



VOL No. 3. Issue No. 8 VIVA NEWSLETTER (ENGLISH MONTHLY)

Vivekananda Institute of Values (VIVA)

Practical Spirituality for All

“Wherever there is life, there is this search for freedom and that freedom is the same as God.”

Swami Vivekananda



LOOKING INWARDS (Freedom for the Living)

Most religions speak of heaven, a place unlike this Earth free from all suffering and agony present in the human life. We believe that we can be free of all suffering by reaching this ‘heaven’ by performing prescribed acts. The Hindu religion also introduces us to a freedom called ‘moksha’ – a complete liberation from the eternal cycle of life and death. The religion of ‘Vedanta’ propagated by Swami Vivekananda, speaks of gaining a sense of freedom while living this life by controlling our inner nature, awakening to our real selves and purifying our minds, as true freedom is nothing but knowledge of who we really are – ‘tat tvam asi’. In this issue our contributors have written of spiritual practices they undertake as they strive towards this freedom. For many of us, meditating daily on Swami Vivekananda’s teachings alone pushes us along this long road for freedom.

The Editorial Team

Path to liberation for householders with duty by Chaitali Chatterjee from Delhi

It’s a common belief that one must renounce worldly attachments to embark on a spiritual quest. The journey of a householder is a delicate balance between duty and devotion, between earthly roles and longing for an inner journey. Ma Sarada says the householders have no need for external renunciation. They will spontaneously get the internal renunciation. She says one must do some work. Through work alone one can remove the bondage of work. Total detachment comes later. One should not be without work even for a moment.

While performing our household duties we can do it unconditionally, giving our 100% to every sphere of our life. We witness every moment and learn from every incident. Slowly materialism and external validation starts losing its priority in our life, pride will reduce, and we are identifying less and less with the ego.

Swami Vivekananda says that liberation in life is that state of life wherein the last trace of egoism and selfishness have been given up. In Bhagavat Gita Lord Krishna says to rise above the attachments; one needs to work in a detached manner, without thinking about the fruit of one’s actions. We can perform our duties as sincerely as possible surrendering everything at the feet of the Lord, keeping in mind that all is entrusted in God. Be satisfied with whatever is provided by the Supreme.



A householder’s busy life too can be a means to freedom. Source: Various images from the internet

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

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Park Hospital Road, Sector 47, Gurugram 122018 ✉ values.viva@gmail.com



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Recognizing the Freedom Within by Dr. Suruchi Fialoke from Bengaluru

In today's world, many believe that freedom lies in an abundance of choices, thinking that more options will set us free. However, this abundance of choices often leads to the 'paradox of choice'¹. Instead of feeling liberated, we often become overwhelmed by the need to make the perfect choice, leading to anxiety, dissatisfaction and regret. As this cycle repeats, we yearn for a deeper freedom, one that transcends the mere accumulation of choices and material.

Remarkably, true "freedom", as many spiritual teachings suggest, is about maintaining tranquillity regardless of circumstances. The Bhagavad Gita beautifully conveys this with "sarvatra samabudhya," or equanimity in all situations². This equanimity is a state of inner peace, steadfast and unshaken by the ever-changing tides of the external world.

As we delve deeper, we come to understand that even a tranquil mind cannot escape the inevitabilities of aging and decay. The default thinking patterns of the mind, including its incessant need to please the senses, form a formidable obstacle in realizing true freedom. This quest for lasting freedom prompts us to transcend our circumstances, physical body as well as the mind. Spiritual teachers empowered us with practical tools of the four yoga; devotion (*bhakti yoga*), meditation (*raja yoga*), selfless work (*karma yoga*), and knowledge (*jnana yoga*) to fully realize this freedom³.

The life of a spiritual aspirant, hence, becomes a lifelong journey of reconnecting with their inner essence, a state symbolized as the "Jewel in the Lotus" (Om maṇi padme hūm⁴). This ancient mantra evokes the image of living amidst nature's elements, yet remaining uncoloured and unaffected by them, essentially and eternally radiant in the pure state of freedom and bliss.

