

CHICAGO CALLING



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Chicago: From the Ruin Rose the Queen



It was a warm and windy Sunday evening, October 8th, 1871. Daniel Sullivan, a resident of Dekoven Street, was sitting on a step overlooking Catherine and Patrick O’Leary’s residence. Suddenly he noticed flames in the O’Leary’s backyard barn and loudly yelled – “Fire! Fire!”

Within no time three tons of dry hay in the O’Leary’s barn burned with an intense fury and raced with the help of strong wind to burn almost everything in that neighborhood. Crowds were shouting “Fire! Fire!” as they raced ahead of a 1000-foot wide and 100-foot high wall of fire. Poor, middle-class and rich all joined the fleeing masses.

Some “Preachers” were shouting that Chicagoans, because of their sinful lives, were being punished by God with the “Hell Fire”. But, the Chicagoans played the role of Holy Fighters that night. Alfred L. Sewell reported, “I saw a great many kindly acts done as we moved along”. People dropped their only belongings to carry injured strangers to safety. Men and women rushed into smoky buildings to rescue those whom they never knew.

On the morning of October 9th, 1871, the frightened people saw their city, Chicago, disappear.

Thousands of years ago the Vedic Rishis pronounced only two words to inspire humanity – “*charaiveti charaiveti*. March on, March on”, come what may, oh man, do not stop. “In the midst of a calamity without parallel in world history, looking upon the ashes... the people of this once beautiful city have resolved that Chicago shall rise again!” wrote the Chicago Tribune two days after the fire.

Chicago, once a swampland where a slow moving river emptied into Lake Michigan, named by the local Potawatomi Indians as “Chicagou” had only 100 people in 1830. In 1870, just before the fire, her population was 298,977. And after the fire “Ruins! Ruins, far and wide from the river and the lake to the prairie side!”

But as John Stephen Wright, a Chicago businessman predicted, “...Chicago will have more men, more money, more business within five years...” by 1890, Chicago became as if by a miracle, the “Queen of the West” – with a population of 1,099,840. And, what more, in May 1893 thousands of visitors came from all over the world to Chicago to attend the World Columbian Exposition.

This grand exposition of Chicago created a vision of “beauty and harmony”. This specialness of the fair, perhaps, attracted Swami Vivekananda, the young representative, of an ancient civilization, India, to America and on September 11, 1893, at the first World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, he spoke the immortal words, “Sisters and Brothers of America...”



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: THE EMBODIMENT OF DEVOTION

PRAVRAJIKA BRAHMAPRANA

Vedanta Society of Southern California

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

When we think of Swami Vivekananda, what comes to mind is: luminous intellect, penetrating insight, renunciation, manliness, self-control - the embodiment of Advaita Vedanta. But these very qualities are what made Vivekananda a great lover of God and gave him a heart so vast that it embraced all humanity.

Vivekananda once disclosed: “Ramakrishna was all bhakti without; but within he was all jnana. I am all jnana without; but in my heart all is bhakti.” “How did this come about?” we might ask. The answer is *darshan*, direct experience; and it happened in spite of Naren’s strong and resolute mind.

On Naren’s second visit to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna suddenly touched Naren and the walls and everything in the room vanished, and the whole universe along with his individuality began to merge in the Great Void. Naren was terrified and cried out, “What are you doing to me? I have my parents!” That was the time Ramakrishna unleashed the super-conscious channel within Naren. And that was the time he became Ramakrishna’s disciple.

Swami Vivekananda’s faith was sculpted with the chisel of reason and logic and pounded out with the hammer of scientific inquiry. Vivekananda admitted, “I doubted the Master for six years!” But once convinced his faith was indomitable.

When Naren first came to the Master his Brahmo belief was in the formless God with attributes. He used to scoff with Hazra at Sri Ramakrishna’s non-dual teachings. “Can it ever be

possible that a water pot and cup are God,” he joked, “and that everything we see and all of us are God?” Ramakrishna approached and overheard them both, and then touched Naren. Later Vivekananda disclosed what transpired with this touch: “I was aghast to realize that there really was nothing whatsoever in the entire universe but God.”

But still Naren doubted Ramakrishna as a “brain-sick baby, always seeing visions. I hated it,” he declared. “But then I, too, *had* to accept Mother Kali!” [*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Memorial Edition), 8: 263]. That time came when Naren’s family was suffering from dire poverty after his father’s death. One day Naren appealed to Ramakrishna: “Since God listens to you, pray to Mother on behalf of my starving family.” But Ramakrishna refused: “I can’t make such demands on Her. Besides you suffer because you disregard Her. But if you go to the Kali temple and ask any boon of Her, it will be granted. I assure you.”

So Naren started for the temple but as he walked he became intoxicated with bliss. Only the Divine Mother shone in his heart. Standing before Her luminous form, Naren forgot everything and prayed instead for knowledge, devotion and Her unbroken vision. When Naren returned and related this to Ramakrishna, the Master sent him back to the Kali temple - three times altogether, but each time Naren became overcome with the same ecstatic joy. Finally Ramakrishna conceded. “All right,” he promised Naren, “your family will never be in want of plain food and clothing.”

Sri Ramakrishna lived only two years after he forged this union between Naren and Mother Kali – an extraordinary relationship with God that would take yet another even higher turn. But we're getting ahead of our story.

Vivekananda once said, "I loved him [the Master], you see, and that was what held me. I saw his marvelous purity. I felt his wonderful love." [CW, 8:263] But his was a manly devotion - not fickle – so solid and unconditional that it could withstand Ramakrishna's tests. For more than one month, the Master ignored Naren. "Why do you keep coming when I don't say a single word to you?" the Master finally asked Naren.

"Do you think I come here just to talk with you?" Naren answered. "I love you. I come because I want to see you."

Swami Vivekananda's love was further fortified by his renunciation and will-power. Another time Ramakrishna tested Naren by suggesting to him: "Perhaps I'll transfer my powers to you so you can do Mother's work."

"Will they help me to realize God?" was Naren's response.

"No, but they'll be useful once you realize God and start doing His work," Ramakrishna replied.

"Let me realize God first," Naren resolved. "If I

get these powers now, I might forget the whole purpose of my life." Ramakrishna was extremely pleased.

