

# Sri Sarada Society Notes

Dedicated to Holy Mother

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## DIVINITY AT WORK WITHIN THE WORLD

*The following is adapted from an article by Swami Nikhilananda, a disciple of Sri Sarada Devi, published in Living Wisdom: Vedanta in the West, edited by Pravrajika Vrajaprana, 1994. Read the complete article on the Internet at <http://www.srisarada.org/mother/lw.html> courtesy of Vedanta Press, Hollywood.*

Holy Mother's immaculate purity, her unceasing meditation and prayer, her all-embracing compassion and utter selflessness, endowed her with the delicacy and tenderness of a maiden, a subtle grace and quiet dignity, and withal guilelessness and simplicity.

Her innate motherliness put visitors at ease. To a person coming to her for the first time, she conveyed the feeling that she had been eagerly waiting for him. Holy Mother always inspired reverence but never a feeling of remoteness...

It is extremely difficult for ordinary men to recognize God when he is embodied as man. An apparent victim of hunger and thirst, pain and pleasure, hope and despair, sickness and fear, he weeps, laughs, and suffers without really losing awareness of his divine nature. In the God-man humanity blends with divinity. When living at the phenomenal level the God-man is alert about human affairs, possesses practical knowledge and realism, and observes the conventions of society. Side by side with divine ecstasies, he cultivates humility, magnanimity, ethical sensitivity, love, the spirit of service, modesty, and other similar traits in order to set a model for others. He also shows how one living in the world can rise above it and enjoy inner peace in the midst of life's turmoil and worry.

The life of Holy Mother is a demonstration of these facts. Though an embodiment of divinity, she identified herself for her own accord with the lives of her relatives, the people of her village, and her devotees. She rejoiced at the happiness of oth-

ers and wept at their suffering. Purposely she often suppressed her true nature, because, as she said, "The excessive manifestation of divinity creates fear in the minds of devotees; they cannot feel intimate." Once a disciple spoke of her being the Divine Mother, and she said, "You always harp on that one theme. I say that I am your mother, and that does not satisfy you." Her language was simple and natural, and her conduct spontaneous and unostentatious. She never lost these characteristics, even while giving initiation or spiritual instruction.

In her conduct she was always alert, remembering that in the future people would regard her as an ideal to follow...

Her brothers regarded her as their affectionate big sister, her nieces and nephews as their indulgent aunt, and her disciples as their mother. Many ladies, after visiting her, said that she was just like one of them. Yet she said to a disciple that, even in the midst of all her activities, by a mere wish she could remember her divine nature in a flash, and realize the world to be the playground of maya. If she was constantly conscious of her true self, how could she fulfill her mission?

How humble she was! Once when she was ill an ordinary priest was called in to perform some special worship

for her recovery. After the ceremony she took the dust of his feet. When someone told her of his having a loose character, she remarked, "That may be. One must show respect for the brahminical garb. The Master was not born to break traditions."

Often she said to her disciples that she constantly prayed for the total effacement of her ego. And yet she once said openly: "I am the Primordial Power, the Mother of the Universe. I have assumed this body out of compassion for the world. I have been born in every epoch in the past; I shall be born, too, in the future."



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**IN MOTHER'S WORDS:** "I am the mother of the wicked, as I am the mother of the virtuous.

Never fear. Whenever you are in distress, say to yourself, 'I have a mother.'"

## OFFERINGS TO MOTHER

*The following are among the varied offerings left by visitors to Holy Mother's Cyber-Tantu at <http://www.srisarada.org/>.*

Some time back I desired to retire to some secluded place and spend time in prayer, meditation and doing some simple social service. But Mother won't let me. She seems to have placed me in the midst of the busy world. I know why. Which Mother would not want her child to mature? And how can maturity come, if one is not exposed to life's trials and tribulations and allowed to face them squarely and surmount them with Her blessing? Why not face them when we are sure that when our steps falter, She will hold your hand, and if hurt, take you in Her arms? — *Saigon, Vietnam* ☺

Mother, please shower your bountiful grace and blessing on us, your little children. Let us be filled with purity, as in your prayer to the moon. Let us be filled with an uncarping spirit, as in your very last message to the world. The whole world, irrespective of cast, creed, religion or belief, good or bad, are thine own little children; and Thou, as the loving Mother, may Thou carry us little children in your arms and protect us. — *Port Monmouth, NJ* ☺

Mother, the world fills my mind and I feel weary and fearful. I come to you for refuge and strength, but thoughts spin endlessly. I feel no comfort. Perhaps to escape the thoughts, I fall asleep—but the sleep brings no rest.

I know you are my only refuge and my one desire. You alone. But I cannot remember you often enough. Worldly cares press in, and I become entrapped in their resolution. There is so much to take care of, Mother.

Help me to be efficient, that I may remember you as I work. For in this memory is my strength; knowing that we are in this together. *San Diego, CA* ☺

## LITERARY FOUNDATIONS

*While cataloguing biographies on Sri Ramakrishna for the Vedanta Society of Southern California library, Brahmacharini Saraswati happened on a rare find. Her review inaugurates the literary theme in this issue of SRI SARADA SOCIETY NOTES*

*Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples* by Sister Devamata, Ananda Ashrama, 1928.

