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## Vedanta-Ramakrishna

Swami Vivekananda started the “Vedanta Society” in New York in 1894 and the same Swami Vivekananda started an association called “Ramakrishna Mission” in Kolkata in 1897.

Are Vedanta and Ramakrishna different?

Vedanta, Veda + anta, the culmination (anta) of spiritual knowledge (Veda), recognizes that the absolute Brahman, which no one can describe but only refer to as Absolute Existence (Sat), Consciousness (Chit) and Bliss (Ananda), becomes manifested in various aspect and forms.

Brahman is both formless and with form, impersonal and again personal, transcendent and also immanent.

Sri Ramakrishna is the personified Vedanta.

Sri Ramakrishna realized Brahman through his unique sadhana and became Brahman himself. (ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मैव भवति *brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati*).

The Rishi of the Shwetashwata Upanishad (3.8) proclaimed, after realizing Brahman, “I know the mighty spirit” – (वेदाहमेतं पुरुषं महान्तम् *vedāhametaṁ puruṣaṁ mahāntam*), and in this modern age Sri Ramakrishna, like the Vedic Rishi, affirms, “Yes, I have seen God; God talked to me”. “God alone is Real” – Sri Ramakrishna’s realization tallies with the Vedic truth “Brahman alone is Real” (ब्रह्म सत्य *Brahma satya*). Moreover, as the Upanishads emphasize that Chaitanya, Consciousness, is all pervading, similarly, Sri Ramakrishna stated, “She (the Goddess Kali) was Consciousness. The image (of the Mother Kali) was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water vessels were Consciousness, the door-still was Consciousness, the marble floor (of the temple) was Consciousness – all and everything was Consciousness.”

How can a personal Goddess be compared with Brahman? Sri Ramakrishna’s reply, “Whom you call Brahman, I call Mother (Kali)”.

Sri Ramakrishna in his characteristic simplicity,

said, “What Brahman is, cannot be described” (ब्रह्म एतो हन नि *Brahma eṭo han ni*).

In the Brahma-Sutra-Bhashya (3.3.50) Adi Shankaracharya explained why Brahman is beyond words, “Even the cleverest acrobat cannot mount on his own shoulders”. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (2.3.6) we hear the Rishi Yajnavalka supporting the same truth in a question, how would one know the knower (विज्ञातारं अरे केन विजानीयात्, *vijñātāraṁ are kena vijānīyāt*)?

If Brahman is All-pervading Formless Consciousness, then how is the transition from Brahman to the objective world effected?

Shankaracharya in his commentary on the Brahma-Sutras explained, “the causal power is neither different from the cause nor imaginary; it is the very essence of the cause and the effect is the very essence of the power” (शक्तिस्य कारणस्य शक्तेश्चाम् भूतं कार्यम् *śaktisya kāraṇasya śakteśchāṁ bhūtaṁ kāryam* [2.1.18]).

Sri Ramakrishna never attended any school, never received any formal education but unhesitatingly explained this complicated philosophical question. He said that *Vidyā-māyā* (the illusion of Knowledge) and *Avidyā-māyā* (the illusion of ignorance), good and bad, both are flowing from God. This world is the “Lila” (play) of God.

Vedanta teaches individual beings are nothing but Brahman alone (जीव ब्रह्मैव न-अपर, *jīva brahmaiva na-apara*) nothing else. Sri Ramakrishna teaches, “*jīva-śiva*” (every embodied being is Shiva himself). Explaining this, his chief disciple Swami Vivekananda said, “Never forget the glory of human nature! We are the greatest God... Service to man is service to God”.

The Vedanta Societies in the west and the Ramakrishna Mission centers in the east are both serving the “living gods” Brahman in forms in different manners.

# SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S CONTRIBUTION TO SPIRITUAL UNITY IN DIVERSITY

**SWAMI SARVADEVANANDA**

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This lecture was delivered on Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at "Chicago Calling".



Swami Vivekananda is the symbol of unity; in him there was nothing which is not universal, in whom there is nothing but things related to the whole of humanity.

