

# american vedantist

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## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

**American Vedantist** (AV) is dedicated to developing Vedanta in the West, especially in the United States, and to making The Perennial Philosophy available to people who are not able to reach a Vedanta center. We are also dedicated to developing a closer community among Vedantists.

We are committed to:

- Stimulating inner growth through shared devotion to the ideals and practice of Vedanta
- Encouraging critical discussion among Vedantists about how inner and outer growth can be achieved
- Exploring new ways in which Vedanta can be expressed in a Western cultural context
- Networking through all available means of communication with Vedantists in the United States and other countries, and
- Facilitating the establishment of grass roots Vedanta groups and social service projects.

We invite our readers to join with AV in these endeavors. Please send us articles, poems, songs, letters to the editor, ideas for action programs and other suggestions for achieving our goals.

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# american vedantist

truth is one; sages call it variously  
*e pluribus unum*: out of many, one

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## Cover image: Compassionate Hotei

Hotei is often known as the Laughing Buddha. In China, called the Loving or Friendly One, his image graces many temples, restaurants, and homes. Hotei almost always carries a cloth sack, which never empties. It is filled with many precious items, including rice plants (indicating wealth), sweets for children, food, and the woes of the world.

Painting by Jan Zarembo [www.janzarembo.com/sumi-e](http://www.janzarembo.com/sumi-e)

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**Swami Vivekananda in India**/Courtesy Vedanta Society of Southern California  
*american vedantist* 2 *summer 2008*

## *A Message from President Maharaj*

In 1893, Swami Vivekananda brought the ancient, spiritual values of Vedanta to America. He saw here a good field for the Vedanta work. He preached: "It is the patient up-building of character, the intense struggle to realize the truth, which alone will tell in the future of humanity". He wanted to infuse this universal message of the Vedanta into the dynamic, creative power of America and the American people also accepted this message heart and soul. Onwards, a new movement – the Vedanta movement was planted on the soil of America.

Swami Vivekananda also trained up to practical Advaita realization a small band of men and women for the growth of the movement and he succeeded. All the Vedanta Societies of America were established with the help of this band of Vedantists of America. They have played and are still playing a vital role in spreading the Vedanta movement in America.

A few years back, a group of dedicated Vedantists of New York started a quarterly journal, '**American Vedantist**', for the people of America who are unable to reach the Vedanta societies. Generally, a journal is the mouth organ of a particular movement; '**American Vedantist**' is also no exception. It is purely and absolutely dedicated to the Vedanta movement, acting as a bridge between the old and new Vedantists. Through '**American Vedantist**', the Vedanta movement will go forward.

I hope and pray that '**American Vedantist**' will be on the soil of America for decades and throw the light of the Vedanta to every corner of America.

May Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda shower their blessing on you all.

With affectionate blessings to you all.

**Swami Atmasthananda**

President

Ramakrishna Math and  
Ramakrishna Mission



**Swami Prabhavananda** — a portrait of his guru by Swami Tadatmananda. Swami Prabhavananda was Head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California from 1929 until 1976. (Original is in color; image used by courtesy of Charlie and Sita Mitchell.)



## In Memoriam: Swami Tadatmananda *Interpreter of the Divine*

Krishnadas

(Charlie K. Mitchell)

Swami Tadatmananda was abbot of the Vedanta Society of Southern California's Trabuco Monastery.

Photo: Charlie K. Mitchell

It has been nearly 40 years since my wife Sita and I first met Swami Tadatmananda. Over those decades we witnessed a profound spiritual development that can only be summed up as inspirational. In the last few years of his life, Tadat (as he was known to nearly everybody) was often called a "fully realized soul." Our son, Lal Chand, joined the Ramakrishna-Vedanta Monastery in Trabuco to be near him. His account of the beautiful old swami's passing is appended to this obituary.

The life of a holy man is interior. Even those who know such a one get only glimpses. A few years ago a devotee who was staying at the Trabuco monastery told me he was awakened about 3:00 a.m. by the sounds of something moving around in the bushes outside his room. The monastery is located in Trabuco Canyon, still a wilderness area, intensely dark at night without the perpetual twilight of even a small town. Still, through his window the devotee could make out a human shape. He grabbed a flashlight, slipped out his door and flicked the switch, prepared to confront an intruder.

An ochre robe blazed a light. The devotee was as startled as Tadat. "Swami!" Said the devotee, "What are you doing here?"

"Shhh," the swami whispered. He looked a little sheepishly at his hand, which was full of flowers. "I'm getting some flowers for my morning worship." He paused. "Don't say anything about this. Nobody needs to know."

With that, flashlight off, the devotee returned wonderingly to his room. Here, three hours before the morning meditation, Swami Tadatmananda was getting ready for the worship he performed every

day in his room. He didn't want it known because it could have resulted in adulation, something this intensely private soul could never abide. For example, even though his gorgeous oil paintings are known, hung and respected all over the world, he never signed a one. Many of them may be viewed on the vedanta.org website: <http://www.vedanta.org/photos/main.html>

If Tadat's spiritual practices were accidentally discovered only by a few, his spiritual experiences were known to even fewer. It is probably fair to say that he expressed his realizations in his art. The man who was born John Markovich in Detroit, Michigan on January 16, 1932, was recognized for his artistic gifts in elementary school and allowed to skip certain academic classes to pursue his talent. He was sent to the only "art-oriented" high school in Detroit at the time, Cass Technical H.S., and at age 18 received a scholarship to the Colorado Springs School of Fine Arts. The young artist who would become Swami Tadatmananda was both gifted and classically trained.

During a stint in the navy after art school, "Marko" (as he used to be called) discovered books about Ramakrishna. He decided to come to Los Angeles, enroll in a fine arts school and investigate the Vedanta Society where such luminaries as Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, Christopher Isherwood and many others were celebrating the universalist ideas of Ramakrishna and his disciples. They all orbited around the powerful, intellectually brilliant and personally charismatic Swami Prabhavananda; Marko was enthralled for life.

But when he tried to join the monastery, Prabhavananda insisted that he first finish his education in art. He would not let anyone quit something until it was finished. Tadat joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1959, moved from the Hollywood center to the monastery in Trabuco Canyon in 1964 and stayed there the rest of his life. He took his brahmacharya vows in 1965, sannyasa in 1971.

Tadat's one-room cell in the monastery was his studio. He literally lived with his art. (Constant exposure to benzene fumes brought on several serious maladies during his life: a nine-year torment of boil-like skin eruptions on his face and the myelo-fibrosis form of leukemia that finally killed him.) He drew remarkable insights from his work with oil paints. A few weeks before his death, he and I were chatting alone in the monastery kitchen when I found occasion to quote the famous line from Marlowe's "Faust": "Why this is hell, nor am I out of it." "Well," said Tadat, "that's more true than people might think. Did you ever stop to think about oxidation? It's a form of burning, sometimes fast like with a fire, but usually slow. Everything in this world is oxidizing all the time.



People, plants, steel beams, oil paints – everything in this world is burning. Just without smoke, mostly, so we don't notice."

Swami Tadatmananda was tall (6' 3"), beautiful in his appearance with white hair and unforgettable, crucified liquid brown eyes, gentle, quiet, intensely humble and usually indrawn. But there was always a little streak of Detroit in him, and a splash of the former Navy man. He could tell a raunchy joke and talk sports with everybody in the barber-shop. He was the best ping-pong hustler I ever saw, having played endless hours on a rolling ship's deck, learned precision footwork and simply amazing paddle control. I used to tease him about cheating with psychic powers, but after years of playing with him it finally dawned on me that he had allowed me to win (which I did satisfyingly often but less often than he) just because he wanted to keep the play alive.

Tadat was the abbot of the Ramakrishna Monastery in Trabuco, not by appointment or even by assent, but rather as a sort of act of nature, like the flow of a river. Things went according to his sense of how things should go because they could go no other way. At the noon meal recently, when Tadat was too weak to join his brothers at table, Swami Sarvadevananda noted appreciatively how Tadat had simply mentioned his concern about a needed repair and two of the brothers had eagerly undertaken the job. "You must respect him greatly to obey him so well," he said. Swami Medhananda spoke for everyone when he replied, "We don't obey him out of respect, Swami. We obey him because we love him."

Sita said of Tadat at his memorial service, "How thankful I am to have had the good fortune to know this very special man." I echo her words. Tadat was a jazz buff most of his life, but toward the end he became fond of folk and gospel songs. His favorite, which he listened to frequently in his last days, was "I'll Fly Away." In loving memory, and as a prayer for my dear old friend, I close with a verse and the chorus:

Some glad morning when this life is o'er  
I'll fly away  
To my home on God's celestial shore  
I'll fly away (fly away)  
  
I'll fly away. Oh Glory,  
I'll fly away (in the morning)  
When I die, Hallelujah, by and by  
I'll fly away (fly away).

*– continues on following page*

## Swami Tatatmananda: His Final Days

(January 16, 1932 - January 11, 2008)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

After discussing his medical condition with an oncologist at Mission Hospital, Swami Tatatmananda decided to switch to Hospice care. Since that time, a desire to leave this world had been steadily growing in the Swami.

At first it would just be a casual remark, when offered his vitamins or other medicine, for example, he would say “why bother?” Over the next week he would sometimes cry in the middle of the night for Sri Ramakrishna to take him. By yesterday evening he was openly and repeatedly saying to all of his Trabuco brothers, the hospice nurse, Dr. Mahadev, and whoever else happened to be in the room, that he wanted to die.

Around 4:45am this morning, a strange sound coming from Swami Tatatmananda’s bed awoke me. Quite often over the last few months, he could be seen at any time of the night sitting on the edge of his bed, looking silently at the picture of Sri Ramakrishna above his mantle. I looked up to see him sitting in this position, but his body was listing toward the floor.

I got up, broke his fall before he hit the floor, and put him back in bed. He had been getting progressively weaker, so weak that he could not hold his trunk upright while sitting on the edge of his bed. He was gasping for air and his lungs were full of fluid. I raised the hospital bed so that his body was upright and his legs were stretched straight before him, in order to try and drain the fluid (via gravity) from his lungs.