From notes preserved from her stay in India from 1907 to 1909, Devamata faithfully reproduced what she gathered primarily from Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras, as well as from other of the direct monastic and lay disciples in Calcutta. From the latter association we have the benefit of her stories of Sri Ramakrishna's final days at Cossipore, and stories from Holy Mother and the women disciples. Her receptiveness to

the Holy Mother's quiet graces is evident in accounts of their tender meetings. Devamata continued to correspond with Holy Mother for many years after returning to the United States. Some of these letters appear in her book, *Days in an Indian Monastery*, which recounts her life in Madras.

Devamata's accounts offer insight into already familiar incidents. For example, she presents Sri Ramakrishna's thought process when discriminating between Ganges clay and rupees in an expanded form, thus making his conclusion more readily understandable and acceptable to the Western reader.

The last two chapters offer selections from Ramakrishna's teachings and a short piece about Vivekananda's Western sojourn. The former includes some aspects of the Master's teachings which, sadly in recent decades, have become de-emphasized to the point of disappearance in the propagation of his message in the West. "Spirituality is caught rather than taught" is the axiom that best describes those values. The unfoldment of the innate essence of the individual, rather than the spread of a movement, was the original emphasis.

In attempting to bridge the gulf between East and West, some of Devamata's definitions of *Sanskrit* terms are not quite accurate, but not totally erroneous. The book is a truly remarkable achievement for a woman of her time. It is unfortunate that it has been out of print for so long. The prospective reader will have to scour libraries and rare book shops for copies. Her other two books, *Days in an Indian Monastery* and *The Path Devotion* are still available in paperback.

Born Laura Franklin Glenn, Devamata was a native of Cincinnati and a descendent of Benjamin Franklin. After graduating from Vassar, she lived and studied in Europe for ten years. In 1896, she first heard Swami Vivekananda speak in New York, thereafter attending his classes and lectures. In 1902, she became a member of the Vedanta Society of New York and was put in charge of publications under Swami Abhedananda. In that capacity she edited Sara Ellen Waldo's notes from the summer in Thousand Island Park, published as the celebrated *Inspired Talks*. (See article on Sarah Ellen Waldo, Page 4)

In March of 1907, Swami Paramananda, then a very young assistant swami at the New York center, initiated her and gave her the name Devamata, meaning "Mother of the Gods," because she was so much older than himself. Later that same year she collected his sayings. Published as *Path of Devotion*, the collection continues to be popular generation after generation. Details of her lifelong association with Swami Paramananda and his work are recorded in *A Bridge of Dreams*, one of the better biographies of Ramakrishna Order swamis in the West. She passed away in 1942, two years after her guru.

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**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.

## A CONSCIOUS BATTLE

*Pravrajika Vivekaprana of Sri Sarada Math, New Delhi, responded to these questions about karma yoga, conscious, selfless action, while in San Juan, Puerto Rico, June 1999. (Transcribed by Shraddha)*

*Q: Does karma yoga challenge you?*

But of course. All my daily experiences have to become my teachers. If I am to rise to any level of inner control, my whole experience has to become conscious experience. In today's world, we don't have superfluous time and energy after we have done the day's battle. Actually this is a war, a daily battle, so I must use the energy very consciously, controlled.

*Q: How is it that one should be conscious?*

I should know that I am aware, and my mind should not wander. Wandering of the mind is a waste of energy — because it is not conscious. A wandering mind wastes almost all energy.

*Q: How do you keep sense organs from running after sense objects?*

There is a noise there. I can run and forget this completely — or I can keep it outside and pay attention to it. Use this idea for everything. Do not be a compulsive slave to your sense organs. There is noise — but I have the capacity to keep it in the background and pay attention to something else. One should not run away with the senses. One has to understand these principles, and then apply

them. One may fail twenty times, but the twenty-first time will give some result.

*Q: Can we anticipate fear?*

A: No, you cannot anticipate fear. We are supposed to become conscious of the fact that fear is a very deep part of us. We must not forget it. If I know that fear is there, it may not manifest itself just now, but it is there. Anger is there, obsession is there. But what we do is think, "It wasn't there, I don't know how it happened." We think, "Something outside made me afraid or made me angry" — as if it weren't there to begin with. The outer stimulus merely brings it up. What we are supposed to do is to know that these things are there all the time, and at any time they can erupt. Therefore we have to learn to be watchful about ourselves, how we behave, how the ideas build up—and how they lead me to fear or anger or obsession. Everything takes place through feelings, through ideas, through images, thoughts, sensations, that's all. There is nothing else.

And all these—sensations, feelings, thoughts, images—take place at the conscious level. We have to learn how to see through their rising. It's like measuring the temperature and the speed of the wind, and seeing in which direction it is blowing, and then forecasting the weather tomorrow.

The strategy is left to each person, it is a personal war, but what we need to understand is preparedness. We must be prepared. Something that is within we need to be prepared for, we need to know that these enemies are there.

