

CHICAGO CALLING



A Spiritual & Cultural Quarterly eZine of the
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago
No. 20, 2018

Table of Contents



	Page
EDITORIAL	3
BE ATTACHED! <i>SWAMI ATMAJNANANANDA</i>	5
SAGA OF THE SOUL (1) <i>SWAMI ISHATMANANDA</i>	9
ARISE, AWAKE AND STOP NOT	14
INTRODUCTION TO THE COVER PAGE	15
ADVERTISEMENTS	20

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Harmony of Paths

The path of Vedanta, which was practiced and propagated by Sri Ramakrishna, Ma Sarada & Swami Vivekananda, is very special.

What is the specialty of this path? This path harmonizes all paths that lead to the supreme goal, God. "As many faiths, so many paths" is the slogan of this movement.

In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, we find Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna telling the devotees, "He indeed is a real man who has harmonized everything. Most people are one-sided. But I find that all points (indicates) to the one." Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna made this statement from the depths of his own realization of the truth. Realizing the same truth, the great rishis of the old also declared, "The Truth is one, Sages call it by various names."

In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, again, we find Sri Ramakrishna explaining,

"The Saktas say OM Sat-chid-ananda Siva.

The Vaishnavas say OM Sat-chid-ananda Krishna.

The Vedantins say OM Sat-chid-ananda Brahman." Then again, he said, "He who is formless is also endowed with form."

To explain this point, Sri Ramakrishna used the example of water, which is liquid with no form, but when cooled becomes ice, which is with form. Again, when heated the same ice becomes water.

Under the cooling effect of Devotion, the all-pervading consciousness takes form, and under the heat of knowledge it appears as formless.

Moreover, Sri Ramakrishna also proclaimed that the same truth, the same God has manifested as this universe, and has taken different names and forms.

In the Upanishads we find, "Narayana, the

Great God, has manifested as this universe."

The great teacher, Lord Buddha, says after realizing the One, "As the mother loves and protects her only child, you should develop similar love and friendship to all beings."

The famous teachings of Lord Jesus also echo the same truth – "Love thy neighbor as thy self."

But still, in the name of religion the world has been soaked again and again with human blood. Why? The answer to this question shows the importance of "Harmony of Paths."

Sri Ramakrishna is known as "Samanvaya Devata"—God of Harmony. In the pages of "Ramakrishna Kathamrita", we find that Sri Ramakrishna taught so many times, in so many ways, to so many people, through so many examples, this single truth—"God can be reached through any path." Only three special qualities are required:

1. Faith in the existence of God.
2. Sincere effort in practicing the necessary disciplines of the chosen path.
3. Accepting other paths as also valid systems to realize God.

This catholicity, this broadness of mind, will help to remove the Ego, which is the one and only hindrance to realize God. All problems are solved when the wretched 'I' in me completely goes away.

Ego is the barrier between God and Man.

In the "Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna", we find Sri Ramakrishna and Mahendranath Gupta talking.

M – Why can't I see God?

Sri Ramakrishna holding a piece of cloth in between them, "Can you see me now? The cloth is Maya, the ego that separates Jiva and Brahman."

Vedanta defines :

What is Jiva? - Chaitanya Upahita Ahamkara
Jiva or Consciousness veiled by Ego.

What is God? -- Chaitanya Upahita Maya
Ishwara or Consciousness veiled by Maya.

Shortlisting the problems one faces to realize
God, it has been pinpointed—Ego.

How to overcome this Ego?

Ego breaks and separates. To fight this Ego we
must adopt the exact opposite to separation—
Harmony.

That is why the Almighty God came as Sri
Ramakrishna, who practiced and preached in his
own life the harmony of all the paths as the only
and the best way to reach the goal, which grants

eternal peace for the individual soul and progress
for human society.

The great wave of spirituality took shape in
1893 at The World's Parliament of Religions, which
was held in Chicago with a grand mission:

To bring together in conference, for the first
time in history, the leading representatives of the
great historic religions of the world. 10 religions
participated and 7000 people attended. The
famous disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami
Vivekananda, proclaimed, "We believe not only in
Universal Toleration, but we accept all religions as
true."

Harmony of the paths is the mission of the
modern age.



*Say, "Peace to all: From me no danger be
To aught that lives. In those that dwell on high,
In those that lowly creep, I am the Self in all!
All life both here and there, do I renounce,
All heavens and earths and hells, all hopes and fears."
Thus cut thy bonds, Sannyâsin bold! Say—
"Om Tat Sat, Om!"*

-- Swami Vivekananda
CW 4: The Song of The Sannyasin

BE ATTACHED!

SWAMI ATMAJNANANANDA

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This article is based on the talk delivered during May 2018 spiritual retreat in Ganges.



Introduction

We hear a great deal about the role of detachment in spiritual life, and may perhaps begin to feel that all attachment is bad. We understand, of course, that attachment to spiritual practice, holy company, our spiritual ideal, etc. all fall under a different category of attachment and are not only not harmful, but helpful and necessary. But what about so-called worldly attachments, including family ties, devotion to our careers, fondness for possessions, and so on? While it is easy to lump all of these under one category and label all of them as harmful, the situation is a little more nuanced and complicated. This is especially true when we look at some of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. So, in the next few pages, we will try to examine this question of attachment and detachment.

One thing we should try to remember. There is no simple formula, as we sometimes hear, that attachment is bad and detachment is good. There are times when a detached attitude is a sign of death, laziness, or fear of failure, and when attachment represents a boldness and zest for life, a passion which we need in order to be successful in any field of life, especially in spiritual life. Of course, such an attachment will differ in several respects from ordinary attachment, especially in so far as it does not lead to bondage, is not based on selfish motives, on a feeling of "I" and "mine." But it is still a kind of attachment, or at the very least, engagement. In fact, we will see that both detachment (which we will examine in the context of vairāgya) and attachment (which we look at in terms of anurāga) are extremely helpful and

necessary in all fields of life. And it will turn out that rather than representing two opposing ideals, they each help each other and fulfill each other.

Vairāgya and anurāga (dispassion and passion)

Both words are based on the Sanskrit root ranj, meaning to be colored or dyed, especially the color red. Red is the color of the guna rajas and represents passion. Even the word for blood, rakta, comes from the same root, since it is not only red in color but also associated with passion or anger, as when the blood rushes to the head and the face becomes flushed. We also get the word rāga from the same root, which has a vast range of meanings, running the gamut from love and attachment to anger and rage. The reason a Sanskrit root for "dyeing" comes to be used for words connected to "passion" is beautifully explained by Sri Ramakrishna's example of our minds being like white cloth which will take the color of the liquid we dye them in, i.e., the thoughts we let our minds dwell on.

