



# Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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## Newsletter – May 2007

### THE BUDDHA

When a man merges his *Buddhi*, his intelligence, in *Bodha*, Consciousness, then he attains the knowledge of Brahman, he becomes *Buddha*, enlightened... Buddha is an incarnation of God. How can you compare him to anybody else? As he is great so is his teaching great. ~ Sri Ramakrishna

## Words to Inspire

(Gospel of Buddha)

What did Buddha say with his dying breath? "None can help you; help yourself; work out your own salvation."...

Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism... Ours is the Religion (Hinduism) of which Buddhism with all its greatness is a rebel child... The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the other and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.

To many the path becomes easier if they believe in God. But the life of Buddha shows that even a man who does not believe in God, has no metaphysics, belongs to no sect, and does not go to any church or temple, and is a confessed materialist, even he can attain to the highest. We have no right to judge him. I wish I had one infinitesimal part of Buddha's heart. Buddha may or may not have believed in God; that does not matter to me. He reached the same state of perfection to which others come by Bhakti—love of God—Yoga, or Jnana.

Perfection does not come from belief or faith. Talk does not count for anything. Parrots can do that. Perfection comes through the disinterested performance of action.

"Do not believe in what you have heard," says the great Buddha, "do not believe in doctrines because they have been handed down to you through generations, do not believe in anything because it is followed blindly by many; do not believe because some old sage makes a statement; do not believe in truths to which you have become attached by habit; do not believe merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Have deliberation and analyze, and when the result agrees with reason and conduces to the good of one and all, accept it and live up to it."

The Buddha told his disciples, "Let there be no false bondage, no dependence on me, no false glorification of this passing personality. Buddha is not a person; he is realization. Work out your own salvation."

- Swami Vivekananda

## What is Renunciation? – Part I

*(Based on a talk delivered by Prof. M. Ram Murty at the Vedanta Society of Toronto  
on April 22, 2007)*

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that if you repeat the word *gītā* several times, it becomes *tyāga*, which means renunciation, and this is the essential message of the Bhagavad Gita. So, it is important for us to understand the meaning of this word and what it implies for our day to day living in the context of a spiritual life. In one sentence, renunciation means the giving up of our lower nature, so that our higher nature manifests. Thus, we give up our lower attachments, and attach the mind to higher ideals, higher goals. The conventional interpretation focuses on the giving up of the lower attachments, and thus views renunciation in this light. However, there is the positive component to it also. We give up certain things so that we can raise the mind to a higher level. We give up TV so that we can devote our time to study. We give up gossip so that we can exercise, both the body and the mind. We give up something lower, so that we can gain something higher. Indeed, if we analyse whatever talents or skills we have, they were obtained through the practice of renunciation. Instead of wasting our mental energy in idleness and gossip, we put it in a creative direction and focus the mind on learning.

For the spiritual seeker, the mind has to be taken still higher. That is why it is important to analyze this notion and unravel its deeper meaning. In the Bhagavadgita, Sri Krishna says:

*Caturvidhābhajante mām janāh sukrtino’rjuna  
ārto jijnāsur arthārthi jñānīca bhāratarsabha*  
(7.16)

The virtuous ones who worship Me are of four kinds: the man in distress, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker for wealth, and the man of wisdom.

(Here, the word ‘man’ is used in a generic sense to refer to a human being. No specific gender is implied.) In the next verse, Sri Krishna clarifies what he means by the “man of wisdom” or the “wise one”:

*tesām jñānī nityayukta ekabhaktir visisyate  
priyo hi jñānino’tyartham aham sa ca mama  
priyah*  
(7.17)

Of these, the wise one, who is ever in constant union with the Divine, whose devotion is single minded, is the best. For I am supremely dear to him and he is dear to Me.

Thus, we have here the definition of the highest ideal. The man of wisdom is one who is in constant union with the highest level of awareness. The devotion to this level must be single-minded. All the great sages and saints of the past come into this category and this is our ideal. Sri Ramakrishna is a perfect example of someone who was in constant union with the Divine.

As for us, we are somewhere in the other three categories. Most of us seek God because we are in distress or mentally disturbed. We turn to God for peace of mind. If not this, we pray to God for some particular reason. For most of us, religion is more like a “feel-good” philosophy. It provides us with a sense of belonging and so makes us feel good. There is certainly nothing wrong with this attitude. The only danger is that it leads to a sense of complacency. Our efforts to take the mind to higher levels become minimal or even zero. It would be fine if the mind did not misbehave but here is where the problems start. In many ways, there are more problems for the spiritual seeker than there are for the ordinary worldly individual. Because the seeker of God has on one hand rightly resolved about the goal, but at the same time feels the weight of past tendencies. This tussle between our lower and higher nature is a formidable one to contend with and the true meaning of renunciation is the giving up of our lower tendencies so that our higher nature becomes manifest. It is to have the spiritual goal firmly fixed in our mind and not to deviate from that goal. It is the stuff that all the great saints and sages of the past were made of.

