



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter March 2010

Words to Inspire

It is the law of nature that one gets what one wants. The desired object is obtained if one has sincere earnestness and yearning. You have heard that one realizes God, when one has such longing that life without God is unbearable. If you can develop that longing in this life, you will succeed.

From Spiritual Treasures: Letters of Swami Turiyananda, p 146

SPIRITUAL TREASURES

Dear Devotee,
I have received your letter of April 29. I am very happy to know that you are feeling much better after reading my letter. One needs enthusiasm.

The more you know that the Lord is your own and experience his close presence, the more worldly suffering will disappear and you will feel great JOY and comfort.

The Master used to say, "The more you go towards the east, the farther you will be from the west." If you can advance towards God, this world of maya will automatically go away from you.

The Lord is always present in the heart; we must keep our attention on him. God is the Soul of our souls, the Life of our lives; it is through his grace that we are alive and functioning in this world.

Therefore he is truly the first object of our love. Without knowing this, we undergo endless suffering. When we realize this fact, all of our troubles cease to exist. May the Master always keep this awareness awake in your heart, and then your life will be blessed. The Lord said in the Gita, as if he were swearing an oath.

"Having come into this transitory, joyless world, worship me. Fix your mind on me, be devoted

to me, sacrifice to me, bow down to me. Having thus disciplined yourself, and regarding me as the supreme goal you will come to me".

[IX.33-34) In spite of this encouraging and positive message of the Lord we still do not turn towards him. What else can be more unfortunate and regrettable than this?

Happiness and misery - none of them are permanent in this world. So the Lord has advised us to go beyond both.

That is possible if we can fix our minds completely on him, and by no other means. Therefore always keep him in your heart, and he will do the rest.

O foolish mind, think of Rama always;
What is the good of hundreds of other thoughts?
O tongue, chant unceasingly the name of Rama;
What gain is there in vain meaningless talk?
O ears, hear the story of Rama;
What benefit do you get by listening to secular music?
O eyes, behold everything as full of Rama;
And give up all else besides Rama.

With love and best wishes,
Turiyananda.

VISION OF BHAGVAD GITA FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (Part-I)

(Based on a talk given at the Vedanta Society of Toronto by

Narendra N. Bakhshi,

Professor Emeritus, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon)

It is said that we are all created equal. Yes, we all look alike, that is- we have similar features, a face with a mouth, a nose, two hands, two feet etc., but there the similarity ends.

In reality, we are all different. We differ in our temperaments, in our behavior, in our personality, in our thinking, in our development etc. A list of characteristics that differentiate us from one another in our personality- in our mental development- can simply go on and on.

Now, some of these traits in our personality (our mental development) are desirable, some undesirable and some highly desirable.

Thus, what is then required for the development of our personality-or, as, I prefer to call it 'Human Development', is to evolve or develop from the least desirable personality (which has highly undesirable characteristics), to the most desirable personality (which has highly desirable characteristics).

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

There are a huge variety of traits in a human personality which makes the overall situation rather complex. In order to get a handle for this complex situation, we can simplify it by classifying human personality in the following four major categories:

1. Beast
2. Animal
3. Human
4. Super-human or Divine

Here "beast" is the least desirable and "super-human (or the divine) the most desirable.

This classification, then, gives us the direction of human development (that is, the development of the personality) from the least desirable to the most desirable.

However, we should be aware of one thing though and that is quite important. On the outside, we all appear as human beings; however, our personality may be such that we may exhibit the traits of any of the four types mentioned above. It is the quality of the mind which determines our personality, our behavior, our development..

WHAT DO I MEAN BY THESE FOUR CATEGORIES?

WHAT ARE THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

1. Beast

Such a behavior or personality indicates a heedless, cruel and senseless behavior.

2. Animal

Such behavior is motivated simply for the satisfaction and urges of senses. There is no thought other than sense gratification.

In "Hitopdesa" a verse beautifully describes the difference between animal and human natures.

"ahara nidra bhaya maithunam ca
samanyam etat pasubhir naranam
dharmo tesan adhiko viseso
dharmena hinah pasubhih samanah

"Certain features are common to both men (humans) and animals such as food (hunger), sleep, fear and procreation. What makes man (human being) different from animals is dharma (righteousness, a life of moral and ethical values). Without dharma, a human being is like an animal".

