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Newsletter March 2007

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Master (to Bankim): 'Woman and gold' alone is the world; that alone is Maya. Because of it you cannot see or think of God. After the birth of one or two children, husband and wife should live as brother and sister and talk only of God. Then both their minds will be drawn to God, and the wife will be a help to the husband on the path of spirituality. None can taste divine bliss without giving up his animal feeling. A devotee should pray to God to help him get rid of this feeling. It must be a sincere prayer. God is our Inner Controller; He will certainly listen to our prayer if it is sincere.

- Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna – page 670

Words To Inspire

Sri Ramakrishna- Relation with His Wife [From The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, pp37-38]

The Master took up the duty of instructing his young wife, and this included everything from housekeeping to the knowledge of Brahman. He taught her how to trim a lamp, how to behave toward people according to their differing temperaments, and how to conduct herself before visitors. He instructed her in the mysteries of spiritual life – prayer, meditation, japa, deep contemplation and samadhi. The first lesson that Sarada Devi received was: "God is everybody's Beloved, just as the moon is dear to every child. Everyone has the same right to pray to Him. Out of His grace He reveals Himself to all who call upon Him. You too will see Him if you but pray to Him."

Totapuri, coming to know of the Master's marriage, had once remarked: "What does it matter? He alone is firmly established in the Knowledge of Brahman who can adhere to his spirit of discrimination and renunciation even while living with his wife. He alone has attained the supreme illumination who can look on man and woman alike as Brahman. A man with the idea of sex may be a good aspirant, but he is still far from goal." Sri Ramakrishna and his wife lived together at Dakshineswar, but their minds always soared above the worldly plane. A few months after Sarada Devi's arrival, Sri Ramakrishna arranged, on an auspicious day, a special worship of Kali, the Divine Mother. Instead of an image of the Deity, he placed on the seat the living image, Sarada Devi herself.

The worshipper and the Worshipped went into deep Samadhi and in the transcendental plane their souls were united. After several hours Sri Ramakrishna came down again to the relative plane, sang a hymn to the Great Goddess, and surrendered, at the feet of the living image, himself, his rosary, and the fruits of his life-long sadhana. This is known in Tantra as the Shodasi Puja, the "Adoration of Woman". Sri Ramakrishna realized the significance of the great statement of the Upanishad: "O Lord, Thou art the woman, Thou art the man; Thou art the boy; Thou art the girl; Thou art the old, tottering on their crutches. Thou pervadest the universe in its multiple forms."

By his marriage Sri Ramakrishna admitted the great value of marriage in man's spiritual evolution, and by adhering to his monastic vows he demonstrated the imperative necessity of self-control, purity, and continence, in the realization of God. By his unique spiritual relationship with his wife he proved that husband and wife can live together as spiritual companions. Thus his life is a synthesis of the ways of life of the householder and the monk.

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

Swami Kripamayananda (based on a talk at the Vedanta Society of Toronto on Sunday, February 4, 2007)

Who is a friend? A friend is a well-wisher, someone with whom we share interests, values, goals. There are casual friends and life-long friends. With casual friends, we may share passing or temporary interests. Our life-long friends are those with whom we share our life's goals. For

example, two monks may have a life-long friendship based on their common goal of spiritual realization.

Sometimes, a good book can be our friend. Mahatma Gandhi said that the Bhagavad Gita was his mother. In it, he found counsel, guidance, consolation and reassurance. The name of God can also be our friend. It gives us joy, helps us to reflect on our experiences and deal with them, and guides our mind and whole being to a higher plane.

All of us need friends. Human beings are social creatures and they need social interaction as they need food and water for survival. Happiness, and even sadness, has to be shared. Joy and grief have to be shared. Friendship gives us an opportunity to share experiences.

This sharing is a two-way street. If we go to someone to unburden ourselves, but never concern ourselves with the well-being of the other person, it is not friendship. This is why it is said that friendship is between equals.

Sometimes we keep the company of certain individuals because we expect something from them. This is not friendship. Sri Ramakrishna says that many come to visit a rich person with the hope of getting some gift from him. But the person who comes out of love and brings some gift attracts the affection of the rich man, because he is not asking for anything.

If one is a supplicant to the other, it is not friendship. This applies as much to individuals as to communities and even nations. In the context of a talk about the relation of India to other countries, Swami Vivekananda said "Rights and privileges and other things can only come through friendship, and friendship can only be expected between two equals. When one of the parties is a beggar, what friendship can there be?"¹

Friends do not act out of obligation, but out of honesty and sincerity. Anything done out of obligation has an expectation behind it and when that expectation is not fulfilled, it could lead to friction.

Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, says that he is a friend who speaks out at the right time. Sometimes we have to warn our friends, even if it is unpleasant. Our concern for our friend's well-being will outweigh the risk of annoying or offending our friend.

Deep friendship matures into unselfish love and it is constant. Swami Vivekananda says "In happiness, in misery, in famine, in pain, in the grave, in heaven, or in hell who never gives me up is my friend. Is such friendship a joke? A man may have salvation through such friendship."²

Through such friendship one can in fact approach God. This is how the gopis and gopas of Vrindavan approached Krishna. They did not know, and did not care, about his greatness. They only knew him as their friend and through that, they established a deep relationship. This is also how Arjuna approached Krishna. When Arjuna realized Krishna's spiritual status, he felt embarrassed at calling him his 'friend'. Nevertheless, we can approach God through friendship. Not only that, Krishna himself says in the Gita that He is the friendship between friends.

In our spiritual journey, we may first conceive of God as external and we try to establish a relationship with God. What form that relationship takes depends on our attitude and approach. But whatever the approach, we will keep the company of God through our thoughts, our words and our actions. Through this frequent company, and later constant company, closeness is established. This closeness is a kind of friendship. Slowly, as our friendship deepens, our friend comes closer to us. God, who was external, comes closer to us and is realized to be within us or a part of us.

We said above that friendship is between equals and we may protest that we cannot approach God as an equal. We may even think that it is blasphemous. We are so used to approaching God as a supplicant. It is fine to approach God as a powerful being from whom we can beg the things we need in life. There is nothing wrong in that approach. However, if we are to grow spiritually, the relationship with God has to mature to be based on love. The supplicant has to develop a more two-way relationship.

Vedanta teaches that God, the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent ruler of the Universe is the same as the spirit within us. Our essential nature is not body or mind, but spirit. This is why it is said that God made man in His own image. Our true nature is divinity. It is because of this that it is possible to approach God as friend.

Now the question is, how can we cultivate friendship with God? Sri Ramakrishna gave simple guidelines for developing a sweet and friendly relationship with God. He told 'M' that the method is to "Repeat God's name, sing his glories and keep holy company."

Finally, there is another kind of spiritual friendship, and that is to have a friendly attitude towards all

spiritual traditions. I do not have to become a Buddhist or a Christian or a Muslim or a Hindu, but I can learn from them by being friendly. By approaching all traditions in a friendly way, we open our mind to the wisdom of that tradition. Seeing our friendly approach, our fellow travelers of different traditions will also open their minds and share their wisdom. In that exchange, both parties benefit, and through this spiritual friendship, they help each other on their common spiritual journey.

¹ - Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 3, "The influence of Indian spiritual thought in England".

² - Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 8, "My life and mission".

Worship of God

By Swami Yatiswarananda

(From his article 'How to Become Spiritually Awakened', *Vedanta Kesari*, August 1965)

What is the conception of God? In Europe a devotee said to me 'Swami, never utter the word "God". It calls up our childhood image, viz., there is one beyond the clouds, in the Heaven, ever eager to punish those who break His laws. I cannot think of that.' I said, 'All right, use the word Ishwara. I use the word Brahman.'

If we wish to worship God we must feel our nearness to Him. In a way He is the Creator, the Protector and the Destroyer. He takes things back to Himself, which we call destroying; but He is much more than that, He is the Soul of our souls, nearer than the nearest, dearer than the dearest. He comes to us as Father and Mother. He comes to us as the Guru and He comes to us also as Ista Devata - the deity chosen for worship. According to the dualistic Vedanta, and most of us should start as dualists, the soul and the over-soul - the Atman and Paramatman - are ever connected. They are ever in union; yet owing to the impurity of our mind, we become attached to the Lord's creation but not to Him. A great Western psychologist, seeing the ways of ordinary religious people, once remarked, 'People do not want God. They want to use God!' They want to pray to God so that He may grant all their prayers and if He does not grant these prayers, some become skeptical and say "Oh, God does not exist, and even if He exists, He is deaf, He is blind, He does not respond". That kind of childish conception is no good. Again you want only the good God, as if He has no other task but to grant you boons.

You know, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna worshipped the Supreme Spirit, first in the form of Kali, a representation of the Cosmic Process. Mother with one hand is creating; with another hand She is protecting; with the third hand She is destroying; and with the fourth hand She is holding the decapitated head. This is the formal representation of what one of the Upanisadic seers said. The disciple asked the father 'Adhi hi bhagavo brahmeti', 'Master, tell me about Brahman.' And the father replied: 'Brahman is that out of which all things come into being, by which all things live and unto which all things go back'.

