

**Sarada Ramakrishna Vivekananda
SRV Associations**

SRV Sangha Life

*Setting the feet of humanity solidly on the
path of universal Truth*



None else but Self; none other than Mother

***An introductory booklet of
questions & answers concerning sangha life,
SRV's history, and recommended reading***

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*Dedicated to our precious spiritual Ideals, Sri Ramakrishna,
Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda, and our Teachers,
Swami Aseshananda, Lex Hixon, and Babaji Bob Kindler*

Repeat God's name and sing His glories, and keep holy company; and now and then visit God's devotees and holy ones. The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities; it is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God.

– Sri Ramakrishna

As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it or the scent of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, one becomes spiritually awakened by continuously contemplating God.

– Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

As soon as human beings perceive the glory of the Vedanta, all abracadabras fall off of themselves. This has been my uniform experience. Whenever mankind attains a higher vision, the lower vision disappears of itself.

– Swami Vivekananda

Vairagyam, renunciation, means positivity in the sense of deification of the world — that you deify yourself. I am divine. And when you are divine you also see the same divinity behind all name and form. Each and every person that you meet in this pilgrimage of life reflects God.

– Swami Aseshananda

We do not enter the path to engage in religious fantasy, but to become more realistic, more free from self-deception, more uncompromising about Truth.

– Lex Hixon, Nur Al-Jerrahi

Sadhana is spirituality's gift to you on how to cut yourself in the image of innate divinity. Sadhana is different from therapy and conventional religion, i.e. it is not about dredging up good and bad, or moral and immoral, but about watering the flowers instead of the weeds. Name and form should not impinge upon knowing yourself as formless Spirit.

– Babaji Bob Kindler

Preface

This small book on SRV Sangha life is meant to be a useful resource for those who have come to SRV Associations seeking a spiritual community in which to strive for spiritual Illumination under the guidance of an adept Teacher who is connected to the powerful and pure lineage of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Important aspects of sangha life concerning practice, teacher-student relationship, initiation, and our lineage are covered. Additionally, SRV's history, Guruparampara, and a suggested reading list are all included.



Some Questions and Answers regarding SRV Sangha Life

What is SRV Associations?

SRV Associations, under the guidance of the Spiritual Director, Babaji Bob Kindler, is many things to its members and those who find us:

- SRV is a sangha, a community of spiritual aspirants whose goal is direct, personal experience of our eternal oneness with Brahman, Ultimate Reality.
- To spiritual aspirants, SRV is an ashram where spiritual disciplines are taught and practiced for purification of the mind so that we may qualify ourselves for the realization of Brahman.
- To Wisdom seekers, it is a spiritual university where the diverse and profound philosophical systems of India are deeply taught and authentically transmitted.
- To the devotees of God, SRV is a temple where they can worship God with form, the Lord and Mother of the Universe, as embodied through our three ideals, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, and the other Divine Incarnations.
- To the general public, SRV Associations is a publisher of spiritual books and the journal, Nectar of Non-dual Truth.
- To men and women in prison, SRV is a spiritual resource and support as they work through the challenges of karma and incarceration.
- For teens and young adults, SRV is a source of radical teachings on the nature of Reality versus the conventional world appearing before them.
- For parents, it is a place for the whole family to receive the teachings, experiences, and collective support that Holy Company – Guru, Dharma, and Sangha – make possible for establishing a dharmic home and family.

Once you get qualified, the Light cannot remain away. You yourself pull away the veils. - Babaji

What does it mean to be a sangha member?

The word “sangha” means a spiritual community. A sangha member is someone who attends classes, worship, retreats, and/or studies via

email or mail with Babaji Bob Kindler, the Spiritual Director and living Guru. The SRV sangha functions through the time-honored system of Teacher and Student, known as Guru-Sishya, within the spiritual lineage of Sri Ramakrishna. SRV sangha members participate in the Teacher-Student relationship according to the level of their interest and spiritual intensity.

What is a lineage?

Spiritually speaking, a lineage is the line of descent from a Teacher to a qualified student, who may, in turn, become a Teacher who transmits Truth and the dharma to the next generation of students. This process is called Guruparampara in Sanskrit.

What is SRV's Lineage?

Our lineage begins with Sri Ramakrishna, and passes through Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, his wife and spiritual consort. She initiated Swami Areshananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, and Swami Areshananda initiated Babaji Bob Kindler, Spiritual Director of the SRV Associations.

SRV Associations of America, a national organization started in the 1980's, was founded by Lex Hixon, a disciple of Swami Nikhilananda, who was also initiated by Sri Sarada Devi. Lex Hixon, an intimate spiritual influence for Babaji, gave his blessings on the formation of independent SRV Associations that would operate as a sangha with a Teacher. SRV Associations of San Francisco, Hawaii, and Oregon are the result of this. (a more detailed history appears at the end)

What is a Guru/Spiritual Teacher?

