



Newsletter June 2005

M: "Sir, may I make an effort to earn more money?"

Master: "It is permissible to do so to maintain a religious family. You may increase your income, but in an honest way. The goal of life is not the earning of money, but the service of God."

-Sri Ramakrishna

Words To Inspire

There is a verse in the Manu Smṛti. I want to quote for you this verse so that you realize the greatness of a *grhastha*.

"The *grhastha ashrama* is the greatest among the ashramas, because it is only the *grhastha* who provides food and education to the people of the other three ashramas."

A *brahmachari* does not earn any money, a *vanaprasthi* too does not earn anything, and so also a *sannyasin*. It is only the *grhastha* who earns money, engages in productive work, and supports the entire society. A *grhastha* does so much work and yet underestimates himself! He should be proud of his contribution to society. Society runs on the strength of a *grhastha*. So the *grhastha ashrama* is the greatest of the four ashramas.

What Manu has said above appears before us in a new language today. I am referring to the modern concept of citizenship. A citizen is not concerned only with his or her own home. He or she thinks of the progress of the entire country. Only when anyone works with the idea that the country as a whole should progress, does he or she become a citizen, a true *grhastha*. So today, a *grhastha* stands for a citizen. By becoming a citizen, his or her will be broadened. He or she will then think in terms of the progress of all people and act accordingly. A *grhastha*, if he or she is not also a citizen, will remain a *grhastha* only in name; one imprisoned, as it were, in a home.

We should have within us the sense of national and social responsibility. We should always be concerned about the progress of our society. There must be a feeling that whatever work we do must have bearing on the welfare of society also. This is the true nature of a citizen.

Today, there is a need in our country to educate millions of our adults to become such citizens. The advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda was for this purpose. They educate people in the values of strength and self-reliance and a concern for others.

-Swami Ranganathananda
from *Spiritual Life of the Householder*

The World Within The Mind

Based on a talk delivered by Prof. Ram Murty, Dep't. of Mathematics, Queen's University, at the Vedanta Society of Toronto, May 8th, 2005

What exactly is mind? Philosophers has pondered this question for ages. They are still pondering it today and no one has come up with a conclusive answer. Most philosophical inquiries begin with the question, "Is there anything that I can be certain of?" Bertrand Russell's famous book, "Problems of Philosophy" begins with this question. The famous French philosopher and mathematician, Rene Descartes is noted for his method of philosophic doubt. Through such a method of reasoning, Descartes concludes that he is not certain that matter exists. He is not certain even that the world 'out there' exists. For all intents and purposes, it could very well be a dream. His inquiry finally concludes that there is really nothing he can be certain of apart from the sensations of his own mind. He has thoughts. He experiences them. He is certain of this. So we have his famous line, cogito ergo sum, I think, therefore I am.

With this Vedanta disagrees. It says that this is putting Descartes before the horse. (I am sorry for the pun!) The Vedantic inquiry reverses the conclusion and says - I am, therefore I think. Even the thought process is to be questioned. Is it really there? The experience of the thought process is not different from the experience of the so-called world out there. It is as real as the dream is real to the one having the dream. Vedanta asks what is that by which the dream is being perceived? It concludes by saying that it is the light of pure awareness.

These two positions, "I think, therefore I am," and "I am, therefore I think," represent two opposite views. The former is the basis of Western Philosophy and the latter, the basis for much of Eastern Philosophy. This dialectic can be synthesised into a Vedantic unity. I will do this at the end of the discourse.

In the life of every individual, a lot is dependent on the condition of the mind. Wherever we go, we carry our minds with us. There is no way to escape from our own minds. We are wedded to our mind for life, whether we like it or not. Thus, we must learn to love, and understand our own mind. Our world consists of our own mind. In some sense, we create our own world. The famous poet, John Milton wrote that "The mind is its own place, and in itself, can make a heaven of hell and a hell of heaven." Is mind matter, or is matter mind?

The title for this discourse was suggested by a verse in the Yoga Vasishtha:

Manomayam atho visvam yatram pari vrsayate.