When we add the prefix vi to rāga, we get the word virāga, absence of passion, from which comes the word we are more familiar with, vairāgya, sometimes translated as renunciation or detachment, but more literally "dispassion." Vairāgya is traditionally considered one of the most important prerequisites for spiritual life. For the monk, of course, it is an essential element, a burning dispassion for the world which, traditionally, resulted in withdrawing from society, avoiding family life, and turning within in order to realize the ultimate goal of God-realization or Self-realization.

But all devotees, whether monks or householders, need to cultivate a spirit of detachment and mental renunciation, freeing the mind from the binding power of desires, ego, and name and fame, and allowing it to dive deep into the spiritual ideal.

Vairāgya is especially important when it comes to meditation. When Arjuna complains to Krishna that the mind cannot be controlled, he is told that two things are necessary: vairāgya, dispassion, and abhyāsa, practice. We try to eliminate the desires of the mind which cause it to wander, and at the same time, try to catch it and bring it back to our object of meditation when it does wander. This is the classic formula which is accepted by most schools of meditation. But Sri Ramakrishna does not stop here. He adds a second element, and in fact emphasizes that almost to the exclusion of the first. That second element is anurāga, passionate attachment or love for someone or something. Again we find the same root word rāga, or passion, but with the prefix anu, which means “in accordance with something.” The mind becomes dyed in the color of the beloved. One of the best examples of this phenomenon is Holy Mother. Swami Abhedananda has written the beautiful line in his hymn Prakritim Paramām, tad-bhāva-ranjitākārām. Holy Mother’s whole being was dyed in the “color” or essence of Sri Ramakrishna. By constantly thinking of him with tremendous love, her mind became soaked in his very being, so much so that at times she practically became him. We find a beautiful example of this when she was on pilgrimage to Brindavan shortly after Sri Ramakrishna’s passing. One day she went into a deep meditative mood, and after coming down from that mood a bit, behaved, spoke, and even took pān exactly as Sri Ramakrishna used to do.

Why did Sri Ramakrishna emphasize anurāga to such an extent? There is a very simple answer. He understood that the mind rebels when it is forced to think about something which does not attract it. And when contrary thoughts of the world, job,

family, pleasures, are so strong, it is practically impossible to pull the mind away. So Sri Ramakrishna’s solution was not to try to push the mind away from something that has such a power of attraction, but rather try to increase the power of attraction of our spiritual ideal. How to do this?

Dying the cloth of the mind

When dying cloth, there are basically three factors at work: the intensity of the solution, the length of time we allow the cloth to sit in the solution, and the condition of the cloth itself. In other words, we need an adequate amount of dye, a sufficient amount of time, and a clean cloth. We have to dive deep in our spiritual practice, have a passionate desire for God, and call on God with tears in our eyes. That is the intensity aspect. And this intensity is increased through holy company, solitude, constant remembrance of God, prayer, and other spiritual practices.

But there is also the extensity aspect: the time factor. When Holy Mother was asked by her disciples why they were not making progress in spiritual life, she would often reply, “How much time do you spend in japa and meditation?” The fact is that unless we give a proper amount of time to our spiritual practices, the mind will again be attracted to the world. If it is not possible to spend long hours in meditation and spiritual disciplines every day, then at least occasionally we should try to spend a little extra time in the shrine room, do extra japa, spend more time in spiritual reading, worship, and prayer. That way the dye of spirituality will have time to soak in and infuse the mind with divine thoughts and feelings.

What about the third factor? We have seen that the cloth of the mind should be clean, stainless, and pure if it is to take the dye. And yet we know that our minds are not stainless. Here we get a great concession. What does Sri Ramakrishna say?

“The mind is like freshly laundered cloth just back from the washer man.”

If we immerse it in the thought of God for a long enough time, it will fully take the color of God (anurāga). So, we start to understand that spiritual dye has a double action agent: it purifies as it dyes. This does not mean that we should not strive to purify the mind. We must try, but we also should understand that spiritual practice is the best means to purify the mind. We do not have to wait for the mind to become pure on its own. We can begin with the very mind we have and understand that the dye of spirituality is strong enough to color the mind completely if we only we pursue our spiritual life with sincerity, devotion, and intensity, and devote sufficient time to spiritual practice.

The role of attachment and detachment in everyday life according to Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna no doubt wanted his disciples, the future monks of the order, to be cautious about mixing too much with the world. He constantly warned them of the dangers of lust and greed. But he did not want them to hate the world or turn away from it. In a sense he taught a combination of the two paths of nirvritti and pravritti, engaging in the world, but with a spirit of renunciation. Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of joy and could not bear a dry outlook or a selfish and timid attitude. Many times he said, "I would pray to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, don't make me a dry sadhu!' " He said to Pandit Shashadhar: "The rishis of old had timid natures. They were easily frightened. Do you know their attitude? It was this: 'Let me somehow get my own salvation; who cares for others?' A hollow piece of driftwood somehow manages to float; but it sinks even if a bird sits on it. But Narada and sages of his kind are like a huge log that not only can float across to the other shore but can carry many animals and other creatures across. Teachers like Narada belong to the class of the vijnāni. They were much more courageous than the other rishis. They are like an expert satrancha player. You must have noticed how he

shouts, as he throws the dice: 'What do I want? Six? No, five! Here is five!' And every time he throws the dice he gets the number he wants. He is such a clever player!"

So for Sri Ramakrishna, and perhaps even more so, for Swami Vivekananda, perfect renunciation did not mean absolute disengagement from the world, fleeing from life out of a fear of attachment and suffering. If we are attached to our near and dear ones, what Sri Ramakrishna called maya, the solution was not to withdraw our love out of fear, but rather to expand it so that it includes the entire world (dayā). If the mother is attached to her child, the solution is not to withdraw, but to increase the feeling of love by seeing the divine in the child.

Examples of spiritual attachment

The best examples we have of attachment stemming from a high spiritual plane are found in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji had a tremendous feeling of attachment to his mother and to his brother disciples and own disciples. But he was the perfect example of dayā, because he was equally able to identify and empathize with all beings. His attachment came from his vision of the one Self dwelling within all living beings.

Holy Mother had her deep sense of attachment to Radhu, of course, but also to the monastic disciples and all who came to her. At the same time she viewed all beings in the world as her very own. No one was a stranger to her. Her sense of attachment was based on her feeling of universality as the Mother of all.

In some ways Sri Ramakrishna exhibited the highest degree of attachment. He would often weep at not seeing his beloved Naren (Swami Vivekananda). He was almost overcome with grief at the death of his nephew Akshay. But his so-called attachment came from seeing the Divine dwelling within all beings. As he explained to Naren one day, "I love you because I see Narayana in you.

The moment I will not be able to see the Lord within you, I won't be able to even look at your face."

