



1894



1900



1910



CHICAGO CALLING



1925



1930



1930



1933



1938



1938



1939



1953



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1968



2000



2006



2016

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SHABDA BRAHMA

On the morning of Sept 11, 1893, the World's Parliament of Religions opened in the great Hall of Columbus at the Art Institute on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, U.S.A. During the first day's afternoon session, after four other delegates had read their prepared speeches, Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu Monk representing India, stood up, and his big bright eyes, crimson robe, and yellow turban drew the attention of the audience. Silently they waited to listen to him.

The moment the deep and charming voice of Swami Vivekananda addressed the gathering—representing the best of American culture— as “Sisters and Brothers of America”, the entire audience of 7000 people broke into prolonged applause and greeted him with unprecedented enthusiasm.

This incident has been recorded by both Dr. Barrows and Mr. Houghton. They wrote, “When Mr. Vivekananda addressed the audience as ‘Sisters and Brothers of America’, there arose an applause for several minutes”.

Another reference to this incident comes from Mrs. S. K. Blodgett, who later became Swamiji's hostess in Los Angeles, “I was at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893”. She remembered. “When the young man got up and said, ‘Sisters and Brothers of America’, seven thousand people rose to their feet as a tribute to something they knew not what.”

This statement of Mrs. Blodgett, “...something they knew not what” is truly important and very interesting.

The first five words of Swami Vivekananda's Sept. 11th address, which had an electrifying effect on the huge audience, were only normal English words. The English speaking audience very well knew their meaning. Even then why

did 7000 people spring to their feet and break into prolonged applause !!

The only answer to this question can be that the great Yogi, Swami Vivekananda, through those Five English Words of address, applied *Shabda-Brahma*.

In Hinduism Shabda-Brahma or "Brahma as sound" is very important. It is pronounced A-U-M or OM. Shabda-Brahma is also known as Pranava. It is the universally accepted symbol of Hinduism.

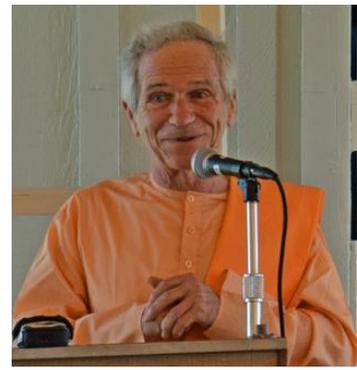
The Vedas, the main Scripture of the Hindus, give the Pranava or Shabda-Brahma great importance. The Katha Upanishad declares that OM is Supreme Consciousness, Para-Brahma itself. (OM Iti Brahma). The Mundaka Upanishad teaches us to use OM to realize the supreme Brahma. According to the Yoga-Sutras of Patanjali, OM is the symbol of God.

Brahma is One and Without a Second (ekam eva advitiam). The realization of Brahma removes all duality, and the realized soul feels great joy and bliss. Swami Vivekananda, with his spiritual power, gave a touch of Brahma to those 7000 people.

Swami Vivekananda has given a very simple but interesting and instructive explanation of the three letters comprising OM, thereby bringing out the uniqueness of this great symbol; “The first letter A is the root sound, the key, pronounced without touching any part of the tongue or the palate; M represents the last sound in the series, being produced by closed lips; and the U rolls from the very root to the end of the sounding-board of the mouth. Thus, OM represents the whole phenomenon of sound-producing. As such it must be the natural symbol, the matrix of all the various sounds. It denotes the whole range and possibility of all the words that can be made.”

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

SWAMI VARADANANDA
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago



This article is based on the lecture delivered at 125th Year Celebration of Chicago Addresses in the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Center, New York

This year is the 125th anniversary of the Parliament of Religions and Swami Vivekananda's historic speech. The Parliament was one of the most important events in the history of religion. Scholars have called it a watershed event. Before the Parliament, religions were one thing. After the Parliament, they were something different. Before the Parliament, the religions were walled off and separate from each other. After the Parliament, they began to talk to each other and seek a common ground for harmony. The whole interfaith movement started at the Parliament.

As you all know, the most memorable event of the Parliament was Swami Vivekananda's speech. There were hundreds of speeches given during the Parliament, but his is probably the only one that is remembered today. Every schoolchild in India learns about Swami Vivekananda's appearance at the Parliament. Just before Pranab Mukherjee became the President of India, he installed a plaque, commemorating Swamiji's speech, at the Art Institute of Chicago. The city of Chicago named the section of Michigan Ave., which goes by the Art Institute, "Swami Vivekananda Way."

The Art Institute, itself, installed the words of his speech in LED lights on the risers of the main stairway. Normally, the Art Institute only hosts temporary exhibits for three months, but this exhibit was so popular that they kept it for over two years. It was the longest they had ever hosted a temporary exhibit, and they only took it down because the led lights started to burn out.

Just this year the Governor of Illinois named September 11, "Swami Vivekananda Day". The opening day of the Parliament of Religions was

September 11, 1893, exactly 108 years before the destruction of the World Trade Centers. Usually, Americans think of September 11 in terms of 9/11. However, it is much more appropriate to commemorate that date with Swami Vivekananda's clarion call for harmony among religions, rather than one of the worst examples of interfaith conflict.

There was a reason why Swami Vivekananda's speech made such an impact. I remember that one of the first things Swami Bhashyananda said to me when I came to Chicago was, "Some people say that Swami Vivekananda was a great social reformer, but he wasn't a social reformer; he was a sage."