This universe which is seen all around is made up of the mind. The next verse says, "That which is the understanding of objects is called mind. There is no form for this mind. It is not separated from thought or imagination."

In Valmiki's Ramayana, there is a section called Yoga Vasishtha, consisting of 32,000 slokas or verses. It is the teaching given by the sage Vasishtha to Rama, before he was exiled to the forest. It is considered as one of the masterpieces of Advaita Vedanta. It is this teaching that gave the mental preparation for Sri Rama to cheerfully accept the banishment from the kingdom and live in the forest for twelve years.

In a single discourse, it is difficult to compress the teaching of the entire work. Thus, we must be selective and indicate only some of the highlights. For this purpose, scholars have written what is usually called, the Laghu Yoga Vasishtha, which is a condensed version of the larger work. This shorter work consists of 6,000 verses.

We are, in some sense, what our thoughts have made us. In essence, we are all the same, in that the background of our existence is the one and the same Pure Awareness from an absolute standpoint. However, from a relative standpoint, each of us is different on account of our thoughts and stored impressions with which we identify. It is knowledge and experience that distinguishes one individual from another. Each of us journeys through life and we gather a variety of experiences. From these experiences, we filter out knowledge. A surgeon is one who has had many thoughts regarding human physiology. This gives rise to knowledge as well as experience. A physicist is one who has had many thoughts concerning the atomic nature of matter. Thus, a physicist knows more about the atom than the human body and a surgeon knows more about the inner workings of the body than the inner workings of the atom. Thought builds our universe of experience.

It is therefore inevitable that whatever we perceive, we do so through the prism of our past knowledge and experience. All the impressions, feelings, thoughts and images have been stored up since our childhood and thus influence our experience. In his Inspired Talks, Swami Vivekananda writes, "We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care of what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live, they travel far. Each thought we think is tinged with our own character, so that for the pure and holy man, even his jests or abuse have the twist of his own love and purity and do good." (Vol. 7, p.14)

The problem is that thinking or the thought process continues even though we may not be aware of it. There are subconscious currents of thought that operate within every individual and they are largely the momentum of past thinking. Thus, we tell ourselves many things subconsciously, and that affects our experience, our performance and our knowledge. If we are depressed, one reason could be that we told ourselves negative things and thus come to this

plight. The solution therefore is to tell ourselves the opposite. When we fill our minds with all sorts of rubbish, it should not surprise us that our mind reproduces that. Sri Ramakrishna used to say in his own parochial way, "You belch what you eat."

The Yoga Vasishtha can be summarised by the following three teachings. First, we are what our thoughts have made us. Second, by changing our thoughts, we change our knowledge and experience. Third, by holding on to the thought of ultimate reality, we experience it. We become identified with it.

When Swami Vivekananda was lecturing at Harvard, someone asked him if this "changing our thoughts" was a form of self-hypnosis. Swami Vivekananda gave an appropriate response. "We are hypnotised already. This is de-hypnosis." It is now an acknowledged fact of psychoanalysis that there are many subconscious currents in our mind that keep repeating statements reinforcing limitations. By asserting what is real, we undo years of wrong thinking. "By the firm mental resolve, 'All is Brahman' the mind is liberated. ...The inclination toward virtuous conduct is called reflection. ...The mind is bound by mental impressions and set free by the absence of mental impressions." This is really the purpose of daily meditation. As Holy Mother instructs us, we must sit down every day at a fixed time and take stock of what we have done, what we have thought. Then only will we know if we are improving or not.

In the performance of any action, in doing anything, the main tool is of course the mind. So the mind must be prepared. This preparation is largely on of attitude. In theological terminology, one may call it faith. It is interesting to note that it is faith that is at the heart of anything. Even such a thing as science, which is far removed from religion in its outward forms, begins with a two-fold faith. The first is the faith that there is order and pattern in the universe. Second, it is the faith that we can find these patterns, that it is mentally possible to comprehend these patterns.

Thus a sincere, seeking attitude is a preparation for the mind. The mind must not entertain any negative thought or feelings. In this context, I am reminded of a man who goes to the church to make some confessions. He seeks an audience with the minister. He hesitates to speak, so the minister says to him, "It is alright my son, have you been entertaining impure thoughts?"

