



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter May 2011

Words to Inspire

“Whose mind is not agitated in adversity, who is free from desire, and who is devoid of attachments, fear and anger - such a person is called a sage of steady wisdom”

- Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 56

BUDDHA, THE TEACHER

THE DHARMAPADA

This is Dharmapada, the path of religion pursued by those who are Buddha's followers.

Creatures from mind their character derive; mind- marshaled are they, mind-made. Mind is the source of either of bliss or of corruption. By oneself evil is done ; by oneself one suffers ; by oneself evil is left undone ; by oneself one is purified. Purity and impurity belong to oneself, no one can purify another.

You yourself must make an effort. The Tathagatas are only preachers. The thoughtful who enter the way are freed from the bondage of Mara. He who does not rouse himself when it is time to rise, who, though young and strong, is full of sloth, whose will and thoughts are weak, that lazy and idle man will never find the way to enlightenment.

If a man holds himself dear, let him watch himself carefully; the truth guards him who guards himself. If a man makes himself as he teaches other to be, then being himself subdued, he may subdue others; One's ownself is indeed difficult to subdue.

If one man conquers in battle a thousand times a thousand men, and if another conquer himself, he is the greatest of conquerors. It is the habit of fools, be they laymen or members of the clergy, to think, “this is done by me. May others be subject to me. In this or that transaction a prominent part should be played by me.” Fools do not care for the duty to be performed or the aim to be reached, but think of their self alone. Everything is but a pedestal of their vanity.

Bad deeds, and deeds hurtful to ourselves, are easy to do; what is beneficial and good, that is very difficult to do. If anything is to be done, let a man do it, let him attack it vigorously! Before long, alas! This body will lie on the earth, despised, without understanding, like a useless log; yet our thoughts will endure. They will

be thought again, and will produce action. Good thoughts will produce good actions, and bad thoughts will produce bad actions.

Earnestness is the path of immortality, thoughtlessness the path of death. Those who are in earnest do not die; those who are thoughtless are as if dead already. Those who imagine truth in untruth, and see untruth in truth, never arrive at truth, but follow vain desires. They who know truth in truth, and untruth in untruth, arrive at truth, and follow true desires.

As rain breaks through an ill-thatched house, passion will break through an unreflecting mind. As rain does not break through a well-thatched house, passion will not break through a well-reflecting mind. Well-makers lead the water wherever they like; fletchers bend the arrow; carpenters bend a log of wood; wise people fashion themselves; wise people falter not amidst blame and praise. Having listened to the law, they become serene, like a deep, smooth and still lake. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.

An evil deed is better left undone, for a man will repent of it afterwards; a good deed is better done, for having done it one will not repent. If a man commits a sin let him not do it again; let him not delight in sin; pain is the outcome of evil. If a man does not what is good, let him do it again; let him delight in it; happiness is the outcome of good. Let no man think lightly of evil, saying in his heart, “It will not come nigh unto me.” As by the falling of water-drops a water-pot is filled, so the fool becomes full of evil, though he gather it little by little. To the sinful man sin appears sweet as honey; he looks upon it as pleasant so long as it bears no fruit; but when its fruit ripens, then he looks upon it as sin.

- The Gospel of Buddha, pages 110-113

HOW TO STUDY

V. Kumar Murty

(Based on a talk delivered at the Vedanta Society on November 28, 2010)

1. What is study?

By study, we mean a systematic method of acquiring knowledge. Learning and study keep our mind alert and alive and able to face the changing world that we live in. Since knowledge is infinite, we can never say that we have finished with learning or studying. It is said that student life begins but never ends. Sri Ramakrishna said 'as long as I live, so long do I learn'.

A large part of our knowledge comes from the senses. However, as spiritual aspirants, we acknowledge the need to transcend the senses to gain more permanent knowledge. In between spiritual experience and a sense-bound existence lies intellectual knowledge. Through study, we gain access to that level of knowledge and prepare the ground for contemplation and meditation.

The intellectual faculty exists in all of us and is active. If it is not deliberately engaged in study, it will engage itself in other things that may not be healthy. An untended garden tends to grow weeds. It requires work to even keep a field fallow, let alone growing something. Before you know it, weeds spring up from where we do not know.

The habit of study can protect us and act like a safety net for the oscillations of the mind. The mind goes up and down, sometimes to high flights of inspiration, but perhaps also to lower flights of depression. The habit of study protects us by not allowing the mind to go too far down.

Finally, study gives us a way to withstand challenges to our faith. It is not always possible to insulate ourselves from ways of thinking that can be unsettling to our faith. If we have developed a habit of study and

reflection, we will be able to withstand those challenges.

