

# DIPKA



2014





Mother Saraswati



Sri Sarada Devi

## Meditation

I meditate in the lotus of my heart on the Divine Mother:

whose form has the brilliance of the rising sun,  
whose hands are held in the pose of giving  
protection and boons,

whose form is an embodiment of peace,

whose smiling face is like a blooming lotus;

who is dressed in a pure white cloth,

who is a tower of spiritual power,

who is a centre emitting peace and joy,

who bestows on devotees moral excellence,  
desired objects and liberation,

who has come for the good of the world &

who is the source of blessings to devotees.



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Dear Children

# Learn from Nature

We all love stories. Our scriptures teach the best and simplest lessons of life through stories. The knowledge about God is so vast and infinite, that it cannot be contained in one book, so we have many scriptures to help us know God. Also, many saints and sages have actually seen God and experienced His living presence. Whatever they have experienced is presented to us as scripture.



Sri Krishna

One very important and popular scripture is the Srimad Bhagavatam. The story of Lord Krishna appears in this book. During the last days of Sri Krishna's life on earth, He taught wonderful lessons to one of His favourite disciples, Uddhava. These teachings are told through stories about nature.

Day after day, year after year, for thousands of years people have seen the same beautiful Earth; clear blue Sky; clean rain Water; brilliant Fire; soft and gentle Moon and the glorious, bright, golden Sun. We also breathe in pure, fresh Air. We notice that these natural elements are always the same. Weather conditions may change but the elements remain constant and are unaffected. Similarly, those who love God and are absorbed in His thought are not affected by the change of circumstances or the behaviour of those around them. They see Brahman (God) everywhere and in everything, and are unaffected.

Avadhuta are liberated saints who see God in everything. Therefore they are not affected by pain or pleasure; heat or cold and many of the pairs of opposites that are present in the world. Lord Krishna relates the story of the Avadhuta to Uddhava. This is known as the *Uddhava*



*Gita*. The story is a conversation between King Yadu and the Avadhuta.

Seeing a happy and learned young Avadhuta, King Yadu asked, “I see your face shining with the knowledge of God. How did you attain this supreme knowledge? While many people seek the pleasures of the world, you are content and blissful. You are like the elephant, which is not affected by water, even though it stands in the River Ganges. Please tell me how you succeed in being so peaceful and satisfied. The senses, which are by nature very difficult to control, do not seem to affect you.”

The Avadhuta was alert and had observed nature carefully. He said, “Please listen Oh King! I shall explain to you what I have learned from my twenty-four Gurus!”

“A calm and wise person is not distracted from progressing on his path even if he is harassed by others. He should be as steady as the **earth**. Like the mountains and the trees, he should dedicate himself to the service of others. **This is what I learned from Earth!**” Mountains and trees add beauty to the environment. They are not disturbed by people’s views of them. Similarly, saints are unaffected by the outside world. They are always peaceful.



“Innumerable beings and situations, possessing good and bad qualities may surround a person. But like the **wind**, they should never entangle him. While the wind carries different aromas, it never mixes with them. **This is what I learned from Vayu, the Wind!**” We become strong and steady when we follow dharma and are not influenced by people’s opinions.

“Though the **sky** extends everywhere and everything rests within it, the sky does not become enmeshed with anything. The soul and Super Soul (God) have the same quality. The sky is never affected by the blowing

action of the wind. In the same way a saint is never disturbed by material elements. **This is what I learned from the Sky!**



“The saintly person is like **water** because he is free from all impurities. Gentle and calm by nature a saint, speaking words of wisdom, creates a serene vibration like the flowing of water. By seeing, touching or hearing such a holy person, humankind is cleansed as if coming in contact with



Avadhuta said, "O King I have twenty four Gurus (spiritual teachers) from whom I have received wisdom.

They are the Earth, Air, Sky, Water, Fire, Moon, Sun, Pigeon, Python, the Sea, Moth, Honeybee, Elephant and Honey Thief, the Deer, Fish, a lady Pingala, the Kurara Bird, a Child, a young Girl, the Arrow maker, the Serpent, the Spider and the Wasp.

By studying their activities I have learned the science of the Self (to see God within and in all of creation)."





pure water. **This is what I learned from water!**



“Even if a godly person eats food that is bland or tasteless he is not affected, just like the **fire** that burns up contaminated substances that are offered into it.” A blazing fire reduces all things to ashes and continues to maintain its brilliance. Similarly, one who knows God is always blissful and not swayed by circumstances.

“Time flows continually and produces birth, growth and death. Just as nobody can follow the changing pattern of a flame, no one can see the changes produced by time. **This is what I learned from Fire!**

“Though the **moon** waxes and wanes, it is not affected by this change. Similarly the saint is not affected by the changes of the body from birth to death. The rishi realises that it is the body alone that changes, but the Soul or Atman is eternal. **This is what I learned from the Moon!**

“The **sun** evaporates water, clean or dirty, and returns it to earth as pure rain water. So also, a godly person accepts anything (e.g. a gift) and at the right time gives it to the deserving person. This act of accepting and giving never entangles the sun or a saint. The reflection of the one sun in many objects makes it appear as many, yet the sun is never divided. It is only ONE. Similarly, the Soul is reflected in various bodies but is always ONE and the same. **This is what I learned from the Sun!**



“I learned from a **pigeon** not to be too attached to anything. Once, I saw a hunter capture a female pigeon and her children. The male pigeon, thinking that life was not worth living without them, willfully entered the hunter’s net and chose to be captured. Excessive attachment led to his doom. **This is what I learned from the Pigeon!**”

Thus the Avadhuta learnt many valuable lessons from each of the twenty-four Gurus of nature. Let us try to be conscious of the presence of God in all of creation. God teaches us constantly, if we are alert, observant and willing to learn.

Regular prayer and leading a moral life enable us to feel the living presence of the Divine within. This inspires us to be kind and loving to all. It also empowers us to be confident and face our challenges boldly. Moreover, we acquire inner peace and contentment.

May God bless you.

Pravrajika Ishtaprana.







by Kumud Bandhu Sen

I met Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother in 1895, when I was a school boy. It was a memorable day in my life. I used to visit Swami Yogananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, regularly at Balaram Mandir. Once he told me that Sri Sarada Devi had come to Kolkata and was living nearby.

### The Divine touch

The next morning I went to visit Sri Sarada Devi with some red lotuses and sweets, as offerings. Holy Mother was performing *pūja*. Golap Ma called me to meet the Mother. I was filled with emotion as I walked towards Her. Her entire body, except Her feet, was covered. I placed the flowers at Her feet and bowed reverently. Holy Mother blessed me by placing Her hand on my head. It was a divine touch of affection and benediction, which I did not fathom then. There was no talk between us. When Mother left, Golap Ma offered me some fruits and sweets as *prasād* and I went downstairs, overjoyed.

Since then I visited Mother almost everyday and offered flowers to Her, like a worshipper before the Divine image. Yes, an image not made of clay, stone or bronze, but a living, ideal human being. Although there was deep silence, it was sublime, solemn, purifying and penetrating. It glowed with grace and sweet tenderness, springing from the perennial flow of the living kindness of the Divine Mother. This silence was a sacred communication which touched one's heart and stirred up a feeling of hope and security. The unbounded grace and affection of the Holy Mother and Her powerful presence cleansed my heart. I felt that I came to one who meant more to me than my parents.

### Acquire knowledge

Swami Trigunatitananda, another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, often chastised me for neglecting my studies since I frequently visited the Swamis (disciples of Sri Ramakrishna) at Balaram Mandir and Alambazar Math. He scolded me saying, "My boy, you must read your school text–





**Sri Sarada Devi**  
(1853 ~ 1920)

**'These earthly ties are transitory. Today they seem to be the be-all and end-all of life and tomorrow they vanish. Your real tie is with God.'**

**- Sri Sarada Devi -**



Swami Trigunatitananda

books attentively. Do you think that the realisation of God is an easy matter? He who cannot concentrate his mind on his studies can never do so in prayer and meditation. First acquire knowledge through books and lead a pure life, which will help you in meditation and prayer.”

### Hope and trust

During my visit to Holy Mother one day, Mother said “Whose blessed son are you?” “I am your son, Mother.” That was the first time I heard the affectionate voice of the Holy Mother, who seemed pleased at my reply. On that day I had the blessings of the Mother and experienced unspeakable joy. Her loving and gracious glance, face beaming with divine mercy and kindness, and Her maternal majesty inspired me

with hope and trust in Her. I realised that the Divine alone is our refuge and strength.

Mother asked me where I lived and whether my parents were alive. I replied, “No, Mother. I have lost both my parents within a year.” In a sympathetic voice Mother said, “My child, don’t be worried. These earthly ties are transitory; today they seem to be the be-all and end-all of life, and tomorrow they vanish. Your real tie is with God. Come here frequently and have *prasad*.”

With deep emotion and tears in my eyes, I said, “Mother, I have got you, the Divine Mother, as my true mother. This is my great consolation. I want only your blessings and grace.” Mother said, “Master (Sri Ramakrishna) has already showered His blessings on you, my boy. Whenever there is a holiday at your school, come and stay here. Now, eat this *prasad* and go to Yogin (Swami Yogananda) and Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) whose holy company will elevate you.”

### Advice to youth

Swami Yogananda was pleased to hear about my conversation with Mother. He guided me about my studies and how to control my mind. Swami Brahmananda also advised me, “Well, do you do regular physical exercises in the morning and afternoon? Both the body and the mind should be developed simultaneously. Observe cleanliness. Do not associate with boys who neglect their studies and tempt you with futile





Swami Yogananda

leisure. There are also mischievous boys who tell lies. Shun them altogether. Don't talk to them. You must always be truthful. Come here after school and listen to our advice. That will help you to acquire knowledge and become spiritually minded. Remember, during your youth you must observe *brahmacharya* (mind and sense control). You must be pure in body, mind and speech." These words were very illuminating and impressed me.

### Serve your mother

Once I went to meet the Mother for Her *darshan* in the evening. Instead of going to meet the Mother first, I sat listening to Swami Yogananda's absorbing conversation with Devendra Nath Mazumdar, a householder disciple of the Master.

Swami Yogananda recalled that the Master had advised Devendra saying, "Your brother Surendra is no more. So it is your duty to look after your mother who is to you, a living 'Mother of the Universe'. Renunciation arising from grief and misery does not last long. Live in the world and serve your mother. This is your main duty and religion. Do it sincerely and you will be able to advance spiritually." I listened to these talks with rapt attention.