Naren strengthened his "heart vessel" with such gargantuan will and self-control that it resisted any emotionalism in the name of devotion. [Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans., Swami Chetanananda (Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 2003), 905]. During the Master's lifetime, he would counsel devotees: "An upsurge of emotion doesn't transform life or give one the power to resist lust and greed. There's no depth and, therefore, no value to it. But the higher and stronger the dam of self-control, the deeper spiritual emotion becomes." The direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna observed the truth of Vivekananda's words and followed his example.

Naren was now ripe to become the embodiment of the highest devotion - *vijnana*, the experience after *nirvikalpa samadhi* of seeing God, luminous loving Consciousness, everywhere. The story goes that when Naren made up mind to become a monk, Ramakrishna asked him, "What do you want?"

"My desire is to remain absorbed in samadhi for three or four days, coming down to the sense plane to just eat a little food" was the reply.



“You’re a small-minded person,” Ramakrishna reproached him. “There is a state higher even than that. ‘All that exists art Thou’: it is you who sing that song.”

Having pestered Ramakrishna for *nirvikalpa samadhi*, Naren finally experienced it at Cossipore a few days before Master’s passing. Afterward when he regained normal consciousness, he presented himself before the Master, who then disclosed: “Now then, the Mother has shown you everything. Just as a treasure is locked up in a box, so will this realization you have just had be locked up and the key shall remain with me. You have work to do. When you have finished my work, the treasure box will be unlocked again; and you will know everything then, as you did just now.” [See: Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama), vol. 1: 178. (Hereafter, *Life*.)]

Such a statement is unique in the world’s religious history – *and* prophetic. What was this so-called “work” Naren had to do? Ramakrishna saw Vivekananda as not just a *siddha purusha*, or perfected soul, but a savior of souls. And this part of Vivekananda’s divine mission ultimately manifested in his revolutionary “worship of the living god” – the means and end of an experience higher than jnana – the state of *vijnana*

In the West Vivekananda’s mission was to impart spirituality, and in the East he founded the Ramakrishna Mission to serve and uplift the sick, poor, plague-ridden, and uneducated in India. Both spiritual missions were delivered with an intensity that created a spiritual upheaval in the West and East - but ultimately burned out the swami’s own health in the process.

Who then was “the Mother” who had shown Naren everything at the time of his *nirvikalpa samadhi*? None other than Ramakrishna himself who proclaimed from experience: “I and the Mother have become one,” [*Life* 1.169] Days before his *mahasamadhi*, Ramakrishna transmitted the

“force of his power” into Naren. What does this mean? Swami Vivekananda inherited his Master’s powers and states of consciousness. Filled with Ramakrishna consciousness, he lived in the Ramakrishna *loka* while performing his world mission.

Sri Ramakrishna himself had prophesied that his powers would manifest in Vivekananda in time. And, indeed, that became a fact, for there was no better commentator of Ramakrishna’s parables than the swami. He could expound a single parable for days at a stretch – such an uncommon power of assimilation Vivekananda had of his Master’s teachings.

Furthermore, during Swami Vivekananda’s first visit to America, he suffered exhaustion from a brutal schedule of 12-14 lectures per week. But when he felt he had nothing more to speak, the swami would hear a voice from a long distance delivering a message, the contents of which he would repeat from the lecture platform the next day. But when asked by his American hosts, “With whom were you talking last night?” Vivekananda could only smile. However the swami once disclosed: “I am an instrument and He is the operator. Through this instrument He is awakening the spiritual consciousness in thousands of hearts in this far-off country [America]” [*Life*, 1:540].

Swami Vivekananda’s devotion to Sri Ramakrishna was his ultimate sacrifice. How could his experience of the Absolute be “locked” away for the Divine Mother’s own purposes? What was mechanism that brought Vivekananda back from verge of *nirvikalpa samadhi*?

Extraordinary sacrifice is not possible without extraordinary love. The secret is in a telling incident. After his first visit to the West, Vivekananda’s brother monks objected to his Ramakrishna Mission activities, accusing him that he failed to stress Ramakrishna’s emphasis on bhakti and the practice of *sadhana* for God-realization.

At first Vivekananda retorted lightly: "What do you understand of religion? You are babies. Study, public preaching, and doing humanitarian works are, according to you, *maya*, because Sri Ramakrishna did not do them himself, because he said to someone, 'Seek and find God first; doing good to the world is presumptuous!'"

As if God-realization is such an easy thing to achieve! As if He is such a fool as to make himself a plaything in the hands of an imbecile!" Vivekananda's brother-monks were stunned as the swami thundered on: "You think you understand Sri Ramakrishna better than myself! You think jnana is dry knowledge to be attained by a desert path, killing out the tenderest faculties of the heart. Your bhakti is sentimental nonsense which makes one impotent. Who cares for your Ramakrishna? Who cares for your bhakti and mukti? I am not a servant of Ramakrishna or any one, but of him only who serves and helps others, without caring for his own mukti."

Vivekananda's voice was choked, and his frame

shook as he ran from the room. The brother-disciples were seized with fear. At last when they went to the swami's room, they found him seated in meditation, body stiff, tears flowing from his eyes, absorbed in *bhava-samadhi*.

After an hour, Vivekananda arose, washed his face, and came out of his room. The atmosphere was tense. Then he began to speak: "When one attains bhakti, one's heart and nerves become so soft and delicate that they cannot bear even the touch of a flower! I cannot think or talk of Sri Ramakrishna long, without being overwhelmed. So I am trying and trying always to keep down the rush of bhakti welling within me. I am trying to bind and bind myself with the iron chain of jnana, for still my work is unfinished, and my message to the world not yet fully delivered. I have work to do! I am a slave of Ramakrishna, who left his work to be done by me, and will not give me rest till I have finished it! And, oh, how shall I speak of him! O, his love for me!" . [Life 2: 251-53 (abridged.)].



To obtain Bhakti, seek the company of holy men who have Bhakti, and read books like the Gita and the Imitation of Christ; always think of the attributes of God.

