



REACH

Newsletter of Vedanta Centres of Australia

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Motto:

*Atmano mokshartham
jagad hitaya cha,*

**“For one’s own
liberation and for the
welfare of the world.”**

Sayings and Teachings

All religions lead to the same God

“Different creeds are but different paths to reach the one God. Diverse are the ways that lead to the temple of Mother Kali at Kalighat in Calcutta. Similarly, various are the paths that take men to the house of the Lord. Every religion is nothing but one of these paths.”

--- Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna: life and teachings (An interpretative study) by Swami Tapasyananda, page 149, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, India.

Forgiveness and Forbearance

“The mind is everything. It is in the mind alone that one feels pure or impure. A man first makes his own mind guilty and then sees another’s faults. Can you injure anybody by enumerating his faults? You only injure yourself. I cannot see anybody’s shortcomings. If a man does a trifle for me, I try to remember even that. To see faults in others! Forgiveness is a great religious austerity. There is no virtue higher than forbearance.”

--- Sri Sarada Devi.

Holy Mother by Swami Nikhilananda, page 224, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York.

Ideal Householder

“To his enemies, the householder must be a hero. Them, he must resist. That is the duty of the householder. He must not sit down in a corner and weep, and talk nonsense about non-



Sri Ramakrishna Temple at the Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Howrah (West Bengal), India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FROM AUGUST TO NOVEMBER 2008

Function	Centre	Date
Sri Krishna Janmastami	Melbourne	Sunday, 24 August 2008
	Perth	Sunday, 24 August 2008
	Sydney	Sunday, 24 August 2008
Sri Sri Durga Puja	Perth (Prayer)	Sunday, 5 October 2008
	Sydney	Tuesday, 7 October 2008
Cultural Event	Sydney	Saturday, 13 September 2008
	Sydney	Saturday, 1 November 2008

resistance. If he does not show himself a hero to his enemies he has not done his duty. And to his friends and relatives, he must be as gentle as a lamb.”

--- Swami Vivekananda.

Teachings of Swami Vivekananda; Page 122, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, India.

Welcome

We welcome you all to the Ramakrishna - Vedanta Movement and invite you to attend our functions and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal message of Vedanta as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda.

News and activities of Vedanta Centres of Australia and New Zealand

For the period from August 2008 to November 2008

ADELAIDE CENTRE

Monthly activities:

Swami Sridharananda continued to visit Adelaide three days a month to deliver discourses on the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. The talks are held at Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich, SA 5065. The lectures are being recorded and used by devotees to augment their studies. For details of the ongoing monthly programmes please contact Mr. Raman Sharma, Secretary, on 08-8431 9775 or Mrs. Pathma Iswaran on 08-8379 5336.

BRISBANE CENTRE

Daily activities:

Morning worship, evening *arati*, *bhajans*, and reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are the regular activities at the Centre at **181 Burbong Street, Chapel Hill, QLD 4073**, (Phone no.: 07-3720 0228). A resident volunteer looks after the day-to-day activities at the Centre.

Monthly and Annual activities:

Swami Atmeshananda visited Brisbane once every month. He delivered talks on *Srimad-Bhagavad Gita* and other spiritual topics.

Celebrations:

On July 12, 2008, the Centre held its annual celebrations at the Kenmore State High School Hall. The Hon. Rod Welford, Queensland Minister for **Education and Training and the Arts** was the guest of honour on the occasion. In his address the Hon. Minister praised the multicultural and multi-faith aspect of the Vedanta Movement and urged all to follow the ideals as practised by Sri Ramakrishna. Mr. Mahalingam Sinnathamby, President of the Brisbane centre and Swami Sridharanandaji also spoke on the occasion. The variety programme consisted of devotional music and dances by devotees and children. About 400 persons attended the programme.

CANBERRA CENTRE

Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita* twice a month at the Majura Community Centre, Canberra. Parlour talks based on *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* were given by him once a month. Contacts: Mr. J. Venkataraman, Secretary - 02-6258 7612 and Dr. Ian Doherty, Treasurer - 02-6247 8519.

