



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

brahmaid@vedanta-atlanta.org

Sept / Oct 2009

Going Deeper Into Spiritual Practice

Lore has it that the great Russian pianist and composer **Arthur Rubinstein** was approached in the street near Carnegie Hall and was asked, "Pardon me sir, how do I get to Carnegie Hall?" He allegedly replied, "Practice, practice, practice." In this issue of **ProVisions**, we explore the topic of **Going Deeper Into Our Spiritual Practice**. The following articles address the topic from a variety of viewpoints, but the same underlying theme appears in each of them: As in the old Carnegie Hall saw, we deepen our spiritual practice by steadfast commitment and practice. And speaking of practice...

Music as a Spiritual Tool

The following article explores using music as a means of worship and deepening spiritual practice, specifically Indian music, but its principles apply to many types of music. The article was written by our dear friend **Tarun Talwar**, who performs with the **Pandit Jasraj School of Music**. You will recall that they played beautiful benefit concerts to raise financial support for the building of our Chapel.

Almost all religious traditions in the world employ music as an aid to worship in varying forms and degrees. I would like to share with you the creed of a large number of Indian musicians: that music is worship, not just an aid to worship. As a student of Indian classical music, my initial intellectual understanding of this belief has been reinforced experientially.

The origin of Indian music can be traced all the way back to *Sama Veda*, one of the four Vedas. Throughout the ages music was a means of spiritual practice and part of religious rituals in India. It acquired an entertainment dimension only relatively

recently, in the last 600 years or so. However the original purpose and practice has remained intact in parallel.

Various meditation methods involve techniques to make the mind one-pointed, to achieve what Patanjali



has prescribed as *dhaarana* and *dhyaan* in his eight steps to yoga. Depending on the disposition of the student, a guru prescribes a suitable way to meditate, whether it is concentrating on a visual image, a mantra, or bodily sensations. Similarly, music is a powerful medium for this purpose, provided it is pursued with devotion and diligence. In this approach the musician is a *saadhak* (spiritual aspirant) and development and performance of music is *saadhana* (spiritual endeavor). In the words of Sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar, Indian music "is a spiritual discipline that raises one's inner being to divine peacefulness and bliss" and "through music one can reach God." That is a fundamental principle and belief system underlying Indian classical music tradition.

continued on page 2

Music as a Spiritual Tool

continued from page 1

Ancient spiritual literature, including Vedanta texts, helps us understand the efficacy of music as a path to Self realization. Upanishads and Tantras describe sound energy as the first stage of manifestation of the universe, from which all creation emanated. The sound form of God is called *Nada Brahma* or *Shabda Brahma*. The Bible says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” [John 1:1] Certain Muslim mystics, including the Sufi saints, have a similar belief. Australia’s original inhabitants, one of the oldest continuous cultures on earth, believe that the world came into being through song.

Sound being the first, finest and subtlest manifestation of the Supreme Reality, it is only natural that it is also a key to attaining union with it. It is the source of matter as well as a means to transcend that which is material. In fact, one among the various paths to yoga (union with the Supreme) is *Nada Yoga*, i.e., union through sound. The aim of a *Nada Yogi* is to perceive *Nada Brahma* as the primordial and eternal sound that continuously resonates in the entire universe and within each of us. This is not the same as outer or coarse sound we hear with our ears.

Sages and saints like Sharang Dev, Tyagaraja and Kabir have written exhaustively on the subject. And while there is a solid scriptural and philosophical foundation suggesting the use of music as a spiritual tool, we find its experiential evidence all around us, whether in hymns sung at church, Sufi songs, or the bhajan and kirtan traditions of India.

The discipline I am learning, Indian classical music, is particularly conducive to spiritual pursuit. In fact, it

is primarily meant for this purpose. When an Indian classical musician sits to sing, he begins his meditation or worship. His singing is an offering to the almighty, and the *raga* he develops is an invocation of the divine. The resultant effect is experienced by the performer as well as his audience. I have seen completely uninitiated listeners in tears, trance, or absorbed to the point of disconnection with the world around them. I have seen the effect of vibrations created by a soulful rendition on the peaceful and glowing faces of people exiting a concert hall or temple. In that sense, music is a unique spiritual practice that has the potential of giving the experience to the practitioner as well as to his audience.

