

Voice of the Worldwide Vedanta Movement

# GLOBAL VEDANTA

ONLINE

Online Issue #3, 2023



***In This Issue:***

- **The Field and Its Knower**
- **Tales with Nine Lives**
- **South America and Vedanta**
- **Eighty Years of the Ramakrishna Movement in South Africa**

**and much more...**

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# GLOBAL VEDANTA

## ONLINE

ONLINE ISSUE #3 APRIL 2023

**THIS ISSUE**

- 2 The Field and Its Knower  
*Swami Sarvapriyananda*
- 8 Tales with Nine Lives—Part I  
*Dr. Jayendrina Singha Ray*
- 10 South America and Vedanta  
*Swami Atmajnananda*
- 13 Eighty Years of the Ramakrishna Movement in South Africa—Part II  
*Swami Swatmaramananda*

**DEPARTMENTS**

- 1 From the Editor
- 16 An Interesting Carpet
- 17 Vedanta News from Around the World
- 18 Humor—The Spice of Life
- 19 In Memoriam
- 20 Book Review
- 20 Contributors

*Cover: One of the famous brownstones of New York. This one, at 34 West 71st St., is the current home of the Vedanta Society of New York, the first Vedanta Society in America. Inset: the Society's shrine.*

### About Contributing to *Global Vedanta*

*Global Vedanta* will gladly consider articles, poetry, humor, etc., submitted for publication. The subject matter should be religious, cultural, or educational and must appeal to a general and broad-minded readership. Articles should be entertaining, and yet substantial, and be within 2000 words in length. Articles accepted for publication *may* require a release signed by the author.

## FROM THE EDITOR

### *DIVINE REVELATION OF RAMAKRISHNA*

Reality stares us in the face yet, paradoxically, it is so inscrutable. Humankind has been pushing the boundaries of knowledge ever since we began looking about in the external world. And that was a very long time ago. But the more we pushed boundaries, the more we did not know. Even today, with the explosion of information technology, one cannot be absolutely certain about anything. This becomes even more acute in the field of religion and spirituality, because these subjects are intangible, imperceptible, to the senses. The human mind with all its grand accomplishments swings between the hazy demarcation of knowledge and ignorance—we know and yet don't know. The history of humanity, however, has recorded powerful upheavals in knowledge manifesting through some special persons that helped evolve our understanding of reality. These 'events' don't happen randomly but occur whenever there is a pressing need for it in the world. People strive to understand things and then these souls arrive and address the need, which then benefits humanity.

These individuals look and behave like us but there is such a transcendent quality about them that makes them irresistible. These souls bring knowledge from the beyond and make it accessible to all. Humanity then tries to emulate their deeds, words, and life, and are inspired to push further towards the opened paths. These great souls are called Avatars. Like a king going about his kingdom and studying its people disguised, so does an Avatara live incognito and behaves just like us. But however much the Avatara may be disguised, those around him or her can tell the difference between the 'king' and them. It is also seen that there comes a time in the lives of all Avatars when they finally reveal their real nature and purpose to all and sundry. The king's disguise no longer works when his identity is revealed. He then smiles and leaves for his palace. So also, an Avatara disappears from this mortal world for the divine abode on being recognized. Sri Ramakrishna says, "When many people regard "this" (me) as God, and love and respect me as such, "it" (this body) will soon disappear." In Sri Ramakrishna's case this revelation took place at Cossipore (then near Kolkata) on January 1, 1886.

Sri Ramakrishna had been suffering from an advanced stage of throat cancer for some time. That day he was feeling slightly better and decided to take a walk in the garden. He left the house at about 3 pm, and slowly proceeded with difficulty towards the gate along the garden-path. Reaching halfway between the house and gate, he saw Girish, Ram, Atul, and other devotees sitting under a mango tree on the west side of the path. At the sight of Sri Ramakrishna, the devotees drew near the Master and saluted him. Sri Ramakrishna suddenly said to Girish, "Girish, I find you say to one and all so many things about me (that I am an Avatara of God) what have you

seen and understood that you do so?"

Girish with great emotion knelt with folded hands before him, and in a choking voice said, "What more can I say of Him, whose greatness Vyasa (composer of the great epic Mahabharata) and Valmiki (author of the sublime Ramayana) could find no words to measure his glory!"

At these profound words of Girish, Sri Ramakrishna became deeply moved and said, "What more need I tell you? *Tomader chaitanya hok*, may you all be illumined!" Saying this, he merged into Samadhi. Girish, at the sight of the Master's face beaming with divine radiance, shouted joyously at the top of his voice, "Jai Ramakrishna, Jai Ramakrishna" (Victory to Ramakrishna!), and took the dust of his feet. All those assembled did so likewise and there was much shouting and laughter. Sri Ramakrishna then touched each and every one and awakened their inner spiritual consciousness. They forgot time and everything else and saw in the Master a divine being showering grace. Each devotee experienced tangible spirituality and knew that from this day the Master could no longer conceal his divinity from them and from the world.

Swami Saradananda in *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play* writes, "Ramchandra and some devotees (of the Master) have said that on that day the Master became the Kalpataru, the 'wish-fulfilling tree'. But we think it is more reasonable to describe this event as a manifestation of the *Master's fearless divine nature or to say that he revealed himself on that day granting fearlessness to all* (italics ours). It is said that the Kalpataru gives people whatever they ask for, good or bad. But the Master did not do that; by this event he let it be known clearly that he was a godman and that he offered shelter from fear to all without discrimination."

'Kalpataru'; one of the meanings of *kalpa* is to think, consider, regard; *taru* means tree. Kalpa is also a movement of the mind. Just as the surface of a lake undulates when there is a ripple or wave, similarly the mind undulates when there is thought wave, which progressively becomes embodied as karma. This karma then fructifies in time. Popularly understood, Kalpataru or Kalpa-vriksha (tree), is a tree in the world of the gods. It has the power of granting any object that one wishes to obtain! There is not just one tree but five of them—Mandaara, Paarijaata, Santaana, Kalpavriksha, and Harichandana. Sri Ramakrishna is an Avatara and a parallel can be drawn with a Kalpataru, but as Swami Saradananda says, "Kalpataru gives people whatever they ask for, good or bad. But the Master did not do that." Instead, Sri Ramakrishna revealed his Divine Nature. That is why it is appropriate to say, as the Bhagavad Gita declares (4.10), "He who thus truly knows My divine birth and divine karma does not get rebirth after casting off the body. He attains

*See Divine Revelation...page 7*



# THE FIELD AND ITS KNOWER

SWAMI SARVAPRIYANANDA

When Swami Vivekananda was in the United States, he met Robert Ingersoll, a famous free-thinker and one of the most illustrious orators in those days. He was famous as ‘the great agnostic’, a phrase still attributed to him. A few years ago, the Yale University Press published a biography of Robert Ingersoll titled ‘The Great Agnostic’.

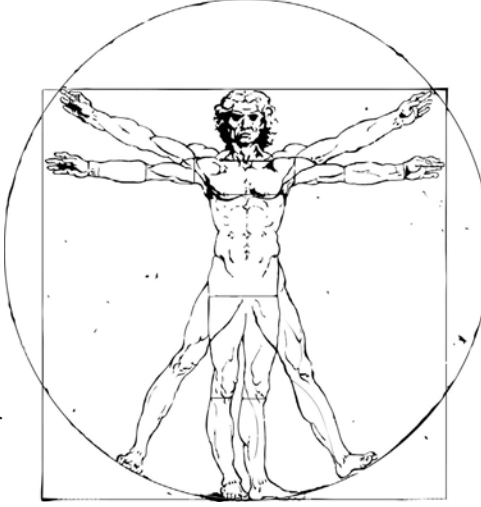
Ingersoll gave Swamiji his usual agnostic spiel, and mentioned that he did not believe in religion. This world was the only thing he was sure of and he believed in squeezing the orange of the world dry. Swami Vivekananda’s response to Ingersoll is notable. He said, “I believe in that too, but I know a better way of squeezing the orange. I know that I cannot die and therefore I am not in a hurry. I know there is no fear, therefore I can enjoy the squeezing. I love every man and woman, I see God in everybody. Imagine the joy and delight in seeing God in all beings. Squeeze the orange of the world in this way and get ten-thousand fold from it. Get every last drop.”

What is that realization by which Swami Vivekananda knew that there is no death and therefore he was not afraid and was not in a hurry? What is that knowledge because of which he knew that there was no fear and he could enjoy life, live in this world, and be filled with the joy of loving all beings by seeing God in them? That is the subject of Vedanta, and the subject here.

## Divine Oneness

Swami Vivekananda’s Vedanta teaching can be thought of as standing on two pillars. The first is the pillar of ‘inner divinity’, according to which there is divinity within all of us. The second pillar is ‘the oneness of all existence’. We are not just divine, but also that the entire universe is one with us. Ultimately there is one divine reality—that is all that truly exists. So, the essence of Vedanta can be

encapsulated in the phrase ‘Divine Oneness’. But how do we understand this and more importantly, how do we realize it and make it a living reality in our lives?



We will try to understand this based on the teaching – ‘The Field and its Knower’, taken from the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita.

## Arjuna’s Question

The thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is a bit of an oddity, as some versions of the Gita have an extra verse in the chapter. This is because, depending upon which version of Bhagavad Gita you start with, it either starts with a question by Arjuna, or it starts directly with the teachings of Krishna. This can be a controversy because in the ancient commentaries, including that of Adi Shankaracharya’s, the first verse is ignored. The verse is a simple list of questions and thought by some as having been put there just to indicate the topics covered in the thirteenth chapter and as a segue into the chapter.

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 13, Arjuna’s question:

*Arjuna uvācha  
Prakṛitīm puruṣhaṁ chāiva kṣhetram  
kṣhetrajñam eva cha  
etaḍ veditum icchāmi jñānam jñeyam  
cha keśhava*

Arjuna asks, “I want to know—what is Prakriti (nature) and what is Purusha? What is the field and what is the knower of the field? What is knowledge and what is to be realized, O Keshava?”

Here we will focus on two terms—‘The field’, and ‘the knower of the field.’ Kshetra in Sanskrit means Field, and Kshetrajna means the knower of the field. The chapter takes its name from these two terms.

