

Sri Sarada Society Notes

Dedicated to Holy Mother

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PERSISTENCE: SETTING THE IDEAL

We are pleased to offer the third in a series of articles by Annapurna Sarada, of the Sarada Ramakrishna Vivekananda Associations of Oregon, San Francisco, and Hawaii. (<http://www.SRV.org>)

In an earlier issue, we mentioned that three of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi's, favorite words, when rendered in English, all begin with 'P': purity, patience, and perseverance. Holy Mother's three P's are really *four*. Peace is the fourth, and from the standpoint of daily life and spiritual practice, peace of mind dawns when each of these qualities is fully implemented and assimilated. From this plateau ultimate Peace is perceived. However, being the very nature of the Soul, called *Atman*, we cannot think of this absolute Peace as a goal, for it is *Ajata* and *Akshara*, unborn and imperishable—it is always "ours," we need only make ourselves ready to perceive it. The stars at the edge of our galaxy are always shining, but mankind had to undergo preparations in order to see them.

Previously we have examined "purity" and "patience" in light of Mother's life and teachings. We will now take up perseverance. "Perseverance" calls to mind consistent effort aimed at a particular goal. Liberation, called *moksha* in *Sanskrit*, is the highest goal according to Vedanta. The saints and sages all exhort us to apply intense effort to realize it. Swami Areshanandaji, Holy Mother's last living monastic disciple, said in one of his final lectures, "If your goal is high, your effort must be tremendous."

Holy Mother encouraged her disciples to persist in their disciplines. Perseverance nourishes and tests one's sincerity, without which there can be no progress. Mother thus counsels, "One should practice *japa* with some devotion, but this is not done. They will not do anything, but only complain, saying, 'Why do I not succeed?'... Can one have the vision of God everyday? Does an angler catch a big carp everyday, the

moment he sits with his rod? Arranging everything about him, he sits and concentrates. Once in a while a big carp swallows the hook. Many a time he is disappointed. Don't relax the practices for that reason. Do more *japa* and meditate."

As a result of persevering in spiritual practice, one grasps the transitory nature of experiences; they all begin, continue, and end. Further, the mind is seen to fluctuate between *tamas* (inertia), *rajas* (restlessness), and *sattva* (balance).

Holy Mother teaches, "You must at least sit down once in the morning and again in the evening. That acts as a

rudder to a boat. When one sits in meditation in the evening, one gets a chance to think of what one has done—good or bad—during the whole day. Next one should compare the states of one's mind in the preceding day and the present... Unless you meditate in the mornings and evenings along with work, how can you know what you are actually doing?"

In this way, one recognizes the Witness of the mind's activities and experiences, and becomes steadfast. Shankaracharya, in his stotram, *Bhaja Govindam*, sings: "Through the company of the good arises non-attachment; through non-attachment arises freedom from delusion; through freedom from delusion arises steadfastness; and from steadfastness arises liberation in this life."

But a feeling of love and wonder comes over one upon looking at persistence in Holy Mother's life. What did she have to gain? Was she bound? Did she need to perform disciplines for Her liberation? It may be that in her early life she had to apply effort to pierce through the veil of her own self-imposed *Maya*. Yet, as she herself states, "I never knew what worry was. And the vision of God, it lies, as it

Continued on page 3: PERSISTENCE



IN MOTHER'S WORDS: "Call on the Lord who pervades the entire universe.

He will shower his blessings upon you."

BEDTIME PRAYER

Great Mother of my mother and me!
The songbirds are sleeping in their nest;
Tired too, in Thy enfolding arms
I lay me gently down to rest.

Great Mother of my mother and me!
The lily, sleepy, droops low its head;
Sleepy too, I ask Thy loving hand
To tuck me softly in my bed.

Great Mother of my mother and me!
Bees, ants, all little things are sleeping;
I too am little and I pray Thee
To take me in Thy tender keeping.

As we begin a new series which will consider ways in which Western children may be brought into the circle of Vedanta, we are pleased to offer this selection from MY SONG GARDEN, a book of poetry for children. The author is Sister Devamata, Laura Franklin Glenn. Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, she first heard Swami Vivekananda in New York in 1896, and was later placed in charge of publications after becoming a member of the Vedanta Society of New York.



PASSING ON THE LIGHT

Drawing from her own experiences with children, Pravrajika Akhandaprana, from the Vedanta Society of Southern California, suggests ways that the light of Vedanta may be passed to future generations. As the author notes, this is a challenge which lies at the heart of Vedanta's potential influence as a spiritual force within the world.

