

CHICAGO CALLING



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Table of Contents



	Page
EDITORIAL	3
THE TRANSFORMATION FROM NARENDRANANTH TO VIVEKANANDA <i>SWAMI CHETANANANDA</i>	4
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA : EMBODIMENT OF SELFLESS SERVICE <i>SWAMI SARVARUPANANDA</i>	8
ARISE, AWAKE AND STOP NOT	11
BETTER HEALTH THROUGH YOGA	12
HOW TO BE A BETTER STUDENT	14
ADVERTISEMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS	16

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Sri Ramakrishna In Three Forms

Sri Ramakrishna is the personified Absolute Brahman. This is not a biased statement. Readers of “Chicago Calling” e-zine have found the reasons in our Sept 2014 Editorial.

One may wonder why on every altar of Vedanta Society shrines, there are three pictures – at the center Sri Ramakrishna, at His left Ma Sarada Devi, and at His right Swami Vivekananda. Their names are uttered together on many occasions. Devotees lovingly mention them as Thakur-Ma-Swamiji. They are apparently three personalities but in reality, One. The Ultimate Absolute Reality which is known as Brahman in Vedanta has three aspects – Sat – Being or Existence, Cit – Consciousness or Knowledge, and Ananda – Bliss or Reality.

The ‘Sat’ aspect of Brahman has three aspects – Existence, Unity, and Power. All these three aspects of “Sat” are found in the personality of Ma Sarada Devi.

The Mother gives existence to the child. “I am the mother of the good, I am the mother of the wicked,” said Ma Sarada. “I am the mother of all.” It is the great Mother Heart that is the source of all Unity. The gentle aspect of Mother Power, Anugraha-Shakti, the power of blessing found its highest expression in Ma Sarada. To introduce Ma Sarada, Sri Ramakrishna declared, “She is My Shakti.” Ma Sarada is Brahman.

The ‘Cit’ aspect of Brahman also has three modes – Knowledge, Will and Self – these are fully expressed in the life of Swami Vivekananda.

Sri Ramakrishna proclaimed, “Naren will teach the world” (“naren shikhe dibe”), and today we find that the highest spiritual knowledge, Vedanta, got expression in his words and life. ‘Cit’, the Vimarsha aspect of Brahman, is expressed through

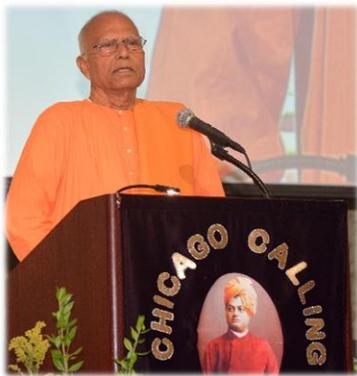
Para and Apra – Spiritual and Mundane Knowledge. Those who possess this aspect are known as Yuga-Acharya, the epochal teachers, which Swami Vivekananda is. Again, in him, Will Power, Iccha Shakti found its highest and widest expression. Also, the third aspect of ‘Cit’, Self-awareness. In ordinary people it manifests as ego. In spiritually awakened persons like Swami Vivekananda it is expressed as Atman. “The more I grow the more it seems to me that everything lies in manliness.” “I have a message to the West ... I am the child of God” are the expressions of an Atmajnani. Swami Vivekananda is Brahman.

Upanishads describe Brahman as ‘Ananda’ – Ananda is the basis of Reality (raso vai sah: taittiriya upan. 2.7.1). This Ananda aspect of Brahman is manifested through the ‘Avatāra’, the Divine Incarnation, so that ordinary people can understand. Bliss is the goal of all human beings and an Avatāra, living as an ordinary human, helps and guides human society to reach the goal – Brahma-Jnana. In the present age, Brahman manifested as Sri Ramakrishna for the welfare of the whole world. How? By establishing ‘Dharma’ (sthāpakāya ca dharmasya) How? By invoking the Mother Power, Mātr Shakti, through Ma Sarada; by manifesting the Guru Power, Guru Shakti, through Swami Vivekananda, and demonstrating Ananda, Hladhini Shakti, through His own life.

Sri Ramakrishna – Ma Sarada – Swami Vivekananda are apparently three different personalities, in reality One.

The Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago will celebrate, in the coming months Sri Ramakrishna in three forms and invites you to join.

Glory to Thakur-Ma-Swamiji.



THE TRANSFORMATION FROM NARENDRANATH TO VIVEKANANDA

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

Minister, Vedanta Society of St. Louis

This lecture was delivered on Nov. 9th, 2013 at “Chicago Calling”.

Today we are celebrating a very auspicious occasion, as all of us from all over the world have come here to pay our homage to Swami Vivekananda in connection with his 150th birth anniversary. Chicago is a very, very holy place. Swamiji arrived here on 30 July 1893 and he gave his maiden speech on 11 September 1893. He was Sri Ramakrishna’s “vānī mūrti”—that is, his manifested “Voice Form”. Swamiji himself implied this when he said, “All the ideas that I preach are only an attempt to echo his [Ramakrishna's] ideas.”

When I first walked on the shore of Lake Michigan in 1972, I tried to imagine that Swamiji had nirvikalpa samadhi somewhere around that place. Perhaps when you walk there you also may think of it. There are so many wonderful episodes connected with Swamiji in Chicago. One touching incident comes to my mind. When Swamiji was leaving Chicago for the last time, in 1900, for India, he stayed a few days with the Hale family. On the morning of his departure, Mary Hale came to the Swami's room and found him sad. His bed appeared to be untouched, and on being asked the reason, he confessed that he had spent the whole night without sleep. “Oh,” he said, “it is so difficult to break human bonds!” Swamiji knew that this was the last time he was to see these devoted friends.

