

# american vedantist

Volume 15 No. 1 ■ Spring 2009



*A flower for each one who  
comes to Your open door ...*

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

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**Vivekananda**, a painting by Swami Tadatmananda (original is in color)

Tadatmananda was a beloved monastic member of the Vedanta Society of Southern California — he lived at the Society's Trabuco Monastery for some 45 years. He never gave a talk or a class, yet his long spiritual practice and his vision live on through his art. The Society is pleased to announce a project that will archive and make available fine art reproductions of Swami Tadatmananda's paintings and drawings. — **More about this on page 15.**

## **From Shafts of Light: Selected Teachings of Swami Ashokananda for Spiritual Practice**

Sister Gargi and Shelley Brown, Editors

Swami Ashokananda led the Vedanta Society of Northern California for more than 30 years, leaving behind a truly astonishing body of spiritual instruction. Using the prisms of their own internal quests, Marie Louise Burke (Sister Gargi) and Shelley Brown looked through notes taken over decades by the Swami's disciples for particularly illuminating precepts and aphorisms.

*From their Introduction:* "Words that Swami Ashokananda spoke in his lectures and classes—soul-stirring, numinous insights from the wellspring of his own experience—were noted down by his close disciples for their own spiritual practice: 'Meditation is not simply thinking about God. It is an actual perception of the presence of God,' and 'Meditation is not imagination; it is the anticipation of the Real.' There are no set formulas on how... to achieve God-vision ('It just happens,' he said)—but Swami Ashokananda's instructions point the way."

Here are a few short lessons on the spiritual practice of seeing the Divine within other people:

"In criticizing a person you are shutting off the most wonderful truth: that person is God."

"Forget that anyone is bad, that anyone is inferior. You have to go beyond the person's behavior. The real person is God, peeping through the eyes. This is the highest ideal."

"Never think another person to be weak or imperfect. Behind his form lies the ever effulgent Being, the Strength of all strength, the Wisdom of all wisdom."

"Imagine God in the heart of all beings."

"Every single being that exists is an inexhaustible mine of beauty and love."

"Unless we see divinity in every being, we will never see unity in the world. Intelligence is that which sees unity among apparently separate things."

"You can have a true democratic spirit if you can really persuade yourself that everyone is divine."

"Behind what appears to you as a dull face, a bright face, or a vicious face is God alone. All these various pictures we see are but misreadings of the one truth, just tricks of the mind. Actually, everything is perfect."

"Everything brings the message of God; from everywhere comes the touch of my Beloved."

# American Vedantist

## *A reflection as we begin our 15<sup>th</sup> year*

**John Schlenck**

**H**istorically, Hinduism has been less successful than other religions in spreading beyond its geographical base. It is not by nature a missionary religion and, like Judaism, has mostly been the religion of a particular people. Where it has appeared outside India, it has been spread mostly by Indians who took their culture with them as they settled abroad.

Swami Vivekananda made a break from this tradition. He taught Vedanta, a form of Hinduism that could be universally understood and practiced, independent of any particular culture. Vivekananda felt he had a mission to the West; his mission was not to transplant Indian civilization and culture to foreign soil but to share with the world spiritual riches that, while they arose in India, had universal resonance and applicability. He also believed it was necessary to speak to people in their own language, in ways they could understand, and he hoped that Americans themselves would communicate Vedanta in America.

*American Vedantist* (AV) was started in 1995 to further Vivekananda's vision of Vedanta for the West. AV's purpose was to continue

the spread of Vedantic idealism through Western, and particularly American, language. The magazine grew out of *Vedanta Free Press*, begun in 1992, a more informal journal that gave voice to concerns about the future of Vedanta in the West. By 1995, the magazine's new and continuing editors agreed that a more positive tone was desirable. The new leadership believed it would be best to work toward creating fresh modes of expression that could speak to present-day Americans in their own cultural context. In addition, a need was felt to bring about a greater sense of community among Vedantists in the West, through sharing ideas, forms of artistic expression and plans of action. What could we do that was not already being done?

### **Vivekananda knew the strengths of both East and West**

Perhaps because Vivekananda was exposed to Western ideas and values as he grew up in Calcutta—then the capital of British India and the main channel through which Western ideas were flowing into India—he was able to appreciate the strengths of both Indian and Western culture. He visualized a future in which each would learn from the other and so develop a richer, more balanced human family. When he came to America, he was not only open to learning

what America could contribute to that future, but was able to relate to Americans as individuals and to form close friendships based on mutual respect.

This is important for Americans, nurtured as they are on an egalitarian ethic in which respect is to be earned through character and achievement and not by social status. An effective teacher must first be a friend. This idea is also found in India: Krishna was a friend first, both in his childhood relationships and as the adult friend of Arjuna. Reverence for him grew naturally as his spiritual stature was revealed. Similarly with Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. Their love for their disciples erased social "distance," and made the disciples feel very close to them and accepted by them. This stands in contrast to the social stratification common in India.

#### **Devotees are serving the legacy Vivekananda left us**

One feature of Vedanta in America during the last three decades has been the development of devotee organizations such as SRV (Sarada-Ramakrishna-Vivekananda) Association, the Vivekananda Foundation, ASTI (American Service to India), the Ramakrishna Foundation, and Mother's Trust. These organizations are not intended to substitute for or compete with the work of the Vedanta Societies but rather to complement them, offering services and developing programs outside the scope of the Vedanta Societies. *American Vedantist* and its parent

organization, Vedanta West Communications, see themselves as part of this movement.

This phenomenon parallels the development of the many lay organizations and ashrams in India that are devoted to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideals. The Vivekananda Kendra in southern India is a good example. Originally formed to build the magnificent Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari (completed in 1970), it has grown into an extensive service organization. Swami Ranganathananda, late revered President of the Ramakrishna Order, was once asked why the construction of the Memorial was not under the management of the Order. "Swami Vivekananda is nobody's property," he replied. Anyone inspired by Swami Vivekananda can take up work in tribute to him and his ideals.

#### **What have we achieved in fourteen years?**

Looking back over the last fourteen years, we may ask how *American Vedantist* has contributed to the Vedanta movement in the West. From the beginning, AV has sought to promote original writing and thinking. Not only does this further the development of a Western language for Vedanta; it also encourages Vedantists to think consciously about their own convictions and practices. Too often our spiritual ideas and practices become mechanical. We can fall into a mood that one senior swami calls

“reverential insensibility.” Many years ago my teacher, Swami Pavitrnananda, requested me to write an article on “Music and Religion,” for publication in Prabuddha Bharata (an English language journal of the Ramakrishna Order). Because I am a professional musician, his assignment forced me to organize my thoughts on the subject and to figure out how I was going to use music in my spiritual life.

AV has published a wide range of articles, essays, poems, and editorials that relate Vedanta to contemporary American life, study the relationship of Vedanta to other religions, and discuss how to intensify our own spiritual lives. It has also encouraged interactive discussion through interviews and dialog. It has offered memorial articles on monks and lay devotees who have made significant contributions to Vedanta in the West, reports of new Vedanta work in the West, inspiring accounts of service, studies of great lives, and reviews of books and other media.

**An invitation to make  
American Vedantist your own**

We hope our readers and friends will continue to contribute to our efforts. You can help us create an effective language for communicating Vedanta in the West, and expand and deepen a sense of community among Vedantists.

**Zen Meditation  
on a Running River**

First I sat for an hour,  
and watched the flowing water;  
then I sat for an hour,  
and listened to its music:  
finally, I climbed in,  
indistinguishable from  
the boulders,  
and let it rock me.

**Today the Geese  
Are Walking**

Today the geese  
are walking  
on the ice,  
tiptoeing across,  
being pulled over,  
to a half-frozen expanse  
of open water.

One by one  
their upright images,  
their uptight postures  
(reflected back in the lake’s  
sun-dashed mirror)  
break through,  
and relax.

—Judith, Hermit of Sarada



## VIVEKANANDA AND THE MEANING OF SALVATION

### Swami Aseshananda

**T**here are two kinds of greatness—one influences people as long as the person lives in the body, and the other remains firm and continues to exert its power even after the death of this mortal frame. Leaders of spiritual thought belong to the second category. Like roses they fall to the ground and their petals are scattered. But the gentle spring breeze carries the sweet fragrance of their message to distant lands. Swami Vivekananda is one of these leaders whose thoughts are traveling far and wide, even though he is gone from our midst. His spiritual power has not diminished; on the contrary, it has gained momentum through the passage of time. The year 1963 marks the birth centenary of that spiritual genius, who lives even today in his work and in the memory of those who had the good fortune to meet him.

Swami Vivekananda came to this country to represent Hinduism at the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. He was a dynamic personality and a forceful speaker. He preached the message of the "Harmony of all Faiths" and "Universal Love." For three years he toured the United

States, lecturing, holding classes, and giving interviews to the representatives of the press and the public. The American psychologist, William James, had discussion with him and called him "the Paragon of Vedantists." The French writer Romain Rolland was deeply impressed by reading his lectures and was prompted to write a book entitled *Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, in which he said about the Swami:

"His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses. I cannot touch these sayings of his, scattered as they are through the pages of books of thirty years distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports must have been produced when in burning words they issued from the lips of the hero."

Swami Vivekananda had great admiration for the youthful, vigorous spirit of America. At the age of thirty-nine he died, on July 4th, 1902, in India, while his friends in America were celebrating the anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence. He dedicated a poem to the American Heritage,

which runs as follows:

Bethink thee how  
the world did wait  
And search for thee,  
through time and clime.  
Some gave up home  
and love of friends  
And went in quest of thee,  
self-banished.  
Through dreary oceans,  
through primeval forests,  
Each step a struggle  
for their life or death.  
Then came the day  
when work bore fruit,  
And worship, love and sacrifice  
Fulfilled, accepted and complete.  
Then thou, propitious,  
rose to shed  
The light of Freedom  
on mankind.

