



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter May 2008

Words to Inspire

“On the other hand, sensuality of all kind is enervating. The sensual man is a slave of his passions, and pleasure-seeking is degrading the vulgar. But to satisfy the necessities of life is not evil. To keep the body in good health is a duty, for otherwise we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom, and keep our mind strong and clear. This is the middle path, O bhikshus, that keeps aloof from extremes.”

-The Gospel of Buddha – page 40

From The Sermon of Buddha at Benares

Buddha said:

“The spokes of the wheel are the rules of pure conduct; justice is the uniformity of their length; wisdom is the tire; modesty and thoughtfulness are the hub in which the immovable axle of truth is fixed. “

“He who recognizes the existence of suffering, its cause, its remedy, and its cessation, has fathomed the four noble truths. He will walk in right path.

“Right views will be the torch to light his way. Right aims will be his guide. Right words will be his dwelling place on the road. His gait will be straight, for it is right behavior. His refreshments will be the right way of earning his livelihood. Right efforts will be his steps; right thoughts his breath; and peace will follow in his footprints.

And the Blessed One explained the instability of the ego.

“Whatsoever is originated will be dissolved again. All worry about the self is vain; the ego is like a mirage, and all the tribulations that touch it will pass away. They will vanish like a nightmare when the sleeper awakes. He who has awakened is freed from fear; he has become Buddha; he knows the vanity of all his cares, his ambitions, and also of his pains. It easily happens that a man, when taking a bath, steps upon a wet rope and imagines that is a snake. Horror will overcome him, and he will shake from fear, anticipate in his mind all the agonies caused by the serpents venomous bite.

What a relief does this man experience when he sees that the rope is no snake. The cause of his fright lies in his error, his ignorance, his illusion. If the true nature of the rope is recognized, his tranquility of mind will come back to him; he will feel relieved; he will be joyful and happy. This is the state of mind of one who has recognized that there is no self, that the cause of all his troubles, cares and vanities is a mirage, a shadow, a dream.

“Happy is he who has overcome all selfishness; happy is he who has attained peace; happy is he who has found the truth. The truth is noble and sweet; the truth can deliver you from evil. There is no savior in the world except the truth. Have confidence in truth, although you may not be able to comprehend it, although you may suppose its sweetness to be bitter, although you may shrink from it at first. Trust in the truth. The truth is best as it is. No one can alter it; neither can any one improve it. Have faith in the truth and live it.

“Errors lead astray; illusions beget miseries. They intoxicate like strong drinks; but they fade away soon and leave you sick and disgusted. Self is a fever; self is transient vision, a dream; but truth is wholesome, truth is sublime, truth is everlasting. There is no immorality except in truth. For truth alone abideth forever.” And when the doctrine was propounded, the venerable Kaundinya, the oldest one among the five bhikshus, discerned truth with his mental eye, and he said, “Truly, O Buddha, our Lord, thou hast found the truth.”

Sri Ramakrishna and Shiva

God incarnates whenever dharma or righteousness declines and adharmā or unrighteousness is in ascendance. It is Vishnu who has the role of incarnating himself from time to time to give a fresh stimulus to the spiritual life of the world. Sri Ramakrishna is also therefore considered an incarnation of Vishnu. All avatars seem to have an affinity to Shiva. It is quite natural because both Shiva and Vishnu are manifestations of the same Reality. Sri Ramachandra's ishta was Shiva and Shiva always repeats the name of Rama. Sri Ramakrishna's devotion to Shiva is also quite natural for the same reason.

Sri Ramakrishna's ishta was Mother Kali, the consort of Shiva. Sri Ramakrishna held that Shiva and His power- Shakti, Brahman and Its creative power- Maya, are inseparable. Sri Ramakrishna was devoted to and had the vision of Shiva. Not only that, Sri Ramakrishna's devotees had the vision of Shiva in Sri Ramakrishna.

Shiva literally means 'that which is auspicious'. Shiva is spirit, divinity. Sometimes Shiva is said to be the destroyer. But what can auspiciousness destroy? Shiva destroys ignorance and its products- misery and attachment to unreality.