MELBOURNE CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

The vesper service is held daily at the Centre at **7 Judy Court, Vermont, Vic. 3133** from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. It includes set hymns, scriptural readings and meditation. A resident volunteer looks after the services in the mornings and on other occasions.

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta and other spiritual literature were made available in print, audio and visual media through the bookstall during the period. For further information please contact Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary, on 03-9803 6154 and Mr. Govindan Iyer, Treasurer, on 03-9543 4091.

2. Monthly/Annual Activities:

The monthly discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita* continued to be delivered by Swami Sridharananda from Thursday to Saturday of a prescheduled week at Monash University, Claton Campus of Law, Wellington Road. The lecture series were based on the *Bhagavad Gita*. The recordings of these discourses are available in Audio, Video and MP3 formats. .

On the **second Sunday** of every month meetings were conducted from 5 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. These regular meetings include prayer, recitation of sacred mantras, rendering of *kirtan* and *bhajans* followed by selected readings from relevant scriptures and discussions thereon. The meetings concluded with *arati* and distribution of *prasada*.

Other Activities:

Yoga and Sanskrit classes have resumed from 13th April 2008. Dr. P.L. Aneja, PhD in Sanskrit and German and also a qualified Yoga instructor conducts the sessions.

PERTH CENTRE

1. Daily Activities:

Worship followed by Vedic chanting in the morning, and vesper service at 7 p.m. followed by a reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation, are being held daily at the Centre located at **2B Roe Close, Bull Creek W.A. 6149**. In addition, a class on *Isopanisad* with *Sankaracarya's* commentary is held daily in the afternoon. The Centre maintains a small bookstall and Library. Contacts: Centre - 08 9313 8796, Mr. K.P. Basu Mallick, Secretary, - 0411 791 058.

2. Weekly/Monthly Activities:

On Sundays, *satsang* for the devotees start at 11:00 a.m. followed by a simple lunch-*prasada* for all. On Wednesdays, a *Kathopanisad* class is held from 6:15 p.m. to 7 p.m. Every Saturday the **Bala Bodhi** class for children and youth is being conducted from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Swami Damodarananda conducts the above activities, meets the devotees and visitors, and, delivers talks at various places in Perth upon request.

Celebrations:

Ram Navami, Buddha Purnima and Guru Purnima were observed on 14th April, 11th May and 20th July 2008 respectively. Swami Damodarananda spoke on each one of these occasions.

SYDNEY CENTRE

Daily Activities:

In the morning, worship and meditation; and vesper service followed by devotional singing from 7 p.m. in the evening form the main focus of the daily activities at **85 Bland Street, Ashfield** and **2 Stewart Street, Ermington** centres. Counselling, interviews and discussions with devotees are also conducted on a



daily basis. The library facility is available to devotees for reference and research. The Centre maintains a bookstall which has a range of books on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, Vedanta, Yoga and other spiritual literature. Devotional songs, discourses on *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, *Mundaka Upanisad*, etc. are also available in various media.

2. Weekly/ Monthly Activities:

The centre conducted the following activities in Sydney:

a) Swami Sridharananda conducted classes on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gitā* every Sunday morning from 9:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. at the South Strathfield Bowling Club, Augusta Street, Strathfield.

b) Classes on *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* were held on Wednesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Centre in Ashfield.

c) Many devotees have availed themselves of **spiritual counselling** and guidance. The Swamis also visited the homes of devotees when required.

d) *Yogasana* Classes for adults continued to be held every Tuesday at the Centre from 7:30 p.m.

e) **Career guidance** sessions were conducted on the second Saturday of every month from 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. for new migrants to Australia to help them find suitable jobs. Mr. Abhijit Guha and his dedicated band of volunteers conducted the sessions.

f) Special **meditation** sessions were held at the Ermington Centre on Sundays from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Annual Activities/ Celebrations:

Ram Navami, Buddha Purnima and Guru Purnima were observed on 14 th April, 20th May and 18th July 2008 respectively.

Other Activities:

Swami Sridharananda delivered two talks at the local Theosophical Society on 6th and 13th of June 2008 on spiritual subjects. He also spoke at a fund raising function organised by Abhayakaram, a local organisation which sends the proceed to the Ramakrishna Mission, Sri Lanka.

