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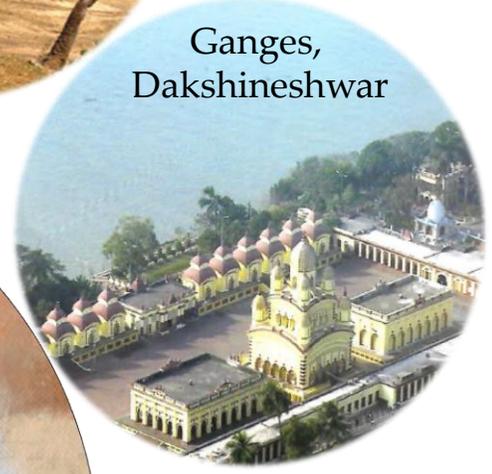
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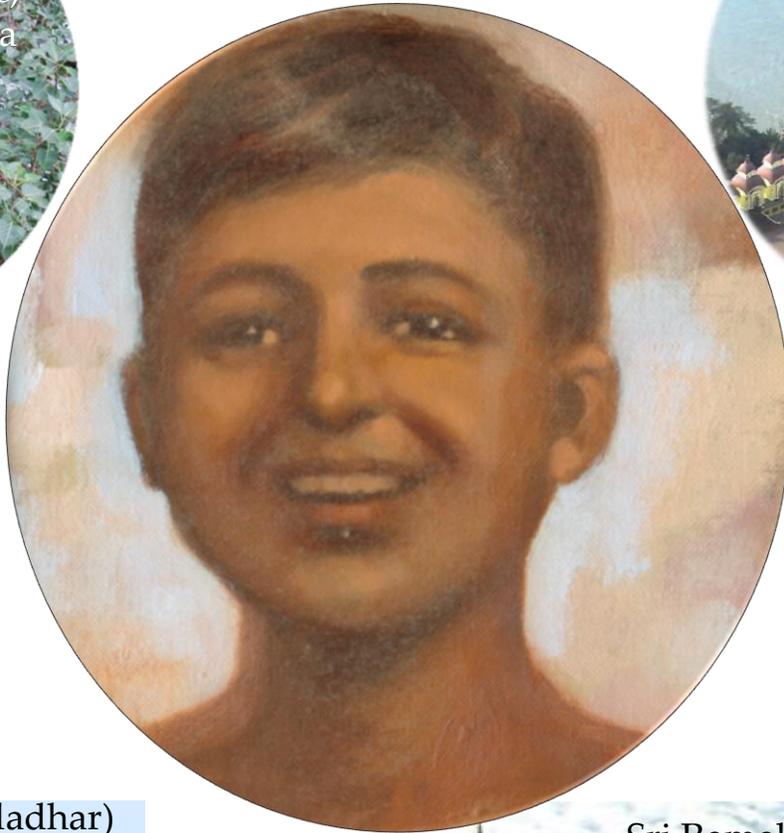
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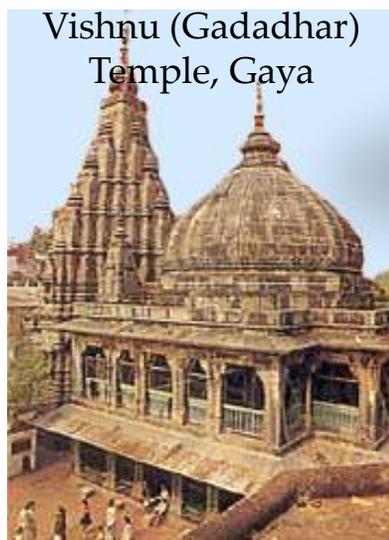
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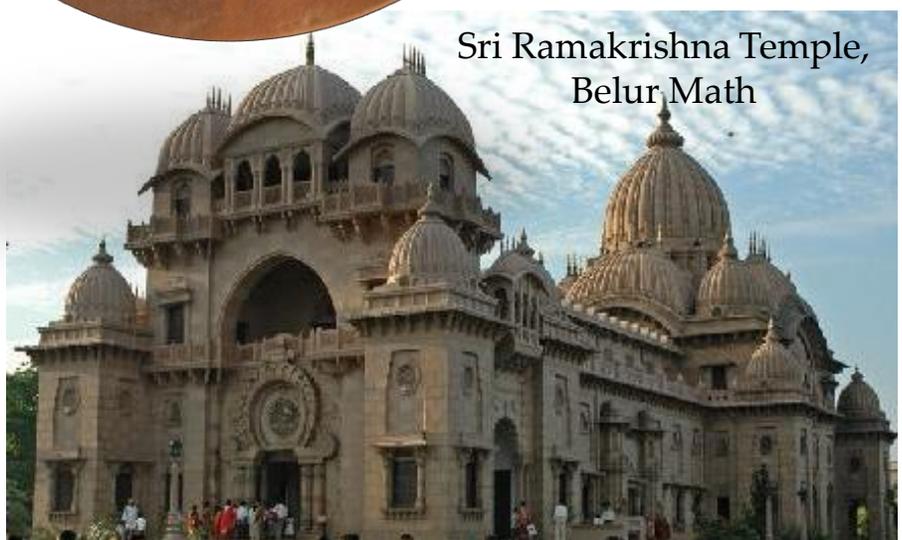
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of Chicago*



No. 17, 2018



Vishnu (Gadadhar)
Temple, Gaya



Sri Ramakrishna Temple,
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E d i t o r i a l

Vijnāni Sri Ramakrishna

Last February 17th millions of devotees and followers of Sri Ramakrishna worshipped him—lighted the lamps, burned incense, decorated the photos and images with flowers, offered food, chanted the holy words, sang devotional songs, served the poor and needy, and meditated to visualize God within their hearts. Who is this God?

Thousands of years before, some enquiring minds asked the same question—"Who is that Deity to whom we offer oblations? (Rig.veda.10)

Sri Ramakrishna, himself, during his lifetime encouraged his intimate devotees to enquire before accepting any ideology or person. He used to ask them now and then what they thought about him. In The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, we find Sri Ramakrishna asking one of his close devotees, Sri M, "Let me ask you something. What do you think of me? How much knowledge of God have I?"

Sri Ramakrishna used to ask this question to encourage his disciples to understand the principle or the person whom they accepted as the goal or the spiritual master.

The ignorant acceptance of a spiritual ideal is not strong enough to help God seekers to reach the goal. Only devotion based on knowledge can bring successful spiritual realization.

Devotees sometimes take a wrong step by attaching themselves to an ideology or person without proper verification and judgment. They presume that their emotional attachment to their chosen ideals will give them the ultimate spiritual experience. Unfortunately, this presumption, which is born of spiritual ignorance, not only blocks the path of truth but destroys their love for seeking the Truth. Religious ignorance is dangerous for the individual and more so for the society. This ignorance about the Truth combined with tremendous emotional attachment to the ideal may make a seeker of God a ruthless murderer.

Sri Ramakrishna said that a true devotee does not need to practice harsh spiritual austerities. He only needs to know two things: "Who I am (means who is Sri Ramakrishna), and, secondly, who they are and what is their relationship to me." (Gospel, pg. 413).

To explain this very important statement of his guru, Swami Vivekananda said, "The eternal relationship between the eternal soul and the eternal God."

Who is Sri Ramakrishna?

The students of the life of Sri Ramakrishna often wonder, thinking, "Who is this unique personality? Who lived on this earth as Ramakrishna?"

Even before Sri Ramakrishna's birth, his father, a pious brahmin named Sri Khudiram Chattopadhyaya, had a dream at Gaya in Bihar, India, a famous pilgrim center for the Hindus, in which Lord Vishnu appeared before him and told him that he would soon be born as his son.

In addition, Sri Ramakrishna's mother, Srimati Chandramani Devi, the kind-hearted lady, had a wonderful spiritual experience at her native village of Kamarpukur in West Bengal, India. One day while standing before a temple of Lord Shiva, she saw a flood of divine light coming out of the image of Lord Shiva and entering her body, and she soon began to feel that she was with child.

The guileless mother, Chandramani, also saw Lord Brahma visiting her house. Now, it raises a very important question. Whose manifestation was Sri Ramakrishna — Brahmā, the Creator of the universe; Vishnu, the Sustainer of the universe; or Shiva, the power that ends the universe?

The true devotees, who sincerely meditate on Sri Ramakrishna, feel that he is all of those and much beyond. As the *Purusha Sukta* (Rig Veda 10.90.3) described, "All this (universe) manifests only one-fourth of the glory of the *Purusha*; the remaining three-fourths lies in the immortal celestial plane.'