Swami Vivekananda said, "We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonizing the Vedas, the Bible, and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best." (CW 6:416). What a vision and mission for bringing unity in this world of conflicting and diverse views! He said, "It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body—to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God." (CW 5:414) Vivekananda stands on this platform where "men everywhere" and the "whole world" are the points of consideration—nothing short of that. He said, "We want to lead mankind"; he has not come for any particular country, particular creed or sect, or caste or particular religion—but to lead and guide the entire humanity. He has come to redeem the whole world; "mankind" was his "mission". He expressed his mission in different language: "I shall inspire men everywhere until the world shall know that it is one with God." What a grand resolution and what an arduous task he undertook willingly out of his tremendous love for humanity. This is his message, the message of unity. And this

unity is the foundation of all spiritual traditions leading to the one ultimate realization. Ultimate truth is the same—Truth is one and only one.

Diversity is the plan of creation; we cannot expect that everything and everyone in the manifested universe will be the same. Then it would not be creation at all, it would no more be the world in which we live. That's why religious traditions and paths are so diverse and different. This difference adds beauty to the spiritual life. It gives freedom to each soul to choose that path with which his heart resonates. Swami Vivekananda accepted this universal approach to spirituality.

His master Sri Ramakrishna not only accepted this philosophy, but lived that life and followed all the different spiritual paths to their summit, in the unique experience of oneness, where all differences come to an end. I recall Sri Ramakrishna's experience of his first vision of Mother Kālī. The form "sākāra" and the formless "nirākāra"—all melted into oneness! The light emanated from the divine image of the Mother, radiating in all directions. As the experience progressed, that image of the Mother gradually merged in the infinite ocean of light and consciousness. Thereafter he himself was also drowned in that infinite light of blissful consciousness, losing all outer awareness of the perceptible or non-perceptible world of duality. He remained in that state for that day and the next.

Much later, when Sri Ramakrishna entered into the nirvikalpa state of samādhi with Totapuri, perhaps his experience was the same. It was the same level of awareness, where there was no two, no diversity, no multiplicity. Everything melted into one Absolute ocean of bliss and consciousness. That is the eternal and absolute reality—the culmination of all spiritual visions and experiences, where the journey ends.

At the beginning of the journey, as also when one moves towards the final experience, the rituals, forms, and visions which followers of different paths encounter will be so very different from one another.

Swami Vivekananda's message reverberates and resonates with the experiences and proclamations of the ancient sages: *ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*.

To reestablish peace and harmony in the world, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda relived the same experiences of the ancient sages in this modern era. Sri Ramakrishna practiced the disciplines of different faiths under the guidance of the teachers of each particular tradition. He first experienced God as the Divine Mother, and then cried and prayed to Her to show him how devotees of other traditions pray to and realize Her. He came to this conclusion: "As many faiths so many paths, *Jata mat, tata path.*"

Diversity has its own charm and beauty. Each path has its unique speciality and attraction for its followers. Still, when we reach the final destination we will all surely experience the same truth. For instance, all of us had different experiences as we made our way to this Hilton Hotel, driving along different roads from different directions, and seeing various sceneries. But now we are all here together, in the same hall, and enjoying the same celebration.

Swami Vivekananda once drew a circle to explain the idea of unity in diversity. Different religions are like different radii of the circle, and God is the center. The goal of each spiritual

tradition is to reach the center. The difference between two radii will be significant at the starting point on the circumference. As the radii move towards the center, the distance between them gets smaller; the differences become fewer. All the differences are dissolved when two religious paths reach the center, that is, God.

The ancient sages experienced this ultimate oneness, following the different paths. The sages of the Rg Veda (Book I, Hymn CLXIV, Verse 46) declared, "Truth is one, sages call it by different names; *ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti.*" The Mundaka Upanishad (3.2.8) declares, "

यथा नद्यः स्यन्दमानाःसमुद्रेऽस्तं गच्छन्ति नामरूपे विहाय।

तथा विद्वान्नामरूपाद्विमुक्तः परात्परं परुषमुपैति दिव्यम्॥

*yathā nadyaḥ syandamānaḥ samudre'stṁ gachchanti nāma rūpe vihāya, tathā vidvānnāmarūpādvimuktaḥ parātparam puruṣamupaiti divyam.*

As flowing rivers disappear in the sea, losing their names and forms, so a wise man, freed from name and form, attains the Purusha, who is greater than the Great.

That is the ultimate experience. The diversity is real so long as we live on the level of outward consciousness, on the level of body and mind. Sri Ramakrishna, like a scientist, experimented to find the Truth of oneness in all religions in his laboratory of meditation at Dakshineswar, and experienced the spiritual unity of the varied paths. He used to say, "All the jackals howl the same way", meaning that the illumined souls of all traditions speak the same truth.



