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## Newsletter January 2005

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### Words To Inspire

Inactivity should be avoided by all means. Activity always means resistance. Resist all evils, mental and physical; and when you have succeeded in resisting, then will calmness come. It is very easy to say, "Hate nobody, resist not evil," but we know what that kind of thing generally means in practice. When the eyes of society are turned towards us, we may make a show of nonresistance, but in our hearts it is canker all the time. We feel the utter want of the calm of non-resistance; we feel that it would be better for us to resist. If you desire wealth, and know at the same time that the whole world regards him who aims at wealth as a very wicked man, you, perhaps, will not dare plunge into the struggle for wealth, yet your mind will be running day and night after money. This is hypocrisy and will serve no purpose. Plunge into the world, and then, after a time, when you have suffered and enjoyed all that is in it, will renunciation come; then will calmness come.

So fulfil your desire for power and everything else, and after you have fulfilled the desire, will come the time when you will know that they are all little things; but until you have fulfilled this desire, until you have passed through that activity, it is impossible for you to come to the state of calmness, serenity, and self-surrender. These ideas of serenity and renunciation have been preached for thousands of years; everybody has heard of them from childhood. And yet we see very few in the world who have really reached that stage. I do not know if I have seen twenty persons in my life who are really calm and non-resisting, and I have travelled over half the world. Every man should take up his own ideal and endeavour to accomplish it. That is a surer way to progress than taking up other men's ideals, which he can never hope to accomplish. For instance, we take a child and at once give him the task of walking twenty miles. Either the little one dies, or one in a thousand crawls the twenty miles, to reach the end exhausted and half-dead. That is like what we generally try to do with the world. All the men and women, in any society, are not of the same mind, capacity, or of the same power to do things; they must have different ideals, and we have no right to sneer at any ideal. Nor is it right that I should be judged by your standard or you mine. Unity in variety is the plan of creation. However men and women may vary individually, there is unity in the background...

Our duty is to encourage everyone in his struggle to live up to his own highest ideal, and strive at the same time to make the ideal as near as possible to the truth.

-Swami Vivekananda from Karma Yoga (p. 40-41)

### Wrestling With The Six Alligators

(Based on a talk delivered by Swami Kripamayananda on December 5, 2004)

Spiritual life is the greatest adventure known to man. It's also the greatest adventure unknown to man, because experientially, we don't really know what illumination will feel like, until we actually attain it. This adventure, which we have all started - trying to transform our character, purify our hearts and expand our consciousness, is really what Swami Yatiswarananda calls 'a hero's job'. We have been told by the great seers of Truth that the way is dangerous, there may be blows, but what lies beyond, once the blows are weathered, endured and transcended, is an unimaginable spiritual treasure more dear and precious than anything we could ever conceive of.

We want to cross the river of worldliness to reach the Holy Land, that infinite shore of bountiful grace and love, laced with the pure white sands of peace and perfection, dotted with the sublime, elegant palm trees of freedom and eternity, that lies on the other side. To do a hero's job, we need to understand, to the best of our abilities, what are our obstacles? What are the dangers? And, most importantly, what do we need to do, to protect ourselves, to ensure a safe passage? You see, we can think of it as a kind of spiritual risk assessment. We want to accomplish something - so, in order to do it properly, intelligently and successfully, we need to understand the risks - the practical aspects of spiritual life. Remember, anything of great value, anything worth attaining, always comes at a great cost, and a great risk - this is the universal law. So in the context of this truth, we need to carefully think things through and make proper assessments. We need to prepare ourselves for fighting against the rushing current of sense objects, which can pull us under and drown us in desire, selfishness and ignorance. And we need to wrestle with the ferocious alligators, infesting the river, lying in wait to pounce on us. Who are these alligators? And what do they want from us? Sri Ramakrishna used to sing a Ramprasad song:

"Taking the name of Kali, dive deep down, O mind / Into the heart's fathomless depths

Where many precious gems lay hid...But never believe the bed of the ocean bare of gems

If in the first few dives you fail / With firm resolve and self-control / Dive deep and make your way to Mother Kali's realm.

Down in the ocean depths of heavenly Wisdom lie / The wondrous pearls of Peace, O mind;

And you yourself can gather them, If you but have pure love and follow the scriptures' rule.

Within those ocean depths, as well, Six alligators lurk - lust, anger and the rest -

Swimming about in search of prey. Smear yourself with the turmeric of discrimination;

The very smell of it will shield you from their jaws. Upon the ocean bed lie strewn / Unnumbered pearls and precious gems;

Plunge in, says Ramprasad, and gather up handfuls there!"