The Spiritual Teacher is that soul who awakens our spiritual consciousness. Swami Vivekananda describes this in his Bhakti Yoga lectures:

“The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the Guru — the teacher; and the person to whose soul the impulse is conveyed is called the Shishya — the student. To convey such an impulse to any soul, in the first place, the soul from which it

proceeds must possess the power of transmitting it, as it were, to another; and in the second place, the soul to which it is transmitted must be fit to receive it. The seed must be a living seed, and the field must be ready ploughed; and when both these conditions are fulfilled, a wonderful growth of genuine religion takes place. "The true preacher of religion has to be of wonderful capabilities, and clever shall his hearer be" [Kathopanisad] — and when both of these are really wonderful and extraordinary, then will a splendid spiritual awakening result, and not otherwise. Such alone are the real teachers, and such alone are also the real students, the real aspirants. All others are only playing with spirituality. They have just a little curiosity awakened, just a little intellectual aspiration kindled in them, but are merely standing on the outward fringe of the horizon of religion. There is no doubt some value even in that, as it may in course of time result in the awakening of a real thirst for religion; and it is a mysterious law of nature that as soon as the field is ready, the seed must and does come; as soon as the soul earnestly desires to have religion, the transmitter of the religious force must and does appear to help that soul. When the power that attracts the light of religion in the receiving soul is full and strong, the power which answers to that attraction and sends in light does come as a matter of course."

The most comprehensive statement on Guru comes from Sri Ramakrishna, who states that Satchidananda is the only Guru. Satchidananda is a name for Ultimate Reality, meaning Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss Absolute. Satchidananda is the Source of all Knowledge and Wisdom that manifests through all teachers, through all of time. Sri Ramakrishna likened this relationship to the rain that falls from the sky and lands on a rooftop that has multiple gutter spouts shaped like birds, fish, lions, and elephants. The water comes out of them in gushes, streams or little spurts. In this way he is saying that the water (Knowledge and Wisdom) comes from the same source (Satchidananda), but the vehicles (the teachers) shape it accordingly.

Is it necessary to have a Spiritual Teacher?

All of Eastern dharma insists on the need of a teacher. Swami Vivekananda states in Bhakti Yoga, and other places in the Complete Works, that the ignition of our spiritual awakening requires a teacher. We cannot get it from reading books. Spirituality is a living verity passed from an awakened soul to a qualified soul. All beings have the Atman within, but intuiting It through the thick veils of ignorance, habit, and conventional thinking, requires a great Light. The Guru manifests that Light. Then it is the Guru's job to point out the obstacles in our way of being established in the consciousness of Atman, and guide us as we ourselves remove them by the power inherent in Atman.

Sri Ramakrishna also stated that in time, the mind becomes its own Guru. This is a very profound utterance that needs explanation. In our independent, self-reliant culture, there are many who think they can be their own teacher in spirituality. This is odd, since no one expects to learn dance, art, music, humanities, social sciences, hard sciences, or medicine without a teacher, yet for the most subtle science of all – the science of the Self – so many people think that they are qualified to teach themselves. Perhaps we can be forgiven this presumption, since many of us who are seeking Truth already sense something undying, something infinite, something that is ever-aware within ourselves. However, what we have not been taught in our culture is the difference between the ego and the true Self, and thus it is easy to misinterpret that “still, small voice” within and confuse it with the ego still tied to attachment, desire, and fear.

What is the qualification of the human Guru? Does one's mind possess this?

According to the great seer Shankaracharya, there are four qualifications for an authentic Guru:

- 1) The Guru must know the essence of the scriptures and be able to transmit them;
- 2) Must live a pure and simple life;
- 3) Impart the teachings with no ulterior motive for wealth, fame, or power; and

4) Be a knower of Brahman.

This last qualification is a teaching all in itself, and provides an answer for those who are wondering why they cannot follow their own intuition and attain Self-Realization. There are four levels to a knower of Brahman (another name for Satchidananda). The lowest level of realization in order to competently guide others requires the following:

Right Aspiration: possesses detachment, knowledge of the scriptures, wisdom,

Proper Inquiry: has gained all virtues, knows the nature of maya, contemplates the Atman,

Peaceful Mind: is free of desire, masters concentration, transcends mind

Illumined Intelligence: attains renunciation, equality of vision, and nondual Truth

Needless to say, if our own personal mind does not meet these requirements, then we must take a Teacher who does.

Who is SRV's Guru?

