It is the problem of the logic of continuity.

TAGORE : Truth, which is one with the universal being, must be essentially human; otherwise, whatever we individuals realize as true, never can be called truth. At least, the truth which is described as scientific and which only can be reached through the process of logic—in other words, by an organ of thought which is human. According to the Indian philosophy there is Brahman, the absolute truth, which cannot be conceived by the isolation of the individual mind or described by words, but can be realized only by merging the individual in its infinity. But such a truth cannot belong to science. The nature of truth which we are discussing is an appearance; that is to say, what appears to be true to the human mind, and therefore is human, and may be called *maya*, or illusion.

EINSTEIN It is no illusion of the individual, but of the species.

TAGORE: The species also belongs to a unity, to humanity. Therefore the entire human mind realizes truth; the Indian and the European mind meet in a common realization.

EINSTEIN: The word species is used in German for all human beings; as a matter of fact, even the apes and the frogs would belong to it. The problem is whether truth is independent of our consciousness.

TAGORE: What we call truth lies in the rational harmony between the subjective and objective aspects of reality, both of which belong to the super-personal man.

EINSTEIN: We do things with our mind, even in our everyday life, for which we are not responsible. The mind acknowledges realities outside of it, inde-

pendent of it. For instance, nobody may be in this house, yet that table remains where it is.

TAGORE: Yes, it remains outside the individual mind, but not the universal mind. The table is that which is perceptible by some kind of consciousness we possess.

EINSTEIN: If nobody were in the house the table would exist all the same, but this is already illegitimate from your point of view, because we cannot explain what it means, that the table is there, independently of us. Our natural point of view in regard to the existence of truth apart from humanity cannot be explained or proved, but it is a belief, which nobody can lack—not even primitive beings. We attribute to truth a superhuman objectivity. It is indispensable for us—this reality, which is independent of our existence and our experience and our mind - though we cannot say what it means.

TAGORE: In any case, if there be any truth absolutely unrelated to humanity, then for us it is absolutely non-existing.

EINSTEIN: Then I am more religious than you are!

TAGORE: My religion is in the reconciliation of the super-personal man, the universal spirit, in my own individual being.

Tagore and Einstein met also at the home of a common friend, Dr. Mendel, in the suburbs of Berlin in 1930.

TAGORE: I was discussing with Dr. Mendel today the new mathematical discoveries, which tell us that in the realm of infinitesimal atoms chance has its play; the drama of existence is not absolutely predestined in character.

EINSTEIN: The facts that make science tend toward this view do not say good-bye to causality.

...

EINSTEIN: One tries to understand in the higher plane how the order is. The order is there, where the big elements combine and guide existence, but in the minute elements this order is not perceptible.

TAGORE: Thus duality is in the depths of existence, the contradiction of free impulse and the directive will which works upon it and evolves an orderly scheme of things.

EINSTEIN: Modern physics would not say they are contradictory. Clouds look as one from a distance, but if you see them nearby, they show themselves as disorderly drops of water.

TAGORE: It is the constant harmony of chance and determination which makes it eternally new and living.

EINSTEIN: I believe that whatever we do or live for has its causality; it is good, however, that we cannot see through to it. (Cut short here. They discuss music after this.)

In science, we go from one metaphor to another, one model to another, but even the best one is not the true system ontologically. The ultimate truth called Brahman is Transcendental to all, of a different quality. Unconditioned or Supreme Brahman is the universe. It is all that is (*tat sat* in Sanskrit). It is free from limits of space, time and causation. It is not to be reasoned about, not to be conceived. Supreme Brahman is described as *satchi-dananda*: Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, as Tagore has hinted in his statements. The identity of Brahman and Atman or the Self, has been expressed in the well known Vedic dictum *tat twam asi*: That thou art. Atman, the conditioned Brahman is called *Ishtwara* (God). Vedanta philosophy often uses the word *maya* to describe the creation. *Maya*, which is not essentially different from Brahman, is the material cause, and Brahman, as pure intelligence, is the efficient cause of the universe. Brahman enters into them as life and consciousness and animates them. Thus Brahman, which is transcendental, of a different quality ontologically, becomes immanent in the universe as Atman. Tagore has touched upon these ideas in his different statements.

