



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

120 Emmett Ave. Toronto, ON CANADA M6M 2E6

Tel: 416-240-7262 Fax: 416-245-3764

Email: society@vedantatoronto.ca

Website: www.vedantatoronto.ca

Newsletter February 2008

Words to Inspire

“Never think you are weak. You may be weak, but the One you have taken refuge in is all-powerful. Therefore, deem yourself strong in his strength. When one is firmly convinced that God is his all in all, he feels an upsurge of supreme strength in his heart.”

- Swami Turiyananda -

“Great Swan – Meetings with Ramakrishna”

(The Paramahansa Transmits Spiritual Intensity – O Brother Madhusudana, Please Come! Chapter 18)

Early on Friday the fourteenth, we journey from the crowded metropolis of the modern world to visit the primeval Temple Garden. It is the auspicious day of the full moon. We find the God-intoxicated sage, clad in only a thin cloth in the chill morning light of December, sweeping the path north of his room. “Mother Kali walks here barefoot,” Ramakrishna explains in a childlike manner. “I am clearing the way for Her delicate Lotus Feet.”

He greets us as if he were expecting us. Shining with the inner heat of yoga, or mystic union, Ramakrishna is the perpetual full moon of Divine Knowledge and Divine Love. Deeply moved, we prostrate before him in the traditional manner, placing palms, knees, and forehead on the sandy path where Divinity walks. The sage surprises us completely by prostrating as well, the crown of his head almost touching ours. As we stand up again together, we are already laughing. Our somewhat romantic, misty mood of devotion is dissipated by the unexpected humor and naturalness of his friendship. Ramakrishna possesses the rare ability to put everyone at ease, allowing us to feel that he is best friend, confidant, brother, and equal in every respect.

Hand in hand, feeling like childhood companions, we enter his fragrant room. He feeds us fruit, sweets, and water, placing delicious morsels directly into our mouths and whispering endearments into our ears. As we sit together intimately on the floor, he inquires in detail about our health, our family, our contemplative practice. Ramakrishna’s mind is so pure, so disciplined, so powerful, that to be the focus of this attention is almost overwhelming. But whenever we feel tears of gratitude rising to our eyes, he skillfully diverts us with some hilarious remark or gesture.

Other seekers of Truth are gradually arriving at this place of pilgrimage, like bees of hummingbirds drawn to an

open flower by its subtle, all-pervading perfume. Because of the presence of these sincere aspirants, the divine child is propelled by his Wisdom Mother into an entirely different mood. He moves onto the small bed, settling into radiant equipoise. Advanced teachings begin to pour through him as from a fountain. We have been transformed once more into humble, devoted disciples, seated with awe at the feet of a God-realized sage, the rarest of beings in any universe. Humor and naturalness continue to grace the Master’s words.

‘Ramakrishna, the mature spiritual person, one who is truly awakened, need not remain involved in social responsibilities or religious observances. The sense that one must, or even can, initiate any action begins to disappear as one realizes that only God acts. This realization is the final fruition of all aspirations and disciples. When the fruit appears, the flower petals fall from the tree. Passages from the Holy Scriptures will flutter away from the mind like petals in a strong wind. The mantra, the condensed inward invocation of Divine Presence, may remain active for a while, but eventually even these sacred words will blow away, leaving only the primordial resonance – OM OM OM – which is not just a word passed down by tradition but a humming tone at the center of awareness, audible at the core of every sound in the universe. OM is the open portal to Supreme Reality.

How long will it be necessary to practice various levels of religious discipline? As long as you do not shed tears and feel tingling sensations coursing throughout your body while repeating one of the precious Divine Names, you are still subject to the structures of moral and religious training. How does a small child learn to wake from a sound sleep in order to use the bathroom? Until this ability develops, the child must continue to wear diapers.’

DO WE NEED RELIGION?

V. Kumar Murty

(Continued from the previous issue)

Thus, the rites, rituals, observances and even the dogma of organized religions help us to grow. There is an unfortunate tendency to belittle these observances, either because of intellectual arrogance or perhaps because of laziness. Both of these are pitfalls and should be guarded against.

Thus, organized religions are seen as stages through which we may pass in our spiritual evolution. This of course contradicts the assertion of most organized religions that they represent the final truth. Given what we have discussed thus far, how are we to understand this assertion of each organized religion that it is not an institution to pass through, but a one-stop shop that has the final truth?

Firstly, any institution is obliged to claim that as a means of survival. Any institution or organization has to set up walls in order to define itself, to distinguish itself and to survive.

Secondly, and more fundamentally, at the center of any organized religion is a spiritual tradition. If we go to the fountainhead of each spiritual tradition, we find that the great teachers always spoke of unity and oneness. Moreover, the assertion is made that this state, which transcends the world of mind and of the senses, can be experienced. Religion is what can take us beyond mind and the senses. In particular, it takes us beyond reasoning. At the level of that fundamental experience, the particular tradition disappears.