The volunteers of Sydney centre were honoured on Sunday, the 6th of July 2008 in a special meeting.

The first book published by the Vedanta Centre of Sydney 'Swami Rudrananda - A visionary Reformist' was released on 18th of July 2008.

Overseas Visit:

Swami Sridharananda visited New Zealand from 15th of May to 21st of May 2008 and delivered talks on

spiritual subjects. He installed the photos of Holy Trinity at the newly purchased house in Auckland on Buddha Purnima Day.

MANAGING COMMITTEES OF VEDANTA CENTRE OF SYDNEY AND OTHER CHAPTERS

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Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play

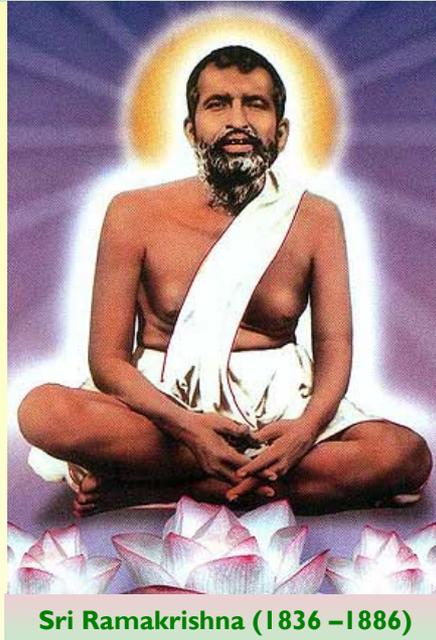
Sri Kshudiram Chatterji, a pious and heroic Brahmin, was the father of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, whom the world today identifies as a Divine Incarnation. It was in one of the pilgrimages undertaken by Kshudiram to Gaya in 1835 that he got the divine commandment from Vishnu, the Presiding Deity of that temple that He, the Supreme Being, would be born in the humble home of Kshudiram as his son. Chandramani Devi, wife of Kshudiram, too had a similar experience of a great birth through her. The earthly advent of this divinely announced son took place at about 5.15a.m. on the 18th of February 1836. The child was named Gadadhar after one of the names of Vishnu.

Spiritual visions during childhood

The Master said, "It is common knowledge that all avatars are sometimes absorbed in spiritual visions during their childhoods. When he was a boy, Krishna revealed his divinity to his parents and friends many times. While walking in a garden, the child Buddha went into samadhi under a rose-apple tree and attracted the attention of both gods and human beings. In his childhood, Jesus attracted the birds of the forest with his love, and he fed them with his own hands. As a boy, Shankara overwhelmed his mother with his divine power and then renounced the world. In addition, during his boyhood, Chaitanaya demonstrated through his ecstatic life that a lover of God sees the manifestation of God in everything, good and bad. Sri Ramakrishna's life is filled with incidents such as these."

The first ecstasy of the Master

In that part of the country [Kamarpukur] children go out to play on the roads or in the fields carrying puffed rice either in a basket or in the corner of a cloth. It was June or July. I was then six or seven years old. One morning, I took some puffed rice in a small basket and was eating it as I walked along the narrow ridges of the rice fields. In one part of the sky a beautiful black cloud appeared, heavy with rain. I was watching it and eating the puffed rice. Very soon the cloud covered almost the whole sky. Then a flock of cranes came flying, white as milk against the black cloud. It was so beautiful that I became absorbed in the sight; I lost consciousness of everything outside of myself. I fell down, and the puffed rice was scattered over the



Sri Ramakrishna (1836 –1886)

ground. I cannot say how long I was in that state. Some people saw this and carried me home. That was the first time I lost external consciousness due to ecstasy.

The Master's second ecstasy

The village of Anur is located a few miles north of Kamarpukur, the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna. The goddess Vishalakshi (literally the One with large eyes) of Anur is a living deity. People of surrounding villages, far and near, vow to offer worship to the goddess if their various desires are fulfilled... The shrine of the goddess is in the middle of a field under the open sky. Every year the farmers build a simple canopy of leaves to protect Her from the rain and the sun. The nearby heap of ruins indicates that there was once a brick temple there. If the villagers are asked about the temple, they will tell you that the goddess Herself wilfully brought it down.