When it got late it struck me that I had not yet seen the Holy Mother. Although it was late at night, Sri Sarada Devi sent for me and I was able to have Her *darshan*. My heart leapt with joy. I then realised what deep affection and kindness the Holy Mother has shown to me!

### Meditate regularly

Once I said to the Holy Mother that I could not concentrate my mind well during meditation. My mind was very fickle and unsteady. She smilingly replied, "Oh, that is the nature of the mind. Meditate regularly. The name of God is more powerful than the senses. You will succeed if you practice *japa* and meditation regularly. Always think of the Master who is looking after you. Don't worry about your lapses." I said, "Mother, bless me that I may practice regularly." Mother assured me, "Be sincere in your practice, words and deeds. You will feel how blessed you are! God wants sincerity, truthfulness and love. Outward expressions do not touch Him."

I touched the Mother's feet and went downstairs, taking the *prasad* which was given to me by Golap Ma at the direction of the Holy Mother.



# The Wisdom of Birbal

**B**irbal was a minister in the court of King Akbar. The wisdom of Birbal was unparalleled during Akbar's reign. Once Akbar decided to test Birbal's wit. He gave him three hundred gold coins and said, "Spend these gold coins such that, I get a hundred gold coins here in this life; a hundred gold coins in the other world (after death) and another hundred gold coins neither here nor there."



Birbal walked the streets of the city holding the bag of gold coins in his hand. He noticed a rich merchant celebrating his son's wedding. Birbal gave a hundred gold coins to him and bowed courteously saying, "The Emperor Akbar sends you his good wishes and blessings for the wedding of your son. Please accept the gift he has sent." The merchant felt honoured that the king had sent a special messenger with such a precious gift. He honoured Birbal and gave him a large number of expensive gifts and a bag of gold coins as a return gift for the king.

Next, Birbal went to the area of the city where the poor people lived. There he bought food and clothing in exchange for a hundred gold coins and distributed them in the name of the Emperor. When he came back to town he organised a concert of music and dance. He spent a hundred gold coins on it.



The next day Birbal entered Akbar's court

and announced that he had done all that the king had asked him to do. The Emperor was eager to know how he spent the money. Birbal related the sequence of the events saying, "The reward for the money I gave to the merchant for the wedding of his son, you have got back while on this earth. The benefit for the money I spent on buying food and clothing for the poor, you will get in the world hereafter. The money I spent on the musical concert, you will get neither here nor there."



**Moral of the story:** The money you spend to help righteous friends is returned or reciprocated in some form or the other. Money spent on charity gets converted into blessings from God. Money spent on pleasures is just frittered away! We must spend money wisely.



# Azshagi of Thanjavur



We often wonder, “Does God know that I pray to him or that I give in charity and help people?” A very interesting, true story shows us how God knows everything. An elderly woman named Azshagi lived in Thanjavur, the Chola kingdom, in South India. In Tamil *Azshagi* means a beautiful maiden. She was pious by nature and greatly devoted to God. Everyone admired her compassion and selfless service to those in need. Although she did not receive formal education and was very simple at heart, she was blessed with virtuous qualities and is remembered even today.

## A temple in Thanjavur

At that time King Raja Raja, a great devotee of Lord Shiva, ruled over the Chola kingdom. He was constructing a huge temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, in Thanjavur. The construction of the temple was started in 1003 A.D. and completed by 1009 A.D.

Azshagi lived in a little cottage near the temple that was under construction. Although she was poor, she never asked God for riches and was content to serve the Lord in the nearby temples. She considered all human beings as manifestations of God on earth. As such, she served people whenever she could. She went to the temple site every day and watched the sculptors, masons and carpenters at work. She saw the craftsmen toiling from sunrise to sunset. They were engaged in cutting huge blocks of stone and shaping them into the forms of Goddess Durga, Sri Ganesha, Lord Muruga and other forms of God. She was greatly impressed by their skill and felt that the sculptors’ talent was a special grace from God.



## Loving service

Every time Azshagi visited the temple site, she felt great concern for the toiling artisans and wondered how she could assist them. She often noticed that the workers were thirsty and tired by midday. She wished to offer her loving service to Lord Shiva and his devotees, but was not sure how she could bring some relief to the artisans. She knew that the sacred work of building the temple would continue for some years.



One day the sight of a woman selling curds and buttermilk, gave her an idea.

Azshagi purchased all the buttermilk and served it to the labourers. While the king expressed his devotion to God by building the temple, Azshagi worshipped God by serving the workers. She provided refreshing buttermilk, spiced with ginger and mustard to them every day. They greatly appreciated the cool drink, in the hot hours of the day, as it quenched their thirst. Her thoughtful gesture touched them. Azshagi offered this service for three or four years until the temple was completed.

## The sanctum sanctorum

However one important aspect of the temple was incomplete, and that was the closing of the ceiling in the *sanctum sanctorum*, over the head of the Lord. The artisans were in search of a suitable stone slab for this purpose. Azshagi made a special request to the master sculptor, who happily welcomed her. She humbly said, "I have a wish. I pray that you will fulfill it." The artisans were always grateful to her for her kindness rendered during the past few years and were willing to accept any request from her. The chief artisan said, "Mother, please tell us your wish and we shall carry it out happily. What is your desire?" Everyone was eager to know her answer.

Azshagi joyfully said, "For many years I have, in my garden, a piece of granite. It will be ideal for covering the *sanctum sanctorum*, where the Lord will be seated. Kindly use it to complete the temple. I shall feel blessed if this privilege were afforded to me." Everyone was ecstatic. When they arrived at her garden, they found the granite to be most suitable. They gladly brought it to the temple site, chiselled it and mounted it over the *sanctum sanctorum*.







They sealed it on the ceiling exactly above the head of the Lord, at an auspicious time. Thus they jubilantly completed the building on that very day, before sunset.

Azshagi was thrilled to be able to offer this service also,

especially because it was the section where the image of the Lord was installed. She felt blessed that the Lord had accepted her offering. Now, the construction work was complete. When the king was informed, he carefully inspected the temple by going around it. He felt proud that God chose him as an instrument for undertaking the mammoth task of building such a majestic temple to Lord Shiva. As it was a huge temple, it came to be called the 'Big Temple' or 'Peria Kovil'. An auspicious day was set to perform the grand official opening of the new temple.

### **A strange dream**

On the night before the official opening could take place, the king had a strange dream. Lord Shiva said to him, "I am happy to dwell under the shelter provided to me in the Great Temple by a simple woman named Azshagi." When the king awoke he pondered, "How could a woman give shelter to the Lord? I have built the Great Temple, which took so many years to complete? Besides, I hired the best artisans, well skilled sculptors and had expert advice. How could another person gain the merit? This is quite mysterious!"

King Raja Raja went to the temple to investigate who had played a significant role in building the beautiful temple. The king soon learned how Azshagi, a simple woman, had served the artisans with cool buttermilk every day and gave the valuable granite to cover the *sanctum sanctorum*. The king admired her devotion and selfless service. He realised that the Lord truly dwelt under her shelter! The modest king honoured her in public for he understood that God notices even small acts of service done in a spirit of devotion. Azshagi's devotion to God and her compassion to the community became legendry. She continued her services to God and His devotees with the same humility all her life. This Great Temple of Lord Shiva exists even today.

We learn from this story that God knows everything. He blesses sincere devotees, who perform even the smallest acts of kindness.

# IS THE LORD A MAGNET OR METAL

by

Sri Swami Vimokshanandaji Maharaj

President, Ramakrishna Centre of S.A.



The other day I was talking to a group of children. They were Sonal, Sashiv, Sundar, Mishka, Kareena and Payal. It is always refreshing to talk to children. One little girl, Sonal, enquired why she is attracted to visit the ashram regularly while some of her friends are not inclined to come. I told her that the Lord, who is the Supreme Controller of this universe, is indeed like a magnet. We are all like iron metal pieces attracted to this grand magnet and therefore visit the ashram. Those who do not like to visit holy places are also like metal but are covered with so much dust that the magnet cannot attract them.



I asked the children what they do at the ashram. Sashiv, a young boy, said that he neatly arranges all the prayer books that were used in the morning. Another child, Mishka, said that she loves to clean the shrine carpet so that they can sit and study comfortably.

One boy, Sundar, said that he enjoys 'meditation'. I was surprised and asked him what he does during meditation. He

told me that his mother tells him captivating stories about Lord Krishna and he sits quietly in the shrine and mentally recounts the whole story.

So I said, "Come Sundar, today you will tell us the story that your mother told you!" Sundar gladly agreed and began relating the story.

The story is an interesting one and concerns a lovely incident that happened in the life of one great devotee. This devotee was born in the present Karnataka State in India, about 500 years ago. He became very popular by the name of Kanaka Dasa.

Kanaka Dasa was devoted to the worship of the Lord in the form of Sri Krishna. Whatever he did – whether working in the fields or going to the market to purchase any items, cleaning the courtyard of his home or even taking care of his parents – he used to think of Lord Krishna and





Sri Krishna

would always express his gratefulness to the Lord.

Once on his pilgrimage, he came to a small town called Udupi. In this town there is a beautiful temple dedicated to Sri Krishna. Kanaka Dasa was very eager to visit this temple and have *darshan* of (see) the Lord.

But in those days, people born of lower castes were not allowed entry into the temple. Only the people of higher castes could enter and perform the worship. Coming to know of his social status, the men at the gate forbade Kanaka Dasa from entering the temple. Greatly disappointed, he went behind the temple

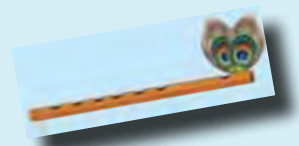
and sat outside the fence just opposite a small window. This window was behind the Lord's beautiful stone image.

Kanaka Dasa could not see the Lord because the image was facing the entrance on the other side. Sitting there, he felt so unhappy that he began shedding tears profusely. He pleaded with God that he was like the piece of metal drawn by the magnet in the form of Sri Krishna. He came to see the Lord but was not successful in having His *darshan*! He began to sing the glory of the Lord throughout the night, with tears in his eyes.

Just before daybreak, the people of the town who were passing by noticed an amazing and surprising phenomenon. When they went into the temple as usual to offer their worship, they found that the image of Sri Krishna had turned 180° (half circle) and was now facing Kanaka Dasa! Behold! It was a miracle that the Lord had performed to make others understand the glory of His devotee!