(to be continued in the next issue)

Belur Math News

Vijayawada centre of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission launched a project named *Viveka Vahini* on 12 January, the National Youth Day.

This programme is meant to carry the message of Swami Vivekananda to different educational institutions and rural areas through a mobile unit equipped with audio-visual equipment, pictorial exhibits, and literature on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda. The project will also focus on personality development, national integration, and other themes of national interest in the light of Swami Vivekananda's teachings. New students home foundation stone laid by the Vice President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji, at Nagpur on January 22nd 2007.

A town centre of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum, has been started with the land, buildings, etc received from Ramakrishna Vivekananda Sevashrama, Belgaum (popularly known as Bhate's house where Swami Vivekananda had stayed for 4 days in October 1892). The address of the centre is: Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, 'Datta Kripa', 3553 A/2, Swami Vivekananda Marg, Near City Corporation, Belgaum 590002, Karnataka; Phone: (0831) 2431230.

Quantum Leap

Two Brothers and the Temple

By Utsha Saha, Age 10

(Based on a Jewish folktale as told by Mr. Eli Rubenstein) There was a Jewish king and he wanted to build a temple for the worship of God. The king had to find the right place to build the temple. In the king's kingdom there was a city. In that city lived two brothers. The brothers had a quarrel and split up. They did not talk to each other but had lots of love in their hearts. One brother had many children, the other didn't. One day the younger brother thought, "My brother has no kids. So who will take care of him when he is old?" The older brother

also thought of something. "My brother has so many children to feed so how will he feed himself?" The younger brother had an idea; he would bring a bag of grain and put it in his brother's grain tin. The older brother also had the same idea. So late, late at night the brothers woke up. The younger brother walked across a field and poured the grain in his brother's grain tin. The older brother did the same but just put it in the younger brother's tin. Both brothers go home but their grain tin is always full. This happened everyday.

One day the brothers woke up at the same time. They walked and bumped into each other. "What are you doing?" they asked each other. Both saw each other's bag of grain. They started crying with love. They embraced each other. Tears full of pure love fell. In the city the people came to know this. The king heard this. Where the tears of love fell there the temple was built. So, where there is love, there is God.

Upcoming Events

Annual Summer Retreat: June 23-24, 2007

Annual Spiritual Retreat will be held at the centre during June 23rd - June 24th 2007.

Swami Atmarupanandaji Maharaj of the Hollywood centre will conduct the Retreat.

Past Events

Maha Shiva Ratri was celebrated on Feb 16, 2007 at 6.30pm. The programme included puja, devotional songs, Offering of Water and flowers to Shiva and distribution of prasad. Close to 150 devotees and friends attended.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna's 172nd Birth Anniversary was celebrated on February 25th from 11 am. The program included puja, devotional songs, pushpanjali, Homa and distribution of Prasad. More than 250 devotees and friends attended the program.

Regular Services

Bookstore

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.

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

The Centre is a regular contributor to the Daily Bread Food Bank serving the Greater Toronto Area. We accept all donations of non-perishable food items throughout the year.

Interviews and 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.

Ram Nam

April 15th at 5:00 pm.

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. There will be no class on March 2nd.

Soup Kitchen

The Soup is cooked at the Vedanta Society and served twice a month at Roncesvalles Food Sharing, 263 Roncesvalles Avenue, Toronto M6R 2L9. This month, the Soup Kitchen dates are March 8th and 15th. Please contact the Centre if you are interested in participating. *Donations for the Soup Kitchen will be highly appreciated.*

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.**

Vedanta Vidya Mandir

An educational programme for young people ages 4 - 17, teaching Indian Spirituality, History, Values, Sanskrit, Music and Yoga - is usually held twice a month. **Classes are from 1 pm to 4 pm.**

Please use front entrance.

Vigil

On Saturday, March 10, 2007 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. 416-240-7262.

Vivekanand Library

A library of roughly 750 books are available for borrowing. Lending hours are Sundays, 10am - 11am and 4pm - 6pm. Please call ahead for all other times.

Vivekanand Seminar

Swami Kripamayananda leads a 'Vivekananda Seminar' twice a month at the University of Toronto, Mississauga Campus (Erindale), hosted by the Department of Historical Studies. Please contact the Centre for dates and times.

Volunteering

For those who wish to volunteer their time and energy to the Centre, we dedicate Saturday mornings from 10am - 2pm to Ashram Seva. Keeping the Society's premises clean and orderly greatly benefits all. If interested, please call the Centre.

For other services, please go to our [events](#) page.

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