



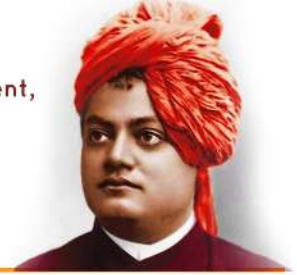
VOL No. 2. Issue No. 9 VIVA NEWSLETTER (ENGLISH MONTHLY)

## Vivekananda Institute of Values (VIVA)

### Practical Spirituality for All

“This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient,  
but they alone live who live for others,  
the rest are more dead than alive.”

Swami Vivekananda



#### LOOKING INWARDS (‘To live to serve’)

Swami Vivekananda had declared that in service lies a path to liberation. Leading a life of an itinerant monk, his objective was solely that of God realisation but his travels around India opened his mind and his heart to the plight of the people of the country. He proclaimed that the ‘gist of all worship and all sacrifice’ was in the ‘service of mankind in the spirit of the Lord’. The inspiring stories and uplifting articles in this issue pay homage to the unselfish service that people perform with the conviction that ‘Nar seva is Narayan seva’.

The Editorial Team

#### The Greatest Service by Vrindha Balagopal from Chennai

Ramana Maharshi said “Your own self-realization is the greatest service you can render the world.” Does this sound selfish? What do you think? Self-realization means giving up our ego, need to control things, desires and attachment to material world. It means realizing that we and everything around us are one and the same. Once this happens, we are able to work for the service of humanity without thinking of our own needs, our desires and our fears. Truth, compassion and love for our fellow human beings become the guiding factors in all our actions. As a result, our service becomes of the highest order. These thoughts are very similar to the ideas expressed by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda who demonstrated that that self-realized souls render the most service.

#### Unsung Heros – Service Before Self, by Sunanda Ganguli from Delhi

We had been walking for quite some time.

“How much farther is the Lalbaba ashram in Bhojbasa from here?” we asked.

“Oh, it is just round the corner”, replied the guide.

“But you have been telling this for the last one hour.” The ripple of laughter that ran through the group was partly drowned by the continuous gurgling of the rushing waters of the Bhagirathi river. Yes, the guide had been repeating those words. What else could he do to motivate the tired trekkers to continue the journey through a trail that follows the river, ascending gradually through forests of pine and deodar trees. After trekking through dense forest and spectacular meadows we reached the Ashram surrounded by mighty mountains all around. We could not meet Babaji till dinner time as he was very busy making arrangements for the pilgrims, their food, beds and most importantly blankets.

We had requested for blankets to warm and rest our tired bodies. We were told that we would be getting the blankets only after we finished our dinner. “Oh, please, please give the blankets, we will cover ourselves and sit here till dinner gong sounds.” But no blankets were to be provided until we finished dinner. “Why?”, we cried in unison. “Because you will be fast asleep with an empty stomach as soon as you cover yourselves with the blanket after a hard trek”.

I could not control my tears, remembering my mother who said similar words at the end of a tiring day. How caring these people are who have forgotten the “I” and think only in terms of “We”. These unsung heroes help pilgrims, day and night, never asking for money. The selfless services provided at that altitude and terrain is priceless.



The Bhagirathi Massif at Uttarakhand, India



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#### SISTER NIVEDITA – She gave her all for India, by Dr. Anuradha Balaram from Gurugram

Long before Mother Teresa gained sainthood for her service to the poor in Kolkata slums, another foreign lady, Margaret Noble agreed to be ‘offered’ to the service of India by Swami Vivekananda in 1898. She was warned by Swami Vivekananda before she came to India that if she wanted to help him achieve his ideal of “preaching unto mankind their divinity and make it manifest in every moment of their life” and to be a “lioness for the upliftment of Indian women”, she should be fully prepared to be hated both by Indians, who would shun her for being a foreigner and by the British who would view her as a crank and watch her every movement with suspicion. She came regardless.