Strictly speaking, Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, are our Gurus in the highest sense. Their realization and embodiment of Ultimate Reality is a spiritual power that is transmitted in seed form during initiation through each generation of spiritual seekers via the embodied Teacher. Since the start of SRV Associations in 1993, Babaji Bob Kindler has served as SRV's Guru, formally designated as the Spiritual Director. By this title we acknowledge that he embodies the Ramakrishna lineage and both the ability and purity to transmit it to qualified students through the ceremony of initiation. The Spiritual Director/Guru is also the primary Teacher transmitting the universal teachings of the Vedanta to the sangha as a whole, and the person who authorizes qualified sangha members to share the teachings with other sangha members and the public.

What is initiation?

Initiation (*mantra diksha*) is a sacred ceremony, performed by the Spiritual Director, which accomplishes three essential functions for the sincere spiritual aspirant:

1. It formalizes one's relationship with Sri Ramakrishna or Holy Mother (or both) as the Chosen Ideal
2. Establishes one in this very powerful and pure lineage of Sri Ramakrishna via the Guru-Sishya relationship with the Spiritual Director
3. It is the auspicious occasion when the Guru bestows the mantra on the aspirant and prescribes a formal spiritual practice.

As mentioned above, the Spiritual Power emanating from Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna, is transmitted in seed form in the process of initiation. Another way of saying this is that all the realization of one's Teacher, his Teacher before him, and all the Gurus before to the source of the lineage is subtly transferred to the qualified disciple at the time of initiation. Rare is the person who can understand this at the time of initiation. Rather, initiation is like planting a tiny seed in the soil of the heart. Next, it must be watered every day with love and concentration, fertilized with the wisdom teachings, and nurtured carefully with japa (repetition of the mantra) and meditation, even for one's entire life. But the truth is, that one is illumined at the time of initiation -- now, the mind has to catch up with this fact.

Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, stated many significant points about initiation:

"The true purpose of initiation is to try and realize God through sincere spiritual self-effort."

The mantra also purifies the body. Man becomes pure by repeating the mantra of God. The body cannot be pure without initiation.

The human teacher utters the mantra into the ear, but God breathes the Spirit into the soul. Everything then depends upon one's mind. Nothing can be achieved without the purity of mind.

A Guru may turn away a person seeking to be a disciple time after time. That one who is really eager for the blessing of the guru, however, will come to him even by begging.

Mother's presence and true spiritual experience, clear as a puja bell and unbroken like the flow of the Ganges river, will commence.

I ask my students to give five dedicated years to the path and teachings, knowing that all that is contained in the Name of Ramakrishna and Sarada will begin to bloom by then. There will be no problem in detaching from the world at that point, for God's love will draw them naturally and the world will remain as it is.

Student: *What are the practices?*

Babaji: Study of the scriptures (Jnana Yoga). Devotion to the Ishta (Bhakti Yoga). Meditation on Reality with form and beyond form (Raja Yoga). Serving God in all beings while offering the fruits of work to the Divine Mother of the Universe (Karma Yoga). The message and distillation of these Four Yogas are part of what Swami Vivekananda brought to the West and the world in 1893, appearing at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago as the forerunner of Neo-Vedantic transmission to begin the ministry of spreading it broadcast worldwide.

Student: *What is it like to be a member of this community?*

Babaji: SRV is very loose knit organizationally speaking, which means that we emphasize a combination of strong, steady, and serious spiritual practice married to observance of universal ideals followed in freedom, while refraining from too much indulgence in building an organization, a common trap of religious convention that undermines the point or essence of spiritual life, which is the seeking, seeing and realization of God. For instance, SRV encourages meeting for arati and satsanga many times a month with its members, but limits its business meetings to once a quarter. We feel Holy Mother is guiding us as a body, getting Her message out in Her own time, so we focus on this precious work and allow financial support to come in as it may, thereby making more time for both detached work in the world and personal spiritual growth. As a non-profit association, we do not depend on donations but depend on Mother. Donations come as they will. Since we own very little in the way of property and have very loose ties with conventional society at large, we remain free to do Her

work and live a divine life. This does not mean impracticality and lack of responsibility rules our organization. The most practical thing we can do is to be responsible for the spiritual well-being of ourselves, thereby benefiting others, especially all those who want to change their lifestyle and transform human nature.

Student: *What kind of changes need to be made in lifestyle?*

Babaji: Primarily, it is that Advaita is to be comprehended and gradually implemented into life. This is nondualism, the focus of which, by way of Truth, is the fact that "I and my Father are one"; by way of practice, it is to remove the line of demarcation between matter and Spirit, creature and Creator, God and humankind. This is done by making the dual mind one-pointed and focused on Reality by use of japa, meditation, study, and by charging up the chitta or mind-stuff/thoughts through inspiration and aspiration, by honing the intellect and turning it towards the Atman so as to catch its salutary reflection there, and by deflating the ego to achieve a humble and sincere perspective that nonetheless acknowledges its identity with Absolute Reality. We are not saying that nature and God are the same thing; for Brahman is nameless and formless in essence, beyond objective reality. Nature is an expression of Brahman, but is its passing and transitory manifestation. Therefore it cannot be accepted as the ultimate condition of Awareness which is birthless, deathless and impervious to change.