We listened to Sundar's story with keen attention. The boy said that his mother also told him that sometimes the devotee becomes the magnet, and the Lord a metal, who is attracted by the devotee. He told us that even today, in that Sri Krishna temple of Udupi, the Lord is facing the window and not the entrance to the *sanctum*!

The Lord always fulfils the earnest prayer of a sincere devotee.





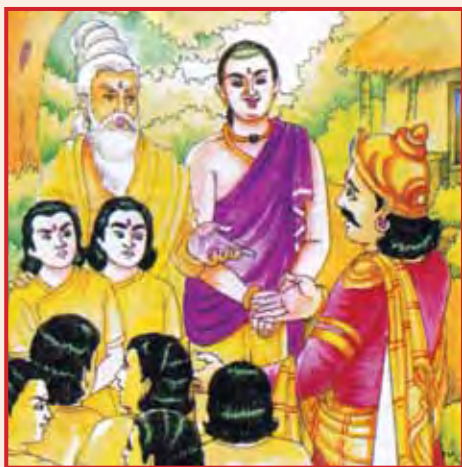
**S**ome people including children, are good at utilising what they have to progress. Others, even though they have enough, grumble and do not make an attempt to progress. Despite not having the best of everything, we can endeavour to succeed in overcoming obstacles. There is an interesting story that teaches us the difference between innovative and idle people.

## **Nanda and Sunda**

King Devadatta had two sons, Nanda and Sunda, who were pampered so much that they became irresponsible. Since they did not have to struggle for anything, they hardly appreciated what they had. The king noticed their idleness. He asked the royal family minister, Raghu, to arrange for an efficient teacher to train and educate the princes. The wise Raghu replied, "Do not worry, Your Majesty, there is a genius named Vidyasagar who is well versed in many subjects and is competent. I will take them to him. However, I am worried about the apathy of the princes. Let us see how they cope under Vidyasagar."



## **At school**



The next day, Raghu took the young princes to Vidyasagar's school. He expressed the king's concern about the princes' lack of enthusiasm to learn. He requested the teacher to kindle some interest in them so that they can be educated. Vidyasagar gladly accepted the boys as his students. In those days, the students lived with the teacher in an ashram so that the teacher could watch over them and determine their capacity to learn.

## **The idle princes**

Nanda and Sunda, together with other boys from the village, lived with



the teacher's family. Within a few days, it was clear that the princes could not cope. They were so used to doing nothing that they could not concentrate on their studies or follow the instructions given to them. They were restless and blamed Vidyasagar for favouring the local village children. They also felt that he ignored them. Nanda complained to Sunda, "Our teacher takes no interest in us. He imparts knowledge only to the village children. Therefore we cannot learn." Sunda agreed and replied, "Yes, that is true. We should return to the palace and inform our father about the partiality of our teacher."

After getting permission from Vidyasagar, the princes arrived at the palace. The king was very happy to see his sons and asked, "My boys, are you enjoying your studies? Do you listen attentively to the lessons and try to remember them?" Sunda remarked, "We are happy at the ashram as we spend our time playing in the woods. We enjoy climbing the trees and bathing in the stream." However Nanda complained, "Father, our teacher does not show any interest in us and favours the local children."



The king was disturbed and exclaimed, "Raghu, the princes are complaining that their teacher is not concerned about educating them. Is that true? Verify this and inform me." Raghu replied, "Oh king, you are aware of the princes' reluctance to study. A piece of iron naturally moves towards the magnet. Camphor burns as soon as a spark falls on it. So, if the princes make the effort to study, they will progress. I will accompany them to meet Vidyasagar tomorrow and verify this complaint through a test."

## The test

Raghu went to the school with the princes. After discussing his plan with Vidyasagar, Raghu divided the students into two groups to test their innovativeness. Two bags, containing ten gold coins each, were brought. Raghu gave one bag to the princes and one to the remaining five students. He said, "There are two houses. The princes will occupy one house, while the five students will occupy the other. Although the funds are limited, each group must purchase items to furnish the houses and beautify them. The king and I will visit you soon to inspect your houses." Nanda remarked, "Our royal teacher is a miser. With just

ten gold coins he expects us to procure articles that will fill the house!" Sunda replied, "Yes, indeed. He is unreasonable. Let us sleep peacefully. We shall find a solution tomorrow." The lazy princes fell asleep and did not care about their responsibilities.

## Skillful students

The five students discussed ideas on how to spend the money sensibly. Raajan remarked, "This is a test to detect our intelligence. So let us think carefully. We must act, using the lessons taught to us by our teacher." Ravi said, "Ah! I have the solution. Let us see the house allotted to us." After inspecting the house, the students commenced the work as planned. Ravi drew a list of the articles required. Trishul said, "Gopal, go to the market and purchase the items listed. I shall tidy the house and its surroundings." Jay offered to decorate the house, as he was skilled in this art. He was hospitable and volunteered to receive guests.

After some time, the king and Raghu went to the school to see how the students fared. They visited the home of the five students first. They observed the beautiful flowers in the garden and the neat lawn. Raghu said, "What an attractive scene! The fragrance of the flowers and the incense are charming."



Jay welcomed them whole-heartedly and said, "Please be seated. Sir, bless us by partaking of milk and these tasty fruits, which have been offered to the Lord." Raghu said, "Dear boys, you have filled our hearts with joy. We are impressed by the neat house, warm welcome and the *prasad*. The manner in which you have spent the money is commendable." Blessing the students, the king and Raghu left.

## Apathy

The king, being curious and impatient to know how his sons managed the test, enquired, "Raghu, where is the house of the princes?" "There, where this paved road ends, and the unkempt road begins," said Raghu.

They then went to the house of the princes, but the princes were nowhere to be seen. The king was disappointed to find them sitting in a corner looking exhausted and sad. He enquired, "Nanda, Sunda! Why have you done nothing? Why are you feeling dejected?" "What else could we do?" retorted the princes. "We have filled the house





with three cart loads of straw. We could purchase nothing else with ten gold coins. Furthermore, as we could not employ labourers to carry the straw into the house, we had to do this strenuous work ourselves.” Raghu took the princes to Vidyasagar. He said, “Oh King, the teacher has taught all without partiality but the princes were not willing to learn. On the other hand, these five understood the lessons and, by putting them into practice, attained success. Dedicated students are like pieces of iron that get attracted to the magnet called the teacher. By imbibing the spark of knowledge, they become intelligent.”

We can make best use of our circumstances to triumph, by being innovative and resourceful.



## Wisdom from the Bhagavad Gita

Lord Krishna says:

‘The senses are said to be superior (to the body); the mind is superior to the senses; the intellect is superior to the mind; but that which is superior to the intellect is He (the Atman).’

Chapter 3 verse 42.

‘I am the same to all beings; to Me there is none hateful, none dear. But those who worship Me with devotion, they are in Me and I am also in them.’

Chapter 9 verse 29.





# Arjuna and Hanumanji

In the Mahabharata we read about the battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. The Pandavas were righteous and had Sri Krishna on their side. Arjuna was one of the five Pandava brothers. It is interesting to know that Hanumanji was present during this great battle of Kurukshetra. Arjuna's chariot had the flag of Hanumanji. There is a story that explains why Arjuna had Hanumanji on his flag.

## In Rameshwaram

Arjuna had been rewarded with the supreme weapon of Lord Shiva called *Pashupat Astra*. It is a powerful missile capable of massive destruction. The valiant Arjuna was proud of his achievements. Once, he arrived at Rameshwaram, in the south of India. While sightseeing, he noticed a small monkey sitting on a hill repeating the sweet name of Sri Rama. Amazed, Arjuna asked arrogantly, "Who are you and what is your name?"



## Meeting Hanumanji

"I am Hanuman, a servant of Sri Rama. I helped to construct the massive stone bridge over the ocean here for the Lord," Hanumanji answered. Arjuna retorted proudly, "Any warrior can construct a bridge across the ocean with his arrows. Rama could have easily done that. His effort in building a stone bridge was in vain".

"An arrow-bridge is not strong enough to take the tremendous weight of the monkey army. It would have collapsed under the weight of Nal, Neel, Sugreev and I who are heavy enough. This is why Sri Rama did not consider building a bridge of arrows," Hanumanji exclaimed.

"If the bridge collapses from the weight of the monkeys and bears, then the knowledge or skill of the warrior is worth nothing. I will display my power and expertise of weaponry so that you can learn. I will create a mighty bridge extending a hundred miles across the ocean, effortlessly. You can go on jumping and playing on the bridge as you please," Arjuna said.

## Arjuna's pride

Hanumanji smiled and remarked, "Well, your so-called arrow-bridge would not be able to take even the load of my thumb. It will collapse. Then, what will you do?" "I will enter into a blazing fire and give up my life if my arrow-bridge collapses under your weight," Arjuna promised. Arjuna then enquired, "And what will you do, Hanuman, if I am successful?"



“I will remain ever present on your flag and serve you always,” replied Hanumanji humbly. Arjuna took his powerful bow, the Gaandiva, and created a long bridge over the ocean with his arrows. The bridge extended for a hundred miles. “Now jump and play on the bridge as you please,” Arjuna challenged Hanumanji.

Hanumanji smiled and simply placed his thumb on the bridge. Lo! It collapsed with a loud crash and was submerged into the ocean. Arjuna was crestfallen. His pride was hurt. He prepared a blazing fire to give up his life, even though Hanumanji dissuaded him from taking such a drastic step.

## The Witness

A saint who was passing by, saw the fire and soon learnt what had transpired. He said that as there was no witness, the bet or promise was invalid. He made them repeat it in his presence, so that he could be the witness. Arjuna once again vowed that if the arrow-bridge fell, he would burn himself. He then created a bridge of arrows. Hanumanji pressed his thumb on the bridge but it did not collapse.



Hanuman and Arjuna realised that this was not an ordinary saint. Hanuman understood that his Lord, Sri Rama, supported the bridge with his *sudarshan chakra* (divine discus) to save Arjuna. Arjuna saw that it was his beloved Sri Krishna who saved him. God himself came to their rescue. The sage revealed his true identity! He was Lord Vishnu! When He removed the *sudarshan chakra* the bridge immediately collapsed. Arjuna accepted defeat

and Hanumanji also agreed to remain on the flag of Arjuna's chariot.

The Lord always protects us by destroying our pride. During the battle, Arjuna would look at Hanumanji and derive great strength. He would think, “God will never allow me to be defeated. He, who gave his servant such great power, will protect me. I shall fight the battle of life, fight the battle of dharma.”

