

# Sri Sarada Society Notes

Dedicated to Holy Mother

Summer 2010 Volume 16, Issue 1

## THE DARKNESS OF ILLUSION

Written by a high school senior from Boston, *Kevin Phat*, *THE DARKNESS OF ILLUSION* is meant to be aloud as Rap. Kevin was in Swami Sarvagatananda's Marshfield youth group.

*We take one step forward and two steps back  
trying to reach samadhi.  
If only we could see, but we are blind.*

*Impure thoughts cloud our mind, even in that little time  
we sit for meditation.  
Our little minds give way to strong imagination.*

*People claim they are spiritual just because they go to a church  
and pray every Sunday.  
While most of them will not even think about God another day.*

*God is for whom some say they work  
But who is God other than a presence  
in every atom, electron and quark.*

*One must learn to make our work  
a worship of God by being detached  
or to this world one will forever remain attached.*

*24 hours in a day  
but not even a full hour to pray.  
Work becomes our life.*

*So much so that sometimes it feels  
as if though there is a knife at our throat.  
Which is why we must devote more of our time to God.*

*Even though sometimes it feels hard to breath  
but through meditation we must conceive  
a light which will guide us*

*through the darkness of illusion  
and lead us out of this confusion  
and then only then will we be illumined.*

## WORK AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Any action we take is prompted by something. It may be an emotional reaction, a hunch, an expected or learned response, a careful act or a careless one. We must have a reason or purpose for which to act. Otherwise why act at all? Or how do we know what action to take? Don't we, in fact, see individuals who are unable to act because they haven't figured out what they would like to get or accomplish? Thus we may say that in order to act we need to have a "goal". This is the case whether or not we are consciously aware of the reasons for our actions. However, as a spiritual aspirant I want to learn to act with awareness and purpose. I want to know why we are taking this particular action rather than another. I want to act with intention and care. With a plan-of-action in mind, I want to strive consciously to use the knowledge and skills I have gained in the best way I can. But ultimately it is my intentions that matter. Am I acting for a noble or selfless purpose? Or do I seek to become "famous" or impose my own will? Fame may come, and a spiritual aspirant must be ever aware not to take this too much to heart. The idea is not that we need to deny our accomplishments. Rather we want to learn to see both "accomplishment" and "failure" as learning opportunities and to not take either to heart.

Why? Because life teaches us that we do not have control over the outcomes. If we did, we would never need be disappointed because something does not go as we expected. Again and again, we take false hope from seeming success as we fall under the spell of maya, only to be later disappointed. What is the answer? Vedanta affirms that we do not have control over outcomes. We are the instrument through which the Divine Will is expressed. Indeed, it is at the time of true selfless mastery in any field that one often begins to feel something greater flowing through them and awareness that whatever happens is not their own doing. But for most of us this is still the aim of our spiritual practice. Trying always to do the best we can, we strive to purify our intentions by setting aside desires and desires. We help this process by continually reminding ourselves that the outcome is not in our hands. These are spiritual approaches that can be applied in whatever situation we find ourselves called upon to act.

*Jayanti Hoye*

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**IN MOTHER'S WORDS:** "One finds Does anything ever happen to another if you enumerate his faults?....  
I cannot see anyone's faults. If someone does even a small kindness for me, I try to remember this instead."

## ALL HER VEDANTA FAMILY

*A Note From Jayanti:* *Sitting at the computer to write about Amala (Carolyn Kenny) for our series on women who have contributed to the expression of Vedanta in the West, I doubted my knowing her well enough. I knew some remarkable facts. Hers was the first Western Vedanta family I would meet; a family that included two monastics and third-generation Vedantin grandchildren. I had come to look to her to unlock the mysteries of ritual worship. She had written a guide explaining evening arati and I looked forward to her reading English translations of the Sanskrit chants and mantras from her seat next to the shrine during special pujas. I knew she had been a steady presence in the early unfolding of our San Diego center and that I felt a sadness when she moved to Portland. But did I know enough? This is when I turned to others for help and discovered that we all shared pretty much the same impressions and high regard. Related or not, all had a place in Amala's family.*

In every spiritual group there are some members, who can be intimidating to newcomers, by letting you know how dedicated they are, and making you feel lacking. But not Amala! Ever ready to answer questions and share her experience, she was never preachy or judgmental, always genuine, real and down-to-earth. And what a great sense of humor she had!

As you got to know Amala better, you realized how intimate her relationship with Thakur and Ma was. On the dashboard of her car she had magnetic pictures of them, which she could flip over in a moment, if she had a passenger who would not understand. On her dining table were photos of Sri Ramakrishna and Mother; she told me: "Most of the time I eat alone" (this was after her husband, Joe, had passed away) "I need some company!"

A rather large and heavy woman, Amala had her share of falls and accidents in later life, breaking an arm or foot several times. I remember visiting her at her home in El Cajon on one of those occasions, supposedly to cheer her up. As I was leaving I realized: it was Amala who had inspired me with her remarkable attitude, even under such adverse conditions.