Swami Vivekananda

VEDANTA MOVEMENT IN AMERICA

DR. HAL FRENCH

Professor, University of South Carolina
This lecture was delivered on Nov. 10th, 2013 at
“Chicago Calling”

I'd like you to go back with me to the days of my long ago youth and hear a Methodist bishop, V.O. Widener, who spoke to a large gathering of people and loved the word “great” and would intersperse it several times during his address, and he would drawl it out, G-R-E-A-T as in, “this is a GREAT occasion”. So maybe it's time for audience participation. I'd like to have you affirm what I've experienced here by sharing the same words. This is a GREAT occasion. I want to thank the swamis in residence here, Swami Ishatmananda and Swami Varadananda, whom I have known for several years, and all the wonderful devotees from here, the swamis and nuns, of course all the International Monastics and the other people from around the planet, and friends who have come to this gathering today. This is a wonderful occasion, a great occasion, and thank you for all of them.

This is a year of India in several different ways. This is one of a number of gatherings, as you know, celebrating the 150th anniversary of the birth of Swami Vivekananda. And maybe you know also that it's the beginning, the launching, the installation of the publication of the eleven-volume Encyclopedia of Hinduism. We have been working on that for about 25 years, and we wondered if it would ever come to pass, and it has. And at my university, the University of South Carolina, we hosted the offices in the West for about 10 years. So, appropriately maybe, the official launch of the Encyclopedia of Hinduism was at our school just over two months ago.

So, we are following that with a program of events about India, which we are calling, “Carol India”. Throughout the year on our campus and



throughout the country and the world there will be many occasions, which cause us to remember the contributions of Swami Vivekananda. And I wanted to do two things today: to share first, some thoughts of about changes in Vedanta in America in recent years. And my own research into it is kind of stale. I did that about 1970 and I have visited some of the centers since then, but I don't have an approach of systematic inventory of what changes have been made, but I am depending partly upon the research of Claire Gyles of the Boston Harvard Pluralism Project and on those of Pravrajika Vrajaprana about a dozen years ago. I didn't have access to the researches of Asim Chaudhuri, which would have been helpful also. Three things: the demographic changes that have occurred from about '65 or '70, and certainly several of you affirmed this too, that shifted the centers more to people coming from India, and with it, the programs that have appealed to them, that have continuity with the ways that they worship the divine in India. It maybe has had some falling off of American participants, but on balance, then, a larger participation by people coming from India and less maybe from America, and I would see that as a challenge probably to Vedanta societies to achieve some kind of balance between those two demographic groups.

Another is, as I understand it, the establishment of four different retreat centers in United States. So, that would be Ridgley Manor in NY and also Vivekananda Cottage in Thousand Island Park, as well as Vivekananda House in Pasadena and Shanti Ashram in northern California. Perhaps there are others, but these are the ones that I'm aware of.

The third thing: when Vivekananda was here, he felt that, unlike in India where he established a pattern of flood/famine relief and charities of various sorts, that that would be a duplication of efforts in United States—so a strong emphasis on educational, social work in general in India but not concentrating on that so much here. But in recent years, there have been some service activities from some of the centers. Various sorts, maybe soup kitchens, other things that some of you can testify to from your own centers.

“Those three observations, then, about some changes that have been made in the movement in the last 40-50 years. But I want to concentrate, in recognition of my own limitations to speak very exhaustively about that; I want to concentrate not on gifts that we can give to Vivekananda on his birthday, his birthday anniversary, but the gifts that he has given to us. And there are three gifts that I will remember today and highlight with you. The first is simply, his high view of human nature. It may not be that he responded to Rev. Joseph Cook, but perhaps you know from the Parliament record, Rev. Joseph Cook of Boston, a rather independent scholar and minister who on one occasion said, “what religion under heaven can cleanse Lady Macbeth's red right hand,” and then he said, “It is a strategic certainty that only Christianity among the world's religions can help to relieve man of his burden of sin and of guilt.” Those declarations: It would have been interesting at that point maybe after Cook had delivered his peroration, if he and Vivekananda could have met together, because Rev. Cook, perhaps, alone had known for years of Vivekananda in the West, had actually met Ramakrishna, and was a guest of

Keshab Chandra Sen on a short voyage on the Ganges when Ramakrishna was present and did some of his devotional activities and apparently Joseph Cook, this independent and pretty conservative minister in the states was impressed with Ramakrishna's devotional activities. There would have been no way that they could have met, and it would be interesting to imagine both he and Swami Vivekananda had so close a connection with Ramakrishna.

But then Vivekananda a few days later, probably in conscious refutation of the emphasis by Rev Joseph Cook, spoke the words that you all know, “Ye Divinities on earth, “sinners”, it is a standing libel on human nature to call a man so. Stand on your feet ye lions and shake off the delusion that you are sheep.” Just yesterday I had dinner with a Jewish friend that I have known for about 40 years, and he just returned from a pilgrimage from Auschwitz and other centers in Europe in honor of relatives of his who lost their lives in the Holocaust. And he told me that it was for him a time of alternating emotions of deep grief and sorrow which brought tears to his eyes, as you can imagine, and a strong anger at the perpetrators even that long ago. A sustained thing. And, as we talked he asked me what I was doing here and so forth and telling what Vivekananda said, the affirmation of human nature, and I had to suggest this is no shallow naive assessment of human nature, but that Vivekananda was asking us to recall our true identity, our true divinity.



This is not a shallow or naïve assessment of human nature but suggests that if we affirm our true identity, “Ye divinities on earth”, we will be responsive to human need and the great issues of our times and the great tragedies of our times. This seemed to me was one of the gifts of Swami Vivekananda to us. I found it in different ways. When I was in Boston some years ago I went to the historic Trinity Church on Coplin Square, memorialized partly, perhaps, by its connection earlier with Reverend Phillip Brooks and the Christian hymn ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’.

On the Sunday I was there, Reverend Theodore Parker Ferris addressed his congregation on the title of “The Doctrine of Natural Human Goodness.”

Perhaps, that is something we can affirm. Perhaps, there is some fall out from the liberal kind of religion that Swami Vivekananda preached here at the Parliament. I am a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church, and that was one of the groups that was most hospitable, I think, to Swami Vivekananda, when he spoke here in different places around the country, and that’s the legacy of liberal religion that I think is a valuable one to us.

