



REACH

Newsletter of Vedanta Centres of Australia

Motto:

*Atmano mokshartham
jagad hitaya cha,*

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

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**Salutation be to You, O
Narayani, O You Who are intent
on saving the dejected and
dressed that take refuge under
You. O You, Devi Who remove
the sufferings of all.**

*May the Divine Mother
Shower blessings on us all.*



The Bhavatarini Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, Kolkata, West Bengal, India, where Sri Ramakrishna attained perfection worshipping the Divine Mother Kali (inset).

Sayings and Teachings

Continue Meditation always

“After the Chosen Ideal is brought and seated on the lotus of the heart, the sacrificial lamp of meditation on Him should always be kept burning. While one is engaged in worldly duties, one should watch at intervals whether that lamp is burning within or not.”

--- Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master Volume I by Swami Saradananda, page 429; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai, India.

God resides in the heart of all

“In the fullness of spiritual realisation, a person finds that the God who resides in his heart resides in the heart of all - the oppressed, the persecuted, the lowly, and the untouchable. This realisation makes one truly humble.”

--- Sri Sarada Devi.

Holy Mother by Swami Nikhilananda,

page 225; Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York, U.S.

Thoughts might differ, not the Goal

We must learn to love the man who differs from us in opinion. We must learn that differentiation is the life

of thought. We have one common goal, and that is the perfection of the human soul, the god within us.

--- Swami Vivekananda,

The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume IX, page 487; Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, India.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FROM OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2009

Function	Centre	Date
Durga Puja	Sydney	Saturday, 26 September 2009
Birthday of Sri Sarada Devi	Brisbane	Saturday, 19 December 2009
	Melbourne	Tuesday, 8 December 2009
	Perth	Sunday, 13 December 2009
	Sydney	Tuesday, 8 December 2009

Welcome

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

News and activities of Vedanta Centres of Australia and New Zealand

For the period From May 2009 to August 2009 also some news about September 2009

ADELAIDE CENTRE

Monthly activities:

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

Cultural Programme:

A cultural programme - 'An evening of Dance and Music of the Indian sub-continent' was held on Saturday, the 18th of July 2009 at the Parks Community Centre, Cowan St, Angle Park, SA. In the first half of the programme Brijanthi Rajeev, an experienced classical exponent of Bharatanatyam, presented four dances in the Kalakshetra style. After the dance performance, Swami Sridharananda, in his brief address to the audience, highlighted the excellence of the Vedantic culture and how it teaches ways to make use of the creative instincts within us to convert our life from egocentric existence to divine-centric existence. He pointed out that lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda are concrete examples of the manifestation of the Vedantic culture. According to it each and every religion is a direct and independent path to realization of the Divine already within us. He also prayed for Divine guidance.

The second half of the programme included a flute recital by Muralidharan and series of melodious bhajans by local artists - Priya Ghosal, Anuj

Anavkar, Sharada Muralidharan and Mallika Prasad. The singers were accompanied by Kiran Mandpe on tabla, Amit Srivastava on key-board and Pravesh Sewrathan on manjira. Shivanthini Gowri Rajaramanan was the MC for the evening.

BRISBANE CENTRE

Daily activities:

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

Monthly and Annual activities:

Swami Atmeshananda visited Brisbane once a month and delivered talks on the Bhagavad Gita as well as other spiritual topics.

Swami Sridharananda delivered three talks from the 3rd of July to 5th of July 2009. The topics of the talks were "Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, who is She?" "Swami Vivekananda as Sri Ramakrishna made him" and "Sri Ramakrishna as Swami Vivekananda saw him". These were delivered at the Ashrama premises, the University of Queensland and Jamboree Heights State School. On the final day a free vegetarian lunch was organized by the committee.

Celebrations:

The Centre celebrated the fifth Annual Function at the Indooroopilly State High School on Saturday 13 June. The Chief Guest, the Honourable Minister of Education and Training of Queensland, Mr Geoff Wilson, together with Swami Sridharananda, inaugurated the ceremony.

The ceremony was participated by number of local artists who performed devotional songs and folk and classical dances. More than 400 guests attended the function. The evening concluded with a speech by Swami Sridharananda and a vegetarian dinner organized by the committee.

CANBERRA CENTRE

Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the Bhagavad Gita twice a month at the Majura Community Centre in Canberra. He also gave parlour talks based on the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* once a month. Contacts: Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary - 02-6258 7612 and Dr. Ian Doherty, Treasurer - 02-6247 8519.

MELBOURNE CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

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

The bookstall made available literature on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta philosophy, and other spiritual topics in print, audio, and visual media throughout the period. For further information please contact Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary, on 03-9803 6154 and Mr. Mohana Krishnan on 03-9801 6174.

2. Weekly/Monthly Activities:

Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the Bhagavad Gita from Thursday to Saturday of a prescheduled week at Monash University Claton Campus of Law, Wellington Road (L. Theatre L1). The recordings of these discourses are available in



Cultural Programme organized by the Vedanta Centre of Sydney—Adelaide Chapter.

