

Voice of the Worldwide Vedanta Movement

GLOBAL VEDANTA

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In This Issue:

- The Significance of Temples Including Those Dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna
- Celebrating 75 Years of the Ramakrishna Monastery
- The Dialog Between Yaksha and Yudhisthira

and more...



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GLOBAL VEDANTA

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About Contributing to *Global Vedanta*

Global Vedanta will gladly consider articles, poetry, humor, etc., submitted for publication. The subject matter should be religious, cultural, or educational and must appeal to a general and broad-minded readership. Articles should be entertaining, and yet substantial, and be within 2000 words in length. Articles accepted for publication *may* require a release signed by the author.

EDITORIAL

WHY TEMPLE WORSHIP?

One sees, in any modern city, towering, massive, monochrome, and glistening skyscrapers, and smaller hulking buildings trying to mimic those that tower over them. Clustered around them are sometimes shabby, squalid, and seedy buildings trying to hold on for dear life. These towers of various shapes and colors, monuments to human ingenuity, engineering skills, architecture, design, and so on, have structures and systems inside that are even more interesting and complex. These are the systems and institutions of money, markets, energy, technology, services, and so on. These cities teach through their various universities and research institutes a plethora of subjects, all leading to the worship of these “gods.” In these cages of steel, glass, and concrete, humans worship, slave, and are snuffed out for a “few dollars more.”

From one perspective these buildings with innovative materials are a testimony to the human spirit and the conquest of nature. A few thousand years ago we were living in mud and grass houses and even earlier humans were hunter-gatherers. These awe-inspiring structures, defining society and civilization, are networked in multiple layers from air, road, and rail, from above and below ground, and by internet and cell phone connectivity. Surrounding these modern structures are people, living in their tiny homes, which have become offices, feeding these insatiable human creations. Life mercilessly revolves around work to feed these gods and these gods in turn feed the workers. At the end of the day, the various systems spit us out from their uncompromising depths, leaving us defeated and unknown. Old places of worship, especially in the West, have become relics of the past where curious tourists go for leisure. This might sound cruel, dystopian, or ominous, but as one songwriter says, “*And the people bowed and prayed to the neon god they made.... And the words of the prophet are written on subway walls and tenement*

balls.” This is “The Sound of Silence” where all our hopes, joys, life, and so forth, end. Or do they?

A unique line of thought that can be traced about humankind to very ancient times is that of worship. In the dim hazy unrecorded past our earliest ancestors were animists (attributing souls to inanimate objects, plants, and natural phenomena), for to them everything was living. This line of thought evolved into today’s religious thought. If this idea of the divine or sacred has been with us for so long, it is not going to go away so easily. Rather, it can be said that if we veer away from it, humans would lose an essential component of what makes us who we really are. Religion, in some form or another, has always been part of the human psyche. The word psyche comes from a Greek and Roman goddess of the soul. Psyche is depicted as beautiful with wings of a butterfly. Psyche was born mortal but was granted immortality. Deep down our mortality seeks immortality, and this is done through religion.

A mantra in the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* (12.16) declares, “In the citadel of the body there is a small sinless and pure lotus of the heart, which is the residence of the Supreme Being. Further in the interior of this small place there is a sorrowless Space. That has to be meditated upon continually.” This is the reason why we need to meditate on immortality. Since meditation is difficult for most untrained people, the same supreme deity is projected externally with a name and a form as a god or goddess. The human mind, not any other agency, is responsible for this externalization. This is the reason why sacred spaces/temples came into being. As a consequence, as the deity has to be adored there followed various rituals, prayers, and so on. The essential thing, which is generally forgotten, is this sacred space outside, representing the inner “sorrowless Space.” This ignorance has made us at times fanatical and iconoclasts

against other forms not defined according to that particular culture.

In India, from very ancient times, there were a large number of gods and goddesses, and also semi-, demi- and, quasi-divine beings. This gave rise to the many places and forms of worship, which enriched and diversified religion. It is a national trait. But temples were not always like this, as each family had their own sacred fire on an altar where they worshipped. Swami Vivekananda says (*My Plan of Campaign*, vol. 3), “The little fireplaces in the houses in which people poured their libations were not strong enough to hold their own against these gorgeous temples and ceremonies (of Buddhism during its rise).” The Vedic religion in its response brought out its own religious concepts and thus began the proliferation of temples in India. However, as Swamiji reminds us, “You must not imagine that there was ever a religion in India called Buddhism with its temples and priests of its own order! Nothing of the sort. It was always within Hinduism.”

Swamiji in his lecture *The Future of India* given in Madras (now Chennai) says,

We have seen that our vigour, our strength, nay, our national life is in our religion. I am not going to discuss now whether it is right or not, whether it is correct or not, whether it is beneficial or not in the long run, to have this vitality in religion, but for good or evil it is there; you cannot get out of it, you have it now and forever, and you have to stand by it, even if you have not the same faith that I have in our religion. You are bound by it, and if you give it up you are smashed to pieces. That is the life of our race and that must be strengthened. You have withstood the shocks of centuries simply because you took great care of it, you sacrificed everything else

Continued on next page...

for it. Your forefathers underwent everything boldly, even death itself, but preserved their religion. Temple after temple was broken down by the foreign conqueror, but no sooner had the wave passed than the spire of the temple rose up again. Some of these old temples of Southern India, and those like Somnath of Gujarat, will teach you volumes of wisdom, will give you a keener insight into the history of the race than any amount of books. Mark how these temples bear the marks of a hundred attacks and a hundred regenerations, continually destroyed and continually springing up out of the ruins, rejuvenated and strong as ever! That is the national mind, that is the national life-current. Follow it and it leads to glory. Give it up and you die; death will be the only result, annihilation the only effect, the moment you step beyond that life-current." (Vol. 3)

If we can remember our own psyche, soul, our own immortality, then all work performed in those "towering, massive, monochrome, glistening skyscrapers and smaller hulking buildings" will become divinized. Those very places fraught with darkness and ignorance will become temples of light and love. This is how modern societies can become transformed and worship their own immortality. This transformation, for now, however, requires the old-style temples as the first step. The next will be meditation on the "small sinless and pure lotus of the heart, which is the residence of the Supreme Being."

As mentioned, the effort, through meditation and prayer, for entering the sacred space within needs to be ensconced in a temple. Swamiji said of Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order, on December 9, 1898: "This Math that we are building will harmonize all creeds, all standpoints. Just as Sri Ramakrishna held liberal views, this Math will be a center for propagating similar ideas. The blazing light of universal harmony

that will emanate from here will flood the entire world with its message of unity, peace, and generosity." It is here that the various Vedanta centers and Ramakrishna temples become relevant. Like in a forest there exist "mother" trees that are progenitors of hundreds of daughters, so also the main Ramakrishna Temple has generated a vast network of temples and centers.

Standing, as witnesses to Sri Ramakrishna's work, on the edge of the Ganges sit three temples: one for Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, one for Swami Vivekananda, and one for Swami Brahmananda. These temples pour their share of spirituality into the Ramakrishna waves. This year, 2024, happens to be the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's and Swami Brahmananda's temples. These temples are, as the Buddha says, and is often quoted by Swamiji, "For the good of the many; for the happiness of the many!"

