



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter June 2008

Words to Inspire

“*Saha na vavatu. saha nau bhunaktu. saha viryam karavavahai. tejasvi na vadhitamastu, ma vidvishavahai*”

May Brahman protect us. May It nourish us. May we work in harmony with great vigor. May our study be illuminating. May we not cherish ill feeling towards each other.

Ten Commandments for Students

(From *The Vedanta Kesari*, December 2007)

The Vedic seers (rishis) were great educationists. They were interested not just in improving the grades and performance of their students but in their total personality-development. They treated their students with respect and affection and were keen that they turn out to be ideal citizens, ideal human beings. Their educational vision included the whole gamut of human life and the ultimate well being of the individual and the society. They encouraged a spirit of inquiry coupled with respect and devotion. Intense love to gain knowledge and zeal for constant self improvement were embedded in their approach to education. The well known *shanti mantra* (peace chant), *saha na vavatu*, is an example of this. The mantra says, ‘May the teacher and the student help each other for their mutual benefit.’

Taittiriya Upanishad contains a section dealing with what a student should do after he completes formal education. Called *shishya anushasanam* (‘rules for a student’), this section consists of timeless wisdom which the rishis had derived from their experience and a wholesome understanding of life. These rules for students hold good even now, despite changed circumstances and a different system of education. One may liken these guidelines to a convocation address given to the final year students who are about to leave the portals of an educational institution to pursue a career or get into an active life of earning and producing wealth, doing their family duties

and contributing to the society. Following are the Ten Commandments drawn from that section. It may well be a source of inspiration and guidance for the present-day students and educationists.

- 1) *Satyan na pramaditavyam* (Hold onto Truth)
- 2) *Dharman na pramaditavyam* (Hold onto righteousness)
- 3) *Kushalan na pramaditavyam* (Hold on to welfare activities)
- 4) *Bhootyei na pramaditavyam* (Hold on to acquisition of wealth)
- 5) *Deva pitru karyabhyam na pramaditavyam* (Hold on to worship of gods and manes)
- 6) *Swadhyaya pravachanabhyam na pramaditavyam* (Hold on to self-study and teaching)
- 7) *Matru devo bhava, pitru devo bhava* (Take care of father and mother)
- 8) *Anavadyani karmani tani sevitavyani* (Do only good deeds, avoid bad deeds)
- 9) *Shraddhaya deyam* (Give liberally gifts with faith and humility)
- 10) *Acharyayapriyam dhanam aahritya* (Bring wealth to your teacher to help him continue his educational work)

This is a total vision of education, containing enduring values for living a purposeful life. Only when one follows these values in life one gets true happiness, prosperity and peace. Mere obtaining a certificate or degree can help one get some job or generating wealth. Life is a process of individual and collective growth.

Belief versus Faith

Harsh Chawla

We have heard about the brave man who walked on the tight rope across Niagara Falls.

Many people watched him do it. To them he asked "Do you believe I can walk on a tight rope across the Falls? They all replied "yes" because they had seen him do it. They had experienced a demonstration and that experience had taken the form of belief.

Later the brave man pushed on the tight rope across Niagara Falls an open box having a single wheel in front, two legs at the back and two shafts with handles for raising the wheel off its legs. It is also called a wheel barrow.

Finally a buddy of the tight rope walker climbed into the box and the tight rope walker pushed him across the Niagara Falls. When they had finished the walk, the tight rope walker asked the crowd, "Do you believe that I can walk on a tight rope across the Falls pushing a box with a person in it?" To that they exclaimed: "Yes" They replied 'yes' because they were now believers in the person's awesome abilities.

The brave man then looked at the crowd and asked "Who is next?" Who else now wants to sit in the box on wheels and go across the Falls on the tight rope?" No one was ready to be a part of the feat. When their own lives appeared to be at risk nobody had faith in the tight rope walker though they did have belief in his ability.