Perfect Advaita lies in seeing God in everything while in an embodied state, and in a disembodied state through absolute surrender of all limitations, ie., body, ego, mind, intellect, nature, objects etc., while easily merging with Brahman like a hailstone into the ocean. Spiritual practice, usually thought of as dualistic, is transformed into service and direct perception by assuming the Advaitic perspective based upon the fact that God is all-pervasive, eternal, indivisible, perfect, and immutable, among others. To go the distance, this means that Brahman is capable, through Its Maya, of appearing in a particular location, of assuming the transitions of life and death, of appearing to divide and separate, to take on imperfections, to change and transform in countless ways - but these are all assumptions,

appearances, for Its true nature remains ever unified and not subject to any modification whatsoever. It is one of the great mysteries of God.

Student: *What are my obligations?*

Babaji: Love God first and foremost. Trust and follow the Guru of your chosen lineage. Gain firm adherence to the truths told in the scriptures and affirmed by the saints and sages, and walk the chosen spiritual path to its consummation. Support the work of SRV, which is not to change the world, as the world is perfect in its imperfections as inferred above, but to make accessible the ignorance-destroying teachings of Advaita Vedanta and other authentic religious traditions to suffering and struggling humanity. This is done by first realizing them yourself, and this sets SRV practices and the tenets of any true religious discipline and observance apart and above society and its haphazard ways of acting, whether well-intentioned or based upon exploitation founded in greed and selfishness. As Sri Ramakrishna states, "You have no room in your bed yet you are inviting others to sleep there with you." So, in action, your obligation is to follow the integrity of thought, word, and deed to the letter. In realization, your obligation is to get it.

Student: *What does "provisional Guru" mean?*

Babaji: In SRV, Babaji is the provisional guru, which means he has hold of the reigns of the lineage, having been given mantra-diksha by the last living monastic disciple of Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Aseshananda, up until his passing in 1996, She being wife, spiritual consort, and inheritor of Sri Ramakrishna's grace, lineage, and His growing thousands [millions] of devotees. The real Guru, as stated by the Great Master, is one's own heart/mind in its perfect and natural condition, since God resides there. Since the impurities of the Kali Yuga are herein manifested in human beings to a high degree, causing ignorance of this fact and its realization, we follow the highest rendering of God with form that ever appears on the world scene, called Avatar. Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda are the most recent and powerful expression of Divinity in the Kali Yuga, hence the Kali Avatara, hence SRV Association. Guru - from Absolute, to Ishta, to initiatory - is the Vedic way. SRV combines this with the Avataravada -

an interior act of self-surrender offers his mind, heart, and ego to be molded by the Teacher. This act of self-surrender is accompanied by seeing or intuiting the Chosen Ideal or presence of Divinity manifest in the human Teacher. A disciple must have also decided by this time that the Teacher is qualified by the standards set forth by Sri Shankaracharya: the Teacher must know the essence of the scriptures and be able to transmit them; must lead a pure and simple life; must impart the teachings without desire for wealth, fame, or power, but only for the student's ultimate good and spiritual Freedom; and must be a knower of Brahman. Initiation follows this stage or sometimes precedes it.

The disciple who consciously accepts the Teacher as described above is in a profound position to reach the highest levels of understanding free from the problems that the half-hearted and fault-finding person will encounter. Surrender to the Teacher (as Guru Tattva, Guru Principle, not as a human personality) is a dynamic practice, never passive. Offering one's mind, heart and ego for the subtle surgery of liberating Wisdom and true Love can be as uncomfortable at times as it is exhilarating. Faith, trust, patience, and humility are essential for the full success of this relationship.

Senior members of SRV have asked that the following paragraph be included to provide a "word to the wise":

Earnest and intelligent students, striving for intensity in their spiritual life, may experience at some point an emotionally hurtful teaching from the Teacher. Those who have settled their minds that the Teacher is qualified and only cares about their spiritual realization will bounce back with humility and either understand the teaching right away, or mull it over with faith and trust until understanding comes. Those who have not achieved this faith in the Teacher's qualifications and intentions, often entertain certain projections, such as: The Teacher "wants to control me", "doesn't understand me or my life," or simply, "makes me feel guilty," etc. Those who have these kinds of reactions sometimes alienate themselves and look for reasons to leave the Teacher-Student relationship. It is essential to maintain communications with the Teacher, especially at these junctures.