Global Vedanta pays homage to and also joins the worldwide celebration of these temples with its prayers.



Jimmy and Johnny, panting and pulling on their tandem bicycle, finally reached the top of a long, steep hill.

"Whew!" gasped Jimmy. "What a climb!"

"Sure was!" agreed Johnny. "If I hadn't kept the brake on, we'd have gone down backward."

— *Healing Through Humor* by Charles Frances Hunter, p. 14

IN MEMORIAM

SWAMI SMARANANANDAJI
16TH PRESIDENT OF
RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
PASSES AWAY



With deep sorrow we announce the passing away of Swami Smarananandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on Tuesday, 26 March 2024 at 8:14 pm at Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan hospital, Kolkata. He was 94.

He was admitted to Peerless Hospital in Kolkata on 18 January 2024 owing to fever and other complications. Subsequently, he was shifted to Seva Pratishthan on 29 January. Despite the best available medical treatment, his condition gradually deteriorated and he finally succumbed.

The cremation took place at Belur Math on Wednesday, 27 March 2024 at about 9.00 pm. The gates of Belur Math remained open all through the night of the 26th and through the 27th till the last rites are completed.

Swami Smarananandaji was born at village Andami in the district of Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, in 1929. He came in contact with the Mumbai branch of the Ramakrishna Order when he was about 20 years old. Inspired by the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, he joined Mumbai Ashrama in 1952 at the age of 22 and embraced monastic life. Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj, the seventh President of the Ramakrishna Order, gave him mantra diksha (spiritual initiation) in the same year. He also received from Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj, brahmacharya vows in 1956 and sannyasa vows and the name 'Swami Smaranananda' in 1960.

From Mumbai centre, he was transferred in 1958 to the Kolkata branch of Advaita Ashrama, the well-known publication centre of the Ramakrishna Math. He served at both Mayavati and Kolkata centres of the Advaita Ashrama for 18 long years. For a few years he was the Assistant Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, the English journal of the Ramakrishna Order started by Swami Vivekananda. He also enthusiastically worked to improve the standard of publications of the Advaita Ashrama.

He was posted to Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, an educational complex near Belur Math, as its Secretary in 1976. During his long tenure of about 15 years there, educational and rural welfare work of Saradapitha saw tremendous development. He, along with his monastic assistants, took up extensive relief operations during the devastating flood in West Bengal in 1978. From Saradapitha he was posted to Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, as its Head in December 1991.

He was appointed a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1983. In April 1995, he joined the Headquarters as an Assistant Secretary, and after two years, he took charge as the General Secretary of the twin organizations. As the General Secretary, he steered the worldwide Ramakrishna Movement for ten long years until May 2007 when he was elected a Vice-President of the Order. He became the President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in July 2017.

He travelled extensively in India and different parts of the world, visiting many branches of the Math and Mission and also unaffiliated centres, spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta among a vast number of people. He also gave mantra diksha to thousands of spiritual seekers.

Revered Maharaj was a voracious reader and a deep thinker. He has contributed a number of articles to various journals of the Ramakrishna Order. Collating his articles and talks, a few books have been brought out, of which *Smriti-Smaran-Anudhyan* and *Chintan-Manan-Anushilan* are in Bengali, and *Musings of a Monk* in English.

Swami Smarananandaji was loved and respected by all for his spiritual wisdom, simplicity, unassuming nature, sense of humour and spiritual fervour. His *mahasamadhi* has left a huge void that is difficult to fill.

26 March 2024
Belur Math, Howrah

Swami Suvirananda
General Secretary

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEMPLES INCLUDING THOSE DEDICATED TO SRI RAMAKRISHNA

SWAMI SATYAMAYANANDA



Sri Ramakrishna Temple
Belur Math, Kolkata

Humans innately need to know their origins and destiny. Looking around we see a world which looks simple but on a deeper level is mysterious. The vast skies have always fascinated the human mind. Of course, nearer to home, the greatest mystery was one's own existence. Religion is an attempt to make sense of the mystery that surrounds humans, and temples arose as a response to this desire. Everything around is a mix of the known and the unknown. The more unsophisticated one's vision was, the more unsophisticated became the religion; conversely, the more sophisticated one's ideas of existence were, the more sophisticated religion became. In India, from the most ancient times, the three factors – *jiva-jagat-Ishvara*, individual soul-universe-Cosmic Soul or God, were shown, in the Upanishads, as a Unit. It is the One that appears as three. This astounding unification was not just vague intuition but the result of the deepest spiritual experiences. Sri Ramakrishna says, "I see that God has become everything." This unification was then taught and transmitted to subsequent generations until it became a part of the cultural psyche.

Religious Freedom

The ancient sages found that it is also true that many cannot attain this unitive experience for the asking, but they had to spiritually evolve until they reached that state. Thus came the need for worshipping God and the need for temples with a staggering array of deities and rituals suited to every kind of worshipper. These temples

represented the unity of existence. And for eons humans have used it to connect with the divine. The ancient peoples of all cultures somehow understood this need. It was only with the growth of monotheism, in some parts of the world, that this ancient tendency was curtailed. There was never in India a "one-size-fits-all" doctrine. For, even with the doctrine of monotheism, there was ample space for the various deities. Everyone has to grow according to their own spiritual nature. This is called religious freedom.

Sacred Space

Essentially, temples are places of worship; for humans are inherently worshippers of the grand and the sublime. In fact, places of worship predate civilizations in the world. Our hunter-gatherer ancestors marked, due to some special spiritual reason, places for worship—this represented the sacred space, as opposed to the worldly or the profane. Violation of the sacred spaces was feared—or the gods would become angry and vengeful. Gradually, these sacred spaces became a symbol of the religious ideals of those

people, which they identified—take, for instance, places like Jerusalem, Rome, or Mecca, or the hundreds of sacred spaces in India like Varanasi. Different religions identify themselves with their sacred places. In time these spaces become pilgrim centers, moving and inspiring millions of people spiritually. When we say temple it includes words like church, mosque, and so on.

Temples in India never had such elaborate and grand structures as we see them today. These temples became what they are as a reaction to Buddhism with their stupas and worship of Buddha's relics and so on. Hinduism brought out their rituals, rites, images, mantras, yantras, songs and music, symbols, poetry, and so on, to counter Buddhism, and Buddhism in turn absorbed these ideas in their temples. In



Sri Ma Sarada Devi Temple
Belur Math, Kolkata

time, in India, Buddhism was absorbed back into its "mother-fold."

Sacrifice

Apart from the inclination to worship the grand and the sublime, another factor, from very early days, was the concept of sacrifice. In some form or another, this idea pervades all of nature. It is the secret of life. We said "idea," but it goes

far beyond just thought. It is part of consciousness, and as the same consciousness is in every living being, so “sacrifice” is in all of nature. Humankind only formalized sacrifice into rituals and prayers. We could go even further and say that another basis of religion and spiritual thought is the outcome of this primal “sacrifice” instinct of a mind. Through it one grows and prospers. It then is inevitable that the concept of a temple would be invariably linked with the idea of sacrifice. The external *yajna*, sacrifice, was just a representation or symbol or the reenactment of this central idea in human consciousness. Humankind can, as it were, see its future in a hazy way, and in order to reach that future goal one must sacrifice. This is one of the great uplifting human thoughts that has been proved true down the ages in all religions and cultures. One sacrificed the best or the most loved possession to the divine, or for others, in order to grow. Without sacrifice even human life would not be possible! That is why in every temple there was an altar where one offered or sacrificed to the gods; in personal life one sacrificed one’s joys, time, energy, care, and so on, for others or for something higher. This also brought on a sense of responsibility.

