

Voice of the Worldwide Vedanta Movement

GLOBAL VEDANTA

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In this Issue:

- Freemasonry and Swami Vivekananda
- Swami Pranavatmananda—an Unforgettable Monk
- Glimpses of the Baltic States and Scandinavia
- “Seek and Ye Shall Find”

and much more...

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Cover: Spring flowers in Seattle, Washington. Photo by Devra Freedman.

LETTERS

In the article about selfless service (*Global Vedanta* Summer 2011) Swami Bhaskarananda gave the most unique and accurate description of lust, explaining how it is a selfish act. The fact that one needs another body to satisfy his/her lust puts the freedom of another person in a compromising position, which makes it a selfish act. I have never read such a novel description of lust anywhere else!

—Dr. Ranajit Roychoudhury
Austin, TX

I am a subscriber of *Global Vedanta*. I enjoy reading the articles in every issue. In the winter 2011 - 2012 issue, the articles *Fruits of Contemplation* and *Treasure from the Attic: From Bondage to Freedom* are worth reading. I like to read these two articles over and over again.

—Rohini Kaneriyia, Danville PA

We always read with great interest each issue of *Global Vedanta*. Articles published bring out both spiritual and practical as-

pect of Vedanta. Moreover, the touch of humor makes reading enjoyable.

—Ranajit and Khuku Pal
Gaithersburg, MD

Thank you
To all who have made contributions to the *Global Vedanta Sustaining Fund*. These tax deductible donations will guarantee the continued publication of *Global Vedanta*. Donations may be made via the “contribute” page on our website, www.vedanta-seattle.org, or by sending them directly to the society.

FREEMASONRY AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA—PART I

BY CHARLES MATHIAS

If you see a man who...without blemish, fulfills his duty as a man...who is pious without hypocrisy, benevolent without ostentation, and aids his fellow man without self-interest, whose heart beats warm for friendship...who in vicissitudes does not despair, nor in fortune will be presumptuous, and who will be resolute in the hour of danger—

[A] man who is free from superstition and free from infidelity, who in nature sees the finger of the Eternal Master, who feels and adores the higher destination of man, to whom faith, hope and charity are not mere words without any meaning, to whom propriety, nay even life, is not too dear for the protection of innocence and virtue, and for the defense of truth—

[A] man who towards himself is a severe judge, but who is tolerant with the debilities of his neighbour, who endeavours to oppose errors without arrogance, and to promote intelligence without impatience, who properly understands how to estimate and employ his means, who honours virtue though it may be in the most humble garment, and who does not favour vice though it be clad in purple, and who administers justice to merit whether dwelling in palaces or cottages—

[A] man who, without court-ing applause, is loved by all noble-minded men...[who,] where need is, will lay hold with dispassionate courage, circumspect resolution, indefatigable exertion and a rare power of mind, and who will not cease until he has accomplished his work, and then, without pretension, will retire...because he did the good act, not for himself, but for the cause of good!—

Quite the catalog of virtues. Is there anyone who could live up to it?

While such paragons are no doubt exceedingly rare, they do exist, and in fact the description above barely does justice to at least one young man who roamed the precincts of late 19th century Calcutta searching for Truth and Virtue.

That man would one day become the world-famous Swami Vivekananda, founder of the Ramakrishna Mission, herald of Vedanta to the Western World. It should come as no surprise then, that even in his pre-monastic life as Narendra Nath Dutta, such a man would be attracted to any organization that promised to mold men in accordance with the noble principles outlined here.

What may come as a surprise, though, is that the organization proposing this particular ideal of manhood has its roots in countries far removed

If you, my Brethren, meet such a man, you will see the personification of brotherly love, relief and truth, and you will have found the ideal of a Freemason.¹

Ah, the Freemasons! Years ago, when my daughters were young, they performed a peculiar ritual whenever we drove by a certain old brick building in our home town. Pointing to it, they'd chant in strange, singsong unison, "Freemasons are running the country!" To understand what in the world *that* might mean, it helps to know something of the history of Freemasonry— and of a TV cartoon show called *The Simpsons*.

In the episode in question, a rich and reclusive old man opens a huge casino in the Simpsons' home town and, in an inspired bit of satire, begins exhibiting the same kind of delusions that befell Howard Hughes, the notorious billionaire and sometime gaming kingpin who bought most of Las Vegas thirty-odd years ago. Racked by paranoia and germophobia, the old man hallucinates tiny germs popping up on his lackey's face; germs that begin to chant, in strange, singsong unison, "Freemasons are running the country!" For some reason, that scene particularly delighted my daughters, and as soon as they found out there was a Freemason lodge right here in

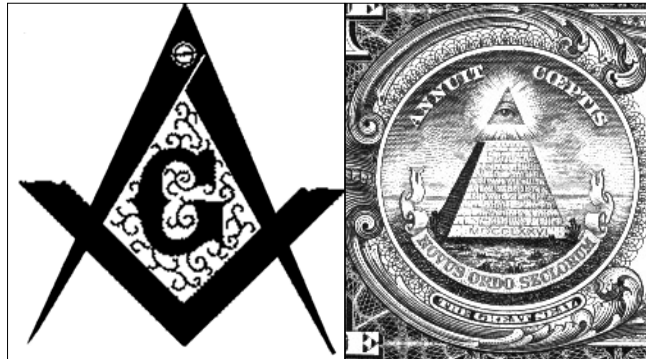
our home town...well, thus began one bizarre family tradition.

Happily, the old man in *The Simpsons* recovers his sanity before the show ends. A dispassionate historian, reviewing the ups and downs of the movement over the past few centuries, might wish some of Freemasonry's more virulent critics had been so lucky!

But on the other hand, it's not as if Freemasonry never gave those critics any ammunition, either. In other words, it's a complicated story...

...one that may have begun with a

1. Excerpted from *The History of Freemasonry* by Otto Klotz, *The Canadian Craftsman*, March 15, 1868.



Freemason Symbols

Left: one of the most familiar Freemason symbols. The square ("V" shape at bottom) and the compasses are common tools of the masons. Most Freemasons consider the "G" to stand for "God" but some, who find this objectionable, take it to mean "Goodness." Right: The pyramid topped by the all seeing eye is another common Freemason symbol which, curiously, appears on the United States one dollar bill as shown here.

from Narendra's native land, and was founded by men with no acquaintance whatsoever with the Vedic tradition. And if that's a surprise, then it will be downright shocking to learn that this same organization has often been vilified as a sinister secret society fanatically dedicated to (depending on who's casting the aspersions) either the overthrow or the eternal preservation of the established order. For anyone familiar with certain far-fetched interpretations of world history, however, shock will most likely give way to a sigh of resignation when they read the final sentence of the excerpt that begins this article:

few jealous workers nearly a thousand years ago. Despite the efforts of some prominent Freemasons over the years to further glorify what they refer to as The Brotherhood by “tracing” its origins back to the Knights Templar, Ancient Egypt, or even the construction of Solomon’s Temple, it seems fairly certain that the organization actually has its roots in a time and place that ought to be far enough removed by now to satisfy even the most snobbish member: a craft guild in Medieval Europe. And not just any craft guild either—the guild of Freemasons (distinguished from regular or “rough” masons by the softer, sculptable material called “freestone” in which they worked), comprised of the craftsmen responsible for the otherworldly beauty distinguishing the facades of so many ancient cathedrals from Scotland to Italy.

Highly sought after and well-paid by their royal and ecclesiastical patrons, the Freemasons looked upon themselves as a breed apart, setting up exclusive “lodges” near their workplace where they could meet, sleep and store their tools safe from the leveling influences and sticky fingers of the common working throng. To protect their livelihood and privileged position they initiated a system of secret passwords, handshakes and the like to identify legitimate apprentices sent from other lodges from unqualified impostors trying to horn in on a sweet deal.

