



Newsletter January 2006

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'Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) is a great soul - perfect in meditation. He cuts the veils of maya to pieces with the sword of knowledge. Inscrutable maya can never bring him under Her control.'

-Sri Ramakrishna

Words To Inspire

Sri Ramakrishna had a vision before Narendra was born:

"One day I found that my mind was soaring high in Samadhi along a luminous path. As it ascended higher and higher, I found on both sides of the way ideal forms of gods and goddesses. The mind then reached the outer limits of that region, where a luminous barrier separated the sphere of relative existence from that of the Absolute. Crossing that barrier, the mind entered the transcendental realm, where no corporeal being was visible. But the next moment I saw seven venerable sages seated there in Samadhi. It occurred to me that these sages must have surpassed not only men but even gods in knowledge and holiness, in renunciation and love. Lost in admiration, I was reflecting on their greatness, when I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into a form of a divine child. The child came to one of the sages, tenderly clasped his neck with his lovely arms, and, addressing him in a sweet voice, tried to drag his mind down from the state of Samadhi. That magic touch roused the sage from his superconscious state, and he fixed his half-open eyes upon the wonderful child. In great joy the strange child spoke to him: 'I am going down. You too must go with me.'" The sage remained mute, but his tender look expressed his assent. No sooner had I seen Narendra than I recognized him to be that sage."

Later Sri Ramakrishna disclosed the fact that the divine child was none other than himself.

- Swami Chetanananda, from *God Lived With Them*

A Life Undistracted

(Based on a talk delivered by Swami Kripamayananda on November 27th, 2005 at the Vedanta Society of Toronto.)

An undistracted life is a grand life.

To make anything focused on that which is true, and centred on that which is real, is really a profound and noble undertaking in this world of impermanence, change and decay. The undistracted life is, and can only be, a spiritual life. Look at the life of any great artist; look at the life of any great leader, or a great scientist. Their accomplishments were only possible by the willful focusing of all their energy into what they wanted to achieve. But upon further analysis, these lives were actually spiritual lives.

Listen to the words of Einstein - "All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man's life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual towards freedom." What a beautiful thought. And this thought, we can accurately infer, is the product of one who has devoted his entire life, without distractions and divisions, to one single pursuit. Only a person who has directed his energies onto one single goal can speak in this way - "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." In this statement two noble ideas are embedded: absence of vanity and presence of persistence. The persistence and perseverance behind these words can only be created from a life undistracted, unyielding, undivided.

There really is no separation between the spiritual world and the secular world. If we believe that God is everyone and everything, then how can any inherent distinctions such as 'spiritual' or 'secular' be held with mutual exclusivity? The apparent distinction is only due to the state of our perception. In the book *The Eternal Companion*, Swami Brahmananda and one of his disciples is

discussing the validity of mystical visions. The disciple is contesting the idea that the form of God can be seen with eyes wide open. The disciple asks, 'But Maharaj, how can one see God in the external world with physical eyes?' To this the reply came, 'Show me the line of demarcation where matter ends and spirit begins.' In essence, there is no separation and no demarcation. Our intensified focus breaks down the perceived division of spirit and matter. How is this possible? If we study karma yoga, the answer is simple, when you can concentrate your mind on one thing, the mind becomes still, quiet and intensely active. This state of mind produces a wonderful purifying effect, making it ready to receive inspiration or flashes of Divine Light which are constantly flooding the universe of His creation.

