



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter November 2008

Words to Inspire

Question: *How should we perform our worldly duties?*

Maharaj: Do your duties conscientiously, and without attachment. Always remember that you are an instrument in the hands of God, and that God himself is the only doer. Keep your mind fixed in God.

(*The Eternal Companion*, Vedanta Press, 1970 Edition. - Page 184)

Living the Simple Life

(Swami Brahmeshananda, *The Vedanta Kesari*, March 2008 p.109)

Question: Why is possessiveness considered wrong? Should we not own things or have friends?

Answer: Let us recall the notice put on certain railway stations: 'Less luggage, happy journey'. Or think of a person burdened with many items of luggage dangling from his hands and shoulders and another person happily striding ahead with just one bag on his shoulder! So also possessiveness adds to our botheration. One has to spend a lot of time and energy in acquiring and keeping them. If they are lost, we feel sorry. Further as we become attached to them, we become dependent upon them for our happiness. Instead of happiness, they bring suffering. They rob our precious time and energy, which could be better utilized for higher pursuits.

There is one more side of this idea of living a simple life. Think of the widespread poverty. All over the world, there are so many people living in poverty, unable to have two square meals a day or have proper clothing and housing. In such a condition, it is indeed criminal to possess more than one's basic needs. Every extra morsel of food we take is snatched from someone who eats just a half meal a day.

Possessiveness of friends is also as bad. True love is never possessive. Possessiveness is bondage and no one likes to be bound. True loves gives freedom to the person loved.

Question: How to get over this possessive tendency?

Answer: First of all, let us be convinced that possessiveness is bad and the less we possess, the better it is for us and for the society. Second, whenever we are tempted to add to our possessions, we should ask ourselves, 'Can I do without it?' In at least 70-80% cases, we will find that we can do without it. We must remember that we cannot become happy by having more. If it were so, millions of people who possess so much wealth but are so unhappy would not have been there. Let us keep our needs simple and know that there is no end to man's greed.

Question: If we are to become desireless, then how can we motivate ourselves to do anything?

Answer: If one really becomes desireless, one will achieve the ultimate goal of human life called Moksha, where there is unalloyed bliss. Then one need not do any work because one will be fulfilled and full of joy always.

But until we reach that we need to work. We should therefore work as a spiritual discipline. Our inspiration should come from our desire to grow spiritual through doing work. The Gita constantly advocates us to do our duty, our assigned work without any selfish motive. 'If a man works without any selfish motive in view,' says Swami Vivekananda, 'does he not gain anything? Yes, he gains the highest. Unselfishness is more paying, only people have not the patience to practice it.'

SADHANA IN THE UPANISHADS-AN APPROACH (Part-I)

Prof. V. BALAJI*

This article is an expanded version of a talk that I gave in Toronto at the Vedanta Society on April 1, 2007. I therefore beg the reader's indulgence for the conversational style in which the article is written. In this article I merely give a glimpse of an aspect of the vast and immense body of the Upanishads to highlight my thesis on *sadhana*. My experience of the Vedas and Upanishads is profoundly influenced by Sri Aurobindo's vision. The Upanishads are a triune expression of the spiritual experience of a certain group of *rishis*, who from all descriptions of the literary history known to us, lived at a certain climactic and transitional phase of what may be termed the Vedic Age.

We say triune in the sense that the Upanishadic word or expression has the consummate combination of truth-substance, sound-expression and rhythm which constitutes the plenary Word. This form of *mantric* speech, by virtue of its truth-substance, the *sat*, gets its deathless quality which dwells perpetually in a certain realm, namely the *paramé vyoman*. The sound-expression and rhythm give it the power to invoke the Presence across barriers of time and modify the inner substance of the seeker. This is my basic premise.

I will dwell on how a certain path can be traversed by keeping the *Veda* and the *Upanishad* themselves as the source and the deity, the *ishta*, and this is what I term as *sadhana* in this article¹.

What I wish to speak about can broadly be termed *mantra-sadhana* as an explicit means

of realisation. *Mantra-sadhana* is verily to understand, to comprehend and dwell on the deep ideas underlying the terms which occur and recur in the Upanishads. There is a somewhat different *mantra-sadhana* as pursued by the *Tantra* practitioners and I will not dwell on that.

The *mantras* were created by *rishis*, seers and *kavis*, poets. The word *kavi* comes from the root *ku*, which means "to make" and etymologically, poesy also means "to make, to create a form". The *rishis* were in fact called *mantra drashtas*, which means they were the visionaries of the *mantras*.

Note the remarkable coming together of the sound and light aspects, or rather the visual and auditory aspects of the word, which underlies the development of the faculties of *drishti* and *shruti* as a part of the *sadhana*.