Naturally, such behavior led to a certain amount of jealousy among the lower classes of workers and, human nature being what it is, jealously eventually led to hatred and suspicion. Soon, the attitude became, “If we can’t join them, destroy them!” and in a few cases it was an easy matter to convince the authorities that Freemasonic secrecy and standoffishness was evidence of seditious conspiracies against Church and/or State—and that would be the end of the Freemason guild in that particular locality.

However, the unique skills of the Freemasons were so highly valued that the guild remained strong throughout most of Europe despite the worst efforts

of its enemies. It’s demise, when it came, was through the machinations of history, not slander. With the rise of humanism, mercantilism and similar cornerstones of the Renaissance, the glory days of cathedral-building came to an end and the Freemason guild gradually disintegrated. But, in a manner and by a process that no one to this day has adequately explained, something calling itself “Freemasonry” not only survived—complete with lodges, leather aprons, and secret handshakes—but thrived, morphing into a world-wide

practiced by the Architect of the Universe Himself, an almighty and benevolent God. As the dogmas and superstitions of the Middle Ages lost their grip on the educated minds of Europe, membership in this high-minded new fraternity became all the rage, first in England where the first “modern” lodges were established in the mid-seventeenth century, later throughout Western Europe.

But the seeds of suspicion, planted centuries earlier by jealous workers, flourished as well, threatening this vigorous new growth presenting itself as a vital counterbalance to the illiberal, hidebound combination of Church and State suffocating much of Europe. The seriousness of this threat was determined by whichever way the winds of history happened to be blowing at the moment. Freemasonry blossomed during times of enlightenment and liberality, withered in times of reaction and retrenchment. It could be argued today that suspicion has been more influential than the movement suspected, if the evidence of two little girls whose only knowledge of Freemasonry was derived, in a very roundabout way, from a historical paranoia that found comic expression in *The Simpsons* is any indication.

Freemasonry has survived it all so far, but ironically, much as the original guild was destroyed by the silent and insidious action of historical and cultural change rather than by the noisy imprecations of its enemies, a similar fate may

await its millennial-spanning offshoot. We’ll examine the causes of that all-too-likely outcome in the next installment of this article.

We’ll also look at the historical moment when conditions were at a peak for promoting the growth of Freemasonry, a Golden Age when the movement extended itself so far it reached the shores of the native land, where it touched the heart and mind of the future Swami Vivekananda.



Swami Vivekananda depicted with Freemason paraphernalia

phenomenon the like of which no medieval stone carver could have imagined.

Somewhere along the way, any practical knowledge of stone carving was dropped as a requirement for membership in what was no longer referred to as a guild; instead, one now joined the fraternal order of Freemasons. What was required to join, aside from the sponsorship of someone already a member, was the acceptance of the Masonic ideal, a remarkably progressive agenda promoting universal brotherhood, social equality and religious tolerance, an agenda apparently having its roots in the original Freemasons’ identification of their craft with that



To be continued in the next issue...

SWAMI PRANAVATMANANDA— AN UNFORGETTABLE MONK

BY SWAMI BHASKARANANDA

(This article is taken from the book *Life in Indian Monasteries/Reminiscences about Monks of the Ramakrishna Order* by Swami Bhaskarananda—ed.)

The confluence of the holy river Ganga and the Bay of Bengal is called *Gangasagar*. It is a very holy place in India. Once a year, on an auspicious day in winter, a great fair is held there. The local people call this fair *Gangasagar Mela*. Thousands of pilgrims from all over India come to the *Gangasagar Mela* to take a dip in the confluence of the Ganga and the sea. They come with the deep faith in their hearts that such a bath will free them from their sins, and bring them liberation from the cycle of repeated births and deaths.

Along with the pilgrims and holy men and women, many traders come to sell a great variety of goods. And along with them, quite a few crooks and charlatans come to swindle unsuspecting and gullible pilgrims.

In Hindu tradition donating milk cows to brahmins is considered a meritorious act. Several years ago a swindler came to the fair grounds. He wore the sacred thread of a brahmin. He brought along with him an assistant and a milk cow.

The assistant loudly announced to all the passers-by, “Friends, don’t lose this opportunity to earn merits and go to heaven. Please buy this cow and donate her to this venerable brahmin. The price of the cow is only five rupees.” Usually the price of a good milk cow at that time was at least two hundred rupees. Some gullible pilgrim would pay five rupees for the cow, and then donate her to the brahmin. The same cow would again be sold to another pilgrim, who would also give her to the brahmin as a gift. In this manner the crooks enjoyed a brisk business.

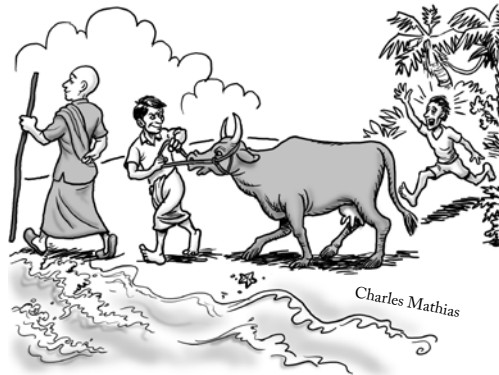
A swami observed this from a distance and wanted to teach the crooks a lesson. He asked one of his companions to buy the cow. Then the swami walked quickly away, pulling the cow behind him. The crooks were alarmed by this turn of

events. The assistant ran after the swami and shouted, “Sir, why are you going away with the cow? Won’t you donate her to the brahmin? Don’t you want to earn merits and go to heaven?”

The swami replied with a smile, “No, I’m not in a rush to earn merit or go to heaven! I’ve no intention of donating the cow to anybody. I just need this cow.”

Meanwhile, the brahmin ran up to the swami and pleaded desperately, “Sir, please forgive me. I’m *really* a brahmin, although my behavior is not appropriate for a brahmin. I’m very poor and this is my only means of livelihood. I live in a nearby village. During the fair I earn a little money from the pilgrims in this devious manner. That’s how I maintain my family. Please don’t take away this cow. This is the only cow that I have.”

The swami felt compassion for the poor brahmin and returned the cow. The swami was a monk of the Ramakrishna Order. His name was Swami Pranavatmananda, popularly known in the Order as Pashupati Maharaj.



As is obvious from the above story, the swami was very witty and humorous. He was also endowed with great compassion, purity of heart, and devotion to God. One of his special characteristics was that he was always cheerful. He was also an excellent storyteller. His stories, usually with spiritual content, were so humorous that his listeners laughed and laughed until their bellies ached.

He often talked about his pilgrimage to the Himalayas and about other places that he had visited. For many years he

traveled from village to village giving audiovisual presentations on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. He very much wanted the village folks to know about Sri Ramakrishna and to benefit from his teachings.

He knew how to model with clay very well. Every year he would make beautiful clay images of Divine Mother Durga for the annual worship of the deity in the Shillong ashrama. Following an age-old tradition, the image would be immersed in a local river after the worship. That’s why it was necessary to construct a new image every year. And Swami Pranavatmananda, as long as he was physically able, would come to the Shillong ashrama every year, and lovingly make the image of the Divine Mother Durga.

The swami would come to the Shillong ashrama nearly two months before the worship, and would start modeling the image with the help of an assistant, nicknamed “Shani Thakur.” After the image was painted, it would be draped in a beautiful sari and adorned with decorations. I, along with other brahmacharis of the Shillong ashrama, sometimes helped in decorating the image under the swami’s guidance.

Swami Pranavatmananda was also an adept in ritualistic worship. He trained some brahmacharis to perform the elaborate ritualistic worship of the Divine Mother Durga. The worship would be held on five consecutive days. He was always present during the worship as *tantradharaka* (guide and prompter), and would guide the brahmachari performing the worship.

Our scriptures say that when the worshipper chants the sacred mantras of invocation, the deity becomes manifest in the image. During every worship of the Divine Mother Durga, Swami Pranavatmananda would want to be sure that the deity had manifested in the image.

