



DECEMBER 2024 - VOLUME 22 NUMBER 12

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Thus Spake

How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

— Matthew 18:12 KJV

Shunning all forms of pride and ego, we must take shelter at His feet. But how many wish to take refuge in the truth and in the Lord? Everybody thinks that he is infallible. Deluded by egoism, man regards himself as very important. He does not even want to believe in the existence of God. He never seriously considers how little he can understand with his intellect. Mahamaya alone knows in how many ways she has kept man deluded.

— Swami Brahmananda

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Monthly Program Schedule for January 2025

1st (Wed)
Kalpataru Day
11:30 ~
(Livestreaming)

3rd (Fri)
Service to the Homeless Narayana
*Contact: urara5599@gmail.com to participate

4th (Sat)
Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy
10:30 ~ 12:00
(Japanese Only) (Video Uploaded Later)

15th (Wed)
Monthly Upanishad Study Class
8:30 ~ 9:30
(Japanese Only) (Zoom) (Video Uploaded Later)

19th (Sun)
Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi Birthday Celebration
11:00 ~ 16:30
(Bilingual) (Livestreaming)(Video Uploaded Later)

21st (Sun)
Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class
14:30 ~ 16:30
(Japanese Only) (Zoom)(Video Uploaded Later)

An Introduction to Vedanta

by Swami Divyanathananda

Based on the talk given on 20th October 2024 at Zushi

The word Vedanta is a very common term for students of philosophy. In India, it is almost a household name. But not all of us have a clear idea, about what Vedanta is. In this article, we shall attempt to explain Vedanta.

If we look around ourselves, beautiful mountains, ocean, rivers, lush green fields, men animals- where from have they come? Among human beings, there are some who are rich, abundant in wealth and all enjoyments, whereas some are poor and remain in a miserable state all their life. The question comes- why? If all of us, who are born are sure to die, why do we covet so many things which we are sure to leave behind when we die? What is real in this world? Is this existence around us real? Moreover, we search for happiness all our life but fail to find real happiness in anything. Why? Where can we find real happiness?

Vedanta attempts to answer these questions.

Brahman

In Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, we find a student asking his teacher, 'By knowing what we can know everything?'

The teacher replied, 'By knowing Brahman, which is the source of manifestation of this phenomenal existence, everything comes to be known.'

Why? Because Brahman is the essence of everything in the phenomenal existence. The One Brahman pervades the entire existence. Just as, in a clay pot, there is nothing but clay inside, in a similar way, behind all these names and forms, Brahman is the One undifferentiated being. He appears to be divided because of the various names and forms. Therefore, when we know Brahman, nothing else remains to be known.



The Rig Veda says that which exists is One, men call it by various names. That infinite absolute, nameless, formless is the foundation of Vedanta philosophy.

Brahman: Nirguna and Saguna

Brahman has two aspects: one without any qualities and the other with qualities. The former is called Nirguna Brahman, and the latter Saguna Brahman.

The Nirguna Brahman, as stated above cannot be defined or explained by any quality or any characteristic feature. It is beyond the reach of mind, speech, and body. Sri Ramakrishna has said that everything has been defiled, except Brahman. Meaning, nobody has been able to describe what Brahman is. It is not God, not an angel, not a man or woman. It is beyond the Sun, Moon, planets, and anything huge or large that we can perceive of. The entire phenomenal existence is limited by time, space, and cause, but Brahman is timeless, spaceless, and independent of any cause. Brahman is also unknowable since it is not an object having a shape, colour, form, etc. We know anything by our organs - the ears, eyes, touch, smell, etc. But Brahman is not such an object which can be perceived by the senses. Thus, it is unknowable.

Brahman, taking the help of Maya creates the Universe. As a creator of Universe, He is called Saguna Brahman, or *Ishwara*. He is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of this Universe. As Creator, he is called Brahma, as sustainer, Vishnu and as destroyer Shiva. The Nirguna Brahman cannot be worshipped, but Saguna Brahman can be.