Focal Point

Thus, temples became the focal point of the religious and spiritual energy of every culture, which drew the best in art, architecture, music, painting, engineering, craftsmanship, sacred and secular literature, and learning, and so on. But, like the workings of a heart, temples also diffused these ideals and ideas to all aspects of social life. Culture and civilization were thus the manifestations of the sacred spaces. Circumambulating and praying at these sites became the ritual. This is found in all ancient cultures, take, for instance, the Greek and Roman life that patterned itself around temples. Temples reflected ideals, aspirations, beliefs, values, and a way of life. As human thought progressed, temples became microcosms invoking



Swami Vivekananda Temple
Belur Math, Kolkata

cosmic elements—a celebration of life on a grand scale. Temples became universal symbols of creation and the Creator where the worshipper connected with them. The goal of such worship was freedom from *samsara*—*moksha*, liberation.

Different Types of Worshipers

It is obvious that the majority of people do not go to temples to know the truth or for *moksha* but to pray to avoid existential problems. The scriptures speak of *tri-taap*, three types of destabilizing factors—*adhidaiivik*, heavenly or extraterrestrial; *adhibhautik*, terrestrial; and *adhyatmik*, internal—body and mind.

Adhidaiivik: However much we try to conquer external nature, we are vulnerable to many types of threats—floods, fires, earthquakes, volcanoes, storms, tsunamis, climate change, and so on.

Adhibhautik: People are also subject to epidemics, famines, genocides, crime, murder, rapes, robbery, animal attacks, and so on. Evil is real. Community life throws up many challenges that most people cannot cope with.

Adhyatmik: Every life is subject to existential threats, to sorrow and suffering, old age, disease, and death.

One does not know when threats will strike, hence the votaries of the various gods and goddesses gravitated to temples because they believed that these deities would protect them from these existential

threats. The Bhagavad Gita (7.16) declares, “O Arjuna, foremost of the Bharata dynasty, four classes of people of virtuous deeds adore Me (God): the afflicted, *aarto*; the seeker of knowledge, *jignasu*; the seeker of wealth, *artharthi*; and the person of knowledge, *jnani*.”

It can also be noted that when the desires for wealth and enjoyment are fulfilled, in many cases, the soul becomes a seeker of truth, *jignasu*. Then the seeker moves towards *jnana*, knowledge of truth.

Sri Ramakrishna Temple

In the Ramakrishna temples the main focus is self-transformation through *sadhana*, spiritual practices. What is self-transformation? It is transformation of one’s spiritual consciousness. Every spiritual transformation also depends on the presiding deity that responds. In the Ramakrishna temples, like an object and its shadow, the temple is the shadow of Sri Ramakrishna’s body or existence. Sri Ramakrishna says, on seeing his own picture: “This represents a high yogic state. This form will be worshipped in every home as time goes on.”¹ We see Sri Ramakrishna’s prophecy coming true. And as time rolls on, people from all walks of life will worship, practice, and ultimately realize the “high yogic state,” as embodied by Sri Ramakrishna. In this age of spurious, counterfeit, unauthentic, and deviant forms of religions, the “Great Master,” Sri Ramakrishna, is the genuine face of Yoga.

Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, says, “Our worship in the shrine was more an act of love and devotion, having none of the external grandeur of ritualistic observances as is prevalent now. While doing the worship we would think of the Master as visibly present.”² Again, he adds, “Don’t think of this picture of the Master as an ordinary picture. He himself dwells in it and listens to the prayers of his devotees.”³ That is why *pūja*, worship, in temples dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna, is done as *seva*, service. Swami Vivekananda says, “He [Sri Ramakrishna] has not given up

his Ramakrishna form.” Holy Mother also says, “like the body and its shadow, the picture of Sri Ramakrishna is like his shadow, and He dwells in his image.”

What Are the Master’s Ideals that Define Temples Dedicated to Him?

a) “The goal of human life is to see God”, says Sri Ramakrishna. That is what defines the Ramakrishna temples. This ideal of life changes one’s whole perception and focus. Devotees are seekers of truth. And as Swamiji says, “He [Sri Ramakrishna] never asked me to preach the worship of his photograph! Meditation, prayer, and realizing his high, noble, life-giving ideals in our own lives and also transmitting these ideas to the wide world are what he taught us.”⁴ *Moksha*, liberation, was the ancient ideal in Hinduism and Sri Ramakrishna reinforced this ideal in this modern age. All over people live without an ideal that confers immortality, yet they want immortality. As Jesus says, “Those who have seen the son have seen the Father.”

b) Why is Sri Ramakrishna the central deity? He is *Sarva deva devi swarupa* – the embodiment of all gods and goddesses. Now that could be a claim which any other godman’s disciples can also say. However, anyone reading his life can see how Sri Ramakrishna experienced various gods and goddesses, who, at times, merged into him, or he appeared to his different devotees and disciples as different gods and goddesses. “One day while meditating at home, Kali [Swami Abhedananda] saw various gods and goddesses and divine incarnations—Krishna, Christ, Chaitanya, and others—merge one by one into the luminous form of Sri Ramakrishna. He related to his Guru what he experienced, and Sri Ramakrishna confirmed it.”⁵

c) Swamiji, after having experienced the highest forms of spirituality in his mature years, says of his Master [Sri Ramakrishna], “*Avatara varistha*; the best of the avatars.” We have a static idea of avatars. If everything in the universe is a process of evolution, then avatars also

evolve. That might sound strange, but it is a fact that as human consciousness evolves, and because times have changed along with our ideas of reality, then an avatar reflects these changes and also pushes further the ideas of reality so that future humanity can be oriented towards them. Sri Ramakrishna says, “He who was Rama and he who was Krishna has now come as Ramakrishna!”

d) The chief role of an avatar is to liberate souls. An avatar has to be accessible to all people. It means that an avatar has to be stationed in such a place where he can be in touch with the Absolute and yet be reachable by all in the relative world. Sri Ramakrishna was commanded by the Divine Mother three times to “stay in *bhava-mukha*.” This state, never before described clearly in ancient scriptures, is the threshold between the finite and infinite. When identified with the finite, an avatar is still in touch with the Cosmic Mind! He knows all minds and hearts, and he can receive any thought anywhere. This is the state of omniscience and omnipotence. At the same time an avatar is identified with Brahman, the Absolute Reality. This is the doorway to the infinite—a state of consciousness that is a junction between the *nirvikalpa* and *savikalpa*.⁶

Avatara/Temple of Harmony

a) *Harmony of Yoga(s)*: Sri Ramakrishna practiced all the yogas—karma, jnana, bhakti, and raja yoga, and all that is in between them, and he preached the harmony of yoga. Even externally, in temples dedicated to him, one finds the symbology of harmony, reflected in the architecture. Sri Ramakrishna also had come, Swamiji says to “revive all the arts.”