Sri Krishna’s teaching in the next two verses are regarded by many as some of the most important verses in the Gita. Many ancient and medieval philosophers have written commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita. While the oldest of these commentaries are lost, one of the earliest and the most profound commentary available to us is that of Adi Shankaracharya, written about 1400 years ago. The importance of the second verse of the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is evident from the fact that compared to the other verses of the Gita, Shankaracharya has written the most extensive and sophisticated commentary on this verse. Even the longest commentaries on some of the other verses do not compare to the commentary on this verse, which is densely written in philosophical Sanskrit.

## The Great Debate

The verse has not just garnered Shankaracharya’s interest, but it has also been a bone of contention for debates through the ages. Even as recently as a few decades ago, there was a great debate held in Bengaluru, India, between the nondualists and the dualists. The exact phrase used by Krishna is—“*kṣhetrajñam chāpi māṁ viddhi...*”, “know Me as the knower of the field, in all fields.” Now that can be interpreted in two ways. One way of interpreting it gives it the meaning, “I, God, am the knower of all fields.” The other interpretation that can be arrived at is by arranging the words in Sanskrit

in such a way that it means—“Know the knower of the fields”—that means, know yourself, and know God. While both are acceptable interpretations, one leads to nonduality, and the other to duality. Nonduality means you and God are one reality. Duality means you and God are separate realities.

In this big debate, a very erudite Advaita master took the nondualist position, while another great scholar took a dualistic position and they fiercely debated which interpretation was right. The debate ended with the audience, who were neatly divided into two aisles, throwing chairs at each other, dissolving the debate into chaos! The nondualist later wrote a book where he says, “I wrote to the organizers of the debate asking who won the debate, and they didn’t reply. So I took it that I had won!”

### Sri Krishna’s Teachings

Sri Krishna starts the teaching to Arjuna saying:

Chapter 13, Verse 2

*śrī-bhagavān uvācha  
idam śharīram kaunteya kshetram ity  
abhidhiyate  
etad yo vetti tam prābuh kshetrajñā iti  
tad-vidah*

Chapter 13, Verse 3

*kshetrajñam chāpi mām viddhi sarva-  
kshetreshu bhārata  
kshetra-kshetrañāyor jñānam yat taj  
jñānam matam mama*

Sri Krishna says, “O Arjuna, know this body to be the field. And in this body, you, the one who experiences this body, know ‘that one’ to be the knower of the field.”

The teaching conforms to our quotidian, or day to day experience—the most basic experience of being embodied. Krishna is referring to the body as a field. Here, Krishna is referring to us as the knower of the field, the body. There are thus these two entities, the field and the knower of the field. With this simple observation, Krishna has given us a mas-

ter key to unlock the mystery of nondual spirituality.

T.S. Eliot, who was deeply inspired by the Upanishads and the Gita, writes in his poem *The Waste Lands*, “We think of the key, each in his prison. Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison.” These beautiful and profound lines go to illustrate how Eliot was inspired by Vedanta. In fact, in some of the original manuscripts of the poem, one can find penciled notes that are quotations from the Upanishads.

As we investigate further, we will understand the mystery better. We will understand, not just how we open the prison, but how to dissolve the prison altogether! To solve the mystery, Krishna gives us the key—the knower of the field.

### What is *The Field*?

The field is actually the entire universe. Whatever is knowable, whatever we experience is the field, but Krishna specifically starts with the body. This is because we never have a problem differentiating ourselves from external objects like the chair we sit on or the clothes we wear. We feel, “I am sitting on the chair, but I am not the chair.” I never think that I am the clothes that I am wearing. But the moment I come to the skin—I hesitate! Again, I know the chair, and I clearly know that I am not the chair. It would be awful, if I knew the chair and I became the chair!

Similarly, I know my clothes, and clearly I am not my clothes. In the same way, I know the body, but here I hesitate to say that I am not the body! Logically speaking, if I know the body, can I not say that I am not the body? This is where we hesitate, and that’s why Krishna starts with the body. He says, look at the body. This is the field. And you are the knower of the field. The knower of the field and the field are distinct. Whatever you know,

that must be distinct from you. This is the first deep insight of Vedanta.

### The Knower and the Known are Different

Straightaway, the meaning of the words field and knower of the field is just our experience of life as we know it. Here is the body, this is the field. And here I am somewhere in this body, I am the knower of the field. Now lets go a little deeper. Notice that the knower and the known must be different. Whatever you see is an object. You are the seer. The seer and the seen must be different. Just as knife cannot cut itself, similarly, the knowing subject cannot make itself an object. This is a philosophical way of saying that whatever you know, must be in some sense distinct from you. Otherwise it couldn’t be an object of your knowledge. *Drig Drishya Viveka* is a Vedantic technique which is based on this principle that whatever you know must be distinct from you. It starts off very simply. If you look at an object, it is very clear that the object



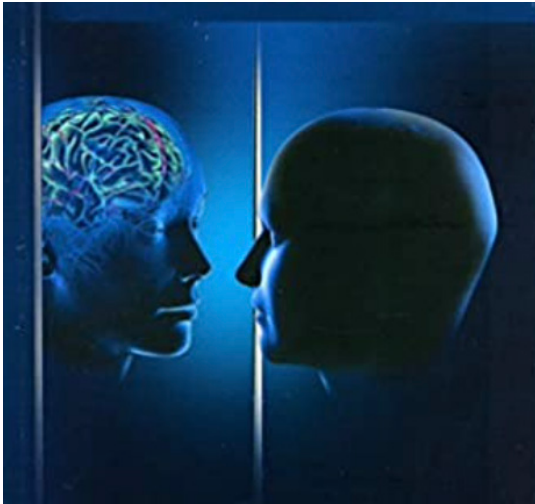
is distinct from the eyes. The eyes are the seer and the object is the seen, and the two are different. Not just this object, but whatever the eyes see are different from the eyes. In fact, the only thing that the eyes cannot see are the eyes themselves. What-

ever is not distinct from the eyes, that the eyes cannot see. The eyes are not distinct from the eyes, therefore the eyes do not see themselves. One may say, “Haven’t you seen your eyes in the mirror?” Yes, but in the mirror we see a reflection of our eyes. The eyes don’t see themselves directly the way they are seeing the other things. If you take a selfie, you will see a picture of your eyes, but not the eyes directly. The eyes are distinct from the forms which are seen.

Forms are many, the eyes are the same. Forms are changing, the eyes are relatively unchanging.

Now let us go deeper and investigate how the eyes themselves become an object to the mind. I know that my eyes are open. Who knows this? I know this in my mind—the mind is the knower and the eyes are the known. When you apply the same principle, you understand the mind and the eyes are different. Not only that, the mind knows not only the eyes, but all the other sense organs.

If we go deeper, we realize that the mind itself is known. When you are happy, you know that you are happy. Similarly, when you are miserable, you know that you are miserable. When there is pain, I know that I



am in pain. When I am feeling great, I know that I am feeling great. When I understand something, I know that I understand something. So, knowledge, ignorance, pleasure, pain, memory, loss of memory, all of these are known. These are all events in the mind and they are all known. That which is aware of the contents of the mind must be different from the mind, by the same principle—knower and known are different, seer and seen are different. This awareness (referred to as awareness because it gives us experience) must be distinct from my mind. The contents of the mind are many—there are thoughts, emotions, ideas, memories, and the sense of ego—I, which is also a part of the mind, but the awareness is one. The mind keeps changing, but the awareness is one, it does not change. This consciousness (using terms like consciousness and awareness synonymously) which is distinct from the mind, which is one and

unchanging, is termed *Sakshi*, or the witness consciousness. This is what Vedanta points to, as a first step—you, the knower. Krishna is pointing towards this witness consciousness by saying “knower of the field, *Ksbetrajna*.”

### Who am I and what is my real nature?

When we investigate the knower of the field, each one of us instinctively feels, I am here, knower of this body of mine. But we may ask, what exactly am I? When we

investigate further, using the clue given by Krishna—here in this field is the one who knows that field, implying thereby that the knower must be distinct from the field, and applying a technique such as the *Drig*

*Drishya Viveka*, we have come to the conclusion that I the knower of the field must be awareness or consciousness.

I, the unchanging awareness, am aware of the changing mind, the active and changing sensory system. I am aware of this body and the external world. This I, or the witness consciousness is the knower of the field, and this mind, senses, body and the external world, are the field. I am awareness, consciousness, witness consciousness, knower of the field, Atman, Self – Self with a capital ‘S’, not the self with the small ‘s’ which is what if we think we are before we inquire or discern anything. Before we inquire, we feel ‘it’s just me, plain old me! I am the self’. But when we inquire and dive deep into finding what exactly we are, we have to say, whatever I am, I exist and I am aware. That seems to constitute my essential nature. If there is an essential nature, then it must be that I exist, and I am aware.

### The Awareness is unchanging

What am I aware of? First of all I am aware of the mind—my thoughts, memories, ideas and emotions. Through my mind, I am aware of the senses and the input of senses, and through these I am aware of the body, the external world and the activities in the world which are dynamic, and changing. Now notice that this witness consciousness is the same when you see multiple things. It is the same when you are hearing various sounds, such as music, people talking or any other noise, or even when there is silence. You are aware—when the noise or speech arises and fades away. That awareness which is aware of the speech, is aware of the fading away of the speech, and of silence. So, noise, sights, taste, smell, touch, all the inputs of the senses, are all different from each other, they all keep changing. What is constant is what illumines all of them. Just like there is one light that illumines the entire room, there is this light of awareness, this consciousness that constitutes our basic nature, what we are right now.

Not just perceptions, but various kinds of thoughts arise internally such as emotions, ideas and memories. These thoughts keep changing as they come and go, but they are all lit up by that same consciousness. This constant consciousness lights up all our internal perception. Not just that, the same consciousness continues through waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. You are awake now, and you will fall asleep at night and dream, then you will wake up again. The experiences of all the three phases are tremendously different. The moment we fall asleep, the entire external world disappears, even our own bodies disappear. We are sleeping on the bed but we are not aware of it. In our sleep, an entire dream world arises. But what is notable is that even in our sleep it is the same awareness which continues. In deep sleep, everything shuts down. Vedanta claims that it is the same consciousness which reveals the utter absence and blankness in deep sleep. In deep sleep there is complete blankness of mind



with no thoughts and no external world. Nothing is presented to you, the subject, but you remain as awareness. The same awareness continues in waking, dreaming, and deep sleep; it continues unbroken through time.