There was a devotee, named Mrs. Montgomery, who had attended some of Swami Vivekananda's lectures. She lived right here in New York. Once, Swami Bhashyananda visited her apartment, and he said that every spare inch had a picture of Swami Vivekananda. A tape recording was made of her reminiscences of those talks. She said that when Swami Vivekananda spoke, she could see this vast ocean of light behind him and that it just streamed through him while he spoke.

When Swami Vivekananda said, "Sisters and Brothers of America," it wasn't the words that did anything; it was this tremendous inflow of spiritual power that came with the words. Swami Vivekananda once said, "I am a voice without a form." He was just the front, the outlet for spiritual power.

In Victorian times houses had downspouts shaped like gargoyles to remove water from the roofs.

Sri Ramakrishna said that when you see all the water coming out of the mouth of the gargoyle, you think that the water is coming from the gargoyle. But the water has actually come from the roof and is just flowing through the mouth of the gargoyle. When we see a man who exhibits great spiritual power, we think that the power is coming from the man, but it is actually coming from God and just flowing through the man.

When you look at Swamiji's life, it seems that wherever he focused his attention, the world changed and went in a new direction. He was friends with Nikola Tesla, the inventor of alternating current. Alternating current is the electricity that we use in our homes today. It is said that he asked Nikolas Tesla whether science could see the underlying unity of the universe. Nikolas Tesla said, "No." At that time, science only had the Newtonian physics, which saw the world as the interaction of separate objects, which bumped into each other. But, just ten years later, in 1905, Einstein published the Theory of General Relativity, which started science looking at the universe in a different way. Now, we see that science not only sees the unity of things, but they are seeing the underlying consciousness and are coming out with ideas that are almost pure Vedanta.

Swamiji met a rich merchant named Tata and told him, "What India needs is industry." This was the beginning of Tata Industries. He met John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest men in America, and told him that he was just the caretaker of the money, and John D. Rockefeller became one of the greatest philanthropists in America.

In so many ways, known and unknown, Swamiji changed the world. When Swamiji said, "Sisters and Brothers of America," he gave the spiritual push to the interfaith movement, and because the push came from God, it is bound to bear fruit. Both Swami Ranganathananda and Swami Prabhavananda have said that because of Swami Vivekananda a great wave of spirituality is

going to come into the world in the not too distant future.

But, first comes resistance. It is significant that the opening day of the Parliament of Religions was September 11, 1893 — exactly 108 years before 9/11. Swami Saradananda has said that every new movement goes through three stages—resistance, acceptance, and laziness. When the Christians were being fed to the lions, you had very sincere Christians. Later on, when it became acceptable, that intense fervor and commitment tended to wane.

Right now we are seeing the spread of the interfaith movement, but we are also seeing the reactions to it. There are many, many interfaith groups throughout the world. One of the most important is the Parliament of Religions, itself. Beginning with the centenary celebration in 1993, the Parliament of Religions has been carrying on the tradition of the first parliament by holding regular parliaments every four years or so. They have held parliaments in Chicago; Cape Town, South Africa; Barcelona, Spain; Melbourne, Australia; and most recently in Salt Lake City. Over 10,000 people attended the parliament in Salt Lake City. The next parliament is going to be held in Toronto, November 1 to 7. If anyone is interested, they can get more information at the Parliament's web site, parliamentofreligions.org.

Although the Interfaith movement is growing, and more and more people are attracted to the idea of interfaith harmony, there has also been resistance. Diana Eck is head of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. It is studying how America has become a pluralistic society. In 1893 the Parliament had to bring representatives of the non-Abrahamic religions from other countries, like India and Japan. In 1993 we found that every single religion of the world had a community right in Chicago. In her study, Diana Eck has noticed that every religion is splitting into a liberal branch that welcomes interfaith dialog and a fundamentalist branch that rejects it.

When you see all the terrible things that are going on in the world, especially the terrible things that are going on in the name of religion, you might ask, "Well, where is all this interfaith harmony?" What's going on now is actually part of the process. A wave has to go down before it can go up. Once, somebody asked Swami Nisreyasananda, "If we are going into the Satya Yuga, the Golden Age, why are so many bad things happening in the world." He said that it is like a spring. A spring gets its power because you press down on it. In the same way, all the terrible things that are happening in the world today are pressing down on the soul of man, until finally deep down people say, "Enough!" Then they are ready for change.

Even though the Interfaith Movement doesn't seem evident, the seed has been planted, and the plant is growing. Once people have seen the extremes to which fundamentalism takes them, the plant will blossom into a new age in which religion is no longer a source of conflict and bloodshed. At the end of his speech at the Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda said, "I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal."

At the Parliament, Swamiji not only gave a push to the Interfaith Movement, but he also introduced Hinduism into America. Before the Parliament, there was one group in New England, known as the Transcendentalists—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, and others, who were familiar with the Hindu scriptures.

To give you an idea of how spiritual truth works—Henry David Thoreau was inspired by the doctrine of Ahimsa in the Hindu scriptures and wrote an essay called, "On Civil Disobedience". It said that if you did not agree with what the government was doing, you didn't have to resort

to violence or bloodshed. You simply refused to cooperate with it. A young Indian lawyer, who was in jail in South Africa for protesting Apartheid, read that essay and took the idea of non-violent non-cooperation to India. Of course, that lawyer was Mahatma Gandhi, and peaceful non-cooperation became the foundation of the Indian Freedom Movement. Later, Martin Luther King was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and brought the idea to the American Civil Rights Movement. In that way, the ideal of non-violence travelled from India to America, then back to India, then back to America again.

However, Swami Vivekananda was the first monk to come from India and speak on Hinduism here. At the time of the Parliament, Swami Vivekananda and his fellow Indian delegates were practically the only Hindus in America. Now, every major city has at least one Hindu temple and Hindu beliefs have become a part of American culture. Practically every American knows the terms karma, reincarnation, guru, etc.

