

[Vivekananda](#)

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Vivekananda A Biography

Narendranath Dutta was born in Calcutta at sunrise, January 12, 1863, into the kshatriya subcaste kayastha, on Makarasankranti day, when millions of Hindus worship Goddess Ganga and bathe in Her sacred waters. His mother had prayed for a soul like Siva. One night in a dream she saw Lord Siva, who promised to fulfill her wish. So she called her son Vireshwara, a name her husband changed to Naren. She read Naren the Ramayana and Mahabharata. He memorized large parts by age five. His father, a lawyer and agnostic, read Persian and English poetry and the Bible. Though sweet-natured, Narendranath was tempestuous, self-willed and stubborn. He teased his sisters ferociously. His mother would pour a bucket of water over his head chanting "Siva, Siva" to calm him. She told friends, "I prayed to Siva to grant me a son like Him. Instead, He sent me one of His demons!" Naren liked animals and had his own pony. He adored Rama and Sita, bought their images and worshiped them in his room until one day someone told him that marriage is a miserable bondage. He removed their images and put the ascetic Siva in their place and worshiped Him. At 15, he experienced his first altered state when gazing at a giant beehive in a cliff. Feeling universal forces of Divinity at work, he fell into bliss and went unconscious. Naren possessed an extraordinary memory, storing away large portions of full encyclopedias. He later explained that he stilled the mind so it could photograph the information on each page. He learned classical singing--in Hindi, Urdu and Persian--and tamed several stringed instruments. In his late teens, some of his musician friends invited him to one of their promiscuous escapades. He declined, saying he didn't want to waste his Brahma tejas, subtle energies. At 17, he entered Scottish College, studying Western philosophy and European history. He enjoyed sports and excelled in wrestling, boxing, fencing and rowing. Around age 19, he joined the Brahma Samaj, a Hindu reformist movement that rejected temple worship and adopted a modified form of Christian monotheism, the idea of man's depravity and a qualified nondual Vedanta. The Day His Whole Life Changed One day Naren was invited by friends to meet an old mystic, a worshiper of Goddess Kali and former temple priest. "I have heard this man is a fool," Naren first said. "I have read the works of Spencer, Hamilton, Locke and other Western philosophers; what does he know that he can teach me?" Still, Naren agreed to go, saying, "I'll teach him a good lesson." Swami Vivekananda, Naren's next incarnation in the same body, wrote of that auspicious meeting: "He looked just like an ordinary man, used simple language and I thought, 'Can this man be a great teacher?' I crept near him and asked him the questions which I had been asking others all my life, 'Do you

believe in God, sir?' 'Yes,' he replied. 'Can you prove it?' 'Yes!' 'How?' 'Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense.' I then began to go to that man day after day." Though deeply impressed, Naren mercilessly tested, teased and argued with Sri Ramakrishna, especially about idol worship. "Sir, these visions of yours of Kali are all hallucinations!" Naren charged. Ramakrishna just smiled. Naren took courses in anatomy to study the human nervous system and spinal cord in an effort to understand his teacher's kundalini experiences. He heard the sage could not stand the touch of money, so as a test he hid a silver coin under Ramakrishna's mattress. The moment the sage sat on the bed, he jumped up as if stung by a scorpion. All through this, Ramakrishna loved him and taught him the widest panorama of Hindu thought and metaphysics. On one occasion, Naren was making fun of Ramakrishna's transcendental teachings. "What can be more absurd than to say this jug is God, this cup is God and that we, too, are God?" As his college mates chortled, the master appeared and touched Naren. Suddenly the young sceptic plunged into a new world of consciousness where "He saw the whole universe permeated by the Divine Spirit. He felt the presence of Brahman in everything--walking in the street, he saw the carriages, horses, the crowd and himself made of the same substance." At Sri Ramakrishna's insistence Naren stayed in college and graduated. When his father died, the family was reduced to poverty. Forlorn, Naren came to Ramakrishna one day and begged, "Sir, my family is starving. Please appeal to the Divine Mother to help me. She listens to you." Ramakrishna told him to ask Her himself. "When I reached the temple, as I cast my eyes upon the image, I actually found that the Divine Mother was living and conscious, the perennial fountain of divine love and beauty," Vivekananda recounted. Naren grew to adore his teacher and eventually came to live with him at the temple--along with several other young renunciate-minded youths. Naren passionately desired the ultimate realization. He meditated constantly. In one meditation he saw Buddha and realized how his teachings had given so much to India. "One evening," narrates biographer Swami Nikhilananda, "he was absorbed in his usual meditation when he suddenly felt as if a lamp were burning at the back of his head. The light glowed more and more intensely and finally burst. Naren was overwhelmed by that light and fell unconscious. After some time, as he began to regain his normal mood, he could feel only his head. He said to Gopal, 'Where is my body?' Gopal was afraid Narendra was dying and ran to Sri Ramakrishna. 'Let him stay in that state for a while; he has teased me long enough for it,' Ramakrishna said." Vivekananda described another experience on that day: "She whom he used to call Kali entered my body. It is She who takes me here and there and makes me work. Before leaving his body, Sri Ramakrishna called me to his side and looked steadily at me and went into samadhi. I also lost outward consciousness. When consciousness returned, I found him shedding tears. 'Today I have become a beggar,' he said. 'I have given you all my spiritual power. You will teach people how to love God and how to know God.' " Naren was only 23 when Ramakrishna passed away in 1886. The youths who had gathered around Ramakrishna established a monastery in a ramshackle shed on the banks of the Ganges. They spent their days and nights in meditation, ritual worship and vigorous philosophical discussion on everything--Kant, Hegel, atheism, history, art, science, Vedas,

