

Sri Sarada Society Notes

Dedicated to Holy Mother

Fall 1999, Volume 5, Issue 2

SRI SARADA DEVI: DIVINITY AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Our consideration of Holy Mother is adapted from an article by Pravrajika Mokshaprana, published in Samvit, March 1980. We did not understand Mataji's reference to Mother as 'a shefali flower' and were delighted to receive the following note from Swami Sarvatmananda in San Diego, California. "A shefali, seuli in Bengali, is a small white flower with a red stem. It blooms in the thousands at night during Durga Puja season. It has a soft, sweet fragrance and usually falls onto the ground. As it blooms at night, it is unpoluted by bees and daytime activities. Sometimes a clean white cloth is spread beneath the tree to collect the blossoms for use in worship."

The malady of the present age is the loss of faith or *shraddha*. Having no *shraddha* to live by and tormented by an inordinate desire to enjoy life, man is tossed between doubt and despair. He has no goal before him. He has lost his sense of values. Indeed, humanity today is at the crossroads. However, in this age of uncertainty there have been noble lives which act as beacon lights. The simple and unsophisticated lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi serve as such to lead men towards the Supreme Goal.

Outwardly Mother's life seems to have nothing outstanding about it. Yet how pure, pious and wonderful it is! Her life is an untouched '*shefali*' flower at the feet of God.

As long as Sri Ramakrishna was there in his mortal frame it pleased Mother to stay in the background. It was only after his passing away that she appeared before us in her full glory. Prayer, sacrifice, austerity, self-control—all that we desire most in spiritual life—may be seen blended so naturally in the simple character of Holy Mother that they found expression in her daily activities, her conversation, her dealings with people, and also in the very way she discharged her duties towards her relatives. Day and night she went about her domestic chores, serving her devoted children and looking after all the members of her vast household. She was quite oblivious of her own interests. Her love for her children broke all borders of caste and creed and prompted her to serve them tirelessly. This is possible only when the mind rises above all mundane desires. As I think of it, my mind fills with wonder. When Sri Ramakrishna's mind soared high in a lofty state of superconsciousness, he

entered into *samadhi*. But when Holy Mother's mind rose to such heights, she attended to the minutest needs of her devotees. The result was that no one noticed her natural state of *samadhi*. No one, therefore, could gauge the depth of her divine personality. It was only by her grace that one could sometimes have a glimpse of her unfathomable love and compassion, and marvel at her divinity.

If we study each of the aspects of her life as revealed to us we shall see with wonder that she manifested perfection in everything she did in her daily life. And this is what we should aim at, namely, manifestation of the perfection already in us. The more we dwell upon her divine life, the more shall we feel benefitted and blessed.

Revered Pravrajika Mokshaprana

December 15, 1915–August 31, 1999

Sri Sarada Society joins devotees around the world in loving memory of Pravrajika Mokshaprana. Affectionately and reverently known as Mataji, Pravrajika Mokshaprana became the second president of Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission in April 1973, serving as spiritual guide for this women's monastic order.



IN MOTHER'S WORDS: "Our essential point is love. It is through love alone that the spiritual family of Sri Ramakrishna has grown and developed."

SPIRITUAL EXPRESSIONS

Focusing on women who are giving their personal interests a spiritual turn, we begin with Vijali Hamilton, founder and director of Earth Mandala, a nonprofit organization, who sent us an announcement of her Millennium art project.

Earth Mandala is an artistic forum for global understanding, calling to awareness the interrelatedness of all life. The first Earth Mandala took seven years and consisted of twelve monumental earth and stone sculptures, each inaugurated by performance events, circling the globe on the 35° latitudinal parallel. This artistic pilgrimage began in Malibu, California, culminating in Japan at the ancient Shinto shrine of Tenkawa in October 1993.

On June 22, 1999 *Achilly Pachacamac* was dedicated in Peguche, Ecuador. *Achilly Pachacamac* is the pre-Incan name for the supreme God, the life force which encompasses all others. From within the immense stone, volcanic boulder, emerges a single face, that of *Pachacamac* blowing a gigantic conch shell, the '*churo*'. In earlier times the call brought together the whole community. Sending forth a resounding call to indigenous peoples everywhere, echoing humanity's urgent need to live in harmony with all creatures and the earth, the sculpture expresses the hope that in the millennium men and women may live in harmony and equality. This message is conveyed by featuring a crescent moon together with a rising sun, which shines forth from the stone. Beneath the stone flows a sacred spring which offers cleansing waters into a crescent shaped well.

