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Newsletter May 2005

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*The mind is very hard to perceive, extremely subtle and wanders at will.
Let the wise person guard it; a guarded mind brings happiness.*

-Buddhist Teaching

Words To Inspire

While residing at the Jetavana Monastery, the Buddha spoke this verse, with reference to a young disgruntled monk who was the son of a banker. The banker's son asked the Buddha, "Tell me some way by which I can obtain release from suffering."

The Venerable Buddha replied, "Yes, become a monk." The banker's son immediately retired from the world and became a monk.

Now he had a teacher who was versed in the Abhidamma and a preceptor who was versed in the Vinaya. After he had made a full profession, whenever he approached his teacher, the latter repeated questions found in the Abhidamma, "In the religion of the Buddha it is unlawful to do this, it is unlawful to do that. And whenever he approached his preceptor, the latter repeated questions found in the Vinaya, "In the religion of the Buddha it is unlawful to do this, it is unlawful to do that; this is proper, this is improper." After a time he thought to himself, "Oh what a wearisome task this is! I became a monk in order to obtain release from suffering, but here there is not even room for me to stretch my hands. It is possible, however, to obtain release from suffering even for householders. I should become a householder once more."

The Buddha said, "Monk, are you discontented?"

"Yes, Venerable, I became a monk in order to obtain release from suffering. But here there is not even room for me to stretch my hands. It is possible for me to obtain release from suffering as a householder."

The Buddha said, "Monk, if you can guard one thing, it will not be necessary for you to guard the rest."

"What is that, Venerable?"

"Can you guard your thoughts?"

"I can, Venerable."

The Buddha answered, "Then guard your thoughts alone."

-Lord Buddha, from *Dhammapada*

Contentment & Its Contents

(Based on a talk delivered by Swami Kripamayananda at the Vedanta Society of Toronto, March 27th, 2005.)

What is contentment? The dictionary defines contentment as "a satisfied state". Shankaracharya, while commenting on verse 5 of Chapter 10 of the Gita defines it as being "satisfied with what one already possesses." Therefore we find that satisfaction or a feeling of fulfilment is the central idea of contentment.

Satisfaction can be on three levels: i) physical, ii) mental and iii) spiritual. The first level makes us ask: are we satisfied with our physical body? With our hair, our nose, our eyes? In this day and age, more can be done to alter our physical form. Suppose we are unhappy with our nose. We come across a celebrity on TV who has a beautiful nose - immediately our mind is drawn to the thought, "Bah! I think that would look great on my face!" No problem. Go down to the plastic surgeon, tell him what you want done - he will instantly agree that, yes, you have indeed chosen a beautiful nose, and he can give it to you for the low price of \$10,000. There. Satisfaction - but is it guaranteed? That kind of satisfaction can have no guarantee.

The second level makes us ask: are we satisfied with your intellectual and cultural life? Are you satisfied with the number of books you have read? How often you can quote the words of great persons and sprinkle them in daily conversations with friends and co-workers? Are you happy with the number of museums you have seen? The number of concerts you have attended? All these have to do with the value of applying cultural learning to enhance our social identity. We want to influence people and make them listen to us and take us seriously. We want some satisfaction from feeling we are smart and "with it", as they say here.

The third level makes us ask: are we satisfied with our spiritual life? Are we working hard enough, diligently enough, steadfastly enough towards the goal - the ideal - the realization of the Self? Have we committed ourselves to regular, systematic practice? Are we devoting sufficient time for meditation, reading and reflecting? Are we deriving some joy from your spiritual nature? These questions help us ground ourselves deeper and deeper in the feeling that attaining illumination, is the only goal of life. Real spiritual satisfaction is of, God-realization - and nothing else. But the joy that comes from committed, regular practice brings about a steady joy in the self that cannot be compared with any kind of sense-gratification.