Move on, O Sun, in thy  
resistless path  
Till thy high noon  
o'erspreads the world,  
Till every land reflects thy light,  
Till men and women,  
with uplifted head  
Behold their shackles  
broken, and  
Know, in springing joy,  
their life renewed.

According to Swami Vivekananda, the fairest flower of a civilization is its religion. The backbone of a nation is its spirituality. Death of a nation takes place when its spirituality decays and materialism prevails. To stem the tide of secularism, which breeds lust for power and greed for possession, there is no other force which can challenge it, control it, and

overpower it, besides the force released by religion. For religion is the greatest motive power to harness the scattered forces of a civilization and give it a direction and an aim. That aim is beautifully expressed by a Hindu poet.

May good betide all  
May happiness come to all  
May all see the face of Truth  
And be fortified by the armour  
Of faith and understanding.

But what is religion? Religion is a way of life. There are many paths but they all lead to the same goal. Unity in diversity is the plan of the universe. It is not possible to merge all religions and fuse them into one and create a super-religion. I believe that will go against the law of nature and stifle growth, kill initiative, and strike a severe blow at freedom. Only in the climate of freedom, development takes place—may it be in secular matters or in spiritual undertakings. Each religion must keep its individuality and play a distinctive role as each instrument of an orchestra keeps its tone and quality in order to produce an overall melody to refresh the ears and sweeten the heart. What is needed is not fusion, but appreciation, respect, and mutual understanding. That was the dream of Swami Vivekananda who spoke in the idiom of the American people and captured their imagination. He says in his lecture on Universal Religion delivered in the Universalist Church, Pasadena, California, on

January 28th, 1900:

I accept all religions that were in the past and worship with them all. I worship God with every one of them in whatever form they worship Him. . . .

Not only shall I do all these but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future.

Is God's book finished or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world.

Revelation is the common denominator of all religions. But according to the Hindus, revelation is not belief in a historic event but an awareness of truth or union with the Eternal, whatever you may call it, in a higher state of consciousness. We are to transcend the intellectual plane and arrive at the spiritual plane to fathom the deep mysteries of life and have conclusive evidence of the Reality, which is at the back of the universe and which is also the true and immortal Self of man. "That art Thou."

To attain this unity is to attain salvation, which is spiritual rebirth. We are to gain it here and now by pricking the bubble of spurious individuality, which is attached to the world of senses and which has made the soul a prisoner. It is the ego that separates us from the string of life. Through contemplation of God and service of our fellow human beings, we will be able

to expand our consciousness and have the power to lose ourselves in order to find ourselves. This is expressed in the Gita as *Brahma-Nirvana* or *Jivanmukti*—freedom while being alive.

Who burns with the bliss  
And suffers the sorrows  
Of every creature  
Within his own heart  
Making his own  
Each bliss and each sorrow  
Him I hold highest of all men  
That are good and wise.

An enlightened man does not live in an ivory tower, indifferent to cares of men. He is in the world but not of the world. He is extremely sensitive to human suffering and woes of mankind. He walks in all the thoroughfares of the world in order to bring solace and comfort to heavy-laden souls.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda—"He works only to do good. His lips speak benediction to all. His hands do only good works. His mind can only think of good thoughts. His presence is a blessing wherever he goes. He is himself a blessing. Such a man will by his very presence change the most wicked persons into saints. Even if he does not speak, his very presence will be a blessing to mankind."

In the Vedas, the most authoritative scripture of the Hindus, the state of enlightenment is called the fourth state of consciousness or *Turiya*. The three states of ordinary

consciousness are waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. The fourth state of awareness is the timeless realization in which one experiences an “eternal now” and all distinctions of the knower and the known, the subject and the object, are obliterated. By transcending the limitations of the senses and reason, man probes into the heart of the Reality, which is Sat-Chit-Ananda, pure existence, infinite knowledge, and everlasting bliss. The great monistic philosopher of India, Shankara, says:

There is a continuous consciousness of the unity of soul and Brahman, the Godhead. There is no longer any identification of the soul with its various coverings. All sense of duality is lost. There is pure unified consciousness. Even though his mind is dissolved in the bliss of Brahman, he is fully awake, free from the ignorance of waking life. He is fully conscious, but free from any craving.

Such a state was described by St. Paul when he said, “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face.” For that, complete renewal of the mind is necessary. Without solid foundation on ethical life, none can reach it. The vision of the Supreme is granted only to those who are pure-hearted. This is the message of the Gita, the crest-jewel of the Vedas.

All consumed  
Are their imperfections,  
Doubts are dispelled,

Their senses mastered,  
Their every action  
Is wed to the welfare  
Of fellow creatures:  
Such are the seers  
Who enter Brahman  
And know Salvation.

Now with regard to the question how the meaning of church is related to salvation, our answer is: The church is a place of worship, a sanctuary for prayer. Its existence is necessary so that fellowship of hearts and kindredness of feelings may be promoted among the members of the church organization. The purpose of church is to foster reverence and deepen spiritual consciousness. The President of the monastic order to which I belong emphasized that point to all the lay and monastic members of our movement. Swami Brahmananda, whom Swami Vivekananda chose to be the leader of our organization, once said: “The success of a religious body depends not on its external achievements, the size of its membership, its efficient organization, its buildings, or its humanitarian activities—but upon the inner life of each of its members and the measure of their progress toward love and knowledge of God.” What is that *inner life* that the Swami speaks of? The inner life is called yoga (union with God) in Hinduism. The fire of inner life can be kindled by four methods of spiritual discipline. They are, unselfish activity, passionate love and yearning for God, relentless discrimina-

tion between the eternal and the evanescent, and lastly, silencing the waves of the restless mind through self-control and meditation. Through one or a combination of all these methods one develops the power of concentration. In deepest concentration we lose the sense of time and become one with the Reality. This has been beautifully put in the Mundaka Upanishad: "Affix to the Upanishad the bow incomparable, the sharp arrow of devotional worship; then with mind absorbed and heart melted in love, draw the arrow and hit the mark, the Imperishable Brahman. Om is the bow, the arrow is the individual being and Brahman is the target. With a tranquil heart, take aim. Lose thyself in Him, even as the arrow is lost in the target."

There is nothing mysterious in yoga. It is simply tranquillity of mind which is evoked, not by any artificial method or drug, but by intense concentration. By developing the power of attention an artist becomes one with his art, a musician one with his song, and a lover of God one with his Beloved. Jesus says, "knock and the door shall be opened unto you." There is a story in Sufi literature in which the Persian mystic describes the spiritual knock at the door of the Supreme Spirit in the following way.

"There came one and knocked at the door of the Beloved, and a voice answered, 'Who is there?' The lover replied, it is I.' 'Go hence,' replied the voice. "There is no room

within for thee and me.' The lover went away disappointed and after spending some time in penance and austerity returned again and knocked for a second time. Again the voice asked (Who is there?') The lover answered, it is I.' 'Go hence, there is no room within for thee and me.' This time the lover was mortified in his heart. He went into the wilderness, wept bitterly, and spent a long time in constant prayer with humble spirit and unselfish devotion. When his ego-sense was completely vanquished, he repeated the knock for the third time and again the voice demanded, 'Who is there?') The lover answered, 'It is thou.' 'Come in,' said the voice 'For I am within.'

The same thought was expressed by Jesus when he said two thousand years ago to his ardent disciples, who wanted to follow him with humility and lowliness of spirit, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within."

The world within is to be gained by unceasing struggle and tremendous perseverance. There is no chance or accident in spiritual life. Everything that we wish to attain must be got by hard labor. There is no place for self-complacency. The worst enemy of man is sloth. To be overcome by sloth is to court stagnation and death. The Bhagavad-Gita urges every man to rise to his highest stature and do his best.

Let a man be lifted up by his

own self; let him not lower himself, for he himself is his friend and he himself is his enemy. To him who has conquered himself by himself, his own self is his friend, but to him who has not conquered himself, his own self is hostile, like an external enemy.

The world is for the strong and the brave. Success in spiritual life depends upon perpetual vigilance and undaunted effort. A holy man gave as his parting advice to me, "Don't depend upon anybody. Depend upon yourself, and bend all your efforts toward realizing the goal." This reminded me of the farewell message of Buddha to his disciples before the Compassionate One made his final exit from this world.

"Decay is inherent in all compounded things. Work out your salvation with diligence. Therefore, Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves, be a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to Truth as a lamp, hold fast to Truth as a refuge. Look not for a refuge in anyone besides yourselves. And those, Ananda, who either now or after I am dead shall be a lamp unto themselves, shall betake themselves to no external refuge, but holding fast to Truth as their lamp, holding fast to Truth as their refuge, shall not look for refuge to anyone besides themselves—it is they who shall reach the very topmost height. But they must be anxious to learn."

We also must be anxious to learn. It is for this reason we have come here to play our part in the

drama of life. In the words of Ramakrishna—"Friend, as long as I live, I live to learn."

A person born in a dualistic tradition will contend and say, "I am anxious to learn, but in the process of learning and in its final achievement what do I gain? If I finally merge in the Godhead, my individuality is completely lost and I become nothing. What good is such a salvation, in which the soul is reduced to a nonentity and the Godhead swallows up everything?"