Hanumanji's flag reminds us of the power of God's name. We must pray saying, “Oh Lord, help us to be truthful and self-controlled. Fill us with strength, love and self-confidence. Destroy the demons in the form of anger, pride and greed. Please bestow your grace on us.”





# Proud Stigo

**S**wami Vivekananda was fond of telling interesting stories to teach us valuable lessons. The following story was narrated by Swami Vivekananda.

## I am powerful

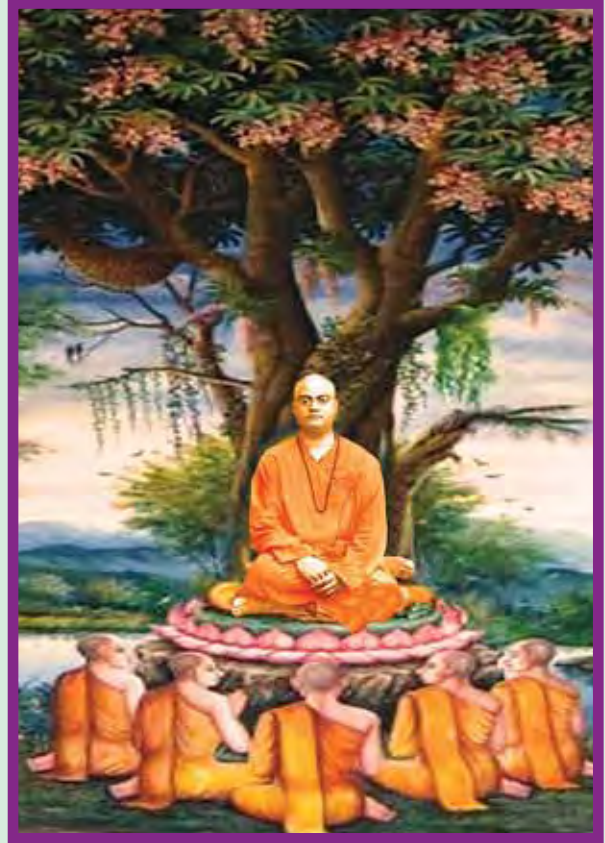
There was once a very proud, courageous and arrogant stag called Stigo. He considered himself to be brave and always thought that he was the best stag in the forest. He often walked through the forest announcing to the other animals, "No one knows my strength. I am powerful! I do not fear anyone."

Once while taking a stroll with his son named Deeno, he was boasting yet again and spoke in a loud voice so that all could hear him. He said, "Look at me, my dear child. See what powerful horns I have. I am able to fight and defeat anyone that challenges me. I can destroy them with one push. Deeno, I must say that being a stag is wonderful."

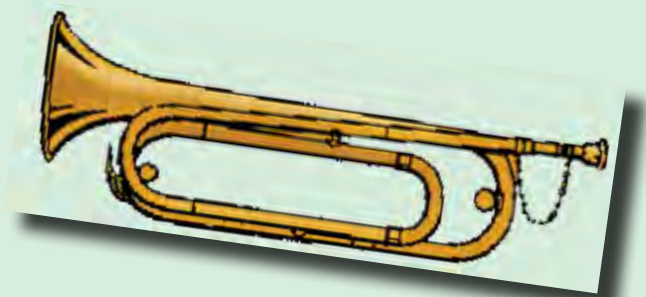
Stigo continued bragging about his powerful horns. Deeno was silent and respectfully listened to his dear father as they walked. Suddenly, from a distance, Stigo and Deeno heard a loud sound. The curious Deeno enquired, "Dad, what is that ear-piercing sound?"

## The sound of a bugle

Stigo replied, "Ah, that is the sound of a hunter's bugle." Then Stigo, who claimed to be powerful and heroic, fled like lightning. He said to Deeno, "Come my dear, we must find shelter quickly before any harm comes to us."



Swami Vivekananda, the universal teacher







The poor child was confused as he had just heard his father gloating about his strength, exclaiming that he could destroy any enemy.

Once they reached a safe place where no one was to be seen, Deeno asked, “Dear dad, you just told me that your strong horns will always protect us and that it is great to be a mighty stag. What made you flee from the mere sound of a hunter’s bugle?”

The stag was greatly embarrassed and bowing his head low replied, “My son, I know that I am tough by nature since I have these massive horns. However, when I heard the sound of the bugle, I forgot about my strength and became anxious. Therefore I ran as fast as possible.”

## Be humble

This story teaches us not to be proud and arrogant. We never know when our circumstances can change. We must be humble if we excel in any field, because it is only through God’s grace that we do well. Pride and arrogance confuse us and make us forget our innate divine nature.

We should not flee through fear but learn to confront our problems, which are like the sound of the bugle. It is important to pray and meditate even during good times so that, during trials and tribulations, we remain strong and steadfast. We must always pray to God to guide and protect us.





# Live with God



## Have a Happy Day

When you get up in the morning, switch on the light. Then mentally bow down to God and say a short prayer. Seek God's guidance and strength to support you during the day.

Make simple resolutions to help you progress:

- I shall pray every morning, feeling blessed and protected through God's grace.
- I shall perform all my activities as an offering to God.
- I shall eat food that is healthy and nourishing.
- I shall try to be calm, truthful, kind and loving.
- I shall avoid finding fault with others.
- I shall help others in whatever way possible for me.
- I must remember that God resides in the hearts of all beings.
- My activities must be a form of worship to Him.



## My Attitude

- I will work with love and care, remembering that my happiness depends on it.
- I will speak kind words to comfort and not to hurt.
- I will try to listen carefully and act responsibly.
- I will be efficient and try to make the best use of my time and energy.



## Before I go to bed

I must pray and reflect on my actions and speech:

- Did I work with love and care, concentrating on the task at hand?
- Was I able to use my words to comfort and help?
- Did I make the best use of my time and energy?

I must go to sleep with the awareness that God is protecting me.

**I am happy because  
God Loves Me.**





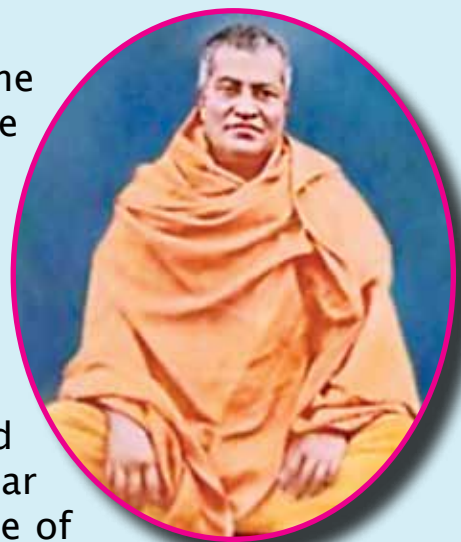
# Swami Vivekananda

## The Embodiment of Lord Shiva

Sri Ramakrishna had sixteen monastic disciples. Swami Vivekananda, known to be the embodiment of Lord Shiva, was their leader. Since they had one Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, they are called brother disciples. Some of the brother disciples actually saw Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) as the living Shiva. Swami Shivananda, known as Mahapurush Maharaj, was one of them who had a remarkable experience.

### An amazing vision

Swami Shivananda recounted a vision that he had about Swami Vivekananda when they were living with Sri Ramakrishna at the Cossipore garden-house. He said, "Well, a very strange phenomenon occurred while living with Swamiji at the garden-house. In those days we all slept together side by side, in a room downstairs; for, we did not have enough bedding. We had a big mosquito-curtain and we took shelter under it. One night I slept near Swamiji. Suddenly I woke up to find the inside of the whole curtain flooded with a brilliant light. Swamiji had been sleeping by my side; but now I could not find him there. Instead, there slept a number of Shivas – seven or eight years old. They wore no clothes, were white in colour and their heads were covered with matted hair. It was



Swami Shivananda  
Mahapurush



the light emanating from their bodies that lit up the place. I was dumbfounded at this sight. I could not understand anything at first. I thought it was a hallucination, so I rubbed my eyes and looked at it again. There slept the many Shivas, sure enough, just as before! I was amazed and sat up with wonder. I did not lie down again. Besides I

was afraid that I might touch them with my feet unconsciously during my sleep. So I spent the whole night in meditation. When the day dawned, I found Swamiji sleeping next to me just as before. When I told him everything, he laughed heartily.”

### At Amarnath

Swami Vivekananda's own experience at the Amarnath cave in the Himalayas, further confirms that Swamiji was none other than Lord Shiva. Sri Ramakrishna (the Master) once said, “When Naren (Swami Vivekananda) realises who he is, he will no longer remain in the body.” Swamiji visited the cave of Amarnath on

2 August 1898. Here he had a mystical experience of which he seldom spoke. When earnestly requested by a disciple, Swamiji related his experience during the Amarnath journey as follows:

“Since visiting Amarnath, I feel as if Shiva is sitting on my head for twenty-four hours and would not come down. On the way to Amarnath, I ascended a very steep mountain. Pilgrims do not generally travel by that path. But the determination came upon me that I must go by that path, and so I did. The labour of the strenuous ascent has told on my body. The cold there is so biting that you feel it like pin-pricks. I entered the cave with only my *kaupin* (*dhoti*) on and my body smeared with the holy ash; I did not then feel any cold or heat. But when I came out of the temple, I was benumbed by the cold. I saw three or four white pigeons; whether they live in the cave or the neighbouring hills, I could not ascertain. I have heard that the sight of the pigeons brings to fruition whatever desires you may have.”

Lord Shiva Himself had appeared before Swamiji and granted him the



**Swami Vivekananda**



grace of Amarnath, the Lord of immortality, not to die until he himself should choose to throw off his mortal bonds. It was all worship there. He had never seen anything so beautiful, sublime and so inspiring. Swamiji went inside the cave after bathing in the stream running in front of the cave. He reached the cave, his whole body shaking with emotion. The cave itself was a large one and the Shiva Linga in a niche of deepest shadow, appeared to Swamiji that He (Lord Shiva) was sitting on a throne. Swamiji knelt before the Linga and was overcome with emotion. He came face to face with Lord Mahadeva Himself in the cave.



**Shivalinga at Amarnath**

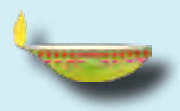
He was saturated with the presence of Lord Mahadeva. He could speak nothing except of Lord Shiva for some days after his return from the cave.