The question is: Is faith the same thing as belief? We base belief on evidence. I believe

through influence of the evidence, that God exists, that the Holy Gita is true, that Lord Rama, Lord Krishna and Guru Nanak are *avatars*; that the Bible is true and Jesus is a son of God. But Faith? Well. That's a different matter. And, that is my subject: 'Faith'... F-A-I-T-H... 'Faith'

The word 'Faith' has been much used like such terms as 'Ecology', 'Global warming', 'Energy', etc. without realizing the true significance.

If I am asked: "Well, then what is faith?" my answer will be: Faith is something we exercise everyday in our lives. And we have been exercising it since the day we were born. Our mother encouraged us to feel that we trust her when we lay in her arms. We became certain that she would not drop us. And we learned day by day that that was, and is, true!

It was the same when we began to ride a bicycle. First we thought we won't be able to. But then our dad or some senior person taught us to ride the two-wheeled machine and to balance it, which we found was wonderfully possible.

And, again, it is of course every time we step into an airplane. We put our faith in the pilot, although he is a complete stranger. Our experience which led to a belief has influenced in us the faith that the pilot will take us safely into the air across thousands of miles of oceans and land, and land us safely in a distant country.

Now the question is: How do we have this faith to begin with? Perhaps it is in our

genes, in our body. It is this faith we inherit from our parents, acquire from our Guru, or receive as a blessing through Thakur's grace that we keep transferring in our lives not only to our friends, but also to other people, and even to a stranger—for example, the pilot—and to all kinds of manifold situations.

So when we think of faith let's not think of faith as something strange, superstitious or obsessive. Faith is based on beliefs which, in turn, are based on experience.

It is something that we practice in our lives. It is on the basis of this faith, based on the belief that he had in Lord Krishna's knowledge and power, that the skeptic Arjuna ultimately imbibed the supreme wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita.

Faith is commitment. It is a continuing relationship with our Guru, our *avatars*, with our deities and with our Thakur.

Faith is a growing recognition of who our God is. It lies in the recognition of who Sri Ramakrishna is. We do have faith but have to find ways to strengthen our faith! Our faith must not waiver. We have to find ways to make our faith grow and strengthen. And our faith will grow when we become open and start assimilating the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda; when

we listen to their words silently and allow them to transform us.

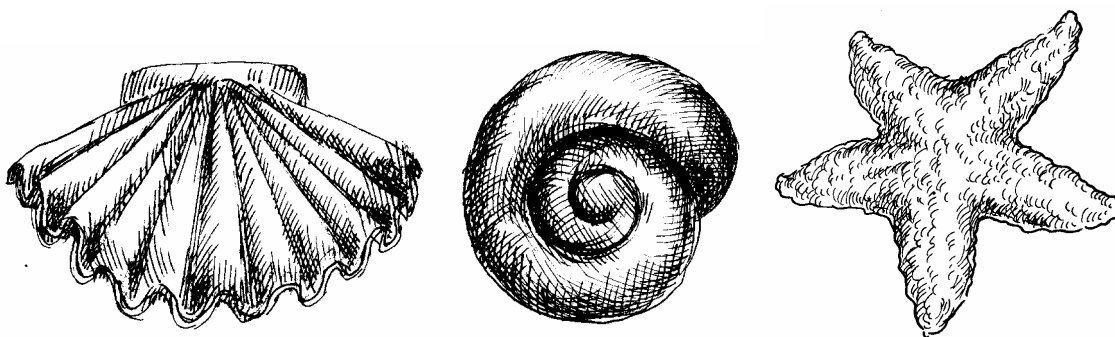
And when our faith has grown it will lead us to a search. The search is for closeness to Thakur. The search is for God.

May Thakur, therefore, give us the perseverance to strengthen our faith! May Thakur, based on commitment and a sincere personal relationship with him, strengthen our faith even further! It is this faith that will lead us to become one with God. It is this faith that will lead us to feel His presence every everywhere.

