

CHICAGO CALLING

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The Shiva-ratri festival comes in Falgun (February-March).

The 14th night of the dark half of this lunar month, is dedicated to Lord Shiva, and a night long worship of Shiva is performed. The tradition is to keep a vigil for the whole night. The villagers usually arrange a yatra, an open air drama on a religious subject.

In Kamarpukur, the village of Sri Ramakrishna, such a 'Shiva Yatra' was organized. The program was going to begin, when the manager noticed that the actor who was to take the role of Shiva did not turn up due to illness. The organizers became worried.

The elders of the village suggested that Gadai, the nickname of Sri Ramakrishna, could become Shiva as he knew many songs of Shiva and his manners were also like Shiva-loving, concerned but unattached.

Gadai agreed and sat to put on the costume. When he stood up, dressed like Shiva, the audience was thrilled. Chinu Shankhari, an aged person, started throwing flowers at his feet. The village women blew conch shells and filled the air with 'Ulu' sound.

A strange feeling overwhelmed them all. In young Gadai the simple & pure-hearted villagers saw the presence of Shiva.

Students of the Biography of Sri Ramakrishna know that Chandramani Devi, the mother of Sri Ramakrishna, was blessed by Lord Shiva. She felt that waves of divine light, emanating from the village Shiva temple, entered into her person. Devadideva – God of all gods & goddesses took human form as Sri Ramakrishna to save human beings.

Mathur Nath, the landlord of the Dakshineswar Temple where Sri Ramakrishna was a priest, was a blessed man indeed. Twice he saw Lord Shiva in

the body of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna was strolling up & down on the north east veranda of his room at Dakshineswar, and Mathur Nath was looking at him from a distance with a question in his mind – is this man, so ordinary looking, divine?

Suddenly Mathur saw in the person of Ramakrishna Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali pacing up & down the veranda. Thrilled, Mathur came running and fell at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna.

On another occasion a devotee was reciting a verse from the famous 'Shivamahimana Stotra' : "O Shiva, if the ocean becomes the ink pot and the tree the pen, the earth the paper on which Goddess Saraswati writes the glory through eternity, even then Thy glory will be incomplete".

Listening to these words, Sri Ramakrishna cried out, in a divine mood, "Shiva there is indeed no end to Thy glory" and the people present there saw Lord Shiva in Sri Ramakrishna. Mathur, the blessed soul realized the truth and declared – 'Father, you are not a common human being, --- Father, I saw you as Shiva Himself'.

In the Puranic age, Shiva drank poison to save humanity. In this modern age, Sri Ramakrishna accepted in his divine person Kalvyadhi, the incurable disease, to teach mankind that even in the jaws of death you can remain peaceful & happy by realizing God in your life.

In one Shiva-ratri night the villagers of Kamarpukur had felt the presence of Shiva in the person of Gadai.

In another Shiva-ratri night at Barangan Monastery, Swami Vivekananda and the other young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna danced ecstatically around a Bel Tree chanting 'Shiva-Guru'!

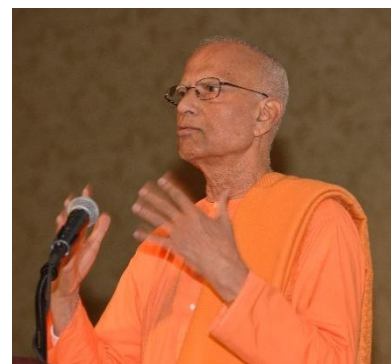
'Shiva Guru'! Shiva Guru Sri Ramakrishna!

HELP, ASSIMILATION & HARMONY FROM VEDANTA POINT OF VIEW

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

Minister, Vedanta Society of St. Louis

This lecture was delivered on Nov. 10th, 2013 at “Chicago Calling”.



Respected Swami Suhitanandaji, my brother monks, sister nuns, and friends. I really appreciate your patience these last two days. From 9 am to 5 pm you have been listening to various talks given by distinguished speakers. Actually we have been doing the *Vangmaye Puja* -- worshipping Swamiji through words -- and all of you have been participating in that worship. It reminds me of a story: Once a monk went somewhere to give a lecture. When he came back, he reported to Swami Premananda: “I gave a lecture, and so many people came. They applauded, and so on...” Thus he was glorifying himself. Premananda understood that this monk was very proud. He asked him: “Did the audience listen to you with one ear or two ears?” The monk was confused and said, “I think, Maharaj, they used two ears.” “Then they did not hear anything,” said Swami Premananda. “What you said went in one ear and out the other.” The swami continued: “You know that the fight between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is universal. When the mother-in-law scolds the daughter-in-law, she complains to her husband at night when one side of his head is against the pillow. The wife whispers in one ear and it goes inside the husband’s mind and he never forgets it.” So you are supposed to speak in such a way that what you say reaches their hearts, and that all depends on your character. Let your character speak.”