b) *Harmony in Intra-Religious Hindu Thought*: Hinduism is bewildering to almost all people, including Hindus. The reason being that there are innumerable sects, traditions of yoga, Vedanta, tantra, paths of bhakti, and so on, and, yes, even

religions. They all, of course, had their roots in the Vedas. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated that all religious and philosophical thought is subject to growth and is true, and that what we need is sincerity. They are not contradictory but are complementary. This demonstration was the result of practicing and experiencing all the various staggering stages of Indian spiritual thought. Never had this been done before. By these experiments he, once and for all time, put an end to the squabbles between different religious sects and declared their genuineness. The grandest truth is that Sri Ramakrishna embodies them all.

c) *Harmony of Religions*: Sri Ramakrishna practiced Islam and Christianity and found them to be true if sincerely practiced with sincerity. Thus, he established interreligious harmony. His well-known exhortation, “*Jato Mat Tatho Path*,” as many faiths, so many paths, is a wake-up call to rouse humanity to put behind it all the centuries of fanaticism, wars, and destruction fought in the name of religion.

d) *A New Spiritual Tradition*: Every avatar comes and establishes a special spiritual tradition with its specific mantras, rituals, prayers, and a line of gurus. This is also found with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna. The various temples and centers of the Ramakrishna monasteries and Vedanta all carry forward this spiritual tradition. These temples and centers are, as Swamiji wanted and said: “In connection with this temple there should be an institution to train teachers who must go about preaching religion and giving secular education to our people; they must carry both. As we have been already carrying religion from door to door, let us along with it carry secular education also. That can be easily done. Then the work will extend through these bands of teachers and preachers, and gradually we shall have similar temples in other places, until we have covered the whole of India. That is my plan. It may appear gigantic, but it is much needed.”⁷

Continuing Lila/Play of Sri Ramakrishna

Swamiji in the early Baranagore Monastery days wrote to Pramadas Mitra, a great pandit and well-wisher of Varanasi: "For various reasons, the body of Bhagavan Ramakrishna had to be consigned to fire. There is no doubt that this act was very blamable. The remains of his ashes are now preserved, and if they be now properly enshrined somewhere on the bank of the Ganga, I presume we shall be able, in some measure, to expiate the sin lying on our heads. These sacred remains, his seat, and his picture are every day worshipped in our Math [Baranagore] in proper form."⁸ In retrospect this "mistake" of cremating the body in fact has acted to spread Sri Ramakrishna's relics all over the world as well his ideals. Thus, universal temples of Sri Ramakrishna have been built and are coming up and will continue to be built in the future. The Master has reversed this mistake.

Surendranath Dasgupta describes a conversation with Swamiji: "Those fascinating eyes of his [Swamiji's] were filled with tears (Oh, how vividly I see that scene before my eyes even now.), and he with a heart overflowing with love, softly and gently spoke: 'At those [Sri Ramakrishna's] Blessed Feet is the perfection of Knowledge, sought by the Jnanis! At those Blessed Feet also is the fulfillment of Love sought by the Lovers! Oh, say, where else will men and women go for refuge but to those Blessed Feet!'"⁹

When Sri Ramakrishna's mother, Chandramani Devi, was pregnant with the future Ramakrishna, she used to have visions of many gods and goddesses. At times she was confused about their identity and inquired of her husband, Kshudiram, about their identities, etc. It is as if the gods were equally confused of how the one Ishvara, God, can descend and become a human being—or they had come to witness the new *lila*, divine play, of the Lord. The *lila* of Sri Ramakrishna is still continuing in his temples and in the lives of his devotees—for the devo-

tees are now part of this continuing *lila*. Blessed are his devotees!

Conclusion

For Vedantins the spiritual journey begins with a temple. For a few it rises above temples to see the living presence of God in everything, but such devotees are few in number. The vast majority need temples in order to awaken the sacred space within, to awaken the idea of the body as a temple, with the presiding deity in the core of one's being, which is like a sanctum sanctorum where devotees discover the unity of *jiva-jagat-Ishvara*, soul-universe-God. This is the culmination of real temple worship.

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- ³ Ibid. 174.
- ⁴ Ibid., 421.
- ⁵ Ibid, 446.
- ⁵ See, Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings*, 'What is Bhava-mukha', Ramakrishna Math, Chennai.
- ⁵ *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol, 3, p. 303.
- ⁵ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 240.



My wife divorced me for religious reasons. She worshipped money and I didn't have any!

– <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-jokes/>

NEW PRESIDENT OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER



Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj
New President of the Ramakrishna Math
and Mission

Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj was elected the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at the meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Math and the Governing Body of the Mission held at Belur Math on 24 April 2024. He is the 17th President of the twin organizations. He succeeds Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj who passed away on 26 March 2024.

Swami Gautamanandaji was born in Bengaluru in 1929, though his ancestors were all from Tamil Nadu. In his youth, he came in contact with Bengaluru branch of the Ramakrishna Order, headed by Swami Yatishwarananda Maharaj (1889–1966). He received Mantra

Diksha (spiritual initiation) from Swami Yatishwaranandaji in 1955. The following year, he embraced monastic life by joining New Delhi branch of the Ramakrishna Mission as per the advice of his guru. He spent six years in Delhi centre getting introduced to monastic life and serving in different departments.

He received Brahmacharya vows from Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj (in 1962) and Sannyasa ordination and the name ‘Swami Gautamananda’ (in 1966) from Swami Vireshwaranandaji Maharaj, the 10th President of the Ramakrishna Order.

In 1964, he moved from Delhi to the Mission’s centre in Sohra (formerly Cherrapunjee) and then to the centre in Mumbai. In these two centres he served for about 12 years altogether. Subsequently, he was appointed the head of the Mission’s centre in the remote tribal village Aalo (formerly Along) in Arunachal Pradesh in 1976. He served there for 13 long years bringing the light of education to tribal children. During his leadership, the centre in Aalo attained national stature and reached new heights.

He became a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in March 1990. Thereafter, he served brief stints as the head of Raipur and Narainpur centres (in Chhattisgarh) and Saradapitha centre (adjacent to Belur Math).

From Saradapitha he went on to become the head of Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, in 1995—a responsibility that he shouldered for almost three decades. Under his stewardship, the activities and influence of this important branch expanded significantly. He also lent his support to the starting of new branches of the Math and Mission in places like Puducherry (a union territory), Kadapa & Tirupati (in Andhra Pradesh), Chengam, Thanjavur, Thirumukkudal & Villupuram (in Tamil Nadu), and nurtured scores of unaffiliated centres in Tamil Nadu.

He started his spiritual ministry in 2012 following the authorization given to him by the Trustees to give spiritual initiation to devotees. A few years later, in 2017, he was elected a Vice-President of the Order.

As a Diksha Guru and Vice-President, he travelled extensively in India and different parts of the world and visited the branches of the Math and Mission and also unaffiliated centres in those places. Through those visits he endeavoured to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta among a vast number of people and gave Mantra Diksha to many spiritual seekers. He has contributed several articles to various journals of the Ramakrishna Order. His physical fitness, mental alertness and jovial nature even at this advanced age are an inspiration to the younger generation.



On analyzing the ego, you will find that there is no real entity that you can call ‘I’. (This) convinces one that the ultimate substance is God alone. When egotism drops away, Divinity manifests Itself.