I was told by a devotee of a song by an old musical group called the Rolling Stones. They have a song called "Satisfaction". In it, the singer keeps repeating - "I can't get no satisfaction" - over, and over again. What does he mean? He is a famous celebrity, loved by millions, and making millions. The spiritual perspective will deduce the sense world, this maya, cannot be the source of human satisfaction. Everywhere we turn, there is maya - and where there is maya, there is dissatisfaction. We must not worry so much about physical and mental satisfaction, because if we start feeling some spiritual satisfaction, some joy from turning inward, some happiness in being at least intellectually convinced that we are not bodies - we are Spirit; we start to get everything we need and want - in the Spirit. The Spirit is the source of all unalterable satisfaction.

Naturally, the question comes - why so much dissatisfaction? Why are most people discontent? The main reason, the root cause of this suffering, arising from our discontented state, is ignorance. Ignorance of what? Ignorance of Reality. This ignorance immediately produces, as its effect, 'ego'. This ego rushes into our living room, our being, in the same way darkness abounds when light is removed. The absence of light immediately produces darkness. As this ego rushes forth, we automatically identify ourselves as body and mind.

If we think ourselves to be body and mind, then naturally we will worry about ridiculous things like hair, and nose. If we identify ourselves with the mind, then we will be worried about our learning, college degrees, and scholarship - all of which develop social identity and allow us to contribute to the world. But if we identify ourselves with Spirit - the Limitless, Infinite, Unchanging, Radiant, Free, Blissful, All-Loving Self, then what we become is are much more important than anything we might have. The state we achieve is important. Being is better than having. This is the idea.

Positive Psychology classifies contentment into two branches: faith-based or acquisition-based. Faith-based contentment comes from the feeling of oneness with the transcendental reality or personal knowledge of God. This type is stable. Or it can also come from the discovery of personal meaning and a realization that life has purpose and human existence is an endeavour to fulfil that purpose. Acquisition-based contentment is unstable. If my contentment is based on purchasing a fancy car, then the car is the root of my positive feeling. If anything happens to my car, the same happens to my contentment. There is no sense in this at all. So faith is the power behind the type of contentment worth achieving.

In Christianity, contentment is a central concept. Listen to the holy words of St. Paul, "In whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Let the world float around me, let things come in and out of existence, let the mind go up and down, side to side, but through it all, let me remain content. In essence, he is saying, let me be the witness. Who we really are has nothing in common with the world, nature, body or mind. So contentment, we can say, is the expression of our eternal non-identity with matter.

Contentment is a satisfied state. In the Vedantic view, we are already equipped with everything we need to be content. All the joy of happiness is deep within our own selves. So the question of acquiring anything is nonsense. Contentment is non-acquisition. But our senses and mind are driven to reach outside themselves and acquire happiness with objects of the world. We get confused in thinking that source of joy is something outside of ourselves. Vedanta exhorts us to increase faith-based contentment and reduce our reliance on acquisition-based contentment, and, to know the difference between the two. We must maintain and strengthen our spiritual constitution.

How to do this? Contentment rests on four pillars: i) sense control - put a tight leash on your senses, focus them inwards, control your cravings and impulses - continence and contentment go hand-in-hand, Socrates spoke these wise words, "He who is not contented with what he has, would not be contented with what he would like to have." ii) ego-sublimation - you are not the doer, you are the witness, step back from the field, lessen your role, decrease your contribution to the world. God does. You don't. Be the witness; or, place your ego at the feet of the Lord, taking the attitude of a humble servant, iii) don't find fault with others, find your own faults - Holy Mother's last message instructs us to do this if we want peace of mind - If we do, then we must stop criticizing. It is imperative. It is non-negotiable. Peace is not possible without this quality. Control anger, forgive others, forget mistakes, and love all; iv) surrender - let God do what He likes, let us enjoy our eternal relation with our Master, let us rejoice in our eternal identity with the Almighty, Radiant, Infinite, Blissful All-Love. Lay everything at His blessed feet. He will take care of everything. Have firm faith in this. Keep surrendering, every day, every night. What can we do? We need to realize how much is possible or not possible according to individual capacity. God is

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the greatest doer. He created the cosmos. What have we created? We must surrender. These four pillars, if practiced little by little, step-by-step, day-in day-out, peace will come, contentment will come, blessedness will come. Have faith. Believe. Try. We must keep going.