We want Him to reveal Himself to us in the same way that Sri Krishna revealed Himself to Arjuna. He won't reveal Himself to us if we keep testing and analyzing him in a laboratory. He won't reveal himself to us if we keep indulging in needless debates about Him.

We simply need to cultivate faith, more faith, more and more faith and then we may not even have to search for him. He will be right with us and within us. He will be our constant companion. Let us remember that Pascal, the 17th century French philosopher, said: God hides himself from those who examine him, but reveals himself to those who search for Him. And for that search we all know that we have to have faith, more faith, unwavering FAITH.

(Harsh Chawla is a member of the Vedanta Society of Toronto)



Quantum Leap

The Prince and The Pitcher

-Utsha Saha, age 10, a student of the Vedanta Vidya Mandir

Once upon a time there was a prince. He did not like the comforts of his castle and its luxuriousness. He decided to leave it. One night when everybody was asleep he snuck outside of his palace. He wandered for a few days and reached at an ashram in the forest.

He asked the monk to give him shiksha. The monk asked the prince to serve the ashram before getting any shiksha (spiritual lesson). The prince accepted.

From then on the prince served the ashram by collecting wood from the forest, water from the river, cooking, laying out the mats for the monks to sleep, etc. He was carrying on with his duties for a few months and thought he deserved to get shiksha by now. He thought working for the ashram was no use. He planned to sneak away from the ashram while getting water the next day. In the morning the prince went to fetch water for the monks like usual. He was going to sneak out when nobody could see him at the river.

He walked to the river and left his pitcher near the bank of the river. He started to walk towards the outside of the forest when he heard a voice, "Oh prince, where are you going?" The prince looked around. He did not see anyone coming or at the bank of the river. He wondered who was talking to him. "I am the pitcher. You left me at the river bank. Wait prince, before you leave please listen to my story." The pitcher said. The prince turned and headed to the river.

The pitcher began talking, "Before I was a pitcher I was soil. One day the pottery maker came by and he picked me up with his sharp shovel to make a pot. It was very painful. He left me outside in the hot sun and cold rain for several days. I thought he'd never pick me up again. Then one morning the pottery maker picked me up and took me to his work place. He then removed all the rocks and pebbles from my body. He hurt me so, so much. He only left the soil from my body. Then he left me outside again. For many days I was left like that. I thought the pottery maker forgot about me. After many days he picked me up and mixed me up with water until I was soft. Then he put me on the pottery wheel and gave me shape. I was spinned around and I felt very dizzy. After he was done I was smooth. Again he put me out to dry in the sun. It felt hot. Few days later he took me and put me in the fire. The fire was burning hot and I felt as if I would die. He took me out and I was all smooth and hard and colorful. Then he took me to the market place. Nobody chose me to buy for a while. Then a disciple from the ashram came and he chose me. He took me to his ashram. I got to serve the monks at the ashram. I felt very good. I was dirt and now I am a sturdy pitcher. Now I serve an ashram and many pitchers don't get to do that. It is an honor to serve them. You are lucky to get a chance to serve them. I went through all these hardships and you are tired of working for a few months. Do you want to leave the ashram? You should be grateful that God gave you an opportunity to work at the ashram. Now you decide if you want to leave."

The prince thought, 'This pitcher went through all these hardships and now he gets to serve an ashram. He was a mere pile of dirt and I am tired of working for only a few months. How foolish of me to think of leaving the ashram. I will stay.' The prince collected the water and headed towards the ashram. When he got there, the monk said, "Come, you have worked a lot. Now I will give you shiksha."

The moral is: Always be patient to achieve something good in your life.

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, June 14**, 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, June 15 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 now served four days (2nd and 3rd Thursday and 3rd and 4th Tuesday) a month at Roncesvalles Food Sharing, 263 Roncesvalles Avenue, Toronto M6R 2L9. This month, the Soup Kitchen dates are June 12, June 17, June 19, and June 24. 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.