—Sri Ramakrishna

God is one’s very own. It is the eternal relationship. He is everyone’s own. One realizes Him in proportion to the intensity of one’s feelings for Him.

—Sri Sarada Devi

Cut out the word “help” from your mind. You cannot help; it is blasphemy! You worship. When you give a morsel of food to a dog, you worship the dog as God.

—Swami Vivekananda

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MONASTERY

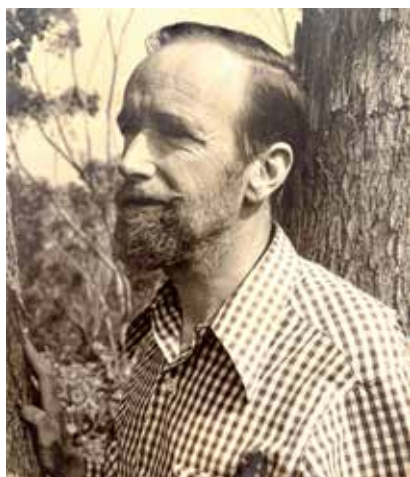
SWAMI DHYANAYOGANANDA

The goal is to be a man of God, whether you are a Hindu, Christian, Jew or Muslim.... My prayer is that we may hold before us the idea of true renunciation in this monastery.... The world needs enlightened men....

These were the words of Swami Prabhavananda, the founder of the Vedanta Society of Southern California on the day of the inauguration of The Ramakrishna Monastery on September 7, 1949.

The Ramakrishna Monastery, a branch of the Vedanta Society of Southern California was first conceived in the mind of an intellectual, a man who wanted to be remembered as “A historian of consciousness and its evolution.”¹ We are talking about the renowned British-born American historian and philosopher Henry Fitz Gerald Heard, commonly known as Gerald Heard.

Gerald Heard (1889 - 1971) was born in London on October 6, 1889, of Irish



Gerald Heard (1889 - 1971)

ancestry. He was educated in England, taking honors in history and studying theology at the University of Cambridge. He later showed interest in parapsychology, religion, Vedanta, and philosophy. He was also an educator, a public lecturer,



Celebrating 75 Years of The Ramakrishna Monastery
(1949 - 2024)

broadcaster and a prolific author of various sciences. He wrote over 35 books and many articles.¹

In 1937 Gerald Heard was offered the chair of historical anthropology at Duke University. He then moved for good to the United States, accompanied by the well known British writer and philosopher, Aldous Huxley. They both settled in California.²

That was probably the time where both, Heard and Huxley, started attending functions at the Vedanta Center in Hollywood. Together with Christopher Isherwood, the Anglo-American novelist, they were introduced to the Vedanta Philosophy under the guidance of Swami Prabhavananda, the founder of the Vedanta Society of Southern California.³

These three men of letters were initiated into spiritual life in the light of the tradition of The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta by Swami Prabhavananda. Their association with Vedanta in Southern California was deepened by serving their Guru, collaborating with him on translations of various Vedanta scriptures, writing articles, and acting as editors.⁴

Gerald Heard co-edited the Vedanta Society's journal, *Voice of India* (later

Vedanta and the West) from 1939 to 1941 and contributed many articles to it over the years. He later served as an editorial advisor to the journal from 1951 to 1962. The Vedanta Press published the bimonthly *Vedanta and the West* from 1941 to 1970 when it was discontinued.⁵

Philip L. Griggs (later became Swami Yogeshananda of The Ramakrishna Order of Monks), the author of *Six Lighted Windows* and many other books, referring to his friend Gerald Heard, said, “Gerald Heard was probably one of the most learned and enterprising

novel thinkers of his time as well as an extraordinary character. It is a pity that very few people know of him today”.⁶

Gerald Heard had a dream. The establishment of a center or college for those wishing to dedicate themselves to a training for the life of the spirit. A place where the study of comparative religion, together with research into and practice of the techniques of meditation and prayer,



Swami Prabhavananda (1893 - 1976)

as taught by the major religions of the world, would be carried on. He began his search for a peaceful location to build the institution he had envisioned. He discovered it in Trabuco Canyon, a then-secluded area adjacent to the Cleveland National Forest some sixty miles south of Los Angeles.

In 1941 Gerald Heard, together with Aldous Huxley, founded The Trabuco College, a religious institution devoted to the study and practice of the contem-



Old photo of the Ramakrishna Monastery

plative life. The construction of Trabuco College began the same year and was completed and occupied a year later. This bold experiment in living stirred tremendous interest among a number of serious intellectuals such as John van Druten and Eugene Exman, religious editor of Harper & Brothers Publishers. Seminars were held, three periods of meditation were observed in the octagonal shrine building, and various experiments in prayer were made. In a short time the College was to build a fine library of mystical literature, much of which is still intact. Huxley was to make ample use of the library to write *The Perennial Philosophy*.⁷

During the Trabuco College years, Heard wrote several religious books on Christian and non-Christian prayer. Most noticeable is *Training for the Life of the Spirit* (1942), which bears some similarities to the Alcoholics Anonymous' Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (1953).⁸

Bill Wilson, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), was a close friend of Gerald Heard. It is said that it was in the Trabuco Library that he developed the twelve step program inspired by the principles of Vedanta.⁹

Heard's noble experiment, however, was not to last. In 1947 financial problems and diminished activities forced Trabuco College to close its doors. The facility was made available for several projects during the next two years. None of these ventures, however, measured up to what Heard felt was Trabuco College's original *raison d'être*.¹⁰

Consequently, and at his specific request, in 1949 the facilities and property were donated to The Vedanta Society of Southern California, on September 7, 1949. Subsequently, this became to be known as The Ramakrishna Monastery to honor the Vedantic World Teacher, Sri Ramakrishna. The monastery shrine was formally consecrated by Swami Prabhavananda and the Ramakrishna Monastery was born.

The Monastery has called the attention of reporters from the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Orange County Register*, and *The San Diego Union*. As an example of the growing awareness of Vedanta in Southern California by local communities, the *Los Angeles Times* published a full page article on the dedication of the Ramakrishna Monastery at Trabuco sometime in 1949.

The *Santa Ana Register*, on Sunday November 27, 1949, published a cherished photo with Swami Asheshananda, Philip L. Griggs, and other brothers. It pointed out that the brothers follow the doctrine that all religions are basically the same and that the real nature of man is divine.

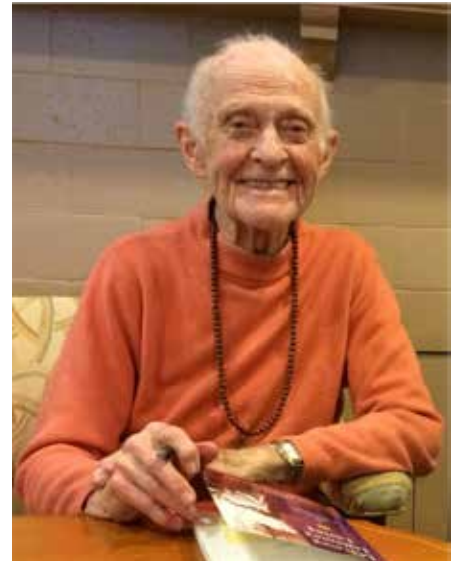


The *Santa Ana Register*
Sunday November 27, 1949

Swami Asheshananda, the then assistant minister of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, was stationed at Ramakrishna Monastery so that Swami Prabhavananda could focus more on

creating a more structured atmosphere suitable for leading a monastic life. A life based on the traditional monastic virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Although only a few men joined the Ramakrishna Monastery in the early years, it is important to highlight that Philip L. Griggs, who later became Swami Yogeshananda, was one of the first monastic brothers to lead his monastic life at Ramakrishna Monastery from 1949



Swami Yogeshananda (1923 – 2021)

to 1955. After serving in many centers in the United States, London and India, Swami Yogeshananda decided to come back to where it all started. He joined the Ramakrishna Monastery monastic community as a retired monk in 2009 and died peacefully surrounded by his brothers on February 13, 2021 at the age of 98.

