

REACH

NEWSLETTER OF VEDANTA CENTRES OF AUSTRALIA

85 Bland Street, Ashfield, New South Wales 2131



*Sri Rāmakrishna Temple
at Belur Math, India
Head Quarters of Rāmakrishna Math & Mission*

Selected Sayings and Teachings of Sri Rāmakrishna, Sri Sārādā Devi and Swāmi Vivekānanda

- ❖ **The Spiritual Verity:** You see many stars in the sky at night, but not when the sun rises. Can you, therefore, say that there are no stars in the heavens during the day? O man, because you cannot find God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God.
(Sri Rāmakrishna: Life and Teachings).
- ❖ There is no treasure equal to contentment, and no virtue equal to fortitude.
(Sri Sārādā Devi: Life and teachings).

- ❖ **Ātman or the Self:** Each soul is a star, and all stars are set in that infinite azure, that eternal sky, the Lord. There is the root, the reality, the real individuality of each and all. Religion began with the search after some of these stars that had passed beyond our horizon, and ended in finding them all in God, and ourselves in the same place.
(Teachings of Swāmi Vivekānanda).

We welcome all interested in the Rāmakrishna Movement to join as members and render all support / help in our activities.

Application forms can be obtained from the Secretary of the Society.

The Rāmakrishna Vedānta Society of Victoria

A snapshot of events, programmes and activities of the Society

- ❖ Inauguration Ceremony
- ❖ Youth Retreat
- ❖ Monthly Discourses
- ❖ Fund-Raising: Odissi Dance Performance
- ❖ Celebration of Rām-Navami
- ❖ Evening Vespers

Gospel Meetings

Inauguration Ceremony

The Society's new Āshrama, at 7 Judy Court, Vermont South, Melbourne 3133, was consecrated by Swāmi Sridharānanda, President, and Swāmi Ātmeshānanda, Vice-President, Vedānta Centre of Sydney, on Saturday 20 March 2004.

The program of events included formal worship and offerings; the rendering of devotional songs; a special talk presented by Swāmi Sridharānanda; an inspiring *Ārati* service [evening vespers] and the distribution of *Prasād* [blessed sacrament]. The on-site book-shop and the accompanying release of the inaugural edition of *Reach*, the Society's quarterly newsletter, provided spiritually elevating literature. An evening program that continued the spirit of reverence and worship included a *Satsang*, a Vespers service conducted by Swāmi Ātmeshānanda, and the final distribution of *Prasād*.

The auspicious occasion showcased a coming-together of our youth to render invaluable assistance.

Youth Retreat

Our youth participated in a special half-day retreat conducted by Swāmi Ātmeshānanda on Sunday 21 March 2004 at the Āshrama.

They were enlightened on a range of topics to promote their personal well-being and instill a general spiritual awareness. The retreat included group activities with feedback, and a question-and-answer session. Parents, who were welcome to participate, volunteered responses during the latter part of the retreat.

The Society looks forward to hosting future retreats that will benefit the youth and adult audience.

Monthly Discourses

Swāmi Sridharānanda conducted special Thursday talks, based on the lives and teachings of the Holy Trinity, at the Āshrama on 18 March and 15 April 2004. On both these occasions a large gathering of devotees was invigorated by the spiritual nature and depth of the talks. Continuing discourses on the Mundaka Upanishad [on a Friday] and the Bhāgavad Gītā [on a Saturday] were presented by Swāmiji during these months, at Holmesglen TAFE in Chadstone.

Further discourses have been scheduled on a monthly basis for the rest of the year. Do contact the Society [see the end of this Newsletter] for further information on dates and times.

Fund-Raising: Odissi Dance Performance

A stunning Odissi dance performance was held on 1 May 2004 by the faculty and students of Kalāmandir, led by Joyoti Das, a disciple of the great teacher, Sanjukta Panigrahi. The performance of the Dance portrayed, in art form, the spiritual treasures of Ancient India. The occasion was graced by

Swāmi Ātmeshānanda, whose message to the audience was based on Sri Rāmakrishna's teaching, 'Service to Man is Service to God'. This became Swāmi Vivekānanda's spiritual inheritance that is so abundantly reflected in his life and teachings.

Kalāmandir donated the entire proceeds of this performance, held in the beautiful Robert Blackwood Hall of Monash University, Clayton, to the Building Fund of the Vedānta Centres of Australia, earmarked for the Melbourne Āshrama. Our grateful thanks go to Kalāmandir and the Das family for this generous, exemplary gesture.

Celebration of Rām-Navami

A special *satsang* was held at the Āshrama on 3 April 2004 to glorify Sri Rāmachandra. The programme included formal worship and prayer; rendering of devotional singing; readings from the Gospel, and reciting the Hanumān Chāalisa. The event culminated in an inspiring *Ārati* followed by the distribution of *Prasād*.

Evening Vespers

The Society hosts a daily 45-minute *Ārati* [Vesper Service] at the Āshrama, starting at 7.00 every evening. All are invited to attend and participate in the singing of hymns.