*Uli Burgin*

In *VEDANTA: AN ADVENTURE AND A JOURNEY* (1994) Carolyn talks in specific detail about recollection.

"Because I am a Bhakta, I try to keep recollectedness of the Lord, and I try to keep my Japa [repetition of the Lord's name] going. It sounds so easy. After 30 years I am still trying! I have discovered one little gimmick that seems to help. It is the process of association. One

day, while making the bed, I consciously started my Japa. The next day I thought of it again as I approached the bed. For quite a while it was conscious on my part to think of it. But before long I began to realize that Japa was starting automatically as I approached the bed. I felt I discovered the technique which could be transferred to many other activities during the day. That really helped me. Reviewing each day just before I went to sleep was another help. It [was useful] to see how often my Japa had been going or, unhappily, how often it hadn't."

*Bob Geib*

Mother brought sacred awareness to everything. Her enthusiasm for Vedanta was contagious. As a mother, I couldn't have asked for anyone better. She sacrificed so much for her children.

The number of friends she had all over the world was extraordinary. My sister and I were astonished by the outpouring of letters after her death saying what an inspiration she had been to them. She touched so many lives.

*Pravrajika Bhavaprana*

Unfortunately, I don't really remember any specific events with her. Rather it was her warmth and joy, which, along with a very approachable and unpretentious presence, that drew me to her. She was also in my life during a very opportune time. I had just moved out of my parents house to go to college in a new city. I think I was just barely 20, and I was living in the monastery in San Diego. The situation could be a bit intimidating at times, and I found her regular presence at all of the monastery's events very comforting. Here was someone very much like a spiritual "Grandma," someone that I immediately felt comfortable with, someone that I felt was "one of mine."

*Asesha Chaitanya*



*Amala (Carolyn Kenny) 1918-2007*

Amala's calm radiance of happiness and enthusiasm were very inspiring, not only to me, but to each and every person she met. Her friendly influence was not confined to San Diego, but went far and wide throughout the U.S. Everyone knew her and, in fact, she was the person I asked first for news regarding anyone, anywhere. Many books and projects, like the *CONCORDANCE TO THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA* exist because of her labor of love, and we are still benefiting by the many facets of her work and life to this day.

*Madhuri Traylor*

**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.

## REMEMBERING MOTHER'S SON

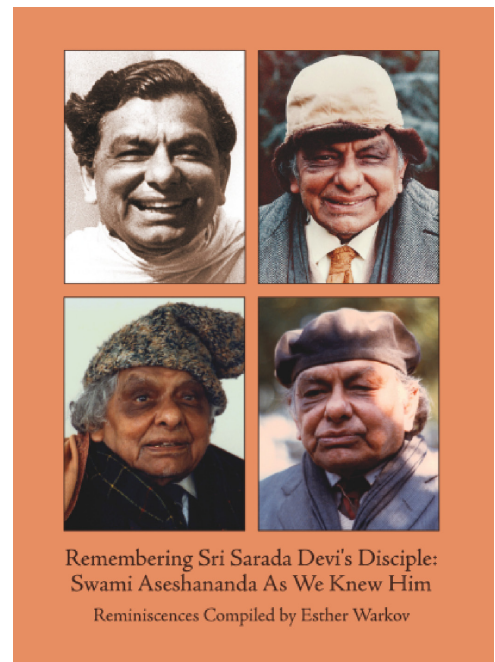
*REMEMBERING SRI SARADA DEVI'S DISCIPLE: SWAMI ASESHANANDA AS WE KNEW HIM*, 64 contributions, 323 pp, compiled by Esther Warkov, published by Compendium Publications, 2010, CD included.

Some of our readers may recall Esther Warkov's requests for reminiscences of Swami Areshananda (1899-1996) who, until his passing, was the last remaining monastic to have been initiated by Holy Mother. In contemplating the somewhat daunting aspects of her vision, Esther writes

*Swami Areshananda eschewed any form of personal adulation or glorification, and as we shall read, went to great—and sometimes amusing—lengths to prevent it. Furthermore, if one did admire Swami, he swiftly redirected that love toward the Divine...How, then, do we tell the story of Swami Areshananda in a way that honors his selflessness?... The solution has been, whenever possible, to focus on the ideal Swami represented rather than our subjective observations of his achievements.*

In addition to being initiated by Mother, the swami served as personal secretary to Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He was sent to serve numerous centers in both India and the United States before assuming responsibilities as swami-in-charge of the Portland, Oregon Vedanta Society. These reminiscences of the monks, nuns, disciples, and devotees carefully preserved in this collection offer insight into the life-transforming power of an exemplary spiritual teacher. As Swami Areshananda spent many decades in America these personal reflections should resonate well with Western readers. An added bonus, the accompanying CD includes a television video interview with Swami Areshananda, numerous historic photographs, a rare booklet entitled *THE LOTUS AND THE FLAME: MONASTIC TEACHINGS OF SWAMI ASESHANANDA* prepared by Swami Yogeshananda, letters, and other archival material.

