



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Words to Inspire

“Are you growing spiritually? Can you love others? Can you feel oneness with others? Have you peace within yourself? And do you radiate around you? That is called spiritual growth, which is stimulated by meditation inwardly, and by work done in a spirit of service outwardly.”

- Swami Ranganathananda

PEACE AND HAPPINESS

Swami Brahmeshananda

Question: Is peace of mind different from peace of our body and peace of the world?

Answer: Though different, peace of mind, body and the world are inter-related. A person may be intensely active physically yet his mind can be absolutely calm. In fact, such calmness combined with intense activity is the ideal advocated by the Bhagavad Gita in its fourth chapter. Swami Vivekananda has paraphrased the meaning of its 18th verse thus: ‘He who even while active can keep his mind calm and in whom even when not doing anything outward, action flows in the form of a contemplation of Brahman is intelligent one among men, he indeed is the Yogi. He indeed is the perfect worker.’ Likewise, there might be great unrest, even war, around in the world, yet one may have absolute peace within. This is the ideal of inner peace.

Question: Then how are they inter-related?

Answer: It is said, ‘A healthy mind in a healthy body.’ Similarly, it can be said, ‘A peaceful mind in a peaceful body.’ This statement has certain practical implications. If you want to make the mind quiet before, say meditation, one must sit quietly without moving any part of your body. This helps in calming the mind. The opposite of it is also true. If your mind is peaceful, the body will tend to be less restless.

Question: Is there a relation between peace of mind and world peace?

Answer: Yes. Most of the unrest in the world is because our minds are restless. No lasting world peace is possible unless our minds are peaceful. Restless of mind expresses as disturbance in society. Hence, much greater effort must be made to calm the mind, than the efforts that are made to establish peace in the world. If we had

paid more attention to make the mind calm, there would have been little need to redress external restlessness.

Question: What is meant by happiness?

Answer: Different people have different concepts of happiness. Some people feel happy by getting more money. Young men and women feel happy if they get a good spouse. Others feel happy in having a son, name and fame, high position in society, and so on. There are others whose happiness lies in serving others. There are yet others, the spiritually inclined people, who derive a great joy in singing the glories of God, chanting His name and meditating on Him.

Question: It is understandable that there could be various causes of happiness. But what is happiness?

Answer: According to Indian philosophy, atman or soul is inherently divine and blissful.

However, this bliss is not expressed or experienced due to the impurities of mind. A pure and peaceful mind reflects this bliss which is called, or is experienced, as ‘happiness’ or joy. When any of our desires are fulfilled, the mind soul’s natural bliss becomes manifested, giving us a feeling of happiness.

Question: How can we have everlasting peace and happiness?

Answer: As explained, the source of all happiness and bliss is the atman or soul. One can get everlasting bliss by realizing the atman. And since this bliss expresses itself through a peaceful, pure and sattvika (serene) mind, every attempt must be made to purify the mind and make it peaceful through spiritual practices. Only a pure mind can get ever-lasting peace and happiness.

-The Vedanta Kesari, February 2011, p.66

I am He

(Based on a Talk delivered by Swami Kripamayananda at the Vedanta Society of Toronto)

This topic is somewhat curious – I am He. The students of Vedanta are familiar with the meaning of this. But for other people this raises their curiosity. I am a man or a woman and I am myself; how I can be He or She. But if we start thinking about the question ‘who am I?’, we get into similar questions – Am I the name given to me, when I was born? Am I this body? Am I the life force which runs the body? Am I the mind which thinks for me? Am I the intellect, which decides my activities? Am I the car or the house or any of my possessions?

We begin by thinking that we have a body, a mind, an intellect, a house, a car, etc., but we are not any of these; these are all just possessions. The ancient sages who dived deep into these thoughts, could realize who really they were. They found that they were that entity which never changed, which is immortal, which is never created, which never becomes sad, which is never born and will never die, which is ever blissful, ever full of knowledge and consciousness, ever existing, resplendent, glorious – that am I. This entity, they termed as ‘Atman’ – the simple meaning of the Atman is the Self or consciousness, which never changes. All other things described above, the possessions, everything that we perceive undergoes change.

But although this Atman is always there, we often forget this, and forget our real entity, who really I am. And not only do we forget our real identity, but identify ourselves with what we are not. The most common identification of myself, is with my name, which is etched so deep in my psyche. When we are called by our name, even in sleep, we wake up. So deep is the identification with our name. Another deep identification is with our body. We consider this body to be ourselves, which is very wrong.

