



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter March 2009

Words to Inspire

'The secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice. To be good and do good—that is the whole of religion.'

- Swami Vivekananda

BEING AND DOING

(From Swami Lokeshwarananda's 'Practical Spirituality'—pages 3-4)

A good man is good because he has to be good, because he feels he cannot be otherwise. If a man is good because of fear of some superior power, visible or invisible, then goodness is not something which circumstances over which he has no control have imposed on him. Or it may be he is good because he expects by being good he will get some reward, which he cannot otherwise get. This too is an artificial goodness, a goodness assumed with a view to gaining some end which is otherwise beyond his reach. A truly good man is good not because of any fear of punishment or any hope of reward, but it is his nature to be good and he just cannot help being good. If this is the test of a good man, how many among those who pass as good men and women in society answer to that description?

A man is often judged by the deeds he does. It is doubtful if this is a correct criterion always. He may do good deeds from an ulterior motive which others cannot detect and which perhaps he himself is not yet conscious of. Or it is even possible that in the beginning he is moved entirely by an altruistic motive, but as he goes on, his self-interest asserts itself and ultimately it may turn out that in whatever he does the motive is selfish. The thin coating of goodness with which he began soon gives way to the pressure of self-interest which, so long dormant, has now become irresistible. This is true of most people engaged in social work. Some are blatantly selfish; whatever good work they do is only a cloak to hide their real motive of gaining power., political or otherwise. It is only a means to an end which, not withstanding appearances, is by no means good.

Take for instance the case of an individual or an organization spending money in charity with object of popularizing a particular religious creed or dogma. Worse still is the case in which there is an attempt to impose a particular political philosophy on a people under the pretext of giving them aid when they are in difficulty. Can this be justified? But this is very likely to happen and this in fact is happening in many places.

The criterion is the motive, but the motive cannot be good if the donor, whether an individual or an organization, is bad. A wicked man trying to do good to others is likely to do more harm than by the very manner in which he will function. Such a man may give some material help, but, in doing so, he may cause much moral damage. Perhaps he will hurt the self-respect of the people he is helping; he may even exploit them for selfish ends. A bad man may have flickerings of goodness now and then., but there is every possibility that his evil propensities will prevail in the end.

It is therefore, risky to judge a man by what he does. The criterion should be what sort of man he is. Being is always more important than doing. A good man may not do much social work, yet his very presence has an elevating influence upon others. The good he does is silent and unobtrusive; it is also lasting. The person who bustles about giving the impression that he is doing much may really not be doing much that is good. A good man need not do much, but whatever he does becomes the source of much good because he is goodness itself.

Holy Mother and the Problem of Alienation

Swami Prabhananda

(Based on the Talk given by the Revered Swamiji at the Vedanta Society on September 7, 2008)

Regarding the present subject, someone might ask, 'Why has Holy Mother been chosen as the subject—and not Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda—in the context of the problem of alienation?' In answer, I shall tell you something based on my own observation. Those who have visited Belur Math must have noticed that there is a tiny temple there dedicated to Holy Mother. In spite of it being so small, I find that the Brahmacharins, the Swamis, and the devotees will spend more time at the temple of Holy Mother than they do in the main temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna. While prostrating, if they spend one minute in front of Sri Ramakrishna then they will spend more than 2 minutes in front of Holy Mother. People rely on her bounty. This is why I have chosen to speak on Holy Mother in the context of the problem of alienation.

Alienation—in the sense of the state of feeling estranged or separated from one's own milieu, work, products of work, or self—is a basic problem of life. The word 'alienation' has various meanings, the most common being a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, self-estrangement, or social isolation. The primary definition is the sense of self-estrangement, which means that the individual in one way or another is out of touch with himself.

Though we all know that humans are social beings, each person lives in a world of his own and in a state of alienation. The different kinds of alienation can be grouped under three heads: self-alienation, economic-alienation, and social alienation. Here I shall focus on self-alienation. Again, self-alienation may be said to have three dimensions: alienation from God, alienation from one's higher Self, and alienation from one's fellow beings.

As said before, humans are by nature social beings, yet we find today that the breakdown of joint families into nuclear families, as well as the rise in the number of divorces and unmarried couples living together, etc., have created a new malady called self-alienation. The present shift away from a family-oriented society indicates that

the human mind has become more fragmented and fractured than ever before. This malady seems to be deeply rooted in modern culture.

Moreover, when I look around I find that our present-day education turns out self-confident individuals with bristling egos. They are ever conscious of their self-interest, but have less capacity to feel for others and less ability to communicate with others.

Communication is not worth the name if it does not communicate, along with some information, a touch of the heart. The capacity to genuinely communicate with others, to love and be loved, is vital to human happiness and self-fulfilment. Unfortunately it is in short supply today.

