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Newsletter February 2005

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The Gita is the embodiment of all scriptures. May you attain your goal by studying the Gita - that is my prayer.

-Swami Turiyananda

Words To Inspire

Don't get discouraged or disheartened. Why should it be always sunshine and good times? Let Mother's will be done. Never mind sunshine or rain, we must not forget Mother at anytime. Even if we don't see her, why should we lose heart? She appears again in our view. She knows what is best for us. Once we have given [ourselves] over to her, what right have we to think of ourselves again? It is not so easy to do as to say - of that I am sure, but there is no other way out. Whether we see or don't see, Mother is our only place of rest. There are ups and downs in all hearts, but we should not give way to them. Real, genuine sympathy works wonders. That is the one thing omnipotent in this world of sorrows and weaknesses. Ask of Mother for that and you will have it. Think not about yourself but only for others. That is renunciation, that is religion, that is all. You have died, why do you think of yourself?

Have you not given everything over to Mother? Why then think of yourself again? Never care for position. Give up all such ideas. Work is worship. Everything is in the life we live, not in position. Mother knows the heart and sees the heart and arranges things accordingly. Let your light so shine that everyone can see it. Let your work be silent and in secret and your Mother who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Be strong! Don't give in to anything whatever. It is not good to be weak; the weak must go to the wall. This is the law of the world. But what have you to do with the world anymore? Mother's child, good or bad, weak or strong, you have no other to look up to but Mother! Others, who do not know, may think of temporal help. But you can never think that way. I am sure! Sri Ramakrishna is the concrete embodiment of the Vedantic Truth, because in his life he manifested in full all the subtle truths that we read in the Vedanta philosophy. Pray for unflinching love and devotion and you will have everything.

-Swami Turiyananda, from *Spiritual Treasures* (p. 233-234)

Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Spirituality

(Based on a talk delivered by Dr. Hema Murty, President, Shanti Consulting (Ottawa), at the Vedanta Society of Toronto on October 10, 2004)

The topic of Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Spirituality is vast. If we all imbibed one aspect of this topic into our personality, we would all be spiritual instantly. In order to make it part of our personality, we must be steadfast in our thinking. Like Shiva, steadfastly meditating in the Himalayas, we must hold on to the ideals with that kind of resolution. Swami Vivekananda refers to this imagery in his reference to the Hymn to the Himalayas. He uses the grandeur of the majestic Himalayas as the measuring rod of mankind's greatness. This hymn comes from the opening of the Kumarasambhava of Kalidasa:

*Aasthyutharasyaam dishi devataatma Himalayo naama nagaadhiraaja
Poorvaparau toyanidhi vaigaahya sthitaha prthivyaa iva maanadandaha*

Kalidasa was describing the scenery of the Himalayas, where Shiva is meditating. This verse says that the juxtaposition of the Himalayas, Shiva and humankind, seems to indicate that the eminence of the Himalayas looked as if they were the measuring stick by which mankind could be measured. It is fitting that Swami Vivekananda uses this imagery for our real greatness to make us aware, if even for a moment, of that. His basic statement of the world is that it is a suggestion to bring out the perfection within us. Thus, the Himalayas, by their eminence, remind us of who we really are, in a figurative sense. We are all audio/visually oriented when taking in information. We seldom think in words, but in pictures and all words bring out pictures that are already in us. We can think of this imagery of the Himalayan peaks and remind ourselves of our internal greatness. By filling the mind with uplifting thoughts we become spiritual for that time.

We have all heard or read Swami Vivekananda's famous quotation that:

- Each soul is potentially divine.
- The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal.
- Do this either by work (Karma Yoga), or worship (Bhakti Yoga), or psychic control (Raja Yoga) or philosophy (Jnana Yoga)-by one, or more or all of these- and be free.

This statement is very powerful and summarizes Swami Vivekananda's concept of spirituality. This concept was that man was to be aware of his Real Self and the methods that he gave us for achieving that are many. When we hear the term 'controlling nature', it conjures up the image of a wrestling match with nature. In actual fact, the culmination of following one of the paths of Yoga will accomplish this 'controlling' in a natural way. What actually occurs is that nature appears to us differently when we change the mindset with which we look at it. It is a natural evolution and not a battle. Our awareness is what we modify with time. That, in itself, is a major difference from saying, 'the world has to change to suit me and it is their entire fault.

Our anger at the outside world is always a form of fear. There is the fear of insecurity, fear of facing the world alone. This list of fears that we have is endless. Mostly we fear those very things we need to face. Swami Vivekananda said,

"Be not afraid of anything. You will do marvellous work. The moment you fear, you are nobody. It is fear that is the great cause of the misery in the world. It is fear that is the cause of our woes, and it is fearlessness that brings heaven even in a moment. Therefore, 'Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached' "

"This faith in themselves was in the hearts of our ancestors, this faith in themselves was the motive power that pushed them forward and forward in the march of civilisations, and if there has been degeneration, if there has been defect, it started the day people lost faith in themselves. If you believe this Omnipresent One is present in every atom, is through

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and through, penetrating our body, mind and soul,
how can you lose heart?"