This wrong identification is the main cause of all troubles that we have in our life. All problems originate from this misidentification or ignorance. Atman is all Knowledge, all Bliss, all Existence, everlasting. So how did we become ignorant? The scriptures say, that this question is not relevant, but it is a fact that you are under the spell of ignorance. Because you don’t know your Self, you have all the troubles in life – suffering, pain, misery, tension- all this is because of your ignorance. If you come to

understand who you are in reality, then all these troubles will come to an end and you will shine in your own glory. The glory of Atman is all peace, happiness, bliss, kindness, joy and freedom.

Where is this limited sense of ‘I’ located? The seat of this ignorance is located in our mind. Ignorance creates this world that we perceive. If the ignorance is less and knowledge more, we will see this world in a different way. To a person who has obtained the Knowledge of the Atman, for him this world is joyful, blissful. For him there are no enemies, he identifies every person as his own Self. The whole universe becomes his or her own Self.

The word ‘He’ or ‘She’ refers to a Supreme Being or God. God has created this universe and all living beings, including myself. Then to say that ‘I am He’ would seem to imply that I am God. As a body-mind-ego complex, it is course false. But Jesus said – I and my Father are One! That time he identified himself with the glorious soul, Atman and he could realize that he was God himself. Other times when he identified himself with the manifestation as the body, he said- I am the son of God! Sometimes he used to say-I am the son of Man! Here he identified himself with the whole mankind or universe. So it is important that we think about who we are. With our knowledge about ourselves, the situation around us also changes; it goes together.

Asking about our true identity – who or what we are – is not just a philosophical exercise. Our concept of ourself impacts on the quality of our life. We suffer because we identify ourselves with this body and mind. With this identification comes desire and either the desire is fulfilled but it is not good for, or the desire is not fulfilled and we feel unhappy. In either case, we suffer.

There is a beautiful story in the Mundaka Upanishad. “*Dva suparna sayuja sakhaya, samanam vriksham parishasva-jate*” – On one tree there are two birds. One bird is very active constantly searching for food, jumping from one branch to another. When it eats the fruits, it finds that they are of two kinds, either sweet or sour. When it gets the sweet fruits, it enjoys and becomes very happy. But when it gets the sour fruits, it feels very sad and starts looking here and there. It thought that the fruit will be sweet, but instead it

turned to be sour. It gets the shock due to this and looks up. It sees another bird, which is sitting on the top branch of the same tree, looking very calm and serene. It has no disturbance or worry, just sitting in its glory, doing nothing. In this process, this lower bird starts going upward. It continues tasting the fruits on its way to the upper branch-sweet fruit making it happy, bitter fruit making it unhappy, dejected, sad. Then again it looks towards the upper bird and sees it sitting calmly. It goes up and up and when it reaches very near to the bird, a strange thing happens. The lower bird finds that the upper bird is glorious and light is emitting from that bird. That light now enters the lower bird's body, since it is in the realm of that upper bird. Finally this lower bird finds that it has melted and then it gets the realization that it was never in existence, but it was the upper bird itself. What the lower bird was eating, enjoying and suffering was its imagination or ignorance. It never existed, but was the reflection of the upper bird. That is how we all are. We are the reflection of that glorious Atman or Brahman, but due to our ignorance and misidentifying ourselves with the body and mind we get into all sorts of troubles. Then when we realize that we are that all pervading Brahman or Atman, then we become completely calm and serene.

What is 'He'? There is a beautiful verse in the *Isha Upanishad* – “*Sa paryagat Sukram Akayam Avranam Asnaviram Suddham Apapa-viddham...*” - That reality, which is resplendent, full of consciousness, which does not have a body or form or wound and cannot be confined, which is infinite, is all pervasive. Nothing is there where That is not. In the *Katha Upanishad*, it says – “*Tad dure tad u antike...*” - He is very far, too far away and yet He is very near. This is because for those who do not understand it is just out of reach. But for those who understand, It is very near, in fact, It is our own Self. This universe is just an appearance of that reality. This world is not other than that reality.

So how is the world created? Vedanta says that this world is a projection of ignorance. Ignorance (or Maya) has two great powers – One is called ‘*avarana sakti*’ and the other is called ‘*vikshepa sakti*’. The ignorance by its *avarana shakti* covers and hides the resplendent, all blissful, glorious Truth. Not only it hides the Truth, but then by its *vikshepa sakti*, it projects something else on top and that is this manifested world which we see. There is a beautiful example of the cinema screen. When

you enter the movie theatre, first you see the screen (or the Reality). Then they put off the lights, which can be compared to the *avarana shakti* – it becomes dark and you cannot see the screen. Then the projector goes on and projects the picture on the screen – which can be compared to the *vikshepa sakti*. So basically what we see is not the reality but something else, which we get involved and get enjoyment or suffering – which is not the Truth. Sri Krishna says in the Gita – “*Mama maya duratyaya*” – This power of Maya is my power, or God's power, and is difficult to overcome.