Audio, Video and MP3 formats.

On the **second Sunday** of every month, meetings were conducted from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. These regular meetings included prayer, recitation of sacred mantras, singing of *kirtan* and *bhajans*, followed by selected readings from the scriptures and discussions on them by the participants. The meetings concluded with an *arati* and the distribution of *prasad*. Swami Atmeshanandaji accompanied by Swami Mahabodhanandaji from the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata, visited Melbourne from the 14th to the 18th of May. They delivered lectures on 'Basic spiritual disciplines' and on 'Practical Vedanta as taught by Swami Vivekananda' at Monash University, Clayton campus and a special prayer session was held at the Melbourne Centre.

Celebrations:

A special satsang was held on the auspicious occasion of **Guru Purnima** on Tuesday, 12th of July 2009 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Sri Krishna **Janmastami** and Ganesha Chaturthi were observed on the 13th of August and 23rd of August 2009 respectively.

Other Activities:

The Centre actively participated and sent representative in the Inter-faith activities organised by the Whitehorse Council.

The Parliament of the World's Religions will be held in Melbourne in December 2009. A local board of management, advisory council and the secretariat have now been established as part of the preliminary discussion for the Advisory Council. For details please look up the official website—www.epwr.org.

Group study of the *Bhagavad Gita* continues every alternate Saturday from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Viewing of the lecture series on the '*Mundaka Upanishad*' took place every Sunday from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Viewing of the lecture series on '*Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*'

was arranged every Friday at 10:30 a.m.

PERTH CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

The Centre located at **2B Roe Close, Bull Creek, W.A. 6149** holds daily worship in the morning followed by Vedic chanting. In the evening there is a vesper service at 7 p.m. with *arati*, a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and meditation. The Centre maintains a small bookstall and Library. Contacts: Centre - 08 9313 8796, Mrs Maya Chatterjee 9332 7633.

2. Monthly Activities:

Satsangs are held on the first Sunday of each month from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. followed by lunch-prasad. Informal satsangs are held every other Sunday at the same time.

Swami Sridharananda visited Perth from the 24th to 27th of June and delivered talks on spiritual subjects. Swami Atmeshananda visited Perth Centre from 26th to 29th of August 2009 and delivered talks on spiritual topics and conducted bhajans.

Celebrations:

Janmashtami was celebrated on 7th of July 2009 evening with readings from the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Bhagavad Gita* and Krishna Bhajans.

SYDNEY CENTRE

Daily Activities:

At the Ermington Centre chanting, daily worship and meditation are held every morning from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., and the vesper service in the evening starting at 7 p.m. includes devotional singing and a reading from *The Gospel of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*. Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees are also conducted on a daily basis. The library is available to devotees for reference and research. The Centre maintains a bookstall which has a range of books on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, Yoga, and other spiritual literature. Devotional songs, discourses on Bhagavad Gita,

the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanisad*, and other topics are also available in various media.

2. Weekly/ Monthly Activities:

The Centre conducted the following activities in Sydney:

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

b) The classes on the *Bhagavad Gitā* were also conducted by Swami Sridharananda at 1 Edwin Street, Fairlight, **Manly Beach** on Tuesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. In his absence Swami Atmeshananda held classes on *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*.

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

d) After a break of few weeks *Yogasana* Classes for adults has resumed on the 3rd of September 2009. It is held every Thursday at the Centre from 7:30 p.m.

e) To help new Australian migrants to find suitable jobs **Career guidance** sessions were conducted on the second Saturday of every month from 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Mr. Abhijit Guha and his dedicated band of volunteers conducted the sessions.

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

g) Classes on moral and spiritual lessons are conducted for children every Saturday from 4:15 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. at 85 Bland street, Ashfield. In addition, drama and movement classes are also held.

h) A class to teach Bengali language to interested people is being conducted on Saturdays from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. by Mr. Debu Mukherjee .

Raffle and Cultural Programme :

A cultural programme Sangamam was held along with a Raffle draw by the Centre on 1st of August 2009 at Bankstown Town Hall. As the Centre is in need of financial assistance a raffle was organized when a devotee donated a pair of her diamond ear-rings.

After an invocation for the blessings of the Divine by children of Bala Sangha, the students of Varalakshmi Sridharan played on Veena. On the occasion, Swami Sridharananda spoke about spiritualizing our lives in all aspects. In the second half Mrs. Uma Ayyar and



Swami Sridharananda delivering a talk in Perth

Mythili Narayanaswamy presented vocal recital including popular Tamil, Malayalam songs with an Abhang accompanied on the violin by Sanjay Ramaswamy, Nirmal Ayyar on Mridangam and Kishan Jeyendran on Tabla. A 'Sur Sangam' composition was presented by Dr Raghuram Subrahmaniyam on Mridangam, Mr Abhijit Dan on Tabla, Mr Kishan Jeyendran on Mandolin and Ashwin Nair on the white electronic violin. The raffle was drawn at the end and the contributions by every participants were acknowledged.