What do we learn from all this? That attachment can actually be a great help to us, both in spiritual life and secular pursuits, if it can be purified of the elements of smallness, selfishness, and desire. This special power of attachment, accompanied by an equal power of detachment, was beautifully captured by Swami Vivekananda in his lecture "Work and its Secret":

Attachment is the source of all our pleasures now. We are attached to our friends, to our relatives; we are attached to our intellectual and spiritual works; we are attached to external objects, so that we get pleasure from them. What, again, brings misery but this very attachment? We have to detach ourselves to earn joy. If only we had power to detach ourselves at will, there would not be any misery. That man alone will be able to get the best of nature, who, having the power of attaching himself to a thing with all his energy, has also the power to detach himself when he should do so. The difficulty is that there must be as much

power of attachment as that of detachment. There are men who are never attracted by anything. They can never love, they are hard-hearted and apathetic; they escape most of the miseries of life. But the wall never feels misery, the wall never loves, is never hurt; but it is the wall, after all. Surely it is better to be attached and caught, than to be a wall. Therefore the man who never loves, who is hard and stony, escaping most of the miseries of life, escapes also its joys. We do not want that. That is weakness, that is death. That soul has not been awakened that never feels weakness, never feels misery. That is a callous state. We do not want that.

At the same time, we not only want this mighty power of love, this mighty power of attachment, the power of throwing our whole soul upon a single object, losing ourselves and letting ourselves be annihilated, as it were, for other souls — which is the power of the gods — but we want to be higher even than the gods. The perfect man can put his whole soul upon that one point of love, yet he is unattached.



When we come to that non-attachment, then we can understand the marvellous mystery of the universe; how it is intense activity and vibration, and at the same time intensest peace and calm; how it is work every moment and rest every moment. That is the mystery of the universe — the impersonal and personal in one, the infinite and finite in one.

-- Swami Vivekananda

SAGA OF THE SOUL

SWAMI ISHATMANANDA

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This article is based on the lecture series delivered by the Swami during Sunday Services



Let us discuss the greatest wonder of this world—that is the “human”. Our main subject of discussion will be people who lived and are still living, grew and are still growing in the Indian Subcontinent. We will look at the subject from a spiritual perspective.

The name of the series is “The Saga of the Soul”- The story of the Soul. Hindus believe that the soul, Atman travelling through different lives taking different forms according to the result of the work (Karma- Fala) . But what is this Atman or Brahman ?

The rishis of the old expressed it through a stotra

“Naham Manushya nah cha Deva Yaksha
Nah Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudraha
Nah Brahmachari nah Grihi, Vanastha va,
Bhikshuh na cha;

Aham nija bodha swarupaha!

It says, “I am not a Human, I am not a god, I am not a Yaksha (celestial being); I am not Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra (the Indian Caste System); I am not a Brahmacharin, I am not a householder, too; I am not retired as a forest dweller; I am not a monk or Sannyasin. Then who am I?”

“Aham nija bodha swarupa -- I am That I am”

That ‘swarupa’ is my original identity (Swa + rupa = Swarupa). Our goal is to discover our original identity, and that is called “The Saga of The Soul”. ‘Saga’ means a story of a soul which is slowly going to reach to its goal--its source of origin.

According to science, fifteen million years ago there were intelligent ‘Hominids’ in the Indian

subcontinent. And, about 74,000 years ago, the ‘Toba supervolcano’ destroyed much of the forest land of India and covered it with a layer of volcanic ashes.

Mere imagination of the days when the first human appeared in this world, trying to survive in the hostile nature, sends a chill through our spine. Steven Spielberg's ‘Jurassic Park’ gives us an idea of those days.

Mother nature has given the animals, huge, powerful bodies, strong jaws and claws with which they could fight and survive and the birds with wings to fly for survival, but what about human being! Humans did not have any physical attributes which they could use to overcome the hostile nature.

How did the human survive? The human survived with the power of education.

Nature has given a wonderful gift to the human. That is its brain, utilizing which human being not only survived in the hostile nature but also conquered the nature. At present the nature is at the mercy of the human.

How did human do this? By utilizing the brain, which is being developed through education.

What is education?

Education is a combination of five actions: Observation, Discrimination, Utilization, Preservation and Transmission.

Imagine a primitive man looking at the fire with awe and fear, created by forceful rubbing of the branches of a tree. He did not know what fire was; he was afraid; he was looking at it trying to decide if this fire, would help him or not. He observed the creation of fire.

Observation is a totally different way of looking at things, studying the pros and cons, the reasons, and then coming to a conclusion.

Along with observation comes discrimination. This discrimination is very important.

With discrimination comes utilization. After observation and discrimination, when we come to know what a thing is, then only can we decide how to utilize it. This is how all the discoveries happen.

Discovering fire was one of the greatest discoveries by humans, after which they were only moving forward and never turning back.

After the observation, discrimination and utilization, we learn how to preserve it. Preservation is very important. Preservation for the future generation. Only Human can do it.

After Preservation comes transmission to the next generation.

All these five elements together are the components of Education. This education is the power.

I went to talk to some students at a University here in the US, and I asked them, "You all are here for education. What is this education?" They answered, "Knowledge." "Where does knowledge come from?" They said jokingly, "from our professors". "Where do the professors get the knowledge?"—"from the Library". "Where from the library get the knowledge?"—"From the books". "Where do the books get knowledge from?" They did not know the answer to this question. But, the books are written based on knowledge from nature.

Whatever we learn, we learn from nature. We are harnessing knowledge from nature; we are discovering truth from nature.

When we were young, we read the story of a man who was sitting under an apple tree, and an apple fell down from the tree. From this observation, he utilised his brain to discriminate and came up with the Law of Gravitation. Apples used to fall all the time before he came up with the

Law of Gravitation. On observing the apple falling down, it struck him, "Why is the apple falling down and not going up?" This phenomenon was already there in nature. Swami Vivekananda said, "Suppose this Law of Gravitation was not there, gravity would still be there, Gravity was not a new discovery. Suppose everyone forgets about the Law of Gravitation, gravity will still be there. All this is part of nature and has always been there and will always be there."

Hindus started worshipping nature in a wonderful way and named it 'Mother'. The concept of 'Mother' came because they realized that nature is like a woman, giving us birth and sustaining us; helping us to grow and survive. So, they gave the highest respect to the Mother. To this Mother Nature, they gave the name Ma Kali.

We find a tiny, skinny man sitting on an elephant guiding it. The huge elephant can kill hundreds of people, but this man is able to do this not because of his physical strength but because of his knowledge of how to control the elephant. This is an example of education. This was given to man by nature. Our ancestors understood that this brain is the main thing which we need to develop, and we have to understand and discover each and everything from nature. All the resources, which we need to develop, are in nature.

