Vedanta Society of Toronto

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Newsletter December 2010

Words to Inspire

Holy men are born on earth to show people the way to God. They teach differently. There are many paths leading to the same goal. Therefore the teachings of all the saints are true.

-SAYINGS OF SARADA DEVI-

JESUS CHRIST

(Practical Spirituality, P 23-P 24)

Christ's message is best summed in his Sermon on the Mount. Here he unfolds an ideal, which has inspired mankind for twenty centuries and will continue to do so in the centuries to come. It has given man a sense of direction, told him what he should aim at, given him a yardstick by which he can judge himself. Without it he would have been helpless like a rudderless ship in a raging sea. Now that he knows his goal, all he needs to do is to struggle, keep struggling, till he reaches it. If the human level is to rise, the Sermon on the Mount points to the way, the only way, it can do so.

But why has man not improved in spite of Christ or Buddha or other religious leaders?. One may ask. He has improved his environment, but why has he himself remained unchanged? This is indeed a paradox. Some will say: Given the present alignment of economic and politic forces, there is no hope that man himself will improve. First of all, much of what is moral or immoral by present-day standards is arbitrary, having been devised by selfish people who want to perpetuate their hold on the poor and the ignorant. Secondly, they argue that so long as large sections of people are denied social justice, there is bound to be preponderance of crime, immorality, and evil.

In other words, it is the social conditions that determine whether a man will be moral or immoral. Pushed further, the argument implies that if a man is poor or otherwise handicapped, he is automatically wicked. But it is common experience that there are People, who despite their economic and social limitations are moral, while there are people who in spite of all the advantages they enjoy in terms of economic resources and social status are prone to be corrupt. So it is not entirely a question of environment. It is in fact a question of whether or not a person has set himself a moral goal and how strong his will is to pursue that goal.

The environment may help, but a truly honest man is honest for reasons of his own. Even if there is no fear of detection, he will not do what he knows to be wrong. He will similarly do no wrong even if there is the prospect of getting a reward for doing a wrong. A man cannot be taught to be kind, good or generous by legislation. He has to acquire these qualities through years of struggle, perhaps marked by frequent failures.

There have always been individuals who have practiced Christ's message, some more, some less. There will always be people who will do so. But the time has come when leaders all over the world should ponder if Christ's message cannot be practiced at the collective level. If the world has to improve, humanity must commit itself to the kind of ideal Christ or, for that matter, other saints and sages preached. That is to say, all human affairs, individual or collective, must be governed by the principles of piety, brotherhood, compassion, love and goodwill. It sounds utopian, but there seems no alternative to it.

COMPANY OF THE HOLY

(Delivered by Swami Kripamayananda at the Vedanta Society of Toronto)

Today's topic is very important and very practical particularly for the seekers of spiritual illumination. We live in an environment and we know how environment affects us. For instance, someone says something that may make us feel sad and disturbed. This is temporary and after a few hours, we feel normal again. But other things in life may affect us permanently. Suppose the house that we live in catches fire. That impression might live in our mind for quite some time. Similarly when we are with friends, due to peer pressure, we get influenced and the influence is usually to pull us down! Perhaps no one in our house consumes alcohol, but due to peer pressure, we may be begin to consume alcohol or smoke. Influence is a fact of life. So that is why it is so important that we get influenced by good people and not the bad ones.

Sri Ramakrishna said that our mind is like a washed white cloth. Whatever dye you dip it in, the cloth will catch that colour. It is of paramount significance what type of company we maintain in our life. To learn something, we seek the company of those who are expert in that field. We take our children to learn music from someone who knows music, knowing fully well that by remaining with them our children will learn music because the teacher is expert in music. Similarly, to become a devotee, we must have to be in the company of someone who has devotion to God. If you want to transform yourself then you have to be in the company of someone who has transformed himself and become good. Those who have transformed themselves and become good in life, are the holy persons.

Holy company is in fact, the first step in spiritual life and the most important one to transform ourselves towards goodness. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, on every page he asserts that one should try to have holy company. He says, 'It will give you the yearning for God. It will make you love God.' That is the power of holy company.

Let me read from the Gospel – "A devotee asked Sri Ramakrishna – Sir what is the way for spiritual progress ?