Swami Vivekananda says that we can not think of God without thinking of Him as having a form. Shiva, the Supreme Reality is also thus conceived as having a human form. More than conception, He assumes form for the sake of the devotees. In meditation mantras, He is described as fair complexioned, wearing a tiger skin, Ganga flowing from His matted locks, the crescent decorating His head, wielding Trishula (trident). He makes the sound of His hand-drum, the damaru. He has snakes as his ornaments and His body is smeared with ashes. Nandi, the bull is His vehicle and demons and hobgoblins are His attendants. His dwelling place is in the Himalayas, away from the humdrum of cities and villages. Shiva, amidst all this, remains immersed in deep meditation on the blissful Self. Why is Shiva, the Pure, the Auspicious Spirit conceived as associated with snakes and demons? What does it

mean? It means that the power of spirit can make every unfavourable situation

into a favourable one. When one is in touch with the Spirit, he can be a refuge to all sorts of creatures, all types of human beings and he himself remains unaffected by the adversities around him.

Sri Ramakrishna, the king of renouncers, had a natural inclination for Shiva, the great Yogi. Before he was born, his mother had visualized light coming out of the local Shiva temple and she felt as if some one had entered her womb. Immediately after his birth, the baby Sri Ramakrishna slipped into an oven and got himself covered with the ashes and with all this the baby was not crying! Was he happy to smear ashes on his body like Shiva?

Sri Ramakrishna had grown to be a boy. When there was once arranged in the village a Shiva dance on the occasion of Shiva Ratri, the day dedicated to Shiva. The person who was to dance impersonating as Shiva suddenly became sick. Village-elders, to keep the program going, suggested that Sri Ramakrishna could substitute for the dancer. Accordingly he was decorated like Shiva and was then sent to the stage to dance like Shiva. Sri Ramakrishna, who was absorbed in the thought of Shiva was carried to the stage. Instead of dancing, he went into Samadhi and stood still there for a long time. Thinking of Shiva he had become Shiva. Later on he said, "What you think, you become. It is said that a cockroach constantly meditating on a kumira worm become the worm. ... If you think of God you will become God, if you think of ghost, ghost will you become."

Sri Ramakrishna later went on a pilgrimage to Varanasi, the holiest city of India, immortalized in religious literature as the Eternal City of Shiva. He saw this ancient and holy city where great teachers, scholars, saints and holy persons have visited since time immemorial, made of gold. He felt that the precious thought of countless monks and devotees was accumulated there. In Varanasi, while going by a boat, he had the vision of Shiva liberating the jivas (bound spirits).

Sri Ramakrishna loved singing and listening to devotional songs and stotras. He used to sing in a most beautiful voice. He especially loved Narendranath's singing. Songs and chants would transport Sri Ramakrishna to a deep spiritual mood and he would go into Samadhi. One day, at a Shiva temple in Dakshineswar, he was reciting the *Shiva Mahimna Stotra*, the Sanskrit hymn composed in the praise of Shiva. When the lines came which mention that Shiva's excellence and glory are limitless, he went into ecstatic mood and tears flowed so profusely from his eyes that his chest, his clothes and even the floor got wet!

Once when Sri Ramakrishna was pacing the Verandah near his room, Mathur babu had a clear and unmistakable vision of Shiva and Mother Kali walking instead. When Mathur came running, fell at Sri Ramakrishna's feet and reported what he had seen just then, Sri Ramakrishna said that he knew nothing. It is Mother Kali who was showing to Mathur who Sri Ramakrishna actually was!

Sri Ramakrishna said that Shiva is present not only in His temples but He also resides in the heart of every human being. Therefore the best way to worship Shiva is to serve human beings. Sri Ramakrishna himself saw to it that the needy people were served by those who can afford to do so. While at Deoghar Baidyanath Dham, on the way to pilgrimage to Varanasi, he asked Mathur to feed the local poverty stricken people and give them each a blanket. Sri Ramakrishna, while speaking about 'compassion to all beings' as a spiritual practice enjoined by the Vaishnava scriptures, suddenly went into an ecstatic mood and said, "Talk of compassion for beings! Insignificant creature that you are, how can you show compassion to beings? Who are *you* to show compassion? You insignificant person, who are you to bestow compassion it? No, no it is not compassion, it is to serve Jiva as Shiva." No one else other than Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) could understand this great message of Sri Ramakrishna meant for the modern times. Coming out of the room, Narendranath said, "Ah, what a wonderful light have I got today from the Master's words. ... If the divine Lord ever grants me opportunity, I will proclaim everywhere in the world this wonderful truth I have heard today." Swami Vivekananda did preach this message to

the world. The central theme of his message is Divinity of the Soul. He regarded and preached that the human body is the best temple because within this resides the living God, Shiva as the Spirit! Not only Swami Vivekananda preached this in his lectures but he established the Ramakrishna Mission and gave it the twin motto as the core of its purpose of existence: 'For one's own liberation and for the good of the world'. Serving human beings as veritable manifestation of God is one of the fundamental practices of the Ramakrishna Mission monks and devotees.

