

Dedicated to Holy Mother

Sri Sarada Society *Notes*

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BEHIND THE MASKS

Stafford Smith

As students of Vedanta we understand that our mental impressions of divine personalities are heavily influenced by our expectations. We are told, for example, that if we are fortunate enough to be greeted at the threshold of death by such an exalted personality, its specific form will reflect our expectations. That is, a Christian will be met at death by Jesus, a Muslim by Mohammed, a Vaisnava by Krishna, and so on. The Divine Presence is universal but its particular manifestations are individualized.

There is ample evidence that something similar happens on the physical plane in conjunction with the historical appearances of Divine Incarnations. The recorded conversations of Swami Vijnanananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, contain the following reminiscence:

When the Master was standing, his mood was that of Mother Kali; but when he sat down, it was that of Lord Krishna. It might be that, because Nityagopal had the bent of his mind towards Sri Krishna, the Master was talking to him in that way. So Sri Ramakrishna, when he shifted his attention from the group to a single individual, altered his persona from Kali to Krishna in order to communicate with Nityagopal on a more intimate and profound level. What is more, this change could be perceived by the entire group.

Holy Mother manifested a similar change in her outward personality during her famous encounter with the brigand and his wife while walking alone at night along the road from Jayrambati to Dakshineswar. While the biographical accounts often identify as the source of her safety Mother's humble appeal to the parental instincts of the dacoit couple, it appears that the pair themselves had a different perspective. Consider this account of a conversation among the three as related later by Holy Mother and recited by Swami Tanmayananda in his biography *THE COMPASSIONATE MOTHER SRI SRI SARADA DEVI*.

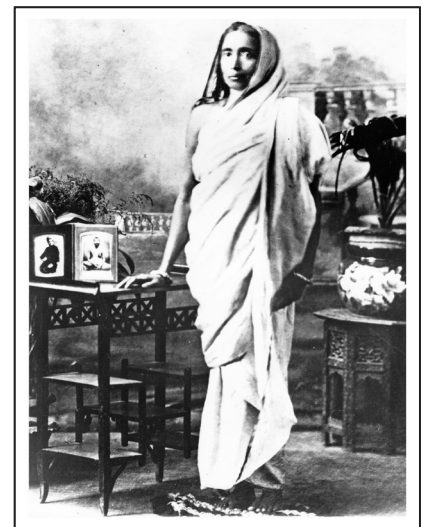
Mother narrated to some of her devotees: "I asked the dacoit parents, 'Why are you showing me so much affection?' They replied, 'You are not an ordinary person. We saw you as Mother Kali!' I asked them, 'What is this? What are you saying? What have you seen?' They replied, 'Yes! We have indeed seen! Are you hiding, thinking we are sinners?' I replied, 'What are you saying? I do not know anything!'"

This incident shows us that in response to necessity Holy Mother, a Divine Incarnation like Sri Ramakrishna, was also able to alter her usual public visual aspect—in this case a lifelong disguise of bashful humility—to manifest a more powerful goddess state.

The general point to be gleaned from these examples is that the physical plane manifestations of Divine Incarnations are circumstantial in character. Divine Incarnations play particular roles for specific purposes, and when the historical context changes so also may the role. It is a fundamental mistake to try to define or limit the potential of a Divine Incarnation based on a description of the historical roles he or she may have at one time assumed. This fact is important to appreciate as we move forward into an era that may be characterized by rapid and fundamental transformations on the physical plane. While it may be true that Holy Mother at the outset played a role subservient to Ramakrishna in many obvious ways, if the world is indeed moving toward reestablishing a feminine polarity, it seems likely that the projection of Holy Mother onto the cosmic stage will be steadily enlarged.

Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi are two windows looking into the same room. They are more than simply equal; they are fundamentally identical. Thus, which of the windows will prove more attractive to devotees at any historical moment is purely a matter of temporal circumstance.