After a few questions, while he was too weak to articulate any clear response, it seemed that he was fully conscious and able to understand everything said to him. It was clear at this point that he would not live much longer. I gave him some morphine and began chanting “Jai Sri Ramakrishna.”

At 5:07am, a stronger look of recognition and immediate seeing returned to his eyes. From my perspective, that look contained compassion, joy, love, and a host of other noble qualities that I am unable to describe in words. It lasted for only perhaps a second, and the light left his eyes. Swami Tatatmananda breathed his last.

While monks, nuns, devotees, friends, family, and admirers of the swami are in mourning today, we should take some consolation in the feeling that his death was a beautiful one. My personal feeling is that it was the appropriate culmination of a beautiful life. — *Lal Chand*

[Ed.’s note: Since writing this moving note, Lal Chand (Mitchell) has taken his brahmacharya vows. Swami Swahananda gave him the name Aasha Chaitanya.]

# Arjuna's Eunuch Problem and the Gita's Epic Frame

to the memory of J.A.B. van Buitenen

Steven F. Walker

Part 1 of 2

**T**he *Bhagavad Gita* is in all likelihood a composite text that grew over time to encompass the eighteen chapters as we know them now, and as they were commented upon by many great Vedantists starting with Shankara. The author of the earliest version of the text must have deliberately embedded his original *Gita* at a well chosen point of the *Mahabharata*, just before the onset of the great battle at Kurukshetra. He must have done his best to create a nearly seamless connection between his text and the preexisting epic text, and by attaching it to the *Mahabharata* must have intended it to reach the widest possible audience—the audience, in fact, of the *Mahabharata* itself, as enormously popular today (witness the wildly successful Indian TV series) as it was throughout the history of India for over two thousand years.

The *Gita's* immediate setting or epic “frame” would thus seem to merit attention in its own right, both for what it might have to offer in terms of thematic continuity and also for the way in which it departs significantly from the epic vision of the *Mahabharata*. This did not happen, however, until the eminent Sanskrit scholar J.A. B. van Buitenen focused attention on the *Gita's* epic frame in his trailblazing book *The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata: a Bilingual Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 1981). But van Buitenen was more of a philologist than an interpreter, and so could only do so much with the question of the *Mahabharata's* thematic relationship with the *Gita*.

Some of what he points out in his excellent introduction is quite suggestive, however. For instance, he notes (17) that “yoga” and the command “to lay on the yokes” (the shout that called for the great war chariots and their horses to be readied for action) both have their etymological origin in the Sanskrit verb root *yuj*—, “to join or link together.” Thus the epic injunction referring to “the yoking of the horses to the war cars, wagons, and other war equipment” is

linked with the idea of yoga as “a self-yoking to a particular effort to win a goal.” (17). But van Buitenen has a tendency to overplay the continuity of the epic vision of the happy warrior with the more reflective *Gita*’s promotion of spiritual struggle; for him, the *Gita* culminates in Arjuna’s “acceptance of ksatriya duty and fate,” (4) although he does add that “there will be no more happy warriors, only resigned ones.” Even with this qualification, his conclusion seems a bit shaky: would it be fair to call Arjuna “a resigned warrior” (a sadder but wiser bear?) by the end of the *Gita*? I think not.

Too great a sense of the continuity between the epic vision of the *Mahabharata* and the spiritual vision of the *Gita*, however valuable it proves to be initially, can quickly become misleading. The point of this essay is to argue that the *Gita*, as we move into Book II and beyond, quickly transforms the hypermasculine warrior concerns of the epic in order to promote a sublimation of the epic’s *kshatra-dharma* (warrior ethic) into the *Gita*’s spiritual discipline of yoga, thus substituting for the warrior’s heroic self-assertion on the battlefield the mental fight and selfless activity of the yogi. The warrior ethic’s perspective is centered on the advantages to the individual warrior of either victory or death on the battlefield.

As Krishna reminds Arjuna early on, while he is still attempting (unsuccessfully) to bring Arjuna back to a sense of his duty as a *kshatriya*, battle is a win/win situation for the warrior: “die and you will attain heaven; gain victory, and you will enjoy the earth.” (II.37) But a yogi’s practice of *karmayoga* is not centered on the ego and its satisfaction; it involves not individual enjoyment here or in the hereafter of the fruits of his actions, but rather the total renunciation of individual enjoyment and advantage. Yoga thus differs radically from *kshatra-dharma* even as it maintains the latter’s emphasis on fearless activity on the battlefield or, in this case, on the battlefield of life.

The immediate effect of the two major epic scenes that frame the *Gita*—one immediately before the text of the *Gita* begins, and the other immediately afterwards—is to undermine symbolically the hegemonic value of *kshatra-dharma* and hence to justify the advent of yoga as the spiritual successor of the warrior ethic. The first of these scenes concerns the announcement of the death of Bhishma; it is actually an interruption of the normal chronological sequence of events, since Samjaya begins his narration to the blind king Dhrtarastra with a death that occurred near the end of the battle; only when he has finished with this devastating piece of news will he go back to the chronological beginning with a description of the early morning marshalling of the

two armies before the battle has begun. But Samjaya's account of Bhishma's death does not disturb the chronological sequence needlessly or meaninglessly, as this death itself can be seen as of high symbolic importance.

The ever chaste Bhishma, the Sir Galahad of the *Mahabharata* as well as the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army, is the most venerable embodiment of the noblest aspects of *ksatra-dharma*; with his death, the warrior code itself has suffered symbolically a terrible blow, as Dhrtarashtra himself seems to realize when, severely shaken by the news, he declares that "Lawlessness, I know now, has prevailed over Law (*dharma adharma balavan samprapta iti me matih*), if the Pandavas still want the kingdom after killing their ancient guru." (van Buitenen, 43)

Arjuna has killed Bhishma by taking him literally at his word that he would never raise his weapon against a woman, and has used Sikhandin, a warrior born as a woman but later changed into a man, as a human shield behind which he was able to shoot Bhishma with his arrows. That Sikhandin had been born a woman is a particular affront to the hypermasculine *kshatra-dharma* exemplified by Bhishma, which makes Arjuna's dirty trick all the more disturbing. But the death of Bhishma symbolically opens the door to something new and as yet undefined that will be created on the ruins of a warrior dharma riddled with fatal flaws: treachery, deceit, and also, as will see shortly, corruption and greed. With Bhishma's death, and with the symbolic death of the *kshatra-dharma* he embodies, there opens up an abyss of meaninglessness, an ideological vacuum that calls for the creation of a new set of ideals to replace the old ones—ideals to be enunciated by a new guru who would be presumably be greater than Bhishma. And this is exactly what will happen, as Krishna steps in with a whole new philosophy of heroic action in the world that sublimates the *kshatra-dharma* into the spiritual path of yoga.

The other framing scene, which comes immediately after the end of the *Bhagavad Gita*, framing it at the other end, reinforces the theme of the discrediting of *kshatra-dharma*. In a seemingly impulsive gesture that first leaves all his fellow warriors baffled as to its meaning and motivation, the elder Pandava brother Yudhishtira suddenly takes off his armor, puts down his weapons, leaves his chariot and proceeds on foot towards the camp of the Kauravas, followed by his puzzled brothers and their advisor Krishna. (The scene provides an obvious parallel and possibly an inspiration for the opening scene of the *Gita*, when Arjuna inexplicably throws down his bow and refuses to fight.) The Kauravas assume too quickly that Yudhishtira is overcome by fear at

the approach of battle, and shout for joy. But Krishna correctly guesses the real reason for this apparently traitorous move, and he informs the Pandavas that “this king will fight his enemies only with the consent of Bhishma, Gautrama, Salya and all his other gurus. It is said that in a former age, when a man openly did battle without first seeking the consent of his betters, he was despised by his betters. But if he did seek their consent and then fought his betters, his victory in battle was assured.” (147)

Krishna turns out to be right, and we soon see Yudhishtira ask each one of his gurus, beginning with Bhishma, for the permission to fight with him and possibly to kill him. This moving scene certainly seems intended to demonstrate Yudhishtira’s remarkable devotion to the highest ideals of his caste and position. But the answer to each one of his petitions is uniformly unexpected and shocking. Each guru in turn gives him permission to fight and to kill him if necessary, but each prefaces his consent with bitter words of self-criticism—words that undermine the nobility of the situation completely—starting with Bhishma, who says “I have been held captive by the Kauravas with their wealth. Hence I can only speak to you like a eunuch (*klibavat*).” (van Buitenen, 149)

The potential pathos of the scene is undermined by this frank self-criticism, as each guru in turn admits how he has been corrupted—made impotent—by Kaurava money. But why do these venerable embodiments of *kshatra-dharma* confess so openly their moral weakness and unworthiness? That is hard to say, but I imagine that the author of the original *Gita* saw an opportunity here, as he realized that, once again, in the epic text into which he wished to insert his newly written spiritual discourse, an ideological vacuum had opened up, and that this vacuum could be filled by the message of Krishna, who, by contrast with Bhishma and the others, was a worthy and uncorrupted guru—in other words, that there was the opportunity to insert into the text of the popular epic a discourse that could take the place of a discredited warrior ethic whose exemplars saw themselves at this crucial juncture as able to speak only “like eunuchs” (*klibavat*).

The opening of the *Gita* will pick up on this key term “eunuch” of the epic scene between Yudhishtira and his gurus, and, taking up the latter’s picturesque term of self-disparagement, will use it as a dramatic springboard for developing a discourse dedicated to the idea of yoga as an original transformation and sublimation of *kshatra-dharma* itself. I am referring, of course, to Krishna’s famous insult to Arjuna “*klaibyam ma sma gamah, Partha*” (II.3). English translators have bowdlerized it in various ways for almost two hundred years, ever since Charles Wilkins’

“yield not thus to unmanliness” (1785), until finally R.C. Zaehner (“play not the eunuch,” 1969) and J.A. B. van Buitenen (“do not act like a eunuch,” 1981) pulled Arjuna’s eunuch problem out from the shadows of the Sanskrit text in which a sense of Victorian propriety had kept it hidden. (For reasons that shall be made clear, I would prefer to translate Krishna’s quip as “Don’t start acting like a eunuch *again!*”).