Along with education men need inspiration. We have the capacity to understand, but unless a person is inspired, he cannot do anything. Inspiration is very important.

We read a poem in school once. In a war one group was losing, and the king who was losing ordered his soldiers to get the trumpeters first. The trumpeters said that they did not fight; they were only blowing their trumpets; they were just musicians. The king told them that it was because of their music that all their soldiers got the inspiration to fight. So, if someone is constantly inspiring you, saying you can do something, then you will feel the need to accomplish that task.

Long, long ago, In India, our ancient sages developed a wonderful word, "Charaiveti! Charaiveti!" That means "March on and on, do not stop!". They used to sing, repeating this word over and over again, "Charaiveti! Charaiveti!"

Whatever comes into your life, you have to move on. Life has to go on!.

In English we find two words: one is 'survival' and the other is 'living'

There are trees and hills surviving for long time. Human life is very short, but they are living. How? By constantly thinking and progressing.

Swami Vivekananda in one of his lectures gave an example of a train moving on the rails and an ant that was also on the rails. When the ant realized that something was coming and its life was in danger, it immediately moved out of the way. This shows that the tiny ant had the capacity to think and understand but the gigantic train didn't. The capacity to think is the greatest boon that the nature has given to the human being.

In Aitereya Brahmana (7.15) we find these magic words

"Charanbai Madhu Vindati
O Ye, observe the honey bee – always active
Charantsvadu mudambaram
Birds collect food by constant movement
Suryasya Pasya Sreemanam
The sun draws respect for its constant work
Yo na tandrayate Charan
So one should continuously move forward
Chairaiveti – Charaiveti"
March on! March on!

The Charaiveti has become a slogan!

Charaiveti is the only word which has helped human beings to reach to the point where we are today. And, now, the same human being is reaching out even to Pluto, the small planet, and learning about it, and in a tremendous way everything is moving forward. So "Charaiveti" is the word.

I took charge of Chicago Vivekananda Vedanta

Society on March 4th, 2013. One person told me jokingly, "Swamiji you have to March forth in your life, as you joined on March fourth."

We have to keep marching on and on. So many things will come our way from time to time; sometimes it's happiness, sometimes it's misery, sometimes it's danger, sometimes it's depression. So many things keep on happening. We really do not know what is going to happen.

When we were Brahmacharins one of our Swamijis used to say that life will always have its ups and downs, but don't worry, "this shall also pass". Good days will pass, so will the bad days. We have to be calm and determined. How do we do that? With "Vichara", Analysis.

This is what we should remember, "Charaiveti"!

After coming to this country, looking at the lifestyle of the people, I saw that they are so capable, and yet they are suffering so much. I get so many phone calls from people asking, "Can I come and talk to you? I am not happy!" But why is this happening? We have to develop this understanding. Different situations are coming but still we have to move on. We have to have the knowledge of "Charaiveti!"

Lord Buddha used to complete His talk by using these two words, "Charaiveti! Charaiveti!"

Dr. Abdul Kalam, one of the past presidents of India, was lecturing even at the last moment of his life. He was very fond of students. At that time he was in Shillong, in Northeastern India, where he was addressing the students. He was very fond of the word "E.N.D", which means "Effort Never Dies". When something is coming to a close, another new thing will come! We always wait for something to end and have a new beginning.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna used to tell a story about a woodcutter who used to get wood from the forest and sell it to earn money. He met a Brahmachari, who told him, "Why are you satisfied only with this? Why don't you go deeper into the forest and see what you find?"

The woodcutter listened to him and went deeper into the forest where he found a lot of sandalwood trees. He took the precious wood, sold it, and made a lot of money. Then he thought, "The Brahmachari told me to go further into the forest, so let me do that." He found even more valuable trees there. So, next he kept moving further and further into the forest and found deposits of gold and silver, and he became very rich.

The moral of the story is that the more we go within our mind, the more we get spiritual knowledge. The deeper we get into our studies of the mind, the more spiritual we become. But we have to understand that we must be practical too. Life is not only all theoretical.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Mother keep me always happy and humorous and don't make me a dry monk". We cannot keep thinking of God only, forgetting others. We have to remember that we have a practical life too.

Swamiji never got tired quoting the famous words of Katha Upanishad:

"Uthishta, jagrata, prapya, varan nibodhata" ; Swamiji translated, "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached".

We have to reach our goal. What is the goal?

Thousands of years ago, in India, a few thoughtful people discovered this goal for each and every human. This goal is "Atman" or the "Brahman", and they said, " Atmanam viddhi", "Know thyself! In the course of our discussion, we will come to know about this Atman and how one can realize and understand the Atman. Everything was discovered by the Rishis or Drshtas. They were able to see things far beyond. They had extended foresight.

Why is it that this happened in the Indian subcontinent? Because India is a very special place. India has so many names. The first and foremost name that we find in the Puranas is 'Jambudwipa'. 'Dwipa' means 'island'. India is surrounded by ocean on three sides, with the Himalayas in the north and a river on its side. It stretched all the the

way to the present day Afghanistan. It was all within the greater India, and all of this was protected from the very cold and chilly weather by the Himalayas.

In Nepal there is a pilgrimage called 'Muktinath'. To reach Muktinath one has to go through 'Jomsom'. It is very dry at that place. There is no grass. By 10 o'clock in the morning, a strong wind starts to blow, which makes even the pebbles to fly. One can reach Muktinath, on top of the hills, on horseback. It is believed that Lord Shiva, who gives us Liberation dwells there. The Himalayas are considered to be 'Devosthana', where only the gods reside. The Himalayas not only protect us, they are also the source of seven rivers that spread all over the sub-continent, fertilizing the soil of the whole country.

The Hindus with great devotion chant - 'Gange cha Yamune chaiva, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmade, Sindhu, Kaveri jale asmin sannidhan kuru'. This are the names of the rivers, they have fertilized the whole India. Civilizations grew up on their banks. The Hindus gratefully remember them.

This 'Jambudweep' came to be known as 'Bharatbarsha'. Bharatbarsha is named after the illustrious king, Bharat, the son of King Dushmanta and Shakuntala. Bharat was a very powerful king. Then the Parsis came, and because of their pronunciation, the River Sindhu became River Hindu, since they pronounce 'sa' as 'ha'. This is a sacred river, part of it is in Pakistan and part is in Kashmir. From this river, 'Sindu', wrongly pronounced as 'Hindu' the name of the country become 'Hindustan'.

Afterwards, it seems that the Greeks gave the name 'India'.

So Jambudweep became Bharatbarsha, then Hindustan and then India. One country is now known by two names, "India" that is "Bharat".

This land, which is also a fertile land because of the seven rivers, has solved the three basic needs of people: food, shelter and clothing.