My topic for today is ‘The transformation from Narendranath to Vivekananda’. Vivekananda was born on 12 January 1863, and was brought up having a Western education which taught him not to accept anything without evidence. He gradually became well versed in both Eastern and Western thought. There are a few important qualities that

we see in Narendranath’s life at that time. First, he had a tremendous passion for Truth. Second, he overflowed with excessive energy -- too much energy. Third, he was a rebel. His classmate Brajendranath Seal wrote: “Undeniably a gifted youth, sociable, free and unconventional in manners, a sweet singer, the soul of social circles, a brilliant conversationalist, somewhat bitter and caustic, piercing with shafts of a keen wit the shows and mummeries of the world, sitting in the scorner's chair but hiding the tenderest of hearts under that garb of cynicism; altogether an inspired Bohemian but possessing what Bohemians lack -- an iron will; somewhat peremptory and absolute, speaking with accents of authority and withal possessing a strange power of the eye which could hold his listeners in thrall.”

The rebel came to Sri Ramakrishna in 1881. As a rebel, he did not like some aspects of Hinduism. First he did not care for the caste system, and he hated child-marriage from the bottom of his heart. He also abhorred image-worship, the neglect of women’s education, the exploitation by some priests who took advantage of the illiteracy and poverty of low caste people. Again, he could not bear various kinds of superstitions, and the narrowness and bigotry of Hinduism. And he especially hated hypocrisy.

Before Swamiji left for America, a pandit of South India told him: “*Kadāpi na*, don’t cross the ocean. You will become an outcaste.” But Vivekananda broke all such superstitions. During his youth, his rebellious nature took him to the Brahmo Samaj, a socio-religious reform movement in India.

He found that they did not have a caste system, and they had started a programme for women's education. They also emphasized meditation and study, and they were involved in reforming Hinduism. All this he liked. And what was the object of their meditation? Saguna nirakara

Brahman -- Brahman without a form but with qualities. This, in particular, suited Narendra, as he did not care for idol worship at all. God with qualities but no form -- that is also the Christian concept of God. Though formless, God is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, almighty, all merciful, all forgiving, all loving, and so on. This idea of God appealed to him. It is not so easy to change a person like Vivekananda. He was āsishtha, drarishtha, balishtha, medhāvi -- well disciplined, strong in mind, strong in body, and had a gigantic intellect and tremendous will power. He was proud of his learning and scientific reasoning, and was firm in moral, ethical, and spiritual values. And yet this was a man who was going to be changed by a temple priest who had no formal education! It is amazing how Ramakrishna smashed his ego and his pride in his convictions and learning, and finally changed his whole life. How did the Master accomplish this?

First, Narendra did not believe in Sākāra-vād— God with form. But Ramakrishna changed all that. After Narendra's father died in 1884, the family suffered from poverty and sometimes starved. It was unbearable for Narendranath to see this, as he was then the head of the family. Despite his best efforts, he could not find any job. With no other hope, he came to Ramakrishna and asked him: "Sir, please do something for me. I cannot bear it that my mother, brothers, and sisters are starving at home. The Divine Mother listens to your prayers. Why don't you pray for me?" Ramakrishna said: "Oh, I prayed to the Mother for you. But She said that you don't believe in Her, so She cannot do anything for you."

"Sir, I do not know your Mother."



"All right! Today is Tuesday, an auspicious day. In the evening you go to the temple and whatever you ask my Mother, She will give it to you." Naren knew Ramakrishna was "Vāk-Siddha" – perfect in speech. Whatever came from his lips, was true. So that evening he went to the temple. But what did he pray for? He prayed five things: "Mother, give me knowledge, devotion, discrimination, renunciation, and uninterrupted vision of You." He then returned to the Master and informed him what he had prayed for. Ramakrishna sent him back to the temple and asked him to pray again. Naren again failed. He went three times to the Divine Mother but couldn't ask for money or any worldly things. Finally, Ramakrishna blessed him, saying, "Your family will never suffer from lack of ordinary food and clothing." It was a great victory for Ramakrishna because Narendra accepted Kali the Mother, God with form. The Master then taught him a song on the Mother which Narendra sang again and again the whole night and then finally went to sleep. The Master knew that Narendra would carry his message, which was an all-inclusive message. And for this reason Ramakrishna gave him the experience of other paths so that he wouldn't be able to form any sect.

Once Sri Ramakrishna predicted: "The day when Naren comes in contact with suffering and misery, the pride of his character will melt into a mood of infinite compassion. His strong faith in himself will be an instrument to reestablish in discouraged souls the confidence and faith they have lost. And the freedom of his conduct based on self-mastery will shine brightly in the eyes of others as the manifestation of the true liberty of the ego."

Second, Narendra did not believe in Guru-vād -- the doctrine of the guru. There is no traditional guru in the Brahmo Samaj, but it has a preacher similar to a Christian minister. Later on Narendra realized the value of a spiritual teacher. But at first he even criticized Ramakrishna: "Sir, you are illiterate. I have not come here to learn anything from you." The Master jokingly said to the devotees: "Naren bale āmi *nirakshara*, kintu āmār akshar jnāna āchhe -- Naren says I am illiterate but I know the alphabet. I can sign my name." Yet this same Narendra later said to Ramakrishna, "Sir, do you have any medicine that will make me forget everything I have learned?" What a change! About his guru Sri Ramakrishna, he wrote, "Samshaya rākshasa nāsha mahāstram yāmi gurum sharanam bhava-vaidyam naradeva deva jaya jaya naradeva - - I surrender myself to my guru, the physician for the malady of this world, and who is the weapon to destroy the greatest demon one can think of -- that is, doubt!" Rama killed the demon Ravana, Krishna killed the demon Kamsa, and Ramakrishna killed the greatest demon in this age -- that is, doubt. Thus Narendranath accepted Ramakrishna as his guru.