Puranas, Sankhya, Sankara, Buddhism and Jainism. One night they lit a big fire and all took lifetime vows of renunciation, called sannyasa. In 1888, Vivekananda left the monastery to pilgrimage alone through India, returning several times. Setting out again in 1890, he proclaimed, "I shall not return until I acquire such realization that my very touch will transform a man." He mixed with Muslims, Buddhists, Jains and outcastes and hiked high into the Himalayas. One day, half-starved and sick, he fell unconscious. A Muslim found him and nursed him back to health. Vivekananda never forgot the man. Swami journeyed from Benares to Rameshwaram. The poverty he saw saddened and incensed him. Reaching the southernmost tip of India, he worshiped Goddess Kanyakumari at Her temple, then swam out to a giant rock in the ocean. There he meditated for three days and nights. "On that rock, I hit upon a plan." It was to go to America and bring back the West's secret of material success and wed it to India's innate spirituality. A few days before he left, he was invited to attend a musical performance at the palace of his sponsor, the Maharaja of Khetri, in Mysore state. When he learned the singer was a nautch girl, he scurried behind a curtain. Crestfallen and teary-eyed at seeing the Swami run away, the entertainer sang him a song. Stunned by the devotional purity in her voice, he came out and addressed her: "Mother, I am guilty. I was about to show you disrespect. But your song awakened my consciousness." He repeated this incident often to instruct how Siva resides in peoples of all walks of life. In 1893, Swami Vivekananda voyaged to America by way of China and Japan to attend the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. He had no formal invitation. From Japan he wrote a letter to the monks: "Our young men should pay a visit to Japan every year. They are an amazing people." At the Parliament, he delivered the most powerful talk of all the delegates and then spent three and half years in America and Europe giving hundreds of lectures on Hinduism. "Woe to the man," wrote the Iowa State Register, "who undertook to combat that Hindoo monk on his own ground." The refinement of American women impressed Vivekananda. "I remember one young girl--so spiritual, so unworldly. She talked so deep and spiritually. She knows everything about our yogis and is herself much advanced in this practice." When he returned to India in 1897, Swamiji was paraded everywhere as a national hero by everyone except a minority who condemned him for breaking caste laws, leaving India, associating with "heathen" non-Hindus, smoking and, on occasion, eating meat. His triumphant message was: "Our is the motherland of philosophy, of spirituality and of ethics, of sweetness, gentleness and love. India is still the first and foremost of all the nations of the world in these respects." Many men and young boys responded to Vivekananda's call to serve. In turn, he raised some money and founded Belur Math near Calcutta. He proposed an ashram for women which came to be called Sarada Math. Later that year, he hiked into the Himalayas to Amarnath Cave where an ice Lingam is worshiped as Siva. Swami Nikhilananda recounts Vivekananda's experience: "His whole frame was shaking with emotion. His naked body was smeared with ashes and his face radiant with devotion. He had a vision of Siva Himself. The details of the experience he never told anyone except that he had been granted the grace not to die until he himself willed it. The effect of the experience shattered his nerves. There was a clot of blood in his left eye; his heart was dilated and it never regained its normal