At the time of the following incident, Gadadhar was eight years old and had not yet been invested with the

sacred thread. One day a group of respectable village women crossed through the field to perform their promised offerings to the goddess Vishalakshi... When Gadadhar saw the women on their way to Anur, he insisted upon going with them. Although they tried to discourage him, thinking it would be hard for him to walk such a distance, the boy followed them without paying attention to their words. Of course, the women were delighted rather than irritated. Who would be captivated by a boy who was always cheerful and humorous? More importantly, even at this young age, Gadadhar had learnt by heart many songs about gods and goddesses, and folk rhymes as well... And so the women pondered, and finally started their journey with Gadai. While joyfully walking with them, the boy told stories and sang songs about gods and goddesses, just as they had expected.

But as Gadadhar was crossing the field, singing of the glory of the goddess Vishalakshi, an extraordinary incident took place. Suddenly he appeared to be struck dumb. His body stiffened and became numb. Tears poured from his eyes. He did not respond when the women asked if he felt ill. Since they knew that the boy was unaccustomed to making such a journey, the women were alarmed at the thought that he might have had a sunstroke. They brought water from a nearby pond and splashed it over his head and eyes. But Gadadhar did not regain consciousness...

After a short while, the thought occurred to Prasanna, that perhaps the goddess *Vishalakshi* had possessed the simple, trusting boy. She then suggested, "Instead of

calling 'Gadai,' let us call 'Mother Vishalakshi' wholeheartedly... Wonder of wonders! No sooner had the women called upon the goddess a few times than Gadadhar's face glowed with a sweet smile, and slight signs of consciousness became visible. They were now convinced that the goddess had completely possessed the boy. They bowed down to him again and again; and addressing him as Mother, they prayed to him.

The Master's third ecstasy

Another incident from Sri Ramakrishna's early life clearly shows that he would often ascend to a higher plane of consciousness during his childhood.

The Pyne family, a family of goldsmiths lived in Kamarpukur, southwest of the Master's ancestral home. The family was very wealthy at that time, which is evident even now from their brick Shiva temple decorated with beautiful artistry... Once, during Shiva-ratri, a dramatic performance had been arranged at the Pyne's. A troupe from the neighbouring village was to perform a religious drama based on the glory of Shiva. The performance was to begin about half an hour after dusk... However, the boy who was to play Shiva had become seriously ill. The village council met to select someone who could play the part, and they decided on Gadadhar. Although he was young, his looks were right for the part and he knew many songs of Shiva. So he was dressed in Shiva's costume and when he was called to appear on stage, one of his friends led him there. He mounted the stage at his friend's request. Absent-mindedly, without looking in any direction he slowly walked to the middle of the stage and stood there motionless. The audience was overwhelmed with joy and awe upon seeing Gadadhar in that costume, with matted hair, bedecked with rosaries, and smeared with ashes. He entered with slow and steady footsteps, and then stood motionless, with a heavenly, indrawn, unblinking gaze, and a sweet smile on the corners of

his lips. According to village custom, the audience suddenly cried out, chanting the name of Hari. Gadadhar remained standing there all the while; moreover, tears continuously trickled down onto his chest. Thus some time passed, and Gadadhar neither changed his position nor said anything. Then the director and a few elderly villagers went over to Gadadhar and found that his hands and feet were numb and that he seemed to have lost all external consciousness... Despite all efforts from his family Gadadhar could not be roused from his ecstatic state that night. In fact, some say that he remained outwardly unconscious for three whole days.

His unique characteristics

Not all of the remarkable events in the Master's early life that have been recorded are the expressions of his divine power emanating from a higher plane of consciousness. Although some of them were of a divine nature, others sprang from the Master's unique characteristics: his powerful memory, strong power of judgement, extreme steadfastness and firm resolution, indomitable courage, joyful sense of humour, and immense love and compassion. The Master's extraordinary faith, purity, and selflessness were constant throughout his life.

His fantastic memory

In the village once there was a dramatic performance based on the life of either Rama or Krishna. The boy Gadadhar attended it along with other villagers. The next day the villagers were involved with their own activities, having forgotten those sacred stories and songs. But in Gadadhar's mind the holy words flowed uninterrupted. He repeated the entire play to his friends, and for fun, assembled them in the nearby mango grove. He helped them to learn by heart, as well as possible, the parts of the different characters of the play. He took the main role himself. The boys enacted the entire drama.

