



VOL No. 2. Issue No. 5 VIVA NEWSLETTER (ENGLISH MONTHLY)

## Vivekananda Institute of Values (VIVA)

### Practical Spirituality for All

I am the mother of the wicked, as I am the mother of the virtuous.  
Never fear. Whenever you are in distress, say to yourself,  
'I have a mother'.

Ma Sarada Devi



Image of the Holy Mother, Ma Sharada Devi (<https://vedantasociety.net/>)

#### LOOKING INWARDS ("I have a mother")

As human beings we express our love only when we feel that the object is worthy of our love. It is only a mother's love that is beyond such considerations. Motherhood as an embodiment of love has been celebrated in India since the ancient times. When Swami Vivekananda was asked to speak on women, he saw the embodiment of complete love in a mother, as the ideal of womanhood. A love that loves for love's sake and asks for nothing in return. A mother sacrifices all and renounces everything for the child's sake. In this issue, we bow down to our birth mothers, wonderful mothers who adopt children and above all to the Holy Mother Ma Sarada Devi, who continues to mother us every moment we seek Her out.

- The Editorial Team

#### WHAT I LEARNT FROM MY MOTHER

That the best way to teach is to lead by example. That attention to detail is important even in the most routine & mundane things. That sacrifice may have to be made silently for the long term good of the family. Such sacrifice is most fulfilling.

Nandini Seshadri, from Delhi

Among many valuable learnings that I got from my mother, the most important learning is that I should always remember and never forget whatever one has done for me, however small the act may be. This sense of gratitude has helped me overcome any negative feelings that I may develop for others.

Indrani Roy, from Delhi

Complete surrender is the word that comes to mind when I think of my mother. She may not have the intellectual knowledge of the scriptures but she lived her life surrendering herself to the will of God. I saw her happy always in any situation. It is very difficult for one to practice surrender, nonetheless, I am trying.

Dharmendra Pandey, from Delhi

I remember my mom as a great picture of humility and love. She had a successful career as a classical singer but gave up the career after a while for family and had no regrets. She thought of music as her sadhana or a divine offering to the almighty and believed in all religions. She gave us a lesson in self-belief early in life. She believed in the power of giving, which is a rare trait these days.

Piya Chakravarty, from Delhi

From my mother I learnt to see the good in everyone. I also learnt that you need immense strength to serve others.

Vrindha Balagopal, reader from Chennai

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#### My Journey into Motherhood (by Avantika, reader from Riyadh)

Today, I got a message from one of my favourite persons, to write an article on motherhood. What does it signify in my life? This made me think back to the early days when we were trying to grow our family but after many failed attempts, we accepted the fact that it's ok to be childless. Then I started coming to RKM Delhi and working with young kids through the ACP program. The pleasure of seeing the young bubbling enthusiastic faces filled my days with happiness. My prayers to Thakur was answered by sudden acceptance of our adoption application. It was an indication from the Lord himself that Motherhood awaits. Our daughter came to our life like a breath of fresh air, it was as if an angel had come in to add colour to my ordinary existence.

I had to change my entire perspective to accommodate another being in all aspects of my life. I think being a birth mother might prepare one for the coming years but being an adoptive parent to 2 year old was challenging for me as suddenly everything else took backstage. There is no mould to be a perfect mom but I feel motherhood is a journey of everyday learning, falling, fumbling and getting up. Though it's a gift, it needs to be handled with care, as there is a thin line where one wrong step can make you question your intention, keeping you awake in early hours thinking - 'Am I doing it right?' 'Would I be doing the same if I was the birth mother?' To conclude I would like to add that being a mother is a divine gift which I will cherish with all my existence.



#### My Journey into Motherhood (by Marisa, reader from Colombo)

It's an ordinary day in late October 2011. Its lunch time and there is a call from an unknown phone number. I answer it and the caller asks me "Are you still wanting to adopt a child? There is a little baby girl available". Everything around me stops. This is a phone call I have been waiting for over 4 years. I had been searching high and low for many years, doors opened but shut very fast, I was getting older and (maybe not wiser) and the proverbial clock was ticking. I stared at the phone wondering if it was yet another dead end. 'Yes, of course'; I hear my self say, excited and at the same time so anxious. A few days later a tiny, underweight bundle arrives and I can hardly bring myself to carry her. This little bundle has brought so much joy not only to me but to every person she interacts with. My aging parents got a new lease of life and my world has been enriched so much. Simple answers don't satisfy her, her curiosity and willingness to embrace the world is so inspiring to me. She has kept me young in heart and mind. 11 years and a few months later I am regularly tearing my hair out as I deal with my extremely confident, strong willed, street smart, fun loving, creative daughter and if was asked to do it all over again I would do it in a flash. I will hopefully be a bit wiser and have realized that cuddly babies grow up and learn to speak! But the sweetest words on earth to my ears is hearing her call me 'Amma' (Mother).

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#### INDIAN MOTHERS WHO SHAPED THE WORLD (by Sobha Menon, reader from Cochin)

“Whatever good impulse I have was given to me by my mother – and consciously, not unconsciously,” said Swami Vivekananda once of his mother, Bhuvaneshwari Devi, during a lecture in Cambridge in 1894. Some of the most iconic personalities in our nation’s history – men who have had an immense impact in shaping our lives and thinking, such as Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Chhatrapati Shivaji – had mothers who “consciously” tried to mould their character and personality.