What do the six alligators represent? They are: lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and envy. All six of these alligators are interrelated - they belong to the same family. Attachment, egotism and desire combine to form the family legacy. We must protect ourselves. You see, they are not neutral. No - all of them very much want to enter the lakes of our minds, and cause havoc. They are enemies, common to all earnest spiritual aspirants. For everyone of us, there are six alligators. The odds are 1 against 6. Only a hero can succeed against such odds! But that is what we all really are! We are all heroes, and we must all be heroes. We need to apply something to ourselves even before we set foot into the water. We need to think and act preventatively. We need discrimination and dispassion. They are the turmeric. Discrimination is the knowledge of what is real, and what is unreal. God alone is real. God alone is Eternal Substance - all else is transitory and impermanent. We can do nothing to the alligators themselves - we don't attack them. We do something to ourselves. We add something to our thoughts. We add something to our words. We add something to our actions. And the additions or changes we make to ourselves, automatically protect us. A little turmeric, and we are free from harm. Dispassion is freedom from passion, bias or emotion; objectivity. It is detachment. We need to anchor ourselves in such a way, that sudden rushes of emotion don't submerge us. We need to learn how to develop these skills of discrimination and dispassion. They will add immeasurable value to our spiritual skill-set. Let us examine each alligator, one by one, and fashion practical approaches to tackle them.

What is lust (we may also call it desire)? Simply put, lust is: selfish desire for bodily enjoyment - sense-gratification. Whatever the senses want, we give them. No control, no success. To a desirous person, others are not even looked at or perceived as being

human beings, but as objects - objects for enjoyment. It blinds us of the true beauty of spirit residing in each and every person. How do we shield ourselves from this alligator? In the psycho-physical system we should concern ourselves with thoughts, words and deeds - these are things we can control. First, stop all actions or deeds motivated by the desire for the body. Second, stop speaking of desires. In other words, change the subject. And finally, and most difficultly, try to sublimate lust as it manifests in thought.

What do we mean by sublimation? Sublimate desires through the fulfillment of duties to family and to society, which are directed to the Supreme Spirit through prayer, worship and meditation. In a sense, we must spiritualize our thoughts, words and deeds. Infuse more and more spirituality into the little cracks of our minds. Try to see the divine in all men & women. Lust can be tackled only on the plane of the spirit. Swami Vivekananda exclaims, "The sexless self!" Think of yourself not as a man or woman. You are not your gender. So stop thinking like that. Anger is an emotional reaction to unfulfilled desires (both conscious desires and unconscious desires). We want something, and we can't get it - so we get angry. Sounds simplistic, but it's the truth. Many times we get angry because we allow ourselves to jump to hasty conclusions, and we rush to judgment. Anger very much has its seed in fault-finding. Anger is also intimately connected with our expectations. Let us make some connections: expectation - disappointment - fault-finding - resentment - hatred. At each step, anger has a chance to express itself. When we expect others to be faultless, we should expect to be very disappointed. Are we faultless? Then why do we expect it in others? We create the anger within us. What is inside us comes outside, due to our lack of analysis and discipline. When we brood over negative thoughts and feelings about others - we get angry. We need to try to watch our mind as closely as possible,

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intensify our self-reflection, and deepen our investigation. Anger robs us of the ability to enjoy objects of desire. If we let our anger out, we lose our opportunity to enjoy. So, even from the point of view of desire, anger is unwanted - because it doesn't allow legitimate desire to meet its goals. Let us try to wait before we react. Let us pause. Let us reflect on what it is that is producing this anger. When we take up the analysis, we are very much starting the process of weeding it out. We must try to reduce the anger reaction to absurdity. Because that is what it really is. Absurd.

Delusion is misperception. That is, perceiving something for what it is not. For instance, someone has "delusions of grandeur" - having a false idea of oneself as being important, noble or famous. He is deluded in what way? If I perceive myself to be important, and others don't perceive that as such, then who has misperceived? Who is deluded? Is it me or the 40 people around me? It is most certainly myself. So when we look at the world, we don't see it - we see an image projected from the light of our minds. It is Maya, which makes us perceive ourselves as single body-mind entities, separate from others. This is a great lie, as Swamiji says. How to battle delusion? Regular practice: practice identification with the Reality of Self, withdrawing the mind from the senses (meditation). We can have a certain dialogue with objects - we can decide whether the object can really satisfy us or not. Trying to extract joy from sense objects is like a dog enjoying the taste of its own blood while chewing a bone. Real Joy is within us, and not in the object.

Greed is an excessive desire to possess for one's exclusive enjoyment. Even too much is not enough. Greed is the meeting place of selfishness and excess. Greed is always trying to have more than what is needed. There is no consideration for others' needs. Greed deprives others, and all thoughts for others. It's like a vacuum cleaner - accumulating all particles for itself. Greed blinds a man and contracts himself to a singular interest rather than expanding towards a mass or universal interest. Swamiji says, "Contraction is death, expansion is life". How to control greed? Turn greed towards God. Feel greedy for Him. Sri Ramakrishna teaches 'If you must have the feeling of 'I and mine', then attach it exclusively with God.' Be rigorous in your self-analysis - does possession of objects really make us happy? Really? Excessive possessions are, in fact, direct insults to the glory of the Self. Any prized and valued object is really insignificant when compared to the infinite glory of the radiant Atman. Let us practice some auto-suggestion - filling our minds with healthy thoughts about our own selves. Set aside some time to think about the real source of peace, joy and happiness, and tell yourself "Peace? I am That! Joy? I am That! And Happiness? Yes, I am That too!"