Persevere and do not let the small self – the unripe ego – spoil this most rare of relationships. As the Upanisad states:

“Even to hear of it is not available to many; many, even having heard of it, cannot comprehend. Wonderful is its teacher, and (equally) clever the pupil. Wonderful indeed is he who comprehends it when taught by an able preceptor.” – Katho Upanisad

“There are those who listen to a teacher speak Truth and agree with 95% of what he says, while the other 5% form their “issues.” So now they have an issue with the teacher. Maybe some of them resolve that issue and feel a little relief, but up comes another issue. This is the wrong tact. Truth is the door to Freedom. Instead of focusing on the 5% you do not agree with, you should focus on the 95% you agree with. Swift progress will then be made, and your issues will simply disappear.” – Babaji

Can one be a sangha member without ever taking initiation?

Some aspirants come to SRV Associations from other spiritual traditions and lineages. Everyone is welcome. One can be a sangha member without taking initiation. Non-initiates have access to the teachings and worship just like initiates. The primary external difference between initiates and non-initiates is being able to serve ceremonially in the shrine room.

What is expected of a sangha member?

Sangha members and especially initiates are strongly encouraged to participate in classes, retreats, worship, and meditation. Lord Buddha states that the rust of monasteries is non-recitation of scripture, and the rust of households is lack of self-effort. We could add that the rust of spiritual centers is lack of participation! The strength of the sangha and its power to create an atmosphere for the Self-Realization of others who are just entering into spiritual life should not be underestimated. The regular and joyful participation of sangha members in the life of the sangha is another way that we jointly fulfill the mission of SRV Associations: *Setting the feet of humanity solidly on the path of universal Truth*. By participating, we build on the divine

energy already established and make it easier for newcomers to enter into this sacred stream of dharma transmission.

Also of importance, sangha members are encouraged to tithe/pledge to SRV Associations in order to support the teachings, the mission, and the Teacher. The personal benefits of tithing to one's spiritual community are well-documented throughout history. Dana, generosity, is a spiritual virtue. A rule of thumb is that the amount one pledges should feel like a substantial offering and come from a spirit of generosity and divine abundance.

Whatever you give, give with faith.

*Whatever you give,
give with a sense of plenty.*

*Whatever you give,
give with humility.*

*Give with knowledge of the purpose
for which the gift is being made.*

Om, Tat, Sat!

- Taittiriya Upanisad

Seva is another important facet of sangha life, and sangha members are encouraged to offer seva according their ability and time. Seva means service; a sevaka is one who offers service to the Teacher, the ashram, and the sangha. It is closely aligned with Karma Yoga, selfless action and service of God in humanity. An ideal sevaka offers his or her service in recognition that it is a privilege to serve the Ideal embodied in the teacher and manifesting for the good of others through the spiritual community. Like danam, it is offered selflessly, with humility and without expectation of recognition or reward, and without intent to manipulate the Teacher or teachings. Importantly, it is performed to completion. Truly, seva offered to the Teacher and his/her mission, is an opportunity to hone one's sincerity and ripen the ego. This is why it is referred traditionally as Mahat-seva – service of the great ones - and considered a rare privilege.

It is not uncommon in spiritual organizations that only a few people do most of the day to day work required to sustain the Teacher's and sangha's activities. These few can make it look easy, even when more sevakas are greatly needed. The offering of selfless service is for the good of the sangha and oneself. As Swamiji has stated, *"It is only by doing good to others that one attains his own good, and it is by leading others to bhakti and mukti that one attains them himself."* In SRV Associations, there are many opportunities for seva in our publishing activities, caring for the ashrams, outreach, technology issues, retreats and more. If you are inspired to offer seva, please contact our administrative office (scroll to the end of this booklet).



*Setting the feet of humanity
on the path of Universal Truth*

A Brief History of SRV Associations

Lex Hixon & Babaji Bob Kindler



Lex Hixon (1941-1995) was a disciple of Swami Nikhilananda, himself a direct disciple of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. In his own words,



Advaita Vedanta made possible his subsequent immersions in Sufi Islam (becoming a Sheikh of the Jerrahi Order), Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and both Tibetan and Zen Buddhism. He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on Gaudapada's Karika and hosted *In the Spirit* on WBAI for two decades, a weekly interview program of teachers, known and unknown, from all spiritual traditions and perspectives. He was more than a practitioner, and

exhibited bliss, ecstatic moods, and deep wisdom which he transmitted in a natural, buoyant way. Lex was known for his ability to introduce sincere aspirants into the spiritual Tradition suited for them. He wrote a number of books on different traditions all pointing to their inherent oneness. To the Sufis he was known as Sheikh Nur, and to intimate companions in the Ramakrishna lineage, he was known as Ramakrishnadas Baul (for he loved the Bauls).



