

Voice of the Worldwide Vedanta Movement

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in South Africa—Part I

Treasure from the Attic:
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FROM THE EDITOR

Genesis of the Ramakrishna Movement and Vedanta Societies

Swami Vivekananda (frequently referred to as Swamiji) founded the Ramakrishna Mission on May 1, 1897. Swamiji, with a few of his brother monks and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna had congregated at Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. It was 3:00 p.m. Swamiji had returned from almost four years of preaching Vedanta in the West, mainly in the USA. He began to speak stirringly about the need for an organization and concluded by saying, "This Association will bear the name of him, in whose name we have become *sannyasins* (monks); him, taking whom as your ideal you are leading the householder life—this *samsara*; him whose holy name and the influence of whose unique life and teachings have within twelve years of his demise spread in such an unthought-of way both in the East and the West. Let this *sangha* (organization) therefore be named the 'Ramakrishna Mission'. We are but the servants of the Master. May you all help in this work!" Little did those assembled know the great impact that this unostentatious and informal meeting was to have on Indian and world spirituality.

Earlier, on March 7, 1897, during the birth anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, Swamiji was present, walking barefooted, wearing a monk's long robe and turban. Throngs of people had congregated for the celebrations and surged to see the great Swami Vivekananda. He was sedately strolling in the temple complex and its gardens, reverentially seeing again the divine places associated with the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna. Singling out Girish Ghosh, the great devotee, from among the thousands, Swamiji said, "What a difference between those days and these!" Girish Ghosh, quoting a passage from the epics, said, "...but there still arises the desire to see more!" And indeed, he would have been amazed to see just how much "more" in just 125 years.

Everything we perceive, remember, or do in the world has behind it a history, a long story of evolution. The human mind is incapable of processing all this complex and deep information all at once. Nothing is simple in the world, rather very ancient and complex. Nothing is ever lost; one thing morphs into another, assimilates and grows. This principle is applicable to all human endeavor and institutions.

The first seeds of the future movement were sown when Sri Ramakrishna gave the monks robes to his disciples at Cossipore. Over the years, he had trained and molded their spiritual lives to become great power-houses in order that their spirituality would transform the world. This event was just a point in the ancient spiritual timeline of India, but it would influence all the

subsequent points on that line.

Sri Ramakrishna, while terminally ill at Cossipore, had difficulty speaking because of his illness, and he would call Swamiji alone for two or three hours at a time when he would impart final instructions on various spiritual subjects as well as advise him how to organize the band of brother monks and how to guide and train them. Swamiji was singled out by the Master to lead and preach Vedanta as the Master had realized it. Sometime before he had told Swamiji, "My *siddhis* (powers) will manifest through you in time!" Sri Ramakrishna had also declared, "Naren [Swamiji] will teach." Swamiji had vehemently objected but the Master had insisted, "Your very bones will do it." Sri Ramakrishna knew things which his beloved disciple did not yet know.

The Lord says in the Bhagavad Gita, "*Dharma-samsthapanarthaya-sambhavami yuge yuge*; I embody in every age to establish Dharma." The highest dharma is to strive for *brahma-vidya*, the knowledge of Brahman. And Swamiji was clear that the Order was for "the unfoldment of *brahma-vidya*." The knowledge of Brahman is the most precious jewel in Indian spirituality and religion and is a culmination of all dharmas. Swamiji, and for that matter Sri Ramakrishna, came to re-establish this knowledge through the ancient tradition of Vedanta. Swamiji, in his reply to his welcome at the *World's Parliament of Religions* in Chicago on September 11, 1893, said, "I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions..." This ancient order of monks in the world, cultivated and protected this knowledge of Brahman from its Vedic days; and the Vedas are 'the mother of all religions.' In his subsequent teachings spanning his entire private and public life, Swamiji's message was the ancient teachings of *brahma-vidya* which had reached its zenith in himself.

Scholars say that Swamiji founded a new order of monks, never seen in India. When one studies the history of monasticism in India, we find that Swamiji was the most recent of the reorganizers of this ancient institution that had weathered many storms and yet remained standing tall. The first organizer of modern monasticism was Buddha (c. 563-483 BCE) and the subsequent reorganization occurred during the first Buddhist council in 483 BCE after Buddha attained *pari-nirvana*, complete nirvana. The second reorganization was done by Sri Shankaracharya (686?-718? CE). The third was done by Swami Madhusudana Sarasvati, the great learned monk, in the early 16th century. The

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*Cover: A recent photo of the Vedanta Society of Southern California's
Sarada Convent in Santa Barbara, California.*

**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 and, unless prior arrangements are made, no materials submitted to *Global Vedanta* can be returned.

Ramakrishna Movement...from inside front cover

latest reorganization was done by Swamiji in 1897.

When Swamiji said, “We are but the servants of the Master. May you all help in this work!” he gave equal importance to householders because Sri Ramakrishna was both an ideal monk and an ideal householder. Swamiji had seen the heights of spirituality that Sri Ramakrishna’s householder disciples, both men and women, had attained. This has been the character of the Ramakrishna movement since the beginning which will not change. In ascetic religions that grew in India, like Buddhism and Jainism, householders were subordinate to monastics. Swamiji, in keeping with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, brought in equality. Therefore, he calls Sri Ramakrishna, in his vesper’s hymn, *sama-darshana*, one who sees with the eye of equality. Swamiji gave the Ramakrishna movement its motto: ‘*Atmano mokshartham jagad hitayas cha*—for one’s own liberation and for the good of the world.’ This motto was for both

monastics and nonmonastics.

The Ramakrishna Mission has completed 125 years, but its first center, astoundingly, was the Vedanta Society of New York, in 1894! This was the seed that grew into what we see today as the Vedanta Societies in the West. And if we look at Swamiji’s saying, “I have a message for the West, as Buddha had a message for the East,” things fall into place.

The twin organizations, known as the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, has since set in motion a non-sectarian, universal spiritual movement that has been working in India and various parts of the world. Thus, in modern times this ancient system of thought has been purified, unified, and energized by Sri Ramakrishna and expounded in the modern idiom by Swami Vivekananda and thus made available to all people all over the world without any distinctions of creed or race.

Sri Ramakrishna went through the whole gamut of spiritual experiences mentioned in the scriptures. Swami Nikhilananda in *Vivekananda: A Biog-*

raphy writes: “Sri Ramakrishna was now convinced of his divine mission on Earth and came to know that through him the *Divine Mother would establish a new religious Order comprising those who would accept the doctrine of the Universal Religion which he had experienced* [emphasis ours].” After experiencing the most comprehensive spiritual experiences, it was further revealed to Sri Ramakrishna that anyone who had prayed to God sincerely, even once, as well as those who were passing through their final birth on Earth, would accept him as their spiritual ideal and mold their lives according to his universal teaching.” Every form of spirituality is now centered in Sri Ramakrishna, and he is distributing it unstintingly to the world.

Swami Satyamayananda
Editor-in-chief



WHAT IS IN A LOGO?

SWAMI ISHADHYANANANDA

Summer in Kolkata is hot and humid. The streets remain almost empty in the afternoons. People avoid outdoor activities. On such a hot and humid afternoon in May 1897, around forty people gathered at the house of Balaram Bose in the Baghbazar area of North Kolkata. Swami Vivekananda, who had returned from the West just a few months before, convened a meeting of the monastic and lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. It was Friday, the 1st of May 1897. Swamiji was staying at Balaram Bose’s house at that time.

Swamiji gave a short talk inspiring the assembled devotees to form an organization. He said that after having traveled to different parts of the world, it was his firm conviction that “no good thing can be done without organization.” That is what he saw in the West, the power of organization. He urged the group to form

an association, which would be “named after him, in whose name, indeed, we have embraced the monastic life, with whom as your Ideal in life you all toil on the field of work from your station in family life.”^{1*} Swamiji, of course, was referring to Sri Ramakrishna. The meeting ended, the name of the proposed organization was not decided yet, nor was its objective. Swamiji was just throwing out some ideas.

After that meeting, Swamiji had to confront some of the devotees, including his monastic brothers, who had doubts about the need for an organization and whether it would be in line with Sri Ramakrishna’s ideals. Swamiji convinced them all, and they got onboard.

They met again at the same place after five days on Wednesday, the 5th of May. They decided that the name of the organization would be “Ramakrishna Mission.”

They discussed, among other things, its object, mission, method of work, work in India, and work outside India. Swami Vivekananda was elected its general president.

It is important, for our purpose, to look closely at the object of the organization: It had two objectives. “(i) To propagate the principles propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and illustrated in his own life for the benefit of humanity, and (ii) to help humankind in the practical application of those principles to their spiritual, intellectual, and physical needs.”²

Four Yogas

Now, the question is: What are the “principles propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and illustrated in his own life”? Sri Ramakrishna illustrated many spiritual principles in his life: He demonstrated that it is possible to realize God; that

* See Endnotes on page 4.

God-realization is the ultimate purpose of human life; that all religions are different paths to reach the same goal, etc. Among these principles, which ones was Swamiji referring to? Alternatively, which ones were uppermost in his mind? Most importantly, what were the spiritual principles to which the members of the organization should aspire to?