What can Vedanta offer to Western children? This question can be quite challenging for small Vedanta Societies and small “unaffiliated” Vedanta Groups. If we do not answer it squarely, we may as well forget about a growing and universal Vedanta movement in this world. Ramakrishna Vedanta offers an excellent perspective from which to explore and understand modern day religions and spirituality. As Sri Ramakrishna said, “God (*Ishvara*) has made different religions for different minds, times and countries. All views are paths (to Truth).” Life is a never ending learning experience, and children are eager to learn.

Even if just one or two children come to a small group, they can be welcomed and incorporated during the first 15 minutes or so of a meeting. Children love to wave incense around symbols or pictures and love to learn their names and something about them. Why not let them do this for everyone? Or, if they are very shy, let them help in some way (hold the incense while you light it, be held by you while you wave the incense, etc.) Another possibility

is to let them put a flower, bouquet or garland at each symbol or picture. Then everyone could participate in a very simple chant or song. For example:

*Om Truth above me, Om Truth below me.
Om Truth before me, Om Truth behind me.
Om Truth beside me, Om Truth inside me.
Om Truth everywhere. (Chant Om 5 times.)
Om shanti, shanti, shantih. (repeat)
Om peace, peace, peace.
Peace be to all creatures.
Namaste (I salute the Divine in you.)*

Nothing could be more simple. Very young children love to hold a decorated card with an Om on it and make the appropriate motions (above, below, etc.). An additional special prayer or song could be done by all. If the children are older, there could perhaps be a short introduction to the theme or topic of the day and perhaps a very short story could be read to illustrate basic relevant ideas. Then the child or children could go to a special area just for them to pursue other activities suited to their age—anything positive and constructive will do. A snack or treat and juice before leaving will make everything perfect! (Try to find out what they like and also have non-sugar alternatives like a salted snack mix.)

Even if there is no formal lesson, just the practice of coming together and exercising thoughtfulness and universal love is an activity that our global community cannot get enough of. What the world needs now more than ever, is pockets of people everywhere learning to make the whole world their own. Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda have started a special universal ball moving in that direction, and it is up to all of us to keep it bouncing.

If there is supervision available for the children, perhaps some time could be spent planning a special presentation (of a comfortable length) during one of the holiday seasons, which could be given at the beginning or end of a meeting. The key to attracting young people is encouraging participation. If one is actively involved in something, it really makes a difference to the body, mind and heart. As the child grows up, we may find in that child a wonderful friend and helper, and a good human being who can go out into the world and keep our universal ball bouncing.

To be continued...

EDITOR'S NOTE: Future segments of this article explore the universal meaning of “God” and present elements of a simple program honoring the seasons. The author has developed several materials for “participatory children’s pujas,” which she is willing to share. Additionally, a CD of children’s songs will soon be available. For information contact akhandaprana@vedanta.org.

WHO WE ARE: Sri Sarada Society is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the furtherance of Holy Mother’s inspiration in the West, particularly as it manifests through women.

Book Review
INSPIRATION

A HEART Poured Out: A Story of Swami Ashokananda by Sister Gargi, Kalpa Tree Press, 2003, 472 pages. Reviewed by Joan Shack.

Its very title is a window into the soul of this biography of Swami Ashokananda, which exposes the heart of the Swami as well as that of the author, his disciple, Sister Gargi (Marie Louse Burke). In so doing, it speaks directly to the heart of the reader. The author's name will be familiar. In their quest to learn about Swamiji, who has not turned to her six-volume classic, *SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IN THE WEST: NEW DISCOVERIES?* Now she pays homage to the spiritual teacher who encouraged her to take up this monumental endeavor.

Through the eyes of the author, the reader has the rare privilege of encountering a dedicated life—the highest teaching of a great soul! How much more powerful its transformative impact to have seen it lived first hand!

The list of projects undertaken during Swami Ashokananda's ministry is, to say the least, notable and include: building a temple in Berkeley, developing the Olema retreat, and publishing the journal, *Voice of India*. Additionally, the Lake Tahoe property was purchased, the old temple in San Francisco was renovated and the Sacramento Center established. Notwithstanding, it is the examples of material help he rendered, such as donating food, clothing, and dishes from the kitchen or giving financial backing for medical care or college tuition, that strike at one's heart. Minute attention was given to the lives of his students in all aspects, whether sacred or mundane.