The philosophical basis for the formation of the mantras by the *rishis*, was the world-view in which this *loka* (the objective world) is indeed a locus traced out by a movement of consciousness, and all material forms and energies are external symbols of a deeper internal reality. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* calls all the planes and stations of consciousness as *vyahriti*, which means "utterance", and therefore the path traced out by the Word, by *Brahman*.

The Sanskrit at the time of these *rishis* was still near its origins and had less of the intellectual influence which comes with the sophistication of the thinking mind. Instinct in the language, was a flexibility which allowed a range of meanings and expressions. Here we sound a word of caution.

¹ The footnotes in this article are an integral part of the theme. The reader is invited to them for more details on some of the topics covered here

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One may misuse this inherent flexibility in the language to bring in our own fancies into the readings. To safe-guard against this, one should bear in mind that the multitude of meanings had always the hint of the word's seed-sound. It is this seed-sound that we must trace and be united with, and this is our principal means of *sadhana*.

The *Rig Veda* says that the *mantras* were "fashioned by the heart and impelled by the mind". The substance constituting the *mantra* was a power-substance, a densified stuff of consciousness, having the potency to give experience, to bring realisation, to be a vehicle to carry great ideas across all time barriers. Our *sadhana* lies therefore in bringing back through a process of *smarana* the hidden intricacies of the *mantras*.

At any point in time when I attempt to study the *Upanishads*, their grandeur and immensity unfailingly stimulates a number of basic questions which I need to keep in focus. What is the meaning of *sadhana*? What specific processes am I interested in, when seen in the context of the *Upanishad*? Where does the *Rig Veda* fit in the body of yoga as perceived today? Is it possible at all to read the *Upanishads* without a commentary ?

Can one have, as it were, a direct conversation with the *rishi*? Is there a realm where these verses are permanently housed as living entities and which allow their substance to be repeatedly and perpetually interacted with? I wish to address a few of these questions briefly and give some clues towards their plausible answers.

Words in the *Upanishads* are a vibrant substance and reveal billowing oceans of connotations and depth. Therefore, although we employ the mind as the instrument in this study, the aim is not merely to understand but to dwell on the words by contemplative and

perceptive thought (*dhi*) and consciousness (*chitta*). The dwelling is the *upasana*, which literally means sitting close to it and being at it. In the English language we have the word assiduity, whose etymology is very similar to *upasana* and which throws up similar connotations.

The practice is not to attach a meaning to a line and convert it into a commandment for what one may term a daily good living, but the practice is really a never ending participation. It lies in the dwelling on the word, in being wholly with it, in making the *mantra* (the *Rik*) a companion which accompanies one in this complex journey of life. The *mantra* then unloosens many stubborn knots within, and reveals hidden potencies within us, clarifies our densities, and even fills our consciousness with its own substance.

Let me examine with care the word *sadhana* itself. Etymologically it comes from the root *sadh*, which means *to go straight to the goal, or attain an object sought after*. The word *sadhu* derived from *sadh* therefore means hitting the mark and so *sadhana* (*sadna*) means leading straight in accordance and in concordance with the *rta*. The term *rta* is one of the capital Vedic terms that stands for the right, rectum, order, or more precisely, the dynamics of the manifestation of the Right. In view of its significance, I will dwell a little longer on *rta*.

The word *rta* in the *Rig Veda* stands for a cosmic principle, a substance which can be experienced and is present in all phenomenal existence. It makes itself felt in normal existence as the presence of harmony and regularity and hence its significance as the right or order.

(Part-II will be published in the December 2008 Newsletter)

BELUR MATH NEWS

Porbandar Centre in Gujarat has launched a Value Education Programme to inculcate higher values in the students of schools and colleges in and around Porbandar through activities such as arranging exhibitions on Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, talks on value education, CD shows on personality development, and distribution of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature.

The **Institute of Culture**, Kolkata, has received an accreditation from the Instituto Cervantes of New Delhi, which is directly under the Ministry of Education, Government of Spain, and has been selected as the centre for holding examinations for the Diplomas in Spanish as a Foreign Language. The Institute, as the first centre in Eastern India to be accredited by the Instituto Cervantes, held the above examinations on 22 and 23 August.

Chennai Math, in the state of Tamil Nadu, organized a function on 8 August as a part of the centenary celebrations of its publishing house. On this occasion, 100 sets of subsidized books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda (in Tamil) released by the Math to commemorate the centenary were distributed free to various schools in rural areas and Seva Samitis in and around Chennai.

Chennai Math, in the state of Tamil Nadu, held the annual meeting of rural youths at its premises on 15 August. About **1100** beneficiaries of the rural projects of the Math, which included nursing assistant trainees, computer trainees, automobile repairing trainees and mat-weaving trainees, took part in the meeting.

