



ProVisions

One who is on the Quest needs provisions for the journey; such are these. We hope some are also visions-forward.

2331 Brockett Road Tucker, GA 30084

770-938-6673

brahmaavid@vedanta-atlanta.org

June 2009

Spiritual Images: Pictorial and Narrative

Whether we view ourselves as a Raja, Bhakti, Jnana, or Karma yogi or yogini – or some combination thereof – most of us look to spiritual imagery for inspiration, upliftment and even worship. That imagery may take the form of paintings, drawings, photographs, tapestries, ancient iconography, or sculpture, in all shapes and sizes, from a tiny crucifix or Om symbol worn as jewelry, to the “Six-Story Buddha” at Chauk Htat Gyi, Myanmar, which was depicted in last month’s issue of **ProVisions**. But it may also take the form of mental images drawn from literature, scripture, poetry – yes, and even life. **Sri Ramakrishna’s** devotee **Girish Chandra Ghosh** – and what he represents for Vedantans – is a favorite. **Girish Ghosh** was a playwright, novelist, and actor. He was considered the greatest Bengali dramatist of his era. The following are excerpts written by and about **Girish Ghosh**, and they all point to one image:

If God Loves Girish, He Must Love Me or, “If he can do it, so can I.”

There were few sins in which Girish Babu had not indulged. He once said to us, “I have drunk so much wine in my life that if the wine bottles were placed one upon another, they would stand as high as Mount Everest.” He was a poet, so he spoke poetically like that. Truly speaking, he did drink a lot. When he was asked by [Sri Ramakrishna] to repeat the name of God morning and evening, he refused to do so. He said: “I am not sure I can do it. I do not know in what condition or where I may be at those hours.” Then Sri Ramakrishna asked him to remember God before meals. “That also I cannot promise you,” replied Girish Babu. “I am often engrossed in lawsuits and have to attend to all sorts of things. I can’t even do that.” At this Sri Ramakrishna said, “Then give me the power of attorney.”



Statue of Girish Chandra Ghosh, Kolkata - Photo by Ted Blanchard

Referring to this conversation later, Girish Babu said to us: “I readily agreed to give him the power of attorney, but later on I realized how difficult it was. I had told him I wouldn’t be able to repeat the name of God even once in the evening, but afterwards I found I could not do the least bit of work without remembering him at every step.”

Girish himself recalled, “I would say all sorts of things to Sri Ramakrishna, but he was never displeased with me. Often when I was dreadfully intoxicated, I would go to him. Even then he would receive me cordially and say to Latu: ‘See if there is anything in the carriage. If he wants to drink here, how can I provide it?’ He knew there must be a bottle in the carriage. Then he would gaze into my eyes and completely destroy the effect of the intoxication. I would say, ‘Why, you have spoiled the effect of a whole bottle!’”

In one day Girish Babu gave up his fifteen-year habit of taking opium. He said the first three days he suffered tremendously; his entire body became inert. By the fourth day though he was all right. Later in life he did not even smoke.

continued on page 2

If God Loves Girish. . .

continued from page 1

At one point when Girish was with him, “Sri Ramakrishna lost outer consciousness and went into ecstasy, and in that mood he started talking with a young devotee. Many years earlier I had heard some slandering remarks against him, made by a very wicked man. Suddenly I remembered those words, and at that moment Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy broke and his mood changed. Pointing towards me, he said, ‘There is some crookedness in your heart.’ I thought: ‘Yes, indeed. Plenty of it – of various kinds.’ But I was at a loss to understand which kind he was particularly referring to. I asked, ‘How shall I get rid of it?’ Sri Ramakrishna replied, ‘Have faith!’

“Sri Ramakrishna was dancing in ecstasy in the courtyard. . . . The courtyard seemed a sea of bliss. Tears filled my eyes. Sri Ramakrishna suddenly became still, absorbed in samadhi. The devotees began to take the dust of his feet. I wanted to do the same, but I could not, as I was shy. I was thinking of what others might say if I went to Sri Ramakrishna and took the dust of his feet. No sooner had this thought crossed my mind than Sri Ramakrishna, coming down from samadhi, began dancing again. While dancing he came before me and stood still, once more absorbed in samadhi. Now there was no longer any hesitation on my part to touch his feet. I took the dust of his feet. After the music Sri Ramakrishna came and sat in the drawing room and I followed him. Then he began to talk to me. I asked him, ‘Will the crookedness go out of my heart?’ He said, ‘Yes, it will go.’

