



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter June 2009

Words to Inspire

“ My advice is, give your mind wholly to Him free from any useless thought or work. Engage yourself always in Dhyana, Japa and constant remembrance of God.”

- Eternal Companion, Letters – Page 317

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

(From “The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna” —page 313)

Master: “It is difficult to lead the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment. Once Pratap said to me: ‘Sir, we follow the example of King Janka, He led the life of a householder in a detached spirit. We shall follow him.’ I said to him: ‘Can one be like King Janaka by merely wishing it? How many austerities he practiced in order to acquire divine knowledge! He practiced the most intense form of asceticism for many years and only then returned to the life of the world.’

“Is there, then, no hope for householders? Certainly there is. They must practice spiritual discipline in solitude for some days. Thus they will acquire knowledge and devotion. Then it will not hurt them to lead the life of the world. But when you practice discipline in solitude, keep yourself entirely away from your family. You must not allow your wife, son, daughter, mother, father, sister, brother, friends, or relatives near you. While thus practising discipline in solitude, you should think: ‘I have no one else in the world. God is my all.’ You must also pray to Him, with tears in yours eyes, for knowledge and devotion.

“If you ask me how long you should live in solitude away from your family, I should say that it would be good for you if you could spend

even one day in such a manner. Three days at a time are still better. One may live in solitude for twelve days, a month, three months or a year, according to one’s convenience and ability. One hasn’t much to fear, if one leads the life of a householder after attaining knowledge and devotion.

“If you break a jack-fruit after rubbing your hands with oil, then its sticky milk will not smear your hands. While playing the game of hide-and-seek, you are safe if you but once touch the “granny”. Be turned into gold by touching the philosopher’s stone. After that you may remain buried underground a thousand years; when you are taken out you will still be gold.

“The mind is like milk. If you keep the mind in the world, which is like water, then the milk and water will get mixed. That is why people keep milk in a quiet place and let it set into curd, and then churn butter from it. Likewise, through spiritual discipline practiced in solitude, churn the butter of knowledge and devotion from the milk of the mind.

Then that butter can easily be kept in the water of the world. It will not get mixed with the world. The mind will float detached on the water of the world.”

DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY (Part-II)

V. Kumar Murty

5. Uncertainty in the small becomes certainty in the large

The fourth principle is that uncertainty in the small tends to get averaged into a degree of certainty when viewed in the large. I do not know whether Dr. X will get the Nobel Prize in Physics this year, but I know with almost 100% certainty that *some* physicist will get the Nobel Prize in Physics this year. An increase in scale decreases the degree of uncertainty.

As another example, consider the surface of a table. It appears quite smooth. But if we were to look at a microscopic level, we would see many undulations. From that microscopic view, our conclusion would have been that the surface is quite uneven. It is true at that level but not at a larger level. Similarly, the laws of physics are deterministic at the macroscopic level, but become probabilistic statements at the atomic level.

6. Dealing with Uncertainty

Now that we have reflected on the nature of uncertainty and its diverse manifestations, we can consider the problem of how to deal with it from an existential point of view. We have identified four principles:

- (a) Uncertainty is an intrinsic aspect of the phenomenal world.
- (b) There are varieties of uncertainty. Not all instances of uncertainty disturb us equally or require our active intervention.
- (c) Uncertainty is a psychological state.

(d) Uncertainty in the small tends to become averaged into a greater degree of certainty in the large.

Thus, principle (a) teaches us that it is not a case that we will ever be able to eliminate uncertainty. It is therefore necessary to learn to deal with it. Moreover, principle (b) teaches us that in dealing with it, we need only address those instances that pose an existential problem for us. Dealing with it involves two aspects. The first is to apply principle (c), namely that we are dealing with a psychological state. The second is to apply principle (d) and seek certainty in a larger perspective.

To address our mental state, we have to satisfy ourselves that we are doing and have done everything we can to remove the uncertainty. We should not have a doubt that if we had taken this action or made that effort, we might not be in the current state of uncertainty. Those who exert themselves to reach their goals, to shape their life according to their dreams will find themselves in a better position to face uncertainty. They have the satisfaction of knowing that they have done everything within their power. That has the potential to produce an inner calmness, which is necessary for taking a bigger picture.

