

Sri Sarada Society Notes

Dedicated to Holy Mother

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NOT FINDING FAULT: A PRACTICAL UNDERSTANDING

Adapted from an article by Jayanti that appears in MOTHER OF ALL, a Souvenir volume published by the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Delhi, in honor of Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary.

What does Holy Mother mean when she says, "I can no longer find fault in anyone"? From the highest perspective we know that Mother experienced all as Brahman. For those of us—the rest of us—who are not at this level, however, I think Mother's words and action convey a more practical application. Clearly, Mother *did see* what we would call "faults" in others. She couldn't claim to be the "Mother of the wicked" if she did not recognize "wickedness." Therefore, there must be some other meaning. Mother sees our imperfections *without passing judgment*.

Mother tells us that enumerating a person's faults has no positive effect. Instead, it is the person who criticizes who suffers. "One shouldn't lose oneself in so much sputtering. If one sees the worst of everything, one feels pain."

Once we understand that by "not finding fault" Mother means that we are not to judge others harshly for their mistakes or imperfections, this becomes a practical principle. Forgiveness and patience become spiritual practices leading us toward loving kindness on the one hand and nonattachment on the other. Genuine love, Mother tells us, is without expectation.

"Let me tell you how to love all equally," she instructs. "Do not demand anything of those you love. If you make demands, some will give you more and some less. In that case you will love more those who give more and less those who give you less. Thus your love will not be the same for all."

To a sadhu in charge of an ashram Mother gives this advice on how to guide others: "Love can achieve anything. You can never make someone obey you by using force or by employing a roundabout way."

I am reminded of a saying of Jesus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." In Vedanta circles we give this the highest meaning of advaita (nondual understanding), that is, by

saying that the Self in the neighbor *is your own Atman*. While this is true, it is not something we readily experience. Again, we can derive a more practical spiritual meaning. For us to love our neighbor as ourself, we must first have or develop a sense of self-worth. This also applies to the universal Golden Rule of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In order to know what is good or beneficial for others we need to know what is good for us from the standpoint of spiritual worthiness. This alone is true worthiness, a state which rejoices in the benefit given others. The person with

the fleeting sense of worthiness that comes from an inflated ego fears that the "bubble may burst" at any time. Such a person selfishly tries to protect his or her ego, often at the expense of others. Likewise, a person who feels unworthy looks for unworthiness in those around him. "One finds fault in others after bringing his mind down to that level," Mother observes—that is, to a level of unworthiness.

"If you want peace, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the world your own. No one is a stranger, my child. The whole world is your own."

These well-known words of Mother's, uttered before leaving the body, are initially disturbing to Westerners. To be told to "see one's own faults" feels too familiar. Once again, we are being told to be self-critical of our imperfections. Once again, we are reminded of our unworthiness. Or *are we*?

Here is the wonder of Mother's loving acceptance! In her eyes, human imperfections are *not cause to feel unworthy*. Yes, as spiritual aspirants, we want to work to overcome our faults and become better, purer, and more receptive to and aware of the divinity within and around us. Yet the very fact that we have not reached this goal means that we are not yet perfect. Mother loves us as we are. And we can find peace from accepting ourselves and others in this same way. We can realize that we have much in common with those all around

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IN MOTHER'S WORDS: "To err is human. One should not take that into account. It is harmful for oneself. One gets into the habit of finding fault."

FEELING THE LIGHT WITHIN

Sandra Giacosa visited the Pangot Retreat Center for women in June 2004. She lives in Montevideo, Uruguay.

I give thanks for having had the opportunity to be in Pangot—an experience so special for me that it is difficult to put fully into words.

It is like having been in a place out of time and dimension and in which I had a glimpse of that which we are really looking for. It is strange because at the same time I felt that it was a place well known to me, like feeling at home. A perfect union between the beauty of the nature that surrounds us and that other beauty which is so subtle and at the same time so immense that it is impossible for us to describe. And I feel that all that strength and indescribable beauty is heightened with the presence of Pravrajika Vivekapranaji.

At first I thought it was going to be difficult for me to adapt. Although I had been in India before, this was my first experience with the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission (the service branch of Sri Sarada Math). But to my surprise I felt as if I had come home. As a consequence, departure was very hard for me.

The environment has a tangible energy and at the same time a peace that nurtures the spirit in a marvelous way—a place that seems suspended in time and for this reason is eternal, a place in which I felt so in harmony that it made me appreciate the greatness of the human spirit.

Since my visit, I feel that a part of me has stayed there and this helps me in the search that I have to continue in the place where I was born.

I want to again thank Mother for giving me the possibility of being touched in the soul. It is my wish that many more of us will be able to go there and feel the greatness that we—all women—have and to learn how to wake it up.