A great Sanskrit scholar once said to Sri Ramakrishna, "You are that from whom all the Avatars have been born." Swami Vivekananda saw in him the fulfillment of the highest ideal. Swami Turiyananda saw him as Lord Jagannath in the sacred shrine at Puri. Swami Shivananda saw him as Shiva at Banares. Swami Abhedananda saw all the incarnations and deities merging into the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna's life and experiences are not only unique and peerless but also beyond the level of ordinary sainthood. Sri Ramakrishna is not only a *jnāni* but he is also a *vijnāni*.

In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, "The *jnāni* gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating, 'Not this, not this.' Only then can he realize Brahman...The *vijnāni*, who is more intimately acquainted with Brahman, realizes something more...The *vijnāni* sees that the Reality which is *nirguna*, without attributes, is also *saguna*, with attributes." (Gospel, pg. 30.)

jnāna is based on analysis and negation. *Vijnāna* is based on synthesis and affirmation. Sri Ramakrishna is a *vijnāni*.

A *vijnāni* must have three qualities: One, renunciation; Two, True Knowledge of Brahman; Three, Love and Compassion

Regarding the renunciation of Sri Ramakrishna, his disciple, Swami Vivekananda, after long and thorough examination, declared, "He is *tyāgishwara* — Lord among Renouncers. The highest renunciation is the renunciation of the ego. Sri Ramakrishna did not have an iota of ego.

Regarding Self-knowledge, Sri Ramakrishna was a veritable emperor. No other spiritual soul ever acquired such a wide and divergent knowledge of Brahman.

Regarding the third attribute, love and compassion for all people, Sri Ramakrishna's was superhuman. His love knew no barriers.

We bow down to *vijnāni* Sri Ramakrishna.

Wherein lies the originality of the Gita which distinguishes it from all preceding scriptures? It is this: Though before its advent, Yoga, Jnana, Bhakti, etc. had each its strong adherents, they all quarrelled among themselves, each claiming superiority for his own chosen path; no one ever tried to seek for reconciliation among these different paths. It was the author of the Gita who for the first time tried to



harmonise these. He took the best from what all the sects then existing had to offer and threaded them in the Gita. But even where Krishna failed to show a complete reconciliation (Samanvaya) among these warring sects, it was fully accomplished by Ramakrishna Paramahansa in this nineteenth century.

-- Swami Vivekananda
(CW 4, Lectures and Discourses)

HOW TO OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES

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This article is based on the lecture delivered at the Spiritual Retreat in August 2017 in Vivekananda Retreat, Ganges, MI



INTRODUCTION

Difficulties have a source and the source is ourselves. That doesn't mean that we should be depressed or think that we are worthless. The idea is that we can always change for the better. Most of the time, we make ourselves miserable due to our worrying over the past and imagining the future. The past is just a memory. One of the mistakes that most of us do, owing to Semitic background, is to think that we are sinners. It's good in a way because it brings humility. But, it suppresses all our powers. It makes us weak. To think all the time that I am sinner will not release the inner potentialities and the grace of the God to flow. So the past is just memory. There is no question of anyone being a sinner or bad. All of us make mistakes. The example is of the dancer. A dancer may fall a hundred times. When she falls, she weeps. But when she becomes an expert dancer, it's all different. If a TV person interviews her and asks her, "how many times did you fall," she will say "Oh, I don't remember. Those are nothing. Now, I am a perfect dancer, and that's what is important." That is called living the positive life. We don't know what were in the past. Neither do we know the future. The future is just an imagination. We don't know what we shall be in the future. So, we need not worry about future happenings. The present is all that we can manipulate. The past is gone, but the residue of whatever we thought or did remains in the storehouse called chitta. That residue, called karma-phala, will bear fruit at the right moment. That is why we suffer. That is why we are responsible for all that happens to us. However, the theory of karma is not fatalism. It's an opportunity. This present moment belongs to us

completely. The present moment opens new doors for a glorious life. So, we can build up our lives. Therefore, instead of brooding over the past or imagining the future, we should begin building our lives up. We should shake off melancholy and begin to work hard. This is the positive way of life. As Swami Vivekananda repeatedly asserted, negative thoughts are harmful and they weaken us. To think negative thoughts means also to brood over the past and imagine negative things about the future. We can change the effects of past karma by doing good deeds now.

So, the theory of Karma is to inform us that there is a bright and great future for every one of us. Whatever may be our present situation, everything can change. No rich man became rich by luck. There is nothing called luck in this world. We should remember that. "Oh! that man is a very lucky person, he won a lottery ticket". There is nothing like that. Everything is based on the law of Cause and Effect. We can change our destiny.

DOES LIFE PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES?

The first point is, we should not think negative thoughts. All can change. All can become better. Sri Krishna says, "api cet su-durācāro bhajate mām ananya-bhāḥ sādhu eva sa mantavyaḥ. Even though a person may be the worst of the worst sinners imaginable, he should be considered a noble soul. And he shall become a religious person (dharmaatma) within a very short time-- Kshipram bhavati dharmaatma. How? If he or she thinks of God constantly. To think of God means to think positively. Never entertain negative thoughts—say all our saints. That should be the fundamental way of life—to be positive, and think positive thoughts. Thus, opportunities begin to open up.

Do your duties, whatever comes to us we must accept, and leave the rest to God. Everything will go well. This is the great promise that Vedanta brings to us.

There is the cause and there is the effect. A person has done so many things in the past, and he is to reap benefits now. What we call this life and that life is all a continuation, that's all. It's a stream flowing on. So, there is nothing to worry. If we do good things, definitely we reap good results. The commentators of Yogasutras like Vyasa, Vacaspati Misra and others, say that 'if your karma, prayers and spiritual disciplines are intense, the effects of bad karma will be eliminated fast, and everything will change very quickly'.

It all depends on the intensity. Suppose, you have some difficulty, some problem or maybe someone has lost a job. It is apparently worldly, apparently technical. But the basis is karmic. We may say, "What can God do in such a situation?" But, negative can be annulled by positive. If we still take up some Mantra, some hymn or some prayer and do it like an austerity – deciding to repeat it 50 times daily, for example, we begin to acquire merit. Our scriptures say that by doing that we acquire merit or punya. The mimamsakas called this apurva. Merits push away negative karmas. This power will eliminate the negative effect and everything will be okay. This is how good things are done. That is why you see people offer pujas, performing homas, etc. Our scriptures

give a long list of expiations for sins or errors. They mention numerous ways of overcoming the influences of negative actions done in the past. Doing good, serving others, serving holy persons, japa, meditation, prayer—all are positive things, which should be done. The intensity is important. Then everything can change. So, life is positive.

There is one thing to be noted here. We must try to avoid making mistakes, especially the same mistakes, of the past. Further, we must be cautious about what we pray to God for. I'll give you an example. A lady was blind from birth. She didn't know why she was blind. So she went to a person who could tell her past and future. She came to know that in her past life, she was a lady and she had two sons, who were very bad. Instead of praying for their welfare, she used to always pray to God: "Oh my Lord, may I be blind. I cannot see the sins of my sons." Because it was her intense wish, it became reality in her next birth. She became blind for one birth. So, don't make wrong prayers or wrong decisions.

All of us have bright future. All the difficulties are born of past bad actions. Past bad actions, called papa or sin, is just a mountain of cotton, tular pahad,, as Sri Ramakrishna said. Strike a match and it will be burnt. The match is God's names. So, everything can be overcome. This should be the positive attitude we can have. That is Vedanta. Vedanta teaches us to be positive.



Ramakrishna Paramahansa came for the good of the world. Call him a man, or God, or an Incarnation, just as you please. Accept him each in your light. He who will bow before him will be converted into purest gold that very moment. Go with this message from door to door, if you can, my boy, and all your disquietude will be at an end.

-- Swami Vivekananda (CW 6, Epistles - Second Series)

AN INTRODUCTION TO NARADA BHAKTI SUTRA

SWAMI KRIPAMAYANANDA

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*This article is based on the lecture delivered in May 2017
spiritual retreat at the Vivekananda Retreat, Ganges, MI*



INTRODUCTION

Narada Bhakti Sutras! You have read the book, and the explanation by Swami Bhuteshanandaji is excellent. It is a small book but very beautifully explains the aphorisms. Aphorisms are very small short statements. They do not explain the statements. It is up to other people to explain the meaning. Otherwise, they are not understandable. And, all Narada wrote about is devotion. What happens if we become devotees of God? What changes come in us? What are the obstacles in the path? And, why is devotion the goal of life? How is the ultimate goal of human life God realization? Sri Ramakrishna said, "The purpose of life, the ultimate goal of life is God realization". There might be minor goals, but the ultimate goal is to realize the truth, to realize God, to be united with God, who is in fact our very soul, our own self. Sri Krishna says in the Gita, *mayy eva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhim niveshaya*. How can you develop love for God? Krishna says try to fix your mind on me, be devoted to me, sacrifice unto me. Having union with me as the supreme goal, you verily come to me.