Master: "Prayer and the company of holy men and women. You cannot get rid of an ailment without consulting a physician. When we are sick, we visit those who are expert in curing the disease or doctors. But it is not enough to be in the company of holy men for a day, but you must constantly seek it, because the disease has now become chronic. Again to understand the pulse rightly, we must live with the physician. Moving constantly with the physician, we learn to distinguish between the pulse of phlegm and the pulse of bile."

The devotee asked "What is the good of holy company? Why should I go to see a holy man?"

Master: "It begets yearning for God."

It is really very difficult to get the yearning, the pull for God and the easiest way for this is associating with someone who really loves God. According to the power and holiness of that person, we get transformed.

Nothing can be achieved in spiritual life without yearning. We have to get that longing for God vision. By constantly living in the company of holy men, the soul becomes restless for God. The restlessness, which we have for worldly objects, that restlessness we must turn towards God and this comes by associating with holy men and women.

There is another benefit from the company of holy men – we learn to cultivate the discrimination between the real and the unreal. What is real? Sri Ramakrishna answers that "God alone is real, that is to say, the Eternal substance. The world itself is unreal, that is to say, transitory."

Associating with holy men, we tend to get attracted to the permanent or real thing, or God. At the same time, we start getting detached from things that are temporary or transitory. We must get bound to God. Our mind is presently attracted by the world – all worldly things – property, possessions, and so on. But we want our mind to be attracted by God. Worldly attraction is described by Sri Ramakrishna as 'Kamini-Kanchan' – 'lust and greed'. We want to be free from it and this is possible only by getting ourselves attached to God.

We must free ourselves from the grip of that worldly rope and get bound by the rope of God and derive eternal joy and fulfillment in life. This dissociation from the bondage with the unreal and association of bondage with the real can only be possible through holy company.

Sri Krishna says in the Gita that spiritual practices such as yoga, a study of philosophy, piety, study of Vedas, charity, visit to places of pilgrimage, vows, austerities, renunciation, rites, sacred mantras, sacrifices and moral rules can bind Him so much as the association of saints and holy men, which roots out all attachment.

Our mind is fluid, it starts flowing in the direction wherever you keep it. If it is kept in some

wrong ideas, wrong path then it flows in that way. If you see one episode of a TV-serial, then next day the mind will become curious about the next episode. Similarly if you start singing some devotional song or chant some Vedic verses or visiting some holy person, the next day the mind will hanker for the same thing.

When 'M', the author of the Gospel, first visited Sri Ramakrishna and was returning, Sri Ramakrishna said to him "Come again." These words were so powerful that M felt a strange pull towards Dakshineshwar and returned back to get the company of Sri Ramakrishna and listen to his teachings. This transformed his life. When he first went ot meet Sri Ramakrishna, he was totally depressed in his life, frustrated and disgusted with the world and was even going to commit suicide. Through the company of Sri Ramakrishna, he became a saint. Afterwards, many people who got in contact with 'M' also got transformed for good; many became monks and this is all due to holy company.

Many people say that Sri Ramakrishn was not a holy person, but holiness itself – God incarnated on earth. It was as if pure sattwa guna was concentrated in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. And the most important thing about Sri Ramakrishna is that it is not lost with his time, but even today we can have his holy company – reading the Gospel or seeing his picture. Holy Mother Sarada Devi has said that Sri Ramakrishna is ever present in his picture. The picture is the shadow of the person. Being near his picture, we can feel that He is there, we can feel and experience His very presence. If we develop further, then we don't need his picture. He comes and takes his seat in our heart and whenever we want to see him, He is present that time. Whenever we call him with a yearning heart, Sri Ramakrishna is bound to come. There is no way that He can desert us.

Reading the Gospel is as good as listening to Sri Ramakrishna – 'M' has recorded the Gospel in a very lively way. If we read a passage and just close our eyes and try to imagine that 'M', Rakhal, Narendra are all present and Sri Ramakrishna is talking with them, that is in itself a holy company. No need to see any movie or TV-serial, just close your eyes and imagine the passage description. Try to go back to that time and try to absorb that holiness into yourself. That is again a form of meditation – Lila Dhyana.