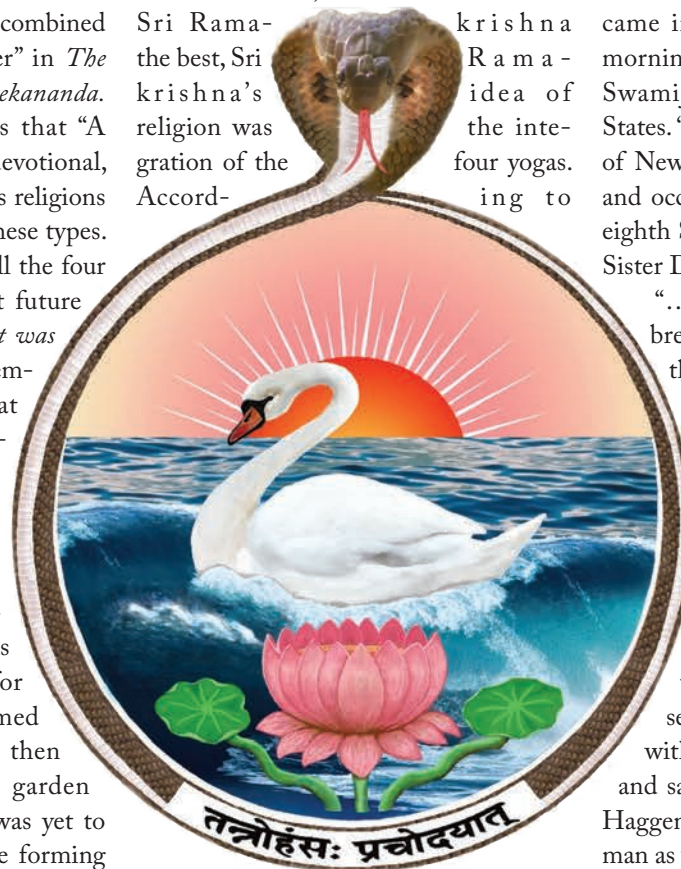
Swamiji rarely spoke publicly about Sri Ramakrishna in the West. He, however, gave two talks on Sri Ramakrishna in 1896, one in New York and the other in London. These two talks were combined and published as “My Master” in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. In that lecture, Swamiji says that “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 [Sri Ramakrishna’s] idea*”³ [emphasis ours]. Let us note that Swamiji thought that a combination of the four yogas would be “what future humanity is going to do,” and that “that was his [Sri Ramakrishna’s] idea.”

We notice the same emphasis on combining the four yogas in the “guiding principles” for the monks that Swamiji framed in 1898. The monastery was then situated in Nilambar Babu’s garden house in Belur (Belur Math was yet to be established). Swamiji, while forming the rules to guide the lives of the monks, emphasized that “the object of this Math is to form characters combining Jnana, Bhakti, Yoga, and Karma.”⁴

Then, in January 1900, during his second visit to the United States, Swamiji gave two talks on universal religion at the Universalist Church, Pasadena, Southern California. In these two talks, Swamiji spoke about a future religion that would be universal in its scope, acceptable to all, and resonate with all. Swamiji tells his audience that the closest ideal of a

universal religion is a combination of the four yogas which “will be the ideal of the nearest approach to a universal religion. Would to God that all men were so constituted that in their minds all these elements of philosophy, mysticism, emotion, and of work were equally present in full! That is the ideal, my ideal of a perfect man...To become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions is *my ideal of religion*” [emphasis added].⁵

Thus, we see that according to Swami Vivekananda, who understood Sri Ramakrishna the best, Sri Ramakrishna’s religion was the integration of the four yogas. According to



Swamiji, this should also be the guiding principle of the lives of the monks who are at the core of the Ramakrishna Mission. Furthermore, according to him, that was his ideal of religion, and that is what future humanity is going to do. Indeed, the integration of the four yogas lies at the heart of the Ramakrishna movement.

The Logo

That is what the Logo of the Ramakrishna Mission symbolizes. Swami Gambhirananda, in his book *History of the*

Ramakrishna Math and Mission, observes that “After the Math and the Mission had their men, money, programmes, rules and actual work, another thing that caught Swamiji’s attention was to devise an emblem that would tell the public at a glance of the ideas behind the twin institutions and also remind the Math and Mission members of the goal they were called upon to attain. The emblem, in short, was to depict Sri Ramakrishna’s message in a visual form.”⁶

That visual representation, the logo, came into existence casually one July morning in 1900 in New York during Swamiji’s second visit to the United States. “At that time, the Vedanta Society of New York was definitely established and occupied a modest house on Fifty-eighth Street,” writes Laura Glenn (later Sister Devamata).

“...The Swami was sitting at the breakfast table one morning when the printer arrived. He said he was making a circular for the Society and wished to have an emblem to go on it. Could the Swami suggest something? Swamiji took the envelope from a letter he had just received, tore it open, and on the clean inner surface drew the waves, the swan, the lotus, and the sun circled by a serpent...He threw the bit of paper with the design on it across the table and said, ‘Draw it to scale.’ Henry van Hagen, the printer, was an able draftsman as well as a printer. He converted the rough sketch into a finished drawing.”⁷

Swamiji’s instantaneous logo drawing suggests that the integration of four yogas as the ideal of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission was sitting at the back of his mind for a long time. It only needed urgency to be expressed.

Soon after designing the logo, he wrote to Josephine MacLeod on the 24th of July 1900 explaining, for the first time, the ideas behind the logo: “The sun=Knowledge. The stormy water=Work. The lotus=Love. The serpent=Yoga. The

swan=the Self. The Motto=May the Swan (the Supreme Self) send us that.... How do you like it?"⁸

Swami Vivekananda explained the symbolism of the logo in more detail to the artist Ranadaprasad Das Gupta, at Belur Math in 1901, after his return to India: "The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of *karma*; the lotus, of *bhakti*; and the rising-sun, of *jnana*; the encircling serpent is indicative of *yoga* and the awakened *kundalini shakti*, while the swan in the picture stands for the *paramatman* (Supreme Self). Therefore, the idea of the picture is that by the union of *karma*, *jnana*, *bhakti*, and *yoga*, the vision of the *paramatman* is obtained."⁹

The logo also has an inscription at its bottom: *tanno hamsah prachodayāt*—"may the *Paramatman*, Supreme Self, [symbolized by] the swan (*hamsa*), awaken our [higher] understanding." Let us not forget that this inscription is part of a longer mantra called *paramahansa gāyatri*: *Om hamsāya vidmahe, paramahamsāya*

dhimahi, tanno hamsah prachodayāt—"We know the *hamsa* to be identical with *paramatman*. Knowing thus, we meditate on the *paramahansa*, the supreme swan, which is none other than the *paramatman*. May that swan direct us to the supreme goal."

Interestingly, the people of then Calcutta knew Sri Ramakrishna by the name "*paramahansa*" because he was initiated into the *paramahansa* class of sannyasins, monks. In fact, he was more popular by the name "*Paramahamsadev*" than by Sri Ramakrishna. Does the great swan of the logo, then, represent Sri Ramakrishna? Was it in Swamiji's mind when he drew the logo?

Who can tell?!

Endnotes

1. "Conversations and Dialogues", *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, Vol. 6, p. 477
2. "Ramakrishna Mission Minute Book", cited in *Ramakrishna Mission Adhiveshaner*

Itibritta, edited by Swami Chetanananda, p.29

3. "My Master", *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 4, p.178

4. Gambhirananda Swami, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, Kolkata, Advaita Ashrama, 1957, p.139

5. "The Ideal of a Universal Religion", *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p.388

6. *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, pp.139—140

7. "A World Mission Draws to a Close," Sister Gargi, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 1992, Vol. 6, p. 307

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, p. 528

9. *Ibid*, Vol. 7, p. 204



HISTORY OF SARADA CONVENT, SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S UNIQUE GIFT

BY PRAVRAJIK VRAJAPRANA

As the Ramakrishna Mission celebrates its 125th anniversary, Sarada Convent at the Vedanta Society of Southern California celebrates her 75th anniversary—both events are cause for great rejoicing, and both came about because of Swami Vivekananda's will, foresight, and love.

As our convent celebrates 75 years of its existence, we can look back to see how the whole miracle came about. One thing is clear: without the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, it could never have happened. More directly, had Swami Vivekananda not come to America, there is little chance there would be American sannyasins and brahmacharinis today. It was Swamiji himself who ensured that Western women would be given the opportunity to lead lives of

renunciation and service.

While today we may take for granted women's sannyasa, it was not so in Swamiji's time, and truly only Swamiji



Shrine of the newly
constructed temple (1956)

himself could have made it a reality. In his day, giving Western women sacred monastic vows was literally unthinkable;

it was an uphill battle that only he could level.

We can feel the shockwaves in the 1896 letter that Swamiji received from his devoted disciple Alasinga Perumal. In replying to Alasinga's alarmed inquiry, Swamiji breezily confirmed, "One of my new sannyasins is indeed a woman." This scarcely credible news reached India via an article in the *New York Herald*.

Any opposition to this Swamiji merely waved off. When he returned to India, he said in an interview with *Prabuddha Bharata*, "Sannyasa is recognized in the Vedas without making any distinction between men and women." Warming to the topic, he added, "Do you remember how Yajnavalkya was questioned at the court of King Janaka? His principal examiner was Vacaknavi, the

maiden orator... Her gender is not even commented upon. Again, could anything be more complete than the equality of boys and girls in our old forest universities?"

Forest universities weren't a matter of American experience, nor were Hindu sacred monastic vows for that matter, but that didn't stop Swamiji from inaugurating them himself. He deeply believed that spiritual freedom was the goal of human life and neither gender nor nationality should interfere with that great calling.

To that end, he gave sannyasa vows in 1895 at Thousand Island Park to Marie Louise (Swami Abhayananda). Though not the most promising candidate, she nevertheless inaugurated the first Vedanta work in Australia. The point wasn't whether or not she was promising in the ordinary sense of the word: Swamiji knew that once he had set the precedent, women's sannyasa would remain as a permanent part of the Ramakrishna Order's sacred history, and America's as well. And so it has been. Swamiji gave brahmacharya in 1895 to an exceptionally promising candidate, Sister Christine. In 1896 Swamiji gave brahmacharya to Sarah Ellen Waldo, giving her the name Tatimata, in New York City. In 1899 he gave the gerua cloth of sannyasa to Sarah Bull and the white cloth of brahmacharya to Sister Nivedita.