People built settlements all along the banks of the rivers, and they depended on the river for sustenance.

But, this assurance of sustenance by developed agriculture did not satisfy the people of India. They still went on investigating, moving forward, “Charaiveti, Chraiveti”! They did not stop. They started asking questions.

Who is the creator? What is this creation? What is the relationship between the creator and his creation? That is the basis of all philosophy. ‘Philosophy’ is called ‘darshan’, which answers the questions about the Creator, Creation and the relationship between the two.

The Rishis, in their metaphysical enquiries, conceived of an original Creator, who is the efficient cause and the material cause of this Universe.

We are discussing this from the view point of spirituality, culture and religion and not from the viewpoint of science. Present day science will

describe this in a different way, but the rishis who composed the Rg Veda—the oldest spiritual scripture which was written more than 7000 years ago—were thinking about these questions, and the enquiry was going on.

In the Rg Veda we find that He who is Father of us all, the great Procreator, the great Providence, He who knows the whole universe, He is One. (Rig. Veda 10.82.3)

Due to this philosophy, this knowledge of oneness, we find in India that the idea of unity in diversity is normal and natural.

It says in the Rg Veda that “ He who knows the whole Universe is one, and yet He assumes the many names of gods.” All the people of the world desire to know about Him, and we, being humans, should be desirous to know. This is the goal of human life— to have this knowledge. This is the Saga of The Soul. It begins with enquiry and ends with discovery or realization.



The eyes of the whole world are now turned towards this land of India for spiritual food; and India has to provide it for all the races. Here alone is the best ideal for mankind; and Western scholars are now striving to understand this ideal which is enshrined in our Sanskrit literature and philosophy, and which has been the characteristic of India all through the ages.

-- Swami Vivekananda

ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT



Marguerite Barankitse remembers the day her mission in Burundi began: It was the day a Tutsi mob tied her up and made her watch the slaughter of 72 Hutus, many of them children. The carnage lasted for ten hours, but her dream of peace and a united country never faltered.

When the civil war began in October 1993, Ms. Barankitse, or “Maggy” as she prefers, was working as a secretary at the Bishop’s house in Ruyigi. She had already adopted seven children—four Hutus and three Tutsis—and although the situation was becoming increasingly dangerous, she refused to separate them. “I wanted to show to my people that when there is justice and love it is possible to live in harmony,” she says.

When the killing began she managed to ransom 25 children whose parents had been murdered. She also saved her own seven adopted orphans and hid them all on the grounds of the Bishop’s house. It was the beginning of her work to care for the children who had been orphaned by the genocide.

“I was surround by bodies, and I didn’t know what to do,” she says. “But then I heard a voice of hope, that a new government of Hutus and Tutsis could be created. And I called my orphans a new name – ‘Hutsitwa’ – a combination of the two.”

Since then Maggy, who is Tutsi, has opened three centers for children traumatized or mutilated during the fighting—*Oasis de la Paix*, *Casa de la Pace* and *Maison Shalom*, which is also the name of her organisation.

Ten thousand children have passed through the centers’ doors, many of whom have lost their parents or become separated from them. Most have witnessed atrocities, others are permanently maimed. Maggy was able to send one little boy for surgery in Germany after he was found clinging to the body of his mother, half his face blown away by a grenade.

“I know in my heart that evil will never have the last word. People come to my house and say they will kill me. But I tell them they won’t succeed and that God will protect my children.

“Everyone thinks I am mad and that I have lost my reason—even my family! I say yes, I am mad, but you are mad too because you have started to kill. Who has lost their reason more—someone who is killing or someone who is trying to save lives?”

Maison Shalom is now at the heart of humanitarian efforts in Burundi. In partnership with UNICEF, the organization has reached areas inaccessible to other aid agencies, providing emergency health care and counselling for victims of rape and other violence.

Maggy believes her dream of Tutsis and Hutus living together will be fulfilled. “With each of our dreams we advance humanity.”

Adapted from:

https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/burundi_women_mission.html

<https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/people/marguerite-barankitse>

Introduction to the Cover Page: Star-story

Br. Panchatapa

This cover page contains an optical image of Arcturus star given by NASA. Arcturus is an red giant star, 25 times larger than the sun and 216 trillion miles away from Earth, while the earth's distance from Sun is only 92.96 million miles. Arcturus's true brilliance is likewise masked by distance. If it was in place of the sun, Arcturus would dazzle 113 times brighter. From ancient times it drew attention of Arabic as well as Vedic astrologers. In Arabic it is called *al-simāk* or "the uplifted ones". Vedic astrologers named it Swati or Svati nakshatra (star).

There are 27 stars that Vedic astrologers use for future predictions. These 27 stars are distributed among 12 zodiac constellations. The moon finishes traveling around all these 12 constellations in 29.5 solar days. Therefore, the moon resides with each star more or less one day. For example, according to almanac, January 1st, 2019, moon will be with Swati. It is believed to be a pious combination to begin any new endeavor.

In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna the mention of this Swati can be found in three different examples in three odd years: 1881, 1883 and 1885.

Let's just reread those sections.

Saturday, December 10, 1881

"One should have faith in the holy name given by the guru and with it practise spiritual discipline. It is said that the pearl oyster makes itself ready for the rain that falls when the star Svati is in the ascendant. Taking a drop of that rain, it dives into the fathomless depths of the ocean and remains there until the pearl is formed."

Tuesday, October 16, 1883

The Master asked Mani Mallick to quote the words of Tulsidas to the effect that one who had developed love of God could not observe caste distinctions.

MANI: "The throat of the chatak bird is pierced with thirst. All around are the waters of the Ganges, the

Jamuna, the Saraju, and of innumerable other rivers and lakes; but the bird will not touch any of these. It only looks up expectantly for the rain that falls when the star Svati is in the ascendant."

MASTER: "That means that love for the Lotus Feet of God is alone real, and all else illusory."

Saturday, 13 June 1885

The way – yearning and renunciation:

"I say, why shouldn't there be a way? Take refuge in God and pray to Him with a yearning heart for a favourable breeze to give you an auspicious opportunity. God definitely listens to the prayers of one who calls on Him with a longing heart.

"The son of a man was critically ill. His father went to various people asking with great yearning for a remedy. Somebody said, 'He will be cured if you can arrange this: That the water of the svati nakshatra fall into a skull; that a frog drink that water; that a snake chase and pounce upon the frog; that the venom of the snake falls into the skull as the frog escapes its bite. If you give a little of that poison water to the patient, he should get well.'

"With great longing this fellow set out in search of the medicine during the svati constellation of stars. It was raining. He implored the Lord longingly, 'Lord, please let me locate a skull. It is raining during the svati constellation of stars.' Then he added to his prayer, 'I appeal to you, Oh Savior. Grant that I may also find a frog and a snake.' He had such great yearning that he found them all immediately. In no time the snake chased the frog. As it was going to bite the frog, its poison fell into the skull.