There are many people who wear garlands and put tilak (mark) on their forehead and try to cheat people. Beware of them. So the question arises 'how do we know that someone is a holy person?' One characteristic of a true holy person is that when we go near them we feel love and attraction and a boundless joy. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu says that when you go to some person and find that he is reciting the name of God and you also feel like reciting the name of God, then know for certain that the man is a holy man. All your worldly thoughts vanish and suddenly you are transported to that height of bliss. A person who is able to bring that change in us is the real holy person. In whose company, our love for God is awakened, that person is holy.

The holy company in Samskrit is called 'Sat-sanga'. Sat means existence. What is existence ? – that is Brahman. Sanga is association. So when we associate with Bramhan, that is Sat-sanga. When we come close to God, that is Sat-sanga or holy company. As discussed earlier, by association with holy men, there comes change in us for good.

Also it is important what we gain through our senses – what we hear, what we see, what we eat that really maters. All the intake through our senses has to be holy and pure for that will make our mind pure. In the Chandogya Upanishad, it is said – 'Ahar suddhe, satva suddhi. Sattva suddhe, dhruva smriti. Smriti lambe, sarva granthinam vipramoksha.' First we have to take in what is pure. In Samskrit, ahar is food. In his commentary, Sankara says that food is not only what we eat through our mouth, but whatever we in take through our senses – nose, eyes and ears. That is why we pray – O Lord, may I see what is good, may I hear what is good. The story of the three monkeys – one closing both eyes, one closing both ears, one closing the mouth is supposed to represent 'see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil'. But there is another set of three monkeys where they close only one eye, one ear and only half mouth. This symbolizes that we should not intake what is bad, but intake what is good. So the Upanishad says – purify your mind and your heart. Then with the pure heart, you will have continuous memory. This will allow you to have discrimination between good and bad. When the heart becomes pure, you feel constant awareness of God. Due to this all the knots of samsara or worldliness or desires will be cut asunder. As much as we need to expose ourselves, we must expose to good things. That is holy – holy means good.

As Sri Ramakrishna emphasizes about the need of holy company, he also says – Meet devotees. He used to ask his 'would-be' monastic devotees to go and meet 'M'. He wanted devotees to come together. Whether we spend time in the company of devotees or monks, the important thing is to use the opportunity to talk about God. In that way, it becomes company of the holy.

BELUR MATH NEWS

Flood Relief: (a) Chhattisgarh: The recent devastating flash flood in Narainpur caused by a cloud burst left a trail of death, suffering and massive destruction. Our **Narainpur** centre immediately started relief operations among the flood victims. The centre served cooked food (*poha* and *khichuri*) to them, and distributed 251 mats, 250 *chadars*, 250 blankets, 125 sets of ladies garments (each set containing 1 *sari*, 1 petticoat, etc), 125 shirts, 125 pants and 125 sets of utensils (each set containing 4 aluminum pots, 1 steel bucket, 1 steel drum, 1 steel plate, 2 steel glasses, 2 steel bowls, 1 ladle, 1 rice spoon, 1 *khunti* and 1 *karai*) to 125 affected families of 8 villages in Narainpur district this month.

(b) Haryana: In the wake of the recent floods in Haryana, our **Chandigarh** centre provided medical relief to 200 flood-affected patients in Panipat district this month.

(c) Uttar Pradesh: Immediately after the recent heavy flood in and around Kanpur, our **Kanpur** centre distributed 3980 kg rice, 1592 kg pulses, 1592 kg sugar, 318 kg rusk, 199 kg cake, 796 plastic buckets, and 796 sets of steel utensils (each set containing 2 glasses, 3 cooking vessels and 2 plates) to 796 families of 7 villages in Kanpur district this month.

Durga Puja was celebrated at Belur Math from 14 to 17 October with all solemnity. Though the weather was cloudy, there was no rain during the main Puja hours. Thousands of devotees attended the Puja on all the four days to receive the blessings of the Divine Mother. The Kumari Puja performed on 15 October drew huge crowds, and the Sandhi Puja on that afternoon was also attended by many devotees. Sri M K Narayanan, Governor of West Bengal, also attended the Sandhi Puja. Kolkata Doordarshan telecast live the Puja at different times on all the days. Cooked Prasad was served to more than 47,000 devotees on Ashtami day and to about one lakh devotees during the four days.