The peace and solitude that the monastery offered were soon to draw others from various walks of life. Regardless of their backgrounds, all came with a similar purpose - to live a more fulfilling spiritual life in a community setting.

Continued on next page...

Religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in intellectual argumentation; it is being and becoming, it is realisation.

—Swami Vivekananda



The San Diego Union
Wednesday October 26, 1949

The San Diego Union published the article pictured above on Wednesday, October 26, 1949.

Other articles published in newspapers that can be found online:

Sep 8, 1989 – *Worlds Apart: Ramakrishna Monastery Is an Oasis of Serenity Surrounded by Suburbia* (<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-09-08-li-2024-story.html>)

Dec. 22, 2002 – *Fighting for Serenity* (<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-dec-22-re-monks22-story.html>)

Feb 15, 2018 – *The Monastery Amid O.C.'s Mania* (<https://www.latimes.com/socal/daily-pilot/news/tn-wknd-et-monastery-20180215-story.html>)

Today, the monastery is little changed. The shrine is still the center of life at the monastery, and its sanctity is even more tangibly felt after many decades of meditation and prayer.

The activities of this monastic community are centered in their universal



Welcome pathway to the Monastery

approach and spiritual ideal. With a shrine dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna and daily worship, all the brothers at



Vivekananda statue by Malvina Hoffman

Ramakrishna Monastery learn to live with a sense of togetherness and belonging that expresses itself in a mutual care and understanding for each other.



Altar table
Ramakrishna Monastery Shrine

Apart from the various tasks assigned to each brother individually, the monastic routine is spiritually strengthened with common activities, such as meditation in the shrine three times a day, and communal meals followed by readings and discussions.

The training of novices is of core importance for this monastic community.



Lunch at the Monastery

Public lectures by monks of the Order take place in the main refectory of the monastery at 11 a.m. on Sundays from mid-September through June. On July Fourth a special celebration is held to



Brahmacharis at Ramakrishna Monastery



Swami Sarvadevananda
The head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California



Public celebration at the
Ramakrishna Monastery



Wednesday class in the library



OM Shrine



Christian Shrine



Buddhist Shrine

honor Swami Vivekananda, which attracts hundreds of visitors each year.

Two activities are held in the Monastery library. Scripture classes on Wednesdays after evening Arati and, twice a month, on Saturday morning, Alcohol Anonymous (AA) meetings have been held since 2012.

Vedanta recognizes the truth of all religions and accepts them as different paths to the same goal. In recognition of this, the monks designed a mile-long trail, along which, shrines to the world's major religions have been built. The walk takes about half an hour, and is notable for its scenic charm and serenity.

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2 Bucknell, Katherine (28 February 2014). *Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood: Writing the Script for Gay Liberation*. LARB Los Angeles Review of Books. Retrieved 7 October 2023.

3 *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*, Dana Sawyer, 2002, page 101

4 *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*, Dana Sawyer, 2002, page 111

6 Ramakrishna Monastery Archives - Swami Yogeshananda's lecture on the History of Ramakrishna Monastery

7 Huston Smith, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000), p. 6; WARHD, pp. 146-47.

8 J. B. Heard, *Tripartite Nature of Man* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1882)

9 *Between the Pigeonholes*: Gerald Heard, 1889-1971, Alison Falby, pp. 107-08, 117-18.

10 *Between the Pigeonholes*: Gerald Heard, 1889-1971, Alison Falby, pp. 107, 113-17.



A man had been driving all night and by morning was still far from his destination. He decided to stop at the next city he came to and park somewhere quiet so he could get an hour or two of sleep.

The quiet place he chose so he could get an hour or two of sleep happened to be on one of the city's major jogging routes. No soon has he settle back to snooze where there came a knocking on his window. He looked out and saw a jogger running in place.

"Excuse me, Sir," the jogger said, "do you have the time?"

The man looked at his car clock and answered, "8:15."

"Thanks," responded the jogger as he jogged off."

The man settled down again and soon another jogger

tapped on his window, "Excuse me, Sir, do you have the time?"

"8:25," answered the man.

The jogger said thanks as he left. Now the man could see other joggers passing by, and he knew it was only a matter of time before another one disturbed him.

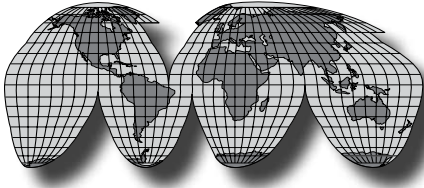
To avoid the problem, he got out a pen and paper and put a sign in the window saying, "I do not know the time!"

Once again, he settled back to sleep. He was just dozing off when there was another knock on the window.

"Sir! Sir! It's 8:45!"

– *Healing Through Humor* by Charles Frances Hunter, p. 9

VEDANTA NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Report of Shanti Ashrama Pilgrimage

On Saturday, April 27, 2024, the Vedanta Society of Northern California conducted its annual pilgrimage to its



historic Shanti Ashrama which is located amid groves of oak and pine in a remote valley of the coastal hill ranges east of the San Francisco Bay Area.

An advance party of devotees had set up a large tent and other facilities for the day's program which began with a ceremonial worship conducted by Swami Tattwamayana, the Swami-in-charge of the Vedanta Society of Northern California. This worship took place in the historic meditation cabin, the first building erected when the Ashrama was founded at Swami Vivekananda's request by Swami Turiyananda in 1900.

Swamis and devotees from the Vedanta Societies of Sacramento, Berkeley and Portland attended the program, in



addition to the monks and nuns of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco.

The day's program also featured meditation, devotional music, flower offerings and talks by Swamis Prapanananda, Prasannatmananda, Swami Devishananda, Vedananda and Swami Tattwamayana, followed by discussions involving devotees and monks. The topic was *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna: A Pilgrimage*. About 150 devotees participated in the event.

This was followed by a tour of the Ashrama grounds and hills with descriptions of the lives and activities of the early visitors, those hardy pioneers who set up a classical spiritual ashrama for the teaching of meditation and other disciplines



to eager spiritual aspirants who came to them for guidance.

Swami Trigunatitananda, also a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, brought groups of devotees to the Ashrama for several weeks' stay each year.

Though this Ashrama, being remote and difficult of access, is no longer actively used, this yearly festival brings a welcome reminder of the great individuals who founded it and the lofty spiritual ideals that they taught and handed down to us.

128th Anniversary of the Ramakrishna Mission



The 128th Anniversary of the Ramakrishna Mission, along with its Foundation Day Celebration, was held at Ramakrishna Math, Belur on 1 May 2024.