Thus, human behavior starts with the dawn of wisdom in our personality, that is with the practice of dharma or living a righteous life with moral and ethical values such as truthfulness, peace, love, self-discipline, not hurting others, compassion, harmony, non-covetousness etc.. If we do not practice these moral and ethical value, our scriptures consider such a person as an animal. And, going down or

slipping downwards from animal behavior to the beastly behavior is not that far off.

The highest category or the most desirable personality is that of the super-human or divine personality. The qualities of such a personality are given in the sixteenth chapter of the Bhagvad Gita, chapter 16, verses 1, 2, and 3. There are 26 qualities of a divine personality:

1. Abhayam sattva samsuddhih jnana yoga vyavasthitih
Danam damas ca yajnasca svadhyaya stapa arjavam
“Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in the yoga of knowledge, charity, control of senses, yajna or sacrifice, study of scriptures, tapas or austerity, uprightness or straightforwardness.”
2. Ahimsa satyamakrodhah tyagah santirapaisunam
Daya bhutesvaloluptvam mardavam hrirachaplam
“Non-injury, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, absence of calumny, compassion to beings, non-covetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness.”
3. “Tejah ksama dhrtih saucam adroho natimanita bhavanti sampadam daivam abhijatasya bhārata.”
“Vigor/energy, forbearance, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride, these belong to one, who is born of the divine state, o descendant of Bharata”.
This is the vision of the Bhagvad Gita for the direction of human development. Reaching a stage where all these 26 traits are reflected in the fullest measure in one’s personality, Yes, it is a tall order, but the Rishi of the Katha Upanishad tells us, despair not.
“Utistha jagrata prapya vran nibedhata Khsurasya dhara nischita durtayaya durgam pathastat kavya vadanti.”

“Arise, awake and learn by approaching the excellent ones. The wise ones describe that path to be as impassable as a razor’s edge, which when sharpened, is difficult to tread on.”

Swami Vivekananda says (C.W. 2: 124):

“Those who dare, therefore, to struggle for victory, for truth, for religion, are in the right way: and that is what Vedas preach: Be not in despair; the way is difficult, like walking on the edge of a razor; yet despair not, arise, awake and find the ideal, the goal. (Quoted in Dec. 2007 issue of the Vedanta Kesari, Upanishads in daily life, page 536).

So, this is the vision of the Bhagvad Gita for human development, that is, rising from the least desirable personality (that of a beast) to the most desirable (that of a divine personality).

However, the question arises, all this is great, but how does one get there? How does one attain it? What path should one follow to achieve such a highly desirable as well as difficult goal?

And, that is the beauty, the power, the strength of the Gita, that in addition to telling us what the goal is, it also tells us- explains to us- as how to get there. Remember, it is God Himself, as an incarnation in the form of Lord Krishna (Krishanstu Bhagvan swayam- Krishna is indeed Bhagvan, tells us Vyasa) telling us both about the goal as well as the path to achieve it.

Gita being the yoga shastra (science of yoga giving us the methodology) it explains to us the procedure- the methods- to achieve the goal delineated.

But, before we do that, another important question arises?

Remember, in the beginning, it was stated that even though we are all created equal, however in reality we are all different from one another.

QUESTION IS---WHY ARE WE DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER?

To be continued.....

Vedanta Society of Toronto Building Expansion Plans

Update from the Board of Trustees

The current building of the Vedanta Society of Toronto was acquired in 1995. In 2003, the Library Wing was added. Now, the Trustees are considering a further expansion of the building. The rationale for this is based on three considerations that are outlined below.

The first consideration is the inadequacy of the residential portion of the building. The quarters of the Swami-in-charge are currently in space that has inadequate ventilation and lighting. Over the course of the last ten years, some ad hoc solutions have been implemented to address this. However, because of the nature of the building, to correct it permanently would essentially be tantamount to destroying the current space and rebuilding from scratch. The space for a second or a visiting Swami is also inadequate. Toronto is one of the major centres of North America and the space we provide to visiting monks should be commensurate with what is available at other major centres.