... I have seen completely uninitiated listeners in tears, trance, or absorbed to the point of disconnection with the world around them. I have seen the effect of vibrations created by a soulful rendition on the peaceful and glowing faces of people exiting a concert hall or temple. In that sense, music is a unique spiritual practice that has the potential of giving the experience to the practitioner as well as to his audience.

I must mention that while the choice of devotional lyrics enhances the effect, the melodic content and tonal arrangement of the *raga* primarily creates the effect, hence, the feelings experienced by a listener even if the

lyrics are in an unknown language, or even from purely instrumental music. Indian *raga* music is boundless in its scope, depth and richness. Authentic Indian classical musicians treat every *raga* as a deity, and performance of a *raga* as worship of that deity form of God.

Though not an advanced practitioner of this art, I do experience its contemplative and meditative effect frequently. After singing a *raga* for half an hour, I find the mind calm and silent. Sometimes I transition naturally into deeper meditation after I stop singing. My music gurus have shared with me their experiences of the spiritual power of music, which range from attaining the deepest blissful state of consciousness to becoming a medium of divine expression. I am grateful to both of them for my knowledge and experience of the subject, including insightful discussions in preparation for this article.

Closing the door on the world,
I open the window
of my heart;

fresh air, sunshine, and
rain emanating from
where it all starts—

from a tiny seed deep
within, like a mustard
seed in a globe of glass:

mysterious, purposeless,
in the beginning worn
more like an ornament,

now grown monumental,
its huge size realized like
no one would ever have guessed—

I've shattered all proscription,
and become unnumbed,
with this living, breathing,
heart full of love.

-Judith, Hermit of Sarada



Meditation I

Immersed in liquid light,
All things around are changed,
As souls to joyous flight
To a world of brightness range.

From this drab matrix souls ascend,
Space centreless and sere,
To shining regions drenched in light,
Bathe in effulgence there.

And anchored in that focal point?
Light's centre seizing being's sight?
Souls change from dim to luminous,
Forever freed from dull world's night.

*From My Quarrel with Myself: Testament
of a Mystic by Shirley Thérèse Lewis*

REGULARLY SCHEDULED EVENTS

Sunday	10:30 AM 11:00 AM	Chant Service. Discourse.
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 Fridays	7:30 PM	RAM NAM will be held on Sept. 18 st and Oct. 16 st , 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> .

SEPTEMBER 2009 DISCOURSE TOPICS & SPECIAL EVENTS

6	11 AM	OPEN FORUM, SPIRITUAL TOPIC TBA
13	11 AM	EVOLUTION: A VEDIC VIEW, Swami Brahmagvidyananda – Talk followed by discussion. †
20	11 AM	A PERSONAL VIEW OF THOMAS MERTON, Alaina Gimbert – Talk followed by discussion.*
27	11 AM	THE BHAGAVAD GITA, CHAPTERS 3 AND 4, KARMA YOGA & JNANA YOGA, Uma Majmudar – Talk followed by discussion. ♀

OCTOBER 2009 DISCOURSE TOPICS & SPECIAL EVENTS

4	11 AM	NO CLASS - RETREAT ¶
11	11 AM	EVOLUTION AND GOING DEEPER INTO OUR PRACTICE, Swami Brahmagvidyananda – Talk followed by discussion. †
18	11 AM	THE BHAGAVAD GITA, CHAPTERS 5 AND 6, SANNYASA YOGA & ADHYATMA YOGA, Uma Majmudar – Talk followed by discussion. ♀
25	11 AM	EVOLVING OUR FIELD OF DREAMS, Swami Brahmagvidyananda – Talk followed by discussion. †

ANNOUNCEMENTS

♀ **Dr. Uma Majmudar** continues her monthly lecture series on the *Bhagavad Gita* on **July 12** and **August 16**. 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 produce a lively class.

† During September and October, **Swami Brahmagvidyananda** will continue his discourse series relating to **Evolution**.

* Our own **Alaina Gimbert** will give a talk on Thomas Merton (1915-1968), who was a writer and Trappist monk at Our Lady of Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky. His writings include such classics as *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, and *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. Merton was the author of more than seventy books that include poetry, personal journals, collections of letters, social criticism and writings on peace, justice and ecumenism.

¶ There will be **NO SERVICE** on Sunday October 4, as we will be participating in our Annual Retreat in the North Georgia Mountains. Please see Gillian Renault or Nina Guzzetta if you are interested in attending.