Sacchidananda (Existence – Consciousness - Bliss Absolute)

Brahman as ‘Sat’ - Existence

The Upanishads describe Brahman as *Satyasa Satyam* meaning Truth of truths. It means, Brahman alone is real, whereas everything else in this phenomenal Existence is temporary. They derive their existence from Brahman. The waves in the water are real as long as the water is there. The waves derive their existence from water. Thus, reality of Brahman is Absolute, whereas the reality of the world is apparent.

Brahman as ‘Chit’ - Knowledge

The colourless sky appears blue because the water particles in the moisture disperse the blue colour in the spectrum most. In our waking and dreaming states, we perceive our own mental and physical states and feel, I am happy, I am sad, I am sick, I am healthy. But all these feelings arise because of the association of the Upadhis- the body, mind, intellect. The Self is free of all these physical changes and emotions. However, these modifications in body and mind are felt through the mind. Mind is not Atman, but the consciousness manifests itself through the mind. This consciousness is always the same- in past, present and future, in waking dreaming and in sleep. This consciousness is Brahman. This consciousness illumines all the states of our body and mind, ego etc. from birth till death.

Brahman as ‘Anandam’ – Bliss

Since Brahman is infinite, and beyond sorrow, grief, death, etc. so it is Bliss itself. Bliss and happiness are not the same. Happiness is an infinitesimal part of Brahman, which comes through worldly enjoyment. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad explains beautifully:

It is not for the sake of the husband that he is loved, but for the sake of the Self he is loved; It is not for the sake of the wife that she is loved, but for the sake of the Self she is loved; It is not for the sake of the son that he is loved, but for the sake of the Self he is loved....’

During deep sleep we all experience bliss, because we forget the world, we forget our body, our sorrows, our troubles, our relatives, etc. But the Bliss of Brahman cannot be measured by any human standard.

The play of Maya

Swami Vivekananda has said that Maya is a statement of facts. It cannot be described. But its play can be known by its effects. It is due to the spell of Maya, that even knowing that we all shall die, yet we all want to live eternally. Knowing quite well that we are born alone and shall die alone, still we associate with others and feel, ‘He/she is my all in all’ and so on. With the association of Maya, Brahman creates the Universe. This Maya is so strong that even incarnations of God sometimes forget their real nature.

Maya has two powers: Concealing power, called *Avaranashakti*, by which it conceals Brahman from us. Another power is its projecting power, called *Vikshepashakti*. A rope, lying on the ground may appear like a snake and a passerby would easily get frightened. Darkness conceals the existence of the rope and at the same time, creates the imagination of snake, followed by fear. Thus, both *Avaranashakti* and *Vikshepashakti* work together.

The Individual Soul: Jiva

The individual Self is also called Jiva, which derives its consciousness from Brahman. By the light of that consciousness, the mind, intellect, and the various organs of our body function. The Jiva is attached to the body, mind, and this world. Although Brahman and Jiva appear to be different in power and magnitude, but actually they are same. However, the difference between the Supreme Soul and the individual Soul can be compared to the difference between a huge mountain and a mustard seed, or the Sun and a small glow of fire. Each Individual Soul is Brahman. But its real nature is obscured by sense organs, mind, ego, etc. due to ignorance. The individual Soul enjoys the fruits of its actions. But when it gets rid of ignorance, it realises its immortality.

Karma and rebirth

The doctrine of Karma forms an important part of the Upanishads. Karma explains the inequality between men. It explains the reason for suffering in this phenomenal existence. However, it should be clearly understood that this Karma doesn't affect the Atman. Its relation is with the Jiva, the embodied Soul.

Karma means action and the residue of impressions which comes after action. Whatever we do or think, everything is Karma. The Jiva has to suffer the consequences of its Karma- good or bad. Sometimes the effect of one Karma comes in the next life. In every life one continues to do both good and bad Karma. Thus, Karma gets stored up and accumulates. That is the reason why we have repeated births. But when discrimination dawns on the Jiva, the discrimination between Real and Unreal, the discrimination between right and wrong actions, then by following the path of virtue and practice of meditation on one's real nature or God, the Jiva can annihilate all his Karma and realise his true identity with Brahman.