Notice that the awareness which is there right now, when you are reading this article, is the same awareness when your body was the body of a baby in your mother's arms, as a kid playing in the playground and as a young person in school. As you grew older, it was the same awareness as a person with a job or marriage, families, and kids. As you grew up, everything changed, but the awareness remained the same. The body and mind has changed so much since you were a baby. Can you think of how your mind was as a baby? You can't even imagine it! The mind of the baby is so alien to you now! And yet, the awareness was the same. The same awareness watched the ever changing world, the ever changing body and the ever changing mind, through time and space.

A few days ago, I was walking in Central Park in Manhattan, and now I am here across a continent, in California. But it is the same awareness which saw New York and Central Park and it is the same awareness which is seeing Hollywood now. Awareness is the same but the place has changed dramatically. Time changes, space changes, awareness is constant. This one awareness, this one witness consciousness, this is what Krishna means when he says, 'in every body, there is the knower, the consciousness, the awareness, which is called *Kshetrajna*—knower of the field. Or you can call it the witness consciousness, the *Sakshi*. Or call it the *Atman*, the Self.

For those who have studied Vedanta in the classical way, the entirety of what I explained can be put in half a phrase. It is called, "*Tvam padartha Shodbana*", an analysis of the term *You*. This is called the difference between *Vachyārtha* and *Lakshyārtha*. *Vachyārtha* means the primary meaning and *Lakshyārtha* is the implied meaning. The primary meaning of the

phrase "Knower of the field" is You—the body, mind, consciousness—all of it. The implied meaning of the phrase "Knower of the field" is the *Sakshi* or "Witness Consciousness".

### Two key questions in Vedanta

Realizing that "I am pure consciousness" is surely wonderful! When I realize that I am pure consciousness and I am not the body or mind, I am free because body comes and goes and mind keeps changing, experiencing ups and downs in the form of happiness and sadness. But I am free of it all and am not affected by the ups and downs of the body, mind or the world, because I realize that I am not the body or the mind, but I am the witness of all the changes that occur in the body, mind, and in the world. While this realization is wonderful, is this all of the teaching about the field and the knower of the field? Adi Shankaracharya says in his commentary, "*Kim etāvan-matrena jnanena jnatavya (Kshetra Kshetrajna)?*", is this enough to know the secret of the field and the knower of the field? He says, "*Na*"—No! The deeper teaching comes next.

Here we should have two questions. Here there clearly are so many bodies or fields, as Krishna would put it. So, if I am the knower of the field in this one body, does that mean that there is a separate knower of the field in each of the billions of human and non-human creatures I see around me? This is a great philosophical question—are we billions and billions, or are we one? The great philosophical systems of Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaishehika, and Purva Mimamsa say that we are many, we are not one. It is Advaita Vedanta, which says we are one, and Krishna is going to emphasize that and answer the question—how many of us are there? How many knowers of the fields are there? and how many consciousnesses are we? This reminds us of Heisenberg who said, "Consciousness is that singular for which there is no plural!"

The second question should be—what about God? Concepts such as existence

and fields, knowers of fields and consciousness have been discussed, but what about God? Where is God, on the side of the field or the knower of the field? If on the *kshetra* side, then God becomes an object. If on the knower side, then God becomes *me*, we can say "I am God!" Both these options seem crazy—is God a thing? Or is God I? But these are the only two options being offered by Krishna—Knower and known, subject and object, field and field-knower. I remember, when I had just received Sanyasa, about 18 years ago in Belur Math, our main monastery, I was asked to give a talk. It was one of my first talks as a new monk. After my talk, an elderly gentleman approached me with some well-meaning feedback! He said, "Swami, your talk was good but if you add a little Rama, little Krishna, then it will be much better. Add a little God to your talk, we need God!" Another devotee when asked to define Vedanta said, "Vedanta is like Buddhism, but with God!"

To summarize, these are the two questions. How many consciousnesses or knowers are there, and what about God?

Krishna gives a stunning answer to both questions in the next verse.

*Kshetrajnam chapī mam viddhi, sarva  
kshetreshu bharata*

*Kshetra kshetrajnāyor jñānam, yat-taj  
jñānam matam mama.*

"O Arjuna, know me alone to be the knower of the field in all these fields. This knowledge of the field and the knower of the field is knowledge according to my opinion. This is the thing to be known in life."

Here is the direct answer to the question. Krishna says to Arjuna, or God says to man—"Know me, the knower of the field in all fields." This is a stunning statement, as God is declaring his identity with all sentient beings. The first question was—how many are there? Krishna says one. The second question was—what is that one? Krishna says, that one is God. The one consciousness in all beings is God.

In answer to the second question, Krishna says, "I am the one consciousness in all beings." While we are reverential to

Krishna's teachings, we may notice how the argument has suddenly moved from reasoning and experiencing to scriptural authority. Earlier we were arguing logically by looking at ourselves as an object and saying that we are the experiencing subject, and that the subject and object must be different. That sounded quite convincing logically. But now when we are establishing oneness, we seem to rely on scriptural authority. Can we be logically convinced about what Krishna is saying? How can we be convinced that there is one consciousness in all beings?

### Are we one or many? - The Advaita Vedanta and Sankhya debate

When Vedantins, philosophers who subscribe to Advaita Vedanta, and Sankhyans, the philosophers who follow the Sankhya philosophy, debate this issue, the Sankhyans insist that there are many consciousnesses. They question—how can you say there is one consciousness? And the Advaitin counter questions—why would you think there are many consciousnesses? To understand this, consider this question. Why would you say there are many bodies? The answer is obvious. When you look around you see there are many bodies. When you take a census, you can count millions and billions of bodies. There is no doubt that bodies are many. What about minds? Are there many minds or one mind? The answer is, there are many minds. You can test this by taking a survey or asking a question. You will find that there are many answers to the same question, indicating that there are many minds.

The Advaita philosopher says, agreed that minds and bodies are different, but why would you say consciousness is different? And the Sankhyan replies, if consciousness were one in all persons the death of one person would mean the death of everybody! But the Advaitin can refute this easily. Death is of the body, not of the consciousness. If one body dies, it doesn't mean that all the other bodies have to die! The Sankhyan may further argue, what if one person falls asleep,

then everybody would fall asleep if it is all one consciousness! The Advaitin asks, what falls asleep? And what awakes? The answer is, the mind, not consciousness. As we had established earlier, it is the same unchanging consciousness, which experiences the waking, and the waking world, the dream and the dream world, and the deep sleep state. Consciousness is not waking, dreaming, or in deep sleep. It is the mind which goes through these three states. Notice that all the arguments that the Sankhyan presents can easily be answered by making the distinction between body and mind on one hand, and consciousness on the other. For example, the Sankhyan may again argue, "if it was one consciousness, it would be so nice, as I would get enlightened if my Guru is enlightened! But that doesn't happen, so clearly it is not one consciousness." To this, the Advaitin would reply, "My dear Sankhyan, you are again mixing up mind and consciousness. Where is ignorance, and where is knowledge? Both are in the mind. The mind has ignorance, and knowledge arises in the mind and removes that ignorance. Isn't this our experience? I who was ignorant, is the one who knows now." So, if I the awareness, experiences the ignorance in the mind, I am the same awareness that is illumining the arising of knowledge in the mind. Consciousness is one and the Sankhyan arguments in favor of multiple consciousnesses do not stand. There is one consciousness in all bodies and minds. Vedanta says that one consciousness, in association with one body and mind is a sentient being or a Jiva, that is you or I. The same consciousness, in association with all bodies and minds, in association with the entire universe, is God. But the consciousness in itself is the same. Apart from bodies and minds, apart from the cosmos, apart from the microcosm and the macrocosm, the consciousness itself is the same. Therefore, you and God are the same reality—That thou art.

### Ultimate Reality is Nondual

But then another question will arise.

What about this entire world? We have moved from thinking that I am this body and mind to thinking that I am one consciousness. That was the first step, establishing the knower of the field. Body and mind are the fields and I am the knower of the body-mind, so I am the knower of the field. In step two, we saw that in millions and billions of fields, or bodies and minds, there is only one knower of fields, or one consciousness. But this still is not nonduality because nonduality means 'not two', and here we still have duality—One consciousness, and everything else. Here everything else means the billions of minds, living bodies, and non-living entities in the world. From quarks to quasars, from viruses to whales, there are so many things in the world, and they all are the fields, and you have one consciousness, the knower of the field. This is still duality.

What was discussed here is hidden in this short cryptic statement Krishna makes, "This knowledge of field and knower of the field is knowledge according to me." What he means here is the same as "*Tat Tvam Asi*", or "That thou Art". This is a *Mahavakya*, a Sanskrit word which means a profound statement of identity, the identity of God and man, and says—You are that reality. A *Mahavakya* encapsulates the entirety of Vedanta. Vast Vedantic literature, sophisticated metaphysics, epistemology and logic, can all be encapsulated in one sentence—"That Thou Art." This *Mahavakya* is from the *Chandogya Upanishad*. Krishna is saying exactly the same thing. He says, "Know me to be the knower of the field in all these fields."

This entire universe and cosmos, is an appearance in that Consciousness. It is not a separate existence apart from that Consciousness. There is no second reality apart from that Consciousness. For instance, when you are watching a movie, you may see cars, people, earth and sky, but none of them exist apart from the screen on which it is being shown. Here the screen is nondual, with respect to all the characters, objects, activities and inci-



dents in the movie. They are not a second reality apart from the screen. Similarly, thousands of waves that you see in the Pacific ocean, are not apart from the water. It is one water appearing as ten thousand waves. Krishna would say later in the Gita, *“Avibhaktam cha bhuteshu, vibhaktam iva cha sthitam”*, “Undivided in all beings, appearing as if divided.” What is meant by undivided in all beings? It means, Brahman is undivided in all beings, appearing as if divided. It means, Consciousness, appearing as so many sentient beings. It means—You are undivided in all beings, but you appear to be divided as so many. The other is an appearance in You, the greater Self with a capital ‘S’. All this is encapsulated in the great Vedantic saying, *“Brahma Satyam Jagat Mithya, Jivo Brahmaiva napara.”* “Brahman alone is real, the world is an appearance, you—the sentient being—are none other than Brahman!”

