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## Newsletter November 2005

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*Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'Fix your mind firmly on God and perform all your duties. Then you will be free from all dangers.' Again, he said, 'In the play of hide and seek, if the player succeeds in touching the "granny," he is no longer a "thief." Similarly, once we see God we are no longer bound by the fetters of the world.'*

-Swami Brahmananda

#### Words To Inspire

You have heard enough. Now do something and show your worthiness. No more waste of time. Begin from this day, this very evening. For the present, do these two things - japa and meditation, every morning and evening without fail. Continue this habit for a couple of years at least. Then you will find great joy, and will know more and more spiritual mysteries.

So much for the present. I shall tell you in time what more practices you have to take up. Now you need not bother yourself about mental worship. Leave it for the time being. After your formal initiation, if I think you should do it, I shall tell you, regarding initiation itself, you need not worry over that at this stage. Now only do as much as instructed and nothing more. No more wasting of time, my child. Begin this very day, and go bravely on.

Procure a new asana to sit upon. Keep it apart to be used solely for meditation, worship and such things. Also choose a solitary retreat for your sadhana. If you feel inconvenient or disturbed at home, now and then retire to a solitary place at night. Remember always that here in this sacred city of Varanasi, spiritual realization is easily attainable. If you can carry on your sadhana for two years at a stretch, I am sure you will gain some realization. There are people who have attained it still sooner, in a year even. So begin now, and after some time you will feel so much joy at heart that you will want to meditate more and more.

Regarding moral conduct, observe these two rules: be truthful always, and honour and worship all women as mother. The observance of these two rules will make all the other moral rules shine in your life. Frequent holy places, study sacred books, and come to me now and then.

Believe in the existence of God, and never feel He does not exist. I tell you, my child, God is. Therefore hold fast to Him in sincere devotion and humility, and pray and pray! Begin now, this very day, and move forward. I will see to the rest.

-Swami Brahmananda, from *The Eternal Companion*

#### Ritualism

(Based on a talk delivered by Swami Kripamayananda on September 18th, 2005 at the Vedanta Society of Toronto.)

When I wake up in the morning, I bring into consciousness and remember the name of my Ishta or Chosen Deity and see His picture. At the same time someone else may be getting a cup of coffee. We will both greatly miss these practices if some day we are unable to do them. As it were, we can say, our whole life is one big ritual. Saying, 'Hello,' or 'How are you?' when we meet each another person is a ritual. Rituals range from large royal coronations or presidential inaugurations to the simple and everyday act such as shaking hands with people when we first meet them.

Habit, ritual, and practice. These are basic building blocks of personal and organizational life. Indeed, we cannot function in any way as social beings without them. But for our focus, as spiritual aspirants, we should form our lives with habits that are rooted in the sacred, the holy and the spiritual. When someone regularly takes coffee in the morning, we loosely refer to it as being a kind of ritual because it makes a positive contribution to the well-being of our psycho-physical constitution. But a ritual should not be misconstrued as being a mindless addiction without any redemptive power. Rituals are positive habits, which reinforce the basic, inherent divinity in all manifestation; creation. Really speaking, a ritual is a practice tied to the symbolic expression of some fundamental truth or meaning. I can say that it has become our Society's ritual to have tea upstairs after Sunday service. This is something we practice. Some might call this our tradition here, which would be correct. But the difference between tradition and ritual lies in the in-built sacred or spiritual component of the latter. Tradition is a handed-down set of practices, whereas ritual is a practice intimately linked with the formalized, predetermined expression of some fundamental truth or meaning in symbolic form.

Rituals have formed a part of human culture for tens of thousands of years. Earliest known evidence of burial rituals dates from around 20 thousand years ago. So ritualism and humanity are shown to be interlinked to a great extent. In religion, a ritual can be an assortment of the prescribed outward forms of performing worship. Ritual has a close connection with reverence, thus ritual in most of the cases is an expression of reverence for a deity. The conceptual tie between ritual and reverence is quite significant. Through a physical action, with physical materials, the non-physical is being symbolically hailed - meaning is loaded into the act. Lighting a candle in front of the image or picture or symbol of the deity or waving incense makes us feel holy and connected with God. These actions create certain impressions on the mind which prepares it for quiet, meditative reflection on the reality that exists beyond the physical plane. When devotees sit during a puja, the purpose is to gather the mind and hold it on the objects of worship which naturally bring up divine thoughts, feelings and impressions. And these thoughts, feelings and impressions help to create a spiritual atmosphere in the place where the puja is taking place. So this furthers the idea that through ritual, the seer and the seen are both interrelating and contributing to the benefit of all present. The puja creates the vibrations and impressions on the minds of devotees, who themselves give back the vibrations and impressions of their devotion.