Gospel Meetings

The Society hosts a 2-hour *Satsang* at the Āshrama, on the second Sunday of each month, commencing at 5 pm for the winter season. These occasions provide opportunities for devotees to be immersed in holy company and holy talks.

National/ international perspective on Rāmakrishna Vedānta centres

The following is a compilation by Swāmi Ātmeshānanda. It gives attention to the growth of the various Centres of the Rāmakrishna Vedānta Society, both nationally and internationally, and of the varying programmes and activities that have been undertaken.

SYDNEY

Vedanta Centre of Sydney, 85 Bland Street, Ashfield, New South Wales 2131

Regular classes

Every Sunday, from 9.45 a.m. to 10.45 a.m. Swāmi Sridharānanda conducted classes on the Bhāgavad Gitā at the South Strathfield Bowling Club (corner August Street and Wallis Avenue).

On Wednesdays classes on Patanjali Yoga Sutras were held at the Centre from 7.30 p.m. to 8.30 p.m.

On the second Monday of every month, classes on Nārada Bhakti Sutras were held at the residence of Naresh & Manju Sharma, at 73 Francesco Avenue, Bella Vista, NSW.

Guru Purnimā

In the Indian tradition, the importance of a Guru as a representative of the Lord is highly placed even above that of the parents. Guru Purnimā happens to be the traditional birthday of Sage Vyāsa, who compiled and classified the Vedas. It was he who spread the knowledge of the Vedas amongst men; he is thus regarded as the Guru of all Gurus. The Sydney Centre observed this day on 2 July 2004 with formal worship, a talk on the significance of Guru by Swāmi Sridharānanda, devotional singing and distribution of Prasād. A large number of devotees participated in the programme, which was held from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Participation in ‘Living Now’ Expo

The Sydney Centre participated in an expo organized by the Living Now

magazine group at Randwick from 13 to 15 August 2004. Books, CDs and audio cassettes were sold during the expo.

Conference on ‘Yoga - Science of Infinite Possibilities’

The Sydney Centre, in collaboration with the Vivekānanda Yoga Research Foundation, conducted a two-day seminar on 21 and 22 August 2004, at the Eastern Avenue Lecture Hall and Workshop Rooms, University of Sydney. The conference was inaugurated by the Indian High Commissioner in Australia, Mr P. P. Shukla, in the presence of Swāmi Dāmodarānanda, Swāmi Sridharānanda and Mr Ganapathi, Consul General of India. Nearly 200 delegates attended the conference. 21 speakers presented on a variety of subjects pertaining to Yoga and its application in life – physical, mental and spiritual – via 6 keynote addresses and 20 workshops.

The Sydney centre celebrated Sri Krishna Janmāshtami on Monday 6 September 2004. The programme, started at 7 pm, consisted of formal worship, readings from the Srimad Bhagavatam, bhajans and distribution of Prasād.

BRISBANE

The Rāmakrishna Vedānta Centre of Queensland, Inc. officially inaugurated its Brisbane Centre on Saturday 3 April 2004. The Hon. Gary Hardgrave MP, Federal Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs & Minister Assisting the Prime Minister, was the guest of honour. The programme, held at Indooroopilly State High School Hall, consisted of a video presentation on the Rāmakrishna Movement (with particular reference to the activities in Australia), speeches by Mr Mahālingam Sinnathamby, Swāmi Sridharānanda and the Honourable Minister, and devotional songs by local artistes. Around 500 persons attended this programme.

The Centre operates from 61 Northbrook Street, Sinnamon Park, Queensland, where morning worship, evening *Ārati*, weekly religious classes for children, fortnightly *satsangs* and yoga classes are

held regularly. Swāmi Ātmeshānanda visits this Centre once a month to hold classes for three days.

CANBERRA

The Canberra Organisation conducted classes on the Mundaka Upanishad and Bhāgavad Gitā by Swāmi Sridharānanda on the second Friday and Saturday of every month. The Belconnen Library conference room was hired for the purpose.

ADELAIDE

Swāmi Sridharānanda visited Adelaide on the third Friday and Saturday of every month. He held classes at the local Ganesha temple as well as at the residence of Dr. Janan Iswaran.

PERTH

Swāmi Sridharānanda visited Perth, WA, on 24 and 25 June 2004. In the following visit, from 22 to 26 July 2004, Swāmi Sridharānanda was accompanied by Swāmi Ātmeshānanda. During their visits the Swāmis met the devotees and held *satsangs*.

International perspective

New Zealand

Swāmi Sridharānanda, on invitation from devotees, visited New Zealand from 29 April to 9 May 2004. He held classes at Auckland and Wellington during this visit. The Auckland Centre has now been registered formally.

Fiji

Swāmi Sridharānanda visited Fiji from 9 to 11 May 2004. He was specially invited to preside over a meeting to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the arrival of Indians in Fiji.

Forthcoming programmes

The worship of Mother Durgā (Durgā Pujā) on the 8th day (Ashtami) of the Divine Mother’s festival, will be held at the Vedānta Centre of Sydney on 21 October 2004, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., and from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. The programme will include formal worship, devotional singing, *Ārati* and distribution of Prasād.