Once Sri Ramakrishna was asked by someone, “can you teach me spirituality in one sentence?” Sri Ramakrishna replied, “Brahman is real, the world is an appearance. Contemplate and assimilate this.” Having said this, Sri Ramakrishna fell silent. This is the essence, the kernel of spiritual life. There is one divinity. This is what Swami Vivekananda meant when he said that there is divinity within each of us, and emphasized the oneness of all existence. To summarize, what is the divinity within each of us? The knower of the field. *Ksbetrajna*, pure consciousness or the witness consciousness. And what is the unity of all existence? The one consciousness which appears as many. The entire universe is one with us. We alone are appearing as our own object and the subject.

Swami Vivekananda writes in a poem, “One alone exists, it appears as nature and soul.” You are that one. As Swami Vivekananda said to Ingersoll, “I know that I will not die, therefore I am not in a hurry. Bodies die, they come and go, but I am not in a hurry. I know there is no fear, therefore I enjoy the squeezing of the orange.” He added, “I agree with you, we may just differ in our choice of

fruit. With you it is an orange, with me it is a mango!” He says, “I love all men and women, because I see God in them. Think of the joy of seeing the divine, seeing God in all beings.” Seeing God in all beings means the same as when Krishna says, “know me alone as the knower of the field in all these fields.” I alone—my real nature, higher Self, I am all of these. You are all one with me, we are all one with you. In this way, Swami Vivekananda said, squeeze the orange to get ten thousand-fold more! Get every last drop.

GV



**Divine Revelation...** *Continuation of Editorial*

Me, O Arjuna.” This state comes when one recognizes an Avatara of God; better still, when an Avatara takes off the human mask and reveals his divine self. Moreover, the state of fearlessness is the state of *moksha*, liberation, and Sri Ramakrishna has come to confer *moksha*, for that is an Avatara’s mission.

Human knowledge leads to self-deception when it is blended with the ideas of selfishness and egotism. The more selfish and narrow we are, the more fearful; the more unselfish we become the more we become fearless. That is why Swami Vivekananda says, “Unselfishness is God.” The Avatara comes to break this prison house of the small, deluded self. That is why Swami Vivekananda, in his vesper hymn to Sri Ramakrishna says, “Breaker of this world’s chains.” By the Avatara’s *Atma-prakash*, self-revelation, the inscrutable Reality now becomes scrutible. The veil of ignorance and mystery shrouding everything is ripped apart.

Sri Ramakrishna says, “When many people regard *this* (me) as God, and love and respect me as such, *it* (this body) will soon disappear.” Disappear? The real work of an Avatara actually begins when the physical body is given up. Now he can work untrammled, revealing his real divine nature, *Atma-prakash*, while all the while granting the gift of fearlessness, *abhaya-vara-pradhan*, to those who seek refuge in him. His divine abode is in the hearts of all living beings.

Swami Satyamayananda  
*Editor-in-chief*

*One must do some work. Through work alone one can remove the bondage of work, not by avoiding work. Total detachment comes later on. One should not be without work even for a moment.*

*—The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi*

# TALES WITH NINE LIVES: WHAT LENDS STORIES THEIR STAYING POWER? PART I

DR. JAYENDRINA SINGHA RAY

“There are tales that are told many times. Some tales you tell children, stories that tell them the history of the tribe, what is good to eat, what is not, cautionary tales. There are the tales the women tell, in the private tongue...there are tales the men tell each other...tales the whole tribe tell each other at festivals, at feasts...low tales. High tales. Tales that are told and heard many, many times.” Neil Gaiman, *The Absolute Sandman*, 231.

Life and death, be that of sentient beings or those that feign sentience—like texts, are typically understood through the prism of time and space. That which exists despite the passage of time is considered eternal. Similarly, that which contests the confines of space, and endures through spatio-temporal consequences, escapes death. An example of both temporal and spatial escape can be found in tales/texts that refuse to die out. This essay is an inquiry into the staying power of literary tales that persist despite the passage of time and change of space.

The five elements that determine a tale’s staying power are:

- Recurrence
- Familiarity
- Provokability
- Advertisement
- Applicability

## Recurrence and Lack of Resolution

It is common to find certain questions, themes, motifs and ideas recur across geographical boundaries and time periods through tales. Take for instance, the prevalence of creation myths. Countless religions have their origin stories. Odinani—the pre-colonial religion practiced by the Igbo tribe of Nigeria—believes all of humanity essentially sprung from god Chukwu. Per the religion’s creation myth, in the beginning, all of earth was covered in water. Then Chukwu created the first human family. But the family had nowhere to go or nothing to eat as

the earth was submerged in water, so god sent them yam, seeds, and blacksmiths to dry out the land for cultivation (Don Ohadike, xix, *Things Fall Apart*), and thus began creation. Similarly, the Akan myth of creation from Ghana, begins with two individual couples (each formed of a man and a woman) who did not know how to procreate. So Onyame—the supreme god—sent down a snake to teach the couples how to reproduce, and thus began creation. This motif of a snake delivering messages to actuate



procreation in a naive couple, is reminiscent of the Biblical story of Adam, Eve, and the snake in the garden of Eden. Furthermore, the recurrence of overlapping ideas does not stop at that, as the concept of the holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) in the Bible finds a reflection in the Ghanaian myth of the supreme Akan god, Onyame, who, as noted in an article by the Atlanta University Center, “has a trinitarian character: God as male, female, and relational principle.” In fact, the idea of trinity can also be found in the Hindu godheads representing the cycle of creation: Brahma (the creator)—Vishnu (the preserver)—Shiva (the destroyer).

A close look at the motif of a god instilling life into space submerged in water, in the Igbo myth, reminds one of life’s origin from the cosmic fluid in one particular Hindu creation story. I say, “one particular” creation story here, as Hindu scriptures encourage multiple possibilities instead of harping on a

restricted definition. For example, the narration of our origin in the “Hymn of Creation” or *Nāsadiya Sukta* in the Rigveda, is less of a prescription and more of an inquiry.<sup>1</sup> In the same light, there are more than one creation myths in Hinduism, of which one found in the Rigveda talks about the possibility of space being covered in cosmic waters. David Leeming in *The Creation Myths of the World* notes that in *Chandogya Upanishad*, we find “the predominance of reproduction, heat, and primordial waters in... the story of Prajapati and the golden egg.”

Stories of origin that involve the motifs of primordial water, a creator, a cosmic egg, etc., can also be found in ancient Egyptian creation myths. Finding commonality between themes, ideas and motifs in creation myths across the world/across academic disciplines, to trace a linear path to the one and only story of origin (as Western education teaches us to do), however, is not the point of this essay. The objective is to realize that tales that are obsessively remembered, across the time-space continuum, owing to the recurrence of certain ideas and motifs they carry, are the ones that refuse to die. But you may ask, why are these ideas or tales that carrying these ideas so popular? Why do certain ideas refuse to die?

This question brings me to the second part of my argument about *recurrence*. As noted earlier, most societies have a tale that explains the genesis of the world. “Where do we come from?” is more than a biological question, as inquiries and speculations hardly stop at knowing one’s parentage. The search continues...Genealogy, Archaeology, Paleontology, Astrophysics, Religion, History, Geography—are all domains of knowledge that try to explain away this mystery of our origin. And somehow, this open-endedness or puzzle is what we seek answers for in tales that explain our origin. The rememberability or recurrence is therefore closely tied to our

lack of fulfillment—the inability to find one definitive explanation for questions we have nursed through eons.

Written texts or oral tales that capture this attempt at solving a fundamental question that lacks one definitive answer, tales that address this human dilemma of wanting to reach a resolution yet remaining dissatisfied, find themselves remembered and resurrected like math puzzles. Therefore, the rememberability of a text through recurrence, is a direct result of its open-endedness or unfinishedness that ensues from an attempt at dictating the truth and the resultant inability to capture the whole essence of truth.

### Familiarity and Universals

Robert Zajonc, a social psychologist, studied the tendency in humans to react favorably to a stimulus they are exposed to repeatedly. He called this tendency “mere-repeated-exposure effect”—one that was most effectual when individuals were not consciously exposed to the stimulus, and bore no preconceived biases towards it. This knowledge later came to inform many advertising campaigns which generated favorable consumer behavior towards a brand or product by exposing the consumer to it repeatedly to build familiarity, and, as a result, increase the chances of the product’s consumption. If we were to apply this principle of the mere-repeated-exposure effect to literature, we would find countless tales replay time-tested themes/universals to connect with the audience. Think about the contemporary relevance of Shakespearean plays. Why do popular movies and TV shows like *The Lion King*, *The Godfather*, *West World*, *House of Cards*, and innumerable others across film industries and cultures, find success despite repeating over-used Shakespearean themes? Tales of an ambitious general who chooses the dark side; a failing king and state; two lovers whose dreams of togetherness never find resolution; a son



bent on avenging his father’s death; a vast stretch of unpopulated land tamed through magic and power, etc. are ones that relay familiar emotions like desire, duty, love, power, fear, and others. A tale that can effectively capture these universal emotions or better still, like Shakespeare, inspire other forms of art to mimic its rendition of universals, is one that persists despite the passage of time and change of space.

