



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter November 2009

Words to Inspire

“The grandest idea in the religion of the Vedanta is that we may reach the same goal by different paths; and these paths I have generalized into four, viz those of work, love, psychology, and knowledge”

-From ‘Karma-Yoga’ by Swami Vivekananda, p.117

THE IDEAL OF KARMA-YOGA

(From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I, pp. 108-110*)

I have already tried to point out that goal. It is freedom as I understand it. Everything that we perceive around us is struggling towards freedom, from the atom to the man, from the insentient, lifeless particle of matter to the highest existence on earth, the human soul. The whole universe is in fact the result of this struggle for freedom. In all combinations every particle is trying to go on its own way, to fly from the other particles; but the others are holding it in check. Our earth is trying to fly away from the sun, and the moon from the earth. Every thing has a tendency to infinite dispersion. All that we see in the universe has for its basis this one struggle towards freedom; it is under the impulse of this tendency that the saint prays and the robber robs. When the line of action taken is not a proper one, we call it evil; and when the manifestation of it is proper and high, we call it good. But the impulse is the same, the struggle towards freedom.

The saint is oppressed with the knowledge of his condition of bondage, and he wants to get rid of it; so he worships God. The thief is oppressed with the idea that he does not possess certain things, and he tries to get rid of that want, to obtain freedom from it ; so he steals. Freedom is the one goal of all nature, sentient or insentient; and consciously or unconsciously, everything is struggling towards that goal. The freedom which the saint seeks is very different from that which the robber seeks; the freedom loved by the saint leads him to the enjoyment of infinite, unspeakable bliss, while that on which the robber has set his heart only forges other bonds for his soul.

There is to be found in every religion the manifestation of this struggle towards freedom. It is the groundwork of all morality, of unselfishness, which

means getting rid of the idea that men are the same as their little body. When we see a man doing good work, helping others, it means that he cannot be confined within the limited circle of “Me and Mine”. There is no limit to this getting out of selfishness. All the great systems of ethics preach absolute unselfishness as the goal. Supposing this absolute unselfishness can be reached by a man, what becomes of him? He is no more the little Mr. So-and so ; he has acquired infinite expansion.

The little personality which he had before is now lost to him for ever; he has become infinite, and the attainment of this infinite expansion is indeed the goal of all religions and of all moral and philosophical teachings. The personalist, when he hears this idea philosophically put, gets frightened. At the same time, if he preaches morality, he after all teaches the very same idea himself. He puts no limit to the unselfishness of man. Suppose a man becomes perfectly unselfish under the personalistic system, how are we to distinguish him from the perfected ones in other system ? He has become one with the universe and to become that is the goal of all; only the poor personalist has not the courage to follow out his own reasoning to its right conclusion.

Karma-Yoga is the attaining through unselfish work of that freedom which is the goal of all human nature. Every selfish action, therefore, retards our reaching goal, and every unselfish action takes us towards the goal; that is why the only definition that can be given of morality is this:

“That which is selfish is immoral, and that which unselfish is moral”

FOUR SIMPLE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Swami Tyagananda

(Based on the Talk delivered by the Swami at the Vedanta Society of Toronto on October 13, 2009)

We have all heard about the ultimate goal of spiritual practice, namely to directly experience God and to live in that awareness. But many of us are so overwhelmed with the loftiness of this goal that the goal appears beyond our reach. What can be done about this? Is there something we can practice right now? Is there some practice that will show reasonably quick results, even if they are small and incremental? That would surely be better than some kind of realization that we believe may come twenty or thirty years later, if at all.

We have heard and studied many things. We need to distill the essence of what we hear and study and, more importantly, start practicing it. Without practice, there will be no transformation and spiritual life will remain just a bunch of ideas. What I am trying to say is that all the teachings that we have received are helpful and inspiring but it is necessary to distill them down to a few specific items, something that we can do, something that is practical.