Swaraj Sansthan Sanchalanalaya, Ministry of Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh, conferred ***Maharaja Agrasen Rashtriya Samman*** on Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, in recognition of its outstanding service activities and its efforts to achieve fraternity and equality in society. Sri Laxmikanta Sharma, Minister of Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh, handed over the award comprising a citation and a sum of Rupees two lakh to the General Secretary on 8 October at Bharat Bhawan, Bhopal.

Indian National Congress conferred *Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration* for the year 2009 on **Narainpur** Ashrama. Smt Sonia Gandhi, President, Indian National Congress, handed over the award comprising a citation and a sum of Rs. 2,50,000/- on 31 October in a function held at Teen Murti House auditorium, New Delhi, in the presence of Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, and several other dignitaries.

The cardiology clinic at **Thiruvananthapuram** hospital was inaugurated on 1 October.

On 1 October, National Blood Donation Day, **Viveknagar** (Tripura) centre organized a workshop on health awareness, which was inaugurated by Sri Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister of Tripura. A blood donation camp was held on the following day in which 47 persons donated blood.

Mr M O H Farook, Governor of Jharkhand, inaugurated a 20-bed primary health care unit at **Ranchi Sanatorium** on 9 October.

The newly built monks' quarters and staff quarters at **Rajkot** Ashrama were inaugurated on 9 October.

A DVD containing the archives of 96 years of *The Vedanta Kesari* was released at **Chennai Math** on 9 October.

Kozhikode centre organized an Eye Care Programme in which 3731 students of our school there underwent eye check-up. Of these, 56 students with refractory errors were given free glasses.

Hyderabad Math conducted a spiritual retreat on 3 October in which about 2000 devotees participated.

The cerebral palsy rehabilitation centre of **Rajkot** Ashrama organized a two-day programme on 2 and 3 October on the occasion of National Cerebral Palsy Day (3 October). The programme consisted of sports and cultural competitions and a funfair for cerebral palsy children, and a public exhibition to create awareness about cerebral palsy.

Mangalore centre conducted seminars for youths from 27 to 29 September in which about 1800 youths participated.

Salem centre conducted value education programme on 12 days from July to September in which 100 college students and 100 school students participated.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Kali Puja was held on **Friday, November 05, 2010 at 6:30pm**. The programme consisted of bhajans, reading, homa and flower offering followed by prasad distribution.

Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday 14 Nov 2010. More than 50 members attended and 85 members sent their proxies.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary will be celebrated on Sunday 30th January 2011 at 11.00 am. The programme will consist of bhajans, puja, homa, flower offering followed by prasad distribution.

Kalpataru Utsav will be celebrated on Saturday 1st January 2011 at 5pm. The programme will consist of bhajans, puja, flower offering followed by 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, December 18, 2010,** 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 19, 2010 at 5:00 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 a month serving 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.

Copies of the Vedanta Society's 2009-2010 Annual Report, Financial Report, and the 2009 AGM Minutes (distributed to attendees at the Vedanta Society's 2010 Annual General Meeting on November 14) are available to any member of the Society. Interested members are requested to contact the Vedanta Society.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tue	Wed	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3 7:30pm Scripture class: *'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'*	4 9:30am Soup Kitchen
5 11am Lecture: *Swami Vivekananda's Ideal of Education* - Prof. Kumar Murty VVM 1:30 pm	6	7 9:30am Soup Kitchen	8	9	10 7:30pm Scripture class: *'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'*	11 9:30am Soup Kitchen
12 11am Lecture: *Power of Imagination* - Prof. Kumar Murty	13	14 9:30am Soup Kitchen	15		17 7:30pm Scripture class: *'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'*	18 9:30am Soup Kitchen Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
19 11am Lecture: *Advent of an Incarnation* 5:00PM Ram Nam	20	21 9:30am Soup Kitchen	22	23 9:30am Soup Kitchen	24 6:00pm Christmas Eve Celebration	25 *Winter Recess begins*
26 *Winter Recess* NO LECTURE	27 11:00 am Sri Sarada Devi Birthday Celebration	28 9:30am Soup Kitchen	29	30	31	

The Vedanta Society of Toronto would like to inform that Society will be observing Winter Recess from Dec 25, 2010 to Jan 08, 2011. Sunday Service and Scripture classes will be suspended during this period. Other services will remain unaffected.

We wish all of our members and friends

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

May peace and spiritual blessings be yours in the coming year and always!