So how to do this? How to renounce our lower nature? This is what all of the yogas speak about. The four yogas—the yoga of reason or knowledge (*jnāna yoga*), the yoga of work (*karma yoga*), the yoga of love (*bhakti yoga*) and the yoga of psychic control (*rāja yoga*)—enable us to renounce our lower nature and express our higher. Swami Sarvagatananda taught us that the four yogas are like the “four-wheeled drive.” They enable us to steer through the highways of life and keep us focussed steadfast on our spiritual goal.

I believe it was Swami Turiyananda, who while he was a teenager met Sri Ramakrishna. His first question to him was how to get rid of our lower tendencies. And Sri Ramakrishna answered, “You don't get rid of them. You give them a higher direction.” What a beautiful answer! A similar sentiment is expressed in the Tulsidas Ramayana. There it is said that you, as a devotee of God should take all the cords of your attachments, twine them all together and use it to pull yourself up to the feet of the Lord. There are deep psychological truths in this advice. Often, we take an attitude of confrontation, only to find our adversary coming back with redoubled force. Rather, we should transmute the situation and view it as a spiritual opportunity. We must befriend the mind, take it with all its shortcomings and give it a higher direction.

In the Bhagavadgita, Sri Krishna advises Arjuna,

*uddhared ātmanā'tmānam nā'tmānam avasādayet  
ātmai'va hyātmano bandhur ātmai'va ripur  
ātmanah* (6.5)

Raise yourself by yourself, don't let yourself done.  
For you are your own friend and you are your own enemy.

How can you be your own friend? How can you be your own enemy? The next verse clarifies this.

*bandhur ātmā'tmanas tasya  
yenā'tmai'vā'tmanājītah  
anāmanas tu satrutvo vartetā'tmai'va satruvat* (6.6)

If you discipline your lower self by the higher Self, your lower self becomes your own friend. If you leave it to itself, it becomes your own enemy.

This indeed summarises the human condition. Sri Ramakrishna used to sing, “O mind, you do not know how to farm! Fallow lies the field of your life. If you had only worked it well, how rich a harvest you might reap!” The art of farming the mind is contained in the four yogas.

The human mind has four faculties: thinking, feeling, willing and restraining. Thought is the ignition. It also supplies the fuel for the mind. In many ways, it is the steering wheel. Thought drives everything. It drives the emotions, it drives the will, and it steers the direction in which the mind goes. Thought determines whether we go in a higher direction or a lower direction. There is a higher manifestation of thought in the form of reason. Reason can be taken higher still. It is called reflection. Thus, our reasoning faculty must be strengthened so that it ripens into reflection. Often, we are too short-sighted. We do not think through things very carefully. We jump to conclusions. To train the mind in reflection, in introspection, is the goal of *jnāna yoga*.

In Indian mythology, we find the gods all depicted with a “third eye.” This ‘third eye’ is not a physical organ; it is the eye of introspection. And the god is not some supernatural entity sitting in the celestial regions somewhere. It is you. It is your higher Self, the Pure Awareness. The more we reflect, the more we introspect, the closer we are to our own higher nature. In this context, the faculty of reason is a great help. Once our reason tells us what course of action to take, we must take it. We cannot dilly-dally along the way. To follow the dictates of our reason is the practice of *karma yoga*. For this, we need to engage the will. And this is done through effort, by constant practice. There is no other way.

(To be continued next issue...)



## Worship of God – Part II

By Swami Yatiswarananda

(From his article, “How to Become Spiritually Awakened,” *Vedanta Kesari*, August 1965)

In our Bhakti Sastras we call [the Ultimate Reality] Ishwara, ‘God’, and in Vedanta we call it Sat-Chit-Ananda. He is Infinite Existence, He is Infinite Consciousness, He is Infinite Bliss. He dwells in our soul and is the Soul of our souls. Again we all dwell in Him. We must feel it, at least His nearness. But even if we cannot feel it, we should try to develop the consciousness that He is nearer than the nearest, dearer than the dearest. What is it that obstructs this consciousness? Our desires stand in the way of this spiritual awareness. So let us try to purify this mind.

Here you come across a big problem. It is the impure mind that runs after the things of the world. The pure mind naturally reflects the glory of God, moves towards Him, meditates on Him, tries to feel His Divine Presence, Love and Bliss. How to purify the mind? First of all you must avoid evil thoughts, evil feelings, evil actions, as much as you can. Entertain good thoughts, good feelings and perform good actions. That is the first step. We should always bear in mind that we are all souls, Atman. This Atman has put on a human personality, with a view to play a part in the Cosmic drama of life. Whatever be the part

that is assigned to us, that part has to be played well; that means, we have to perform the duties of life and work in a spirit of detachment, as a form of service to God. But mere moral practice and the fulfilment of duties are not enough to purify the mind; we have to meditate on Him, pray to Him who is the Infinite Source of purity, of Knowledge, devotion, compassion, Love and Bliss. Here we come to the question: How to worship God, how to pray to Him? But the conception of God is too vast. I give an illustration: We are like small bubbles. The ocean is too big for our conception. So what should we do? We find some mighty waves; let us move towards them, attach ourselves to them and in course of time we have an idea of the ocean itself. Similarly, we start our spiritual journey with one such mountain-like wave, our Ishta Devata, we just worship Him, pray to Him, then we come to have a broader conception of life and a broader conception of Reality. The Ishta Devata tells us ‘Look here. I may be a mighty wave, you may be a small bubble. But all of us have got the infinite ocean behind us’. When the proper time comes, He reveals to us the highest Truth.