The Mundaka Upanishad

An Introduction

The Upanishads are described as the spiritual wealth of India. Being a salient part of Vedic literature which is expressed in a unique language, this is not understood by many. Hence its relevance to present-day living may be questioned. The main focus of the Upanishads is on addressing the critical issues of 'Who am I? What am I?' and 'What is the relationship between this world and me?' It may therefore be useful to understand the inner manner and language of the Upanishads.

If there is anything perennial in this changing world, it is the Upanishads. The world may change but, in essence, human beings remain the same. The perennial questions of 'Who am I?' and 'What am I?', as well as the purpose of being born, remain. The Mundaka Upanishad guides us on these matters rationally and helps us pierce the veil of ignorance, being instructive, informative and educative. It enlightens us on additional methodology in order to educate us to face the challenges of life.

Many of our inadequacies in facing the crises of life can disappear if we can saturate ourselves with this teaching on how to face the world. There are certain faculties that are given only to human beings to break the barriers and remove the miseries of the world. The intention of these discourses is to present the Mundaka Upanishad in a comfortable manner so that all misconceptions about it can be removed from our minds.

History

A brief historical insight of the salient features of the Vedic literature will serve as an appropriate context in which to introduce the gross and subtle teachings of the Upanishads. Some of its emphases include the Hindu concept of Gods and deification, as well as the evolution and forms of worship and prayer.

We know of mass migration from Central Asia through the Indus Valley to the land known as India. The people were charmed by the beauty of nature's bounty — the hills, dales and seasons — and the thought that they were its beneficiaries. They thus developed a great sense of observation, based on their five sense organs, of each minute subtlety of nature. This perceptual observation led to conceptual knowledge.

Our ancestors, by their perceptual observations, found the whole system in the universe to follow a distinctive pattern. This led them to conclude that there must be a guiding principle behind all this, i.e. there are certain concepts behind what we see that control the natural phenomena or happenings. They called this principle The Natural Law. Along with this came the instinct of self-preservation that was manifested in the thinking that "The best way to protect myself is to appease the Power in whom the benefits of nature are safe and secure".

They thought of the natural bounties and the underlying principles. Slowly the concept grew that each and every thing in nature on which their lives depended was a principle in itself. They progressed from being perceptual observers to being conceptual knowers. There was a defining of each and every form as a force, and a worshipping of these forms according to what had been deified by them. The names Surya-Deva [Sun-God] and Agni-Deva [Fire-God] are examples of such deification.

Their rationale of worship is best depicted in the following description. "That which makes it effulgent to us: such a force is in play. Our existence depends on the generosity and munificence of that force." In other words, there was a deification of all forces of nature on which human living was dependent.

In addition to all these elements of Nature, there was an equal importance of Godhead. Among all the laws or 'Devatās' which had been conceived of, there had to be one Supreme Being having a supreme intelligence. People began to think about the supreme God who controlled them, and made their offerings to that God. It thus marked a change from polytheistic worship of multiple Gods to monotheism, and heralded a belief in Divine strength and power. Through a tremendous amount of ceaseless intellectual activity came the conclusion that there must be this Supreme Being - the 'Parama Iswara'.

Rituals

In Vedic literature there is also the question of appeasing the Gods so that our lives remain safe and secure. This led to the creation of another branch of discipline which expressed gratitude to these forms of nature, for they (the

'Devas') were construed as being ever-magnanimous to their subjects. This became an inspiration for the creation of hymns, particular rituals and practices.

These practices included

- Offering of ghee/clarified butter created through the sweat and toil of worshippers.
- Lighting of a fire as a means of conveying offerings to that particular God.
- Reciting of accompanying prayers showing reverence to the Deity being worshipped, as in the following example:

"O fire, I see you burn, going up into the sky, so this is what I am offering humbly to *Surya*."

This discipline, getting hold of human society, was manifested in the thinking that since they were grateful rather than being ingrates, in enunciating this discipline, they should also enjoy its munificence. In this way a culture of worshipping the Divine in various forms developed.

Worship is defined as

- physical activity
- blended with emotional affinity
- performed with rational conviction.

These three, done in a particular manner, constitute "worship to please".

Human society of that time functioned with several motivations, the most important being survival. The discipline of worship had thus to be performed "first thing in the morning" as a means of being seen to be thankful to their Giver for all the blessings, bounties and boons showered upon them.

Forms of worship such as *havans* and *pujās* were aimed at disciplining the human mind.

Ultimately two types of people took charge of this quest. The extroverts focused on the journey outside. The introverts began a journey within themselves to know the answers to the eternal questions of 'Who am I?' and 'What am I?' Thus there followed two distinct paths. All methods of worship were enunciated meticulously; no freedom was permitted. Disciplining the human mind became the goal of introvert and extrovert alike.

It was also self-analysis — to enjoy and understand everything in this universe as well as to understand the mysteries

of the universe. In the Vedic literature both branches of the discipline flourished together. They knew then that for each and every action there is an appropriate reaction. The reasoning was as revealed in the following:

“I don’t see it, but it is an Inevitable, Infallible Being created, that will stand me in good stead when I need help.”

This is how Vedic literature grew. Each and every faith today actually has its own ritualistic worship.