This truth was hidden in the difficult-to-understand language of the scriptures and was available only to a few saints and sages. Swami Vivekananda took it as his mission to bring this sublime truth of oneness to the general public. He broadcast this glorious message of the Upanishads to all, in broad daylight, so that it might become the common property of all seekers of Truth all over the globe, irrespective of their caste, creed, gender, religion, country, or nationality. His mission was to bring the Vedanta of the forest to every home. This ancient truth, profound and deep, is embedded in the Vedas and Upanishads—but is not easy to access by the majority of the people. Swami Vivekananda brought it into our day to day life, to our own homes. And his goal was to lead us to that oneness of realization.

Swami Vivekananda declares, “The ideal of all religions, all sects, is the same—the attaining of liberty and the cessation of misery.” (CW 4:51) He continues, “if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being, from the lowest groveling savage not far removed from the brute, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognise divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realise its own true, divine nature.” (CW 1:19).

So this is Swami Vivekananda’s mission, to lead us to that experience of spiritual unity. Spiritually

we are all connected. Yet we must follow our own path, according to our own tendencies to love God and reach the Truth. There are essentials and non-essentials in every religion. We need to separate out the essential part of the scriptures and religious practices, rejecting what is non-essential.

The core of spirituality is oneness, unity. We shall have to reach unity, to see unity in all. And Swami Vivekananda wanted that we develop his vision of unity in diversity. It is not that we shall have to create unity, ours is to see the unity that exists already. The ancient sages have experienced that; Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda relived that. The same message of unity in diversity was broadcast from this wonderful city of Chicago. This is the country which stands for liberty and freedom. It was Chicago that hosted the Parliament of Religions, giving Swami Vivekananda a platform from which to broadcast his message, a message which has impacted tremendously the thought process of this country, India, and the whole world.

The momentum generated in 1893, at the Parliament of Religions has taken a new direction after 100 years in the form of the interfaith movement. In 1993, two or three monks and some devotees of the Vedanta Society of Chicago got inspired to start this interfaith movement again in collaboration with other religious leaders. In recent years the Parliament of the World’s Religions is creating a deep impact. World forums have been conducted at Chicago (1993), Cape Town (1999), Barcelona (2004), Monterrey (2007), and Melbourne (2009) to fulfill the mission of unity in diversity as propounded by Swami Vivekananda. Presently we find that large numbers of local, zonal, national, and international conferences are being constantly conducted in all parts of the world by religious leaders of all different faiths to bring mutual respect, peace, harmony, and unity in diversity. This is undoubtedly the special contribution of Swami Vivekananda.

Diversity has its inherent beauty. A garland looks beautiful when strung with flowers of different colors—the variety of flowers enhances its beauty. Without diversity, human existence is impossible. Of course there is a unity at the spiritual level. Even if we look at our life in a broad perspective we can see that we are all one. From the human perspective, I may be coming from India, someone may be born in this country, someone from Russia, someone from some other country, but as human beings we are all one. When we suffer, when we have pain or anguish or joy, our emotions and feelings are felt in the same way. It does not become different because of our country of origin or birth, gender and other differences. If we go to the very back of our body-mind-intellect-ego, we find that there exists only one Truth. The ultimate unity is the absolute goal of all religion and religious experiences.

So unity is our very foundation. As a medicine to heal the conflicting religious and sectarian ideologies of the modern world, Swami Vivekananda wanted to teach and preach this unity, and dedicated his life for its realization: how to love and respect every path. Swami Vivekananda was loath to criticize anyone; he even lamented later that he had sometimes criticized some path, whereas his Master had never done so. So we should carry this idea with us, that we shall

have to reach unity, and not take the divisive attitude which separates us from each other. Let us then move towards that spiritual unity, which is the foundation of our very existence—that is called Brahman, that is called Atman, that is the transcendental reality.

Again, as students of Vedanta, as followers of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda we have to understand that that which is transcendental is also immanent. Totapuri attained realization of the transcendental reality before he came to Sri Ramakrishna, but realization of the immanent reality was given to him by Sri Ramakrishna himself. In transcendental experience, absolute oneness alone is realized. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda's special contribution in this age is to bring the unique experience of oneness into the diversity, and to teach us how to manifest it in every movement of life. Swami Vivekananda came in our life to give that perspective of spirituality, that God is immanent and God is transcendent—yes, God is transcendent, and He is equally immanent. In our day-to-day practice, we should have to see that immanent aspect of the Divine. We shall have to practice seeing it, until gradually our spiritual growth takes us to the realization of the immanent Truth manifesting through diverse names and forms.