Today millions of Americans are practicing yoga and meditation. When I was growing up nobody practiced meditation. Nobody even jogged. Those who did were called "Health Nuts." Some of the early Vedantists were told that they needed to see a psychiatrist because they wanted to sit in a corner and meditate. The common complaint was, "Why aren't you out doing something?"

Swami Vivekananda started a dialogue between the East and the West that has continued to this day. He wanted to bring the spiritual treasures of India to the West and the scientific achievements of the West to India. It has been said that India had a beautiful jewel, her religion, but it was lying in the mud. The West had a beautiful case, her technological advancement, but it was empty inside. Swami Vivekananda wanted to bring the two together.

We all know what a great impact he had on America, but he had, perhaps, a greater impact on India itself.

For two hundred years India had been under British rule. The British brought their locomotives and advanced technology to India, and the Indians were made to feel that their religion and culture were backward and inferior to the West. It was only when Swami Vivekananda spoke of Hinduism in the West and the West applauded with great enthusiasm that the Indians realized what a wonderful thing they had. It gave them back their self-respect and self-confidence. All the later leaders of the Indian Freedom Movement pointed to Swami Vivekananda as one of their earliest inspirations.

Along with Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda brought spirituality to America. In America there were many religious people—people who were devoted to God and tried to serve Him—but there was very little understanding of the inner aspect of religion. People believed in God and were taught that when they died, they would go to heaven, but few people understood that God could be experienced now in this life. People believed that they had a soul, but nobody knew what a soul was.

In the early days of Christianity there was a very high level of spirituality, but after the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, which was presided over by the Emperor Constantine, the focus shifted from religion as an individual quest for God to religion as a teaching authority. Spirituality was replaced by dogma, and the few who went beyond the mainstream teachings of the church were viewed with suspicion and even persecuted.

The few mystics who did develop either became saints or were burned at the stake. And, it was pretty iffy which way it went. Nobody understood anything about mystical experiences, which went beyond the ordinary human experiences. St. John of the Cross was tortured by the Inquisition. Meister Eckhart was also interrogated by the Inquisition. When St. Teresa of Avila went into samadhi for the first time, they tried to bury her. Even being a saint wasn't that

easy. When St. John of the Cross died, somebody bit off his big toe to keep as a relic.

In 1893, practically the only spiritual movement in America was known as Spiritualism. In Spiritualism, people held seances and tried to contact the departed souls of those who had died. This was an important movement at the time. People were taught in church that when you died, your soul continued to exist and went on to another realm. People believed by faith, but nobody actually knew. When a person died, they just left this world and were never heard from again. It was called "going beyond the veil." And, nobody knew what was beyond the veil.

When it was found that you could make contact with those who had gone beyond the veil and find out that they still existed and learn about their life there, it was a great revelation. Swami Vivekananda has said that even the person who has seen a ghost is better than a theologian, because at least the person who has seen a ghost has experienced something.

While he was in America, Swami Abhedananda did a study of Spiritualism and wrote a book, called "Life Beyond Death." He examined Spiritualism in the light of the teachings of Vedanta and even attended a few seances. He found that some of them were fake. One wife complained, "My husband doesn't give me any respect, and I am the one who makes the ghosts." But, he found that some of them were genuine. However, he felt that they were of not much spiritual value. The souls that were contacted were pretty much the same as they had been on earth. They may have taken one step inside, but they really didn't know much more than we do.

We have a wonderful center in St. Petersburg, Florida, with Swami Ishtananda and a core group of long-time devotees. Before St. Petersburg became an official center of the Ramakrishna Order, a group was formed by a man named, Rev. Pantheon. He was a disciple of Swami Nikhilananda.

He had been a writer for a very popular radio show, called "The Shadow". It was sort of a mystical detective show. "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of man? The Shadow knows."

One day he was going to enter a taxi cab, when he saw a disembodied spirit sitting in the back seat. I imagine he sat in the front seat. After that he began spontaneously seeing disembodied beings wherever he went. Swami Vivekananda has said that it is possible that we are surrounded all the time by other beings, but we are not aware of them because they are at a higher level of vibration. When Mr. Pantheon began having these experiences, he became a minister in the Spiritual Frontiers Church, which specializes in these things.

He moved to St. Petersburg and began to conduct seances there. But, after some time, he gave it up and went back to Vedanta. Like Swami Abhedananda, he realized that it was of little spiritual value, because these departed spirits didn't know much more than we did.

Spirituality is the basis of harmony among religions. There are two aspects of religion. There is the church as an organization. Each one has its own particular teachings, rituals, practices and scriptures. These are the secondary elements of

religion. At that level all the religions are different. At that level religion tends to create division—an Us And Them mentality. We have the truth, they don't. But, at the core of each religion is the reality of God and spirit, and the primary goal of religion is to experience God directly. God is God, and whether you call him God or Brahmin or Allah, it is the same God. At the secondary level, all the religions are different, but at the spiritual level, it is the same reality that is experienced and there is no argument with anyone. As Sri Ramakrishna said, "All jackals howl alike."

In his opening speech at the Parliament, Swami Vivekananda quoted a verse from the "Siva Mahimnah Stotram", "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee." When people view religion as man's journey to God rather than the secondary elements of religions as organizations, then they can understand that all the religions are just different roads leading to the same destination. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, "As many faiths, so many paths."



This unique photo frame is made out of pens and whole black peppers by a young artist of India.