We conclude quoting Prigogine (*Order out of Chaos*, Bantam 1984): "Einstein emphasized that science had to be independent of the existence of any observer. ... On the contrary Tagore maintained that even if absolute truth could exist, it would be inaccessible to the human mind. Curiously enough, the present evolution of science is running in the direction stated by the great poet."



STUDYING SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S HOROSCOPES

BY BAHUT PAGAL

Readers may be familiar with Sri Ramakrishna's horoscope, cast by one Narayan Chandra Jyotirbhushana. It appears in Swami Saradananda's biography *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, translated by Swami Jagadatmananda as *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* and by Swami Chetanananda as *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*.

According to Swami Chetanananda's translation (pp. 111-112), "Sri Ramakrishna was born in the year A.D. 1836 on the 2nd day of the bright fortnight of the month when the sun was in the zodiac of Aquarius (*Kumbha*—18 February), early in the morning at about 5:00 a.m."

The horoscope concludes that a man born at this time "becomes the head of a religious movement; he is virtuous, highly honoured, and always engaged in doing virtuous deeds; he lives in a temple and gets a large following of disciples; he is called a great man by all, and is born of the spirit of Lord Narayana; he is worshipped by all."

So far, so good. The Hindu system of astrology is right on target in describing Sri Ramakrishna's character and in predicting his future. But what do other systems say?

There seems to be some overlapping between the Hindu and Western systems. They may even be identical in some respects. That shouldn't be surprising, since they're both studying the same stars.

The Western system agrees with its Hindu counterpart in identifying Sri Ramakrishna as an Aquarius. According to the Western system, he was born right at the end of Aquarius, which runs approximately from January 20 to February 19.

Different astrologers describe Aquarians in different ways, but on the main points they generally agree. One of the many websites accessible online, www.psychicguild.com/horoscopes_zodiac.php?sign=Aquarius, has this to say:

"[Aquarians] not only march to a different drummer, they make up new music as they go along. They are 'mind-oriented' individuals, whose thoughts never stop tick-tocking over. Because of their high focus on intellectual exploration, many

inventors, eccentrics and highly original trailblazers are born under this sign. Their intense ability to live on many mental levels holds both pain and pleasure for Aquarians. For example, in the American Hall of Fame there are more Aquarians than any other sign, yet statistics reveal that in mental institutions there are more Aquarians than any other sign too. Many extremes can surround this sign and these extremes can take them to both heaven and hell.

"But in everyday terms, most Aquarians are extremely humanitarian and often involved in social programs that assist others. They can also be objective in judgment, for they never let their emotions get in the way. Outgoing and amiable, Aquarians attract friends wherever they go and those whom Aquarians befriend have their unswerving loyalty.

"Aquarians are the zodiac's most mysterious and unusual people—and no two are anything alike. Those born under this sign—ruled by innovative and non-conformist Uranus—march to the beat of their own drum. They see life in a different way. Others quite frequently think their habits and ideas are eccentric or crazy in some way, but it is this uniqueness that makes them so special. The Aquarian mind is extremely quick and they never seem to stop thinking (it is interesting to note that many born under this sign suffer from insomnia). Aquarians usually have strong political, environmental or social beliefs. But whether it is a relationship, career or cause—Aquarians are happiest when they have 'something' to believe in or nurture."

The author of this horoscope is the provocatively named Athena Starwoman. I think we may safely infer that this is a pen name. Readers can draw their own conclusions as to how much of her analysis applies to Sri Ramakrishna—and how much she leaves out.

Other famous Aquarians include such disparate personalities as Christian Dior, Jack Nicklaus, Humphrey Bogart, Emanuel Swedenborg, Lord Byron, Ronald Reagan, Yoko Ono, Oral Roberts, Jackie Robinson, Abraham Lincoln, Charles

Lindbergh, Zsa Zsa Gabor, and King Farouk. Somehow I feel a bit unsettled at the idea of Sri Ramakrishna having anything in common with Zsa Zsa Gabor and King Farouk.

If he had been born just two days later, Sri Ramakrishna would have been a Pisces (February 20—March 20) and in real trouble. Pisceans are "mysterious and alluring individuals," but they are often conflicted and confused, "the Saint and the Sinner rolled into one; ... the lost soul, the philosopher and the psychotic and the visionary." They often live in a fantasy world, and their romantic life causes lots of problems. We can breathe a sigh of relief that Sri Ramakrishna was not born a Pisces.

