



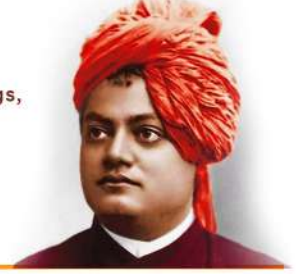
VOL No. 2. Issue No. 12 VIVA NEWSLETTER (ENGLISH MONTHLY)

Vivekananda Institute of Values (VIVA)

Practical Spirituality for All

As for you, my dear, noble, kind friend, I only would say this—we Indians lack in many things,
but there is none on earth to beat us in gratefulness.

(Swami Vivekananda, Swamiji's letter to Margaret Nobel dated 5 December 1896)



LOOKING INWARDS ('The Attitude of Gratitude')

Most Indians naturally think of every good fortune in their lives as God's 'kripa'. Indians tend to express their gratitude to the Almighty through prayer. The use of the word 'thank you' is not common among Indians. We accept that relationships are not momentary but lasting, and the kindness shown unforgettable. Gratefulness is instead shown by returning kind actions with kindness. That is why most Indians say "Please don't say thanks" – they consider that to formal and transactional. On the subject of giving and receiving, Swamiji advises us to remain humble as "it is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become pure and perfect." This issue is a collective attempt at thanksgiving to relationships in our life, that have made us what we are.

The Editorial Team

GRATITUDE TOWARDS OUR GURUS, GUIDES AND MENTORS, by readers in Delhi

Many years back I understood the word 'gratitude', only in its literal sense. It was only after I experienced the profound knowledge and unfathomable kindness of a monk that the deep sense of the word 'gratitude' and the powerful emotion behind the word, dawned upon me. In 2008, I met Swami Shantatmananda ji, the then secretary Maharaj of Ramakrishna Mission Delhi, 30 years after I first met him in late 1970s. I joined the value education team in 2009 under his able guidance. We used to work with schools, colleges and NGOs. This area was new to me and I faced tremendous difficulties dealing with them and ultimately, ended up in frustration each time. He never got tired of listening to my problems and solved them in a wonderful way. After working with him for 14/15 years I realize that he not only helped me in my work-related issues, but also taught me to understand the positive aspects of life, acknowledging the goodness in every person and helped me to live life more consciously and joyfully. I am grateful for the presence and guidance of Swami Shantatmanandaji Maharaj and give my pronams to the holy trinity.

Chaitali Chatterjee

I'm deeply grateful to my maternal uncle who was responsible for getting my husband and me initiated from our Guru Revered Vireshwaranandaji Maharaj. My uncle was not a monk but led a monastic life. He was physician and disciple of Revered Swami Shivananda. I had a strong desire to get myself initiated from Ananga Maharaj (Revered Swami Onkaranandaji). My uncle forced my husband and me to get initiated from our present Guru, since he was then the President of the Ramakrishna Order. He arranged everything that was to be carried for our 'diksha' (initiation) and even arranged a cab that took us to Belur Math. I see him as the guiding force of what we achieved so far in our spiritual life. I remain eternally grateful to my uncle.

Nandita Lahiri



Swami Vireshwaranandaji, 10th president of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission

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

Page: 1/3

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I thank my guru in helping me discover my unique potential. I was an introverted child so I could never open up to my parents about my desire to learn to sing. However, at 39, I had the good fortune of meeting Shrimati. Vidushi Savita Devi, a noted classical singer of the Benaras gharana. Before formally accepting me as her disciple, she tested my seriousness to my calling for six long months. Thereafter, as her disciple I practiced rigorously. Much later, thanks to her I became a performing artiste. I still pleasantly remember her announcing, “Swapna, you are a thumri artiste now.” She chose me to sing on her 60th birthday. At 77, I look back on those days and am filled with gratitude. My guru made my dream possible. It is difficult to express my feelings for her. She instilled faith in me. She gave me the courage to face an audience. I felt heroic in facing those challenges. She helped me in perfecting my art. I grew also in my ‘shraddha’ and expanded my heart and eventually through all my endeavours learnt to be a truth seeker. My guru helped me realize all the universal possibilities.

Swapna Chatterjee

I met my teacher Dr. Radhanath Rath, national fellow in a small town of Orissa. He helped me build my self-belief by urging me to take up challenges and face unusual situations. He made me realize that I was capable of a lot more. I am very grateful for my teacher who showed me the path of self-reliance.