This is my attempt, my mission in life, to show that the Vedantic schools are not contradictory, that they all necessitate each other, all fulfil each other, and one, as it were, is the stepping-stone to the other, until the goal, the Advaita, the Tat Tvam Asi, is reached.

-- Swami Vivekananda

THE ROYAL ROAD: THE IMPACT OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IN PRESENT DAY AMERICA

SWAMI PRASANNATMANANDA
Vedanta Society of Berkeley



Introduction

“I am a voice without form,” Swami Vivekananda once said, yet in 1893 when first he set foot on American soil, he was very much a man of form, a glorious embodiment of the Eternal Wisdom, the Song of the Seers.

In the early 1800's, as German and English translations of the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita became available in the United States, an underlying current of Vedic thought began to course through rural New England. Broad declarations of the immanence of God in nature and the divinity of man were expounded in the Transcendental writings of Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau

“We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles,” Emerson wrote in 1841. “Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related, the eternal ONE.”

Thoreau was more explicit regarding his inspiration and debt, “In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonic philosophy of the Bhagavat Geeta [sic]...in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial.”

These ideas and the Transcendental Movement of which they were a part, waned after the 1860's and the tumult of the Civil War, but the undercurrent never disappeared. It remained latent, poised, waiting for expression.

That is why on September 11th, 1893, when Swami Vivekananda made his opening remarks at the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions, seven

thousand people rose to their feet in thunderous applause – for the current, the vibration, had been silently humming – and as in the days when Sri Ramakrishna imparted enlightenment to his disciples by a mere touch, so too did Swami Vivekananda electrify the consciousness of America that day.

“When the sun rises we instantly become aware of its rising; and when a teacher of men comes to help us, the soul will instantly know that it has found the truth.”

During the next four years, as Swami Vivekananda traveled throughout the eastern and central United States, lecturing to hundreds and teaching to small groups, he laid the beams and lashed the crossbars of his American spiritual house. But it was with his establishment of the New York and San Francisco Vedanta Societies, in 1894 and 1900, that he made his lasting mark. With the inauguration of these two centers, Swami Vivekananda blazed a golden path across America, east to west and west to east, the Royal Road of Vedanta, the Ancient Truth of India, in which millions of Americans traverse to this day.

Know For Yourself That You Are Spirit

One of the first examples of Swami Vivekananda's present day impact can be found in the announcement of an upcoming 2013 Yoga Journal Conference in San Francisco. Between the conference's west coast location and American yoga's east coast roots, lies the broad imprint of Swamiji. It was in 1894 that he initially met famed Harvard psychologist William James.

Prof. James was enthralled with Swamiji, describing him as "...the paragon of Vedantist missionaries," and he referenced Vivekananda's principles of Raja Yoga in his 1902 seminal work, *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

"All the different steps in yoga are intended to bring us scientifically to the superconscious state or Samadhi...Then the Truth shines in its full effulgence, and we know ourselves – for Samadhi lies potential in us all - for what we truly are, free, immortal and omnipotent..."

In James's text the teachings of Swami Vivekananda were given credence and legitimacy by one of America's intellectual elites. Today, with the cornerstone of Swamiji's teachings beneath it, the science of Yoga permeates American society in every shape and form. From the promise of inner transformation to a lithe and toned body, the influence of Swami Vivekananda is undeniably there.

Another enduring, but lesser known expression of Swami Vivekananda's teachings, can be found in the classic children's tale, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. In 1893, thirty-seven year old Theosophy Society member, L. Frank Baum, attended the Parliament of Religions to hear Swami Vivekananda speak. It is suggested in Evan Schwartz's book, *Finding Oz*, that Baum was so inspired by Swami Vivekananda's lectures that he experienced a spiritual awakening and embraced Swamiji's exhortation to realize the truth of oneself.

"Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls' immortal, spirits free..."

The result of Baum's effort was his authorship of America's iconic tale of the search for the Self; a story incorporating Vivekananda's concept of the four Yogas, the four paths to center place: Knowledge, Love, Action and Insight. Today, as countless children read this beloved story, knowingly or not, they catch the echo of Swami Vivekananda's essence, mind and speech. "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest

this divinity within...Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control or philosophy – by one or more all of these – and be free."

Swami Vivekananda's call for Self Realization and his message of man's limitless, inherent potential are also seen in the modern Transpersonal Psychology movement. It is William James, again, who figures in this story, as it is said that he was the first to use the term "transpersonal" in a 1905 lecture. By definition, Transpersonal Psychology is a school that "studies the transcendent or spiritual aspects of human experience." This field of psychology has found no greater support than at California's Esalen Institute, an institute founded, in part, through the influence of Vedanta devotees Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard. Both were long time students of Swami Prabhavananda in Southern California and each helped nurture the seed of Esalen in the early 1960's.

Huxley's "...call for an institution that could teach the "nonverbal humanities" and the development of the "human potentialities" functioned as the working mission statement of early Esalen. Indeed, the very first Esalen brochures actually bore the Huxley-inspired title, "the human potentiality.""

Today, the Esalen Center for Theory and Research is at the forefront of consciousness and human potential studies. Did Swamiji not declare, "...even after death I shall work for the good of the world."

In the east, at the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York, we find another example of Vivekananda's present day impact. For here we encounter the abiding spirit of Swami Nikhilananda and one of his most famous disciples, Joseph Campbell. Author, scholar and comparative mythologist, Campbell could be likened to a peacock fan of a thousand eyes, which, when opened, saw everything. His tremendous impact on American culture, and thus by association, the impact of his teacher's teachers, resounds today.

