



VOL No. 2. Issue No. 11 VIVA NEWSLETTER (ENGLISH MONTHLY)

Vivekananda Institute of Values (VIVA)

Practical Spirituality for All

“The only definition that can be given of morality is this, that which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral.”

Swami Vivekananda



LOOKING INWARDS ('Following Ethics and Morals')

A code of ethics and system of morality is followed in a society for the welfare of all its citizens and the sustenance of social wellbeing, culture and civilization. We all want to be part of such a peaceful and harmonious society. However, it is in the inherent goodness of man that ethics and morals truly derive their basis. This raises the question, ‘why should a person choose to be good or do good’? Further how can we prove that this goodness is inherent in us? The answer lies in our Source. Swami Vivekananda’s conception of a human being was that of potential divinity. According to him, prophets have manifested this potential and we all can too. All our attempts at morality and ethics are steps to reach this divine perfection. We choose to live by the values of truthfulness, service, humility, courage and unselfishness, when the great benefits of such a choice become clear to us.

The Editorial

WHY HAVE I CHOSEN TO LIVE A MORAL LIFE

by Dr. Nandini Sheshadri from Delhi



Why have I chosen to lead a moral life was the question I asked myself. While pondering on it I wondered, is there anyone who does not want to lead a moral life? I realized that most want to, but find themselves unable to.

In the Mahabharata when Lord Krishna asked Duryodhana before the battle of Kurukshetra why he was not following the righteous path Duryodhana remarked, *I know what is right and what is wrong. I don't feel like doing what is right and I cannot stop myself from doing wrong.* This is the human condition. Swami Vivekananda's ideas on morality and ethics gives us clarity on why and how we can lead a highly principled life and how it'll benefit us. The real nature of the human soul is infinite strength and goodness. When we believe in this, we get the courage to stand up and do what is right. Our hearts expand to feel for our fellow beings making us more empathetic and compassionate. Self-belief and faith in our infinite potential helps us to lead a value-based life full of purpose.



Previous issues of VIVA newsletters (in both English and Hindi) can be accessed at <https://viva.rkmm.org/>

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THE PRINCIPLES THAT DRIVE MY LIFE

(a moving personal account)

By a reader from Delhi

Embarking on a life guided by principles is a deeply personal journey, one that dictates our path and may not mirror that of others. This principle was forged twenty-eight years ago, amid a heart-wrenching incident on the eve of Republic Day celebration in our community. A 4-year-old little girl named Mansi, one of the students from my newly-established school's inaugural batch, met a tragic accident, her tiny body pinned under a heavy iron gate, her head bleeding profusely. While her elder brother and mother, overwhelmed by grief and shock, lifted her, I, paralyzed by the sight, stood rooted to the spot. As they approached me, seeking assistance to rush her to the hospital, Mansi, with eyes closed and one hand dangling, surprisingly responded with a gentle "Ma'am" and a smile when I softly called her name. Her hand reached out for me. I cradled her, attempting to soothe her as I tried to identify the source of the bleeding. All the while she clutched my saree and I sang her favorite rhymes. Gradually, her breath grew shallow, and I sensed the moment when she took her last. But perhaps I couldn't accept it, or maybe I was clinging to hope. At the hospital, despite our hopes, she was declared dead upon arrival. Lata, Mansi's mother, overcome by despair, lashed out at me, accusing me of casting a dark spell on her child.

In that heart-wrenching moment, Swami Ranganathananda Maharaj ji's words, "তোমার কোন দোষ নেই মা" ("you are not to blame, my child", that he had said to me after my younger daughter's death the previous year) flashed in my mind, enlightened me, allowing empathy to flood through me, constructing a bridge to Lata's agony. That was the pivotal moment where I embraced 'empathy in all interactions' as a guiding principle in life. I used to make regular visits to her home, spending quiet moments for 10-15 minutes, sometimes talking to her son. But Lata never spoke to me after that incident.