His firm determination

During his sacred thread ceremony

Gadadhar went against family and social customs and insisted upon accepting his first ceremonial alms from Dhani, a woman of the blacksmith caste. Impressed with Dhani's love and affection, and knowing her innermost wish, the boy brushed aside social restrictions and ate food cooked by this low-caste woman. Fearful, Dhani earnestly tried, but failed to stop the boy from eating her food.

His indomitable courage

There is a road leading to Puri at the southern periphery of Kamarpukur. When the Master was young, many Naga monks and Vaishnava mendicants would use that road to travel back and forth to Puri everyday. Because they believed the stories that were told about Naga monks, Gadadhar's friends would stay away from them. But Gadadhar was not at all afraid. He mixed freely with those monks, talked to them, and pleased them with his service. He would spend a great deal of time with them in order to observe their conduct... One day he wanted to look like a monk, so he put holy marks all over his body; then he tore his new cloth into pieces to make a loin cloth, which he wore like a monk does. In this garb he presented himself to his mother.

Alertness of the Master's mind

By studying stories of the Master's early life, one gets an understanding of his spiritual disciplines. He accomplished whatever he set out to do; he shunned forcefully and immediately any obstacle that prevented him from reaching his goal. He performed all actions in this world by placing his firm faith in God, in himself, and in the innate divine nature of all people. He could not accept any ideas tinged with even the slightest narrowness, nor could he bear low, impure thoughts. Purity, love and compassion guided him always, in every respect. This aspirant's mind could not be deceived by its own thoughts, nor could it be deceived by others.

Source:

Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play by Swami Chetanananda; pages 167-174, Vedanta Society of St. Louis, USA.

The birth anniversary of the Swami was observed on the 25th of March 2008 at our centres.

Sri Ramakrishna's training of his disciples

Jogindra was once in a ferryboat on the Ganges when he heard some passengers talking about Ramakrishna in a sneering way. At first, Jogindra was indignant; but he had a mild nature and soon reflected that the speakers were not to be blamed. After all they were only speaking in ignorance; they did not know Ramakrishna personally. "What business is this of mine," Jogindra said to himself. So he remained silent.

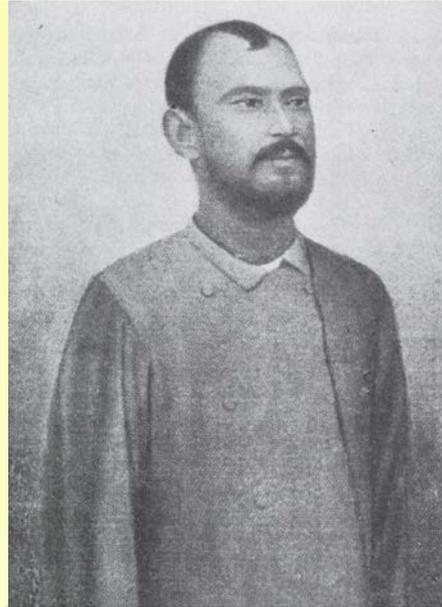
Later, Jogindra told Ramakrishna about the incident, expecting that he would laugh at it. But Ramakrishna dismayed him by exclaiming indignantly, "They spoke ill of me without any reason, and you sat in silence and did nothing! Do you know what the scriptures say? A disciple should cut off the head of anyone who speaks ill of his Guru!"

Guru's instructions: to be followed fully

On another occasion, Ramakrishna discovered cockroaches in a chest which he used for his clothes. He told Jogindra to take the clothes outside, shake out the cockroaches and kill them. The soft-hearted Jogindra did not want to kill the cockroaches, so he merely shook them out of the clothes and let them run away in the garden. He did not expect that Ramakrishna would give the matter a second thought, since the clothes were now clean. But he was wrong. Ramakrishna asked him if he had done as he had been told, and Jogindra was obliged to confess that he had not. "Always do exactly as I tell you," said Ramakrishna. "Otherwise, sooner or later, you'll follow your own whim about something that really is important; and then you will be sorry."