Christopher Isherwood made a remark: “When a being like Vivekananda is changed, then the whole of the nineteenth century is altered. “It is true. This is because Swamiji was the

representative of the Western world. Moreover, he was one of the greatest destroyers. He destroyed the hypnotic spell that had come over Indians under British rule. Indians had lost their self-confidence, self-esteem, and moral and spiritual strength. They had been brainwashed by Westerners, and suffered from an inferiority complex. The Europeans told them: “You are weak and uneducated and not scientifically advanced and civilized like us. You are poor and superstitious. If you want to be great and prosperous, then imitate us and be educated like us.” Thus we forgot our spiritual culture and lost our mental strength and hope. Swamiji broke that trend of thought. If you read Swamiji’s “Lectures from Colombo to Almora,” you will understand what Swamiji did for India. He actually regenerated India through his lectures on Vedanta. Swamiji similarly destroyed the feeling of sin and guilt among Westerners, based on the doctrine of original sin that says human beings are sinners. At the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, he said: “Ye divinities on earth -- sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature.” In that way, Swamiji awakened the spiritual consciousness of the West.

Some of our speakers have talked about this Parliament of Religions in Chicago: Why was Chicago so important at that time? It had been 400 years since Columbus’s discovery of America, and American people now wanted to demonstrate their advancements in science and technology in the 19th century. The Congress of Religions was a part of that Colombian exposition.

America was the first country that brought all religions of the world together on the same platform. But sorry to say that the Archbishop of Canterbury refused to come and sit on the same platform with representatives of other faiths. This conference continued from 11th to 27th September, and 115 speakers spoke about their own respective religion. Swamiji was such a popular speaker at the Parliament that he spoke six times. It is good to know a little history behind it.

In his talks, Swamiji redefined religion. He said: "Religion is the manifestation of divinity already in human beings." "The old religion said he was an atheist who did not believe in God; the new religion says he is an atheist who does not believe in himself." These sayings were new to Western ears. One of Swamiji's best contributions to the Western world was his four yogas – Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Raja. Through these he left a great legacy to the Western world. If you read these four yogas, you will know exactly what true religion is, and nobody can confuse you. What did Swamiji teach? On 30th December 1894, Swamiji said at the Brooklyn Ethical Association: "I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East." What was that message? Vedanta. What did Vedanta teach? The four main tenets of Vedanta are: first, the divinity of the soul; second, the unity of existence; third, the oneness of God; and fourth, the harmony of religions. This is what Swamiji taught. And what has happened since the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893? In most of the main cities in America, Canada, and other Western countries, we find interfaith and interreligious organizations. These things did not exist before the advent of Sri Ramakrishna or before the Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

Swamiji got the concept of religious harmony from four sources: First, from the Hindu scriptures. The Rig-Veda says: "*Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti* -- Truth is one; sages call it by various names." Krishna also says in the Gita: "*Ye yathā mān prapadyante tāmstathaiva bhajāmyaham*

mama vartmānuvartante manusyāḥ pārtha sarvas'ah -- Different people worship different gods but actually they worship me." Again we find in the Shiva Mahimnah Stotram: "*Ruchinam vaichitryad rijukutila nana patha jusham* -- Different rivers originate from different sources, but when they meet the ocean, they lose their name and form. Similarly, many people follow different paths, but all lead to God."

Second, Swamiji learned this concept of harmony from his guru, Sri Ramakrishna. In his foreword to Ramakrishna's biography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote: "Ramakrishna's life was an object-lesson in *ahimsa*. His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise." He was a unique personality in the religious history of the world. He not only realized God through his own faith, he also practised Islam and Christianity. And after realizing God through different paths he proclaimed: "*Jato mat, tato path* -- As many faiths, so many paths." Religions should not fight each other.



Third, Swamiji learned this harmony from his Motherland. Just think of it: from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, and from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal – all that is Bharatvarsha. Bharata (*Bha* means light and *rata* means immersed) -- the country which is immersed in the thought of light. While travelling as an itinerant monk in that vast land, Swamiji saw how the people and languages were different, how cultures, clothes and food habits were different; but people all over the country practiced the Hindu religion. It is easy for people to communicate in America. Here from the East Coast to the West Coast there is one language – English. But in India there are so many different languages. Then what is the common basis of the culture? If you read Swamiji's lectures at Sialkot, you will find that he says the common bases of Hinduism.

Fourth, Swamiji learned this harmony from his own experience. One day while meditating in the Himalayas, he saw in a vision that the microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same pattern. Whatever is in the vast universe, that is also within us. He realized unity in diversity. These are the ways that Swamiji came to understand this harmony of religions.

The topic of our Symposium today is: "Help and not fight. Assimilation and not destruction. Harmony and peace and not dissention." These concluding remarks of Swamiji changed the whole atmosphere of the Parliament of Religions. Here I want to comment on these three statements:

First, help. India is the birthplace of four major religions of the world: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. It shows that India is predominantly a religious country. One of my friends used to tease me: "Hinduism is a very weak religion." When I asked why, he said: "Because in India God is born again and again as an avatar to revive the religion. Look at other religions: Jesus Christ is the only prophet in Christianity, and Muhammad is the only prophet in Islam. But the Hindus have Rama, Krishna,

Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, and other avatars." Then I jokingly said to him: "You see, God gets bored in heaven, so from time to time he comes to this earth to check out how his children are doing. But if God is born in other religions he might be beheaded or crucified. So this is why he comes to India. We love our gods and goddesses."

