



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter February 2011

Words to Inspire

Even If God were to appear before us to bring peace into our souls, we would refuse to recognize Him. For when He comes, He takes away worldly possessions, and few of us are ready to make this sacrifice.

-Swami Vivekananda, *The Vedanta Kesari*~230~ June 2010-

PRACTISING SPIRITUALITY IN A BUSY WORLD

(Questions & Answers by Swami Brahmeshananda -*The Vedanta Kesari*, June 2010, p.230)

Question: The purpose of life is uninterrupted peace and happiness. How to achieve it since we are surrounded by material goals?

Answer: It is an inconsistent question. In the first part it says the purpose of life is to attain uninterrupted peace and happiness. The second part says that there are material goals. There cannot be two ultimate goals in life. So, first of all, we should clearly decide the ultimate goal of life. Our scriptures tell us that one can have uninterrupted peace and happiness as the ultimate goal of life, and the attainment of material gains should be kept as secondary goal. What actually happens in life is that the ultimate goal is forgotten and the secondary goal becomes the primary goal. Hence, it is important that while pursuing the material goals, we should repeatedly remind ourselves that our ultimate goal is attainment of permanent peace and happiness. Let us not be caught up in the material goals and always give them the place of secondary importance.

Question: If the mind is attracted towards worldly things, what should we do?

Answer: There are two ways in which this problem can be tackled. The positive way is to develop attraction for spiritual things, and for God. The second method is to give up the worldly desires by discrimination and an act of will. If one develops strong attraction for God, all other attractions will pale into insignificance. Sri Ramakrishna has further advocated turning of all attractions, all desires towards God. If one has lust, let him lust for God, have greed for God; be angry with anything which stands in your way to God and so on.

Question: How to strike a balance between the spiritual life and worldly life?

Answer: We take it for granted that spiritual and secular are two entirely watertight departments of life. In contrast, Sister Nivedita while explaining Swamiji's ideas says in her introduction to the Complete Works, 'To work is to pray', and hence there will be no difference between the sacred and the secular. The best method is to convert all work into worship. This can only be done if we have an ultimate spiritual goal deeply and strongly rooted in our mind. In that case, whatever we do will be for the spiritual goal and will become sacred. The whole life will become spiritual. There will not be any difference between spiritual life and worldly life. But if the difference between the sacred and secular persists, we will have to strike a balance. We will have to divide our time and energy into two: some time and energy only for mundane activities and other for spiritual

activities. In such a case, let us begin our day with spiritual practice, Japa, meditation and prayer, and reading of Holy Scriptures. Let us do this also during the day whenever we get time in between our daily chores. Let us gradually increase these periods of spiritual activity whenever and wherever possible. Swami Brahmendra said, 'Remember God before beginning the work and remember God in the end. Also remember Him in between.'

Question: How to remain calm even while engaged in day-to-day hassles of everyday family life? Can it be done by Japa?

Answer: A strict spiritual routine including Japa, prayer and meditation must be followed if one wants to be calm even during one's day-to-day activities. But doing Japa for 10 or 15 minutes in the morning or evening is not enough. One should also do some spiritual reading (Swadhyaya) in between one's daily duties. Keeping holy company is of great help.

Question: I am working in a project and the job demands that I work everyday for 10 to 11 hours. I try to spiritualize my worldly life thinking that my work is service to God. But at the end of the day, I am so much tired and sleepy that I cannot do Japa and meditation. Any suggestions?

Answer: Most of such projects are time bound. Once they come to an end, one has greater time for spiritual practices but how many people use it well!

In the given situation, one may try to do sincere spiritual practice before one begins the work. Sometimes, it may not be possible to do deep meditation or concentrated Japa if a person is not used to them. In such cases, it is better to devote a little more time to scriptural studies (swadhyaya). One can also earnestly pray to God to give one opportunity to do spiritual practice. As to feeling sleepy and tired, it is advisable to take nutritious diet and vitamin supplements and see if they help. You may also take the help of devotional songs to create a spiritual mood.

Question: It is said that a mind filled with desires and passion is unfit for meditation.