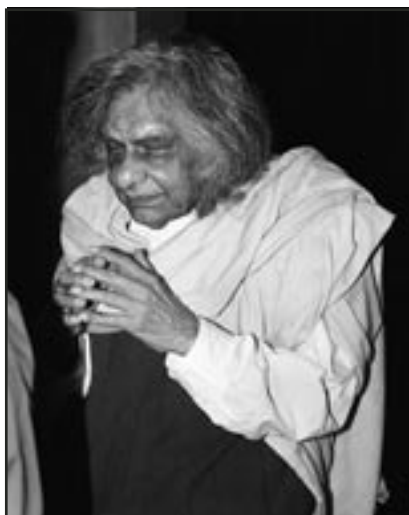
Real individuality is never lost. What a man loses is his false individuality, which is temporal, finite, and adventitious. The real individuality of man is discovered when he identifies himself with the Infinite Being—the ground of existence and ocean of bliss. Rightly does the Upanishad say, "How can the knowledge of the knower be obliterated since the knower is eternal and infinite."

This question of losing one's individuality in the final attainment of the goal was put to Swami Vivekananda, and his answer was very apt. The renowned French songstress, Madame Calvé, became interested in Vedanta and visited Swamiji several times. On one of her visits she frankly confessed that she was unable to accept the Vedantic idea of *mukti*, or freedom, as complete cessation of all desires pertaining to the individual self. She said, "Swami, I cling to my individuality—unimportant though it may be. I don't want to be absorbed into an eternal unity."




To this the Swami answered, "One day a drop of water fell into the vast ocean. Finding itself there, it began to weep and complain, just as you are doing. The giant ocean laughed at the drop of water. 'Why do you weep?' it asked. 'I don't understand. When you join me, you join all your brothers and sisters, the other drops of water of which I am made. You become the ocean itself. If you wish to leave me, you have only to rise up on a sunbeam into the clouds. From there you can descend again, a little drop of water, a blessing and a benediction to the thirsty earth.'"

Swami Vivekananda is such a blessing to hundreds that have met him, such a benediction to thousands that have read about him and slaked their thirst with his teachings, which have been a fount of joy and a continuous inspiration!



Swami Aseshananda passed away October 16, 1996. He is much beloved and revered by many devotees and students in America and senior Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order in America and India. He came to Portland in 1955 and never returned to India.


Sarada Ma Publishing

Sarada Ma Publishing is a department of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. We recently added a sister website called Sarada Press.

This site is dedicated to the printing and distribution of work created by our extended Vedanta family.

Our On-Demand Printing system allows short runs of an author's work. Result: Your investment is low, and there's no extra stock to store. We can even ship orders for you.

Anyone who wishes to be published, please visit us at [www.saradamapress.org](http://www.saradamapress.org) and see what we have to offer.



**Sri Ramakrishna**, a painting by Swami Tadatmananda (original is in color)

The Vedanta Society of Southern California has about 60 of Tadatmananda's paintings; 30 are in private hands (aside from his family); and 22 are located in Vedanta centers in America, Europe and India. We are starting with the Society's paintings, and hope all those who own one of his works also will participate.



# Swami Tadatmananda Art Project

**Ralph Stuart (Dipak)**

**S**wami Tadatmananda was a beloved monastic member of the Vedanta Society of Southern California (Society) — he lived at the Trabuco Monastery for some 45 years. Though he never gave a talk or a class, his long spiritual practice and his vision live on through his art. The Society is pleased to announce a project to archive and make available fine art reproductions of Swami Tadatmananda's paintings and drawings.

The swami did not sign his paintings, but before he died he listed, to the best of his knowledge, where and with whom each of his works was located. As one painting was recently destroyed in a fire, and we are having difficulty tracking down some of his other works, we feel a great sense of urgency about this aspect of the project.

The first step, approved by the Society's board in March, is to have Tadatmananda's paintings digitally scanned at museum-quality high resolution. The scanning will be done at ARTdeSoul, a high-end printing and art reproduction facility in Costa Mesa, California. They use a Cruse scanner, the same type used by the Getty Museum.

Barbara Kaufman, a devotee, and her partner are giving our

project a discounted price for the scanning. Of course, any of the swami's paintings that can't easily be sent to Southern California will need to be scanned locally. The resulting digital files will be stored and preserved at Vedanta Archives and a copy will be kept on file with Barbara Kaufman at ARTdeSoul.

The Society has about 60 of Tadatmananda's paintings; 30 are in private hands (aside from his family); and 22 are located in Vedanta centers in America, Europe and India. We are beginning incrementally, with the Society's paintings, and encourage all those fortunate enough to own one of his works to participate as well.

As the digital files become available, prints on canvas (*giclee*) and photographic art paper will be made available. Because Barbara will print for us at a reduced price, the Society can recoup enough through orders to continue the scanning process.

However, if a tax-deductible donation (currently \$200) is received to expedite the scanning of a particular painting, a print on canvas or paper will be available to the donor "at cost." This sponsorship will also let others buy a reproduction of that painting, at our regular price. (Prices will vary, based on the size of the painting and whether the print is on canvas or paper.) The Society will have exclusive rights to the digital file and control of the reproduction process.

It is a joyous prospect that devotees worldwide will be able to share the privilege of having these inspiring spiritual paintings in their homes. Swami Tadatmananda would be pleased as well—he began cooperating with efforts in this vein some fifteen years ago. This project will further that effort in memory of our beloved Swami Tadatmananda.

This is a big undertaking and volunteer help is badly needed. We hope that some of you will take charge of such tasks as:

- Transportation of paintings
- Maintaining notebooks and other records
- Creating and updating website displays
- Coordinating with distant scanning facilities
- Tracking down painting owners who are no longer in touch with the Society, and
- Making art displays for our upcoming 4th of July Celebration at Trabuco (Vivekananda Day), San Diego's Krishna Puja, and the Durga Puja at Santa Barbara.

To volunteer, or to get more information, please call Barbara Kaufman at 949-500-5100 or e-mail her at [barbara@barbarakaufman.com](mailto:barbara@barbarakaufman.com). You can also contact me (Ralph Stuart) at 505-231-9715. Email [tadatproject@me.com](mailto:tadatproject@me.com).



Sarada Devi — Holy Mother

Devotees worldwide will be able to share the privilege of having these inspiring spiritual paintings in their homes.

Brahmananda — Raja Maharaj



# EGO

## Thoughts on the Ego

**William Page**

**T**he ego has a very bad reputation in Indian philosophy. Together with its henchman desire, it is generally held responsible for most of the problems we experience in spiritual life.

Why is the ego considered such a villain? Because it's a divider. It looks at its own mind-body complex and sees a single entity, which it calls "me." It looks out at the world and sees a multitude of separate entities, which it calls "the others," or "the world." Thus it divides reality into two opposing camps: me versus everybody else, myself versus the world.

Spiritual life tends to have a unifying effect; it moves us toward unity and inclusion. The ego resists this tendency. It says, "All you other guys out there may be okay, but outside this body there is no self of mine, and within this body I alone am the ruler. I will work my butt off to promote the interests of myself and my host organism in a world of potentially hostile competitors. The rest of you can all take a back seat. Out of my way, ye underlings! In the immortal words of Leonardo DiCaprio, "I'm the king of the world!"

When we consider that we are ruled by such a fathead, it's no wonder that spiritual life is so tough.

But the ego is not entirely a bad fellow. The world can be a dangerous place, full of sharks and crocodiles (some of them with human faces) eager to devour us. The ego is a survival mechanism. By asserting itself in a dangerous world, it enables us to survive and flourish. Think of it as a knight defending the castle of our mind-body complex.

It's the ego that tells Arjuna to stand up and fight instead of letting the army of the Kauravas roll over him. It's the ego that gives the cow in Sri Ramakrishna's parable the grit to resist when you pull its tail. It was the ego that gave Swami Vivekananda the courage to "face the brute" when he was being chased by a tribe of big monkeys.

In fact, I recall reading that somebody once complained that Swami Vivekananda had a big ego. Somebody else replied, "Of course he did. The Mother had to give him a big ego in order to get anything done. But his ego was a tool in Mother's hand."

So the ego is not only essential for survival in worldly life; it often pushes us to do good works that benefit others. It deserves credit for that. The problem is that, in many respects, spiritual life is opposed to worldly life. In spiritual life, the ego becomes an obstacle.

To succeed in worldly life, you have to assert yourself. When you're interviewing for a job, for instance, you'll fail if you're modest and self-effacing. You have to "sell yourself"—to put your good qualities out front and speak up for them.

This goes against the grain in most people who are trying to lead a spiritual life. They know that to succeed in spiritual life, you have to be humble. In fact, as a general rule, spiritual life turns everything upside down. The qualities that make for success in the world often lead to failure in spiritual life, and the qualities that lead to success in spiritual life often make for failure in the world.

The world forces us to be assertive, but God loves humility. You'll notice that self-help gurus sometimes offer courses in assertiveness training; nobody offers courses in humility training. But in spiritual life, that's exactly what we need. Bhakti yoga, for instance, regards self-surrender as the highest virtue, and self-surrender is the ultimate expression of humility. Of all the great religious teachers, Jesus put it best: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of

Heaven... Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Why does God love humility? Because only humility allows him to enter and rule. There's no room in the body for two rulers. Either your ego is going to rule the body, or God is. How can God fill you if you're full of yourself? Empty yourself of your self: then alone God can fill you. To use Christian terminology, only when God reigns within you does the kingdom of God come to your heart. And that can't happen until God fills you.

When God fills you, it's possible for the ego to remain, but only in a submissive, subordinate state. When the ego steps down from its throne in you and invites God to step up and rule, then God can begin to manifest himself within you. So long as the ego remains submissive, everything will be fine. But as soon as it reasserts itself, God retires from the scene. He doesn't abandon you completely, but reverts to a dormant state.