To be a devotee but not a fool

Once, Jogindra went to the bazaar to buy an iron pan. The shopkeeper,



Swami Yogananda
(one who enjoys the bliss of
reunion)
(30 March 1861— 28 March 1899)

greatly impressed him by his pious talk. When Jogindra got back, he found that the shopkeeper had cheated him – he had been sold a pot that was cracked. Ramakrishna reproved him. "What – you bought a pot and didn't examine it first? The shopkeeper was there to do business, not to practice religion. Why did you believe him and get cheated? Just because you're a devotee, that's no reason to be a fool."

Early Life of Swami Yogananda

The temple garden of Dakshineswar was built in 1855 by Rani Rasmani, a wealthy woman of Calcutta. It is a charming place full of trees and flower gardens; and the holy river Ganges flows beside its galaxy of temples. Jogin, a teenaged Brahmin boy from the village of Dakshineswar, used to visit this temple garden quite often to bathe in the Ganges or pluck flowers for the worship of his family's ancestral deities. His neighbours had told him about Sri Ramakrishna, an eccentric priest of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Although he was religious-minded, Jogin had not the slightest interest

in seeing the 'mad Brahmin,' as his friends called Ramakrishna. Moreover, Jogin was very shy and avoided meeting people.

One day, while young Jogin was plucking flowers in the temple garden, he met a middle-aged man walking in the flower garden, and thinking that this man was a gardener, Jogin sought his help. Some years later, at the age of sixteen or seventeen, Jogin read an article about the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in a journal of the Brahma leader Keshab Chandra Sen. He decided to visit the Master. With the journal in hand, Jogin arrived at Sri Ramakrishna's veranda and found the room filled with Brahma devotees. He was amazed to find that the man whom he had thought was a gardener earlier and whom his friends called a 'mad brahmin' was actually Sri Ramakrishna. Being too shy to enter the room, he stood outside the door attentively, listening to the spiritual conversation.

Jogindra Nath Roy Chaudhury was born into a well-to-do aristocratic family at Dakshineswar on 30 March 1861. His father was a pious Brahmin who spent long periods of time in spiritual pursuits. He did not pay much attention to managing his properties and, as a result, lost most of them. His only hope lay in his eldest and most promising son, Jogin, who might one day be able to shoulder the responsibilities of the whole family.

However, Jogin developed a religious tendency very early in life. He was sent to a Christian missionary school in Agarpara, a few miles from Dakshineswar. During his final year of school he met Sri Ramakrishna and began to visit him daily. This contact with Sri Ramakrishna brought about a great change in his thinking; the attainment of God became the sole purpose of his life. After his Entrance examination, Jogin began to live with Sri Ramakrishna for longer

periods of time and to spend more time in meditation. He was, however, aware of his family's hardship. He tried for several months to get a job but did not succeed, so he spent most of his time in prayer and meditation. His absentmindedness alarmed his uncle, who wrote to Jogin's father urging him to arrange his son's marriage. Forced to marry, he rebelled like a caged lion that desperately wants to be free.

Jogin later described his mental condition, "As soon as I married, the thought came to me that the hope of god-realisation was now a mockery. Why should I go to the Master, whose very first teaching was the renunciation of lust and gold? I have ruined my life because of the tenderness of my heart. It cannot be reversed...I used to visit the Master daily; but after this event, I stopped going to him altogether and spent my days in utter despair and repentance."

Sri Ramakrishna heard about Jogin's marriage and was anxious to see him; he sent for him repeatedly, but Jogin did not come. As Jogin disregarded his repeated summons, the Master hit upon a plan which finally resulted in Jogin returning to the Kali temple. Sri Ramakrishna said to Jogin, "What if you are married? Haven't I too been married? What is there to be afraid of in that? If you have the grace of this place [meaning himself], even a hundred thousand marriages will be powerless to affect you. If you want to live a family life and realise God at the same time, bring your wife here at once. I will make both of you fit for that. And if you want to renounce worldly life and attain God, I'll make that also possible for you."