India also gave shelter to other world religions. Swamiji said: "The purest Christianity in the world was established in India by the Apostle Thomas about twenty-five years after the death of Jesus." Still you can see the Thomas Mound in Chennai. Christianity spread in India by missionaries with the help of Christian rulers. Again, during the time of King Solomon, some Jewish people settled in Cochin, South India. There you can see one of the oldest synagogues in the world. And when the Zoroastrians were persecuted in Persia, they also took shelter in the western part of India and practiced their own religion. The Arab Muslims invaded India sometime in 1000 AD and often converted the Hindus by force. They ruled India for nearly 700 years. Now India has the second largest Muslim population in the world, next to Indonesia. So in this way India gave shelter and help to other religions of the world.

Second, assimilation. How can we assimilate others' religious ideas without changing our own faith? Swamiji beautifully described this on the concluding day of the Parliament of Religions. He said: "Do I wish that the Christian would become a Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become a Christian? God forbid. The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth, or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant; it develops after the law of its own growth; it assimilates the air, the earth, and the water, and converts them into plant substance, and then it grows into a plant." Thus we can assimilate the spirit of others and grow according to our own law of growth.

Many of you know Huston Smith, the author of the book *World's Religions*. He is a prominent professor in America. I think in 1993, Huston and I spoke in Kansas City in commemoration of the centenary of the Parliament of Religions. After the lecture, somebody asked Huston: "You were a Methodist minister, and now you are involved in Vedanta, Buddhism, Sufism, and so on. How do you manage it all?" Huston said: "I have no problem. I take my regular food, and I also take vitamins as food supplements. So I practice my own religion, and I use other religions as my spiritual food supplement. They give me fresh energy with their new ideas and thoughts. I have no problem."

Look how Sri Ramakrishna assimilated other religions: He had high regard for Muslims who practiced their prayers five times a day. He attended a prayer service of a Christian church in Calcutta. He also practiced different denominations of Hinduism. Sri Ramakrishna said: "As long as I live so long do I learn." We should keep our heart open and learn wherever we find anything good, beneficial, uplifting, and inspiring. That person who says he has nothing to learn is dead.

Third, harmony. Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are the harbingers of harmony in this age. Referring to interreligious relations, Swami Nikhilananda wrote "Religions as human institutions cannot be absolutely perfect, but God is perfect. Religion is not God, but shows the way to God. As clocks should be corrected from time to time by the sun, so also religions. The correction is made by the mystic saints, who directly commune with God, and not by the theologians, who are only the interpreters of the scriptures."

In 1992, there was a convention on 'Contemporary Mysticism' in Avila, the birthplace of Saint Teresa, in Spain. I talked on Sri Ramakrishna. I mentioned the modern trend of religion in this 21st century. We find that the main focus of religion in the 19th century was on *reason*,

and in the 20th century on *humanism*. Now in the 21st century it will be on *mysticism*. Why? Nowadays many people say: "We have read enough. We have heard so many sermons, and now we want experience." That is the present popular sentiment in the West. We live in an age when creeds are shaken, dogmas are questioned, and traditions are dissolving. Some Western thinkers have predicted that doctrines, dogma, or rituals will not be able to sustain religion in the 21st century. The external aspects, such as the symbols, doctrines, creeds, and rituals of each religion, differ from one another. But the internal aspects, such as purity, love, renunciation, compassion, and unselfishness, are the same in all religions. Swamiji once commented: "'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' This sentence alone would save mankind if all books and prophets were lost. This purity of heart will bring the vision of God. It is the theme of the whole music of this universe."

About one-sidedness, narrowness, and bigotry in religions, Sri Ramakrishna told Keshab Sen, pointing to the music coming from the nahabat in Dakshineswar: "Do you hear how melodious that music is? One player is producing only -- po-o-o-o -- a monotone on his flute, while another is creating waves of melodies in different ragas and raginis. That is my attitude. I want to play various melodies on my instrument with seven holes. Why should I say only 'Brahma! Brahma!'? I want to call on God through all the moods -- through shanta, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya, and madhur. I want to make merry with God. I want to sport with God."



I sometimes go to hear the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. I see 90 musicians on the stage. Some play the violin, while others play the cello, drums, bassoon, flute, and so on. All musicians are contributing their music and creating a symphony. So also, in this present age the ideal of Vedanta as taught by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is like a symphony. It will flourish, because it is universal. It is not limited by any kind of doctrine or dogma or creed.

We often find that if you want to establish any kind of religion you need three things:

First, you need a book; second, you need a prophet; third, you need a personal God. But Vedanta is not confined to all these things.

Moreover, America is the best place to teach Vedanta. Why?

Because these two things are in the American blood -- freedom and democracy. Look at the Statue of Liberty in New York City. She is the presiding deity of America. American people love liberty and freedom. Vedanta teaches freedom -- *Jivan-mukti*, free while living. That is the goal.

Second, the concept of democracy: The Vedantic concept of God is a democratic concept of God. Each soul is divine; every human being is the veritable manifestation of God; every human body is the tabernacle of God. This is why Ramakrishna and Vivekananda taught us to serve human beings as God. This is truly practical Vedanta.



A real Vedantist must sympathize with all. Monism, or absolute oneness is the very soul of Vedanta.

-- Swami Vivekananda



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: THE EMBODIMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

SWAMI NIRMALATMANANDA

Minister, Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, Brazil
This lecture was delivered on Nov. 9th, 2013 at “Chicago Calling”

Revered General Secretary Maharaj, Revered Chetnanandaji Maharaj, Ishatmanandaji, other Revered senior Monks, Brother monks, the Sisters of the convent, devotees and friends!

