

Sri Sarada Society Notes

Dedicated to Holy Mother

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LIFE'S STRUGGLES: REMINDERS OF SOMETHING MORE

Sri Sarada Devi managed a household, cooked, cleaned, and was surrounded by family members who caused her no end of trouble. Due to the death of her younger brother and insanity of her sister-in-law, she assumed the lifelong care of her niece, Radhu. We can identify with such a life. It inspires faith that Mother truly understands our struggles. When she speaks of patience and forbearance, we can listen and learn because her life reflects our own. And if we pay close attention to her actions, we discover that patience and forbearance do not mean resigning oneself to less than expected. Rather they represent Mother's positive embrace of the world around her. Knowing this world was not the whole of Reality, she was able to accept it without making demands. For this same reason, whenever necessary, she possessed the strength to withstand unreasonable demands on her. Mother's day-to-day example gives us a glimpse of Truth by showing us a different way to approach and embrace life, as well as how to let it go.

Radhu was in Mother's constant care well into her adulthood. Yet a change was observed as Mother approached death. While she received other visitors despite the objection of those attending her during her final days, Mother refused even to look at her niece and forbade her to enter the room. Sri Sarada Devi is described as being a mother-heart of compassion. What caused such seemingly uncaring and paradoxical behavior? Mother gives a clue. She tells us that after Sri Ramakrishna's death, he appeared to her and placed a child in her arms. "This is your yogamaya," he told her. After the Master had left the body, Sri Sarada Devi's naturally high plane of existence lost its moorings within the world. The Master was now free. Likewise, Mother longed to be free from the bonds of physical life. Yet Sri Ramakrishna had left Mother behind for a reason. She had work to do. Something was needed to draw her mind back to the world. Mother recognized Radhu as the

child Sri Ramakrishna had placed in her arms.

Radhu, Mother's niece, her thread of union with this world, was certainly not the pleasant, ideal, loving child we would expect to be associated with Mother. A willful child and unstable adult, Radhu was a constant source of aggravation and trouble. It is recorded that she was even physically abusive to Mother. We expect our life will one day be perfect and carefree, and often resent anyone or anything which "spoils" our dream. Surely Sri Sarada Devi deserves the life we seek for ourselves?



Yet Mother did not reject Radhu out of disappointment or bitterness. When her life was drawing to an end, she withdrew from the one thread of attachment which held her mind in the world. She knew her work was finished and that she had remained behind solely to help others understand that life offers us so much more than a pleasant, happy existence. We cling to our worldly attachments because we have forgotten our true nature. Gradually, through disenchanting blows, we come to want more from life. We expand our horizon to seek what is enduring. How much longer would our spiritual journey be if Mother

offered us only pleasant experiences, if her life did not mirror our own?

This world is alluring, after all. Consider the story of Vishnu who, having incarnated as a pig and finished his mission, found it quite pleasant to remain a pig. Not until Shiva came to pierce Vishnu's pig body did the Lord emerge laughing. Being a pig was divine play to him!

Like Vishnu, Mother knew her true identity. As she herself put it: a realized soul laughs upon leaving the body, while we weep, being ignorant of our true nature. Until it was time for her to leave the world, Mother remained bound for our sake through her attachment to Radhu. She did so in a way consistent with Truth, without hint or suggestion that life founded on worldly attachments is meant to be ideal.

IN MOTHER'S WORDS: "These worldly ties are transitory. Today they seem to be the be-all and end-all of life, and tomorrow they vanish. Your real tie is with God."

IN HOLY COMPANY

In this issue our reader contribution is from Uma Abuja of Thousand Oaks, CA, whose inspiring account of her recent visit to Sri Sarada Math will strike a familiar chord in many.

My aunt, Pratibha Puri, and I visited Sri Sarada Math in late October. My aunt, who lives in Delhi, is well known to many of the nuns and they were so happy to have her there. What a blessing it is to be able to go and stay there, as it does not happen without Mother's Will. I feel very grateful to Pravrajika Shraddhapranaji for letting us come then because everyone was extremely busy with the Sister Nivedita Girls' School Centenary celebrations. There were many guests staying at the Math at this time.

This was my second trip to Dakshineswar. It amazes me how in such a crowded and busy city there is a Math which is so peaceful. It seems like all the bustle and mundane daily strife stops at the gate and walls of the Math. When I enter those gates, a certain peace seems to surround me. Even the chatter of my mind seems to slow down. I feel that nothing can touch me, as if I am totally protected. It is like going to your Mother's house. She greets you with so much unconditional love. This is the feeling I got when I saw Pr. Shraddhapranaji. She personified Mother with all her love and gentle care. All the nuns were so loving and considerate. Each would greet us with smiles of welcome.

President Mataji had just returned from a trip and was unwell, yet she graciously gave us darshan twice during our trip. Her smiling face is hard to forget. Even though she was tired, she answered my questions with love.