Answer: According to Patanjali, abhyasa and vairagya i.e. practice of concentration and renunciation are the means for concentration of mind. So, every effort must be made to give up desires one by one if it is not possible to give them up all at once. At the same time, we should practice concentration of mind. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that one must satisfy the minor desires by enjoying them, and must give up major desires by discrimination.

COMPANY OF THE HOLY – (CONCLUDING PART)

(Delivered by Swami Kripamayanda at the Vedanta Society of Toronto - In Continuation of December 2010 Newsletter)

Holy company in Samskrit is called ‘*Sat-sanga*’, where *sat* means Existence -- and existence is Brahman or God -- and *sanga* is uniting, attaching or associating. When we become united or associated with Brahman then it becomes *Sat-sanga* or Holy company.

Holy company refers not only to the people we spend time with. Even the ideas and thoughts that we entertain, in fact everything that we take in through the senses or our thoughts, has to be holy. If we can see that all of our company is holy, that will make our mind holy and pure.

In the Upanishads, it is said- ‘*Ahara suddhau sattva suddhih, Sattva suddhau dhruva smritih. Smriti lambhe, sarva granthinam vipramokshah*’– Whatever we intake must be pure, in common translation ‘*Ahara*’ means food. But Sankara says food is not only what you eat through the mouth, but also any intake done through the other sense organs as well.

This will make our heart pure or *sattva suddhi*. By making our heart pure, we will have *dhruva smriti* – continuous memory of distinguishing between right and wrong and have constant God-awareness. And what happens if we think always of God – *sarva granthinam vipra mokshah* – by that all our knots will be cut asunder. Knots signify desires or ignorance or *samskara*, all will be burned away.

To have this we must have the company of the holy or *sadhu sangha*. The meaning of *sadhu* is any person who is in constant awareness of God. Just coming to a *sadhu* does not make it *sadhu sanga*, but you have to visit a *sadhu* and do *sat-sanga* or uniting with God. If you come to a *sadhu* and talk about politics or complain about another person, that is not *sat-sanga*.

We should try and avoid the company of persons who are not that good or the company of fools and wicked, as it is said. We find that there are some people who disturb our thoughts. Try to be wisely dissociated from them, without hurting their sentiments. Don’t condemn others, don’t hate others, but wisely try to dissociate yourself from the company of the wicked – or the persons whose thoughts do not help you in spiritual matters, those who obstruct you in your attempt to become good.

This does not mean that we should shut ourselves up in a closet and not be aware of what is around us. You recall the story of the three monkeys that ‘see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil’. But there are three other monkeys, where one monkey covers half the mouth, the second one covers one eye and the third one covers one ear. This symbolizes that we speak only good but don’t speak what is bad, we see good things but don’t see what is bad and listen to good things but ignore the bad things. In this way, we do not allow the mind to have unholy company. It is a delicate balance between avoiding bad company, but not condemning anyone and even seeing good in everyone. Sri Ramakrishna said that everything is the manifestation of God but that doesn’t mean that we will embrace the ‘tiger god’!

There is the famous prayer *Bhadram karnebhih srinuyama devah...* Oh Lord, may I hear what is good, may I see what is good. We must always pray– *Durjanah Sajjano bhuyat, Sajjanah shantim apnuyat, shanto mucyeta bandhebhyoh, muktascanyan vimocayet* - May the wicked become good, may the good persons attain peace of mind, may the peaceful person be freed from the bondage (*samsara*) and may those who attain freedom make others free. Sincere prayer helps us and those who we pray for as well.

One of the important qualities of being a devotee of God is cheerfulness. Such a devotee does not mind physical illness or any problems of the world. Somehow they are very cheerful and don't talk ill about others

But when we start criticizing others, know for sure that we are neither being a devotee, nor are we in holy company. In the company of the holy we start becoming holy and then every company becomes holy for us. Even the wicked do not remain wicked, everyone becomes holy.

Sankaracharya said – *Kshanamapi sajjana sangati reka, bhavati bhavarnava tarne nauka* – Even a moment spent with a holy man becomes like a boat to cross the ocean of *samsara*. *Samsara* means all the anger, desires, greed, lust which creates disturbance in our minds. Attachment to worldly things and expecting pleasure and happiness from them is itself *samsara*. To be free from this ignorance, we keep the company of the holy.