References 1. The paradox of choice | Barry Schwartz | TED; 2. Bhagwad Gita, Chapter 12, verse 4; 3. The Four Yogas | Swami Sarvapriyananda; 4. 6-syllable Mantra from Tibetan Buddhism

Artwork on the right is by the author, Dr. Suruchi Fialoke



Practices for householders on a spiritual journey by Sobha Menon from Kochi

Both Sri Ramakrishna and the Mother (Sri Sarada Devi) had meaningful, forceful messages for householders who were filled with longing to follow the path of spirituality but were bound to their duties and responsibilities.

Detachment is a very important quality that a householder needs to inculcate. Sri Ramakrishna would often give the example of Janaka, the king of Mithila and Sita's father, to explain how a householder could, indeed, perform one's duties in the most exemplary manner by practising detachment. "Sages like Janaka performed worldly duties. They performed them, bearing God in their minds..." Sri Ramakrishna said. The Gita also exhorts us to perform all one's duties to our best abilities, without seeking rewards, but by offering the fruits of our best efforts to God. The example of Janaka, who was loved and revered as both a king and a sage, is powerful in the face of temporary, worldly attractions that lead us astray from our spiritual goals.

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For a householder, a spiritual journey could be extremely tough if the society he or she lives in is overtly materialistic. And that's why it's important to remember the words of the Holy Mother: "My child, if you want peace, then do not look into anybody's faults. Look into your own faults. Learn to make the world your own." These were her last words, imparted to a devotee, before she passed away. Sri Ramakrishna's advice to pray earnestly and seek the company of holy people also does work like a miracle in such circumstances.

ASK SWAMI SHANTATMANANDA

A reader writes:

What role does leading a life of values play in my recognizing my true and free inner nature?

Swami Shantatmananda replies:

The ancient scriptures of India, namely the '*Upanishads*' declare our real nature as the eternal, deathless, birthless 'atman' of the nature of '*Satchidananda*' and that such a state of being grants us freedom from every kind of bondage. So, in this world we always seek freedom, in the sense that we want to be free from '*abhava*' or lack, like lack of food, lack of enjoyments, etc. Therefore, freedom is understood as a '*freedom of the senses*', in the form of the pursuit of more food, more enjoyments, etc. However, real freedom is '*freedom from the senses*;' i.e., freeing ourselves from the never-ending demand of the senses. To be happy with whatever we have and whatever is given to us requires a different and higher orientation. This is possible with a sense of values, discipline, control, restraint or '*samyam*' that is not forceful but spontaneous. With the exercise of '*viveka*' and '*vichara*' we learn to choose and adopt values that makes the mind calm, contented, and happy. It is then that our inner nature develops. Therefore, values help us with this inner orientation and as such are necessary to experience real freedom.



MOVEMENT – VIVA Events and Updates

• Workshops at VIVA:

(1) On Saturday, July 13 an 'Awakening' workshop for the primary teachers was held at the VIVA premises. Teachers from Rotary RI Distt 3011, Rotary Club of Gurgaon Greens participated actively, engaging in meaningful interactions throughout the session.

(2) On July 13, the children of the Arth Foundation gathered in two groups for sessions on the topic of 'strengths and weaknesses.' The bright children heartily participated and we are sure will imbibe the teachings in the course of their lives.

• Youth Connect: The following topics were covered this July during the 'youth connect' sessions:

Date: July 7, 2024

Topic: Finding Purpose and Meaning: Lessons from Indian psychology

Speaker: Ms K Amrita, ex-student of psychology, Gargi College, Delhi University

Date: July 21, 2024

Topic: Significance of Guru in spiritual life

Speaker: Sri Devashish Mukherjee

Date: July 28, 2024

Topic: Yoga for complete health

Speaker: Mr Avinash Grover

An average of about 20 participants joins every Sunday and together with the enthusiastic team have an enriching session of new learning.

• New Outreach: This month VIVA started exclusive online sessions for educationists, every Tuesday from 5pm to 6pm, where the educationists get answers to their questions on VIVA's various initiatives and an opportunity to address any concerns they may have. The session is taken by Chief Coordinator of VIVA, Dr. Anuradha Balam.

• On July 24, 2024, Revered Swami Shantatmananda was invited as speaker in the Air Force School principals' annual conference. He spoke on 'Values – Foundation of Education'.



Teachers and VIVA team at the Awakening Workshop



Session with students of the Arth Foundation



A Youth Connect session in progress



Revered Swami Shantatmananda addressing the principals