The concept of Upanishad

Denotative meaning

The “anta” in the word Vedānta means end or climax of wisdom. The Rishis collected the gems from the Vedas and created the Upanishads. The prefix upa means “coming close”. Shad, being the root word, means to “slowly emaciate and totally annihilate”. Ni means “in totality”: that is, it is the removal or annihilation in totality.

There are two levels of meaning: a gross level and a philosophical level.

Connotative Meaning

The ideas contained in the Upanishads are such that one’s ignorance will be totally annihilated by listening to and learning from a person who has mastered those ideas. The spirit or essence of the Upanishads cannot be self-taught, but must be learned from a person who knows it and has the wisdom of a self-realised soul.

On a gross level this means that proximity to a person who has reached that goal which one wants to reach — even if that person has reached it after several errors — will light the lamp that annihilates one’s ignorance totally.

A second meaning: the Upanishads have such an immense intrinsic capacity that if you are exposed to it, are receptive and able to saturate your whole being with it, you will become a realised soul.

Putting both meanings together: if you are receptive, eager to learn and are able to put it into practice in your everyday life, then though born ignorant you will end up knowing the meaning of your true, original nature.

Eternal message and significance of the Mundaka Upanishad

Of the 108 Upanishads in our Vedānta philosophy, many have vanished. The Mundaka Upanishad was one of those retrieved by Āchārya Shankara. The Upanishads are conceived of as the Hindu Indian way of life, its 3 pillars being the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads, and the Bhāgavad Gitā (the latter being closest to us in time).

The Brahma Sutra is a condensation of the whole gamut of the Upanishads in Sutra form. The Bhāgavad Gitā was created as a practical realisation of the lofty ideas of the Upanishads in our daily lives.

As human beings we are gifted with the capacity to reason, and with emotions that are guided and managed by reason. We have the desire to break down barriers to knowledge. The Upanishads say:

“Go forward — don’t stop until the goal is reached: to know your true, original nature”!

There is an endless thirst to broaden the horizon of knowledge. This desire to know the unknown is nothing but the ultimate desire to know oneself. All searching will come to an end when one knows one’s true, original nature. The Rishis of the past managed the principal qualities that belong to a human.

There is a desire to bring about a qualitative improvement of human nature and to manifest the potential divinity that is already within us. This marks an inward journey into the self. This is the subject matter of Upanishad-study: to master and manage the forces of nature — which we see external to us — and to modulate them so as to improve the quality of life.

The last aspect of Upanishad-study is the philosophy that the essence of this universe, which is perceived by us, is the Supreme, Sublime Swarup, “the awareness of my existence”, i.e. the quality of awareness of my existence.

Two things are implied: I am, and I am aware of my ‘am-ness’. This awareness is called chit. The ‘am-ness’ of mine is called Sat. That is, I know that I exist, and so that knowledge is eternally reflected in my mind. The awareness of my ‘am-ness’ is uninterrupted and spontaneous. Sat Swarup, Chit Swarup, Ānanda Swarup is

the essence of my Being. Thus it reflects in my consciousness in all moments of my existence. I am always enjoying ecstasy but I also experience misery.

The Upanishad uses an analogy of transparent mica. Let us say that a fire is blazing before you. You want to enjoy the effulgence of its light, but the heat of the blazing fire is burning you. You want the light but not the heat of the fire. The teacher says that a sheet of transparent mica, when placed between you and the fire, allows light to come through but as an insulator it prevents the heat from reaching you. Thus the fire has two separate qualities: heat and effulgence. You can see the effulgence through the heat-blocking filter. Similarly, the human who has gone through the process of thinking realises that we put a filter within our nature by which we allow *Sat* and *Chit*, but not *Ānanda*, to flow through. We therefore have to remove that filter.

The question to ponder on is: where is that Ānanda Swarup? This mind of ours has developed such a filtering process that it has allowed Sat and Chit through, but not Ānanda. Therefore we are miserable. The Rishis speak to us from the top of the Himalayas; the essence of their message is:

**You are the children of immortal bliss
Why weep and wail?
I have gone through that procedure.
I can help you,
So that you too can realise
This bliss!**

From the Upanishadic viewpoint, material science and spiritual science are within handshaking distance. The Rishis accepted scientific conclusions. They would also say that the scientists have experienced that cosmic energy by ‘objectifying’ it in their laboratory, while we have ‘subjectified’ it by looking at our own, inner nature.

The teacher says, in essence, to the student:

**Thou art that.
Look within thyself.
That cosmic energy of the outside world
Is located within thee!**

This leads to the realisation: **‘I am the Brahman. I am the Ātman!’** Relentless, non-fallacious logic and rationality are

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Thoughts of the Divine / Divinising Ourselves

This topic provided the basis of a talk by Swāmi Ātmeshānanda during a visit to Melbourne. The universal nature of the talk makes it relevant to daily living. The essence of the talk is captured in the ensuing summary. The statement, “We are here to think of the Divine” provided a fitting opening to the Swāmi’s talk.

Before we think of the Divine we have to think of ourselves as Divine. This is the Vedāntic culture. Before you think of God, imagine yourself as a part and parcel of the Divine. Our spiritual practices bear no fruit because we do not see ourselves as being Divine.