The play of Gunas

Maya is composed of three gunas: Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. They can be compared with the three strands of a rope, by which Maya binds a man. The three gunas are present in almost everything- gross and subtle and also in body, mind, intellect and buddhi. When the Universe was in the subtle state, before all this creation came out, these gunas were there, but in seed form, and they were in a state of equilibrium. Then suddenly, by the will of the Lord, Rajas predominated, and all these names and forms manifested and slowly this phenomenal existence came into being.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, the food that we take, our thoughts, work that we perform, charity, sacrifice, worship, etc. all have these three constituents- Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. The function of Rajas is flow of energy and because of Rajas, this evolution and involution in creation happens; these names and forms manifest. In a human being Rajas manifests in activity, ambition, lust, anger, and greed. Under the influence of Rajas, the Jiva gets bound to this world.

Tamas means inactivity. Due to the influence of Tamas, the real is hidden and the unreal appears to be real. Under the influence of Tamas, a man becomes dull, lethargic, and inactive, and loses vigour and energy.

When Sattwa predominates, a person gets inner joy and peace. He serves others in an unselfish way, he exercises self-control. He practices truthfulness. He loves solitude.

The threefold body

The gross body is the physical body we have, wherein the Jiva resides and perceives the world around. It is composed of the five organs of perception- Ears, skin, eyes, tongue, and nose and the five organs of action- the organ of speech, hand, feet, the organs of evacuation and procreation. At the time of death, only this gross body dies.

The subtle body is composed of five pranas- prana, apana, vyana, udana, samana: the ten organs, mind and buddhi. Just like the five organs of actions and the five organs of perception, in the subtle body also these ten organs exist. The ten organs in the gross body derive their power from their counterparts in the subtle body. The function of the mind and buddhi are deliberation and determination, respectively.

The causal body is beyond and deeper than the gross and subtle bodies. In the dreamless state, when there are no imaginations, feelings, joy, sorrow or any other emotions, the soul rests in the causal body.

The three states of a soul

The soul passes through stages, called *Avasthatraya* in Sanskrit. They are **waking state**, **dreaming state** and the **dreamless sleep state**. We shall explain these three states in brief. In the waking state, the soul perceives this world with the senses, body, mind, intellect. He sees the objects around- houses, people, streets, mountains. He can feel the states of his body and mind, for example, whether he is sick or healthy, whether he is cheerful or morose, he can communicate with the outside world and so on.

When the body sleeps, he dreams. In that stage, the soul creates objects and feelings in imagination. Whatever we see and think in the waking state, those things come in our dreams. The sleeping person can dream of riding a horse and the suddenly stumbling down and hurting himself. To quote The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, ‘When he dreams, he takes a little of this all-embracing world, himself puts the body aside, and creates a dream-body in its place, revealing his own lustre by his own light. There are no chariots, no animals to be yoked to them, no roads, but he creates the animals and roads there. There are no pleasures, joys and delights there, but he creates the pleasures, joys, and delights.’

When the dreamer goes into deep sleep, when he dreams no more, that is called dreamless sleep state. ‘When a man being thus asleep, sees no dream whatever, he becomes one with prana.

Then speech enters therein with all names, the eye with all forms, the ear with all sounds, the mind with all thoughts.’ Says the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. It is in the dreamless sleep state that the Soul is united with the consciousness of Brahman. There is a lot of resemblance between this state and the state of a knower of Brahman. In the dreamless sleep state, a man becomes fearless, he has no sorrow, no attachments, no desires. But when a man becomes awakes from sleep, he again becomes conscious of this world and becomes his old self again.

Moksha or Liberation

All men are by nature Sat-Chit-Ananda, divine, pure, immortal. However, because of the limiting adjuncts- the association of body, mind, intellect and ego, the Jiva forgets his real nature. He binds himself to his body, to his relatives, money, wealth, name, and fame. He accumulates his desires for enjoyments and thus invites both joy and suffering. The only way to get out of suffering is to know one’s identity with Brahman. Our scriptures have prescribed a graded path to the realisation of our real nature. They are:

- Discrimination of the Real and the unreal, called *Viveka*
- Aversion to all forms of enjoyment, either in this life or hereafter, called *Vairagya*
- Six assets: Serenity of the mind, Self -control, Fortitude, Dispassion, Faith in the words of the scriptures and one’s teacher, and having the goal constantly in mind, known as *Shat sampatti*
- Longing for liberation, called *mumukshutva*

Along with these above qualities, the student desiring Self Knowledge, approaches a competent teacher, called Guru, who can explain to him about Brahman. The student first hears the teachings (Shravana), then he contemplates on those teachings (Manana), and then meditates on them (Nididhyasana).