When we turn to the Chinese system of astrology, we run into major problems. The Chinese system is based on the lunar calendar and consists of 12-year cycles. Each year is named after an animal: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig. Each year is also associated with one of the five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water.

Chinese New Year fell on February 17 in 1836, so Sri Ramakrishna was born on the second day of the new year, equivalent to our January 2. The second day of any Chinese New Year is always a happy one, because all the Chinese people are still satiated from the feasting they enjoyed the day before.

But there's bad news for devotees who believe in Chinese astrology. Sri Ramakrishna was born in the year of the Fire Monkey. That's a *yang* (bright, active, masculine) year. If he had been born two days earlier, he would have been born in the year of the Wood Sheep (or Goat, or Ram). That's a *yin* (dark, passive, feminine) year.

According to www.chinesezodiac.com/monkey.php (no author named),

Fire Monkeys are strong, determined, and good at setting and meeting goals. Other people enjoy their company, "even though these Monkeys want the upper

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My Prayer-My Offering The Divine Passage

*My karma threads through eons of time,
the cause and effect chaining me to endless
lives
played out in this mortal world.
Countless mental thoughts and physical
actions
bind me to birth after birth and
death after death.
Suffering and sorrow, joy and bliss com-
mingle,
the pain tormenting my soul,
the glory uplifting it to the abode of God.
Wherein is safe harbor from this tempest
storm
tossing me about on a frothing sea of dual-
ity?
Where is the calm beyond this ocean of ever-
changing tides?
I am weary of this mortal play,
my heart yearns for eternal peace,
for union with God
my refuge, my goal supreme.*

*Oh, Dear God, hear my fervent prayer
to offer my self, my soul, my all in all
to merge in you alone.
Guide my every thought and action.
If I must suffer, as I must, let it be
with the awareness of your divine grace.
Cut off the head of the serpent of ignorance,
the constricting mind bound in matter.
Transform my vision so I see only Thee in
every karma to be paid
every karma to be received.
Give me the strength and humility
to accept all that comes due:
the bad and the good
the dark and the light
the finite and the infinite.
Let only love be my guide.
Let me live only to serve
the One beyond all worlds
residing in my heart of hearts,
my true home
Self alone
ever pure, ever free.*

By Marianne Quinn

Ramakrishna

*Lord, everywhere I hear the sound
of devotees chanting and singing your
glories.
The priests recite the mantras without ceas-
ing.
They know—
so many words.
The temples are filled with sounds of wor-
ship,
ringing bells and drums and conch,
but in my mind is only
the stillness of a vast space.
All sounds have receded into Light unend-
ing.
I can no longer remember Lord
the words to praise you
or even how I came to be so near.*

*The rich have come Lord
laden with offerings—
garlands, sweets, silks and sandal.
Milk and honey they pour
in hopes of winning your favor.
You know Lord, I have nothing left to give,
nor have I anything to ask.
I have given all I have
so long ago ...
Then how can I express my love?*

*You have drawn me close to you.
So close ...
and here I sit in the quiet
without words, or mantras, or knowledge
of worship.
Here in the silence
I am in your presence
whatever little is left of me—
Even the few white flowers
that I offer
are stolen Lord from you.
So many names you have,
and writing one upon a leaf,
I offer it into your light.
Light into Light eternal.
Lord do accept
that which is
already your own.*

*You have put on the form
of the children
and come to me
saying, "I am here."
Looking out through their eyes,*

*O sweet one, Ramakrishna,
you have come.*

*You have dressed yourself
in the garb of the poor and the lowly,
and placing your small arms
around my neck
cried to the Mother.*

*Do Lord accept my service.
Do accept my adoration
and the love of one
who has nothing else to give.*

By Pravrajika Sevaprana

Fountain

*I saw a fountain —
Tracery streams outlined
Against the sky,
invisibly supported.*

*Some streams arched quickly,
Other trajectories were longer.
But all returned to the Source
Whence they came.*

*All equally valuable —
No injustice there!
Irrepressible energy of Life,
Shifting, changing, I become it.*

*Honored to be chosen
Amongst infinite possibilities,
Leaping with joy
From the Source!*

*This life energy
Of the universe
Cannot be denied.
Its purpose will prevail.*

*Turning downward,
Decay sets in
Until only the Spirit is left,
Pure, bright and joyful in its longing.*

*My trajectory completed,
I return to the Source,
With gratitude
For the journey.*

By Garth Stanton



You Must Believe

It was summer and a drought threatened the crops throughout the region.