Zaehner and van Buitenen wisely decided that it was best to call a eunuch a eunuch, and thus to preserve in their English translations the full force of the original Sanskrit insult. It is good to remember that Krishna, like Bhishma, Drona and the other respected gurus, are warriors who speak like warriors, and when they call themselves or anyone else a “eunuch,” they mean just that. (It would not be hard to find equivalent friendly insults among today’s soldiers, although most of them would probably be unprintable in this particular journal.)

Lest readers think that I am making too much out of one peculiar turn of phrase in the *Gita*, I must call attention to Vivekananda’s extraordinary interest in it and its metaphorical resonance. In an impromptu talk (in Bengali) he gave to the young monks of the recently founded Ramakrishna Math, and that was recorded in the Belur Math diary, he said this: “if one reads this one shloka “*klaibyam ma sma gamah Partha*” [and he quotes the rest of the verse], one gets all the merits of reading the entire *Gita*; for in this one shloka lies embedded the whole message of the *Gita*.” (Vivekananda, *Collected Works* IV.110).

This certainly is an amazingly original statement, especially since this particular shloka or verse had not been favored with any commentary whatsoever by the great Vedantic *Gita* commentators Shankara, Ramanuja and others. That Vivekananda clearly meant to make the verse the main motif of his talk is demonstrated by the fact that, in the course of his discourse to the young monastics, he recited in Sanskrit the phrase *klaibyam ma sma gamah* a total of six times, adding that “if you, my sons, can proclaim this message to the world, then all this disease, grief, sin, and sorrow will vanish off the face of the earth in three days. All these ideas of weakness will be nowhere . . . go, go to the mouth of the cannon, fear not.” (109-110).

But to continue: behind Krishna’s urging Arjuna “not to play the eunuch” lies not only the scene of Yudhishtira’s gurus calling themselves eunuchs, but also another equally significant, if more distant, framing text. Book IV of the *Mahabharata*, which precedes immediately the book in which the *Gita* was inserted, tells the story of the Pandavas’ sojourn at the court of King Virata. In the thirteenth year of their exile, during which they were obliged to live openly but in

undetected disguise before reasserting their claim to their kingdom, each brother as well as their common wife Draupadi chose a particular disguise in which to live openly at Virata's court. Arjuna chose, cleverly but also somewhat ludicrously, to hide his bow scarred arms under the dress of a court eunuch.

We know that Vivekananda was familiar with this story, since he alluded to it in a talk on the *Mahabharata* given at the Shakespeare Club in Pasadena, California in 1900 (Collected Works, IV:92), in which he said that "Arjuna, dressed as a eunuch, was made a teacher of dancing and music to Uttara, the princess, and remained in the inner apartments of the King." The *Gita* verse, much admired by Vivekananda, which contains Krishna's friendly insult to Arjuna, in all likelihood has this episode in the *Mahabharata* as its ultimate inspiration. I will argue that this odd and somewhat comic episode in Arjuna's recent life helped make him into the ideal interlocutor for Krishna—someone capable of asking heartfelt questions, who is, and knows he is, in real need of spiritual help. In other words, Arjuna's days spent as a court eunuch paradoxically may have made him the ideal student in need of guru, and his charioteer and friend Krishna's sudden transformation into a spiritual guru demonstrates the truth of the spiritual law according to which, when the student is ready, the guru will inevitably appear.

**End of Part 1 of 2 (second installment will appear in Fall 2008/V14#2)**

## READER'S FORUM

**You are invited to answer the question posed below.**

Please limit your answer to 300 words or less, and mail it to American Vedantist, Vedanta West Communications Inc., PO Box 237041 New York, NY 10023, or email a Microsoft Word or SimpleText file to VedWestCom@gmail.com. All serious responses will be published in our Fall 2008 issue.

The opening lines of "Breaker of this World's Chain" by Swami Vivekananda read:

***Breaker of this world's chain,  
We adore Thee, whom all men love...***

How are we to understand the phrase, "whom all men love"? On the face of it, Vivekananda's statement seems to contradict our everyday experience of the world we live in.



# Swami Siddheswarananda - Excerpts from his writings and talks

As collected by Maude Lallemond, author of  
*Swami Siddheswarananda et son Temps*  
(Swami Siddheswarananda and his times)

**Swami Siddheswarananda (1897-1957) was a respected monk  
of the Ramakrishna Mission.**

**G**opal Marar of the Kottilil house or Tharavaad (maternal joint family) of Thrissur, was a prince of the House of Cochin, Kerala in his pre-monastic days. He was initiated by Swami Brahmananda and popularly called Gopal Maharaj. A charming person, he served as the President of Mysore branch of Ramakrishna Math. During this time, he was instrumental in shaping the career of Puttappa, legendary kannada poet Kuvempu. He had great regard for Sri Ramana Maharshi. He founded the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Gretz (Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna), France in 1947 and spread the message of Vedanta in French language. He became well known in France as an author and lecturer. — *Adapted from Wikipedia*

## **Introduction by Swami Yogeshananda (Vedanta Center of Atlanta)**

I've completed my translations from the second volume of *Swami Siddheswarananda et son Temps*. I have taken from the many selections those which I think I will want to use in Provisions. Attached are all the rest, for the use of AV if, and as it chooses. I feel that the Swami was a most unusual one, on many counts. He mingled extraordinarily with European society, and particularly the clergy.

He operated one of only three ashrams of the Order that allowed both men and women (the others being Hollywood and San Francisco). He had an historic career in running from the Nazis. He was on familiar terms with some of Europe's most important people of the era. He was of princely blood, taught at the Sorbonne, was a pupil at the famous Mysore Study Circle and on and on... We find some of the things he says quite extraordinary — all the more reason for interest.

## **PART 1 OF 2: THROUGH THE END OF 1949**

(Part 2 will run in our Summer edition – Ed.)

**Toulouse, May, 1945**

From a letter:

I will write to you later in detail about those points which were raised in speculating on the origin of humanity, confining myself for now to some remarks: no one can judge either for or against the theory

that the whole human race has descended from a single couple, for the simple reason that we haven't a single observed fact. In Hindu tradition it is the evolution of life. Here it is not a question of the metaphysical tradition, because from that point of view the entire manifestation, framed by time and space, is an *explosion* of Brahman, just as a dream is an explosion in the dream mind. Time and space only have validity in the manifest; metaphysically the question is of no importance. In fact, Brahman alone *is*, all the rest being *maya*, appearance, the same being false if the manifestation is taken separately, without seeing Brahman in it. Taking the appearance separately and giving it importance – that is *mithya*, error. Then why add another error while looking for the cause of the original one?

There is in every tradition the legend of a state of perfection, the present one being considered a Fall. One can give this state of perfection a metaphysical cause: that of non-manifestation.

**Gretz, 1947**

I have received from Teilhard de Chardin a great lesson, the same that Tantine [Miss McLeod] wanted to give at the time of my leaving [India] for France when she made this recommendation: "Gopal, never hurry to put your point of view forward to others. One of the special traits of Swami Vivekananda which always impressed us most was the way he had of knowing how to listen. I see all of you so impatient to speak, and to do so without thinking that the other person has perhaps something to say to you. You have much to learn from others and their words can become very instructive, but you lack the courtesy to let them express themselves and you monopolize the whole conversation."

More than once I too have felt ashamed when I realized that I lacked this courtesy. Only recently I recall having lost a fine opportunity when an eminent faculty member visited me in Calcutta. When I had stopped speaking, dear Bhupen Maharaj [Swami Pavitrananda] called my attention to my mistake. Of course the professor did not notice my impoliteness, as it was our first meeting and he was interested in listening to me. But from the point of view of human relationships, it was a grave error on my part.

In the presence of R.P. Teilhard de Chardin I felt this aptitude for knowing how to listen. From time to time he asked me questions, and then let me develop my point of view. That surprised me because in the course of previous encounters with eminent Catholic personalities I had noticed that in the interplay of questions and answers they never leave you the time to calmly expound your point of view, but rather they set themselves to bombarding with their objections and offering their own propositions. The Jesuits [Chardin being one] have the reputation of being remarkable pedagogues. We need to learn that excellent lesson: knowing how to listen, especially when others are expressing to us opinions which do not coincide with ours.

I think that is the beginning of tolerance, of which we have little, in spite of our innumerable discussions on the ideal of tolerance! Very often I feel remorse, thinking that I have not known how to listen to all my interlocutors had to say, and I frequently heard in my ear Tantine's reprimand. In my particular case I've understood that one of the reasons often preventing me from knowing how to listen, is the difficulty of keeping my attention while the other speaks, especially on the days filled with gatherings where the visitors speak on and on, and when the best means of cutting them off is to take on the job oneself!

If we wish to do effective work among cultivated people, *we must learn the art of knowing how to listen*. You may find me annoying for insisting on this point, but these reflections can be of service to those of us who hold meetings. Expressed in Vedanta language, relative silence (which is not to be interpreted as indifference) is even more effective than propagating our own ideas.

In fact, there are no "our ideas," only some ideas and some thoughts. And in according full value to the opinions of others, we come to know the contradictions inherent in all verbal communication. It simply implies contradictions, quarrel and struggles. If we preserve this background even when we speak, we can avoid taking sides and remain, in this way, the spectator of the game. Obviously we are obliged to spread and carry on in this way a part of our work, otherwise the humorous remark of Swami Tapasyananda to one of our friends at one of the meetings of Dr. Radhakrishnan at Oxford will have full force: "If such is your position, then Dr. Radhakrishnan will have accepted the invitation at Oxford and made all this long journey from India just to sit for several minutes in silence and go back to his base saying he had delivered his Vedanta message." Of course this is the other extreme and we have to know how to find the happy medium.

**Gretz, September 1948**

Samadhi is the union of the self with the Divine Person, realized at its highest degree. Let us try to explain how this experience is able to work "trans-psychologically: the empirical reality is presented to the jiva, the individual soul, under the double appearance of space and time. Space and time are the two presentations of the finite, to thought. Meditation has no other purpose but to retrieve the infinite in the interior of a particular manifestation. The mantra is the instrument which helps the mind to bridge the gap separating the limited from the Unlimited.