*Featuring News and
Information About
Your Vedanta Center*

Directors' Corner

Several weeks ago we asked you, our beloved community, to send the board of directors suggestions about the current and future life of the Vedanta Center of Atlanta. Our thanks to all who responded. In this column, I'll summarize your feedback and the actions we have taken in response. Since that time, we held an Open Forum on Sunday, August 30, in which we invited you to give us further feedback. We will provide a summary of the ideas you presented at that meeting at a later date. Our goal in all events is to listen to you and your ideas. Here are some of the things you suggested to us:

“If we can get in front of children with Swami Vivekananda’s message, then we can spread the message of Vedanta Center indirectly in Atlanta.” This was a suggestion from Malla Reddy. Alaina Gimbert, who also suggested a program for children, and Mahathi Venkatreva are now running a Children’s Program from 10:30-noon on Sundays. Alaina has volunteered to provide supplies. “Whatever I can do to help. I am grateful for the Vedanta Center and its community,” she says. Thank you Alaina and Mahathi. We hope this program grows as more devotees bring their children.

Lexie Ross sent in several suggestions. She states, “I think it would be great for us all of us to get together and have a brainstorming meeting.” We hear you Lexie and will see you on the 30th. “I want to share how grateful I am for having found the Vedanta Center and the teachings of Vivekananda....There are so many people who have never heard of Vedanta Center and Vivekananda’s message.” We have placed listings of our events in New Awakenings and

Aquarius magazines and hope to do more in this regard. Lexie is also helping with marketing - thank you.

In a related suggestion, Tarum Seam wrote: “In order to reach out to and draw in masses - especially the wired generation - without spending lot of time and \$, I was thinking you may want to consider putting out audio/video clips of Swami’s lectures and other messages on appropriate local and broader websites, like Youtube.” A great idea Tarum. We have started a Facebook page, but need more help in this arena.

James Provoost suggested “going back to the original books, yogas and other works, Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, etc. There may be too much disparity in the teachings relating to the other books. Also is the board meeting open to non-board members?” Dr. Uma Majumdar’s monthly lectures on the Bhagavad Gita are part of our commitment to the original Vedic texts. And we’re delighted that Uma has agreed to continue her lectures through June 2010. We hope to do more in this regard James. As for the board meetings, they are not open to non-board members; we hope the Open Forum will shed light on what the board is doing.

Debbie Wiles writes, “I’d appreciate it if we went back to beginning arati, Thursday night class, and Sunday discourses on time.” We agree, and are making an effort to do so out of respect for the shrine and our community.

Vijay and Neera sent a thoughtful list of things to be considered: “We would like to hear from our Swami more lectures with emphasis on Spirituality as opposed to an emphasis on Universal Religion. Some suggested topics of interest are as follows: (a) Pairs of Opposites, (b) Gunas, (c) Spirituality with and without pressure of religion, (d) Spiritual conduct, (e) Spiritual aspects of life of Chaitanya Ji, (f) Spiritual aspects of life of Ramana Maharishi Ji, (g) Aspect of Ishwara, (h) Spirituality’s contribution towards strengthening determination and discrimination, (i) Core of Spirituality, (j) Practice versus Theory: Aspects of spirituality that would help Vedanta Center members

continued on page 6

Directors' Corner

continued from page 5

to interact with each other at a higher spiritual place anywhere and everywhere, (k) Japa to resonate with the Absolute, (l) Extreme Subtlety of Ego, (m) Ego as a positive and as a negative in our lives, (n) Spirituality and Self Analysis.” We passed these thoughts to Swami Brahmavidyananda. In addition, some of these topics may be addressed by Swami Sarvadevananda at the October retreat.

Toshia Johnson sent us some positive ideas and questions: “Are there mentors/teachers/guides available for one-on-one counseling...that may be contacted at any time?” Swami is our spiritual guide and is available for one-on-one counseling. However, those in our community who have been studying Vedanta for some time are always happy to answer newcomers' questions.

Jerry Brunner suggested doing an occasional Sunday talk targeted specifically to newcomers. A great idea, Jerry, and one we will consider.