We are trying to reach that which lies beyond. We must utilize, to the best of our physical and mental ability, all the resources available to us to lift our consciousness high enough to receive the spiritual current constantly running. Reading books which uplift our minds is also a ritual. Taking in spiritual information makes the mind strong and pure. We are fortifying the mind with healthy, stable, strengthening nourishment which produce the right kind of vibrations. The mind is the target for rituals. Ritual is a mental and physical act performed with a wish to reach a goal which is beyond the object of worship. We are using the object in a way that will let us transcend the object. The driving desire behind each ritual is to leave the mind to rest upon the subject of divinity for as long as possible. Thus rituals protect us from our wavering mind. It forces us to pursue good habits even though the mind may feel reluctant some days. Rituals, when planned with a certain level of pomp and complexity, have the ability to unite communities. For example, there is Durga Puja for the Bengali communities, Ganesha Puja for the Marathi communities, Christmas for Christians, and Eid for Muslims. Rituals have the power to bind groups together under one common banner of social, cultural and more importantly, spiritual harmony. We must keep it in mind that rituals, for spiritual aspirants such as ourselves, are for the sake of our own spirituality.

Each age has its own rituals. During Vedic times there used to be elaborate yajnas, or sacrifices. During that segment of history, elaborate temples and image-worship did not exist, as they do quite prevalently today. It was congregational worship. All would join; there was no caste distinction. It reveals the generally high states of mind possessed by the people of those times.

Every religion that is prevalent today has a ritualistic component of practice. This is because ritual helps us to find intimacy with God in our everyday lives. We want to combine the three aspects of ourselves: body, mind and spirit. In rituals, we are able to do so in a way that nurtures a personal relationship with the Supreme Reality. When we use our bodies in some ritual act, no matter how small, and engage our imaginations, our emotions and our faith, the religious experience we have is not only deeper, it becomes an integrated part of our lives. Rituals live on within us. They enter into the subconscious mind and stay there to provide spiritual anchors with which we can cling to when our minds pass through bouts of turbulence and instability. Test this. Gauge how your mind reacts when the conch shell is blown during a ritual ceremony. Analyze all the associations that are wrapped up with that one single sound. For a Hindu, richness of symbolism is embedded in each and every single part of a ritual.

What do we do in our worship ritual?

1. Remember God - the auspicious one and pray to him before beginning the act of worship.
2. Purify the water used for worship by imagining that holy water from sacred rivers - Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri have come into the container.
3. Removal of disturbing spirits if any are present, by broadcasting rice grains.
4. Purification of the earth and the seat.
5. Paying respect to the lineage of the Guru; purifying the deity & the worship materials and even mantras.
6. Pranayama - regulating the breathing.
7. Purification of the elements that make our physical body and removal of all impurities from the psychic body (bhuta suddhi)
8. Jiva-nyasa - deifying our body with the presence of Ishta.
9. Worship of Guru and five deities beginning with Ganesha.
10. Meditation on the Ishta.
11. Mental worship.
12. Inviting the Lord to accept the worship
13. Offering articles of worship - sandalwood paste, flowers, incense, light, food (fruits and sweets), water.

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#### 14. *Pranam*

Common Hindu ritualistic worship helps to make you feel purer (physically and mentally) and closer to God for a longer time. We gradually grow in reverence and love for Him. Each step is full of meaning which, when reflected upon, stirs up the heart of devotion and brings in a noticeable change in the worshipper.

Meditation is the best method of spiritual practice, but it is also the most difficult. Commonly we do not really meditate, as such. We try to meditate. We try to maintain the meditative posture; physical as well as mental. With meditation being difficult for most of us, it is better to do some ritualistic worship. It is the most suitable and natural spiritual practice for a person of devotional nature. The spiritual journey is a personal journey. As Plato stated, life "is the path of the alone to the Alone". For personal meaning, the way we express ourselves is varied and expansive. Creativity and art exists because of this seemingly limitless range of expression. It is very good for us to have our own personal rituals.

All these things help to make our progress in moral and spiritual life steady. Enriching our lives is our own responsibility. We choose what to fill our lives with. When a ritual becomes habitual, it helps us to become spiritual. But one more thing is required. In the words of Swami Ashokananda, "Everything you do is a ritual. If your heart is in it, it becomes spiritual." Our hearts must be in everything we do to become truly spiritual.

### Quantum Leap

#### Swami Vivekananda and The Quest for World Peace

Swami Vivekananda's inspiring personality is well known both in India and in America since the late 19th century and early 20th century. At the Parliament of Religions, which was held in Chicago, Swamiji attended as a representative of Hinduism. He had a national and international mission. He strove to promote peace and brotherhood based on the foundation of the Vedantic Oneness of existence.