In fact, let us see how time and space come to birth in the thinking process. Time presents itself to the mind as a succession of ideas: it is the notion which frees us from our experience of the continual succession of

particular ideas. Space appears when the mind has determined two fixed points. So the movement of ideas and the formal fixing of objects comprise the whole content of empirical reality.

In the course of this meditation, I meditate on a particular form (*rupa*), the form of my chosen Ideal. While keeping this form in the field of my attention, I repeat the mantra, i.e., the Name of the Divine, of God. It is a question of passing from the empirical of a particular form to that of the Infinite or Unlimited. I begin by giving to my ideal cosmic dimensions. "I will tell you," says Sri Krishna, "what you need to know, knowing which you will gain Immortality. It is Brahman Supreme without beginning. It cannot be called being or non-being. With hands and feet everywhere, eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, ears everywhere in the universe, That exists, filling everything. Undivided, yet It exists divided among all beings. Consider It as sustaining all, dissolving all and generating all." (Gita XIII. 13-16.) The repetition of sound introduces at the same time the infinity of time. Thus leaving limitation, I see the framework of my fixed ideas breaking, little by little. The mantra formed by the "condensation" of the Infinite contains, in these two terms (*nama, rupa*) a return to the source from which the manifest is projected. There all possibility of particular meditation ceases. The experiencing of the finite disappears along with the mind itself, inundated by that invasion of the Infinite. Also, by their conjoined radiation, the form and name of the Chosen Ideal have made multiplicity relative and led the mind to discover in itself the Infinite as the sole Reality. After that realization, when the mind descends again to empirical consciousness, it recognizes in everything the presence of the Reality; this renunciation of the person to the object of worship is the supreme sacrifice which permits the religious person to find the Will of God in everything. Then the plurality of events or beings appears illusory for he sees only the Infinite everywhere. *Purnasya purnam adaya, purnat purnam udachyate.*

When *dhyana* in turn becomes intense there is union, and all meditation stops here, for the stage of perfection has ended; the mind becomes *sattvik* and the Lord is reflected there.

**Gretz, 1949**

The function of a spiritual guide is to help the devotees to make the transfer to the Ideal without the least appropriation to himself; and in this process, he too progresses in his spiritual evolution, for he becomes humble.

The end of all these efforts is in the state of consciousness which gives the understanding of *everything*, which is also the knowledge which brings about the disappearance of the apparently irreducible opposites on the empirical plane – opposites created by the contradictions of life. In a word, it is the identity of subject and object. This state is attainable only through metaphysical knowledge. It is Love, which is totally different from sentimentality or

sensuality resulting from our attachments in life. Love, which is equally purity, comes to our aid when all fears have gone.

To sublimate an instinct like fear, what a prodigious program of transformation of primordial prana! The journey is long for everyone, but the joy is in the struggle. The normal and balanced person is the one the *Gita* speaks of, the *stithaprajna*. Any other acceptance of "norm" is artificial and relative. The unbalanced person who becomes anti-social is labelled with that label. Virtually all of us are in a state of disequilibrium. Since our *buddhi* is not too shadowed (as is that of the ill), we have a better chance of knowing the process of transfer to the Ideal; a process which, in the ill and neurotic, operates in a special way. The potential mentality of the ill is charged with the possessive instinct and the object of transfer becomes a center acting to produce a sort of psychic synthesis.

In spiritual life, although a possessive state presents itself at the outset, that quickly transforms itself into a worshipful state, for the transfer is reciprocal. The Ideal, such as Krishna, Buddha or Jesus, who have an objective reality apart from our mental creation, envelops us by his Grace. When Grace envelops us by our life in Him (through the repetition of the mantra, which is the most effective communication with Him), the rays of *sattva* – His own radiation – envelop and transform the lower *gunas*. Then begins our attitude of imitating His attitude, which is worshipful. We will do everything for the love of God (without fear when the transformation is well advanced.) Then the *buddhi* is not clouded by the usual agitations in the state of possessiveness, the aspirant understands this transfer process, and in that understanding (*jnana*) alone there is liberation.

The realization of the Atman is that of the ideal love of the All, the Whole. The divine incarnation and the liberated soul (*jivanmukta*) are the actualization in history of the truth of this doctrine. We attempt to trace our life on their model and the reciprocal transfer thus accomplished is the path for our progress.

**Gretz, 1949**

*Prospectus for the French translation of Cosmic Mind according to the doctrine of Huang Po.*

The problem of life is that of suffering; it can have only one solution: the removal of ignorance. When *sambodhi* (or *satori*) arises, ignorance gives place to Knowledge (*prajna*). The state of consciousness of one who gets *satori* is called *prajna*, but in the present work this term is synonymous with Cosmic Mind. The Zen Masters refuse all foreign interference and make their independence a major doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism. One of the characteristics of the Chinese culture is the faculty of assimilating the essentials from other cultures and transforming them into something specifically Chinese. Offspring, so to speak, of the very heart of Mahayana Buddhism, Zen (in the words of Professor [D.T.] Suzuki) "is undoubtedly

one of the most precious and in certain respects most extraordinary, of the spiritual graces whose blessing the Orient has received." Dr. Hubert Bennoi has contributed a remarkable introduction to Yvonne Laurance's faithful translations. It takes the reader into the very heart of the doctrine. What Dr. Benoit conceives as the characteristic merit essential and unique to Zen applies equally to Vedanta, and we find it in the exposition by Gaudapada in his *Karika* on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, as well as in the commentaries of Sri Sankaracharya on Gaudapada's *karikas*.

We want to insist on one particular point: the life of the saint who has realized any particular doctrine is the canvas for the exposition of that doctrine. In the presence of a being who has attained satori, the interest certainly is not in the metaphysics or the philosophy. If we are in the presence of Ramana Maharshi, for example, his writings do not attract our attention nearly so much as the living radiation which emanates from him and which gives us a glimpse of that intuitive understanding and that consciousness of which he is the living symbol.

But in the sage's absence, his doctrine, (so far as it reflects his oral teachings), brings us evidence both intuitive and intellectual. Reflection on his teachings will bring us the needed help to lead the pure intelligence (buddhi) to maturity and to refuse, as Dr. Benoit says, "every embodiment of Truth in a form which touches the emotional."

However, let us not forget that satisfaction is not a criterion of Truth. In our search for the Absolute, we must renounce all conditionings of the mind; that is, all *vrittis*. It is only then that the Reality reveals Itself in all Its purity. There is the wonderful description given by a zen Master:

"Before beginning the study of Zen, mountains are mountains and water is water; then, when, thanks to the instruction of a good Master, the disciple gets a glimpse, a quick glance into the truth of Zen, mountains are no longer mountains and water is no longer water. Yet later, when the disciple has truly attained the place of Quietude (i.e., when he has obtained satori) the mountains are again mountains, and water again water."

We can say that a written doctrine has the same utility as a photograph: it reminds us of the original. One can think of it as an exoteric doctrine; while the process of inner awakening launched by the direct contact of the master with the pupil is the esoteric teaching. In the Buddhist and Vedantic traditions there are two methods of initiation, one a process of gradual maturation which ends finally in illumination; the other, called sudden, which the Zen and Mahayana call *sambodhi* or satori; it is said that the Zen Master gives the light of satori more quickly than the eye can blink. In the Vedanta monasteries there is likewise a mode of initiation, extremely rare, which confers the awakening of Consciousness or jnana at

the moment when the guru speaks the *mahavakya*, the Upanishadic formula which awakens instantly and completely the Advaitic Consciousness in the aspirant. The illumination is immediate and total.

The instruction which Lord Buddha imparted to Mahakasyapa gave him sudden illumination. It was transmitted to a whole line of masters; in fact the document we have before our very eyes is the account of teachings received from one of them: Hsi Yun, who lived in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century C.E. When my friend, Aloy Lombard of Lausanne sent me the English translation of this little book I was startled to find in this Chinese text the whole of what I believe to be the highest Vedantic teaching, contained in the *karikas* of Sri Gaudapada and Sri Sankara. For me, belonging to the Vedantic tradition, and who has known personally the Sage of Tiruvannamalai, I get from these lines the profile of the jnani that Ramana Maharshi was. The teaching that Maharshi gave us culminates in the realization of SILENCE, *mauna*. The silence of the Vedantic tradition expressed in the life of Maharshi, is the state of Advaitic consciousness, *sahaja sthiti*, it is the state of nirvikalpa samadhi experienced with "eyes open"; he remains always above the states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. This very state is called by the Zen Masters the eternal present; in walking, sitting or lying down, the awareness of the Non-duality is unchanged. The Zen doctrine of Cosmic Mind puts at the top of its values one aspect of the Truth which Maharshi has not expressly developed; that is the dynamic aspect of the Reality or the Cosmic Mind. Indian thought, in the classical Vedanta, has neglected this aspect, or relegated it to an inferior level, considering it as "empirical reality," *vyavaharika satta*. Zen, on the contrary, gives it primordial importance. After satori there exists, obviously, no evidence of "degrees" in Reality. The experience of the manifestation in the framework of space, time and causation is the experience of duality; it belongs to ignorance, *avidya*. So long as we are sunk in ignorance, we see the multiplicity, but there is no causal connection between ignorance and knowledge. Reality, thought of as movement or Energy is, of course, a notion familiar to the school of the Saktas of Vedanta, but the Zen teaching gives us all its beauty through the lines of Pen-Hsien (941-1008): "If you want to truly penetrate the Truth of Zen, do it while walking, standing up, sleeping, sitting, when you are speaking or keeping silent, or while you are engaged in your daily chores." This same Master, distributing among his monks different tasks, ironically asks, "So, you are constantly in motion; where, then, is that which you call the Immutable, or that which remains in the samadhi of Naga?" By the doctrine of Huang Po the reader is put at once in the presence of Maharshi's silence and in the dynamism of the Sakta doctrine of Cosmic Energy.