(Sheikh Nur in dzikr)

Babaji Bob Kindler (1950 -) is a disciple of Swami Aseshanandaji who was Holy Mother's last living monastic disciple. As early as 19 years, Babaji immersed himself in the study of Yoga, the Upanisads, and discovered the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. In the 1970's, Babaji was living in Hawaii when he met Lex Hixon. He learned from him that Sri Ramakrishna had left a lineage and that Swami Aseshananda was teaching in Portland, OR where Babaji had lived as a child and youth. He flew out to Portland to meet the swami and later he and Loke Ma were initiated by him and became devout students, visiting several times a year to take teachings.

During this time, Babaji, musician and classically trained cellist, created Jai Ma Music, a sacred arts ensemble, as a vehicle to share the profound wisdom of India, particularly as it had been embodied by Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami



Vivekananda. Long before the current emphasis on kirtan music, Jai Ma Music toured the U.S. presenting an East-West fusion of instrumental and devotional music, as well as sacred poetry and dance. In particular, Jai Ma Music focused on the devotional wisdom songs, bhajans and stotrams, of India, taking it more seriously than succeeding artists have, by including poetic translations in English, instead of focusing only on simple chants. These concerts became a medium of spiritual transmission and over time a few people began to actively study with Babaji.

(Babaji teaching the Upanisads in a park at SRV's very first retreat held at the national SRV Associations center in Greenville, NY. Circa summer, 1994)



(Swami Nityasvarupananda)

Babaji was also privileged to have two other “upa” Gurus. Swami Damodarananda, who was then in charge of the Fiji Ramakrishna Mission and taught him puja and the Bhagavad Gita, including how to chant it; and Swami Nityasvarupananda, who gave Babaji additional teachings in Advaita Vedanta.

SRV Origins

In the 1980's Lex Hixon, together with Babaji Bob Kindler, Rose Cabanlit (Loke Ma), John Schlenck, Eric Johns, Violet Eaton (Shankari), and other American Vedantists, organized the Sarada Ramakrishna Vivekananda Association of America. This ordering of the names emphasizes the importance of Shakti Power (via Nature, Teachers, and Teachings), for Holy Mother is the embodiment of this Maha Shakti, the Divine Mother of the Universe. Further, the acronym "SRV," thus produced, is pronounced as "serve," which epitomizes our intent to serve and continue Swami Vivekananda's mission for the West.

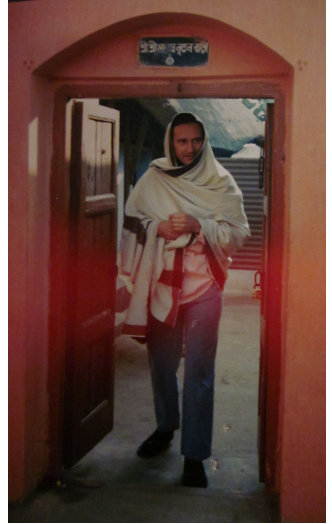
Swami Asheshananda and other swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, such as Swami Nityasvarupananda and Swami Sarvagatananda gave their blessings on the new organization. The Association's mission was to spread the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda via education and humanitarian works. The organization was run by consensus and not designed to have a single teacher, if any. A newsletter was created and the group met regularly. Others were added to the board, including Leigh Anne Gurtov (Annapurna Sarada), sometime in the early 1990's.

Inspired by Swami Vivekananda's statement from the 1890's that land was plentiful in the Catskills, the members began to look for property in New York state and discovered 100 acres in Greenville with a Hindu temple on it already and a retreat house with many rooms. It was purchased and became the site of meetings, study, concerts with Jai Ma Music, and the first two summer retreats given by Babaji in 1994 and 1995, after the forming of independent SRV Associations.





(Lex and Babaji at Koalpara)



Pivotal Pilgrimage & Independent SRV Centers

In 1993, Babaji and Lex went on pilgrimage together, leading a small group that included Bhavatarini Ma and Annapurna, along with Sheila Hixon and their three children. Babaji gave classes each day, primarily to Bhavatarini Ma and Annapurna, and the group spent over a week at Belur Math, and several weeks at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture at Gol Park.



(Babaji and Bhavatarini Ma at Holy Mother's ghat in Jayrambhati (L); Bhava Ma and Annapurna on the rooftop where Holy Mother performed the Panchatapa. (R))

During this time, Lex encouraged Babaji to begin teaching formally and together they decided that new chapters of the Sarada Ramakrishna Vivekananda Association of America should be formed with Babaji as the teacher. Bhavatarini Ma wanted Babaji to teach at her nonprofit,



The Healing Center of San Francisco. In Portland, a group of people were also asking for classes, resulting from the teachings transmitted during Jai Ma Music concerts.