I would also wait eagerly each day to have an interview with Revered Pravrajika Shraddhapranaji. And she never disappointed me. I know how busy she is, yet she met with us several times. My mind was full of questions and she answered each one patiently with love. I know I asked her some questions again and again and yet she was like Mother, full of concern for me. How can I ever forget those precious moments in her company?

I was not able to meet Pr. Amalpranaji when she toured California on her last trip. However I had heard tapes of her talks and had a great desire to meet her in person. I mentioned this to Pr. Shraddhapranaji. She arranged for us to meet. I felt the greatest joy to be in Amalpranaji's presence. Her smile stays in my mind. I asked her many questions and she sat there looking at me with so much love and answered them at great length. Those few moments are so special for me. She really made me believe that if I wanted to I could find God in this lifetime. Seeing the radiant faces of all the nuns around me, I believed her.

Archana and Ambika, American devotees from Sacra-

mento, were also staying at the Math. I met them for the first time, but felt like I was meeting family. I relished the moments we spent talking on the patio outside our rooms overlooking the Ganges. It gave me a warm feeling to know that they would be near me in California and that we had shared something wonderful together.

I think of attending the early morning prayers and arati with all the nuns. Recalling the nun conducting the early morning prayers, her radiant face stays with me. Something funny happened to me there. During the early morning meditation in the temple, I would hear all kinds of noises while I was sitting there. I would hear the birds, the cows, dogs and even loud music! But none of this would bother me. Even all that sounded just right! Yes, the temple is like a sanctuary surrounded by the daily life. Nothing from the outside angers you here.

I just loved the food in the Math. And they do feed you very well. The nuns said that the food was simple but it tasted absolutely delicious to me. I know I cannot prepare those dishes here. I cannot get that very important ingredient called Love which they use in all of their preparations. I cannot buy that in any store.

On the last day, we went to the Kali temple. This time I saw things from a different perspective. On our first trip the Pravrajika who accompanied us had very graciously talked to us about Thakur's experiences at the temple. During this visit I kept remembering the incidents she had related to us, which made everything become so real. Also, I had read Usha Harding's book on Mother Kali, which relates so many things which make going to the temple meaningful. We sat in Thakur's room for a while. It was so crowded that there was not much room or quiet. Yet, I saw people sitting there so peacefully, totally unaffected by anything. I hoped that I would be like that someday.

It is hard to put into words the feelings I experienced in the Math. It is like an oasis in a desert. It is true what is said about holy company. It forces you to make a better person of yourself. It gives you confidence. I take it as Mother's blessing to be able to visit there. My many many thanks to Her. My sincere gratitude to Her.

MISSING AN ISSUE OF SAMVIT?

Samvit Journal is published by Sri Sarada Math twice yearly. Foreign subscriptions are sent via airmail and should arrive in the United States and Canada by March and September. If you are a subscriber residing within these countries and have not received an expected issue of *Samvit* within a reasonable time, Sri Sarada Society will happily help locate and replace your missing issue. We also process subscriptions and renewals. **Renew now for 1999!**

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

ON SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

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: How do you let go in terms of bhakti?

Take as an example Sri Ramakrishna's attachment to one image. As one pays more attention to one image, giving all one's emotional energy to that one image of God, one let's go of the ego. That is bhakti.

Q: Could you speak about emotion? How to use emotions in spiritual life or what to do with them? Can they be useful?

Of course, otherwise there would be no progress. The best use of emotion in religious, spiritual, life has been to turn it towards God, enjoyment of God's company, God's vision. That is religious language. Expressed in philosophical language, the search for truth needs a lot of energy, terrible energy, to help you concentrate your mind. You have to constantly convert the energy of the emotions of life into that. We need emotional energy to feel for what we are saying. We need to feel for what we are listening to. If we don't feel anything, our minds will not take it in.

Q: Is meditation something that you do just in the morning, do you try to focus your mind all the time?

Well, the science of Vedanta says that all your experiences can be tapped, you can turn your attention to whichever activity you are doing in such a way that instead of being more and more divided, they can lead you back to a sense of unity and fulfillment. But since we have become externalized, it is very difficult and you need training for some time, therefore there has to be a separate set time for doing it intensely, which is meditation, but the method has to be applied to all human activity.

Q: Why is the spiritual path so difficult?

When the material world around us is so real, when we can see it and touch it and, nevertheless, the scientist has not been able to show what is real in it after researching it for so long, how much more difficult is the search when you come to something as subtle as consciousness itself? It is difficult because we are it. The final answer is, "I am it!" But we love to play games, not with ourselves, but with our images. We create experience. Through millions and millions of years of evolution, we have created the gadget through which to get the experience, the mind and the body. This is what the final answer is: we create body after body so that we can play the game again and again and again — until we see through the game and realize that we have been making it all up.

Q: Why does spiritual life start out so much fun and then it becomes not so exciting?