"No, Father," the man replies, "impure thoughts are entertaining me." Most of the time, we give in. We let thoughts have their sway over us and forget that we are not the thoughts. Thoughts come and go, but Pure Awareness is the background. That is our ultimate reality. As we become more and more conscious of this background awareness, we find that the mesmeric hold of the thoughts over us slowly begins to weaken and eventually, we do find that we are not the thoughts. The mind then becomes established in Brahman.

To summarise then the main teaching of the Yoga Vasishtha, what is the mind, we may not know. However, we must know how it operates and how to diminish the influence of mental impressions, so that ultimately, we can experience Pure Awareness that is at the background of all phenomenon. To return to the dialectic of Cartesian dualism versus the Vedantic non-dualism, we can synthesise both views from the standpoint that what is perceived is energy, change, Shakti. But we know at the same time, there is the background of pure awareness, Shiva. Our experience, at every moment of our life is a mingling of matter and mind, of energy and consciousness, of Shakti and Shiva.

New President of the Ramakrishna Order

Revered Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj was elected President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Math and the Governing Body of the Mission held on 25 May 2005. He is the 14th President of the Order.

Swami Gahananandaji was one of the Vice-Presidents of the Math and Mission since 14 April 1992, and succeeds Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj who attained mahasamadhi on 25 April 2005.

Born in the village of Paharpur in Sylhet district (now in Bangladesh) in October 1916, Swami Gahananandaji studied the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda during his student life, and was deeply attracted towards them. He was also greatly influenced by the dedicated lives of some of the monks of Ramakrishna Order, especially the late Swami Prabhanandaji (Ketaki Maharaj), who was his cousin in his pre-monastic life. He had also once met Swami Abhedanandaji Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami Gahananandaji joined the Ramakrishna Order at its centre in Bhubaneswar in January 1939 at the age of 22 and received mantra diksha from Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, the then President of the Order, after two months. In 1944 Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj gave him Brahmacharya vows and the name Amritachaitanya, and in 1948

Sannyasa vows and the name Gahanananda.

At Bhubaneswar, he worked under the inspiring guidance of Swami Nirvananandaji Maharaj (later a Vice-President of the Order). He also got opportunity to serve Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj (later the 7th President of the Order) and Swami Achalanandaji Maharaj (a disciple of Swami Vivekananda and Vice-President of the Order) when they visited Bhubaneswar and Puri. From 1942 to 1952 he served at the Kolkata branch of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. In the course of those 10 years, he went to Mayavati Ashrama in the Himalayas a couple of times to stay and spend time in reading, meditation, etc in solitude.

From 1953 to 1958, he was in Shillong centre, where he worked under the guidance of Swami Saumyanandaji Maharaj (a disciple of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj). During this period he also organized flood relief operations in Assam a couple of times. Keenly interested in the service of the sick and the suffering humanity, Swami Gahananandaji was posted to the Mission's hospital centre, Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata, in 1958. For long 27 years, he was deeply involved in all its activities – during the first 5 years as an Assistant Secretary under the inspiring guidance of its founder secretary Swami Dayanandaji Maharaj, and then onwards as its head for 22 years, till 1985.

The Seva Pratishthan was originally started, and was known for several years, only as a model maternity and child welfare centre. The vast and multifaceted shape of this centre that it assumed in later years was largely achieved under the stewardship of Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj. He worked tirelessly to develop and expand its services to cater to the medical needs of more and more people belonging to poor and low-income sections of the society. During his stay there, he also started health care activities at 33 remote villages through mobile medical units, and also free eye operation camps in nearby villages, medical relief for Ganga Sagar Mela pilgrims every year and for the refugees during Bangladesh liberation war.

He was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1965. In 1979, he was appointed an Assistant Secretary of the twin organizations. Even after that, he continued to shoulder the responsibilities of the Seva Pratishthan as its Secretary till March 1985. Thereafter he came to the headquarters at Belur Math to function as a whole-time Assistant Secretary. He became the General Secretary of the Math and Mission in 1989 and continued in that post for three years till 1992 when he became a Vice-President of the Order. From that time he was also simultaneously the head of Ramakrishna Math (Yogodyan) at Kankurgachhi, Kolkata.