Narada, as we all know, is a *devarishi*. That means one of the gods, and he is also a great Rishi. A Rishi is one who knows everything, an illumined soul, a realized soul, one among the superhuman enlightened beings. So, among those Rishis, Narada is a *devarishi*. There are many *devarishis*, but Narada excels among them. That is why Sri Krishna says in the Gita, "*devarishinām Narada*". He was describing the best among the Rishis. "Among the rivers, I am Ganga; among the mountains, I am the Himalayas." Whatever is the holiest and the best, there is my manifestation. You can see my presence there. And then he says that among the *devarishis*, I am the Narada. How great Narada is! Where godliness fully manifests, that is

Narada. So, today the topic is pure devotion. Sri Ramakrishna used to pray to the Divine Mother, "Mother take away good and evil and give me pure devotion to thy lotus feet; take away honor and dishonor, and give me pure devotion to thy lotus feet."

Bhakti as the Highest Goal of Human Life

As we heard in the introduction, ultimately, Bhakti and Jñāna, Karma and Jñāna, all merge into the same thing. Bhakti is a path to God-realization. As Sri Ramakrishna said, "In the *kali-yuga* (iron age) the path shown by Narada is more convenient for most people." There are people who like *Jñāna*; the path of knowledge, discrimination, inquiry; the path of searching for the real truth by negating the unreal. There are people who want more than Bhakti. There are also people who prefer meditation, diving deep into one's own self without negating anything; just going deep within one's own self searching the reality. Diving deep, controlling the mind, that is the path of meditation, Dhyana. Selfless action is also capable of taking us to God. Some people say that Karma is just to purify the mind, *chittasya shuddhaye karma na tu vastu-upalabdhye*. Because Shankara was the propounder of jñāna, he said that jñāna is the one which will take you to reality. He was establishing the Advaita Vedanta through jñāna, that's why he had to lay emphasis on jñāna yoga. Swami Vivekananda said that all four paths are equally valid.

Each one is capable of taking you to the goal. But, for humanity the best way is to combine all four paths. That will take you quicker and is a clearer way to realize God. You meditate, you feel love in your heart for God, you do selfless service to fellow human beings and fellow creatures, and also you inquire into the reality.

Sri Ramakrishna once explained how to put one's mind on God. He mentioned four points. One of the points was *Sat-asat vichāra*—always think that this world is impermanent. It is not forever and because it is impermanent, it is called it *mithyā*.

So, today we are discussing Bhakti as described by Narada as the highest goal. What does Narada have to say about Bhakti? Of the 84 aphorisms, the first one says, *athaṭo bhaktim vyākhyāsyāmah*.

Now, therefore, we shall explain devotion to God. Bhakti is devotion to God, supreme devotion to God. The first word is *atha*. The aphorism doesn't start with OM, and all the aphorisms begin with *atha*, *athāto brahma jijñāsā*. Now, therefore, there is an inquiry to Brahman, what is Brahman, *jijñāsā*. Here I will explain. Bhakti is something we don't need to enquire about. It is already inherent within us. So, there is no need to enquire. We know love. Only we do not know real love. We do not know intense love for God. We don't know the supreme love. But, every creature that is born knows love. So, the word *atha* is 'now'. This *atha* is a very auspicious word equal to OM. And *atha* at the beginning of explaining, writing something, guiding something is very auspicious. It says, 'Surrender to God, now'. He says, 'Now I am ready to talk about something very important.' And Narada is expecting that we are also ready to listen. Now is an expression of God. They say this 'now', this present moment, is really God. The past is gone, the future is uncertain. This present moment, if you could live in this present moment, you will be *mukta*, you will be free. Free from all these anxieties, miseries. Everything will go, if we are in the present moment. Because we live in past, we live in miseries, suffering. Or we live in future. That is why we have anxiety, tension. But, the present moment is a very Godly moment. That's why they say the present is God's presence to us. So, therefore, 'now' is a very auspicious word. It is equal to OM. I begin by saying my offering to God. That means *atha*. Therefore, I am supposed to talk about God, about Bhakti. That's what Narada says. Narada had written other books, he had spoken about other things, but Bhakti was important. Therefore, now to talk about Bhakti, that's why 'now' is used. What is Bhakti, what is real devotion to God, that I will explain he says. All the scriptures have four qualities essential to explain any scripture. These essential things are called

vishaya, adhikāri, prayojana and *sambandha*.

Vishaya — the subject matter, what I am going to talk about. So, the subject matter is naturally about devotion, devotion to God, what devotion really is. There are so many different forms of divine love, different forms of devotion. So, what is the *vishaya*? It is clear that it is about real devotion to God according to Narada.

Prayojana — what is the essential thing. The *prayojana* of this explanation is supreme devotion and how to attain it. That is the purpose of studying this scripture. The relationship between the teaching and the goal — that is called *sambandha*.

Now, *adhikāri* — the competence to study the subject. One who has sincere desire to love God is the *adhikāri*; one who really wants devotion is the competent person. The competence comes from a strong desire to have devotion to God. That is the only competence in Bhakti Yoga. In *jñāna yoga*, you have to study formally all the Vedas and Vedanta and have self control and have to negate the world, so many requirements. But here just to have a strong desire to have devotion to God is all that is needed.

Who really has need of Bhakti? In the Bhagavata it is said, Bhakti is for those who are *na nirvinna nāti sakta*. One who is not totally freed from all attachment -- *nirvinna*. He doesn't need anything in the world, he is not attached to anything, he has already attained Nirvana. For him, Bhakti is not needed. He has already got the culmination of Bhakti. For him or her Bhakti is not needed -- *nirvinna*, who has already renounced everything, established in detachment. *na ati sakta* - one who is not totally attracted and attached to the worldly things. If one is fully satisfied with the things of the world and is very happy with whatever the world can offer; like relatives, and people, and money, and luxury. For those people, also, Bhakti is not needed. So, Bhakti is for those who have not completely renounced the things of the world and also are not completely engrossed in the worldly things. So, it is for most of the people. Those who really find that the world is not ultimate goal, the ultimate aim of life and are not fulfilled by the world. Those who need something else and yet cannot completely negate the world and worldly relationships — *na nirvinna*. So, we are really fit for Bhakti. Bhakti yoga is a subject which concerns our life.



ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT

Hemant Patel has personally witnessed what hunger can do to people — not once but twice. The first time was when his own daughter was sick and he had no money to feed her. And the second time was after the 2002 riots in Gujarat when he saw hundreds of people sitting outside a hospital with no food. In the 13 years since then, Hemant has been going regularly to government hospitals and slums to provide meals to the poor. This is his story.

“I know what hunger is,” says Hemant, with deep sorrow. He remembers the time when his daughter fell ill and was admitted to VS Government Hospital, Ahmedabad. She asked Hemant to get her some food from outside because she could not stomach the hospital food. But Hemant did not even have Rs. 10 (15 cents) in his pocket since he had been recently sacked from his job from a travel company. With tears in his eyes he kept thinking of ways to feed his hungry daughter. He looked at other people around him — there were several other relatives of hospital patients who did not have enough money to buy food. “I felt helpless. But there was nothing I could do at that time,” he says.

Luckily, his daughter soon recovered and came back home. But the incident stayed with Hemant. Hemant started his own catering business after that and moved on with his life. But again, in 2002, he was reminded of what had happened to his daughter when he went to visit a friend in the hospital. Ahmedabad’s streets were burning after the riots that had taken place, and thousands of wounded people were admitted to the hospital. One of them was Hemant’s friend. “When I reached the hospital, I saw hundreds of people sitting outside with no food and money. It brought back memories of the time when my daughter was in hospital and I had no money to feed her. Their plight touched my heart and I decided to deliver food to the patients’ families,” says Hemant.

Since then, Hemant has been going to VS Hospital

everyday to deliver healthy meals cooked with his own hands. Hemant prepares meals that include rice, daal and roti for about 250-300 people in the hospital. On special occasions and festivals, he adds a sweet too. The patients and their relatives eagerly wait for him everyday. Hemant starts preparing the food at 4 pm. Everything is ready in two hours and Hemant leaves home at 6:30 pm to deliver the delicious and healthy meals at the hospital. Hemant’s kindness has won people’s hearts at the hospital. Whenever a new patient is admitted, nurses rush to his/her relatives to tell them about Hemant’s food service. Some years ago, Hemant also started visiting slums in Ahmedabad where he would feed about 150 needy families during each trip. “The meals may not be very fancy but they are healthy and made with love,” he says.