As mentioned in the last issue of *ProVisions* we are in transition and need the support of all our community, whether it's maintaining the garden and the shrine, setting up the coffee hour, or managing other operations. Swami Yogeshananda chose to manage most of this himself and now, out of respect for Swami Brahmavidyananda, we are taking on these responsibilities. We are enormously grateful to the volunteers who are helping out.

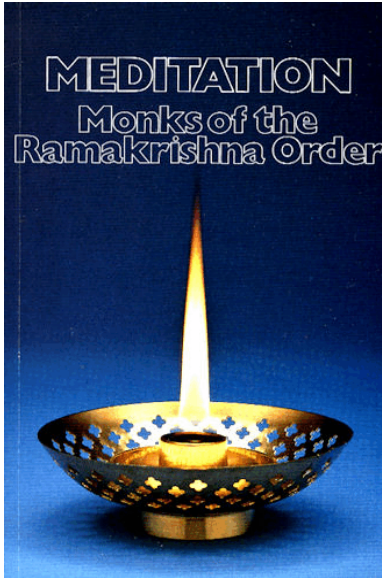
With your love and support, we have a bright future in front of us. Please continue to provide us with feedback and suggestions.

– Tom Couch, President
– Gillian Renault, Vice President

SpiritRead

As we look for ways to deepen our practice, there are books in our bookstore you might find useful:

Meditation: Monks of the Ramakrishna Order – In this volume, nine senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order (including Swami Swahananda, Swami Ashokananda and Swami Pavitrananda) discuss methods of meditation as found in the Upanishads. As they show us, meditation is not so simple as some Eastern teachers appear to indicate; nor is it as difficult as Westerners sometimes suppose. A very accessible and practical book. (\$20. Also in the library.)



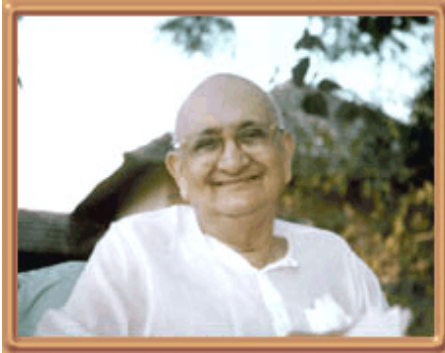
Way of the Mystic, Part I – The writings of Swami Vivekananda/arranged by Swami Brahmavidyananda. This volume consists of the writings and lectures of Swami Vivekananda on the topic of meditation. In arousing the power within, the challenge is to free up consciousness from the external world by

collecting and focusing attention on an object, person, holy word, or concept. Eventually, attention or concentration matures into a state of meditation. Through deeper meditations on higher ideals, we arouse our inner spiritual power. The more centered and open our acts of concentration, and the larger our thoughts and feelings, the more our consciousness is able to intuit an ultimate Truth, within and without. Eventually, a state of uninterrupted absorption occurs in which we are able to discern higher Reality as our core Self. (\$16.00)

Incense is also available in the bookstore: *Sandalwood* and *Mother's Incense*.

* * *

We still have a few spaces open for our **Annual Retreat** at the **Center for New Beginnings** in the beautiful North Georgia mountains on October 2-4, 2009. Reserve yours with a \$25 deposit. Total cost is \$250. **Swami Sarvadevananda**, Assistant Minister of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, will be our special guest. His topic will be ***Narada's Bhakti Sutras (Narada's Way of Divine Love)***.



Papa Ramdas

The path of self-surrender is the most natural and the easiest path. Offer up everything to Ram. Lay your whole existence as a complete and unqualified offering at the

holy feet of Ram. Behold the whole universe as the manifestation of Ram. Rejoice in seeing the worlds since they all remind you of Ram. Ram is light, love, and bliss.

You have nothing to condemn, the world is *lila* of Ram. God is playing in it by assuming the various forms. Observe the play and remain always peaceful and full of bliss.

Offer up everything to Ram, your actions, words, thoughts, your body, your mind and soul. Remember Ram at all times. He will then give you peace. Let all desires, fears vanish in Ram. Let all so called evil disappear in Ram. Let all thoughts rest in Ram. Be absorbed and merged in Ram. Then you will have all that you have wanted. You have realized Ram, you have reached Truth, you have attained peace.