The use of the *koan* is the particular form Zen takes; it spread after the death of the Sixth Patriarch. This style is incomprehensible for most of us. Surely it is dangerous to try to give oneself to these practices for anyone

not belonging to the Chinese tradition of Zen. Many publications have made us familiar with these ideas in the West. Here they are harmless, for the simple reason that without a qualified master who has himself received the initiation in the apostolic succession, no one can get engaged in the *koan* sadhana. Now, so far as I know, there is no such master in the West, and besides, I would be surprised if there is found, outside of China, an aspirant qualified to practice that exercise. But there is another danger, here as everywhere else in the world. The exotic exerts a special attraction which can impel certain people to experiment with a method without using the help of a guru. Now if the aim of the search really is to attain satori, there are other methods than the practice of *koan*, for, long before the advent of such a practice, candidates in quest of Truth have attained satori. What is indispensable is the correct study of the Doctrine. One is confronted with great difficulties in arriving at a precise understanding of the Zen doctrine by reading the voluminous canonical works of Mahayana Buddhism. The doctrine of Huang Po fills this gap; it is the opus of one who has attained satori; this doctrine reflects the majesty of a soul who has broken the chains of suffering; reading this text, high hopes rose up in me. I called upon the words of Dostoyevsky: "If the sin, the lie and the temptation are all around us, there is nevertheless somewhere on earth a saint, a superior being who possesses the truth, who knows this truth; that is why it does not pass away from the earth, that is why one day it will be among us, and rule over the world just as was promised." (*The Brothers Karamazov*).

If the Zen Masters are no longer here, we can adapt Dostoyevsky's words and say, "If sin, falsehood and temptation are all around us, there are, however, some place on earth, documents left by saints who have gone beyond the bounds of suffering, and these documents have the power of sacred scripture. So we *can* possess Truth, we *can* know It." That Truth cannot die. It remains the hope of the future. Lord Buddha himself, while leaving this world, gave his last message to his disciples: he asked them to center all their affection and their loyalty on the Dharma. The Truth of the Dharma is eternal and only Truth can free us from ignorance.

**End of Part 1 of 2 (second installment will appear in Fall 2008/V14#2)**



# LETTERS FROM SWAMI RITAJANANDA

William Page

## Part 1 of 2

Swami Ritajananda was a prolific letter writer. He and I corresponded for several years. I saved all the letters we exchanged—the originals of his and carbon copies of mine—from the time I arrived in Thailand in May 1986 till he passed away in 1994.

Most of these letters dealt with personal matters—his travels, the things that were going on in Gretz at the time. He was very much interested in finding out more about Thai Buddhism, especially its spiritual practices and life in the monasteries; and I told him whatever I could and also sent him some books. He had encountered Theravada Buddhism many years before in Sri Lanka, and was of the opinion that the Sri Lankan version, at any rate, was a bit narrow and intolerant.

In the excerpts that follow, I omit things that are not likely to be of interest to the general reader. Several ideas come out clearly in these letters. First, Swami Ritajananda had the idea that real religion is universal; it is not narrow or parochial; and a truly religious person will transcend a narrow attachment to his own religion and be able to appreciate the religions of others. He himself read deeply and widely in the scriptures of the various religions, and he was always eager to learn more. Since I was living in a Buddhist country, his letters to me often dealt with Buddhism.

Second, he regarded religion as realization, and did not think it was of much use if it did not produce results. He thought that the essence of religion was a transforming experience that would change a person's character. He also thought it was possible to expand the parameters of the mind and attain what he called in one letter an "egoless condition."

Third, he was pessimistic about the ability of the average person to really go into religion deeply. A recurring theme in his letters was the feeling that all the talks and lectures he was giving were probably not having much effect. People might appreciate his ideas intellectually, but the number of people who would actually put them into practice was relatively few.

Fourth, he had been away from India so long and had read about so many different religions that he found it difficult to communicate his ideas even to his fellow Indians in terms that they could understand. As he remarked in one letter, he "felt like a lone wolf!"

In one of my early letters I asked about the relationship of the individual soul to Brahman. He replied that this was an eternal relationship that could never be broken. It was usually obscured, but it was always

there. I remember being very much impressed by this answer. Unfortunately I have lost that letter—or maybe I received it before I came to Thailand—so I cannot quote it directly.

In one of my early letters from Thailand I mentioned that some of the monks in Bangkok live luxurious lives, having bank accounts, TV sets, and sometimes cars. He replied that laxity in spiritual life begins when the aspirant starts to find it boring. Then he starts trying to make life comfortable. Unfortunately I also lost that letter, and cannot quote it directly.

Most of Swami Ritajananda's letters were handwritten. But after his stroke, they were sometimes typed. I presume that the typed letters were dictated. Often I could tell the state of his health by whether the letters were handwritten or typed. If he was in bad health, they would be typed. But sometimes when he was traveling—to Brazil, Greece, Spain, or wherever—the letters would be handwritten even if he was in bad health, because whoever did the typing was not with him. In the excerpts below, the letters were all handwritten unless the word "[Typed]" appears at the beginning.

**22 Aug. 1986:** "We are accustomed to see results of actions we do and people do not always see some tangible results for what they do in spiritual life; probably they do not put sufficient effort and concentration....In practice spirituality is not interesting for all people and many slowly drift away from the ideal....To have an organized monastic life, it seems that the Thai monastery where you spent some time seems to be ideal, because the whole day is well programmed. In R.K. Mission it is a bit like this: meditation, work, food, rest, work, meditation, food, and sleep. Studies are not easy, except for a few people, because the work takes plenty of time."

**21 Sept. 1986:** "In this age of conflicting ideologies, I do not know, whether there is any religion, which can please many people. Unless, people consider that one must work to establish the fraternity of all races, take away the prejudices, on account of race, religion, etc., what can religions do? In this respect, I feel Sri Ramakrishna, was the first who tried to do it....It is time for me to be relieved from responsibilities, because the physical condition does not permit it anymore. The little time of my life, I wish to go deeper in my personal spiritual research."

**23 March 1987:** "In my recent visit to India, I learnt a bit of my thinking and how it differs from the life and activities in an organization and also outside. Work has the important place and inward study is very little heard of. In the other religious organizations, a great 'Sadhu' is he, who is very learned in the scriptures. He is venerated and held highly. One day, I had to be with a group, around a Sadhu, with a great reputation. Compared to him, I am nothing. Fortunately, I had Sri Ramakrishna to give me courage. He was, of course, all courteous and kind. One asked my

spiritual experiences. I said that I cannot talk about, because what is mine, can never be properly understood by others. Finally concluded saying by arriving at a point in life that the Lord is our dearest and is with us always one can live in the world with a greater peace of mind than otherwise. Nobody opposed this and I do not know, what their Guru thought of it."

**27 May 1987:** "Though I meet people, talk with them on spiritual subjects, give talks, I just wonder how many are really deeply interested in these talks. I have always told that it is an experiment to be tried and realized. But... Of course, I have full faith and clear convictions, yet it is not easy to convince profoundly others. So, you can understand , my feelings about running centres and giving talks. I have a few friends like you, with whom I correspond and discuss these matters. There is Mr. Moffitt, an ex-monk of the R.K.M. but now a free man, writing articles and books. We are old friends, since 1954, when I went to New York and at that time, we were together in Nikhilananda's center. He was a great help to me and we keep our friendship, though he left the order. We have many common ideas. But such swamis, I have not yet met! Probably my coming out of India and my own nature, which has never accepted fixed rules or beliefs, are responsible for what I do and say. During this trip, I met many brothers, with whom I spoke about spirituality as I understand. Nobody said anything against it. But they never did anything on this side. I felt like a lone wolf!!!"

**12 July 1987:** "Here the house is full! Yesterday (Saturday) we had nearly 60 guests and today 70. I had to see as many people as possible, hear their woes, console them, humour them or weep with them. Anyway with the grace of Sri Ramakrishna so far everything is going on well, though some times I feel tired. I should not forget the body is old, though it seems, some times, in good shape. I was able to travel, even alone, give talks in Germany for two weeks. I went as far as Puttgarten, northernmost part of Germany, before going to Danemark, crossing the sea. There I had a week's rest. It is a very peaceful island with large fields all around. Then came south, going to Essen and Dortmund etc. Everything went on very well. For two months, no more travel plans. This is the best period here. We have nice weather for the last five days. It may continue for some more days, I hope. We expected some guests from India, including our vice-president, but they did not come, because the vice-president fell sick...."

"I have not been reading anything actually. The time goes fast. In the day time, interviews and letters take all the time. So many letters are yet to be replied. My friend Moffit is not well. He is 79 and seems to go down, because of so many major physical troubles. A few months ago another good friend, exactly of my age left the world. So I am seeing death, more really, than the Buddhists, who keep the skeleton to remind them!! But, it does not bother. The one thought ["I am really Atman" has to be [illegible word: instant? in heart?]] whenever the egocentric ideas of "I am doing, I

shall do etc. want to establish themselves. This is the experiment I am doing now!! I still strongly believe in a 'transformative experience.' Though something happened to me some years ago, I do not think it is enough. I cannot say anything more....

"One of my recent studies was spirituality in the Orthodox Russian Christianity—the lives of their great saints. The book was interesting and fits in with the general notion, that a life of intense prayer, meditation, renunciation, asceticism form the essentials. Sometimes miracles. Many have even written books. When I see all these and think of Sri Ramakrishna, I can see a big difference. He is unlike all others who are considered saints. His genuine love, willingness to go to any extreme to help people, living in the world only on the surface, but during all free time living in the depths, capable of a lot of fun, showing by his own life, the meaningless conditioning imposed on us, by society and religions etc. makes me marvel at him. There may be some points, which we may not see eye to eye with him. But still, he is really somebody great in the modern world. Everybody may judge him, in his own way. I have learnt to appreciate him, more and more."

**20 August 1987:** "Now Moffitt is no more. He was very sick and wrote to me a few days earlier. In him I lose my first friend in America, known for 33 years and always had good relationship, though he became a swami of the Order and left it to be independent. He was a poet, wrote some books and had a lot of correspondence. He should have left the body in a good state of consciousness, in his 79th year....

"It is time that the progress of spiritual evolution depends a lot on concentration. And this depends (1) on detachment of our present actual life and (2 ) a complete relaxation. Then comes a period like walking in a no-man's land. Very difficult to check it and cannot come easily to understand where we are. It is not a sleep and not also awake. It gives a pleasant feeling, when we come out of it.