The man who realises his identity with Brahman, gets rid of fear, sorrow and death. He becomes immortal. He is like a person who has woken up from sleep and dreams no more. There is no more birth and death for him because he has no more desires. The Shwetashwatara Upanishad says, ‘Just as a lump of gold stained by dirt being purified by fire shines brightly, similarly the embodied being by realizing the truth of Atman becomes united with the Supreme Self, attains Self-fulfilment and goes beyond sorrow.’

• Thought of the Month •

‘Pavhari Baba said to Swami Vivekananda : “Remain lying at the door of your guru like a dog.” Swamiji repeated this remark to us many times. As a dog never leaves his master’s home to go elsewhere, whether he is fed or not, whether his master beats him or is kind, in the same way one must be completely resigned to the Lord. He who can take refuge at His feet and stay resigned under all conditions and circumstances till the last, will indeed obtain divine grace. You have no reason to worry, because you have taken refuge in him ... As the Master used to say: “The child whose hand is held by the father has no-fear of falling.” Know for certain that the Master will save you ...’

- Swami Shivananda

Vedanta in Australia

by Swami Atmeshananda

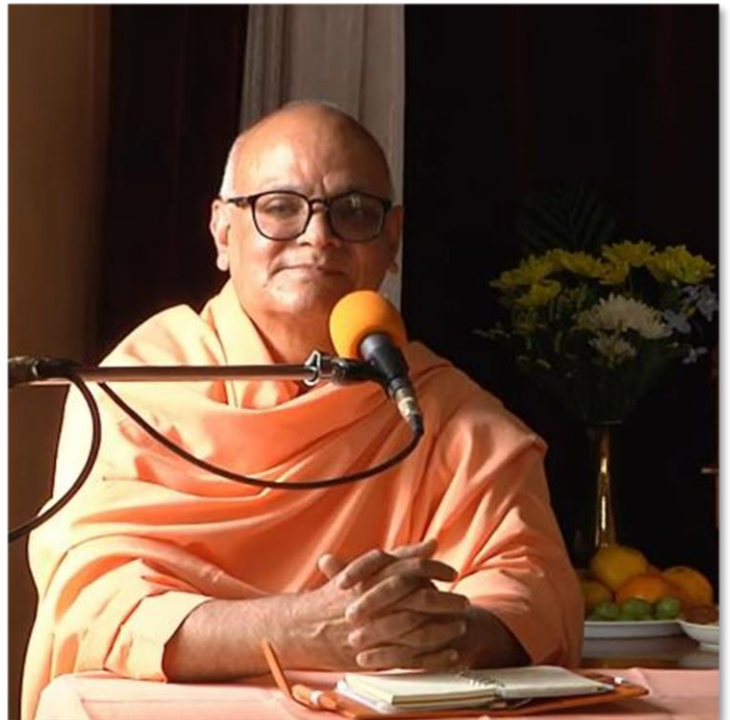
On 16th November at Zushi

(Swami Atmeshananda-ji who is in charge of the Brisbane sub-center of the Sydney Centre, Australia visited our ashrama in November and gave the following talk on the day of our monthly retreat in November.)

Revered Maharaj has asked me to say briefly how I joined the Ramakrishna Order. I have always reflected upon this and have found that I have not come to Sri Ramakrishna, but Sri Ramakrishna has brought me here. When I was a young boy, nearly five years old, I got acquainted to an elderly gentleman, who stayed next to my house, and I called him grandfather. He was very well-read, and the first stories that he narrated to me were stories of Swami Vivekananda and from the Buddha. He also made me memorise the Chicago lecture of Swamiji and also some verses from the Dhammapada. Later, I had my schooling in Ramakrishna Mission Vidyashala, Mysore and I had to stay in a hostel. There, I learnt about Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother too. There I came in touch with the Swamis, and I was particularly inspired by Swami Jagadatmananda. As a matter of coincidence, much later, when I was posted in Singapore as a monk, Swami Jagadatmanandaji was also there.