At Parliament of Religions, Swamiji addressed his audience as his "Sisters and Brothers", which immediately endeared him to the people of America. At this convention, Swamiji hoped to convey the message of Vedanta, whose four cardinal points are non-duality of the Godhead, divinity of the soul, oneness of existence and harmony of religions. Although the natural tendency of Swami Vivekananda's mind was absolute devotion to and contemplation of God, another part of his personality bled at the sight of human suffering around the world.

Even so, Swamiji chose service to man as his mission on earth. In America Swamiji became India's spiritual ambassador and pleaded for better understanding between India and the U.S. in order to create a healthy synthesis of East and West, of religion and science. Service to man as the visible manifestation of God was the special form of worship he advocated for the Indians, as we were already well versed in the contemplative and philosophical foundations of our ancient faith. In the course of his short life of thirty-nine years (1863-1902), of which only ten were devoted to public activities--and those, too, in the midst of acute physical suffering--he left for posterity his four classics: Jnana-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, and Raja-Yoga. He also organized the Ramakrishna Order of monks, which is the most outstanding religious organization of modern India. It is devoted to globally spreading and offering the life-giving message of the universal philosophy and religion of Vedanta and the harmony of all religions. Swamiji chose to convey his worldwide message of peace and brotherhood by giving the following example: "The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth, or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant." He emphasized that religion was a similar case. "The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth." Thus Swamiji was a fervent advocate of world peace and the unity of religions. Until the last years of his life, he gave numerous lectures, composed many soul stirring poems and acted as spiritual guide to many who sought his guidance.

His final words at the Chicago Parliament of Religions were, "Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written in spite of resistance 'Help and not Fight,' 'Assimilation and not Destruction,' 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.'" Swami Adiswarananda of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre in New York has aptly written: "At a time when world peace is being maintained by continuous wars, divisiveness is glorified at the expense of unity, and the human soul is being buried beneath the debris of brutality, violence and hatred, the words of Swami Vivekananda give us assurance -- an assurance that we are not living the last days of our destiny and that the light of the Divine, shining in every heart, will triumph over the forces of darkness."

By Vinita Bijur, Age 17,  
Student of the Vedanta Vidya Mandir  
(This was a short talk given as part of the Swami Vivekananda Statue Dedication Ceremony on September 11th, 2005 held at the Centre.)

### Past Events

This year's **Durga Puja** was publicly celebrated with due festivity and solemnity. Mahashtami was observed on October 11th and Vijaya Dashami was observed on October 13th. Close to 400 devotees attended the joyous event and took in the special programmes featuring homa, shanti-jal, bhajans, readings, meditation, flower offering and partaking of cooked prasad.

### Upcoming Events

#### Vedanta Society of Toronto - Annual General Meeting

**Sunday, November 13th, 11 am**

Any member wishing to nominate an active and willing member of the Vedanta Society of Toronto for service on the Executive Committee may do so by writing to the Society. All nominations must be received by October 30th and be duly proposed and seconded, and approved by Swami Kripamayananda. All our members and friends are requested to attend the meeting.

If you are a member are unable to attend, you are invited to designate Swami Kripamayananda, the President of the Vedanta Society of Toronto, or an active member to represent you using the proxy form included with this newsletter. Please complete the form as instructed and ensure that the Society receives it on or before November 13th, or that your appointed designate brings the form with them on the day of the meeting.

### Regular Services

#### Daily Meditation

Meditation is held at the Centre every morning from 6 am to 7 am. Devotional singing and meditation is held every evening from 6 pm to 7 pm.

#### Interviews and Instruction

Swami Kripamayananda grants interviews to those interested in knowing more about Vedanta, Indian Philosophy, and spirituality and its practices. Please call in advance and make an appointment.

#### Sunday Service

Lectures are given every Sunday at 11 am by Swami Kripamayananda or distinguished speakers. The service includes devotional singing, reading, meditation and refreshments. **Please use front entrance.**

#### Scripture Class

Scripture classes are held every Friday at 7:30 pm. **Please use upstairs kitchen entrance.**

#### Vedanta Vidya Mandir Children's Programme

An educational programme for young people, teaching Indian Spirituality, History, Values, Music and Yoga - is usually held twice a month. The class schedule this month is **November 6th** and **November 20th**. Note: This year, classes are from **1 pm to 4 pm**.

#### Book Store

The Book Store carries selected titles from Ramakrishna - Vivekananda literature, as well as other material related to Vedanta and Indian Philosophy. Please call for store hours.

For other services, please go to our [events](#) page.