Third, Narendra rejected the Avatāra-vād -- the doctrine of the avatāra. He did not believe that God incarnates as a human being. One day the Master said to Narendra: "Girish says, I am an avatāra. What do you think of it?"

Narendra replied: "Sir, I don't care for such things. But he has faith. Let him believe whatever he likes. If I experience anything myself, then I shall let you know." Later he accepted the Master as an avatāra. One night in Cossipore Narendra went to the Master's room and silently questioned whether he was an avatāra. The Master immediately removed his doubt, saying, "He who was Rama, he who was Krishna, is verily in this body Ramakrishna." Moreover, at that time Narendra actually saw Rama and Krishna in the Master's body. Later, in his Bhakti Yoga lectures, Swamiji talked elaborately about the guru and the avatāra.

Fourth, Advaita-vād -- the doctrine of nondualism. This is a vital point. Narendra did not believe in the philosophy of Advaita. He was a believer in Saguna Brahman, God with qualities. According to him, the creator and the created cannot be the same. It is absurd, he thought, that a table and the creator of the table are the same. He tried to use reason to understand it, but could not. One day he sarcastically remarked to the Master: "It is blasphemous, for there is no difference between such philosophy and atheism. There is no greater sin in the world than to think of oneself as identical with the Creator. I am God, you are God, these created things are God -- what can be more absurd! The sages who wrote such things must have been insane." The Master didn't mind Narendra's outspokenness at all. He just smiled and said: "You may not accept the views of these seers. But how can you abuse them or limit God's infinitude? Go on praying to the God of Truth and believe in any aspect of His that He reveals to you."

Another day while chatting with Hazra at Dakshineswar, Narendra again ridiculed the Vedantic experience of oneness: "How can this be? This jug is God, this cup is God, and we too are God! Nothing can be more preposterous!" When the Master heard Narendra's comment from his room, he came out and said: "Well, what are you talking about?"



He then touched Narendra and went into samadhi. This magic touch of Ramakrishna gave Narendra the immediate experience of nondualism and changed him completely. He later attained nirvikalpa samadhi. And it was this nondualistic philosophy that Swamiji preached in the East and the West.

Swamiji once wrote a letter to Mr. Francis Leggett, saying: "When I was young, I was such a puritan that I did not walk on the same sidewalk where there was a movie house. But now I can live in a house of ill-fame. It does not even bother me." Swamiji had changed so much.

Fifth, Janmāntara-vād -- the doctrine of reincarnation. In many of his lectures in the West he mentioned the reasonableness and validity of the theory of reincarnation. In this regard also Ramakrishna changed Narendra. The Master did not force, or intimidate him. He did not argue with him. What did he do? The Master gave him unconditional love, freedom, and experience. Christopher Isherwood remarked: "When a being like Vivekananda is converted, then the whole of the nineteenth century is altered."

Later Vivekananda admitted: "It is no great matter to control external material powers by some means and to perform miracles. But I have never seen a greater miracle than the way that 'mad brahmin' [Sri Ramakrishna] would handle human minds like a lump of clay. He would pound those minds, beat them into shape, develop them, and then with a mere touch he would cast them into a new mould, with new thoughts."

When Swamiji returned to India, Swami Vijnanananda said, "Swamiji, the Master said that one should renounce woman and gold, but you mixed with so many women in the West."

"What Sri Ramakrishna told you, you should practice. What Sri Ramakrishna told me, I shall practice! Sri Ramakrishna destroyed any idea of sex or gender in me." Swamiji saw the Atman in all

beings – men and women. He was a knower of Brahman. And his transformation is vital and extremely important to our spiritual tradition. Vivekananda wanted to be selfish. He wanted to realize Brahman and be immersed in nirvikalpa samadhi. But Sri Ramakrishna told him: "Shame on you! I thought you would be like a huge banyan tree and under your shade people would take rest.

And like a selfish person you want your own liberation?" Vivekananda changed. Later he said, "May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls -- and above all, my God the wicked, the miserable, the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship." He became a universal man. We do not see his physical form anymore, but his spirit has spread all over, flowing in the veins of humanity.

Swamiji is simply a wonder to me. 'Wonder' means that which arouses awe, astonishment, surprise, or admiration. When we gaze at the Great Wonders of the world -- the Great Pyramid of Egypt, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Light House of Alexandria, the Great Wall of China, the Taj Mahal of India, and the Roman Colosseum of Rome -- we are struck with wonder. Similarly I look at my bookshelf and see the many books by and about Swamiji. I am in wonder as I consider Swamiji's achievements and contributions.

Swami Vivekananda lived in this world for 39 years, 5 months, and 24 days. He started his public work at the age of 30. He worked for about 7 years, and then he said: "I have given enough to thinking humanity for 1500 years." Is this not a wonder? Now it is 2013, and we are observing the 150th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's birth. Generations to come will also stand in wonder as they observe the depth and magnitude of Vivekananda's life and message.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA : EMBODIMENT OF SELFLESS SERVICE SWAMI SARVARUPANANDA

Monk, Ramkrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch)

This lecture was delivered on Nov. 9th, 2013 at “Chicago Calling”

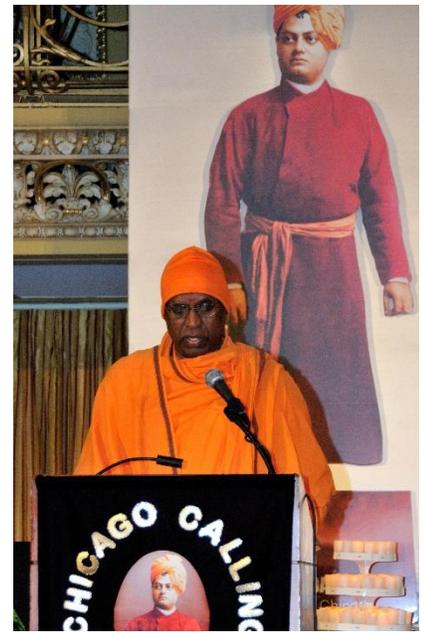
Swami Vivekananda lived in this world for less than forty years. He cannot be measured by his age. Though he belonged to a certain period of the history of the world, his words and Mission is for all times and all generations. Swami Vivekananda was at his best in wisdom and discernment in the role of a spiritually enlightened religious leader. He was endowed with a large heart.

