

Sri Sarada Society Notes

Dedicated to Holy Mother

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THE THREE PURITIES: FOLLOWING MOTHER'S EXAMPLE

Adapted from an article by Annapurna Sarada, associate editor of NECTAR OF NON-DUAL TRUTH (Advaita-Satya-Amritam), a quarterly journal of universal philosophical and religious teachings, published by the Sarada Ramakrishna Vivekananda Associations of Oregon, San Francisco and Hawaii, <http://www.SRV.org>

When translated into English, Holy Mother's three favorite words all begin with the letter 'p': purity, patience and perseverance (*shuddhi*, *dhriti* and *avastitha*). This is one of the foundational teachings that I received from my teacher. Easily memorized, it readily becomes a source of endless reflection and insight for living a divine life. For the purposes of this article, we will focus on purity. There exists a classic system delineating three aspects of purity that provides a useful framework for appreciating this most intrinsic quality of our Mother Sarada.

Dravya shuddhi refers to associating with objects and places that are sattvic by nature, as well as maintaining their cleanliness. By handling them, or being in their presence, one develops devotion for God, contentedness, dispassion, exaltedness of mind and other components of spirituality. Speaking of the power of subtle influences, Holy Mother has said, "As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it or the scent of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, one becomes spiritually awakened by continuously contemplating God."

Kriya shuddhi refers to performing those actions that are righteous and nonharmful, neither driven by egoistic desires and attachments nor by aversion. When one becomes naturally disposed to good action and free of the need to discriminate at this level, one next learns to discriminate between the actions of the body and mind in contrast to the actionless state of the Self. With respect to her own awareness, Holy Mother commented that "even in the midst of my activities, whenever I wish I can understand by the slightest effort that all this is the mere play of Mahamaya."

At the fundamental level, *Chit shuddhi*, purity of mind, requires a maturity of discipline in the other two "purities." The practice of mental purity consists of making the mind one-pointed. Engaging in *non-sattvic* actions and associating with impure objects, persons and places create distractions in one's mind, thwarting inner peace and cre-

ating obstacles to spiritual practice. Holy Mother tells us, "Know the worldly objects to which the mind is drawn to be unreal and surrender your mind to God."

When the mind finally tends toward one-pointedness, one gradually realizes that the Self is distinct from the body and mind. Even this is still a stage, for as Holy Mother explains, "After nondual knowledge dawns, God and all else vanish into nothing... In the end, Mother pervades the whole universe. Everything becomes one. This is the simple truth."

It is with this in mind that we can cherish the sublimity of Mother's life, a life that was the perfection of conventional purity and dharma while exceeding their limitations. Her realization far transcended the idea of purity based upon a dualistic outlook consisting of right and wrong, virtue and vice, and so forth. Purity that is understood only in terms of what is impure does not culminate in the highest Wisdom. Holy Mother, herself, was established in the highest nondual Reality that simultaneously supports, permeates, and transcends relative existence with its attendant pairs of opposites. This explains how she could give such practical and compassionate guidance to spiritual aspirants in any mode of life, set an unceasing and sterling example of right action, and at the same time be perfectly spontaneous according to the needs of the moment.

Holy Mother shows us the culmination of *dravya* and *kriya shuddhi* resulting from her pure mind and universal Motherhood. Sri Ramakrishna kept a loving and protective eye on Holy Mother. She obeyed him implicitly in most matters, but when he told her not to associate with a woman known to have led an impure life, she refused. In Holy Mother, we find that through her pure mind, which was based upon the knowledge of the Self and not merely on the diligent observance of conventional purity, she was not only incorruptible but actually conferred purity on others, as seen by those whose characters were reformed by her presence.

Holy Mother emphasized that it is the mind that is first made impure, and then one sees impurity externally. From
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IN MOTHER'S WORDS: "It is harmful if the mind is drawn to worldly objects like money and members of one's family... You should constantly discriminate between the real and the unreal."

TAKING LIFE IN STRIDE

Pravrajika Bhaktiprana, senior nun with the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, shares experience and insight on aging and disability.

Q: How does a devotee deal with changes in the body as one ages, and how does it integrate into one's spiritual life?

Well, it seems to me that these things come on so gradually that one is not really aware of what's happening. As far as physical handicaps go, sometimes they start very early in life and you do not really realize the extent of what's going on. For instance, the onset of my ankylosing spondylitis was when I was first out of college in 1945, and I passed it off just thinking it was nerves. It wasn't until 20 years later that I discovered I had an arthritic ailment of ankylosing spondylitis, arthritis of the spine, which is a hereditary condition. That makes one a little more objective about one's ailment, knowing that you have something that you cannot prevent. When I told my father, he said, "Oh, yes, your grandfather had it." So that puts a new light on it. It is not something that you have done particularly, or something that you can help. It is just a factor that you have to deal with and find out what you can do to make it bearable or better or improved in whatever way is possible...