Hemant has managed to do what he can so far without any big donor backing him. He uses his own resources, money from his catering business, and donations from friends and family, to do his work. The cost of maintaining his free service comes to about Rs. 60,000 a month. “God has given me strength to do this. I don’t have any staff and no major financial support as such. I do get some donations but I also use my personal money to buy ingredients, prepare the meals and deliver them,” he says.

Although this extraordinary man has managed to serve food to the needy for over a decade now, he has constantly faced challenges to arrange funds to support his mission. “I need regular funding to prepare the food. I can’t skip going to the hospital even for a single day since people wait for me there. Also, finding people who can volunteer their time to help cook and deliver food with me is a challenge,” he says. “I am getting old. My health does not allow me to work so much. I need more people to help me in this cause,” he says. Hemant would like to get government aid for his work. But until that happens, this brave and kind man will soldier on without any help because he is dedicated to the cause of feeding the poor and needy.

(Source:

<https://www.thebetterindia.com/33226/hemant-patel-feeding-hungry-government-hospitals-unsung-heroes-ahmedabad/>)

SPIRITUAL RETREAT IN ANDAMAN ISLANDS

SWAMI ISHATMANANDA, Swami-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of Chicago

From the aircraft window, I saw below the land I loved, Andaman—a green emerald surrounded by the vast blue Bay of Bengal. The shadow of our aircraft was floating on the waves of the ocean. Then, suddenly, we were on the land.

The fresh salty air of Andaman greeted us before the welcome party of the Andaman Spiritual Retreat Group handed over the bouquet of flowers with a smile.



We, 122 people in all, had assembled in Port Blair, the capital city of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, to enhance our spiritual life. This must have been the first of its kind, having a spiritual retreat (Bhakta Sammelan) in such a faraway place from mainland India with devotees from Chicago, Canada, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Assam.



Mallika Shyam Chowdhury and a group of devotees, who had made the brave commitment to organizing a spiritual retreat in Andaman, met me and gave me a brief update.

When they were telling that the hotel rooms were all a/c, buses and cars were a/c, the sailing boat by which we would go to the other islands were also a/c, my eyebrows went up and up. "Is this that same Andaman, which I left in 2000, after staying for eight years?" I asked myself. Well, India despite hundreds of difficulties is making great progress catching up with the advanced nations. Has not Swami Vivekananda said, "*Ebar Kendra Bharatvarsha*" (This time India is the center.)

India is progressing and some bad things are also infiltrating into her social body. This is obvious. When a great flow of water comes in the river, it brings along many dirty things, too. It is the duty of the people, living on the banks of the river and using the water, to clean it. Similarly, the age-old traditions of India, according to the Vedas, should be restored and practiced, removing the dirt that may accumulate in her body while she is adopting modernity. This is the sole purpose of spiritual retreats conducted by the monks and the holy people. We had also come with that as our goal along with a little site seeing and touring.

The organizers in collaboration with White Shell Tours arranged the whole trip so methodically that they deserve great thanks. (pic-03)



The idea of the spiritual retreat in Andaman began in the closing session of another retreat that I had held on the seashore of Digha, West Bengal in 2016, which had been organized by the Kathamrita Sangha, Kolkata. A few delegates from Andaman asked me, "Swamiji, can't we have a retreat like this?" Then, very casually I replied, "Why not, I will come again in 2018 if you can organize it in Andaman." They took it seriously. Within a few days, they organized a web group named Andaman Spiritual Retreat and started collecting donations for the retreat. That was a huge task, no doubt. Corresponding with so many people, removing their doubts, explaining the details of the program, etc. Observing the way the registrations were pouring in, I cautioned the organizers, reminding them that Andaman is a faraway place. Civic services might be difficult.

Moreover, visiting different islands means sailing on the ocean, which might be difficult for many. I advised them to be careful by limiting the number of registrations, avoiding the places where they would have to go by the old type boats, etc. But, the enthusiasm of the devotees was really inspiring.

On 13th February, we were in Andaman ready to face all those hurdles for the sake of "Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna", the topic of our retreat.

In the afternoon of the 13th, we visited the Cellular Jail, the infamous British prison, where hundreds of young patriotic freedom fighters suffered for the freedom of India at the hands of the British. We heard the pathetic stories of their sufferings in a Light and Sound program inside the jail. Our retreatants visited the cells where the prisoners used to live in completely inhumane conditions. They did it to give us political freedom. Now, it is our turn to learn and teach the spiritual freedom for our future generations.

There was a great excitement when the organizers gave a call for the group photo.



There was a lot of commotion when friends were trying to be together in the photo, and I could hear the conversations like, "I am going to be your friend from now. Why not stand by my side!" The organizers had a tough time to keep the other tourists at bay, while they were photographing our group. Immediately after the photo session, we had tea and snacks in the nearby park, dedicated to the memory of the patriots. There we found our Shyamali Di, the lawyer in the Port Blair court. She was the first devotee who used to donate for the temple prasad of the Andaman center on a regular basis. I could not forget those days when a little money was of a great help for us. We ended our

day in the new temple of the Andaman Ramakrishna Mission.



Our retreatants joined fifty orphan boys in singing the evening prayer while one of the swamis was performing the Arati. The sound of the prayer, mingled with the sound of the waves, was carried all over the island by the gusty winds. It was a great evening for all of us.

It was a moment of great excitement when we all assembled at the Jetty to board a small but very modern ship, Makruzz Gold, to go to Havlock, an island two hours by boat from Port Blair.



My mind once again went down the memory lane when we used to go to the same island to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna in a small boat, constantly being tossed in the waves for more than 4 to 5 hours. Now, we were sitting in the comfort of an air-conditioned boat with a coffee outlet. I got up from my seat and strolled inside the boat noticing our devotees chatting, laughing and dozing. They greeted me with broad smiles and took photos and selfies. Pinki and her husband, Anshuman, the owners of the White Shell Tours and Guides, were great hosts. They offered me coffee and snacks. I could drink the coffee without spilling though the boat was moving at a high speed.

Surprises were waiting for me when we embarked. Instead of shabbily dressed people with pedaled rickshaws, well-dressed representatives of different hotels met us at the dock. There were lines of beautiful cars. The room that was allotted to me at the resort was the best one, I think. Sitting on the open verandah, I could enjoy the sight of the open sea.



After we all settled, we went for lunch, which was served with great professionalism by the staff. The laughter and the chattering of the devotees proved their satisfaction with the food.

In the afternoon we all gathered in a beautifully decorated hall with a flower-decked shrine of Sri Ramakrishna, Maa Sarada, and Swami Vivekananda. A big poster hanging at the back of the hall announced the topic of the retreat, "Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna".



The retreat began with the lighting of the lamp accompanied by conch-shell blowing and chanting. The surroundings were, I must say, very congenial for higher thoughts.

I looked at the faces of the retreatants, all beaming with eagerness. There was a dress code for the ladies and the gentlemen, which added to the atmosphere.



Days passed with discourses, meditation, bhajans, and of course, question and answer.

We were in a world-famous tourist spot, but none of the devotees were interested to visit those places without attending the retreat. Their thirst for learning the spiritual truth, their eagerness to practice it, were something very special and inspiring. In the evening we lighted a dhuni fire in a coconut tree grove at the seashore, chanted the holy name of God, sang songs in His glory, and many danced around the fire.



Contented and satisfied, we returned to our rooms.

In the morning of the next day, we sailed for Neil Island by the same boat. The beauty of the island is peerless. Another great surprise was waiting for me there. In 1993 I requested the then village chief of Neil Island to organize a fair in the name of Swami Vivekananda to break the monotony of the islanders. I had totally forgotten about the fair, but the people had not. When they came to know that I was going to visit the island, the present chief with some of the villagers were waiting to receive me at the jetty. I felt thankful to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. Through his grace, an insignificant person like me was honored by people whom I never met before. They had only heard about me from their predecessors and became thankful to me. A wonderful cultural program was organized on the fairground in my honor.



I reached there with all the devotees and took the seat. My, My! The young students of different schools of the island were presenting in a competitive mood their best performances. It was difficult to choose who was the best.



Even in this remote part of the country, the standard of the education and culture has progressed so much. They gave me so much, but what could I give them? I silently prayed to the Divine Mother to protect them and pour Her blessings upon them.