The Vivekananda Vedanta Society of British Columbia now has a place of its own



The society, previously housed in a small apartment in Vancouver, has been relocated to Surrey, British Columbia.

Its new address is:

14488 110 Avenue

Surrey V3R 2A5 CANADA

If you must be mad, be it not for the things of the world. Be mad with the love of God.

—Sri Ramakrishna

VEDANTA NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

125 Years of Vedanta in Los Angeles

In 2024, the Vedanta Society of Southern California (VSSC) will commemorate the 125th anniversary of the arrival of Vedanta in Los Angeles with Swami Vivekananda. The Vedanta Society of Southern California launched a year-long celebration of this milestone on January 8, 2024, at the American Embassy in New Delhi. Swami Sarvalokananda, Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission New Delhi, along with Lissa Coffey, an American devotee of the Vedanta Soci-



ety of Southern California, and several others, convened with US Ambassador Eric Garcetti in his office. They presented books and a prasad shawl to Ambassador Garcetti on behalf of Swami



Sarvadevananda, Head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. Ambassador Garcetti, who previously served as the Mayor of Los Angeles, warmly



recalled his encounters with the Swami during their meetings in Los Angeles on numerous occasions.

The city of Los Angeles paid tribute to the Vedanta Society's contributions




by bestowing a plaque inscribed with the words: "VEDANTA SQUARE—Commemorating the message of peace, harmony, and oneness brought to Los Angeles by Swami Vivekananda in 1899." On February 22, 2024, the Vedanta Society installed this plaque at the intersection of Vedanta Terrace and Vedanta Place, in a solemn and joyous ceremony including Vedic chanting, and remarks from the City as well as monastics. Approximately 60 persons participated, including 25

monastics. This event garnered significant appreciation online, with over 7,000 viewers tuning in online within just three days of the program.

On February 24, 2024, VSSC commemorated the 125th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta's arrival in Los Angeles. Swamis Chetanananda, Sarvadevananda, Prapannananda, Ishatmananda, and Tattwamayyananda, along with Pravrajikas Saradeshaprana and



Virajaprana, engaged in insightful discussions on various topics. Approximately 150 devotees participated in the program. In the afternoon, around 25 Swamis and Pravrajikas paid homage to Swamiji at Vivekananda House in South Pasadena, offering flowers and music. This portion of the program was exclusively for monastic members, with only 50 attendees, including volunteers.

On Sunday, February 25th, VSSC kicked off a year-long celebration commemorating the 75th anniversary of its Ramakrishna Monastery in Trabuco Canyon (see the article on page 9 of this issue of *Global Vedanta*). Around 250 devotees gathered to participate in a symposium focused on *Monasticism* featuring Swamis Chetanananda, Prapannananda, Ishatmananda, Tattwamayyananda, and Pravrajikas Anantaprana and Vrajaprana as speakers. 

THE DIALOG BETWEEN YAKSHA AND YUDHISTHIRA

SUDHA SHARMA



Yaksha and Yudhishthira
(from DNA India)

Among the many dialogs in the epic *Mahabharata* we come across that between Yudhishthira and Yaksha, called *Yaksha Prashna*, the questions of Yaksha. Yakshas are powerful nature spirits and can morph into any shape. They are generally benevolent and safeguard hidden treasures. However, stories about their mischievous and even greedy nature are also aplenty. King Yudhishthira was the eldest and wisest of the Pandavas, the five brothers, the central characters in the *Mahabharata*.

The *Mahabharata* is the longest known work written in verse dealing with metaphysics, philosophy, statecraft, religion, stories, and stories within stories, riddles, behavior, heroism—in short, the whole gamut of individual and collective human physical, mental, emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual experiences. While speaking of the comprehensiveness of the *Mahabharata* the sage Vaisampayana declares: “*Dharme cārthe ca kāme ca mokṣe ca bharatarsabha; yadihāsti tadanyatra yannehāsti na tat kvacit*; O King, regarding dharma, *artha* (working for wealth), *kama* (legitimate desires) and *moksha* (liberation) – whatever is (found) elsewhere is here, and that which is not (found) here is not (found) anywhere.”

The story is one of the many adventures that the Pandavas had in the

forests. That is why it occurs in the *Vana Parva*, the forest section. Being very conspicuous, these five brothers were living incognito, at the end of their twelve years exile. They met a brahmin who urged them to trap a deer that had snagged on its antlers his *arani*—a pair of wooden sticks meant to get ignited by friction—to be used in his yajna, fire sacrifice. The five heroes tracked the deer. While

on the long hunt they were exhausted and thirsty. Yudhishthira asked for water and so Nakula set off to look for drinking water. He found a lake. There were no birds or insects near the lake. A lone crane stood sentinel. When Nakula bent to slake his thirst first then to carry water for his brothers, the crane said, “O Nakula! The water will become poisonous if you drink it before answering my questions.” Nakula dismissed the warning and took a long draught and immediately died. Worried, Sahadeva, Nakula’s twin, followed his brother’s tracks and found the lake with Nakula lying dead beside it. The crane warned him like before, but Sahadeva also ignored the warning, and drank the water to fall down dead. Similarly, Arjuna and Bhima, the other brothers who were sent by Yudhishthira to find out what is going on, also met the same fate. The thirsty Yudhishthira then, becoming alarmed, went and soon found his four brothers dead near the lake. Before searching for his brothers’ killer, he decided to quench his parched throat. He heard the crane cry out, “O Prince, I am a crane and I have killed your brothers. You dare not drink this water, without answering my questions, because the water was first taken by me (lake is mine).” Yudhishthira looked at the killer! The

crane then transformed into a Yaksha. Yudhishthira replied, “*Yathāprajñam tu te praśanān prativakṣyāmi prccha mām*; I will answer your questions according to my understanding, ask me!” The Yaksha then puts some questions to the King.¹⁰

The questions are philosophical, in the form of rapid-fire riddles testing Yudhishthira’s mastery of dharma. The following are a few select verses.¹¹

Q: *What person, enjoying all the objects of the senses, endowed with intelligence, regarded by the world, and liked by all beings, though breathing, is not considered alive?*

A: A person who does not offer anything to these five: gods, guests, servants, *pitris* (departed ancestors), and himself, though endowed with breath, is not alive.

Q: *What constitutes the divinity of the brahmins? What even is their practice that is like that of the pious? What also is the human attribute of the brahmins? And what practice of theirs is like that of the impious?*

A: The study of the Vedas constitutes their divinity; their asceticism constitutes behavior that is like that of the pious; their liability to death is their human attribute, and slander is their impiety.

Q: *What is weightier than the earth itself? What is higher than the heavens? What is fleetier than the wind? And what is more numerous than grass?*

A: The mother is weightier than the earth; the father is higher than heaven; the mind is fleetier than the wind; and our thoughts are more numerous than grass.

Q: *What is that which doth not close its eyes while asleep? What is that which doth not move after birth? What is that which is without heart? And what is that which swells with its own impetus?*

A: A fish does not close its eyes while asleep, an egg does not move after birth, a stone is without heart, and a river with its own impetus, swells.

Q: *Who is the friend of the exiled? Who is the friend of the householder? Who is the*

friend of him that ails? And who is the friend of one about to die?