One night, in a happy and drunken mood, I was visiting a house of prostitution with two of my

friends. But suddenly I felt an urge to visit Sri Ramakrishna. My friends and I hired a carriage and drove out to Dakshineswar. It was late at night, and everyone was asleep. The three of us entered Sri Ramakrishna's room, tipsy and reeling. Sri Ramakrishna grasped both my hands and began to sing and dance in ecstasy. The thought flashed through my mind: ‘Here is a man whose love embraces all — even a wicked man like me, whose own family would condemn me in this state. Surely this holy man, respected by the righteous, is also the saviour of the fallen.’



The Long Leg, Edward Hopper (American, 1882-1967)
Huntington Library Collection

*The Breeze of God's Grace is always blowing;
unfurl your sail to catch this breeze. – Sri
Ramakrishana*

“After these meetings with Sri Ramakrishna I began to wonder: ‘Who is this man who speaks to me with such intimacy and makes me feel that he is my very own? No longer do I fear my own sins, for I feel sure he would not condemn me.’

“Sri Ramakrishna has taken full possession of my heart and bound it with his love. But such a love cannot be measured by any earthly standard. If I have acquired any virtues, it is not through my own efforts, but solely due to his grace. He literally accepted my sins and left my soul free. If any of his

devotees would speak of sin and sinfulness, he would rebuke him saying: ‘Stop that. Why talk of sin? He who repeatedly says, “I am a worm, I am a worm,” becomes a worm. He who thinks, “I am free, I am free,” becomes free. Always have that positive attitude that you are free, and no sin will cling to you.’”

– Source: **Ramakrishna As We Saw Him**
ed. and trans. by **Swami Chetanananda**
Vedanta Society of St. Louis; 1st ed. (1990)

The formless Absolute is my Father, and God with form is my Mother. God reveals Himself in the form which His devotee loves most. His love for the devotee knows no bounds.

–Ramakrishna

Among the most dramatic and visible creations of plate-tectonic forces are the lofty Himalayas, which stretch 2,900 km along the border between India and Tibet. This immense mountain range began to form between 40 and 50 million years ago, when two large landmasses, India and Eurasia, driven by plate movement, collided. Because both these continental landmasses have about the same rock density, one plate could not be subducted under the other. The pressure of the impinging plates could only be relieved by thrusting skyward, contorting the collision zone, and forming the jagged Himalayan peaks.

In the Hindu tradition, however, the Himalyas are much more than a majestic mountain range. To the Hindus this great grandfather-like figure has always been an abode of gods. The Himalyas are thus referred to as *devatma* or “God-souled.” Moreover, the Himalayas are sacred for followers of four other Asian religions – Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and the indigenous Bon tradition of Tibet. These religions revere the mountains as places of power where many of their most important sages and teachers have attained the heights of spiritual realization.

Giri-raj or the “King of Mountains,” is also a deity of itself in the Hindu pantheon. The most visited places of pilgrimage in India are located in the Himalayas. Prominent among them are the *Nath troika* of



Sunset view of towering, snow-capped Mt. Everest, from the village of Lobuche (Solu-khumbu), Nepal. (Photograph by Gimmy Park Li.) Courtesy of U.S. Geological Survey

Amarnath, *Kedarnath* and *Badrinath* as well as *Gangotri* and *Yamunotri* – the glacial origins of the holy rivers of Ganga and Yamuna. There are also three seminal Sikh pilgrimage spots in the Uttarakhand

Himalayas. Swami Vivekananda founded his Mayavati Ashram 50 km from Almora. The Mughul emperor Jehangir said about Kashmir, the westernmost extent of the Himalayas: “If there is a paradise on earth, it is here.”



Shivaling Peak and a lake in the Himalayas, near Gangotri Glacier, northwestern Uttarakhand state, India. © Galyna Andrushko/Shutterstock.com (Source: Britannica.com)

Hindus view the Himalayas as supremely sacred, as a corollary to seeing god in every atom of the universe. The mighty altitude of the Himalayas is a constant remembrance to the loftiness of the human soul, its vastness – a prototype for the universality of human consciousness. The Himalayas have come to embody the highest ideals and aspirations. The sight of their sublime peaks, soaring high and clean above the dusty, congested plains of India, has for centuries inspired visions of transcendent splendor and spiritual liberation.