Good afternoon to each one of you, “Boa tarde a cada um de vocês” in Portuguese! The heart felt greetings to all of you from the devotees and friends of Vedanta in Brazil, and personally, my greetings to each one of you.

I was asked to talk this after noon on “Swami Vivekananda: The embodiment of knowledge”. To begin with, I divide knowledge into three categories. The first category is that of the knowledge of the world, the knowledge about the world that we see, feel and interact, that of the innumerable names and forms, in short, the knowledge of the objects that we perceive through the five senses. If we look closely, our life is based on this category of knowledge. Much of our knowledge centers around the laws that govern the world, that of every type of science, mathematics, physics, chemistry, medicine, music and a host of other areas of science. We live by this knowledge, that is to say, that our lives are much depend on how much knowledge we acquire in this category from the day one of our schooling. We get a degree and thereafter get an employment and we earn money and our lives go on. Almost 99 percent of our lives spent in getting and using this knowledge. Swami Vivekananda knew the importance of this knowledge and that is why he was emphasizing so much on ‘education’. More than 200,000 students are studying in different

educational institutions run by the Ramakrishna Order in India. He knew the utmost benefit of this knowledge and how it would remove many ills of human society, both individually and collectively. I am not going into much details on this point for want of time.

Now, I will go to the second category of knowledge. What is that? The knowledge about our ‘inner’ world, i.e., knowledge about mind, intelligence, memory, emotional ups and downs and so on. Where from the thought arise? Sometimes I want to retain certain thoughts but I cannot; and at other times I don’t want certain thoughts to remain in my system, I want to get rid of them, but I cannot. Where do I store so much memory? Why children of the same family behave differently? Is it true that we accumulate tendencies from past lives which shape our present lives? Why one should follow moral and ethical values in life? We want to meditate and be quiet and that is the time thousands of thoughts cross our mind. According to one study, on an average around sixty to seventy thousand thoughts cross in man’s mind in a day. How much knowledge do we have about all these intricate and subtle ways our lives are being influenced all the time? A lot of problems that we have in daily life, which look for solution in psychology or psychiatry or their branches, is the lack of knowledge of this kind — the science of inner world, the second category of knowledge. Swami Vivekananda was an adept in this category of knowledge.

During his sojourn in U.S.A one of the very first things he did was to write a commentary on and translation of Patanjali Yoga Sutras, known as Raja Yoga. This book is the basis of Hindu Psychology. He has written a master piece introduction to the subject in eight chapters. Raja Yoga precisely deals with this subtle knowledge, knowledge of the inner being leading to deeper and higher dimension of the self.

The third category of knowledge is the Self-knowledge, knowledge of our true nature of our being. We hear so much about this Self or Self-knowledge but we hardly have an experiential knowledge of it. Swami Vivekananda says 'if there is a Self you must feel it'. To him it is the knowledge of the highest category, Supreme knowledge. Sri Krishna calls this category of knowledge as the 'king of sciences, king of all the secrets.' Why do you called it a supreme knowledge? Decades ago when I started reading about this subject I thought seriously as to why this Self-knowledge is called supreme knowledge, as if the other types of knowledge are reduced to second category or third category. It is called supreme knowledge because there are certain specific and valid reasons for it.

Firstly, the Self-knowledge puts an end to all suffering in human life once and for all. In life we do find some solutions to suffering, but those solutions are temporary. They do not last long and suffering returns with redoubled force. Self knowledge is the only way to put an end to all types of suffering once and for all. There have been examples in lives of great sages, saints and world teachers the demonstration of this fact.

Secondly, it removes all fear from the person completely and for ever. Our daily life is full of fear, fear of this person or that person, fear of things, objects and circumstances. All fear that we experience in day to day life have the origin of fear of ultimate death, death of the bodily existence. Self-knowledge puts an end to this fear once and for all.

Thirdly, with this Self knowledge all doubts in your life come to an end. We desperately look constantly for a consultant to whom we relate our problems and get help in deciding even in small things. Our clarity of thinking is so weak that every now and then we need someone's help in deciding things of day today life. Hundreds of doubts crop up within us all the time. Once a person has this Self knowledge he has no more doubt in life. All doubts are gone for ever.

Fourthly, no more running after things and persons in this world. A self realized soul lacks nothing, he is supremely satisfied in his Self.

Fifthly, this Self-knowledge fills the heart and mind with peace and bliss that cannot be taken away by anyone. The Self does not depend upon anything or anyone outside for its peace and joy.

Sixthly, the Self knows it has regained its eternal nature, rediscovered its true identity which is infinite existence, infinite knowledge and ever free. The list is long to say in detail, but no doubt, to the possessor of this knowledge comes enormous inner strength, strength that can stand alone even if the whole world united in opposition. When a person has this knowledge he does not feel lonely, for there is an invisible presence hovering around him in all the three known states of his being, namely waking, dream and dreamless sleep state. You are surrounded by this existence all the time.

There is always an unmistakable connection between you and this presence. When Lord Krishna said "remember me and fight, remember me and struggle in your daily life" it was not just a mere suggestion or practice but much more than that. It was a reality and fruit of Self knowledge. Normally, we struggle alone based on the little 'i and mine' idea and identification with body mind complex and soon get exhausted and confused. But if we remember Him and struggle we get enormous strength and that comes out of the result of our march towards the Self-knowledge. So therefore this Self-knowledge is called supreme knowledge.