The image of Mother Durga has ten arms. In course of the worship, the brahmachari had to put a flower smeared with fragrant sandal paste on one of the ten hands of the deity. Swami Pranavatmananda would silently say to himself,

"I'll take it as a sure sign that Mother Durga has become manifested in the image if the brahmachari puts the flower on that particular hand of the Mother." And invariably the brahmachari would put the flower on the hand chosen by the swami. Thus he would be 100% convinced that Mother Durga had come and was accepting the worship offered to Her.

On the last day of the worship, following the ritualistic tradition, the worshipper bids farewell to the Mother, and requests Her to come again from Her celestial abode the following year to accept his worship. During the farewell, Swami Pranavatmananda, overwhelmed by intense spiritual emotion, would shed tears. Like a child, he didn't want the Divine Mother to go away, leaving him behind.

The authorities of the Order asked him several times to take charge of one or the other of its branch centers. At one time, he was made the head of the Contai center. But after a few years he asked to be relieved of that responsibility, as he felt that the message of Sri Ramakrishna should be spread among the masses. So with the blessings of Swami Madhavananda, then General Secretary of the Order, he started giving audio-visual presentations on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in the rural areas in Bengal. Later he learned Hindi, so that he could work in the Hindi-speaking areas as well. He did that work for many years until he became old and began suffering from occasional attacks of gout. Then the authorities placed him in charge of the Gauhati (now renamed Guahati) ashrama.

Once when he was in Gauhati, an interesting incident happened. A gentleman came to the ashrama and wanted to talk to Swami Pranavatmananda privately. At that time the swami was suffering from a severe attack of gout that had made him completely bedridden. The gentleman was told that it wouldn't be possible for him to see the swami. But the gentleman was desperate, and insisted on talking to Swami Pranavatmananda. At last the monks yielded to his request, and with Swami Pranavatmananda's permission, the gentleman was allowed to go and talk to the swami in his bedroom.

After saluting the swami the gentleman said, "Maharaj, I've a grave family problem. That's why I needed to talk to you privately.

My only daughter seems to be possessed by a departed spirit. Although I heard about such things, I never believed that a spirit could really possess anyone. But now I've no way of disbelieving it, because it has happened to my own daughter.

"Ever since the possession she has become a completely different person. The other day the spirit that possesses her asked my wife to give her a bath, and demanded that before her bath, a fragrant hair oil called Javakusum Oil be applied to her hair. When that was done, the



Swami Pranavatmananda (1904 – 1975)

spirit said to my wife, 'In the other world we have desires, but we can't satisfy them. It feels so good to have a body again, because I can now fulfill my desires.'

"The spirit demands to be given certain special dishes to eat every day, and unless we meet those demands, it becomes very upset and angry. The spirit also has an uncanny sense of time. If it says, 'Give me food at 1 p.m.' and we bring the food half an hour earlier, it says, 'Why have you brought the food now? It's only 12:30 now. Take back the food; I won't eat until 1 o'clock.' Even though there's no clock in the room, the spirit can sense the correct time.

"But the main reason why I've come to see you, Maharaj, is that the spirit again and again demands, 'Take me to Belur Math!' The spirit seems to have some fondness for Belur Math (the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order), and we thought that it may listen to you, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, and agree to leave my daughter's body."

Swami Pranavatmananda felt great compassion for the gentleman. Despite his terribly aching legs that had temporarily made him almost a cripple, he agreed to visit the gentleman's home. The swami was lifted from his bed by an able-bodied monk, and put in a vehicle. When he arrived at the gentleman's home, the swami was helped by that gentleman to go to the haunted girl's room and sit there. As soon as the girl saw the swami, she said to him, "Please take me to Belur Math. I want to live there."

Swami Pranavatmananda said, "Only monks live in Belur Math. You're a girl. You can't live there!"

The girl, speaking like a young child, said, "If they don't allow me to live there, I'll jump into the river. (How the spirit knew that Belur Math was on the bank of the river Ganga is hard to explain!) Then the monks will pull me out of water and let me stay in the monastery."

Swami Pranavatmananda said, "I'm sorry. I don't think it'll work. The monastery is only for monks, no girl can stay there." Then he added, "Why don't you leave this girl? I give you my word; I'll pray to Sri Ramakrishna for your liberation."

At this the spirit said that it would leave the girl a few days later, on a certain day. The swami then returned to the ashrama. He later heard from that gentleman that the spirit truly left his daughter as promised, on that particular day. And his daughter had no memory whatsoever of what had happened to her when the spirit possessed her.

I heard the above story from Swami Pranavatmananda himself.

After I was sent to the United States by our Order to work in the Seattle ashrama, Swami Pranavatmananda wrote me a few letters. In the last letter that I received from him, he wrote in his usual humorous way, "Now I've discovered my escape route from this world. I went to see my doctor the other day for a check-up, and he said that half of my heart is gone!" A few months later I got the news that he had had a sudden heart attack, and had passed away. Knowing him, I could not help thinking that he must have left this world with a smile on his face.



GLIMPSES OF THE BALTIC STATES AND SCANDINAVIA

BY MITHRA SANKRITHI AND USHA SANKRITHI

One of the fringe benefits of living in today's world is that advances in economical and reliable air transportation enable us to quite easily travel and explore a very rich diversity of places and cultures. In September 2011 we had an opportunity to drive around the Baltic states and Scandinavia, a memorable journey from which we'd like to share some glimpses.

From Seattle we flew via Chicago to Helsinki, Finland. We were immediately struck by how extraordinarily neat, clean and organized the Finnish people are. We were astonished at the ease and efficiency of the immigration and customs process, and at being able to claim and drive our rental car out of the airport parking garage with no human contact, no security checkpoint and no cross-checking of paperwork! We came equipped with a Garmin European navigation system but couldn't get it figured out on the first day, so the navigation through the city was quite challenging with turns in quick succession between a dozen or more roads with tongue-twisting names like "Flygstationsvägen," "Hämeenlinnanväylä" and "Kalastajatorpantie." In the evening we took a walk by the Sibelius Park, honoring the great Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, and the Olympic Stadium. At dinner we encountered our next delightful surprise—a wonderful quiet atmosphere because so few people were talking. We learnt later about the Finns' great tolerance for silence, for only speaking when there is something to be said. Many scriptures speak highly of restraint or moderation in speech, but how few of us abstain from the delight of spouting a hundred words a minute whether or not we have anything meaningful to say? Here is something we can learn from the Finnish culture, from a people who are comfortable with silence.

From Helsinki we took a huge Tallink Silja car ferry across the Gulf of Finland to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are Baltic states that were formerly part of the U.S.S.R., and we saw many Soviet era buildings and landmarks interspersed with historic

buildings dating back to the Middle Ages. As we drove through the beautiful countryside of Estonia, we felt sad seeing the obvious poverty reflected in farmhouses and barns that looked like they hadn't been repaired or painted in decades. From Estonia we drove into Latvia and Lithuania, with the roads flanked by pine forests of great beauty. In Riga, the capital of Latvia and the largest city in the Baltic states, we walked through the old city

part of modern Europe while distancing themselves from the heritage of being part of the greater Russian constellation.