For information visit <http://compendiumpublications.com>. Sponsors are needed to buy additional copies purchased for someone of limited means, a monastic, Vedanta center/retreat, religious organization, or library. You might also encourage your local library to acquire a copy.



## HOLY MOTHER'S EXAMPLE: TIMELY AND TIMELESS

*Freely adapted from SRI SARADA DEVI: THE MIRACLE OF HER LOVE AND COMPASSION by Dr. Sreematti Mukherjee, Senior Lecturer at Basanti Devi College, Kolkata, India.*

Loneliness and alienation are not really the characteristic malaise of twentieth-century life alone. In mid-nineteenth century England, Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) had pointed out the gradual alienation of the intellectual particularly, from both the self and nature. In *THE SCHOLAR GIPSY* he lays the burden of blame not only on the increasing materialism and mechanization of society but also on an excessive life of the intellect, which makes mental poise and serenity difficult to achieve. Those acquainted with the Victorian ethos will know that not only was it a period of frenetic intellectual and scientific pursuit, but also one in which the manifold complexities of urban culture often caused the self-conscious individual to retreat from meaningful relationships and a meaningful response to nature. In the poem *TO MARGUERITE* Arnold poignantly utters:

*Yes! In the sea of life enisled,  
With echoing straits between us thrown,*

*Dotting the shoreless water wild,  
We mortal millions live alone.*

His answer to this state of spiritual malaise that afflicts the world are the three words of advice that Brahma (*Prajapati*) supposedly gave respectively to the Gods, to Man and to the Demons in the *BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD: Damyata, Datta and Dayadhvam*. Eliot of course, changes the order of the words in his poem to "Man", "Demons" and "Gods", which Harish Trivedi in *POSTCOLONIAL TRANSACTIONS* has taken great pains to point out, is an act of great intellectual casuistry on Eliot's part. I am not interested in debating these questions here, but would like to draw attention to the closing lines of the poem, which borrow the traditional invocation to peace at the end of most of the Upanishads: *Shanti, Shanti, Shanti!*

How does one explain the meaning of the word "Shanti," I wonder? Is it something that one arrives at through meditation alone, or through reconciling sometimes the most brutal contraries of experience, or through connecting

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with some of the most vital and abiding areas of one's own being? Eliot's own explanation of it in the elaborate notes he provides at the end of the poem is "The Peace which passeth understanding.

In a world that knows perhaps, one of the worst crises in human values, what has Sri Ramakrishna's wife to offer us? Sri Sarada Devi had none of the external conditions of power as we understand it today, none of the accomplishments that make us viable and competitive commodities in the ruthless rat race of our professional lives. However, her life perhaps bears out the truth of Jesus' saying; "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." In my opinion she stands for that inexplicable condition of grace, which operates on us in mysterious and unseen ways, carrying restorative and healing powers. In his essay "My Week With Gandhi" the American journalist Louis Fischer made insightful observations about the nature of Gandhi's power. Citing examples of presidents and prime ministers who functioned within the external accoutrements of power like Lloyd George and Churchill, Fischer exclaims about Gandhi, "His power was nil, his authority enormous. It came of love. The source of his power lay in his love." I feel that such a comment would be extremely appropriate in the context of Holy Mother's life whose power lay in her seeming powerlessness.

Indeed, the kind of power she embodied seemed to work best not through anger and admonition, (although, she had provocation enough) but through patience and endurance. Some aspects of Sri Sarada Devi's life have a persistent quality. These include her unwavering commitment to people both within and without the family and a scrupulous sense of dispensing her duties, untiring embracing the ideal of

work as service. She retained a habit of contentment well into her final years, and rarely displayed displeasure. Her last words to a woman devotee were, "If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own!" They reflect the example she set before us. Sri Sarada Devi touched the lives of many while she was alive. Even after her death she continues to draw many lives to her and perhaps provides them with that still point of rest or repose, that "shanti" to which T. S. Elliot alludes.

## News & Announcements

### Digital Notes

If you would like to "go paperless" and receive *SARADA SOCIETY NOTES* as a PDF, please email your current mailing address (for removal from list) to [notes@srisarada.org](mailto:notes@srisarada.org).

### Help Needed In Spinning Mother's Web

Our website dedicated to Holy Mother was among the first Vedanta sites in cyberspace. Since then the internet has become a vast network with design possibilities far exceeding Jayanti's knowledge and capabilities. We know that many of Mother's children have web design skills. Please email us if you would like to help with maintaining Mother's site.

### Fruitful Reading

Six booklets in the *UNDERSTANDING VEDANTA LECTURE SERIES* by Pravrajika Vivekaprana are now available from Amazon.com. Each based on a series of lectures, titles include: "Path of Knowledge", "The Universal Message", "Death or Immortality", "Discrimination between the Real and Unreal", "Who Am I?" and "I am That". Also available by Pravrajika Vivekaprana: *A CHALLENGE FOR MODERN MAN*

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EDITORIAL STAFF: Joan Shack, Janet Walker, Jayanti Hoye, Ellen Paull • CIRCULATION: Hari & Lakshmi

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