“If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world, it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written in spite of resistance: "Help and not fight," "Assimilation and not Destruction," "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension”.

Swami Vivekananda  
September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1893



# VEDANTA MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA

## SWAMI VIDISHANANDA

*Monk, Ramakrishna Society-Vedanta Centre, Russia  
This lecture was delivered on Nov. 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at "Chicago Calling".*



The Vedanta Movement in Russia is very young compared to the same in the USA. It started just about 20 years ago. It took almost a century for the seed, which was brought from the Parliament of Religions in Chicago to Russia and sown there, to come out as a sapling. The World Parliament of Religions was convened at a time when the world was once again in need of change, in need of new ideas. Russia was also in need of something that could bring vigor to her intellectual and spiritual life.

For many centuries, clericalism and a nationalistic approach towards other religions and ways of thinking in Russia did not give real opportunities for a serious study and spread of knowledge about the philosophy of India. However, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, interest of the Russian people in the East, particularly in India greatly increased.

The World Parliament of Religions was indeed of global significance. In a way, information about the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in Russian journals and subsequent publications of the Russian translations of Swami Vivekananda's lectures and books on Sri Ramakrishna were

responsible for establishing the Vedanta Movement in Russia. We can say this Movement was conceived during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it took actual shape only in the last decade of the century.

In 1917, Russia received the greatest shock in her history, which is named the October Revolution. Power of the State came to the Bolsheviki. This period in history lasted for more than 70 years. Indian philosophy was of no use to communists, and materialistic Marxist ideology became the sole State ideology. Tight censorship was imposed. But the people of Soviet Russia did not forget the names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, though there were almost no publications until 1970-s. There was one exception, one book in particular, that kept the memory alive of the earlier readers of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Others also came to know about them from the same volume and became ardent admirers. This book was written by Romain Rolland – the well-known French savant. His *Life of Ramakrishna* and *Life of Vivekananda and his Universal Gospel* were published in Russian in one volume for the first time in 1936 as a part of his complete works. However, this volume was not reprinted in the Soviet Union for the same ideological reason. Only many years later, after the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, it was published again. These biographies were as if great magnets, which attracted people to these great lives and grand ideas of India.

In 1961, Swami Ranganathanandaji was invited by scholars to the Soviet Union. He gave several lectures in Moscow and in Leningrad. These lectures stimulated interest in the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.

The Ramakrishna Society of St. Petersburg was founded at the end of 1990. It was inspired by Swami Lokeshwaranandaji, who was then visiting the Soviet Union and at that time was Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. After the arrival of Swami Jyotirupananda in Russia in 1991, he became the spiritual adviser of the Society. He is still conducting scriptural classes, and gives lectures on Indian culture and religion. The Society has published several booklets on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. In 2007 it was made a branch of Ramakrishna Math with Swami Jyotirupananda as President.

In 1991 Swami Jyotirupananda was sent to Moscow from Belur Math by the Headquarters on request from the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. Swami Lokeshwaranandaji was in many ways instrumental in sending Swami Jyotirupanandaji there.

The beginning of 1990-s was a tough period in the lives of the Russian people. There was scarcity of almost everything. But in spite of all the difficulties the Swami and devotees could keep the Ashrama running.

Swami Bhavyanandaji from the Vedanta Society of London visited Russia a number of times and contributed substantially to acquire apartments in Moscow and St. Petersburg to continue the work on a firm footing. Gradually, centering around Swami Jyotirupananda, a circle of devotees and admirers was formed. They organized the core of the Ramakrishna Society and become its founders. In 1993, during the centenary year of the Chicago Parliament of

Religions, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, gave affiliation to the Center in Moscow and named it Ramakrishna Society-Vedanta Center, Moscow. Only in 1995, the Government of Russian Federation registered the center as a Religious Society. After a few years the law was changed and some rigorous restrictions were imposed upon all religious organizations of foreign origin. Only those religious organizations based in Russia and belonging to the four so-called "traditional" religions were allowed to function freely. For others neither outside religious activities were allowed, nor publications, nor visit to the other cities, unless special permission was given. After 3-4 years some restrictions were lifted because of the Supreme Court's decision.