To summarize, a coming age of planetary healing will invoke the descent of a great wave of shakti to the earthly plane. This wave will bring feminine forces to the forefront, includ-



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IN MOTHER'S WORDS "It is only by accepting an illusion that I am so.
This is nothing but continuing in the midst of an illusion."

PRAVRAJKA VIVEKAPRANA RETURNS TO THE UNITED STATES IN 2013

We are pleased to report that Revered Pravrajika Vivekaprana of Sri Sarada Math is returning to the United States to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. She is arriving late January 2013 to participate in an interfaith event being held in Phoenix, Arizona, in honor of both the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week and Swami Vivekananda's 150th birthday. Following this event, retreats to study Swamiji's message to the world will be given in four states before her departure in mid-April.

Pravrajika Vivekaprana is a senior sannyasini of the Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Order. She is presently head of the Retreat Center of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission at Pangot, district Nainital. She first lectured abroad in 1989 and since then has visited Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Germany, Holland, the United States, and Uruguay. She speaks from her own realizations and understandings of Swamiji's teachings and does so in a way that this ancient Indian philosophy becomes relevant and practical to our daily lives.

Many of the retreats being offered will be using one of three books based on Pravrajika Vivekaprana's lectures issued as part of the Understanding Vedanta Lecture Series, edited by Indu Ramchandani and published by Angus and Grapher of New Delhi. The three books are *THE ATMAN: OUR TRUE NATURE*, *THE FACES OF GOD*, and *THREE STEPS OF VEDANTA*. For information regarding ordering these books or to inquire about attending retreats, please email or call the contact person listed below for each location in which you are interested.

The organizers invite you to make a contribution to help with the expenses of the tour. Tax deductible donations may be given by check, payable to Sri Sarada Society at PO Box 38116, Albany, NY 12203. Please note "Vivekaprana's visit 2013" on the check.



RETREATS IN PHOENIX, ARIZONA

January 29 to February 19, 2013

Contact: Caroline Williams

Email: 2clwilliams@gmail.com

Phone: 732-456-4015

Celebration Weekend: Universal Religion—February 1-3

One of the many observances of Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary being held throughout the world, this special weekend will include a day of classes on "Universal Religion," a day celebrating UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, and conclude with a day celebrating Swami Vivekananda's birthday.

Retreat 1: The Three Steps of Vedanta, February 4–6

Retreat 2: The Faces of God, February 8–14

(Women's Retreat)

Retreat 3: The Four Yogas, February 16 – 18



RETREATS IN MARIN COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

February 20 to March 6

Contact: Mary (Archana) Tamraz

Email: cmtamraz@volcano.net

Phone: 209-295-5664

Retreat 1: Three Steps of Vedanta, February 22–25

(Women's Retreat)

Retreat 2: Advaita Vedanta, February 27–March 1

(Women's Retreat)

Retreat 3: Work and Its Secret, March 3–5

(Retreat for Women and Men)



RETREATS ON THE KITSAP PENINSULA, WASHINGTON

(Seattle area)

March 7 to March 27

Contact: Barbara Smith

Email: maitreyi.barbara@gmail.com

Phone: 206-713-0173

Retreat 1: Practical Vedanta, March 9–12

Retreat 2: Faces of God, March 15–19

This retreat includes the public Sunday lecture on March 17 given at the Seattle Vedanta Center by Pravrajika Vivekaprana.

Retreat 3: The Atman, Our True Nature, March 22–25



RETREATS AT THE

GREATER WASHINGTON DC VEDANTA CENTER

March 28 to April 6

Contact: Caroline Williams

Email: 2clwilliams@gmail.com

Phone: 732-456-4015

Retreat 1: The Atman, Our True Nature, March, 30–April 3

This retreat includes the public Sunday lecture on March 31 given at the Greater Washington DC Vedanta Center Temple by Pravrajika Vivekaprana.