"Recently reading some article in a book, I came across the name of E. Swedenborg. He was a genius. He had a variety of mystical experiences. Wrote 150 books. He was a scientist and also a religious man. Perhaps you know about him. In France, they have no interest. There is a foundation in New York and I shall try to get some books. In spiritual life, without some experience it will not of much value. So, when Vivekananda told a man if he had not seen a ghost, he was not for spiritual life, there is this meaning. With my terrible inquisitive nature, I want to know this effect of man. I have a friend in New York, who is willing to send me any book I require.

"The idea of the One Atman is all, must have made a tremendous impression on the old Hindous of 3 or 4 thousand years ago, that it enters in many of their books. It can never be easily put In our intellectual form

and it remains to be understood only by personal experience.”

**14 Oct. 1987:** “Moffitt was indeed a seeker of Truth and we always corresponded in that way. Perhaps, we helped each other mutually! It is time that we evolve in spirituality and one day we get the final flash. This idea is put in the Vedanta tradition, when a person reaches a state, when all the influence of Maya is taken out and left with a conclusion that he is Brahman, the Guru tells him he is Brahman and immediately the disciple experiences that state of identity. Sri Ramakrishna had the duality—he and the Divine Mother—concept, but it was strong. So his master asked him to cut it off and concentrate on one point. The last trace of duality disappeared and Sri Ramakrishna plunged into Samadhi. I also feel, that this Samadhi is not necessary. Some peculiar change takes place, which cannot be expressed in words, that the person feels he is different. He has no explanation. It can arrive because of constant meditating on these ideals.... “Recently I got a book from a friend. It is called ‘La Source Noir.’ It was fantastic to me, because it tells something about transformation of people, who have passed through Near Death Experience. It happened to quite a few. Though there is no reference to Indian thought directly, it seems to me these people, who were clinically dead, they had the mind, which understood, and saw a lot, fantastically unbelievable, found there was no death, experienced a different good world, and when they were brought back to life, their values of things in our world had changed. They did not care much for anything, what a worldly man wants. They feel, very happy, having intense love for all, and we can easily call them a saint, though God may not have a place in their thinking. The ‘Source Noire’ is only a collection of information, from different sources, and books. Some of these people, who came back, even showed many psychic powers, powers to heal, etc. So, I found, what it really means, when they say, ‘Those who know Brahman, become Brahman, i.e., attains the state of Infinity. One more point also I learnt that it is not necessary to go through Near Death Experience for the transformation. It may happen to anyone under any condition. So there is much hope for all of us!!!”

**End of Part 1 of 2 (second installment will appear in Fall 2008/V14#2)**



**Kuan Yin, Buddha of Compassion**

Painting by Jan Zaremba  
[www.janzaremba.com/sumi-e](http://www.janzaremba.com/sumi-e)

## In search of historical truth: Father Jean-François Six on St. Therese of Lisieux



Saint Therese at 15 before entering the Carmelite Community/Image courtesy Wikipedia Commons

Karl Whitmarsh

### Part 1 of 2

There was a young Frenchwoman of the 19th century that a pope declared to be the greatest saint of modern times. The pope was Pius XII, and the woman's name was Therese Martin, better know as St. Therese of Lisieux. She wrote an autobiography, which we know under the title of *The Story of a Soul*. Many years ago I came across a beautiful old translation of this book and have not succeeded in shaking St. Therese from my thoughts ever since.

Were it not for that one book, immensely popular in its day, I would not know the first thing about her, nor would any of us. Therese was, after all, a cloistered Carmelite nun from the age of fifteen till her death at age twenty-four.

*The Story of a Soul*, published soon after Therese's death in 1897, reveals a young woman of rare intellect and remarkable passion. A young woman at once profoundly reflective and rapturously devoted to Jesus. Her language is simple, vivid, poetic and stirring. Her autobiography quickly sold millions of copies, and made Therese of Lisieux a household name among the Catholic faithful.

But eventually it came to light that what had been accepted as Therese's autobiography, though inspiring, was not entirely genuine. It had, in fact, been liberally edited by her sisters, themselves Carmelite nuns. Fearing she would be misunderstood, they had quietly taken it upon themselves to excise, edit and add to Therese's original writings. In 1947 the Abbé Andre Combes, working in Lisieux to compile an anthology of Therese's letters, suddenly realized that the documents he had been given access to were retouched. He dug deeper. He discovered not only were Therese's letters compromised, but even the most prized part of her legacy, the *Story of a Soul*.

Abbé Combes began in earnest to request and collect the authentic texts of Therese. With the help of Jean-Francois Six and others, the Abbé gradually brought to light the genuine writings – and voice – of Therese.

In his several biographical studies of Therese, Father Six carefully parses important distinctions in meaning between Therese's purported writings and what she actually wrote. For example, in her autobiography as originally translated and published we read:

"If iron and fire were endowed with reason, and the iron could say: 'Draw me!' would not that prove its desire to be identified with the fire to the point of sharing its substance?"<sup>1</sup>

"Sharing its substance" – dry, impersonal language, utterly untypical of Therese. This is what Therese actually wrote:

"If iron and fire were endowed with reason, and the iron said to fire, 'Draw me to you!' would that not prove that the iron desires to find its identity in the fire? and in this way: that the fire should penetrate it and saturate it with its flaming substance and become uniquely one with it."

Therese's thought was subtle, and her language was vivid. She yearned to be united with her divine Spouse. But her subtlety, vividness and passion are always muted and often absent from the originally published version of her autobiography.

Father Six writes eloquently on this passage:

"We are here at the height of Therese's mystical union: she asks to be united 'in an intimate manner' with Jesus — that is her fervent prayer in these last weeks of her existence. 'Beloved Mother,' she writes to her prioress, 'this is my prayer: I ask Jesus to draw me into the flames of his love, to unite me to Him so closely that He will live in me and act through me.'

"If she makes such a request, it is not primarily for her. Insistently, she asks her spiritual brothers (Roulland and Bellière) to pray for her after her death, that she might receive grace from the Trinity to continue to light the fires of Love on earth."



This observation of Father Six leads us to a second example, the famous phrase attributed to Therese: "I will spend my heaven doing good on earth." Therese never wrote these words, though she is alleged to have spoken them. In fact, a careful study of her original writings unsurprisingly fails to reveal any concept or attitude of "doing good on earth" – as she would have found such a notion brazenly assertive. Therese's attitude was rather more gentle and self-effacing, and what she actually said was more specific and profound. Knowing she would soon die, she asked a fellow spiritual seeker to pray that she might "spend her heaven loving Jesus and making him loved."

A third serious distortion of Therese's spiritual legacy involves her so-called "dark night of the soul." Eighteen months before her death, Therese underwent a dark night of faith, wherein she experienced a sudden loss of hope and faith from which she never fully recovered. Yet although Therese's grave doubts brought her inordinate distress, they also filled her with compassion for atheists and agnostics. She imagined they must be suffering from their disbelief at least as intently as she was suffering from hers. Addressing Jesus, she wrote of her fervent desire to "to eat the bread of suffering as long you [Jesus] wish, and not to rise from that table, filled with bitterness, where poor sinners dine, until the day of your choosing . . ."

Her editors and the majority of her biographers have tended to treat this episode of Therese's autobiography with discomfiture and haste – not unlike the current unease that the newly revealed doubts and despair of Mother Teresa are arousing in some circles. But where others see an attack on their faith, Father Six finds inspiration. Determined to continue Therese's outreach to non-believers, Father Six has initiated and maintains dialogues with atheists and agnostics.<sup>2</sup>

It was two of Therese's sisters in particular, Sister Genevieve and Mother Agnes – herself an abbess — who took great pains to censor the image of Therese that would be presented to the world. The budding saint who was loving, intelligent, humorous, and incredibly pious from childhood – this is the Therese we know from *The Story of a Soul* as edited by Mother

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<sup>1</sup> *The Story of a Soul*, manuscript C, translated by Canon Taylor, 1926

<sup>2</sup> Father Six is also a member of the national commission on the Rights of Man (as enunciated by the United Nations) to the office of the prime minister. He is deeply interested as well in the conciliatory power of mediation.

In addition to his numerous books on Therese, Father Six has written extensively on blessed Charles de Foucauld, the visionary French priest martyred in the Sahara in 1916 and who, like Therese, lived intensely in the love of God though virtually hidden from the world. Father Six has for some years been the head of the worldwide religious order (sodalité) founded by Charles de Foucauld.

Agnes. The unedited autobiography, however, suggests a complex young woman who is not only these things, but also riven with doubt, inner turmoil, and unbridled passion for the divine. These were the aspects of personality that Therese revealed in her writing that Mother Agnes thought it better to conceal.

And even as Mother Agnes edited the writings, so Sister Genevieve, as portraitist and photographer, sought always to depict a perfect likeness of her sainted sister. For decades the real photographs of Therese were suppressed in favor of idealized portraits. The oval-faced, rosy-cheeked beautiful young girl commonly thought to represent Therese, in fact only scarcely resembled her. And then there is the well-known photograph of Therese taken immediately after her death, showing the young nun reposing in joyful peace. Not only was this photo the result of a thoroughly retouched print, but Sister Genevieve even went so far as to destroy the original.

We are fortunate now, more than one hundred years after the death of Therese, to have access at last to her un-retouched photographs and writings. And the marvelous discovery that Father Six has made, over many years of scholarship — and that he shares with his readers — is that the genuine person of Therese, for all her surface flaws, is much more human, and much more potent spiritually, than the porcelain saint whom her well-meaning sisters displayed to the world. I welcome you to discover for yourselves the probing and provocative writings of Father Six on St. Therese.

End of Part 1 (In January of 2008, Karl Whitmarsh spoke with Father Six about St. Therese of Lisieux. A translation of their conversation will be published in the Fall issue of *American Vedantist*.)

## LIFE'S STRUGGLES: REMINDERS OF SOMETHING MORE

Jayanti Hoye

[This article originally appeared in the Spring 1999 issue of SRI SARADA SOCIETY NOTES.]