The second consideration for expansion is the Vedanta Vidya Mandir. This school, which was the vision of Swami Pramathananda, is now entering its seventh year of operation. Currently, the school holds its classes in whatever space is available in the building. On Vidya Mandir days (roughly two Sundays per month), a casual visitor to the centre will not find quiet space as every available room will be in use for the Vidya Mandir classes. At the end of the classes for the day, all materials have to be put away so that the space can return to its normal use. This is clearly not a permanent arrangement.

In addition to this, each year, progress is being made in improving the quality of the school. A nine year curriculum is being developed and slowly, adult classes are also being added. We view the growth of the Vidya Mandir as being family-based and so we expect to see more involvement of parents through adult classes. In order for the activities to expand and for the school to realize its potential, it will be necessary to have dedicated space.

The third consideration is that on special occasions (such as the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda), a large number of devotees attend and the main hall becomes overcrowded. We have also observed that the current washroom facilities are inadequate. Moreover, we have to make better provisions for our elderly devotees. Finally, the kitchen facilities are being pushed to their limit to provide prasad to all the devotees. The tireless efforts of the Food Committee still ensure that every devotee is given prasad. However, we need to think of a better solution for the future. On special occasions, we find that the dining hall is also too cramped. The challenge here is that the extra capacity is not needed at all times, and so the solution has to allow for a flexible or multiple use of space.

Currently, two architectural firms are being consulted and once the property survey is completed, they will be invited to make a formal proposal.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Maha Shivaratri was celebrated on **Friday 12th Feb 2010 at 6:30 pm**. The programme included bhajan, meditation followed by Arati. Close to 80 devotees participated.

Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary Celebration was held on **Sunday 21st Feb 2010 at 11.00 am**. The programme consisted bhajans, puja, homa, flower offering followed by prasad distribution. More than 250 devotees participated.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Spiritual Retreat with Swami Sridharanandaji at Canmore, Alberta, (Rockies) on Sept 4 & 5, 2010. Seats are

limited. If you are interested, please contact Vedanta Society of Toronto at 416-240 7262.

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 13, 2010**, 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 14, 2010 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 offer seven days a month (3 Tuesdays, 1 Thursday & 3 Saturdays) serving 300 meals at **Syme Woolner Neighbourhood & Family Centre, 2468 Eglinton Ave W, Unit 3, Toronto, ON, M6M 5E2**. 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.

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/fax/email or in the Membership/Renewal form. Those Members, who have already opted for the Newsletter to be sent by post in the 2010 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.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u> 7:30pm NO SCRIPTURE CLASS	<u>6</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>7</u> 11:00 am Lecture: 'Goal of Meditation' <u>1:30pm - VVM</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>12</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>13</u> Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
<u>14</u> 11:00 am Lecture: 'Divine name: The Mantra' <u>5:00pm RamNam</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>20</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>21</u> 11:00 am Lecture: 'De-hypnotizing ourselves'	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>24</u> 6:30pm Sri Ram Navami	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> 7:30pm NO SCRIPTURE CLASS	<u>27</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>28</u> 11:00 am Video: Spiritual Evolution <u>1:30pm: VVM</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>31</u>			

Vedanta Society of Toronto has the following DVD's available for Sale. Any members / devotees / friends, who are interested can obtain the same from society. Shipping and handling charges are at actual.

Discourses delivered by Swami Sridharananda at the Vedanta Society of Toronto are available for sale :

1. Retreat on the Bhagavad Gita held in Sept. 2009- CD & DVD set - \$40.

Shipping and handling extra.

2. Reminiscences of Swami Virajananda- DVD set - \$ 15.00. Shipping and handling extra.

Swami Kripamayananda of Vedanta of Society of Toronto will conduct the annual Spiritual Retreat (founded by Swami Pramathananda) at Arunachala Ashrama, from Friday July 2nd to Sunday July 4th. The Ashrama, 180 km from Halifax international airport, is situated in a serene, secluded and picturesque site in rural Nova Scotia, and is ideal for self-contemplation.

Registration fee including two breakfasts, two lunches, two dinners, coffee/Tea as well as reading materials is \$65 per person, \$50 for the second and \$45 for the third person from the same family. To facilitate close interactions only a small number of participants (15-30) is registered on first cum first serve basis. First 20 people receive free accommodation at the Ashrama. Registration fee, payable to *Spiritual Retreat* may be sent to P. Basu, 23, Bayview Road, Halifax, B3M 1N8. Further detail email to prabir.basu@gmail.com.