Dr. Johnson in his Preface to *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, captures the power of familiarity in the following words,

“Shakespeare is ... the poet of nature ... His characters are not

modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world; by the peculiarities of studies or professions ... or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions: they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply...His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which minds are agitated, and the whole systems of life is continued in motion.” (*Select Plays of William Shakespeare*, 114)

Johnson’s reference to these quintessential human passions and principles reminds us of the psychoanalyst Carl Jung’s studies on the collective unconscious and archetypes. In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Jung describes the collective unconscious as, “part of the unconscious [that] is not individual but universal ... it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals ... identical in all men and thus constitute[ive] [of] a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in everyone of us.” (pp. 3-4)



Archetypes are what represent this collective unconscious, through certain common symbols, ideas and motifs, that recur across varied socio-cultural spaces. A few examples of archetypes according to Jung are the archetypes of the wise man, the hero, and the mother figure. A lot of tales in human history that persist are ones that draw on these universal archetypes/motifs. Consider the motif of the hero we find across literary texts and films—Lord Rama’s war on Ravana in Valmiki’s *Ramayana*; Achilles’ trials in Homer’s *Iliad*; Samson’s revenge on the Philistines in The Bible; Luke Skywalker’s fight against Vader in *Star Wars*; etc., are all examples of texts that use the archetype of the hero and his transformative journey<sup>2</sup> that entails the overcoming of obstacles, and a triumph of spirit over matter. An effective application of familiar archetypes in a tale, can lead to its staying power. Think of the current popularity of science fiction novels<sup>3</sup> that re-imagine human habitat in space. While we do not know yet if these would

stand the test of time, their popularity relies heavily on the eon-long human desire to study the sky and construct theories/stories on what lies in its mysterious folds. A tale’s ability to incite the familiar/universal in us—those conscious/sub-conscious questions, emotions and ideas that we experience collectively—that which can reminisce the collective unconscious, is one that holds the power to contest the limitations of space and time.

*Author’s Note:* Part II of this essay will discuss the other three elements—Provokability, Advertisement, Applicability—that contribute to a tale’s staying power.

... to be continued



1. “Who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation?” (Rig Veda, Tr. Ralph Griffith, sacred-texts.com)
2. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.
3. Few examples: Liu Cixin’s, *The Three-Body Problem*, Neal Stephenson’s, *Seveneves*.



# SOUTH AMERICA AND VEDANTA

SWAMI ATMAJNANANDA

Swami Vivekananda called Vedanta “the Universal Religion” as it encompasses the entire gamut of human aspiration—its search for truth and excellence; not binding its followers to any set of sectarian dogmas but instead, liberating them from all types of limitations. Vedanta, while laying emphasis on the manifestation of perfection inherent within each individual, is intensely practical and essential for success in the external world, as well. Swami Vivekananda emphasized the broadest aspects of Vedanta when he brought it to the Western world for the first time. India, until then, was painted as a land of mystery and superstitions by the missionaries and to find out that such a grand philosophy existed there was an eye-opener to the many of the so-called educated West!

Swami Vivekananda’s Master, Sri Ramakrishna, despite being born in an unknown village of India during colonial times, had a mind that was uncorrupted by the modern-day world and expansive in its inclusiveness; something unimaginable even to the educated minds of his time! He was hailed “a phenomenon” and his extraordinary life and message were the best answer to the doubts and questions of religion. “All religions are but various paths to the same Truth, only the names are different”, Sri Ramakrishna would often say, based on his spiritual experiences. When Swami Vivekananda, his chief disciple, brought Vedanta to the West, it appealed to all thinking minds and reached unknown corners! Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and many other countries of South America reported on the grand success of Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 with great enthusiasm in the local newspapers. Interest in Vedanta, Yoga and Indian thought started to take root.

South America, with an area spanning 17,840,000 square kilometers, had the famous Mayan and Inca civilizations



Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta Rio de Janeiro

with their own religious beliefs and traditions. Places of worship, burial grounds, and figurines found in Peru, Mexico, and other regions show that they had very rich cultures and belief systems. Unfortunately, these civilizations no longer exist and all the knowledge that they had is gone with them! Needless to say, we are poorer for it and in the zeal to proselytize, cruelty, and genocide became handy tools! The land was rich with diamonds, gold and other precious metals but soon, as happened elsewhere, the colonizing powers of Europe invaded the lands and decimated the locals through deceit and war. Only a few tribes remain to this day in various inaccessible regions of the Amazon jungles, and even now these poor people are exploited and denied their land by the selfish mining companies.

The Portuguese and Spanish were the main conquerors who brought with them Christianity, which was enforced. They engaged slaves from various parts of Africa to help them build cities, roads, and plantations of sugarcane and coffee to supply their mother countries. Exploitation continued unabated and the region was depleted of its wealth over the

years. The trauma of this tragic colonial past torments the people here today but they are boldly facing the economic and cultural troubles. Military coups and political instability add to their woes and they still face uncertainty on many fronts. After the two world wars, many people from Italy, Lebanon, Germany, Japan and Spain immigrated to South America and have settled there, becoming well established. There are mixed populations from the wedlock of locals with Africans and Europeans. Slavery was abolished in these countries, starting with Chile in 1823; Brazil was the last to abolish slavery in 1888! Ninety percent of South Americans are Christians, mainly Roman Catholic. The African settlers continued to practice their faiths in secret and soon new shades of their religion mixed with Christianity appeared. Santo Dam, Candomblé, Spiritist, and Umbanda are a few of the popular faith systems that are widely practiced in these regions. Invoking spirits, esoteric rituals, and ceremonies are prevalent among these practitioners. By and large the people of these regions are friendly and easy to approach. They are open to new ideas and have great

interest in Yoga, Vedanta, spirituality and Tantras (more about that later). The main problems that they face are addiction to drugs, crime, corruption, and poverty. The gap between the rich and the poor is wide and exploitation of the poor is seen in all major cities. There is frustration among the have-nots and they express their feelings through graffiti and crime! There is some churning going on and if proper direction be given, the region can reach great heights.

In 1909, Livaria do Circulo Esoterico, a Free Mason movement interested in oriental thought and esoteric practices, was started in São Paulo, Brazil, by a Portuguese named Antonio Olivio Rodrigues who considered Swami Vivekananda one of its five patrons. He started a library with related books and lectures, and discussions on these subjects were held there regularly. This was probably the first opening to Vedanta literature for the people of Brazil.

Meanwhile, in 1912 a Spanish translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by 'M' (Mahendranath Gupta), as edited by Swami Abhedananda, was published in Buenos Aries by the publishing house Editorial Keir, titled *El Evangelio de Ramakrishna*. The life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna started spreading and soon some admirers of Vedanta started a Sociedad Vedanta (Vedanta Society) in Buenos Aries. They published Spanish translations of *Karma Yoga*, *Raja Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga* by 1922. These books were translated by Mr. M. Lopez Villiamil and Mr. Ricardo Vivie and were available in Brazil also!

A society, "El Hogan de Amigos de Buenos Aries" was started by 1930 for the study Indian philosophical thought in depth. Mr. Joseph Schmidt, Dr. Bartoleme Allodio, Dr. Miguel Catalano and many other members of this society wanted to be guided by a monk from India and Mr. Schmidt took the lead to write a letter with the request to *Prabuddha Bharata*. This was forwarded to Belur Math authorities and correspondence continued. In 1932, a delegation

of Vedanta admirers went to India and met the president of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Shivananda, who deputed Swami Vijayananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, to Argentina. Swami Vijayananda was close to many of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and was dear to Swami Brahmananda. His coming to South America was a blessing! He arrived at Buenos Aries on 10th December 1932 and started giving classes on Vedanta, religion and philosophy. He stayed in an apartment arranged by a devotee, Mr. Chiodi, and celebrated the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna in Argentina in 1933! He started an Ashrama in the apartment on 18th March 1933. Mrs. Ninoh Wolf de Kahn, a devoted lady disciple of the Swami, donated a property for the establishment of a permanent Ashrama at Bella Vista at which location the new ashram began functioning on 3rd July 1941.

Swami Vijayananda travelled extensively from Argentina to Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Peru, etc., giving talks in Spanish and initiating people into Vedanta. He gave lectures in Brazil almost yearly from 1952 when some devotees had contacted him and invited him to Brazil. He would visit them for two to three months and give series of talks in cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. A few of his disciples are still living and recount his powerful spiritual personality that they said had a force in it! He was loved by these people and he reciprocated it amply. He passed away peacefully on 1st September 1973 at Bella Vista. His reminiscences of his guru Swami Brahmananda and other direct disciples are full of wonderful insights and are a must-read for devotees.

Swami Vijayananda was succeeded by Swami Paratparananda who was instrumental in getting many source books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda translated into Spanish and Portuguese. He also continued to visit Brazil frequently from Argentina. The movement grew steadily. He had to return to India after some years and Swami Pareshananda

succeeded him, who has been successfully guiding the activities in Argentina since and is widely respected and loved by the devotees of both Argentina and Brazil. The ashram has another property outside the city that is used as a retreat place. He also continued to visit Brazil frequently until recently.

Swami Nirmalatmananda was deputed by the authorities of Belur Math in 1999 to conduct the activities in Brazil, and after his coming the movement became strong and grew fast. The centre in São Paulo was affiliated first and the centres in Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Curitiba became its subcenters. Now, Curitiba and Rio de Janeiro have been recognized as independent centers and have dedicated Swamis deputed from Belur Math. Swami Prajnantmananda has headed the Curitiba centre since 2021. Groups of devotees have also formed in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, and a center there is already functioning. It is waiting to be made a subcenter! There is a retreat centre at Embu Gauçu, about fifty kilometers away from São Paulo where regular devotee retreats are held.

The reader will understand that there is great scope for Vedanta as interpreted by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in these regions. Unknown persons have come forward and have helped in setting up the centers, miraculously! It is certain that Sri Ramakrishna is himself settled here and has graciously accepted the love of these people. Another interesting thing to note is that these people love Holy Mother Sarada Devi as 'Santa Mãe'. The patron saint of Brazil is 'Our Lady of Aparecida', enshrined in a huge Neo-Romanesque Basilica in the city of Aparecida. The small, black figurine of the Lady was found by fishermen in Porto Itaguaçu in a miraculous incident. Huge crowds of devotees throng to this place and offer worship here.

Swami Brahmananda holds a special place in the hearts of the devotees here! As Swami Vijayananda's guru, he was already familiar to these people.

But in the 1950s, in Belo Horizonte, a lay person named Arlindo Correa da Silva, a local Brazilian, had repeated visions of Swami Brahmananda, who urged him to do some service activities for the poor uneducated children! This man was not connected to any of our Swamis or devotees and did not know who this divine-looking person was! He consulted his spiritual guide who was a Christian padre or spiritualist leader (I am not sure which) and was assured that this was a divine vision and that he must follow the instructions given by the Swami! He later came to know about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Brahmananda from a book that was presented to him by a friend! He started teaching poor children and as the years passed by, it grew into a huge private institution, 'Instituto Ramacrisna'. They have a simple and beautiful shrine with the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Brahmananda, Jesus Christ, Buddha and other saints! They have prayer meetings in the hall that is attached to it. It was registered as a service organization in 1959 and it provides vocational training in simple machinery, handicrafts, music, computers, etc., making way for thousands of youngsters to become employed constructively. It is a life source to the people of that region! Arlindo has passed away but the work continues unabated and it is a huge institution with good infrastructure and facilities for the students. Many of our visiting Swamis have visited this service institution!