AUCKLAND, NZ CENTRE

Daily activities:

A vesper service is held daily at the Centre at 27 Arawa Street, New Lynn, Auckland from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. It includes singing of hymns, readings from *the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation.

Monthly activities:

On the **second Sunday** of every month *Satsang* programmes were conducted from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. which includes singing of Bhajans, chanting of the Ramayana, reading and discussion

about direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and meditation. On the **last Sunday** of every month reading and discussion on *Srimad-Bhagavad Gita*, *the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the life and teachings of Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda were conducted in addition to the above. Music and chanting classes were also held on these days.

Celebrations:

The Centre celebrated **Guru Purnima** on 7th July 2009. The programme started at 8:00 p.m. after the *arati* and continued up to 9 p.m. followed by *prasad* distribution. There were bhajans/Kirtans and talks on the significance of Guru. Swami Tadananda of Ramakrishna Mission, Nadi, Fiji, visited Auckland from 25th to 30th August 09. He delivered talks on Spirituality - 'What is it really - Seeing through the Vedanta-scope' from 7:45 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. and on Sunday, the 30th August from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.



The Cultural Programme held on 1st of August 2009 at the behest of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney— photos, sequentially, the make shift shrine in the hall, a prayer by children, an ensemble of Veena and other artists presenting various items.





Group Photo at the Spiritual Retreat held in April 09 at Mangrove Mountain.

"Yes, work is very troublesome. It is now good for you to meditate on God for a few days in solitude. No doubt you say that you would like to give up your work. Worldly people talk that way; but they don't succeed in carrying out their intention."

— Sri Ramakrishna



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The worship of the Divine Mother Durga at the Sydney Centre on 26th September 2009, the photos include the worship of the Divine Mother, the recitation of Chandi, the performance of havan, the arati and distribution of Prasada.

Sri Ramakrishna - My Master

Swami Vivekananda's life mission was to propagate the lofty teachings of Vedanta throughout the world, in the light of the realisations of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, and to regenerate his Motherland in tune with her ancient traditions.

Two lectures delivered in New York and England in 1896, by Swami Vivekananda, were subsequently combined under the stated heading, 'My Master', a concise version of it is being given below.

Upbringing of Sri Ramakrishna

It was while reforms of various kinds were being inaugurated in India that a child was born of poor Brahmin parents on the eighteenth of February, 1836, in one of the remote villages in Bengal. The parents were very orthodox people. It is written in our books that a man should always be charitable, even to the extreme. The character of the father and mother of my Master was very much like that. Very poor they were, and yet many a time the mother would starve herself a whole day to help a poor man. Of them this child was born; and he was a peculiar child from boyhood. He remembered his past from his birth and was conscious of what purpose he came into the world, and every power was devoted to the fulfilment of that purpose.

While he was quite young, his father died; and the boy was sent to school. A Brahmin's boy must go to school; the caste restricts him to a learned profession only. This boy went to one of the gatherings in which professors are invited to attend and discuss various subjects. The professors were discussing various topics, such as logic or astronomy, subjects much beyond his age. The boy was peculiar, as I have said, and he gathered this moral out of it, "This is the outcome of all their knowledge... It is simply for money...I will not go to school anymore." And he did not. And that was the end of his going to school. However, this boy had an elder brother, a learned professor, who took him to Calcutta, however, to study with him. After a short time the boy became fully convinced that the aim of secular education was mere material advancement, and nothing more, and he resolved to give up study and to devote himself solely to the pursuit of spiritual knowledge.

The father being dead, the family was very poor; and this boy had to make his own living. He went to a place near Calcutta and became a temple priest.

His worship of the 'Blissful Mother'

In the temple was an image of the "Blissful Mother". This boy had to



conduct the worship morning and evening, and by degrees this one idea filled his mind, "Is there anything behind this image? Is it true that there is a Mother of Bliss in the universe? Is it true that She lives and guides the universe, or is it all a dream? Is there any reality in religion?"

This idea took possession of the boy and his whole life became concentrated upon that. Day after day he would weep and say, "Mother, is it true that Thou existest, or is it all poetry? Is the Blissful Mother an imagination of poets and misguided people, or is there such a Reality?" We have seen that of books, of education in our sense of the word, he had none, and so much the more natural, so much the more healthy, was his mind, so much the purer his thoughts, undiluted by drinking in the thoughts of others.

At last it became impossible for him to serve in the temple. He left it and entered into a little wood that was near and lived there. About this part of his life, he told me many times that he could not tell when the sun rose or set, or how he lived. He lost all thought of himself and forgot to eat. During this period he was lovingly watched over by a relative who put food into his mouth which he mechanically swallowed.

