



1. Sri Ramakrishna's home at Kamarpukur with Shiva Temple

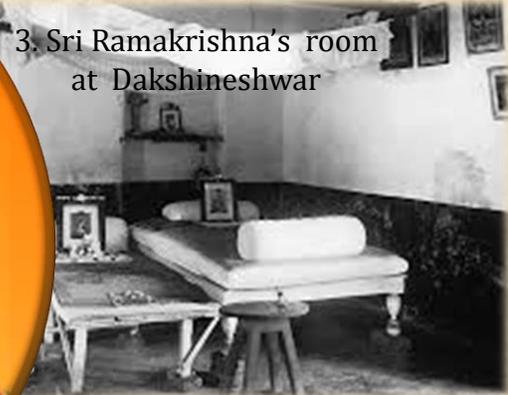
2. Sri Ramakrishna's room at Kamarpukur



CHICAGO CALLING



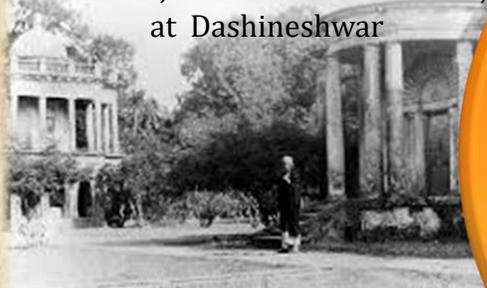
8. Sri Ramakrishna's room at Cossipore



3. Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineshwar



A Spiritual & Cultural Quarterly eZine of Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago
No. 13, 2017



7. Sri Ramakrishna's room and Nahabat, Sri Sarada Devi's room, at Dashineshwar



4. Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineshwar (view from the temple side)



6. Panchavati at Dashineshwar



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Editorial



On February 28, 2017 millions of people all over the world celebrated the 182nd Tithi Puja (Birth Anniversary) of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna.

Hindus believe and the scriptures support the idea that every time the culture and religion of India (Bharat-Varsha) face the danger of being overpowered by hostile forces the Supreme Being takes form and ascends to earth to save them.

Students of Indian history know how throughout the centuries diverse forces tried to crush the loftiest ideas and ideals of India. It was to save this most ancient culture and religion that Almighty God took birth on 18th February 1836 in a humble village of India and became famous as Sri Ramakrishna.

In the language of Sri Pramadas Mitra, a famous scholar, "That Being born on earth as Sri Ramakrishna was always immersed in the nectar of Supreme Knowledge, and whoever received the merciful touch of his hands had their minds at once freed from attachment of lust and wealth."

The Avatara or incarnation of God ascends with tremendous cosmic responsibilities. The main function of an Incarnation is the redemption of mankind. With their tremendous divine power they cut the bonds and destroy the ignorance of millions of souls by instilling spiritual power and divine knowledge into them so that they can experience the Supreme Peace and Bliss. The

Avatara is a reservoir of great spiritual power.

Sri Ramakrishna showed through his life how to inculcate the divinity already in every human being. His boyhood was full of mystical experiences. The whole of his youth was spent in various spiritual practices. The intensity and diversity of his practices have no parallel in the history of hagiology. Observing the unique life of Sri Ramakrishna, Rishi Aurobindo wrote, "...in the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity..."

Any spiritual aspirant can get at best only one type of religious experience. A Christian may work his whole life in order to gain a mystical experience known as the "Spiritual Marriage." A practitioner of the Sufi faith may dedicate his whole life to get the experience of "Fana and Anal Hag." A Buddhist may concentrate all through his life to reach "Nirvana." A devout yogi practices severe austerities to attain "Nirvikalpa Samadhi."

Only God in human form can attain and demonstrate all these extraordinary spiritual states in one life. But how? Ma Sarada Devi remarked, "...he (Sri Ramakrishna)...was always absorbed in divine moods. He used to enjoy the Divine Play through all those moods adopted by the Christians, Mussalmans, and Vaishnavas (a Hindu sect) for the realization of God. His days and nights passed in these alone—he had no other consciousness." (Sri Sri Mayer Katha, Vol. 2, p. 217)

The great minds of India discovered that "Perfection" could not be found in the external world because that world is full of contradictions and is impermanent.



Sri Ramakrishna, through his tremendous concentration realized the Eternal Existence, Immutable Truth, and Unfathomable Bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda). This knowledge is, in Vedantic terms, "Prajnanam Brahma ("Consciousness is the Infinite"). One who truly understood this Mahavakya, the profound word of the Vedas, became "Liberated-in-Life" (Jivanmukta).

Sri Ramakrishna was a fully liberated individual person (Jivanmukta Purusha). His diverse and unique spiritual experiences proved that he was a knower of the Supreme Brahman (Brahmavid-Barishtha). His absolute renunciation, dispassion, and detachment proved he was a man of steady wisdom (Sthita-Prajna). Again, he was above all these; he was a fully illumined soul (Vijnani).

Sri Ramakrishna was through and through an Advaitin. At the same time he was a lover of God because he was a Paramahansa of the highest order.

Sri Ramakrishna, himself, explained, "There are two classes of liberated Individuals (Paramahansas), one affirming the formless Reality and the other affirming God with form...those Paramahansas who believe in God with form keep the love of God even after

attaining the Knowledge of Brahman so that they may teach spiritual truths to others."

Sri Ramakrishna, himself, was full of love for God with form even after attaining the highest Knowledge of Brahman.

In order to express the uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda wrote, "(His) mind is full of the highest knowledge of non-dual Reality and externally he is full of devotion..."

Sri Ramakrishna's knowledge of Brahman and God surpassed all previous experiences and his love had no bounds. Sinners were transformed into saints by the touch of his love.