Years rolled by, carrying numerous personal challenges and trials my way, yet I steadfastly adhered to acknowledging and prioritizing the feelings and perspectives of others above my own struggles. Six years ago, Lata visited me, tears streaming down her face, said, "please take my grandson under your wings." That moment was a monumental discovery in my life. I realized that leading a principled life, centered around empathy, by making choices and actions that prioritize understanding and caring for emotions, is indeed a distinctive journey. It has frequently endowed me with the ability to confront challenges directly and derive strength from within.

Steps to ensure that everyone follows an ethical code at work

By Govind Singh Bisht from Faridabad

An ethical code is a guiding set of principles intended to direct professionals to act in a manner that is honest and beneficial for all stakeholders involved. To ensure everyone follows an ethical code in the work place, I would take the following steps:

- Set the guiding principles according to the mission and vision of the organization.
- Ensure each one has understood it clearly and is aligned with the mission and vision of the organization. This can be achieved by asking team members how they can contribute through their daily work to adhere to the vision and mission.
- Stay in touch with the team to maintain enthusiasm.
- Make them understand the benefits of these set of principles.
- I would need to lead them by example as team mates learn from the peers first. My personal integrity would dictate that I follow the codes myself, before asking others to follow.
- Constantly train the team members in areas they need support and guidance.
- Reward the ethical behaviour and report and address unethical behaviour in a fair and compassionate manner.



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MOVEMENT – VIVA Events and Updates

1. The SVARAT offline and informal meeting with VIVA group was on the topic of “Dealing with Difficult people”. Participants began by identifying the kind of difficult people they usually encounter. All unanimously agreed that the most difficult of the lot were the ones that lack integrity and were low on the scale of moral and ethical values. Ways to deal with were discussed animatedly with personal stories. Revered Swami Shantatmanandaji culminated the meeting with an explanation of how it was most important to work on ourselves to help in our dealings with difficult people with more understanding and charity.



Children engaged in offline and online surveys

2. Impact Assessment Survey: A baseline impact assessment survey is being carried out for the Awakened Citizens Program (ACP). The Centre for Science of Student Learning (CSSL) has been engaged in this extensive process. A total of 307 schools have participated in the survey. ACP is a three-year graded program; therefore, the assessment is planned to start with a baseline (assessment before the administration of the program) survey. At the end of year 1 an endline test shall be conducted to assess the program impact which will be done at the end of each year until Year 3. The idea is to assess the behavioral shift in students' thinking.

The stakeholders of ACP, i.e., the educational institutions, the teachers, parents and the funding agencies, have many a times asked about the efficacy of the program. Previously too in the year 2019, an online impact survey was carried out which showed the remarkable impact of ACP on the students.

ASK SWAMI SHANTATMANANDA

A reader writes:

Are morals and values the same thing?

Swami Shantatmananda replies:

Morals form a part of values but values cover a wide range of areas, e.g., moral values, ethical values, societal values, community values and also national values. So, different types of values can be grouped under one heading of ‘Values’. Then there are individual values, values at a collective level. Values obviously have a much larger field of operation. However, morality in a way is the foundation for values themselves. Unless a person is ethical and moral, there will be no values in him/her – why should I be honest, why should I be kind, why should I be sympathetic, why should I obey social laws, why should I have values concerning others? All such questions are practically rooted in ethics and much more in morals. Therefore, more a person is ethical and moral, more will there be a manifestation of values in the life of such person. Many problems in society where we see an utter lack of a concern for values, like not practising honesty and other ideas are basically because they are not grounded in morality. A person grounded in morality will look at things differently, have a good appreciation for values and also have values of a high order.

WHEN ALL TEETH FELL - TRUTH FROM THE PARABLES

A man used to celebrate the Durga Puja at his house with great pomp. Goats were sacrificed from sunrise to sunset. But after a few years the sacrifice was not so imposing. Then someone said to him, "How is it, sir, that the sacrifice at your place has become such a tame affair?" "Don't you see?" he said, "My teeth are gone now."

So, who was he doing the Puja for?