At some level we all want this spirituality because we all come to the house of spirituality, the Vedanta Society, in order to drink from it a little and take away something to quench that thirst for spirituality. However, we are not spiritual because we are here in body. We are spiritual because we hold spiritual ideas for the time we are at the Vedanta Society. We have all heard the familiar quotation:

"Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms are but secondary details"

This is the key of Swami Vivekananda's concept of spirituality. We are the sum of the ideas that we hold at any given time. We are not defined by our external actions but the thoughts with which we carry out those actions. Today's popular authors of success management echo the following thought:

*Muktaha abhimaani muktaha hi baddhaha baddhabhimaanyapi
Kim vadanti iha satya ayam yaa matihi saa gatirbhavet*

'He who thinks he is free, he is free. He who thinks he is tied up, he really is tied up. The popular saying is true: As one thinks, so one is'. Swami Vivekananda quoted this verse in his conversation with his student, Sarat Chandra Chakravarty. This verse is from the Ashtavakra Samhita.

All of the current popular seminars, videotapes, audiotapes, and DVD's on achieving success in life were summed up in this verse. Originally, this thought was brought forth by the rishis who discovered this truth through meditation and then again, we heard it from Swami Vivekananda. At the individual level, how do we think of ourselves as free within the hectic lifestyle of today? We need to jettison our constant attention on doing something and instead focus on being. We look for results, while not focussing on the attitude with which we carry out the work. However, being is spirituality. Therefore, spirituality is really about the attitude with which you carry yourself or your 'sense of being'. Swami Vivekananda repeatedly asked us to remember who we are. We are descendants of rishis who carried out great tapas. We can never lose our identity because the blood of the ancient rishis courses through us. We should act in keeping with that image of ourselves. Acknowledging who we are and coming nearer to it, pleases our soul. We are no longer tormented by its inner pleadings to help identify it. It's these inner pleadings which make people frustrated and they go searching everywhere to no end. The answer does not lie outside. It is within us.

Another example can be found in our daily worship. When we recite prayers in Samskrit, we are reciting something that was spoken by our ancestors. For example, a verse from the Bhagavad Geeta was first spoken by Sri Krishna. While reciting the verse, the power of Sri Krishna will be touching us since we will share a commonality for that time. It is left for us, to retain that feeling and use it to uplift ourselves. When we speak Samskrit or offer a prayer in Samskrit we are connecting to our origins internally. Our soul's thirst for our acknowledgement of our identity for that small time period. Imagine if a whole nation did that, how powerful we would be! Swami Vivekananda reminds us of this phenomenon many times so that we could be reawakened to our identity:

"If the faith in ourselves came back, then our national life would be as it was in the days of Vyasa and Arjuna. Born with the consciousness that they were to be great, people became great. We need to have faith in ourselves and stand up on that faith and be strong: that is what we need."

We need to find out what makes us unique. We each have a gift and we should be unique, be ourselves. When we touch that magical place in our heart that makes us unique, then we touch a piece of that Infinite Loving Consciousness.

When we express our uniqueness, we fill ourselves with a joy that cannot be surpassed by any material thing. Each person's particular uniqueness is a gift from God. The joy we feel in expressing that uniqueness is the joy of spirituality. We have all heard that story from Sri Ramakrishna about everyone being mad after something.

"Some are mad after worldly love, some after name, some after fame, some after money, some after salvation and going to heaven. In this big lunatic asylum I am also mad. I am mad after God. You are mad; so am I. I think my madness is after all the best."

We must find our soul's particular journey to the highest. We all like different kinds of music, different kinds of art, and different kinds of profession. Being you, means celebrating that uniqueness and finding out your path to God. An example of this is the civilization from Bharat. We are descendants of Bhageeratha Rishi who carried out great selfless tapas. He wanted to help the population and purify them. So he was determined to bring the great waters of the Ganga to Earth. Bhageeratha's blood courses through us. Therefore his conviction to help the population of his country and his determination to obtain spiritual help to do that also runs through us.

When we do something we love, we are not looking at the results, and we are focussed on the love and the joy from the experience. This is called Karma Yoga. Alternatively, it can be called the law of detachment. However, this may have no meaning for us, unless we translate it into the everyday example of loving what we do so that we don't focus on the results.

Swami Vivekananda says, "We all concentrate upon those things we love, and we love those things upon which we concentrate our minds." In another example of the same principle, Swami Vivekananda asks, "Who enjoys the artwork, the seller or the seer? The seller is busy with his accounts, computing what his gain will be, how much profit he will realise on the picture. His brain is full of that. The man is enjoying the artwork who has gone there without any intention of buying or selling. So this universe is a work of art and when these desires have vanished, men will enjoy the world, and then this buying and selling and these foolish ideas of possession will be ended." Equivalently, we can express this idea of appreciation of the universe in the following statement of Swami Vivekananda:

"He is the Great Poet, the Ancient Poet; the whole universe is His poem, coming in verses and rhymes and rhythms, written in infinite bliss"

"This is of course, all well and good until someone comes and makes us really mad again. The only solution here is to persevere and try again. A time will come and we will not be affected by the others who make us angry."