Because of this, some religious teachers try to smash and crush the ego, to humiliate and destroy it. But Sri Ramakrishna was wiser than that, and more practical. The ego is like a cockroach. No matter how hard you smash it, even when it's splattered all over the floor, it will slowly pull itself together and stagger off.

Now, you can kill a cockroach if you really work at it, but Sri Ramakrishna knew that it's impos-

sible to kill the ego. It disappears only in the deepest samadhi. Even then it's not dead. When samadhi is finished, the ego comes staggering back—although, like the cockroach, in greatly weakened form. Wiping it out completely, even if that were possible, would be a bad idea. After all, it's a survival mechanism.

Sri Ramakrishna taught us to tame the ego and keep it around as a servant. So long as it keeps to its assigned role as the “servant ego,” it won't give us any trouble. But the minute it tries to stage a rebellion and become the “master ego,” we have to give it a good whack on the head and put it back in its place.

The “servant ego” is like a well-trained guard dog. It knows how to growl and bare its fangs and protect us from our foes. It can be aggressive if it wants to. But once it's been thoroughly trained, it will obey our commands and will usually be found sleeping at our feet.

If we can train the ego and get it to serve us in the spiritual quest, it can actually help us. But we have to turn it from self-centeredness to God-centeredness, and re-channel its energies from self-assertion and self-aggrandizement to love for God. After all, if we realize God, the ego does too, because the ego is part of our minds.

We come to the garden to eat mangoes. Who is it that enjoys eating the mangoes? The entire mind, including the ego. But it is an ego tamed and transformed, a willing tool in Mother's hand.

### **To The Infinite**

O my Own,  
Thou art so gently near me  
As is a babe to its mother's eyes.  
Thou art around me  
Cooing where'er my cradles are.  
Rockest Thou contentedly  
In Self-joy,  
Uncontained.  
The evening wind finds Thee  
everywhere  
smiling independently.

### **Truth**

Truth walks alone through  
all the ways of man.  
Touches no fringe,  
neither left nor right.  
Penetrates through  
color of doubt  
And settles the Questor  
On a pinnacle of joy in knowing.

### **Two Powers Pitted**

What holdest thou, O Earth?  
We can not wait so long.  
Shake down the senseless  
smashers of the beautiful.  
Change the course of the river  
of greed  
And flood out the material  
accumulation.  
Bring Thou a marvelous sweep—  
Great storm over all the earth.  
We expect new-born out of the  
waters of the Spirit  
To abide in goodness  
and plant new seed.

—M. G. Corson

## READER'S FORUM

### Question in Winter Edition

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In his book *The Metaphoric Mind*, Robert Samples describes a radio show where an author spoke about his intuitive sense of a larger wholeness. Listeners were asked to call in and share similar experiences.

A woman rang in and talked about a powerful and spontaneous experience of the interconnectedness and unity of all life. She remembered it vividly and felt profoundly changed by it.

Samples said... "The board lit up. It became apparent that such glimpses are commonplace... normal..." — *From My Grandfather's Blessings by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.*

**Q: Have you had such an insight or experience of unity?** Write or email us your story.

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**From Edith Tipple (Nalini):** There are innumerable types of experience of a subtle reality beyond the gross – some fleeting glimpses, some life-altering. Swami Prabhavananda used to say that some people have them and they are signposts that he or she is on the right path, but that not all people have them and they are not necessary; all that is necessary is simply the plodding and unceasing effort to reach the goal. One day early in my acquaintance with the swami, I reported an experience. His response was a snort: "Hmphh. Honeymoon. Honeymoon. Is that all you want?!"

In a lecture in Hollywood on December 7, 1969 titled "Mysticism and Mystic Experience" the swami said: "A mystic can describe some of these experiences – and they are true spiritual experiences and visions – but they are not the supreme truth. If we stop and do not move onward, we miss the ultimate reality.

That often happens: mystics having some visions or experiences think they have seen God, have realized the ultimate, and they do not study anymore. But my Master [Swami Brahmananda] told me this truth: 'Light, more light, more light, more light! Is there any end to it?'"

Again, I remember his advising his disciples not to tell of their experiences because such sharing was apt to lead to pride. Further than that, he advised us to refuse ourselves the comfort of holding onto the memory of an experience, for such attachment would keep us from moving forward. He clarified what he meant by relating that a disciple of Ramakrishna was asked by Swami Vivekananda if he had had any visions or experiences: the disciple answered, "Brother, I don't know anything about your vision and experience, but this much I know: my heart has grown big." [*Mysticism and Mystic Experience, Santa Barbara 3/13/1966*]

Swami Prabhavananda would tell us that we must be constantly vigilant that we do not become attached to a vision or experience in even the subtlest manner, that we must become so free, that an attachment forward becomes so great, that we want to break through all barriers, for that is the only way to become one. His urgent exhortation still rings in my ears: "Never lower the ideal!"

### **Like Home**

You keep being here,  
or I keep being there.  
As time's gone on,  
Death can't keep you  
to your side  
or me to mine.

In the night we slip  
behind the lines where  
past and present mingle,  
and as with two notes  
of one perfume,  
we do not say,  
Ah, rose, ah jasmine,  
No, we say,  
Divine!  
So unlike anything I've  
known before.

So this place we meet —  
not-here, not-now,  
not-there, not-then —  
is new to me,  
and so unlike any place  
I've ever been,  
but past the threshold,  
so like home!  
So more like home  
than home is now.

—Marjorie Kemper

## **ANNOUNCEMENT**

**From —**

Rev. Patricia Jimenez  
*Chaplin*

Hennepin County  
Medical Center (HCMC)  
Minneapolis MN

I am interested in getting quotations, aphorisms, words of comfort for both the dying and those who care for the dying from the Vedantic tradition.

This is for a project I am leading, to provide free reading materials — especially in a Hospice situation. Please email your selected material to **Krishna.seshan@gmail.com** (the email address of a volunteer group that is helping me), or mail it to:

**Krishna Seshan**  
"Tranquility Base"  
1376 Martin Ave  
San Jose CA 95126

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**Readers:** We invite your contributions to this Announcements column.  
— **The Editors**



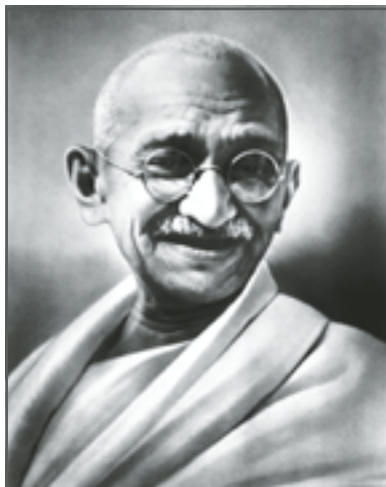
# My Pilgrimage to Gandhi's Motherland

**Uma Majmudar**

*"Uttishthata  
Jagrata Prapya  
Varan Nibodhata"*  
or "Arise, Awake,  
and Stop Not  
Until Thy Goal Is  
Achieved," Swa-  
mi Vivekananda  
exhorted his  
fellow Indians  
at the turn of the  
previous century.  
Swamiji's spirit-  
boosting com-

mand woke me up as if from my long slumber or state of inertia; it spurred me to act upon my long cherished but yet not fulfilled goal of visiting Gandhi's Motherland, not as a tourist, but as a pilgrim.

Since I too am an Indian by birth and heritage, I visit India often for family reunions or just for fun and sightseeing. This, however, was a special trip, which I'd call "My pilgrimage to Gandhi's Motherland." But you may ask: why was I interested in Gandhi? Because, as a child growing up in the pre-independence era, I was fascinated by Gandhi; ever since then, he has been my moral and spiritual hero. As an adult, I revived my interest in Gandhi, studying and researching about him for almost ten years to earn my Ph.D. (1996), which again



prompted me to write my first book: *"Gandhi's Pilgrimage of Faith: From Darkness to Light"* (SUNY, 2005).

Never, however, I had gone on a "pilgrimage" to Mahatma Gandhi's *"Karmabhumi"* (karma: selfless work; *bhumi*:

land). So I desired for the *darshan* of Gandhi's birthplace, his home and hometown; his Sabarmati Ashram (in Ahmedabad) and other ashrams, memorials, and institutes that were founded by or associated with him. I yearned to soak into the purifying environment; to feel the joy, the sadness and the wonder of that unique period in Indian history. Though I knew it could be emotionally overwhelming, I still looked forward to being there, to be standing on those sacred grounds, and feeling like how the hundreds and thousands of my fellow Indians must have felt—a searing pain upon visiting *"Rajghat,"* Gandhi's Memorial, and *"Martyr's Column"* in Delhi, where he was assassinated!

If the desire of your heart is pure and intense, God fulfills it



sooner or later, believed Gandhi. A scholarly opportunity presented itself to me to participate in a “Gandhi-King” seminar in India, organized by Stanford University. This, for me, was a “God-sent” invitation as if, to fulfill both my academic goal and my personal dream of going on a pilgrimage to Gandhi’s Motherland. No wonder I jumped at the opportunity and said, “YES!”

### **The Gandhi-King Connection**

Like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi before him, Martin Luther King, Jr., was also in search of “truth”—not as a metaphysical concept, but as “the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people” (King Autobiography, 1998, 22).

