



# Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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## Newsletter May 2009

### Words to Inspire

“Living in solitude, alone, with controlled mind and self, free from cravings, owning nothing, the Yogin ought to apply himself to Yoga incessantly.”

- Bhagavad Gita Bhashyam, Chapter VI – Page 226 -

### BUDDHA, THE TEACHER

(From ‘Gospel of Buddha’—pages 148-149)

Buddha said:

“Let the bhikshu subdue his passion for human and celestial pleasures, then, having conquered existence, he will command the dharma. Such a one will wander rightly in the world.”

“He whose lusts have been destroyed, who is free from pride, who has overcome all the ways of passion, is subdued, perfectly happy, and of a firm mind. Such a one will wander rightly in the world.”

“Faithful is he who is possessed of knowledge, seeing the way that leads to Nirvana, he who is no partisan, he who is pure and victorious, and has removed the veil from his eyes. Such a one will wander rightly in the world.”

Said the bhikshus: “Certainly, O Bhagavant, it is so: whichever bhikshu lives in this way, subdued and having overcome all bonds, such a one will wander rightly in the world.”

The Blessed One said:

“Whatever is to be done by him who aspires to attain the tranquility of Nirvana let him be able and upright, conscientious and gentle, and not proud.”

“Let no one deceive another, let no one despise another, let no one out of anger or resentment wish to harm another.”

“Happy is the solitude of the peaceful who know and behold the truth. Happy is he who stands firm by holding himself in check always. Happy is he whose every sorrow, whose every desire is at an end. The conquest of the stubborn vanity of self is truly supreme happiness.”

“Let a man’s pleasure be the dharma, let him de-light in the dharma, let him stand fast in the dharma, let him know how to enquire into the dharma, let him not raise any dispute that pollutes the dharma, and let him spend his time in pondering on the well-spoken truths of the dharma.”

“A treasure that is laid up in a deep pit profits nothing and may easily be lost. The real treasure that is laid up through charity and piety, temperance, self-control, or deeds of merit, is hid secure and cannot pass away. It is never gained by despoiling or wronging others, and no thief can steal it. A man, when he dies, must leave the fleeting wealth of the world, but this treasure of virtuous acts he takes with him.

Let the wise do good deeds; they are a treasure that can never be lost.”

# DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY

V. Kumar Murty

## 1. Introduction

It is said that we can be certain about two things: death and taxes. Everything else is uncertain. In spite of this, there is a tendency within us to seek certainty. We think that we will find reassurance, comfort and security in certainty.

There are two extremes of people, who are not troubled by uncertainty. At one extreme are the dullards. If they utter such phrases as 'what will happen, will happen', it is because they are too indolent to make the attempt to know what will happen, much less to try and affect it. Then there are people at the other extreme, namely those people who are perfectly capable of analyzing a situation and making the effort to know the answers, but who have also placed the entire question in a broader context which gives them a perspective from which they are able to deal with uncertainty. Most of us are somewhere in between these extremes. For us, dealing with uncertainty is not a philosophical or speculative question, but an existential one.

Nevertheless, once the question is raised, it is interesting to examine it in its different aspects. We shall discuss four principles regarding uncertainty.

## 2. Uncertainty is intrinsic

Firstly, uncertainty is an intrinsic aspect of the phenomenal world. All knowledge has ignorance as its counterpart. The more we know, the more we discover there is yet to be known. Our attempt to gain knowledge is really our attempt to gain certainty. But the paradox is that certainty does not seem to exist without uncertainty.

This principle of uncertainty arising from our attempt to gain certainty, or the coexistence of the apparently contradictory states of certainty and uncertainty is a fundamental concept of Vedanta. It is called *maya*.

This word is familiar to many, but over millennia, it has attracted much misunderstanding. We are thankful to Swami Vivekananda who in several masterly essays in *Jnana Yoga* explained it so clearly that a child could understand it. It is to be considered one of his important philosophical contributions.

So, what is *maya*? Swami Vivekananda explains it thus: "There is this contradiction in knowledge. It seems that man can know everything, if he only wants to know; but before he has gone a few steps, he finds an adamant wall which he cannot pass. All his work is in a circle, and he cannot go beyond that circle. The problems which are nearest and dearest to him are impelling him on and calling, day and night, for a solution, but he cannot solve them, because he cannot go beyond his intellect. And yet that desire is implanted strongly in him."<sup>1</sup>

Understanding that uncertainty is intrinsic is a first step in learning to deal with it. We will never be in a position where uncertainty does not exist, and we are not alone in this. Everyone is subject to the same limitation. This philosophical understanding is itself a way of dealing with uncertainty.

