



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter May 2010

Words to Inspire

“ Let a man’s pleasure be the dharma, let him delight in the dharma, let him stand fast in the dharma, let him know how to inquire 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.”

-Buddha, The Teacher, page 149-

THE LESSON GIVEN TO RAHULA.

(From Buddha, The Teacher, pages 143-145)

Before Rahula, the son of Gautama Siddhartha and Yashodhara, attained to the enlightenment of true wisdom, his conduct was not always marked by a love of truth, and the Blessed One sent him to a distant vihara to govern his mind and to guard his tongue. After some time the Blessed One ordered the boy to bring him a basin with water and wash his feet, and Rahula obeyed. When Rahula had washed the Tathagata’s feet, the Blessed One asked: “Is the water now fit for drinking?”

“No, my Lord,” replied the boy, “the water is defiled.” Then the Blessed One said: “Now consider your own case. Although you are my son, and the grand child of a king, although you are a shramana who has voluntarily given up everything, you are unable to guard your tongue from untruth, and thus defile your mind.” And when the water had been poured away, the Blessed One asked again: “Is this vessel now fit for holding water to drink?” “No, my Lord,” replied Rahula, “The vessel, too, has become unclean.”

And the Blessed One Said: “Now consider your own case. Although you wear the yellow robe, are you fit for any high purpose when you have become unclean like this vessel?” Then the Blessed One, lifting up the empty basin and whirling it round, asked: “Are you not afraid lest it should fall and break?” “No, my Lord,” replied Rahula, “the vessel is but cheap, and its loss will not amount to much.”

“Now consider your own case,” said the Blessed One. “You are whirled about in endless eddies of transmigration, and your body being made of the

same substance as other material things that will crumble to dust, there is no loss if it be broken. He who is given to speaking untruths is an object of contempt to the wise.” Rahula was filled with shame, and the Blessed One addressed him once more: “Listen, and I will tell you a parable:

“There was a king who had a very powerful elephant, able to cope with five hundred ordinary elephants. When going to war, the elephant was armed with sharp swords on his tusks, with scythes on his shoulders, spears on his feet, and an iron ball at his tail. The elephant-master rejoiced to see the noble creature so well equipped, and knowing that a slight wound by an arrow in the trunk would be fatal, he had taught the elephant to keep his trunk well coiled up. But during the battle the elephant stretched forth his trunk to seize a sword. His master was frightened and consulted with the king, and they decided the elephant was no longer fit to be used in battle.”

“O Rahula, if men would only guard their tongues all would be well. Be like the fighting elephant who guards his trunk against the arrow that strikes in the middle.

“By love of truth the sincere escape iniquity. Like the elephant well subdued and quiet, who permits the king to mount on his trunk, thus the man that reverses righteousness will endure faithfully throughout his life.”

Rahula hearing these words was filled with deep sorrow; he never again gave any occasion for complaint, and forthwith he sanctified his life by earnest exertions.

The Goal of Meditation

Swami Kripamayananda

(based on a talk at the Vedanta Society of Toronto on March 7, 2010)

When asked the question of what the goal of meditation is, the most commonly heard answer is that the goal is to get improved physical and mental health. Meditation can strengthen the body so that it is able to prevent disease. Meditation also gives peace of mind. But is either of these the goal? Do we practice meditation for this purpose?

In fact, neither of these is the goal. Rather, they are by-products. It is similar to refining oil – it results in many useful by-products. But the main goal of the process is to produce the petroleum. The practice of meditation does lead to physical and mental refinement and this does result in improved health. But the goal is far greater. It is to cure *bhavaroga* -- the disease of worldliness.

What is this disease? It is ignorance: ignorance of the real nature of our self and the real nature of the world. Knowledge of our true nature and the nature of the world is the cure for this disease. Meditation makes that knowledge accessible to us.

Our concept of ourselves and our identities are crucial factors in our life. What I hold to be true about myself will affect my actions, my words, my reactions to the words of others and so on. What I hold to be true about the world will also have a similar effect. Meditation helps us to question assumptions that we take for granted about ourselves and about the world.

If we try to locate our identity, we may begin with our body. If anyone touches my body, I will say that they touched me. But we know that the body is constantly changing. Cells are dying and new cells are replacing them. Moreover, if a person were to lose an arm or a leg, their body has changed but it is the same person. If a person grows their hair, again the

body has changed, but we still say that it is the same person. As we grow up from childhood, to youth and to old age, the body undergoes many changes and yet we feel that it there is one and the same person whose body is changing. Thus, we cannot equate our identity with our body. This is easy enough to say, but meditation helps us to experience the truth of this.