However, in spite of all restrictions, the Society could work on, and is continuing its services, as from all over the land, the people of Russia welcome the Society because of their love for Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda and Vedantic books in Sanskrit. There are several weekly Sanskrit classes, regular readings on Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and direct disciples and monthly lectures on the Upanishads – all conducted in the Ashrama premises. University students are also enthusiastic in hearing Vedantic ideals in Moscow as well as in St. Petersburg.

Finally, I must not forget to mention that Russia has already contributed a monk to the Ramakrishna Order. As years roll by, we hope and pray that more and more Russians will learn to love the broad ideals of Vedanta and come forward to live idealistic lives.

Kirtan by "Sacred Water", Hilton, Nov. 10<sup>th</sup> 2013



## ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT



Maricel Apatan

On September 25, 2000, Maricel Apatan, an 11-year old girl in Zamboanga went with her uncle to draw water. Along the way, four men with long knives hacked him on the neck and killed him. Maricel tried to escape, but the men ran after her. She cried, "Don't kill me! Have mercy on me!" but a man slashed her on the neck too. Maricel fell to the ground unconscious. When they walked away, Maricel ran back home. But along the way, she saw that both her hands were falling off because the men had hacked them too.

She cried but she kept running. Sometimes, she would faint and fall to the ground. But she'd regain consciousness and run again. When she was near her home, Maricel called her mother. Her terrified mother wrapped the bloodied child in a blanket and carried her to the hospital. From her house to the highway, it was a 12-kilometer walk. When they arrived in the hospital, the doctors thought Maricel was going to die. After a 5 hour surgery and 25 stitches, Maricel barely survived but she lost both of her hands. Ironically, the next day was Maricel's 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. But tragedy didn't end there. When they went home, they saw their home had been ransacked and burned down. Being very poor, Maricel's family also didn't have money to pay the hospital bills and a distant relative paid for hospital bills and helped bring the criminals to court.

But this is is the incredible miracle: instead of staying down, Maricel kept running. Instead of cursing or brooding why she has no hands, she now uses her wrists in incredible ways. Maricel was cited as the most industrious, best in computer, and most courteous in the School for Crippled Children. In 2008, she graduated from a course in Hotel and Restaurant Management. She even received a Gold medal for Arts and Crafts. In 2011, she finished her education to be a chef. Yes, a Chef without hands. Nothing can stop this young lady from reaching her dreams.

Courtesy:

<http://propelsteps.wordpress.com/2013/09/02/true-story-maricel-apatan-faith-endurance-must-read/>



Achyuta Samanta

The village Kalarabanka in the district of Cuttack of Orissa State, India and its surrounding villages have become an education hub not through any miracle but, through the continuous and dedicated effort of its prodigy Achyuta Samanta who was raised there against all hopes of survival. Wild spinach and rice gruel were all that his mother could give Achyuta for sustenance, for she had to fend the entire family of seven in absence of her husband who died untimely when Achyuta was only four.

The journey from a Primary School to the University, always with the merit scholarship was both fascinating and challenging for Achyuta. He got his Master's in Chemistry from Utkal University and his academic excellence got him the job of a teacher in a local college to sustain himself and help the family back home.

Dr. Samanta's innovative mind and adept hands weaved an educational institution that has become a model for emulation. KIIT Group of Institutions was started with an Industrial Training Institute and its academic excellence was soon recognized by Government of India. Achyuta thought something big for deprived children where each one of them could study. With his paltry savings of Rs. 5,000 (\$100), he started a small school for 125 children belonging to the under-privileged section of the society. That small institute – Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) has now grown into the largest institute of the world for 20,000 tribal children, who are provided with accommodation, food, health care and education from KG to PG absolutely free. The savings of KIIT runs KISS.

Through KISS, Achyuta ensured that no child should ever have a nightmarish shattered childhood. Participation of world organizations like UNESCO and US Federal Government in various projects of KISS prove that it has become the most accepted model to empower and create sustainable livelihood through education.

Achyuta who single-handedly dared to give the underprivileged children, their due in the society. Reputed journals like 'Reader's Digest' have featured him. He stands apart as a person who could have bought all the luxuries of life, but for a man like him money and luxury meant very little. His struggle, his sacrifice and his simplicity are definitely more precious than anything money could buy.