(Babaji, Lex, and Bhavatarini Ma at SRV Retreat Center, Greenville, NY, 1994.)

Lex and Babaji presented this idea to the Board of the SRV Association of America to seek their permission. The Board readily granted it with the stipulation that these new centers organize independently and become separate nonprofit organizations. The Sarada Ramakrishna Vivekananda Association of San Francisco became part of Bhavatarini Ma's nonprofit Healing Center. In Portland, OR it was organized separately as the SRV Association of Oregon, or SRV Oregon. Babaji began teaching 2 – 3 times a year at both centers, sometimes combining these teaching events with Jai Ma Music concert tours, which he and Loke Ma continued for a few more years.

(Babaji, Loke Ma, and Girish in New England)





(The altar in Lex and Sheila's shrine room)

Lex Hixon passed away November 1, 1995, a day that was simultaneously Jagadhatri Puja and All Saints Day. Prior to his passing, Babaji wrote the poem, *We are Atman All-Abiding – 108 Verses on the Atman*, which Lex praised highly. In memory of Lex, a booklet of the poem was created. This was the origin of SRV publishing, followed closely by several other books by Babaji. One of these, *Strike Off Thy Fetters – Commentary on Swami Vivekananda's Song of the Sannyasin*, led Babaji to connect with Advaita Ashram, one of the Ramakrishna Order's main publishing centers in order to secure the rights to print Swamiji's poem. This was granted by revered Swami Mumukshanandaji, who was then the president of Advaita Ashram, (followed by Swami Bodhasaranandaji) and initiated a close and ongoing relationship between SRV and Advaita Ashram.

Additional points of interest over the years:

- In 1997 SRV opened its first dedicated residential ashram in Portland at the Shogren Mansion, with two of Babaji's students, Medhakendra and Anurag, anchoring it as residents.
- 2000 – First issue of Nectar of Non-Dual Truth was published and SRV commenced audio recordings of Babaji's discourses.
- 2001, Babaji and Annapurna began teaching in Oregon prisons, followed later by Anurag, Nischaya, and Mahesh. Children's classes begin.

- 2003 – SRV’s administrative office was moved from Portland to the Big Island of Hawaii where Babaji resides. The official name for the organization was then changed from Sarada Ramakrishna Vivekananda Association of Oregon (SRV Oregon), to simply, Sarada Ramakrishna Vivekananda Associations (SRV Associations).
- 2004 – SRV opened the first Hawaii ashram in Honoka’a, HI.
- 2010 – Chela Dharma, classes for youth, were instituted at the annual summer retreat.
- 2012 – SRV began offering webcasts on and edited videos of Babaji’s classes with the financial assistance of Advaita Academy. Visit: livestream.com || Advaita-academy.org || SRVassociations on YouTube, Mahesh Madhav serving as video editor.
- 2013 – SRV Publishing enters the e-book era with Twenty-Four Aspects of Mother Kali
- 2014 – Nectar of Non-Dual Truth now published online as well as in printed form.

At the time of this writing (November 2014), SRV has published 12 books by Babaji. He attends on the West Coast centers four times a year offering classes and a seminar or retreat with each visit. While in Hawaii, he teaches most Sundays and an annual retreat is offered. The Portland ashram has been relocated a few times and is currently in the Hawthorne district of southeast Portland. Anurag is the current head of center when Babaji is away. The San Francisco center continues on in Bhavatarini Ma’s Healing Center.

The Hawaii ashram in Honoka’a closed in 2007, then reopened in 2012 for two years. A teaching center was opened November 2014 in Waimea.



Contact Information & Other Information:

Spiritual Director:

Babaji Bob Kindler

Use contact information for Administrative offices

SRV Administrative Office

srvinfo@srv.org || 808-990-3354

Contact: Annapurna Sarada

Office manager: Loke Ma

SRV San Francisco:

hcsv@comcast.net || 415-468-4680

Head of center: Bhavatarini Ma (Jocelyne Nielsen)

SRV Associations, Portland:

srvinfo@srv.org || 503-774-2410

Head of center: Anurag (Neal Aronowitz)

SRV Associations, Hawaii:

srvinfo@srv.org || 808-990-3354

Head of center: Annapurna

www.srv.org

For schedules, retreat information, and access to YouTube, Livestream, online store, and many teachings

Board Officers & Members (as of 2014):

Annapurna Sarada, President

Anurag, Vice President

Kanyakali, Secretary/Treasurer

Nischaya, Board Member

Use Administrative contact information to reach board members

Assistant Teachers:

Annapurna Sarada, Bhavatarini Ma, Anurag, Mahesh Madhav

Suggested Reading List

This list focuses on essential books for a well-rounded student of Vedanta in the Ramakrishna lineage.