Next, we might identify with our thoughts. But we quickly realize that thoughts are constantly changing and that there is a person who is witnessing all of these changing thoughts. Thus, we cannot equate ourselves with thoughts either. Again, this is easy to say but meditation helps us to experience its truth and to live accordingly.

If I am not the body, and I am not the mind, then what am I? Meditation helps each individual to discover their spiritual identity. We are spirit. Moreover, meditation helps each individual to live in the awareness of their spiritual identity.

In particular, we discover that there is no multiplicity of spirit. Thus, we discover our kinship, and even our identity, with all beings. This is why the spiritual teachers of the world are full of love for everyone. This is why they teach that we are all brothers and sisters. It is not a social nicety that they are preaching, but the truth.

The state of spiritual realization cannot be described in words, but it is felt that the walls that separate us from the universe are removed. The awareness of time and space is obliterated. Reaching this goal may be the work of a lifetime (or even several lifetimes!) We have to proceed step by step. The *Gita* says that one makes progress slowly and steadily '*sanaih*

sanaih'. It also says that everything is revealed to us in time – '*kalena atmani vindati*'.

There is a strange and amusing incident in the life of Swami Vivekananda. When Sri Ramakrishna was at the Cossipore garden house, Narendra (the future Swami Vivekananda) repeatedly asked him for an experience of the highest state of realization. Soon afterwards, while Narendra was meditating, he felt the presence of a bright light behind his head and he lost outer consciousness. After a long time, he regained awareness of the world around him, but could not feel his body. He cried out 'where is my body?' This was reported to Sri Ramakrishna who simply said 'let him stay in that state for awhile; he has pestered me enough for it!' Soon afterwards, Narendra regained his normal awareness. We have to proceed step by step so that the body and mind are prepared to handle spiritual experience. If we somehow get spiritual awareness without the preparation, we may have this kind of strange experience. This is why the *Gita* says that one should proceed slowly and that one will understand everything for oneself in the fullness of time.

It is very interesting that spiritual teachers use the word 'realization'. One does not become something that one is not. The goal of meditation is to realize our spiritual identity. We do not *become* spiritual. We are spirit now, only we are not aware of it. We are pure now, only we are not aware of it. Meditation does not make us purer. It makes us aware of our nascent purity.

The disciplines of meditation help to remove the obstacles. Mostly, these obstacles arise from the body and the mind. This is why we may preface the practice of meditation with

physical exercise to keep the body fit. These exercises and postures help the body to become a fit instrument for meditation. We also practice calming the mind so that thoughts do not obstruct our spiritual awareness. This is why the *yoga sutras* of Patanjali start with the aphorism '*yoga chitta vritti nirodhah*' – yoga is the cessation of thought waves.

The question can be asked what happens 'after' spiritual realization. We experience a serenity of mind that is not disturbed by any external circumstance or happening. It is not that we will be ignorant of what is happening around us. We will know everything and understand everything. But we will not be disturbed by it. The *Gita* says '*samatvam yoga ucyate*' – they say that equanimity is yoga.

Moreover, this serenity and equanimity is not a 'dry' calmness. It is full of bliss and joy. There is a constant 'spiritual enjoyment'. What is it that we enjoy? We enjoy contemplating, repeating, hearing and sharing with others the name of God. We enjoy the experience of the presence of God. This may be expressed mentally or physically. We know that in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, on occasions devotees would see an indrawn calm joy in which the Master was absorbed in *samadhi*. The joy he was experiencing would be evident in his facial expression. On other occasions, he would express that joy more physically by dancing and singing. It is said that he would dance 'with the strength of a lion'.

Yet another aspect of this serenity and equanimity is that we are very concerned about the welfare of all beings. The *Gita* says that the realized soul rejoices in the well-being of all '*sarva bhute hite ratah*'. There is a self-dedication to the well-being of all.

BELUR MATH NEWS

Viveknagar centre organized an All Tripura Devotees' Conference at the Ashrama on 14 March, which was attended by 587 devotees.

Swami Gitanandaji, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the renovated building for library and computer centre at the newly acquired premises of **Kankurgachhi** Math on 24 March, Ramanavami Day.

At **Narainpur** centre, Swami Smarananandaji, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for the proposed higher secondary school building on 24 March and inaugurated the blood bank unit of the Ashrama hospital on 28 March.

The dining-hall-cum-kitchen block at **Ootacamund** centre was inaugurated on 26 March.

In the All India Essay Writing Competition 2009 conducted by United Nations Information Center for India & Bhutan, a student of Class XII of our **Aalo** school won the first prize in the northeast region.

Vidyamandira college (**Saradapitha**, Belur) has been identified as one of the 149 "colleges with potential for excellence (CPE)" from among the nearly 7000 colleges all over India under section 12(b) of University Grants Commission (UGC) Act.