## Naren is Shiva

It is extremely rare for a man of God, dwelling in an exalted spiritual realm, to come down to earth, astonish human beings by his life, and then disappear as suddenly as he came. Swami Vivekananda was one such rare soul. The only person who recognized his true nature was his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna. The Master described him as one of the seven great sages, the *saptarishi*.

The Shiva-like nature of Swami Vivekananda was foremost in the mind of his Master. Once Sri Ramakrishna saw a beam of light emanating from Varanasi (the abode of Lord Shiva) and travelling to Kolkata. Seeing the young Narendra he recognized in him the concrete form of that very light of Lord Shiva. If somebody spoke ill of his beloved Naren, Sri Ramakrishna would stop him, saying that insulting Naren was tantamount to insulting Lord Shiva. The brother disciples of Swami Vivekananda too, used to regard him as an incarnation of Lord Shiva. When Nag Mahashaya, a householder disciple, would come to the Math and meet Swamiji, he would exclaim reverentially, "Victory to Shiva! Victory to Vishwanath, the Lord of the Universe! Today I am blessed to see Shiva incarnate!"

Swami Vivekananda's entire life was intimately connected with Lord Shiva.

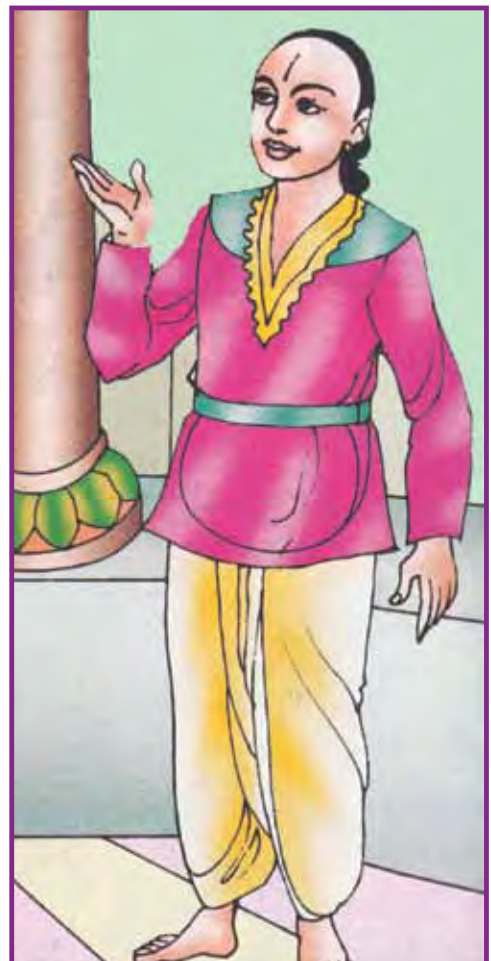


# The Three Dolls

There was once a great king called Krishna Deva Raya, who had many wise ministers in his court. The wisest of them was Tenali Rama. One day, a clever merchant named Bhaga came to the king's court from a distant kingdom. He saluted the king and said, "Your Majesty, I have heard that you have many wise ministers in your court. I would like to test their wisdom with your permission." This stirred the king's interest and he granted permission to Bhaga. Bhaga gave the king three dolls that looked identical. He said, "Though these dolls look similar, they are different in some way. If your ministers can find the difference, I will acknowledge their wisdom. However, if they cannot, I will assume that there are no wise ministers in your court. I will return in thirty days for the answer."

The king summoned all of his ministers, except Tenali Rama. He gave the three dolls to them and asked them to find the difference within three days. Alas! None of the ministers could determine the difference. The king was worried and called for Tenali Rama. He said, "Tenali, I did not inform you previously because I thought that this problem would be too simple for you. However, since no one has been able to find the solution, you will have to find the difference among these dolls." Tenali took the three dolls and left.

The problem proved difficult for Tenali too, but at last, after careful thought, he found the solution. He went to the court with the dolls on the day that Bhaga was due to return. Then, he announced before the king and the courtiers that he had found the answer. He said, "These three dolls are certainly different from one another. They represent different types of people. Let me demonstrate what I mean." Tenali then took a very thin piece of wire and put





it into the first doll's ear. The wire came out from the doll's mouth. He did the same with the second doll and the wire came out from the other ear of the doll. When he did the same to the third doll, the wire went to the heart and did not come out.

Tenali Rama explained the meaning of the difference among the dolls. He said, "In the first doll, the wire went in through the ear and came out through the mouth. This doll represents people who talk without listening, understanding or assimilating any knowledge. In the second doll, the wire came out of the other ear, characterising people who do not listen to good advice or learn meaningful lessons. The third doll, in which the wire went straight to the heart, symbolises wise people who understand, appreciate and practice the good lessons that they learn."

The king, Bhaga and all the courtiers were greatly impressed with Tenali's intelligent answer. It is wise to reflect on advice that we get and if it is beneficial, then we should practice it. Thus we can progress and achieve productive goals.



## Keep Good Company

Always beware of the company you keep.

If a drop of water falls on a lake, it loses its identity, unnoticed.

If it falls on mud it becomes part of it, unwanted.

If it falls on a rose it shines, appreciated.

If it falls on a shell, it becomes a pearl, precious.

If it falls on a thirsty tongue, it becomes life saving elixir, most precious.

The drop is the same but it is the company that matters.



# Ramlal

## Blessed to serve the Master

*Ramlal Chattopadhyay who lived from 1858 to 1933 was a son of Sri Ramakrishna's elder brother, Rameshwar. When he was young, he became the priest of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar and was also an attendant of Sri Ramakrishna. This article, which gives the reminiscences of Ramlal Dada, is taken from 'Ramakrishna As We Saw Him' by Swami Chetanananda.*

### See God with open eyes

If anyone would meditate or close his eyes while repeating his *mantra* inside the Kali temple, the Master (Sri Ramakrishna) would tell him, "What are you doing? You are seated here in front of the living Mother. See Her to your heart's content. Suppose you have gone home to visit your mother. Would you sit before her with closed eyes and repeat her name?" (This shows that the Master saw the Divine Mother as a living Goddess.)

### The power of the name of God

Sri Ramakrishna once explained the meaning of the name of Rama. He said, "Ra means the universe; Ma means God, or the ruler. He who is the ruler of the universe is Rama. The human mind cannot comprehend the divine sport (*lila*) of God. By a mere wish he makes the impossible possible, and the possible impossible." Explaining the power of God's name, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Well, if there is a collision between two trains, some people will die and some will survive. Those who started their journey chanting the name of Mother Durga survived, and those who did not, died. According to a person's karma, his foot is supposed to be pierced by a plough. However, as he started his journey chanting the name of Mother Durga, a blade of *kusha* grass entered his foot instead. This shows that he escaped major injury through the power of the Mother's holy name."

### On fasting

About fasting the Master used to say, "After eating a little *prasad* (offered food) of the Divine Mother, if you eat your regular food, it will not harm you. One gets the benefit of fasting – that is, purity of the mind – when one observes it wholeheartedly. But if fasting causes stomach pains (or headaches), it is almost impossible to practice spiritual disciplines or perform any work. In the *kali yuga* (the iron age) the span of life is short. The human body is weak and cannot survive long without food. It is difficult to concentrate on God while fasting. Therefore, eat something first and then practice spiritual disciplines."





*Sri Ramakrishna*

### Days in Dakshineswar

Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, served the Master wholeheartedly. The Master said that Hriday's service was rare and that even parents could not serve their children so well. Later, Hriday gave the Master much trouble. It was interesting to watch a quarrel between them. When the Master got angry with Hriday, he would scold him using strong words. Hriday usually kept quiet, but occasionally he would say, "Uncle, what are you saying? I am your nephew." And again when Hriday became angry, the Master would keep quiet. After such quarrelling I would think that they would never speak to each other again. But after a short while, they would smile and talk and tease each other.

In his room at Dakshineswar the Master sang, danced, talked and joked with people. He was full of fun. Sometimes He made us laugh so much that our stomachs would ache. Like a child he would ask the devotees, "Well, I have actually seen and heard all these funny things. Is it wrong for me to tell you?" The devotees would reply, "No, sir. It is not wrong. Please tell us more. We love it."

### Sri Ramakrishna's singing

If someone broke the rhythm while singing, the Master would cry out "Oohu, oohu." But if the person sang with devotion and deep absorption, such irregularity would not disturb Him. The Master sang in ecstasy. His voice was soft, sweet and melodious. Sometimes while singing, he would improvise some joyous phrases. I saw the Master enter into *samadhi* many times while singing. Sometimes he would ask me or Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) to sing and while listening, he would again enter into *samadhi*. When I sing accompanied by drums, my mind dwells on the rhythm of the drums. Therefore it is hard for me to sing wholeheartedly to God. Noticing this, the Master taught me to concentrate on God while I sing.

### Sri Ramakrishna's daily routine

The Master usually got up at three or three-thirty in the morning, and as soon as he got out of bed I would wake up. After finishing his ablutions (bath, etc.), he would take a little Ganga water on his palm and sprinkle it over his head saying, '*Brahma-Vari! Ganga! Hari Om Tat Sat!*' This means that the water of the Ganga is as pure as Brahman. God is the only Reality. Then he would take some *prasad* of Lord Jagannath and Mother Kali. He ate a few bits of dried *bel* leaves that had been offered at the shrine of Tarakeshwar Shiva. With joined palms he would salute all the holy pictures in his room and then sit on the small cot.

He would then go to the Kali temple where he would decorate the Divine Mother with flowers, feed Her or offer flowers and *bel* leaves at Her feet.

### The Master's simplicity

The Master suffered from stomach



Sri Ramakrishna is feeding Mother Kali





Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi. Hriday is supporting the Master.

trouble during the rainy season, and he would then eat only rice, bitter squash curry and soup. Hriday and I slept on the floor of the Master's room. Once at midnight we woke up to find him cutting vegetables and gathering rice and spices. Hriday said to the Master, "Uncle, what are you doing? Can't you do that in the morning? Both of us are here. We will do everything for you. Why don't you go to bed and sleep? Besides, Uncle, your household work makes me laugh. That quantity of vegetables and rice is hardly enough for one person. You are so miserly!" The Master replied, "Look, when I woke up, at first I sat quietly. Then I thought that it was not good to sit idle, so I should do some household work. Some people do not know how much food I eat, so they cook too much and waste it. Hriday, for a morsel of food and some money you are now working at this temple. If you had land and money in Sihar, would you come here for a job? Learn how to be thrifty and simple. Otherwise the Goddess of Fortune will leave you." "You are right, Uncle," exclaimed Hriday.

