



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter December 2007

'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' – Jesus Christ

'When I used to stay in the Nahabat, on moonlit nights I would look at the reflection of the moon in the still waters of the Ganges and, weeping, pray to God, "There are stains even on the moon, but let my mind be absolutely stainless" '

-- Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

Words to Inspire

(Based on the Life and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi from the book Peace of Heart, p. 65 - 67)

My Day Begins

What others considered to be wealth,
Francis considered to be a trifle.
His ambitions were higher.
He longed to be poor with all his heart.
The world might flee and abhor poverty
but he knew that it was treasured
by the Son of God.
Poverty became his spouse, the love of his life.
He loved her beauty,
He abandoned his father and his mother
That he might hold her more closely.
He surrendered everything else that they might be as one.
Not for even an hour was he unfaithful to her.
This, he told his followers, was the way to perfection,
the guarantee of eternal riches.
No one desired gold as he desired poverty,
no one guarded their riches
as he guarded this jewel of the gospel.
Nothing upset him more
than to see in his companions anything
that was contrary to poverty.
From the beginning of his religious life until he died,
his riches consisted of only a tunic, cord, drawers
and nothing else.
The poverty of his habit proclaimed where his riches were.
In this way he went through life
happy, secure, and confident.

DO WE NEED RELIGION?

V. Kumar Murty

(continued from the previous issue)

There are some that will answer that there is nothing real, here or beyond. All of this is illusory and a charade, 'a tale told by an idiot'. This is the nihilist perspective that nothing is real. All of this may be unreal and a charade. But we are also a part of that charade, and so if we accept this view, it implies that we are also not real. Nihilism is not a tenable philosophy because it negates the person asking the question. It is like having a headache but no head. I may not know whether God exists, but I am not ready to accept that I do not exist. I begin with the assumption that I exist. And as long as I exist, these questions of reality, meaning and purpose fill my mind and this will lead me to frame some concept of Ultimate Reality.

There are others that will answer that this world of mind and senses is real enough, but beyond that there is nothing. We are being naïve and foolish in looking for something beyond that. However we may try to cling to such a perspective, the hammer blows of life and death will force us to return to the question. Swami Vivekananda says "We may talk about seeing nothing beyond and keeping all our hopes and aspirations confined to the present moment, and struggle hard not to think of anything beyond the world of senses; and perhaps everything outside helps to keep us limited within its narrow bounds. The whole world may combine to prevent us from broadening out beyond the present. Yet, so long as there is death, the question must come again and again, 'Is death the end of all these things to which we are clinging, as if they were the most real of all realities, the most substantial of all substances?' The world vanishes in a moment and is gone. Standing on the brink of a precipice beyond which is the infinite yawning chasm, every mind, however hardened, is bound to recoil and ask, 'Is this real?' The hopes of a lifetime, built up little by little with all the energies of a great mind, vanish in a second. Are they real? This question must be answered. Time never lessens its power; on the other hand, it adds strength to it."¹

Anthropologically, the issue of death is considered to have played a major role in the formation of our concept of reality. Some scholars believe that religious ideas began with ancestor worship. We are not prepared to accept that our dead relatives are gone and so we evolve some mechanism by which to keep their memory and their presence with us. And that mechanism takes the form of worship. Some scholars feel that religion arose from such behaviour.

Other scholars feel that religion originated not from the worship of ancestors, but of nature. Swami Vivekananda writes "The human mind seems to struggle to get a peep behind the scenes. The dawn, the evening, the hurricane, the stupendous and gigantic forces of nature, its beauties, these have exercised the human mind, and it aspires to go beyond, to understand something about them. In the struggle, they endow these phenomena with personal attributes, giving them souls and bodies, sometimes beautiful, sometimes transcendent. Every attempt ends by these phenomena becoming abstractions whether personalized or not."² Thus in Vedic writings, we find Usha, the goddess of the evening, Aruna, the goddess of the morning, Surya, the god of the sun, Varuna, the god of rain, Vayu, the god of wind, and so on. We find similar concepts with the ancient Greeks and many other cultures.

