



# Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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## Newsletter January 2007

**DEVOTEE:** "What must the bound soul's condition of mind be in order to achieve liberation?"

**MASTER:** "He can free himself from attachment to 'Woman and Gold' if, by the grace of God, he cultivates a spirit of strong renunciation."

-The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, pg 165-

### Words to Inspire

(from The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 374-75)

**JAYAGOPAL:** "How can we know that all paths are true?"

**MASTER:** "A man can reach God if he follows one path rightly. Then he can learn about all the other paths. It is like reaching the roof by some means or other. Then one is able to climb down by the wooden or stone stairs, by a bamboo pole, or even by a rope.

"A devotee can know everything when God's grace descends on him. If you but realize Him, you will be able to know all about Him. You should somehow meet the master of a house and become acquainted with him; then he himself will tell you how many houses he owns and all about his gardens and government securities."

**JAYAGOPAL:** "How does one receive the grace of God?"

**MASTER:** "Constantly you have to chant the name and glories of God and give up worldly thoughts as you can. With the greatest effort you may try to bring water into your field for your crops, but it may all leak out through holes in the ridges. Then all your efforts to bring the water by digging a canal will be futile.

"You will feel restless for God when your heart becomes pure and your mind free from

attachment to things of the world. Then alone will your prayer reach God. A telegraph wire cannot carry messages if it has a break or some other defect.

"I used to cry for God all alone, with a longing heart. I used to weep, 'O God, Where art Thou?' Weeping thus, I would lose all consciousness of the world. My mind would merge in the *mahavayu*.

"How can one attain yoga? By completely renouncing attachment to worldly things. The mind must be pure and without blemish, like the telegraph wire that has no defect.

"One must not cherish any desire whatever. The devotion of a man who has any desire is selfish. But desireless devotion is love for its own sake. You may love me or not, but I love you: this is the love for its own sake.

"The thing is that one must love God. Through intense love one attains the vision of Him. The attraction of the husband for the chaste wife, the attraction of the child for its mother, the attraction of worldly possessions for worldly man—when a man can blend these three into one, and direct it all to God, then gets the vision of God."

Jayagopal was a man of the world. Was this why the Master gave instruction suited to him?

## **Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to India and the World**

*(Address by the High Commissioner of India, Shyamala B. Cowsik, at the Vedanta Society in Toronto on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2006)*

Swami Kripamayananda and friends,

I am not just happy but honoured to have been invited here today, for your monthly Sunday lecture to the Vedanta Society. It is not every day that one has the opportunity of paying homage, however inadequately, to the one of the greatest sons of Mother India, and indeed of the world, not just of his age but of all times. In over three decades of diplomatic service, I have, for some strange reason, never had this opportunity till two and a half months ago when, as Swamiji had mentioned just now, I was invited to participate in the inauguration of a beautiful statue of Swami Vivekananda at the Vedanta Ashram Society in Halifax on September 17, 2006. And now I am having a second chance so soon, and I am naturally delighted about this unexpected privilege. When the idea of my speaking on this occasion was broached to me, however, the subjects that were initially proposed were too philosophical and abstruse, and so I had to beg off, explaining my lack of expertise for tackling any of them adequately. It was then that Swamiji thought of the present topic, which I hope I shall be able to manage reasonably well. However, I must point out that I am neither a scholar or an academic, nor a philosopher or a deep thinker who would be well versed in Swami Vivekananda's teachings and able to expound on them with authority. Moreover, I am here today in the presence of not just the Head of the Vedanta Society of Toronto, but also of an audience that is very knowledgeable about Swami Vivekananda. I am thus an amateur among professionals, and if you find that my presentation is inadequate, as is very likely, I would request you to bear with me.

Talking about Swami Vivekananda's impact on and contribution to India and the world is at once very easy and very difficult. It is easy because it is a field so rich in fact and detail that one has no shortage of material. In fact Swamiji was, as Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore had said in a different context "Like those trees which come out from the heart of the earth, like fountains of life, towards the bosom of the infinite sky". On the

other hand, it is very difficult precisely for the same reason – there is so much one can say that one does not know where to start, how to proceed in a coherent, lucid fashion, and how to end. I can but try to do my best.