As mentioned above, this Supreme Reality is glorious and resplendent, and does not have any physical or mental body. It is pure like the fire, it is not mixed – whenever there is mixture, there comes impurity. No sin can ever touch it. It is all-knowing, it can see and hear everything – it is said that God can hear even the footsteps of an ant. It is Manishi – one who has his mind under complete control and He can use his mind as a serpent. It is Swayambhu – self-created, nobody has created It. There is no cause for this Brahman and that is He.

Sankaracharya said that all scriptures, the Vedas or Upanishads want to teach us that Reality. He said- “*Shlokardhena pravakshyami yaduktam grantha kotibhh*” – there are millions of scriptures, and millions of verses. He went on to say that he will summarize the essence of all of these teachings in half a verse: “*Brahma satyam jagan mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah*” – Brahman, that reality, is the Truth and this world is apparent truth (not ever lasting -- it is created and it will be destroyed). When we use the word ‘*mithya*’, it does not mean that this world is not there at all, but that it exists in the minds of the people due to ignorance and it is not permanent. Also ‘*Jiva*’ that ‘I’ sense is none other than that supreme infinite reality. All scriptures declare the same thing and it is the gist of scriptures, but is described in various ways.

Swami Turiyananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, used to visit him frequently. But suddenly for many days he did not come. Sri Ramakrishna used to take care of all these boys and loved them very much because he found them very pure, very dedicated – and with the potential to achieve the highest in life. So he asked ‘Where is Hari (Swami Turiyananda), why is he not coming here these days?’ Somebody said that Hari was very busy in studying the scriptures and practicing Vedanta. Then Sri Ramakrishna sent for him to visit

him at Dakshineswar. When Hari came to meet Sri Ramakrishna, the later remarked 'Oh I hear that you are very busy and practicing Vedanta. What is there in Vedanta – *Brahma satya, Jagat mithya*, is there anything more in Vedanta? Then Hari accepted this and started coming regularly to Sri Ramakrishna and started serving him again as before.

The identification of oneself with that Supreme reality is Knowledge and identification of oneself with anything other than That is ignorance. Knowledge is joy and peace whereas ignorance is suffering and misery. If I identify myself with anything which I am not, it brings suffering. Whatever we perceive through our senses is unreal (in the sense of impermanence). Because we perceive this world, it is unreal. Something covers the reality and projects something else to us, which we think as the reality. The reality is unperceivable by our senses. Everything is the product of Maya on the reality. The products include this microphone, the podium, the table, our temple, all the houses, roads, car, body, mind, intellect and all that is perceived by our senses. Once this ignorance goes, we then see all is bliss, all is good, all is joy. The death that we see is just a transformation from one body to another, nothing is really destroyed. Everything is just One – there is not really many. We perceive ourselves as undying, undecaying, immortal being and cannot be disturbed by anything in the world. We will become free and ever happy.

If this is the situation, then the problem to examine is how we can practice the awareness of and identification of ourselves as Atman or Brahman. Once sage Bhrgu approached his father Varuna, who was a knower of Brahman or Truth and asked him 'Father please teach me Brahman'. A great question from a small child! Varuna, instead of chanting the shlokas does not say anything – how to teach someone Brahman? Varuna said- "*Tapasa Brahma vijijnasasva*" -- Practice Tapas (austerities) and know Brahman. The reply appears so simple- not much to listen but more to practice. Bhrgu then goes and practices austerity. The Gita has described very clearly about the austerities of the body and mind. The Upanishads have described about austerity as concentration and thinking deeply on the question 'Who am I?' Whatever you are not, just remove that just like how you remove the sheaf from the kernel. Practise '*Neti-neti*' – 'Not this, not

this' – I am not this body, not this mind, not this intellect.

Bhrgu practices and comes back to his father each time asking him questions based on his progress. At first, he asks 'Am I this body?' Varuna replies 'No, the body changes; it cannot be Brahman. Go again and practice further'. After some more practice, Bhrgu asks his father 'Am I the mind?' Varuna replies 'No, this also changes. Go again and practice further'. Then Bhrgu his father 'Am I the Prana or the life force?' Varuna replies 'No. The life force also undergoes change. Go again and practice further'. Finally Bhrgu realizes after a lot of practice, what is Brahman, the unchangeable Truth.