After Swamiji's death, Swami Trigunatitananda carried on the new tradition by establishing a convent in San Francisco in 1908. Despite a valiant try, it dissolved—due to a number of factors—by 1912. Nevertheless, a convent blessed by a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was no small matter—its powerful effect and promise remained intact: Swami Ashokananda rekindled the embers when the Northern California Vedanta Convent officially began in 1959.

This long preamble leads us to Southern California, where Sarada Convent—with branches in Hollywood and Santa Barbara—officially began in 1947, under the nurturing guidance of Swami Prabhavananda, who founded the Vedanta

Society in 1930. The first nun, soon given the name Sarada, came in 1941 to Hollywood, but there was no convent to join. In its stead there was a group of dedicated spiritual aspirants living at the Vedanta Society, in the home of the saintly Sister Lalita, Carrie Mead Wyckoff, a disciple of Swami Turiyananda and one of the fabled Mead sisters who had hosted Swamiji in Pasadena.

Sarada was the first young woman to come with the ideal of becoming a nun, though more young women would have to join before a true convent could form. With Sarada's arrival in Hollywood, the daily 5-item puja was expanded to a daily 10-item puja, thus fulfilling Swami Brahmananda's instruction to Swami Prabhavananda, "Be ritualistic." The daily 10-item puja has since been conducted by the nuns in Hollywood and Santa Barbara to this day. (There are two daily pujas in Santa Barbara, one in the convent shrine and one in the public temple). On special worship days—the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Brahmananda—a 16-item puja and homa fire is performed by the nuns, along with other celebrations such as Shiva Ratri, etc. Durga Puja is celebrated in Santa Barbara and Kali Puja in Hollywood.

Interestingly, beginning in 1938, Swami Prabhavananda performed Kali Puja in Hollywood, at first only using a framed picture of Mother Kali. Then in 1938, he had a vision of Swami Brahmananda who told him to have a murti, statue, made for Kali Puja. Swami Prabhavananda then asked the artistic Brahmacharini Sarala (Khunki) to make the first murti in 1948, and since then murtis have been made every year in Hollywood for the puja.

In 1943 Barada (or Varada) came to the Hollywood Vedanta Society, after reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in the Los Angeles public library. She wrote Swami Nikhilananda in New York for further instruction, only to be told that there was a swami and a Vedanta Society in her own city, Los Angeles! While Barada was eager to join at once, her

parents forbade it until she was 21. She finally joined in 1944 and remained in the convent until her death in 2014. A skilled musician, her exquisite and original musical compositions (including putting much of the Bhagavad Gita to music) are performed in Vedanta Societies to this day.

Even more significantly, when Baradaprana went to India with several of the other nuns, she studied puja under the guidance of the renowned Swami Hitananda, the pujari at Belur Math and the author of *Worship of Sri Ramakrishna*. Baradaprana taught puja to several generations of nuns, and she performed pujas, both 10 and 16-item, as well as homa fires well into her seventies, while training the younger generations of nuns to do the same. About convent living, Baradaprana once told a younger nun with a smile, "The first 50 years are the hardest."

In 1944 Yogaprana joined the growing Hollywood community. Christopher Isherwood remembered her as "very lively and gay." He added, "It took me a long time to realize how serious and intelligent she was about religion, and how much it meant to her."¹ She spent her years doing puja, cooking, and bookkeeping and was the longtime treasurer of the Vedanta Society. Yogaprana smiled often and conveyed love and warmth, passing away in 1996.

What made a critical difference to the future of women's monasticism in the West was a decision by the Belur Math trustees in 1946 to give Swami Prabhavananda permission to establish a monastery and convent, empowering him to give vows of brahmacharya, preliminary monastic vows. At long last, it was established that we would have a real convent that would be under the protecting umbrella of the Ramakrishna Order. This was an extraordinary event, since, as Baradaprana wrote, for the first time "women were officially accepted by the Ramakrishna Order." The May 10, 1946, letter, signed by the General Secretary,

1. *Diaries*, Vol. 1: 1939–1960. Ed. Katherine Bucknell, London: Harper Flamingo, 1996, pp. 268–9.

Swami Madhavananda, said, “Resolved that the draft scheme ... for admitting monastic workers to the Order in U.S.A. be accepted, and that Swami Prabhavananda be permitted to start a monastery and a convent according to the scheme.”² It was the first time that a convent, in any part of the world, was given official sanction by the Ramakrishna Order. Included in this correspondence was the Ramakrishna Math’s “Scheme for Western People Desiring to Join the Ramakrishna Order,” which contained the noble objective to be achieved, the goal of human life:

Both these institutions [convent and monastery] will aim at God-realization through the unfoldment of the inner life, following a course of spiritual discipline, self-sacrifice, and performance of household duties on lines set forth in the rules of the Belur Math framed by Swami Vivekananda.³

The year 1947 was another significant year as the monastic ranks swelled. Since the the convent’s inception 75 years prior, young women came, inspired by the ideals of the Ramakrishna Order—realization of God and service to the world. Many came, remaining in the convent their entire dedicated lives. Others came and left, after a shorter or longer period of time. In their own way, each made their contribution. The convent benefitted from their presence and they benefitted from their years as nuns. Many have told us that their years in the convent were the best years of their lives.

Both Prabhaprana and Satyaprana joined in 1947. Since the first five nuns are our standard bearers, and few people today knew them, a short description is in order:

Philosophically minded Satyaprana discovered Vedanta after an early interest

in the Rosicrucians. Vedanta philosophy struck a very deep chord and she decided to make Vedanta her life. She was a superb cook, but was more famed for her plain-spoken manner and resolutely Western ways, which masked her profound devotion to Holy Mother. A master stamp collector and an even more avid reader, she had a largely self-taught education, her gruff exterior belied her kind heart and ability to care tenderly for others. She suffered from severe arthritis and other more serious ailments, but she

went far out of her way to be available with a ready ear to monastics, devotees, neighbors, local townspeople, gardeners, laborers, house cleaners, children, animals of all sorts—truly making everyone her own, without show and without stint.

Prabhaprana possessed a keen intelligence and was a born diplomat. She could have an enjoyable conversation with pretty much anybody, connecting to people with ease and warmth. She was a skillful business manager with impeccable manners, and both Swamis Prabhavananda and Swami Swahananda valued her advice, experience, and rare common sense. She passed away in 1998, exactly as she had wished: surrounded by her monastic sisters who were chanting, “Jai Sri Ramakrishna.”

In 1947 brahmacharya was given to two of the nuns, Sarada and Amiya, and to a young man who later became the saintly Swami Krishnananda. Swamis Yatiswarananda, Vishwananda, Vividishananda, Devatmananda, Akhilananda, Satprakashananda, and Prabhavananda were there for the ground-breaking event. The following month, all of the nuns from the Hollywood center, excepting Amiya, moved from Hollywood to Santa Barbara to establish, finally and officially, Sarada Convent. Predictably, by 1948 more help was needed in Hollywood, so two of the nuns returned there, Yogaprana and Satyaprana. In 1949 several of the nuns, then brahmacharinis, made their first pilgrimage to India, accompanied by Swami Prabhavananda.

In 1959, sanction was given by the trustees of Belur Math for the nuns to receive sannyasa vows, final vows of renunciation. At that time guidelines for running the convents were given. The letter, written by the general secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Madhavananda, further finessed and clarified the Western nuns’ standing. To clarify: In India in 1959, the first nuns of Sri Sarada Math were given sannyasa by the then president of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Shankarananda. At that point, Sri



Convent members with Swami Lokeshwarananda

didn’t let it define her. She passed away in 1983, her devotion to Mother becoming all the more visible.

If there was one person crucial to the formation of the Santa Barbara convent, it was Prabhaprana. She was its manager from 1947 until her death in 1998. It was telling that at her memorial, a number of people told us privately, “She really loved me the most!” When a nun once criticized Prabhaprana, Swami Prabhavananda sharply retorted, “But she knows how to love!” Which was true. She not only made everyone feel loved, she really did love and care for pretty much everyone, and her love and loyalty ran deep and wide. She

2. Archives, Vedanta Society of Southern California.
3. *Diaries*, Vol. 1: 1939–1960. Ed. Katherine Bucknell, London: Harper Flamingo, 1996, pp. 268–9.

Sarada Math was recognized as a completely independent organization and the full administration was handed over to the nuns from the Ramakrishna Order. Simply put, the Ramakrishna Order and Sri Sarada Math are completely separate organizations, separate in every way except a shared sacred spiritual lineage.

Wisely, however, not only did Swamis Prabhavananda and Ashokananda in San Francisco know that this would never be feasible in the West, the authorities at Belur Math understood it as well. As Swami Madhavananda wrote:

The Trustees readily agreed with you that it would not be possible to separate the convents there, as we are going to do



The “five Pranas” with former Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru of India

in India. Nor did they consider it practical to attach them to this Sarada Math. So those convents must continue to be parts of particular centers, forming a different category from those in India.⁴

Thus our monastic vows are to the Ramakrishna Order of India, and we are directly under the guidance of the swami-in-charge of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, under the larger umbrella of the Ramakrishna Order.