Many senior Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order have visited Argentina and Brazil over the years and this has given a lot of inspiration to the local devotees. Spiritual retreats and lecture programs are organized on such occasions and they are very popular. Swami Ritajananda (from Gretz, France), Swami Bhavyananda (London), Swami Swahananda, Swami Bhaskarananda, Swami Prabudhananda and Swami Ishtananda (from the USA) and Swami Prabhananda, Swami Prameyananda, Most Revered Swami Smarananandaji (our present President

Maharaj) from India, Matajis from the Santa Barbara center and many others have graced these centers by their visits.

Regular *arati* and weekend lectures are held in the three main centers. All the centers have a good collection of source books in English and Portuguese that devotees can use and borrow. Sale of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature is also done in these centers. The São Paulo centre publishes *Vedanta*, a tri-monthly journal in Portuguese. It is the main publishing house in Brazil and has been steadily publishing the source books in Portuguese. New editions and reprints have been made and all the books are thoroughly edited before publication.

Service activities such as distribution of food, materials, and clothes to the needy during Christmas and other special occasions are done by the São Paulo center regularly and by the Rio de Janeiro center when the need arises. The main attraction of the Rio de Janeiro centre is the singing group, 'Grupo Gadai', which enthusiastically chants, sings, and plays percussion instruments during *arati* and special events. The group has a large repertoire of songs and music including Bengali songs! There are some wonderful songs in Portuguese that it sings and this makes the centre vibrant and attractive. The birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Guru purnima, Durga puja, Christmas Eve, and Kalpataru day are all observed in a grand manner by all the centers with special pujas, offerings, lectures, and music. Devotees enthusiastically participate in these events and the reader will be surprised to know that there are hardly any Indian devotees in these places. Maybe there are two or three in the São Paulo center. All the rest are local Brazilians! Yoga classes for the interested public are a regular feature in all these centers, while Ayurveda camps, meditation, and pranayama courses are also occasionally held by special arrangement in the São Paulo centre.

There are many religious institutions from India in Brazil and they all

have been spreading the different paths like Bhakti, Yoga, and Tantras. ISKCON, Gaudiya Vaishnava Math, Sai Baba Ashramas, Mata Amritanandamayee Ashrama, Brahmakumaris, Yogoda Satsanga Society, and many others have established themselves quite well here. Sri Sri Ravisankar and other popular gurus have been visiting regularly and holding audience with the local public in well-advertised events. Anything connected to India and Oriental thought is welcomed here and some esoteric practices have also become popular! Behind the curiosity and glamour of Eastern religions there is a hankering to find peace and true happiness in a modern-day world. That, after all, is an eternal quest in all of us and time will tell us how far this region will be able to assimilate Vedanta. Yoga is a buzzword here and there are many schools of Yoga offering all types of fancy benefits! But "seekers of Truth do not get misled by the grace of the Lord", says Sri Ramakrishna. The search is there and there must be light, today or tomorrow! People in general are progressive in these countries and are eager to learn and adapt. They like to experiment for themselves and this is a good sign that their minds are active! Vedanta and its universal aspects appeal to them and allows them the freedom that they are seeking! Although Swami Vivekananda never visited South America, his thoughts and ideas are working silently, as a powerful upthrust. The banner of Vedanta is flying gracefully and high, accumulating strength day by day.



*Religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in intellectual argumentation; it is being and becoming, it is realisation.*

—Swami Vivekananda



# EIGHTY YEARS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA, PART II

SWAMI SWATMARAMANANDA

Swami Nischalananda wanted to share with his fellow countrymen the rich tradition of an ancient Hindu legacy recast and made universally applicable for modern humanity by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The central thrust of the Ramakrishna Movement in South Africa is the spiritual progress of the individual and thereby, the society at large. Weekly congregational worship has become the hallmark of the Centre, with devotional singing, discourses, meditation, and ceremonial worship.

This worship helps one to tap into the

those that had imbibed the spirit and ethos of the worldwide Ramakrishna Movement. Swami Shivapadananda (the second President of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa) nurtured these and brought them under the umbrella of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa as “branches” under a unified constitution.

Swami Shivapadananda was keen on healthier relationships between South Africa and India for mutual advantage. The Centre established relationships with the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, as far back as 1990. After the first

dia, the Ramakrishna Mission. At this point, Swami Vimokshananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order from



Swamis Nischalananda, Shivapadananda and Saradaprabhananda (L to R)

heart of one's being - to come face to face with and to realise the living presence of God. Inspired by this fountain head of spirituality, devotees engage as volunteers in the humanitarian projects of the Centre which are focused on holistic upliftment of the disadvantaged, irrespective of race or religious affiliation.

Upon Swami Nischalananda's return to South Africa he established Prayer Groups in almost every village, suburb and town where Indians had settled. The local community would meet at weekly intervals in congregational worship using private homes or any other local amenity.

This pattern has now become the norm on the South African Hindu religious landscape. Many of these groups have matured into independent societies with their own constitutions and premises.

Among these local organisations were

free democratic election in South Africa in 1994, closer links were forged with the worldwide Ramakrishna Movement.

Swami Saradaprabhananda who succeeded Swami Shivapadananda in 1994 oversaw the official opening of the Ashram Complex in Durban in July 1995. Though deriving inspiration from the international Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Movement, at Belur, India, the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa developed independently of it because of the circumstances of history. In particular, the restrictive apartheid government of the country ensured that there was no meaningful contact between South Africa and India.

## Affiliation to the Worldwide Ramakrishna Movement

In 2007, the Centre was as affiliated as a branch of the parent body in In-

India was posted as the President of the Ramakrishna Centre. This was the first time after 65 years of its formation that the Centre was led by a monk from India. Swamis Nischalananda, Shivapadananda and Saradaprabhananda were all born in South Africa.

In South Africa we have two independent Centres (The Ramakrishna Centre of S.A—Durban, and the Ramakrishna Centre of S.A—Phoenix) reporting directly to Belur Math. These Centres have various Sub centers reporting into them.

## Overview of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban, is located on a fourteen-acre plot of land. Nestled on a hilltop surrounded by tall eucalyptus trees and indigenous vegetation, the site presents a



natural tranquility for an ideal retreat and a place to meditate for those seeking such an environment.

This plot originally served as the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa. This year marks a historic milestone in the life of the Centre as it celebrates the 80th Anniversary of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa which was founded by Swami Nischalananda. This year also marks 15 years of being a Branch of the Worldwide Ramakrishna Mission, which has its Headquarters at Belur Math, West Bengal, India.

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa Durban has 7 Sub-Centers being Chatsworth, Etete, Cape Town, Ladysmith, Newcastle and Pietermaritzburg. Over the past 80 years the Centre has been propagating the universal message of peace and harmony as demonstrated by Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda in their own lives. Swami Swatmaramananda is its present President.

The Centre has contributed significantly to the upliftment of disadvantaged communities through many of its outreach programmes. These include medical services, riot relief, pandemic relief, poverty alleviation through nutrition programmes, skills development, women empowerment, youth resource development, educational services, HIV/Aids shelters, free distribution of value-based literature, etc.

In addition to the spiritual wellbeing of its congregation, it has offered many welfare services including:

**Nutrition and welfare activities** – which provides relief to families affected by the tough economic times and other circumstances beyond their control. All the subcenters support deserving families with monthly grocery hampers, childrens' education and uniforms, medical and legal services.

**Medical** – The Ramakrishna Clinic, Durban conducts free community medical clinics throughout Kwazulu Natal in Chatsworth, Etete, Sydenham,

Inanda, Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith and Newcastle. During 2022 a total of 3595 patients were treated at an estimated value of R. 2,548,580.

Through the support of The South African Red Cross Air Mercy Service the doctors and volunteers of the Ramakrishna Centre were able to provide access



to appropriate healthcare services for both the critically ill or injured persons and those requiring specialist medical expertise, especially from remote rural communities.



**Education:**– The Centre conducts year-long distance and supported learning courses for adult learners, dealing with the Spiritual Heritage and Culture of India. The following five Certificate courses are being offered by the Faculty of Peace, Spirituality and Culture in the 2023 Academic year: Certificate in Hindu Studies, Certificate in Appreciation of Great Lives: Sri Ramakrishna, Certificate in Appreciation of Great Lives: Sri Sarada Devi and Certificate in Appreciation of Great Lives: Swami Vivekananda Module 2.

**Hinduism for Children** - The Centre and its Branches conducts weekly classes for pre-school and school going pupils. This is a value based, structured course, incorporating study of a prescribed text,

chanting of verses from the Bhagavad Gita and other scriptures.

### Overview of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa Phoenix

Since its inception in 1942, the Centre served as a Sub-Centre of Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban.

It came into the fold of Ramakrishna Mission in 2007 when the Mission granted affiliation to Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa and to all its units.

In 2018, the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa – Phoenix was separated from its parent Centre in Durban and was given the status of a full-fledged branch of Ramakrishna Mission. This Centre is located in Phoenix with its subsidiaries, viz., the Johannesburg Sub-Centre and the Ramakrishna Clinic of South Africa – Phoenix, has been involved in various spiritual and welfare projects in our country for approximately eight decades. Swami Saradaprabhananda is its President.

#### Activities:

**Vedanta Classes** are conducted on an ongoing basis. Swami Saradaprabhananda conducts classes on Wednesdays and Fridays on various Hindu texts. The Swami is presently conducting classes at the Swami Vivekananda Study Circle on Saturdays.

The **value-based children's education programmes** conducted by a team of 23 teachers have been structured for the all-round spiritual and cultural development of almost 160 children, as well as for good character-building, so that these children are able to develop into responsible members of society.

The **Ramakrishna Open School** was implemented during 2020 due to the suspension of childrens' classes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Value-based material is made available every fortnight to children by means of one-page worksheets sent via Whatsapp to their parents or the elders in their homes. The lessons incorporate, in very simple language, a variety of topics including inspiring incidents from the lives of Sri Ramakrishna,

Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, Hindu deities, scriptures, religious festivals, moral stories, modern-day heroes and self-improvement skills. Over 1240 children are presently registered for this programme.