Thus, the foundation was laid by Sri Ramakrishna himself, and so when I finished my school, the natural choice for me was to join the Ramakrishna Order. I wrote to the head of the Mysore Ashrama, requesting him to allow me join there as a novice. But He wrote back, asking me not to join at Mysore, but to go to Belur Math and meet Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj. Thus, one fine day, I took a train and travelled for two days and reached Belur Math. When I reached, it was quite early in the morning and the office had not yet opened. So, I waited. When the office opened, I went to a swami and told him the purpose of my coming to Belur Math.

He asked, what my age was? I said, 'I am seventeen'. Immediately he said, 'Go away, we won't admit you. We will be charged by the Police, for you are under-aged.' But,



when I left home, I had decided that if I am not allowed to join at Belur Math, then I shall go to Bodh Gaya and shall become a Buddhist Monk. I sat down on a bench.

After some time, a young Brahmacharin came and asked me, why I was waiting there. After hearing from me, he asked me to wait there for some time and went to Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj and reported that a boy is waiting. Then Maharaj himself came out and as soon as he saw me, he gave him a big embrace and said, 'I am so glad that you have come.' I was surprised. Later, I came to know that one month earlier, he had visited Bangalore and in a public meeting, addressing the crowd, had said, 'Is there any young man, who wants to join the Ramakrishna order as a monk? If you are interested, then come to Belur Math.' Thus, I stayed back, served in many centres in India and later was sent to Singapore. Swami Shridharanandaji who at the age of seventy-four was going to take charge of Australia, requested the Belur Math headquarters so that I may be sent there to assist him. This is in brief about me.

Now, I shall talk about the Vedanta Movement in Australia and New Zealand.

Australia is one of the last countries where Vedanta has reached and is spreading in right earnest. Unlike other countries, in Australia, there was a lot of resistance for a new movement like Vedanta to come. In Australia, earlier only whites were allowed to come and settle till as late as 1970/71. But even before all this, the seeds were sown much earlier. Swami Vivekananda said, like a dew which falls unseen, unheard, yet brings into bloom the fairest of roses, is the work of Vedanta. In about 1894, Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna was in Sri Lanka. Many Europeans were attracted towards him. He used to hold classes on Bhagavad Gita and some other scriptures. One of the Europeans was a lady called Elsie Picket. Swami Shivananda gave her the name Haripriya. He told her to go to Australia and New Zealand and spread the message of Vedanta in those countries. She travelled throughout Australia and New Zealand and gave classes on Vedanta.

Thereafter, in around 1904, another devotee by the name of Blanch Baughan, who was a poet from New Zealand, was staying in San Fransisco. She was inspired by Swami Prakashanandaji, who asked her to go back to her country and spread the message of Vedanta. She was very passionate about women's rights. She went back to New Zealand and travelled to some parts in Australia but settled in the southern part of New Zealand in a place called Christ Church. There she worked among women prisoners and gave them talks on Vedanta and inspired them to become self-reliant. She was known as a great social reformer and a great poet. Later, she established an Ashrama in Christ Church and took the reformed women prisoners and gave them moral and spiritual support. She passed away in 1957 but unfortunately nothing is known about the Ashrama anymore.

In 1908, a lady named Sister Abhavaniya was in New York. Her Christian name is not known. Swami Abhedanandaji initiated her and asked her to spread the message of Vedanta in Australia and New Zealand. She was originally from Sweden. Thus, the seeds of Vedanta were sown much earlier.

In early 1920s, a gentleman called James Wales lived in Sedney. He was a bricklayer by profession, but he was given to drinking alcohol and other vices. On his birthday, he was living with his sister, and he went to fetch some grocery and some beer bottles, so that he could have a nice birthday party. Now, as he was walking along the road, he came across an old bookshop. He saw on the shelf a book called Raja-Yoga authored by Swami Vivekananda. Suddenly, the name 'Swami Vivekananda' rung in his ears. He bought the book, didn't buy the beer, nor did he have a birthday party. He felt, this is what he was looking for in his life. He wrote to the President of Mayavati Ashrama that he wanted very much to lead the kind of life mentioned in this book. The letter was forwarded to Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, who wrote to him, asking him to come to Belur Math. That was in 1924.