"Manmatha, a local Calcutta ruffian, was hired by some people in order to frighten Sri Ramakrishna away when Ramakrishna used to visit devotees in Calcutta. But Manmatha, after seeing Sri Ramakrishna and hearing a few of his words, fell at his feet and wept, saying: "My Lord, I am guilty. Please forgive me." Sri Ramakrishna told him to come to Dakshineswar. When Manmatha went to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna treated him very kindly, touched his body and blessed him in the Kali temple. When Manmatha went to see Sri Ramakrishna for the third and last time in Calcutta, Sri Ramakrishna asked one disciple to bring a photograph of his and with his own hand gave it to Manmatha. Without speaking a word to anyone Manmatha ran out of the house as if he were mad. From that moment he lost all consciousness of the world and day and night he sat repeating, "Priya Nath, Priya Nath (Beloved Lord, Beloved Lord)." When the rest of the community would be sleeping, one could hear those words of Manmatha sounding out in the silence of the night. The disciples of Ramakrishna were surprised by his saintly transformation. Soon he left his body in a state of divine ecstasy." (Swami Chetanananda, Ramakrishna As We Saw Him, P. 240-41, 353-4, 448.)

Sri Ramakrishna is the God of Pure Love and Pure Knowledge.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S INSPIRED TEACHINGS

SWAMI KRIPAMAYANANDA

Minister, Vedanta Society of Toronto

Swami Vivekananda's teachings have been seen through many eyes, a new light has been thrown upon these teachings. In one sense Swamiji is inexhaustible, in another sense Swamiji's core message is brief and very simple: Man, is the Atman, the Self. Atman is perfection and perfection defies all types of limitations. It's universal and eternal. Swami Vivekananda is still working and inspiring through his message. He himself said, "I shall not cease to inspire". We can take up Swamiji from any angle. We will see that his every idea is useful for the betterment of the individual, of society and of the world at large. That is the special purpose of a teacher, especially a religious teacher who is an inspirer, an awakener of the soul. Swamiji taught- if the mind is intensely eager, alert and focused then anything can be accomplished, mountains can be crumbled into atoms. "Take up one idea, make it that one idea your life, think if it, dream of it, live on that idea and let the brain, muscles, nerves- every part of your body be full of that idea and just leave any other idea alone, this is the way to success. ... We are what our thoughts have made us. So, take care about what you think; words are secondary. Thoughts travel faster and far. ... Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached. ... All love is expansion; all selfishness is contraction. Love is therefore the only law of life. ... You have to grow from inside out. None can teach you, none can make you spiritual. ... You cannot believe in God until you believe in yourself. ... Our duty is to encourage everyone. It is struggle to live up to one's own highest ideal and strive at the same time to make that ideal intensely practical. ... The whole secret of existence is to have no fear. Never fear what will become of you. ... Depend on no one. Only the moment you reject all help, are you free. ... All the powers in the universe are already

ours it is we who have put our hands before our eyes and cry that it is dark. ... Condemn none; if you can stretch out helping hand, do so; if you cannot, fold your hands bless your brethren and let them go their own way. ... All differences in this world are of degree and not of kind because oneness is the secret of everything. ... Truth can be stated in a thousand different ways each one can be true. ... Come out in the universe of light everything in the universe is yours. Stretch your arms and embrace it with love. If you ever felt you wanted to do that, you have felt God." These are the immortal teachings collected from nine volumes of his complete works.

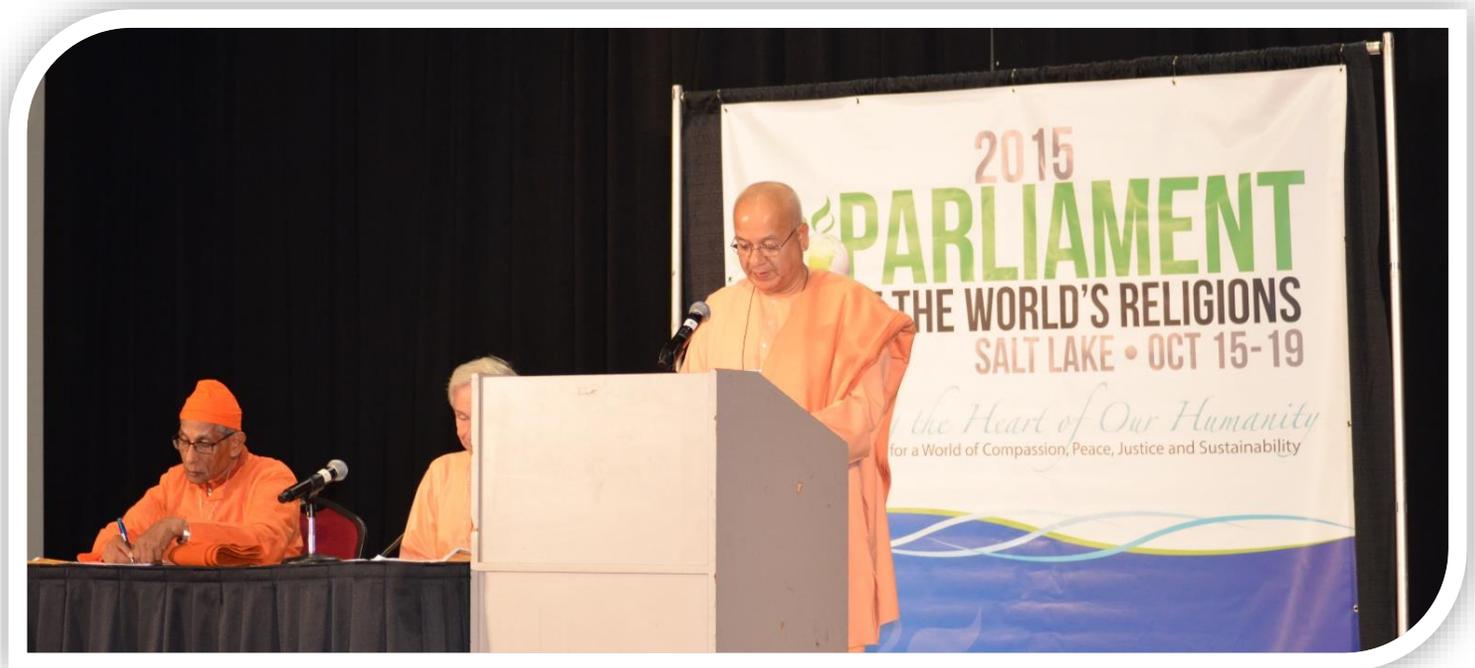
Now, what Swami Vivekananda did on September 11, 1893 is very well known to all of us who have gathered here today. He electrified the audience, he inspired whoever heard him. He inspires whoever reads his message. The inspiration of the 1893 is the same in 2015. It will be so in 2050 and so on. Thunderous applause to 'Sisters and Brothers of America' still resonates with us. Therefore, we see Swamiji's principles are still working and working very effectively. Swamiji had said that there will be poverty somewhere or other so long as civilization exists. Hence the need of relief today. Every citizen of the world individually or collectively is trying to help those who need daily sustenance. For example, NGOs, government agencies, food banks, etc. Swamiji encouraged and inspired wealthy Americans to give back to society. This inspiration we see in the life of Sri Ramakrishna as well. How he inspired Mathur Babu to help the poor! Today, Americans like Warren Buffet, Bill and Melinda Gates along with many others are pledging and giving to others major share of their wealth for the good of humanity all over the world.