Forthcoming Retreats and Seminar

1. Our Annual Summer Retreat with **Swami Prabuddhananda**, Minister, Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, on the '**Prasnottara Ratna-malika**' of Sankaracharya, to be held at the Vedanta Society of Toronto on June 21 and 22.
2. The 40th Anniversary Seminar on '**Communicating Vedanta**' with **Swami Prabhananda**, *General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* as the Chief Guest; **Swami Tyagananda**, Minister, Vedanta Society of Massachusetts, Boston; **Swami Yogatmananda**, Minister, Vedanta Society of Providence; and **Swami Atmajnanananda**, Resident Minister, Vedanta Society of Greater Washington DC, on Saturday September 6.
3. Retreat at 'Bliss Haven', Dunnville, Ontario, with **Swami Sridharananda**, Head of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney, Australia, on the topic of '**Sri Ramakrishna - Holy Mother - Swami Vivekananda**', on Friday September 19 to Sunday September 21.

Space is limited and will be provided on a first-come, first-served basis.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p><u>1</u> 11am -Guest Lecture: 'International Influence of the Upanishadic Thoughts' by Chander Khanna</p> <hr/> <p>VVM: 1:30 pm</p>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<p><u>6</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Tattvabodha</p>	<u>7</u>
<p><u>8</u> 11am-Lecture: 'Self- Abnegation'</p> <hr/> <p>Karma Yoga 1:30 pm – 2:30 pm</p>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<p><u>12</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen</p>	<p><u>13</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</p>	<p><u>14</u> Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm</p>
<p><u>15</u> 11am VVM: Pradarshanam</p> <hr/> <p>5pm: Ram Nam</p>	<u>16</u>	<p><u>17</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen</p>	<u>18</u>	<p><u>19</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen</p>	<p><u>20</u> NO SCRIPTURE CLASS</p>	<p><u>21</u> Annual Summer Retreat</p>
<p><u>22</u> Annual Summer Retreat with Swami Prabuddhananda</p>	<p><u>23</u> Summer Recess begins</p>	<p><u>24</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen</p>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>

Summer Recess

The Vedanta Society of Toronto will observe its regular summer recess this year from June 23 to September 5. The Annual Seminar will be held on September 6. Regular services will resume after the Seminar. Please note, however, that Guru Purnima will be celebrated during the recess, on Friday, July 18 at 6pm and Janmashtami on August 24 at 6pm. Morning and evening prayer and meditation at the centre will continue throughout the summer. The Newsletter will not be published in July and August. *The Vedanta Society of Toronto wishes everyone a safe and happy summer!*

BELUR MATH NEWS

Distress Relief: The following centres distributed various items, shown in brackets, to poor and needy persons in their respective areas: Almora (48 blankets), Guwahati (120 blankets), Ranchi Sanatorium (100 saris, 82 sets of school dresses, 5 bicycles).

Rural Development: Cooch Behar centre dug 6 wells at different villages near Mekhliganj, Ranchi Sanatorium gave roofing materials (asbestos sheets, pipes, etc) to a poor family, and Sikra Kulingram centre sunk 29 deep tube-wells in and around Sikra Kulingram, and 5 deep tube-wells in Sundarban.

Fire Relief: Vrindaban centre distributed relief materials to 7 families whose houses had been gutted by fire at Aila village in Mathura district and Shyam Kutir Kshetra in Vrindaban.

Economic Rehabilitation: The following centres distributed various items, shown in brackets, to poor and needy persons of nearby rural areas, under the Self-employment Programme:

Cooch Behar distributed (13 rickshaws), Guwahati {6 sewing machines and 12 sets of *talsal* (weaving equipment)}, Ranchi Sanatorium (3 rickshaws).

