



# ProVisions

One who is on the Quest needs provisions for the journey; such are these. We hope some are also visions-forward.

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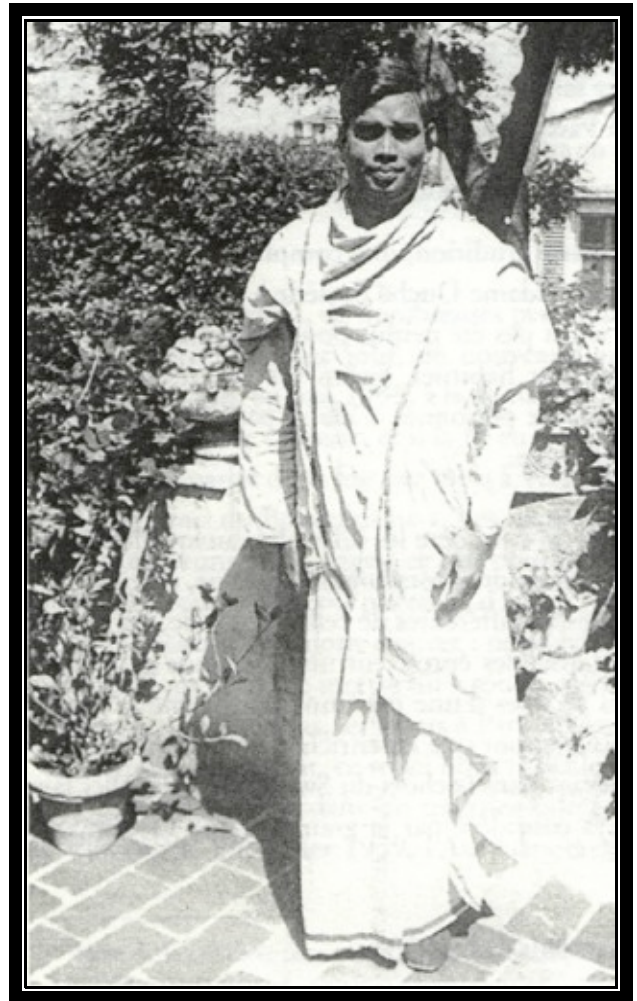
## Swami Siddheswarananda & His Times

One of the most distinguished and brilliant monks of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Siddheswarananda, was posted to France in the summer of 1937, at the invitation of certain French savants and writers. Among those remembered today are Romain Rolland, Jean Herbert, and Marcel Sauton and his wife – contacts made by Swami Yatiswarananda, in preparing the ground in Paris and environs, for the establishment of a permanent center of the work of the Math and Mission.

The Swami quickly made his mark on the elite and learned of Paris society, was invited to lecture at the Sorbonne and began learning the language. When Hitler invaded France in May of 1940, and spread the Nazi control steadily westward, the entire work of the Swami and his friends was threatened. Advised to move quickly to the south of France, Swami Siddheswarananda and one or two close devotees settled in the southeast corner near the city of Montpellier. He was compelled to move many times. The following letter tells dramatically of his finding at last a place where he could stay and do the public work as well.

The letter is published in the book *Swami Siddheswarananda et son temps, Part I*, a continuing biography by Maud Lallement of the Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, Gretz. We are indebted to the author for permission to translate and use this memoir. This letter, written to a disciple, follows:

I am astonished that the house of Sri Ramakrishna [at Saint-Mandé, near Paris] seemed to you



Sw. Siddheswarananda during a Pilgrimage to Assisi, June 1939

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## Swami Siddheswarananda

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luxurious. Not a single piece of furniture, carpet or installation whatsoever has been added that could give an impression of luxury. We have lived here only with what is available in Auteil and which you have seen last year. The Sautons, so devoted to the work of Sri Gurumaharaj [Sri Ramakrishna], have dedicated to him all that they owned from the day they welcomed me to their home. Why should they give up or hide all the beautiful furniture, pictures, statues etc., earned by the sweat of their brow, and which they have now dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna? I have rarely come across, even in India, any others so devoted and they are not at all wealthy!