As a young African-American student preparing for a career in the preaching ministry, King entered Crozer Theological Seminary (1948-1951) in Pennsylvania, where he studied many western philosophers and theologians like Marx, Nietzsche, Niebuhr, Rausbusch and others. No one could quench, however, his thirst for truth. He now realized that “Truth is found neither in Marxism nor in traditional capitalism” (*ibid*).

As a doctoral student at Boston University School of Theology

(1951-1955), King continued his search further, studying master theologians like Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman. He was even exposed to the pacifist position of A. J. Muste; though deeply moved, he was not convinced about the practicability of pacifist response.

Just when he was groping his way out of this intellectual morass, King found the light. He heard Dr. Mordecai Johnson, the president of Howard University,



who, after having returned from India, spoke at the Fellowship House in Philadelphia, about the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. So fired up was King by Gandhi’s electrifying message

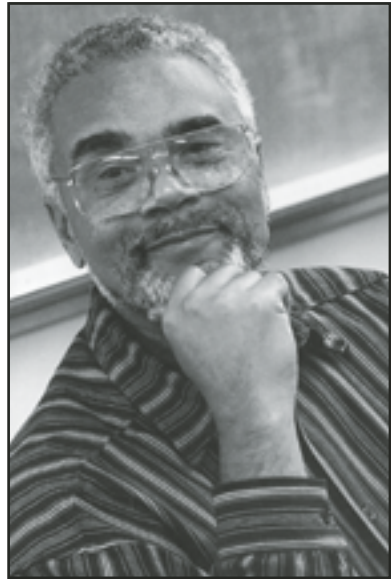
and his profound yet practicable method of nonviolent resistance, that right there and then he purchased a half-dozen books on Gandhi's life and works. Although, before reading Gandhi, King had believed in Jesus' ethics of "love your enemies," he had thought it then to be effective only in individual relationships. But after reading Gandhi and seeing what he achieved and how, King was not only convinced; he was inspired!

As he wrote in his Autobiography, **"Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation"** (1998, 24). In more than any revolutionary method of Marx, Lenin, or even the superman philosophy of Nietzsche, King discovered in the Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence the method for social reform that he had been seeking.

### **Highlights of the Gandhi-King Seminar in New Delhi**

From August 26 through September 15, 2008, I joined the Stanford team of students and faculty to participate in the "Gandhi-King" seminar held first in New Delhi, and, then in Ahmedabad. I felt as excited as a kid in a candy-store—listening to lectures, contributing to the ensuing discussions, and meeting

face to face some of the leading Gandhian and Kingian scholars, professors, activists and dedicated social workers! Major speakers were: Clayborne Carson, professor of history at Stanford University and founding director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute; Vinay Lal, professor of history at UCLA;



Clayborne Carson of Stanford University, founding director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. Photo by Michael Collopy, 2007, courtesy of Stanford

Dilip Simeon, former professor of history at Delhi University and now a human rights activist; Purushottam Agrawal, a former professor of Hindi literature at Jawaharlal Nehru University;

Madhu Kishwar, activist and the editor-founder of *"Manushi"*—a Journal About Women and Society; Ashok Vajpeyi, a poet-cum-dynamic cultural leader; and myself, as an author of the book on Gandhi. Among some of the Gandhi-influenced young people we met, Ravi Gulati—the educator-founder of "Manzil Learning Center," made a lasting impression; more about him later toward the end.

Most of the speakers on Gandhi talked about the multiple facets of this otherwise ordinary man, who rose to extraordinary moral and spiritual heights to be universally revered as the "Mahatma" or "Great Soul!" Yet, we were cautioned by Professor Vinay Lal against pigeonholing Gandhi or labeling him as this or that (e.g. a social reformer or a saint or a politician), because Gandhi was a complex man with many antithetical aspects which remained in him side by side, but which ultimately came together to make him a "whole man!"

As I argue in my book (2005, 188-195), it was Gandhi's pursuit of God as "Truth" and his faith in the inherent Godliness of the human soul, which helped him overcome, master, and transcend his weaknesses into his strengths. Gandhi was primarily a seeker after Truth, who chose politics as a work-field to serve God through human service. An Advaitist at

heart, Gandhi believed Truth to be One, yet many-sided, and as multidimensional as life itself. He therefore wrote in *Harijan*: **"I do not regard my life as divisible into so many watertight compartments... it is one organic whole, and all my activities spring from the same source, namely, my passion for and vindication of truth and nonviolence in every walk of life, be it great or small."** (21 November, 1932).

Most of the lectures on King were delivered by Stanford's Professor Carson—a well-known scholar, author, and chief editor of all the written and spoken material of King and about King. Speaking in his gentle but persuasive style, Dr. Carson talked about the "grass-roots-beginnings" of the so-called "Civil Rights Movement" during the mid-fifties and early sixties. It was then known as the "Freedom Movement," with its students' sit-ins and freedom rides. Perhaps the most revealing, if not also shocking statement that Carson made, was, "Even without King, the freedom movement would have continued and achieved what it did. King, however, provided the vision, the direction!"

In a way, what he said is also comparable to the Indian struggle for freedom, because far before Gandhi entered the political scene, the independence movement had already begun by stal-

wart leaders like Tilak, Gokhale and others. What Gandhi added, however, was not only the vision, but also a new nonviolent approach to fight injustice and oppression by "*satyagraha*"—based on adherence to "truth, nonviolence and self-suffering." Referring to King's remark at the NAACP national convention in 1956, Carson observed that from the early days of the Montgomery bus boycott, King had considered the Indian independence struggle as a model for his own efforts in the South for the Black emancipation, and he also expressed his desire for visiting India to deepen his understanding of Gandhian principles (to which I'd add that both King and Coretta King visited India in 1959). What he said is worth quoting:

**"To other countries I go as a tourist, but to India I come as a pilgrim."** And that's how I too went to India this time as a "pilgrim!"

#### **Gandhi Darshan**

My pilgrimage began with "*Gandhi Darshan*"—a 36-acre complex with extensive lawns and life-size sculptures of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and other independence era leaders; spread across four pavilions, it houses an elaborate

photo exhibit, paintings, and museum of Gandhi, as well as a film-auditorium, Gandhi library and archives, children's corner, and "constructive work" offices.

#### **Rajghat: Mahatma Gandhi Samadhi**

To be reading about a great man's memorial is appetizing, but to be actually visiting is fulfilling! As I entered the sacred grounds of "*Rajghat*"—where Mahatma Gandhi was cremated on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1948, I could not help noticing first how peaceful and beautiful were the surroundings—with its well-manicured, lush green landscape, rows and rows of symmetrical trees, artistic topiary, and fragrant Indian flowers—champa, jasmine, roses and others. I now



Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti includes a Gandhi museum, bookshop, room in which Gandhi lived for 144 days, his last footsteps on January 30, 1948, and the garden in which he was assassinated. Photo courtesy [peace.maripoc.com/x\\_india\\_gandhi.htm](http://peace.maripoc.com/x_india_gandhi.htm)

understood what poet Keats said and why: "Truth Is Beauty, and Beauty, Truth!"

Listening to the music playing softly in background, of Gandhi's favorite hymn—"Vaishnava jana to tene re kahiye je peed parayi jane re" ("Know him to be a true Vaishnava, whose heart melts at the suffering of others"), I kept moving toward the actual site along with flocks and flocks of visitors from all over the world.

Now, arriving at the last resting place of Mahatma Gandhi, I was struck by the simple dignity of this memorial! Here lay the ashes — the mortal remains — of Mahatma Gandhi, underneath a black marble stone platform, with "*Hey Ram*" — his last words — inscribed near it. An Eternal Flame burning in a copper urn, reminds everyone of Gandhi's immortal faith: **"So long as my faith burns bright, even if I stand alone, I shall be alive in the grave and what is more, speaking from it."** As I stood there reflecting — with my head bowed, eyes closed, and hands folded in prayer, a reel played in my mind of that darkest day in the Indian history, when Jawaharlal Nehru—the first prime minister of independent India,



Rajghat is a memorial to Mahatma Gandhi. It is a black marble platform that marks the spot of Gandhi's cremation on January 31, 1948. Photo by Humayunn N A Peerzaada, courtesy of Wikipedia

addressed the grief-stricken nation on the All India Radio:

**"Friends and comrades, the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere... The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light... For that light represented something more than the immediate present, it represented the living truth...the eternal truths"** (Nehru 1948a, 127).

### **Gandhi Smriti and Martyr's Column**

"*Gandhi Smriti*" treasures the memories of the last 144 days of Mahatma Gandhi's life, as well as his death in the old Birla House (5 Tees January Marg, New Delhi), now converted into a national museum. "*Martyr's Column*" is erected at the very spot where



Gandhi fell to his assassin's bullets on his way to the prayer ground in the garden lawns at the back of the building; the memorial stone marks the exact place, time, date (5:17 Evening, 30. 1. 1948), and the words — here written "**He Ram**" — by which he lived and by which, he breathed his last!



The Martyr's Column at the Gandhi Smriti, the spot where Gandhi was assassinated. Photo © by James G. Howes, September, 2006/Courtesy of Wikipedia

At a little distance, next to the lawns, stands a bronze Eternal Flame sculpture (by Sankho Chawdhury) to symbolize the undying spirit and presence of this great martyr for peace and brotherhood of the humankind. What moved me to the deepest core, however, was the sight of the—stone footsteps—leading from Gandhi's room to the prayer ground—upon which he walked his last walk that fateful evening!

And how prophetic proved to be his words inscribed near it: "**I know the path. It is straight and narrow. It is like the edge of a sword. I rejoice to walk on it!**"

The National Museum inside the building displays the audio-visual memorabilia of Gandhi, including his photographs, sculptures, paintings, frescos, inscriptions, and the simplest daily items he used, such as his wooden sandals, his "charkha" or spinning wheel, pair of glasses, and his own old-fashioned "lap-top"—a small wooden board he used as a support for writing, and a copy of his spiritual guide—the *Bhagawad Gita*.