Days and nights thus passed with the boy. When a whole day would pass, towards the evening when the peal of bells in the temples, and the voices singing, would reach the wood, it would make the boy very sad, and he would cry, "Another day is gone in vain, Mother, and thou hast not come. Another day of this short life has gone, and I have not known the truth." In the

agony of his soul, sometimes he would rub his face against the ground and weep, and this one prayer burst forth, "Do Thou manifest Thyself in me, Thou Mother of the universe! See that I need Thee and nothing else!" Verily, he wanted to be true to his own ideal. He had heard that the Mother never came until everything had been given up for Her. He had heard that the Mother wanted to come to everyone, but they would not have Her, that people wanted all sorts of foolish little idols to pray to, that they wanted their own enjoyments, and not the Mother, and that the moment they really wanted Her with their whole soul, and nothing else, that moment she would come. So he began to break himself into that idea; he wanted to be exact, even on the plane of matter.

He threw away all the little property he had, and took a vow that he would never touch money, and this one idea, "I will not touch money", became a part of him. The other idea that came into his mind was that lust was the other enemy. Man is a soul, and soul is sexless, neither man nor woman. The idea of sex and the idea of money were the two things, he thought, that prevented him from seeing the Mother. This whole universe is the manifestation of the Mother, and She lives in every woman's body. "Every woman represents the Mother; how can I think of women in mere sex relationship?" That was the idea: Every woman was his Mother, and he must bring himself to the state when he would see nothing but Mother in every woman. And he carried it out in his life.

This is the tremendous thirst that seizes the human heart. Later on, this very man said to me, "My child, suppose there is a bag of gold in one room, and a robber in the next room; do you think that the robber can sleep? He cannot. His mind will always be thinking how to get into that room and obtain possession of that gold. Do you think then that a man, firmly persuaded that there is a Reality behind all these appearances, that there is a God, that there is One who never dies, One who is infinite

bliss, a bliss compared with which these pleasures of the senses are simply playthings, can rest contented without struggling to attain it? Can he cease his efforts for a moment? No. He will become mad with longing.”

Sri Ramakrishna's Divine Madness

This divine madness seized the boy. At that time he had no teacher, nobody to tell him anything, and everyone thought that he was out of his mind. This is the ordinary condition of things. If a man throws aside the vanities of the world, we hear him called mad. But such men are the salt of the earth. Out of such madness have come the powers that have moved this world of ours, and out of such madness alone will come the powers of the future that are going to move the world.....

When as a temple priest his extraordinary worship made people think him deranged in his head, his relatives took him home and married him to a little girl, thinking that that would turn his thoughts and restore the balance of his mind. But he came back and merged deeper in his madness. In her far off home the girl had heard that her husband had become a religious enthusiast, and that he was even considered insane by many. She resolved to learn the truth for herself, so she set out and walked to the place where her husband was. When at last she stood in her husband's presence, he at once admitted her right to his life. The young man fell at the feet of his wife and said, “As for me, the Mother has shown me that She resides in every woman, and so I have learnt to look upon every woman as Mother. That is the one idea I can have about you; but if you wish to drag me into the world, as I have been married to you, I am at your service.”

The maiden was a pure and noble soul and was able to understand her husband's aspirations and sympathise with them. She quickly told him that she had no wish to drag him down to life of worldliness; but that all she desired was to remain near him, to serve him, and to learn of him. She became one of his most devoted disciples, always revering him as a divine being. Thus through his wife's consent the last barrier was removed, and he was free to lead the life he had chosen.

His desire to know the truth about the various religions

The next desire that seized upon the soul of this man was to know the truth

about the various religions. Up to that time he had not known any religions but his own. He wanted to understand what other religions were like. So he sought teachers of other religions. He found a Mohammedan saint and placed himself under him: he underwent the disciplines prescribed by him, and to his astonishment found that when faithfully carried out, these devotional methods led him to the same goal that he had already attained. He gathered similar experience from following the true religion of Jesus the Christ. He went to all the sects he could find, and whatever he took up he went into with his whole heart. He did exactly as he was told, and in every instance he arrived at the same result. Thus from actual experience, he came to know that the goal of every religion is the same, that each is trying to teach the same thing, the difference being largely in method and still more in language. At the core, all sects and all religions have the same aim; and they were only quarrelling for their own selfish purposes—they were not anxious about the truth, but about ‘my name’ and ‘your name’. Two of them preached the same truth, but one of them said, -“That cannot be true, because I have not put upon it the seal of my name. Therefore do not listen to him.” And the other man said, “Do not hear him, although he is preaching very much the same thing, yet it is not true because he does not preach it in my name.” That is what my Master found.

His lesson in humility

He then went about to learn humility, because he had found that the one idea in all religions is, “Not me, but Thou” and he who says, “Not me”, the Lord fills his heart. The less of this little “I” the more of God there is in him. He had the most wonderful faculty of carrying everything into practice which he thought was right. Now, there was a family of Pariahs living near the place. By birth the Brahmin stands for holiness, and the Pariah for the reverse. And this Brahmin asked to be allowed to do the menial services in the house of the Pariah. The Pariah would not permit it; so in the dead of night, when all were sleeping, Ramakrishna would enter the house. He had long hair, and with his long hair he would wipe the place, saying, “Oh, my Mother, make me the servant of the pariah, make me feel that I am lower than the Pariah.” “They worship Me best who worship My worshippers. These are all My children and your

privilege is to serve them”-is the teaching of Hindu scriptures.