From Klaipeda in Lithuania we drove onto a ship for the overnight journey across the Baltic Sea to Karlshamn, Sweden. The captain warned us of rough seas, and that night in the cabin we were palpably aware of the fragility of human life in the storms of nature. We remain wonderstruck at the intensity of the



One of Norway's many fjords. This one is Halsafjorden.

and saw the huge Latvian Academy of Sciences building and the Riga Dom Cathedral with its magnificent organ having over six thousand organ pipes. In Lithuania we visited the busy and prosperous port city Klaipeda, and the peaceful beach village Nida on the Curonian Spit. We were surprised to see a young lady doing *Suryanamaskar*¹ on the beach walkway in Nida. The huge dunes and coastal forest at Nida were delightful, and the beautiful white swans swimming in the Curonian Lagoon reminded us of our own beloved *Paramahansa* and *Paramahamsi*.² From our brief glimpses of the Baltic States we came away with an impression of many contrasts, from somber elderly survivors of the Soviet era to energetic and hopeful youngsters who identify themselves as

waves in what is essentially an inland sea. The drive through southern Sweden reminded us our native Washington State, with scenic farms, forests and hills. At Helsingborg, Sweden, we were impressed by the prevalent functional, non-ornate Scandinavian design and the efficiency and practicality of Swedish folks. Taking the short car ferry ride across the Öresund to Helsingor, Denmark, we had an opportunity to tour the Kronborg Castle and learn a bit of Danish history. The castle served more as a fortress than a palace, and was not elaborately ornate as castles further south in Europe, such as the Palace of Versailles. The Kings and Queens of Denmark would spend some of their time in Kronborg Castle, while their soldiers fought against their Swedish enemies. Our tour guide noted that the Danish soldiers, who received a ration of two liters of beer a day, suffered from some morale problems and had mixed

1. Making salutations to the sun.—ed.
2. Lit. the supreme swan {male} and supreme swan (female). Used here, the words refer to Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi respectively.—ed.

results fighting the Swedes. A painting at Kronborg depicts Danish royalty sitting at a table strewn with lemons, which were considered articles of great luxury as they had to be imported from Italy. Each lemon was worth as much as a cow! At Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, we saw a bustling cosmopolitan city with a very diverse population. On the canal tour we saw the historic buildings of Copenhagen, the “Little Mermaid” statue and the home of Hans Christian Andersen. The canals reminded us of the canals of Venice and Amsterdam.

From Copenhagen we drove over the long and very impressive Öresund bridge to Sweden, and past the important port city of Göteborg (say *Yurtaybobry*) on to Fredrikstad in the southeastern corner of Norway. We were immediately impressed with the beauty of this small city and its setting near the confluence of the Oslofjord and the Skagerrak. This was the start of our sojourn in Norway, unquestionably the most spectacular country in Northern Europe for its mountains, fjords, forests and lakes. We were delighted to find a nice Indian restaurant in Fredrikstad, “Mother India,” with an invocation to Vakratunda (Lord Ganesha) at the entrance and the Sāvitrī Mantra in Sanskrit above our table!

We reached Oslo after driving through some very long tunnels, and had a chance to see the Royal Palace, Oslo Radhus, Oslo University, Oslo Domkirke (Cathedral) and the Oslo Nobel Peace Center. We were moved by the legacy of Alfred Nobel and by many of the inspiring stories of Nobel Peace Prize winners that were portrayed there, as well as by the touching special exhibit on the hardships faced by refugees around the world. From Oslo we drove by the exquisite Lake Mjøsa to Lillehammer, the site of the 1994 Winter Olympics. We stayed at the Hotell Birkebeineren that had been created by converting the Olympic athletes’ quarters, and enjoyed seeing the ski jumps and other winter games facilities. We next drove through the high altitude Dovre and Rondane National Park areas, with spectacular treeless alpine scrub landscapes that reminded us of Iceland, and on to the remarkable fjords that form Norway’s Atlantic coastline. Words cannot describe the extraordinary scenery of steep mountainsides diving precipitously

into the deep fjords formed by the sea engulfing ancient sunken river valleys. We drove alongside the Sundalsfjord, Tingvollfjorden, Halsafjorden, Vinjefjorden, and Trodheimsfjord en route to Trondheim, and saw the most strikingly vivid double rainbow we have ever witnessed. From Trondheim we proceeded via the Asenfjorden, Faterfjord, Beitstadfjorden, Vefsnfjord and Ranafjord to Mo i Rana in Northern Norway; and then across the beautifully desolate, unmarked border into northern Sweden. Sweden has a proud heritage of being a sovereign state for over a millennium, and its people are known for their efficiency, organization, innovation and national pride, but we were soon to learn another aspect of their good qualities, a genuine hospitality. At a coffee stop in very remote area, we were very hospitably received by a Swedish septuagenarian, who had a long and brimmingly friendly conversation with us though we spoke no Swedish and he, no English. He insisted on sending us off with some home baked Swedish cakes, gratis. In our travels we have been repeatedly touched by acts of affectionate kindness by totally unknown people, proof positive that good hearted children of God are present all around the world.

We visited the neatly organized northern city of Lulea along with Swedish Lapland and then on to Finnish Lapland. At Rovaniemi we visited the Arctic Circle and the Arktikum museum with wonderful exhibits about the Sami people and their reindeer herding heritage, and about this magical land of lakes, forests and auroras. From Rovaniemi we drove to Oulu on the Gulf of Bothnia and to the central Finland university town of Jyväskylä before returning to Helsinki.

Throughout Norway, Sweden and Finland we were impressed with the hardworking but unpretentious professional people, the modern buildings, the cleanliness, the excellent urban organization and infrastructure, and the widespread use of wind turbines for renewable energy. On this trip as on many of our other trips, we have learnt the lesson that there are good people and good things to be found everywhere if we have the eyes, mind and heart to see them and learn from them.



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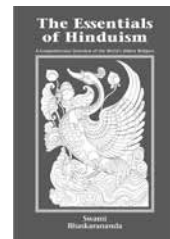
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TREASURE FROM THE ATTIC



“SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND”

(This article has been taken from the magazine Voice of Freedom, April 1912. One of the earliest Vedanta journals in America, this monthly was started by Swami Trigunatitananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and published by the San Francisco Vedanta Society (later the Vedanta Society of Northern California). The name of the author of the article is not mentioned in the journal but it would be fair to suppose that it was written by Swami Trigunatitananda himself or by his able assistant, Swami Prakashananda.—ed.)

This pithy saying contains in a nutshell the whole secret of success in any enterprise in our life. Centuries roll by, still it never loses its force, rather increases its intensity by verification due to its practical application.

It is not only true with relation to our spiritual life, but can be profitably applied in all departments of our life.

First, we must have Shraddha. This Sanskrit word has not an exact equivalent in the English language. It is a unique word. It has different shades of meaning. Have faith in yourself and in the teachings of those who have already attained success by following certain methods. Without self-confidence you cannot accomplish anything. Root out that strange delusion of inherent weakness from your mind. Never cherish the thought even for a moment that you are worthless or insignificant. Rather try to get imbued with the thought that the power to do is within you. Only it is latent for the time being. That you are born to make great achievements should be your current of thought. It is not that you have to fill your mind with the self conceit that you are a great man, but you must have that intense faith in yourself, which is the first requisite for a successful man.

Then place reliance on the sound instructions of those who have known the way and accomplished something. Be not vain, but open your heart to receive the truth. It is a world-old truth

that we have to work out our own salvation, but we shall reach our goal quicker and prevent a considerable waste of energy, if we take proper help from genuine souls.

How can we seek, unless we feel a great longing in us? So intensify your longing as much as possible. We have to generate that burning desire in us, whatever branch of knowledge we may choose. Those who generally fail, complain of unfavorable circumstances, ill luck and other things. They do not stop to search their own hearts which lack in that intensity of yearning. Oh! before such deep longing the most untoward conditions melt away. It guides us with unerring steps in our search and lands us successfully in the region of accomplishment.

Those who complain that they have sought, but their efforts have not been crowned with success, should discover by the analysis of their own nature, if their seeking was accompanied with whole-hearted devotion to the ideal. Though the power of thought is well-known, yet, by simply thinking, we cannot achieve anything. We must learn by observation and experience how to translate our thought-power into external activity. Then, above all, we must never forget to direct our efforts along the right channels. Many a time we fail in our enterprises owing to our lack of judgment and true understanding.