condition." Vivekananda exclaimed at the time, "Siva has entered my brain. He will not let me go." In 1899, Swamiji founded Advaita Ashram at Mayavati, 7,000 feet in the Himalayas. "It will be a center for work and meditation, where my Indian and Western disciples can live together, and I shall train them as workers." He also requested a theological college for men and women be founded in Madras. On Friday, July 4, 1902, Swamiji rose early, entered Kali's shrine, bolted the door and meditated for three hours. When he emerged, he sang a song to Kali for all the monks. At 7pm the bell in the Kali shrine sounded. He meditated again, then told his beads, layed down, breathed deeply twice, fixed his eyes between his brow and left his earthly frame. Swami Vivekananda was 39 years old. Vivekananda

Here is a sampling of the great Hindu monk's thought, his call for peace and harmony, his hope for India's awakening, his vision of Oneness.

No soul in recent Hindu history so fearlessly explored, fully embodied, eloquently articulated, courageously defended or mystically mirrored the highest vision of Hinduism as did Swami Vivekananda. He appeared at a critical time when India lay in a spiritual coma, demoralized by centuries of Muslim and Christian rule. The Hindu spirit that had nourished Bharat for millennia was finally losing its life, drained day by day by foreigners who callously mocked the Hindus' Gods and ways of worship. India's own intelligentsia, enamored by Western thought, hailed rationalism and materialism as saviors from India's "plight of spirituality." This infuriated the young monk, Vivekananda, himself a former scoffer, who later wrote: "Ay, when a man has become ashamed of his own ancestors, the end has come. Here am I, one of the least of the Hindu race, yet proud of my race, and proud of my ancestors, proud to call myself a Hindu and proud that I am one of your worthy servants. For a long time our religion has come to be static. What we want is to make it dynamic. To this I have dedicated my life. I will rouse Hindus through the infallible power of Vedic mantras! I am born to proclaim to them that fearless message, 'Arise, Awake!' And the Satya Yuga will come when there will be one caste, one Veda and peace and harmony." He blamed India's poverty and waning spiritual vigor on Hindu society, not Muslim invaders, British imperialists or Christian missionaries. "Not with violent denunciation, but with all-sweeping self-criticism must reform be carried on--with infinite love and infinite patience and the spread of education. And, the education must be from the Hindu point of view and consist of a justified glorification and expansion and conscious understanding of the ideals of Hinduism for, remember, Hinduism is not a mistake. Dive deep and you will fathom its greatness! We are hypnotized by allowing ourselves to think that India is backward in the vision of ideals. This is the real heart-rending poverty which stalks the land. " Until his passing at 39, Swamiji flooded India, the United States and Europe with myriad lectures and a sea of inspired writings--catalyzing a revitalized Hinduism, hence a vitalized India. Mahatma Gandhi eulogized: "I have gone through his works very thoroughly, and the love that I have for my country has become a thousand-fold." Hinduism On the World Stage In 1893, the Maharaja of Mysore sponsored Swami Vivekananda to go to America to attend the World Parliament of