Swami Bhuteshaandaji used to say that he had seen James Wales, and he was one among the persons posing for the group photo at the first convention of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1927. He was given brahmacharya, but after some time his health broke and which didn't permit him to stay there any longer. Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj asked him to go back to his country and to live the life of a monk there. He went back and lead the life of a wonderful monk there. He was nicknamed 'The Holy man' in the community. He used to help old women and the widows to get groceries for them and he also started a small group where he taught the Vedanta. He passed away in 1954.

Swami Ranganathanandaji first came to Australia after visiting Japan in 1959. There he started giving talks on Vedanta. Thus, a small group of people were interested in Vedanta. Maharaj didn't come back to Australia again until 1969, but after that he used to visit Australia every year till 1983 and used to hold lectures and retreats in Sydney and other places in Australia. The devotees were very much interested to have a centre of the Ramakrishna Mission in Australia. But Ramakrishna Mission, at that time was not prepared to have a branch centre there, so Maharaj requested Sarada Math to start a centre there. In 1978, Pr. Ajayaprana Mataji went there, after staying for six months, she felt that a centre can be started there, so in 1983, she permanently went there. She travelled to other cities in Australia also to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Holy Mother.

Swami Damodaranandaji, who was in Fiji, started visiting Australia from 1979 onwards. He was mainly interacting with people who had migrated from Fiji to Australia. Thus, a small group developed around in various parts of Australia. He

used to invite Swamis of our Order, for example, Swamis Bhuteshanandaji, Ranganathanandaji, Smarananandaji, Shridharanandaji, Jagadatmanandaji. He would invite them to Fiji and whenever they went to Fiji, Damodaranandaji would also take them to Australia and New Zealand. The contribution of Swami Damodaranandaji in spreading the message of Vedanta in Australia and New Zealand is immeasurable. In 1993 and 1999, he had invited Swami Shridharanandaji to Fiji, Australia and New Zealand. The people of Australia were very much drawn towards Swami Shridharanandaji, so these devotees requested Belur Math to send him over. Belur Math authorities finally responded to their call and in the year 2000, after the Olympics, Shridharanandaji reached Sydney.

Five months later I joined him. Initially Maharaj stayed in a devotee's house. Later he rented a house for the use of Vedanta Society and a hall was used for giving lectures.

All beginnings are fraught with lots of trials and tribulations. Swami Shridharanandaji was the head of a very big centre in India – Lucknow – for almost forty years and at the age of seventy-four, he was sent to Australia to lead a very austere life. He was six feet tall and weighing about 120 kgs. But he was given a bed which was smaller than him. But he didn't mind all these hardships. In those days, we used to have almost one meal a day, and I used to cook for him.

Twenty-five years ago, Australia was still not a multi-racial, multi-cultural country. In those days, there was lot of resistance against people of brown skin. For example, one of our neighbours complained to the local authorities that in this place a lot of brown people are coming and singing and dancing. So, we had to go to the Local Mayor and convince him that we have not come here to sing and dance loudly. In 2002, we bought a house and moved there, and we faced opposition there too. But because of the charming personality of Swami Shridharanandaji people started coming closer toward him. He started visiting other cities like Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide every month to conduct classes there. I was asked to go to Brisbane and give classes every month. Thus, a group of devotees purchased a house in Melbourne in 2007 and another group in Perth bought a church in 2008. In 2008, a house was purchased in Brisbane too.

Swami Shridharanandaji started visiting New Zealand from 2002 onwards and in 2007 a house was purchased at Auckland for the Ashrama. Thus, Sri Ramakrishna's message and the message of Vedanta is spreading through The Ramakrishna Mission and also by the Sarada Math. A bigger place was bought in 2007 in Sydney and the Ashrama moved there. In 2015, fifty acres of land was donated for the Brisbane centre.