With the new name of Nivedita, this ‘most loyal of English women’ became a true daughter of our nation, after being deeply influenced by Indian spiritual thought and the Hindu approach to life. She used her pen and voice to introduce the soul of India to the Western World, making many readers revise their views from a barbarian India to a highly civilized one. She set up a girls’ school in Kolkata with Sharada Ma’s blessings to teach girls (many of whom were child widows) ways to lead a productive and meaningful life, without compromising on their Indian sentiments.

During the dreaded contagious plague epidemic in Kolkata in 1899, she not only did yeoman service educating people on how to maintain sanitary conditions, but actually went from hut-to-hut cleaning and caring for the stricken. In fact, a young child died in her arms, listening to her soothing voice. Talk about expansion!

She also directly experienced the cruelty of her countrymen to natives, and soon became a strong voice of the revolutionary struggle for Independence, even designing a national flag with the Vajra symbol and Vande Mataram written on it, as early as 1904. Volumes can be written about how she inspired and encouraged Dr Jagdish Chandra Bose, when he was struggling to make his pioneering work accepted, how she tried to revitalize Indian Art by encouraging Abanindranath Tagore, Nandlal Bose and others. She died at the age of 43 in Darjeeling where her epitaph says “She gave her all for India”.

#### An Opportunity to Serve, by Geeta Dhyani from Mumbai

A homeless woman with psychological issues started living outside my home. Often, she would spend the entire night shouting at the top of her voice. One such night, I was so troubled by her yelling that I called the police women helpline and explained the situation. I thought that she would be hospitalised and get treatment for her disorder but to my surprise the police took her in a van and soon brought her back to the same place after few hours. During the monsoon, I saw that she was fully drenched in Mumbai rains. I bought her a piece of tarpaulin to make a makeshift shanty to protect herself. I talked with her and found that her name was Jyoti. Some ladies in our building objected to my encouraging squatters. I used my viveka and continued to help her.

When the covid epidemic broke out, there was gloom, fear and uncertainty all around. I remembered the incident from Swami Vivekananda’s life, when plague broke out in Bengal. He was even ready to sell the land acquired for building the Belur Math in order to help the needy. I was fully charged up. In my small way I gave masks and sanitizers to the small vendors in my locality and counselled them to take the necessary precautions. Since all roadside stalls were closed, I suddenly remembered Jyoti. How would she survive? I decided to provide her meals twice a day and this continued for almost a year. I also bought her soap, oil, biscuits and other essentials regularly. I gained her confidence to the extent that she would even tell me her choice of biscuits!

One day I was spell bound when I saw her giving some biscuits to stray dogs. This brought tears to my eyes. I thought, “Look at Jyoti, despite her having so little, she cares that the dogs don’t go hungry. What a big heart she has and people called her a mad woman!”



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#### MOVEMENT – VIVA Events and Updates

1. On 12th August 2023, VIVA showed gratitude for the Chairperson Apeejay Education, Mrs. Sushma Paul Berlia and her family. The program was attended by about 150 principals, vice principals and teachers from Apeejay educational institutions. The program started with the Apeejay family unveiling the plaque on the 3rd floor of VIVA which was donated in the name of the Founder of Apeejay Education Mr. Stya Paul. Lamp lighting was done by the chief guests, Rev. Swami Shantatmanada ji, and Dr. Anuradha Baram (Chief coordinator) of the Awakened Citizen Program (ACP) amidst auspicious singing of Ganpati Vandana and Saraswati Vandana by Apeejay teachers. After the felicitation ceremony, Mrs. Sushma Paul Berlia spoke about the journey of Apeejay educational institutions and expressed her gratitude and satisfaction for the way the Awakened Citizen Program contributed in bringing values to their students. Mrs. Berlia conveyed her trust and assurance of all possible cooperation for VIVA's future endeavors. Revered Swami Shantatmananda ji spoke about the need of values across different sections of the society, from school children to parents and even in the corporate world. The program concluded with vote of thanks by Ms. Sunanda Ganguly, a resource person at VIVA.