Religions in America. The yellow-turbaned, orange-robed monk recalled his experience in Chicago, "My heart was fluttering, my tongue nearly dried up. I was a bundle of nerves." Beside him were Buddhists, Shintoists, Christians, Jains, Zoroastrians, Taoists and Confucians. After two unsuccessful attempts to get the nervous Hindu monk to speak, the Parliament President abruptly announced, "The next speaker will be Swami Vivekananda...." The sturdy figure approached the podium. "I bowed down to Devi Sarasvati and stepped up," he later recounted. "The other delegates were all prepared and came with ready-made speeches. I was a fool and had none." He stared at a sea of educated, expectant faces. His fright vanished as a surge of energy entered him. In a booming, resonant voice, full of tenderness, he opened: "Sisters and brothers of America...." Suddenly, 7,000 people rose to their feet, erupting into applause. "It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the grand words of welcome given to us by you," he continued. "I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks the world has ever seen, of which Gautama Buddha was a member. I thank you in the name of the mother of religions, of which Buddhism and Jainism are but branches. And I thank you, finally, in the name of the millions and millions of Hindu people of all castes and sects. "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe all religions to be true. I am proud to tell you that I belong to a religion in whose sacred language, Sanskrit, the word exclusion is untranslatable. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. "I will quote to you, brothers, a few lines from a hymn which every Hindu child repeats every day. 'As the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, O Lord, so the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.' "The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself an indication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: 'Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form I reach him, all are struggling through paths that in the end always lead to Me.' Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant fanaticism have possessed long this beautiful earth. It has filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human gore, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations into despair. But its time has come, and I fervently believe that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of the representatives of the different religions of the earth is the death knell to all fanaticism, that it is the death knell to all persecution with the sword or the pen and to all uncharitable feelings between brethren wending their way to the same goal but through different ways." The giant hall echoed again with deafening applause. Swami Vivekananda was the sensation of the spectacular 17-day World Parliament of Religions. The West's peculiar image of a Hindu monk--frail, sheepish and light-headed--crumbled in the presence of this muscular sannyasin of spiritual brilliance and towering intellect. In one lightning flash, filled with love and intelligence, he both shattered many of the West's misguided ideas of his Hindu faith and gifted the Parliament its noblest credo--interreligious harmony. "It was no experience of my own which came to my lips on that august day," the swami later wrote. "I did not speak myself. Had I delivered the speech, I would have certainly

told the world about the wonders of my master. But it was not I who spoke. My lips uttered the words which Sri Ramakrishna prompted me to say. Only my figure spoke, like an instrument. It was the spiritual consciousness of India that he sermonized through my lips." In his five dynamic, but physically depleting years in the West, Vivekananda never once apologized for Hinduism's bewildering diversity of rites and expressions that repeatedly attracted foreign reprobation. "To me, Hinduism is the most satisfying religion in the world," he repeated. Despite every opportunity and encouragement, he never diluted or censored the broad picture of India's living faith to make it more palatable to the West. On any subject-- the Saivite order of naked Naga ascetics, the mystifying Goddess Kali or the ponderous pantheon of 330 million Gods--he spoke with shining pride. He declared Hinduism a universal faith because of its depth and never advocated it be reduced to narrow dogma. "One characteristic idea of Vedanta is that we must allow infinite variation in religious thought, and not try to bring everybody to the same opinion, because the goal is the same," he said. Once he ridiculed a tantric sect that followed socially unacceptable sadhanas. His guru scolded him, "Why should you criticize those people? Their way, too, ultimately leads to God." Vivekananda personally worshiped, communed and communicated with Goddess Kali, but maintained he was an advaitin--one who sees "All is One," and championed the Vedic vision, Aham Brahmasmi, "I am the Self." He said a thousand times dualism and nondualism are not contradictory and defended all that is dualistic in Hindu thought and practice. He faulted Hindu society, not Hinduism, for its ill-treatment of women and particularly derided the dowry system and sati, widow immolation. He felt caste consciousness ultimately breeds unbrotherliness: "You are continually telling the untouchables, 'Don't touch me!' Is there any fellow-feeling or sense of dharma left in the country? How I wish to abolish 'Don't touchism.'" He preached ahimsa--noninjury, physically, mentally and emotionally--as Hinduism's cardinal law. He even recorded how ashamed he was, on later reflection, when he fiercely berated Christians for criticizing his faith. "My master's lips never cursed anyone, never even criticized anyone," he wrote. The sacredness of ahimsa was driven home one day as he performed puja to worship Goddess Kshirbhavani in the form of a four-year-old girl in an old temple. Upon hearing the temple had once been destroyed by Muslim invaders, he railed: "How could the people have permitted such sacrilege without offering resistance? If I had been here then, I would never have allowed such a thing. I would have laid down my life to protect the Mother!" Then he heard the Goddess say: "What if unbelievers should enter My temple and defile My image? What is that to you? Do you protect Me or do I protect you? My child! If I so wish, I can have innumerable temples and monastic centers. I can even this moment raise a seven-storied, golden temple on this very spot." The swami later confided, "Let these things be as Mother wills." Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and the future Behind the swift current of Swami Vivekananda stood a great glacier, his guru, the legendary Bengali mystic, Sri Ramakrishna, who when still a boy, left school and became a temple priest in a small Kali shrine. Eventually he moved to a nearby forest to meditate on the Goddess day and night. Ramakrishna said, "During that time, I could not tell when the sun rose or set or how I lived." He had transforming visions of Kali--the dark-skinned Goddess with long jet-black hair and