Pride is a high or overbearing opinion of one's worth or importance. Pride is the feeling of doership. Pride can come from achievements, possessions and even physical appearance. Hubris, arrogance, smugness, self-importance, braggadocio, haughtiness and vainglory or simply pride. The Toronto Star newspaper recently put out an article about pride and its manifestation in the City of Toronto: "Why do corporate executives buy Porsches and Ferraris? Because they want to send the message 'We are the biggest (or the brashest) therefore we are the best; the closest to touching the hem of our god's garment'. Control your pride! Try to impress the idea that you are not the doer, you are not a free agent and the world is not without God. Think about all the factors that contributed to your achievement. Try to see the impermanence of your pride-producing possessions. Be proud to be a servant of God. And great regulators of pride are all the people who bless us by bruising our egos, knocking us down from our own self-conceived pedestals.

Envy is a feeling of discontented or resentful longing aroused by another's better fortune. Competition breeds envy. Envy is borne of a deep-seated desire for some object. And when we see someone possess that object and enjoy it, then we become envious. Be happy with what you have right at the moment. A simple smile can arouse that noble feeling. Try smiling! Pay compliments to others - see the good in others, and the mind will move away from criticism. Try not to see others' defects - mind your own business, don't be curious about other peoples lives. Limit the attention paid to others regarding their possessions, achievements

and relationships. Try to feel that we here, all of humanity, are all related. Nothing really belongs to us. Everything is on loan, in a way. Spouse, parent, children, job, and property all will leave us at some time. We only have God. He is our own. He is one's own - for each and everyone. We need to have tremendous faith in ourselves and our possibility of attaining the goal. And at all times, along with our self-conviction and confidence, we must practice self-surrender.

The driving desire to be free, to clamour forth from behind the small pebbles of our changing bodies, swinging emotions and limited thoughts, is the fire in the belly as it were, to keep applying the turmeric of discrimination and dispassion, day in day out, as much as we can, to the best of our abilities. Don't give up! Keep this desire present within you. The Lord is always with you; never yielding, never disappointing, and never failing. Let us wrestle with each and every alligator, as valiant heroes do in times of necessary conflict, like Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Our Kurukshetra lies with the senses, desires, actions and reactions, fear and facts, assumptions and assertions, comfort and complacency, power and poverty, gossip and judgements, doubts and denials, indeed, with everything that occupies our hearts and minds. We must fight. We must win. And, because the breeze of the Good Lord's Grace is everblowing, constantly reassuring us with every small step we manage to take, without a doubt, with regular discrimination and dispassion, we will win!

### Quantum Leap

#### Our Mother Sarada

Holy Mother Sri Saradamani Devi was born in Jayarambati, in the Bankura district of West Bengal. Her parents, Syamasundari and Ramachandra Mukhopadhyay were a well-respected couple. Before her birth, Sri Sarada's parents had a dream in which a little girl came and announced her arrival as their daughter. Finally, she was born! At the age of five, Sarada Devi attended a pooja at one of Sri Ramakrishna's cousin's houses. There, one of the village women asked Sarada which of these men she would marry, as a joke. Little Sarada stood up and pointed to the 23 year-old Sri Ramakrishna, who was sitting in a corner, praying. As shocking as it may seem, a few months later, they were married. Sarada stayed with her parents until she matured enough to be able to perform her duties as a wife. While growing up, she heard a lot of rude comments made about her husband. When she was old enough, she decided to travel to Dakshineswar to find out if all the rumours were true. When she got there, she was happy to discover that none of the rumours were true. As the years went by, Mother Sarada became Sri Ramakrishna's most dedicated disciple. One day, Sarada Devi went to Sri Ramakrishna and asked him how he saw her. He told her that he looked at her as Ma Kali or even his own mother.

After Sri Ramakrishna passed away, Mother opened up a place where she fed the hungry and sheltered the homeless. One day, a Muslim man named Amjad came in for some food. As Sarada Devi was busy, she told her niece, Nalini, to serve him. Nalini, whose family was very orthodox, threw his food from a distance. When Mother Sarada saw this, she was furious! She told Nalini that it didn't matter if Amjad was Hindu or Muslim. She, Herself, served him that day. This incident showed that Sarada Devi didn't care if a person was Hindu or Muslim. Above all, Mother Sarada initiated the Ramakrishna Mission. In other words, she blessed it. I think that Mother Sarada was a very compassionate person. She cared for everyone as if they were her own children. Also, she was so kind-hearted that all who came to her got the love and affection of a true mother.

By Nandita Bijur, Age 11, Student of Vedanta Vidya Mandir

### Belur Math News

**Revered President Maharaj**, who had been admitted again to Seva Pratishtan on 5 November, was discharged on 9 November. He is keeping fairly well now.

A new branch centre of the **Ramakrishna Math** has been started at Bindweide, **Germany**. Its address is: Vedanta-Gesellschaft e.V., Bindweide 2, D-57520, Steinebach / Sieg, Germany. **Swami Baneshananda** has been appointed head of the Bindweide, Germany centre.

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