Editor's Note

We extend our sincere apology to Swami Tathagatananda, Pat Gibbons and to our readers because of an unfortunate error that appeared in the review of the swami's book, JOURNEY OF THE UPANISHADS TO THE WEST. While editing the review we inadvertently made it to read that Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman had met Swami Vivekananda and had been influenced by him.

Neither Swami Tathagatananda nor the reviewer, Pat Gibbons, made this reference, which is historically impossible. As originally written the review refers to Swamiji's welcome by those who had been influenced by the earlier Transcendental movement, with which Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson were associated at various times during its history.

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us. We share the present limitations of our human birth, and we share the potential of realizing that all are One.

Mother's love flows from the fountain of the highest advaitic truth. Through coming to feel this love, which is untainted by worldly desire, we are drawn closer and closer to this goal. Following Mother's practical example of dealing with others appropriately and lovingly, without judgment, ill-will, or selfish expectation, reflects the ideal of divine motherhood. By thus removing the social and psychological barriers separating us from others, we open the way for our own realization. This path of universal acceptance, made manifest in Sri Sarada Devi, is available to everyone.

WHY?

Why is it pussycat has fur
And I have only skin?
Why does she lie still and purr
While I always make a din?
It is because
Girls, boys and pussycat
Live to different ends;
Which doesn't mean that
They cannot be good friends.
Why is it puppydog can bark
And I can only scream?
Why can glow-worm make a spark,
While I cannot give a gleam?
It is because
Girls, boys, dog, worm and cat
Act to different ends;
Which doesn't mean that
They should not be good friends.
Why is it bull-frogs can croak
And I can only call?
Why fire-flies their fire can poke,
While I have no fire at all?
It is because
All have different ways to go—
This for one, that for others;
They purr and bark, croak and glow,
Yet are all our brothers.

From MY SONG GARDEN, a book of poetry for children, by Sister Devamata, Laura Franklin Glenn.

In Answer to Your Inquiry

Readers frequently ask if they may contribute to the cost of receiving *SRI SARADA SOCIETY NOTES* by mail. Printing and postal costs are approximately 96¢ an issue, averaging in both foreign and domestic mailings. Any amount that you would like to donate is both welcome and appreciated.

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.

INDIA: 1907–1909

Second in a series on the life of Laura Franklin Glenn, Sister Devamata, who became Swami Paramananda's first disciple and served as his chief assistant.

The New York Vedanta Society was founded by Swami Vivekananda himself in November 1894. It holds the distinction of being the first center of the Ramakrishna Order, preceding Belur Math. In 1906, Swami Paramananda, Swamiji's youngest disciple, was sent from India to assist at the center, where Swami Abhedananda was the minister in charge. Disembarking from the boat anchored at the pier in the New York harbor, Swami Paramananda was greeted by Laura Glenn. Within a few months, she would become his first disciple, receiving from him the name Devamata, meaning "Mother of the Gods."

He arranged for her to go to India and study under Swami Ramakrishnananda, sending her off with the words, "You are going to the land of great souls, go in freedom. If you should meet with one whom you would rather have as your teacher, do not be bound by any thought of me."

The next two years were rich in experiences, engraved indelibly in her memory. For most of this time, she lived across from the Madras Math under the direct spiritual guidance of Swami Ramakrishnananda. This daily contact with one who had witnessed the divine lila of Sri Ramakrishna counted among her most precious Indian memories. She had a profound reverence for him. He had a motherlike solicitude for her.

In *DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY* Devamata chronicles the religious life of India as she witnessed it during these years. Perceived as they were through the reverential and appreciative eye of a devotee, the various spiritual practices of India are captured in their essential spirit, as were various religious and social observances. Also recorded were reminiscences of the six-month visit of President Maharaj, Swami Brahmananda, to South India toward the close of 1908.

Addressing her as Sister, President Maharaj noted that December, "You are the Christian member of the Math. You should give us a Christmas party." Devamata set up a Christmas altar behind fragrant hangings of jasmine garlands. Bread and wine, symbols of the Christian Eucharist, were placed beside the altar. Another table was piled high with fruit, sweetmeats, and plum cake.

President Maharaj then requested her to read the story of Christ's birth. Then lights, incense, and burning camphor were waved before the altar and hymns were sung. He later confided to her that as she read the Bible, Christ suddenly stood before the altar dressed in a long blue cloth. "He talked to me for some time," the swami told her. "It was a blessed event."

From Madras, Devamata made a pilgrimage to Calcutta.

Sister Christine met her at the train station. Due to illness in Holy Mother's household, she boarded at the school started by Sister Nivedita in the locality of Baghbazar. Every morning she walked several long blocks to Holy Mother's house. Mother gave her the privilege of making her bed and ordering everything in her room. On Devamata's first visit, Mother allowed her to massage her body, thus fulfilling her inner desire.