What can we do to live our lives in this way? What is the procedure? We must concentrate on some important concepts:

Desire: We must ask ourselves, "What do we want?" This is not to be asked just once, or twice. We must repeatedly ask ourselves this question - we must learn to ask this question deeply. The asking must be done deeply, and the answering must be done sincerely. We have to clear up all internal contradictions and knots in the heart. Self-opposition is a powerful obstacle to any and all kinds of personal progress. As Sri Ramakrishna warns us, there should be no theft in the chamber of the heart. What we desire, we must first admit to ourselves that, 'yes, we want that.' When Swami Turiyananda was making plans to prepare the first group of aspirants for an intensive spiritual retreat in Shanti Ashrama, California, a young devotee approached him and expressed her ardent desire to be a part of the group. The Swami gave her a response which left a deep impression in her mind. He said, 'What you want you will get. Be sure of it. If you want entertainment, you will get entertainment. If you want Mother, you will get Mother. So be careful.' This is an articulation of the spiritual power of desire. If we desire God, we will surely get God.

When the object of desire is properly placed in the core of the mind, and the chamber of the heart, then only can the pursuit be sincerely attempted. And when we have decided what we want, and we can rest easy with that decision, then the work can be taken up with full force, full heart and full mind. Only then can the objective be attained.

Sincerity: We must relate to ourselves with utmost sincerity. We don't want to create any self-hatred, or fall into a defeatist attitude of self-loathing. We don't want any self-deception - let us be true to ourselves, of all people. What is the value of a life that isn't lived with sincerity? It is a life not worth mentioning. Sri Ramakrishna stressed the idea of sincerity very much. It is our sincerity that God wants. Is sincerity really so easy to generate? The mind is so crafty; it comes up with all sorts of convincing arguments to have its way with us. To counter these arguments, we need to fill up the heart with sincerity. That is what God sees. When he looks into our hearts, what is he looking for? This sincerity makes our devotion real - and not some fluttering of emotions that come and go like the wind.

Honesty: Uphold the truth. Truth saves. Truth is what forms real character. Be honest with yourself first - and be honest with others. This by itself is a great spiritual practice. Sri Ramakrishna proclaimed with great emphasis that in this age, just practicing truthfulness alone will lead one straight to God. Such is the power of truth. As most of you know, Sri Ramakrishna offered the Divine Mother all the opposites created by the world, right/wrong, good/evil, purity/impurity, so that in return he could receive pure love for Her. But he could not offer truth and untruth. Why could he not part with truth? Because truth is at the very heart of what he is asking for. Can pure love for God exist without truth? Sri Ramakrishna, in that pledge to Mother, is saying in effect, that 'Mother, I will practice the truth, without compromise - because without it pure love doesn't exist'. Love and truth are inseparable. So to attain love, we must be truthful. A senior swami of the order once said, "The yearning for truth is another name for love."

Intensity: How much of ourselves are we willing to give to the desired pursuit? What are we willing to sacrifice in exchange for the desired object? This is another big question we must ask ourselves. Many professional athletes are asked to comment on their performance in games they have played - and many speak about giving "110%". It's astonishing. Are we able to give more than what we have? I believe the expression is laying stress on our human ability to be relentless when we are engaged in achieving what we want. Never giving up, remaining committed to the goal steering back on course when we go astray, regrouping - these qualities speak of the intensity of our actions, and the intensity of commitment to the goal. Swami Ashokananda says, "Conviction is what most people call faith. Real conviction, when it comes will not let you alone - you become a lunatic in your pursuit of God." This unshakeable quality of the soul, when it yearns for God, is an example of the intensity that builds up along the path of spiritual practice. It can transform us so completely.

These concepts are very important to us. If we coordinate them and integrate them successfully into our life, our life will become free of distractions, and thus sanctified. These four concepts will merge together in a kind of spiritual constitution of our daily life. We must constantly analyze ourselves with regards to these four because of one simple reason; desire, sincerity, honesty, and sacrifice are aspects of our character that we can choose, change and control. God has given us these tools, to strive for what is worth striving for. We must use them wisely. And we must use them carefully.

A spiritual aspirant once went to Swami Yatiswarananda and asked him, "Swami, I want to be a spiritual person. How can I do that?" He answered, "You want to become a spiritual person? Then make yourself a gentleman first." This shows the precedence involved in clearing the stages of spiritual ascent. We can't leap from one rung of a ladder to another, as far as practice is concerned. Everything must happen step by step, in order.