We have all heard someone say to us "He makes me mad". Our empathic voice inside us tells us that if someone else can 'make' them mad, perhaps we are then able to make them happy. However, we soon realize that just by saying "be happy" doesn't make another happy. Happiness must come from inside. Similarly, we make ourselves angry by reacting to outside circumstances. On this topic, Swami Vivekananda has given us a goal to which we can aspire. "When we have succeeded in preventing all the forces in the world from throwing us off our balance, then alone we have attained to freedom and not before." To describe this concept further, a story from the Ramayana can be cited.

After defeating Ravana, the king of Lanka who had captured Sita, Rama and his entourage went back to Ayodhya and celebrated. During that celebration, Rama gave everyone gifts. He gave Hanuman, his loyal devotee who helped him throughout the ordeal, a pearl necklace, which was very valuable. Hanuman took the necklace, went away and examined it. He plucked each pearl from the necklace and said to himself "Is there Rama in this?" If not, he threw the pearl away. He did this continuously with the whole necklace and in the end, threw the necklace away. We would be astonished at this act. However, we must remember Hanuman's criterion for something to be valuable.

Is Rama in the necklace or not? To Hanuman, life was Rama and he became known as the greatest devotee of God. This story shows how focussed one needs to be in order to advance spiritually. Spirituality is realization in daily life. It is not talk or outer showings. All spirituality is internal. It is the whole soul getting changed into what it believes. With internet and international television, everyone around the world is watching the same thing -- the Western world. The ideals of our ancestors like Bhageeratha, get forgotten. Then we suffer from the confusion of identity syndrome. We are all Presidents and CEOs of our own identity and we know that companies do best when they market their own unique identity. We need to be ourselves, recognize our heritage and the shoulders on which we now stand. We should strive to understand our true nature in our own unique way. Then, we will be able to live life according to Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Spirituality.

Quantum Leap

A Speech On Swami Vivekananda

Learned Gurus, Parents, Brothers and Sisters,

I am here before you today, to speak about Swami Vivekananda the "Cyclonic Sadhu", as Nehru called him. Swami Vivekananda was born on January 12th, 1863. His parents named him Narendranath Dutta. As a boy he was very mischievous and sometimes his mother, being annoyed, would throw cold water on him. But she knew he was very intelligent and had a powerful memory. After high school education, he was sent to Calcutta University, where he graduated. Soon he began to ask his lecturers, "Have you seen God?" No one could give him a satisfactory reply. His professor directed him to a priest who fell into a trance when the name of God was mentioned. He went to that priest and asked him "Have you seen God?" At once came the reply, "Yes I have seen God as I see you but more intensely." This priest was Ramakrishna. From 1883 to 1886 Swamiji was with Ramakrishna as his foremost disciple.

Under Naren's inspiration, young men joined him in spiritual practices. Sometimes they lived in huts with poor villagers. Sometimes with middle-class city folk. After some days he received a bidding from his late Guru to go to the west. The admirers of Swamiji collected money and sent him as their representative of India to the Parliament of Religions to Chicago in America. There were 7,000 people assembled in the hall to listen to the representatives from all countries.

The Chairman requested Swamiji to speak. Vivekananda came forward. There was giggling and gossiping amongst the audience. Swamiji began, "Sisters and Brothers of America." The audience felt in his address such power and love that they were drawn to him for many minutes and applauded him. Swami saw all human beings as One in Spirit. This Oneness is the essential teaching of Vedanta. Swamiji saw this Personified in his master, Sri Ramakrishna the harmony of all religions.

By Ragulan Gnanaskandan, Age 11

Past Events

The Vedanta Society celebrated **Kalpataru Utsav** on January 1, 2005 with great pomp and joy. Over 250 devotees braved the icy Toronto streets and bitter cold and gathered together to lay their sincere prayers at the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna. The celebration consisted of puja, devotional singing, reading, meditation, flower offering and distribution of prasad.

The **Birth Anniversary Celebration of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi** was held on January 9, 2005, with a special programme of worship, devotional singing, reading, meditation, flower offering and homa, followed by distribution of prasad. Close to 200 devotees attended the blessed event.

Swami Kripamayananda was invited by the **Vedanta Society of Montreal** to conduct the celebration of **Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's Birth Anniversary**. The event was held at the Hindu Mission Mandir on January 15th. The programme, attended by approximately 250 people, consisted of puja, bhajans, dance performances and lectures. Swami Kripamayananda, who is also President, performed the puja and delivered a discourse on Holy Mother. Lunch prasad was served to all that had the good fortune to attend.

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