Malavika Ghosh



Renowned classical vocalist (late) Vidushi Savita Devi

On Gratitude, by Sanjib Sengupta from Kolkata

Gratitude (Kritagyata in Sanskrit), at a dictionary level, refers to “the quality of being thankful, of being ready to show appreciation for and to return kindness”. For Indian humanity, Swami Vivekananda (SV) points out that gratitude and hospitality are peculiar characteristics, thereby delineating its elevated significance in Indian DNA. Gratitude can be expressed through prayers in daily life or by a simple and heartfelt “Thank you”.

A grateful heart keeps us appreciative of what we have, takes away our worries and presents happiness in all the significant and day-to-day events of our lives. Gratitude helps us to accept ourselves and our current state positively, thereby building confidence in us and improving our interactions and exchanges in society. We feel inspired to spread around the goodness we enjoy through charity or through heartfelt wishes and prayers.

The virtue of gratitude, in due course, ushers in the pinnacle of human happiness through “Sharanagati” (self-surrender) or “Thy will be done, not mine, not mine”, where the ego is dropped. We learn to rely more and more on God’s will rather than our own, a state that awakened souls are blessed with.

The essence of the Indian concept of gratitude is best explained by SV, a concept alien to Western philosophers and spiritualists. Be thankful (i.e., gratitude) that you are allowed to exercise power of benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become more and more perfect. Hindu religion believes that the giver is lower than the receiver, for the receiver for the time being is God Himself. “Let the giver kneel down and give thanks, let the receiver stand up and permit”. “Daridra Deva Bhava” is the route of our service to God. The feeling of giving is best explained by “Give as the rose gives perfume, because it is its own nature, utterly unconscious of giving.”

A Poem on Gratitude,
by Dr. Anuradha Balaram

If I knew then, what I know now
To live life well, what to do and how
My journey would have been less weary
Less anxious, less critical, less teary
Strength and balance I'd have found
within me
With far fewer expectations I would have
been free
Knowing we are all one, I'd
have generously served
Rather than judging who my kindness
deserved.
Luckily, I was brought to the
Ramakrishna Mission
And, voila! there was a sea-change in my
vision
Now there's so much more beauty than
what I thought
Focussed on self-awareness - let me
arise, awake and stop not.



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MOVEMENT – VIVA Events and Updates

1. A meeting of a few journalists of regional and local newspapers and media houses was organized at the VIVA premises on November 20, 2023. The journalists present learnt about the various activities and workshops conducted by VIVA and its core philosophy. Revered Swami Shantatmanandaji was also interviewed by the journalists. The articles ran in the newspapers the very next day and the interview is available on YouTube.



2. As part of their curriculum involving a six-week NGO immersion project, twenty students from the SOIL Institute of Management visited the VIVA center on November 21, 2023. The students were explained in detail about VIVA and its activities in a daylong session. Thereafter, guided by able mentors, the students will be collaborating with VIVA towards creating a successful strategy for the outreach of VIVA programs amongst various sections of the society.



ASK SWAMI SHANTATMANANDA

A reader writes:

Can we consider practising gratitude a spiritual discipline?

Swami Shantatmananda replies:

Gratitude involves humility and acknowledging someone's contribution to our wellbeing. A sense of humility comes from bowing down to the fact that the other person is capable of helping and rendering you service when you most need it. It in turn implies that this help comes ultimately from God Himself working through nature or fellow human beings. Gratitude involves humility that can be considered a spiritual practice if we acknowledge the spiritual idea that all assistance in our life is received from a higher spiritual power/ being.

GOD ALONE IS THE GIVER – Truth from the Parables

When Akbar was the Emperor of Delhi many people visited a hermit who lived in the forest. This hermit once felt a great desire to entertain his visitors. But how could he do so without money? So, he decided to go to the emperor for help. The hermit entered the palace while the emperor was at his daily prayers and took a seat in a corner of the room. He heard the emperor conclude his worship with the prayer, "O God, give me money; give me riches", and so on. When the hermit heard this, he was about to leave the prayer hall, but the emperor asked him to wait. When the prayer was over, the emperor said to him, "You came to see me. How is it that you were about to leave without saying anything to me?" "Your Majesty need not trouble yourself about it", answered the hermit. "I must leave now." When the Emperor insisted, the hermit said, "Many people visit my hut, and so I came here to ask you for some money to entertain them." "Then", said Akbar, "why were you going away without speaking to me?" The hermit replied: "I found that you too were a beggar; you too prayed to God for money. So, I said to myself, 'Why should I beg from a beggar? If I must beg, let me beg from God.'"

We can all be grateful to God, for He alone gives.

Page: 3/3

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