His legacy to humanity is vast and rich. The best of his legacy to us is the example of his own life, characterized by love, spiritual power, immaculate purity, unceasing activity and mature wisdom. He was highly talented in many fields. He lived whatever he preached. That is why his teachings deeply touch people’s hearts.

The teachings of Swami Vivekananda stress different aspects of religion, education, character building as well as social regeneration. Swami Vivekananda gave his message to all people, the messages of love, compassion, and service. These are not merely to be intellectually known, but are to be practiced everyday and realized in life

He embraced the whole of humanity, regardless of race, culture, country, religion, or social affiliation. He imparted life to the almost dead bones and muscles of the people and made them conscious of their spiritual dignity. There is something extraordinary, something refreshingly striking, in Swami Vivekananda’s contribution, which gave humanity a new philosophy of service, God in man.

The words of the world thinkers from every walk of life at national and international levels, on Swami Vivekananda also bear witness to this statement.



To quote Revered Swami Ranganthanandaji on Swami Vivekananda: “What was unique about him as a spiritual teacher of mankind, however, was his deep interest in man and his untiring work for total human development and fulfillment everywhere. And this interest and work, we should not fail to note, was not just religious in the narrow sense of that word – just helping men and women to secure the salvation of their souls, as all other spiritual teachers have done – but covered all aspects of human life, as much economic and social as moral and religious. In fact, this all-round human interest formed the central theme of Swami Vivekananda’s life and work.”

His selfless service can be divided into three categories. 1. At the religious and spiritual level 2. At the Social level and 3. At the level of the Common Masses.

Some of his teachings under the above categories prove that he is the embodiment of selfless service. In all his speeches we can find these things are interrelated.

Let the poor be your God! You must give your body, mind, and speech to "the welfare of the world". You have read- "look upon your mother as God, look upon your father as God"- but I say “the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted -- let these be your God. Know that service to these alone is the highest religion”.



“Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man”.

“It may be that I shall find it is good to get outside my of body, to cast 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”.

“Go from village to village; do good to humanity and to the world at large. Go to hell yourself to buy salvation for others. If death is certain, it is better to die for a good cause”.

“After so much austerity, I have understood this as the real truth, God is present in every Jiva; there is no other God besides that. Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed”.

“I may perish of cold or hunger in this land, but I bequeath to you, young men, this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed”.

“I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth. However sublime be the theories, however well-spun may be the philosophy – I do not call it religion so long as it is confined to books and dogmas. The eye is in the forehead and not in the back. Move onward and carry into practice that which you are very proud to call your religion, and God bless you”!

“Let each one of us pray day and night for the downtrodden millions in India who are held fast by poverty, priest craft, and tyranny- pray day and night for them. I care more to preach religion to them than to the high and the rich. I am no metaphysician, no philosopher, nay, no saint. But I

am poor, I love the poor”.

“I see what they call the poor of this country, and how many there are who feel for them! What an immense difference! Who feels there for the two hundred millions of men and women sunken forever in poverty and ignorance? Where is the way out? Who feels for them? They cannot find light or education. Who will bring the light to them - who will travel from door to door bringing education to them? Let these people be your God - think of them, work for them, pray for them incessantly - the Lord will show you the way”.

“Look upon every man, woman, and everyone as God. You cannot help anyone, you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord Himself, if you have the privilege. If the Lord grants that you can help any one of his children, blessed you are; do not think too much of yourselves. Blessed you are that that privilege was given to you when others had it not. Do it only as worship. I should see God in the poor, and it is for my salvation that I go and worship them. The poor and the miserable are for our salvation, so that we may serve the Lord, coming in the shape of the diseased, coming in the shape of the lunatic, the leper, and the sinner”.

Romain Rolland speaks about Swami Vivekananda's humanistic philosophy of man, as he exemplified man in his universal aspect, and not in the narrow racial, national, or sectarian aspects; That universal dimension expressed itself in a deep concern for men everywhere and in every field of his life; it made them the exponents and exemplars of humanism, as much deep as wide, as much intellectually stimulating as spiritually inspiring”.

With great difficulty Swamiji brought the Belur Math property to have a permanent home to worship the relics of Sri Ramakrishna. But when people were struck by an epidemic in Kolkata, he did not hesitate to think of selling the property, and utilizing the money to mitigate the suffering people.

He Inspired Nivedita to work for the downtrodden and give education.

Swami Vivekananda said that if there were another Vivekananda, he would have understood what this Vivekananda had done. He said he had given enough ideas to last 1500 years.

He alone can give who is pure in heart, clear in brain, unselfish in motivation, lives in a balanced manner with his head, heart, and soul, who has shed all his pettiness and illusions, and who has experienced the unity of existence in his expanded consciousness. And this selfless, spotless and fearless, high character, enlightenment and love, is the hope of the world today. Such people are the

greatest hope of the humanity.

Swami Vivekananda wanted to be immersed in nirvikalpa samadhi. But after being condemned by Sri Ramakrishna, he worked tirelessly for the upliftment of humankind by showing them the way to God.