One hot and dry Sunday, the village parson told his congregation, “There isn’t anything that will save us except to pray for rain. Go home, pray, believe, and come back next Sunday ready to thank God for the rain he will send.”

The people did as they were told and returned to church the following Sunday. But as soon as the parson saw them, he was furious.

“We can’t worship today. You do not yet believe,” he said.

“But,” they protested, “we prayed, and we do believe.”

“Believe?” he responded. “Then where are your umbrellas?”

The Way to Heaven

An elderly minister told of a time early in his career when he arrived in a small town to preach a sermon. Wanting to mail a letter, he asked a young boy where the post office was.

When the boy told him, the minister thanked him and said, “If you’ll come to the church this evening, you can hear me telling everyone how to get to Heaven.”

“I don’t think I’ll be there,” the boy said. “You don’t even know your way to the post office.”

NASA & Chickens

Scientists at NASA have developed a gun built specifically to launch dead chickens at the windshields of airliners, military jets and the space shuttle, all traveling at maximum velocity. The idea is to simulate the frequent incidents of collisions with airborne fowl to test the strength of the windshields.

British engineers heard about the gun and were eager to test it on the windshields of their new high-speed trains. Arrangements were made, and when the gun was fired, the engineers stood shocked as the chicken hurtled out of the barrel, crashed into the shatterproof shield, smashed it to smithereens, crashed through the control console, snapped the

engineer’s backrest in two and embedded itself in the back wall of the cabin.

Horried Britons sent NASA the disastrous results of the experiment, along with the designs of the windshield, and begged the U.S. scientists for suggestions. NASA’s response was just one sentence... “THAW THE CHICKEN!”

A Difference of Opinion

A congregant asked his minister, “You’re a man of God. So why is it that you are always talking about business, when I, a businessman, am always talking about spiritual matters?”

“You have discovered one of the principles of human nature,” the minister replied.

“And what’s that?”

“People like to discuss things they know nothing about.”

Who’s the Boss?

Paul went to see his boss one day and said, “My wife, Natalie, says I should see you. She says I should go up to you and ask for an increase in my salary. She says I’m entitled.”

Paul’s boss replied, “Come back tomorrow. I’ll ask my wife if I should give it to you.”

Precious Cargo

A wealthy woman from California telephoned an airline requesting a first-class ticket for her dog. The airline attendant was astonished and promptly advised the lady that she could not have a seat for her dog.

The lady was very upset, but at the end of the discussion the airline attendant agreed to personally carry the pampered poodle in a suitable cage on the plane.

The plane landed and as the service people removed the cage, they noticed to their horrified surprise that the poodle was dead. They immediately dispatched someone to buy another poodle, which looked the same as the dead dog.

They happily handed over the cage to the lady who looked at the cage and flatly

rejected it, saying, “This is not my dog!”

The airline personnel were surprised—they thought the substitute poodle looked like an exact match, but the lady replied: “My dog was dead and I was taking her home to be buried.”

A Mother’s Approval

A young Jewish man excitedly told his mother he had fallen in love and that he was going to get married. He said, “Just for fun, Ma, I’m going to bring over three women and you try and guess which one I’m going to marry.”

The mother agreed.

The next day, he brought three beautiful women into the house and sat them down on the couch and they chatted for a while. He then said, “Okay, Ma, guess which one I’m going to marry.”

She immediately replied, “The one on the right.”

“That’s amazing, Ma. You’re right. How did you know?”

“I don’t like her.”

The Last Supper

Three men, an Italian, a Frenchman, and a Jew were condemned to be executed. Their captors told them that they had the right to have a final meal before the execution. They asked the Frenchman what he wanted.

“Give me the best French wine and French bread,” he requested.

So they gave it to him, he ate it, and then they executed him. Next it was the Italian’s turn.

“Give me a great big plate of pasta,” said the Italian.