For years he thus educated himself. One of the Sadhanas was to root out the sex idea. Soul has no sex, it is neither male nor female. It is only in the body that sex exists, and the man who desires to reach the spirit cannot at the same time hold to sex distinctions. Having been born in a masculine body, this man wanted to bring the feminine idea into everything. He began to think that he was a woman, he dressed like a woman, spoke like a woman, gave up the occupation of men, and lived in the household among the women of a good family, until, after years of this discipline, his mind became changed, and he entirely forgot the idea of sex; thus the whole view of life became changed to him.

We hear in the West about worshipping woman, but this is usually for her youth and beauty. This man meant by worshipping woman, that to him every woman's face was that of the Blissful Mother, and nothing but that. I myself have seen this man standing before those women whom society would not touch, and falling at their feet bathed in tears, saying, “Mother, in one form Thou art in the street, and in another form Thou art the universe. I salute Thee, Mother, I salute Thee.” Think of the blessedness of that life from which all carnality has vanished, which can look upon every woman with that love and reverence when every woman's face becomes transfigured, and only the face of the Divine Mother, the Blissful One, the Protectress of the human race, shines upon it!

As a teacher and preacher

This rigorous, unsullied purity came into the life of that man. All the struggles which we have in our lives were past for him. His hard-earned jewels of spirituality, for which he had given three quarters of his life, were now ready to be given to humanity, and then began his mission.

In our country a teacher is the most highly venerated person, he is regarded as God himself. We have not even the same respect for our father and mother. Father and mother give us our body, but the teacher shows us the way to salvation. We are his children, we are born in the spiritual line of the teacher. All Hindus come to pay respect to an extraordinary teacher, they crowd around him. And here was such a

teacher, but the teacher had no thought whether he was to be respected or not, he had not the least idea that he was a great teacher, he thought that it was Mother who was doing everything and not he. He always said, "If any good comes from my lips, it is Mother who speaks; what have I to do with it?" That was his one idea about his work, and to the day of his death he never gave it up. This man sought no one. His principle was, first form character, first earn spirituality and results will come of themselves. His favourite illustration was, "When a lotus opens, the bees come of their own accord to seek the honey; so let the lotus of your character be full-blown, and the results will follow." This is a great lesson to learn.

He alone teaches who has something to give, for teaching is not talking, teaching is not imparting a doctrine, it is communicating. Spirituality can be communicated just as really as I can give you a flower. This idea is very old in India and finds illustration in the West in the theory, in the belief, of apostolic succession. Therefore first build a character-that is the highest duty you can perform. Know Truth for yourself, and there will be many to whom you can teach it afterwards; they will all come. This was the attitude of my Master. He criticised no one. For years I lived with that man, but never did I hear those lips utter one word of condemnation for any sect. He had the same sympathy for all sects; he had found the harmony between them. A man may be intellectual, or devotional, or mystic, or active; the various religions represent one or the other of these types. Yet it is possible to combine all the four in one man, and this is what future humanity is going to do. That was his idea. He condemned no one, but saw the good in all.

People came by thousands to see and hear this wonderful man who spoke in a *patois* every word of which was forceful and instinct with light. For it is not what is spoken, much less the language in which it is spoken, but it is the personality of the speaker which dwells in everything he says that carries weight. We hear most splendid orations, most wonderfully reasoned out discourses, and we go home and forget them all. At other times we hear a few words in simplest language, and they enter into our lives and produce lasting results. The words of a man who can put his personality into them take effect, but he

must have tremendous personality. All teaching implies giving and taking, the teacher gives and the taught receives, but the one must have something to give, and the other must be open to receive.

This man came to live near Calcutta, the capital of India, the most important university town in our country which was sending out sceptics and materialists by the hundreds every year. Yet many of these university men-sceptics and agnostics-used to come and listen to him. I heard of this man, and I went to hear him. He looked just like an ordinary man, with nothing remarkable about him. He used the most simple language, and I thought, "Can this man be a great teacher?"- crept near to him and asked him the question which I had been asking others all my life: "Do you believe in God, Sir?" "Yes," he replied. "Can you prove it, Sir?" "Yes." "How?" "Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intense sense." That impressed me at once. For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he saw God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. I began to go to that man, day after day, and I actually saw that religion could be given. One touch, one glance, can change a whole life. I have read about Buddha, Christ and Mohammed, about all those different luminaries of ancient times, how they would stand up and say, "Be thou whole", and the man became whole. I now found it to be true, and when I myself saw this man, all scepticism was brushed aside. It could be done; and my Master used to say, "Religion can be given and taken more tangibly, more really than anything else in the world." Be therefore spiritual first; have something to give and then stand before the world and give it. Religion is not talk, or doctrines, or theories; nor is it sectarianism. Religion cannot live in sects and societies. It is the relation between the soul and God; how can it be made into a society? It would then degenerate into business, and wherever there are business and business principles in religion, spirituality dies. Religion does not consist in erecting temples, or building churches, or attending public worship. It is not to be found in books, or in words, or in lectures,

or in organisations. Religion consists in realisation.