A: The friend of the exiled in a distant land is his companion; the friend of the householder is the wife; the friend of him that ails is the physician, and the friend of him about to die is charity.

Q: *What is that which sojourns alone? What is that which is reborn after its birth? What is the remedy against cold? And what is the largest field?*

A: The sun sojourns alone; the moon takes birth anew; fire is the remedy against cold; and the earth is the largest field.

Q: *What is that which, if renounced, makes one agreeable? What is that which, if renounced, leads to no regret? What is that which, if renounced, makes one wealthy? And what is that which if renounced, makes one happy?*

A: Pride, if renounced, makes one agreeable; wrath, if renounced leads to no regret; desire, if renounced, makes one wealthy; avarice, if renounced, makes one happy.

Q: *What, O king is said to be knowledge? What, tranquility? What constitutes mercy? And what has been called simplicity?*

A: True knowledge is that of divinity. True tranquility is that of the heart. Mercy consists in wishing happiness to all, and simplicity is equanimity of heart.

Q: *What is the highest refuge of virtue? Of fame? Of heaven? And of happiness?*

A: Liberality is the highest refuge of virtue; gift, of fame; truth, of heaven, and good behavior, of happiness.

Q: *What enemy is invincible? What constitutes an incurable disease for man? What sort of a man is called honest and what dishonest?*

A: Anger is an invincible enemy. Covetousness constitutes an incurable disease. He is honest who desires the weal of all creatures, and he is dishonest who is unmerciful.

Q: *What is the best of all laudable things? What is the most valuable of all his possessions? What is the best of all gains? And what is the best of all kinds of happiness?*

A: The best of all laudable things is skill; the best of all possessions is knowledge; the best of all gains is health, and contentment is the best of all kinds of happiness.

Q: *What is pride, and what is hypocrisy? What is the grace of the gods, and what is wickedness?*

A: Stolid ignorance is pride. The setting up of a religious standard (marks) is hypocrisy. The grace of the gods is the fruit of our gifts, and wickedness consists in speaking ill of others.

Q: *Who is the wealthiest person?*

A: One to whom agreeable and disagreeable are the same, and also happiness and sadness, in both the past and the future, is the wealthiest person. So long is a person to whom the agreeable and the disagreeable, weal and woe, the past and the future, are the same, is said to possess every kind of wealth.

Q: *What is most wonderful?*

A: Day after day countless creatures are going to the abode of Yama (god of death), yet those that remain behind believe themselves to be immortal. What can be more wonderful than this?

Yudhisthira's answers pleased the Yaksha. He offers to bring back to life *only* one of his brothers. Yudhisthira, without a second thought, asks for his stepbrother Nakul to be brought back to life. The Yaksha is puzzled and asks, "Why would you not want to bring back to life your dear Bhima or the one most capable of supporting you, which is Arjuna. Why do you want your stepbrother Nakul?" Yudhisthira replies with the now famous words, "Dharma eva hato hanti dharmo raksati raksitah; tasmād dharmam na tyajāmi mā no dharmo hato avadbhī; Indeed, those who destroy dharma, are destroyed; those who protect dharma are protected by dharma; therefore, I do not renounce (or betray) dharma, (if I do) the betrayal will destroy me." He tells Yaksha that his father had two wives (Kunti and Madri) and so, at least one son of each mother could live—Yudhisthira from Kunti, and Nakula from

Madri. The Yaksha was even more impressed by Yudhisthira's intelligence and grasp of dharma in every nuance. Yaksha then revealed himself to be the god Yama (also called Dharma). He said that it was he who had morphed into a deer that snagged the *aranis* and led them to the lake. He blessed Yudhisthira, telling him that since he had adhered to dharma (righteousness), that dharma would protect the Pandavas. All four dead brothers were then brought back to life.

References

- 1 *Mahabharata*, 1.62.53.
- 2 *Ibid.* 3.313.44.
- 3 Slightly edited translation of the *Mahabharata* by Kesari Mohan Ganguli. <Yakshaprasna (Sanskrit and English Translation) - K. M. Ganguli : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive



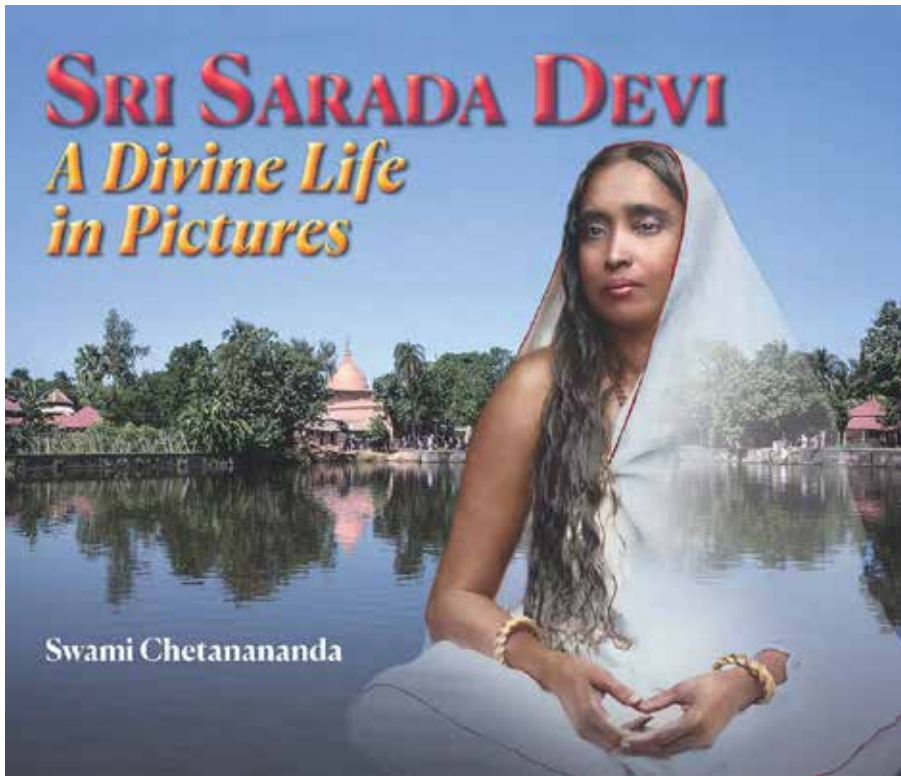
When the mind becomes purified like a mirror, knowledge is revealed in it. Care should therefore be taken to purify the mind.

Do not look at anybody in terms of friend or foe, brother or cousin; do not fritter away your mental energies in thoughts of friendship or enmity. Seeking the Self everywhere, be amiable and equal-minded towards all, treating all alike.

—Sri Shankaracharya



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Alicia was very impressed with her boyfriend's loving parents. "They're so thoughtful," Alicia said one night to Michael. "Why, I've noticed that your dad even brings your mom a cup of hot coffee in bed every morning."

After a time, Alicia and Michael were engaged and then married. On the way home from the wedding to the reception, Alicia again remarked on Michael's loving parents and even mentioned the coffee in bed.

"Tell me," she said, "does it run in the family?"

"It sure does," replied Michael. "I take after my mother."

— *Healing Through Humor* by Charles Frances Hunter, p. 18