## Pravrajika Vivekaprana In Florida

Pravrajika Vivekaprana will be in Orlando, Florida from mid-July to mid-September this year. Dates and topics for her classes will be posted on the Sri Sarada Society website at <http://srisarada.org/>. For information on accommodations and other inquiries you may also e-mail Caroline Giorgi at [zzclg@aol.com](mailto:zzclg@aol.com) or Joan Shack at [tour@srisarada.org](mailto:tour@srisarada.org).

## VEDANTA—NEW VOICES

*Several books related to Ramakrishna Vedanta have been published during the past decade, many of which have been written or edited by women. As a service to our readers, additional titles will be listed in upcoming issues and we will offer occasional book reviews.*

*Vedanta: A Simple Introduction* by Pravrajika Vrajaprana, published by Vedanta Press, Hollywood, 1999, 89 pages. A freshly written overview of one of the world's most ancient religious philosophies.

*Bhakti, Dedicated Life of Helen Rubel* by Elva Nelson, Frugal Printer, New Hampshire, 1995, 49 pages. We are given a glimpse into the life of this disciple of Swami Akhilananda through reminiscences and personal letters.

*Centred in Truth: The Story of Swami Nitya-swarup-ananda* by Shelley Brown, M.D., published by Kalpa Tree Press,

New York, 2001, in two volumes. Explores the life of the founder of the Ramakrishna Institute of Culture in Calcutta.

*Josephine MacLeod and Vivekananda's Mission* by Linda Prugh, published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai, 1998, 601 pages. Offers a fascinating look at this foremost supporter of Swami Vivekananda and his vision.

*Swami Trigunatita: His Life and Work* by Marie Louise Burke (Sister Gargi), published by Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, 1997, 434 pages. A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Trigunatita began work in San Francisco in 1903, at the request of Swami Vivekananda.

*Portrait of Sister Christine* by Pravrajika Vrajaprana, published by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1996, 107 pages. This American disciple of Swami Vivekananda is remembered for her spiritual accomplishment. She worked closely with Sister Nivedita in India.

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## THE INSPIRED SCRIBE

*Looking back a little more than a century we consider the contributions of Sarah Ellen Waldo, in our series on women who have helped in shaping Vedanta in America.*

It is through the lives of those near and dear to Swami Vivekananda that we turn back the pages of time and relive those hollowed days of his presence amongst us. Sarah Ellen Waldo is one of these: a disciple and ever-present worker. Ellen was entrusted by Swamiji to transcribe his talks in the very early days of the New York Vedanta Society. So close was her association, so devoted her service, her mind became as if one with his. And it was to her he said, “How could you have caught my thoughts and words so perfectly? It was as if I heard myself speak.”

We can picture Swamiji in his New York apartment on a quiet afternoon in 1895 dictating to her his translation of the Yoga Sutras, later published in England as *Raja Yoga* in 1896. She sat, pen poised, ready to dip in ink the second Swamiji broke the silence with some illuminating interpretation of the sutras. Remaining for a time in a state of deep meditation, he would emerge, suddenly. Sara was ready, poised, to take his words down in longhand. Day after day she would leave her Brooklyn home at 8:00 AM by horse-car, cross the bridge and arrive at his lodging on W. 39th Street two hours later. Each night at 9:00 PM, she made the same arduous trip home. Thus time flowed in tireless service.

Again, it was Ellen who captured his most sublime utterances for posterity, during those seven blessed weeks at Thousand Island Park in the summer of 1895. Later published as *Inspired Talks*, they capture Swamiji as the ancient rishi he was, come to earth to disseminate eternal

truths. Swamiji described himself as being at his best during those weeks, training the twelve students who followed him there in “Advaita realization.”

We imagine the spiritual impact Swamiji’s lecture had on Ellen when first she heard him speak on December 30, 1894. The Brooklyn Ethical Association had invited him to lecture. That night, membership of this learned gathering sat spell-bound, hanging on his every word. Ellen, herself a member, was transfixed. The call had come. She never looked back.

We picture her half out of breath, trying to keep up with Swamiji’s quick pace as they walk up Broadway. We smile amusedly, thinking of Swamiji’s experiences preparing combinations of Western food in her kitchen. Her quiet home was an occasion of rest for him on his free days. Images of their association fill the mind.

Often referred to as “S. E. Waldo” in various writings, Sister Devamata describes Ellen as a tall, portly figure, familiar to those who attended Swamiji’s classes. Extending a warm welcome to visitors, seating guests, renting chairs, printing tickets, preparing flyers, mailing posters, noting names and addresses, taking notes, cooking and cleaning are the diverse ways in which she served. Ellen writes to Sister Devamata, “there was nothing I would not have done for him.”

In 1896, Swamiji wrote to her from England, “Why do you not begin to teach? — Hold regular talks and lectures... Wherever Ramakrishna’s children boldly come out, He is with them. Plunge in boldly.” In undertaking his charge, Ellen was considerably successful. She received a warm response from her audience. He was her “blessed, blessed guru,” and to him she was Haridasi, “servant of the Lord,” one among those who best understood his teaching.

*Joan Shack*

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