Swami Vivekananda, or Narendranath Datta in his poorvashrama, was, as you would all know, highly endowed spiritually right from his childhood. His mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi had to curb his restless energy, and his tendency to tease his sisters mercilessly, by holding his head under the cold water tap while chanting "Siva, Siva". It was perhaps because of these repeated duckings, accompanied by these chants, that he was inspired to start meditating at a very early age. There was also another experience which was later recognized by his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, as a sign that his favourite disciple was a great spiritualist. When young Narendranath was about to fall asleep, he would see, between his eyebrows, a ball of light which changed colour as it rotated, then slowly expanded and burst, bathing his body in a white radiance. Narendranath's mind was not merely restless, but sharply questioning as well. He had been disappointed, when he was at college, in his discussions with various scholars about the nature of the ultimate Truth. It was only when he met Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa in 1881 that he found his true Master, one who had not only had direct experience of God but could also help his disciple achieve this realization as well. The two had just five years together, but it was obviously a lifetime of spiritual communion, for when Sri Ramakrishna passed away in 1886, it was clear who was his spiritual heir and the bearer of his legacy. From then, Narendranath Datta began his long odyssey, which was to take him across the length and breadth of India, and over the oceans to America, where he burst upon the world scene in a blaze of glory at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Before this, however, his travels across India for three years gave him first hand knowledge of the distortions that had crept into India's ancient civilization and the related social order, as also of the wretchedness and deprivation afflicting large sections of the common people. India was then

suffering from the worst aspects of British colonial rule. At a special exhibition at the Vivekananda Kendra in Kanyakumari, called The Wandering Monk, there was a frieze of Swamiji smoking from the tobacco bowl, a sort of hukka, of an untouchable. The experiences he gained during his travels across India culminated in three days of continuous meditation, from December 24, 1892 - about the past, the present and the future of India - on a rock off the coast of Kanyakumari.

Swami Vivekananda decided, from that point on, to do everything in his power to cleanse the Indian social structure of all the warts and excrescences that were disfiguring Mother India. He wanted to do this, above all, by re-instilling in all Indians, irrespective of caste, creed or language, their lost sense of pride in their unique and ancient culture and spiritual heritage. "Arise and awake!" was his resounding battle-cry, and he sought to awaken the Indian people from their lethargy and torpor, and to inspire them to energetic action through a strong and character-building faith. At the same time, given his scientific and rational bent of mind, he also realized that for India to make progress, it was necessary for all Indians to learn whatever was good in the West and adapt it to India's needs. He knew that while slavish imitation of the West or a cringing inferiority complex were totally undesirable, there was much in the West from which India could benefit. He also sought to strengthen the self-esteem of the average Indian, humiliated and suppressed by decades of colonial rule, by acquainting the West with the ancient wisdom and the richness of India's civilization. He wanted to teach them the glories of Vedanta, as a spiritual vehicle for the salvation not just of Indians, but of all human beings. And so he decided, at the urging of Sri Bhaskara Setupati, the Raja of Ramnad - who had in fact been invited to the Parliament of Religions but who felt that Swamiji would be the ideal representative of Hinduism at such a gathering - to go there. At the same exhibition in Kanyakumari that I had mentioned earlier, I remember another panel which showed Swamiji standing on the deck of the ship that sailed from Mumbai on May 31, 1893.

Swamiji's goal in making this journey to America was to convey the essence of India's spiritual culture, especially the concepts of Vedanta,