This supreme knowledge is not contrary to the other knowledge. Each category of knowledge is necessary and Swami Vivekananda, the embodiment of all the three category of knowledge knew very well the importance of each kind as I briefly touched upon earlier.

Now you may ask, "Okay, Swami, it is all very nice, very wonderful to hear, but how one should go about it.?" I would say 'get connected'; get yourself connected to Swami Vivekananda. Give a little bit of your mind and heart and get connected with him on a regular basis. Establish a relationship with him, say, as a friend, as a brother, as a guide, as a hero, as a General and so on. You will soon feel He is there with you more than you expected, inspiring you and lifting you up wherever you are and whenever you needed, through his profound teachings, writings, poems, and talks that spread over in 5000 pages of

Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.

Self-knowledge gives freedom unlimited. We know what limited freedom is, but unlimited freedom is what we are hankering about and that comes out of this Self-knowledge. Swami Vivekananda is an embodiment of not only this Self-knowledge but also the other two categories as well. If a man is hungry give him food, an empty stomach is not good for religion he said. If you give education to a person it is still more better. Highest is to give Self-knowledge, knowledge about God realization or whatever you may call it. Swami Vivekananda stands as the embodiment of knowledge, infinite energy, unending enthusiasm and down to earth practical in religion and spirituality. All that we have to do is to get connected with Him!

Thank you very much.



We are Shiva, we are immortal knowledge beyond the senses.

-- Swami Vivekananda, CW:7; Inspired Talks



A Puranic Reference

One day, the child Ganesha diverted himself in tormenting a cat, pulling his tail and rolling him on the ground.

Just a moment after, he left the cat peaceful and went away. He did not even think about what he had done. He arrived at mount Kailash to meet again his mother Parvati. He found her badly suffering, covered with wounds and dust. He asked her about what happened.

"I've no idea," said Parvati. "What have you been up to?"

"I was playing with a cat and..um...I was pretty rough with her."

"Now I know why I have these bruises!" said Parvati. She explained, "Ganesha, my body is the world and every living creature in it. I was that cat, too! Whatever you do to other beings, you do to me as well!"

TO SEE POTENTIAL DIVINITY IN EACH SOUL

Holy Mother's love for her disciples was not just like the love an earthly mother feels for her children. It was much deeper. Once a monastic disciple asked her, "How do you regard us?"

Mother: As God Himself.

Disciple: But we are your children. If you think of us as God, you cannot regard us as children.

Mother: I regard you as God and also as children. ...

Holy Mother's love was not confined to her disciples alone. It was showered upon all who went to her for succor, irrespective of caste, creed, merit or demerit. She helped them with food, clothes, or medicines according to their need.

The story of Radhu's pet cat gives even more striking insight into Holy Mother's love. She arranged for it to have a daily ration of milk. The cat used to lie peacefully near her. Sometimes she would pretend that she was going to punish it with a stick, but this only made the animal creep nearer her feet. Laughing, she would throw away the stick, and inmates of the house would also laugh. The cat, following its own nature, often stole food, and the Mother would remark, "To steal is its *dharma*. Who is there always to feed it lovingly?"

One day a monastic attendant treated the cat roughly dashed it against the earth. The Mother looked very sad.

[Once when she was leaving for Calcutta] she said to the monk, "Scold the cat but do not beat it. Please feed it regularly and see that it does not go to any other house to steal food." she again reminded solemnly, "Do not beat the cat. I dwell inside the cat too."

(Excerpt from:
*Sri Sarada Devi, the
Holy Mother: Her
Teachings &
Conversations*
Edited by Swami
Adiswarananda)

"The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The image was Consciousness, the water was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water vessels were Consciousness, the doorsill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness - all was Consciousness.

That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that the Divine Mother Herself had become everything – even the cat."

(Gospel of Sri ramakrishna, Swami Nikhilananda, Page 345)



PREPARATION FOR GOD REALIZATION

PART I

SWAMI ISHATMANANDA

Minister-in-Charge
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The Goal of Human Life

Happiness and peace are obviously the goal of human life, but unfortunately we think that by worldly prosperity we can reach that goal.

Experience proves that material wealth cannot give permanent happiness and peace. Constant change is the basic nature of this world. Naturally, that which is temporary in nature cannot give an everlasting or permanent result.

That is why the Isha Upanishad advised that lasting happiness and Peace can be had only through the realization of God.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna declared that God Realization is the goal of every human. He has emphatically said- God is verily a Reality. God can be seen. Anyone can talk to him.

Eternal happiness and peace can be obtained only after God Realization and human being only can realize God.

Unfortunately many of us do not realize how fortunate it is to be born as human beings. The Holy Scripture says that a human birth, the desire for God realization and the guidance of holy persons are very, very rare – obtainable only through God's grace.

According to Hindu tradition, the individual soul begins as an amoeba, a single celled organism and attains a human body only after 8,400,000 births.