Invoking such visions, the Puranas, ancient works of Hindu stories, have this to say of *Himachal*, or the Himalayas: “In the space of a hundred ages of the Gods, I could not describe to you the glories of Himachal; that Himachal where Siva dwells and where the Ganges falls like the tendril of a lotus from the foot of Vishnu. There are no other mountains like Himachal, for there are found Mount Kailas and Lake Manasarovar. As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of mankind by the sight of Himachal.”

Sources: U.S. Geological Survey public information and “Himalayas: Abode of Gods” – Subhamoy Das, for About.com



Featuring News and Information About Your Vedanta Center

Upcoming ProVisions: Science & Vedanta

Pranams to all of you who submitted wonderful material and ideas for this issue of **ProVisions**. Each upcoming issue will also focus on a different theme, and your contributions will again be welcome. The July issue will focus on **“Science and Vedanta.”** Deadline for those submissions is **June 20**. If you have an idea of a topic which you would like to see featured in a future issue of **ProVisions**, please let us know.

Buddha Jayanti Celebration



Vedanta Center devotees and friends celebrated the thrice-blessed day of the Lord Buddha with a special service followed by pot luck lunch. Brother

Utsumi and Sister Denise of the Nipponzan Myohoji (Japanese Peace Temple) were our special guests for the service, performing a stirring drum-accompanied chant.

Selected readings for the occasion included a poem by Pushpa Ratna Tuladhar entitled “After 2549 Years,” readings from *A Walk with Four Spiritual Guides: Krishna, Buddha, Jesus & Ramakrishna* by Andrew Harvey; *Rude Awakenings*, by senior monk Ajahn Sucitto of the Thai Forest Tradition, and Nick Scott; and *The Miracle of Mindfulness – A Manual on*

Meditation by Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, and responsive readings from the Dhammapada. “Nagumomu,” a vina musical selection, was performed. After Swami Brahmavidyananda’s discourse on the Buddha, the congregation made flower offerings at the beautifully decorated shrine and participated in the guided meditation.

NEW Library Check Out Guidelines

Our Vedanta Center has an amazing library for an organization of its size. Swami Yogeshananda and devotees carefully built and maintained the collection

Library Materials Checkout Form			
Name:	Phone:	Email:	Checkout Date:
Title:	Library No.	Author or Translator:	
Title:	Library No.	Author or Translator:	
Title:	Library No.	Author or Translator:	

Note: All materials are due 4 weeks from checkout date.

over many years. Unfortunately, several of our valued pieces have “gone AWOL,” thus, we are implementing new procedures. If you wish to check out a selection, please **completely** fill out a check out slip (sample above), including your email, so that we may notify you, as well as the call number, since we may have more than one copy. (We have one piece of paper that simply says, “for Holy Mother biography” – with no book title or name!) Place the slip in the designated box on the library table. The checked out item is due back to us in four weeks; however, you may renew one time for another four weeks by emailing us at vca.library@vedanta-atlanta.org. If you have had a selection checked out four weeks or more (**and you know who you are!**), you may quietly and discreetly return it, no questions asked, by simply placing it on the library table bottom shelf. If you cannot locate a book that we have loaned you, please replace it. Thank you for your cooperation!

Koffee Klatch Volunteers Needed

Our weekly Koffee Klatch has become a tremendous success! All are welcome following our Sunday service. We have coffee, herbal and regular teas, and snacks. **We are in need of volunteers in June to help with set up and clean up.**

SpiritRead

Our bookstore at the Center is up and running. We have a wonderful inventory of books, incense, and CDs on order. Please visit after class on Thursday nights, after worship on Sundays, or by appointment with Swami Brahmavidyananda.

Top of the book list is Swami Brahmavidyananda's ten-book series in which he has reorganized the essence of Swami Vivekananda's Complete Works. It is specially organized for a Western audience, with a natural progression of Swamiji's ideas including the inner dynamics of a universal spirituality.

This month, we are featuring Volumes I and II. They are \$15.95 each.