The second gift that I would like to highlight from Vivekananda is the gift of freedom. And, you can find that in so many of his utterances, but I am thinking of the Song of the Sannyasin, where freedom is a repeated theme. One particular passage that illustrates that: “Far beyond both name and form is Atman forever free. Know that thou art that Sannyasin bold, say OM TAT SAT OM!”



So, the Sannyasin’s role was not a straight jacket for Vivekananda, binding him to restrictive vows and behavior molds, which would have been alien to him, but it is a liberating role, as I am certain that you monastics would affirm, and this is evidenced in two incidents I want to mention for a moment. On one occasion, tired from his heavy speaking schedule in Southern California, he retired to a retreat at Camp Taylor near San Francisco with some of his friends. And it was an idyllic time of refreshment for him. He delighted in cooking for the group, in showing them how to mix spices, making curry for them, and he enjoyed the informality immensely.

Ida Ansell, known also as Ujjawala, records that Vivekananda enjoyed the company, in particular, of Mrs. Hansborough, one of the Mead sisters, whom he had met in Los Angeles. He was charmed with her. She’d lived a kind of a rugged life in Alaska for a little while, roughing it, and so this was a situation which was very comfortable for her and, after he had served her on her plate, he helped himself from the same plate and he said, “it is fitting that we should eat from the same plate, we two vagabonds.” Is that another term for Sannyasin? [Laughter] At least the freedom it suggests is a marvelous thing.

Still another incident occurred; Mr. Chaudhury has reflected on this also. It occurred at Green Acres conference in Maine, where he spoke several times and shared, also, rustic accommodations. He slept, again, in his vagabond monastic style, in one of the tents provided for young people. He rather chided the more or less well-to-do people in the inn as the Dudes and Dudines. He wrote these words after sleeping in a tent, “I had a nice night under the stars, sleeping on the lap of mother earth, and I enjoyed every bit of it. I cannot describe to you the night’s glories, after the year of brutal life that I have led, to sleep on the ground, to meditate under the trees and the forest.” The brutal life for him was the one following the Parliament.



He had been hosted generally in well-appointed homes and hotels, but it was dwelling with nature which most appealed to his vagabond spirit. But, no other relationship with any of his Western friends was, perhaps, so characterized by freedom as that with Tantine, Josephine Macleod. She was with Vivekananda more in the last few years before his death than any of his other Western associates or American associates, and she remained an unusually effective friend and international ambassador for the movement at the Hollywood Center till her own death in 1949.

By her own declaration, she was a friend of Vivekananda and never a disciple. And, Vivekananda treasured that diversity in the way that he responded to people. If you were his disciple, he would be quite strict with you, but, if you were a friend, he would not interfere and he gave you that freedom then that you may have needed. Swami Atulananda captured Tantine in a letter to Ujwala in which he said in part, "Dear Tantine, she has helped to love many and no one has ever caught her, not even Swamiji. She plays with the work as her toy, she plays with the Lord.

She loved and played and went her own sweet way. Shakti, the dancing Kali, she would've

danced in the aisles here, I suspect. And not even Shiva was able to catch her dancing feet. Then Atulananda recalled Tantine asked Nivedita what Swamiji stood for. She said "renunciation." Mrs. Sevier said, "union." Then Tantine said, "To me he represented freedom."

So, different responses from different people each giving her own freedom to experience the truths of who he was. Thank you Swami Vivekananda for your gift to us of Freedom.

The final gift I want to highlight is an obvious one: Swami Vivekananda's emphasis on respect and harmony between religions. It is the theme for today that's been adopted and which many of you have spoken. Vivekananda's final words at the Parliament "help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissention." And to these I would add one more, which Vivekananda emulated, vision and not division. Division was certainly there but not vision then. So the influence of the Parliament, as a whole, and Vivekananda, in particular, on the religious climate in America is immeasurable. Think of all the courses in world and comparative religions, which have been added to the curriculum of colleges, universities and even Christian seminaries since the Parliament, along with upper level courses in particular traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and others since the Parliament. That's one of the outflows of the Parliament, which is why I have to leave a little bit after this address, because I have a flight to catch and two classes to teach tomorrow. With his emphasis on understanding the world religions academically has come the clarion call for harmony between them, giving rise to innumerable settings and dialogues that have fostered respectful exchanges in which we learn from each other. I have no right to speak to someone to whom I am not ready to listen to, and also willing, then, to learn with and from each other.

Many interfaith organizations have been founded since the parliament, including the one with which I am currently involved in. I have been kind of an interfaith junkie, and the one I am currently involved with is the International Association for Religious Freedom, and this claims to be the world's oldest international interfaith organization, which grew directly out of the Parliament, beginning in 1900. Its first president was J. S. Carpenter of Oxford, who has also spoken at the Parliament. His presentation included these words, "There are so many kinds of voices in the world and no kind is without significance. So many voices, so many words, each soul a fresh word with a new destiny." Wayne Teasdale called for an inter-spiritual path in his book "The Mystic Heart" — discovering the universal spirituality in the world religions. He's concerned, as each of us must be, with the total human family; so unity and

variety is the plan of nature. It is the same light coming through different colors.

It's a kaleidoscope of beauty, revealed in each soul on which we focus. Consider then the amazing tapestry of loveliness woven for us to experience. There are three interesting words that illustrate this, coming from the Greek language; the term "Oikas", which means "house." We use that word in three ways and the Oikas translates into English as echo or ECO. So, ecology, the study of the house; economics, which is the law of the house; and ecumenists, the inhabited house. We explore the wider meaning of the latter word and embrace, in our concern, the whole human community, which inhabits the earth. This is what echoes and reechoes from the Parliament from the birth of Swami Vivekananda down the years. So thank you again Swamiji for all of your gifts to us.



Nov. 6th, 2013;
Vivekananda
Retreat, Ganges, MI

ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT



Randy Pausch

Randy Pausch was a very popular and respected professor of computer science at Carnegie Mellon University. In 2006, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and though he got every treatment possible, the doctors told him the cancer was incurable and he may have 6 months left.

He had to accept that the battle was over, but he kept an optimistic attitude, and never wallowed in depression. Rather he spent time thinking about ways to make the loss as easy as possible for his family.

His university invited him to take part in the "Last lecture" series. The concept of it was for people to give the speeches as if it was their last lecture. For Randy, this scenario was close to the truth!