Courtesy: [www.achyutasamanta.com/biodata.html](http://www.achyutasamanta.com/biodata.html)

# BETTER HEALTH THROUGH YOGA

Swagata Saha

As it was introduced in our previous issue, I am provide you with a brief description of each of these twelve steps involved in performing the *Surya Namaskara*.

**Step 1:** *Tadasana samasthiti* (mountain pose) Stand with your feet together, straighten the spine and exhale. Close your eyes and offer a prayer to Lord Surya, facing eastward in the direction of the rising sun. The prayers that can be uttered while performing this asana are:

“May the divine Sun, the Lord of wealth, endowed with energy, bestow treasures upon us; May He, with His far-spreading lustre, provide nourishment to all.” (*Rig Veda* 7,45,3)

“May the solar rays drive away diseases, dispel malignant thoughts, and keep us away from sin.” (*Samaveda* 3,9,7)

**Step 2:** *Urdhvahastasana* (upward hand) Inhale slowly, raise your hands over your head, and then slowly bend backward as much as possible. The legs should be firm and straight.

**Step 3:** *Uttanasana* (forward fold) Exhale and

bend forward, making an effort to touch the knees with the head, and finally place the hands on the ground besides the feet. Initially it might seem difficult to touch the knees with the head, but with regular practice this can be achieved. The legs should remain firm and straight.

**Step 4:** *Ashwasanchalana* (low lunge) Inhale and stretch the left leg back as much as possible. Bend the right knee so that it is directly over the right ankle. Place the right foot in between both the palms and align the fingertips of both hands with the toes of the right foot. Lengthen the spine.

**Step 5:** *Palakasana* (plank pose) Exhale, and push the right leg back to the maximum extent, while pressing the floor away with both the palms.

**Step 6:** *Chaturangandasana* (four-limbed staff pose) Exhale, lower your thighs and elbows more close to the floor, keeping your chest forward while pressing the floor away with both palms. Keep your elbows bent. Align your head in line with your spine.



**Step 7:** *Bhujangasana* (cobra pose) Inhale and straighten the elbows. Move the chest and head up, stretching both the legs back as much as possible.

**Step 8:** *Adhomukhasavasana* (downward-facing dog pose) Exhale and move the hip, waist, and tailbone up, dropping the chest and the head down. The feet should be firm and shoulder-width apart. Spread the fingertips of both palms onto the floor and push the floor away from you.

**Step 9:** *Ashwasanchalana* (low lunge)

Inhale, and slowly move in to the low lunge pose as described in Step 4 above. This time, stretch the right leg back as much as possible while placing the left leg between the palms.

**Step 10:** *Uttanasana* (forward fold) Exhale, and move in to the forward fold pose as described before in Step 3.

**Step 11:** *Urdhvhastasana* (upward hand) Inhale, and come up. Raise your hands over your head once again and then slowly bend back as much as possible as described before in Step 2.

**Step 12:** *Tadasana samasthiti* (mountain pose) Exhale, and come back to the original position as described in Step 1 above.

Therapeutic advantages of the *Surya Namaskara*:

1. The *Surya Namaskara* is effective for disorders of the digestive system.
2. The *Surya Namaskara* stretches the abdominal muscles and helps lose excess fat in the mid-

section of the abdomen.

3. The *Surya Namaskara* is beneficial for expectant mothers to help ease the process of childbirth.
4. The *Surya Namaskara* is beneficial for people who suffer from chronic insomnia.
5. The regular practice of the *Surya Namaskara* prevents hair loss, graying of hair, and enhances the growth of hair with a healthy glow.
6. The *Surya Namaskara* helps reduce wrinkles and gives the face a radiant and ageless look.
7. The *Surya Namaskara* has a soothing effect on the nervous system, and helps to reduce stress and anxiety.
8. The *Surya Namaskara* improves the circulation of blood throughout the body.
9. The *Surya Namaskara* improves vision, strengthens the bones, and improves the flexibility of the body.
10. The *Surya Namaskara* helps reduce the pain from arthritis, improves the mood, and improves the power of concentration.

May the Sun bestow good health, happiness, and enlightenment to all those who offer their prayers to Him through the daily practice of *Surya Namaskara*.