The first pravrajikas—Saradaprana, Baradaprana, Yogaprana, Prabhaprana and Satyaprana—received sannyasa in August 1959. Nine swamis came to Santa Barbara to participate in this extraordinary event: Satprakashananda, Pavitrananda, Prabhavananda, Vividishananda, Aseshananda, Ritajananda, Shraddhananda, Vandanananda and Krishnananda.

Swamiji’s wish that women be given

the opportunity to pursue in a monastic setting humanity’s highest goal, spiritual freedom, was being fulfilled on deeply grateful soil. This was a great landmark in American spiritual history and the Ramakrishna Order’s as well.

The five new sannyasinis made a pilgrimage to India a month after sannyasa. The “Panchapranas,” as they were humorously known, were greeted everywhere with appreciation and affection. At a time when few Western women were seen in India, seeing five sannyasinis in gerua on pilgrimage in India was an extraordinary sight. They met many dignitaries wherever they went, including Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter, Indira Gandhi. These American nuns were, after all, the very first Western pravrajikas. Swamiji’s initial precedent had borne remarkable fruit, as it has continued to do so since then.

The list of nuns who made a permanent contribution have to include more



The “Pranas” with Swami Prabhavananda

than just the first nuns to join. We need to mention Anandaprana, for example, who joined in 1952. A German-born Jewish refugee who fled the Nazis with her parents, she came upon the Vedanta Society while working in Los Angeles. It wasn’t long before she knew that’s where the goal of her life would be found. Her sharp intellect and strong work ethic were quickly put to use when she became

Swami Prabhavanada’s secretary. She also managed the Hollywood Vedanta bookstore and the Vedanta Catalog. If Anandaprana seemed a bit stiff at times, that only hid a genuine warmth and a surprising sense of fun and spot-on humor. Her first 30 years were spent in Hollywood where she served as the convent manager and then she moved to Santa Barbara, where she remained until her death in 2014, after suffering a debilitating stroke.

Bhaktiprana joined the Hollywood convent in 1954. A Juilliard-trained violinist, she directed the Hollywood women’s choir. She was also an avid pujarini, rigging up ways to sit to do puja when sitting cross-legged became impossible for her. In her older years, she was one of the convent’s first ambassadors to the larger world—learning Spanish to give lectures to Spanish-speaking audiences, and traveling outside the country to give lectures. She was confoundingly innocent and had neither a mean bone nor an angry word. She contributed as much as she could until she became severely handicapped, passing away in 2007.

Shuddhaprana joined Santa Barbara in 1954 and was instrumental in training younger nuns. She also started the convent’s bookstore in 1975. For decades the only Vedanta books available in Santa Barbara had to be trotted out weekly from boxes and assembled on a small table



Nuns with Swami Smaranananda, right, the present president of the Ramakrishna Order, and Swami Sarvadevananda, the present head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California

outside the temple on Sunday mornings. When the devotees who lived in the gate-

4. Letter of Swami Madhavananda to Swami Prabhavananda, April, 20, 1959, Archives VSSC.

house adjacent to the temple passed away, however, Shuddhaprana transformed it into a small but elegant bookstore with precious little money and a great deal of donated labor and materials. Nearly 50 years later, the store continues to prosper; moreover, it brings people to the temple who otherwise wouldn't have entered through its doors.

Shraddhaprana joined in Hollywood in 1955 in middle age, much older than

is permitted today. She had sight and hearing problems, but despite her near blindness, she was an avid reader, and read

an enormous amount for the Vedanta Catalog. Deeply sympathetic by nature, she corresponded widely with devotees as well as with inquiring or troubled souls, especially prisoners. In a letter she wrote to a seriously disabled devotee, Shraddhaprana wrote that she'd not told anyone this experience she wanted to share with her:

My recent, unanticipated experience of accepting... the surgery, the hospital stay, and continuing recovery gave me a great gift, which was the experience of complete self-surrender, unconditioned by thoughts or words. I was carried through with such freedom in my deepest heart, and something akin to joy, but much quieter, very, very still.⁵

What a blessed gift, to receive a letter conveying such words of comfort and inspiration! She passed away in 1993 with her rosary in her hand.

The 1960s brought about a wave of interest in the Hindu tradition, creating a slowly growing wave of nuns (and devotees). In 1960 Gauriprana joined

the Hollywood convent and Shaktiprana joined in Santa Barbara. Gauriprana was a miracle of cooking, puja, Sunday school, and outreach to devotees. Shaktiprana, extraordinarily well named, transformed Santa Barbara's wild chapparal into pathways, trees, plants, flowers, animals—all working harmoniously with the existing natural beauty. Meanwhile Sarada Convent continued to grow: Atmaprana joined Hollywood in 1965, Vivekaprana joined

in 1966, and Dhy-anaprana joined Santa Barbara in 1967.

With Swami Prabhavananda's death in 1976, Swami

Swahananda took the helm of the ever-expanding Vedanta Society of Southern California. In contrast to Swami Prabhavananda's approach, Swami Swahananda encouraged, sometimes badgered, the nuns into becoming more active in public work. He strongly encouraged the nuns to take up public lecturing, give classes, and engage themselves in other public Vedanta activities. With some stellar exceptions, the response was mostly heels-dug-in reluctance. Nevertheless, Swami Swahananda persisted, and eventually he won us over. He possessed an indomitable belief in women's strength and abilities, and he wanted them used to maximum effect for the benefit of the Vedanta movement.

Because of his foresight and persistence, nuns began to regularly lecture and give classes in Southern California, then branched out to other Vedanta centers (both affiliated and unaffiliated). Swami Swahananda started a number of Vedanta centers (some yet to be affiliated), so inevitably the nuns eventually began visiting and lecturing there. Most significantly, Swami Swahananda placed nuns in managerial positions as Resident Ministers at the Vivekananda Retreat in New York, at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of North Texas and at the Ramakrishna-Sarada Vedanta Center in Phoenix.

While nuns had spoken on occasion to college and high school classes who were visiting the temples during Swami Prabhavananda's years, outside engagement went into overdrive with Swami Swahananda. Nuns not only gave talks on Vedanta to schools, colleges and universities, they began actively engaging in interfaith activities. They also began to participate in programs to feed the homeless and serving victims of domestic abuse. Nuns began serving as hospital chaplains and hospice representatives. A former

editor himself, Swami Swahananda strongly encouraged nuns to write. Thus, a number of nuns began writing articles for Vedanta journals and writing books

and editing books as well. A small sampling: Brahmaprana, for example, edited Volume Nine of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* as well as Swami Turiyananda's translation of the *Vivekacudamani*. Vrajaprana wrote *Vedanta: A Simple Introduction*, while Shuddhatmaprana wrote a book on Sri Ramanuja, one on the Alvars as well as *Indian Saints and Mystics*. Another nun began engaging with the academy, speaking at schol-



With Swamis Bhuteshananda, center, and Swahananda



Recent view of the Santa Barbara Temple

5. Personal correspondence to Pamela Hoye.

arly conferences, and writing articles and books to rectify widespread misinterpretation of Sri Ramakrishna and the Hindu spiritual tradition.

We need to backtrack a bit to catch up with the growing convent: Sarade-shaprana joined in Hollywood in 1968, Krishnaprana joined the Santa Barbara convent in 1972, and then Brahmaprana in 1973 (becoming resident minister in Dallas in 2008). In quick succession, Bhavaprana joined in 1975, Deviprana in 1976 and Vrajaprana in 1977, all in Santa Barbara.

Hollywood's ranks swelled with Akhandaprana joining in 1983 (becoming resident minister in Phoenix in 2009), Gitaprana in 1984 (becoming resident minister of Ridgely in 2004), Shuddhatmaprana in 1985 (later joining Gitaprana in Ridgely in 2006). Meanwhile, Sevaprana joined the Vedanta Convent in San Francisco in 1976, then came to Sarada Convent in Hollywood in 2008. Vidyaprana joined Hollywood in 1990, as did Dayaprana in 1995, and Sitaprana joined Santa Barbara in 2000. Today's convent also includes Brahmacharinis Jagaddhatri and Durga, and a pre-probationer, Devi. We hope that the numbers of fledgling nuns will grow, and, as always, this remains in the hands of the Lord.

When Swami Swahananda passed away in 2012, the helm of the ever-expanding Vedanta Society of Southern California transferred to the capable hands of Swami Sarvadevananda. The convent has continued to flourish under his loving guidance and support, and he has consistently proved to be a source of inspiration and encouragement.

Two sannyasins who passed away in recent years need further mention, beginning with Vivekaprana. Though she was a trained musician, she was, more than anything else, a natural student who became in course of time a respected teacher. As a monastic sister said of her, "Her only real interest was Vedanta." Over time she became Vedanta Catalog editor, secretary of the Vedanta Society and its cash manager. In later years she gave classes

on the *Bhagavad Gita* and established the Vedanta Study Circle to study Vedanta philosophy and the *Brahma Sutras*. As Swami Swahananda once said about her, "Vivekaprana is one of the success stories of Vedanta." Despite debilitating Parkinson's disease and accompanying dementia, she remained cheerful and at peace until she passed in 2018.

Another memorable sannyasini who made a permanent contribution to the Vedanta work in the West was Bhavaprana, who joined Santa Barbara in 1975. She was a skilled cellist and had been a published cytologist, specializing in cancer cells. Her innate attention to detail bore fruit in her darkroom where she patiently and carefully developed photos for a large number of the Vedanta societies. A purist, she never touched up or photoshopped holy photos—"everything is in the photo," she said. What is already there simply needs to be brought out, like a statue hidden within the marble.