Brihad Vishnu Purana states,

Number of species

1,200,000 (sthavara) non-mobile, plants

900,000 Aquatic creatures

900,000	Amphibians and Reptiles
1,000,000	Birds
3,000,000	Animals
4,00000	Anthropoids
2,00000	Human varieties

Swami Vivekananda also supported this age old theory and said, "From the lowest protoplasm to the most perfect human being there is really but one life. Just as in one life we have so many various phases of expression, the protoplasm developing into the baby, the child, the young man, old man, so from the protoplasm up to the most perfect man, we get one continuous life, one chain. This is evolution.... This whole life was involved in it (protoplasm) and slowly came out, manifesting itself slowly, slowly, slowly" (CW 2.228).

After 8,400,000 births a human begins the journey towards perfection. Even after attaining the first human birth, thousands and thousands human births are required to understand and live a compassionate, loving, considerate, unselfish life. Swami Vivekananda says, (CW 2.154 - 5), "The highest evolution of man is effected through sacrifice alone. A man is great among his fellow beings in proportion as he can sacrifice for the sake of others.

Whereas in the lower strata of the animal kingdom that animal is the strongest, who can kill the greatest number of animals, human achieve greatness through self-sacrifice. Hence, the struggle theory is not equally applicable to both kingdoms.

Man's struggle is in the mental sphere. A man is greater in proportion as he can control his mind. When the mind's activities are perfectly at rest, the Atman manifests itself. (CW 2.154 - 5)

If we are earnest in preparing for God Realization, we should gradually control the weakness of our mind. As has been said in the Bhagavad Gita, (6.25),

शनैः शनैरुपरमेद्बुद्ध्या धृतिगृहीतया ।

आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत् ।।

śhanaiḥ śhanair uparamed buddhyā dhṛiti-gṛihītayā
ātma-sansthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñchid api chintayet.

One should gradually withdraw one's intelligence which is kept steady through perseverance. Keeping the mind fixed in the Self, one should not think of anything whatsoever.

The whole of spiritual life is a gradual elimination of the animal nature and a refinement of the human nature in preparation for God realization.

One has to fix the ideal according to one's station in life, as well as, one's physical and mental capacity. In The Gita Sri Krishna said, in 3rd chapter,

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ।।35।।

śhreyān swa-dharmo viguṇaḥ para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhītāt
swa-dharme nidhanaṁ śhreyaḥ para-dharmo bhayāvahaḥ.

"Better is one's own Dharma, though imperfect, than the Dharma of another well performed? Better is death in one's own Dharma; another person's Dharma is fraught with fear."

In India the entire life cycle has been divided into four states:

- Student
- House-holder
- Retired
- Dedicated to God

Preparation of God Realization begins from the

beginning of human life.

What is God?

By the term "God" is designated a Supreme Power, the creator of the universe. The goal is God, but different concepts have created different schools of thought or philosophies.

God according to Buddhism:

The Buddhist system of religion does not believe in the concept of God. The Buddhists strongly believe that the Karmas of an individual decide the destination of an individual. Even Buddha Himself cannot interfere with the Karmic process. Of Course, some later Mahayana schools which developed outside India ascribe divinity to a transcendent Buddha, considering the living Buddha to be a manifestation of the Adi-Buddha. Like the Dalai Lama (in Tibet), Panchen Lama etc. In the Theravada tradition the Buddha is regarded as a supremely enlightened human who has come to his last birth.

God according to Christianity:

Christianity admits the existence of God who is

- Omnipresent - Everywhere
- Omniscient - All Knowing
- Omnipotent - All Powerful

Gospels of Luke (24:39), John (4:24) and Mathew (16:19) declare that,

"God is a spirit without flesh and Bones", "God is Invisible", "God is immutable (unchangeable)".

And God is full of – Light (Truth), Love, Holiness, Mercy, Gentleness, Righteousness, Goodness, Perfection, Justice, Faithfulness, Grace.

God according to Islam:

God (Allah) is the All-Powerful, All knowing, Creator, Sustainer, Ordained and Judge of the universe. God is 'Tawhid' (Singular), 'Wahid' (Unique) and 'Ahad' (one). God has 99 names.

God according to Judaism:

God is Absolute, indivisible, incomparable being – the ultimate cause of all existence, Incomprehensible and unknowable. It is only God's revealed aspect that brought the Universe into existence and interacts with mankind.

According to Jewish Traditions, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the one God of Israel who has a proper name YHWH; in modern pronunciation Yehovah, "The Self-Existent One".

God according to Jainism:

Jainism, like Buddhism rejects the idea of a God as the creator. They believe in the Karma theory and also believe the inherent nature of any soul has infinite Bliss, Infinite Power, Perfect Knowledge, and Perfect Peace.

One who achieves this state of soul through right belief, right knowledge, and right conduct can be called a god (with small "g").

God, according to Hinduism:

Hinduism has given humanity the freedom to search for God accordingly to one's own will. This has developed three permanent paths for God Realization, ascribing three different names to the same Reality. In a famous Hindu scripture, The Srimad Bhagavatam we find

वदन्ति तत्त्वविदस्तत्त्वम् यज्ज्ञानमद्वयम् ।
ब्रह्मेति परमात्मेति भगवानिति शब्दते ॥

The knowers of Truth declare that knowledge, where there is the absence of duality, to be the ultimate Truth, which is referred to as Brahman, Paramatma (Supreme Soul) and Bhagavan (God).