From Swami Vivekananda's point of view, both of these anthropological theories can be reconciled into what he considers to be the real germ of religion, namely the struggle for freedom. We are familiar with the concept of individual freedom and social freedom. Many constitutions of the world guarantee the freedom and liberty of

¹ "The Real Nature of Man", in: CW, Volume 2, pp. 70-71.

² "The Necessity of Religion", in: CW, Volume 2, p. 59.

individuals and of society. But they cannot guarantee freedom from death or from the limitations of the senses. But the desire for freedom is so deep within us, that we start to search for some means to overcome these limitations. The idea that when our ancestors die, they continue to live in another sense is a way of discovering freedom from death. Similarly, nature is able to mobilize forces on a scale that goes far beyond what we are able to do. The worship of nature is an attempt to transcend the limitation of the senses, possibly by harnessing those very forces in our service and thus expressing our freedom from them.

Now let us return to religion as that which unites. We said that unity is to be sought and discovered at three levels. One is that of unity within the individual and the second is unity in inter-personal relationships. The third is unity with Ultimate Reality. We said that the first two are answers to existential problems. Taking Swami Vivekananda's interpretation of the origin of religion as the seeking of freedom from the limitations of the senses, we see that the third is also an answer to an existential problem. Thus religion is about solving the problems of life. It does not need to begin with belief or dogma or doctrines or rituals. It addresses fundamental needs of the human being.

The role of organized religions

How do we reconcile this view of religion with the popular view that religion is a collection of dogmas, beliefs, observances, customs and rituals that in fact serve to distinguish a community from others? Indeed, most organized religions do take this form.

Observances as taught by organized religions have an importance and we should not underestimate their role. It is very easy to take the view that these are actually hindrances, that they are limiting and that 'real' religion is beyond such prescriptions and injunctions. However, such a view is fallacious. It ignores the fact that we are growing and evolving in all dimensions. As a physical baby grows and learns, the constraints imposed on it are varied. In the beginning, there are many instances of 'don't': things that the baby should not do. If we think that the baby should be free and we do not impose any limitations on it, it would not survive for very long. The fact that all of us are alive today is because of people who took care of us when we were vulnerable. They told us what we should do and what we should not do. Through that training and by observing those injunctions, we slowly grew. Now, we do not need to be told or to follow those injunctions in the same way. Some we observe without being told. And others we do not. This is because we have crossed a safety threshold whereby we can be entrusted with the responsibility of regulating ourselves.

Similarly when a seed is planted, care has to be taken that the seed is not destroyed by animals. Some fencing or other obstacle is installed. When the seed becomes a small plant, different kind of fencing and support is installed because the threats are different. But when the plant becomes a tree, it is strong enough to protect itself against those dangers. Therefore the hedging can be removed and we may expect that the plant will take care of itself, as it were.

Similarly, religious injunctions protect us while we are spiritual babies. It is too easy to think that we know what is good for us, but in fact there may be dangers that we are not aware of. These injunctions will increase the chances of our well-being until we come to a state of maturity in which we do not need them anymore.

Note that as with the plant and the human baby, if the protective measures are not removed at a certain point, they are in fact harmful. What was beneficial and protective at one stage becomes harmful and limiting at another stage. This is why Swami Vivekananda said 'It is good to be born in a church, but not to die there.' This means that it is good to begin in a religious tradition, observing all the rites and rituals. But one must understand the role of these in the process of growth and must eventually transcend them. It is similar to a school. A student enters a school and studies for some years. When the program of studies is complete, the student graduates and leaves. What do you think it means if a student stays in the same program forever? Clearly, something is wrong. The normal process is to learn and move on.

(To continue in the February issue)

On Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

Swami Vivekananda:

You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mothers life – none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Shakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. Why is it that our country s the weakest and the most backward of all countries? Because, Shakti is held in dishonor there.

Swami Brahmananda:

If you want the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, first propitiate the Mother. The Mother is the supreme Primordial Power Herself (Parama Prakiti).

Swami Premananda:

What to speak of us – we have not found even Sri Ramakrishna doing this. Even he used to accept people after lot of testing and screening. And what do you find here, in the case of Mother? Astonishing! Amazing? She is giving refuge to all and digesting the sins of all. Mother! Mother! Victory unto the mother!!