### SHODASHI PUJA

It was on the new-moon night, May 25, 1873, an auspicious occasion of Phalarini Kali Puja, that the Master made special arrangements for privately worshipping the Divine Mother as Shodashi in his room rather than performing the worship in the temple. (This special festival is also observed in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar. This year, Phalarini Kali Puja falls on May 16<sup>th</sup>.)

He then invoked the deity with following prayers: “O Divine Mother Tripura-sundari! O Eternal Virgin, possessor of all power! Please open the gate of perfection. Purify her body and mind, and manifest Yourself through her for the welfare of all.”

He then worshipped Sarada as a veritable manifestation of the Devi. Sarada went into Samadhi. While uttering mantras in a semiconscious state, the Master also went into deep Samadhi. Thus, the

worshipper and the worshipped became fully united and unified in the Atman, the Existence – Knowledge – Bliss – Absolute.

In the semiconscious state, he offered himself to the Devi manifest in the person of Sarada, and then forever surrendered himself at her feet, along with the result of his sadhana, his rosary, and everything else. He then bowed down to her with a prayer:

“O Concert of Shiva, the most auspicious of all beings! O Doer of all actions! O Refuge of all! O three-eyed goddess of all-Golden complexion! O Power of Narayana, I salute You again and again.”

The worship was completed. The Master’s sadhana culminated in this worship of the Divine Mother in the body of a woman who was an embodiment of spiritual wisdom. Both his divine and human aspects had achieved their ultimate perfection.

## **BELUR MATH NEWS**

**Swami Gokulanandaji** (Govinda Maharaj), Head of New Delhi centre, passed away on 31 March at 10.25 am at Gangaram Hospital, New Delhi. He was 78.

**Swami Pujyanandaji** (Prabhakar Maharaj), Head of Jaipur centre, passed away in his sleep on 29 March at about 6 am at the Jaipur Ashrama. He was 81.

**Vivekananda University**, Belur, conducted a national seminar entitled *Indian Scientific Heritage: Aryabhatta to Harish Chandra* at Vivekananda Auditorium, Belur, on 23 and 24 February. Distinguished speakers from several eminent institutions all over India, including IIT, Mumbai, University of Madras, Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, ISI, Kolkata, Bose Institute, Kolkata, and

Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, Kolkata, spoke in the two-day seminar.

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, **Durban**, has been made a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission. The centre is situated at 8 Montreal Road, Glen Anil, Durban, South Africa, but its address for correspondence is "Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, P.O. Box 40002, Red Hill, 4071, South Africa."

The **Institute of Culture**, Kolkata, has brought out Vol. VII (Part-I) of *The Cultural Heritage of India*. Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, released the book at his residence in Delhi on 3 March.

### **VISITING SWAMI**

Swami Swahanandaji, Head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, will be visiting our Centre from May 15 to 17, 2007.

### **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 12th, 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:** On Sunday, May 13th 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:** This month, the Soup Kitchen will be held on May 10, 17 and 24. 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 collections, as well as other Vedantic materials

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

*Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India*

## MAY 2007

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u> Scripture class: <i>Gospel of Buddha</i>	<u>5</u>
<u>6</u> <i>11 am</i>  <b>Buddha Jayanti Celebration</b>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> <i>9 am</i>  Soup Kitchen	<u>11</u> <i>7:30pm</i>  Scripture class: <i>Tattvabodha</i>	<u>12</u>  <b>Vigil:</b> 6 am to 6 pm
<u>13</u> <i>11am - Guest Lecture: 'Words of the Buddha: Sharing the Unsharable' by Theodore Tsaousidis</i>  VVM: 1:30 pm RamNam: 5pm	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u> <i>7 pm</i>  Informal talk by Swami Swahanandaji	<u>17</u> <i>9 am</i>  Soup Kitchen	<u>18</u> <i>7:30pm</i>  Scripture class: <i>The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i>	<u>19</u>
<u>20</u> <i>11am - Lecture: 'The Problem of Ego'</i>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u> <i>9 am</i>  Soup Kitchen	<u>25</u> <i>7:30pm</i>  Scripture class: <i>Tattvabodha</i>	<u>26</u>
<u>27</u> <i>11am - Lecture: 'Preparation for Meditation'</i>  VVM: 1:30 pm	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u>		

### Buddha Jayanti Celebration

Although the Buddha Purnima this year falls on May 2, we will celebrate Buddha Jayanti on the weekend, on Sunday, May 6<sup>th</sup> at 11 am. There will be Worship, Meditation, Devotional songs, Flower offering by the Devotees, and Prasad Distribution.

### SUMMER RETREAT with Swami Atmarupanandaji

June 23: 6 am to 9 pm; June 24: 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.**