Hinduism states that Satya or Truth is the bedrock of Spiritual life. The Mundaka Upanishad firmly declared (111.1.6) सत्यमेव जयते नानृतम्, Truth alone triumphs; not falsehood.

In the Mahabharata we find

nasti satya samo dharma -- There is no religion like Truth

na satyat viadyate param -- There is nothing Superior to Truth

na hi teevra taram kinchid – There is nothing on earth that is

anritadiha vidyate – -more useless (baser) than Untruth

Hence the founders of Hinduism are known as Sayta-Drasta, Seers of Truth or Revealers of Truth.

What is this Satya?

Satya is Tattva and Tattva means Existence or "Thatness". In simple language, it is that Reality which is above all illusions, delusions, doubts, deceptions and appearances. According to the Rig Veda, only One exists and not two (ekam sat).

According to Sri Shankaracharya, "*Brahma satyam jagat mithya, jiva Brahmaiva na aparah.*"

Brahman is Satya (Real), this world with its appearances is false – but all beings are nothing but Brahman.

The cause and the effect are identical.

Shankaracharya's view has been supported by the Chandogya Upanishad (3.14.1)

saravam khalu idam Brahman - All this is verily Brahman. This is born from, dissolves in, and exists in That.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad also pronounced,

idam Brahma idam sarvam (2.5.1); Brahman is all these

ayam atma Brahma (2.5.19); This Soul is Brahman

aham Brahmarshmi (1.4.10); I am Brahman

We find the famous dictum *tat-tvam-asi* – Thou art that in Chandogya Upanishad.

But this is very difficult for the ordinary people to understand that he or she is God.

I am God! How is it possible for a sinful, sorrowful, puny, panicky feeble and foolish Jiva, the individual soul, to be all-virtuous, all-blissful, all-great, all-poised, all-powerful, all knowing Brahman?

[To be continued]

ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT



Vijaya Mishra, Artist

Misfortunes hit her again and again. Each time new fight showed up, she just moved forward denying the defeat. Her name is Vijaya (meaning *triumph* in Sanskrit).

Within a few years of finishing her undergraduate studies and becoming an Arts student, Vijaya Mishra became bedridden due to arthritis. Conventional treatment was not of much help. After watching a TV show on pranayama, she began practicing those exercises at home and slowly regained her ability to walk and decided to attend a pranayama camp in Hardwar.

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On the way to the camp, just as she was getting down from the train, she got terribly injured by a car accident.

Vijaya's left elbow broke and her weaker leg got damaged more severely and her left toes had to be cut out. After spending almost three and a half months in the hospital, when she returned, she permanently lost her capacity to walk on her own feet again.

The resident of Srirampore (a suburb of Kolkata, India), Vijaya prepared herself for another fight. She started physiotherapy and decided to offer herself fully through her arts. She started with pencil sketches and then continued painting on canvas with brush & color.

Then her work started to get recognition. In 2010, her painting of Rabindranath Tagore was displayed in the Commonwealth Games Village in Delhi. She presented her paintings to political leaders and ministers purchased her portrait drawings too. Vijaya had her exhibitions in the prestigious museums & art galleries of Kolkata. In her mid-forties, she once again started to nurture her dream of becoming a great artist.

In 2012, she started a school to teach drawing to people who had lost their ability to walk. She got about twenty students. When her life seemed almost almost settled, the challenge of cancer showed up. She had to go through chemotherapy and her uterus had to be removed. In January 2015, she had her second surgery. However, Vijaya says, "I used to get curled up in physical pain. But I never broke down mentally. You know, now I am free from cancer & ready on my toe to start to work for my school full fledged".

Story adapted from anandabazar.com

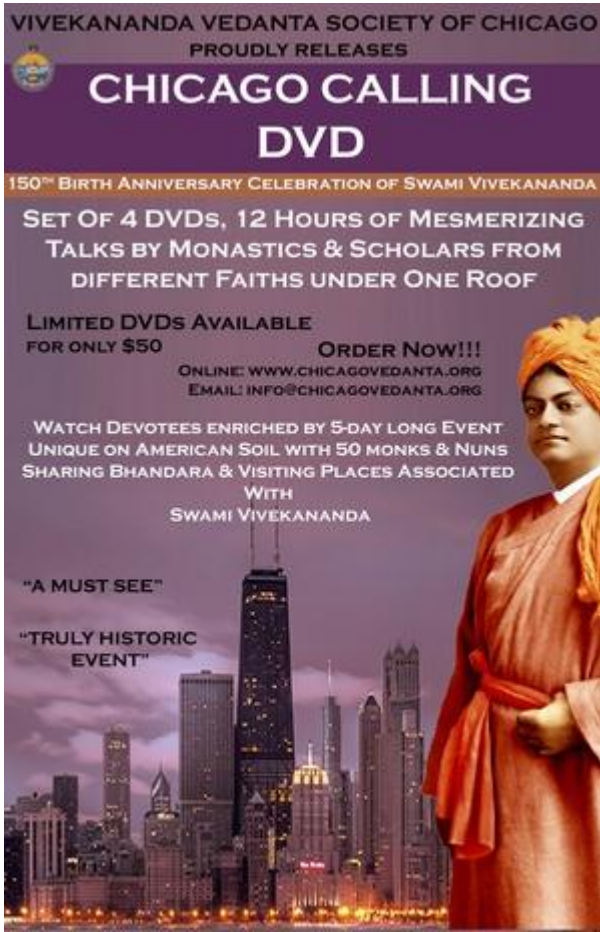
The sign of vigor, the sign of life, the sign of hope, the sign of health, the sign of everything that is good, is strength. As long as the body lives, there must be strength in the body, strength in the mind, [and strength] in the hand.