I would like to share with you four simple exercises that are possible for all of us to do. This is just one sample listing. Through your own study, you can prepare your own list of things that you can do. Don't make the list too long or too difficult to implement. Keep it short, with things that can be practiced. The four exercises I want share with you can be subdivided into two groups: things to forget and things to remember. We need to forget two things and we need to remember two things.

Let us begin with the two things to forget. Forgetting should be easy since we forget so many things! The first thing to forget is all the good you have done to others in your life. Don't stop doing good things; do all the good you can, help everybody, but don't keep a mental record of it. Why? If we remember it, then the heart is filled with expectation. Swami Vivekananda says that we suffer in life not because of what we *give* but because of what we *expect* in return.

Expectation is a great bondage. If you can live without expectation, you can be happy this moment. If you can sincerely feel that whatever

you need will come to you through the grace of Thakur and Ma, and if you don't expect anything from the world, you can be happy right here and right now. You don't have to wait until you realize God to experience this happiness. In Sanskrit it is said "*asha hi paramam duhkham, nairashyam paramam sukham*" -- Expectation is the greatest misery, and non-expectation is the greatest happiness.

When we do good to others or help others, we should be careful not to let pride enter into our heart. The whole point of karma yoga is, as Swami Vivekananda said, "Work for work's sake". Or to do good for the love of God; do it say as an offering at the feet of Thakur and Holy Mother. If my serving others is truly an act of worship, then I have no right to expect anything in return. Not even a "thank you." This is not easy to practice, of course. A relentless effort is needed to succeed.

According to the theory of karma, I don't deserve any credit for doing good to others. The karma of the person attracted the help that he or she got, and I was only the carrier or the instrument through which the help was delivered. Suppose you order a packet from Amazon.com. If the mail person demands payment from you when he delivers the packet, you will say that it has already been paid for. You will remind the mailman that he is simply carrying it. In the same way, if I help somebody, then that help was due to the good karma of the person who received it. I am just the mailman who delivered it to him. I don't have any right to demand any credit for what I did.

So the first exercise is "Forget the good you have done to others." But if you tell somebody to forget something, then they will remember that very thing! "Oh what was I asked to forget? I was supposed to forget the good things that I have done." Then I start to remember them.

The best way to forget something is by not giving too much importance to it. If you give too much importance to it, then of course you are going to remember it. The sun gives light to everybody but it does not demand anything in

return. Similarly let us live our lives joyfully, guided by ideals of goodness and helpfulness, such that helping others becomes our second nature, something that does not “stick” in the mind.

The second exercise is to forget all the bad things that others have done to you. This is even more difficult. Sometimes we tend to forget all the good things that others have done to us, but cannot forget the bad things that they have done to us. You can apply the same principles of the theory of karma: if somebody has made me miserable then that person is only a mailman. My suffering was already due to me; I am the one who ordered it.

The whole point of karma theory is not to blame anybody. Blaming others is very childish. Little children do that all the time. If we continue with the same mentality even after we grow up, then we haven't really “grown.” When we grow up, we lose the innocence of childhood, we lose the spontaneity, we lose all the good things of childhood. But we tend to keep childishness!

If I am suffering, nobody should be blamed for it. I must take the responsibility, recognizing that it is my own karma that brought me the suffering. The one I blame for it was only an instrument or a carrier. So don't hold any grudges. One of the great bondages in life is to cling to a victim-mentality. It is convenient to be a victim, for then I become free from the responsibility for my current circumstances or my actions. This philosophy of convenience keeps the person bound and miserable.

A spiritual seeker looks at the situation differently. If it is true that there is such a thing as justice in life, then whatever good or bad has happened to me is a result of my own actions, maybe in this life or in my past life. I don't know and I do not need to know the details. It is enough to know that what I am today is the result of my own past actions, and what I want to be tomorrow will depend on what I do today. This gives me control over my life. If you are sitting in a car and the person at the wheel is asleep, your life is in danger. Your life is not in your hands. You would rather be sitting at the wheel yourself and controlling your own life. That is what Swamiji meant when he said that you are the creator of your own destiny.