“May my inner being and outer being be divinised. I am that Divine Light (*Jyoti*)”. This is an example of a prayer that can inspire us towards this positive reflection of ourselves as being concepts of the Divine.

We need to install that Divine Light and then practise meditation. Therefore the first process is to think of ourselves as being Divine. One needs to first purify the body (external being), then the mind. Readings from Swāmi Brahmānanda, a spiritual giant who raised the spiritual consciousness of those whom he came into contact with, serve to emphasise this idea. He said that religion is only for the chosen few, whether you like it or not. Whenever you put your heart into something, you always get something out of it. This part of spiritual life is difficult, but not impossible, to go through. We are very fortunate indeed. Being in the very presence of those who seek after God shows our spiritual progress. God is the one and only substance that we should

hanker after. Company of holy books and holy people are important. Go forward! Go Forward! Go forward! So says Sri Rāmākrishna. We cannot stop in this quest for the highest in spiritual life. We have to leave behind what is temporary, what is transitory, and go towards the Divine which is the only source of greatness in our lives.

There is no place for weakness in spiritual life. Such a person can progress neither spiritually nor materially. In ordinary life, all we say is “Give me! Give me! Give me!” There is give and take in nature. If you give out the least, you will receive the least. We must use discrimination (between right and wrong) and bring right to the right person.

Our spiritual fervour must be maintained. The mind is too restless. We should be on guard. Eternal vigilance is the price to pay on the spiritual path. We need to check if we are on the right path and whether ego and desire predominate. Doggedness and tenacity are really required. It may be for a long time but it should be steady; with great intensity; with great devotion to the Ideal. The Lord is the only one who is taintless, sinless, changeless, where no second exists. Whatever you think is what you become.

A regular concern is that it is difficult in the world to think about the Divine. Let us think of ourselves as the Divine, and thus think of Him. Divinise yourself. But how are we to know Him? There is a need to practise your disciplines but you must know how to do so. Give as much importance to the means as to the end. According to Swāmi Vivekānanda, one task of our lives is to assert this potential divinity. God is hidden in all things;

pervades all things; He is the inner life of all beings. Think of God as the inner ruler. He is dwelling in you, and in me; He is the giver of all fruits of our actions, and He is without any attributes, because He is the only Reality. God is known to him who really knows Him to be unknown (as an Upanishadic saying goes). To the true, steady devotee, God reveals His Glory. The Lord asks us to be in constant communion with Him. Then God manifests Himself in those who think of the Divine. The main philosophy behind the Avatār is that God descends and man ascends.

We want to gather information but we do not get into the essence. A finer, subtler instrument is needed by which we can see and know God - that is, our own mind. The mind is pure, free of all blemishes. When we break our ego we become one with God. His *Leelā* can never be explained, but it can be transcended. He can know the highest truth who has a pure mind, and heart, and whose mind is one-pointed.

The whole process of spiritual struggle is to purify the mind. Let us not put rubbish on rubbish with the five senses. Rather, to begin to purify the mind through *bhakti*, prayer, meditation and *karma-yoga* through chanting the Name of God - like a guileless child.

“Give me that by which I can realise my immortality!”

Prayer is a very, very potent tool. Let us pray to the Divine. Let us not swerve from this path. And be at peace. *Om, Shānti!*

- Swāmi Ātmeshānanda/2002/Melbourne

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used to arrive at a unified theory that leads to this knowledge. This knowledge ascends from the perceptual to the conceptual; then the culture surpasses the limitations of sensory knowledge.

The effort of each and every individual is to know his or her true, original nature. There is only one purpose of being born a human. Though □ senses and develop extra sensory perception, that is, what we do not know. Instead of re-establishing ourselves, we demean ourselves to be at par with all other biological creatures, which is the tragedy of life. The four faculties remain unutilised to their fullest potential.

The I □ make you know your true, original nature. It thus unfolds the potential divinity within oneself. The miser does not know the wealth of the being within him/her, and dies without knowing his/her own true, original nature. Therefore we should not be ‘miserly’ but use our qualities so that we can experience our own true, original nature before we die. In this way we are the ‘knowers’ of our own selves and utilise that wealth for the benefit of society. Om.

— Swāmi Sridharānanda in Melbourne/2000 2004©, Vedānta Centre of Sydney
(The discourses on the Mundaka Upanishad will continue in future editions of Reach).

Bhāgavad Gitā: An Introduction

Thought A Day -- 1 January

Duryodhana and Arjuna open their hearts to their Gurus before the start of the battle. Duryodhana thinks of his selfish motives. Arjuna thinks of others, not minding to sacrifice himself for others.

(Source: Thought A Day Gitā)

The Gitā is from the spiritual wealth of India. There are three distinct approaches in studying the Gitā.

- Listen and try to create much doubt in your mind; one by one, these doubts would be removed.
- This leads to a rock-solid conviction. This crystallises in the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna.
- Saturate yourself with these ideas so that there is a total personality change, leading to a qualitative improvement of human personality. You should be imbued with the spirit of thinking thus: 'Though I am a human and my behaviour pattern is human, it is motivated by that divinity within me which is centered within this being and which is manifested in the whole universe.'