Your words are like nectar to such people. "Kavi.." the seers are praise it because they have realized it. If you follow this you will find peace. What is the goal of our life? In school when we were asked what we wanted to be, we usually wrote doctor, engineer etc. I had a peculiar dream. That I would become the driver of a double-decker bus. In those days Punjabi Sardarjis in Bengal would drive. Is it true, doctor, engineer? I saw a doctor from London in Calcutta who would purchase books and send it to a particular address everyday. Same books. Once I asked him why? 'I came to marry a girl but she has left me. So I have a lot of pain' he said. Though he is a doctor and knows so much about the body, still he cannot stop his misery. Suffering. The futility of life has to be understood. "Kalmashap.." the moment you listen to it, read it, you ponder about all the scenes of unselfishness. The more you are selfish, the more you go down. You have to be unselfish. In the life of Ma Sarada Devi we find so many incidents. The moment you become unselfish, your mind becomes broad and you enjoy the emotions of people around you. Sri Ramakrishna once saw people

making merry, and he came out and encouraged them. The joy of God has to be reached. This is only a small step. Once we come closer, we see everything rightly. "Kalmashap" means eradicating the seed. In Islam they call it "gunap". You reap as you sow. Doing bad things takes you to hell and tortures you. If you scare them, people might do something good but that is not correct.

In this advertisement age, we know how things like soaps are advertised. One person had done 50/50 good bad. After dying, when he reached Yama's office, they were confused. So they gave him the option. He said 'Unless I see it, I can't decide'. So he was taken to heaven. Calm, quiet, people doing japa. He said 'It is ok, but no life. Let's see hell'. So many people there were jumping, eating, loud music. 'Can I use all my days in hell?', he asked. 'Yes, but you have to give this in writing.' So the next day he entered and saw a person with tied legs put in boiling water. The man was confused. The staff said that what he saw the other day was their advertising department! The whole word is tempting us. We have the power to listen to God with faith and develop mental power. "Samagra virya". We'll also get tremendous power. Swamiji says "Viryaman bhava". Mental power. We see that in Sri Ramakrishna's father. He had cows, etc., as a village person and was happy. The zamindar once asked him to tell a lie and would reward him in return. Even though he was pressured, he said no. 'If you don't do it, I'll throw you out', said the zamindar. 'No, I'll stick to truth'. Mental power. His wife was also like that.

Yudhistira also said likewise. This is not just a story or imaginary things. They are still there. Our devotees purchased the land. The village is located 3 kms from Kamarpukur. What did he get? He got nectar. All over when people read the life of Sri Ramakrishna they read about his father and all the devotees know his name. Suppose he had lied. Thousands would have talked about it. "Sravana Mangalam"

The moment you hear it, naturally you will get excellent results in life. You may not think about it now, but slowly you understand. Even casually, right now people are looking at the TV, but one or two words might inspire them and protect them. Sri means very attractive. Aagam, great effect. It is said those who spread the message of God in the nooks and they gain all blessings and all good qualities of a "Daata", one who has donated. Those who read also get the benefit. This message has come to us and now we will read from the Kathamaritam.

Master M has written this book. In their first meeting, M did not know about Sri Ramakrishna. M was a school teacher. It was a low paying but respected job. He had troubles in the family because his mother and wife quarreled often.

The spiritual discussion continued in different formal and informal way throughout the trip.



To understand the history of Andaman, it was necessary to visit Ross Island, the then capital of the British Administration. In Andaman, often it is very to stay on time and keep up with the program because every destination needs to be covered by boat and it mostly depends on the captain of the boat (navigator) whether they would be sailing the boat or not. This happened when we all assembled at the jetty to cross the creek from Port Blair to Ross Island. Everything was fixed as per the schedule when suddenly we came to know that the captain is refusing to sail the boat on the plea

that the engine was malfunctioning. It was very frustrating for the organizers to announce to the eagerly awaiting devotees that the plan might have to be cancelled. Some of them were venting their frustrations without being aware of the situation. Suddenly I received a phone call from a navy officer who saw me I was in Andaman in the 90s. He came to meet me at the jetty knowing our difficulties asked his officers to help us. He was a godsend. Finally, we went to Neil Island although it became dark. At the time of returning back from there, our boat suddenly started rolling and pitching because of strong wind and waves. That is very normal in the sea. The devotees started singing Ramakrishna Saranam loudly and the sea became normal. Nothing serious happened.

Our retreat concluded on a hilltop, named Mount Harriet. From the top of that mountain, one can see the vast green foliage going down to embrace the sea. Sitting under a pipul tree we remembered the purpose for which we all came to Andaman that is, human life is precious (*manushatyam*), again having the desire to realize the God is rare (*mumukshutvam*) and finally the guidance of a holy soul to reach the goal (*mahapurusha samasraya*).



We have all the three and we have God in the form of Sri Ramakrishna as our guide.

We all promised to ourselves to keep the desire to realize God burning within ourselves. Bidding goodbye to each other and the beautiful islands we returned back.

Photo album link: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/inX8cYZuz2vOo0a3v1>

Introduction to the Cover Page: Gadadhar Sri Ramakrishna

Br. Panchatapa

Swami Vivekananda, while trying to describe the best of all Divine Incarnations, *Avatara Varishtha*, Sri Ramakrishna, he wrote:

नरदेव देव जय जय नरदेव
अद्वयतत्त्वसमाहितचित्तं प्रोज्ज्वलभक्तिपटावृतवृत्तम्।
कर्मकलेवरमद्भुतचेष्टं यामि गुरुं शरणं भववैद्यम्॥
नरदेव देव जय जय नरदेव

*nara-deva deva jaya jaya nara-deva
advaya-tattva-samāhita-cittam
projjoala-bhakti-ṣaṭāvṛtavṛttam
karma-kalevaram-adbhuta-ceṣṭam
yāmi gurum śaraṇam bhava-vaidyam.
nara-deva deva jaya jaya nara-deva*

Hail, O Lord of Men! Victory unto you! I surrender myself to my Guru the Man-god, the physician for the malady of this Samsara (relative existence), whose mind ever dwelt on the non-dualistic Truth, whose personality was covered by the cloth of Supreme Devotion, who was ever active (for the good of humanity) and whose actions were all superhuman.

Hail, O Lord of Men! Victory unto You!

This verse is excerpted from *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Stotram* composed in 1898, around the same time when *Khandana Bhava Bandhana* and *Om Hrim Ritam* were created. A translation of the hymn is adopted from the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*.

Sri Ramakrishna was not a mere guru to Swamiji, but the dearest treasure of his heart; he entered into Swamiji. Pure joy overpowers our minds when we can contemplate on the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna in the light of Swami Vivekananda. This issue's cover page is an attempt to taste that divine joy.

The story begins at Gadadhar Vishnu temple of Gaya. Let us read that story from the 'Great Master' (*Leela Prasanga*) by Swami Saradananda. "Some time during the winter of 1835, Kshudiram visited Varanasi (Banaras) and Gaya. It was the

beginning of Chaitra (middle of March) when he reached Gaya after paying obeisance to Visvanatha (the Lord of the universe) at Varanasi. He came to Gaya at this time of the year probably because he knew that the spirits of his ancestors would have immense satisfaction if worship was offered at that holy place during spring, in the month of Chaitra. He lived there for about a month, performed all the ceremonies according to the scriptures. ... Having fulfilled to the best of his capacity his obligation to his forefathers, he was now free from all anxiety. When the thought came to him that the divine Lord had made it possible for an unworthy person like him to accomplish all this, his grateful heart overflowed with a feeling of humility and love such as he had never experienced before. Peace and joy were with him all that day and at night also. Scarcely had he fallen asleep when he had a dream He saw himself in the holy temple, in the act of offering worship to his forefathers, at the divine feet of Gadadhar. He even saw his ancestors in luminous celestial bodies, joyfully accepting the *Pindas* and blessing him He could not control his emotion at seeing them after what seemed a very long time. With tears in his eyes, and a heart overflowing, with devotion, he bowed down to them and touched their feet. The very next moment he found that the temple was filled with a divine light as never seen by him before. His forefathers were standing in the temple on both sides in a reverential attitude with their hands folded, worshipping a wonderful divine Being seated happily on a beautiful throne.

He had a luminous body, green like the color of new *Durova grass*. Looking at Kshudiram with benign, affectionate eyes, He beckoned him. Hardly conscious of what he was doing Kshudiram drew near and full of devotion prostrated himself at His feet in worship, and uttered hymns in praise.

Pleased by his worship that divine Being addressed him thus, in a sweet voice, “Kshudiram, your extraordinary devotion has made me very happy; I bless you and I will be born as your son and will receive your loving care.” On hearing these words—strange even for a dream—Kshudiram’s joy knew no bounds. But the very next moment the thought struck him how being so poor, he could possibly feed and give proper shelter to such an exalted Being.