The audio part of the exhibit replayed Gandhi's words, speeches, hymns and messages, which were electronically embedded in the objects he used. At first I wondered, "what would Gandhi say about such computerization of his concepts?" But then I heard him say or ask me, as if: "Why not? When was I ever against anything that was innovative and which, without causing harm to anyone, would only help understand my ideas better?" The wisdom in Gandhi's words became appar-

ent, as I saw an unceasing line of young visitors pouring in to see, to read, and to learn about Gandhi's life, while also having fun. By operating such simple electronic devices, they could see Gandhi come alive before their eyes; they could hear him speak: **"I want to find peace in the midst of turmoil, light in the midst of darkness, and hope in despair."**

### Ahmedabad Highlights

Ahmedabad, my hometown! Here I grew up at the height of the Indian independence movement; it revived many a poignant memory of my pre-adolescent years! The year was 1942 and the Gandhi-led "Quit India" movement against the British was in full swing. Fervent patriotic slogans — *"British Quit India;" "Mahatma Gandhi ki jay"* ("Hail to Mahatma Gandhi"); *"Jay Hind;"* "Gandhi is our Hero, and his spinning wheel's our arrow!" — kept replaying in my mind! (for more, see Majmudar; 2005, preface, xi).

### Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram aka Satyagraha Ashram or Harijan Ashram

Upon his return from South

Africa, on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1915, Gandhi founded this ashram first at Ko-chrab—a small rural community in Ahmedabad, but later moved it to a less congested location on the banks of the Sabarmati River at the outskirts of the city. As if validating the Vedantic principle, "Truth is one; sages call it variously," the ashram came to be known by different names at different times in its development.



"Old Town" Ahmedabad. Photo used by permission of Namit Arora (shunya@shunya.net)

Gandhi and Kasturba (his wife) lived here from June 1919 through March 12, 1930.

Since Gandhi was primarily a seeker after truth, he first named it *"The Satyagraha Ashram;"* (*satya*: truth; and *agraha*, insistence) or "adherence to truth in a nonviolent manner." Also, being an ardent campaigner against untouchability, he later renamed

it as “*Harijan Ashram*” (*Hari*: God; and *jana*: people). Gandhi, like his spiritual predecessor, Swami Vivekananda, believed in serving the poor as “*Daridra-Narayan*” (*Daridra*: poor; and *Narayana*: God).

There is an interesting, true story associated with the ashram’s history. Gandhi had to launch a personal satyagraha against his own wife and close associates, who threatened to leave if he admitted any untouchable into the ashram. Gandhi certainly did admit them, and all financial support was withdrawn. Yet, undaunted, Gandhi adhered to his principles of inclusivity and non-discrimination on the basis of caste or creed.

Just when he was in acute moral and financial crisis, an anonymous donor appeared, leaving a huge sum of money for the ashram’s maintenance! That donor was eventually identified as the Ahmedabad mill-owner, Ambalal Sarabhai, who would later be Gandhi’s friend as well as opponent (in the 1919 *satyagraha* of mill-owner versus mill-hands). Gandhi’s faith that



Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, India (also known as Gandhi Ashram, Harijan Ashram, or Satyagraha Ashram) was one of Gandhi’s residences. It is now a national monument. Photo by Nichalp on Jan. 28, 2006, courtesy of Wikipedia

“truth shall always triumph” was thus vindicated.

Gandhi first wrote his object statement for founding the ashram; it is posted at the entrance of his cottage both in Gujarati and English: “The object of this Ashram is that its members should qualify themselves for, and make a constant endeavor towards, the service of the country, not inconsistent with universal good.” He also prescribed for the ashram-residents **twelve observances**: *Satya* (Truth); *Ahimsa* (Nonviolence); *Brahmacharya* (Chastity); *Aswad* (Control of the palate); *Asteya* (Non-stealing); *Aparigraha* (Non-possession or Poverty); *Swadeshi* (Use of local or home-grown products); *Abhaya* (Fearlessness);



Asprushyata-*nivaran* (Removal of untouchability); *Varnashrama Dharma* (not caste distinctions, but division of labor; and the four stages of life); *Sarvadharmasamabhava* (Equal respect for all religions); *Parishrama* (Physical or manual labor).

Taking a tour of the ashram, I first visited Gandhi's cottage, "**Hridaya Kunj**"—the "**Heart of the Ashram**," so named by one of Gandhi's learned disciples, Kakasahheb Kalelkar. I could visualize Gandhi living in this modest cottage with his bare minimum belongings: his charkha, his reading glasses, eating utensils, his small desk, books of Tolstoy, Thoreau, Bhagavad Gita, and his *ashram-bhajanavali* with prayers from all religions. He subsisted on little, always experimenting with different types of food and fasting often; waking up at 4 a.m., he would first pray and meditate and then begin to answer letters before going for a walk and breakfast.

His daily activities were varied—from cleaning the latrines, spinning, doing manual chores, teaching and writing—to meeting

with many visitors. These ranged from peasants to politicians, from dignitaries to journalists. But in the middle of all this he would still manage to have a massage, laugh and play with children, nurse the sick, tend to the cows and goats, and even to deliver a calf.



Mahatma Gandhi's Vistor Room in Hridaya Kunj. Rahul Guhathakurta photo, courtesy Wikipedia

I also saw the nearby cottages of Vinoba Bhave—Gandhi's spiritual heir, Sanskrit scholar, author and founder of the *Bhudan movement* (land-donation) after Gandhi's demise, Mirabeau (Madeleine Slade), Mahadevbhai Desai (secretary) and others. The most gratifying feeling for me was to be present there to participate in the evening prayers with all ashram's children, reciting prayers from major world religions.

I could not believe I was sitting on the same sacred grounds

where once Gandhi—the “Saint of Sabarmati”—sat every morning and evening to conduct his group prayer-sessions. I felt doubly blessed: to be alive to undertake this pilgrimage, but even more, to be able to join in the prayers.

My ashram-visit would not have been complete without seeing Gandhi’s salt-march site. On March 12, 1930, the sixty-one-year-old

Mahatma—staff in hand and barefoot—led a group of 78 *satyagrahis* on a long march to the Arabian sea coast of Dandi. Now, the Government of Gujarat, together with the followers of Gandhi, are working on a huge project to build a complete new bridge-road from ashram to

Dandi, where Gandhi collected salt from the sea in a nonviolent defiance of the British monopoly and taxation on salt. More about that later.

### **Environmental Sanitation Institute (ESI) aka Sughad**

In my mother tongue, Gujarati, ESI is called “*Sughad*,” meaning “Neat or Tidy,” which is quite fitting, because what strikes a visitor

first is its eye-catching cleanliness and meticulous maintenance. On a hot, hot summer day in Ahmedabad (even in mid-September), as soon as you enter ESI, you begin to cool off just by looking at the organically grown green, green grass; and by the balmy breeze blowing through its beautifully maintained garden with shady trees, scented flowers and a lotus-pond!



3 Wise Monkeys Coin/Image courtesy [monetarium.ru/coin-simages/Somalia](http://monetarium.ru/coin-simages/Somalia)

You also feel uplifted by reading some of the quotes from Gandhi or other authors who inspired him’ or by looking at some of the sculptures of “Gandhi on charkha” or “Gandhi leading a satyagraha,” and especially, by Gandhi’s all-time favorite — the picture

of “Three Wise Monkeys” (representing three wise men) — one with his hands over his mouth; the second with his hands over his eyes; and the third, over his ears!

The ESI building itself is an architectural marvel; it was designed specifically in compliance with environmental concerns, such as utilizing energy-efficient

solar power and cavity walls to reduce heat, and overhangs to create shade. In keeping with modern technology, it harvests rainwater and recycles wastewater by a natural ‘root zone system.’ ESI also builds energy-efficient toilets for the use by rural women.

Associated with Sabarmati Gandhi Ashram, ESI functions as a research and training institute for those who want to specialize in rural healthcare and sanitation projects. The NGO volunteers like Viren Joshi, Jayesh and Anar Patel, and other well-educated social workers dedicate their time and energy in training other students in the Gandhian style “constructive programs” which include: eradication of untouchability, alcohol and drug-addiction; village upliftment; sanitation education through the reuse and recycling of the human and animal waste; organic farming and gardening; and the promotion of personal healthcare, hygiene, nutrition, and holistic living and wellbeing.

### **Manav Sadhna or Service to Humankind**

Manav Sadhna, like ESI, is



The ESI building itself is an architectural marvel; it was designed specifically in compliance with environmental concerns, Photo courtesy ESI

a volunteer-based organization, affiliated with the Sabarmati Ashram. The vision and goal of its founder — “*Padmashri*” Ishwarbhai Patel — and his associates is to transform *seva* (service) into *sadhana* (spiritual endeavor), in keeping with the Gandhian philosophy.

Performing a nonstop “*seva-yagna*” (community service as a sacrificial offering to God), its volunteer staff serves over 4,300 underprivileged children and women through twenty-plus projects in and around the slums of Ahmedabad. Their service projects are divided into various categories: Basic Education; Health, Hygiene and Nutrition; Earn n’ Learn (Income generation for children and women); Savings and Marketing; Fun (arts and crafts); Value Education through prayers

and meditation; Library, Computer and Visual Media instruction; Disaster Management; Non-traditional Addiction counseling with a follow-up; Communal Harmony and Nonviolence training; Festivals, Trips, and Picnics; and the “Ekta” group — a dance drama performance that links the lives of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

While our group was in Ahmedabad we not only visited, but also participated in many of these on-going educational programs, attended children’s arts, crafts and vocational training classes; saw their “Ekta” dance-drama, and spent a whole day working and playing with the children of “Rampir no tekro” — the largest slum in Ahmedabad. The last but not the least important was our wonderful experience of cooking and serving food at their volunteer-run café, “Manav-Seva,” managed by Shrimati Anar Patel.