We must shake off our lethargic spirit, and be full of enthusiasm, but it is always necessary to be wise, to proceed cautiously by feeling our way at every move.

And we have to be earnest in our endeavors. Many trifle with life's opportunities and fritter away their best energies in various ways. It is not that we have to be grave and morose, but we must take up our life's problems and various duties seriously, and cheerfully devote our heart and soul to the task before us; and then and then only success will be ours.



A STORY FROM HASSIDIC LORE

RETOLD BY ALLEN AND DEVRA FREEDMAN

The students of a rabbinical college were studying the Talmud and came to the passage that said: *We must thank God for the good as well as the bad.* This was puzzling to them. To thank God for the good that God bestows on us, that is understandable and reasonable. But thanking God for the bad that befalls us, which can cause us endless pain and suffering, doesn't seem to make any sense. How is it humanly possible to do so? To *accept*, without complaint or bitterness, whatever is ordained from the Highest, seems reasonable. To come to the *realization* that, ultimately, everything is for the

good, this they could agree with. But that they should bless and thank God for the evil that plagues them, that was beyond their comprehension.

The students brought their dilemma to the attention of the dean of the college. He stroked his long beard and pondered the question. “Yes, this is a question that only Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli¹ can answer. Go to his house and ask him.”

The students left immediately for Rabbi Zusha's house. The Rabbi lived outside of the town and the students entered a

dark and dreary forest. Following a narrow, muddy path, they finally came upon a run-down shack. They discovered that this was Rabbi Zusha's dwelling! Looking at each other in amazement, the students noticed that the windows were broken, the roof was badly in need of repair and the exterior walls were cracking with large pieces of plaster having come off.

The Rabbi greeted them warmly and, as he led them in, he apologized for not being able to offer them anything to eat, as there was no food in the house.

1. A historical person of 18th century Ukraine.

See Zusha...page 11

A STAFFING PROBLEM IN THE RAMAKRISHNA LOKA

BY BAHUT PAGAL

(Writer's Note: The following bit of whimsy was inspired by a little story told by Swami Atmapriyananda. It was passed on to me by Swami Atmeshananda. In the original story, the Ramakrishna Loka needed a driver who couldn't drive, for the reasons given below. I've developed this idea and added to it.)

(Scene: The afterlife. A sign over an archway reads: "This way to the Ramakrishna Loka." Under the archway, a receptionist and her assistant sit at a desk to welcome newcomers. Enters a new arrival, Dave O'Tee, with his luggage.)

Dave: Hi, I'm Dave. Is this the Ramakrishna Loka? I was told to report here.

Receptionist: This is the reception area. Welcome, Mr. O'Tee.

Dave (looking around): Thanks. Looks like a spiffy place. (Notices a sign on the desk. Reads it aloud:) "Wanted: Driver." Say, you need a driver here?

Receptionist: Yes, we do.

Dave: I might like to apply. I can drive.

Receptionist: We don't need a driver who can drive, sir.

Dave: Huh?

Assistant: One of the requirements of this job is that the driver must not drive.

Dave: That doesn't make any sense at all. You want a driver who doesn't drive? What does he do—just sit there?

Receptionist: Precisely, Mr. O'Tee. The Lord does everything. Especially up here. So the Lord will do the driving.

Dave (baffled): But if the Lord does the driving, why would you need a driver at here?

Assistant (sternly; as if to an imbecile): Mr. O'Tee. If you saw a car going down the street with nobody in the driver's seat, would you not freak out, sir?

Dave: I guess I would, all right.

Receptionist: Therefore, we need a driver who doesn't drive. He just sits in the driver's seat. The Lord does the driving, as indeed he does everything.

Dave: I see. That's brilliant. The driver is merely window dressing: a puppet, a robot, a figurehead, who just sits there pretending to drive while the Lord himself guides the vehicle. Fiendishly intelligent, I would say.

Receptionist: Would you like to apply?

Dave: Why not? Being a driver will enable me to explore the place and get the lay of the land, so to speak. Besides, I'm new here, and I'll need something to do.

Assistant: That's not the point, Mr. O'—

Receptionist (aside): Shush, let him learn.



(Scene: The same. A week later. Enters Dave.)

Dave: Say, Miss, I'm starting to go a bit squirrely in this new job. I sit in the car and it cruises around with no visible means of propulsion, and I've seen the whole place, and it's all very nice, but I... I... I need something to DO.

Receptionist: This is the afterlife, sir. You don't have to do anything.

Dave: But—but didn't Swami Vivekananda exhort us to work? Up, up, young lions, set your shoulder to the wheel, we want nerves of steel and muscles of iron, and all that?

Receptionist: That was in the Maya Loka, sir. The place where you lived when you were alive. Earth, you call it. (With heavy irony and considerable disdain:) The Maya Loka, as you may have noticed, suffers from severe shortcomings: poverty, hunger, disease, pollution, terrorism, and inhumane atrocities, to name just a few. They need to be corrected by hard work on the part of the human species. Things are different up here. Here everything is perfect, and the Lord does everything, so there's nothing that humans need to do.

Dave (unhappily): I guess not. But where's Sri Ramakrishna? This is his loka, right? Shouldn't he be sitting on a throne somewhere presiding over the whole shebang?

Assistant (severely): Sitting on a throne somewhere presiding over the whole shebang is a crude and primitive concept suitable for infants and savages, sir. Here we are more refined and subtle. Sri Ramakrishna is in the air. You cannot see his visible form.

Dave (beginning to unravel): But I need to DO something! I'm a man of action!

(Assistant whispers at length in receptionist's ear.)

Dave (getting hysterical): How can I build up any good karma here if I can't DO anything?

Receptionist: Sir, you're dead. Dead people can't build up any kind of karma.

Dave (starting to whine): And there's another thing. I haven't been through any kind of judgment. Aren't we supposed to go through some sort of judgment process to see whether we're fit for the afterlife?

Receptionist: Yes, sir. This is it, sir. And I regret to say that you do not seem to be suited for the afterlife—especially in the Ramakrishna Loka. We propose to send you back to be reborn on Earth, if you have no objection, sir.

Dave (bowing and scraping in gratitude): Oh, yes, please! Send me back! Give me something to do!

Receptionist: Gladly, sir. Well, let's see, we have several openings available. You could become a famous actor, or a great singer, or—how would you like to be reborn as a professional football player?

Dave: Oh, yes, that would be great! Thank you, thank you!

Assistant: You're welcome, sir. A vehicle will be along shortly to take you to the rebirthing station. With no visible driver, as you will note.

Receptionist: And by the way, sir, this is not the Ramakrishna Loka. This is just the screening station. The Ramakrishna Loka is over in the next dimension.





The Stolen Car

Several days ago as I left a meeting at our church, I desperately gave myself a thorough pat down. I was looking for my keys. They were not in my pockets. A quick search in the meeting room revealed nothing.

Suddenly I realized I must have left them in the car. Frantically, I headed for the parking lot. My wife, Diane, has scolded me many times for leaving the keys in the ignition. My theory is that the ignition is the best place not to lose them. Her theory is that the car will be stolen. As I burst through the doors of the church, I came to a terrifying conclusion. Her theory was right. The parking lot was empty.

I immediately called the police. I gave them my location, confessed that I had left my keys in the car, and that it had been stolen. Then I made the most difficult call of all, “Honey,” I stammered. (I always call her “honey” in times like these.) “I left my keys in the car, and it has been stolen.”

There was a period of silence. I thought the call had been dropped, but then I heard Diane’s voice. “Ken” she barked, “I dropped you off!”

Now it was my time to be silent. Embarrassed, I said, “Well, come and get me.” Diane retorted, “I will, as soon as I convince this policeman I have not stolen your car!”

The Absent-minded Professor

An absent-minded professor was on board a train and he was unable to find his ticket. The conductor said, “Take it easy. You’ll find it.”