I think one has to consider there is a fact of karma, and everybody has something, some kind of ailment or some kind of debilitation that comes sooner or later. So you just accept that this is par for the course. This is what I've got. Somebody else may get cancer or some other horrible ailment. I think that when it comes on slowly or at an early age, that you have more opportunity to just accept it and find out in a very matter-of-fact way what you can do to improve it or what you can do to prevent its getting worse or slow down its getting worse.

Q: What about the osteoporosis?

I didn't discover I had osteoporosis until a few years ago when they gave me a bone scan. I was a little disappointed in my doctors, that they didn't suspect... So, well, now I've got osteoporosis. What do I do for it? Get some medicine, do some exercise and surrender it to the Lord. Everything may be done as an offering to God. We try to offer up our very best. But when we haven't got the best to offer, we offer what we have. It reminds me of the story of Krishna dancing on the serpent. The serpent tells him, "Well, Lord, all I have to offer is poison. That's the best offering I can give you."

When you first receive the news that you have something incurable or irreversible, it may hit you like a blow. One can't help but be upset briefly about it. But later you can be more objective and think that other people have

things that are worse. No matter how bad it is, one can always think of instances that are worse, and be glad one does not have something that turns out to be worse than what you have. I think that having an inner life, some kind of spiritual discipline, spiritual beliefs, ambitions, or faith does help one to prepare for aging as well as for any calamities that may happen in one's life. I think it makes it easier to stand back and be a little bit more detached. Finding out one has an incurable illness is, naturally, a shock. But one can come to terms with it, I think, by just remembering that it is the body. Even though you feel it in the body—you feel the suffering, and sometimes it may be to a point where you cannot keep your equanimity—I think if one works at just trying to put it at the Lord's feet, and surrender to the Divine Mother, or whatever aspect appeals to you, that one can overcome it to some extent.

Learning and growing towards fullness of being happen as one continues one's spiritual practice. Even though it is frustrating sometimes when the mind does not cooperate, which may be most of the time, at least one has the satisfaction of knowing one made the effort. That is as much as we can do, make the effort and then leave the rest to karma, to the grace of the Lord, or however you want to put it.

There are occasions when one may be falling apart briefly, but rather than just throw up one's hands and say, "Why me?" think instead, "Why not me, why not this?" You know, everyone has to go through something. Rather than try to escape, it is better to just try to accept whatever comes and detach yourself from it. ☺

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the ultimate standpoint, it is not a matter of *making* things pure by the practice of cleanliness or avoiding pollution from contact with objects and places, as in the lower practice of *dravya shuddhi*. Nor is it the performance of endless rites and charitable acts that make one's actions pure with regard to *kriya shuddhi*. Purity itself lies in recognizing the purity of the Self. Yet, this is not recognized without spiritual self-effort. More than any other practice Holy Mother prescribed *japa* (repeating the Divine Name) for purification of body and mind: "The mantra purifies the body. One becomes pure by repeating the Mantra of God." In view of the three purities, *japa* is a perfect synthesis. The mantra is one with the Deity, thus placing the sensitive and focused practitioner in the holiest of company. The body and mind are both the tools used and the holy place wherein this sacred action of *japa* practice takes place. Mother is known to have regularly repeated the mantra 100,000 times a day for the benefit of her disciples. Thus has she earned the reverent epithet, *Japaharini Devi*, "She who confers salvation through the Holy Name."

AN HISTORICALLY SACRED SETTING

During the centenary of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Raghavananda searched for places sanctified by the visit of Sri Ramakrishna and came across the house of the sweeper of the temple garden of Dakshineswar, Rasik, who would call the Master "Father." One day as the Master returned from the Panchavati, Rasik, though of the lowest caste, boldly approached him and, falling prostrate before him, prayed, "Father why don't you bless me. What will happen to me?" Full of compassion, the Master assured him, "You have no need to fear. You will have your wish fulfilled. You will see me at the time of death." Under the cover of night, Sri Ramakrishna had visited Rasik's house to clean the open drain with his own hair in order to destroy the pride of being a Brahmin.

Shortly before his death, Rasik requested his sons to carry him outside to a holy spot, a nearby tulsi plant. At the moment of death, he cried out in astonishment, "You have come to me, Father! You have really come, Father." The Master gave him immortality.