What is it that makes us good human beings, or gentlemen and gentle women? Follow and practice right desire, genuine sincerity, unswerving honesty, and prolonged intensity and sacrifice. If we are able to do these, then being a good human being is easily attained. Only when we are established in goodness as human beings can we progress to become truly spiritual beings. The one follows the other - as Swami Vivekananda gave us the spiritual spectrum of existence: from animal to man, from man to God. Success is only for those who give of themselves 110% to reach the desired goal. Think big, because in thinking big, you are pulling out of yourself all the powerful elements lying dormant inside your own being. Manifest those things. Spiritual living means

becoming bigger.

Quantum Leap

Guru Nanak

Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji was the founder of Sikhism and the first of the ten Gurus of the Sikhs. He was born in the village of Talwandi, now called Nankana Sahib, near Lahore in present-day Pakistan. His father, Kalu Mehta and mother, Mata Tripat, were Hindus. From an early age Guru Nanak made friends with both Hindu and Muslim children and was very curious about the meaning of life. At the age of six he was sent to the village school to learn reading and writing in Hindi and mathematics. He then studied Muslim literature and learned Persian and Arabic. He was an unusually gifted child who learned quickly and often questioned his teachers. As a young man shepherding the family cattle, Guru Nanak would spend long hours absorbed in meditation and in religious discussions with Muslim and Hindu holy men who lived in the forests near the village.

At the age of 16 Guru Nanak Dev Ji married Sulkhni, daughter of a pious merchant, and they had two sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das. He continued his religious pursuits even as a householder and worked as the manager of the government granary. One morning, when he was 28, he went as usual down to the river to bathe and meditate. When he did not return, people thought that he had drowned. He reappeared after 3 days and was filled with the spirit of God. It was then he began his missionary work.

Guru Nanak Dev ji made four great journeys, traveling to all parts of India, and into Arabia and Persia; visiting Mecca and Baghdad. He spoke before Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Parsees, and Muslims. He spoke in the temples and mosques, and at various holy places. Wherever he went, Guru Nanak Dev Ji spoke out against empty religious rituals, pilgrimages, the caste system, the death of widows on their husband's funeral pyre and of depending on books to learn the true religion. He did not ask his listeners to follow him. He asked the Muslims to be true Muslims and the Hindus to be true Hindus.

Once Guru Nanak ji chose to stay with a poor carpenter. At the same time, a wealthy man was holding a feast where all holy men were invited. Guru Nanak Dev ji did not attend the feast. When asked why he didn't join in the feast, the Guru took food served in both the houses in separate hands and squeezed them. Blood appeared out of the rich food while milk oozed out of the poor man's food. People realized that the rich man had earned his money by exploiting the poor, while the poor carpenter had earned money by his honest hard work.

While visiting Haridwar, a holy place on the Ganges river he found some devotees taking ritual baths in the holy river. They were offering water to the sun. When the Guru asked what they were doing, the devotees replied that they were offering water to their ancestors. Guru Nanak ji upon hearing this started throwing water in the opposite direction towards the west. When the devotees asked him what he was doing, Guru Nanak replied "I am sending water to my farm which is dry". They asked, "How will water reach your crops so far away?" Guru Nanak ji replied, "If your water can reach your ancestors, why can't mine reach my fields a short distance away?" The pilgrims realized their mistake and fell at the Gurus feet.

On his fourth great journey Guru Nanak ji traveled to the west and visited Mecca, Medina and Baghdad. Arriving at Mecca, Guru Nanak ji fell asleep with his feet pointing towards the holy Kaaba. When the watchman on his night rounds noticed this he kicked the Guru, saying, "How dare you turn your feet towards the house of God". At this Guru Nanak ji woke up and said, "Good man, I am tired after a long journey. Kindly turn my feet in the direction where there is no God." The watchman then realized that God is everywhere.