This place where our Ashrama is, is itself a miracle. It was a land of about 40,500 acres. One devotee of Sri Ramakrishna named Maha Sinnathamby, a disciple of Swami Vireshwaranandaji, was very close to Swami Ranganathanandaji. Interestingly his father wanted to become a monk, and he actually became the first disciple of Swami Virajanandaji. Mr. Sinnathamby was an engineer but became a developer in Perth. He always had the desire to do things at a big scale. So, he became a developer in Perth, making a lot of money. But somehow, he lost everything he had, so he moved to Brisbane.

He started working for the Government. But the dream of developing a city had started taking shape in his mind. So, when he saw the advertisement in the newspaper that this vast land was being sold, which was a forest, he bought this land by taking a loan from the Bank. But when he mentioned this to the main builders who could have built this place, they were unhappy. They said, Brisbane is so near, why would you have a city which is just twenty minutes' drive from Brisbane? The first payment towards the loan was due the following week, but in this meeting, it was discovered that he could not do anything, so he was very exhausted, so he went away with his wife, for prayer and relaxation for the week, because he was apprehensive that they would lose everything that they had.

But, miracle of miracles, the chairman of the Company who were going to take up the development of the place called and asked for him on phone on Sunday. His daughter conveyed the message that the Chairman of the Company wanted to meet him at the Executive Lounge of Melbourne Airport on Monday morning. The Chairman said, 'Look here, Maha, my consultants have said that this project cannot be taken up. But something within me says that this will be a success. You go ahead, I shall make the first payment towards the loan, and we shall renegotiate.

So, Maha Sinnathamby would say that it was a divine will, which made the project a success. Then there was another big hurdle to cross. The Queensland State Government had to pass the resolution to admit this development to take place. But who would admit sanctioning a new city so near to Brisbane? But as a miracle, all the Parliamentarians voted in favour of this project. Not even one voted against it. Thus, when he got the land, he decided to dedicate fifty acres of land for Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother.

But some more hurdles were also waiting for us too. This donation of the land was made to us in 2015. We were required to pay to the Government 850,000 dollars. But where could we get so much money? So, we went to one of our friends and met the Commissioner of Taxes and after a long struggle, got this tax exempted. Then there was another problem. The local council sent us a bill and we were required to pay 250,000 dollars every year as council fees. We tried a lot, nothing would

happen, so took the legal aid and miracle of miracles, something happened, and this annual council fee too was waived.

Here, I shall mention another incident. Before the take-over ceremony, the ground-breaking ceremony was to be performed. We had dug a small portion of the land for that purpose. We had to clear the land of trees and do the digging. One Muslim

Gentleman came and said, 'I have a bulldozer, I shall clear all the trees and do the digging, you don't have to pay me any money.' He dug and went away. The Celebration was going to happen on 23rd of March and on the 20th, it rained cats and dogs and the whole land was full of water. I didn't know what to do. One way was to remove all the water with the use of buckets. But as one of our devotees went home to bring a bucket, a man from inside the forest came and asked us what we were doing. When we told him about our problem, he said, let me do it. He brought a big hoe and removed all the water in a couple of hours and went away. We didn't know, who he was and from where he had come. There are more such incidents to show that we are not the doers, Sri Ramakrishna is doing his own work from behind.

In 2009, a master plan was made for these 50 acres of land for the Ashrama, to have a Temple, an educational Institution and about 256 houses as part of a retirement village for elderly people. We are still working for that.

Swami Shridharanandaji has a vision to have an Institute of World Culture and Civilization, where people from all over the world will come and do research on different aspects of culture, like, music, dance and all other things. Apart from preaching and teaching Vedanta, we have some service activities too like Karma Yoga in our centre. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, one cannot preach religion to a hungry person. In Brisbane I found that there are a lot of people who were homeless or are unable to cook food for themselves. So, we started a soup kitchen, where once every week, we cook 300 meals and distribute them for free. We cook the meals, pack them, freeze them and give them to agencies who distribute them. There are some families to whom we supply enough groceries to last them for the whole week. There are about ten to twelve such families. They take the cooked food also. All the preparation of food is done by a group of devotees.