Swami Vivekananda says that “a tremendous statement is made by all religions; that the human mind, at certain moments, transcends not only the limitations of the senses, but also the power of reasoning. It then comes face to face with facts, which it could never have sensed, could never have reasoned out. These facts are the basis of all the religions of the

World.”¹ Moreover, “all the existing religions of the world claim for the human mind this peculiar power of transcending the limits of the senses and the limits of reason; and this power they put forward as a statement of fact.”²

The goal of religion is to reach that state. Belief will not suffice; it must be one’s own experience. As Jung writes, “Belief is no adequate substitute for inner experience, and where this is absent, even a strong faith which came miraculously as a gift of grace may depart equally miraculously.”³ Furthermore, inner experience has to correlate with outer behaviour.

Swami Vivekananda says, “This conquering of the inner man, understanding the secrets of the subtle workings that are within the human mind, and knowing its wonderful secrets, belong entirely to religion.”⁴ Once we have reached that unity and oneness, the concept of the tradition vanishes. Moreover, one recognizes that the same goal may be reached through many paths. This is the basis of the principle of the harmony of religions. It is not an ecumenical harmony, but a harmony of goal.

The Rk Veda records an aphorism of an unknown teacher: “One Being, sages speak of by various names.” The Bhagavad-Gita records Krishna as teaching “As men approach me through whatever path, I accept them”⁵. The Torah records the saying that ‘God created man in his own image’: not certain men, but all of humanity. Buddha said that the light of truth is in all beings. There is no end to the list of teachings of great souls that emphasize the essential unity of humanity – nay, of all existence – and of Ultimate Reality. In our time, Sri Ramakrishna taught, “The more you advance towards God, the less you will

¹ “The Necessity of Religion”, in: CW, Volume 2, p. 61.

² “The Necessity of Religion”, in: CW, Volume 2, p. 61.

³ “The position of the west on the question of religion”, in: The Undiscovered Self, C. G. Jung, p. 37.

⁴ “The Necessity of Religion”, in: CW, Volume 2, p. 65.

⁵ Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4, Verse 11.

see of His glories and grandeur.” After various visions of names and forms, the aspirant “sees only Light without any attributes”. “At last he sees the Indivisible Light and merges in it.”⁶

The future of religion

From our discussion, we see that there is a gap between religion in the true sense of the word and religion as it is taught and practiced through institutions. Swami Vivekananda says that we have not yet seen the full power of religion. With several millennia of religious history behind us, this statement is rather amazing. What then is the future of religion?

Swami Sarvagatananda has expressed the view that the future of religion is not in traditional places of worship but in educational institutions. Jawaharalal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, described a newly constructed dam as ‘the temple of modern India’. It seems that going forward, the temples of the world may be in schools, colleges and universities. For it is here that we have a chance of taking a good look at the religious traditions of the world from an empirical point of view, with an idea to discovering the harmony amongst them and in extracting their universal principles. As Swami Vivekananda said, “Religion must be studied on a broader basis than formerly. All narrow, limited, fighting ideas of religion have to go. All sect ideas and tribal or national ideas of religion must be given up. That each tribe or nation should have its own particular God and think that every other is wrong is a superstition that should belong to the past. All such ideas must be abandoned.”⁷ Clearly, no organized religion will undertake such an endeavour. It therefore lies to the institutions of knowledge to make such an empirical enquiry.

Swami Vivekananda further said, “The religious ideals of the future must embrace all that exists in the world and is good and great, and, at the same time, have infinite scope for future development. All that was good in the past must be preserved; and the doors must be kept open for future additions to the already existing store. Religions must also be inclusive, and not look

down with contempt upon one another, because their particular ideals of God are different.”⁸

Moreover, he said, “Religious ideas will have to become universal, vast and infinite; and then alone we shall have the fullest play of religion, for the power of religion has only just begun to manifest in the world. ... The power of religion, broadened and purified, is going to penetrate every part of human life.”⁹

Do we need religion? The answer is clearly that we do. For religion helps us to satisfy our fundamental needs of peace and harmony within, inter-personal and social cooperation without, and the even more fundamental need to discover freedom, meaning and purpose. Religion helps us to discover what true freedom is. This should be a matter of experience and not just affirmation. Religion is a process of growth and evolution. The religious traditions of the world can help us in that process. In the realm of spirit, the differences that separate us are annihilated and we discover perfect unity. Then we can chant with the Vedic rishi:

*Let us be united. Let us speak in harmony.
Let our minds apprehend alike. Common be our
prayers; common be the aim of our gathering;
common be our resolution; may our deliberations
be cooperative. Alike be our feelings. United be
our hearts. United be our intentions. Perfect be
our unity.*

(Concluded)

Purity, patience, and
perseverance are the
three essentials to
success, and above all,
love.

~ Swami Vivekananda

⁶ The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 177, p. 853 and p. 354.

⁷ “The Necessity of Religion”, in: CW, Volume 2, p. 67.

⁸ “The Necessity of Religion”, in: CW, Volume 2, p. 67.

⁹ “The Necessity of Religion”, in: CW, Volume 2, p. 68.