Jogin was stupefied. What was this that he had heard? Was it possible? He felt himself suddenly transported from a region of utter despair to one bright with hope... A dead weight was lifted from his heart and he breathed freely again. Jogin bowed down to the Master with tearful eyes. Then the Master, taking

Jogin's hands, escorted him to his room.

The spiritual relationship between the Master and the disciple was re-established. Ramakrishna reinforced Jogin's spirit of renunciation and the cloud of maya that had been hovering in Jogin's mind disappeared. He began to spend time with the Master once more.

In the company of Sri Ramakrishna

A real teacher practices what he preaches. If his speech and action do not coincide, people do not trust him. Sri Ramakrishna would therefore ask his disciples to test him as money changers test their coins.

One evening, Jogin decided to spend the night with Sri Ramakrishna, with the intention of serving him if needed. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased. After dinner the Master went to bed, and Jogin made his own bed on the floor and slept. Throughout his life Jogin was a light sleeper. In the middle of the night, he woke to find the door open and Ramakrishna gone. He got up and looked out, but Ramakrishna was nowhere to be seen. Then the terrible suspicion came to Jogindra: perhaps the Master has gone to the Nahabat, to be with his wife! Could it be that all his purity was pretence? Determined to find out the truth without delay, Jogindra went out of doors and stationed himself near the Nahabat, so that Ramakrishna would not be able to leave it unseen by him. But while he lurked there and watched, Ramakrishna suddenly appeared, walking from the direction of the Panchavati, where he had been meditating. Jogindra was bitterly ashamed at his own lack of faith. But Ramakrishna told him, "You are quite right – before you accept anyone as your guru, you should watch him by day and by night."

Once Sri Ramakrishna asked Jogin, "What do you think of me? Jogin replied, "You are neither a householder nor a sannyasin [in any exclusive sense]." He meant that the Master was God – beyond attributes. Ramakrishna was greatly pleased and exclaimed, "What an extraordinary

statement you have just made!" Sometimes the Master would ask his disciples to evaluate him in order to check their level of understanding.

Ramakrishna always watched over his disciples' spiritual practices, and also their sleeping and eating habits. He approved of eating a heavy meal at lunch, but did not like his disciples to eat large quantities at night, because he considered night the time for *sadhana* (spiritual practices). One day the Master asked Jogin, "What do you eat at night?" "Bread made from one pound of flour, and one half pound of potato curry," replied Jogin. Immediately the Master said, "My goodness! I don't need your service. I cannot afford to provide such a large quantity of food every day. You had better eat at home before coming here."

After that, Jogin began to strictly observe the Master's rules regarding eating. He did not even drink water in anyone else's house. One morning he ate a little breakfast at home and then left for Calcutta with the Master. Ramakrishna visited several places, but did not ask Jogin to eat anything as he knew his strict observance about taking food. However, in the evening at Balam Basu's house, the Master asked Balam to feed Jogin. The Master knew that Jogin had eaten sweets and fruits as Prasad at Balam's on previous occasions. Balam immediately took Jogin to the dining hall and fed him sumptuously. Even though the Master frequently passed in and out of spiritual ecstasy, he was able to keep a vigilant watch on the mental and physical condition of his disciples.

Most artists and scientists are negligent about personal tidiness and external affairs while absorbed in their work. But it is amazing to see that although Ramakrishna was completely oblivious to his body and surroundings during samadhi, he was careful even about trivial details while in the normal plane. One morning the Master left for Balam's house by carriage with Jogin and Ramlal. When the

carriage reached the Dakshineswar gate, the Master asked Jogin, "Did you carry my cloth and towel?" He replied, "I am carrying your towel, but I forgot to bring the cloth. Anyhow, Balaram will be happy to give you a piece of new cloth." The Master said indignantly, "Nonsense! People will say, 'What a hapless fellow has come!' It will cause them trouble and they will be embarrassed. Stop the carriage. Go and bring the cloth." When Jogin obeyed, the Master said, "There is an abundance of everything when a good, fortunate person comes as a guest. Whereas when an unlucky, wretched fellow comes, the host finds great difficulty in accommodating him, particularly if he arrives on a day when there is a dearth of necessities in the household."