There is the story of a bird that was resting on a ship when the ship was in harbour. While the bird was asleep, the ship left harbour and went out into the ocean. Later, when the bird awoke and found that it was surrounded by water in an unfamiliar setting, it decided to try and fly back to land. It did not know which direction to fly in, so in turn it flew in each of North, East, West and South. In each case, it flew as far as it could and when its

wings were getting tired, it turned back and returned to the ship. Having exhausted all directions and not being able to find land, it resigned itself to its condition and decided to wait on the ship itself. Sri Ramakrishna told this story to explain the idea that surrendering oneself to a higher ideal becomes possible when one has exerted oneself in making every possible effort. He would say 'tire your wings'.

Self-exertion is a good way of dealing with worry. Anxiety and worry deplete our energy and contribute nothing to our well-being. Since we are so rooted in our physical aspect, engaging it in constructive action will tend to draw the mind in that direction as well. It is said that an idle mind is the devil's own workshop. An idle mind does not actually sit still. It tends to generative unproductive and unhelpful thoughts. Keeping the mind constructively occupied is an essential component of dealing with uncertainty.

The extent to which one has to 'tire your wings' depends on the personality of the individual. Some have a natural calm bent of mind. If we look at the life of Rama, we find that he had the ability to remain calm at all times and to not be unnerved or perturbed by circumstances. We know how on the eve of his coronation, he was asked to give up the throne, give up living in the palace with his family and to go into exile for fourteen years. While everyone around him was outraged, distraught and emotional, Rama took it with great calmness and asked for blessings from the very person who was responsible for this sudden change of circumstance. The *Bhagavad Gita* says '*samatvam yoga ucyate*' – equanimity is yoga – and Rama was the embodiment of this ideal.

To reach that level of self-surrender, we might reflect on the fact that

whatever has a beginning has an ending. The problems we are facing now had a beginning and they will have an ending. No problem lasts forever. Taking the stance of the witness of all the changes and all the phenomena that we see around us, we will discover a greater degree of calmness and ability to withstand uncertainty. It may seem paradoxical at first, but the same witness attitude will also loosen our desire for certainty. Things come and go, or as the *Gita* says, nature functions. While everything else comes and goes, the witness is the only constant. My body is constantly changing. My mind is constantly changing. But I, as the witness of all these changes do not change.

If we feel that we do not have the strength to do this, then we can instead reflect on the great spiritual giants who were able to do it and actually carry it into their everyday life. Swami Vivekananda says "Stand as a rock. You are indestructible. You are the Self, the God of the Universe." By recalling such statements, gradually conviction and strength do come. Probing more deeply into the nature of 'I', we discover that it is neither material nor psychological. It is pure consciousness and pure love. And it is not only 'I' but also 'you' and 'us'. If we fully identify with that state of pure loving consciousness, there is no question of uncertainty, but there is no question of certainty either. At the level of spirit, such distinctions do not make sense.

And this is the final answer: ultimately the way of dealing with uncertainty is by giving up both certainty and uncertainty and embracing our identity with pure spirit, pure loving consciousness.

(Concluded)

KALI TEMPLE AT DAKSHINESWAR

(Continued – Part III)

Unable to resist the persuasion of Mathur Babu, Sri Ramakrishna at last entered the temple service, on condition that Hriday should be asked to assist him. His first duty was to dress and decorate the image of Kali.

One day the priest of the Radhakanta temple accidentally dropped the image of Krishna on the floor, breaking one of its legs. The pundits advised the Rani to install a new image, since the worship of an image with a broken limb was against the scriptural injunctions. But the Rani was fond of the image, and she asked Sri Ramakrishna's opinion. In an abstracted mood, he said: "This

solution is ridiculous. If a son-in-law of the Rani broke his leg, would she discard him and put another in his place? Wouldn't she rather arrange for his treatment? Why should she not do the same thing in this case too? Let the image be repaired and worshipped as before."

It was a simple, straightforward solution and was accepted by the Rani. Sri Ramakrishna himself mended the break. The priest was dismissed for his carelessness, and at Mathur Babu's earnest request Sri Ramakrishna accepted the office of priest in the Radhakanta temple.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS A PRIEST

Born in an orthodox Brahmin family, Sri Ramakrishna knew the formalities of worship, its rites and rituals. The innumerable gods and goddesses of the Hindu religion are the human aspects of the indescribable and incomprehensible Spirit, as conceived by the finite human mind. They understand and appreciate human love and emotion, help men to realize their secular and spiritual ideals, and ultimately enable men to attain liberation from the miseries of phenomenal life. The Source of light, intelligence, wisdom, and strength is the One alone from whom comes the fulfillment of desire.