In September, 2007, he gave his last lecture, titled "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams". He dedicated the lecture to his children and spoke about the dreams he had had as a child, and how he proceeded to fulfill them. He talked about what he had learned from going after his dreams regardless of the obstacles on his way. He also spoke of how helping others reach their dreams made him as happy as pursuing his own. His inspiring life lesson – to never give up pursuing your dreams, and his positive attitude while facing a terminal illness made it a truly inspiring experience.

The speech was recorded and put up on Youtube where it quickly went viral and made him famous. He had never planned on this, but he was now inspiring so many more people than he could've possibly imagined. A best-selling book was published about his life, titled "The Last Lecture".

Randy left his body at the age of 47 in 2008. His words of wisdom are unceasingly inspiring many people not to stop before reaching their goal.

Courtesy: Wikipedia, http://youtu.be/ji5_MqicxSo



Akshay Sahis

Meet 36-year-old Akshay Sahis, a famous Chhau dancer from Hariharpur, a remote village in India. By dancing Chhau with a prosthetic foot he has surprised the world.

He dreamt of performing as a Chhau dancer and wanted to become legendary in this art. But, fate had it otherwise. At the age of 15, he went to play in a football tournament and injured his right leg. The swelling gradually got worse and doctors finally had to amputate the lower part of the leg in order to save his life.

At first he used to bemoan his fate but one day he got a brochure offering free medical help for the disabled and Akshay got a prosthetic leg. "At first, I started walking a little with the prosthetic foot and slowly I got a little confidence, and thought 'Is it totally impossible to dance again?' Neighbors and friends laughed and told me, 'Be careful! Don't try to dance in one leg! The other leg will be twisted.' Unknown to them, I started to practice a little dancing. At first, it was too much pain in the legs. Enduring the pain, I started to slowly practice slowly all steps. To earn the faith of the friends one day I showed my dance to them".

Now, Akshay is a regular Chhau dancer not only in Bengal, but also in other states such as Orissa, Jharkhand and Bihar. He is involved with the local Jai Hind Chhau dance troupe. The manager of the dance troupe says that Akshay is their pride.

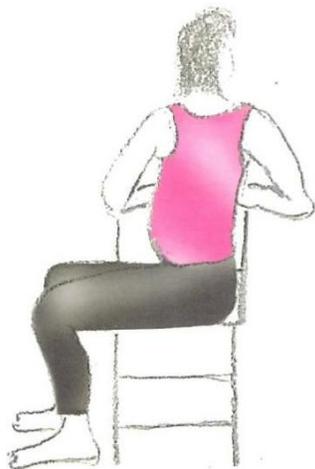
He is so poor that he cannot even keep his dancing kit in his small hut and thus keeps them at his neighbors house. While dancing he feels tremendous pain but his courage, and determination at every moment are helping him to not only endure, but even to dance!

Courtesy: Times of India, Anandabazar Patrika

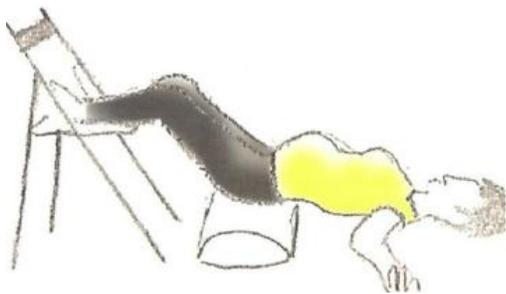
BETTER HEALTH THROUGH YOGA

Swagata Saha

Spinal Twist (Baradvajasana) Place a chair in the middle of the room. Sit on the chair facing forward, and then slowly turn your entire body to the right. Turn your mid to upper torso further to the right and place both hands on the upright backrest of the chair. Using your arms and back muscles, gently turn further to the right as much as you can. Relax your neck and throat, and turn your head and neck to the right. Hold the pose briefly, and then slowly come all the way out and sit forward in your chair. Now repeat the same steps on the left side. Perform a total of 3 repetitions on each side (left and right).



Leg Elevation (Viparita Karani) Place folded blankets or a bolster under the buttocks and place the calves on a raised surface such as a chair or a couch. Your mid-back, shoulder, neck, and head should be on the ground. Tuck your shoulders under. Rest for as long as you wish.



(This concludes the Prenatal Yoga article from the previous issue)

THE winter months are generally a depressing time for many people. Sub-zero temperatures and less daylight hours create mental fatigue, sadness and decreased energy levels – a condition termed as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) or commonly known as “the winter blues”. During the winter months, the bodies of some people cannot properly adjust their internal clocks to shorter days. The symptoms begin in the fall, with decreased need of food and increased need of sleep, as people start struggling with lethargy. During such sensitive times, it is very helpful to tide through the waves of emotional fluctuations through mindful meditation and restorative yoga. Restorative yoga, combined with correct breathing pattern, is potent enough to restore the nervous system and providing yoga practitioners with proper emotional balance. Scientists have established the fact that controlled breathing - which has its roots in traditional yoga , mainly in kriya yoga – that entails various breathing patterns can help to relieve depression. A healthy boost in levels of neurotransmitter gamma -amino butyric acid (GABA) can be observed in brain scans of yoga practitioners as early as one hour after a yoga session. Low levels of the neurotransmitter or GABA are generally associated with depression and anxiety. Serotonin is also a neurotransmitter present in the central nervous systems of humans, which regulates the mood, appetite, and sleep. Reduced levels of serotonin are also responsible for depression. When people suffering from depression practice yoga, they tend to come out of their shell and become more sociable due to an increase in serotonin levels in the brain.

Incorporating yoga into one’s daily routine can effectively combat depression. In traditional yoga philosophy, the tendency toward anxiety is directly related to the energetic imbalance of rajasik state, and the tendency toward depression is directly related to the energetic imbalance of tamasik state.

So for emotional restlessness ,the raja guna should be addressed through alternate nostril breathing (nadi sodhana). On the other hand, for sadness or depression the tama guna should be addressed through pranayama like Kapalbhata and Agnisara.