In the life of Holy Mother, we find a wonderful personality whose qualities as wife, mother, and nun were harmoniously blended. She demonstrated that conjugal love and devotion are possible without a physical relationship with one's spouse. In spite of being married, she remained a nun, pure in body and mind, and in uninterrupted communion with God. Again, she took loving care of others as if they were her own children, but she was totally unattached in her love and concern, and she expected nothing in return from anybody.

We shall look at Holy mother's life from 1872 to 1920, and divide it into three periods. During the first period, from 1872 to 1886, the most important event in her life occurred—the event in which Sri Ramakrishna worshipped her as *Shodasi*, the Divine Mother. The Divine Mother's manifestation in the *Shodasi* form (Tripura Sundari) is a special manifestation of the Divine Mother, and incidentally is worshipped as the presiding deity in the Shankaracharya Maths.

As many of you know, the monks of the Ramakrishna Order belong to Shankaracharya's monastic Order. During this special worship of *Shodasi*, Sri Ramakrishna invoked in Holy Mother the living presence of the Divine Mother. As a result, we find that after this a change came over her life, as well as in her relationship towards others. Not only was she filled with a new manifestation of the Divine Spirit, but she also

became united at the spiritual level with Sri Ramakrishna. If someone reads the details of that incident and looks at the utterances of both of them, he will not fail to notice that the two of them became united in Spirit.

The second phase of her life was from 1886 to 1900. The Master passed away on 16th August 1886, and her niece Radharani (Radhu) was born on 26 January 1900. As observed by Swami Saradeshananda, a disciple of Holy Mother, this was a period of intense sadhana for her. She seemed to be preparing herself to play the role that Sri Ramakrishna had designated for her. Overwhelmed with grief at the loss of the Master's physical presence, she engaged herself in the practice of intense austerities and spiritual disciplines. She also prayed to the Divine: 'Please bless me so that I may not see faults in others.' During this period she would spend many hours of the day in meditation and often experienced deep ecstasy. She generally avoided a lot of interaction with others.

Towards the end of this period she started giving initiation liberally, although the first initiation she gave was to Swami Yoganandaji at Vrindavan soon after the Master's passing away. Gradually she emerged as the centre of spiritual strength for the entire Ramakrishna Movement. Manifesting the motherhood of the Divine in all its glory, she was the source of unflinching inspiration not only to her own disciples but also to the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji as well as other devotees. They all believed that she was their guide and she would solve their problems.

The third phase was from the time when Radharani was born in 1900 to 1920, when she passed away. During this phase, Sri Sarada Devi's motherhood was in full bloom. It expressed itself in various ways, and also helped to arouse the spiritual consciousness in others. Her activities spread in different dimensions. In the first photograph of Holy Mother, taken in 1898, she was forty-five, but she looks like a young woman of twenty. However, in the pictures taken thereafter we find that her health had broken down under the pressure of work and she looks quite advanced in age. At that time she was working very hard to take care of Radharani and her many relations. Moreover, she looked after a large number of devotees as also monastic members of the Ramakrishna Math.

Now we come to the problem of alienation in the context of Holy Mother's life. If we observe

closely we find that Holy Mother herself was totally free from the problem of alienation at all three levels—alienation from God, alienation from her higher Self, and alienation from her fellow beings.

The problem of alienation from God did not arise at all for her. She had firm faith and the realisation that as the moon is the 'uncle' of all children, so God is everyone's very own. Everyone has an equal right to call on Him. One who sincerely prays to God is blessed by Him. When she lived in the Nahabat at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna had told her this. She herself earnestly prayed to God and was blessed. After the Shodasi puja she palpably felt the presence of the Divine Mother all the time. She also told the devotees, 'Through realisation the mind becomes pure, and through the pure mind one obtains enlightenment.'

Holy Mother was also free from alienation from her higher Self. Based on her own realisation that all manifested phenomena were illusory, she once said: 'In the course of time, one does not feel even the existence of God. After attaining Jnana [wisdom], one sees that the gods and the deities are all Maya [illusion]. Everything comes into existence in time and also disappears in time.'

The third problem of alienation—alienation from fellow beings—also did not exist at all for Holy Mother. She was hardly aware of it, for she regarded everyone as her own child and also as Narayan Himself, the Supreme Lord. Her advice to others was: 'Learn to make the world your own. No one is a stranger, my child. The whole world is your own.' And this is what she practised throughout her life.

Not only was Holy Mother free from any form of alienation, no one who came to her ever felt any kind of alienation in her presence. We can hardly find another personality like her in history. Lest there be any doubt that she was free from a sense of alienation, let us briefly narrate some incidents by way of illustration:

Once when Holy Mother was staying at Koalpara, the wife of a boatman who had lost her teenaged son came to her and started crying. People gathered around and were amazed to see Holy Mother sharing the grief of the boatman's wife and loudly crying with her. After few minutes the wife of the boatman calmed down and returned home with her grief assuaged and heart filled.