When the conductor returned, the professor still couldn’t find the ticket. The conductor said, “I’m sure you bought a ticket. Forget about it.”

“You’re very kind,” the professor said, “but I must find it, otherwise I won’t know where to get off.”

Sigh, Moan and Weep

Three elderly women were sitting on a park bench. The first one let out a deep

sigh. They sat in silence for a few minutes, and then a second elderly woman also sighed sadly. A few minutes later, the third lady brushed away a tear and moaned.

At which the first woman told the other two: “I thought we agreed we wouldn’t talk about our children!”

Nothing Like the Real Deal

Abraham Lincoln (1809 –1865) was born into a very poor family, and worked as a young man splitting wood with an axe to earn money. And amazingly, the axe that he used is said to be on a farm in rural Illinois, where it was still being used after nearly two hundred years.



The current owner, a farmer, was asked by a horrified historian why Lincoln’s axe was still being used to split wood when it was a priceless artifact. In reply the farmer, eager to put the historian’s mind at rest, said, “An axe is meant to be used. But don’t worry. We’re protecting history here. Why, we’ve changed the handle twice and the head once!”

Man and Wife

The mayor in a small town was walking past a construction site with his wife, when one of the construction workers called out to the woman, “How are you, Betty?”

“Why, it’s nice to see you again Mark,” the woman replied. She turned to introduce her husband to the construction worker, and they spoke for several minutes.

After the mayor and his wife continued on, he turned to his wife to ask how she

knew him. “Oh,” she said. “I knew him in high school. I even thought about marrying him.”

The husband began to laugh. “You don’t realize how lucky you are. If I hadn’t come along, today you would be the wife of a construction worker!”

The wife replied without hesitation, “Not really. If I had married him, he’d now be the mayor!”

From The Great Beyond

For months, Mrs. Smith had been nagging her husband to go with her to the seance parlor of Madame Freda. “Bob, she’s a real gypsy, and she brings the dead from the other world. We all talk to them! Last week I talked with my mother. Bob, for only twenty dollars you can talk to your grandfather who you miss so much!”

Bob Smith could not resist her appeal. At the very next seance at Madam Freda’s Seance Parlor, Bob sat under the colored light at the green table, holding hands with the persons on each side. All were humming, “Oooom, oooom, tonka tooom.”

Madame Freda, her eyes closed and lost in a trance, was making passes over a crystal ball. “My medium...Socrates,” she called. “Come in. Who is that with you? Who? Martin Smith—Bob Smith’s grandfather?”

Bob swallowed the lump in his throat and called, “Grampa? Is that you?”

“Ah, my Bobby?” a thin voice quavered.

“Yes! Yes!” cried Bob. “This is your Bobby! Grandpa, are you happy in the other world?”

“Bobby, I am in bliss. I’m together with your grandma and we laugh and we sing. We gaze upon the shining face of the Lord!”

A dozen more questions Bob asked of his grandfather, and each question his grandfather answered, until, “So now, Bobby, I have to go. The angels are calling. I can answer just one more question. Just ask.”

“Grandpa,” sighed Bob, “how come you speak English with a Russian accent?”

Continued on the next page...

Breathing Exercise

Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in.
Breathe out. Forget these simple things
and attaining enlightenment will be the
least of your problems.



Zusha...from page 8

Perhaps some water.... The students
declined politely. They looked around to
see in what abject poverty Rabbi Zusha
lived. The chairs were wobbly and few.
The other furnishings were shoddy and
in poor repair. Further, it appeared that
he never had enough to eat, and his fam-
ily was beset with all sorts of afflictions
and illnesses.

The students realized that the Rabbi
suffered great hardship in his life. Yet
they found him to be good-humored and
cheerful, and constantly mumbling under
his breath his gratitude to the Almighty
for all His kindness.

Finally, one of the students spoke,
“Rabbi, we have come to ask you a ques-
tion which has confounded us in our
studies at the rabbinical college. The dean
has sent us to you for an answer.”

“Ask, ask,” replied the Rabbi.

“Why does it say in the Talmud that
we must thank God for the good as well
as the bad?”

The Rabbi sat in contemplation for a
few moments. Then he said, “Why has
he sent you to ask me that question? I
also cannot understand it. Nothing bad
has ever happened to me. He should have
sent you to someone who has experienced
suffering....”



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POETS' CORNER

A Byzantine prayer

*Serene light shining in the ground of my
being,
Draw me to yourself.
Draw me past the snares of the senses,
Out of the maze of the mind;
Free me from symbols, from words
That I may discover the signified;
The unspoken in the darkness
That veils the ground of my being.*

Author unknown.

To the Guru

*Once, way back,
Perhaps we flowed down time
As leaves in a stream do, together,
Or sometimes apart,
Sucked down whirlpools
Sometimes surging
Into different places,
Other times.
Sometimes then, we touch again,
As eddies, currents flow us,
Towards other futures,
Near and far.
Sometimes
You sound your conch;
I light my beacon;
You see my signal – I hear your call,
But distanced by
Different tides
There is no meeting.
Sometime soon perhaps,
Times' flow will slow to still,*

Deep pools.

*Together by the bank awhile,
In our own slow eddying,
Round, round, as leaves do,
We will come together again;
Your flame will light my beacon,
And all consumed, without an ash,
Without yesterdays or tomorrows,
Time must have a stop.*

By Russell Atkinson

The Divine Dance

*The western sun is setting
on Shiva's cosmic stage.
The dark is coming, marking the end of day,
as the light creeps to the east
to shine a while elsewhere.
But in Truth, there is no night
nor day,
nor any compass points,
no east nor west,
nor south or north.
The only timeless, true direction,
without need of map or lamp,
leads within
where pure existence dwells
beyond light and dark
beyond suns and moons and
galactic pole stars
to the center of the infinite soul,
the ever-existent Self;
where no "I" or "my" remain,
where all merge as One in
Shiva's Cosmic Dance.*

By Marianne Quinn

The Words of Sri Ramakrishna

Little children play with dolls in the outer room just
as they like, without any care or fear or restraint. But
as soon as their mother comes in, they throw aside
their dolls and run to her crying, “Mama mama.”
You too, oh man, are now playing in this material
world, infatuated with the dolls of wealth, honor,
fame, etc., and do not feel any fear or anxiety. If,
however, you once see your Divine Mother, you will
not afterwards find pleasure in all these. Throwing
them all aside, you will run to Her.

VEDANTA NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

INDIA

Belur Math celebrates the 175th birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. The celebration began with a colorful procession on February 22nd from Dakshineswar to Belur Math in which about 13,000 persons of different faiths participated. On the arrival of the procession at Belur Math, Swami Atmasthananda, President



Worship of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math

of the Ramakrishna Order, formally inaugurated the celebration by lighting 175 lamps, followed by a meeting on the *Spiritual Significance of the Advent of Sri Ramakrishna*. The special worship of Sri Ramakrishna on his birthday was celebrated at Belur Math on Thursday, February 23rd. Cooked prasad (sanctified food) was served to about 22,000 devotees. Swami Atmasthananda delivered a benedictory address at the public meeting held in the afternoon, which was presided over by Swami Smaranananda, the Order's Vice-President. Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, and Swamis Bhajanananda and Srikananda, Assistant Secretaries, also addressed the gathering. On February 24th, a Parliament of Religions was held in which speakers from different religions spoke on Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and Jainism. On February 25th, there was a conference on the philosophy and spiritual realizations of Sri Ramakrishna vis-à-vis earlier divine incarnations like Buddha, Shankara and Chaitanya. The public celebration held on Sunday, February 26th, drew more than 100,000 visitors throughout the day. Cooked prasad was served to about 34,000 persons. In the evening there was a spectacular display of fireworks on the Ganges.

Book release at Belur Math in Commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. On March 26th Swami Atmasthananda, President of the Ramakrishna Order, released at Belur Math the Santali version of the book *Bharat-Jagaraner Agradut Swami Vivekananda* published by Belur Math.