Let us hope and pray to the Lord, who dispenses all our happiness and sorrow to shower his choicest blessings on all of us and the whole humanity at large, so that we shall be in a position to develop our individual and collective and social life based on these principles, and we all live in peace, happiness and prosperity.

God bless us all!



ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT



Phan Thi Kim Phuc

On June 8, 1972, as a napalm bomb dropped on the town of Trang in North Vietnam, photographer Nick Ut took a picture that won him the Pulitzer Prize and captured the horrifying reality of war. It was of a little girl, running away from her home, naked, her clothes burnt off, and a look of horror and pain on her face. That 9 year old girl was Phan Thi Kim Phuc. She survived the incident, but with severe burns and scars which left her in chronic physical pain. Kim, who had spent 14 months in a hospital and years in therapy, admits that she felt bitterness and hate, and often wondered why it had to happen to her. But she soon realized that she needed to overcome these negative emotions, and that she needed to forgive so that she could move on and find peace

On Veteran's day, 1996, Kim was present as Vietnam veterans gathered at the War Memorial in Washington D.C. She spoke about her survival and talked about how she no longer felt anger towards those responsible, because she had found the strength to forgive them. Suddenly, John Plummer, the pilot who had been in the plane that dropped the bomb, stood up, moved towards Kim and told her he was responsible and that he was sorry. Kim came down from the stage and hugged him, and told him he was forgiven.

Kim believes she survived because of a higher purpose, and that the event was necessary to teach her about forgiving and helping others. In 1996 she founded the Kim Phuc Foundation which helps child victims of war, and also became UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. Her strength to forgive, positive attitude and tireless efforts to help others inspire everyone she meets.



Jessica Cox

Jessica Cox was born without arms due to a rare birth defect. As a young child, at her first dance performance, Jessica asked to be put in the back row, but her dance teacher told her there was no back row. Tentatively she took the stage with the other students and performed. When she finished, the applause from the audience gave her encouragement and the confidence to continue.

Now she is the world's first licensed armless pilot, as well as the first armless black-belt in the American Taekwondo Association (she now has two black belts in Taekwondo). She earned her pilot's license on October 10, 2008, after three years of training, and is qualified to fly a light-sport aircraft to altitudes of 10,000 feet; Jessica Cox flew in a single engine airplane for the first time via Wright Flight. She received her flight training through an Able Flight scholarship and soloed under the instruction of Parrish Traweek. Cox has not used prosthetic arms since she turned 14. Using her feet as most people use their hands, she is able, among other things, to drive a car (she has an unrestricted license and drives a car without modifications), to type on a keyboard (25 words per minute), to pump her own gas, and to put in and remove her contact lenses. She is also a certified SCUBA diver. Cox holds a Bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Arizona and works as a motivational speaker and has shared her message in 20 different countries.

Courtesy: kimfoundation.com & wikipedia

BETTER HEALTH THROUGH YOGA

Swagata Saha

The practice of Yoga through every stage of our lives, starting from kids' yoga to yoga for senior people, allows and facilitates the natural quality of our being which is dynamic. We move in and move out of yoga postures with the natural rhythmic flow of our breath which supports our dynamic expression. While practicing yoga this dynamic movement allows the body to open slowly, gently and deeply, and in a process of doing so it also awakens the sense of connection of breath in the body. Connecting with the breath during the practice of yoga is immensely beneficial for everyone, especially for pregnant women.

Prenatal yoga is a form of yoga that is specifically developed for pregnant women, and facilitates the process of bringing new life safely onto this earth. Regular, safe practice of yoga during pregnancy helps women to cope with the physical demands of the pregnancy. Changes in hormonal levels in the body make pregnant women emotionally fragile. Emotion is a highly significant factor in pregnancy and can have a direct effect on the physiology of the body. In this delicate phase of life, a woman becomes more sensitive internally and also is more attuned to the forces of universe. In Samkhya, which is one of the six classical schools of Indian philosophy, the universe is divided into Purusha or consciousness and Prakriti or nature. Prakriti consists of three gunas or qualities commonly referred as swatta ,tama and raja. These gunas within each person gives a particular person his or her very own energetic structure and also a sense of self. We can lead a happy and healthy life when we can strike a perfect balance between these three gunas. Moreover these gunas need to constantly be in a state of harmony in a would-be mother's body, in order to welcome a physically and mentally healthy child onto this earth. Asanas calm both the mind and the body by providing both physical

and emotional stress relief, a crucial need for a woman who is undergoing the rigors of pregnancy.

Regular practice of yoga during pregnancy can effectively reduce the symptoms such as morning sickness, fatigue and constipation. Yoga also eases the intensity of labor pains by relieving the tension around the cervix and birth canal. Practice of yoga also ensures the opening of the pelvis, which in turn leads to an uncomplicated and smooth delivery.

A few important points to remember in prenatal yoga are mentioned below:

- First of all, a would-be mother should never practice yoga all by herself. She should always work with an experienced yoga instructor who can guide her throughout pregnancy.
- None of the postures or asanas that require the woman to lie on her belly (like Cobra or Bhujangasana) are allowed for pregnant women after the first trimester, as these postures can potentially reduce blood flow in the uterus.
- One should avoid the postures (Urdhva Dhanurasana, Ustrasana, Bakasana, Parsvottanasana) that can potentially cause muscle injury. Recuperation from muscle strains or injuries is much slower during pregnancy, as the connective tissues are softened because of a hormone called relaxin (which helps the uterus to expand during pregnancy).



- From the second trimester onwards when a woman starts getting heavy and the center of gravity starts to shift, standing postures such as Tree Pose/ Vrikshasana or Triangle Pose/Trikonasana can still be performed, but should always be performed against the support of the wall or a chair to ensure that the pregnant woman never goes out of balance.