Campbell deftly wove a pattern called 'the universality of world myth' from a fiber of Swamiji's thread and with this his works continue to inspire numerous reflections of Vedanta. Within the sphere of American film, Campbell's book, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, influenced not only George Lucas, director of the Star Wars trilogy, but more recently, Chris Vogler, screenwriter for Disney's, *The Lion King*. According to Vogler, Campbell's book provided key elements for his story line.

As we listen to the words of Mufasa, the lion ghost to his son: "You have forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me. Look inside yourself, Simba. You are more than what you have become..." we hear the message of Swami Vivekananda again. "Arise, awake and dream no more. Rouse yourself and manifest the divinity within."

Unity Of Existence

Swami Vivekananda stated over a century ago: "This mind is part of the Universal mind. Each mind is connected with every other mind. And each mind, wherever it is located, is in actual communication with the whole world."

Today Swamiji would be pleased to see that science is finally catching up with this ancient Vedic truth. He would laud the 1920 words of Stanley Eddington: "All through the physical world runs that unknown content, which surely must be the stuff of our consciousness," and praise the 1927 findings of physicist J. S. Bell: "At a deep and fundamental level, the separate parts of the universe are connected in an intimate and immediate way." Each statement would undoubtedly bring Swami Vivekananda deep satisfaction, but the exciting research of today might bring him joyous tears.

Almost every year in contemporary America one sees announcements for far ranging physics symposiums, such as the one held in 2011 at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, entitled,

"Science, Vedanta and Foundation of Physics." Or one reads about an organization such as Science and Non Duality (SAND) which brings together scientists, mystics and teachers for "an exploration of the new paradigm emerging in spirituality that is grounded in cutting-edge science." One may also follow the work of quantum physicist John Hagelin or read *The Self Aware Universe* by Amit Goswami, who affirms that "consciousness, not matter, is the ground of all existence." These are but a few examples in the burgeoning field of science and religion studies, which support and ripen the century old teachings of Swamiji.

It is the Same Light Coming Through Different Colors

"The future religions of the world have to become universal and wide," Swami Vivekananda said.

Thus it is fitting that Diana Eck, director of Harvard University's Pluralism Project, an organization dedicated to helping Americans work with the realities of religious diversity, is a woman steeped in the knowledge of the Vedas and Upanishads. Having lived and traveled extensively in India, Eck is well suited to understand and communicate Swami Vivekananda's highest principles of religious harmony in our present day.

"People of many religious traditions bear witness to the truth, the transcendence..." she states in her autobiographical work, *Encountering God*. "To recognize this plurality of religious claims...does not constitute a betrayal of one's own faith."

Across America Swami Vivekananda's teachings on universal religious harmony are being actualized in myriad ways. From the pledge of The Unity and Diversity World Council: "To respect the teachings of the prophets and sages of all times and cultures," to the words of Women of Spirit & Faith:

“Humanity is poised on the cusp of a powerful shift into unity and oneness,” to the reestablishment of the Council for the World's Parliament of Religions, everywhere the shift is towards the ideal which Vivekananda preached.

And in hundreds of interfaith groups, Swami Vivekananda's refrain of “Service to man is service to God,” is manifested through food banks, shelters, sanctuary and community efforts towards wholeness and peace.

The Young Woman In A Tree

One final example of Swami Vivekananda's impact in present day America can be found in the story of Julia Butterfly Hill. In 1997, deep in the heart of a Northern California old growth forest, twenty-three year old Julia Hill engaged in an act of civil disobedience, moving atop a 1500 year old Redwood tree in order to protect it from loggers. For seven hundred and thirty-eight days, without once coming down from her two six-by-six foot platforms, Julia demonstrated to the world the practice of austerities. Whether she, a Christian, had ever read a word of Vivekananda is immaterial – for in her being and doing - Julia lived his teachings. And from her recent statement: “Our world is literally dying for us to become emissaries of love, and that love has to be based in every thought, every word, every action,” it is apparent she lives them still.

Julia's act of civil disobedience was Karma Yoga. Her love of the forest, Bhakti. Her interior journey, Raja and her knowledge, Jnana. In the chronicle of her experience, The Legacy of Luna, Julia's voice is both an echo and a duet with Swamiji.

*Swamiji: “Our duty is to encourage everyone in

his struggle to live up to his own highest idea, and strive at the same time to make the ideal as near as possible to the Truth.”

Julia: This book is dedicated to “...the power of individuals committed to living their truth.”

*Swamiji: “I see it clear as daylight that you all have infinite power in you...what will you do with wealth and fame that are so transitory.”

Julia: “I knew that sometimes the work of conveying the power of spirit, the Truth as I understood it, was as important as making money.”

*Swamiji: “Learn to feel yourself in other bodies, to know that we are all one.”

Julia: “Living in this tree...I remembered how to feel the connection and conscious oneness that's buried deep inside each of us.”

*Swamiji: “Through the heart comes inspiration. Love opens the most impossible gates; love is the gate to all the secrets of the universe.”

Julia: “I had prayed, and for the last time in her branches, Luna (the tree) spoke to me...Julia, all you have to do when you are afraid, lonely, worn out, or overwhelmed is touch your heart. Because it is there that I truly am, and it is there I will always be.”

Conclusion

The examples mentioned above of Swami Vivekananda's impact in present day America and the shining glory of his golden path, bring to mind this moving statement: “Therefore...do not be frightened at whatever drops from my lips, for the power behind me is not Vivekananda but He the Lord.”



The Birth of Vedanta in America

Swami Ishatmananda, Vedanta Society of Chicago

At 10:00 AM on September 11, 1893 ten solemn strokes of the new liberty bell on which was written, "A new commandment I give unto you, that Ye love one another", announced the opening of the first World's Parliament of Religions in the great Hall of Columbus at the Art Institute on Michigan Avenue in Chicago.