Swamiji talked about education. He encouraged Ramakrishna mission monks to go door to door in remote villages with maps, globes and books to teach. Today companies like Google and Facebook trying to reach remote parts of the world with the blessing of the internet, so the people can learn. They get valuable information and can communicate with each other. Swami Vivekananda spoke about women's empowerment, women's education, women's right to think and do for themselves. When women rise, only then the society will progress and prosper. A bird cannot fly only on one wing. Today every government, every institution especially in the developing world, are fervently trying to facilitate programs, schemes and projects for women's education, health and right to choose for themselves. In America, we find women taking up the top positions and moving

shoulder to shoulder with men. Here, CEO's of many international companies women. They are taking up Swamiji's idea of seeing oneself as an all-powerful soul and capable of accomplishing everything as good as men and perhaps even better. CEO's PepsiCo, of IBM, of Xerox are all women, to count a few.

To conclude, I will say Swamiji's principles very much valid, practical and attainable today. This world of ours has seen many personalities and their ideologies come and go but Swami Vivekananda's thoughts and teachings still alive and powerful. They reverberate and resonate with the humankind today as in the past because they are not dogmatic, absolutist and fanaticized. He is immortal in his inspiring thoughts. After all he wanted to be a voice without a form.

**This article is based on the talk that Swami Kripamayanda gave at the Parliament of World Religions in October 2015 at Salt Lake City, Utah*



Give up all self, all egotisms get out of anger, lust, give all to God. "I am not, but Thou art; the old man is all gone, only Thou remainest." "I am Thou." Blame none; if evil comes, know the Lord is playing with you and be exceeding glad.

Swami Vivekananda (CW: 7, Inspired Talks)

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON COURAGE

SWAMI TYAGANANDA

Minister

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It's a privilege to be able to participate in this parliament of religions. While the one held in 1893 had Swami Vivekananda's physical presence, all the subsequent interfaith gatherings have been pervaded by his spirit. This particular conference dedicated to "reclaiming the heart of humanity" would have made Swamiji happy, because reclaiming the heart of humanity is a very courageous act—and courage is what Swamiji represented through his personality and emphasized through his teachings. and when we do it and we look deeply into that heart we will see nothing but divinity. Swamiji's insights on courage are what I would like to reflect on in the next few minutes.

It is strength that manifests as courage. Strength is needed to realize our true nature as the Atman. It's good to keep in mind that strength is needed not only for success in spiritual life but also for success in secular life. Swami Vivekananda said that he wanted us to develop "muscles of iron and nerves of steel." Now exercise in a gym may help us develop "muscles of iron," but not "nerves of steel." That requires a different kind of exercise because we need a different kind of strength to develop "nerves of steel."

Just as there are different kinds of strength there are different kinds of courage. The courage of a soldier in a war, or of a firefighter in a rescue mission, is easy to recognize. Not so easily recognized is the courage of a poor person working hard to raise a family in a challenging environment. Even less recognized is the courage of a monk or a nun, or a sincere spiritual seeker, in

persevering with the spiritual ideal in a predominantly materialistic environment. Every one of these instances of courage needs strength; physical, moral and spiritual.

Now courage is generally seen as an ethical virtue: a much admired quality, a quality that we need to develop. Swami Vivekananda refused to see courage as merely a virtue. He saw strength not simply as a quality but as our own true nature. If strength is our true nature, how is it that we don't feel this strength always? Why do we so often lack courage in life? According to Vedanta, this happens because there is something within us which seems to be preventing the manifestation of courage—and that something, not surprisingly, is fear and anxiety.

None amongst us can claim to be completely free from fear and anxiety. How do we distinguish between fear and anxiety? Are the two really different? Yes and no. The similarity between the two is that both are like poison for the mind, both fear and anxiety weaken us and make us feel helpless and vulnerable. In extreme cases they can destroy us completely. But fear and anxiety are also different, fear has an object, anxiety has no object. A person may have fear of snakes, for instance, and the solution to manage this fear is to keep away from snakes. We may not always succeed in doing so, but at least we know what we can try to do. But anxiety is different: it is nebulous and hazy. It has no objects and so it is more difficult to handle. That's why if you have anxiety, try to convert it into a fear, you will at least know what you can do!

We become anxious when we are not able to deal positively with change, external and internal, especially the change that threatens our own body, mind or ego. An intense form of anxiety is produced through one's troubled past, perhaps some horrendous event that occurred in childhood or early youth. Sometimes this kind of anxiety can become pathological and, when that happens, psychological treatment may be needed.

But in most cases anxiety is not so much an illness but the general condition of the average person. Anxiety seems almost inseparable from our existence as human beings. This kind of general anxiety we are all familiar with. From our own experience we know that anxiety can take many forms such as anxiety associated with guilt, with emptiness, or with death. While these can enter into our lives at any time, usually these anxieties dominate certain stages of our life. For instance, the anxiety associated with guilt and condemnation often occurs in early youth. The anxiety of meaninglessness and emptiness takes hold of our minds in middle age—that's why we sometimes call it "midlife crisis." And the anxiety of fate and death occurs when old age is upon us.