The first ideal of this attempt to realise religion is that of renunciation. Darkness and light, enjoyment of the world and enjoyment of God will never go together.

The second idea that I learnt from my Master, and which is perhaps the most vital, is the wonderful truth that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are but various phases of one eternal religion. There never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your national religion; there never existed many religions, there is only one. Religions manifest themselves not only according to race and geographical position, but according to individual powers. In one man religion is manifesting itself as intense activity, as work. In another it is manifesting itself as intense devotion, in yet another, as mysticism, in others as philosophy, and so forth. It is wrong when we say to others, 'Your methods are not right.'

To learn this central secret that the truth may be one and yet many at the same time, that we may have different visions of the same truth from different standpoints, is exactly what must be done. Then, instead of antagonism to anyone, we shall have infinite sympathy with all... Just as nature is unity in variety.. as in and through all these variations of the phenomenal runs the Infinite, the Unchangeable, the Absolute Unity, so it is with every man.

An embodiment of renunciation

In the presence of my master I found out that man could be perfect, even in this body. Those lips never cursed anyone, never even criticised anyone. Those eyes were beyond the possibility of seeing evil, that mind had lost the power of thinking evil. He saw nothing but good. That tremendous purity, that tremendous renunciation is the one secret of spirituality...

That man was the embodiment of renunciation. He was a triumphant example, a living realisation of the complete conquest of lust and of the desire for money.

The other idea of his life was intense love for others. The first part of my Master's life was spent in acquiring spirituality, and the remaining years in distributing it. Men came in crowds to hear him, and he would twenty hours in the twenty-four, and that not for one day, but for months and months until at

last the body broke down under the pressure of this tremendous strain. His intense love for mankind would not let him refuse to help even the humblest of the thousands who sought his aid. Gradually, there developed a vital throat disorder, and yet he could not be persuaded to refrain from these exertions. As soon as he heard that people were asking to see him, he would insist upon having them admitted, and would answer all their questions. When expostulated with, he replied, "I do not care. I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man. It is glorious to help even one man." There was no rest for him. Once a man asked him, "Sir, you are a great Yogi. Why do you not put your mind a little on your body and cure your disease." At first he did not answer, but when the question had been repeated, he gently said, "My friend, I thought you were a sage, but you talk like other men of the world. This mind has been given to the Lord. Do you mean to say that I should take it back and put it upon the body which is but a mere cage of the soul?"

When the people heard that this holy man was likely to go from them soon, they began to come round him more than ever, and my Master went on teaching them without the least regard for his health. Many of the people came from long distances, and he would not rest until he had answered their questions. "While I can speak, I must teach them," he would say, and he was as good as his word.

His thoughts and his message were known to very few who were capable of giving them out. Among others, he left a few young boys who had renounced the world, and were ready to carry on

his work. These young men, living as Sannyasins, begged through the streets of the city where they were born, although some of them came from high families. At first they met with great antagonism, but they persevered and went on, spreading all over India, the message of that great man, until the whole country was filled with the ideas he had preached. This man, from a remote village of Bengal, without education, by the sheer force of his own determination, realised the truth and gave it to others, leaving only a few young boys to keep it alive.

Today the name of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is known all over India to its millions of people. Nay, the power of that man has spread beyond India; and if there has ever been a word of truth, a word of spirituality, that I have spoken anywhere in the world, I owe it to my Master; only the mistakes are mine.

His message to the modern world

This is the message of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world: "Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticise no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realisation. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light."

Therefore my Master's message to mankind is, "Be spiritual and realise truth for yourself." He would have you give up for the sake of your fellow beings. He would have you cease talking about love for your brother, and set to work to prove your words. The time has come for renunciation, for realisation; and then you will see the harmony in all religions of the world. You will know that there is no need of any quarrel. And then only will you be ready to help humanity. To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my master. Other teachers have taught special religions which bear their names, but this great teacher of the nineteenth century made no claim for himself. He left every religion undisturbed because he had realised that in reality they are all part and parcel of the one eternal religion.

An Untitled poem on Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Vivekananda

*He who was praised by the Brahmanas,
those knowers of the Vedas*

*Who made the sky reverberate with the
scared sounds of the sacrifice*

*And caused the darkness of delusion to
vanish through well-performed rituals*

And the knowledge known as Vedanta-

*He whose greatness was sung in the
sweet chants of the Sama-Veda etc.,*

With voices thundering like clouds-

*To that Sri Ramakrishna, I offer my
eternal worship.*

Source:

The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol IV, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, India, pages 154-187; and Vol IX, page 304.