Sri Sarada Devi managed a household, cooked, cleaned, and was surrounded by family members who caused her no end of trouble. Due to the death of her younger brother and the insanity of her sister-in-law, she assumed the lifelong care of her niece Radhu. We can identify with such a life because it is familiar. Hearing about the difficulties Mother encountered within her own family inspires faith that she truly understands our struggles. When she speaks of patience and forbearance, we can listen and learn because her life reflects our own. And if we pay close attention to her actions, we discover that patience and forbearance do not mean resigning oneself to less than expected. Rather they represent Mother's positive embrace of the world around her.

Knowing this world was not the whole of Reality, she was able to accept it without making demands. For this same reason, whenever necessary, she possessed the strength to withstand unreasonable demands on her. Mother's day-to-day example gives us a glimpse of Truth by showing us a different way to approach and embrace life, as well as how to let it go.

Radhu was in Mother's constant care well into her adulthood. Yet a change was observed as Mother approached death. While she received other visitors despite the objection of those attending her during her final days, Mother refused even to look at her niece and forbade her to enter the room. Sri Sarada Devi is described as being a mother-heart of compassion. What caused such seemingly uncaring and paradoxical behavior? Mother gives a clue.

She tells us that after Sri Ramakrishna's death, he appeared to her and placed a child in her arms. "This is your yogamaya," he told her. After the Master had left the body, Sri Sarada Devi's naturally high plane of existence lost its moorings within the world. The Master was now free. Likewise, Mother longed to be free from the bonds of physical life. Yet Sri Ramakrishna had left Mother behind for a reason. She had work to do. Something was needed to draw her mind back to the world. Mother recognized Radhu as the child Sri Ramakrishna had placed in her arms.

Radhu, Mother's niece, her thread of union with this world, was certainly not the pleasant, ideal, loving child we would expect to be

associated with Mother. A willful child and unstable adult, Radhu was a constant source of aggravation and trouble. It is recorded that she was even physically abusive to Mother. We expect that our life will one day be perfect and carefree, and we often resent anyone or anything which "spoils" our dream. Surely Sri Sarada Devi deserves the life we seek for ourselves?

Yet Mother did not reject Radhu out of disappointment or bitterness. When her life was drawing to an end, she withdrew from the one thread of attachment which held her mind in the world. She knew her work was finished and that she had remained behind solely to help others understand that life offers us so much more than a pleasant, happy existence. We cling to our worldly attachments because we have forgotten our true nature. Gradually, through disenchanting blows, we come to want more from life. We expand our horizon to seek what is enduring. How much longer would our spiritual journey be if Mother offered us only pleasant experiences, if her life did not mirror our own?

This world is alluring, after all. We may be reminded of a story of Vishnu. After incarnating as a pig and having finished his rescue mission, Vishnu found it quite pleasant to remain on earth in his pig body. The gods tried everything to get Vishnu to assume his true identity, but not until Shiva came to pierce Vishnu's pig body did the Lord emerge laughing. Being a pig was divine play to him!

Like Vishnu, Mother knew her true identity. As she herself put it: "A realized soul laughs upon leaving the body, while we weep, being ignorant of our true nature." Until it was time for her to leave the world, Mother remained bound for our sake through her attachment to Radhu. She did so in a way consistent with Truth, without hint or suggestion that life founded on worldly attachments is meant to be the ideal.

IN MOTHER'S WORDS: "These worldly 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."

## MEDIA REVIEWS



### Scholar Reading a Book

Painting by Jan Zaremba  
[www.janzaremba.com/sumi-e](http://www.janzaremba.com/sumi-e)

### *How to Live with God In the Company of Ramakrishna*

By Swami Chetanananda

**Vedanta Society of St. Louis   Hardback, 584 pages   \$29.95   2008**

Bill Davis

I am a devotee of Ramakrishna and therefore to me this is a wonderful book. It is a bit difficult to define the subject of this book. The title “How to Live with God” seems to have been picked because it fits with Swami Chetanananda’s previous books, *They Lived with God* and *God Lived with Them*. Indeed the book is full of practical tips on spiritual practice but it is so much more than this. The subtitle also covers much, but not the entire book. I would say the subject is Ramakrishna the avatar in his multifarious aspects (not a very catchy title).

Separate chapters are devoted to his form, his name, him as an object of meditation, the many gospels and portraits written about him, how he was seen and understood by his disciples and others, his relationships with his devotees, little known stories about lesser known devotees, Dakshineswar as an object of mediation, and other aspects of him.

In the preface the author states that the “aim of this book is to remove boredom and despondency and to create excitement and inspiration, hope and imagination love and devotion in the minds of spiritual aspirants.” The spiritual aspirants he is addressing are those devoted to Ramakrishna.

He succeeds in his aim. This book is saturated with Swami Chetanananda’s exuberant love of Sri Ramakrishna. It is said that faith is not taught; it is caught. Reading this book is being in the holy company of Swami Chetanananda and his faith and love are contagious just as he hoped they would be. Every line is instinct with Swami Chetanananda’s faith that Ramakrishna is God. He marshals his evidence from all over the literature in support of his belief. Most of the material is mined from Bengali sources.

Those who have read *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, *Sri Ramakrishna*, *the Great Master* (or Swami Chetanananda’s translation of the same work called *Sri Ramakrishna and his Divine Play*), the books on Holy Mother, and Swami Chetanananda’s previous books will be familiar with most of it. The material he cites is very precious, like diamonds, and rubies. If one possesses precious gems it is not enough to look at them only once or twice. One wants to see them again and again. By placing this material in a new context their radiance can be enjoyed in a new way. However, there is much new material also. Much of it comes from Sri Ma Darshan. “Ma” is how Bengalis pronounce M. Sri Ma Darshan is Swami Nityatmananda’s Boswell-like account of M.’s conversations with devotees. Swami Nityatmananda is M.’s M.

The material in these volumes, 16 in all, constitutes at least a 6<sup>th</sup> volume as it were of the *Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, the Bengali title of M.’s original work of which the *Gospel of Ramakrishna* is a translation. It is full of M.’s inspiring reminiscences of incidents and conversations of Ramakrishna that didn’t make it into the five published volumes. It also has M.’s reflections on the meaning of what he observed, his commentary on the *Kathamrita* as it were. I know that at least 12 of these 16 volumes have appeared in English as *M.*, *the Apostle and the Evangelist*.

The first chapter, Various forms of Ramakrishna, is the longest. He retells accounts of Ramakrishna being beheld at various times in a huge array of divine forms. It’s mind boggling to realize that he was seen in

mystic visions as Kali, Shiva, Kali and Shiva in quick succession, as Vishnu Narayana, as Gadadhar, Jaganath, Krishna, Radha, Radha and Krishna united, Gopala, Ramachandra, Sita, in the mood of Hanuman and of Durga, as the Kundalini power, the ocean of Satchidananda, as Christ, as Sikh Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, as a luminous being, as an Avatar and as the Kalpataru. Many devotees also had visions of Sri Ramakrishna in his Ramakrishna form both during his life and after his passing away. This chapter ends with practical suggestions on how to meditate on the form of Ramakrishna.

The chapters are very diverse and I enjoyed each of them.

A few criticisms:

1 He refers to various collections of Ramakrishna's sayings but he overlooks the collection of Ramakrishna's sayings, *Swami Vijnananada and his Paramamsa Carita*

2 He very often cites his previous works rather than giving the original citation. If you want to know it you must go to the cited book to find out the original. This is inconvenient.

3 He has decided to translate "*kamini* and *kanchan*," i.e. woman and gold in all his works as "lust and gold." It's good to make the word for woman more general, but the problem with this in my view is that it is not a parallel construction. Gold is an object and lust is a feeling. Lust and greed would do but Ramakrishna liked to speak concretely and so used two concrete objects to illustrate lust and greed. "Lust-objects and gold" is more awkward but makes more sense in the sentence "Lust and gold cannot be goals of human life (page 485)." No one has lust as his goal, but one's goal may be to satisfy one's lust with a lust-object.

These criticisms are trivial. I felt a desire to read this book again as soon as I finished it the first time. It is a handbook of practice. There are suggestions of practice that I want to try out as I go along. Thus on the second reading I'm going much slower. There are prayers, mantras, meditation techniques, and new ways to view and understand Ramakrishna. Also there is the sheer pleasure of again savoring the many stories about him.

There were new things that were a pleasure to find out. For instance, a male dancer trained in classical Indian dance saw that photo of Ramakrishna in samadhi with Hriday holding him. He said, "Who is this great dancer? His mudra (position) is perfect." When asked to explain he said, "According to our dancing tradition, this mudra signifies the infinite (p. 444)." Also I never knew that there was a fourth photo of

Ramakrishna taken during his lifetime. Ram had it taken, but Ramakrishna did not approve of it and so Ram threw it into the Ganga.

I asked myself whether this would be a good first book about Ramakrishna for someone to read. Sooner or later it will happen. Someone unfamiliar with Ramakrishna will pick it up. Will he or she be attracted or repelled? Who can know, but probably this would not be an ideal first book for the average person. It is meant for someone who already has some devotion to Ramakrishna. On the other hand, sooner or later a stranger to Ramakrishna will be enthralled by this book. Such a person would have to be in a very ripe condition of mind.

We owe again a hearty “thank you” to Swami Chetanananda for pulling all this material together in such a loving way.

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## *Hymn to Holy Mother*

A Choral Suite with Flute, Harp, Organ, Tambura and Finger Cymbals  
by John Schlenck, text by Swami Abhedananda and *Invocations:  
Hymn from the Upanishads*.

**Vedantic Arts Recordings Compact Disc \$16.95 VAR004**

Esther Warkov

Recognizing that the appreciation of a musical work is a subjective experience, I offer a personal reflection on John Schlenck’s *Hymn to Holy Mother*, a choral suite with small ensemble based on the text Sri Sarada Stotram by Swami Abhedananda. While *American Vedantist* readers will be familiar with Schlenck’s many compositions and recordings from his 40+ years as a professional composer and music director at the Vedanta Society of New York, I only recently learned of Schlenck from a Portland, OR, radio broadcast of *Raise the Self by the Self: A Cantata on the Bhagavad Gita*. I soon came to appreciate Schlenck as a phenomenon: whereas Western composers have incorporated elements of Indian music and/or taken inspiration from India’s sacred texts, Schlenck has created a unique repertoire focusing on texts, melodies, and persons central to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition. So after hearing the radio broadcast, I determined to survey Schlenck’s intriguing musical compositions and to share my enthusiasm with those unfamiliar with his works.