Bhavaprana became one of the convent's best writers and wrote a number of articles for Vedanta publications. Though she had a lifelong stammer, she overcame that obstacle and was able to give thoughtful, inspiring lectures in the temple. Amazingly, she taught herself HTML so she could learn coding, then developed our enormous vedanta.org website, and was its webmaster for many years. Though shy, she conveyed enormous great warmth and empathy. Despite suffering from Alzheimer's, her personality remained the same—loving and deeply empathetic until her death in 2021.

Time and space prevent me from writing more about the many nuns who have graced, and continue to grace, Sarada Convent for the past 75 years. The Convent has nurtured nuns with a wide variety of aptitudes and skills with a wild variety of personalities, temperaments, and attitudes. Yet all of us are united in the ideal of spiritual realization and service, the twin ideals that Swamiji bestowed upon us. With the passage of time, we can see more and more how everything was guided by the Lord's

hand. More than ever, we see that Sarada Convent came about because of pure divine grace. We have been blessed beyond measure in this life, and we pray that others will find inspiration in this amazing miracle of Swami Vivekananda.



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EIGHTY YEARS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA, PART I

SWAMI SWATMARAMANANDA

Hindus in South Africa

Between 1860 and 1911 over 150,000 Indians arrived in South Africa as indentured laborers, largely to work on the sugarcane plantations. Fewer Indians came as free men in order to engage in trade. In 1911 Indian immigration ceased totally and the government pushed for repatriation to India. Those Indians who remained in their country of adoption lived under extremely trying circumstances. They had little access to education, restricted opportunities for trade, and could not move freely within South Africa.

After 1950, when the Indian population had grown to 500,000, over one third were forcibly relocated to barren or remote under-serviced areas with inadequate or no compensation. It must be noted that only in 1961, a century after they had arrived, that the South African government reversed its repatriation policy and accepted Indians as citizens.

Swami Vivekananda wanted to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna to South Africa

The following is a letter of Swami Vivekananda:

*To Swami Shivananda
Jeypore,
27th December, 1897.*

*My Dear Shivananda,
Mr. Setlur of Girgaon, Bombay, whom you know very well from Madras, writes to me to send somebody to Africa to look after the religious needs of the Indian emigrants in Africa. He will of course send the man and bear all expenses.*

The work will not be very congenial at present, I am afraid, but it is really the work for a perfect man. You know the emigrants are not liked at all by the white people there. To look af-

ter the Indians, at the same time with a cool-headedness not to create more strife — is the work there. No immediate result can be expected, but in the long run it will prove a more beneficial work for India than any yet attempted. I wish you try your luck in this. If so, please write to Setlur about your willingness and asking more information, mentioning this letter, and god-speed to you. I am not very well, but am going to Calcutta in a few days and will be all right. —

*Yours in the Lord,
Vivekananda.*

Marie Louis Burke noted in her works

that Swami Vivekananda wanted to spread the Master's (Sri Ramakrishna's) message not only in Europe and Asia but also to South Africa, where an Indian community lived.

In her trailblazing multi-volume study, *Swami Vivekananda in the West—New Discoveries*, one of the few encyclopedic works on Swami Vivekananda's activities in the west, Marie Louis Burke (Sister Gargi) drew attention to an interesting and deeply symbolic detail.

Marie Louis Burke noted how Swami Vivekananda wanted to spread the message not only to Europe and Asia but to South Africa where an Indian community was living on uneasy terms with the British. On a request from a Bombay friend to send somebody to look after the religious needs of the Indian immigrants there, Swami Vivekananda considered for a while sending one of his young brother monks to give succor to the community.

Swami Vivekananda demanded more information on the conditions of Indians

in that region and was satisfied by a certain young barrister who was then living in Durban, Natal, and championing the rights of his people. It was none other than Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. In his letter dated 23 February 1898,

written to a high Court pleader and disciple of Swami Vivekananda in Bombay, Barrister M. K. Gandhi spoke of the need of a "religious preacher" who must "tower above all the priests here" and must be "absolutely pure minded and unselfish and



This photo and the one below show early Indian residents of South Africa



must not require money to support him.”

Speaking of the future where India will grow proactively and cater to the welfare of the Indians beyond the seas, Barrister Gandhi noted presciently, “if we are to be self-governing at any stage of our national life we would send out doctors to look after the health of our people outside India, lawyers to give them legal advice but more particularly to find out their grievances and voice them, and priests to keep up the national religions.” Barrister Gandhi concluded his letter with an appeal for the swami’s personal intervention, “could not the Swami himself,” he wrote, “be induced to pay a visit, I shall do everything I can to make his mission a success.... I very rarely write unreservedly but I thought this was one of those occasions when it is allowed and even obligatory on a man to throw off his reserve.” Barrister Gandhi’s letter was forwarded to Swami Vivekananda, who was then in Kashmir.

Early Ramakrishna Missionaries in Africa

Swami Adyananda and Swami Ghanananda, both from the Ramakrishna Mission, India, each stayed in South Africa for a few months at the invitation of the local community in 1934 and 1947 respectively. From 1959, Swami Nisreyasananda stayed in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) moving in neighbouring countries.

Swami Nischalananda: Founder of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa

However, it was left to a South African born young man, Mr Dhanagopal Naidoo (later Swami Nischalananda 1925-1965) to conceive, establish and strengthen the Vedanta movement in South Africa and give it a firm footing in Africa by forming the Ramakrishna Centre in 1942, when he was 17 years old.

From his youth Mr Dhanagopal Naidoo was inspired by the life and message of Swami Vivekananda, characterized as it was by renunciation and service. He trav-



Swami Nischalananda

elled to India in 1948 to the headquarters of The Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, where he was initiated in spiri-



Swami Nischalananda

tual life by Swami Virajananda, the sixth president of the Ramakrishna Order. He undertook further training under Swami Purushottamananda in a cave, Vashishta Guha, on the banks of the Ganga at the foothills of the Himalayas. Swami Purushottamananda was a disciple of Swami Brahmananda. Swami Nischalananda returned to South Africa in 1953 as the first South African born Hindu monk.



[Part II of this article will appear in the next issue of GLOBAL VEDANTA ONLINE.-ed.]

Swami Vivekananda Experiences Cold and Snow

Swami Vivekananda was born in a warm climate and, until he travelled to North America, had not experienced prolonged periods of cold weather or snow. Excerpts from his letters tell an interesting tale:

From the “Empress of India” ship after it landed in Vancouver (July 1893):

...From Japan I reached Vancouver. The way was by the Northern Pacific. It was very cold and I suffered much for want of warm clothing. However I reached Vancouver anyhow....

Observed from the Canadian Pacific train en route to Chicago (July 1893):

...Canada is still colder. I never saw snow on such low hills as there....

In Massachusetts (mid August 1893):

...Even now it is so cold in New England that every day we have fires night and morning....

But things changed, a few months later he seems to have adapted. In Minneapolis, Minnesota (late November 1893):

...The day I came here they had their first snow, and it snowed all through the day and night, and I had great use of the arctics (a waterproof overshoe). I went to see the frozen Minnehaha Falls. They are very beautiful. The temperature today is 21° below zero, but I had been out sleighing and enjoyed it immensely. I am not the least afraid of losing the tips of my ears or nose.

The snow scenery here has pleased me more than any other sight in this country.

I saw people skating on a frozen lake yesterday....



A Good Clean Lesson

Rabbi Epstein received a call from a wealthy businessman who was interested in exploring Judaism but had many questions. He asked if Rabbi Epstein could pay him a visit at the office, which he obliged.

The next day, Rabbi Epstein pulled up to an enormous manufacturing facility which produced soaps and other household cleaners. The company president, Aaron Miller, was there to greet him.

"Thank you for coming Rabbi," Mr. Miller said. "Let's go for a walk, shall we?"

After some small talk Mr. Miller said, "Rabbi, please help me answer this question that I've been thinking about: what good is religion, really? Look at all the trouble and misery in the world! Even after thousands of years of religions teaching about goodness and truth and love and peace, there's still war and deceit and so many terrible things. If Judaism is true, why should this be?"

Rabbi Epstein just stroked his beard in thought.

They continued walking until he noticed a child playing in the gutter. Rabbi Epstein said, "Look at that child. You say that soap makes people clean but see the dirt on that youngster. Of what good is soap? With all the soap in the world, over all these centuries, the child is still filthy. I wonder how effective soap is, after all!"



Mr. Miller, president of a soap company, protested, "But Rabbi, soap can't do any good unless it is used!" "Exactly," replied the Rabbi. "Exactly." *From Aish.com*

A Hairy Exchange

A young boy had just gotten his driving permit. He asked his father, who was a minister, if they could discuss his use of the family car. His father took him into his study and said, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your Bible a little, get your hair cut, and then we'll talk about it."

After about a month, the boy came back and again asked his father if they could discuss his use of the car. They again went into the father's study where the father said, "Son, I've been very proud of you. You have brought your grades up, you've studied the Bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut."

The young man waited a moment and then replied, "But, father, in my studies I've learned that Samson, who was loved by God and a leader of the Jewish people, also had long hair. Can't I follow in the footsteps of the great Samson?"

The minister replied, "Sure you can follow in Samson's footsteps, because he walked everywhere he went." *From Aish.com*



A Healthy Breakfast

Bill was talking to his psychiatrist. "I had a weird dream recently," he said. "I saw my mother but then I noticed she had your face. I found this so worrying that I immediately awoke and couldn't get back to sleep. I just stayed there thinking about it until 7 a.m. I got up, made myself a slice of toast and some coffee and came straight here. Can you please help me explain the meaning of my dream?"

The psychiatrist kept silent for some time, then said, "One slice of toast and coffee? Do you call that a breakfast?" By Aish.com



Charles Mathias



Charles Mathias

False Advertising

Airman Johnson was assigned to advise new recruits about GI Insurance. Captain Smith noticed that he had almost a 100% record for sales.