So they brought it to him, he ate it, and then they executed him. Now it was the Jew’s turn.

“I want a big bowl of strawberries,” said the Jew.

“Strawberries!!! They aren’t even in season!”

“So—I’ll wait...”

Humor...continued on the next page...

- A father said to his son, “When Abe Lincoln was your age, he was studying books by the light of the fireplace.” The son replied, “When Lincoln was your age, he was President.”
- A Zen master once said to me, “Do the opposite of whatever I tell you.” So I didn’t.
- A fine is a tax for doing wrong. A tax is a fine for doing well.
- Mixing politics and religion is like mixing manure and ice cream. It doesn’t do much to the manure, but it surely does ruin the ice cream.—Will Rogers, quoted in the *Lincoln Nebraska Journal Star*.

Don decided that he wanted to be a competitive yachtsman, so he scrounged together all the money he could and bought a sailboat. When he entered his first race, he looked around at all of the new and expensive boats of his competitors and realized that he needed to do something to give himself a competitive edge, so he named his boat the “Bad News.”

When other competitors asked why he chose such a strange name, Don replied, “Because as everybody knows, bad news travels fast.”



hand in every situation.” That doesn’t sound like our Thakur.

Monkeys in general are curious, mischievous, clever, playful, and masters of practical jokes. Their fondness for playing pranks sometimes gets them in trouble. They like being challenged, are intellectual and creative, but sometimes appear to others as being confused. They enjoy people-watching, and prefer urban life to rural life. Their active lifestyle keeps them in good health. “They adapt well to changing environments and they’re very intelligent. They work quickly, but they’ll frequently charge double for their services.” They make good accountants, bankers, scientists, engineers, stock market traders, and air traffic controllers. I can just picture Sri Ramakrishna trading on the stock market, directing air traffic, and charging double for his services every time.

Worst of all, Monkeys are promiscuous. At this point we have to throw up our hands in horror and conclude that, in its assessment of Sri Ramakrishna’s character, Chinese astrology has really blown it.

But there is yet hope. Monkeys born close to the previous year of the Sheep may assume some Sheep qualities that will nullify their Monkey traits. Unfortunately, Sheep don’t have much to brag about. They’re creative, intelligent, calm, and dependable. They like to be alone and absorbed in their own thoughts. They also like to be in groups, but they don’t like to be the center of attention. They are homebodies, basically couch potatoes, but they have a nurturing temperament and make excellent caregivers.

That’s not much, but it’s a lot better than being promiscuous and charging double.

While Sri Ramakrishna’s Western and Chinese horoscopes can provide considerable entertainment, the results suggest that they can be wildly off base and we shouldn’t take them seriously. After all, they’re not part of the *nitya*—they’re part of the *lila*. And the *lila* is just for fun.



Teacher: In this box, I have a 10-foot snake.
Seven year old student: You can’t fool me, Teacher...snakes don’t have feet!

and causation. Therefore, Nirguna Brahman is beyond good and evil.

What is the relationship between an individual being and Nirguna Brahman?

According to Advaita Vedanta, an individual being is no other than Nirguna Brahman. Sridhara Swami, the famous nondualistic philosopher and saint, explains this with the help of an analogy of the relationship between the ocean and its waves. In this analogy the infinite ocean is Nirguna Brahman and the waves are individual beings. But is the ocean any different from the waves, or are the waves any different from the ocean? They are not. They are one and the same. Similar is the relationship between individual souls and Nirguna Brahman. They are one and the same.



VEDANTA NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

INDIA

Belur Math celebrates the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna's birthday (according to the lunar calendar) was celebrated at the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order at its monastery complex at Belur Math on Sunday, March 6th. Cooked Prasad was served to about 38,000 devotees. Swami Prabhananda, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, presided over the public meeting held in the afternoon.



Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday at Belur Math

The Public Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was held on Sunday, March 13th, drawing more than 100,000 visitors, who thronged the monastery grounds throughout the day. Cooked Prasad was served to about 36,000 persons on that day.



Public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday at Belur Math

A new branch center of the Ramakrishna Math started at Naora in West Bengal. At Naora, the birthplace of revered Swami Trigunatitanandaji, a branch of the Ramakrishna Math has been started with the land, buildings, etc., received from Sri Sri Ramakrishna Trigunatita Sevashrama, Naora. The property was handed over to the Ramakrishna Math on February 7th, the birthday of revered Swami Trigunatitanandaji.