"If you surrender to the Lord and call on Him with a heart full of yearning, He is bound to listen and take care of everything for you."

These stories put light on fundamental paths of spiritual practices. Story # 1: Guru is special for the disciple so is the rain during the presence of Swati for the oyster. This story talks about being totally absorbed in the mantra that is received from guru.

It shows the path of *dhyana* or meditation. The second story clearly stands for *bhakti* or devotion. Even if the bird is scared of cloud-thunder and lighting during the rain, still it won't give up the water when Swati is present. Even if one gets hard times, the disciple would accept the Knowledge from guru only. And, the third story is inspiring to meet the goal through *nishkama karma* (selfless action) and *jnana* (knowledge) with faith.

Swami Vivekananda excelled in all these paths – reasoning, selfless action, devotion and meditation by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna. He reached the end or *anta* of all knowledge or *veda*, and took up the mission of spreading the message of Vedanta in the West for the welfare of the humanity. He decided to deliver his first message from the platform of the first Parliament of World's Religion in Chicago. On the 31st May of 1893 Swamiji started from Bombay and touched the city on July 30th, 1893.



Stars again! The City of Chicago flag contains three sections of the white field and the two stripes that represent geographical features of the city, and four stars. Of course these stars do not stand for *karma-yoga-bhakti-jnana*, but symbolize historical events of the city. This flag was designed in 1939.

The First Star: The beginning of the community in the area, which today is known as city of Chicago, was built in 1804 centering fort Dearborn. John Whistler and his wife Julia, his son William made their way to Chicago on a schooner called the Tracy. The troops reached their destination on August 17, 1803. The Tracy was anchored about half a mile offshore, unable to enter the Chicago River due to a sandbar at its mouth. About 2000 Native Americans gathered to see the Tracy. By the summer of 1804 the construction was completed and was named in honor of Henry Dearborn, then United States Secretary of War, who commissioned the construction.

In 1812 due to a commotion between the fort dwellers and local Potawatomi tribes the fort was attacked and got destroyed during the battle of Fort Dearborn. A new fort was constructed on the same site in 1816. However, by 1837, the fort had been de-commissioned. Parts of the fort were lost to both the widening of the Chicago River in 1855, and a fire in 1857. The last vestiges of the Fort were destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The site of the fort is now a Chicago Landmark that is standing on that site to share the story of the beginning of the city with us.

In 1871 the great fire, which just started from a barn, turned the whole city into ashes within a few hours. The second red star on the flag represents the huge tragedy. But that's not the final one! The 3rd star showed up on the flag soon enough, when with all her life force, the city turned around in 1893 and invited the whole world to celebrate 400 years of Columbus's discovery of America. It was a different Chicago with totally new architecture and city plan.

Lets see the city as Swamiji found it. When Swamiji arrived the world's fair just started. 1893 Chicago World's Fair was not the first one in history, though it is considered the most influential world's fair in history.

World Fair started in Paris in 1844 and organized by different countries. During the years of 1851 to 1938 the focus of the fair was 'Industrialization'. Each fair had its own theme; for example: London, UK, 1851 (theme: Industry of all Nations); 1855 Paris, France (theme: Agriculture, Industry and Art); 1862 London again (theme: Industry and Arts) and the like. In 1893 the World's Columbian Exposition was attended by 27,300,000 people. Many famous and infamous people came to enjoy; for example Helen Keller, along with her mentor Anne Sullivan and Dr. Alexander Graham Bell (inventor of telephone) visited the fair in summer of 1893, as well as Serial Killer Herman Mudgett (H. H. Holmes) attended the fair with two of his victims, Annie and Minnie Williams.



Forty-six nations participated in the fair and it was the first world's fair to have national pavilions. For amusement the Ferris wheel was installed. The original wheel, sometimes also referred to as the Chicago Wheel was the centerpiece. It was also the tallest attraction, with a height of 264 ft. it was dismantled then rebuilt in Lincoln Park, Chicago, in 1895.

During his second visit to the USA in 1899 Swamiji was the guest of the Hale family, whose residence was in Lincoln Park neighborhood too. We hope he saw it during his second visit as well. The wheel was dismantled and rebuilt a third and final time for the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri. It was demolished there in 1906.

Swami Vivekananda stayed at 262 Michigan Avenue with Lyons family during the Parliament of Religions program. That house was within walking distance (about five and a half blocks) of the Art Institute. There is no trace of Lyon's home now. But from a 1914 photo we can have an idea about the residential homes by the Michigan Avenue and one of the homes belonged to the Lyons.



Though now it is impossible to identify Lyon's residence, still we can try to zoom in and compare it with the description of Lyon's granddaughter, Cornelia Conger. Swamiji probably saw what she described: "Our home was 262 Michigan Avenue, a pleasant somewhat old-fashioned frame house, painted a soft olive green. It had a porch on its side, and in summer we had red and white striped awnings and window boxes with red geraniums and white petunias. Big trees lined the street; there was a little back yard, and we had a kennel for our dogs and a little stable. It was all very nice and cozy. Its location was under the middle of what is



On 11th September the New Liberty Bell rang 10 strokes for 10 major world religions to signal the beginning of Parliament of Religions. In the afternoon of that day Swamiji addressed the Opening session of Parliament of Religions in the Columbus Hall of the Art Institute. Rest is the history.

After the Parliament, the wandering monk, *parivrajaka* Swami Vivekananda set on his travel and founded the first Vedanta Society of this planet in New York in 1894. Completing his first visit of the USA, Swamiji returned India, established Belur Math in 1897. In 1899 he came back to this country once again and spent most of his time on the west coast and founded the second Vedanta Society in San Francisco. Though he visited Chicago during this trip also, he did not start any Vedanta Society this time either. Was that job awaiting someone else? Probably.

Swami Gnaeswarananda was the founder head of the Vedanta Society in the city of Swamiji's triumph. The year 2018 marks his 125 years birth anniversary too. We shall look forward to an opportunity to remember this great soul separately. Here we shall just revisit the beginning of Vedanta Society in Chicago, briefly.

Gnaeswarananda arrived Chicago in December 1929 with object of opening a Vedanta center. On 19th January 1930 the Vedanta Society of Chicago was established with great enthusiasm at the Masonic Temple building at 32 W Randolph Street.

It was probably not just a coincidence that the Vedanta Society of Chicago was inaugurated at the Masonic Temple. Swami Vivekananda was also a member of Freemasonic society before meeting Sri Ramakrishna. Lawyer Bishwanath Dutta, father of Narendranath Dutta, was a member of Masonic society. On February 19, 1884 he applied for the membership in this Society. Naren's father passed away on February 23 and his membership was approved on passing the freemasonry test on April 5th. He became Master Mason on May 20, 1884. The first meeting between Sri Ramakrishna and Narendranath Dutta happened in November 1884 at the house of Surendra Nath Mitra.