The World's Parliament of Religions was one of the many events that took place during the World's Columbian Exposition, which was held to observe the 400th Anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492.

The Exposition was inaugurated by the President of the USA, Grover Cleveland, on the 1st of May, 1893, in Chicago. It covered 200 acres of mostly reclaimed swamp land. The whole spectacular exposition became known as the "White City". One of the major buildings, which was built on 600,000 square feet of land, still stands to tell the tale of the grand world's fair and now houses the "Museum of Science & Industry".

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, God in human form, who was born in 1836 in Bengal, India, practiced and propagated the grand unity among the divergent philosophies of the world. He proclaimed for the first time in the history of world religions that God is One but the Paths to reach Him are different, "As many Faiths So Many Paths."

Interestingly, within seven years of the passing away of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna (the incarnation of Harmony), the Parliament of World's Religions was held with the theme, "Unity in Diversity and Diversity in Unity."

The objectives of the World's Parliament of Religions were, as the Parliament proudly declared, "to bring together in conference, for the first time in history, leading representatives of the great historic religions of the world; to demonstrate in the most impressive way, what and how many important truths the various religions held and taught in common; to discover what light religion can shed on the great problems of the time, especially

temperance, labor, education, wealth & poverty; to bring the nations of the earth into more friendly fellowship in the hope of securing permanent international peace."

Thousands and thousands of years before, in the land of India, a few great minds, popularly known as Rishis (spiritual scientists), discovered that before the creation there was only one and not two (EKAM-EVA-ADWITIYAM). From that one, through the power of God known as 'Maya', millions and millions of divergent beings and things have been projected. This projection is known as 'Sristi' (Creation). Realizing that One among the diversity is the final knowledge—ADVAITA JNANA, also known as Vedanta (Veda=Knowledge and Anta=End or Last). Vedanta is the Summum Bonum of Hinduism.

On 11th September, 1893 at 10 AM, the president of the World's Parliament of Religions, Mr. Bonney, recorded that the great bell rang 10 times in honor of the ten major religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Mohammedanism, Christianity and Jainism.

Before the sounds of the bell faded, suddenly "the great organ of the gallery burst forth, and the entire assembly rose to sing, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow...'"

After the ringing of the bell, the delegates, who had come from all over the world, started towards the hall in a procession. At the head of the procession Cardinal Gibbons, the highest authority of the American Catholic Church, and Charles Carroll Bonney, the Chairman of the Congress Committee, walked hand in hand. They were followed by the President and Vice-president of the Board of the World Columbian Exposition, then by Mrs. Palmer, and the delegates of the various religions of the world who had come to the congress. On account of the various types of costumes and attires in various colors, the procession presented a picture of international diversity.

When the procession entered the Hall, more than four thousand spectators had already been in their seats for quite some time, and yet a solemn silence prevailed in the hall. One of the spectators has reported that a tiny bird entered the hall through an open window and went out again after flying over the vacant platform, and the fluttering of its wings was distinctly heard by everyone. Such was the silence, at the root of which was a sense of expectation and curiosity.

That was but natural. It was undoubtedly an unprecedented event in the religious and cultural history of mankind. For that moment, at least, everyone who was in the procession felt that all men were children of God, whom they worshipped with reverence. The same feeling was created in the minds of the spectators who saw that wonderful spectacle. The procession reached the platform.

In the center, on a chair meant for the President, sat Cardinal Gibbons. The chair beside him was occupied by Mr. Bonney. On the right side of the President were five delegates of the Greek Church. All the other delegates were equally divided into two main groups of oriental delegates and occidental delegates on either side. The platform was fifty feet long and ten feet wide. On the platform stood two huge statues of the great orators, Cicero and Demosthenes, with a distance of twenty-five feet in between. A third statue was comparatively smaller. It was the statue of the Goddess of Knowledge, who had raised her right hand to shower blessings on all. Exactly at the center of the two huge statues was placed a beautiful iron chair specially made for the President. The other chairs were made of wood. There were three rows of chairs, each containing thirty seats. Vivekananda's seat happened to be in the second row.

After all the delegates were seated, from the upper gallery the organ played its solemn notes, and the entire hall was filled with its melodious music.

The first day of the Parliament was devoted to the inauguration and speeches of welcome from the officials. After seven speeches by the officials welcoming all the delegates, came the turn of the delegates to reply to those speeches of welcome.

Eight delegates spoke in the morning. The first among them was the Archbishop of Greece. It was quite befitting the occasion, since the whole European culture arose in Greece.

All this time Vivekananda remained seated, watching the whole function. This was the first time he had ever seen such a solemn event, superbly organized, and attended by a large audience.

When their names were announced by the President, the speakers, one after another, addressed the gathering.

On 2nd November, in a letter to Alasinga, Vivekananda wrote an exhaustive account of the entire inaugural function. "Of course, my heart was fluttering and my tongue nearly dried up. Mazoomder made a nice speech, Chakravarty a nicer one, and they were much applauded. They were all prepared and came with ready-made speeches. I was a fool and had none. I was so nervous that I could not venture to speak in the morning.

In 1896, three years after this event, while speaking at T. J. Desai's house in London, he said, "While standing up to speak in the Parliament of Religions, at first I was completely nervous and had totally lost my courage. But suddenly a saying from the Upanishad, "I am that Supreme Reality", flashed before my mind. This gave me tremendous courage and confidence, which enabled me to address the gathering. During the afternoon session, four delegates read out their speeches and then Vivekananda's name was announced. The French pastor, G. Bonnet Mourie, was sitting near Vivekananda and had been watching him hesitate right from the morning. He said to him, "Don't wait now, speak." Upon this urging, Vivekananda rose from his seat and went to the rostrum, offering a silent prayer to Devi Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning.