- One should avoid practices such as Bikrama Yoga or Hot Yoga during pregnancy, as overheating can be potentially damaging or even fatal for the growing fetus.

- Ujjayi Pranayama is extremely beneficial for pregnant women, but Kapalbhathi or any other forms of pranayama that involve a pumping action of the belly are not suitable during pregnancy.

- While practicing twisting postures like Marichiyasana, the twist has to be from the shoulder and upper back because twisting from the waist level would cause pressure on the abdomen. Postures that promote abdominal stretch should generally be avoided.

- In forward bending postures like Uttanasana, the breast-bone has to be extended through the spine. The pregnant woman should elongate her neck from the crown of the head while tucking the tail-bone down, which would create more space for the ribs to move leading to easier breathing during these postures.

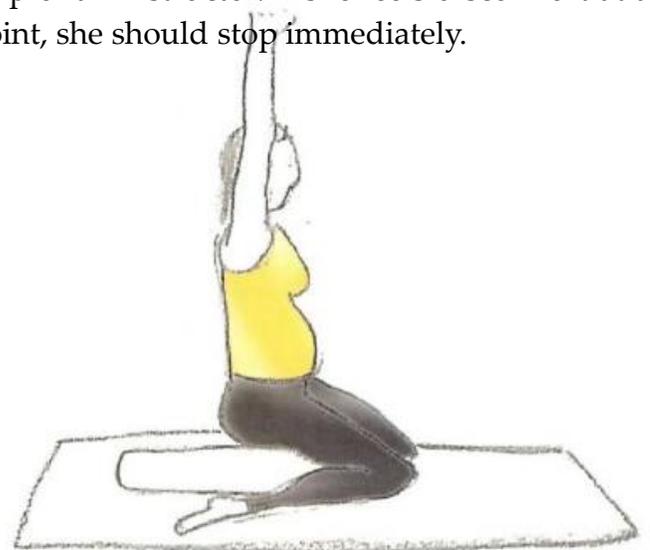
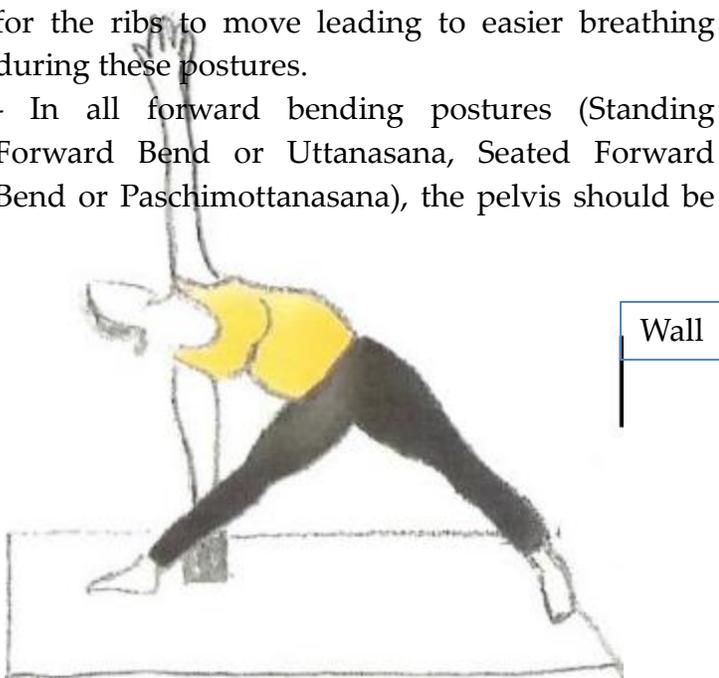
- In all forward bending postures (Standing Forward Bend or Uttanasana, Seated Forward Bend or Paschimottanasana), the pelvis should be

in a neutral position which can be achieved by tucking the tail-bone down. This would help relax the muscles of the buttocks and the hip flexors, which in turn helps to prevent sciatic nerve pain in the leg - a common complaint during pregnancy.

- In seated forward fold or Paschimottanasana, one should use the help of props like a rope or a yoga strap. The pregnant woman should place the prop behind her feet and grasp the two ends of the rope or strap. Then she has to lift her chest up and bend from the hips while bending forward. This would not create pressure on the abdominal region. In Seated Forward Bend like Paschimottanasana, a couple of rolled up mats or towels can be placed under the sitting bones to gain the desired height of the upper body, otherwise bending forward with the growing belly might seem difficult. Also, keeping the legs about hip-width apart would give the belly adequate room to move forward in any forward bend.

- If the pregnant woman is new to inversions like Shirsasana/Head-stand, Halasana/Plow pose and Salamba Sarvangasana/ Shoulder-stand, this is certainly not the time to learn. In such a situation, she should steer clear of all the inversions to minimize risks.

- Last but not the least, the pregnant woman should always listen to the demands of her body and then customize each yoga posture with the help of an instructor. If she feels discomfort at any point, she should stop immediately.



HOW TO BE A BETTER STUDENT

Q: When I study, how do I know that I am actually learning? What is the best learning technique?

Our teachers try their best to impart us an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter. No two teachers teach in exactly the same manner, and furthermore, as students, we have no control over their quality. Thus, it becomes the student's responsibility to learn efficiently. You need to learn how to become an effective learner. To this end, it is instructive to understand Bloom's taxonomy of learning goals (Bloom 1956). Bloom identified six learning goals, which form a rough hierarchy, as follows: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. We will try to understand these six learning goals using a running example from simple Newtonian physics.