## 3. Not all uncertainty is the same

Secondly, not all instances of uncertainty are the same. Not all cases disturb us or require our active intervention. Will the sun rise tomorrow? Will the current legislation in front of parliament be passed or not? Will gravitation and quantum theory be unified in our lifetime? All of these are interesting questions and even important ones, but we need not lose sleep over them. On the other hand, questions such as whether I will be able to complete my assignment on time, whether a

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<sup>1</sup> "Maya and Illusion", in: *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, 1976, Volume 2, p. 91.

loved one will be able to overcome a disease or whether we will be able to make our mortgage payment this month loom larger in our mental horizon and are potential sources of anxiety and worry.

If we are faced with several uncertainties at the same time, we may implicitly or explicitly order them in some manner and we may find that we are better at handling some of these than others.

For example, if we have to write an exam and we are also concerned about a sick member of the family, we will tend to prioritize these in some way. Perhaps the fact that we have to deal with an illness in the family might make us more philosophical in our approach to the exam. Had this other difficulty not existed, perhaps the uncertainty surrounding the exam would have overwhelmed us. No amount of advice from others to take it in perspective would have helped us. But the existence of the second problem gives us perspective and helps us to deal with the first problem. Perhaps we will tell ourselves 'let me study as well as I can for the exam and write it and accept the consequences'.

In this case, we are forced to prioritize. But it is better if we could do this without being forced. For this, we need to give some time to reflect on what our priorities are. Reflection is actually an important tool in dealing with uncertainty. If something troubles us, let us try and discover where it stands in relation to our priorities and that will help us to have perspective. Socrates said that an unexamined life is not worth living. We have to examine ourselves through reflection. That will also

reveal how we came to the situation we are in, and how we formulated our priorities. How is it that we consider the outcome of a particular issue to be so important for us?

Reflection is a skill. It is not brooding. In brooding we simply emphasize our current way of thinking by replaying it again and again. In reflection, we also replay thoughts, but watch them as a witness. We try to stand apart from the play of thoughts to observe. In that process of observation, there is the possibility of discovering something new or the possibility of altering our perspective. For example, it is possible that our imagination is running wild and we are actually exaggerating a relatively minor matter into a major cause for concern.

In order for reflection to be effective, there has to be a degree of detachment, and a willingness to consider other perspectives. If we find detachment to be difficult, here is an exercise that we can all try. Suppose we are told that we have only six months to live. What would we do with that time? Suppose we only have one month. What would we do? This exercise will help us to identify our priorities in life (and in death). Such thought experiments can be done regularly and it will help us to develop both detachment and the ability to reflect effectively.

#### **4. Uncertainty is a subjective state**

The third principle is that uncertainty is a psychological phenomenon and not a material one. It is not the case that a set of material circumstances will engender the same degree of certainty or uncertainty in all individuals. As it is a psychological issue, our efforts to deal with it have to be at the level of mind.

**(To be continued)**

### **Spiritual Retreat in Nova Scotia: July 17-19, 2009**

#### **Guided By Swami Kripamayananda**

The annual spiritual retreat would be held in the beautiful countryside Arunachal Ashrama in Nova Scotia. This retreat started by Rev Swami Pramathanandaji provides the participants with unique opportunity for Ashrama living for 3 days filled with activities and meditation and close interaction with the Swami. A very small number of participants (< 25) are accepted for close interaction. The cost including food, accommodation and retreat materials etc is kept exceptionally low to make it affordable for all. It is \$65 per person and \$115 for two persons from same family. Contact prabir.basu@dal.ca or fax 902 443 6424 for registration and further information.

## KALI TEMPLE AT DAKSHINESWAR

(Continued – Part II)

The whole symbolic world is represented in the temple garden -- the Trinity of the Nature Mother (Kali), the Absolute (Siva), and Love (Radhakanta), the Arch spanning heaven and earth. The terrific Goddess of the Tantra, the soul-enthraling Flute-Player of the *Bhagavata*, and the Self-absorbed Absolute of the Vedas live together, creating the greatest synthesis of religions. All aspects of Reality are represented there. But of this divine household, Kali is the pivot, the sovereign Mistress. She is Prakriti, the Procreatrix, Nature, the Destroyer, the Creator. Nay, She is something greater and deeper still for those who have eyes to see. She is the Universal Mother, "my Mother", as Ramakrishna would say, the All-powerful, who reveals Herself to Her children under different aspects and Divine Incarnations, the Visible God, who leads the elect to the Invisible Reality; and if it so pleases Her, She takes away the last trace of ego from created beings and merges it in the consciousness of the Absolute, the undifferentiated God. Through Her grace "the finite ego loses itself in the illimitable Ego -- Atman -- Brahman".