2. Information, knowledge and wisdom

Sometimes, we make a mistake in thinking that study is only about acquiring information. However, this is not correct. On the other hand, we cannot completely eliminate the need for information. We have to distinguish between information, knowledge and wisdom. Study has to do with all of these.

There is a difference between knowledge and information. Knowledge is meta-information or processed information. Knowledge is information about information: relationships and patterns. Even knowledge is an intermediate phase. Knowledge has to be distilled into wisdom.

Information can be compared to raw food stuffs. Before it becomes useful for us, we have to clean and then cook raw food stuffs. And after cooking, we have to eat the food and have the power to digest it and assimilate it. The cleaning phase corresponds to our effort to filter out good information from bad. The cooking phase corresponds to thinking about the good information that we have gathered. Thirdly, the eating, digesting and assimilating correspond to turning knowledge into wisdom.

It is not sufficient to know something. We have to assimilate it so that it becomes part of our being. Then knowledge becomes wisdom. Sri Ramakrishna says that some have heard of or even seen milk. That is information. Some have been able to drink it. That is knowledge. Some have been able to assimilate the nourishing aspects of milk to become stronger. That is wisdom.

3. Books and Teachers

Study may or may not be based on books or anything written. Traditional forms of study (for example in music or drama) do not use books and one is not even allowed to write anything down.

Study may be with a teacher or without a teacher. We know that in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, he began without a teacher but with intense eagerness to have direct spiritual experience. Later on, teachers came forward to instruct him systematically.

The most difficult study is without a teacher and without a book. In this case, one has to rely extensively on observation, experimentation, trial-and-error, and reflection, and most importantly on the eagerness to know and experience. Because of trial-and-error, it is more time consuming.

All methods of study are meant to minimize the waste of time due to trial-and-error. When we use a book, we rely on the author to have identified the material to be mastered. But even when we have a book, we still need to engage in observation (hearing, reading, imagining), experimentation and reflection.

4. Eight aspects of study

We shall discuss eight aspects of study: identifying the goal of our study, taking a prayerful approach to the teacher and the subject, recognizing that there are stages of study and determining which stage we are at, developing a habit of taking notes, spending time in thinking and reflecting, asking meaningful questions, engaging in fruitful discussion and being regular.

5. Identifying the goal

The goal will determine what and how we need to study. Also, note that our goal may evolve or even change with time. If we want to be sufficiently informed of current events, the daily newspaper will suffice. Perhaps we

can improve the quality of information by consulting several news papers. But if we want to become an authority on some current event, it requires deeper study.

If we are trying to lead a spiritual life, studying the lives of the exemplars of the virtues we are trying to practice can be a great help. This will not help us to understand current events, nor will the newspapers help us to live a spiritual life. We have to be clear on our goal and study appropriately.

If we are not clear on our goal, study becomes more difficult. The goal can be greatly varied: pass an exam, exercise the mind, become master of a subject, discover something new, find the truth, and so on.

Sometimes, failure comes not because the student is not qualified, but because they have undertaken study of something that is not directly related to their goal or they are employing a method that is not suitable for their goal.

6. Prayerful attitude

Despite all our analyses, learning is still mysterious. It is like growing a plant. We can follow a scientific and systematic approach, but there are circumstances beyond our control and perhaps beyond our knowledge. Of ten seeds planted, perhaps one germinates.

The Gita says that when we approach teachers with humility and reverence, they will tend to open up the secrets of their knowledge. We have to be prayerful and reverential. This attitude has been codified in the concept of a 'goddess of learning'. Knowledge is sacred and we must pray that knowledge is revealed to us and that we are able to understand it. This is the meaning of the Gayatri mantra. May that supreme and adorable light of knowledge illumine my understanding.

... To be continued

BELUR MATH NEWS

Bangalore Math organized a programme from 24 to 27 March to mark the centenary of Holy Mother's visit to Bangalore. It was inaugurated by Sri M N Venkatachalaiah, former Chief Justice of India. The programme included ceremonially receiving the Mother at Bangalore Cantonment Railway Station, special worship on the Holy Mother Rock, and a public meeting at Gavi Gangadhareshwara Temple which the Holy Mother had visited.

Cherrapunjee centre organized 32 health awareness camps in different parts of Meghalaya and Assam from August 2010 to March 2011. About 13,800 persons attended the camps.

Porbandar centre conducted 30 value education classes from July 2010 to February 2011 in which 7578 students and 245 teachers from 23 schools participated.

Porbandar centre conducted a dental camp at the Ashrama campus on 11 March, in which 34 patients were treated.