Now how does Vedanta look upon anxiety? Vedanta looks on anxiety as a natural result of forgetting that "I am the Atman." When we deny our true nature, we become fearful and anxious. We read in the Taittirīya Upanishad: उदरमन्तरं कुरुते अथ तस्य भयं भवति (udaram antaram kurute atha tasya bhayam bhavati)—meaning, fear arises as soon as we separate ourselves from the Atman. The Atman is pure perfect and free. The Atman is one with existence, conciseness and bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda).

The only way to eliminate fear and anxiety is through cultivation of strength. There are at least three sources of strength and hence three kinds of courage. The first kind is moral courage, which derives its nourishment from dharma. When we take refuge in dharma, enormous strength is unleashed. Taking refuge in dharma means

practicing dharma no matter what price we have to pay. No price is too small and no sacrifice too great to hold on to dharma with faith and determination. This requires enormous will-power. Through his teaching on Karma Yoga, Swami Vivekananda shows us how this kind of courage can be developed.



The second kind of courage is religious courage. Here the source of strength is the deity, often one's own chosen deity (Ishta). When we are able to develop unshakable faith in our Ishta and practice complete surrender to the Ishta, nothing in the world can frighten us. In order to develop this kind of faith and surrender, we need to purify our emotions and feelings, and direct them toward God. Swamiji taught us how to develop religious courage through his teaching on Bhakti Yoga.

The third kind of courage is the courage to be one's own true self—the Atman. Since the true self is the spirit, we can call this type courage—spiritual courage. When we assert our true self—in other words, when we live with the awareness that we are the Atman, what results is abhaya, the state of fearlessness. When king Janaka attained this state, sage Yajnavalkya told him अभयं वै जनकं प्राप्तोऽसि (abhayam vai Janaka praptosi) "O Janaka you have indeed reached the state of fearlessness." Swamiji taught us how to develop spiritual courage through his teachings on Jnana Yoga.

Swami Vivekananda's four yogas are spiritual manuals that point us towards different sources of strength. They teach us how to cultivate courage in life and they inspire us to do it now, not postpone it for later. Swamiji's life is the best commentary on his teachings. If there is anything in his books that we don't understand, we only have to study his life and see how he lived and what he taught. Swamiji's teaching on strength and courage are powerful. When we feel despondent or helpless or weak we only need to read his words.

I will conclude now with these words of Swami Vivekananda: "God is not be reached by the weak. Never be weak you must be strong. You have infinite strength within you. How else will you

conquer anything? How else will you come to God? Stand up and try again. Do not add to your weakness the evil that is going to come. That is all I have to say to the world—be strong. The sign of life is strength and growth. The sign of death is weakness. Whatever is weak, avoid. It is death. If it is strength, go down into hell and get hold of it. There is salvation only for the brave. Therefore stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibly on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succor you want is within yourself, therefore make your own future."

Thank you!

**This article is based on the talk that Swami Tyagananda gave at the Parliament of World Religions in October 2015 at Salt Lake City, Utah*



World Parliament of Religions, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2015

It is always for greater joy that you give up the lesser. This is practical religion—the attainment of freedom, renunciation. Renounce the lower so that you may get the higher. Renounce! Renounce! Sacrifice! Give up! Not for zero. Not for nothing, but to get the higher.

-- Swami Vivekananda

ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT

"Are you in pain?" - this is the question Gurmeet Singh usually asks when he enters a hospital ward in the northern Indian city of Patna. It is a damp and grubby facility with stained tiled floors and half a dozen gurneys for sick patients are scattered all over the ill-lit place. The food - dinner comprises rice, lentil soup and some vegetable gruel - is insipid. A doctor and a nurse come on their rounds a couple of times a day. At other times, the patients appear to be left to their fate. The place has the appalling moniker of the ward for lawaris or the abandoned. Put simply, it treats patients who have no family or have been rejected by them. When they recover, they are usually sent away to rehab homes - or returned to the streets.

On a bed, lies a young woman who has had her limbs amputated after she was hit by a train. She's also pregnant. In the bed opposite her, a bedraggled woman with wild hair trembles all the time. Across the room a man lies in a bed with his leg in traction. In another room, across the ward, two patients appear to be lost in their own world. There are no doctors or bed charts to check with. But, as soon as Mr Singh waddles into the ward their weary faces light up, some even manage to break into a smile.

By day, Mr Singh, a genial 60-year-old man, works at the family-owned clothes shop in a bustling city market. By night, he is a veritable messiah to the residents of vast 90-year-old 1,760-bed state-run Patna Medical College and Hospital, one of the largest in the state of Bihar. For more than 20 years now, Mr Singh has been visiting the abandoned patients' ward every night with food and medicines. He hasn't been on a vacation or stepped out of Patna for the past 13 years because, he says, he cannot abandon the abandoned. The unflinching devotion to his patients is matched by Mr Singh's unchanging routine. Around nine every evening, he leaves his modest apartment - all his five brothers live on a floor in one of the city's oldest high-rises - and heads to the hospital. He picks up some money to pay for medicines - the five brothers put away 10% of their monthly earnings in a donation box at home to pay for Mr Singh's patients. On the way he stops at one of the many cheap eateries that dot Patna to pick up bread, vegetables, salad, eggs and curd to feed to his patients.

Once Mr Singh reaches the ward, he enquires about the patients' condition, playing, at once, nurse, doctor, provider and kin. He goes through their prescriptions

and pays for the more expensive medicines, tests, scans, and chemotherapy for cancer patients. He also donates "a lot of" blood. Then he takes out the shining steel plates, and caringly serves the food. Tonight the menu is piping hot bread, vegetables, curd and a sweet. The gruel that the hospital provides for dinner is usually left uneaten. In a bit, the patients are wolfing down their first proper meal of the day.

"All they need is some dignity and some care. The government is not even able to provide that," says Mr Singh.



His involvement began some two decades ago when a woman selling plastic bags turned up at his shop carrying a badly scalded boy in her arms. "It was a hot day. I saw tears in her eyes. Then I saw her boy who had got burnt. I took them to this hospital, and found that there was nobody to treat him. The doctors were on strike. The poor and the abandoned were the worst affected. I was very angry. I decided to do something about it."