Questions or comments?  
Please email [ezine@chicagovedanta.org](mailto:ezine@chicagovedanta.org)

# HOW TO BE A BETTER STUDENT

Welcome to the Youth Corner. This column will feature inspirational messages for the youth, addressing issues such as success in studies, development of will-power and memory, concentration, competition, and other challenges that are faced inside and outside the classroom. You are invited to write in to [ezine@chicagovedanta.org](mailto:ezine@chicagovedanta.org) with questions that we will attempt to address.

**Q: When I read, my mind does not stay focused. I find myself staring vacantly at the book. Even if I force myself to read the text, nothing registers in the brain. Kindly advise how to overcome this problem.**

Let us try to troubleshoot your problem. You may be technically unprepared to undergo this course of study, or the mind may be preoccupied with disturbing thoughts – brooding over what has already happened, or worrying about the future. If you are technically unprepared to undertake the course of study, then the problem has been identified. It is like trying to study quantum physics without an adequate preparation in calculus or Newtonian physics. You need to go back and revise the foundational material first.

If it is the other case, viz., that of disturbing thoughts that intervene, then it is tricky to handle. There could be a variety of reasons causing the disturbing thoughts, so you need to analyze your situation carefully. Here are some possibilities. Did someone say or do something to you that is foremost in your mind and that keeps pushing out all other thoughts? Perhaps your ego is injured or you are afraid of some situation. Perhaps you are anxious about some work assigned to you and are worrying about it. Perhaps you want to do something else, like play sports or spend time with friends, rather than study. Or perhaps you did something or said something to hurt someone, and that is bothering your conscience.

The mind is a complex instrument, and so it is important to carefully identify and isolate the cause and then deal with it. You have to play a mental tango to identify the cause. Thoughts keep coming

from the subconscious mind when you least expect them, like an adversary, to confuse you in identifying the cause. You need to introspect carefully. It helps if you do some deep breathing. Inhale and exhale gently, pausing in between. Try to focus your attention on the breath as the air moves up and down your wind-pipe, and in the intervals in between. You may also try some simple *pranayams*.

Once the cause is identified, you need to reason with your intellect to find a satisfaction for what is bothering your mind. It is very important to find a satisfaction because concentration is very difficult without a calm mind and a clear conscience. For example, if someone has said something nasty to you, reason that you need not feel bad about it. Or if you have hurt someone, resolve to make amends and apologize. If your mind keeps getting thoughts of spending time with friends, reason that that is not beneficial for your academic progress. Using the intellect and your will-power, try to coax and cajole your mind to focus on the studies at hand. Ultimately, you have to live in the present moment, and when it is time for studies, studies it should be.

Here is an amazing story about concentration from the Mahabharata. The Pandava and the Kaurava princes were staying in the gurukulam for training under the tutelage of guru Dronacharya. To teach them archery, Dronacharya placed a painted wooden bird on a distant tree-branch. In succession, he asked the princes to take aim at the bird and asked them what they saw. One prince said he saw the tree on which the bird was sitting. Another prince said he saw the sky behind the tree. A third prince said he saw the branch on which the bird was sitting.

And so on. When it was Arjun's turn, he steadfastly took aim and when asked the same question, said that he saw only the bird's eye and nothing else. Guru Dronacharya was immensely pleased with Arjun. The moral of the story is that a student's concentration and focus should be like that of Arjun. Focused on the target to the exclusion of all else.

As we have seen, when the mind is disturbed and cannot focus on studies, a critical step to

overcome the problem is to identify the cause of distraction. If you can do it on your own, well and good, but that is not always possible. In that case, talk out your problem with someone whom you can trust will lend you a patient ear and a matured understanding. Seek advice – it could be from a parent, a teacher, an elder sibling or a counselor.

Please email your questions to  
[ezine@chicagovedanta.org](mailto:ezine@chicagovedanta.org)



In ancient Greece, Socrates was reputed to hold knowledge in high esteem. One day an acquaintance met the great philosopher and said, “Do you know what I just heard about your friend?”

“Hold on a minute”, Socrates replied. “Before telling me anything I’d like you to pass a little test. It’s called the Triple Filter Test.”

“Triple filter?”

“That’s right”, Socrates continued. “Before you talk to me about my friend, it might be a good idea to take a moment and filter what you’re going to say. That’s why I call it the triple filter test. The first filter is Truth. Have you made absolutely sure that what you are about to tell me is true?”

“No,” the man said, “Actually I just heard about it and ...”