Amazed, the captain stood in the back of the room and listened to Johnson's pitch. Johnson explained the basics of GI Insurance, then said, "If you have GI Insurance and go into battle and are killed, the government has to pay \$200,000 to your beneficiaries. If you don't have GI Insurance and you go into battle and get killed, the government only has to pay a maximum of \$6,000."

"So, you tell me" he concluded, "who do you think they're going to send into battle first?!"

Such a Son-in-Law

A young Jew and an old Jew are riding on a bus in Jerusalem. The young Jew asks, "Excuse me, sir, what time is it?"

The old Jew doesn't answer.

"Excuse me, sir," the young Jew asks again, "what time is it?"

The old Jew still doesn't answer.

"Sir, forgive me for interrupting you all the time, but I really want to know what time it is. Why won't you answer me?"

Finally, the old Jew speaks, "Son, the next stop is the last on this line. I don't know you, so you must be a stranger. If I answer you now, according to Jewish tradition, I must invite you to my home. You're a handsome young man and I have a beautiful daughter. You will both fall in love and you'll want to get married. And tell me, why would I want a son-in-law who can't even afford a watch?"



Charles Mathias



THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DEATH

SWAMI ASHOKANANDA

[This lecture was delivered in San Francisco by Swami Ashokananda on April 21, 1940. A transcription appeared in the March 14, 1945, issue of The Voice of India. The lecture has four parts and we presented Parts I and II in the last issue of Global Vedanta ONLINE. Parts III and IV are reproduced here. This will conclude the lecture.]

Part III

You may say, “This is a strange teaching. Why should we prepare for death while living? Is it not abnormal to dwell on death?” All religions have attached great importance to death and have recommended preparation for it. Hinduism also insists on our preparing ourselves for death. It teaches that we should do this by developing proper conditions of mind; for it maintains that our state after death and our existence in the next incarnation will be determined by whatever thought we entertain at the time of passing. The thought that comes to the dying is considered not to be in any sense subject to chance but to be the result of the entire life of which the individual is taking leave. This being so, we must take great care to make our whole life a preparation for death.

I confess I dislike the idea of being at the mercy of either life or death. We belong to neither the one nor the other. Instead of preparing for either, you should rather prepare for eternity, which is beyond both. Though no doubt this idea occurs in most religions, it is certainly prominent in Vedanta. The Upanishads have often declared that here on earth we must realize the Eternal; that what we are in this life, we are in the next life also; that if we do not reach our goal in this life, we do not do so in the next. I prefer such an approach to life and death. If, however, we are still floating on the surface of life and there is no likelihood in this incarnation of our realizing the Eternal, probably the

best thing for us is to prepare for death, so that we may have peace at the time of our passing and be prepared for a more spiritual life in our next birth.

If life is lived so that one is truly prepared for death, the passing will not only be easy, but actually bring spiritual consummation. Convinced that the relations of the worldly life have no validity beyond death, one should renounce them, and thus having left the world behind, one should fix the mind on the Eternal. The Bhagavad Gita says: “He who at the time of death, meditating on Me alone, goes forth leaving the body, attains My Being. There is no doubt of this.”

That indeed instructs us concerning the ideal way to die, but can we follow the instruction? I have seen some pass in this way, raising their consciousness to a high level, fixing it on God and departing in meditation. For such a passing there must be continuous preparation, and this preparation, this training of the mind should be undertaken by all. It should be made a vital part of the plan of living. At least one period in our life should be dedicated entirely to such spiritual culture.

According to the Hindu scriptures, life should be divided into four stages of which the last should be given to complete renunciation. The first stage is student life; the next is that of the householder; and the third is the life of contemplation, into which many in India retire when they reach approximately their fiftieth year. Formerly, at this stage of life people renounced their homes and went to live as hermits in the forest. Nowadays, it is not always practicable to go to the forest; so they often seek holy places, where they can live in retirement, devoting themselves to spiritual practices.

One summer I visited the sacred city of Puri on the Bay of Bengal. There in the dark of early morning, while dawn is just breaking, hundreds of worshipers

go to the temple of Jagannatha, the Lord of the Universe. I still remember vividly the inspiration of seeing their white clad figures gleaming in the darkness, as they waited calmly for the temple door to open. Countless were the hours such devotees spent in the temple in meditation. Even in Calcutta, which is modern and not looked upon as a holy city, many men and women may be seen in the dark hours of early morning hurrying to the sacred Ganges to bathe and meditate. I remember the face of a woman I once saw returning from the river. She was the very personification of profound meditation— infinite calm and power dwelt in her eyes. I cannot forget that face.

Preparation for death must be started long before we die—years and years of effort should be devoted to it. When children are grown and our duties to family and community are finished, we usually hope to spend our remaining years in recreation, perhaps in travel, but this is not the right way to spend those precious years.

Why live on the surface of life forever? Having discharged his duties, a man should dive deep into contemplation. He should penetrate the depths of life and find its true meaning. He should be able to go deep into his soul, to enter into the holy of holies of his being and through it reach the heart of the universe. When we have finished with our duties and responsibilities, it is surely time to devote ourselves to spiritual practice. By doing so we not only fulfill our higher possibilities but also become of great service to the community.

Rather than blame young people for their unrestrained life, we should censure the old who set a bad example. If the young could see around them older men and women who were the very embodiments of sincerity, love, and purity, they would feel inspired by their example. Do not think yourself useless in middle

age and old age because you cannot frisk about like the young. If these later years are devoted to the quieting and purifying of the mind, to the spiritualization of thought and life, the greatest achievement of life can be made, and death will not mean destruction but fulfillment.

However, no one seeks the truth and joy of contemplation or tries to quiet the mind unless he first assimilates the basic truth that there is nothing on the surface of life, that life and reality as we ordinarily know them are always changing and vanishing away. Such is indeed one of the great truths to be learned from death. The dying and the dead impress it on the minds of those they leave behind, who can benefit from it if they so wish.

Picture existence to yourself. Consider how the soul moves from birth to childhood, manhood, old age, and death. Hindus have a term for this movement—samsara. It means continuous movement, transmigration. Each of us must assimilate the truth of samsara. Do you think anyone should resist this continuous movement and change? Should I expect my childhood to return, or hold forever to my present condition or being? If I am intelligent I shall not attempt to cling to anything. I shall let everything move, change, and pass away; only I shall try to extract the best from every moment. The continuous movement, signifying that the soul is passing through many stages, does not cease with death but continues to an ultimate end. What is this destination? Our limited personal experience may not always disclose its nature, but we have the knowers of God and the scriptures to enlighten us.

Our ultimate end is conceivable only in terms of the Absolute, for nothing limited and relative can be permanent. To attain our destiny we have to realize the state of infinitude beyond all time and conditions, and to reach that state we must undergo disciplines to break our bondage to the finite. Our present life has justification only to the extent that it succeeds in breaking it.

The basic cause of bondage is ig-

norance, the belief that we are limited mortal beings, rather than the free, self-fulfilled spirit. Our bondage is composed of the many attachments we have formed and for the many cravings we have for worldly possessions and joys. We rid ourselves of our attachments and cravings partly by satisfying them and learning the emptiness of such satisfaction and partly by reasoning, through which we become convinced of their unreality. Understanding gradually dawns and grows clearer until we realize that we are pure spirit. It is thus that we solve the problems of life. The soul goes on moving from incarnation to incarnation until it realizes that it requires no further experience, because everything to be known it has found within itself.

This is the general picture of the journey of the soul, a journey which is punctuated not only by the ceaseless and comparatively small changes in our lives but by the recurrent and revolutionary change called death. As we would not resist the little changes, so we should not resist the profound change, death, because it is urgently needed in the long journey undertaken by the soul.

Why is death urgently needed? After the soul has lived here in the flesh for a long time, the mind and body tire of activities and decline sets in, so that we no longer assimilate further experience and forget even what we once knew. At this time rest is of course called for, and death is a wise provision. Is it not better to depart for a period of repose and come back to learn anew? Death is indeed a most welcome friend when it comes at the proper hour.

When life is comprehended as part of a larger scheme of existence and attainment, it at once becomes truly purposive. Then we grow aware of an eternal fulfillment toward which we are moving. This eternal end does not belong to any particular time or space but, being eternal and infinite in nature, is forever existent and therefore inherent in our life, perceivable here and now. We do not perceive it because our present mode of perception is

distorted by our partial recognition of reality, by our identification with superficial life, and our complete ignoring of death.

If we could with an equal mind welcome the two aspects of the long journey of the soul, that is, both life and death, our perception would become clarified and the truth would be immediately recognized.

It is to bring to our consciousness the need of such equanimity that death always follows life, that even through life it comes in disguise almost every day. Is not life really another name for death? Our present is reared upon the extinction of our past. Anything that happens can happen only because what preceded it is gone. Thus, we are continually accompanied by the shadow of death through the twenty-four hours of every day, although we may fail to recognize it.

In falling asleep, do we not really enter into death? Every night nature separates us from the waking world, the only world that is real to us. We become virtually dead. We do not see, hear, or perceive anything; we are not aware of our near and dear ones; we become unconscious of all the relationships of earthly life. Every night we are made to pass through this experience, but we simply call it sleep and do not try to understand it in any deeper sense.

If we study ourselves we shall notice that we exercise most of our deeper faculties unconsciously and instinctively. We do many remarkable things. We have great power or self-withdrawal, but it is unconscious. We separate from this life, this body, and even the mind; we actually attain the transcendental Self every day, but we do so unconsciously. If we could effect all this consciously, it would at once disclose profound meaning to us. Death is indeed a withdrawal, a separation from superficial life, but it is involuntary. When we can die, that is, withdraw and separate from life, consciously and deliberately, we shall perceive death differently and succeed in balancing life and death in one single perception—and we shall become free from the bondage of life. This is what

is meant by combining life and death. We should practice this combination in everything we do. We should learn to die deliberately.