Introductory works on Vedanta and/or other philosophical systems:

- *Self-Knowledge (Atma Bodha)*, translated by Swami Nikhilananda. Read the Introduction for an exceptional overview of Vedanta.
- *Spiritual Heritage of India*, by Swami Prabhavananda. This book covers the basics of Indian philosophical systems.
- *Strike Off Thy Fetters! Commentary on the "Song of the Sannyasin"*, by Babaji Bob Kindler
- *Vedanta, A Simple Introduction*, by Pravrajika Vrajaprana

Sri Ramakrishna:

- *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, translated by Swami Nikhilananda
- *The Great Master* vol. 1 & 2, by Swami Saradananda. This is the authoritative biography of Sri Ramakrishna. The U.S. edition, translated by Swami Chetanananda is called *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, and combines both volumes.
- *Ramakrishna & His Disciples*, by Christopher Isherwood
- *Great Swan, Meetings with Ramakrishna*, by Lex Hixon
- *An Extensive Anthology of Sri Ramakrishna's Stories*, by Babaji Bob Kindler

Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi:

- *Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi*, by Swami Nikhilananda. An excellent first biography for Westerners.

- Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, by Swami Gambhirananda. An exhaustive biography on Holy Mother's life in all its phases.
- The Gospel of Holy Mother. This is a collection of conversations and teachings Mother gave to Her disciples.

Swami Vivekananda:

- Vivekananda, A Biography, by Swami Nikhilananda
- The Master as I Saw Him, by Sister Nivedita

(It is recommended that all students eventually read the 9 volumes of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, however, the following are essential portions from the Complete Works):

- Vedanta Voice of Freedom, excerpted by Swami Chetananda. This book is an introduction to Vedanta using the works of Swamiji
- Karma Yoga (the Yoga of selfless action)
- Bhakti Yoga (the path of Devotion)
- Jnana Yoga (the path of Knowledge)
- Raja Yoga (the path of meditation) this book contains introductory chapters on Yoga sadhana and also Swamiji's translation of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.
- Practical Vedanta
- Letters of Swami Vivekananda
- Talks with Swami Vivekananda

Scriptures:

- *Bhagavad Gita*: There are many fine translations. We especially recommend those by Swamis Chidbhananda and Nikhilananda, for their fine commentaries.
- *Upanisads* – These scriptures form the foundation of Vedanta philosophy and all orthodox philosophical systems in India. Babaji favors the translations by Swami

Sarvananda and Tyagisananda. The translations by Swami Nikhilananda include excellent introductions that explain many esoteric aspects of the ancient Vedic culture.

- *Vivekachudamani, The Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, by Shankaracharya: This is an essential work of Advaita Vedanta, non-dual Vedanta. We recommend the translations by Swami Turiyananda and Swami Madhavananda.
- *Narada's Bhakti Sutras*. This is a classic scripture of the devotional path. We especially recommend the translation by Swami Prabhavananda titled: *Narada's Way of Divine Love*.
- *Adhyatma Ramayana* This is considered the nondual version of the Ramayana. It is a rare combination of highest Wisdom blended with highest Love.
- *Ashtavakra Samhita* - translations by Swami Nityasvarupananda. This radical Advaitic scripture and the one following are reported to be the only two books Sri Ramakrishna kept in his possession.
- *Avadhuta Gita* – translations by Swamis Ashokananda and Chetanananda

General Reading

- Sermon on the Mount According to Vedanta, by Swami Prabhavananda
- Meditation and Spiritual Life, by Swami Yatiswarananda

Books by Babaji Bob Kindler:

- *We are Atman All-Abiding, 108 Verses on the Atman**
- *Strike Off Thy Fetters! Commentary on the Song of the Sannyasin**
- *Hasta-Amalaka Stotram, Commentary**
- *Twenty-Four Aspects of Mother Kali**

- *The Ten Divine Articles of Sri Durga**
- *The Avadhut and His Twenty-Four Teachers in Nature*
- *Sri Sarada Vijnanagita*
- *Swami Vivekananda Vijnanagita*
- *An Extensive Anthology of Sri Ramakrishna's Stories*
- *A Quintessential Yoga Vasishtha*
- *Reclaiming Kundalini Yoga*
- *Dissolving the Mindstream*

* Indicates books available as e-books

Books by Lex Hixon:

- *Coming Home, the Experience of Enlightenment in Sacred Traditions*
- *Great Swan, Meetings with Ramakrishna*
- *Mother of the Universe, Visions of the Goddess and Tantric Hymns of Enlightenment*
- *Mother of the Buddhas, Meditations on the Prajnaparamita Sutra*
- *Living Buddha Zen*
- *Heart of the Koran*
- *Atom from the Sun of Knowledge*
- *Illahis of Shaykh Nur al-Jerrahi*
- *Sufi Meditation*