Belgaum Centre, in Karnataka, has launched a project named *Viveka Vahini* to carry the message of Swami Vivekananda to different educational institutions and rural areas through a mobile unit with audio-visual equipment, pictorial exhibits, and printed literature on the life and teachings of Swamiji. The project will particularly focus on character-building and personality development of the youth.

Ulsoor Centre, in Karnataka has launched a **Youth Awareness Programme** named *Yuva Jagrati*. The project aims to inculcate higher values in the college students by exposing them to the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda through

activities such as presentation of Ramakrishna-Sarada-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature to college libraries as well as organizing sales of these books, arranging exhibitions and creating study circles in colleges, conducting regular retreats and annual conventions for the youth, etc.

Dr Z L Mkhize, Minister for Finance and Economic Development, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, inaugurated Ramakrishna Abalindi Home (Inanda) on 6 August. These facilities were built by the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, **Durban**, and handed over on that day to the office-bearers of the Home. The Home with 45 beds, intended for terminally-ill patients, will provide a much-needed facility for HIV / AIDS and cancer patients in the area.

Mangalore Centre in Karnataka, conducted a district level convention of yoga teachers at its premises on 17 July. About 200 teachers attended the programme.

A branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math has been started at the birthplace of Swami Niranjananandaji (a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) at **Rajarhat Bishnupur**, Kolkata, with the land, buildings, etc received from Sri Ramakrishna Niranjanananda Ashrama, Rajarhat Bishnupur. The handing over ceremony was held on 16 August, the sacred birthday of Swami Niranjananandaji. Swami Atmasthanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, gave a benedictory speech and Swami Prabhanandaji, General Secretary of the Math & Mission, addressed the gathering. A large number of monks and devotees attended the function. The address of this new Math centre is: Ramakrishna Math, P.O. Rajarhat Bishnupur, Bishnupur, Kolkata 700135; Phone: (0) 90074-01963 (Office) and (0) 90074-01971 (President).

Ms. Arundhati Roy Chowdhury, who successfully completed the course on *International Understanding for Human Unity* from the **Institute of Culture**, Kolkata, has been invited by the *Canadian Centre for Teaching Peace* (CCTP) to present a paper at the **Seventh Annual Peace Education Conference at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada**, to be hosted by CCTP from 21 to 23 November.

Sri Ramakrishna Society, **St. Petersburg, Russia**, has been made a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math. Its address is: Ramakrishna Society, Ulitsa Pestelya, Dom 8, Apartment 70, St. Petersburg 191028, Russia; Phone: (7) (812) 273-3544.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Durga Puja was celebrated on **October 07, 2008 at 6.00 pm**. The programme consisted of bhajans, discourse, flower offering followed by prasad distribution. About 500 devotees attended the function.

Kali Puja was celebrated on **October 28, 2008 at 6.30 pm**. The programme included bhajans, discourse, flower offering followed by prasad distribution. Close to 200 devotees were present.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sri Sarada Devi Birth Anniversary will be celebrated on **Sunday 21st Dec 2008 at 11.00 am**. The programme will consist of bhajans, puja, homa, flower offering followed by prasad distribution.

Christmas Eve will be celebrated on **Wednesday 24th Dec 2008**. The programme will include devotional songs, carols, reading from the Bible, worship, offering of candles followed by 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, November 8, 2008**, 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 November 9, 2008 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 (2nd Tuesday and Thursday, and 3rd Tuesday and Thursday) a month at Roncesvalles Food Sharing, 263 Roncesvalles Avenue, Toronto M6R 2L9. This month, the Soup Kitchen dates are November 11, 13, 18 and 20. 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.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						<u>1</u>
<u>2</u> [N.B.: Daylight Saving Time Ends] 11am Lecture: 'The Science of Human Possibilities' – by Prof. V. Kumar Murty VVM: 1:30 pm	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u> NO SCRIPTURE CLASS	<u>8</u> Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
9 11am Lecture: 'Essentials of Meditative Life' 5:00 pm RAM NAM	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>14</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>15</u>
16 11am Lecture: 'Faith or Reason?' VVM: 1:30 pm	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>21</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Tattvabodha'	<u>22</u>
23 11am ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28 7:30pm</u> Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>29</u>
30 11am Lecture: 'Self-Realization through Control of Mind.' VVM: 1:30 pm						

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Vedanta Society of Toronto's Annual General Meeting will be held on Sunday, **November 23, 2008 at 11:00 am**. Any member wishing to nominate an active and willing member of the Vedanta Society for the Executive Committee may do so by writing to the Society. **All nominations must be received by November 9, 2008** 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 unable

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to attend and have not yet sent the proxy, please fill in the **proxy form** that was included with the October Newsletter, and send it so that it reaches us **before November 23**.