In the beginning you need a lot of energy and a lot of emotion. As you proceed, emotion changes into a kind of perseverance, persistence, holding on to the last. I would say that is the difference.

A LASTING CONTRIBUTION

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

In his preface to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* Swami Nikhilananda writes, "Miss Margaret Woodrow Wilson and Mr. Joseph Campbell have worked hard in editing my translation." Joseph Campbell is known for introducing the significance of myth into modern thought. But the name Margaret Woodrow Wilson also fosters recognition.

It was in Swamiji's Cottage at Thousand Island Park that I came across a history of the United States written by Woodrow Wilson, given to Swami Nikhilananda by the President's daughter, Margaret. It interested me to learn that Swami had requested these volumes and that Margaret had given them on the condition that he read them, since he had encouraged my own interest in history.

Margaret had retired to India long before I first came to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in 1951, but clearly she was held in great esteem. Older disciples related instances and told of her important role in translating M.'s *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* into English. Swami himself indicated that Margaret had insight into how words should read. She would stop his tendency toward excessive prose by asking him to imagine himself seated in Sri Ramakrishna's room with the disciples, listening to the Master's own words. This helped him capture and convey into English the simple imagery and beauty of the original Bengali text.

Margaret was born in 1886, the year Sri Ramakrishna died. In a book about their father, Eleanor Wilson offers us a colorful glimpse into her older sister's character and their Presbyterian family life.

Margaret never lied. She was "defiantly truthful." She was "vividly intelligent and interested in other people"A leader in everything.... I looked up to her with awe and admiration: she was so fearless, so energetic, so independent. I spent countless hours of my life following Margie, wringing my hands and begging her to "come down" or "come back". She had a passion for being alone.

Margaret, Jessie and I walked to church with father and mother every Sunday morning, rain or shine. Every Sunday we read religious books that mother had carefully chosen to

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improve our minds and character. No games or songs were permitted on Sunday... no unnecessary work of any sort was done on the Sabbath. Father and mother loved poetry and took turns reading it aloud. Favorites were Wordsworth, Shakespeare and Browning.... A deep happy peace permeated the household... much laughter and teasing and warm friendliness...

An early love for fine music brought Margaret to New York City where she studied music and took voice lessons. Throughout the first World War she gave frequent recitals in many American cities and at Army camps, the former usually for the benefit of the Red Cross. Leaving for France in October 1918, she spent the next eight months visiting camps to entertain troops in the Allied armies. A New York Times critic wrote that her voice has "a sympathetic quality, which is its most commendable attribute" and that she sang "with intelligence and feeling and without affectation". Margaret also arranged concerts for her talented musical contemporaries and was responsible for bringing the famous pianist, Paderewski, to the White House during her father's presidency.

Margaret's introduction to Vedanta in the early 1930's ignited within her the deep devotion to Sri Ramakrishna which would prove beneficial to future Western devotees who now read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. It was a lasting spiritual commitment, one which led Margaret to take a five-year residence at Sri Aurobindo's Ashram in Pondicherry, India, where she remained until her death on February 12, 1944 at the age of 57. Interviewed a year earlier by a *New York Times* correspondent, she was quoted as saying, "I am not homesick. In fact, I never felt more at home anywhere any time in my life." Her name at the ashram was *Dishta* meaning "leading to the discovery of the divine self in every human being."

Betty Robinson

INTER-NET-CONNECTED

"How much the worldwide web mirrors the Divine Mother's web of creation, Maya!.." From *Holy Mother's Cyber-Tantu*

<http://www2.scescape.com/saradama/>

Since Mother's website made its debut, the Internet has become a way of life. From behind computer screens people access a vast "space" of information, entertainment and commerce. Maya is said to have a veiling power, which causes us to forget the Truth, and a revealing power, which lights our path back to it. Both of these are reflected in cyberspace.

Among beacons of light, Vedanta has kept pace in establishing an "internet presence." An increasing number of devotees, Vedanta centers, and related organizations throughout the world now have websites. No longer hampered by physical distance, there is an emerging sense of connectedness. Devotees sharing a common quest now meet via email lists, letters, and discussions. Visiting one Vedanta site, you find it contains links to others. This linking of sites, and sharing of spiritual thoughts and ideals through email, is helping build a feeling of a Vedanta community. Just last month, for example, Mother's site was invited to link with the Vivekananda Centre in London.

While there is not room to list URLs in this article, we are in the process of updating links within Holy Mother's site to focus on Internet resources for devotee association. One resource is the Vivekananda Foundation Message Forum. Facilitating discussion on a wide range of topics, posted comments appear automatically. After adding your message, chose to read posted replies or have them sent to you by email. You can access the Forum by visiting the Vivekananda Foundation at <http://www.vivekananda.org/> where a detailed "Help" menu will assist you in navigating through message board options. This cyberspace forum offers a worldwide avenue for spiritual interaction.

Jayanti

SRI SARADA SOCIETY NOTES ONLINE

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