A real reformer is a teacher, a Master, and a blessing to mankind

"If you wish to be a true reformer, three things are necessary. The first is to feel. Do you really feel for your brothers? Do you really feel that there is so much misery in the world, so much ignorance and superstition? Do you really feel that men are your brothers? Does this idea come into your whole being? Does it run with your blood? Does it tingle in your veins? Does it course through every nerve and filament of your body? Are you full of that idea of sympathy? If you are, that is only the first step. You must think next if you have found any remedy. The old ideas may be all superstition, but in and around these masses of superstition are nuggets of gold and truth. Have you discovered means by which to keep that gold alone, without any of the dross? If you have done that, that is only the second step; one more thing is necessary. What is your motive? Are you sure that you are not actuated by greed of gold, by thirst for fame, or power? Are you really sure that you can stand to your ideals, and work on, even if the whole world wants to crush you down? Are you sure you know what you want and will perform your duty, and that alone, even if your life is at stake? Are you sure that you will persevere so long as life endures, so long as there is one pulsation left in the heart? Then you are a real reformer, you are a teacher, a Master, a blessing to mankind. But man is so impatient, so short-sighted! He has not the patience to wait, he has not the power to see. He wants to rule, he wants results immediately. Why? He wants to reap the fruits himself, and does not really care for others. Duty for duty's sake is not what he wants. "To work you have the right, but not to the fruits thereof," says Krishna."

- - - Swami Vivekananda

According to the Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac Swami Niranjanananda's birthday celebration was observed on Wednesday, 5th of August, 2009.

Early life

Nityaniranjana Ghosh, who later became Swami Niranjanananda, was born in 1862 (probably in August) at Rajarhat-Vishnupur, a few miles from Calcutta. His father's name was Ambika Charan Ghosh. Niranjana was tall and handsome. He had a strong, energetic, and athletic physique. His nature was heroic and fearless. In his childhood, he was fond of playing with a bow and arrows like the great heroes of the Hindu epics. He had a consummate passion for truth and deep compassion for the poor. When he was in his teens, he was sent to his uncle's house in West Calcutta, for higher education. There he was attracted by the group of spiritualists headed by his uncle, Pearychand Mitra. They made Niranjana their medium; he enjoyed the experience as one enjoys an adventurous game for Niranjana's mind was as powerful as his body. However, disillusioned with spiritualism, soon Niranjana turned to Dakshineswar in his quest for spirituality.

Meeting with Sri Ramakrishna

Nityaniranjana Ghosh first came to Sri Ramakrishna at the age of eighteen. At the time he was living in Calcutta with an uncle. In his adolescence, he had clairvoyant powers and was used as a medium by a group of spiritualists. He was also a psychic healer. Sri Ramakrishna reproved Niranjana for taking part in spiritualistic practices. 'My boy,' he told him, 'if you let your mind dwell on ghosts, you'll become a ghost yourself. If you fix your mind on God your whole life will be filled with God. Now, which are you going to choose?'

The Master also said to Niranjana, 'Look here, my boy, if you do ninety-nine good deeds for a person and one bad, the person will remember one bad deed and won't care for you anymore. On the other hand, if



Swami Niranjanananda
(One who enjoys the bliss of
blemishlessness)
(1862—1904)

you commit sins ninety nine times but do one thing to God's satisfaction, God will forgive all your wrongdoing. This is the difference between the love of man and the love of God. Remember this.'

The training of Niranjana

Niranjana was habitually good-natured, but he had a violent temper. One day, when he was going to Dakshineswar on the public ferry-boat, he overheard some of the passengers speaking ill of Sri Ramakrishna. Niranjana protested strongly, but the speakers ignored him. At this, Niranjana became enraged, jumped to his feet and began to rock the boat, threatening to capsize it midstream. Niranjana was a powerful swimmer; he could easily have swum ashore after carrying out his threat but the passengers who were frightened and begged to be forgiven.

When Sri Ramakrishna heard about this incident, he rebuked Niranjana severely. 'Anger is a deadly sin,' he said, 'you ought never to let it carry

you away.'

In the service of the Master

In September 1885 Sri Ramakrishna had to move to Shyampukur, Calcutta, for his cancer treatment. Niranjana left home and became the Master's gatekeeper, as he was strong and heroic by nature. Once Girish Chandra Gosh's brother Atul Ghosh came to visit the Master and was stopped by Niranjana. Atul was very hurt and vowed that he would not visit Sri Ramakrishna again. One day the Master asked Niranjana to go to Atul's house and bring him to check his health. Immediately, Niranjana rushed to Atul and brought him to the Master. Even while he was sick, the Master was training his devotees-sometimes humbling one and sometimes increasing longing in another.

During the winter Sri Ramakrishna would bathe with hot water. One day Niranjana used a lot of firewood to heat a large vessel of water. That waste displeased the Master but Niranjana was stubborn. He carried the whole vessel of water to the Master and said, 'Sir, I don't have enough sense to know how much water you need. Since I have brought it, you will have to use it.' The Master was pleased by Niranjana's simple and fearless behaviour.