“All right”, said Socrates. “So you don’t really know if it’s true or not. Now let’s try the second filter, the filter of Goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend something good?”

“No, on the contrary.”

“So”, Socrates continued, “you want to tell me something bad about him, but you’re not certain it’s true. You may still pass the test though, because there’s one filter left: The filter of Usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about my friend going to be useful to me?”

“No, not really.”

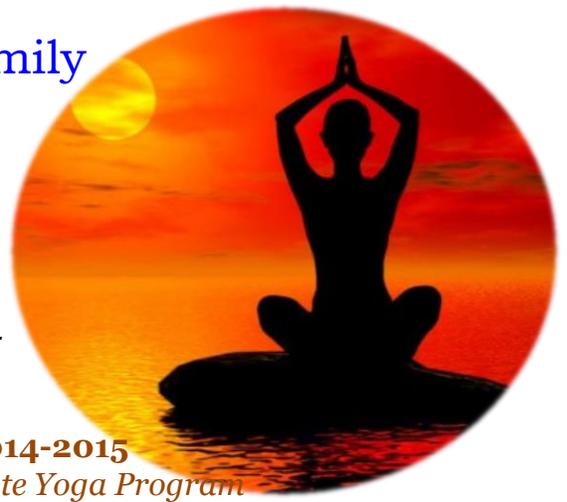
“Well”, concluded Socrates, “if what you want to tell me is neither true nor good nor even useful, why tell it to me at all?”

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**Kalyani (Amy Eley)** has been practicing yoga and meditation since 1996 and has been teaching yoga classes, workshops and private lessons since 2002. Over the years, she has trained in many different styles of yoga and has taught hundreds of students of all ages, backgrounds and fitness levels, ranging from very beginners to yoga instructors.

**1996-2002** studied Meditation and Yoga Philosophy with Ma Vandana

**2002** Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training Certification at Spirit Rising Yoga Center in Chicago IL (200 hr level)

**2006** Kali Natha Yoga Teacher Training Certification at the Kashi School of Yoga in Sebastian FL (200 hr level)

**2014** began her formal training in the system of Satyananda Yoga (Bihar School of Yoga) at the Yoga Academy of North America where she is currently working towards her 500 hr Yoga Teacher Training Certification.

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**Swagata Saha** is a life-long yoga enthusiast who loves to share her knowledge and passion for yoga with everyone is a certified Yoga Teacher (RYT-200). She received her training in yoga in Kolkata, India and in San Francisco, California. She is proficient in Hatha Yoga, Viniyasa Yoga, Ageless Yoga, Anusara Yoga, Prenatal Yoga, and Therapeutic Yoga. Her yoga classes also incorporate instruction in pranayama, Raja Yoga meditation, and Vedic chanting. She is also an independent practitioner of Vedic astrology.

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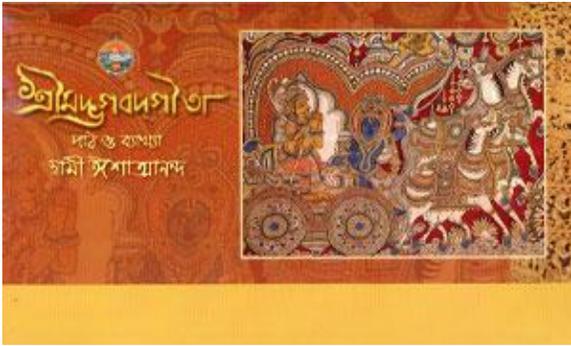
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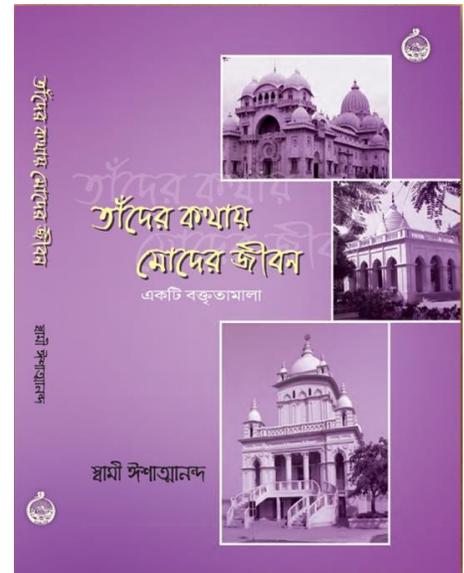
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