No bewilderment, no doubt, no struggle, when one has handed oneself completely into hands of God. Live life in complete submission to Ram, and you have no anxieties, no cares, no sorrows, no confusion. Do not mind what people say of you. Remain firm in your faith in Ram in praise and ignominy alike. Do not condemn anything, seek no advice; don't be led away; exercise your own will, i.e. the will of Ram. Don't dwell upon personalities; all forms are unreal; all opinions are nothing to you; cling to Truth, Peace, Love, Light, Bliss. Have no misgivings. Be peaceful, contented and blissful. Ram is only reality. Meditate on Ram, always. See only Him everywhere. Om Ram.

**– Papa Ramdas (1884-1963)
(Submitted by Shailesh Pawar)**

Swamiji's Lectures

With this issue, we continue our series devoted to the lectures of Swami Vivekananda. The following passages focus on spiritual practice and karma yoga.

Even if our every attempt is a failure, and we bleed and are torn asunder, yet, through it all we have to preserve our heart – we must assert our Godhead in the midst of all these difficulties. Nature wants us to react, to return blow for blow, cheating for cheating, lie for lie, to hit back with all our might. It then requires a super-divine power not to hit back, to keep control, to be unattached.

Every day we renew our determination to be unattached. We cast a glance back and look at the past objects of our love and attachment, and feel how they've all made us miserable. We went down into the depths of dependency because of our "love!" We found ourselves mere slaves in the hands of others, dragged down and down! And we make a fresh determination:

"Henceforth, I'll be master of myself; henceforth, I'll have control over myself." But the time comes, and the same story occurs once more! Again the soul is caught and can't get out. The bird is in a net, struggling and fluttering. This is our life.

I know the difficulties. They're tremendous, and ninety per cent of us become discouraged, lose heart, and in our turn often become pessimists and cease to believe in sincerity, love, and all that's grand and noble.

We have to avoid all this. Therefore, I say, we require super-divine power. Superhuman power isn't strong enough. Super-divine strength is the only way out. By it alone we can pass through all these intricacies, these showers of miseries, unscathed.

We may be cut to pieces, torn asunder, yet our hearts must grow nobler and nobler all the time. It's very difficult, but we can overcome the difficulty by constant practice. We must learn that nothing can happen to us unless we make ourselves susceptible to it.

notes and quotes

Q: Swami [Vivekananda], if all things are one, what is the difference between a cabbage and a man?

A: Stick a knife into your leg, and you will see the line of demarcation.

From Mrs. Alice Hansbrough's reminiscences of a question-answer exchange following the class entitled "Hints on Practical Spirituality"

Instead of training our minds to appreciate the little comforts of our humble existences, we yearn to become more and more precious, to surround ourselves with increasingly beautiful things, to hoard our stuff and our free time and our obscene piles of money until all of that beauty and space and meticulous perfection melts into an unbearably inadequate, fly-infested, profane mess.

From "I Like to Watch" by Heather Havrilesky, www.salon.com, June 22, 2008

The only devils in this world are those running around in our own hearts, and that is where all our battles should be fought.

– Mahatma Gandhi

You should know that this world's life is a cheat; increasing one's riches and offspring is like raising the

plants that spring up after the rain, making the farmer happy, then turning yellow and withering away. Those who turn away from vanities and the play of their passions, give alms, offer prayer, and take care of their debts and duties, will inherit eternal happiness.

– Kor'an.

Everyone has inside him a piece of good news. The good news is that you don't know how great you can be! How much you can love! What you can accomplish! And what your potential is!

– Anne Frank

The "house of credit cards" economy based on trickle down has gone belly up, and we must face another, sadder truth. Individually and collectively, we've been suffering from Deficit Inattention Disorder, and since we were unable to do the math, we must now do the aftermath. It's a buy-o-logical fact. You cannot spend more than you have. Nature knows this. We can use no more energy than what we have in reserve. We cannot charge energy on our Ascended MasterCard and repay it next lifetime. . . . We must go beyond the fear-based state of emergency to a state of emergent seeing. That is where we emerge and see the genuine wealth that is all around us: the virtually infinite energy from Father Sun, the prolific nourishment Mother Earth brings us every season, the love we generate from our hearts, and the inventiveness of our minds.

– From "Swami's 2009 State of the Universe" by Swami Beyondananda (Steve Bhaerman). For more information, go to <http://www.wakeuplaughing.com/>



Vedanta Center of Atlanta

2331 Brockett Road
Tucker, GA 30084