#### **Nutrition Programme:**

The indigent families of these various programs are provided with grocery hampers, vegetables and necessary household items on a monthly basis. An average of 250 hampers are prepared and distributed monthly to sustain an average family of four people for a full month. Other regular programmes include the provision of LP gas refills for fifteen families without electricity on a monthly basis and the provision of a litre of milk and a loaf of bread on an average of three times a week each for indigent families.

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 until May this year, by pre-arrangement with the beneficiaries the Centre distributed an average of 250 food hampers every month and vegetable packs on a *knock and drop* basis through a team of 50 volunteers, all of whom were trained by the Centre's Clinic staff to strictly observe hygiene and health protocols. These food hampers were each supplemented with hand sanitising soaps and nutrient fortified breakfast cereals. Also, during the pandemic, 30 x 10 litre oxygen concentrators, each with a step-down transformer, oximeter and the necessary tubing were donated to Oxygen Centres, Clinics and Homes for terminally-ill and frail aged patients for the treatment of COVID-19 positive patients. The total value of these oxygen concentrators is R. 810,000.

The Centre also introduced the **Surya Breakfast Packs** project in 2020 also as a result of the pandemic for those children, who were used to getting their first meal of the day at school but were left hungry due to the disruptions in schooling caused by the pandemic. Each box contains seven sachets of nutrient fortified cereals, noodles, biscuits and other snacks. Approximately 800 packs are distributed every month. During 2021 a total of

9,579 such packs, i.e., 67,053 sachets of cereal, were distributed.

Following the week-long spate of riots, looting and arson in our country which commenced on 12 July 2021 the Centre distributed forty-one tons of groceries, vegetables and nutrient fortified breakfast cereals to a total of 1500 families between July and August 2021.

Between April and June 2022, in the aftermath of the **floods** in KwaZulu-Natal which had left many families in a state of devastation and hopelessness, the Centre undertook the following projects: through its team of 140 volunteers, it distributed 9420 litres of bottled drinking water, 1100 freshly cooked meals, 100 food hampers, 200 blankets, 5000 adult diapers for physically challenged patients, 5000 paper plates and 5000 paper cups to those families which had been affected by the floods. A total of 20 x 2500L rainwater harvesting tanks were installed at the homes of families and a school affected by erratic water supply and damage caused by the floods.

**Ramakrishna Legal Aid Clinic** provides free legal services and assistance through its 14 Attorneys and Advocates to disadvantaged persons from the Phoenix and surrounding areas. Legal documents such as official correspondence with government departments, and wills and other testaments documents are prepared for some of these persons. The Ramakrishna Legal Aid Clinic conducts regular legal seminars as part of its continuing legal education programme.

The Centre's volunteer workers regularly visit homes in the Phoenix area to distribute **value-based literature**. A total of 9876 Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature packs and 4000 calendars promoting Yoga for 2022 were distributed to homes.

Regular **veterinary** visits are undertaken to ascertain the health conditions and needs of the pets in indigent families. Medicine and food are provided for pets. During 2021 twelve surgical operations were performed and 20 vaccines for infectious diseases administered.

As part of the Centre's ongoing **agricultural work** seed packs, seedlings, saplings, fertilisers, compost, gardening tools and agricultural accessories are donated to poor families and other welfare organisations which had developed kitchen gardens. The Centre is maintaining 120 kitchen gardens in the Phoenix area.

Through the Centre's **Sarada Ganga Water Project** six families were each provided with fully installed 2500 litres rainwater-harvesting tanks during 2021.

**Skills Development:** The Centre encourages skills development so that families are able to progress and become self-sufficient. Provisions and other supportive means were provided to 17 beneficiaries to boost their home-based businesses. Sixteen youth are receiving driving lessons. A skills teacher was engaged to train women and youth in tailoring in rural areas.

**Medical Services:** The medical wing of the Phoenix Centre, viz., the Ramakrishna Clinic of South Africa – Phoenix, which has its buildings and facilities on the Centre's premises in Phoenix, provides specialist and super-specialist medical, dental and surgical services free of charge to poor patients at its facilities in Phoenix as well as in State Hospitals and medical camps. A total of 23,155 consultations were conducted in 2021. The Clinic also conducts regular medical seminars as part of its continuing medical education programme for healthcare professionals.

The Ramakrishna Mzamo Home was established by the Ramakrishna Centre of S.A Phoenix which specifically caters for the care of abandoned children suffering with Cerebral Palsy – a disabling condition which affects body movement and muscle co-ordination. The R. 25 million facility is the first in the country to specifically deal with the needs of children with this condition.

Amongst various other contributions to society, the centre contributes to the Ramakrishna eThembeni Home and Ramakrishna Abalindi Home for terminally ill patient.





**Johannesburg Sub-Centre:** Swami Nischalananda established the work in Johannesburg in 1954. The Sub-Centre conducts regular prayer meetings, birth anniversaries of the Holy Trio and other festivals.

These programmes were moved to an online platform during the pandemic. Swami Swatmaramananda, the Swami-in-Charge of the Johannesburg Sub-Centre at that time, also conducted online adult and childrens' classes on various Vedantic texts which benefitted many people in South Africa, India, Oman, Germany, UK, USA and Australia.

It continues to contribute to the upliftment of the disadvantaged communities through many of its outreach programmes, which include medical services, nutritional aid, skills development, women empowerment, youth resource development, etc

The Sub-Centre continued with its welfare and relief activities to support the many affected communities due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 virus. The welfare activities included the distribution of approximately 35 tons of essential grocery supplies, meals, vegetable hampers and detergents throughout Johannesburg, Pretoria, etc.

The Sub-Centre provides groceries/vegetables, school shoes, blankets and other household items.



**Indian Rug**  
Swami Vivekananda's wedding gift to Francis H. Leggett.

Francis Leggett's daughter, Frances Leggett, presented this rug to Swami Nikhilananda and the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York.

For many years the rug was placed in the shrine of the Vivekananda Cottage at Thousand Island Park.

Swami Vivekananda's devoted friend Francis Leggett wrote to his future bride Betty Sturges:

*Swami made me another call yesterday at 7:30 a.m.; this is his unconventional hour of visiting me of late. A porter accompanied him hugging a very heavy rug from a prince of India. I have it spread over my drawing room floor and it looks very well. It is quite thick and heavy and of harmonious coloring and marked with conventional flowers... The gift and presentation were truly original.*

Also, Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter:

*"Some days I get into a sort of ecstasy. I feel that I must bless everyone, every being ... I am in one of those moods now, dear Francis ... that Love Infinite who brought me into being has guided every one of my actions ... what am I, what was I ever, but a tool in His hands, for whose service I have given up everything ... He is my playful darling. I am His playfellow."*

—Swami Vivekananda (Letter to Francis H. Leggett, July 6, 1896)



*Let me tell you how to love all equally. 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 you more and less those who give you less. Thus your love will not be the same for all. You will not be able to love all impartially.*

—The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi



**The Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago** welcomed the New Year 2023 through the celebration of the Kalpataru Day with great pomp and joy. About a hundred devotees attended the program, which began at 3 pm. Swami Ishatmananda welcomed all. There was meditation, devotional singing, and reading of an excerpt from *The Great Master*. Swami Ishatmananda reminded all of the spiritual significance of this celebration. After a brief worship and Arati, all offered flowers and partook of Prasad snacks.

**The Vedanta Society of Portland** observed Kalpataru Day (1st January) with devotees offering Japa Yajna (repetition of God's names). On January 1st in 1886, Sri Ramakrishna bestowed fearlessness to the devotees revealing himself to be God incarnate.

On January 1, 2023, in keeping with the tradition, **The Vedanta Society of Providence** arranged a special celebration to



remember the special grace bestowing day in Sri Ramakrishna's life, when he was at Kashipur Garden House for the treatment of his advancing cancer. It is popularly known as the Wish-fulfilling Tree (Kalpa-Taru) Day. The celebration included devotional music, readings from Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi, reading about the importance of this day from Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play, reflections by Swami Yogatmananda, worship and food offering, flower-offering, and a Prasad-potluck lunch. As the weather was nice, the attendance was twice what was expected

(over 100). After lunch, a PowerPoint presentation of the activities during 2022 was shown.

On January 1, the **Vedanta Center of Greater Washington, DC** celebrated Kalpataru Day with Puja, bhajans, flower offerings, and Arati. Approximately 325 devotees attended, and all were served cooked prasad. Everything went smoothly by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother.

A New Year's Day (Kalpataru Day) special service was held on Sunday, January 1, 2023, by **The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center**, commemorating the historic



occasion when the Master revealed his true self to the devotees. The service was held in the Center's Chapel. In keeping with tradition, the chapel was profusely decorated with colorful flower arrangements surrounding the large photograph of the Master. Swami Yuktatmananda, the spiritual leader of the Center, conducted the service which began with the chanting of Vedic hymns and devotional songs by the Center's choir, after which Swami Yuktatmananda invoked the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna and gave a talk describing the extraordinary event of January 1, 1886, during which the Master gave his

special blessings to the assembled devotees. The subject of Swami's talk was "Sri Ramakrishna's Self-revelation." The talk was followed by several more devotional songs by the choir.

**The Vedanta Society of New York** observed Kalpataru Day on January 1 with a small group of devotees in attendance. There was music, reading and flower offerings to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. Packed prasad was distributed to the attending devotees afterwards.

**The Vedanta Society of Kansas City** observed Kalpataru Day on Sunday, January 1, 2023. At 11:00 a.m. the devotees worshiped Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. and Swami Vivekananda in the ritualistic way. One devotee read the Kalpataru day portion from *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*. Devotees offered flowers after the Puja, and all were served with lunch Prasad brought by them.

**The Vedanta Society of Western Washington** observed January 1, 2023, with a four hour continuous vigil. Devotees came and silently did japa and meditation. The vigil ended with Arati.

Kalpataru Day was celebrated online on Sunday, January 1st, 2023, at the **Vedanta Society of Northern California**, New Temple, with special Puja, flower offering, Arati, chanting, devotional music, talks and reading from sacred scriptures. The program was attended by a large number of devotees from all over the Bay Area and far off places of California.