I have already mentioned what death means subjectively, that is, to the one who dies, but we are now ready to consider it further. Suppose I died a moment ago, what do you think is the state of my consciousness now? What am I thinking and feeling? I discover that the preoccupations of the life I have just left behind are no longer valid. Whatever I possessed in life is now beyond my reach and useless to me. All the relative things that harassed me have entirely lost significance. The world I knew when endowed with a body and a limited number of senses has changed its character, and another world is appearing before me. Many things which I did while living and thought worthwhile seem meaningless now, and I find that I wasted my time.

Such being the implications of death, let us say to ourselves as we deliberately practice dying while living, "We shall hold to that alone which is immortal." What is it that survives death? Should we give up all human relationships? No, that is not my meaning. We can know any man in terms of impermanence or of permanence. We can relate ourselves to him as a temporal or as an eternal being. If we want to include death in our scheme of life, we shall wisely relate ourselves to the eternal rather than to the temporal in him. We shall give recognition only to what will survive change, destruction, and death. We shall pay attention not to the changeable but to the unchangeable alone.

Here some of you may say, "We admit an eternal element in every thing and every being, but how about the infinite number of duties that have to be done? We must earn our living, help others, and share and fulfill the common responsibilities of life, and these concerns do not pertain to the eternal. How then can we combine life and death in our existence?" You are justified in asking this, for our usual activities apparently have no eternal meaning. But when even these are done

in the right spirit, they partake of the character of the eternal.

If I prepare a meal to satisfy my own hunger or because I am fond of delicacies, the act is earthly and binding, but if I do it as an offering to the Lord who dwells within me and also in the heart of the hungry man to whom I may offer it, then it takes on the character of a sacrament. Everything can be done in the sacramental spirit. I am aware that even when our daily activities are done in this spirit, they are still not absolutely eternal, but they are very close to the eternal and therefore much less binding.

If a man works eight or nine hours a day in order to earn two hundred dollars a month, little time or strength remain for spiritual practice. But if he earns this money thinking not of self-gratification or enjoyment but of learning to manifest his soul and to help others to work out their spiritual destiny, and if he devotes whatever he can spare to charity, then the earning of the money becomes worship.

To illustrate the point further, let me say that although speaking to you of spiritual truths is a spiritual action, even that becomes unspiritual if I do not maintain true ideas about you and this action of mine. If I fail to perceive the eternal in you, whatever I do will only have temporary value, will belong to death, and death will claim it; it will not prove eternal. But if I have the right attitude, this action will not be an obstruction to the realization of the eternal consciousness.

So we try continually to reach the eternal in everything we know or do, and in this way gradually become detached from the superficialities of life. Do you understand what a spiritual man does? He not only conquers life here but also conquers death here. He dies while yet in this world. I mean that he consciously and deliberately experiences here and now what occurs at death, and that he thereby transcends death.

We have seen that the process of dying means complete separation from the body, from attachments to the outside world, and from the allurements of life. Any of

us can deliberately accomplish such separation now. If we are not attached to this body, it dies, as it were, even while we are yet living in it.

You may ask, "Should we refuse to breathe? Should we prevent the body from functioning?" Yes, if you could do so as a master, that would certainly be a conquest of the body and of life, and the body and life would trouble you no more, nor would this be suicide. But since very few can do so as a master, what I suggest is this: conquer the body that it may cease to clamor for anything. Then even when hungry, it will not trouble you. However, hunger is less pernicious than some of the other bodily cravings which hold one down to life and consequently to death and which completely obstruct spirituality. All obstructions, whether small or large, have to be eradicated.

You can indeed overcome all obstructions now, and when separation from the body is achieved—yes, friends, by gradual degrees one at last comes to feel distinct from it every moment—you will know that you are the Infinite One, that you are pure Spirit, master of both life and death. Your mind will stand still; and though apparently continuing to live on earth, though apparently continuing to work, to feel, and to know, you will nevertheless perceive the great Silence—the formless transcendental Being and Consciousness underlying all superficial activities.

Part IV

When such detachment and separation are realized, death reveals to us a yet profounder aspect. Neither the dying nor those left behind understand this aspect unless they have already acquired spiritual vision, unless they have incorporated death in life and thereby corrected distorted perception. Having done so they are at last in a position to perceive death at its deepest.

Our infinite experience is marked by infinite changes, many of which we cannot even perceive at the time of their occurrence. When one state is followed by another state, there is between them an

unnoticeable interval. What is the nature of this hiatus? What is the nature of the indefinable moment which is neither this state nor the one that follows? Of the long series of intervals, I would like to picture the particular interval when this life has ceased to be and the next life has not yet begun. What is that indefinable interval?

Let us say that I have been separated from earthly existence by death. The relative life and the consciousness connected with it fall away from me. I no longer feel that every Sunday morning and Wednesday evening I must appear on the platform or that I must sleep, eat, work, meet people—all these infinite temporal details have entirely disappeared. Of course, if I have not already attained the Eternal, another life with similar details is lying in wait for me. But the moment between these two lives—what is it?

Often we think of death as a long peaceful sleep, a cessation of all experience and activity. Such thought certainly does not infer a deep understanding of death. Nevertheless, even such an understanding contains a fragment of a truth which often eludes us, the truth that the real nature of death is the complete negation of this life and all that pertains to it, that in death nothing remains. Buddha recognized this truth. That is why he called the full realization of it nirvana, by which he meant both extinction and illumination.

The subtle nature of death that we have tried to understand as the moment between two changes or the moment between two lives, completely eludes a mind devoid of subtle perception. But when death is understood in this true way, it is the same as the realization of pure Spirit, because in that, too, all forms are extinct.

Do you know when the highest truth is revealed to us? In that one moment. In it the Transcendental flashes, but before we are aware of it, another life seems to overshadow it. That moment of nonexistence, that moment of death, contains the essence of truth. Have you ever noted how the hum of conversation in a crowded room can lapse suddenly for a moment

into absolute silence, which is shattered the next moment by resumed conversation? That moment of silence illustrates death as we are now trying to understand it—death which is of the nature of the Supreme Divinity. We have a name for God—Mahakala, the Great Death. Do not think that such a name is indicative of morbidity—it shows a very profound understanding of the Divine nature.

The word Mahakala also means the Great Time. Have you ever tried to perceive pure time? As we cognize it, time is like a stream, the surface of which is so covered with floating things that we are unable to see the stream itself. Events crowd and hide time, so that it is never revealed to us in its true nature; but if events were eliminated, we would know pure time, pure duration. We would then find time or duration to be the same as eternity, the same as death. Death in its essential nature is not an event; it is therefore realizable at any time and is far more fundamental than life as we know it.

Life is like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. As the leaf floats above the pool, drops of water sometimes splash upon it, shine and tremble with the passing breeze, and then fall into the pool again. If the drop of water on the lotus leaf is life, the water in the pool is death. Life slips into death. Falling into the pool and mingling with its water does not mean loss and destruction to the drop, but a realization of and release into infinity. True death is really a most wonderful revelation. Infinite peace is there, infinite joy and fulfillment. As a mother takes her child to her breast in deep affection, so the Great Death gathers us into its arms, and in that embrace we feel loving union with the Eternal.

In Paris a young man came to Swami Vivekananda and sought to become his disciple. The Swami said, "You want to follow me? Then you will have to embrace death. I teach death!" The young man grew frightened and went away, but later he came to America and told this story to one of our swamis, saying that now he understood what Swamiji meant and that

he would follow him if he were yet here.

How true it is that neither life nor death is what we ordinarily think it to be! To understand life we must transcend the life of the body and the lower mind and try to perceive reality in the higher consciousness, which is truer and more certain than our so-called normal consciousness. We who are left behind can never really know death by observing it from the outside. If we ourselves were to die this moment, even then we would not understand it, unless we were properly prepared. But if we dive deep into this life, then indeed we shall be able to perceive profound meaning in death.

Let me reiterate the facts concerning the true nature of death. It reveals to us the great truth that reality is not on the surface. In a more intimate revelation, it is seen by us as identical with the Eternal, the Highest Consciousness, the Great Death, the Great Time. In it time and eternity are one, in it life and absence of life are one.

This is the one truth, the only truth. If we want to understand death in this way and conquer both life and death, the practical thing is to unite death and life here and now. Make room for death in the scheme of your life, not in a morbid way, by sleeping in coffins or wearing long faces, but in a heroic way, with knowledge and understanding. You will find there is nothing more stimulating in life than death.

[This concludes Swami Ashokananda's lecture.]



VEDANTA NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

USA

Three Vedanta Societies welcomed four Assistant Swamis from India in 2022. Swamis Sumanasananda and Medhananda were posted as assistant ministers to the Vedanta Society of Southern California. Swami Bhaswatananda took charge of the Vedanta Center of Greater Washington, D.C. in July 2022. Finally, Swami Shivacharananda has been posted as Assistant Minister to The Vedanta Society of St. Louis.



Swami Sumanasananda

Swami Sumanasananda was ordained as a monk of the Ramakrishna Order in 1991 by Most Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, the 12th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. From 1980 to 2009, the Swami served in various capacities at different Centers. His postings included, amongst others, Hostel Superintendent and Principal of the Ramakrishna Mission High School at Ramharipur and Principal of the Ramakrishna Mission Higher Secondary School at Malda, both in West Bengal.