*Hymn to Holy Mother* remains, for me, the perfect introduction to Schlenck’s sacred compositions. Its inspired quality allows the composition to be heard tirelessly again and again. As a testimony to this, I cite



my own response as a listener whose preferences include contemporary Western art music, world music, and experimental jazz—in short, music of a complex nature. After hearing *Hymn to Holy Mother* numerous times—it served as a constant companion during a year of transition—I found it capable of providing inspiration, comfort, peace, and fresh musical interest on each hearing.

From a strictly musical point of view, this tireless quality results from a varied musical language that is both sophisticated yet accessible. Schlenck's settings are tonal, relying on major, minor, and modal scales. For example, the suite begins with *Supreme Mother* ("Holy Mother, Divine Mother, You remove our tears and grant us grace"), set in the major mode but subtly colored by the lydian mode (a major scale with raised fourth scale degree). Flute and harp add to the serenity of this movement. By contrast, the next movement, *The Ship* ("Mother, kindly hallow this day, Your children, who are in need of your guiding hand, Have fallen into delusion"), pleads in the phrygian mode. The next movement, *The Nectar* ("Only drink the immortal nectar of her loving heart"), in the major mode, is joyous and delightfully syncopated. Throughout the suite, these and other modes associated with medieval church and folk musics, along with subtle shifts between major and minor modes, gapped scales and other coloristic elements, contribute to an engaging tonal language.

Schlenck creates a unique setting for each verse, utilizing textures and styles associated with earlier Western art and church musics. In *Purity* we hear the choir chant "Pure life" in a style reminiscent both of Gregorian plainsong and medieval polyphony, but with Schlenck's individual imprint. Listening to the finger cymbal accompaniment, I am transported hundreds of years back in time, imagining street songs accompanied by simple percussion. (You won't want to miss the delightful ending of this setting!) Echoes of the Renaissance period can be heard in *Ramakrishna* ("With your heart absorbed in Ramakrishna, You are completely colored in his qualities,"), especially when the solo tenor sings to harp accompaniment. Other movements (e.g. *Compassion*) that feature a denser choral texture, employ bold—but accessible—harmonizations.

Personal reflection and an intimate, meditative quality are fostered by the small ensemble scoring (flute, harp, organ, tambura and finger cymbals). Even in the bolder movements, the suite is never bombastic. The text is beautifully rendered in English by Schlenck with important contributions by Eric Johns (the librettist for Aaron Copeland's only opera, *The Tender Land*) . I especially appreciate the clarity of the set-

ting—despite the contrapuntal texture—so we needn't rely upon liner notes to understand it. Thus, we can easily meditate on the meaning of the text as we imbibe the instrumental component. With its clearly discernable text, *Hymn to Holy Mother* can be appreciated both as uplifting "background" music while we attend to other tasks, or as a deeply inspiring composition worthy of our full attention.

This CD is a wonderful acquisition for anyone who appreciates the message of Vedanta. For devotees of Holy Mother, it is a gem that could only inspire greater devotion. For the followers of the jnani path, I offer my own experience: you may find that *Hymn to Holy Mother* delivers a transmission of unanticipated bhakti as it tenderly draws you to contemplate the divinity of Sri Sarada Devi.

[You can order CDs from Vedantic Arts Recordings (VAR) at [vedantawest.org](http://vedantawest.org), [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) or [cdbaby.net](http://cdbaby.net). Orders to VAR can also be placed by mail; write to Vedanta West Communications, PO Box 237041, New York, NY 10023.]

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## The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future

By Riane Eisler

**Harper & Row Paperback, 260 pgs. \$18.95 (list) 1987**

Pravrajika Vidyaprana (Hollywood Convent, VSSC)

On the front cover Ashley Montagu, noted anthropologist says, "The most important book since Darwin's *Origin of Species*."

**B**uilding on the archeological work of Maria Gimbutas and other scholars of the mid 20th century, cultural historian Riane Eisler reconstructs the path taken by the human race from paleolithic times to the present. Those were times when the two genders lived and worked cooperatively (The Chalice) to produce the first neolithic civilizations. Indeed, she contends that every technology to sustain human life originated during that time: agriculture, housing, roads, aqueducts, sewer systems, pottery and especially religion.

If the "savages" who existed prior to our "earliest" civilizations were peaceable, it is reasoned they would naturally, lacking the proper motivation, have produced little of any lasting value... [But] one of the best-kept historical secrets is that practically all the material and social technologies fundamental to civilization were developed before the imposition of a dominator society. (Pg. 66)

She concentrates on the Minoan civilization of Crete as the last bas-

tion in the west of a civilization based on partnership of the sexes. This society operated on the basis of equality, peacefulness and cooperation with the earth. Using the Minoans as a model, it became easier to reconstruct how societies elsewhere functioned before the advent of successive wars (The Blade) and its patriarchal aftermath.

Of especial interest to me was the section on the origin of Christianity. I'm sure that most of us have wondered why the teachings of Jesus are so at odds with what we see in the behavior of the various churches. This contradiction has always been officially avoided by universities, churches, and governments. But Ms. Eisler takes it on in a way that can hardly be disputed.

She contends that Jesus' message of "love thy neighbor" and the numerous stories of his association with women and the lower classes were a call to return to the predominant values of an earlier time. His values were indeed taken up by the populace. But when Christianity became the *official* religion of the Roman Empire, the church was immediately overlaid by the prevailing patriarchal agenda, which is designed to permanently subjugate half of the human race. Domination, ranking and hierarchy, and tyranny over the earth's resources typify this type of social organization.

In the last chapter she looks forward to an affiliative style of transitional society that will prepare us for a return to the earlier values of partnership with one another and with the earth that sustains us.

This book is well worth a read. Indeed, I wish I had found it much earlier.

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## Gathering reminiscences of Swami Asehanandaji

Dear Swamis, Monastics of the Ramakrishna Order, Disciples,  
Devotees, and Associates of Swami Asehanandaji,

I'm writing to ask your participation in a project to gather reminiscences about Swami Asehanandaji, the last living disciple of Sri Sarada Devi. The purpose of this project is to preserve the memories, experiences, observations, teachings, stories, etc. of those who were blessed to know him so that others may benefit in the years to come. The intent is preservation with the possibility of publication in some form. Each individual's reminiscence will be released only with his/her permission.

This opportunity to serve also has personal significance as I'd like to learn more about Swami Asehanandaji. Initiated in my youth during

the turbulent 1970s, I spent much of the ensuing years either in foreign countries or engaged in various pursuits. Finally it became clear that I should redirect my focus, and this project suggested itself. Our family recently moved to Portland to be connected with the Vedanta Center.

Because Swami Aseshanandaji always admonished me to complete my higher educational degrees, I received preparation for this current project. Working as an ethnomusicologist, I interviewed many musicians and composers in Britain, the US, and Middle East for research and publication projects.

The way to contribute to the project is quite simple. Your reminiscences could be written or, if preferred, spoken into a tape cassette, which can be conveniently turned on when something comes to mind. Once the cassette is mailed to me, I will then transcribe it. I will return a written copy of your reminiscences should you wish to review or revise anything. Your original ideas will be far better than my suggestions, but if you need some ideas to get started, you might look at the questionnaire below.

If you prefer a live interview I'd be happy to meet with you if possible. Or we could do a phone interview with the microphone on my end capturing our discussion.

Anonymous contributions are also welcome. You may submit materials to me and only I will know the source. It will be published anonymously. Alternately, you may mail something to me anonymously, but I suggest you use a friend's address so I can acknowledge receipt.

If you have videos, newspaper articles, or photos please feel free to send them to me by ordinary mail or scanned email. Anything sent by ordinary mail will be copied and returned promptly. I may also be able to make you a CD or DVD of anything submitted to preserve them for your own collection.

The project has been launched with the first interview of Swami's oldest disciple in Portland. As of October 2007, twenty reminiscences have been collected, one third from monks and nuns. I'm hoping to wrap up the project in the spring of 2008 and would appreciate knowing whether I should await your contribution.

Whether you have known Swami Aseshanandaji for decades or just a short time, the information you provide will help us gain a fuller picture of his role and mission within the Ramakrishna Order.

Your questions, comments, and suggestions are welcomed. Please feel free to forward this to anyone who could contribute. Thank you so much!

Sincerely,  
***Esther Warkov***

**Please write, phone or send an email to:**

**Esther Warkov, Ph.D**

**3626 NE 16<sup>th</sup> Ave.**

**Portland, Oregon 97212**

**971-255-0388**

**esther\_warkov@comcast.net**

### **Swami Aseshananda Questionnaire**

1. How did you first meet Swami Aseshananda? Was there anything memorable about the occasion or your first impression?
  
2. How did your relationship with Swami Aseshananda evolve?
  
3. How did Swami Aseshananda mold and impact your life?
  
4. Over time, did you come to certain conclusions about Swami Aseshananda?
  
5. What were some of the essential teachings of Swami Aseshananda?
  
6. What were some of his memorable sayings?
  
7. Are there any personal stories you'd care to share?
  
8. How would you characterize Swami's pujas, worships, lectures, etc?



## **A NOTE TO OUR READERS**

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### **FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION**

We believe AV is a magazine with considerable promise; yet, in these early years, it still needs help. We send complimentary copies to more than 50 individuals and Vedanta centers (official and unofficial) in this country and elsewhere. Heads of Center, and some Center libraries, always receive a copy.

We do not want to impose the cost of these unpaid subscriptions on our regular subscribers, which would result in an unnecessarily high subscription price. Therefore, we need donations, to subsidize the free copies. We invite you to join us in this enterprise by sending a little extra — whatever you can afford — to cover printing and mailing costs. In time, we expect to build our circulation to the point where AV can handle these added costs. Until then, please help as you are able.

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