Authorities want to fete him for his work and have sent him letters of admiration, but the Good Samaritan prefers to shun the spotlight. Tonight, he is busy feeding the dishevelled woman, who is having her first proper meal of the day. Then he'll tuck her under a blanket for the night. "He is like God," comes a voice from the ward, as the diminutive Sikh man puts out the light and shuts the door to keep the cold out.

He will be back again tomorrow night.

Adapted from : <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-35299545>

MAHAVAKYAS

SWAMI ISHATMANANDA, Swami-in-Charge, Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago



Prayer

The God who creates the Subtle Cosmic Being, Brahman, in the beginning of each cycle and who reveals the Vedas, in that Lord, the Revealer of Self-Knowledge, verily do I take refuge, seeking for Liberation.

In India Philosophy is known as 'Darshan', which means 'Vision'. There are Six Darshans, each providing a particular view of Reality.

1. Vedanta
2. Yoga
3. Sankhya
4. Mimamsa
5. Naya
6. Vaisheshika

'Vedanta', itself, has six schools.

1. Advaita
2. Vishishtadvaita
3. Shuddha-advaita
4. Achintya-bheda-abheda
5. Bheda-abheda
6. Dvaita

Many consider Advaita Vedanta the topmost. Advaita Vedanta is the dominant and most well-known school of Indian Philosophy.

It is very important in Vedanta, especially in Advaita Vedanta, to know the exact meaning of the four Maha-Vakyas (Great Statements) because they help the seeker of Advaita Knowledge to reach the goal, i.e., Brahman — Brahma Jnana.

Vedanta is not a mere view of reality; it is also a way of Spiritual life. Vedanta teaches human beings how to overcome the problems of daily life, transcend limitations, realize the ultimate truth and attain Bliss.

The famous western scholar, Paul Deussen, expressed in a very interesting way, " On the tree of wisdom there are no fairer flowers than the Upanishads and no finer fruit than the Vedanta Philosophy."

Of all the Schools of Vedanta, Advaita is now accepted as the main school of Hinduism. It has two forms:

1. Philosophy- Logical understanding
2. Experience – Realization

Advaita Philosophy, in the opinion of some scholars, is the creation of Sri Shankaracharya, but Advaita as a form of experience is the teaching of the Upanishads. The sage, Badarayana, wrote the Brahma Sutras to explain the teachings of the Upanishads.

Advaita, as a philosophy, logically explains how the Impersonal Absolute becomes the phenomenal world, the basic question of all philosophies. “Who is the creator of this universe?”

The Taittiriya Upanishad states, “Seek to know that from which all beings here are born; having been born, by which they remain alive; and into which, on departing, they enter. That is Brahman.” (Taittiriya Upanishad, 3, 1.)

Shruti teaches that Brahman is the cause of the world, and the Upanishads urge us to know that Brahman. Naturally, questions arise:

Is Brahman the cause of this creation? If yes, is it the Real cause or Apparent Cause?

Is Brahman totally transformed after creation, as milk ceases to be milk after becoming yogurt?

Is Brahman the Material cause or the Intelligent cause?

To get the answer we should go back to the Upanishads, which describe Brahman’s two aspects:

Nirvishesha (Devoid of any characteristics)
Savishesha (Endowed with qualities)

Para-Brahman (Supreme Brahman)
Apara-Brahman (Inferior Brahman)

The Brihadarankya Upanishad states, “Verily, there are two forms of Brahman: gross (murta) and subtle (amurta), mortal (mara) and immortal (amara), limited (parichhinna) and unlimited (aparichhinna), defined (parakshya) and undefined (aparakshya).” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 2.3.1)

Pratyaksha — word used to indicate the knowledge of a Material.

Paraksha or Aparaksha — used in relation to the realization of Brahman.

According to Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is also known as Jnana, Samvit, Anubhuti.

Advaita As Philosophy

Sri Shankaracharya convincingly established the Non-Dual nature of Brahman as the Ultimate

Reality.

He took the help of the Upanishads and profusely quoted them to establish that Brahman is the one and only Reality. As in the Chandogya Upanishad, “In the beginning, my dear, this universe was Being alone, one only without a second. It was Being alone that existed in the beginning, one only without a second.” (Chandogya Upanishad, 6, 2, 1-2.)

Again, in the Brihadaranyaka and Katha Upanishads also we find the same confirmation.

“There is in It no diversity. He goes from death to death who sees in It, as it were, diversity.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4, 4, 19)

“By mind alone is Brahman to be realized; then one does not see in It any multiplicity whatsoever. He goes from death to death who sees multiplicity in It. (Katha Upanishad, 4, 11)

This is the most crucial problem in Advaita, how to explain the coexistence of two entirely different entities, Brahman and the world.

The Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and all the schools of Vedanta hold that Brahman is both the material cause (Upadana-Karana) and the efficient cause (Nimitta-Karana).

Brahman is indescribable in words and unknowable to the mind (Avang-Manasagocharam).

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “Brahman is the only thing which has never become defiled by the human mouth (Ucchishta).”

Brahman is the sole Reality.

Brahman is Pure Consciousness.

Brahman is the Eternal Subject (Never ever an object—a thing that is known).

All the teachers of Vedanta: Shankara, Ramanuja and also the uncompromising advocate of Dualism (Dvaita), Madhava, accept that there is only one Reality, Brahman. So, we can say that they are all monist and Vedanta is monism.

Shankara prefers to use the word “A-dvaita” instead of “one” because one implies the idea of many.

Vedanta accepts three types of Differences:

Vijatiyabheda = Difference between two species—like a tree & a stone

Sajatiyabheda = Difference between two Individuals of the same species—like two mango trees

Svagatabheda = Difference between two parts of the same individual—like branches, leaves, flowers etc.

All the Schools of Vedanta deny the first two types of differences.

But, the dualistic Schools of Vedanta accept the third difference. According to them the individual self, Atman, and Brahman are like the part and the whole (Svagata-Bheda).