2. The first offline Foundations of Citizenship Program (FCP) for private schools at Indore was conducted on 12th August. 36 teachers from 17 schools from the region were part of the workshop. The inaugural address for the workshop was given by Revered Swami Shantatmanadaji through hybrid mode from VIVA Gurugram. The participants appreciated the content of the program and participated enthusiastically. The session concluded with presentations by the participants. At the end of the workshop, the participants were impressed with the invaluable service offered by VIVA, as is testified in the following feedback received from them:

“Me and my team extend gratitude for conducting the session for teachers. It will definitely change scenario of the teaching way and patterns in school. Ramkrishna Mission is really doing a great work for upliftment of students and will help us in inculcating importance of values in students for sure in some way and open up their vision of life.”

Babita Singh Simaraiya, Prudential Kids Higher Secondary School

“I found this program very intellectual and learnt something different from other training programs.”

Yashika Chouhan, St. Vincent Pallotti School.



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3. An online parenting workshop was held on August 24th and 25th for a group of enthused and engaged parents. The VIVA faculty led the highly interactive group through a framework of parenting to help develop a loving bond between the parents and children. The participants and the VIVA faculty exchanged insightful observations from personal experiences. On day 2 of the workshop, that comprised the Q and A session, Revered Swami Shantatmanandaji answered various queries of the parents. The parents were encouraged in their parenting journey and very grateful for the session. For information on our parenting workshop please reach out to us at [arise.parents@gmail.com](mailto:arise.parents@gmail.com).



#### ASK SWAMI SHANTATMANANDA

##### *A reader writes:*

What are the signs of a Karma Yogi?

##### *Swami Shantatmananda replies:*

A karma yogi may be understood in terms of levels of growth in a person and through his/her attitude to life. There are several levels of a karma yogi. At the very least, a person who has an altruistic feeling may be said to be a karma yogi. An element of 'tyaga' and service in a person makes him/her a greater karma yogi. A sense of sacrifice, where the feeling of 'me' and 'I' are completely erased and a person is able to sacrifice his/her complete sense of self, without a thought of reward or expectation in return for the service, is the highest category of a karma yogi. Classification in terms of an attitude towards work is twofold. The first generally understood attitude is working as the Lord's agent. Therefore, all work is undertaken in an attitude of service to the Lord and all fruits thereof is an offering to the Lord. The second and higher attitude is that of a person with a deep appreciation of the oneness of existence, enabling his readiness to jump to the service of others, knowing that in serving others he/she only serves himself/herself.

#### A TALE OF TRUE SEVA - Sharat Maharaj's Seva to Ma Sharada, by Karthik Shankar from Bengaluru

Swami Saradananda, also known as Sharat Maharaj, played a key role as the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He is remembered as the author of the masterpiece, 'Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga'. What is it that gave him such capacity for organizational leadership and creativity, besides his innate spiritual personality? Perhaps the answer lies in his complete surrender to Ma Sharada, whose responsibility he was alone deemed fit to shoulder. When we consider the complex dynamics in which the Holy Mother lived, one can then begin to see how Sharat Maharaj's role was also equally demanding as he considered himself her servant. From fulfilling her daily needs to constructing a residence for her by borrowing money, his humility, equanimity and determination shone forth in every instance. He also served the Holy Mother by resolving a family dispute concerning the partition of ancestral property with his spiritual insight and practical wisdom. He would also sing devotional songs about the Divine Mother or Shiva at her behest, in his sweet voice. His name, Saradananda, is so appropriate because it shows how he took delight in serving Ma Sharada. His love and devotion to her can be gauged from this quote of the Holy Mother: 'It is extremely difficult, my child, to stand up against my heavy pressure. Nobody excepting Sarat will be able to shoulder my burden.'



Swami Saradananda