As a Vice-President of the Math and Mission, Swami Gahananandaji travelled extensively in various parts of the country and visited many branches of the Order and also a number of unaffiliated centres. In 1993, he represented the Ramakrishna Order at the commemorative function organized by Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago (and attended by 6500 people from all parts of the world) to celebrate the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's historic appearance at the World Parliament of Religions. During that time he also visited the centres of the Order in USA and Canada. He also visited at different times various places in England, France, Switzerland, Holland, Russia, Australia, Japan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia and Mauritius.

In all these places, he spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda and also gave mantra diksha to thousands of spiritual seekers. He always responded to the requests for spiritual guidance from all corners of the country, including very remote villages, ignoring his personal difficulties and inconveniences.

Belur Math News

The sad news of the Mahasamadhi of our dear and **Revered President, Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj**, in Kolkata, India on Monday, April 25th 2005, at 3:51 pm.

The sad news was broadcast over radio and television all over India the same night and published in the newspapers the following morning. Sri Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, Chief Minister of West Bengal, sent a floral wreath as homage to Revered Maharaj at the hospital, as soon as he got the news. The body of Revered Maharaj was brought to Belur Math at 6.40 pm and was kept in the cultural hall adjacent to President Maharaj's quarters. Thousands of disciples, devotees, admirers and friends, poured in all through the night and the day after to pay their last respects and homage with floral offerings. On 26th morning at 10:15 am, the body of Revered Maharaj was taken in a procession to the

courtyard in front of the Math Office and kept on a high platform in a decorated pandal where it remained till 12:10 pm. The last rites of cremation started at 12:40 pm and were over by 3:15 pm. An estimated 60,000 people thronged the Math to pay their last homage to Revered Maharaj. For the official Memorial Service in Belur Math held May 7th, an estimated and unprecedented 150,000 people attended.

His Mahasamadhi has created a huge void in the hearts of monastics and countless devotees. It is an irreparable loss to the Organization.

Past Events

The Vedanta Society of Toronto held the Public Celebration of Lord Buddha's Birthday on Monday May 23rd at 11 am. The special programme included puja, bhajans, reading, meditation, flower offering and distribution of prasad. Close to 130 devotees attended the holy event, with due solemnity and joy.

The Vedanta Society of Toronto held a special Memorial Service for the late Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, 13th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission on May 7th. The programme consisted of special worship of Sri Ramakrishna, readings from works by the late President Maharaj, personal reminiscences, video presentation, meditation and distribution of prasad. Over 100 disciples, devotees, admirers and friends came to pay homage to the life and spirit of the late great soul.

Upcoming Events

Annual Summer Retreat 2005

'Atmajyoti'

Light of the Spirit
Mundaka Upanishad

June 18th & June 19th

Special Guest:
Swami Dayatmananda

Head of the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre
Bourne End, England

This year's Annual Summer Retreat will be held Saturday, June 18th to Sunday, June 19th at the Centre. The two-day event will last from 6 am to 9 pm on the 1st day, and from 6 am to 5 pm on the 2nd day. The Retreat programme will be planned to encourage active participation, and to help all move forward in their spiritual life.

Participants are expected to come early in the morning for meditation on both Saturday and Sunday, spend the entire day in a spiritual atmosphere, and return home in the evening. The weekend event will revolve around the study and discussion of the Mundaka Upanishad.

The registration fee this year is: **\$75 for both days. \$50 for the 1st day. \$35 for the 2nd day.**

The fee includes: 2 breakfasts, morning and evening tea breaks, 2 lunches and one dinner (1st day). Lunches and dinner will be catered. All menu items will be vegetarian. Please inform the Centre no later than June 12th if you wish to attend. Capacity is limited. 1st come/1st served.

Please note, there will be an afternoon lecture by Swami Dayatmananda which will be open to the public. The time has yet to be announced. Please call the Centre for more information.

Regular Services

Summer Recess - No Regular Services from June 20th to September 10th.

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

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

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

Book Store

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

For other services, please refer to the [events](#) section.