### **The Riverside School and Experiential Learning**

At the other end of the spectrum we visited a private school founded by a visionary young woman — its Principal, Kiran Sethi, who has successfully implemented the Gandhian principle of experiential learning through innovative thinking, programming, experimenting, and through practical training in the field.

As we moved from class to

class from pre-KG through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, we saw students working like a team of investigative reporters; each busy working on a problem, trying to find facts on his or her own, comparing notes with others, discussing, debating the pros and cons, and finally presenting their individual and joint findings before the class.

The teacher’s role was also untraditional; she or he acted only as a loving guide or a consultant who would encourage students to probe further, but not spoon-feed them. Only when the students miss something important or if they get stuck, teacher would point the way but not find it for them. Another remarkable feature was their “cross-class interaction,” in which the advanced students assisted their younger peers in problem solving and in software and computer training.

### **Darpana Academy of Performing Arts**

The founder of the Darpana Academy, Mrinalini Sarabhai, is a world-acclaimed Bharat Natyam dancer, educationist, and a champion for the rights of underprivileged women, children and untouchables. Through her marriage into the Sarabhai family, she came under the strong influence of Gandhi’s reformist ideas about social justice, rural uplift and women’s rights.

Mrinalini and her equally talented daughter Mallikla Sarabhai

work together. They perform, teach, choreograph, and produce dance-dramas, documentaries and films that reaffirm the images of positive Indian womanhood. Both mother and daughter search for raw talents throughout the city and villages, to train them to perform. They also educate as well as entertain by reviving the indigenous, informal folk-shows like "*Ramlila*," or "*Bhawai*." While visiting *Darpana* we met a legend of a woman, Mrs. Sarabhai, who is still going strong in her eighties, now mostly teaching rather than performing herself. As a side note, while talking with her about our mutual interest in Gandhi, we were happily surprised to find out that each of us had recently written and published a book on Gandhi, both with a Foreword by Gandhi's grandson, Rajmohan Gandhi!

### **A 3-city Tour of Saurashtra — the Gandhi Region**

After the Stanford group left, I continued the pilgrimage on my own, visiting three main cities of Saurashtra or Kathiawad (now a part of Gujarat), associated with Gandhi's birth and childhood. Gandhi was very much the son of his soil—its culture, customs, and religious openness.



Mallika Sarabhai, co-director of *Darpana* Academy of Performing Arts in Ahmedabad. The Academy was established in 1949, and has been directed by Mallika for the last three decades. Photo courtesy of the Academy

First, I visited Gandhi's ancestral home in the provincial sea-coast town of Porbandar, where he was born on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1869; the house is now remodeled as a national memorial called "*Mahatma Gandhi Kirti Mandir*." Three generations of Gandhis had lived together in this sturdy, three-storied house built by Gandhi's forefathers, who served as "*Diwans*" or "*Prime ministers*" of the local

princes under the British raj.

Gandhi's father, Karamchand Gandhi, too, carried on the family political legacy, by first serving as the Diwan of Porbandar, and then of Valkaner and Rajkot. Taking a tour of the house, I noticed that most rooms were small with wide open corridors and tiny windows; only Gandhi's room on the third floor, had a nice, cool breeze coming from the Arabic ocean. Moving from room to room, and viewing Gandhi's baby-pictures along with those of his parents, I was dumbfounded to enter a dark, small, airless room on the ground floor—where Putliba (*ba*: mother) had given birth to her youngest and most favorite son, "Moniya" (nickname).

Another point worth noting is that though the Gandhis were deeply devout Vaishnavas, they heartily welcomed into their home people of all faiths—the Jains, the Muslims, the Parsees and others. Putliba also continued to practice her own maidenhood "*Pranami*" faith (a sect founded by Prannath in the 17<sup>th</sup> century), which links the Vaishnava and Islamic faiths.

In Porbandar, quite unexpectedly, I happened to visit the "*Ramba Teachers' Training College*," long associated not only with Gandhi, but also Swami Vivekananda! As my cousin and I were looking around for interesting places in town, by chance we

discovered this hidden treasure, where we were invited by the principal to join in their Gandhian style all-religion prayer session. When he learned about my work on Gandhi and my interest in Vedanta, the principal requested me to speak about my book. It was then that I came to know through him that Swami Vivekananda had also spoken from the very same platform more than a century ago. In deep gratitude, I knelt down to Swamiji's invisible presence!

In Rajkot, where Gandhi spent his boyhood, I paid a visit to two special places. The first was Gandhi's "Alfred High School," now renovated after the devastating 2003 earthquake in Gujarat. They have preserved Gandhi's classroom with all its historical records of the subjects he studied, the grades he made, along with the names of the teachers, and portraits of the principals during his school years.

My second visit was to "Kaba Gandhino Dehlo" or Father Kaba (short of Karamchand) Gandhi's Residence. Gandhi's troubled adolescent years were spent in this home, this town, and in this neighborhood. Here, while trying hard to juggle his three conflicting duties—as a son, a friend, and as a husband (married early at age 13)—Mohandas suffered an acute youthful crisis of identity and faith; ultimately, as we know, his faith survived.



The last city I visited in Saurashtra was Bhavnagar—another seacoast city about 90 miles from Rajkot, where Gandhi attended his first college—the then newly opened, *Shamaldas College*. I knew that Gandhi attended only one semester here because of what he called his “raw” knowledge of English, and because he was ill at ease with the bombastic teaching style of the Victorian professors. Nevertheless, the college proved to be a stepping-stone for him to explore wider horizons outside India. Unfortunately, I reached there on a Saturday afternoon and the college was closed after the morning hours. Though I could not see it from inside, at least I got the feel of the whole campus.

### **Wardha Sevagram Ashram**

I arrived here, by arrangement, on October 2<sup>nd</sup>—Mahatma Gandhi’s 139<sup>th</sup> Birth-anniversary day—to see Gandhi Panorama (the First Gandhi International Film-festival) at Wardha, a small, rural town in Maharashtra.

In 1936, Gandhi established this ashram about eight kilometers from Wardha, in a remote village of “shegaon,” which he renamed as “*Sevagram*” or a “village of service.” Like his previous ashram in Ahmedabad, this, too, has retained all its original thatched-roofed, hand-built cottages. Gandhi and his followers lived there to serve the poor, the peasants and the untouchables, and to train

them to be self-sufficient by reviving the village-industries such as spinning, weaving and farming.

I was fortunate to have attended the all-day celebrations: the garlanding ceremony of the huge statue of Gandhi in the heart of the village; special speeches and tributes to Gandhi; the group prayers, and children’s performances. During the two-day international film festival, I feasted my eyes and fed my soul by watching some of the most inspiring films and documentaries on Gandhi and the Gandhian themes of peace, nonviolence and religious harmony.

Some national and international film-makers were even present to show and tell about their award-winning films: “*A Road to Gandhi*” (Germany); “*In Search of Gandhi*” (India); “*Water-Bearer*” (Canada); “*Gandhi-Alive in South Africa*” (India); “*Between Gandhi and Hitler*” (South Africa); “*Bapune kaha tha*” (India) and many, many more.

### **Vinoba Bhave’s Ashram at Paunar, Maharashtra**

Gandhi’s foremost spiritual disciple, Vinoba Bhave, established this ashram on the banks of the Dham River in Paunar, about nine kilometers from Wardha. Though it was not in my original plan, I decided to go based on strong recommendations by the local residents. I am so glad I did, because, like a rare gem hidden in

wilderness, I found this to be the most tranquil place suitable for spiritual sadhana—pure, pristine, and unadulterated by the din and bustle of modern living.

No wonder, Vinobaji named the ashram “Param Dham”—from *param*: ultimate, and *dham*: abode. As the history goes, while digging the ground for gardening in this area, Vinoba hit upon some ancient *murties* (stone or metal statues of deities) of “Rama-Sita and Hanuman,” and one rare *murti* of “*Rama-Bharat-bhet*” or “The meeting of Rama and Bharata” (Rama: the God-King-and-Hero of *Ramayana*, and his brother Bharata).

Inspired by this holy discovery and the serenity of the place, Vinoba Bhave founded his ashram. For me, however, the biggest bonanza or surprise was to see the “*Mahatma Gandhi’s Shrine*” (containing his ashes) standing right in the midst of the river! In the presence of this holy shrine, I felt as awe-inspired as I had been at the sight of *Gandhi Samadhi* and *Rajghat* in New Delhi. Even more.

### **To Dandi—the Destination of Gandhi’s Salt-Satyagraha**

Many of us have seen the picture of Gandhi as he picked up salt at Dandi in defiance of the British monopoly and taxation of salt in India—but not perhaps the actual site! So I accompanied my young lady-guide, an architect who is involved in the big

project of “bridge-building”—connecting Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad (the starting point of Gandhi’s salt-march) and Dandi, its destination.

Sometimes, an actual historic site does not match our preconceived images, and that’s what happened here. As my guide explained, Gandhi did not pick up salt from the actual sea as shown in the pictures; he picked it up from this village named Dandi, which is a totally parched, barren land. Why then did Gandhi select Dandi for salt picking? Could it be that Gandhi, being a dramatic genius, wanted to project this simple act of salt picking as a symbolic gesture of mass civil disobedience (as he did in South Africa with a massive bonfire of registration cards)! But why Dandi?