to the Americans. He wanted to enrich their religious consciousness through the rationalistic and humanistic teachings of Vedanta. He went as, and became India's spiritual ambassador, speaking eloquently of the need for better understanding between India and the New World and for a healthy synthesis of East and West, of spirituality and science. Many of you might not be aware that as part of the celebrations of America's Bicentennial in 1976, the National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC mounted an exhibition "Abroad in America : Visitors to the New Nation", which paid tribute to those foreign visitors to the US who had made a deep impression on the American mind. In this exhibition, a large portrait of Swami Vivekananda was displayed prominently, and the commemorative volume of the exhibition had this to say about him, "The Swami charmed the audience with his magical oratory, and left an indelible mark on America's spiritual development". **Note that the word used is "spiritual development", not 'mind' or even 'heart'.** Indeed Swamiji had completely captured the heart of the whole American nation. Although nowadays we talk of rock stars - poor shallow creatures for the most part - as an example of what mass adulation can be, the fan following Swamiji acquired overnight in the US surpassed that of any rock star of today, and this in an age with no mass media, like the TV, the internet or the SMS, that could whip up a mass sensation. Crowds gathered in the streets of Chicago to look at the posters of Swamiji, magnificent in the orange robes of an ascetic, with his turban crowning a noble head, his calm, wise gaze seeming to enter the very hearts of the viewers. Lecture bureaus vied with each other to enlist him for discourses in different US cities. The leading newspapers and journals published his messages in bold lettering. He was described as "a cyclonic Hindu", "a prince among men", "the Brahmin monk", "the warrior prophet", and "the militant mystic".

And what of Swamiji's message? It was the message of Vedanta :

*"Ekam Sat; Vipraah Bahudhaa Vadanti"* - 'The truth is one, the wise call it by many names'. **The four cardinal points of Swamiji's Vedantic messages were: the non-duality of the Godhead, the divinity of the soul, the oneness of all**

**existence, and the harmony of all religions. In Vedanta, religion is but the manifestation of the divinity already present in human beings.** From those flows the linked emphasis on the harmony of all religions, which is to be realized by deepening our spiritual consciousness. Thus, a Christian should be a true Christian, a Hindu a true Hindu, a Muslim a true Muslim, a Buddhist a true Buddhist, a Jew a true Jew, and so on. Swamiji said “Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but varied expressions of The Religion, which is oneness, so that each may choose the both that suits him best. This message resonated powerfully in a United States still recovering from the ravages of a civil war and unsettled by the iconoclastic scientific theories of Darwin and others. **The Americans were seeking a philosophy that could harmonize science, humanism and mystical experience, and in Swamiji they found a teacher who could show them this path.** At Chicago, when he addressed the audience “in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world”, of “the mother of all religions”, and of “the millions and millions of Hindus, people of all classes and sects” in India, when he proclaimed “I am proud to belong to a religion that has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the refugees of all religions and of all nations of the earth”, they listened. We in India today can be rightfully proud of having lived up to this tradition right up to the present. Swamiji, in his speech, made specific mention of the Israelites, or Jews, who came to India 175 B.C. after the destruction of their temple by the Romans, and of the Zoroastrians, or Parsis, to who came to India when they were driven out of Persia. But there are far more recent and more striking examples. During the Bangladesh war in 1971, India accepted as many as 11 million refugees from East Pakistan – the combined population of Switzerland and Austria – without any certainty that they would return. **One has only to compare this with the behaviour of the Western nations when faced with far smaller numbers of Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust.** Again, India gave refuge to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and over one hundred thousand Tibetan refugees, despite the problems that this created with China.

**This is truly a tradition of unquestioned hospitality and warmth of which we can be rightfully proud.** To revert to the Parliament of Religions, when Swamiji quoted from the Bhagavad Gita, “Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him. All men are struggling through paths which, in the end, lead to Me”, - they listened. As Romain Rolland observed, “His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses”, and America listened, enraptured.

Back home in India, Swamiji’s teachings, and the news of the tremendous impact he had had in America, led to a national awakening, a new spirit of vigour and confidence, a spiritual renaissance that would propel India to great intellectual and social development. He was seen as the patron saint of modern India, preaching to the Hindus the idea of a strong and character-building religion. His words could at once inspire and transform. It is no wonder that all the great Indian national leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to Subhash Chandra Bose and Sri Aurobindo, acknowledged their debt to Swamiji. Mahatma Gandhi said “The love that I had for my country became a thousandfold..... Vivekananda left an indelible impression on Indian life. If Vivekananda is the name of your Society, you dare not neglect the teeming millions”. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said “Vivekananda was a luminous mind. Each word he said or wrote was like a flame. When we read him, it shakes us up from lethargy and inspires us immensely. He brought his great spirituality to bear upon his patriotism, and this message was not confined to India alone but was for the whole world”. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, another fearless fighter for the freedom of India, but one who could not be more different in some ways from Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was even effusive in his admiration of Swamiji, whom he described in these ringing phrases “Reckless in sacrifice, unceasing in activity, boundless in love, profound in wisdom, exuberant in emotion, merciless in attack and yet simple as a child”.