An untouchable woman in Koalpara one day came to Holy Mother in tears and sought her

help. She had left her family and had been living with a man as his mistress for some time. On hearing that the man wanted to reject her, Holy mother called this man and gently reproached him, saying: 'Look here, this woman has renounced all for your sake and served you for so many days and now you want to leave her. It will be sinful for you to reject her now; there will be no room for you even in hell.' The man kept his head down and surrendered to Holy Mother. The couple was then reconciled.

Holy Mother initiated more than 1200 devotees from different parts of India. Most of them were from middle class or poor families. One day the Holy Mother heard that Balaram Bose's wife was complaining because a lady who had a poor reputation had taken refuge with Holy Mother, and she did not like it. Balaram Bose's wife even considered stopping her visits to Holy Mother. Balaram Bose had done much to help the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. On hearing about the complaint of Balaram Bose's wife, Holy Mother quietly said: 'Those who have taken shelter with me are always welcome. If that stops the visits of some others, I cannot help it.' This was enough to correct the attitude of Balaram Bose's wife.

One day Yogin Ma was annoyed with a Brahmacharin and started shouting that she would not be able to live in the Udbodhan house with him. Holy Mother tried to pacify her but failed. Then she quietly but firmly said: 'That boy has taken shelter here and calls me Mother. How can I ask him to go? If you feel that you cannot continue here, then it is your wish.'

Motherhood was Holy Mother's forte. She was mother first and foremost. Her spontaneous sympathy, empathy, and unique way of making others her own invariably left a deep impression on

the minds of others. No matter what the situation, Holy Mother was always forbearing, sympathetic, and compassionate to all, irrespective of their merits and demerits. She herself said that she was the mother of Amjad, the robber, as well as of Swami Saradananda, the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. She was the mother of the honest and the dishonest. And she was also the mother of animals, birds, and other creatures. Perhaps this is why Holy Mother has become so well-loved in India and the West.

Holy Mother once mentioned that Sri Ramakrishna had left her behind so that she could manifest the concept of motherhood. What is the importance of such a role and how does it help us? Being children of Holy Mother, we must try to imbibe that same spirit. I quote from the Chandi: '*Ya Devi Sarva-Bhuteshu Matri Rupena Samsthita* (The Devi who resides in all beings in the form of mother).' The quality of motherhood exists within all of us, though sometimes in a latent form. Let us try to manifest it. If we can cultivate this quality, we can, without doubt, overcome the problems of alienation. And if we find any difficulty, we have only to remember that we have a mother. This will be sufficient to remove all problems. But most of us don't remember this and we suffer. We are blessed that Holy mother has taken responsibility for us.

Let us remember that as we are children of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, we must set a high ideal for ourselves. As the Universal Mother, Holy Mother expects of us, her own children, to endeavour to make the whole world our own, just as she herself did. Without doubt, she is the ideal role model. Let us always remember this advice of Holy Mother: 'The purpose of one's life is fulfilled if one can give joy to others.'

Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

Religion is realization; not talk, not doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.

- Swami Vivekananda

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDAJI'S VISIT

Rev. Swami Tathagatanandaji Maharaj, Minister in charge, Vedanta Society of New York, will be visiting Toronto from March 26 to 29. He will give the Sunday Talk on March 29 at 11am.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Maha Shivratri was celebrated on Monday 23rd February 2009 at 6:30 pm. The programme consisted of reading, bhajans, puja,

water and flowers & bilwa leaves offering to Shiva by the devotees followed by prasad distribution.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sri Ramnavami will be observed on Friday 3rd April 2009 at 6:30 pm. The

programme will include Ramnam, bhajans, puja, and 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, March 14, 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, March 15, 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 (2nd and 3rd Thursday and 2nd and 3rd Tuesday) a month at Roncesvalles Food Sharing, 263 Roncesvalles Avenue, Toronto M6R 2L9. This month, the Soup Kitchen dates are March 10, 12, 17 and 19. 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.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<u>1</u> 11:00 am Sri Ramakrishna Birthday Celebration	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u> <u>NO SCRIPTURE CLASS</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>8</u> 11 am : Lecture <i>'Glimpses of Sri Ramakrishna'</i> <u>VVM 1:30 pm</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>13</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>14</u> Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
<u>15</u> 11 am : Lecture <i>'Living in Simplicity'</i> RAM NAM 5:00 pm	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>20</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>'Vivekachudamani'</i>	<u>21</u>
<u>22</u> 11 am : Lecture <i>'Self -knowledge through Karma Yoga'</i>	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>28</u>
<u>29</u> 11 am: Guest Lecture <i>'Suffering and Enlightenment'</i> By Swami Tathagatananda <u>VVM 1:30 pm</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u>				

Due to increasing costs and environmental concerns, please note that henceforth, the Newsletter will be mailed only to those members/devotees who specifically request it. If you would like to continue to receive the newsletter by mail please indicate so by mail/email or in the Membership/Renewal form. The members who have already opted for the Newsletter to be sent by post in the 2009 Membership form, need not write again. Please note that the Newsletter is always available at the centre and can also be downloaded from the website.