Japan centre organized the second phase of its golden jubilee celebrations on 26 and 27 September 2009 and the third phase on 24 January 2010.

Aila Cyclone Relief : The Headquarters and Belgharia (Kolkata) centre distributed the following items to the victims of Aila cyclone:

(a) **Headquarters** – 1050 textbooks to 75 Aila-affected students in Hingalganj block, North 24-Parganas district, on 26 March.

(b) **Belgharia centre** – 958 *saris*, 1020 *lungis*, 19 *dhotis*, 402 shirts, 273 pants, 477 *churidars*, 200 blankets and 25 mosquito-nets to 1044 families of 17 villages in Sandheskhali - I & II blocks, North 24-Parganas district, during this month.

Flood Relief: On 26 March, **Hyderabad centre** distributed 280 handlooms to the poor weavers of Nagaladinne village in Kurnool district who had lost their looms in the flood of October 2009.

(b) **Kamarpukur** centre distributed 100 blankets to flood victims in Khanakul-II block, Hooghly district, on 13 January.

Winter Relief: 20,016 blankets were distributed through the following centres to poor people affected by the severity of winter: **Aalo** – 1700, **Almora** – 300, **Asansol** – 980, **Bankura** – 865, **Baranagar Mission** – 1500, **Belgharia** – 475, **Cherrapunji** – 2800, **Contai** – 100, **Deoghar** – 2000, **Ghatshila** – 197, **Jamshedpur** – 154, **Jayrambati** – 1058, **Kamarpukur** – 1700, **Kanpur** – 523, **Khetri** – 61, **Malda** – 13, **Narendrapur** – 600, **Purulia** – 300, **Ramharipur** – 1603, **Ranchi Morabadi** – 416, **Sargachhi** – 800, **Sikra Kulingram** – 300, **Taki** – 71, **Vrindaban** – 1500.

Besides, the following centres distributed various winter garments, shown in brackets, to the needy: **Almora** (100 used woollen sweaters), **Kanpur** (464 sweaters and 33 woollen *chadars*), **Purulia** (815 sweaters).

Fire Relief: **Bankura** centre distributed 200 kg rice, 100 kg *dal*, 60 kg flour, 40 mosquito-nets, 60 *saris*, 200 notebooks and 40 pens to 40 families whose houses had been ravaged by a devastating fire at Jhola village of Sarenga block in Bankura district, this month.

Distress Relief: The following centres distributed various items to the needy: **Agartala** (600 *saris* & 200 *dhotis*), **Baranagar Mission** (700 *saris*), **Belgharia** (1513 *saris*, 620 *dhotis*, 777 *lungis*, 556 shirts, 424 pants & 447 children's garments), **Bhubaneswar** (1350 kg rice, 650 kg *dal*, 700 kg *chira*, 500 kg peas, 650 litre palm oil, 400 kg salt, 96 kg milk powder & 370 *saris*), **Jalpaiguri** (300 *saris*), **Jamshedpur** (82 *saris* & 70 *dhotis*), **Kanpur** (100 kg rice, 140 kg *dal*, 3 tins of refined oil, 140 kg sugar, 70 kg vegetables, 6 cooking vessels, 60 bed-sheets, soap-bars, soap powder, toothbrushes & tubes of toothpaste), **Narainpur** (2500 school bags, 3000 jerseys, etc).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Summer Retreat will be held at the Society on **June 19 and 20** under the guidance of **Swami Chetanandaji**, Head of our St. Louis Center. The theme of this Retreat is **Bhakti Yoga of Swami Vivekananda**.

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.

Guru Purnima will be held on **Monday 26th July 2010 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 08, 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 May 09, 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 nine days a month (4 Tuesdays, 1 Thursday & 4 Saturdays) serving 450 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

May 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						<u>1</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>2</u> 11am Lecture: <i>'Tradition and Innovation'</i> By Prof. V Kumar Murty	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>7</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Vivekachudamani'</i>	<u>8</u> Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
<u>9</u> 11 am Lecture: <i>'Spell of Perception'</i>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u> 7:30pm No Scripture class.	<u>15</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
VVM 1:30 pm						
5:00 pm Ram Nam						
<u>16</u> 11am Guest Lecture: <i>'Over the Rainbow'</i> by Swami Yogatmananda	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Vivekachudamani'</i>	<u>22</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>23</u> 11:00 am: Special Meeting of the Members and Friends for the Building Expansion	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>29</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>30</u> 11:00 am: Buddha Purnima VVM 1:30 pm	<u>31</u>					

Special Meeting of the Members, Friends and Admirers of the Vedanta Society of Toronto will be held on Sunday, May 23, 2010 at 11 am to discuss the building expansion plan of the Centre. All are requested to attend.