Pravrajika Vivekaprana will be speaking on Swamiji's message during each retreat, helping to underscore the practical relevance of Vedanta in everyday life.

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.

UNIVERSAL ENERGY OF THE MOTHER

In the following excerpt from FACES OF GOD, Pravrajika Vivekaprana considers the significance of the power of Shakti.

A cceptance of God with form was the most significant event in his (Narendra's) early life....(He came) to realize that there is this Energy, the Mother, and because we do not believe in Her, we suffer. Till we believe in this Conscious Energy as the other face of Brahman, we cannot function. Just as Sri Shankaracharya was made to recognize the power of the Mother, so was Narendra made aware of it....She is the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of this phenomenal Universe. Without Consciousness changing into Energy there is no Creation.

Another illustration of the Power of the Mother as Shakti is seen in the experience of Totapuri, the Advaitin guru of Sri Ramakrishna who initiated him in the practice of pure Advaita....(When) the veil over his intellect (was pulled off), Tota's mind was dazzled by a bright light and he saw, "Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, the origin of the universe! Mother the unthinkable Power! Mother in land and Mother in water! The body is Mother, the mind is Mother; illness is Mother, health is Mother; knowledge is Mother, ignorance is Mother; life is Mother, death is Mother....As long as one is in the body, one has no power to be free from her influence, no not even to die till She wills! It is Mother again who is beyond body, mind, and intellect—That One who Tota has so long been realizing as Brahman... is the very Mother. Shiva and Shakti are one! Brahman and Shiva-Shakti are one and the same!"

Till we recognize our link with the Universal Energy we cannot cross over. Without this recognition and without consciously seeing ourselves as the instruments of the Mother in this phenomenal world we remain buffeted by the laws of cause and effect, and karma, and keep oscillating between happiness and misery. Being the conscious instrument is the only way to function; then She takes over.

Kali's Message to the Western World

A few days before his passing, Swami Vivekananda stated: "That which Sri Ramakrishna called Kali, took possession of my body and soul. That makes me work and work and never lets me keep still and look to my personal comfort." As his final day approached, he simply noted, "She has left my hand." With respect to his work Swamiji had once declared, "I have a message for the West as the Buddha had a message for the East."

Echoing this declaration in its title, this poem by Cassia Berman reflects the role of the goddess in life and death. It was published in a small book of her poetry, DIVINE MOTHER WITHIN ME. Cassia passed on earlier this year. We offer this selection as a memorial to her.

I am the Goddess of Time
 which destroys all illusions
 and I am the Goddess of Mercy
 Who holds you in Her embrace
 while you watch the March of Time
 destroying all you thought most precious
 to reveal what is truly precious
 and real.
 I am the Goddess of Wisdom
 Who whispers to you in your innermost heart
 these words of Truth:
 Trust not in appearances,
 not even your own.
 All you see today will fall away.

While your ego holds onto impermanence
 and makes a king of it,
 The Queen of the Universe is dancing
 to the ever-changing rhythm of your heartbeat
 through history.
 More spacious than you can imagine,
 more secure in your forgotten metamorphoses
 than you are in your sense of expanding self.
 She is the One Who gradually weans you from this world
 with a mixture of disappointment, horror, and bliss
 into surrender to a movement the mind cannot possibly encompass.



ing the elevation of Sri Sarada Devi to a position of world prominence as an avatar of transformation. The ascendancy of Holy Mother will result in an expansion of her influence beyond the boundaries of the formal Vedanta movement. It will also require a reconsideration within the movement itself of the original foundation stories purporting to categorize Holy Mother's essential nature and her relationship to Sri Ramakrishna.

The preeminence of Sri Ramakrishna as the exemplar of renunciation and ecstatic love will remain undiminished. But for individuals trying to integrate themselves harmoniously into an evolving world process during a difficult era of transition, the Holy Mother will shine forth as a refuge of spiritual clarity and nurturing compassion. In time it may even be understood that

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