Later Guru Nanak Dev Ji settled in the town of Kartarpur, in Punjab. People from all over came to listen to him. His followers came to be known as the Guru's disciples, or sikhs.

On September 22, 1539 in the early hours of the morning Guru Nanak ji merged with the eternal light of God. His followers found nothing except fresh flowers where he was lying. The Hindus took theirs and cremated them, while the Muslims took their flowers and buried them.

By Arjun Raha, age 10. *Student of the Vedanta Vidya Mandir*

Past Events

On December 24th, the Centre celebrated **Christmas Eve**. And on Christmas Day, December 25th, the **Birth Anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi** was formally celebrated with *homa* (fire ceremony). Both events featured a special programme of worship, bhajans, flower-offering and distribution of prasad. Many devotees attended the spiritually uplifting events.

Upcoming Events

Kalpataru Day, Sunday, January 1st, 2006, 6 pm.

Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary, Saturday, January 21st, 2006, 11 am.

Shiva Ratri, Sunday, February 26th, 2006, 6 pm.

Sri Ramakrishna, Sunday, March 5th, 2006, 11 am.

Regular Services

Winter break from December 26th to January 7th.

Regular Services resume on January 8th.

Daily Meditation

Meditation is held at the Centre every morning from 6 am to 7 am. Devotional singing and meditation is held every evening from 6 pm to 7 pm.

Interviews and Instruction

Swami Kripamayananda grants interviews to those interested in knowing more about Vedanta, Indian Philosophy, and spirituality and its practices. Please call in advance and make an appointment.

Sunday Service (Not held during Winter break)

Lectures are given every Sunday at 11 am by Swami Kripamayananda or distinguished speakers. The service includes devotional singing, reading, meditation and refreshments. **Please use front entrance.**

Scripture Class (Not held during Winter Break)

Scripture classes are held every Friday at 7:30 pm. **Please use upstairs kitchen entrance.**

Bookstore

The Bookstore carries selected titles from Ramakrishna - Vivekananda literature, as well as other material related to Vedanta and Indian Philosophy. Please call for store hours.


Calendar of Events

Minister and Teacher

Swami Kripamayanda

Ramakrishna Order of India

January 2006

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Jan. 1st Kalpataru Day <i>What more shall I say?</i> <i>I bless you all!</i> <i>Be Illumined!</i> - Sri Ramakrishna	<u>1</u> Public Celebration: Kalpataru Day 6 pm	Winter Break from December 26th to January 7th Regular Services resume January 8th..					<u>7</u>
Jan. 8th *Guest Speaker: Fr. Terry Gallagher Scarboro Missions	<u>8</u> Lecture: Epiphany 11 am Vedanta Vidya Mandir 1 pm	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u> Scripture Class: <i>Life of Swami</i> <i>Turiyananda</i> 7:30 pm	<u>14</u> Vigil 6 am - 6 pm
Jan. 15th Speaker: Prof. Kumar Murty Dep't of Mathematics, University of Toronto	<u>15</u> Lecture: Teaching Through Poetry 11 am Ram Nam 5 pm	Swami Kripamayanda will be visiting Montreal from January 13th -16th.				<u>20</u> No Scripture Class	<u>21</u> Public Celebration: Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary 11 am
<i>The Vedanta</i> <i>Society of</i> <i>Toronto wishes</i> <i>all of our dear</i> <i>members and</i> <i>friends a very</i> <i>Happy New</i>	<u>22</u> No Lecture: Guided Meditation 11 am Vedanta Vidya Mandir 1 pm	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u> Scripture Class: <i>Life of Swami</i> <i>Brahmananda</i> 7:30 pm	<u>28</u>
	<u>29</u> Lecture: Essence of Character 11 am	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u>				
	 <p>Our karma determines what we deserve and what we can assimilate. We are responsible for what we are; and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in the future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Swami Vivekananda</p>						

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