It was a great education to live with Sri Ramakrishna: his every action and word carried deep meaning. According to the arrangements of the temple management, every day Sri Ramakrishna was to receive a portion of prasada, food offered to the deities. One morning he found that his share had not been sent to his room. This irregularity disturbed him, so he went to the temple office to inquire about it. The embarrassed temple manager immediately sent the Master's portion to his room. Jogin was surprised at this for he knew that the Master did not care much about eating as he had a very delicate stomach. Moreover he had never seen the Master so upset as he was on that day. After a good deal of reflection, Jogin came to the conclusion that the Master, in spite of his great spirituality, could not overcome the petty tendencies of his priestly class.

Meanwhile, Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room and said to Jogin, "Look here, Rani Rasmani has bequeathed her large estate to the service of this temple so that the offerings may be distributed among devotees and sadhus...I fight with the temple officials for the share that comes here so that Rasmani's objective may at least be partially fulfilled." Thus Jogin discovered that every act of the

Master, no matter how trivial it might appear, had deep significance.

Jogin learned from the Master to defend the truth. The Master also taught him to ignore the endless gossip of worldly people, for otherwise it would drag his mind from God to the worldly plane.

Ramakrishna had a special way of teaching his disciples. He did not teach in a classroom with a curriculum; there was no binding routine, nor any book to be read. He put himself on the same level as his young disciples. He was their companion; he talked familiarly with them; without any trace of superiority. The advice he gave them was not his own: it came through his lips from the Mother of the Universe. Sri Ramakrishna enacted the divine play with his disciples in the temple garden of Dakshineswar and demonstrated true spirituality to them by the example of his own life. He taught them how to realise God. He eradicated worldliness from their minds and gave them a taste of divine bliss.

In September, 1885, Sri Ramakrishna was taken to Calcutta for treatment of throat cancer and then in December, to Cossipore. Jogin followed the Master and served him. It was not so easy to serve Sri Ramakrishna. Once at Cossipore the Master expressed a wish to eat palo pudding (a kind of custard made from the zedoary root), and asked Jogin to buy it in Calcutta. On the way Jogin thought that the pudding from the market might be adulterated and that it might aggravate the Master's illness, so he went to Balaram's house and told everything to the women devotees of the Master. They detained Jogin for lunch and began to make pudding with pure milk. Since Ramakrishna could not get the pudding for lunch, he had taken his regular meal instead. He heard from Jogin what had happened, then said to him, "I wanted to eat the pudding from that particular shop... why did you bring this pudding, giving trouble to the devotees? Moreover, this pudding is very rich and hard to digest. I shall not eat

it." Truly the Master did not touch the pudding at all and Jogin was extremely embarrassed.

Jogin continued to serve the Master with heart and soul. Since he was very austere and neglected his body, he became sick at Cossipore. The Master was very sorry to hear that and asked Jogin to eat at the proper times and take sufficient rest. When he was not serving the Master, Jogin devoted his time to japam and meditation. Another aspect of his nature was his deep feeling for the suffering people. Once a man from his village died in a train accident, and his wife and children were left helpless. Jogin mentioned it to his brother disciples, and Tarak immediately gave Jogin forty rupees to take to the family.

In spite of his fatal disease, Sri Ramakrishna gave final shape to his future Order in Cossipore. He made Narendra the leader of his young disciples. One day the elder Gopal, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, brought twelve pieces of ochre cloth and twelve rosaries, which the Master distributed among his disciples, including Jogin. Eight or nine days before his passing away, Ramakrishna asked Jogin to bring the almanac and read the events of each day and the position of the stars. When Jogin finished reading about 16 August 1886, the Master told him to stop and to put the almanac back in its proper place. Sri Ramakrishna passed away at 1.02 a.m. on the same auspicious day in August that he had selected.

Sources:

1. *God Lived with Them: Life Stories of Sixteen Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna* by Swami Chetanananda; pages 219-231, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.
2. *Ramakrishna and his Disciples* by Christopher Isherwood; page 222, Advaita Ashrama; Kolkata.

"The living God is within you, and yet you are building churches and temples and believing all sorts of imaginary nonsense. **The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body.** Of course all animals are temples too, but man is the highest, the Taj Mahal of temples."

— Swami Vivekananda