You meet a holy man for a moment and that gives a turn to your life by changing your way of thinking for good. The story of Pavhari baba and the thief who came to steal away his little belongings, itself justifies this. The same thief came in contact with this great saint for just a moment and his whole life changed for good. Many years later, Swami Vivekananda encountered this man in the Himalayas. He was no longer a thief, but had become a holy man!

Swami Adbhutananda, when he was young, was a servant in the house of a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. He came one day to meet Sri Ramakrishna with his master. He immediately told his master that he wanted to live with Sri Ramakrishna and serve him. This boy was a poor person living somewhere in a remote village. One would have expected him to have the desire to become a rich man. Instead he met Sri Ramakrishna, a holy man who himself was poor, and he instantly told his master that he wanted to serve this holy man. This is

nothing but the attraction for the association with the holy.

When the soul longs for the company of the holy and develops an attraction for holy company, we can know for sure that a great achievement has been done in the path of spiritual life. The mind has started flowing in the right direction that it likes to be in the company of the holy. In order to get to that stage, we have to pay attention to our ego and not let it grow too big.

They say that as God lives in the heart of human beings, holy persons live in the heart of God. God also seeks the association of holy persons. Sri Ramakrishna used to go on the top of the temple house and cry to his future disciples to come fast, since he wanted to share his experiences with them. He wanted to impart his holiness to the people.

In the presence of holy company, even without our knowledge, we start absorbing the holiness around us. Thoughts emanate from us and affect our surroundings. Thus, if we are in the company of the holy, we start absorbing and reflecting holy thoughts. Similarly if we go near a wicked person, we start absorbing their thoughts too. In the company of a holy person, all our anxieties and worries disappear and we start feeling blissful and happy.

There is of course no alternative to spending time in direct company of holy persons. But in the absence of holy persons, there are other holy things like the holy scriptures – Gospel, Bible, Koran, Granth Sahib – or wonderful music. When you listen to pure good music, your mind gets transported. Just hold on to that holy feeling and you will enjoy that bliss.

Holy company removes the false attachment to impermanent worldly things and establishes us in God and brings a spring of permanent bliss, joy and fulfillment. It removes the delusion and ignorance and attaches us to God. As Sri Ramakrishna said – Yearning for God makes us see God – and for developing that yearning, we must have holy company.

BELUR MATH NEWS

We are glad to announce that **Shyampukur Bati**, where Sri Ramakrishna stayed for seventy days before moving to Cossipore garden-house, has been taken over by Ramakrishna Math, Belur, and made a sub-centre of Ramakrishna Math (Balaram Mandir), Kolkata. A function was organized on this occasion on 18 November, the birthday of Swami Subodhanandaji, in which Swami Atmasthanandaji and Swami Prabhanandaji, respectively President and General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, addressed the gathering. Many monks and devotees attended the function. The address of this new sub-centre is Ramakrishna Math (Shyampukur Bati), 55A, Shyampukur Street, Kolkata 700004; Phone: (033) 2555-8580.

Bhilai Steel Plant conferred the *Bhilai Mitra Puraskar* on our **Narainpur** centre on 14 November for the centre's excellent welfare activities for the poor and backward people. The award carries a memento with citation.

On 17 November, the sacred Jugal Parikrama day, **Vrindaban** centre conducted a medical camp in which 200 pilgrims were provided first aid.

Sri Shekhar Dutta, Governor of Chhattisgarh, inaugurated the four-day sports meet organized by **Narainpur** centre from 18 to 21 November. About 2000 school children from 36 schools of Narainpur and Kanker districts participated in the meet.

As a part of the centenary celebration of Ramakrishna Movement in Kadapa, the **Kadapa** centre conducted an All Andhra Pradesh Written Quiz Contest based on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda. In all, 79,902 students from 759 educational institutions participated.

On the initiative of **Bangalore** Math, the cross road nearest to it and joining the Bull Temple Road has been named *Sri Sarada Devi Raste*.