Probably Swamiji was in touch with his Masonic brothers in the West too. After Swamiji, his disciple Paramananda was also well-received by the Masons in Buffalo, NY around 1920. In 1927, Gnaeswarananda first came to the US to assist Bodhananda at

the Vedanta Society of NY. He, too, like Swami Paramananda may have developed brotherhood with this group.

Dr. Archibald Baker of the University of Chicago presided over the inaugural ceremony.

Many prominent socio-cultural personalities like Mrs. Hollister Sturgis and Mrs. Chauncey Blair were present.

Swami Gnaeswarananda addressed the audience by describing Chicago as *"the city of my dreams, where America discovered true India through her great son Swami Vivekananda.... Chicago is the city where the ancient great grandmother of the human race [India] greeted the most modern of her children, the American culture, through the message of Vivekananda... India and America occupy just the opposite sides of the globe. They are geographical antipodes. To me it is significant. You know, when the two opposite ends in an electric battery meet, they manifest a tremendous energy. So, when modern America is united with ancient India, by assimilating the best of each other's cultures, and tremendous civilization will be the result. The Vedanta movement, to my mind, is the pioneer in this great achievement."* He concluded his lecture announcing, *"I shall be speaking systematically on the subject of Vedanta Philosophy from next Sunday at 3 pm, in the hall next door, Hall no. A4."*

Swami Gnaeswarananda's universal outlook brought him many admirers. He soon established the center in rented premises at 120 E Delaware Place, just off Michigan Avenue. On the first letterhead of the Society, the objects of the Society were stated as: "1. To disseminate the ethics, psychology, and the broad and universal practical spiritual philosophy of the Vedas, through the practice and culture of Reason, Love, Meditation, and Work. 2. To promote peace and harmony among mankind by including the Oneness of the origin and goal of all human aspirations and ideals."

The work began with great enthusiasm after 37 long years of Vivekananda's historic speeches in Chicago. Gnaeswarananda would give interviews, private and group classes in the center and would deliver public lectures at the Masonic Temple. He spoke on radio, and used to give talks at churches, schools, clubs, and other cultural organizations.

During 1933-34 another World's Fair was organized in the city. This is one of the important events that took place in Chicago during Gnaneswarananda's time. The theme of the fair was: *A Century of Progress.*, technological innovation. The fair's motto was "Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Adapts". The goal was to put the city in the spotlight for its centennial, while displaying the best of scientific progress as well as bringing the cultures of the world to Chicago.



This fair marks the 4th and the final or the 4th star on the city's flag. The fair started in 1933, May 27th and went through 1934 November 1st. From 1893 to 1933, the city was changed greatly; a simple example, public transportation was no more horse carriage but motor car.

Though it was held just after great economic depression, yet 48,469,227 people visited the fair (1.8 times more than 1893).



On this occasion Swami Gnaneswarananda organized a Convention of all the leaders of the American Vedanta Centers. Attendees were

Swamis Paramananda, Ashokananda, Akhilananda, Vividishananda, Nikhilananda & Devatmananda. All assembled in Chicago and delivered a series of public lectures, creating great enthusiasm among the public.

This time Gnaneswarananda published an attractive brochure entitled, "Hinduism Comes to America". This came with a brief account of the origin, purpose, and spiritual significance of the Vedanta movement in America, with the photographs of all the Swamis who had served in America beginning from Swami Vivekananda. It was the first attempt in that direction and received a lot of appreciation.

The public lectures went on through out the summer and many other functions held during the convention were well-attended and many Chicagoans not only felt attracted to get involved in the Vedanta Movement, but some of them were also fortunate enough to have been accepted as disciples by Swami Gnaneswarananda.

Let's end here with a trivia: The 1933 World Fair's opening night began with a nod to the heavens. Lights were automatically activated when the rays of the star Arcturus (Swati) were detected. The star was chosen as it was believed that its light had started its journey at about the time of the previous Chicago world's fair — the World's Columbian Exposition — in 1893. The rays were focused on photoelectric cells in a series of astronomical observatories and then transformed into electrical energy which was transmitted to Chicago.

However, the travel time of light from Swati was calculated wrongly as 40 years. Now with much finer technology we know it takes very close to 37 years for that heavenly light to touch the earth. Therefore, the light that illumined the 1933 fair actually started its journey in 1896. And, the that shone from Swati in 1893, the year Swami Vivekananda gifted the West with his message of Vedanta, reached 37 years later, in 1930 – the year Vedanta Society of Chicago was founded!

Mere coincidence?

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Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago 2019 Calendar

'Haribhai, (Swami Turiyananda) I am going to America. Whatever you hear of as happening there (meaning preparations for the Parliament of Religions), is all for this (striking his own chest). For this (me) alone everything is being arranged.'

... Swami Vivekananda; Life of Swami Vivekananda by his eastern and western disciples - Volume I; pg. 385



2019

Celebrating 125 years of Swami Vivekananda's historic addresses at the World's Parliament of Religions in September 1893

Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

14630 Lemont Road, Homer Glen, IL 60491, Tel: 708.301.9062, email: info@chicagovedanta.org, website: chicagovedanta.org

Theme of the calendar:
125 years of Swami Vivekananda's Historic Speech at the World's Parliament of Religions (1893)



Swami Vivekananda
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swami_Vivekananda_\(San_Francisco\)_California_1900.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swami_Vivekananda_(San_Francisco)_California_1900.jpg)



Professor John Henry Wright
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Henry_Wright

The Swami (Vivekananda) had given up all hope of speaking at the Parliament of Religions, but wonderful are the ways of the Lord! Professor Wright became so deeply impressed with his rare ability that he insisted that he should represent Hinduism in the Parliament, saying, 'This is the only way you can be introduced to the nation at large.' The Swami explained his difficulties and said that he had no credentials. Professor Wright who recognized his genius said,

'To ask you, Swami, for your credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine!'

He then assured the Swami that he would take it upon himself to see that he should have a place in the Parliament as a delegate representing Hinduism. He was acquainted with numerous persons of position and distinction in connection with the Parliament and wrote at once to his friend, the Chairman of the Committee on the selection of delegates, stating,

'Here is a man (Swami Vivekananda) who is more learned than all our learned professors put together.'

Knowing that the Swami had not enough money he kindly presented him with a ticket to Chicago, and also gave him letters of introduction to the Committee which had in charge the matters of housing and providing for the Oriental delegates. This was, indeed, a godsend! The Swami rejoiced at this literal manifestation of Divine Providence.