Advaita denies Svagata-Veda, too, and says that in the state of mukti the Atman (individual self) does not remain distinct from Brahman. Rather, it becomes one with it.

Shankara put forward the theory of a two-level reality to answer the relation between Brahman and world.

Paramartha Satya – Absolute Reality (Nitya according to Sri Ramakrishna)

Vyavaharika Satya – Relative Reality (Lila according to Sri Ramakrishna)

There is also Samvrti Satya or conventional truth.

But how can there be two ‘reality’?

If the world is real (Sat), it cannot be unreal (Asat), and vice-versa.

Advaita solved this problem in a wonderful way—this world is different from both Sat and Asat (Sad-Asat-Vilaksana)—neither Existence nor non-existence.

Then what is it? The Advaitin answers

Anirvacaniya = inexplicable Or

Mithya = Mysterious Or

Ajnana = wrong knowledge Or

Maya = Power of the Deity (Devatma-saktim) according to the Svetasvatara Upanishad (1,3); Power of the Lord (Paramesha Shakti) according to Shankaracharya

‘Maya’ – When in an individual, it is known as

ignorance (Avidya also sometimes called Tula-vidya); the sum total of all ignorance is Maya (Mulavidya).

Brahman superimposed with Maya is Ishwara, the Creator. From Ishwara creation begins. First come the five Subtle Elements, then the Subtle Body. The sumtotal of Subtle Bodies superimposed on consciousness (Chaitanya) is Hiranyagarbha (also known as Prana or Sutratma). From Hiranyagarbha come the five Gross Elements (Fire, Water, Earth, Air & Space). Then comes Jagat, this Phenomenal World.

Therefore, it is proved that though Brahman is the Absolute Reality, again, the same Brahman associated with Maya becomes the cause of Relative Reality.

This is, in brief, the Philosophical aspect of Advaita Vedanta initiated and propounded mainly by the great Philosopher, Shankaracharya.

Advaita As Experience (Anubhava)

This is the focus of the Rishis of old.

How to get this experience?

Scripture suggested Three Steps: Shravana (Hearing), Manana (Brooding) & Nididhyasana (Meditating)

Evidence is a must in the path of knowledge. Accordingly, there are 6 Pramanas, or types of evidence:

Pratyaksha—Perception; External through the sense organs, i.e., sound, sight, smell, touch and taste, and Internal through the mind, i.e., love, hate, etc.

Anumana—Inference; “Where there is smoke there must be fire”.

Upamana—Comparison; When we see some animal, we compare it with our previous experience and get knowledge. “This animal is like a cow”.

Shabda—Scripture; Verbal Testimony

Arthapatti—Assumption; “He is fat so he must eat a lot.”

Anupalabdhi—Non-Apprehension; “There is no animal in this classroom.”

Mahavakyas

Through the Mahavakyas or 'Great Statements' the Upanishads teach the Oneness of the individual self and the Supreme Self.

Once this truth of oneness is realized, the individual self (Jiva) is free from the bondage of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (Samsara).

Perfect understanding of the Great Statements, as uttered by the Teacher, merges Three things into one: knowledge, knower, and the object of knowledge become one. This system is known as Triputi-veda. Knowledge (Jnana), the knower (Jnata), and the object of knowledge (Jneya) become one.

There are Four Great Statements:

Prajnanam Brahman—"Consciousness is Brahman" (Rig Veda, Aitareya Upanishad). This Mahavakya gives the definition of Brahman, "What is Brahman like? Consciousness."

Aham Brahma Asmi—"I am Brahman" (Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad). This Mahavakya confirms the realization of the Truth, "I am no other than that Brahman."

Ayam Atma Brahman—"This self is Brahman" (Atharva Veda, Mandukya Upanishad) This Mahavakya asserts that the individual soul is, indeed, the one universal Self.

Tat Tvam Asi—"Thou art That" (Sama Veda, Chandogya Upanishad). Through this Mahavakya the Guru instructs the disciple, "You are that one consciousness, Brahman." The intelligent student (Disciple) understands this Mahavakya, the instruction of the teacher (Guru) through the 'Lakshana' system.

Lakshana means 'indication'. When the teacher says, "You are Brahman, the student understands the 'indication', Lakshana. It is a unique way to understand the meaning of words or statements. Advaita Vedanta refers to the three meanings that all words and sentences carry — the direct meaning, the implied meaning, and the suggested

meaning.

The implied meaning, known as Lakshana is of three kinds — Jahallakshana which consists in discarding the direct meaning, i.e., "That is a car." Ajahallakshana in which the direct meaning is not completely given up and the real meaning is hinted, "My house is on the river" means on the bank of the river. And Jahadjahallakshana which consists in giving up a part of the direct meaning and retaining the other part.

Thus, in the Mahavakya, "Tat Tvam Asi", 'That' (Tat) refers to the Nirguna Brahman who is absolute and without attributes, and 'Thou' (Tvam) refers to self or atman, the pure consciousness which is the reality underlying the mind-body complex. It is according to the third Lakshana that the identity of Brahman and Atman is established, that these two words in their implicit sense point to the same reality, that Brahma-anubhava is the non-dual experience of the sole reality.

We can take any Mahavakya and mediate on it. Constant remembrance of this thought of Brahman is called, Brahma-Kara Vritti.

I always think 'I am this body.' This identification with the body binds us. If we die with this thought, we will be born again in another body. The cycle of death & birth, passing from one body to another body, will continue.

Brahman is all-pervasive, Brahman is Consciousness & we are that. Constantly remembering this will change our mindset.

The teachings of the Guru will boost our confidence and mental energy; and the idea that I am a limited, finite being will be removed.

When the knowledge of Brahman dawns, it is complete knowledge.

'Complete' means that the Internal, External, and Essential will be the same. Like Gold Jewelry—Material or Essence is Gold, but the Interior and Exterior of the jewelry is also Gold.

By practicing, the Jiva completely becomes Brahman.

Introduction to the Cover Page

Sri Ramakrishna taught more by his life than by words. The cover page holds photos (organized clockwise) of eight places beginning from the birth of the body through its end. Each place has numerous stories, we recollected some very common ones.