View from the Center (Volume One)

Swami Vivekananda lays the logical foundation for a universal religion. He argues the necessity of total freedom while offering a coherent metaphysics and psychology on which much of contemporary transpersonal psychology is built. This primary book feeds into all the remaining books of the series. For Swami Vivekananda, the religions of the world are all prototypes of transcendental Reality, doors through which our feelings and wills can open out into the Infinite, and the Infinite can in turn, express itself through us. This is the grand view of spirituality that Swami Vivekananda has reawakened for our modern world.

The Way Home (Volume Two)

Swami Vivekananda builds on the truth of the same divinity manifesting within all religions, and how it emerges in the process of spiritual development. We're given a vision of religion based on strength and rational understanding, a spirituality open to all the laws and processes manifesting through the sciences as well as through the scope and depth of every religion. His ideas are based on an all-inclusive Vedic spirituality which sees all of our intellectual and spiritual endowments as energized by divine Spirit, an approach supported by the insights of the Vedanta philosophy.

Music for the Soul

The Journey Home: Several of you have asked about the music Swami plays during the Sunday meditation. The track is from the CD *The Journey Home* by Kathy Zaveda. We have ordered 10 copies which are due to arrive in early June. They are \$20 each.

Interfaith Outreach

Our community's interfaith outreach continued in May with a presentation on Sunday, May 10, at the Morningside Presbyterian Church as part of their series of World Religions. Before the presentation, our speaker attended the church service in the bright and sunny sanctuary. She was impressed by the large congregation and the dynamic sermon given by Pastor Joanne Adams. The final hymn sung included phrases that could have been describing the Bhagavad Gita, for instance (this is a paraphrase): "And when I go to battle, Thou will be there to guide me." Yet another reminder of the commonalities among all religions.

About 25 people attended the presentation after the service. Our speaker talked briefly about the Vedas, the concept of self-realization, the four yogas, and our basic practices. The first question from the group was about caste. "Is caste an integral part of Hinduism and Vedic spirituality?" The same question was asked at a similar event held at Inman Park United Methodist Church in March – it makes one wonder how many Westerners assume that India's predominant religion cannot be separated from its culture, even when it is pared down to its essentials, as Swami Vivekananda did so beautifully in his teachings.

One woman asked if it is difficult being a non-Christian in a primarily Christian culture. Her son, she explained, is reading a lot of Eastern philosophy and appears to be "different" from her strong Presbyterian family. We hope our outreach in the community will promote greater understanding not just among religious organizations, but among families like hers. Many local organizations, including the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta, are working hard to develop greater interfaith harmony and, as we know, Swami Vivekananda took this to another level with his concept of a Universal Religion.

REGULARLY SCHEDULED EVENTS

Sunday	10:30 AM 11:00 AM	Chant Service. Discourse , followed by Discussion and Guided Meditation .
Thursday	8 PM	We are reading <i>Way of the Mystic Part II – The Lectures of Swami Vivekananda On a Universal Approach to Mysticism</i> . The book is available for sale from the Vedanta Center of Atlanta. A half-hour's meditation in the Chapel follows the one hour class.
3rd Fri.	7:30 PM	RAM NAM will be held on June 19 th , 993 Walker Ave., Atlanta, GA 30316.
Daily**	6 PM	Vespers/Arati – A short period of prayer is followed by silent meditation. ** <i>Except Sundays.</i>

JUNE 2009 DISCOURSE TOPICS & SPECIAL EVENTS

7	11 AM	EVOLUTION – THE DRIVE FROM WITHIN. Talk followed by discussion.
14	11 AM	Special Guest Speaker: Sharon "Scottie" Scott – Talk followed by discussion.☼
21	11 AM	Introduction to the <i>Bhagavad Gita</i> – Uma Majmudar. Talk followed by discussion.♀
28	11 AM	EVOLUTION – THROUGH SUBLIMATION, TRANSFORMATION AND EXPANSION. Talk followed by discussion.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

☼ **Sharon "Scottie" Scott** has agreed to speak to our group on **Sunday, June 14**. She is a social worker at Hospice Atlanta. Formerly a nun, her work is primarily with bereavement – she will talk about her own religious experiences and her journey, and also how people relate to their own spirituality as they experience terminal illness or that of a loved one, and the grief that follows. She is a dynamic, lovely person – all smiles.

Swami Brahmavidyananda begins a discourse series on **June 7** relating to **Evolution**.