New Branch of Ramakrishna Math at Gourhati. Ramakrishna Math, Gourhati, till recently a sub-center of the Ramakrishna Math, Ichapur, has been made a full-fledged branch center of Ramakrishna Math, Belur. Its address is Ramakrishna Math, PO Gourhati, Dist. Hooghly, West Bengal 712613, and its phone number is (03211) 261209.

NEPAL

New Mission Center in Nepal. Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kathmandu, Nepal, has been made a branch center of the Ramakrishna Mission with Swami Gaurangananda as its head. Its contact details are as follows: Postal Address: Ramakrishna Ashrama, Ward No 2, Saraswoti Marg, Gairidhara, Kathmandu, Nepal. Phone numbers: (977) 1 4004053 and (977) 9851144315. Email: ramakrishnaashramnepal@gmail.com.

MAURITIUS

The Ramakrishna Mission in Mauritius celebrates Maha Shivaratri. From Friday, February 17th, to Sunday February 19th, three days before celebrating Maha Shivaratri, the Mission served soft drinks and snacks and gave overnight accommodations to about three thousand pilgrims



Celebration of Maha Shivaratri at the Ramakrishna Mission, Mauritius

going to the sacred lake of Grand Bassin. On Monday, February 20th, throughout the entire night, the Mission celebrated Maha Shivaratri festival. Some 230 devotees participated in the event, which consisted of the worship of Lord Shiva, devotional singing by devotees and a spiritual discourse by Swami Krishnarupananda.

The Ramakrishna Mission, Mauritius, celebrates the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna in its temple at Vacoas, Mauritius. On Sunday, February 26th, in the morning, a special worship of Sri Ramakrishna with havan and devotional songs was performed in the presence of 230 devotees. All who participated were given prasad. In the evening, before aratrikam, Swami Krishnarupananda gave an inspiring discourse in English on Sri Ramakrishna.

FIJI

Ramakrishna Mission in Fiji conducts flood-relief work. In the wake of the devastating floods, which hit most of the Western Viti Levu towns of Fiji, our Nadi center, which itself was under nearly two feet of water, conducted extensive primary relief work in the areas affected by flood. The center served cooked meals to



Flood relief work by the Ramakrishna Mission in Fiji

nearly 2,200 people and also distributed 392 grocery packs (each pack containing 2 kg rice, 2 kg pulses, 1 kg sugar, 500 gm salt, 200 gm spices, 2 packets of breakfast crackers, 1 packet of powdered milk, 500 ml cooking oil, 1 can of baked beans, peeled tomatoes, etc.) among the affected people. In addition, medical relief was given to 65 people.

MALAYSIA

The Vedanta Center in Malaysia acquires a new name. The “Persatuan Sri Ramakrishna Sarada” has been renamed “Ramakrishna Mission.”

JAPAN

The Vedanta Society of Japan celebrates Sri Ramakrishna’s 175th birth anniversary and dedicates its new Annex building. On Sunday, March 18th, the celebration started in the morning with *Mangalarati*, meditation and the chanting of hymns. Then the chief guest, Swami



A choir sings at the dedication of the new building of the Vedanta Society of Japan

Jyotirupananda, President of the Vedanta Center in Moscow, Russia, conducted the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the newly constructed annex of the Society’s main building. Swami Medhasananda, head of the Japan Vedanta Society, then gave a short, guided tour of the two-story annex. This was followed by a special worship of Sri Ramakrishna. Prasad was served to all who attended the event.

During the afternoon session, Swami Medhasananda gave a welcome address and Mr. Kenichi Mitamura, Secretary of the Society, gave a vote of thanks. A message from Swami Atmasthananda, President of the Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, was read out by Swami Medhasananda. Swami Jyotiru-

pananda then gave a talk on the subject *Sri Ramakrishna’s Uniqueness*.

In the cultural program which followed, a choir of thirty singers composed



Swami Jyotirupananda performs Arati at the Vedanta Society of Japan

of the Society’s devotees and friends from the Kailas Yoga School sang three devotional songs in Japanese. Then Mr Samudra Datta Gupta and Mrs Sreyasi Mandar sang some Indian devotional songs. After a tea break, Sri Amit Ray, accompanied by Sri Sudarsan on tabla, gave a sitar recital. After the Aratrikam in the evening, Swami Jyotirupananda gave another talk regarding the *Vedanta Movement in Russia*. Nearly 170 people attended the celebration.

AUSTRALIA

Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of New South Wales celebrates Sri Ramakrishna’s birthday and the Shivaratri festival. The public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna’s birthday was held in the Society’s Vedanta Hall on Sunday, February 26th.

The program commenced with Vedic chanting by the Sarada Math nuns, followed by a symposium on Sri Ramakrishna moderated by Prof. Raja Jayaraman, Vice-President of the Hindu Council of Australia. The speakers were: Mr. Gerard Brennan, Dr. Anuradha Singh and Mr. Shankar Sridharan. After some devotional songs, Pravrajika Gayatriprana, President of the Society, gave the con-

cluding talk. All were served a sumptuous lunch. Over 75 people attended.



Prof. Raja Jayaraman moderates the symposium on Sri Ramakrishna at the Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of New South Wales

The Shivaratri festival was celebrated at the Society’s Vedanta Hall on Sunday, March 4th. The event consisted of meditation and holy chants by devotees and talks by Mr. Robert Grant and Pravrajika



Sarada Math nuns perform Vedic chanting at the Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of New South Wales

Gayatriprana.

The Vedanta Centre of Sydney and its sub-centers celebrate Sri Ramakrishna’s birthday. The Vedanta Centre of Sydney has, besides the main center in Sydney, four sub-centers. They are located in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth. The Sydney center celebrated the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna on March 23rd. The celebration began in the morning with chanting from the Vedas, *Sri Vishnu*



Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna’s birthday at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney, Australia

Sahasranamam and other scriptural passages. An elaborate worship of Sri Ramakrishna was performed by Br. Sivaramakrishna. In the evening, Swami Sridharananda gave a talk about the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's advent in the present age. Lunch and dinner were served to all the participants. Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was also observed at its four sub-centers.

FRANCE

A commemorative plaque unveiled at a house in Paris where Swami Vivekananda stayed in 1900. The Vedanta center in Gretz and the Maison de l'Inde (India House), Paris, with the support of the Town Hall of the 14th District of Paris, the Embassy of India and the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris (CIUP), jointly organized the unveiling ceremony of a commemorative plaque on Swami Vivekananda on March 8th at 39 rue Gazan, 75014, Paris, where Swamiji had stayed for some time in 1900. The plaque was unveiled by Mrs. Gaitri Kumar, Chargée des Affaires of the Embassy of India in Paris, in the presence of the Mayor of Paris and many other dignitaries, including Swami Veetamohananda, Head of the Gretz Vedanta center, and Dr. Bikas C Sanyal, Director of Maison de l'Inde, Paris. All were served lunch at the end of the ceremony.

GERMANY

The Vedanta-Gesellschaft of Germany celebrates the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna on February 26th. The celebration took place at the Vedanta center's retreat house in Bindweide and consisted of a special worship, Vedic chanting and devotional singing. Many devotees and members of



Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday in Bindweide, Germany

the Vedanta center attended the event and partook of Prasad at the end of the ceremony.

RUSSIA

Ramakrishna Society-Vedanta Centre (Obschestvo Ramakrishni-Centr Vedanti) in Moscow observes the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. The celebration held on February 23rd, Thursday, consisted of prayer, meditation and a special worship of Sri Ramakrishna in the morning. The previous evening, the Russian devotees had cleaned the shrine and kitchen and prepared everything for the next day's function. Some



Observance of Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday in Moscow, Russia

of them worked till 1:30 in the morning. Sumptuous Indian dishes prepared by the Russian devotees were served to all. In the afternoon some Indian as well as Russian dishes were offered to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. This was followed by Aratrikam, devotional music and readings from *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*. More than 90 people attended.