Historic Background of the Bhāgavad Gitā

The Bhāgavad Gitā contains 700+ verses. Each is self-contained. Even if one studies just one verse one can complete the study. If one can understand a few salient facts of the Gitā and translate it into one's own life, it would be useful. Why then is there so much literature on the Bhāgavad Gitā?



Because the Divine Mother has provided a table laden with food to appease hunger according to the taste, capacity, likes and dislikes of different people. To study the whole gamut of literature is not a necessary condition for gaining *moksha*. One little idea being put into practice is good enough.

There are three aspects to consider in the study of the Gitā: the student, the process involved and finally the goal to be reached.

What is the goal? To feel free; not being bound down by one's understanding; by developing an unbreakable attachment with the Divine. The process of rehabilitating oneself is known as *sādhanā*. This is the purpose of all scriptural studies.

The Bhāgavad Gitā is an important section of the great epic known as the *Mahābhārata*, which is a recorded history of the dynasty of kings of India. It is given much respect in our spiritual culture. It is the fifth of the *Vedas*, which are the pillars of India's spiritual culture. The collection of all human experiences is the matter known as *Veda*.

All prevalent religions of human society rotate around a personality, usually a human one. In the Vedas it is totally different. It is the experience of Sages and *Rishis* who started a journey within themselves, thus being subjective, (*i.e.*, based on the questions 'Who am I?' and 'What am I?') and not objective. They lived in this

world. They observed certain facts in nature that were correlated, for they were observers of perceptual knowledge through the five sense organs. Via their rationality they found a core in that perceptual knowledge, which graduated into conceptual knowledge. The third area of awareness, which is that which you polish and hone, comes to you when you have attuned yourself with the essence of the universe. This is based on intuitional experience. Therefore the Vedic literature is the storehouse of infinite experiences. It does not rotate around one single person's teachings. This is the fundamental difference between the Hindu concept of Absolute and personal concept of Absolute.

**I have educated myself to see the Divine everywhere.
This universe is of infinite diversity,
And I have infinite joy
In interacting with the Divine
Every moment.**

This concept is known as polytheism, which entails seeing God in multiple forms.

Vedic pursuits start from observing Nature. From this stage Sages, Seers and *Rishis* started a journey within themselves to find out the reality beyond the appearance. The Supreme God is regarded as *Ishwara*, who is manifested in the whole cosmos. It thus fostered a discipline of worshipping that object as manifestation of the essence of the universe. The *Rishis*, in their upward journey as well as whatever they went through, recorded these. All of it is not required for one's spiritual emancipation. It was required to meet the demands of spiritual seekers.

Sage Vyāsadeva took the essential teachings of the Vedas and wrote out the treatise known as the Brahma Sutra. He virtually rewrote the Vedic literature in another form so as not to burden one's memory.

Maharishi Vedavyāsa brought abstract ideas down to the level of human understanding. He started enumerating the history of that Empire of India. He named the epic, the Mahābhārata, as the Panchama Veda, the fifth Veda, a history of the royal dynasty. It is legend, mythology and history in one.

The Bhāgavad Gītā is that part of the Mahābhārata that makes it concretely understandable.

Indian spiritual literature stands on three pillars. The first is the Vedic literature; the second is the Brahma Sutras; the third is the Bhāgavad Gītā, a day-to-day handbook on how to lead your life.

The epic Mahābhārata has 100,000 verses or *shlokas*. Vedavyāsa found that no one but Lord Ganesha could write the Bhāgavad Gītā as he dictated it. Two conditions were imposed on Vedavyāsa by Lord Ganesha. First, there was to be no revision of Vyāsa's ideas: as he spoke, so was it to be written. Too, it had to be written in an endless flow. Vyāsa, in turn, imposed a condition: Lord Ganesha had to understand everything that was said, before he wrote it down. Hence we have a veritable crossing of two giants' swords.

Vyāsa's imposition dealt with the process of writing, stipulating that it would not begin without an understanding of the meaning. There were difficult words used which Lord Ganesha had to think about. The importance of this story

is that it showed how God helped man to achieve perfection. Now, when studying the Mahābhārata, there are areas that can be interpreted in many ways. Vyāsa did this on purpose, to give himself time to think of the next verse as Lord Ganesha wrote.

Psychological analysis of the Bhāgavad Gītā

The next aspect of this inspiring text is that it is recited by Lord Krishna himself. The other protagonists embody characters that we see in our day-to-day lives. You are not being kept isolated or insulated. Individuals have to live in this world that has characters of different personalities. So the Gītā is being used to suggest that spiritual life is not in an idealistic environment but one in which you are thrust in the wider society to challenge yourself. The war of Kurukshetra symbolises the struggles in our daily lives.

The two collaterals of the same clan, being the Kauravas and the Pāndavas, had the same grandfather. Both thought themselves to be the rightful heirs to the throne of India. In this world greed and vanity are rampant. You have to find the ideal to reach the spiritual goal. There is no ideal laboratory to protect you. Therefore the Gītā is depicted as a scene of warfare, for one's life is a continual war.