The story of our establishing ourselves in this modern building is worth telling. As I was giving regular classes from the beginning of October on Auguste Maquet street in Auteil, the landlord, who belonged to the old pre-war bourgeoisie, asked me to stop the classes. Then we looked for a room to rent, and from last year until today, all the Saturday afternoon meetings have been held at the Conservatory of Music. I hope, God willing, to continue to give them there, as it is a central location which allows many to come in the evening. I was receiving in my room only those who wanted interview or wished to meditate. And then one day, the landlord found that that was still too much. The fact is, he did not want any public activity of any sort in his house.

Obliged to go elsewhere we went in search of another apartment and visited innumerable ones, in every direction for months, but each time we were at the point of settling on one, when the mention of my work brought the same objection, and we had to

begin again. Numerous studios also were attempted, but who would care to allow a stranger like me to carry on a public activity? This move which we had in mind was only that the work of Sri Ramakrishna might be continued. If that proved to be impossible, staying on in Paris would have no meaning for me. I was very depressed. One of my good friends, a secretary in your Senate, did his best to find me a location through an Agency; everywhere he was told that some place could be found if one lives "upscale," not otherwise. The only alternative was to rent one of such places designed for professionals, but they are awfully expensive.



Swami Siddheswarananda at Saint-Mandé with devotees

Just at this time, one day the phone rang. It was a disciple who lives in America, a French woman [Madame Verdier]. She said she owns an apartment building in Saint-Mandé and, seeing us in this fix, suggested we occupy it. Since arriving in San Francisco, she had not yet spent any time in the

building and urged us to go right away and see if there wouldn't soon be a vacancy. If none was available, she would give notice to one of her tenants.

It truly was a miracle. We went to the place and, to our surprise, there was an empty apartment which was put at our disposal. The owner was so happy! The manager and the caretaker received special instructions that she supported all our activities, and if other tenants complained, they could leave. In any case, we were not to be disturbed.

Two of my brother-swamis in America happened to be in Paris. They accompanied us to Saint-Mandé and Ramakrishna was installed, to the great joy of Madame Verdier, who even dreams of dedicating the entire house to the Lord's work, if her present financial situation improves.

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## REGULARLY SCHEDULED EVENTS

Sunday	10:30 AM 11:00 AM	Chant Service. <i>SUSPENDED AUG. 14- SEPT. 4.</i> Discourse.
Tuesday	8 PM	Reading: <i>Holy Mother</i> by Swami Nikhilananda is the text for this one-hour class, which is followed by a half-hour of meditation. <i>CLASS SUSPENDED AUG. 14- SEPT. 4.</i>
Thursday	8 PM	Reading: <i>The Textbook of Yoga Psychology</i> by Swami Brahmananda Sarasvati is the text. <i>CLASS SUSPENDED UNTIL SEPT. 6.</i>
3rd Fridays	7:30 PM	RAM NAM will be held on Aug. 17, at 993 Walker Ave., Atlanta, GA.
Daily**	6 PM	Vespers/Arati - A short period of prayer is followed by silent meditation. <i>**Except Sundays.</i>

## AUGUST &amp; SEPTEMBER 2007 DISCOURSE TOPICS &amp; SPECIAL EVENTS

5	11 AM	THE ROLE OF EMOTION IN SPIRITUAL LIFE - Talk followed by discussion.
12	11 AM	QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS*
18	7:30 PM	VINA & MRIDANGAM BENEFIT CONCERT†
19	11 AM	WHAT VEDANTA MEANS TO ME with Gillian Renault and Ted Blanchard - Talk followed by discussion.
26	11 AM	EFFORT AND GRACE – recorded talk by Swami Prabhavananda‡
2	11 AM	Guest speaker: Frances Baldwin- Talk followed by discussion.‡

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

\*By popular demand, **Swami Yogeshananda** will again attempt to answer all of your **questions about Vedanta and spiritual practice** during the service on Sunday, August 12. Please think about questions you would like to pose.

† On Saturday August 18, **Priya Chandrasekaran** and her senior students will give a **Vina Benefit Concert**, accompanied by **'Bombay' Santosh Chandru** on Mridangam, at the Center to benefit our Building Fund. Suggested donation is \$10 (but more, of course, will be accepted!) and the program starts at 7:30 p.m. Refreshments will be available.