Knowledge: This is the first goal in any learning exercise. It involves being able to remember, define, and list information. In our physics syllabus, assume we are studying the forces that act on objects that are in circular motion. As part of knowledge, we need to know the definitions of the gravitational, frictional, centripetal, and centrifugal forces. The centripetal force is directed towards the center of the circular motion, whereas the centrifugal force is an inertial or fictitious force observed in a non-inertial reference frame, and also the equal and opposite reaction to a centripetal force.

Comprehension: This is the next level of learning. It reflects a deeper understanding of what the forces mean and how they operate. When you experiment with moving a heavy object tied to a string that you are holding in your hand, in a horizontal circular motion first and then in a vertical circular motion, you get some idea of how these forces operate. Or when you experiment by

traveling in a vehicle at high speed on a sharp curve, you get a first-hand feeling of these forces acting on you. Comprehension involves being able to discuss and explain, and to give examples of the deeper understanding obtained.

Application: In this level of learning, we are required to take previous understandings and apply them to understand new situations. Suppose you are enjoying a ride on a Ferris wheel or a merry-go-round, or a high-speed roller-coaster in an amusement park. As you are subjected to the various thrusts and feelings in your body, you should be able to relate them to the knowledge and comprehension of the definitions of the physical forces. As a result, we are able to extend our understandings to a wider range of circumstances and newer situations.

Analysis: In this level of learning, we are expected to be able to break down informational materials into their component parts, examine their organization and interactions, and develop conclusions that are supported with evidence. Thus, given a real or a hypothetical example of an object in circular motion, we are expected to isolate and identify all the relevant forces acting on it. If the object is moving on a conical surface in a circular motion, we should be able to answer questions such as at what increased circular velocity will the object fly off the surface. The ability to identify how things are related to each other gives a deeper understanding of the context of phenomena and how different components of the system influence each other.

Synthesis: In this level of learning, we are expected to creatively apply prior knowledge and skills to produce a new or original whole. Thus, synthesis involves originality in using the analytical understanding to create new ideas and models.

In our running example, assume you have been tasked to design a new and daring roller-coaster in an amusement park. You have all the parameters, such as the maximum height, the number of loops, and the number of corkscrew turns in your control. By using synthesis of all prior knowledge, you design a new thrilling roller-coaster that meets the primary criterion of safety. Here, innovation is the key, wherein we apply existing understandings of principles, functions, and relationships to generate a new product.

Evaluation: This level of learning involves judging the values of ideas, designs, and products based on personal values/opinions and prior knowledge. Here, solutions may not be absolutely right or absolutely wrong, and a discriminative judgment is involved. In our example, assume you have been asked to evaluate the design of a roller-coaster ride, not only in terms of safety but also in

terms of the thrill factor involved. Your task involves analyzing all the forces at every stage of the synthesized product. This requires not only a deeper understanding of all the forces involved along the ride but also a subjective evaluation of the thrill factor along the ride. Thus, the level of mastery required is deeper than for synthesis.

The six levels of learning are not mutually exclusive but tend to form a loose hierarchy. The later levels of learning in the hierarchy typically require added skills and maturity. As a student, you have to develop your abilities along all these six dimensions to be effective in life. By developing your abilities on how to learn a wide variety of things in new situations, you will be preparing yourself for the journey of life.

Source: Ken Barger, What Makes a Good Learner?
<http://www.iupui.edu/~anthkb/learning.htm>



We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.

Swami Vivekananda
CW 5/Conversations and Dialogues/II-V Sri Surendra Nath Sen

Register for Yoga Classes! \$50 only!!**Foundation A (open to all)****Fridays 6:00-7:30pm :: January 2-March 6**

This is a good class for those with injuries or health issues where the typical "beginner class" may still feel rushed or not appropriate. Many practices can be modified and done while sitting in a chair. Classes focus on opening the joints, developing strength and awareness so that one can move into advanced practices with better alignment and attention to finer details. You will be introduced to:

Pawanmuktasana 1 and 2 (for joint and digestive health)
 Basic breathing methods
 Yoga Nidra -deep guided relaxation
 Seated meditations such as 'Kaya Sthairyam'-Body Steadiness

Foundation B (open to all)**Sundays 8:00-9:30am: : January 4-March 8**

Foundation B builds on and revisits the practices learned in Foundation A and focuses on developing hip flexibility, core strength and upper body strength, preparing students for the rigors of Foundation C. You will also be introduced to:

Pawanmuktasana 3 -Shakti Bandhas- (for increased energy, vitality and hip flexibility)
 Introduction to modified Sun Salutation
 More Classical Asana
 Lung expanding, Balancing and Tranquilizing Breathing Practices
 More advanced levels of 'Kaya Sthairyam'- Body Steadiness Meditation
 OM chanting
 jala neti - a purification practice to keep nasal passages and sinuses well functioning

Foundation C (experience and permission needed)**Tuesdays 6:00-7:30pm :: January 6-March 10**

Foundation C builds on and revisits the practices learned in foundation A and B courses. This course requires a healthy back, core strength, and upper body strength to perform fully and safely. You will also be introduced to:

Flowing Sun Salutation-Surya Namaskara
 Classical Asana
 Balancing, Tranquilizing and a Vitalizing Breathing Practices
 'Antar Mona'- Inner Silence Meditation
 'Trataka'- meditation practice of 'Gazing Steadily'

Instructor

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.

Meditation through Yoga (open to all)
Sundays 10:00-11:00 am :: January 4-March 8

Meditation through Yoga starts with Vedic chanting. We will then delve deep into various techniques of Vedic and Raja yoga meditation. Aphorisms from Patanjali Yoga sutras, Upanishads, Rigveda, and the Bhagvad Gita will also be discussed during the class. Asanas, Pranayama, and Pratyahara will regularly be practiced during the class, and will serve as a preparatory base for meditation. These practices will help to bring about clarity of mind, provide a deeper understanding of meditation, and are powerful tools to enlighten the soul. The class will end with the chanting of Aum (the eternal sound of the universe) coupled with the gentle accompaniment of Himalayan music bowl. Natural soundscapes and meditative music will be played to facilitate the process of meditation. The ultimate goal of these classes is to fix the mind upon the inner light of consciousness, which is beyond all sorrow.