The Ramakrishna Society in St. Petersburg observes the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. The event held on Sunday, February 26th, consisted of a special worship of Sri Ramakrishna and a talk on Sri Ramakrishna given by Swami Jyotirupananda. About 25 Russians participated.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The Vedanta Society of St. Louis celebrates Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. The celebration held on February 26th consisted of a ritualistic worship performed by Swami Nirakarananda, scriptural chanting and a talk on Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Chetanananda, and devotional singing by the Vedanta choir. Devotees

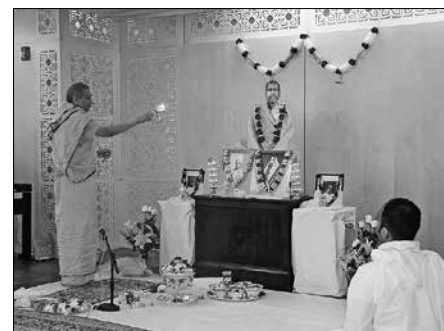
offered flowers, and Prasad was served to all who attended the event.

On March 4th Swami Prasannatmananda, assistant minister, Vedanta Society of Berkeley, gave a talk on *Sri Ramakrishna's Philosophical Teachings*.



Swami Prasannatmananda after his lecture at the Vedanta Society of St. Louis

The Vedanta Society of Providence celebrates Sri Ramakrishna birth anniversary on Sunday, February 26th, in their new chapel. During the celebration Swami Yogatmanada performed the worship of Sri Ramakrishna. Then devotees offered flowers to the deity. All the 80 devotees, who attended the event, were given Prasad. Later a dvd, *Sri Ramakrishna Museum*, was shown, and a three-speaker symposium on Sri Ramakrishna was held. The celebration concluded with Aratrikam and devotional chants.



Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday at Providence Vedanta Society

Vedanta Society of Providence dedicates its new chapel and celebrates the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. To dedicate a newly constructed building, which houses the Society's new shrine, chapel and women's guest rooms, a three-day function was held from April 20th to 22nd. During that period the So-

ciety also held the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

On Friday, April 20th, twenty-two monks and nuns from all over the United States and Canada, and many devotees and friends, enjoyed devotional music



The new chapel for the Vedanta Society of Providence

and a dance performance followed by dinner. On Saturday, April 21st, there was a special worship, followed by a day-long symposium on *Swami Vivekananda's Message* presented by all the monastics attending. In the evening the building



Worship at the dedication of the new chapel for the Vedanta Society of Providence

construction team was honored and photos of the various phases of the building construction were displayed. On Sunday, April 22nd, scholars in different fields elaborated on the mutual exchange of culture between the East and the West. In the afternoon, fusion music was followed by an Interfaith Prayer and Music Meet. The whole weekend celebration ended with a dinner on Sunday evening.

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York celebrates the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. In the early morning of Thursday, February 23rd, Swami Yuktatmananda, head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, performed a special worship of Sri Ramakrishna in the Center's shrine. On Friday, February 24th, more than 100 devotees assembled at the Center for a

solemn service consisting of devotional hymns, meditation and offering of flowers to Sri Ramakrishna.

On Sunday, February 26th, the Center observed the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna with a special public service in the chapel. More than 200 devotees filled the chapel to capacity for this most important annual event of the Center. The chapel was elaborately decorated for the occasion with beautiful flower arrangements surrounding the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Yuktatmananda conducted the service.

The service began with the chanting of Vedic hymns and devotional songs by the choir of the Center, after which Swami Yuktatmananda gave an inspiring talk on



The altar at the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York

the subject *What Sri Ramakrishna Taught*. In conclusion, the choir offered several more devotional songs after which a full-course luncheon was served to the entire congregation.

The Vedanta Society of Berkeley observes Shivaratri festival on February 20th. The event consisted of prayer, meditation and devotional singing on Lord Shiva by devotees. Forty-two people participated in the event.

The Vedanta Society of Berkeley celebrates the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. The celebration held on February 23rd consisted of ritualistic worship, devotional singing and chanting of hymns. Eighty devotees attended the event. Swami Aparananda performed the worship and Swami Tattwamayananda, of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, read a passage from an Upanishad.

The Vedanta Society of Greater Washington DC celebrates Ram Navami on their Foundation Day. On March 31st, Saturday, the fifteenth anniversary of the

founding of the Center, the Society celebrated Ram Navami festival. It consisted of a talk by the guest speaker Swami Kripamayananda, head of the Toronto Vedanta Society, followed by a worship



Swami Kripamayananda performing worship at the Vedanta Society of Greater Washington, DC

and distribution of Prasad. In the afternoon there was a meditation retreat and discussion session. On Sunday morning, Swami Kripamayananda again spoke on *The Glory of God's Name*.

The Vedanta Society of Portland celebrates Shivaratri. The celebration held on Monday, February 20th, consisted of a special worship of Lord Shiva, devotional singing, scriptural readings and offering of flowers to the deity. Refreshments were served to all who participated in the event.

The Vedanta Society of Portland celebrates the 175th birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. The celebration held on Sunday, February 26th, started with a worship of Sri Ramakrishna performed by Swami Prapannananda of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento. It was followed by Vedic chanting, reading from *The*



Swami Prapannananda performing the worship of Sri Ramakrishna at the Portland Vedanta Society

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and singing of devotional songs by devotees. After the offering of flowers to the deity by the devotees, all, who attended the celebration, were given Prasad.

The Vedanta Society of Northern California celebrates the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna on Saturday, February 25th. The event consisted of worship performed by Swami Tattwamayana, assistant minister. The worship was followed by Aratrikam, devotional singing, and readings from the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna by Swamis Aparananda and Prasannatmananda of the Berkeley Vedanta Society. After flower offering by the devotees, Prasad was served to all who were present. Nearly one hundred and seventy-five people attended the event.

The Vedanta Society of Western Washington in Seattle observes Shivaratri and the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. On Monday, February 20th, a special worship of Lord Shiva was performed in the evening in the presence of many devotees.



Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday in Seattle, Washington

After the worship, there was devotional singing, offering of flowers to the deity by devotees and monks, and distribution of sumptuous Anna-Prasad to all who attended.

The celebration on Sri Ramakrishna's birthday on Thursday, February 23rd, started with a special worship performed by Swami Bhaskarananda. It was followed by devotional singing and offering of flowers to the deity by monks and devotees. Later, all the eighty people, who attended the celebration, were treated with a sumptuous lunch.

BRAZIL

The Vedanta Society of Brazil performs worship of Sri Ramakrishna on

February 25th. Swami Nirmalatmananda performed the worship in the morning. During the worship there were readings from the scriptures about Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings. There was also singing of devotional songs. Much of the food offered to the deity during the worship had been brought by the devotees. At the end of the worship there was offering of flowers by the devotees, and the food offered during the worship was partaken of as prasad by all.



Devotees participating in the worship of Sri Ramakrishna in Sao Paulo, Brazil

SOUTH AFRICA

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa celebrates it's 70th anniversary. Swami Atmapriyananda, the Vice Chancellor of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, was the guest of honor for the celebrations of the 70th Anniversary of The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa. He arrived on May 3rd and left on May 14th. During his stay he visited the sub-centers in Chatsworth, Phoenix, Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith and Johannesburg. In the Durban center he conducted a *Gita* class, spoke on Vedanta, met the members of the Sri Sarada Devi Women's Circle on and addressed the youth. His talks were all received with great appreciation. The celebration



Public meeting at the Durban City Hall for the 70th anniversary of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa

CONTRIBUTORS

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concluded with an invited public meeting at the prestigious Durban City Hall on Sunday, May 13th, where more than 500 people attended. It was a grand and fitting finale to the 70th anniversary when he also released the center's commemorative brochure.