... Life of Swami Vivekananda by his eastern and western disciples - Volume I; pg. 405, 406

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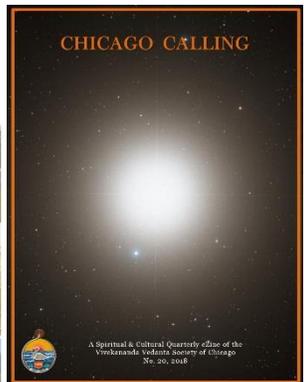
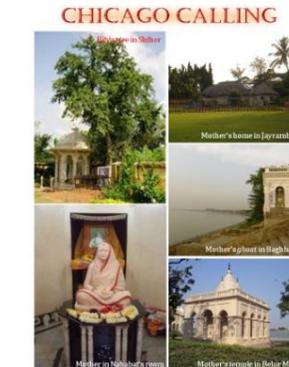
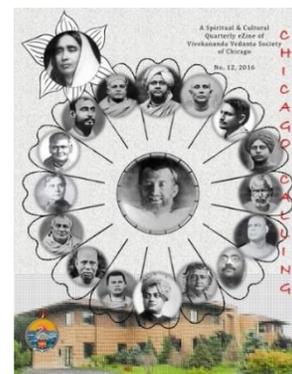
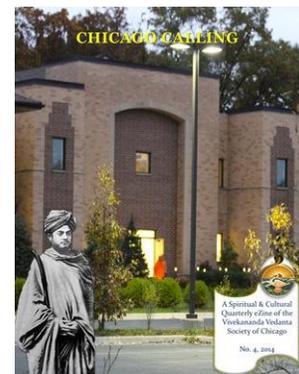
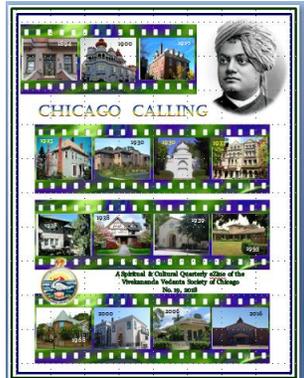
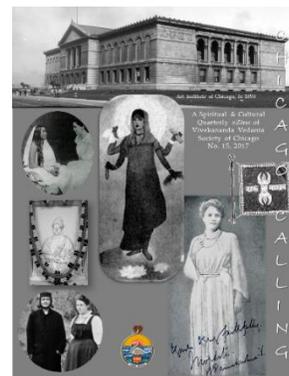
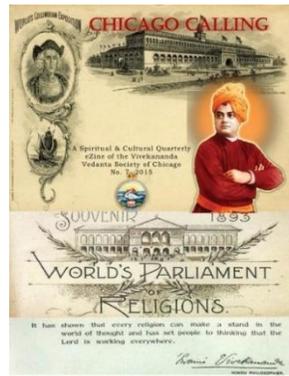
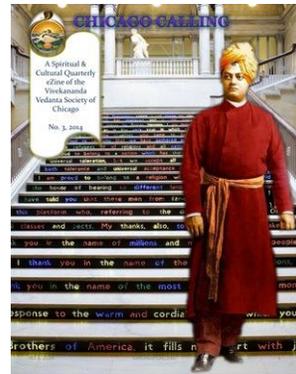
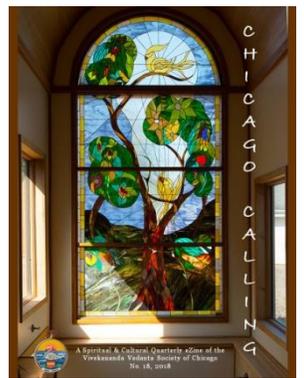
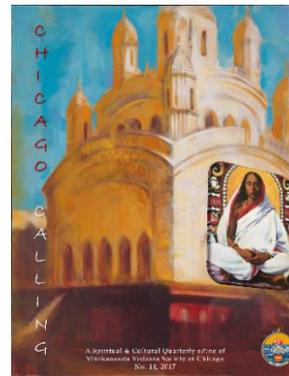
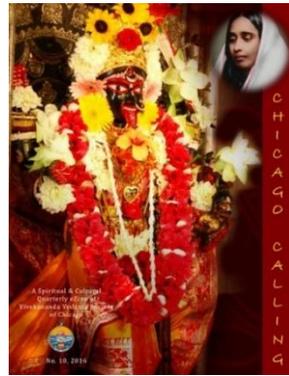
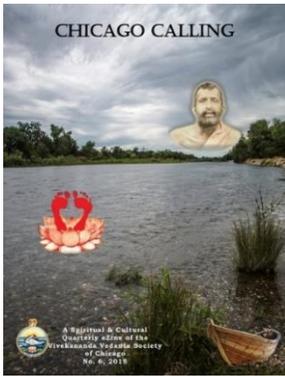
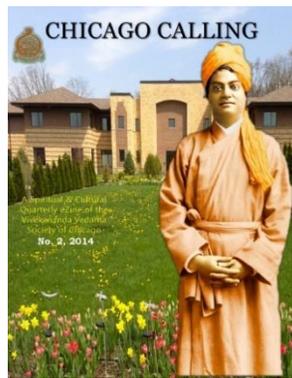
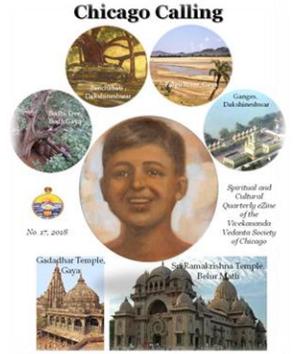
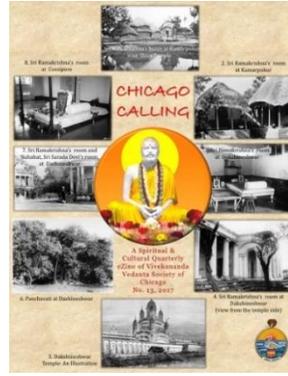
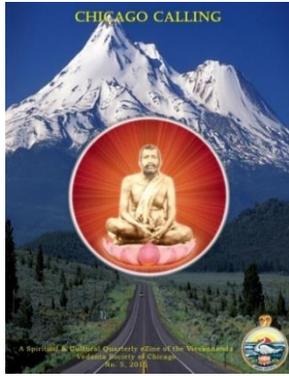
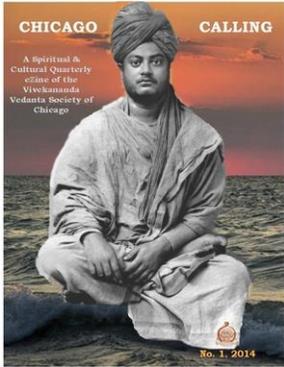
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