Quantum Leap

Happy Birthday to Sarada Devi

By Sudeshna Haldar 'Purna' of Montreal, Age 9

I am Sudeshna Haldar Purna. Today I am going to talk about Sri Sarada Maa that is, the Holy Mother. In my family, we are the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Today we are celebrating the 154th Birthday of the Holy Mother. She was born in India on 22nd December 1853.

In my daily life, I always try to maintain the devotion to Sarada Maa. Every Morning when I get ready to go to school, I pray to Maa Sarada and take her blessing with me. When I go somewhere with excitement, I pray to Maa Sarada before leaving.

In our house, we have a small shrine where we have pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Mother Sarada and Swami Vivekananda. We have many pictures of Sri Maa. In our house; when we eat we see Sarada Maa, when we are in our car we see Maa Sarada.

My father daily does the puja of Thakur, Ma and Swamiji. When my father does the puja, I help him a lot. Sometime I do the puja, but it is not

perfect like my father, but after doing puja I feel very powerful and energetic.

Gadadhar Chatterjee of Kamarpukur grew up to become Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Mukherjee of Jayrambati, to Sri Maa; their life was flooded with devotional light. I follow their teachings to build up my future.

When I go to school for an exam, I always pray to Maa Sarada and take a flower offered to her with me. It gives me confidence.

We live in Canada. Canada is a multicultural country. From various parts of the world, different people from different religions, different cultures and different languages have come and settled here. In my class too there are some Hindu, some Muslim, some Buddhist and some Christian boys and girls, but we are all students. In Sri Ramakrishna's words also we find him say that, there are so many ways, but there is only one goal.

I wish you all to stay happy and good.

Thank you!

Jay Thakur! Jay Maa! Jay Swamiji!

BELUR MATH NEWS

The **Birthday of Holy Mother** was celebrated at **Belur Math on Sunday, 30 December 2007**. Thousands of devotees attended the celebration throughout the day. Cooked Prasad was served to about **31000** devotees. **Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission**, chaired the public meeting held in the afternoon.

The **98th Annual General Meeting** of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on **Sunday, 16 December 2007**. It was chaired by Swami Atmasthanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Mission.

Sri Pradip Majhi, an ex-student of Narendrapur Blind Boys' Academy, won the **National Award for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2007**, for his outstanding performance as the most efficient self-employed person. Smt Pratibha Devi Singh Patil, President of

India, handed over the award to him at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 3 December, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Sri Bhabesh Barman and Sri Deb Kumar Maity, ex-students of the Blind Boys' Academy, received the State Awards for the year 2007 from Sri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal, in recognition of their outstanding performance as the most efficient self-employed persons.

A 10 ft x 10 ft painting on the theme *Harmony of Religions*, depicting Sri Ramakrishna as the central figure, was installed at **Ramakrishna Ashram Marg Metro Railway Station, New Delhi**, on 5 November

Md. Firoj, a 16-year old **born-blind boy** of Samastipur district, Bihar, got his vision by an operation conducted in our **Patna eye clinic** last month.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi Birth Anniversary Tithi Puja was celebrated on **30 Dec 2007**. The programme consisted Bajan, discourse, havan, flower offering followed by prasad distribution. About 180 devotees attended.

New Year Eve was celebrated on **31st Dec 2007 from 9.30 pm** and lasted about three hours. More than 60 devotees attended the event.

Kalpataru Day was celebrated on **1st January 2008 at 5.30 pm**. The programme included puja, bhajans, readings, flower offering followed by prasad distribution. Close to 200 devotees attended the celebration.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sri Ramakrishna Birthday will be celebrated on his **Tithipuja day, Sunday, March 9, 2008 at 11.00 am**. The programme will

include Bhajans, reading, Puja, Homa, 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, February 9**, 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: **February 17 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: The Soup is cooked at the Vedanta Society and served three days (2nd and 3rd Thursdays and 4th Tuesday) a month at Roncesvalles Food Sharing, 263 Roncesvalles Avenue, Toronto M6R 2L9. This month, the Soup Kitchen dates are **February 14, February 21 and February 26th**. 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.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS **FEBRUARY 2008**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					<u>1</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna	<u>2</u>
<u>3</u> 11am: Public Celebration Swami Vivekananda Birthday Celebration	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Tattvabodha	<u>9</u> Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
<u>10</u> 11am-Guest Lecture: What is Right Knowledge: Vedantic Approach -Prof. N. Bakhshi VVM: 1-30 pm	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u> 9.30am Soup Kitchen	<u>15</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna	<u>16</u>
<u>17</u> 11am-Lecture: Austerity RamNam: 5pm	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u> 9.30am Soup Kitchen	<u>22</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Tattvabodha	<u>23</u>
<u>24</u> 11am- Lecture: 'Eat the Mangoes' VVM: 1-30 pm	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> 9.30am Soup Kitchen	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u> 7:30pm Scripture Class: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna	

Guest Speaker on February 10th 2008 Dr. N. Bakhshi, Prof. Emeritus University of Saskatchewan

“It is love and love alone that I preach, and I base my teaching on the great Vedantic truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the Soul of the Universe.”

- Swami Vivekananda