extraordinary radiance that would then expand into an ocean of Pure Consciousness. "At this time," Vivekananda wrote, "there came to this place a woman of beautiful appearance, learned beyond compare. She was a sannyasini, for women also give up the world in India. This woman remained with the boy for years, taught him the forms of the religions of India and initiated him into the different practices of yoga." What flowed into Ramakrishna, he poured into his disciple, and what Hindus revere in Vivekananda is a confluence of these two souls and the Goddess Kali who blessed them. Vivekananda saw young Hindus as the key to renaissance: "Youth of India, my hope is in you. Have tremendous faith in yourselves, like the faith I had when I was a child. A hundred thousand young men and women fired with the zeal of holiness and nerved to a lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and downtrodden will go over the length and breadth of our land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up and the gospel of equality." Swami Vivekananda's magic has inspired bright minds of India for a hundred years. Some were moved by his command to wrest independence back from Christian British rule. Others, hearing him preach, "Serve God by serving man," built schools, hospitals and orphanages in his name, most notably the Ramakrishna Missions worldwide. Indian women revere his affirmation of their spirituality and right to the fullest religious expression as enjoyed in Vedic times. Still others, hearing his ultimatum to throw down the world and realize the Self, were awakened to the innerness of the renunciate path. Swami Vivekananda was a Hindu monk, a renunciate and brother to hundreds of thousands of orange-robed sannyasins who throw down worldly life--the literal meaning of sannyasa--to singlemindedly seek God Realization and serve others selflessly. Even as a boy, Vivekananda aspired to this illustrious path, and his inner life while young augured well for his solitary path-choosing. At bedtime each night, he would see a ball of light of changing colors, expanding and then bursting, bathing his body in its radiance. In meditation, he once saw a luminous figure, a monk, with a serene countenance carrying a begging bowl and staff. It was Buddha. "Every night when I went to bed," he later shared, "two ideals of life appeared before me. One of them was to be a man of great wealth, surrounded by servants and dependents and enjoying high rank and immense power. I saw myself as foremost among the great men of the world. But then, the very next moment, I would picture myself as having renounced everything in the world. I was wearing nothing but a loin cloth, eating without anxiety whatever food came my way, sleeping under a tree and living in complete reliance on God's will. I knew it was within me to lead this life of the sages and ascetics, if I should choose to do so. These two pictures of the two directions in which I could bend my life kept appearing before me; but I always ended by choosing the latter. As I dwelt on such a life, my mind would become absorbed in God, and I would fall asleep." He never compromised the importance of renunciation. While others preached that the householder could attain the renunciate's heights by virtue of right attitudes and genuine detachment from the world he was immersed in, Vivekananda reminded them that this was just not so. Listen to his bold assessment: "Never forget to say to yourself and to teach to your children, as the difference between a firefly and the blazing sun, between the infinite ocean and the little pond, between a mustard seed

and the mountain of Meru, such is the difference between the householder and the sannyasin!" Perhaps Vivekananda's most important accomplishment, and one he cultivated personally, was establishing the Ramakrishna Order, a body of renunciate monks that carries forward his teachings and his guru's teachings to this day. Indeed, were it not for that order of monks, all that he did might have been forgotten. When he attained mahasamadhi, there were only 16, and today there are nearly a thousand. Swamiji composed the following poem, Song of the Sannyasin, in July of 1895 while residing at Thousand Island Park, New York, on the St. Lawrence River. ¹**Song of The Sannyasin**