From May 2009 to March 2015, the Swami served as Head of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunjee, Meghalaya (North East India) which at that time, ran 68 schools, with nearly ten thousand students and 300 teachers, located in various parts of the State. Swami Sumanasananda published a number of books in different languages on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda

in commemoration of Swamiji's 150th Birth Anniversary and toured extensively, giving spiritual discourses in seven states of North-Eastern India.

Swami Sumanasananda was posted to South Africa as President of The Ramakrishna Center of South Africa in July 2015. The Swami was instrumental in the re-affiliation of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Lusaka, Zambia to the Ramakrishna Mission. During his time, a new Center, The Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Cape Town was set up and was officially opened by most revered Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj (Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission) in December 2019.

He has also been instrumental in expanding the services of The Ramakrishna Clinic of South Africa, Durban (which provides free medical services) throughout Kwa-Zulu Natal.

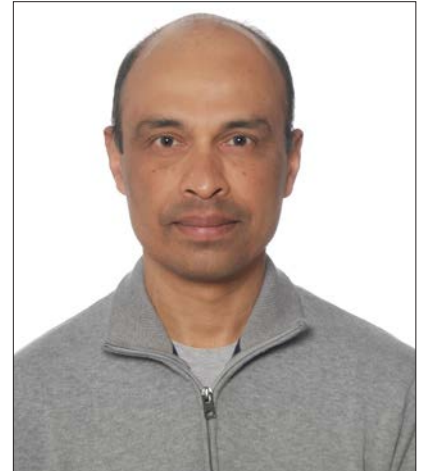
Under his guidance, a new multipurpose Wellness Centre was constructed at the Durban Centre for rendering various services to the community.



Swami Medhananda

Swami Medhananda has been posted as monk to the Vedanta Society of Southern California. He joined the Order in 2010 and received Sannyasa in 2020. He was posted in India from 2010 to 2021, at Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (formerly Vivekananda University). From 2021 to 2022, he was in Mysuru; arriving in the

USA in August 2022 to take up his new posting from 2022.



Swami Bhaswatananda

Swami Bhaswatananda became resident monk at the Vedanta Center of Greater Washington, D.C. in July 2022. He joined the Ramakrishna Order as a novice in May 1982 at the Ramakrishna Math, Bengaluru, India. Here he spent five years and ten months (May 1982 to March 1988) undergoing monastic training. From April 1988 to March 1990, he was at the Probationers' Training Center (seminary of the Ramakrishna Order), at Belur Math.

He then was posted for seven years (April 1990 to April 1997) at the Headquarters Office of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, where he worked as an office assistant at the audit & consolidation department, while also contributing articles for the Order's journals and reviewing books for them. He was ordained a monk in 1993.

He was then posted for nine years and four months (April 1997 to August 2006) at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas, where he served as associate editor of the Order's English journal Prabuddha Bharata.

For fifteen years and six months (December 2006 to May 2022): he shouldered the responsibility of assistant minister of Vedanta-Gesellschaft, Germany—conducting retreats, maintaining

the ashrama, giving weekly scripture classes for devotees and students, and the editing and publication of the Society's German-language trimonthly Vedanta.



Swami Shivacharananda

Swami Shivacharananda has been posted as Assistant Minister to The Vedanta Society of St. Louis. He joined the Order in 2001 at Ramakrishna Mission, Deoghar and had Sannyasa in 2011. He was at Deoghar from 2001 to 2005 and the Probationers' Training Center from 2005 to 2007. He was posted to Jayrambati and Koalpara from 2007 to 2017 and at Udbodhan from 2017 to 2021. He arrived in the USA for his latest posting in April 2022.

INDIA

The first phase of the Abhedananda Convention Centre was inaugurated on October 1, 2022.

Swami Abhedananda was an illustrious monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda chose him as his successor for preaching Vedanta in America and Europe. For nearly twenty-five years (1897-1921), he spread the eternal message of Vedanta in the West and captivated their hearts and minds. After returning to India, he continued the mission to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He was not only a powerful speaker but also a prolific writer. All his writings and speeches are available in a set of eleven volumes containing 6242 pages. Hence, it was imperative to have a memorial in his

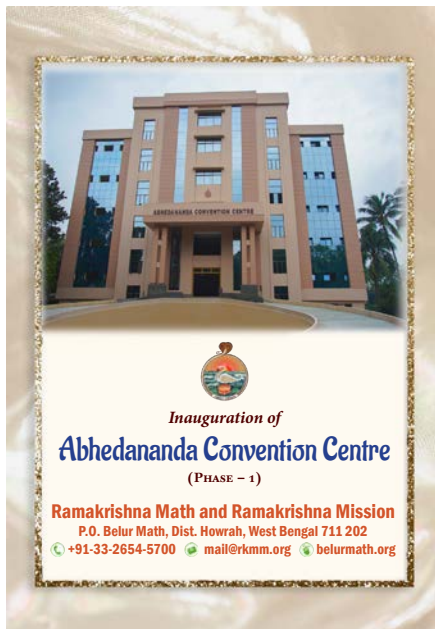
name in the hollowed Belur Math.

This project is now in progress. You are well aware of the significance of Belur Math as a very sacred place of pilgrimage. Throughout the year, it attracts thousands of people from all over the world.

Although Belur Math has almost all the necessary public amenities, there was a long-felt need for a state-of-the-art auditorium in Belur Math. To address this need, we took up the construction of Abhedananda Convention Centre.

In this Memorial building, there will be two separate meditation halls, one dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna and the other to Sri Sarada Devi for men and women devotees, respectively. We wanted to create a place for serious spiritual seekers to meditate, which will help them to regain spiritual serenity and strength. Both the meditation halls are air conditioned and to address exterior or interior noise, were made soundproof.

We reproduce here the four page invitation to the Phase One Inauguration issued by Belur Math. It contains a clear explanation of what has been done in the first phase and contains nice renderings of the buildings and auditoriums.



Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Belur Math

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are extremely glad to inform you that **Abhedananda Convention Centre (Phase-1)** at Belur Math will be inaugurated by **Srimat Swami Smaranandaji Maharaj**, President of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, on the auspicious **Maha Shashthi**, Saturday, **1 October 2022**, at 10:00 am. You are cordially invited to attend the inauguration with your family and friends.

The 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Abhedananda was celebrated with various activities and programmes in the year 2016-17 by the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. One of the projects envisaged on that occasion was the construction of a large auditorium on Belur Math grounds for holding conventions and meetings. Accordingly, the construction of Abhedananda Convention Centre was started in late 2017. A portion of this building, which is now ready for inauguration, consists of two smaller auditoriums on the ground floor, two meditation halls, a few offices, 30 rooms for monks and other facilities.

We once again solicit your kind presence in the inaugural function.

Swami Abhedananda's Birthday Yours in the service of the Lord,
19 September 2022 Swami Suvirananda
General Secretary

Facilities in Abhedananda Convention Centre

1. Auditorium (Main)	1700 seats on 1st to 4 th floor
2. Auditorium -II	360 seats on lower ground floor to 1 st floor
3. Auditorium -III	340 seats on ground floor
Total capacity	2400 seats
4. Meditation hall-2 nos.	100 seats each on ground floor
5. Permanent exhibition hall	on ground floor
6. Bookstall	on lower ground floor
7. Residence for senior monks	30 rooms
8. Website department office	4 rooms
9. Green rooms - 2 nos.	
10. Pantry	
11. Bhava Prachar Parishad office	2 rooms on 3 rd floor
12. Auditorium office	2 rooms on 1 st floor
13. Yoga hall	on 5th floor
14. Conference hall	40 seats on ground floor
15. Lifts - 5 nos.	
16. Staircase - 7 nos.	
17. Ramp	

The three auditoriums in the **Abhedananda Convention Centre** will be used to host the following programmes for the devotees, general public and the youths throughout the year:

- ❖ Devotees' Conventions / Spiritual Retreats
- ❖ Youths' Conventions
- ❖ Values Education Workshops
- ❖ Lectures and seminars on topics related to religion, philosophy and Indian culture
- ❖ Cultural programmes

Further, the Convention Centre will also be used to hold Heads' Conference, Monks' Conference, General Body Meeting of Ramakrishna Mission, Foundation Day Celebration of Ramakrishna Mission, and other conventions for the members of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

CANADA

The Vivekananda Vedanta Society of British Columbia, Vancouver, conducted their 2-day Annual Retreat at the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts, Burnaby, BC, on the 10th and 11th of September, in which 39 devotees from the USA and Canada participated. The retreat was conducted by Swami Vimohananda on the topic: "The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita according to Swami Vivekananda". The program consisted of talks, devotional songs, Q & A sessions, guided meditation, and arati.



Swami Vimohananda and Retreatants at the Shadbolt Centre, Vancouver, B.C.



*The Vedanta Society of Western Washington
and Global Vedanta Online wish all our
readers a Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year.*



CONTRIBUTORS

Swami Ashokananda (1893–1969), a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, was head of the Vedanta Society of Northern California in San Francisco from 1932 to 1969.



Swami Ishadhyanananda is the Assistant Minister at the Vedanta Society of Sacramento, California.



Charles Mathias is a devotee and member of the board of directors of the Vedanta Society, Seattle, and a gifted cartoonist and artist. The cartoons contained in this issue of *Global Vedanta* are his contributions.



Swami Satyamayananda is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order. He has been assigned to the Vedanta Society of Western Washington as assistant swami-in-charge. He also serves as editor-in-chief of *Global Vedanta*.



Swami Swatmaramananda is the Swami-in-Charge of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa.



Pravrajika Vrajaprana is a nun at the Vedanta Society of Southern California's Sarada Convent in Santa Barbara.