1. *Yugi Shiva Temple of Kamarpukur:*

One day Chandramani, Sri Ramakrishna's mother, was standing in front of the Yugis' Shiva temple and was talking with a friend named Dhani. The little temple was just across the road from her house. Even today it is there at Kamarpukur.

Suddenly, Chandramani found a light flowing out of the Shiva image in the temple. The light came in waves, filled the temple, and rushed towards her. Before she could say anything, the light entered her and filled her. She fell down unconscious.

When Chandramani came to her senses, she felt she was with child.

2. *Sri Ramakrishna's room at Kamarpukur:*

While at Kamarpukur, Sri Ramakrishna used to stay in the south-facing hut situated at the western side of the premises which is presently being used as part of the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna. When Sarada Devi was at her teens, she used to come from Jayrambati to be with Sri Ramakrishna. Later she recalled, 'During my stay in Kamarpukur, Ramalal's father would ask me to sleep with his brother [Ramakrishna], and the Master would smile. At that time we used to sleep in the same bed, and he would tell me stories the whole night. He taught me how to do housework and behave with people. One should know God is one's very own, the eternal substance.'

Once the Master told the Holy Mother, "After my passing away, you stay at Kamarpukur, grow greens, live upon this simple fare and spend your days in repeating the name of the Lord. Whatever

arrangements the devotees might lovingly make for you, don't let your own house at Kamarpukur be ruined". That was why the Holy Mother lived in that hut after the passing away of the Master, despite dire financial and other difficulties.

3. *Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineshwar:*

The room is simple. It had red cement floor and two beds, some photographs of Gods and Goddesses on the wall. There are two beds standing next to each other in the southwestern corner of the room. The one next to the wall is a little higher. Sri Ramakrishna slept on this one and used the lower one as a seat when entertaining visitors and talking to them about God.

4. *The porch (towards the temple side) of Sri Ramakrishna's room:* One evening the owner of the temple, Mathur, was watching Ramakrishna pace up and down outside on this very verandah. As he walked one way he took the form of Kali. As he turned and walked back, he assumed the form of Shiva. Mathur fell at Ramakrishna's feet in awe.

5. *River edge of Dakshineshwar temple:*

Sri Ramakrishna's first meeting with his Tantric guru 'Bhairavi' happened here. Early one morning of 1861 when Ramakrishna went down to the river's edge to collect flowers, he saw a small boat draw up alongside one of the banks. A holy lady stepped ashore, dressed in ochre robes and carrying a few books. An air of purity and deep peace surrounded her and Ramakrishna believed her to be the divine mother. She was known as Bhairavi and she stayed with Ramakrishna for three years.

One day Sri Ramakrishna was standing here when a young boatman hit his brother, Ramakrishna cried out in pain; his body bore marks of the assault.

In this very place Sri Ramakrishna addressed Keshab Chandra Sen's group of Brahma devotees.

6. *Panchavati (a grove of five trees):*

It was at the foot of this Panchavati — a small grove of five trees — that Sri Ramakrishna practised many religious austerities. And he would often roam about here with his devotees. At times, deep at night, he would rise and come here. This grove is a collection of five trees — the bata (Indian fig), the peepal, the neem, the amalaki and the bel. These were got planted by Sri Ramakrishna under his own care. Coming back from Vrindavan, he scattered here the holy dust of that place. Right to the east of Panchavati, Sri Ramakrishna had a thatched hut built and meditated so much upon the Lord and practised so many austerities here. This hut has now been turned into a brick-built room.

Vision of Sita: One day, while Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in the Panchavati—he had a vision of Sita Devi. At first he could not recognize her. Suddenly a monkey uttered a cry and fell at her feet. Sri Ramakrishna then realized that she was Sita Devi.

Vision of Christ: The year was 1874 and Sri Ramakrishna was then 38 years of age. Towards the end of that year, sometime during the month of November, Sri Ramakrishna felt a great urge to learn the truth about Christianity.

‘The Master remained constantly absorbed in the meditation of those inner happenings. He forgot altogether to go to the temple of the divine Mother (Kali) and pay obeisance to Her. The waves of those ideas had mastery over his mind in that manner for three days.

At last, when the third day was about to close, the Master saw, while walking under the Panchavati (grove of 5 sacred trees), that a marvelous god-man of very fair complexion was coming towards him, looking steadfastly at him.

As soon as the Master saw that person, he knew that he was a foreigner. ... The Master was charmed to see the extraordinary divine expression of that handsome face, and wondered

who he was.

Very soon the person approached him and from the bottom of the Master’s pure heart came out with a ringing sound, the words, “Jesus! Jesus the Christ, the great Yogi, the loving Son of God, one with the Father, who gave his heart’s blood and put up with endless torture in order to deliver men from sorrow and misery!”

Jesus, the god-man, then embraced the Master and disappeared into his body and the Master entered into ecstasy (Bhav Samadhi), lost normal consciousness and remained identified for some time with the Omnipresent Brahman (God, the Ocean of Consciousness) with attributes.’

[From: Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master by Swami Saradananda (pages 415 to 416)].

Not only Sri Ramakrishna himself, his disciples (both monastic and lay) did immense austerities here.

7. *Nahabat*

Right to the north of the Sri Ramakrishna’s room (in Dakshineswar) is a rectangular verandah. To its north is a garden path. Again to its north is a flower garden. Just beyond it is the Nahabat (the concert room). In the room below lived Chandramani, the revered mother of Sri Ramakrishna and later the Holy Mother.