14,132 blankets were distributed through the following centres to poor people: Agartala – 250, Antpur – 500, Asansol – 903, Bankura – 204, Bhubaneswar – 874, Cherrapunjee – 2600, Deoghar – 1000, Ghatshila – 53, Jamshedpur – 26, Jayrambati – 1500, Kanpur – 6, Khetri – 298, Malda – 900, Narendrapur – 500, Purulia – 700, Ramharipur – 1500, Ranchi Morabadi – 513, Sargachhi – 355, Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House, Kolkata – 750, Taki – 200, Tamluk – 250, Vrindaban – 250.

Bhubaneswar centre also distributed 66 sweaters to needy people. The following centres distributed various items, shown in brackets, to needy people: Agartala (511 saris, 69 dhotis, 317 sets children's garments), Bangalore (125 saris), Bhubaneswar (2500 kg flour, 500 kg oil, 560 saris, 8 school uniforms, 380 school bags, 1250 school books, 380 value education

books, 760 notebooks, 380 geometry boxes, 760 pens, 760 pencils), Cherrapunjee (554 garments), Garbeta (140 saris), Kamarpukur (150 saris, 75 frocks), Nagpur (100 saris, 8 dhotis, 11 pajamas, 18 pants, 37 T-shirts, toiletries, etc.), Puri Mission (1000 saris), Ramharipur (1500 saris, 500 dhotis, 1000 sets of children's garments), Sargachhi (1675 saris, 25 arsenic water filters), Thrissur (283 school uniforms).

The 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated by the Headquarters and the following centres with great zeal; main programmes are given within brackets:

Headquarters (symposium and drama on 9 March), Baranagar Math (devotees' convention, public meeting and cultural programmes from 4 to 6 March), Delhi (public meeting, presided over by Dr Karan Singh, and musical performance on 6 March), Jammu (bringing out a book Sri Ramakrishna ke Ikwale-Zarin, an Urdu translation of the abridged version of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, which was released by Sri NN Vohra, Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, on 9 March), Kamarpukur (religious discourses, devotional songs, cultural programmes and exhibition from 6 to 10 March), Kankurgachhi (japa yajna, devotees' convention and public meeting on 26 and 27 March), Nagpur (spiritual retreat from 11 to 13 March), Rahara (parliament of religions, devotees' convention, procession and cultural programmes from 3 to 8 March).

An all-India convention of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishads was held at Belur Math on 12 and 13 February in which 78 Conveners and Joint Conveners of different Parishads and 81 monks, mostly Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Parishads, took part. Swami Prabhanandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, delivered the welcome address. The convention mainly discussed the programmes that may be conducted by different unaffiliated ashramas under the Parishads to commemorate the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna and the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekanand

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Sri Ramanavami was celebrated on Tuesday April 12, 2011 at 6:30 pm. The programme included bhajans, puja and

Ram Nam sankirtanam followed by prasad distribution. Close to 100 devotees attended.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Guru Purnima will be held on Friday July 15, 2011 at 6:30 pm. 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 14, 2011**, 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 15, 2011 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 offered 9 days in May (3, 7, 10, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24 & 28) 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.

ONE-DAY SPIRITUAL RETREAT IN CALGARY

Vedanta Society of Toronto is going to organize a Spiritual Retreat in Calgary to be conducted by Swami Kripamayananda on Saturday September 3, 2011 from 9am to 5pm at Willow Ridge Community Hall, 680 Acadia Drive SE, Calgary T2J 0E1. Registration Fee is \$ 45 per person. Interested persons are requested to contact the Vedanta Society of Toronto, Phone number [416-240-7262](tel:416-240-7262) or Mr Anup Roy, Phone number: [403-252-8424](tel:403-252-8424)

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesda	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<u>1</u> 11am Lecture: 'Destiny and Divine Grace'	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>7</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>8</u> 11am Lecture: 'Story of Shankara' <u>VVM 1:30 pm</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>14</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
<u>15</u> 11am Lecture: 'The Awakened' <u>VVM 1:30 pm</u> 5:00PM Ram Nam	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>20</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>21</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>22</u> 11am: BUDDHA JAYANTI CELEBRATION	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>28</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>29</u> 11am Guest Lecture: 'Yoga and Pranayama' by Gagan Bhalla <u>VVM 1:30 pm</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u>				

ANNUAL SUMMER RETREAT

Annual Retreat will be held on Saturday, July 2nd and Sunday July 3rd, 2011 at the Vedanta Society of Toronto. The subject of the retreat is "Bhaja Govindam". The retreat will be conducted by a Guest Monk and the resident Swami. If you are interested in attending, please contact the Society by June 10, 2011 at 416-240 7262 or by email at society@vedantatoronto.ca