One morning the Master asked someone to cut a twig for him so that he could clean his teeth. The person brought three twigs. The Master took one and said to him, "Rascal! I asked you to bring one twig. Why did



Ramlal

you bring three? However, save those two.” The next morning the Master asked the same person for another twig. When he was about to go to the garden, the Master asked, “Where are you going? Why don’t you give me one of those that you brought yesterday?” He continued, “Without checking the stock, why are you running to get a new one? Have you created that tree? You are about to break its branches at your own whim! Only the Creator knows how difficult it is to create. Learn how to work methodically. Do not waste anything.”

Sri Ramakrishna was all-knowing

I was an attendant of the Master. Gradually the disciples of the Master began to come to Dakshineswar, so one

day I said to him, “I haven’t visited Kamarpukur for a long time. I think I should go there and clear the taxes on our property.” The Master said, “If you go, then who will look after me?” I replied, “Well, these devotees are coming regularly and they often stay here at night. They can look after you. Besides, I won’t be gone for long. As soon as I finish my work, I shall return.” The Master then said, “Yes, they are coming, but they do not know my way of life. They cannot serve me like you.”

The next morning when I asked the Master’s permission again, he thought for a while and said, “No, you won’t be able to go to Kamarpukur. It is not the will of the Mother that you should leave me alone.” I told him, “But I am ready to go. I only need the temple manager’s permission.” Hearing this, the Master made a circle in the air with his finger and wrote something. Then he said, “Ramlal, you won’t be able to go to Kamarpukur. Go to the manager and see what he says.” When I approached the manager he said, “No, it’s not possible for you to leave now because there is not enough staff to perform the work of the temples.” Thus my visit to Kamarpukur was cancelled.

Once the Master told me, “Offer whoever comes here, whether known or unknown, a little *prasad* and a glass of Ganga water. You will not have to do anything else. This service to the devotees will give you the result of *japa*, austerity and sacrifice.” So I follow what the Master said and it gives me great joy.

There is a saying, ‘As one thinks, so one becomes.’ The Master said, “God is the ruler of this universe and all beings are His children. Oh my mind, know for certain that you are a child of God. God’s power dwells in the heart of one who attracts many people and gives them joy.”





# Smell and Sound



After finishing work, a poor builder called Pravesh was on his way back home. While passing through the market the aroma of the delicious sweetmeats wafted through the air. The smell was



coming from a nearby sweetmeat shop. Since the smell was very tempting, the poor man stopped at the shop. He was eager to buy the sweets. However, he could not afford it. After waiting for a while, Pravesh turned to go away. Just then, a stern voice stopped him, "Wait! Before you go, you must pay me," demanded Maganlal, the shopkeeper. The poor man was

astonished to hear this and asked, "Payment? What kind of payment?"

"Payment for the sweetmeats!" retorted the shopkeeper. "You did not eat the sweetmeats but you enjoyed its pleasant fragrance for quite a long time," said the cunning Maganlal. "Smelling is as good as eating. So you must pay for it." The poor man was upset to hear this for he did not have sufficient money to pay the shopkeeper.

A wise man overheard the whole conversation. He called Pravesh and whispered something in his ears. Pravesh's eyes twinkled with joy. He went into the shop, jingled the few coins that he had in his pocket for some time. Maganlal's eyes shone to hear the jingling of the coins. He said, "Hurry up, pay the money fast."

Pravesh replied with conviction, "Why, I have already paid you the money. Didn't you get that? Didn't you hear the jingling sound of the coins? If smelling is as good as eating, then hearing the jingling of the coins is as good as accepting the money." Pravesh smiled proudly and left the shop, greatly relieved.





# Jayadev

## Tell a story

There was once a little boy named Jayadev. Like many children, Jayadev too loved to play and enjoy the company of his friends. Although he went to school, he struggled to learn or even understand the lessons taught by his teacher. One day the teacher told the class that they must learn a story and present it to the class the following month. Jayadev felt greatly perturbed and sad for he knew that he would not be able to memorise the story. Days passed and Jayadev would tearfully watch his friends enjoying their games in the playground while he sat trying to remember the story. The time was drawing near. The next day he would have to relate the story.



Jayadev tried for a short while to remember his work but he felt extremely tired. Firstly, he could not understand the story so he could not memorise it. Secondly, he was unable to play and have fun with his friends. His friends were able to enjoy their free time as they had completed their work. Jayadev simply closed his book and fell off to sleep. He was exhausted just by reading the story.

The next day his teacher scolded him angrily, "How could you not learn such a simple story even after one whole month? You are useless, Jayadev. You should not be attending school from now on. You should look after your father's cows in the fields." Jayadev felt greatly hurt and cried profusely. He really loved his teacher and the company of his good friends. The harsh words of his teacher made him feel that he was worthless. Jayadev was embarrassed and thought, "I am not fit to be with them. I shall go away to a distant place, far from my school and home."

## Steps made of stone

Jayadev left home and walked a long distance. Tired and thirsty he looked for some water. He noticed a deep well in the outskirts of a



village. He watched an old lady collecting water from the well and kindly asked her for some water to drink. She lovingly served him some cool water, which satisfied and relieved him. Being exhausted, Jayadev sat on a stone step nearby. He was an observant child and was intelligent in his own way. As he sat for some time on the steps, all made of stone, he observed that the last step was worn out in just one spot. He asked the lady in amazement, "Grandma, why is this stone carved out at this particular spot? Does it serve any purpose?" The grandma replied affectionately, "My dear child, the step has not been carved out by anyone. You see, after collecting water in their clay pots, the village women place it on this same spot every day before carrying the pots to their heads or waists. This spot is repeatedly used by the ladies for the same purpose and over a period of time, it has worn out."



## Nothing is impossible

Jayadev thought about this carefully and exclaimed, "What? Has such a strong stone been worn out by mere clay pots? So stone too, even though it is strong by nature, can become worn out if it is used daily? Now I clearly understand this of my lessons and work at school. Anything can be done with practice. Nothing is impossible." He realised that he had not concentrated well on his studies at school. His mind was restless as he thought about many other things like games and friends. The sight of the stone steps made him realise the need to practice concentration on whatever he was doing. He was now determined to succeed in his studies and returned to school. He proved that he was capable of excelling, through much effort.

We must always be reassured that we are intelligent by nature and may have many talents and skills. However, to be perfect requires practice. Whatever actions or work we do, must be done with sincerity, concentration and practice. Thus we will be able to achieve our goals and aspirations.



"Let positive, strong, helpful thoughts enter into your mind. Lay yourself open to these thoughts and not to weakening and paralysing ones. This world is the great gymnasium where we come to make ourselves strong. Stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny."

~ Swami Vivekananda ~

# Be Cool & Calm

A wise Samurai (warrior) lived near Tokyo in Japan. He was now old and taught Zen Buddhism to young people. One afternoon a warrior, known for his total lack of morals, arrived at the Samurai's hermitage. The young and impatient warrior had never lost a fight. Hearing of the Samurai's reputation, he had come to defeat him and increase his own fame. All of the Samurai's students were against the idea, but the old man accepted the challenge.



They gathered at the town square and the young man started insulting the old master. He threw a few rocks in his direction, spat on his face, shouted every insult under the sun and even insulted his ancestors. For hours he did everything to provoke him but the old man remained undisturbed. By late afternoon, the foolish and irrational young warrior left feeling exhausted and humiliated.



Disappointed that their master had received so many insults and provocations, the students asked, "How could you bear such indignity? Why didn't you use your sword instead of displaying cowardice? You should have reacted even though you could have lost the fight."

The sensible Samurai thought for a moment and asked, "If someone comes to you with a gift, and you do not accept it, who does the gift belong to?" "To the one who delivers it," responded one of his disciples.



"The same is true of vices such as envy, anger, hatred and insults," replied the wise Samurai. "When they are not accepted, they continue to belong to the one who carries them."

This story teaches us to be cool and calm, always. We usually regret the wrong actions done in anger. It is better to think carefully before we act. Thus we can enjoy peace of mind.



'It is the level-headed man, the calm man, of good judgement and cool nerves, of great sympathy and love, who does good work and so does good to himself'

- Swami Vivekananda -



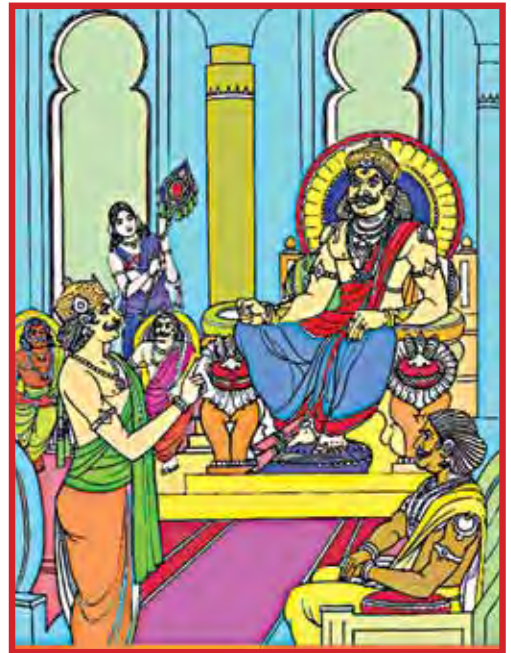
# The Virtuous Vibhishana

**T**he Ramayana is an ancient scripture that teaches us many wonderful lessons on the significance of having patience, purity and faith in God. Vibhishana is an important character in the Ramayana. He had a positive attitude and unbounded devotion to Sri Rama. He was the brother of the demon king Ravana, who lived in Lanka. Although he lived in the kingdom of the rakshasas, the wicked Ravana could not influence Vibhishana, who was kind and loving by nature. In contrast to Ravana, Vibhishana had many divine qualities and bravely objected to Ravana's evil habits.

Vibhishana was the youngest son of Sage Vishrava, who was the son of Sage Pulastya. Being pious and virtuous by nature, from his early childhood, Vibhishana spent much time in prayer and meditation. He was blessed when Lord Brahma appeared before him and offered him a boon. Vibhishana said that all he wanted was purity and infinite devotion to God. He also longed to have the *darshan* of Lord Vishnu. This prayer was fulfilled.