The idea here is that Brahman is not a concept that can be described in words. Sri Ramakrishna has said- Brahman is that thing which has never been defiled, never touched with the tongue. Everything else has been described-- God's beauty, the universe, and so on- everything can be described except Brahman. It is beyond the ability of language to describe it. All of the adjectives that we have used – 'It is resplendent, glorious, blissful' – everything is only our mental conception of Brahman. Swami Vivekananda has said in his poem '*Nahi Surja, nahi jyoti*' – that Brahman is '*bujhe pran, bujhe jar*'- one who experiences, only he can know what that Reality is. Before reaching that state, all is just imagination. Sri Ramakrishna gives a very good example about why we cannot describe Brahman. Somebody tastes clarified butter or ghee, and another person asks him to describe the taste. He will reply – 'ghee tastes like ghee' and nothing else. To understand the taste of ghee, you have to taste it yourself. Similarly if you want to understand Brahman, you have to experience Brahman. Again understanding is not the proper word, since understanding takes place with the mind and mind is in the domain of Maya. Another beautiful example of Sri Ramakrishna helps us to understand this. A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean, and to do this it walked into the ocean. Obviously, it melted there-- it merged into the ocean. So when we experience Brahman, we basically merge into Brahman and become one with Brahman. Then we say- I am He. But really speaking, we will not be able to say this, since there will be no 'I' left, it would have merged with 'He'. 'I' then becomes 'He'.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Tithi puja was celebrated on **Sunday 6th March 2011 at 11:00 am**. The programme included bhajans,

puja, homa, meditation, flower offering followed by prasad distribution. Close to 300 devotees attended.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Buddha Purnima will be held on Sunday May 22, 2011 at 11:00am. The

programme will include bhajans, reading, puja, flower offering and prasad distribution.

REGULAR PROGRAMMES

SCRIPTURE CLASS: **Friday Scripture Classes** begin at **7:30 pm**, following the regular evening prayer at 6:00 pm. The class, held at the centre, is open to all interested persons.

VIGIL: On **Saturday, April 16, 2011**, a vigil consisting of japa and meditation will be observed, from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. To participate, please call the centre at 416-240-7262.

RAM NAM: Will be held on Ram Navami, **Tuesday April 12, 2011 at 6:30 pm**.

INTERVIEWS/INSTRUCTION:

Swami Kripamayananda will be happy to give interviews to those interested in knowing more about Vedanta and meditation. Individual interviews are also given for spiritual instruction. Appointments for interviews should be made in advance with the Swami at 416-240-7262.

DAILY MEDITATION: Meditation is observed at the Centre every morning from 6:00 am to 7:00 am. Devotional singing and

meditation is held in the evenings from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

DAILY BREAD FOOD BANK: Many less fortunate families are dependent on the food bank for their daily nutrition. Please help us by contributing non-perishable food items that we may pass along to the Daily Bread Food Bank.

SOUP KITCHEN: The Soup is cooked at the Vedanta Society and offered **9** days in a month serving about 450 meals at **Syme Woolner Neighbourhood & Family Centre, 2468 Eglinton Ave W, Unit 3, Toronto, ON, M6M 5E2**. Please contact the Centre, if you are interested in participating. *Donations for the Soup Kitchen will be highly appreciated.*

BOOK STORE: The Book Store is open after Sunday Services and special programmes, and arrangements can be made by phone for weekday and Saturday visits. We carry selected titles from the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, as well as other Vedantic materials.

Due to increasing costs and environmental concerns, please note that henceforth, the Newsletter will be mailed only to those members/devotees who specifically request it. If you would like to continue to receive the newsletter by mail please indicate so by mail/ email or in the Membership/Renewal form. Those Members, who have already opted for the Newsletter to be sent by post in the 2011 Membership form, need not write again. Please note that the Newsletter is always available at the centre and can also be downloaded from the website.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					<u>1</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>Vivekachudamani</i> '	<u>2</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>3</u> <u>11am</u> Lecture: <i>'Be a Yogi'</i> <u>VVM 1:30 pm</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>9</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
<u>10</u> <u>11am</u> Lecture: <i>'Manifesting Motherhood of God'</i> <u>VVM 1:30 pm</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen ----- <u>6.30pm</u> <i>RAM NAYAMI PUJA</i> & <i>RAMNAM</i>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>Vivekachudamani</i> '	<u>16</u> <u>VIGIL:</u> 6 am to 6 pm <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>17</u> <u>11am</u> Lecture: <i>'Ego: raw and ripe'</i>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>22</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>23</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>24</u> <u>11am</u> Lecture: <i>'Ways to God'</i>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>Vivekachudamani</i> '	<u>30</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen

ANNUAL SUMMER RETREAT

Annual Retreat will be held on Saturday, July 2 and Sunday, July 3, 2011 at the Vedanta Society of Toronto. The subject of the Retreat is 'Bhaja Govindam'. The Retreat will be conducted by a Guest monk and Swami Kripamayananda. If you are interested in attending, please contact the Society at phone number 416-240-7262 or by email at society@vedantatoronto.ca