*To Continue...*

## **BELUR MATH NEWS**

Statue of **Swami Vivekananda** was installed at Swami Vivekananda Park on the bank of Ulsoor Lake, Bangalore. Sri Kumar Swamy, Chief Minister of Karnataka, life and message unveiled the statue on 4 November.

The Foundation Stone of Academic-cum-administrative building for **Vivekananda University's** faculty of Integrated Rural Development and Management at Narendrapur centre was laid down by Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission on

29 November, the sacred birthday of Swami Premanandaji Maharaj.

The 97th **Annual General Meeting** of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 17 December. It was chaired by Swami Gahanananda, President, Ramakrishna Mission. In all 122 monastic members, 60 lay members and 46 associates participated in it. For details of the activities for the year 2005-06 please visit web site <[www.belurmath.org](http://www.belurmath.org)> and then click at the 'current news'

## **SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS**

Holy Mother **Sri Sarada Devi's** 153<sup>rd</sup> birth anniversary was celebrated on Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup> at 11am.. The programme included puja, devotional songs, pushpanjali and distribution of prasad. Close to 300 devotees and friends attended.

**High Commissioner of India** to Canada, Shyamala B. Cowsik visited the Vedanta Society on December 3, 2006 and delivered a speech on "Swami Vivekananda's Contributions to India and the World" to about 100 devotees and friends who were present to greet her and listen to her speech.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Kalpataru Utsav** will be celebrated on Monday, January 1, 2007 at 6:00 pm.

Public celebration of the Birth Anniversary of **Swami Vivekananda** will be held at the Vedanta Society on Sunday, January 14, 2007 at 11 am, with a special programme of worship, bhajans, pushpanjali and homa, followed by distribution of prasad.

Public celebration of the Birth Anniversary of **Sri Ramakrishna** will be held at the Vedanta Society on Sunday, February 25, 2007 at 11 am, with a special programme of worship, bhajans, pushpanjali and homa, followed by distribution of prasad.

## **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, January 20, 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:** January 21 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:** This month, the Soup Kitchen will be held on January 18. 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 collections, as well as other Vedantic materials.

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

*Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India*

## JANUARY 2007

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>1</u> 6:00 pm <b>KALPATARU DAY CELEBRATION</b>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u> <i>Swami Kripamayananda leaves for Montreal</i>	<u>6</u> <b>Winter Recess Ends</b>
<u>7</u> 11am - Lecture: <i>The Power of Good Wishes</i> By V. Kumar Murty	<u>8</u> <i>Swami Kripamayananda returns from Montreal</i>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u> : 7-30pm Scripture Class: <i>Tattvabodha</i>	<u>13</u>
<u>14</u> : <u>11-00 am</u> Celebration of the Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> <u>9 am</u>  Soup Kitchen	<u>19</u> : <u>7-30pm</u> Scripture Class: <i>Life &amp; teachings of Swami Brahmananda</i>	<u>20</u> :  <i>Vigil:</i> 6 am to 6pm
<u>21</u> 11 am - Lecture: <i>The Greatest Battle</i>  <b>RamNam:5pm</b>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> : 7-30pm Scripture Class: <i>The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i>	<u>27</u>
<u>28</u> 11am - Lecture: <i>The Best in Jewish Folk Tales</i>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u>			

### **Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary Celebration**

Sunday, January 14, 2007 at 11 am

Consisting of devotional songs, meditation, reading from the Works of Swami Vivekananda,  
Puja, Homa, Pushpanjali and Prasad distribution

**Special Sunday Service: January 28 at 11 am**

Guest Speaker REV. Rabbi Eli Rubenstein will speak on

**'The Best in Jewish Folk Tales'**

“The only God to worship is the human soul in human body. Of course all animals are temples too, but man is the highest, the Taj Mahal of temples.

If I can not worship in that, no other temple will be of any advantage.” “This is the gist of all worship – to be pure and to do good to others”. - Swami Vivekananda-