On Saturdays we run a kitchen called Ma Sarada Kitchen. Food is prepared and sold at a very reasonable price, which helps us maintain our Ashrama. We make vegetarian meals. Usually, idli, dosa, sambhar etc. Some devotees come at 5am, start the preparations and by 10am everything is ready. It is very popular and about 100 -150 families come to have the food on Saturdays and to take the food back to their homes. We have these two regular programs every Friday and Saturday. The

advantage is, on Fridays a lot of senior citizens come. It is a good time for them to come out from their homes, cut the vegetables, and cook the food. They enjoy working together and go back home very happy.

In addition to these activities, we have classes for the devotees thrice a week on Bhagavad Gita and some other scriptures. Once a month I go outside and take classes.

In Sydney, Swami Shridharanandaji is there. Even though he is 99 years of age, he takes classes on Bhagavad Gita whenever he feels better. Though he is not very well now. We have a Swami in Melbourne and another at Adelaide who take classes. In Perth we don't have any Swami, but one Swami regularly goes from Sydney and takes classes. There is also an education Institution started around two years ago in Sydney.

One big problem that the developed nations are facing now, which is a reason for worry of most parents is the number of suicide cases, which is increasing. So, we are trying to work on that. We have started a project called 'Power of Us'. It is a suicide prevention group, where youngsters can communicate amongst themselves. It is a drive to prevent suicide.

We are also into teaching meditation to school students. We conduct meditation sessions in schools and that is helping the students immensely. Sometimes teachers from schools visit us and we give them guidelines on how to look after the mental health of the students. We have introduced some simple meditation techniques for school students.

We have also chiropractor sessions every Friday, where a few chiropractors give free service. We also conduct Yoga lessons, which are given free of charge. Yoga conferences have also been organised under the guidance of Vivekananda Yoga University, Bangalore. One thing which we are trying to send message to all our devotees and admirers is to pay heed to that wonderful verse of the Bhagavad Gita:

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥ ६-५॥

*uddharedā tmanā tmā naṃ nā tmā namavasā dayet
ā tmaiva hyā tmano bandhurā tmaiva ripurā tmanaḥ 6-5*

Let a man lift himself by his own Self alone, and let him not lower himself; for, this Self alone is the friend of oneself, and this Self is the enemy of oneself.

• Story to Remember •

Parable Of The Butter Hidden In The Milk

The young daughter had gone to her village home for the first time from her city-dwelling. At night before retiring to bed, her mother opened a pot in which there was good cow's milk and poured a little buttermilk.

The girl asked her mother: "Mother, that was butter milk; and why have you mixed it with Milk? The milk may be spoiled!" "Child," answered the mother, "that is the way to prepare the milk in order that we might get butter out of it." "But where is butter in it, mother?" "It is in every drop of the milk, dear; but you can't see it now. I will show you in the morning."

In the morning the daughter saw that what was liquid the night before had become solid overnight. Mother put a churning rod into it and started churning the curd vigorously. Butter began to float on the surface of the curd. Then she gathered it all up and presented it to the astonishment of the daughter.

The mother explained: "The addition of the buttermilk curdles the milk. Milk is transformed into curd. Then you have to churn it. By this process the butter which was all-pervasively hidden in the milk is obtained. At first you were not able to see it; it was hidden. From where has it come now? From the milk only. Therefore, you understand now that it was there all the time. It awaited the process of churning to reveal itself to your great joy." The daughter, too, followed the same process and got the butter, for herself.

Similarly, a worldly man approaches a Mahatma and asks him: "O Sadhu, why have you renounced the world, and poured this new element of Vairagya and Tyaga into your life? Why don't you let the life take its natural course?"

The Sadhu replies: "Brother, I do so in order to realize God?" "Where is God?" "He is all-pervading." The worldly man does not see and is not convinced. The Sadhu then explains how the inner personality which is fickle, and outflowing should be made solid and firm. Then the churning rod of one-pointed concentration and meditation should be taken hold of, and this solid Antahkarana should be very well churned. Then God is realized. He is all-pervading, in every atom of creation. But He is not visible to the naked eye nor is He realizable by a man except through this process called Sadhana.

Just as a mother was necessary for her daughter to learn that butter exists in milk and that churning will bring it out, even so a Guru is necessary for a man to know that God is, that He is all-pervading, and that He is attained through Sadhana. If the aspirant follows the Guru's instructions, he too can realize God.

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