Some of the yoga postures that effectively help people open up and bring them out of their shell are Urdhva Hastasana (Mountain pose with arms over head), Adhomukha Swanasana (Downward facing dog) Balasana (Child's Pose), Bhujangasana (Cobra) and Bridge Pose (Setu-Bandhasana), Viparita Karani Mudra and Sarvangasana (shoulder Stand) In Urdhva Hastasana, the continuous upward motion through the limbs and torso and spreading of the fingers will set the spirit high and invigorate your system.

In Balasana, the stretching of the lower back and hips relieves stress and fatigue. Bhujangasana boosts energy and mood by strengthening the back of the body. Supta-Bandhasana boosts mood and mitigates anxiety by increasing the flexibility of the spine.

Setu- Bandhasana (How to get into the pose)

1. Lie supine on the floor.
2. Deeply inhale, bend both of your knees, and bring both of your heels close to your sit bones.
3. Place your hands by your sides with palm side flat on the floor.
4. Exhale and press down through your feet to lift your buttocks off the floor.
5. Flex your hands and extend through your fingertips.
6. Inhale and lengthen the back of your neck and draw the neck away from your shoulders.
7. With your next exhalation, come down vertebra by vertebra, and release your spine onto the floor.



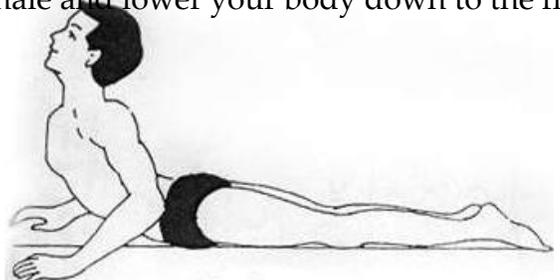
Balasana (How to get into the pose)

1. Kneel on the floor with hips aligned over knees
2. Bring your legs together so that your big toes are touching.
3. Lower your body to rest your buttocks on your heels.
4. Separate your knees about one hip width apart.
5. Exhale and lower your torso down to your inner thighs.
6. Elongate your spine and your neck stretching your tailbone down toward the floor.
7. Place the back of your hands alongside your feet or you can stretch them forward.
8. Allow your shoulders to relax toward the floor.
9. Place your forehead on the floor.



Bhujangasana (How to get into the pose)

1. Lie prone on the floor.
2. Bend your elbows , placing your hands flat (palm side down) on the floor alongside your chest.
3. Extend your thighs keeping your toes together and flexed.
4. Inhale and lift your chest off the floor as you press down the floor with your palms.
5. Lift through the top of your chest.
6. Tuck your tailbone down.
7. Push the shoulder blades down and back.
8. Elongate your neck and gaze slightly upward.
9. Hold the posture for thirty seconds.
10. Exhale and lower your body down to the floor.



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 with questions that we will attempt to address.

Q: What are some of the good learning habits of successful students?

It is a well-known fact that intelligence and smartness are not enough to be successful in studies. We have all encountered friends who are very sharp and intelligent, yet they are not necessarily at the top of the class. It is often the average intelligence or the above-average intelligence students who are hard-working that get the best grades in class. What is the secret of this success? No doubt hard work is an essential component of this success. For every hour of “contact” in the classroom, the average student is expected to study three hours on his own out of class. The successful student is able to put this amount of time, but beyond that, he has developed a suite of habits that pave the way for his success in studies.

The first good habit is to build a regular schedule for studies during the semester. Fix a time of day, preferably early mornings, when you can devote some time to studies. By being regular, you do not wait for the tests and exams to begin studying. The early morning is recommended as the best time because the mind is refreshed after sleep, and there are fewer distractions that can interrupt your studies.

The next good habit is to become an active learner, which means to take charge of your own learning and development. Active learning involves assuming responsibility for your own learning, while recognizing that you will be tested on the course material and held accountable for what you have and have not learned. Recognize your own weaknesses in the learning process, and

then compensate for them by putting in the extra effort to overcome them.

In order to structure your learning process, you can

- (i) prepare yourself before the class
- (ii) proactively participate in the class, and
- (iii) consolidate your learning after the class, on a regular basis.

Before every class, read through the material that is to be covered in the upcoming class. You can refer to the textbook, as well as to any instructor’s notes that may be made available before class. Think about the material, and prepare a list of questions about what you have not understood.

Attending class is an important component of being an active learner. The teacher presents ideas and information in a highly structured and organized manner that is easy to assimilate. He gives examples to help clarify understanding, and asks questions in the classroom to stimulate the ability to apply understanding. Being attentive in class, and carefully following others’ questions and discussions stimulates interest in learning and reinforces understanding. So during class, make sure that you understand the ideas and concepts being taught. Quite importantly, pay attention to the discussions and take good notes about what is being taught. Writing down helps to reinforce learning, because the mind, ears, eyes, and the hand are all involved in the process. One cannot be expected to memorize everything that transpires in class; hence the importance of the notes which become the record of learning. Make sure your notes are organized and comprehensive, so that when you refer to them after class, you will be able to capture the essence of the class session.

Participate in class by answering the instructor's questions, and also by asking those of your questions from the preparation phase that are still unresolved.

After class, review the course material and your notes to consolidate your learning. Refer to the text book, your notes, and any other auxiliary material available. Make sure you understand each point that was covered, and update your notes to make your record as complete as possible. Then, either write down or explain to a study partner, your own explanation of the subject material, in your own words. This is very important as it puts you in the instructor's seat and requires gaining mastery over the material. Test yourself by solving the exercises at the back of the chapter. If you feel that a secondary textbook is useful in offering more problem sets, then by all means acquire the secondary reference textbook and solve its exercises. Iterate over this process until you feel confident that you have learned the course material.

When an exam approaches, prepare yourself well in advance. Review all the course material Get together with a few serious like-minded classmates and test each other on the material by asking and answering what you think are the important concepts and likely questions. This is a good opportunity to fill in any gaps in your

understandings. Remember, that to be an active learner, you are ultimately responsible for assimilating the material.

If a term paper or report is due, then prepare it by first drafting the contents, then the conclusions, and then the introduction sections. Then rewrite the entire report to ensure there is a logical flow and continuity. Read the report carefully to ensure that it reads logically. If possible, read out the report to a third party. If they do not understand the flow or the ideas, arguments, and evidence, there is a good chance that the teacher will also have problems with the report. This way you get useful feedback before the report is due.