All previous Avatāras presented God in a segmented manner. Lord Krishna is presented in a total human form. Arjuna represents such a human being, who has succeeded in every branch and aspect of living. Yet in a crucial moment in his life he refuses to fight. He also exhibits, clearly,

the qualities of self-confidence, arrogance and vanity. Arjuna transgressed the limits of self-confidence into the area of arrogance, yet he was trying to see insolence in his enemies, himself looking down upon them. If we want to learn a lesson from this, we see that Arjuna transgressed the decency of well-mannered behaviour.

The teacher stimulates thinking in the student and does not spoon-feed him. So Lord Krishna calmly accepts Arjuna's request to be his charioteer. In masterly fashion he recites the blood-relationships and emotional relationships that Arjuna has with his "foes" in the battlefield. Arjuna then comes to an understanding of what he was about to do, and criticises Lord Krishna for not intervening. The lesson is that human beings, with their arrogance and ignorance, put themselves in situations of difficulty and need God to rescue them.

Arjuna applied 'aparāvidyā' in his role and not 'parāvidyā', that is, the art of managing yourself. His education was unbalanced. He was the best of his time, with a sterling reputation; yet he could not apply the knowledge of managing himself. Then, he thought of not fighting, but of giving up, running away from the problem. It was left to Lord Krishna to re-educate him, to re-establish in him the conviction that warfare was an inescapable duty for him. Arjuna, though being an excellent person, did not know how to manage himself in a critical situation; he exposed his weakness and broke down.

The answers that unfold in the Gitā, to the pivotal questions of 'what happened to Arjuna' and

'why it happened to him', have parallels in our day-to-day lives. Education in India is two-fold. It is based on the material sciences and the spiritual science of sages and seers, both being taught at par. The management of forces of nature *external* to human beings is the main focus of material science such that one's life and living becomes easy.

The pursuit of spiritual science is the management of those forces, experienced within oneself, like anger and greed, which includes all human propensities. To the extent that this is managed well, one may become cultured, enlightened and civilised. In this way, life and the quality of one's life improve.

That morbid view of spirituality has to be avoided. This may be evident in the following thinking:

"I am the master of myself and not the slave of my propensities."

The goal of spiritual science is to be at one with one's divine self, one's own true, original nature.

It has been found by the Seers and *Rishis* that the person who has power biased towards the material science reveals traits of being a tyrant and despot, consequently loses his balance and behaves like a beast, not a human. If one wants to do justice to being born a human, one needs to focus on the spiritual science.

Thus, there has to be a balancing power. This is one of the main themes of India's spiritual sciences. The issue of one being a master of one-self but of being unable to know how to manage oneself, is the whole message of the Gitā.

Arjuna is a supreme example of the heights of achievement that a human can reach. He is a *Kshatriya*, born to defend righteousness, fair-play, equity and justice, and fight the tyranny of nature. He is a warrior by birth, caste and education. He pays the highest price of his life to defend all these and the territorial integrity of the Motherland.

Arjuna was thus the best specimen of a *Kshatriya* at that time. He even brought Gods to shame by his power and general-ship. However, the Gitā reveals that Arjuna had an inflated sense of self-confidence. While he remained undoubtedly the best specimen of a warrior, he outgrew his own limitations of propriety, of proper understanding of what is right and what is wrong.

(Source: Lecture Series on the Bhāgavad Gitā by Swāmi Sridharānanda.)

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(This thought-provoking introduction to the Gitā will lead to a closer examination of the actual text, in the lecture series being presented by Swāmi Sridharānanda, in the next issue of REACH.)

Visiting Swāmis

Swāmi Damodarānanda, retired head of the Fiji Centre, visited Melbourne in July-August 2004, enthraling devotees at daily satsangs held at 7 Judy Court, Vermont.

A special message for the Youth

This excerpt from Swāmi Vivekānanda's address on Bhakti-Yoga is particularly relevant for our understanding and appreciation of spiritual education. It is also revealing in its definitions of the role of the Guru and the disciple, and the attributes that each should manifest.

In intellectual development we can get much help from books, but in spiritual development, almost nothing. In studying books, we tend to think that we are being helped spiritually, but on close analysis we shall find that only our intellect has been helped, and not the spirit. That is the reason why almost every one of us can speak most wonderfully on spiritual matters, but when the time of action comes, we find ourselves woefully deficient. It is because books cannot give us that impulse from outside. To quicken the spirit, that impulse must come from another soul.

That soul from which this impulse comes is called the Guru, the teacher; the soul to which the impulse is conveyed is called the disciple, the student.