Vidyamandira (Saradapitha, Belur) students achieved excellent results at the joint admission test for M.Sc. courses in the various Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). The all-India ranks secured (within the first ten) are given below. General Candidates: Mathematics: 1, Physics: 6, Chemistry: 2, 3, 7 & 9
Other Candidates: Physics: 1 & 5

President Maharaj inaugurated Vivekananda Sabha Griha (seminar hall) at Varanasi Home of Service on 6 April. He also inaugurated the restored Swami Vijnanananda Kutir at Allahabad on 8 April and laid the foundation stone for the proposed temple on 11 April.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Buddha Purnima was celebrated on 25th May 2008. The programme consisted Bhajans, puja and flower offering followed by prasad

distribution. Close to 125 devotees attended the programme

UPCOMING EVENTS

Guru Purnima will be celebrated on 18th July 2008 at 6 pm with bhajans, short meditation, worship, flower offering and prasad distribution.

Krishna Janmashtami will be held on August 24, 2008 at 6 pm. The programme consists bhajans, puja, flower offering followed by prasad distribution.

NOTICE FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

During the past year, on two occasions, spiritual services of the Vedanta Society were interrupted by individuals who approached the altar or podium and sought to express their opinions on various matters. Both the content of their remarks and the manner in which they made them were considered highly offensive by many present.

The Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee wish to remind all members, friends and visitors to the Society's services that unauthorized interruption of a service is not acceptable behaviour and that it will not be tolerated.

Those who would like to express personal opinions or concerns on any issue pertaining to the Society should give them in writing to any member of the Executive Committee or the Board of Trustees. These bodies will discuss the issue and respond in writing. All of us who attend services of the Society have a responsibility to maintain the decorum and spiritual atmosphere of the place. We ask for everyone's cooperation in this regard.

REGISTRATION FORM
FOR
SUMMER RETREAT, FALL SEMINAR
& 'BLISS HAVEN' RETREAT

Please indicate which event(s) you plan to attend, and return the form with payment to the Vedanta Society of Toronto, 120 Emmett Avenue, Toronto, ON, M6M 2J6. Please note that space is limited; please register as early as possible.

Cheques may be made out to 'Vedanta Society of Toronto', with the name of the event mentioned on the 'memo' line.

Name(s) of attendee(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

- Annual Summer Retreat - Saturday, June 21 and Sunday, June 22, 2008,**
at the Vedanta Society of Toronto.

This year the Retreat will be conducted by **Swami Prabuddhananda** (Minister, Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco). The topic will be **Sankaracharya's Prasnottara Ratna-Malika**. The program will run from **6am to 9pm on Saturday and 6am to 5pm on Sunday**, and will include meditation, discourses, discussion, devotional music, and meals (Saturday: breakfast, lunch & dinner; Sunday: breakfast & lunch).

Number of persons attending: Both days: _____ (\$75 per person)
Saturday only: _____ (\$50 per person)
Sunday only: _____ (\$35 per person)

- 40th Anniversary Seminar – Saturday, September 6, 2008,**
at the Vedanta Society of Toronto

This Seminar will feature **Swami Prabhananda** (General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission) as the Chief Guest. He will be joined by **Swami Tyagananda** (Minister, Vedanta Society of Massachusetts, Boston), **Swami Yogatmananda** (Minister, Vedanta Society of Providence), and **Swami Atmajnanananda** (Resident Minister, Vedanta Society of Greater Washington DC). The topic will be '**Communicating Vedanta**'. The program will run from **8:30am to 4pm**, and will include discourses, discussion, and lunch.

Number of persons attending: _____ (\$40 per person)

- Retreat at 'Bliss Haven' (Dunnville, Ontario) – Friday, September 19 to Sunday, September 21**

This fall, the Vedanta Society will be holding a special Retreat in Dunneville (near Stoney Creek) from **September 19 to 21**; 'Bliss Haven', the retreat centre, is a historic mansion located in an idyllic natural setting. This Retreat will be led by **Swami Sridharananda** (Head, Vedanta Centre of Sydney, Australia), on the topic '**Sri Ramakrishna – Holy Mother – Swami Vivekananda**'.

Number of persons attending: _____ (\$130 per person)