## Hanumanji in Lanka

His cruel brother Ravana had captured Mother Sita and hid her in the Ashoka grove. While in search of Mother Sita, Hanumanji arrived in Lanka. As he moved silently from palace to palace, he soon noticed clusters of young *tulasi* plants outside a splendid building. He rejoiced and wondered, "Who, in this land of the demons, worships the *tulsi* that is so dear to Lord Vishnu?" He became curious and alighted gently to see who lived there. Just then he heard the sweet chanting of Sri Rama's name. Hanumanji was amazed and thought, "It is strange to find a devotee of Sri Rama here!" Vibhishana revered Sri Rama and always repeated His holy name.



Hanumanji made friends with Vibhishana and learnt where Mother Sita was. Vibhishana was also overjoyed at meeting Hanumanji, a devotee of his beloved Lord. Hanumanji asked Vibhishana how he, a righteous

person, lived with the demons who had many vices like greed, anger and pride. Vibhishana replied, “I live here like the tongue in between thirty-two teeth. Just as the tongue has to be careful not to be crushed by the teeth, so I too live carefully, by praying to Sri Rama.”

## **Vibhishana warns Ravana**

Vibhishana had made every attempt to warn Ravana about his unjust behaviour. He loved his brother and wished to assist him. Vibhishana said, “Brother! Rama is no ordinary man. It was immoral of you to capture his wife. Furthermore, he has truth on his side. Remember that a man who fights for truth is twice armed. Sita is like a raging fire that will destroy Lanka and the demon race. You have brought death to Lanka. Take my advice and return Sita to her husband. Seek Rama’s pardon and save our kingdom. Bad omens already prevail in Lanka. The cows are not providing milk; the elephants and horses are shedding tears and refuse to eat.” Ravana was enraged. Accusing Vibhishana of being ungrateful and jealous of his power, Ravana exiled him from Lanka.

## **Refuge with Sri Rama**

Vibhishana felt dejected and left Lanka to seek refuge with Sri Rama. Since he was the brother of their enemy Ravana, the followers of Sri Rama regarded him as an enemy, also. Considering him to be a spy of Ravana, they wanted to attack him. Vibhishana announced that he was banished from Lanka because he opposed his brother’s actions. He now sought



refuge in Sri Rama. Recognising Vibhishana’s earnestness and sincerity, Sri Rama and Hanumanji immediately accepted him into their fold. Sri Rama accepted his friendship saying, “You have come to me as a friend. Once a man surrenders himself to me, I trust him completely. From today you are one of us.”

Vibhishana was assured of Sri Rama’s protection and promised to help Sri Rama fulfil his mission of destroying Ravana and rescuing Sita. Vibhishana divulged the secrets of Ravana’s kingdom and army to Sri Rama. Thus Sri Rama was victorious in the great battle.



## Vibhishana crowned king of Lanka

Sri Rama's love and compassion for Vibhishana indicates that God is impartial and loves all equally, irrespective of one's status. After vanquishing Ravana, Sri Rama crowned Vibhishana the king of Lanka. Vibhishana followed the path of dharma. He encouraged his subjects to follow the path of righteousness, promoted regular prayer to God and transformed Lanka into a kingdom of virtuous people. His wife, Queen Sarma also supported his selfless efforts. When Sri Rama was about to leave Ayodhya at the end of his reign, He ordered Vibhishana to stay on earth to serve and guide the people on the path of dharma. Hence, Vibhishana is considered to be immortal.

Swami Vivekananda said, "Purity, patience, and perseverance are the three essentials to success, and above all, LOVE. Equipped with these, an individual is able to face the whole universe in opposition. Wherever these are present, there is no power below or above the sun to crush the possessor thereof." We see the truth of this statement clearly, in the life of Vibhishana.



## Smile Awhile

Two doctors saw a man limping. The cardiologist said, 'I am sure he is suffering from a serious heart problem.' The orthopedic surgeon disagreed, 'No, it must be bone problems!'

The first doctor asked, 'Do you have a heart problem?' The bone specialist quickly added, 'You do have a bone or joint problem, don't you?' The simple man replied, 'By God's grace, I am enjoying good health, but my right shoe is torn, so I am limping!'

In a school cafeteria, the teacher places a note in front of a pile of apples. It read: 'Take ONE only. God is watching.'

Further down the line is a pile of tasty cookies. Young Pravin makes his own note, which reads: 'Take all you want. God is watching over the apples.'

Little Rakhi complained, 'Ma, I have a stomach ache.'

'That's because your stomach is empty, my dear' her mother replied. 'You will feel better if you had something in it.'

That afternoon, her father came home complaining that he had a severe headache all day. Rakhi perked up, 'That's because it's empty,' she said. 'You will feel better if you had something in it.'



# Four Candles

Once four candles were burning. The atmosphere was so calm and peaceful that one could almost hear the candles talking. The first candle said, 'I am PEACE. The world is full of anger and fighting. Nobody can keep me lit.' Then the flame of Peace went out gradually.



The second candle said, 'I am FAITH. I am no longer indispensable. It does not make any difference whether I stay or go.' Just then a gentle breeze blew softly and Faith's flame slowly faded away.



The third candle then spoke. 'I am LOVE. People do not understand my importance so they simply put me aside. They even forget to love those that are closest to them and care about them.' Love's flame also went out.



Suddenly a child entered the room and saw the three unlit candles and exclaimed, 'Why are you not burning? You are supposed to be burning brightly until the end.' Saying so, the child began to cry. Then the fourth candle answered, 'Don't be afraid, child. I am HOPE. While I am still burning, we can ignite the other candles.' With shining eyes, the child took the candle of Hope and lit the other candles. With Hope, each of us can live with Peace, Love and Faith. But the flame of Hope should never go out of our lives.



It is infinite hope that begets aspirations. When we have hope we can succeed despite challenges. God is always with us and certainly helps those who make an attempt to progress.





# Swami Virajananda

Swami Virajananda was the 6<sup>th</sup> President of the worldwide Ramakrishna Order. His pre-monastic name was Kalikrishna Bose. His father, Trailokyanath Bose, was a renowned physician of Kolkata. Kalikrishna was born on 10 June 1873. He was hard-working and had a natural flare for handicrafts, fine arts, cooking and gardening. He had a sweet, dignified nature and was inclined towards spirituality from a young age.

## Holy company

Kalikrishna was influenced by Khagendranath Chatterjee (later Swami Vimalananda), a fellow student. When Kalikrishna and Khagen were at college, they became friends with Sudhir Chakravarty (Swami Shuddhananda), Sushil Chakravarty (Swami Prakashananda), Haripada Chatterjee (Swami Bodhananda) and Govinda Shukul (Swami Atmananda). All of these young men were disciples of Swami Vivekananda and became renowned monks of the Ramakrishna Order. They led virtuous lives, studied religious books and practiced spiritual disciplines. Religious gatherings and holy company greatly attracted them.

After reading the *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* and *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Kalikrishna became attracted to Sri Ramakrishna. He would shut himself in his room, spending most of his time practicing meditation and other spiritual disciplines. Singing and listening to devotional songs also gave him great joy. Soon Khagen and Kalikrishna began visiting the Kankurgachi Yogodyan Ashrama and assisted with the daily work of the ashram. Sometimes they were allowed to perform Sri Ramakrishna's worship. Mahendranath Gupta, known as 'M' encouraged them to visit the Baranagore monastery where the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna lived. Their visit to the ashram left an indelible impression on Kalikrishna's mind. He felt that they had come to a 'new world' where everything seemed wonderful.

Henceforth Kalikrishna would go to Baranagore regularly and spend time with the monks. On the pretext of learning mathematics, Kalikrishna stayed at the monastery and assisted Swami Ramakrishnananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, to fetch water from the pond, pick

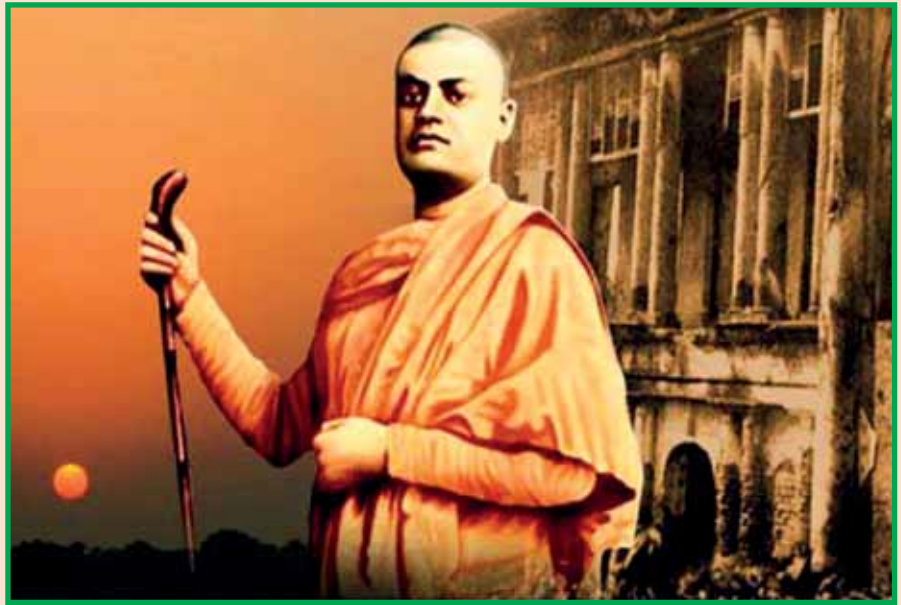


Swami Ramakrishnananda

flowers for the worship and perform other chores.

## Renunciation

Kalikrishna now found it difficult to concentrate on his studies. He felt very restless at home and lost interest in all worldly activities. Close to his house was a large garden, where he would spend hours in meditation on the banks of a pond. Kalikrishna's parents noticed this change in their son.



Swami Vivekananda in front of the Baranagore monastery

His father said, "My son, if you want to prosper in the world, you must concentrate hard on your studies. If you want to realize God, you must perform spiritual practices with all your heart and soul. Think carefully. I give you three days to decide." After three days Kalikrishna told his father, "I have decided to try to realize God." Receiving the blessings of his parents, he left for the Baranagore monastery. Kalikrishna was the first to join the monastery, other than the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He was very fortunate to meet these disciples. By serving them, he learned much about spirituality and true renunciation.