By Swami Vivekananda Wake up the note! the song that had its birth far off, where worldly taint could never reach, in mountain caves and glades of forest deep, whose calm no sigh for lust or wealth or fame could ever dare to break; where rolled the stream of knowledge, truth, and bliss that follows both. Sing high that note, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." Strike off thy fetters! bonds that bind thee down, of shining gold, or darker, baser ore-- love, hate; good, bad; and all the dual throng. Know slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free; for fetters, though of gold, are not less strong to bind. Then off with them, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." Let darkness go; the will-o'-the-wisp that leads with blinking light to pile more gloom on gloom. This thirst for life forever quench; it drags from birth to death, and death to birth, the soul. He conquers all who conquers self. Know this and never yield, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." "Who sows must reap," they say, "and cause must bring the sure effect: good, good; bad, bad; and none escapes the law. But whoso wears a form must wear the chain." Too true; but far beyond both name and form is atman, ever free. Know thou art That, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." They know not truth who dream such vacant dreams as father, mother, children, wife and friend. The sexless Self--whose father He? whose child? whose friend, whose foe is He who is but One? The Self is all in all--none else exists; and thou art That, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." There is but One: the Free, the Knower, Self, without a name, without a form or stain. In Him is maya, dreaming all this dream. The Witness, He appears as nature, soul. Know thou art That, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." Where seekest thou? That freedom, friend, this world nor that can give. In books and temples, vain thy search. Thine only is the hand that holds the rope that drags thee on. Then cease lament. Let go thy hold, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." Say, "Peace to all. From me no danger be to aught that lives. In those that dwell on high, in those that lowly creep--I am the Self in all! All life, both here and there, do I renounce, all heavens and earths and hells, all hopes and fears." Thus cut thy bonds, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." Heed then no more how body lives or goes. Its task is done: let karma float it down. Let one put garlands on, another kick this frame; say naught. No praise or blame can be where praiser, praised, and blamer, blamed, are one. Thus be thou calm, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." Truth never comes where lust and fame and greed of gain reside. No man who thinks of woman as his wife can ever perfect be; nor he who owns the least of things, nor he whom anger chains, can ever pass through maya's gates. So, give these up, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." Have thou no home. What home

can hold thee, friend? The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed; and food what chance may bring--well cooked or ill, judge not. No food or drink can taint that noble Self which knows Itself. Like rolling river free thou ever be, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." Few only know the truth. The rest will hate and laugh at thee, great one; but pay no heed. Go thou, the free, from place to place, and help them out of darkness, maya's veil. Without the fear of pain or search for pleasure, go beyond them both, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om." Thus day by day, till karma's power's spent, release the soul forever. No more is birth, nor I, nor thou, nor God, nor man. The "I" has All become, the All is "I" and Bliss. Know thou art That, sannyasin bold! Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om."

Vivekananda Chronology

1863 Born in Calcutta, near the Ganges. 1881 His first life-changing meeting with Bengali mystic Sri Ramakrishna. 1882 For 4 years, he close associates with Sri Ramakrishna. Time of deep sadhana. 1883 Passes B.A. examination. 1884 Father dies. Vivekananda, age 21, decides not to marry but become a monk. 1886 Ramakrishna attains Mahasamadhi. 1886 Vivekananda founds Baranagore Math. 1886 Initiates himself into sannysasa with fourteen other young men. 1888 Pilgrimages into Himalayas and throughout India for four years. 1892 Reaches Kanyakumari, meditates for three days and decides to go to America. 1893 Sails for America, via Japan. 1893 Delivers his famous talk at Parliament of Religions in Chicago and lectures in hundreds of US cities. 1895 Goes to London, returns to USA and conducts a 7-week course on Hinduism to Americans at Thousand Island Park. His daily discourses become the famous Inspired Talks. 1896 Sails to Europe and meets German Vedic scholar Max Muller. 1897 Returns to India, establishes the Ramakrishna Mission and speaks throughout India, calling for an "awakening" of Hinduism that will uplift the poor through education. 1898 Consecrates Belur Math, reveals plan for Sarada Monastery for women and pilgrimages to Amarnath cave with English disciple Sister Nivedita, two American women devotees and many other pilgrims 1899 Establishes Advaita Ashram at Mayavati, high in the Himalayas. 1899 Takes second trip to the West--USA, Europe and Egypt. 1901 Returns home, pilgrimages in Bengal. 1902 Visits holy Buddhist site Bodhi Gaya with Buddhist monks from Japan. Attains mahasamadhi at Belur Math, Calcutta, on July 4, at age 39.