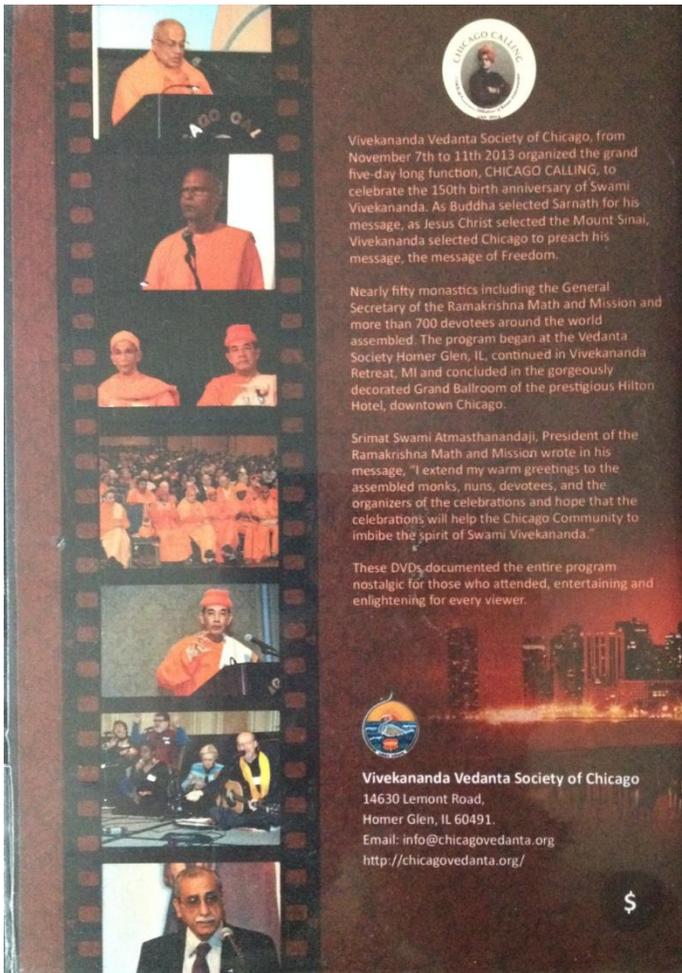
In the final analysis, your motivation, determination, and discipline will make the greatest difference in how effective your learning process is. Remember that the course content itself will likely have limited value in your long-term life and career challenges. Although the principles and individual skills learned may provide important help in addressing professional challenges, it is the development of your learning abilities that will help you most throughout life. And for this, good learning habits will prove to be most useful.

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

All knowledge that we have, either of the external or internal world, is obtained through only one method — by the concentration of the mind. No knowledge can be had of any science unless we can concentrate our minds upon the subject. The astronomer concentrates his mind through the telescope... and so on. If you want to study your own mind, it will be the same process. You will have to concentrate your mind and turn it back upon itself. The difference in this world between mind and mind is simply the fact of concentration. One, more concentrated than the other, gets more knowledge.

Swami Vivekananda

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Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago, from November 7th to 11th 2013 organized the grand five-day long function, CHICAGO CALLING, to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. As Buddha selected Sarnath for his message, as Jesus Christ selected the Mount Sinai, Vivekananda selected Chicago to preach his message, the message of Freedom.

Nearly fifty monastics including the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and more than 700 devotees around the world assembled. The program began at the Vedanta Society Homer Glen, IL, continued in Vivekananda Retreat, MI and concluded in the gorgeously decorated Grand Ballroom of the prestigious Hilton Hotel, downtown Chicago.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission wrote in his message, "I extend my warm greetings to the assembled monks, nuns, devotees, and the organizers of the celebrations and hope that the celebrations will help the Chicago Community to imbibe the spirit of Swami Vivekananda."

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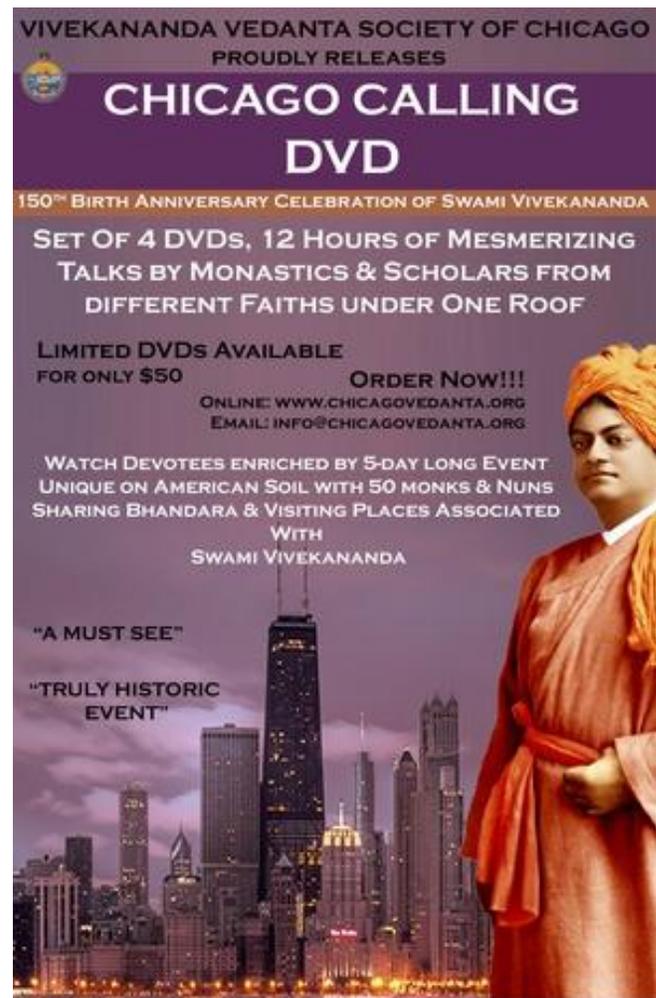
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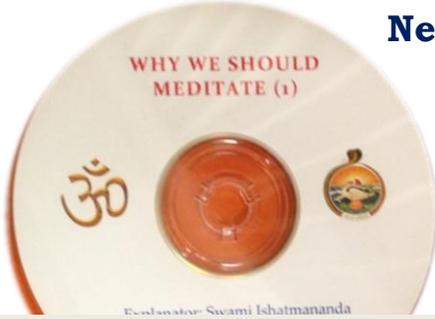
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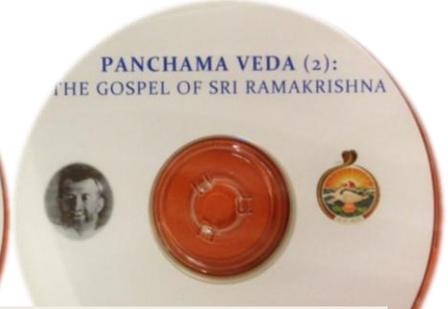
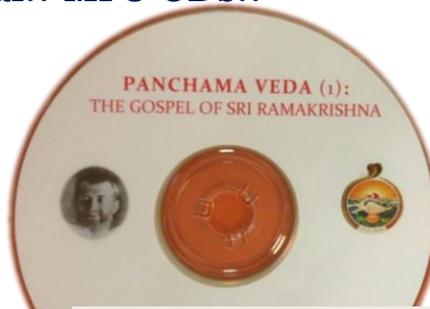
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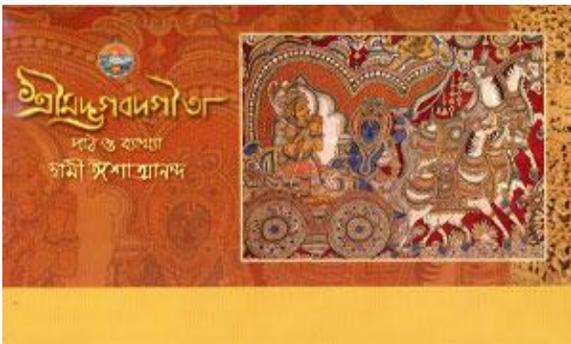