Once, while at Jayrambati, Swami Saradananda (a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) and Kalikrishna had contracted malaria. Kalikrishna continued to suffer despite treatment. In 1892, the monastery shifted to Alambazar. Kalikrishna spent his days here joyfully in spiritual practices. At this time Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother came to stay at Belur. Kalikrishna came to see Her one day. When he met the Holy Mother, She lovingly advised, "My son, what a healthy body you had! I am sad to see you looking so weak. Go back to your home where you can recover your health through nutritious food and suitable medicine."

## Spiritual disciplines

Although Kalikrishna was reluctant to return home, Holy Mother filled him with peace by initiating him. With Her blessings he resolved to spend his time practicing intense spiritual disciplines at home. Proper medical treatment and nutritious food soon helped him regain his former good



health. He began to practice intense spiritual disciplines, repeating his *mantra* as much as 108 000 times.

Several months later, Kalikrishna left for Vrindavan, after meeting Holy Mother and the monks. The young ascetic's heart was overflowing with joy. He returned to Kolkata in February 1897, a few days after Swami Vivekananda returned from the West. About his first impression of Swamiji, Kalikrishna later wrote, "His eyes were captivating. Light seemed to emanate from his entire body. What a charming figure – combining beauty and power, a calm air and a dazzling personality! My first reactions were love, devotion and a sense of awe."



Sri Sarada Devi

### Days with his Guru

Within a few days Swamiji granted *sannyasa* to Kalikrishna and three other *brahmacharis*. Swamiji gave Kalikrishna the name 'Virajananda'. Swamiji's radiant form on that day always illumined Kalikrishna's heart and he recalled, "His naturally shining face, brightened by the sacrificial fire, sparkled with a halo, as if the god of fire himself had assumed a human form and were seated there! Oh, how joyful Swamiji was after investing us with *sannyasa*!"

A new chapter began in Swami Virajananda's life. He had the rare opportunity of rendering personal service to his Guru. Swamiji had once told him, "If you work for the salvation of others, you will become liberated this moment." Swami Virajananda resolved to sacrifice his life for his own salvation and for the good of the world.

He went to Mayavati in the Himalayas, with Swami Vivekananda. Swami Virajananda remained in Mayavati and, harmonizing work and meditation, followed the ideal taught by his Guru. In Mayavati, he used to cook for Swamiji. Once, the noon meal was delayed. Swamiji grew impatient like a child and went to the kitchen to scold his young disciple. But what he saw there made him withdraw without uttering a word. Swami Virajananda was vigorously blowing the hearth and the whole kitchen was full of suffocating smoke. Later Swamiji enjoyed the meal prepared with such devotion.

Swami Virajananda devoted himself heart and soul to Swamiji's service. Swamiji's health had broken down due to overwork and so



**Swami Virajananda**

he had moved to Balaram Bose's house for medical treatment. Swamiji was extremely pleased with Swami Virajananda's devoted and meticulous service. Although he remained awake to serve his Guru day and night, he did not feel tired. On the contrary, he was always blissful because he was serving his Master. When Swamiji returned to America, Swami Virajananda went to Mayavati with Swamis Vimalananda and Satchidananda.

### **Good Administrator**

From 1906 to 1913 Swami Virajananda was the President of the Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati. He was a practical and good administrator who was patient and tolerant. Under his able guidance the ashram gradually became self-supporting and the circulation of *Prabuddha Bharata* increased. This magazine is still published today. He also took up the responsibility of completing the monumental task of compiling and publishing five volumes of Swamiji's *Complete Works* and *The*

*Life of Swami Vivekananda by his Eastern and Western Disciples*. He worked from morning until late at night on these projects.

Swami Akhandananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, wrote, "I have read Volume 1 of *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, and while reading it, my hair stood on end. Swamiji has poured his own spirit into the Book. On account of your combined efforts and unflinching devotion, Swamiji will remain forever, as it were, within the pages of this book."

In 1934, when Swami Akhandananda became the President of the Order, Swami Virajananda was appointed Secretary. A monk of the Order reminisced, "I shall never forget how revered Swami Virajananda once saved me. My eyes still become wet with tears when I recall the incident. How profound was his love; what sympathy he had for all. He was the Secretary of the Order then and I was a *brahmachari* in the Varanasi Sevashrama. My father was ill. Through his kindness I was able to visit my father before he passed away."



## President of the Order

In 1938 Swami Virajananda was elected the President of the Order and maintained this great responsibility for the last twelve years of his life. In spite of the great pressure of work and the various problems faced by the Order, he was always calm and composed. This great monk was indeed God's special blessing to the Ramakrishna Order.

Swami Virajananda's life was solely aimed at fulfilling Swamiji's mission. He had also inherited Swamiji's love for his country and believed that 'the salvation of the world depends on the regeneration of India'. Even at that time he dreamt of a 'Vivekananda University' that would be established at Belur Math. Today there is a Vivekananda University at Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Swami Virajananda influenced the founding of the two educational institutions of Belur – Vidyamandir and Sarada Pitha. He was convinced that the mighty tree of the Ramakrishna Order, with its multiple branches, drew its sustenance from Sri Ramakrishna, who was its very root, its very life.

## A source of Inspiration

Fulfilling the dream of his Guru, Swami Virajananda inspired the establishment of the Sri Sarada Math in 1954, the year of Holy Mother's birth centenary.

Swami Virajananda clearly saw God as a living Reality. He was a friend, philosopher, guide and an ideal teacher to many spiritual aspirants. His letters to genuine seekers of God reveal another facet of his character. One such letter reads in part, "I am glad to learn that you are performing your spiritual practices regularly. One who can shed tears for God is indeed blessed. Sincerity of heart is what counts. Tears of love for God are perhaps more sacred than the water of the Ganga. They purify the heart, and then one attains devotion to God and becomes fit for receiving His grace. You must pray to Him with all your heart. Keep Him in the innermost recess of your heart and keep meditating on Him. I pray to Him that you may attain love and devotion for Him."

Swami Virajananda had a great capacity to forbear physical suffering. He alleviated the sorrows of many people with his kind glance and affectionate, soothing words. In spite of his old age and various physical ailments, he was never seen to be depressed. On 30 May 1951, in the holy hours of the morning, this child of Sri Sarada Devi attained final refuge at Sri Ramakrishna's feet. He had initiated many monks of the Order and still continues to be a source of inspiration to thousands of earnest devotees on the path of spirituality.





# Rich in Values

Living in urban areas, we often forget the beauty of nature. Nature helps us to be closer to God therefore many great spiritual teachers lived in mountainous regions or in forests. The beautiful, bright sun, the vast blue ocean, the forests and the clear blue sky, remind us of the infinite power of God.

Nature teaches us many lessons. Sri Ramakrishna used to observe: a tree heavily laden with fruits, bends low while a tree with no fruits stands up straight and tall. So if we want to love God and lead a fruitful life, we must be loving, humble and simple. Without these qualities, we can become arrogant and haughty.

Once a very wealthy man named Perumal took his son Ramesh on a trip to the countryside to show his son how poor people live. They spent a few days and nights with a poor family, to observe what farm life is all about. On their journey back home, Perumal asked his son, "How did you like the trip, Ramesh?"

"It was great, Dad." Replied the youth. Perumal asked, "Did you see the condition of poor people?" "Yes Dad," replied Ramesh. "So what did you learn from the trip?" asked his father, eager to know what his son had observed.

Young Ramesh replied, "I saw that we have one dog and they have four. We have a pool that reaches the middle of our garden and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden and they have the stars at night. Our patio reaches to the front yard and they have the whole horizon.

We have a small piece of land to live on and they have large fields that go beyond our sight. We have servants who serve us, but they serve others. We buy our food but they grow theirs. We have walls around our property to protect us. They have friends to help and protect them."

Perumal was speechless. He realised that his son was very wise and thought deeply. The hustle and bustle of our modern lifestyle prevents us from admiring the beauty of nature. A few moments with nature calms us, gives us peace and enriches our lives.

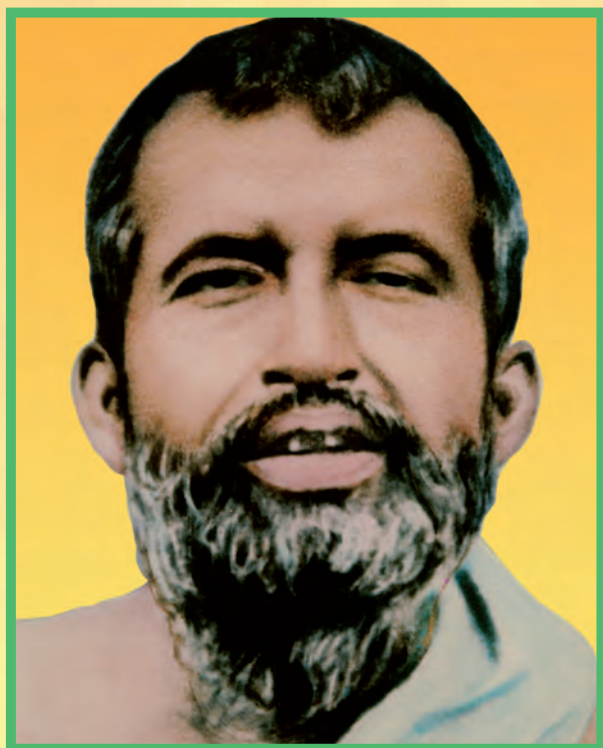
May we love all of God's creation and be kind to all.





# Degrees of Knowledge

~ Sri Ramakrishna ~



The knowledge of a worldly person, a devotee and an incarnation of God are by no means of the same degree.

The knowledge of a worldly person is like the light of a lamp, which shows only the inside of a room. Through such knowledge he eats and drinks, attends to household duties, protects his body, brings up his children, and so on.

The knowledge of a devotee is like the light of the moon, which illumines objects both inside and outside a room. But such light does not enable him to see a distant or a very minute object.

The knowledge of an Incarnation of God is like the light of the sun. Through that light the Incarnation sees everything, inside and outside, big and small.

The mind of a worldly person is, no doubt, like muddy water; but it can be made clear by a purifying agent. Discrimination and renunciation are the purifying agents.







## Sanctum Sanctorum of Sri Sarada Devi Ashram

Why should one not be able to see God? One should practice *japa* (repetition of God's name) and meditation at regular times, giving up idleness.

As the clock goes on ticking, so too must you continue to repeat God's name. Thus you will attain everything.

The less you become attached to the world, the more you will enjoy peace of mind.

My child, I bless you from the bottom of my heart that you live long, attain devotion and enjoy peace. Peace is the principle thing - one needs peace alone.

~ Sri Sarada Devi ~