The property was gifted to Sri Sarada Math in 1998. A four-level building has been constructed on the site. On November 23, 1999, Most Revered Shraddhapranaji Mataji, President of Sri Sarada Math, laid the foundation stone.

The new center opened this fall. Among activities to be offered are computer and language classes for the poor and meritorious girls of the locality, and seminars and scripture classes. The second level will house a permanent display of the history of Sri Sarada Math since its inception. Looking out from the meditation hall and assembly room on the fourth level one can see the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar rising above the houses.

A large mural of Rasik at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna graces the wall as one enters the center. Providing a blessed historical significance to the center, it serves to convey the attitude with which the work was undertaken—as an offering at the Master's feet.

Joan



Sri Sarada Math NOW ON THE INTERNET

You can now visit the official web site for Sri Sarada Math at <http://www.srisaradamath.org>. This is happy news to devotees who have been awaiting the presence of Mother's Order on the Internet. Visitors will find a 'virtual puja' among the unique features.

Joan Shack, Sri Sarada Society president, happened to be visiting the Math's headquarters in Dakshineswar, when the new site was unveiled this August.

SAMVIT REMINDER

Samvit is the semiannual journal published in English by Sri Sarada Math, first introduced in 1980. Its title, *Samvit*, is a Sanskrit word meaning "knowledge which leads to enlightenment." The publication offers readers holy company through scripture, prose, and poetry. Readers in the United States and Canada may order and renew their subscriptions in the West by sending their name, address and \$6.00 (U.S. dollars) subscription payment to Sri Sarada Society at the address given below.

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AN INSPIRING LIFE

BOOK REVIEW

Centred in Truth: The Story of Swami Nitya-swarup-ananda, by Shelley Brown, M.D., published by Kalpa Tree Press, New York, 2001, in two volumes. Reviewed by Steven F. Walker

In her richly detailed biography and selection of writings and reminiscences, Dr. Shelley Brown has given us an unparalleled portrait of a swami of the Ramakrishna Order notable for the originality of his thought and for the vigor with which he acted for the realization of his ideas. For this reader, three things stand out in the life of this remarkable swami. Other readers will surely find other high points in his inspiring life and writings.

First, we read of his devotion to the spirit and letter of Vivekananda's teachings. Swami Nityaswarupananda treasured the dream of creating a School of World Civilization, a dream he believed coincided with Vivekananda's plan for an "International University" which Swamiji wished to establish in 1894, according to Marie Louise Burke's *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*. As the swami was to say, "I live and move and have my being in one of the dreams of Swamiji." He wanted people to be educated for world civilization and global consciousness, and to be free of parochially defined cultural allegiances. In his later years he focused on studying the spirit and on observing the very letter of Vivekananda's *Rules and Regulations of the Ramakrishna Math*; he insisted on its importance for his Order. As one of Swami Nityaswarupananda's monastic colleagues remembers, "Swamiji's *Rules* remained his constant companion till the very end, as sacred to him as the *Bhagavad Gita*, to be read daily, the clarifier of all doubts." His last publication, *Divine Rights of the Sangha*, embodies his passionate commentary on this text.

The second thing that stands out in my mind is the very practical, activist nature of the swami. One devotee remembers him saying "I do not believe in words, I believe in things being done". Those of us who have enjoyed the hospitality of the wonderful Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta especially need to be reminded how much it was the swami's creation—its cosmopolitan spirit, its openness to the dialogue of cultures, not to mention the meticulously planned and executed buildings at Gol Park. Exactly how all this came into being, with all its ups and downs, is one of the most fascinating features of Dr. Brown's biography.

Finally, the third outstanding characteristic of Swami Nityaswarupananda's life seems to me to be his particular devotion to Sri Ramakrishna as represented in photographs. In two lectures given at the Vedanta Society of New York in 1988, recorded in Volume 2, the swami tells how as a boy of thirteen he discovered the photo of Sri Ramakrishna in sitting posture in an issue of *Udbodhan*, adding that "my life has been inextricably linked with his feet from the very first day of my seeing that photograph." He often spoke in later years of the meaning and the effect of this and the two other photographs in which, he said at the Sacramento center in 1963, "if we have the capacity—the power of mind—we can see nothing but God himself."

The second volume contains, along with a variety of texts penned by the swami, a series of personal reminiscences by those who had been blessed by his company. The last of these, and perhaps the most moving for me, is that of his personal servant, Rashbehari.

In *Centred in Truth* Shelley Brown has produced a meticulously researched and beautifully written biography and an inspiring anthology, with interesting photographs and a well done index for each volume.

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