Fifteen years of expressing a vision of world family and peace through her art has brought Vijali in close cooperation with indigenous communities throughout the world. During the six weeks of work on *Achilly Pachacamac*, members of the community worked with her, offering their dreams as guidance. This project also received financial support from the Institute of Noetic Science, the Flow Fund Circle and Earthways Foundation. Edie Hartshorne, founder of Global Women's Vision, assisted Vijali in translation and community outreach.

The sculptor writes of her vision, "The world became my home. I was a pilgrim who made offerings and gave voice and form to the spirit of the earth and the people I met along the way. I kept expanding the borders of what sculpture was, what art was, integrating it more and more into life itself... the people around me; their problems their hopes, their dreams of the future. I saw that at the root of these problems is the misunderstanding of ourselves as separate, isolated beings needing to exploit the earth and each other for our gain. This dualistic way of thinking is the direct cause of our ecological and social problems which is

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LIFELONG DEDICATION

This article is the third in a series highlighting Western women devotees who have played a role in shaping Vedanta's history.

Swami Tathagatananda, head of the New York Vedanta Society, writes in a booklet dedicated to the Genét sisters, "A life above the ordinary and the search for fulfillment in one's higher self has been the quest for many gifted souls who often become the silent creative leaders of mankind."

Jeanne and Rolande Genét were two such souls. Born one year apart to a well-to-do French Canadian family, they pursued artistic careers in New York City, where they moved with their mother in 1924 following their father's sudden death. Jeanne, the older of the two, was heard playing violin on one of the earliest radio broadcasts, and Rolande became a professional dancer. Happening upon *Prophets of New India* by Romain Rolland, the sisters were profoundly inspired. In 1933 they learned of the Vedanta Society of New York and attended Sunday service. Hearing Swami Bodhananda, disciple of Swamiji and spiritual leader of the Center, marked the turning point for the two young women in their twenties. The Swami became a spiritual father to the sisters, and Rolande came to live at the Center to serve him when his health deteriorated, identifying herself completely with the life of the Society.

Upon an invitation from Swami Pavitrananda, then head of the Center, Jeanne and her Mother came to live with Rolande in the Society's basement in 1951. Their sincerity and genuine spirit of service, despite the difficult living conditions, were a deep source of inspiration to others. When Rolande passed away in full consciousness in 1960, she had rendered 27 years of selfless service to the Society.

Although Mrs. Genét, affectionately called Maman by everyone, never fully shared her daughters' passion for Vedanta, she served unstintingly. At the age of 95, she was doing the Swami's laundry one day, as usual, when she fell ill. Taken to the hospital, she died in her sleep two days later. Ironically, Maman had taken her daughters out of convent school when they were small, fearing they would become nuns.

Jeanne survived the passing of both her sister and her mother, becoming a beacon of light, strength and fortitude coupled with a soft and gentle nature. She served as Secretary of the Society from 1957 until her death in August of 1998.

Swami Vivekananda's message of strength, service and refinement of character flowered beautifully in the lives of Jeanne, Rolande and their mother. Their legacy lives on in the hearts of the many devotees who were touched by these generous souls.

Joan Shack

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.

Pravrajika Vivekaprana

FACETS OF REALITY

Questions in this column are from lectures given in the United States by *Pravrajika Vivekaprana* of Sri Sarada Math, New Delhi. (Compiled and edited by Edith D. Tipple)

Q: "Can one talk about Ramakrishna without talking about Holy Mother? Are they not one and the same?"

Yes we can, in that Sri Ramakrishna's demonstrations in the beginning had nothing to do with anyone else. He alone demonstrated what we need to focus upon in this Age. He clarified the basic tenet of every religion, which is that God is real. He did this at first by posing the question to a stone (the stone image of Kali), "Is there consciousness in this universe, and is anything outside that?" He proved that there is none: Brahman alone is real and you are Brahman. That is the last word.

Q: You keep saying we need to understand. How can we understand if we don't think, and where does contemplation fit in with this?

Contemplation is a different thing. Getting hold of data is how thinking takes place. First there is an observation, then you collect your data relative to your research, then the data is sifted between superfluous and important facts. On the basis of that you find the link between the causes and effects, and when the link is understood clearly, that is what I call understanding. It leads to the flow of energy in a harmonious manner. That kind of understanding leads to acceptance.

Q: The law of cause and effect, we see it happen here at this level. Does it also reach other levels?