Patanjali states in his Aphorisms on Raja Yoga, "From contentment comes superlative happiness." Swami Vivekananda infuses this aphorism with great strength by commenting,

"The first sign that you are becoming religious is that you are becoming cheerful. When a man is gloomy that may be dyspepsia, but it is not religion. A pleasurable feeling is the nature of Sattva. Everything is pleasurable to a sattvika man, and when this comes, know that you are progressing in Yoga. All pain is caused by Tamas, so you must get rid of that; moroseness is one of the results of Tamas. The strong, the well-knit, the young, the healthy, the daring alone are fit to be Yogis. To the Yogi everything is bliss, every human face that he sees brings cheerfulness to him. That is the sign of a virtuous man. Misery is caused by sin, and by no other cause. What business have you with clouded faces? It is terrible. If you have a clouded face, do not go out that day, shut yourself up in your room. What right have you to carry this disease into the world? When your mind has become controlled, you have control over the whole body".

Keep smiling and be cheerful. Let our desireless, pure, god-centered, contented mind shine through our faces, spreading joy and noble thoughts throughout God's vast universe.

Quantum Leap

The Buddha

Buddhism started with the Buddha. The word Buddha is not a name, it is a title meaning "one who is awake" - in the sense of having woken up to reality. The name Buddha was first given to a man called Siddhartha Gautama in Nepal, 2500 years ago. Siddhartha was born in a royal family of a small kingdom on the Indian/Nepalese border. According to many traditional stories, he had a sheltered upbringing but later was shaken to the core on realising that life includes difficulties and problems of old age, sickness and death. After seeing such shocking incidents, Siddhartha set off on a journey of self-discovery that would end in his Enlightenment. He tried various things to find the meaning of life, but true understanding seemed as far away as ever. He decided to leave this path and look into his own heart and mind. He sat down beneath the pipal tree and swore to himself, "flesh may wither, blood may dry up but I shall not rise from this spot until Enlightenment has been won". After forty days under the tree, Buddha finally attained Enlightenment. Buddhists believe he gained a state of being that exceeds anything in the world. What Buddha discovered is known as "the Four Noble Truths" and his teachings on the way to become enlightened are known as "the Noble Eightfold Path".

By Darshan Sivaloganathan, Age 12
A Student of Vedanta Vidya Mandir

Belur Math News

The birthday (tithi puja) of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at Belur Math on Saturday, March 12th. Cooked prasad was served to about 24,000 devotees. The public celebration held on Sunday, March 20th, drew more than 100,000 visitors who thronged the premises throughout the day. Cooked prasad was served to about 34,000 persons on that occasion.

Past Events



The Vedanta Society of Toronto held Sangeetanjali, a fundraiser for Tsunami Relief Work in India and Sri Lanka on April 16th. Close to 200 caring people attended the classical and devotional music programme which featured a wonderful flute recital by renowned performer Sridas, and beautiful bhajans by various talented musicians and performers. We heartily thank all of those who came to give support for this noble and necessary cause.

Upcoming Events

Buddha Purnima

The Public Celebration of Lord Buddha's Birthday will take place on Monday May 23rd at 11 am. The special programme will include puja, bhajans, reading, meditation, flower offering and distribution of prasad. All are invited to attend.

Regular Services

Daily Meditation

Meditation is held at the Centre every morning from 6 am to 7 pm. Devotional singing and meditation is held every evening from 6 pm to 7 pm.

Interviews and Instruction

Swami Kripamayananda grants interviews to those interested in knowing more about Vedanta, Indian Philosophy, and spirituality and its practices. Please call in advance and make an appointment.

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.

Scripture Class

Scripture classes are held every Friday at 7:30 pm. **Please use upstairs kitchen entrance.**

Book Store

The Book Store carries selected titles from Ramakrishna - Vivekananda literature, as well as other material related to Vedanta and Indian Philosophy. Please call for store hours.

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