Special Events

December 2 at 11am	Memorial Service for His Holiness Revered Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj and Rev. Swami Adiswaranandaji Maharaj
December 16 at 11am	Special Sunday Service- Talk on ‘ Disciples of Jesus ’ by the Guest Speaker Rev. Lois M Wilson , Ecumenist in Residence, Toronto School of Theology
December 24 at 6.00pm	Christmas Eve celebration
December 30 at 11am	Celebration of Holy Mother’s Birthday
December 31, 9:30 pm – 12 am	New Year’s Eve Celebration

Obituary

With deep sorrow we inform of the passing away of Rev. Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj 14th President of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, on Nov. 4, 2007 and of Rev. Swami Adiswaranandaji, Head of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York on October 31, 2007.

With a heavy heart we inform you that this year we lost the following of our members: Prabhouti Devi Karnahan on February 5, 2007; Amal Bhattacharya on March 4, 2007 Chitta Majumdar on June 25, 2007. May their souls rest in Peace!

Copies of the Vedanta Society’s 2006-07 Annual Report, Financial Report, and the 2006 AGM Minutes (distributed to attendees at the Vedanta Society’s 2007 Annual General Meeting on November 18) are available to any member of the Society. Interested members are requested to contact the Vedanta Society.



BELUR MATH NEWS

MAHA-SAMADHI OF Swami Gahananandajji Maharaj 14TH President of the

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

A special Puja and a memorial meeting will be held at Belur Math on Friday, 16 November 2007. Details are available at the following link –

http://www.belurmath.org/pm_tentative_programme.htm

Shubhajit Dasgupta, a student of class IX of **Deoghar** Vidyapith, bagged the first prize in the All India National Science Seminar on *Global Climate Change and its Impact* organized by the National Council of Science Museums at New Delhi on

5 October. He will be getting a scholarship of Rs. 1000 per month for two years.

Purulia Vidyapith organized a three-day function from 10 to 12 October to mark the first phase of its golden jubilee celebrations. Swami Gitanandaji, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the function, which was attended by about 2000 persons, including students, teachers, monastics and devotees. Sri Chittatosh Mukhopadhyay, former Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, Prof. Asish Kumar Banerjee, Vice Chancellor, Calcutta University, and some other distinguished persons addressed the gathering.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Kali Puja was celebrated on **Friday, November 9, at 6 pm**. The programme included puja, devotional songs, pushpanjali and distribution of prasad. Close to 300 devotees and friends attended.

The Vedanta Society of Toronto held its **Annual General Meeting** on **Sunday, November 18, at 11:00 am**.

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, December 8**, 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: **Sunday, December 16**, at 5:00 pm.

INTERVIEWS/INSTRUCTION:

Swami Kripamayanda 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: This month, the Soup Kitchen will be held on **Thursday, December 13, Tuesday, December 18 and Thursday, December 20**. 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 collections, as well as other Vedantic materials

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

DECEMBER 2007

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						<u>1</u>
<u>2</u> 11am Memorial Service for Rev. Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj and Rev. Swami Adiswaranandaji	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u> 7:30pm Scripture Class: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna	<u>8</u> 6am to 6pm Vigil
<u>9</u> 11 am Lecture: Miracle of Impermanence	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u> 9.30 am Soup Kitchen	<u>14</u> 7:30 pm Scripture class: Tattvabodha	<u>15</u>
<u>16</u> 11am: Guest Lecture: Disciples of Jesus by Rev. Lois M. Wilson 1:30pm: VVM 5pm: Ram Nam	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u> 9.30am Soup Kitchen	<u>21</u> 7:30 pm Scripture class: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna	<u>22</u>
<u>23</u> 11 am Lecture: Embodiment of Love	<u>24</u> 6 pm Christmas Eve Celebration	<u>25</u> Winter recess begins	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>30</u> 11am Public Celebration Holy Mother's Birthday Celebration	<u>31</u> 9:30pm to 12 am New Year's Eve Celebration					

Vedanta Society of Toronto would like to wish all of our members and friends

a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