Surveying the huge assembly before him, he uttered, "Sisters and brothers of America." When these five words were uttered, it was as if an electric shock ran through the entire audience that was seated before him, and there arose a thunderous applause that lasted for full two minutes.

Thus, the Vedanta was born in America.

Introduction to the Cover Page: Vedanta Societies

Br. Panchatapa

The September 2018 issue of the 'Chicago Calling' eZine is a part of the year-long celebration of the 125th year of Swami Vivekananda's historic Chicago Addresses.

In 2013, the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago organized the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. There, mainly, the monks of Ramakrishna Mission who are serving in the centers outside India, shared their different perspectives about Swami Vivekananda and his message of Vedanta in the West and outside India.

During that conference, in his lecture on the 'Transformation from Narendranath to Vivekananda', Swami Chetanananda reminded us Swami Vivekananda as the *Voice Form* or the 'Vani Murti' of Sri Ramakrishna' [Chicago Calling, V3, p4]. Addressing Sri Ramakrishna in his poem 'A Song I Sing to Thee' Swami Vivekananda said, 'Thou art within my speech. Within my throat Art Thou, as Vinapani, (Goddess of learning) learned, wise'. Now, where was this form first manifested? In that very meeting, Swami Shantarupananda in his lecture on 'Vivekananda's Contribution to Humanity' [CC, V6, p7], reminded us, 'As Buddha selected Sarnath to preach his message, as Jesus Christ selected a mountain [Sinai] to give his sermon, Vivekananda selected Chicago – the very place where we are in – to preach his message.' Buddha had a message for the East, Swamiji told us, he, too, brought one for the West. That message was the eternal message of Vedanta.

To convey his message Swami Vivekananda lectured at many places, gave personal interviews, wrote books and of course, established the Vedanta Societies. Just as after Buddha and *Dharma* comes the organization (*Sangha*), in the same way right after Swamiji and his message of Vedanta come Vedanta Societies.

The very next year after the first Parliament of World's Religions, Swamiji founded the Vedanta Society of New York in 1894. Three years later the Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission was born. In 1900, during his second visit to the US, Swamiji

established another Vedanta Society in San Francisco. Though it is not a 'rule', it is a common practice to use the name Vedanta Society when the center is officially considered as a branch of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

Anyway, as time moved forward, the flag bearers of the 'after-Vivekananda-Vedanta-movement' developed many Vedanta Societies in the US and Canada. On the cover page, we have followed the chronological order as much as possible. But when we dive deeper into the Vedanta-days in North America, stories after stories come up. Many center have several sub-centers, some sub-centers are now functioning as independent centers; some centers were in existence but the official recognition as an independent center came later. The images on the cover are of Vedanta Societies of: New York (1894), San Francisco (1900), Boston (1910), Portland (1925), Chicago (1930), Southern California (1930), Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York (1933), St. Louis (1938), Seattle (1938), Berkeley (1939), Sacramento (1953), Toronto (1968), Providence (2000), St. Petersburg, Florida (2006) and Houston (2016).

In this pictorial history of Vedanta Societies, perhaps some important centers are missing, and perhaps some chronologically later centers appear earlier, but let us remember how Tagore, in his book 'My Reminiscences' described the way mind select images. Let's have a look at the image of each building and revisit the stories of the monks and devotees of each center, keeping Tagore's words in the mind, 'I know not who paints the pictures on memory's canvas; but whoever he may be, what he is painting are pictures; by which I mean that he is not there with his brush simply to make a faithful copy of all that is happening. He takes in and leaves out according to his taste. He makes many a big thing small and small thing big. He has no compunction in putting into the background that which was to the fore, or bringing to the front that which was behind. In short he is painting pictures, and not writing history.'