Khetri centre organized a Child Eye Care Project in which 12,000 students of 50 schools in and around Khetri underwent eye check-up. Of these, 1191 students with refractory errors were given free glasses.

Ponnampet centre organized a seven-day naturopathy & yoga treatment-cum-awareness camp from 30 October to 5 November, in which 28 persons from different parts of Karnataka participated. The new office block was inaugurated on 15 September.

Allahabad centre organized the closing function of its centenary celebrations from 13 to

24 November with a devotees' convention, a public meeting and religious discourses.

Porbandar centre conducted a dental camp on 12 November in which 30 patients were treated.

Midnapore centre held a medical camp on 17 November in which 213 gynaecology patients, 249 paediatric patients, 98 dental patients and 719 other patients were treated.

Sarada Kindergarten of our **Singapore** centre has won the following prestigious MOE-AECES 2010 awards: (1) 'Distinction' for Innovation, (2) 'Merit' for Outstanding Kindergarten Teacher, and (3) 'Merit' for Good Practices. Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister of State for Education & Home Affairs, Singapore, handed over the awards on 23 November. These awards are jointly presented by MOE (Ministry of Education) and AECES (Association of Early Childhood Educators Singapore).

Sri Anupam Ray, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, visited **Vedanta Society, New York, USA**, on 28 November and released the book *Celebrating Shri Ramakrishna* authored by Swami Tathagatanandaji.

Winter Relief: 2189 blankets were distributed through the following centres to poor people: **Belgharia** – 1989, **Jalpaiguri** – 200.

Drought Relief: **Sargachhi** centre sunk 4 tube-wells (2 in Sargachhi village and 2 in Baninathpore village) to help people suffering from water scarcity.

Distress Relief: The following centres distributed various items, shown in brackets, to needy people: **Belgharia** (1573 saris, 157 dhotis, 374 lungis, 1358 pants, 1516 shirts and 2146 children's garments), **Cooch Behar** (317 saris, 63 dhotis, 20 lungis and 102 pairs of socks).

Flood Rehabilitation: Karnataka: The progress report of the construction of houses by **Belgaum** centre for the victims of October 2009 flood (at Gokak and Sindhanur taluks in Belgaum and Raichur districts respectively) is as follows:

Taken up for construction	: 213
Construction up to roof level	: 130
Construction up to lintel level	: 7
Excavation, foundation, and construction up to plinth level	: 59

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

New Year's Eve was celebrated on **Friday 31st Dec 2010 from 9:30 pm**. The programme included devotional singing and meditation followed by Arati at 00:01 am on 1st January 2011.

Kalpataru Utsav was celebrated on **Saturday 1st January 2011 at 5:30 pm**. The programme included bhajan, meditation, Arati and pushpanjali followed by Prasad distribution. More than 275 devotees participated.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary Tithi Puja Celebrations will be held on Sunday 06 March 2011 at 11.00 am. The

programme will consist of bhajans, puja, homa, 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, February 12, 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: **Sunday, February 20, 2011 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 Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		<u>1</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>4</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>Vivekachudamani</i>	<u>5</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>6</u> 11am Lecture: <i>Nivedita of Ramakrishna- Vivekananda</i> VVM 1:30 pm	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>11</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>12</u> VIGIL 6am to 6pm 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>13</u> 11am Lecture: <i>'I am He'</i> VVM 1:30 pm	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>18</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Scripture class: <i>Vivekachudamani</i>	<u>19</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>20</u> 11am Lecture: <i>Sri Ramakrishna and womankind</i> 5:00 pm RAM NAM	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>25</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>26</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>27</u> 11am Lecture: <i>We would see God</i> VVM 1:30 pm	<u>28</u>					

- ❖ **God dwells in all people** but the manifestation of this inner Divinity varies from person to person. In saintly people there is greater manifestation of God. Women are special manifestations of Divine Mother of the Universe, and so are to be treated with respect.
- ❖ The **goal of human life** is the realization of the Ultimate Reality which alone can give man supreme fulfilment and everlasting peace. This is the essence of all religions.
- ❖ **Egoism**, caused by ignorance, is the **root-cause of all suffering**.

-Message of Sri Ramakrishna