**Swami Yogeshananda** takes a much-needed vacation from Aug. 14 to Sep. 4. He will be in the Monasteries of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. During his absence the evening classes and the chant service are suspended, and the Library is closed except for returning books.

‡ **Frances Baldwin** gave us a gripping presentation on "Presence," as you may recall. She is a facilitator for the Faith and the City Leadership Institute.

‡ *Effort and Grace*, along with other recordings, is a new addition to our Library. See below for other new additions.

Please do honor these interim Sunday programs by your attendance. Thank you.

## Swami Siddheswarananda

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As for the Center, my intention is not to organize the work along the lines of a Society as in America. I do not have that attitude, nor numerous friends, such as Mr. and Mrs. [Jean] Herbert had when they made an observational tour of all the wide-spread work of the Mission. I have no tendency whatever to want to organize. Too much organization has been the bane of European life; advice has been unanimous on this subject and imminent catastrophe can be the only result of too much organization and of organized bodies which stifle the liberty of individual conscience. I have been sent here as a representative of a spiritual Order. My life is an open book for all. And I work with His inspiration behind me. Where all human efforts will prove unable to procure a roof, when so many devotees search so conscientiously, it is, finally, God who takes charge. Help has arisen from an unexpected quarter. There was no visible reason for Madame Verdier to come to Paris at that time. Yet she came. As she herself expressed it, one would have to say that the Lord sent her here to offer us her house. And always, since we have been in Saint-Mandé, there has been a constant flow of visitors for meeting, meditation, etc.

Therefore, I do not have any desire to separate myself from the spiritual directives inspired by Sri Ramakrishna, in order to throw myself into an enterprise founded on human suggestions. The less we organize the spiritual work on an institutional basis, the greater the effect it will have on our lives. And the less we think of scattering our attention on worldly matters, the more we are progressing spiritually. Why compel ourselves to conform to such and such a standard? The work in America has been developed in its appropriate manner and the devotees there receive the inspiration which makes them behave in a certain way. As for me, I do not concern myself with what the next day will bring. We have to work in the living present. Tomorrow, the whole of Paris may fall; we are on a volcano. If that unfortunate moment comes, that will be the will of the Divine Mother, and we should make no reproaches. May Her will be done! Even if it becomes necessary for all this work to end, that will cause me no pain, for during these two years, 150 people at least have been touched by the message

of Vedanta and the lives of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, and that will inevitably have lasting results. It is never the number that counts.

The political situation is actually extremely tight, and I have no desire to absent myself from Paris, but M. Herbert long ago arranged a month's program of work in Geneva. So I leave tomorrow and return the 4th of June to resume the classes. If it is not compulsory in case of war to leave Paris for some other province, we shall remain just here.

**I have been sent here as a representative of a spiritual Order. I work with His inspiration behind me. Where all human efforts will prove unable, it is, finally, God who takes charge.**

I forgot to answer another point raised in your letter. We are absolutely not rich. Month by month the work depends on the voluntary contributions of devotees. I never impose on anyone any charge whatever to benefit any of the various projects of the Center. As in India, the work must depend only on the help that comes voluntarily.

## New Library Additions

Four new CDs and two new tapes have been added to our library: A discourse on *Knowledge and Understanding* by **Aldous Huxley**, recorded at our Hollywood Center; a discourse on *Girish Ghosh*, Sri Ramakrishna's renegade, by **Christopher Isherwood**, also recorded in Hollywood; a discourse on *Christianity and Vedanta*, by **Swami Atmatattvananda** ("Atma-tattva-ananda," if that helps – our old friend **Shiva**, the 4th of July guitar player); *So, Who's Planning?*, a discourse by **Swami Sarvadevananda**, Asst. Minister, So. Calif. Vedanta Society; *Effort and Grace*, a talk by **Swami Prabhavananda** (this tape will be played on August 26 – see above); and *Reminiscences of Swami Shantananda*, by **Swami Sridharananda**, a heart-warming account by the Swami in Australia of his life with a known jivanmukta.