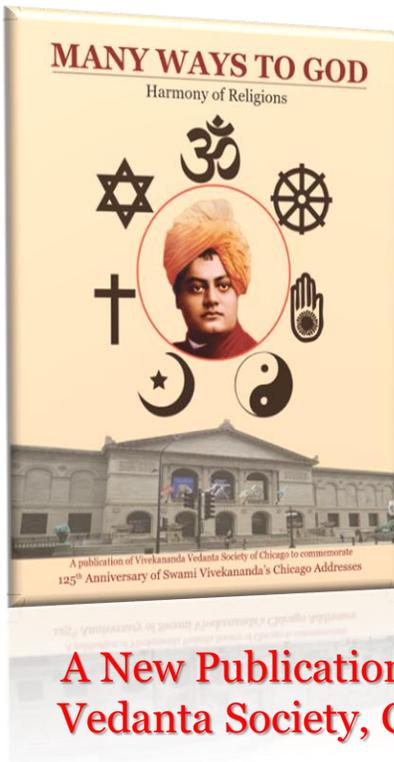
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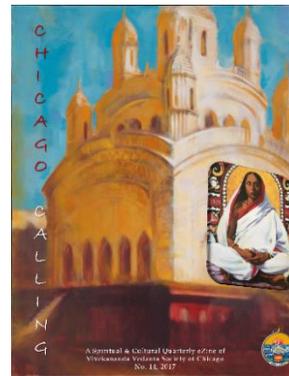
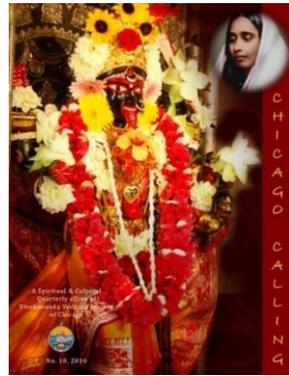
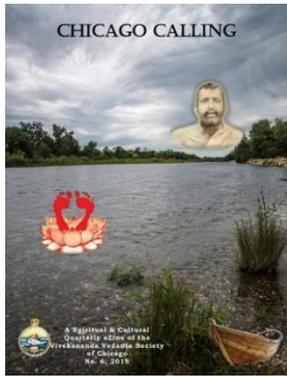
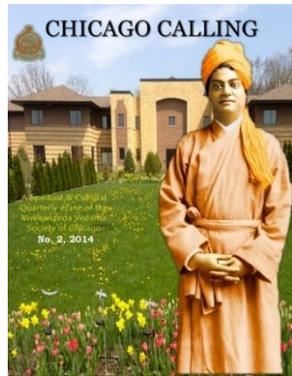
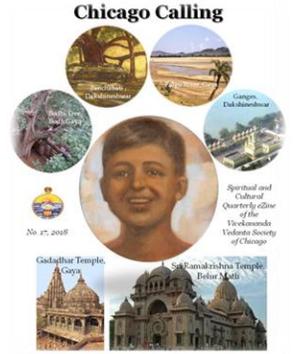
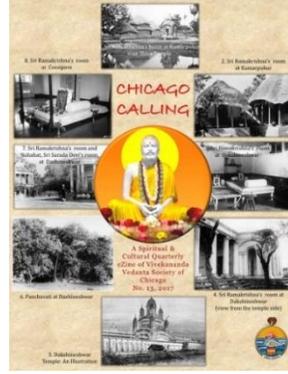
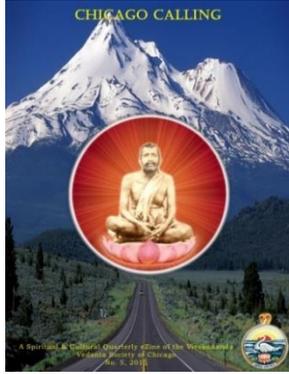
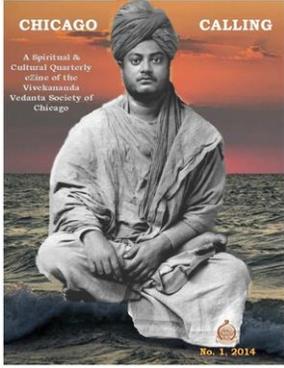
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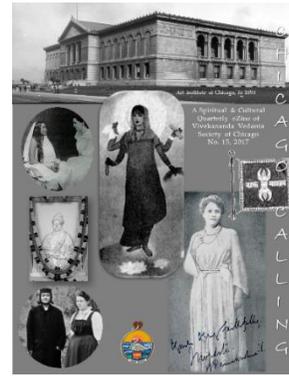
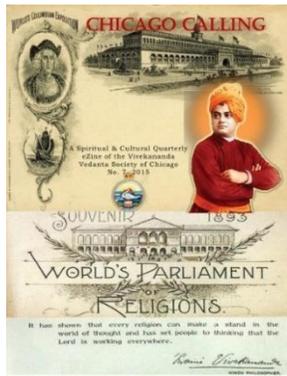
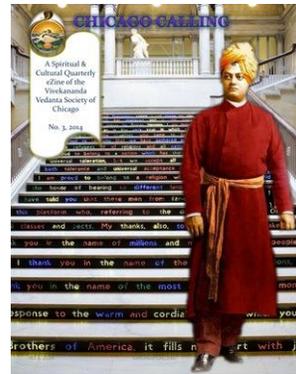
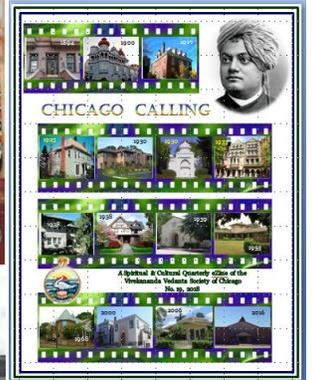


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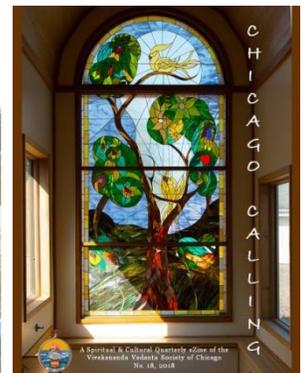
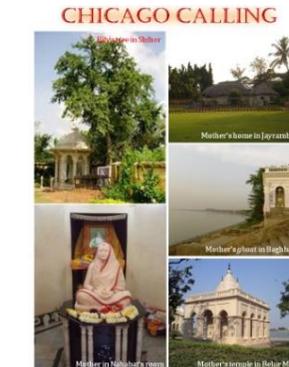
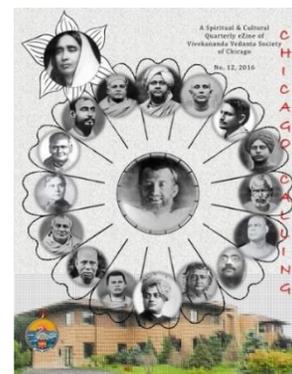
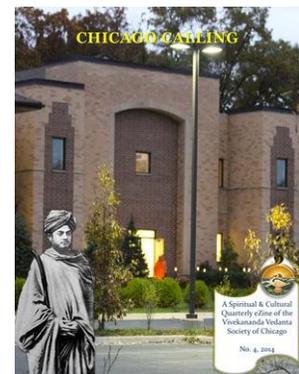
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