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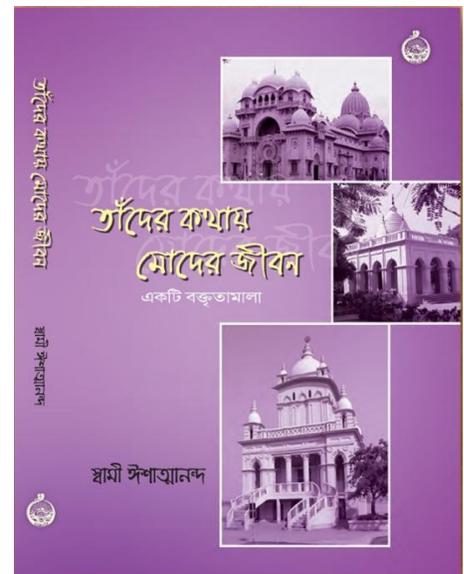
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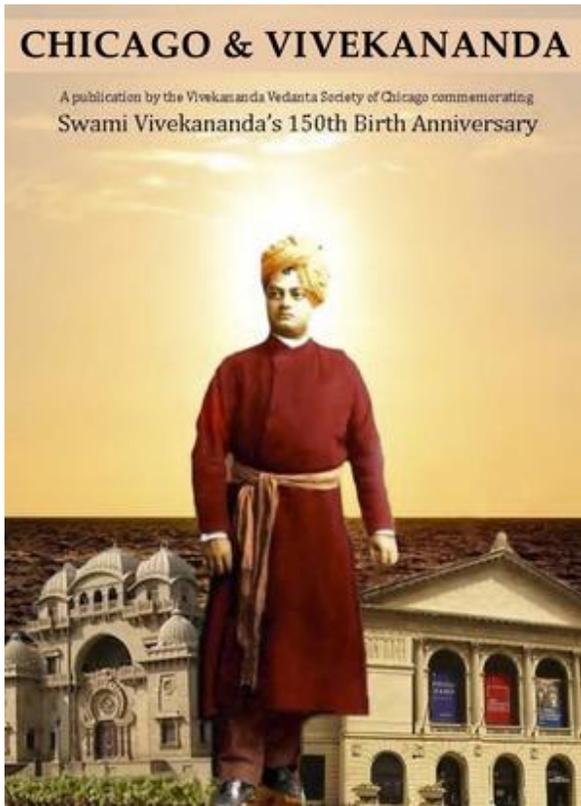
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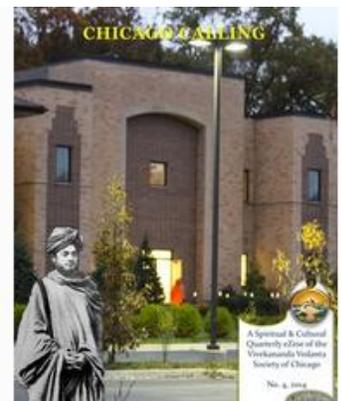
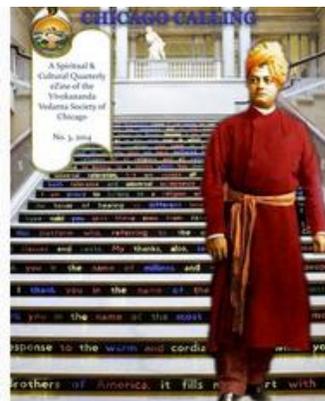
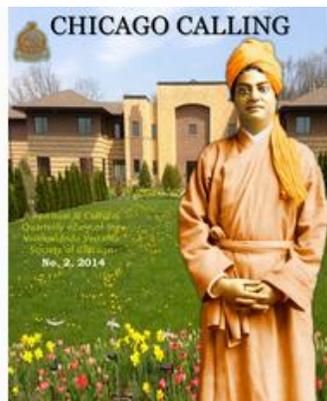
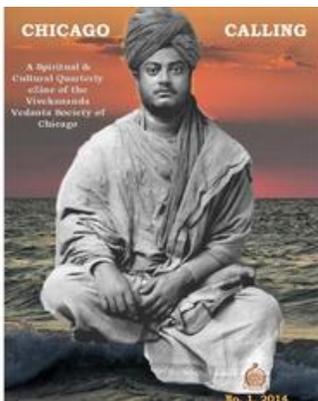


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