Ravi Shankar

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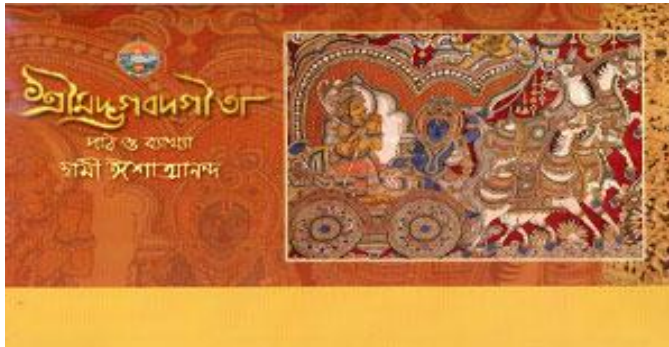
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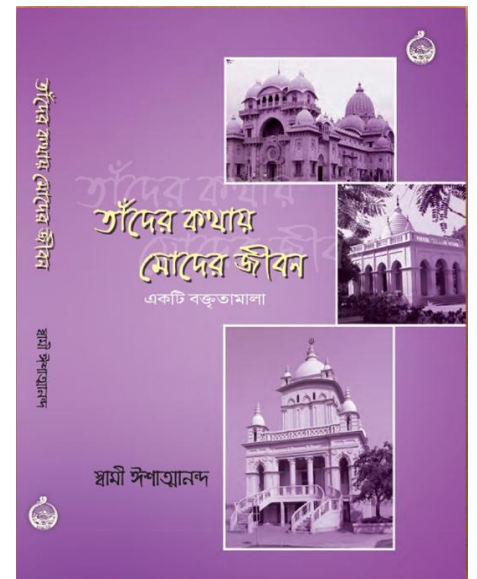
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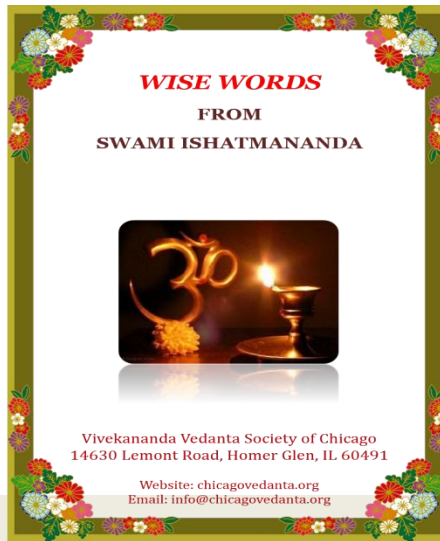
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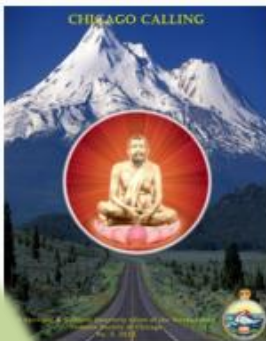
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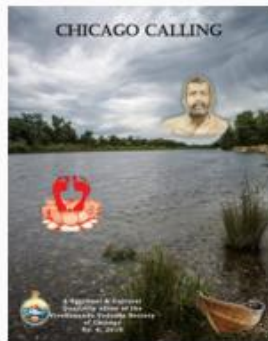
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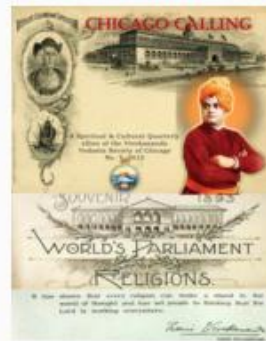
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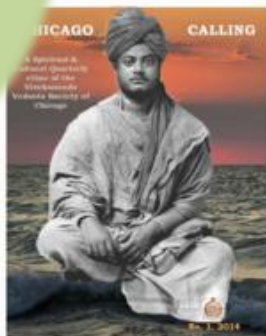
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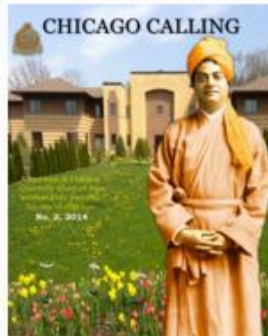
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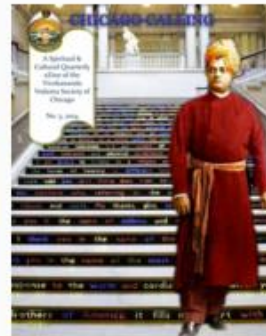
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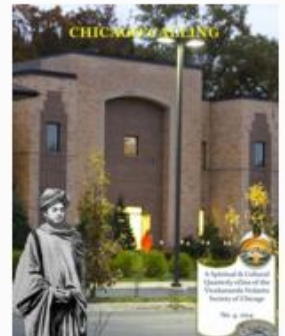
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