There is never a lapse in the book's ability to hold one's attention. And just as those in the Swami's circle of association were "stretched mentally, emotionally and spiritually," the reader feels similarly challenged. The author's style and narrative talent, rendered more powerful by the depth of love for her teacher, affords the reader this opportunity. Be it from accounts of his laughter ringing down the hall; or by his impassioned words, which were nuggets of spiritual gold; by his quick wit; or by his personal spiritual experiences—the reader is "stretched" mentally, emotionally and spiritually by this rich, multi-faceted portrait.

And yet, it is not the Swami's personality that one comes away impressed with. The underlying reality of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in his life is what captures one's attention and imagination. Not because the Swami frequently declared, "Sri Ramakrishna is the road and remover of obstacles." The reason is much more subtle and compelling. By abiding moment-by-moment in the heart of that reality—a place of "profound security," Swami

made it real and thus accessible to his students. And like the Swami of his disciples, the author expects the reader "to be capable of containing the whole" truth of the life she portrays—what and who it points to.

This is a story of a spiritual guide who had a keen grasp of the needs of his students, and of the Western mind. Tapping the Western work ethic, he used karma yoga in shaping the character of his students. He worked alongside them chopping trees, digging ditches and even pleaded a case before the military draft board, in person. His method was practical, "hands on." He presented his students with a twofold ideal which arose naturally from their acceptance of Vedanta.

Every student of Vedanta has, in my opinion, two distinct duties. One is to live and practice the principles of Vedanta, realize the Truth through self-discipline and meditation and prove in his own life that Vedanta is not empty forms. The other is to help maintain the Vedanta movement from which he has derived so much benefit himself, so that similar benefit can be extended to more and more men and women.

I do not want you to feel the burden of these responsibilities. Take them naturally and you will find that you have the strength to discharge them fully.

His students were challenged to live meaningful lives—dedicated to causes greater than themselves and not defined or bound by their own mental limitations. One specific challenge the community faced was the purchase of two thousand untamed acres of retreat property. The Swami had been thinking in more modest terms, of buying twenty secluded acres. How would it be possible for a small society to undertake a purchase of this magnitude? With faith in Sri Ramakrishna and in each student's ability for "great achievements," he pressed forward. The power of faith to ignite the spirit to service is unmistakable. Ennobled and called to greatness, one's capacity to be and to do expands.

Continued from page 1: PERSISTENCE

were, in the palm of my hand. Whenever I like, I can have it...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*."

Mother's persistence was naturally for the benefit of her children. As she told a disciple, "I have done much more than is necessary to make my life a model." No less than Sri Ramakrishna's amazing austerities, Mother's persistence in sadhana and service, natural and utterly selfless, overflowing with love, and established in true Knowledge, parted the veil of *Maya* and made intimacy with God easy of access.

PRESERVING GLIMPSES OF HISTORY

In the Fall 1999 issue of *Sri Sarada Society Notes*, we reported that Sri Sarada Society had received ten glass slides dating from 1873 to 1906, through the efforts of Rosanne Buzzell, archivist for the Eliot Baha'i Community and historian for Green Acre, in Eliot, Maine. The slides were produced from photographs taken by Ralph Sylvester Bartlett, a relative of Sarah Farmer, and showcase familiar figures in Vedanta's early history.

Earlier this year we received a request for scans of the two slides of Swamiji. This request, coming from Pravrajika Virajaprana of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, prompted us to have all the slides scanned. This digital format helps to preserve the pictures while also rendering them easy to share with others. In preparing the scans for reproduction in a book being published in India, the nuns in San Francisco were also able to digitally enhance the very worn images of Swamiji.

We are pleased to be able to share the slide images with our readers. In this issue are two photos of Mrs. Frances Leggett (Betty) and her sister, Josephine MacLeod, together with Olea Bull, daughter of Sara and Ole Bull. Both were taken in Norway, the homeland of Ole Bull, a world famous violinist. Born March 4, 1871, Olea was named after her father; her name also referred to a mythological stringed instrument played by angels. It was not uncommon to see Olea in the company of her mother's friends, as Olea seemed to prefer Josephine's free spirit to the company of her mother.

In the photo at right, the threesome has been to dinner with Queen Victoria's granddaughter, Princess Maud Charlotte Mary Victoria, and her husband, Prince Charles of Denmark, within a year of the couple's coronation as King and Queen of Norway, on November 22, 1905. Charles was elected king, taking the name Haarkon, after Norway gained independence from Sweden.



Betty Leggett, Josephine MacLeod and Olea Bull at Floien, Bergen, Norway. July 1906.



Olea Bull, Betty Leggett and Josephine MacLeod at the Holdts Hotel, Bergen, Norway, after dinner with King Haarkon and Queen Maud. July 23, 1906.

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