Picture source: <https://godivinity.org/swami-vivekanandas-love-for-his-mother/>

Bhuvaneshwari Devi’s plans and preparations for motherhood, in fact, had started long before her son was even born. “I know that before I was born, my mother would fast and pray and do hundreds of things which I could not do for even five minutes. She did that for two years. I believe that whatever religious culture I have, I owe to that. It was consciously that my mother brought me into the world to be what I am,” said Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda also talked about his mother’s abounding love and called it a “debt to her that I can never repay”. He recalls his mother’s readiness to place the welfare of others above her own and sacrifice for them. “That was her life and she liked it. And that is why we worship mothers as gods,” he told his audience. Bhuvaneshwari Devi provided for her extraordinary child the environment that supported and nurtured all the qualities we have come to adore and admire him for – his love, his expanded heart that bled for his countrymen, his altruism, his sacrifice and his emphasis on the heart rather than the intellect.

There is a common thread that runs through the stories of the mothers of these leaders from our past – it is their deep religious fervour, which their children imbibed. Gandhiji describes his mother Putlibai Karamchand Gandhi as “deeply religious”. She would keep strict vows and religious fasts, all with a gladness in her heart. Before Gandhiji left for England to study law, she would ask him to take three vows, which he did in earnest: no meat, no women and no alcohol or tobacco. “The outstanding impression that my mother has left on my memory is saintliness,” Gandhiji wrote in his autobiography. Is it just a coincidence then that Putlibai’s son was awarded the title of Mahatma by Rabindranath Tagore?

Then there’s Jijabai, Shivaji’s mother, who would tell him stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata to instil in him the desire to live a life of heroism and dharma. She delved into these epics even later in life: There is a story of how Shivaji became a broken man after having left a very young Sambhaji as a hostage with Aurangzeb. It was Jijabai who reminded Shivaji of the ordeals faced by the Pandavas and Shri Ram and their power of endurance. Jijabai’s influence on Shivaji is also said to have reflected in the way he treated other women respectfully, even if they belonged to the enemy camp. There were also times when after having won a victory Jijabai would caution Shivaji against letting arrogance get the better of his wisdom.

The invaluable treasures these mothers have bestowed upon us have influenced so many other thought leaders not just in India but around the world. To use Swami Vivekananda’s words, can we ever repay our debt to them?



Picture source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jijabai>



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#### MOVEMENT – VIVA Events and Updates

Three consecutive Orientation Sessions for Parents were successfully conducted for various Bal Bharati Public Schools (BBPS). The first one was held on 24th March in BBPS Rohini, Delhi, followed by the second on 25th March in BBPS Brij Vihar, Ghaziabad and the third on 1st April in BBPS Indraprastha Yojna Bharat City, Ghaziabad.

The school authorities welcomed the team, from Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Institute of Values Gurugram, with plants and smiles. Dr. Anuradha Balaram was the key speaker both in Rohini and Brij Vihar branches. Dr Nandini Seshadri was the key speaker for the IP Yojna branch.



*(Parents attending session at Bal Bharati Public Schools, Rohini (above) and Brij Vihar, Ghaziabad (left))*



Taken together an overwhelming number of more than 500 parents attended the sessions. With some role plays being enacted to depict the various parenting styles, parents found the session interesting and engaging. In their feedback, the parents enthusiastically reported that they found the sessions informative, helpful and were sure to go back and apply them to their own parenting. The goal of our workshops is to help the parent discover their immense role in forming a loving bond with their children to enable them to lead a fulfilling life. Parenting is a spiritual journey and can be most empowering and enjoyable.



We, at VIVA, are happy to conduct parenting programs for schools, RWAs, companies, in fact any stakeholder group. Those interested may please contact us at [arise.parents@gmail.com](mailto:arise.parents@gmail.com)

*(A picture from the session at BBPS Indraprastha Yojna Bharat City, Ghaziabad)*



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#### ASK SWAMI SHANTATMANANDA

##### *A reader writes:*

My parents are suspicious about me and never trust me. Moreover they don't pay heed to my explanations and don't try to understand me. What should I do?

##### *Swami Shantatmananda replies:*

Normally parents start by trusting children. If there is a loss of trust it may be worth reflecting on when and why parents became suspicious. Alienating parents is never a good idea. Hence trust has to be restored and a child can do that by knowing what is expected of her/ him and then making sure that efforts are put in to remove suspicion. With time and continuous sincere effort parents will no longer be suspicious.

#### ANSWER TO READER'S SECTION FROM PREVIOUS ISSUE



##### *Vivek Patel from Ranchi writes:*

A lot of times, we as human beings think that we can control our lives, emotions, likes and dislikes but instead end up getting controlled by these things. Like, Pooh in this image who's so engrossed in eating honey that he ends up getting trapped and leaving himself blinded. The image is a perfect example of how sometimes our dissatisfaction from materialistic things leads us towards suffering.

*Vrindha Balagopal from Chennai writes:* Very often we embark on an endless chase for luxuries and wealth only to end up like Pooh and find that too much of even a good thing leads to problems. In life we should learn to look beyond material things and find happiness in simple things around us.

*Devahuti Choudhury from Singapore writes:* We create a bubble around ourselves constituting of, among other things, our material pursuits, people, places and goals that form part of our immediate vision. Staying within the vicinity of this vision can be sweet and bitter, but mostly remains extremely personal and inward-looking. This heady experience, which most of us describe as life can be intoxicating, much like Pooh's honey pot. But it can be often myopic since it does not let us establish a relationship with everything outside of our bubble. It can often lead to a debilitating failure to acknowledge and to be accountable for the impact of our actions on the world without, outside this honey pot. The fact is that for us to operate well within our 'honey pot' there are so many energies and resources that are not our own, that are often limited and that may be taking away from others' share. So while I, like Pooh, would love to douse myself with the sweetness of life, I necessarily have to learn to give back and know that in many others' happiness and access to the honey pot, will I also continue to enjoy my own.

#### READER'S SECTION

Let us know what emotion strikes you when you see this picture and if you can make any connection with it to your own life. Please send in your responses to the email below and titled 'Answer to Reader's Section'.