Rani Rasmani spent a fortune for the construction of the temple garden and another fortune for its dedication ceremony, which took place on May 31, 1855.

Sri Ramakrishna -- henceforth, we shall call Gadadhar by this familiar name (no definite information is available as to the origin of this name. Most probably it was given by Mathur Babu, as Ramlal, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, has said, quoting the authority of his uncle himself) -- came to the temple garden with his elder brother Ramkumar, who was appointed priest of the Kali temple. Sri Ramakrishna did not at first approve of Ramkumar's working for the sudra Rasmani. The example of their orthodox father was still fresh in Sri Ramakrishna's mind. He objected also to the eating of the cooked offerings of the temple, since, according to orthodox Hindu

custom, such food can be offered to the Deity only in the house of a brahmin. But the holy atmosphere of the temple grounds, the solitude of the surrounding wood, the loving care of his brother, the respect shown him by Rani Rasmani and Mathur Babu, the living presence of the Goddess Kali in the temple, and, above all, the proximity of the sacred Ganges, which Sri Ramakrishna always held in the highest respect, gradually overcame his disapproval, and he began to feel at home.

Within a short time Sri Ramakrishna attracted the notice of Mathur Babu, who was impressed by the young man's religious fervor and wanted him to participate in the worship in the Kali temple. But Sri Ramakrishna loved his freedom and was indifferent to any worldly career. The profession of the priesthood in a temple founded by a rich woman did not appeal to his mind. Further, he hesitated to take upon himself the responsibility for the ornaments and jewellery of the temple. Mathur had to wait for a suitable occasion.

At this time there came to Dakshineswar a youth of sixteen, destined to play an important role in Sri Ramakrishna's life. Hriday, a distant nephew of Sri Ramakrishna (Hriday's mother was the daughter of Sri Ramakrishna's aunt (Khudiram's sister). Such a degree of relationship is termed in Bengal that of a "distant nephew"), hailed from Sihore, a village not far from Kamarpukur, and had been his boyhood friend. Clever, exceptionally energetic, and endowed with great presence of mind, he moved, as will be seen later, like a shadow about his uncle and was always ready to help him, even at the sacrifice of his personal comfort. He was destined to be a mute witness of many of the spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna and the caretaker of his body during the stormy days of his spiritual practice. Hriday came to Dakshineswar in search of a job, and Sri Ramakrishna was glad to see him.

(To be Continued)

## SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

**Sri Ram Navami was celebrated on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2009 at 6:30 pm.** The programme consisted bhajans, puja and

Ramnam followed by prasad distribution. More than 70 devotees attended.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Guru Purnima will be held on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2009 at 6:30pm.** The

programme will include bhajans, reading, puja, flower offering 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, May 09, 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, May 17, 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 a month at Roncesvalles Food Sharing, 263 Roncesvalles Avenue, Toronto M6R 2L9. 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 programme, 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.

### Visiting Swami's (Monks)

Swami Swahananda – May 13 - 17, 2009

Swami Yogatmananda – May 23 - 24, 2009

Swami Tathagatananda – May 28 - June 1, 2009

**"Behold, O monks, this is my last advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation. Do your best. "**

**-Teachings of Lord Buddha-**

# Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher- Swami Kripamayanda,  
Ramakrishna Order of India

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### May 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					<u>1</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>2</u>
<u>3</u> Lecture 11 am <i>'Why Spiritual Disciplines?'</i> VVM 1:30 pm	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u> <u>11 am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>'Vivekachudamani'</i>	<u>9</u> VIGIL 6am to 6pm
<u>10</u> 11 am <b>Buddha Jayanti Celebration</b>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u> <u>11 am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u> No Scripture Class	<u>16</u>
<u>17</u> Guest Lecture 11am <i>'Ten Precepts of Sri Ramakrishna'</i> by Swami Swahananda	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u> <u>11 am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u> No Scripture Class	<u>23</u>
<b>RAM NAM</b> 5:00 pm						
<u>24</u> Guest Lecture 11am <i>'Vedanta and Democracy'</i> by Swami Yogatmananda VVM 1:30 pm	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> <u>11 am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: <i>'Vivekachudamani'</i>	<u>30</u>
<u>31</u> Guest Lecture 11am <i>'Sri Ramakrishna for All'</i> by Swami Tathagatananda						

### Summer Retreat at Vedanta Society of Toronto with Swami Amaranandaji – Head, Centre Vedantique, Geneva

June 27: 6 am to 9 pm & June 28: 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 June 15.