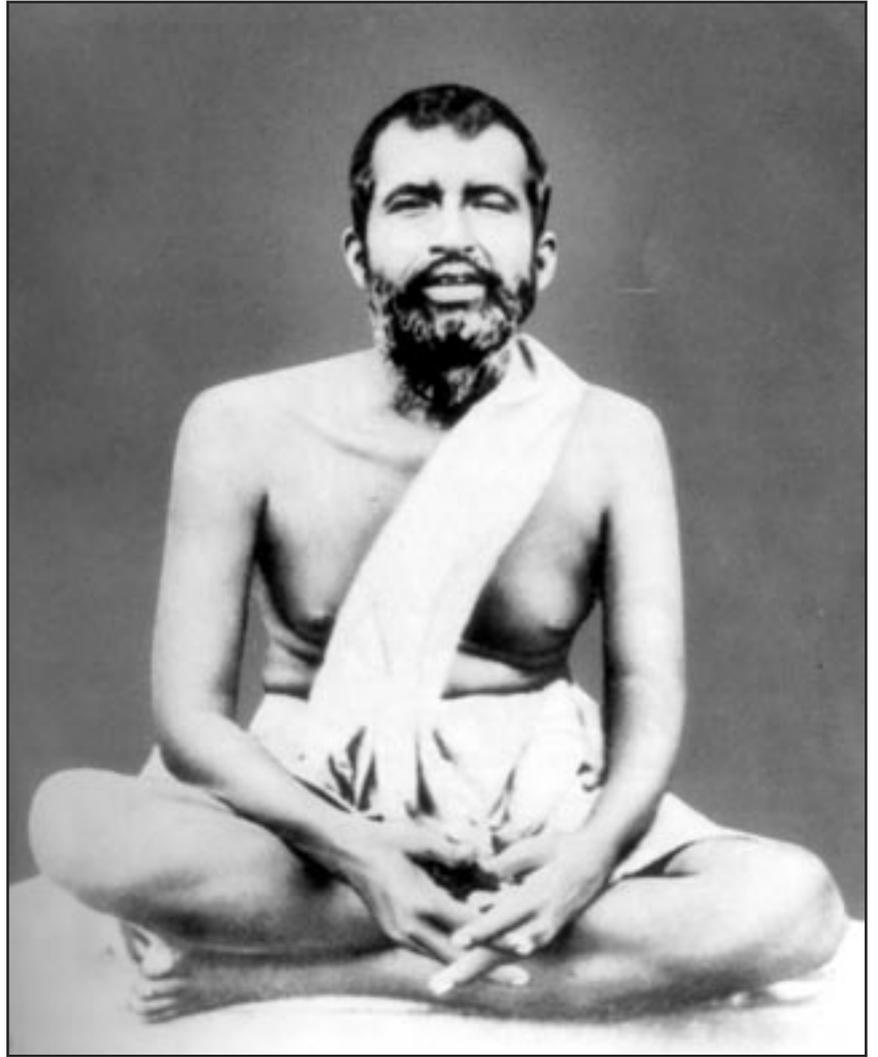
How are we to know a teacher then? In the first place, the sun requires no torch to make it visible. We do not light a candle to see the sun. When the sun rises, we instinctively become aware of its rising; and when a teacher of men comes to help us, the soul will instinctively know that it has found the truth. Truth stands on its own evidence; it is self-effulgent.

There are certain attributes necessary in the taught and also in the teacher.

The conditions necessary in the taught are purity, a real thirst after knowledge and perseverance. Religion does not consist in hearing talks, or in reading books, but it is a continual struggle, a grappling with our own nature, a continual fight till victory is received. It is not a question of one or two days, of years, or of lives, but it may be hundreds of lifetimes. The student who sets out with such a spirit finds success.

In the teacher we must first see evidence that he knows the secret of the scriptures. That is, the teacher must be able to know the spirit of the scriptures. Second, the teacher must be sinless. We must see first what he is, and then what he says. The third condition is motive. That is, that the teacher teaches simply for love, pure love for the student.

(Source: The Complete Works of Swāmi Vivekānanda. Excerpt entitled: The Teacher of Spirituality.)



Book Shop News: The Society has a host of resources that are available for one's spiritual consumption. These encompass an extensive range of religious texts, audio and video recordings and related materials. These are made accessible during Arati Services at the Ashram and during the public lectures. Members may also be contacted in regard to purchases.

Donations: There has been a formal appeal made in a public forum as well as in written communications to devotees in which devotees and well-wishers have been invited to pledge their financial support towards the financial growth of the Ashram. The Society looks forward to the support of all spiritual seekers and fellow-devotees.

Poem-song on the Divine Mother

We are the children, we are the children.

We are the children of Divine Mother

Are we any less strong?
Let the *Yama* God come.
Conquer we shall him
Without struggle.

We are the children, we are the children.
We are the children of Divine mother

Let obstacles come
In our path;
We shall trample them
Under our feet.
Oceans will dry up,
Mountains topple
With the roar of
Mother! Mother!

We are the children, we are the children.
We are the children of Divine Mother

Sun, moon, planets,
stars

ObeY our Mother's words.

We are the children.
We are the children
Of such a Mother

We are the children, we are the children.
We are the children of Divine Mother!

We are not sinners.
Care we not for heaven or hell.
Once our task is done,
Mother will take us
Into Her arms!

We are the children, we are the children.
We are the children
Of Divine Mother!



(Translation of Swāmi Chandikānanda's Bengali song
'Āmra māyer chhele' by Swāmi Ātmeshānanda)



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“Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life - think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success”.

- Swami Vivekananda

Best compliments from N.N. Moorthy

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