Swami Vivekananda used to sing a Sanskrit hymn to Sri Ramakrishna which he liked very much. It was composed by Sankaracharya and describes the real nature of ourselves as Chidananda-rupa Shiva. Each of us in reality is Shiva whose nature is Consciousness and Bliss.

Ultimate reality can not be described in terms of qualities, but we understand everything through qualities. These idealized qualities are "gods' and "goddesses". Shiva represents the auspicious, luminous aspect of Ultimate Reality. Shiva also represents the quality of not having any qualities! Shiva as an abstract principle is formless. To contemplate on Shiva is to contemplate on the auspicious aspect of the Ultimate Reality that lifts us from the world of the differentiated, the world of qualities, the world of form, the world of cause and effect to a state beyond differentiation, qualities, forms and causality. This is of relevance to anyone, whatever their spiritual tradition.

QUANTUM LEAD

A poem on Swami Vivekananda

by Ayush Ray, Age 13,
Clayton Park Junior High School, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

January 12 of 1863 was a very special occasion
For you see a baby boy was born, later to become a renowned and noble Indian
From the beginning of his childhood, he had a very keen mind
But the true answer of existence he took a while to find
Growing up he had plentiful of questions about God
He wondered about God's existence or even if he was a fraud
Ramakrishna was his guru, master and spiritual guide
He passed his message from country to country and worldwide
He often found himself in the streets lonely, hungry and tired
Regardless of health and needs, the meaning of life he always inquired
His mission was to raise awareness about India's Vedantic settings
He bravely confronted the listeners and audience with a simple but humanistic teaching
We still remember his teachings and knowledge today
Swami Vivekananda, an exemplary man's beliefs and memories will always stay

BELUR MATH NEWS

The birthday (*tithi puja*) of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at Belur Math on Sunday, March 9, 2008. Cooked prasada was served to about 32,000 devotees. The public celebration held on Sunday, March 16, drew more than 1,00,000 visitors who thronged the Math throughout the day.

A new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission has been started at Srinagar in Jammu & Kashmir.

Swami Prabhanandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the students' home building named *Sri Ramakrishna Balakshramam* at Putlampalli campus of **Kadapa** centre on March 13.

Swami Smarananandaji, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission,

inaugurated the newly constructed building for the higher secondary school of **Malda** centre on 16 March.

Swami Smarananandaji, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built *Vivekananda Vidya Vihar* (a building for school and other service activities for the poor and the youth) at Sitanagaram campus of **Vijayawada** centre on February 14.

Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (HBCSE), Mumbai, conducts *National Standard Examination in Astronomy* every year to select students to participate in the *Training and Selection Camp for International Astronomy Olympiad*. Out of the 20 students selected all over India this year, three are from our **Deoghar** Vidyapith.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Ram Navami was celebrated on **14th April 2008**. The programme consisted Bhajan,

Ramnam followed by prasad distribution. About 125 devotees attended the programme.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Vedanta Vidya Mandir **Pradarshanam** will be held on Sunday, **June 15, 2008** at 11:00 am.

Annual summer Retreat will be held on Saturday, June 21 and Sunday, June 22,

2008. **Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj, President, Vedanta Society of Northern California** will be conducting the Retreat.

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, May 10**, 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 May 11 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. This month, the Soup Kitchen dates are May 8, 13, 15 and 20. 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 Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Tattvabodha	<u>3</u>
<u>4</u> <u>11am-Lecture:</u> <u>'Ideal Relationship'</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u> 9.30am Soup Kitchen	<u>9</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna	<u>10</u> Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
Karma Yoga 1.30 pm – 2.30 pm						
11 <u>11am-Lecture:</u> <u>'Hammering the Delusion'</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u> 9.30am	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u> 9.30am Soup Kitchen	<u>16</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Tattvabodha	<u>17</u>
VVM: 1-30 pm		Soup Kitchen				
Ram Nam						
<u>18</u> <u>11am-Lecture:</u> <u>'The Heart of the Buddha'</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u> 9.30am	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna	<u>24</u>
Karma Yoga 1.30 pm – 2.30 pm		Soup Kitchen				
<u>25</u> Buddha Jayanti Celebration 11:00 am	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Tattvabodha	<u>31</u>

Summer Retreat with SWAMI PRABUDDHANANDAJI

June 21: 6 am to 9 pm; June 22: 6 am to 5 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 May 31.