



VOL No. 2. Issue No. 3 VIVA NEWSLETTER (ENGLISH MONTHLY)

Vivekananda Institute of Values (VIVA)

Practical Spirituality for All

"It is not the law of nature to be always taking gifts with
outstretched hands like beggars.
To give and take is the law of nature."

Swami Vivekananda



LOOKING INWARDS (Respect for Mother Nature)

We have much to learn from Nature that surrounds us. Our original teacher. What we find most striking is her infinite variety. She plays the most compassionate, nurturing and patient mother, providing ceaselessly while we human-beings mindlessly try to destroy her, little realizing that we too are part of Nature. She plays the ruthless tyrant and leaves us helpless and in awe of her fury. We take her for granted and forget to revere her and be grateful to her. Great souls have seen God manifested in Nature and have felt a great oneness with her. Through this issue we bring before you touching, eye-opening observations made by our readers and resource persons, who are mesmerised by the shraddha they feel for her.

-The Editorial Team

LESSONS FROM NATURE

Circle of Life

(Contributed by Piya Chakravarty, from New Delhi)

There is a small hole in the wall of the balcony at home. A pair of sparrows came and went in and out of that hole many times, inspecting the area. Soon they started bringing twigs and feathers and straw and the nest building began, with equal contribution of both birds. I placed twigs and rice grains for my guests to use. The curtains from that window were tied on one side to get an uninterrupted view of the balcony. Going to the balcony was minimized as it disturbed them. Keeping an eye on them became the most important priority for my family. The balcony became the most happening place in the house - enlivened with the continuous chirping. My son and I danced out of sheer joy for the blessed arrival of our little guests.

The mother sparrow was slender and beautifully streamlined. The fragile life within her delicate body seemed to be fuelled by an immense need to feed her babies. On and on she went flying in and out with single minded devotion. Have I dedicated myself so completely and selflessly in raising my child? I quickly brushed aside the uncomfortable thought.

Soon the chirping from within the nest became stronger. When the parent sparrow brought food, a pair of open mouths became visible. There were two of them, tiny little lives, peeping through the hole, ready to spread their wings. It was celebration time at our home.



Then just as silently as Nature had cast her spell and sprung forth new life, in the wee hours of the morning the two birdies took their flight. The nest had done its work and now lay empty. The day that followed suddenly seemed to be robbed of life. It had no music, no flutter of wings, and no chirp bursting forth with life. Something precious was gone. As I stood in the balcony watching the empty nest, I realized that the real love and devotion of these lovely sparrows were not just in raising their babies, but in giving complete freedom to them to fly at the beat of their own drums. They have shown me the joy of giving completely without any expectation. Here I am pining for them – my guests who came and left behind a lesson for me to imbibe.

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Trust with Divinity

It was mid-morning. We were en route to Leh trying to cover as much distance as we could in the mountainous terrain. Many times the weather becomes unfriendly after midday. This is when we noticed a tiny chorten with bright prayer flags flying all around it. It was slightly off the main road in an elevated area and the view seemed to be out of this world. We wanted to step out of the car but strong winds pushed us back. The small stones placed one over another with the colourful flags were the symbol of someone's deep faith, respect, love; it had some magical power, all its own. One by one we all came out and walked laboriously towards the ledge even as the cold mountain wind tried to break our resolve.

Presently small flakes of snow started falling down silently which made us even more excited. We were struck by the splendour of the vast expanse of snow-clad mountains and the valley below. The sound of silence was overwhelming and humbling and I felt a strong sense of connection with everything around. It was as if I was in communion with my Maker.

Silently I prayed and thanked the Almighty who had given me the wonderful opportunity of being a part of the ethereal surrounding and brought me this far. I remembered the lines I had read long back— sometimes we look back and see only one set of footprints during troublesome phases in our life's journey. That is because then THE MAKER had carried us. Our maker is always by the side of the faithful. Hope and faith are the keys to live life in spite of trials and tribulations.

There are hurdles, daily issues in life but I felt that I may use the resolve within to trudge uphill, not to quit and stick to the dream of being close to these mountains. I hoped that I would be able to soar high, hand in hand with my fellow travellers in the journey of life. Later at night, the star spangled sky really looked ethereal and heavenly. The moon was shining in solitary majesty, selflessly lighting up the night sky and everything around, keeping the dark patches within it. Nature is so bountiful, humbling and uplifting.