Through and through. There can be nothing on the surface that does not touch the depth of the ocean. The whole thing is one. If there is a cause, it goes to the depth. We are aware of the surface causes, but what is the depth of the whole thing?

Q: What would make a person lose realization?

Real realization cannot be lost. If you do not understand how to enter into consciousness, it can be lost because you have no control over it, you do not know how to enter that level consciously. Experience takes place at the gross and subtle levels, not the conscious level. If an experience just comes to you, it can go also. Raja yoga warns that on the way you will have all kinds of experiences which give tremendous joy but they are only signposts. They must not be taken as the goal.

Q: Can you explain how God is in the subtle form? You say God is in the subtle form of particles...

No, I said, all there is to God is within me as my consciousness, pure consciousness. And it is reflected. It is reflected in the subtle system, it is reflected in the gross world outside also. You see visions. Those visions are nothing but the reflection of this consciousness through the subtle system.

Q: What does "the will of God" mean?

The will of God is the will that is manifesting itself in every atom. Put it all together, give it some kind of harmony, that is the will of God.

DIVING DEEPER

Devotees in the United States and Puerto Rico were pleased to host Pravrajika Vivekaprana this May and June. A sannyasini of Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Pravrajika Vivekaprana is the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission in New Delhi. This was her third visit to the West.

Unlike her whirlwind tour in 1996, Mataji gave a series of in-depth classes in three locations. Devotees in Sacramento, California, focused attention on the *Chandi*, *Katha Upanishad* and *Jnana Yoga*. In San Juan, Puerto Rico, Mataji spoke on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and the three *gunas*, and held classes on "Chapter Two" of the *Bhagavad Gita*. In Albany, New York, devotees gathered to study the *Mundaka Upanishad* and "The Master's Sadhana" from *The Great Master*.

Interested in purchasing audio tapes of the classes mentioned above? Send a postcard, e-mail or fax and Sri Sarada Society will forward your inquiries to the appropriate location. (See "How to Contact Us" below.) Information will also be posted on our new web site as it becomes available. Color photos of the visit are now on view.



How To CONTACT Us: Sri Sarada Society, P.O. Box 254 Selkirk, New York 12158, PHONE (518) 767-3532,

FAX (518) 767-2546, EMAIL info@srisarada.org, HOLY MOTHER'S WEB SITE <http://www.srisarada.org/>

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rapidly leading us toward global disaster. Re-educating ourselves about who we really are, can change society. Without even moving from where we are, we can change our environment by the bravery of a life-style that reflects a change of perception, a view of oneness with the world...

"I feel my work is living Vedanta. It is my way of teaching and sharing the ideals of Vedanta. It is my spiritual practice and the world has become my ashram."

ARTIFACTS OF VEDANTA HISTORY

Thanks to Rosanne Buzzell, Archivist for the Eliot Baha'i Community and historian for Green Acre, in Eliot, Maine, Sri Sarada Society has received ten glass slides dating from 1873 to 1906. The slides were produced from photographs taken by Ralph Sylvester Bartlett, a relative of Sarah Farmer, and preserve images of familiar figures in Vedanta's early history. Featured are: Sarah Farmer, Swami Vivekananda, Sarah Bull, Josephine MacLeod and Betty Leggett.

In 1889 Sarah Farmer and associates bought the property which is now owned and maintained by the Baha'i Community, adding an inn for guests. Commenting on the site's peacefulness during a visit the following summer, the poet John Greenleaf Whittier gave it the name "Green Acre." Dedicating the resort to the ideals of peace and religious unity, Sarah began the Green Acre conferences in 1894, inviting speakers of various persuasions, including Swami Vivekananda. Yearly spiritual conferences drew men and women of nationwide prominence and distinguished guests from abroad. Swami Saradananda and Swami Abhedananda attended in later years.

Classes were held under the Lysekloster Pines, a half mile from the Inn. The stump of the "Swami Pine," the large

pine under which Swamiji taught, is still sought out by Green Acre visitors. A seedling from beneath this tree planted on the Ridgely estate after Vivekananda's death has become the "Prophet's Pine."



Joan Shack, Sri Sarada Society's President (left), accepted the gift of ten glass slides from Rosanne Buzzell during a July visit to Green Acre.

Special Note: Mother's web site has moved to <http://www.srisarada.org/>. Our new email address is info@srisarada.org.

SRI SARADA SOCIETY NOTES EDITORIAL STAFF: Joan Shack, Janet Walker, and Jayanti **PRODUCTION/LAYOUT:** Jayanti

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P.O. Box 254 Selkirk, New York 12158

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