♀ Our own **Uma Majmudar** is conducting a monthly lecture series on the *Bhagavad Gita* for us. The text she is using is *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War*, translated by Barbara Stoler Miller, which is available in our bookstore, or you may bring any version you have. Uma's enthusiasm and scholarship will produce a lively class.

We are now accepting registration for our **Annual Retreat**, which will again be held at the Center for New Beginnings in the beautiful North Georgia mountains on October 2-4, 2009. Space is limited. Reserve yours with a \$25 deposit. **Swami Sarvadevananda**, Assistant Minister of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, will be our special guest.



*sri-bhagavan uvaca
urdhva-mulam
adhah-sakham
ashvattham prahur
avyayam
chandamsi yasya
parnani
yas tam veda sa
veda-vit*

“There is the imperishable Asvattham tree with its roots above and the branches below and of which the leaves are the Vedic hymns. One who knows this is the knower of the Vedas.”

– *Bhagavad Gita vs. 15:1*

Submitted by Sw. Yogeshananda

Image: “Ashvattha Tree of Life” by Om Shanti Kim Wade

For availability of this image, see

<http://www.yogalifestyle.com/PODAOSAshvatthaTreeOfLife.htm>

Holy Mother & Sister Nivedita

It was not easy in those days in India to accept Western people [due to the then extreme rigidity of the Hindu Caste system]. They were regarded as *maleech* [or *mlechcha* – meaning, without caste (out-caste), literally “heathen,” as in Christianity or “*kafir*” in Islam], cow eaters, pork eaters, beef eaters. People would say, “They are so defiled. Do not allow them in my temple or near my person.” But the same



Holy Mother and Sister Nivedita Talking

this. Holy Mother accepted her even at the risk of being rejected by the so-called orthodox, learned people. But you and I cannot do it because we are so afraid of what our neighbours are going to say, we are so afraid of what our friends are going to say. But she did not care even if she was excommunicated [made an outcaste]. She knew she was looking at purity, the purity of a child.

– Sw. Shivapadananda (1938-1994)

Head, Vedanta Center of South Africa.

Source: Mother Radha's recordings, <http://swamishivapadananda.typepad.com/>

Gayatri Mantra

Om
Bhur Bhuvah Svah
Tat
Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi
Dhiyo Yonah:
Prachodayat

continued on page 8



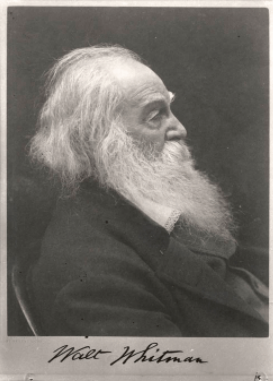
Source: Gayatri Mantra <http://www.worldwidelightcircle.net/>

Gayatri Mantra

continued from page 7

“Throughout all realms of experience,
 ‘That’
 essential nature illuminating existence,
 is the adorable
 One.

May all beings perceive through
 subtle and meditative intellect,
 the magnificent brilliance
 of enlightened awareness.”



Walt Whitman Imagery

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) seems to have come very near to the philosophy of Vedanta in his writing. Swami Vive-kananda read **Leaves of Grass** and once called Whitman “the sannyasin of America.” Below are verses from various portions of **Leaves of Grass**, including his famous epic, “**Song of Myself.**”

I am the mate and companion of people,
 all just as immortal and fathomless
 as myself;
 They do not know how immortal, but
 I know.
 Why should I wish to see God better
 than this day?

I see something of God each hour of the
 twenty-four, and each moment then,
 In the faces of men and women I see
 God, and in my own face in the glass.

Sometimes how strange and clear to the soul,
 That all these solid things are indeed but
 apparitions, concepts,
 non-realities.

– Supplied by Jerry Brunner

Sw. Vivekananda Poetry

ONE CIRCLE MORE

A fragmentary poem composed at Ridgely Manor, in 1899

One circle more the spiral path of life ascends,
 And time's restless shuttle – running back and
 fro
 Through maze of warp and woof
 of shining threads of life – spins out a stronger
 piece.
 Hand in hand they stand – and try to fathom
 depths whence springs eternal love, each in
 other's eyes,
 And find
 No hold o'er that age but brings the youth anew—
 And time—the good, the pure, the true.



Vedanta Center of Atlanta

2331 Brockett Road
 Tucker, GA 30084