This made him exceedingly sad and in a voice choked with tears, he said, “No, no, Lord, I am not worthy of such good fortune. Is it not enough that Thou hast blessed me by graciously revealing Thyself and wishing to be born as my son? If Thou wert really to be born as my son, what service can a poor man like me render?” Hearing these words full of pathos, that celestial Being seemed to become even more gracious than before, and said, ‘Do not fear, Kshudiram, I will relish whatever you give me to eat. Let my desire be fulfilled.’ Kshudiram had not the heart to say ‘No.’ Conflicting emotions like joy and sorrow assailed him with so much force that he could hardly contain himself, and lost consciousness. This broke his dream.”

Sri Ramakrishna was born on the 2nd day of the waxing moon of spring, within two days of great night of Shiva, *Maha Shiva Ratri* in the year of 1836.

It is interesting to note that after having blessings from Shiva in Kashi, Kshudiram went to Gaya. The play of Shiva and Vishnu-incarnate Sri Ramakrishna can be seen again and again. We shall come back to this point later. Now we shall get back to Kshudiram’s story.

Kshudiram was told that Vishnu Gadadhar would be born as his son. To define the word ‘Vishnu’, one of the Vedanga scholars Yaska provided us with two beautiful definitions. One, he who can enter everywhere and two, *atha yad vishita bhavati, tad vishnur bhavati* – whatever is free from all bondages, is Vishnu! The word Vishnu is

originates from the root ‘vish’. From this very root two words, ‘to enter’ and ‘to pervade’, originate at the same time. That is why that is verily Vishnu who has become everything and is within everything.

Now how can a devotee, who is limited by body-mind identities, can perceive this infinite, limitless and formless One? Even after knowing that ‘I myself am Vishnu’ – the devotee craves for the taste of ‘sugar’, does not want to remain one with sugar. To enjoy the company of the Lord, a devotee needs a form of his beloved .

That is why during the early Vedic age itself, that all-pervading Vishnu, to soothe the hearts of devotees, assumed one the forms of twelve Adityas (Sun gods). In Bhagavad Gita (10/21), God Himself said, ‘Amongst these twelve Adityas I am Vishnu’. In time, this very Vishnu appeared in Gadadhar form with four hand holding conch-disc-mace-lotus.



The conch represents ‘OM’, the disc is the symbol of world or collective mind, the lotus stands for sustenance and liberation. In Krishna Upanishad (23) it is said, *gadā cha kālikā sākshāt sarva shatru-nivārhini* -- the mace is verily the power of *kālikā*, time itself! Meaning, it symbolizes time. None can overcome time, likewise, no one can stand before the mace of Lord Viishnu. Again, in Vishnu puran 91/22/68), *buddhirapāste gadā-rupena mādhave*, the mace in Madhava or Vishnu’s hand, as if, is the embodiment of collective intelligence. The power of Buddhi is the best as using the buddhi, one can control many. According to some, mace is the sign of primordial knowledge. Due to his immense compassion the Lord removes the ignorance from the mind of his devotee through one stroke of His mace.

Who is this Gadadhar? We can think of two answers. First, That Sat-Chit-Ananda beyond all qualities, bereft of all forms, 'all pervading' that 'Vishnu', covering Himself with His power of maya, manifests as 'Gadadhar', a God with all six types of treasures.

The second answer can be given using a historic account. Let us look at the Gadadhar temple in Gaya, where our story began.. A description of the temple was provided by Dr Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, a University of Edinburgh graduate of 1783, Scottish physician who made significant contributions as a geographer, zoologist, and botanist while living in India. He did research on malaria and served as a surgeon in Merchant Navy ships that were traveling from England to Asia and in 1794. He came to Calcutta and joined the Medical Service of the Bengal Presidency and served till 1815.

In 1799, after the defeat of Tipu Sultan and the fall of Mysore, he was asked to survey South India resulting in *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar (1807)*. He also wrote *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal (1819)*. During 1803-1804 he was surgeon to the Governor General of India Lord Wellesley in Calcutta, where he also organized a zoo that was to become the Calcutta Alipore Zoo. In 1804, he was in charge of the Institution for Promoting the Natural History of India founded by Wellesley at Barrackpore.

From 1807 to 1814, under the instructions of the government of Bengal, he made a comprehensive survey of the areas within the jurisdiction of the British East India Company.

He was asked to report on topography, history, antiquities, the condition of the inhabitants, religion, natural productions (particularly fisheries, forests, mines, and quarries), agriculture (covering vegetables, implements, manure, floods, domestic animals, fences, farms, and landed property, fine and common arts, and commerce (exports and imports, weights and measures, and conveyance of goods). Buchanan's survey works

between 1809 and 1813 are one of the most detailed sources for the social and cultural history of Bihar and eastern UP in the early 19th century.

Nishi Sinha, in her book on *Tourism Perspective in Bihar*, gathered Buchanan's description of Vishnupada-Gadadhar temples. Though from the purana *Gaya Mahatmya* we get many mythological stories, in this early 19th century book for the first time we get a historical account. The city of Gaya gained some importance during Buddha's days. In the early Buddhist Literature the river in Gaya is mentioned. However, any mention of the demon Gaya or the special sanctity of the place remained missing. With the revival of Hinduism in Gupta period, Gaya seemed to start regaining importance. The puranas, later parts of Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Smritis are full of references to Gaya as a place of pilgrimage for offering *pindas* to the ancestors. Though at the beginning of 9th century the geographical position of this sacred city with all its monuments and ruins became obvious, yet from all the pilgrims' accounts that are obtained until the 12th century, the relationship between the place and the *pinda* offering is not clear. It may be that the famous myth of Gaya Asura that is portrayed in *Gaya Mahatmya* were compiled around the 12th or 13th century AD. During the period of Muslim rule it was not favorable to the further rise of the sanctity of pilgrimage to Gaya but again in 18th century with the rise of Marathas, Gaya rapidly assumed the importance as it is now today.

Buchanan reported that the town as 'a strange looking place', extremely populous and the Vishnupada temple is considered to be the most sacred shrine in Gaya. Many stories are available that are talking about the close association between the Vishnu temple and the place to perform the final rights for ones ancestors. One of the versions says, in the ancient time there was demon (Asura) called Gaya Asura. He did immense austerity and became so pure that anyone touched him would get free from worldly bondages.

Knowing this Gaya was traveling around and people of those places would come and touch him and was getting free from worldly desires. If all become free and contented, how would creation sustain? The Lord of preservation, Vishnu in consultation with the lords of creation (Brahma) and destruction (Shiva) arranged for Gaya Asura to sacrifice his body.

He did so. But before giving up his body he asked for a boon from Vishnu. He knew that he will not be able to go and touch people anymore, but he asked that whosoever will come and touch him (in the city named after him) and offer homage to their forefathers, will all get freedom. Vishnu agreed. So the faith goes like this, the ancestors get ultimate satisfaction if they are offered food etc in Gaya.

The temple consists of a sanctum, an open pillared hall or *mandapa* in front surrounded by an irregularly shaped open courtyard all around. It contains granite pillars with little decorations on them and Inside the sanctum the object of worship is a footprint mark, larger than human size, believed to be that of Vishnu. All through the construction material is local grey color granite.

There is yet another temple of Vishnu adjoining the above temple on the north side in the compound of Vishnupada Temple. This stone-made temple, as per Buchanan's description, has an image, which is not really a Vaishnava image, rather 'it represents a person with a Linga on his head'. Therefore, it would appear to be really a representation of a Shiva deity. Any further description of this enshrined image is unavailable. This image of Gadadhar is to stand as solemn witness to testify for those who have performed some of the *pinda* ceremonies at Gaya.

In Vedanta this term 'witness' is very significant. The final perceivable consciousness before nameless, formless absolute Brahman is this state of witness. The sincerity of Kshudiram got life to this 'witness' Gadadhar, who is both Shiva and Vishnu in one! The very first photo on this

cover is, therefore, of Vishnu temple in Gaya.

Lord Gadadhar was born in Kamarpukur as 'Ramakrishna'. The *Gayatri mantra* of Sri Ramakrishna is: *OM Rāmakrishnāya vidmahe; Gadādhārāya dheemahi; tanno Vishnu prachodayāt.* May That Vishnu, whom [I] know as Ramakrishna, on whom [I] meditate as Gadadhar, illumine [my mind].

Ramayati iti Rāma, the one who is the cause of all joy, is Rama and *karshati iti Krishna*, the one who attracts is Krishna. In Sri Ramakrishna, the Light of Lights in our heart, both essences are manifested fully. Where ever he is, may it be Kamarpukur or Dakshineswar or Calcutta, there is a mart of joy. Due to his attraction only, all kinds of devotees – distressed, seekers of wealth, seekers of Knowledge and the wise ones, are coming to him.