The benedictory address of revered Swami Atmasthanandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Order, was read out and Swami Prabhananda, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, addressed the gathering. A large number of monks and devotees attended the function. The address of this new branch center is—Ramakrishna Math, Village Naora, P.O. Bodra, Dist. South 24 Parganas, West Bengal 743502; Phones: 9143730403 and 9830527243.

Newly constructed office building dedicated at the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order. On March 23rd, revered Swami Atmasthananda, President of the Ramakrishna order, dedicated a new office building, constructed near the headquarters office, to be used for Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary celebration.



The new office building at the Ramakrishna Order's headquarters in Belur

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum, consecrates the Gopurams of the Universal Temple of Sri Ramakrishna and inaugurates the new auditorium. On February 4th, Mr. L K Advani, former Deputy Prime Minister of India, inaugurated the new auditorium at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama in Belgaum, and revered



Consecration of the Gopurams of the Universal Temple of Sri Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum



**The new auditorium
Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum**

Swami Smaranananda, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order, consecrated the newly built Gopurams of the temple on February 5th. Revered Swami Smaranananda; Swami Prabhananda, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order; Dr. Abdul Kalam, former President of India; Mr. Advani; and several other distinguished speakers addressed the public meetings, youth convention and devotees' conference. Many monks, dignitaries and devotees attended the four-day program from February 4th to 7th.

Prize distribution for high school students organized by Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara. On February 28th, as a part of the 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration of Swami Vivekananda, the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara, organized a State Level Written Quiz Competition for high school students at the CC Mehta auditorium. From 733



Prize distribution ceremony, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara



Shiva Ratri celebrated at Belur Math

schools of the state of Gujarat 34,267 students participated in the competition. Every participant was given a gift of the book *A Short Life Of Swami Vivekananda*. Other special prizes were given to students who did well in the quiz. The competition was organized to encourage the students to study the books by Swami Vivekananda in order to feel inspired to build their own character and dedicate them to the service of the nation. The Governor of Gujarat, Dr. Shrimati Kamla, while giving away the prizes, urged the students to follow the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and make India great in every respect. Many other dignitaries and swamis of the Ramakrishna Order were present at the event and addressed the students.

BANGLADESH

Ramakrishna Math, Dhaka, celebrates the 176th Birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna Math, Dhaka, celebrated the 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna and the Annual Function of the Ashrama with a 6 day-long program from March 6th to March 11th.

The Social Welfare Minister and the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, the High Commissioner of India in Bangladesh,



Worship of Sri Ramakrishna
Ramakrishna Math, Dhaka

and many other dignitaries and distinguished persons as well as numerous devotees attended the function on different days. About 15000 people were served with khichuri prasad on the last day of the function.

Swami Aksharanandaji (Kalipada Maharaj), head of Dhaka and Narayanganj centers, breathed his last on 18 April at 9:57 am at Apollo Hospital, Dhaka. He was 81 and had been suffering from kidney disease, diabetes and hypertension for some years.

The news of his passing away spread immediately all over Bangladesh through



Swami Aksharananda (Kalipada Maharaj)
1929 – 2011

electronic media and was published in all national newspapers the following morning. The President and the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, and several other important persons sent their condolence messages. His body was brought to Dhaka center at 3 pm and kept there till 12 noon of the next day. About 50,000 people from different walks of life came to pay their last respects and homage.

Initiated by Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, Swami Aksharanandaji joined the Order in 1950 at Pathuriaghata Ashrama (later moved to Narendrapur) and had Sannyasa from Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj in 1959. He was the head of both Dhaka and Narayanganj centers for the last 37 years. A source of inspiration and guidance to thousands of spiritual seekers, he tirelessly preached the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in Bangladesh for nearly four decades. He has left behind nearly 55,000 initiated disciples in Bangladesh. His passing away has created a huge void, which is difficult to fill.