At another time Mother offered her two choice mangoes that had been gifted to her. Devamata responded, "It would give me greater pleasure to have you keep them." Mother's reply came quickly: "Do you think it will give you greater pleasure to have me keep them or give me greater pleasure to have you take them?" The response arising in her own heart, Devamata answered: "It must give you greater pleasure because you have a larger heart to feel it."

Mother's unbounded affection and tender care can be sensed in all her letters to Devamata. Typically addressing her as "my sweet daughter," she wrote in one

Your loving letters are duly in hand. . . I always remember you. . . Whenever I see the place you used to sit and meditate your loving form comes to my mind. All the inmates of the house always speak of you."

With my blessings,

Your most affectionate Mother

Devamata's first visit to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar was in the company of two of the Master's disciples, Swami Saradananda and Yogin-ma. Counting it as one of her most vivid memories, she wrote, "I sat under the banyan tree where Sri Ramakrishna attained the vision of eternity. I pushed barefooted through the brambles to the bel tree to which he had fled for deeper seclusion. I bowed before the image of the great Mother of the Universe where he had worshipped, I lingered in the room where he had lived and taught."

Devamata went on pilgrimage to Dakshineswar several more times, once in the company of Master Mahasaya, recorder of the *GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA*, then with Sister Christine and again with Lakshmi-didi, the Master's niece. She saw almost daily direct disciples who had served Sri Ramakrishna, such as Swamis Saradananda, Adbhutananda, and Premananda. She sought out those who had known him like Girish Chandra Ghosh, Golap-ma, and Ramlal-dada, Ramakrishna's nephew. They narrated incident after incident of his life, their many personal experiences with him, and the words he had spoken.

Sailing back to New York on September 17, 1909, her heart was filled with inspiration. Her being felt full of the tangible presence of Sri Ramakrishna, a presence enlivened through the memories of those who had had intimate contact with him.

Joan Shack

Book Reviews

PLUMBING PRIMARY SOURCES

Swami Vivekananda's Western Works. Revised and edited by Swami Brahmavidyananda. Volume 1, VIEW FROM THE CENTER: SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON A UNIVERSAL SPIRITUALITY, Temple Universal Publishing, 2003, 248 pages. Volume 2, THE WAY HOME: SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON THE ESSENCE OF SPIRITUALITY, Temple Universal Publishing 2003, 288 pages.

"I have a message for the West as Buddha had a message for the East." Thus it is, during the latter phase of his short span as world teacher, that Swami Vivekananda realized and stated his mission. Such a bold, clear statement should lead us to ask, "So, what was Vivekananda's message to the West?"

The Swami was himself very careful to address what he saw as distinct differences between Western society and his homeland and to fashion his message to address the needs and potential of each. Yet, among the published writings about Swamiji and numerous compilations of his lectures, a complete, systematic presentation of his Western lectures has been missing.

Such a goal has been taken up by Swami Brahmavidyananda, an American monastic who has spent his life as a Vedantist studying Swamiji. In his own quest to find and understand Vivekananda's message to the West, he saw the need to isolate and publish what might be called the "Complete Works for the Western reader." This set will be an invaluable addition to Vedanta literature, aiding anyone wanting to learn Vedanta more closely as Swami Vivekananda unfolded it a little over a century ago.

These teachings are being arranged according to themes found in Swamiji's lectures, the first and foremost being the

universal principles of Vedanta, namely, that underlying unity that is the basis of spiritual impulse. This underlying unity, according to Swamiji, also drives the sciences and all secular life.

Two volumes on spirituality, from the universal and individual perspectives, are presently available. Volumes on each of the four yogas are expected to be released this year.

SHAFTS OF LIGHT: SELECTED TEACHINGS OF SWAMI ASHOKANANDA FOR SPIRITUAL PRACTICE. Compiled and edited by Sister Gargi and Shelley Brown. Kalpa Tree Press, New York, 2004, 187 pages.

Gleaned from the notes taken by Sister Gargi and other disciples of Swami Ashokananda, the passages in this volume, many no longer than a sentence, are a treasury of guidance, clarity, and encouragement to spiritual sojourners. Vibrant and practical in style, the Swami's words were especially directed to and for the Western mind and heart.

The collection has been arranged first into three themes, "Spiritual Perspectives," "Spiritual Practice," and "The Experience of God." Within this broad sweep, they are further divided by topic and arranged to reveal a multifaceted approach to spiritual understanding. The reader will no doubt discover that certain passages speak more loudly than others. Presently, I find the section on spiritual practice especially helpful. We usually have some idea of what we are to do when we sit for meditation (whether or not we are successful). But how do we bring our spirituality into daily living? Subtitled "Feeling the Spirit—Inside and Out," the section on spiritual practice is brimming with helpful tips.

Jayanti Hoye

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