Sri Ramakrishna, *paramahansa*, used to remain in the mood of a five year old child. His photographs of his later age are available. How would he look as a five-year-old? Swami Tadatmananda imagined that form. The center drawing, Sri Ramakrishna as a boy, is adopted from Swami Tadatmananda's work. The Swami was born in 1932, joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1959 at the Hollywood center and served Trabuco Monastery until his last breath in 2008. His artistic talent brought him a scholarship to study the Colorado Springs School of Fine Arts in 1950. and later to the fine art school in Los Angeles. He was an initiated disciple of Swami Prabhavananda, then the head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. Swami Tadatmananda's artwork -- paintings, drawings and sculpture are treasured and displayed in many locations.

The Child's mood of Sri Ramakrishna was adored by his close ones, who, too, came with him with their own special spiritual signs. For example, Swami Vivekananda is considered as the Shiva-incarnation. Shiva is the Master of Yogis and always in *samādhi*. According to Shaiva tantra, Shiva is none but that indivisible *Sat-Chit-Ananda*.

Years later in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna one of his incredible visions was recorded. 'One day in samādhi I saw that my mind, going up by a luminous path, went beyond the gross world studded with the sun, moon, and stars; it entered first into the subtle world of ideas. The more it ascended to higher and higher strata of that realm, the more did I see beautiful ideal forms of gods and goddesses existing on both sides of the path.

The more it ascended to higher and higher strata of that realm, the more did I see beautiful ideal forms of gods and goddesses existing on both sides of the path. It came gradually to the end of that region. I saw that a fence made of the indivisible. Leaping over that fence, the mind entered by degrees the realm of the indivisible. No person or thing having a form existed there. As if afraid to enter there, even the *devas* and *devis* possessing heavenly bodies exercised their authority over realms far below. But the very next moment I saw seven Rishis having bodies consisting of divine light only, seated there in samādhi. I felt that in virtue and knowledge, love and renunciation, they had excelled the gods and goddesses, not to speak of human beings. Astonished, I was pondering over their greatness when I saw before me that a part of the homogeneous mass of Light in the abode of the indivisible, devoid of the slightest tinge of difference, became solidified and converted into the form of a divine Child. Coming to one of those Sages, and throwing its soft delicate arms around his neck, It embraced him, and then calling him with a voice sweeter than a music of a *vina*, made great efforts to wake him from samādhi. The sage did wake up, and with half-shut eyes beheld the Child. I, seeing his bright expression full of delight, thought that the Child must be the treasure of his heart – that their familiarity was of eternity. The extraordinary divine Child then expressed great joy and said to the sage, "I am going; you must come with me." The sage did not reply, but his loving eyes expressed his assent.

Looking on the Child with eyes of love for some time, he entered again into samādhi. I was astonished to see that a part of the mind and body of that Rishi, converted into the form of a bright light, came down to earth along the luminous path. Hardly had I seen Narendra when I knew that he was that Rishi.'

This Child is none but Sri Ramakrishna himself and that king of the sages is Swami Vivekananda. They used to meet mainly in Dakshineshwar which was the place of spiritual practices too.

Gaya, where Lord Vishnu informed Kshudiram about the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, is located in about 10 miles of Bodh Gaya where over 2500 years ago, the crown prince of Kapilavastu Siddhartha Gautama attained the highest Knowledge, the state of wisdom or Bodhi. The pipal tree, under which he sat in meditation, is now known as Bodhi tree. Almost 2500 years later Sri Ramakrishna again set his seat of austerity, with the same resolution, *Skin, sinew and bone may dry up as they will, my flesh and blood may dry in my body, but without attaining complete enlightenment I will not leave this seat.* It was in Dakshineshwar. It was not single pipal tree but grove with five trees and one of those was, of course, pipal. The trees, under which Sri Ramakrishna had various Divine visions, is known as Panchavati. Photos of both these greens of spiritual enlightenment are put on the cover page to remember that meditation, which led to Knowledge.

Rivers flow by both of these places – Gaya/Bodh Gaya and Dakshineshwar. River often symbolizes the continuous flow of devotion. The Falgu river that flows by Gaya has a very weak stream. Mostly covered by sands, as if the sand-egos of devotees are covering their love for their chosen ideal. The same river by Bodh Gaya is called as Niranjana or Leelājana. Both the names are very significant. Niranjana means stainless. The absolute Knowledge is free of all blemishes. It is Eternal. And, the One upon whom this Eternity stands, on That only this eminent gets manifested.

This immanent, in Sanskrit, is called 'Leelā'! As the flow of Falgu is carrying the messages of both devotion and Knowledge, so is the Ganges, which flows by Dakshineswar. Puranas say that the Ganges is originated from the feet of Vishnu and it flows touching the matted hairs of Shiva.

Scriptures say, the Shiva-incarnations set the path of Knowledge while Vishnu-incarnations are the embodiment of love and devotion.

In Sri Ramakrishna both characteristics got blended perfectly. As we see in Swami Vivekananda's hymn to Sri Ramakrishna, *advaya-tattwa-samāhita-chitta* and at the same time *projjala-bhakti-paṭāvṛtavṛttam*.

Though through these pictures we attempted to touch the spiritual journeys of Buddha-Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, yet it is not merely their stories — it the story of each of us, who, as Swami Vivekananda said is 'potentially divine'. In each of us there is love for God or Self, each of us has the thirst for Knowledge and crave to dive deep inside to attain That, though most of the times we name these craving or thirst for the higher differently.

To help us, the Lord of the universe comes as '*kārya manush*'. This wonderful adjective is used in 'Sri Bhagavatam' to describe Lord Krishna. In three ways the word is used:

In the Sri Bhagavatam, Shukadeva has described Bhagavan Sri Krishna as '*karya-manush*', man of action [10-16-60]. This profound word Swami Gitananda, in his book 'Bhagavat Katha', has explained in three ways:

- a) Lord of the universe incarnates in human form to work for the protection of the virtuous and to destroy the vices. That is why he is the man of action or work, '*kārya-mānush*'.
- b) Being the God Himself, He plays as an ordinary man, that is why He is called man of play or '*kārya mānush*'.
- c) Seeing His playful actions, ordinary human beings become real 'man' through the

attainment of love and devotion. That is why He is '*kārya mānush*'.

Throughout his life Sri Ramakrishna worked. He saw it as the Divine Mother's work - to preach mankind. His journey this time started from Gadadhar Vishnu Temple. His *sādhana* was to understand the Religion of Man. He offered the results of all his *sādhana* at the feet of Mother Sarada Devi, whom later he said, 'People round about live like worms in darkness. You should look after them.' To Sri Ramakrishna 'work is meant to realize the Lord'. He appreciated Vidyasagar for his selfless work. How to do selfless work? Sri Ramakrishna answered this eternal question in the Gospel:

"A Particular Bhakta - Should we give up all work so long as we do not realize God?

Sri Ramakrishna - No, why will you give up work? You will have to do all this: Meditation upon the Lord, chanting His names and glories, and undertaking day to day rituals.

The Brahma Bhakta - And what about the worldly work? About worldly affairs?

Sri Ramakrishna - Yes, you will attend that too, as much as is necessary to run the household. But you must cry in a lonely corner and pray to God so that you do all these works in a *nishkama* manner (selflessly). And you will say, 'O Lord, please lessen my worldly work, because O Lord, I see that when engrossed too much in work, I forget You. I think in my mind that I am doing the work in a *nishkama* way but it turns out to be *sakama* (with a selfish motive.)"

This very Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is the *karma kalevara*, the saga of his endeavors. With so much enthusiasm he engrossed people in meditation and prayers, devotional singing and dancing and spiritual talk. Almost everyday since morning through evening he traveled from Dakshineswar all the way to Kolkata to meet Brahma devotees, to encourage Vaishnava devotees, to support the worshippers of the Divine Mother.

On his way hugged a Muslim lover of God, watched the prayers of Christians, listened to the beliefs of the Sikhs. His eternal support is for all, whoever is sincere to realize God. At the end of his play in Cossipore garden house three important incidents took place, which at least partially can explain why Swamiji addressed Sri Ramakrishna as the embodiment of actions/works, *karma kalevara*. Vivekananda for wanting to remain immersed in samādhi for three or four days at a stretch, breaking it only for food.

Sri Ramakrishna actually scolded him “Shame on you! You are asking for such an insignificant thing. I thought that you would be like a big banyan tree, and that thousands of people would rest in your shade. But now I see that you are seeking your own liberation.” However, after this incidence Swamiji attained the state of samādhi he was longing for. When he returned to normal consciousness he came to the Master, who told him: “Now the Divine Mother has shown you all. But this realization of yours shall be locked up for the present, and the key will remain with me. When you have finished doing Mother’s work, this treasure will again be yours.”