Instructor

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.



Yoga, Meditation and Health 4 hr Workshop

Saturday, January 10:, 2015 :: 2:00-6:00pm
\$60

Led by Yoga Teacher and Therapist with 35 years of teaching experience

An easy-to-understand, easy-to-do, highly therapeutic Holistic Yoga Practice will be followed by lecture and Q&A session.

Lecture will explain how properly administered and correctly performed yoga and meditation work, what physiological changes take place in the body during the practice, what differentiates yoga from other forms of exercise, how and why meditation can help where other counseling, such as talk therapy and psychoanalysis may show limited or no results.

****Please bring questions about personal health issues to be addressed in lecture**

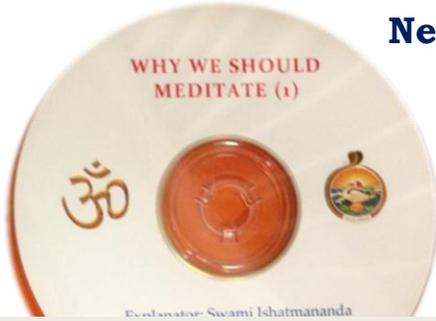
****Practices can be modified to be done in chair**

For registration write to us : ezine@chicagovedanta.org

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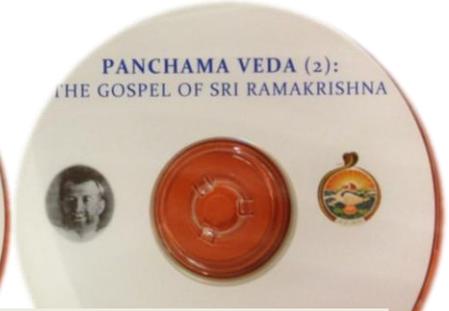
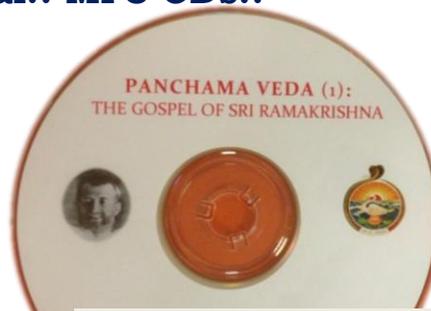
Eternal Literature : The Vedas, Bhagavat Gita, Bhagavatam, Brahma Sutra, Upanishads in original Sanskrit with English translations. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta scriptures, Sanskrit texts.

New Arrival!! MP3 CDs!!



Why We Should Meditate:

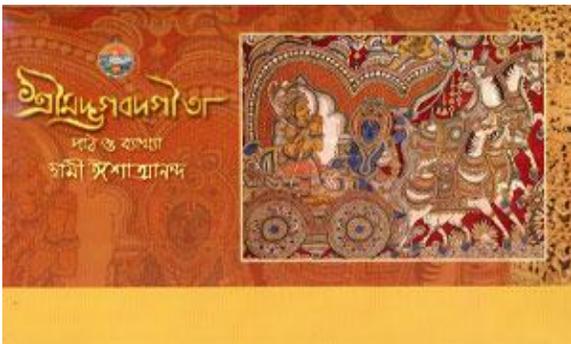
The human mind, its nature & the results of its control have been explained based on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras by Swami Ishatmananda. Collection of 24 lectures (\$5)



Panchama Veda Vol. 1 & 2:

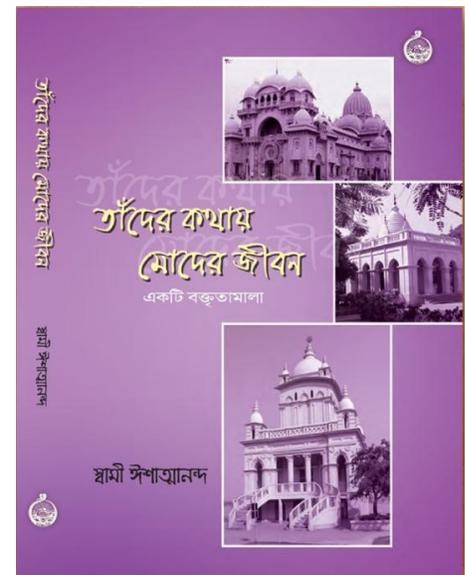
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A Very helpful book to learn Gita

Complete Bhagavat Gita, 700 verses, recited and explained in lucid Bengali with profusely quoting from Sri Ramakrishna, Ma Sarada and Swami Vivekananda to explain the intricate philosophy by Swami Ishatmananda. Collection of 14 DVDs. \$50.



Books for Children: Moral values taught through stories from *puranas* and lives of great souls in comics.

Documentaries, various DVDs, and spiritual mementos are also available.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1st Friday of Each Month @ 7 pm

SRIMAD BHAGAVAT GITA

Regular teaching through recitation, explanation and
question – answer by

Swami Ishatmananda

Minister in Charge

Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

Venue : Naperville Public Library

95th Street , 3015 Cedar Glade Rd , Naperville, IL, 60564

1st Saturday of Each Month @ 11.30 am

INDIA ETERNAL

Discourse on Religious Scriptures, History, Culture of
India & Question-Answer Session by

Swami Ishatmananda

Minister in Charge

Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

Venue : Vivekananda Spiritual Center, HTGC, Lemont