According to my guide, though Dandi was a dried up land, it was not too far from the actual seashore. So maybe, she speculated, the Mahatma wanted to cheer up his weary fellow-walkers and reassure them that the destination was not now too far, that they have arrived!

Whatever the reason, the fact is, the “*Memorial of Gandhi*”—with his famous pose of picking salt from the sea—stands right here in this wilderland of Dandi. But all that will change once the new project gets finished. The present memorial site in Dandi will be connected to the actual sea via



canals, thus transforming this dry, barren land into a lively green one with rows and rows of beautiful trees and fragrant flowers on both sides of the bridge. It also will be interspersed with small, name-inscribed monuments in memory of all the uncelebrated villagers who joined Gandhi along the way!

Another happy discovery for me was to visit the “Saifee-House” across from the Gandhi Memorial, where Gandhi had stayed overnight after reaching Dandi. The Saifees donated their house to the Indian government; it was converted into a Gandhi Museum and inaugurated by the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in 1950.



Gandhi (r.) with India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. When Gandhi was assassinated, Nehru announced over national radio, “The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere...” Photo courtesy Indo-Asian News Service

## The Unsung Gandhians

The story of my pilgrimage to most Gandhian places in India would not be complete without paying homage to all those dedicated volunteers, teachers, activists and community organizers whom I met—people who silently and selflessly continue working to serve the poor, the forsaken, the underprivileged—they put into action Gandhi's motto of **“being the change you want to see in others.”**

I cannot write at length about them all, but would like to highlight a few remarkable young men and women who are making a difference in the lives of others or trying to lessen their burden. The first such inspiring figure is Ravi Gulati—an idealistic yet realistic educator whom we met in New Delhi. This young MBA from India's top business school first went the usual route of money-making, success-seeking and power-hunting, but that did not satisfy the deeper hunger of his soul for something beyond money, success and power. So instead

of pursuing so-called happiness, he pursued truth to find out what will really make him feel fulfilled at the end of the day.

He started to invite into his home some neighborhood children to teach them math, English, science, computer and so on; he even started counseling a few troubled young people who had no money, no mentor and no hope. Gradually, as the number of students and help-seekers increased, Ravi thought of opening his "*Manzil Learning Centre*," which fosters peer involvement through voluntary teaching. It is a two-way system of give and take in which the more experienced or knowledgeable students teach the young novices and they in turn pass on what they've learned to others.

Eventually, the families of children got involved and so did the entire community; as a result, "*Manzil*" has become a self-supporting, volunteer-based center to address the educational, cultural, and psychological needs of the underprivileged or challenged communities. Ravi and his mother together oversee two such Manzil Learning Centers in New Delhi; Ravi envisions more such centers developing in other cities and towns.

This is a brilliant example of how one person acting upon his/her vision can make a positive difference. I mentioned earlier some other well-educated vision-



Author Uma Majumdar published a well reviewed biography, "*Gandhi's Pilgrimage of Faith: From Darkness to Light*" (SUNY), in 2005.

aries as well as activists and social workers—people like Kiran Sethi (Principal, Riverside School), the husband-wife team of Jayesh and Anar Patel; Ishwarbhai Patel, and Viren Joshi (ESI; Manav Sadhana; Sabarmati Ashram); Madhu Kishwar (journalist and women's rights activist); Mrinalini Sarabhai (Darpana); Sheba George—a Muslim women's rights activist. These are only a few Gandhi-inspired or Gandhi-influenced persons I met along my pilgrimage to India, but I am positive, there are many such principled people who work selflessly in the spirit of the *Gita* without making noise and without expectation of results, recognition, name or fame.

# MEDIA REVIEWS



## Scholar Reading a Book

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

### **A Spiritual Teacher and His Disciple: A Portrait of Swami Aseshananda**

Todd D. Thomas 162 pp. Available from [www.saradamapress.com](http://www.saradamapress.com)

#### **Esther Warkov, Ph.D**

With the passing of Swami Aseshananda, the last remaining monk of the Ramakrishna Order initiated by Sri Sarada Devi, we see an effort on both the part of the Portland Vedanta Society and independent writers to preserve the swami's teachings and example for

posterity. First, in 2007, the Vedanta Society of Portland published twelve talks by Swami Asesh-ananda in a single MP3 CD. Now, a long-time disciple, Todd D. Thomas, has released *A Spiritual Teacher and His Disciple: A Portrait of Swami Aseshananda*. At least two other projects, independent of the Portland society, are in the works: one, a collection remembering Swami Aseshananda, and the second an electronic compilation of his teachings.

In *A Spiritual Teacher and His Disciple: A Portrait of Swami Aseshananda*, Mr. Thomas writes about his thirty-six years with Swami Aseshananda, including ten years' service as a resident of the Portland center. Mr. Thomas, now in his late eighties, created this publication from handwritten notes with assistance from two "scribes" who honored his voice.

The book is clearly intended for those who knew Swami Aseshananda during his tenure at the Portland center (1955-1996). It may also interest devotees associated with the Seattle Vedanta society because it includes stories about Swamis Bhaskarananda and Vividishananda. Written simply and from the heart, Mr. Thomas uses an associative style not unlike his guru's style of lecturing! Mr. Thomas narrates incidents of personal significance, events with visiting swamis, and the story of his guru's passing. He includes Swami Aseshananda's memorable sayings (e.g. "Man would rather die than think") and oft-repeated prayers as powerful reminders of the swami's example.

Mr. Thomas also ventures to describe and interpret some of his own spiritual experiences. He also publishes several of his own talks on basic Vedanta given upon Swami Aseshananda's

request, but he is most engaging when narrating events pertaining to Swami Aseshananda.

*A Spiritual Teacher and His Disciple* affords an opportunity for those who met Swami Aseshananda to further contemplate his example in light of these newly-published accounts. By reading Mr. Thomas's portrait in conjunction with other print and media resources about Swami Aseshananda, we may begin to more fully understand Swami Aseshananda's enduring contribution to Vedanta in America. Thanks to Trabuco Digital Press, the monks at the Trabuco monastery provide a valuable and innovative self-publishing resource for the extended Vedanta family, allowing for the publication of personal memoirs such as *A Spiritual Teacher and His Disciple*.

Esther Warkov, Ph.D, a member of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington, is compiling remembrances of Swami Aseshananda for publication.

**Readers:** Please send us reviews of books and other media that you found interesting — or, publications, films, etc., on which you think your fellow readers shouldn't waste their time and money. While we can't promise to print every submission, we look forward to your participation. — **The Editors**

### **Walking in Snow**

January snowstorm, cold, dark, but friendly, a perfect winter day in the mountains. No wind, but small persistent snowflakes determined to amount to something fill the late afternoon air. I move slowly down village streets towards the post office, walking among the machines, the shops and among the human beings. Dogs run freely in the street, their coats covered with snow. But I am *seeing*—seeing the landscape, the shopscape and the peoplescape differently today. Is it the snow that causes a different kind of seeing? Is it some shift in the bearing of people and dogs alike? Or is the altered *seeing* something happening especially for me? I move slowly among the shops and then out into the landscape. I'm startled. There is no way to describe it, but as a landscape radiating love. Something in me cuts through to the essential nature of both people and the land today. Love pours forth from mother nature, from living beings, and from their creations alike. I am seeing the whole, and in some way that is just beyond saying, *I am* the whole—the interconnected One. I walk through a peaceful snow, a kind, enabling snow causing me to relax into a silent *knowing* at the ground of all being. Through this kind of relaxation, I *see* with a singular kind of sight, that of the Mother Consciousness, that of the Great Love, the basis of us all.

—Richard Simonelli

## **READER'S FORUM**

### **Question for this Issue**

#### **First, an Editorial Comment:**

About the time I was offered the position of Coordinating Editor for American Vedantist, some readers were concerned about the growing number of ethnic Indian devotees at Centers in the West. There was lament about the changes this brought about—some crowding at events, a growing sense that aspects of Indian culture were displacing Western social attitudes and practices, and other, similar complaints.

As a member of the Vedanta Society of Southern California since 1973, I have seen all the things AV readers wrote to us about, and have listened to devotees who now feel alienated from what they regard as their spiritual home. Those who would condemn these disaffected people might want to reread the quotations from Swami Ashokananda on page 3.

And to those who are bitter about the increasing numbers of Indian devotees at Western centers, I offer the same prescription! There can be little doubt that these deeply devoted people and their children are part of the future for Vedanta as it grows in the West.

So, here is the Reader's Forum Question for this issue (*please mail or email us your answer*): **What are you willing to do, to help assure that Swami Vivekananda's vision for an American Vedanta is fulfilled?**



## Contributors' Notes

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## **A NOTE TO OUR READERS**

**American Vedantist** (AV) is a not-for-profit, quarterly journal staffed solely by volunteers. Vedanta West Communications Inc. publishes AV four times a year. We welcome from our readers personal essays, articles and poems related to spiritual life and the furtherance of Vedanta. All articles submitted must be typed and double-spaced. If quotations are given, be prepared to furnish sources. It is helpful to us if you accompany your typed material by a CD or floppy disk, with your text file in Microsoft Word or Rich Text Format. Manuscripts also may be submitted by email to [VedWestCom@gmail.com](mailto:VedWestCom@gmail.com), as attached files (preferred) or as part of the email message.

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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.



*A flower for each one who has come forward  
to walk the path that Sri Ramakrishna struck  
through this jungle world.*