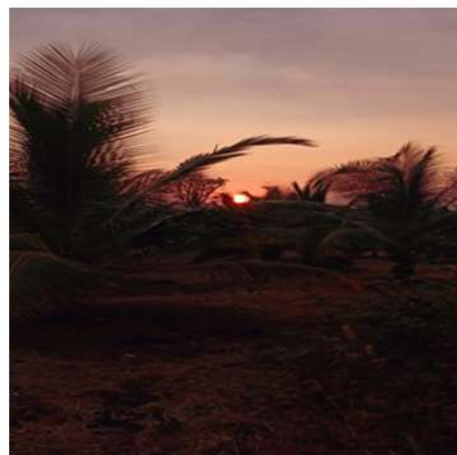
(Contributed by Sunanda Ganguly, from New Delhi)

God's own Country

The beauty of nature lies within the state of Kerala and within its people who cherish this aspect of their state. From the beaches of Kochi to the mountains of Wayanad, from the heat of Ernakulum to the cold Munnar, from the water bodies to the mesmerizing green forests, from its modernity to its ethnicity, Kerala is a place, which will take your heart away. Cherishing its beauty is an opportunity given to me by God himself.

(Contributed by Bicky Dhar, our resource person, originally from Meghalaya and posted in Kerala)

(Our team members are often given an opportunity to travel and serve in different parts of India thus developing a feeling of 'Indianness' whether in revelling in each other's cultures or in delighting in the varied beauty of Nature that is contained in our country).





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MOVEMENT – VIVA Events and Updates

Implementation of 'The Awakened Citizens Program (ACP)

A humble beginning of reaching out to a handful of schools in 2013 has become a national movement, resulting in over 6000 schools joining the program. The program has two main components:

1. Training of teachers in the selected school, and
2. Implementation of the program by the trained teachers.

It is extremely challenging to ensure that the ACP is implemented in its true spirit. Each of our resource persons (RPs) cover 100 schools assigned to him/her. Our relationship with the schools starts after the teachers are trained to run the program. The RP's job is to support the teachers conducting the ACP and ensure that:

- The school has allotted a dedicated period in the time table for conduction of program.
- The school/teachers have program content (CDs and facilitation manual) to run the class.
- The teachers use the correct methodology taught in training.

Understanding and practicing facilitation techniques is an integral part of the program. These techniques enable the students to discover their potential within. The techniques include, acknowledging each student's views without being judgmental. It also includes the students' learning from peers rather than from the facilitator.

The RP observes the class being conducted by the trained teachers and interacts with the students and teachers to understand whether the values of the program have enriched their outlook and whether they find any positive behavioural changes in themselves. In no circumstance does an RP act as an inspector or examiner. Rather, RPs aim to hand hold teachers and reduce their burden. Consequently, the feedback we receive is extremely encouraging and motivates us to go to remote schools despite huge logistical challenges. This free offering of Ramakrishna Mission Delhi-Gurugram, has been lauded repeatedly by teachers, principals, government authorities, parents and children. The demand for ACP in more and more schools has to be met. Hence, committed resource persons/donors who are interested in contributing towards this program may contact us at the email address given below.



A class observation in progress



Our implementation team actively interacting with teachers and students on a recent visit to JNV Bulandshahr.



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ASK SWAMI SHANTATMANANDA

A reader writes:

How can I connect my heart to God and my hand to work?

Swami Shantatmananda replies:

A large majority of people work for a variety of reasons (earning money, name, fame etc.) but their heart and feelings are disconnected with their work. When there is no clarity in the heart about the purpose of our work, there is mechanical action with consequent boredom, tension, restlessness etc. Even philanthropic work done without a full understanding of why we are doing this will not give us ananda (joy). When the heart is connected to God, work becomes worship and our hands turn out excellent work seamlessly. A flow is created and mastery is assured. Hence it is advisable to surrender our ego and do work as an instrument of God.

ANSWER TO READER'S SECTION FROM PREVIOUS ISSUE



ABOUT THE PICTURE:

We are grateful for the teachings of many realized souls who have taught us how to respond to life. We merely need to immerse ourselves in their teachings and construct our thoughts in such a way that we live an enlightened life.

Anamika Jeypaul from Dubai writes: Vultures. And a monk with his human side-the casual onlooker to the one with deep thoughts. The little human's posture depicts his outlook to the terrors overhead (vultures) - he's almost nonchalant and probably secure knowing that wisdom (the monk) which is greater than all that surrounds us (nature), will keep him safe.

Kiran Mehta from Delhi writes: Sometimes life throws so many problems at us that we get frustrated, distraught and clueless. We are unable to navigate ourself through the stress...only a Guru/teacher/spiritual mentor can carry us on his shoulders and help us out of the situation. From him we get the wisdom and groundedness to face all adversities and live a calm life.

READER'S SECTION

Have you noticed that a river purposefully travels from its source to its destination (the sea) regardless of any obstruction that comes its way? What does this teach us about overcoming barriers on our path? Please send in your responses to the email below and titled 'Answer to Reader's Section.'