Yet, as long as a man is bound by his human limitations, he cannot but worship God through human forms. He must use human symbols. Therefore Hinduism asks the devotees to look on God as the ideal father, the ideal mother, the ideal husband, the ideal son, or the ideal friend. But the name ultimately leads to the Nameless, the form to the Formless, the word to the Silence, the emotion to the serene realization of Peace in Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

The gods gradually merge in the one God. But until that realization is achieved, the devotee cannot dissociate human factors from his worship. Therefore the Deity is bathed and clothed and decked with ornaments. He is fed and put to sleep. He is propitiated with hymns, songs, and prayers. And there are appropriate rites connected with all these functions.

For instance, to secure for himself external purity, the priest bathes himself in holy water and puts on a holy cloth. He purifies the mind and the sense-organs by appropriate meditations. He fortifies the place of worship against evil forces by drawing spiritual centers of the body and invokes the Supreme Spirit in his heart. Then he transfers the Supreme Spirit to the image before him and worships the image, regarding it no longer as clay or stone, but as the embodiment of Spirit, throbbing with Life and Consciousness. After the worship the Supreme Spirit is recalled from the image to its true sanctuary, the heart of the priest.

(To be Continued)

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

The **Buddha Purnima** was celebrated on **10th May 2009** at **11:00 am**. The programme consisted bhajan, Puja, flower

offerings followed by prasad distribution. About 120 devotees attended the programme.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The **Guru Purnima** will be celebrated on **Tuesday, 7th July 2009** at **6:30pm**. with bhajan, reading, worship, flower offering followed by prasad distribution.

PRAVRAJIKA AMALAPRANA MATAJI, General Secretary, Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission

will speak on '**The Significance of Guru Purnima**' on Tuesday July 7th at 7:00pm.

The **Sri Krishna Janmashtami** will be held on **Thursday, August 13, 2009** at **6.30 pm**. The programme will consist of bhajans, puja, flower offering followed by prasad distribution.

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 6, 2009** 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 7, 2009** 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 a month at Roncesvalles Food Sharing, 263 Roncesvalles Avenue, Toronto M6R 2L9. 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. Annual Summer Retreat at Vedanta Society of Toronto with Swami Amaranandaji – Head, Centre Vedantique, Geneva, June 27: 6:00 am to 9:00 pm & June 28: 6:00 am to 5:00 pm.**
There is a registration fee of \$75 per person for this two-day program. If you wish to participate, please contact the society by June 15.
- 2. The Annual Seminar with Swami Ishtananda, Minister, Vedanta Center of St. Petersburg, Florida as the Chief Guest on Saturday, September 05, 2009.**
There is a registration fee of \$35/Adult and \$10/Student
Space is limited and will be provided on a first-come first-served basis.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher- Swami Kripamayananda,
Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 2009

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|---|---|
| | <u>1</u> | <u>2</u> 10 am Soup Kitchen | <u>3</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>5</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' | <u>6</u> VIGIL 6am to 6pm |
| <u>7</u> Lecture: 11 am 'Anubhuti :The Experience' <u>VVM- 1:30 pm</u> RAM NAM : 5 pm | <u>8</u> | <u>9</u> 10 am Soup Kitchen | <u>10</u> | <u>11</u> | <u>12</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani' | <u>13</u> VVM Rehearsal for Pradarshanam |
| <u>14</u> 11 am Vedanta Vidya Mandir <u>Pradarshanam</u> | <u>15</u> | <u>16</u> 10 am Soup Kitchen | <u>17</u> | <u>18</u> | <u>19</u> NO SCRIPTURE CLASS | <u>20</u> |
| <u>21</u> 11 am: Swami Tyaganandaji's video- <i>BhaktiYoga:</i> <i>Preparation (1)</i> | <u>22</u> | <u>23</u> 10 am Soup Kitchen | <u>24</u> | <u>25</u> | <u>26</u> NO SCRIPTURE CLASS | <u>27</u> Annual Summer Retreat |
| <u>28</u> Annual Summer Retreat | <u>29</u> | <u>30</u> 10 am Soup Kitchen | | | | |

Summer Recess

The Vedanta Society of Toronto will observe its regular summer recess this year from June 29 to September 4. The Annual Seminar will be held on September 5. Regular services will resume after the Seminar. Please note, however, that Guru Purnima will be celebrated during the recess, on Tuesday, July 7 at 6:30pm and Janmashtami on Thursday, August 13 at 6:30pm. 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!