‘When she [Sarada Devi] went subsequently to live in her quarters in the nearby nahabat (music tower), her life was that of a recluse. In addition to her meditations in the morning and night, she was always busy with personal service to Sri Ramakrishna, cooking for him, feeding him and attending to the visiting devotees. Yet, very few people even knew she was living there. Everything was done so quietly. Sometimes she had for companion Lakshmi, niece of Sri Ramakrishna, and sometimes some elderly women disciples of the Master: Yogin Ma, Golap Ma and the wife of the devoted Mahendranath Gupta or the old woman devotee, Gopaler Ma who looked upon

Ramakrishna as Gopal, the child Krishna, and had great affection for his spiritual partner living in the nahabat. Holy Mother described later how happy were those days. Though she did not have access to the assembly in Sri Ramakrishna's bedroom, she sometimes managed to stand in the veranda of the nahabat and look through the bamboo screens. How splendid was the spectacle inside -- the inspiring dialogues between the Master and his disciples, the melodious singing and the ecstatic dancing! Latu, one of the Master's young attendants, was sent by the latter to help Holy Mother at the nahabat. Another young disciple, Saradaprasanna (later Swami Trigunatita), was sent to her with the cryptic statement that he was not going to an ordinary woman, but to a spiritual Mahashakti like Radha, and that he should never forget this!

[from:http://www.maasamiti.org/samiti/media/samvit/samvit98_9.php]

8. *Sri Ramakrishna's room at Cossipore:*

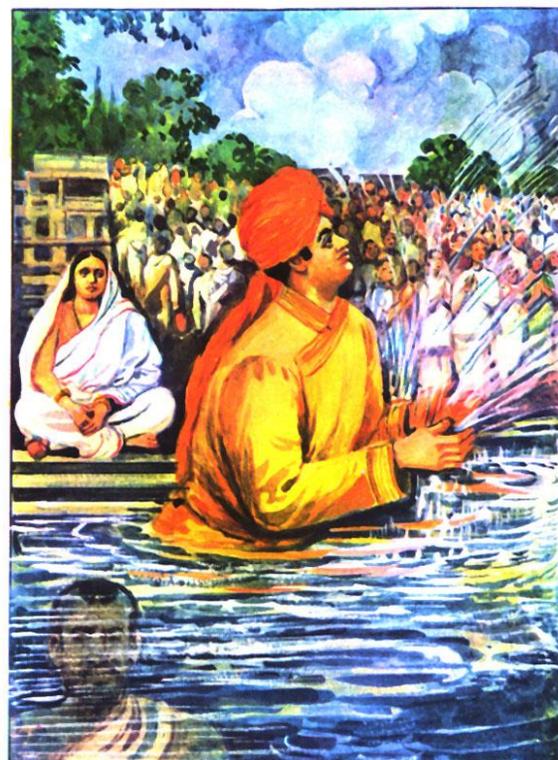
"I shall make the whole thing public before I go", the Master had said some time before. On

January 1, 1886, he felt better and came down to the garden for a little stroll. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Some thirty lay disciples were in the hall or sitting about under the trees. Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish, "Well, Girish, what have you seen in me, that you proclaim me before everybody as an Incarnation of God?" Girish was not the man to be taken by surprise. He knelt before the Master and said, with folded hands, "What can an insignificant person like myself say about the One whose glory even sages like Vyasa and Valmiki could not adequately measure?" The Master was profoundly moved. He said: "What more shall I say? I bless you all. Be illumined!"

After one or two days Narendra said to himself, "If in the midst of this racking physical pain he declares his Godhead, then only shall I accept him as an Incarnation of God." He was alone by the bedside of the Master. It was a passing thought, but the Master smiled. Gathering his remaining strength, he distinctly said, "He who was Rama and Krishna is now, in this body, Ramakrishna — but not in your Vedantic sense."

In 1893 Mother Sarada Devi went to stay at Nilambar Babu's garden-house for the second time. This house is located opposite bank of the Dakshineswar temple and close to present Belur Math. Here she performed the austerity known as "Panchatapa". It was here where she had a wonderful vision. She saw Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] getting down into the Ganga in which his body dissolved. Swami Vivekananda took that sacred water and sprinkled it on innumerable people standing on the bank with the cry "Glory unto Ramakrishna!" As a result, everyone was liberated.

Adapted from:
http://belurmath.org/kids_section/category/sarada-devi-for-children/page/6/



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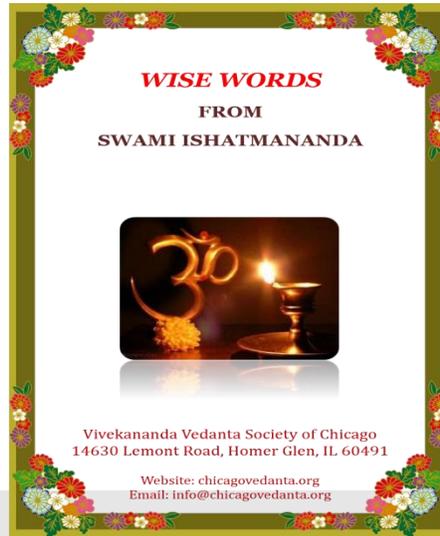
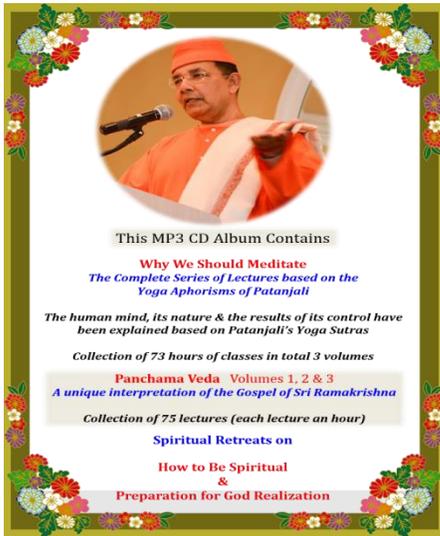
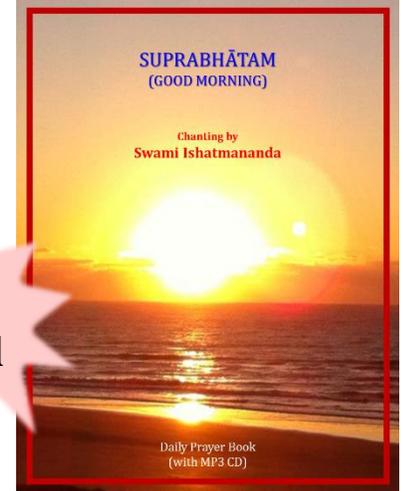
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