USA

Birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna celebrated in all the Vedanta Centers in U.S.A. The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated in the Vedanta Centers in Hollywood, San Francisco, Berkeley, Sacramento, Portland, Seattle, Providence, Boston, New York, Chicago, St. Louis and St. Petersburg with worship, holy readings, devotional singing and distribution of Prasad. The sub-centers in San Diego and Washington D.C. also observed Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. Please see the inside front cover page for photos of some of these celebrations.

JAPAN

Japan Vedanta Society celebrates Sri Ramakrishna's 176th Birthday. On March 20th, Sunday, Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday Celebration was held at the Society's Zushi Center with a ritualistic worship of Sri Ramakrishna performed by Swami Medhasananda. Some devotees participated in the event. Later in the day the congregation held a special prayer session for the victims of the Tohoku natural disaster of March 11th.

Vedanta Society of Japan provides relief materials for the victims of the Tohoku natural disaster. The Society has already handed over the following articles to the authorities of the Zushi City for the victims in Tohoku (the northeast region of Japan most affected by the earthquake/tsunami disaster): blankets 101 pcs; cotton masks 1550 pcs; towels 183 pcs; milk powder 14 packets; baby diapers 600 pcs; adult diapers 298 pcs; body soap 75 bars; toilet paper 300 rolls; sanitary napkin packages 198 pcs; tissue



Worship of Sri Ramakrishna
Vedanta Society of Japan, Zushi

paper boxes 65 pcs; wet tissue canisters 93 pcs; postcards 500 pcs; and bottled water (2 liter each) 38 bottles.

Also, ¥200,000 (US\$2,422.33) worth of vegetables were purchased and delivered to Fukushima Prefecture for distribution by local officials to the relief shelters.



Boxes filled with relief items to be sent to disaster victims by the Vedanta Society of Japan

Please Note

For those who would like to donate money to the relief efforts in Japan through the Vedanta Society of Japan, the following banking information is provided for making a wire transfer:

Vedanta Society of Japan
Bank: Mizuho Bank, Ltd
Address: 11-35 Onarimachi, Kamakura, Kanagawa 248-0012 Japan
Bank Telephone: 81-467-23-1155
Swift Code: mhbkkjpj
Account name: Shukyohoujin Nihon Vedanta Kyokai
Account number: 760-1114571

If you send donations please inform the Japan society of the amount of donation and the name of your bank and the date of the bank transfer through e-mail; all correspondence regarding the donation should be sent to the following e-mail address only: jprelief@gmail.com

BRAZIL

Sri Ramakrishna's birth-anniversary observed in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was duly celebrated by the devotees of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama in São Paulo. The celebration consisted of a ritualistic worship, which was followed by holy readings and singing of devotional songs. Most of the

food offered to the deity during the puja was brought by devotees and then the Prasad was partaken of by all the devotees during lunch time.



Devotees at the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, Sao Paulo

AUSTRALIA

Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of NSW celebrates Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday. On March 12th, Saturday, the Sarada Vedanta Society observed the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday at the Vedanta Hall in Croydon. The event started at 5:30 pm with a welcome address by Mr. Stafford Watts. It was followed by Vedic chanting by Sarada Math nuns, a symposium on Sri Ramakrishna, singing of devotional songs, 15 minutes of silent meditation and a speech by Pravrajika Ajayaprana. At the end of the program dinner was served to those who attended the event.

The Vedanta Centre of Sydney celebrates the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna on March 6th. The birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna began with chanting of hymns from the Vedas by Swami Damodarananda. It was followed by chanting of the Vishnu Sahasranama, hymns on Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and



Worship of Sri Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Sydney

Swami Vivekananda by monks of the Vedanta Center and devotees. A special worship was performed while Dr. Raghu Raman chanted the *Durga Saptashati* (*Chandi*). In the evening, there was Kali Kirtan by monks and devotees and a talk by Swami Sridharananda entitled *The Significance of the Advent of Sri Ramakrishna*. Around 600 devotees participated in the event.

CANADA

Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary observed in Vancouver, B.C. On March 17th, in the presence of quite a few devotees, the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of B.C. celebrated the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna at its own premises. The celebration consisted of a ritualistic worship of Sri Ramakrishna performed by Swami Bhaskarananda of Seattle in the evening. The worship was followed by devotional singing and distribution of Anna-Prasad.

On March 17th, at a hall in Vancouver, the Society organized a talk given by Swami Bhaskarananda on the subject: "Sri Ramakrishna—the Unique Teacher."



Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, Vancouver

SRI LANKA



The Ramakrishna Mission in Colombo, Sri Lanka holds the worship of Sri Ramakrishna

of God's Motherhood. After reading it I could not bring myself to read another serious thought-provoking article *Before you Sit in Meditation* since my mind kept going back to the article on Holy Mother. I waited for some time and started reading the article *All for the Sake of a Lemon*. By the time I finished reading it, I was chuckling and was thinking, "Hmm, sounds very familiar...." The article *All for the Sake of a Lemon* points out how much we worry about small petty things in our lives and many times ignore the serious issues.

In my opinion *Global Vedanta* is a magazine without comparison. It provides excellent inside knowledge about Vedantic philosophy not only through serious writing, but also through light humorous ones for common people like us.

I would like to thank all those who are spending their time and effort to bring out such an excellent magazine. Best wishes for continued success of *Global Vedanta*.

—Ashok Bhattacharya
Federal Way, Washington

Note to Vedanta Centers around the world

Your news items are welcome and encouraged. You may submit them by email to:

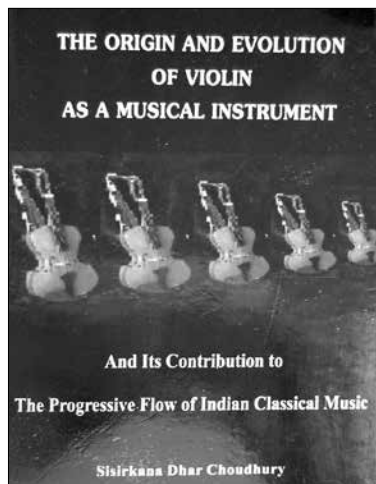
global@vedanta-seattle.org

For more effective news coverage please
attach one or two
HIGH RESOLUTION
pictures to your email message.

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Global Vedanta will gladly consider articles, poetry, humor, etc. submitted for publication. The subject matter should be religious, cultural, or educational, and must appeal to a general and broad-minded readership. Articles should be entertaining and yet substantial, and be within 1500 to 1700 words in length (not exceeding 2000 words in any event). Articles accepted for publication may require a release signed by the author and, unless prior arrangements are made, no materials submitted to *Global Vedanta* can be returned.

BOOK REVIEW



The Origin And Development Of Violin As A Musical Instrument And Its Contribution to The Progressive Flow of Indian Classical Music

By Sisirkana Dhar Choudhury

Publisher: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math,
Kolkata,

ISBN: 978-9380568065

Price: \$35.00 (hardcover), pp. 192

Reviewed by Swami Bhaskarananda

Many in India rightly think that the bamboo-flute, some kinds of drums, and the veena are musical instruments that originated in ancient India. They also think that the violin originated in Europe. But this book by Sisirkana Dhar Choudhury dispels that wrong notion by informing us that a certain kind of violin was developed in ancient India by Ravana, the mighty king of Sri Lanka. It was called Ravanayantram or Ravanastram. *The Origin And Development Of Violin As A Musical Instrument* is a wonderful research-oriented book packed with similar illuminating facts—historical or otherwise—concerning not just the violin, but also many other similar musical instruments that are used in different parts of the world.

Its author, declared to be the best woman violinist of the North Indian classical tradition, is also the former Baba Alauddin Khan Professor and Head, Department of Instrumental Music and Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, India. She has had the privilege of studying under

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Swami Bhaskarananda is the editor-in-chief of *Global Vedanta* and the president of the Vedanta Society in Seattle, U.S.A.

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famous musicians like Pundit V. G. Jog, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, Annapurna Devi, Pundit T. L. Rana, Pundit Ravi Shankar, Mr. Birendra Kishore Roychoudhury and several others.

In 1997 she received the prestigious Sangeet Natak Academy award.

She has given violin performances almost all over the world, drawing high praise from distinguished audiences everywhere. She also has held several workshops and given lectures at some major universities in Europe and Japan. She was associated with Ali Akbar College of Music, San Rafael, CA, USA, from 1998 to 2004. At present she is holding the position of the Principal, Sangeetanjali College of Music in Fremont, CA, USA.

This book is a must-read for all music lovers and serious students of musicology.