## Note to Vedanta Centers Around the World:

Your news items are welcome and encouraged.

You may submit them by email to: [global@vedanta-seattle.org](mailto:global@vedanta-seattle.org)  
For more effective news coverage, please attach one or two high resolution, clearly labeled pictures to your email message.





### Big Fisherman

A very upset rabbi walked into the fish market. "I want you to throw me four big fish," he said to the clerk, "Just toss 'em to me."

"But why toss them to you?" the fish seller asked, "I can just wrap them and give them to you like everyone else?"

"No, sir!" yelled the rabbi. "Do just as I say. So, if anyone asks me if I caught any fish today, I can truthfully say, "Sure did! Caught four big ones!"—World's Greatest Collection of Church Jokes Compiled and Edited by Paul M Miller, p. 12.



### Prayer for Safety

A nearsighted minister glanced at the note that Mrs. Jones had sent him by an usher. The note read, "Williams Jones having gone to sea, his wife desires the prayers of the congregation for his safety."

Failing to note the punctuation, the cleric startled his audience by announcing, "William Jones, having gone to see his wife, desires the prayers of the congregation for his safety."  
—*ibid.*, p. 15



### New Pastor Warranty

It's come to our attention that the pastor you received was shipped with a slight defect—he is not psychic. Because of this, you must observe certain procedures to ensure optimum performance.

It is necessary to inform him of any members who are hospitalized.

If someone you know is in need of prayer, the pastor must be told, or he won't know.

If you are in need of a pastoral visit, you will get best results if you ask him.

We regret any inconvenience this may cause. —*ibid.*, p. 1.



### Pastoral Perfection

Good news! After hundreds of years of ministers, a model minister has been found—one who will please every church member.

He is twenty-six years old and has been preaching for thirty years. He is tall, short, thin heavysset, handsome, and has one brown eye and one blue eye. His hair is parted in the middle (blonde), left side (dark and straight) and on the right side (brown and wavy).

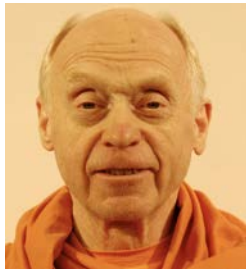
He has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends all his time with older folks. He smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his work.

He makes fifteen calls a day on church members, spends all his time evangelizing the lost, and never leaves his office.  
—*ibid.*, p. 17-18.

All cartoons are drawn by  
Charles Mathias



# IN MEMORIAM



Swami Atmajayananda  
March 12, 1940–January 3, 2023

Swami Atmajayananda joined the Vedanta Society of Portland in February 1960, and was initiated by Swami Asehananda, the last direct disciple of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Sometime in the sixties, Swami Atmajayananda came to the Vedanta Society of Western Washington and was accepted as a probationer in the Ramakrishna Order in 1968. In 1971 Swami Atmajayananda returned to the Portland Vedanta Society, and in May 1975 he took his brahmacharya vows there.

Swami Atmajayananda moved back to the Seattle Vedanta Society in 1993 and divided his time between the Ashrama in Seattle and the Society's retreat in Arlington, WA. In 2000 he took his sannyasa vows and was given the name Swami Atmajayananda.

In Seattle, he would be the doorman and usher for the Sunday morning talks, unless he himself was giving the talk. He also regularly gave talks in Vancouver, British Columbia at the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of British Columbia. He was very friendly, helpful, and a welcoming presence to all those attending the services.

*May his soul rest in peace*



Sanjoy Chatterjee  
March 30, 1958 — December 16, 2022

Swami Tripurananda (Jagannath/Jonathan Carter) breathed his last on 16 November at 4.30 pm GMT Wexham Park Hospital, Slough, UK, due to heart failure. He was 81 and had been suffering from ulcerative colitis for several years. Initiated by Swami Ghanananda ji Maharaj, he joined the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, UK, in 1963 and received sannyasa initiation from Swami Vireshwarananda ji Maharaj in 1977. All through his monastic life, he served at the UK center, first at the Muswell Hill and Holland Park locations in London, and later at Bourne End, the Centre's present location. He assisted in editing the Centre's bimonthly journal Vedanta for 25 years. He had been living a retired life since 2001. Ever cheerful despite his prolonged illness, the swami was orderly, soft-spoken and particular about neatness. He served the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre for nearly sixty years.

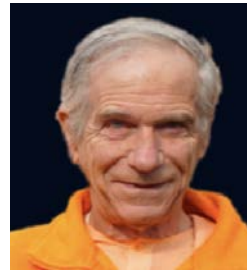
*May his soul rest in peace*

A devoted and generous life member of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington for over 30 years, as well as a member of the Society's Board of Directors, Sanjoy Chatterji passed away peacefully on December 16, 2022.

Sanjoy was born in Jabalpur, India on March 30, 1958. His schooling took place at St. Xavier's in different cities of India. He completed his Bachelor of Engineering from BITS in Pilani, India,



Swami Tripurananda  
1941–November 16, 2022



Swami Varadananda  
November 1945–December 30, 2022

Swami Varadananda was born in Keokuk, Iowa in November 1945 as Charles D. Streeter II. He graduated from Mount St. Mary's University in 1967 and in the same year enrolled in the U.S. Army where he was first introduced to the Patanjali Yoga-Sutras which spurred his interest in Vedanta as interpreted by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. In 1973 he joined the Ramakrishna Order at the Vivekananda Society of Chicago and was ordained in 1982, serving as the center's manager.

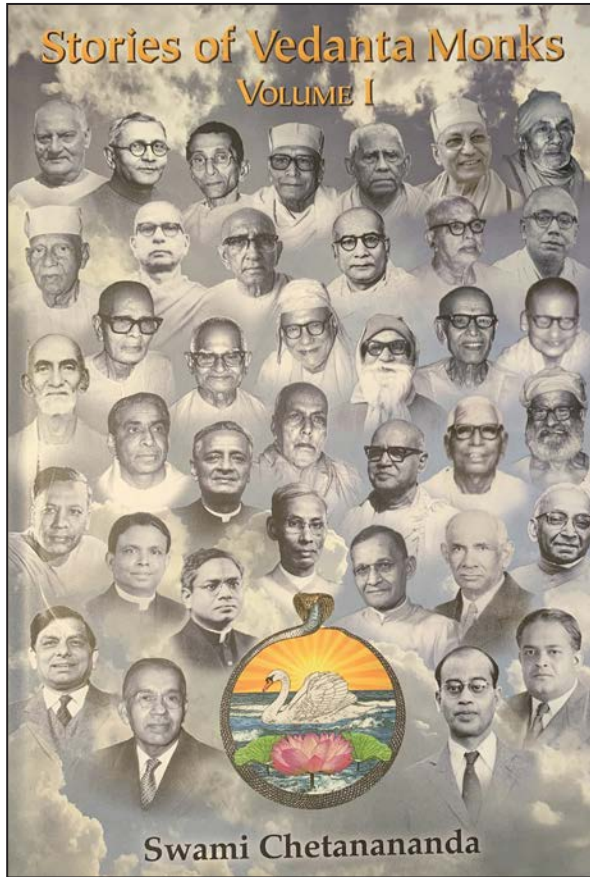
Swami Varadananda was one of the founding members of the Parliament of the World's Religions, then known as the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, and served as a trustee for a number of terms between 1993 and 2018. A committed interfaith leader, he also represented Hinduism on the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago for decades until his passing. Swami Varadananda is remembered for his passion for the interfaith movement and his commitment to the Ramakrishna Order.

*May his soul rest in peace*

and his Masters of Computer & Systems Engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York.

Sanjoy was the founder and CEO of Entomo Inc., a position he held until he was diagnosed with an astrocytoma (cancer) of the brain in November of 2017. He is survived by his wife, Suparna (Nina), his son, Om, and his sister, Jayanti (Tuki).

*May his soul rest in peace*



## *Stories of Vedanta Monks—Volume I*

Author: Swami Chetanananda

We are glad to place before readers the first volume of *Stories of Vedanta Monks: Reminiscences of the Second-Generation Monks of the Ramakrishna Order* by Swami Chetanananda. It is a translation of the first volume of the Bengali work *Prachin Sadhubder Katha* by the same author. As the subtitle suggests, it contains the reminiscences of the second-generation monks of the Ramakrishna Order. The monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna constitute the first generation; their disciples in turn constitute the second. It is the second generation of monks which forms the main topic of discussion in this book.

The second-generation monks had not seen Sri Ramakrishna. Nevertheless, they met many of the first-generation monks who had lived with Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma, and Swami Vivekananda. Just as the direct impact of the Holy Trio on the life and character of the first-generation monks is marked and distinct, so is the impact of the first generation of monks on the second. The latter were directly molded by the first-generation monks and hence were quite unique compared to later generations. It is through them that we are linked to the first generation of monks as well as to Sri Ramakrishna. Therein lies the importance of studying their lives and teachings. They are repositories of invaluable information about Sri Ramakrishna, his monastic disciples, and the glorious traditions of the Ramakrishna Order. The author had close associations with some of these monks and has put on record the information that he gathered from them.



Swami Atmajnananda is head of the Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



Charles Mathias is a devotee and member of the board of directors of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Seattle, and a gifted cartoonist and artist. The cartoons contained in this issue of *Global Vedanta* are his contributions.



Dr. Jayendrina Singha Ray is a Learning Experience Designer with a background in English literature. She has a PhD in English and has taught Rhetoric and Research Writing at colleges in Washington and New Delhi. Her research interests include Postcolonial Studies, Spatial Literary Studies, British literature, and Rhetoric and Composition.



Swami Sarvapriyananda is the Minister and spiritual head of the Vedanta Society of New York. He is globally a much sought after speaker on Vedanta.



Swami Satyamayananda is the Minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington. He also serves as editor-in-chief of *Global Vedanta*.



Swami Swatmaramananda is the Swami-in-Charge of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa.

## ERRATA

On page 9, column 1, of *Global Vedanta, Online Issue #2* the sentence, “In 1896 Swamiji gave brahmacharya to Sarah Ellen Waldo, giving her the name **Tatimata...**” should read, “In 1896 Swamiji gave brahmacharya to Sarah Ellen Waldo, giving her the name **Yatimata...**”