Swami Tapasyananda’s book *Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother* mentioned about the second incident. “In his last days at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna said to her very feelingly, ‘Well, won’t you do anything? Am I to do all?’ To this the Holy Mother replied, ‘I am a woman. What can I do?’ But the Master said, ‘No, no. You have much to do.’

In conclusion, let us remember a heart-touching account is available from Bhavatarini, a daughter of one of Sri Ramakrishna’s lay devotees used to come to Dakshineswar with her father. She got married to one of the lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna called Upen. Throughout her life she was connected with Sri Ramakrishna and his *Sangha*. Upen and Bhavatarini had a big publishing house known as ‘Basumati Press’ and later generation used to address Bhavatarini as

‘Basumati Ma’. Gayatri Devi, a disciple of Swami Paramananda met Bhavatarini and recorded her experiences with Sri Ramakrishna in the book ‘Devine Joy at Play’.

Sri Ramakrishna blessed Bhavatarini with *mantra*. Later period of her life she felt, “‘Has he given grace only to me? No! for uplifting all human beings he has taken birth. He is a wishing tree that fulfills. Did you know this, my boy? Even with such a big sore in his throat, not even a little of his power worn away? His body dried up like a stick. It was difficult for him to turn from one side to the other. Even in this dreadful state one day this man raised himself up from the bed and alone went down the staircase step by step calling, ‘Let humanity be realized Chaitanya.’

My boy! Realize this Truth! Not to Naren, not to Rakhal, not to Tarak, not to Yogin, not just to of these boys who were doing great service to the Guru. He was not saying this to any particular person. He was saying, ‘Let humanity be realized Chaitanya.’ The humanity that was of that time; the humanity that is of this time. And furthermore, these words will be heard by all.”

Even now this service is still going on.

Swamiji proclaimed, ‘My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.’ in order to do that ‘It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body—to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God.’ He formed Belur Math that is standing today as the representative of Sri Ramakrishna ideology. The eternal journey that was started from Gadadhar Vishnu Temple where work and worship are going on side by side, it touched the points where the sādhanawork was manifested as worship and finally completed its circle at Belur Math, where work is one with worship.

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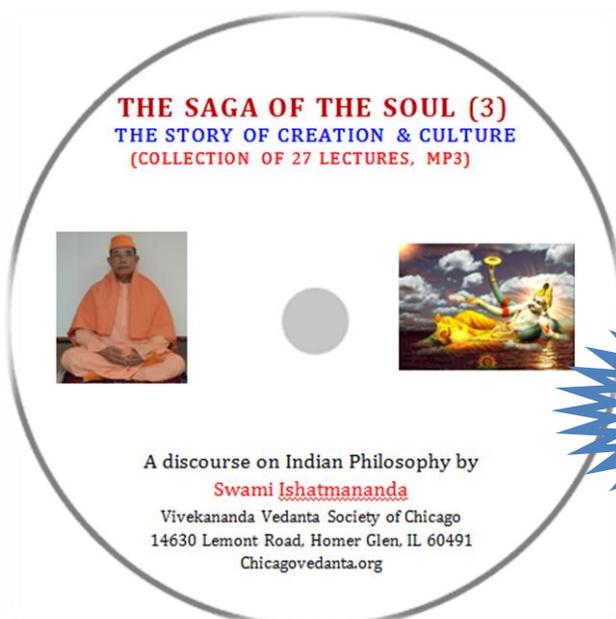
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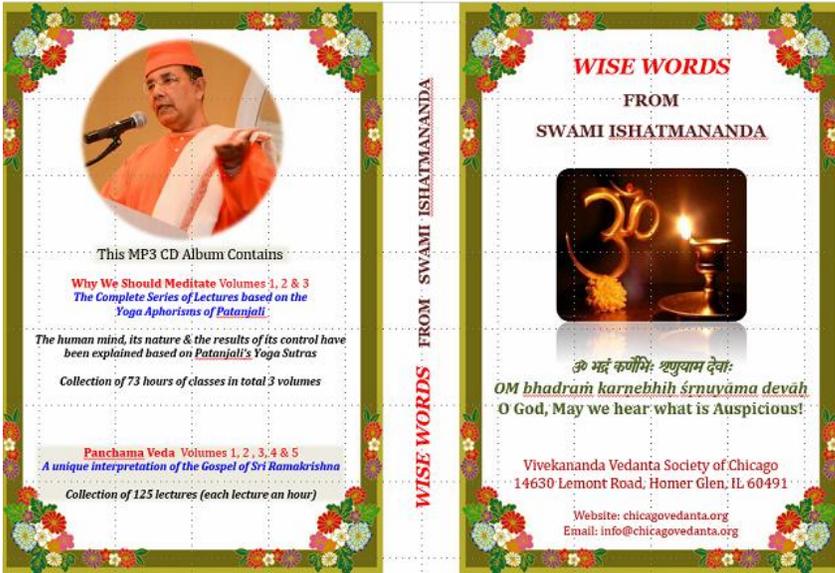
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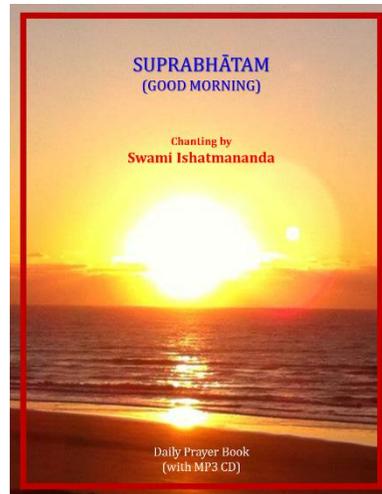
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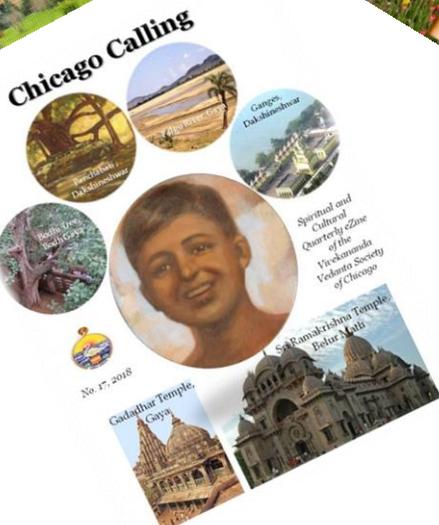
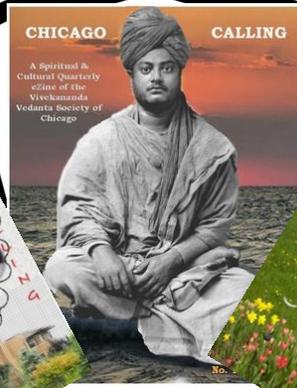
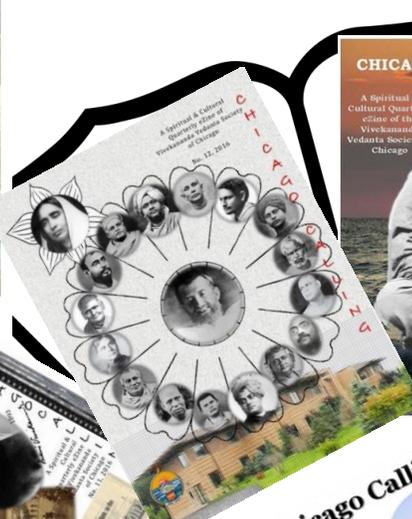
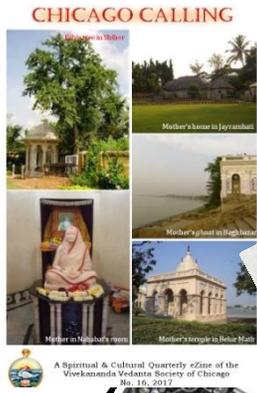
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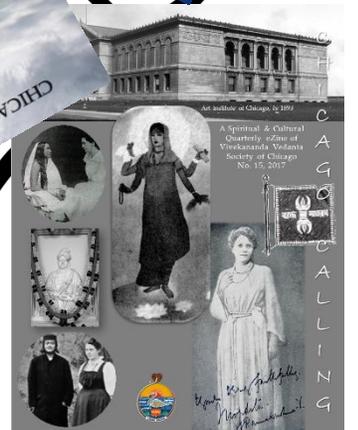
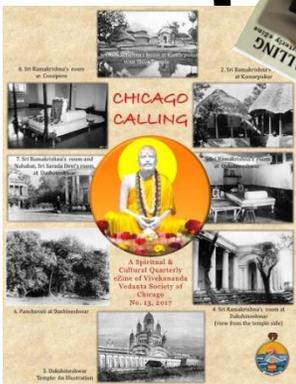
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