While serving the Master, Niranjana often worried about him. The Master read his mind and one day asked him, 'Niranjana, if I were cured of this disease, what would you do?' With great excitement Niranjana replied, 'Master, I would uproot that date palm from the garden.' Knowing his heroic nature and his overwhelming love and devotion, the Master remarked, 'Yes, you could do that.'

The disciples took care of the Master's body, and he in turn took care of their spiritual life. He silently and naturally gave shape to this group of ideal characters. From his birth,

Niranjan had been endowed with divine qualities-simplicity, purity, fearlessness, steadiness, truthfulness, and renunciation. When the elder Gopal brought twelve pieces of cloth and twelve rosaries, the Master gave one of them to Niranjan and distributed the rest to other disciples. Thus Sri Ramakrishna sowed the seeds of his forthcoming monastic order.

Pilgrimage and Austerity

In December 1886 Niranjan, Narendra, and several other brother disciples went to Antpur, the birth-place of Baburam. There they took vows of renunciation in front of a sacred fire, not knowing that it was Christmas Eve. Sri Ramakrishna had created the hunger for God in their minds, and they began to spend their days in meditation and austerities. One day Sarada went to bathe in a pond. All of a sudden he slipped from a step and fell into deep water. He did not know how to swim. Immediately Niranjan jumped in and rescued him, ignoring any threat to his own life.

In the early part of 1887 Niranjan joined the Baranagore Monastery and took the final vows of sannyasa with his brother disciples. Swami Vivekananda gave him the name 'Swami Niranjanananda.' He continued his spiritual practices and austerities in the monastery.

With Swami Vivekananda and Others

When news reached the monastery that Vivekananda would return from the West in early 1897, Niranjanananda left for Colombo and received Swamiji there on 15th January 1897. Later he travelled with Swamiji all across Southern India and various parts of North India. The brother disciples were thrilled and proud of their leader's success in spreading the message of Vedanta in America and Europe.

In 1898 Niranjanananda went with Swamiji to Almora, then remained there in order to practise further spiritual disciplines.

In the latter part of February 1902,

when Swamiji became gravely ill, Niranjanananda and Shivananda escorted him to Belur Math. The doctors had been treating Swamiji for diabetes and kidney disease, but at Niranjanananda's earnest request he took ayurvedic medicine for three weeks. During this period, in accordance with the treatment, he did not drink any liquids except a little milk now and then to satiate his thirst. On Sri Ramakrishna's birthday Niranjanananda became Swamiji's gatekeeper in order to prevent the general public from disturbing him. A young brahmacharin, a disciple of Swamiji, arrived from Mayavati to visit him. Since Niranjanananda did not know the young man, he stopped him at the gate. However, while Niranjanananda was talking to someone else, the clever brahmacharin crawled through his legs and entered Swamiji's room. When Niranjanananda heard this from Swamiji, he appreciated the boy's resourcefulness and dedication.

Niranjanananda's character was a mixture of tenderness and sternness. He was an unattached monk and his love for truth was uncompromising.

Towards the end

Because he practised such hard austerities, Niranjanananda's health began to fail. During the last few years of his life he suffered from dysentery. The climate and water of Hardwar are better than those of Belur Math, so he decided to move there and went to Holy Mother to receive her blessings. This last meeting was deeply moving as his pent-up devotion for Holy Mother suddenly found expression. He insisted that the Holy Mother do everything for him. He entreated her to cook for him, and feed him as a mother feeds her young child. Holy Mother fulfilled his wishes. Before leaving, he fell at her feet and burst into tears. Then he silently went away, knowing that he would never see her again.

At Hardwar, he lived in a rented house and continued his sadhana. His chronic dysentery was inexorably

emaciating his body, but it could not stifle his renunciation. Sri Ramakrishna had kindled his spirit when he was just in his teens and it continued to shine brightly throughout the remainder of his life. Swami Niranjanananda, a heroic monk of Sri Ramakrishna, passed away in Samadhi on 9th May 1904.

Niranjanananda left no writings or any recorded reminiscences but on 18th of December 1946 Swami Achalananda described some of the important characteristics of Niranjanananda's life:

He believed that Sri Ramakrishna was the infinite God incarnated in human form; and he who took refuge in him would not have to worry in his life.

He had a similarly high estimation of Holy Mother. He believed that by the grace of the Mother, he could do anything.

He was a strong person and was not afraid of anybody. He considered the master his only refuge. He appreciated those who had a dauntless nature.

He had tremendous faith in the doctrine of service as established by Swami Vivekananda and he encouraged people to serve human beings as manifestations of God.

He was a man of truth and wanted others also to adhere to the truth. He did not care for people who did not keep their word.

He was extremely generous. Without any misgivings, he would take care of anyone who asked help from him.

He used to do physical exercises regularly and he encouraged young men to keep their bodies strong and active.

Sources:

God Lived With Them: Life Stories of sixteen monastic disciples by Swami Chetanananda; Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; pages 243-260.

Ramakrishna and his Disciples by Christopher Isherwood; Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; pages 238-9.