We must forget, therefore, anything bad that others have done to us. Be brave and be strong. Have the courage to say, “I am responsible for what I am going through.” Don't blame anybody; the blaming game does not help in life. It keeps you perpetually miserable. So the two things to forget are the good things that you have done to others and the bad things that others have done to you.

Now let us discuss the two things we need to remember. The first thing to remember is that everything passes away. Nothing lasts; in life everything changes. Look at your photographs taken at different times in your life. Just line up those photos in front of you and see for yourself. Over the years, you have obviously changed physically. But the change is not only in your appearance. With age, even your hopes, your thoughts, your life situation, your way of thinking has changed. And all these things will continue to change. Life is an ever-changing process. If we accept the reality of change, we are able to deal with life more intelligently. But if we resist the inevitable changes, then we suffer and cannot be happy. Everything passes away, including the people we love.

Thinking like this may appear to be very negative and pessimistic, but I think it is intensely practical. For instance, you know that roses wither after a while. But that does not prevent you from enjoying their fragrance, their color and their beauty. You are aware that the flowers are not going to be in the same state always. So you look at the flowers, place them carefully in the vase, change the water daily to make them last longer, and so on.

We human beings are like the flowers. One day we all will go away. If we remember that everything will one day perish, we will have better appreciation of the people we live with and we will take good care of one another. We will not then hurt anybody. We will be able to deal with the eventual separation in a more mature way when we understand that everything passes away.

That brings us to the second thing we need to remember. In the midst of all the changes happening around us and within us, there is only one truth that stays unchanged, and that is God. Perhaps God is a kind of ambiguous and broad

term. We need a God who is close to us, someone we can relate to. It is helpful to remember that the unchanging Being in this constantly changing universe is our Ishta. For many of us here, that Being is Thakur, or Holy Mother, or Swamiji, or all three put together.

The Sanskrit word for world is *jagat*, literally, “that which is always changing.” A storm, or a tsunami or a tornado can carry away everything. But if you are holding on to something which is immovable, which no wind can shake, no flood can carry away, no fire can burn, only then can you save yourself. When these storms come in your life, you will be safe and protected if you have something stable, something which does not change, something you can hold on to. That unchanging, immovable, everlasting Being is God.

Those who are spiritual find their security in God, and in God alone. If we really call ourselves devotees, then here is a good test. In times of difficulty or crisis, who do we think of first? If we are devotees, then our primary support, the source of our security, should be God. The help from other sources will come, but if the first person I think of is God, then I can say that my whole being—my body, mind and soul—is filled with God and instinctively I know that God is the one who saves me. Even if the help comes from other sources, I will still feel that the help has come through God’s grace. So God becomes the focal point of my thinking.

Of course, the ultimate test is how we deal with our own death. It is easy to put on a brave face and say glibly, “Oh, I depend fully on Thakur and Ma.” That is very nice, but deep down in the heart, do I really feel fully secure? Swami Ramakrishnananda, a disciple of Thakur, used to say that the presence of anxiety and stress is an

indication that we have not developed complete faith in God. It does not mean, of course, that we don’t have any faith in God at all. It means that whatever faith we have at present needs to be intensified. Nobody has ever seen a baby passing sleepless nights worrying over whether he or she will get milk the next day. The baby knows ‘My mother will take care.’ All of us were also babies once, with no stress, no anxiety, no care about the future. Now that we have grown up, we feel that we have to take care of ourselves. “If I don’t look after myself, who will do it?” It is not wrong to take care of oneself, but I am merely pointing out how things have changed after we grew up.

Physically and (hopefully!) mentally we have grown up, but spiritually have we remained children of Thakur and Mother? Do we really feel that we are children in the lap of Holy Mother? If that is true, we must ask ourselves, why do I feel anxious or stressed? I need to intensify my spiritual life. I need to strengthen my faith. I need to make some intelligent changes in my lifestyle, so that I will move nearer to God, nearer to something which is eternal. Then I will be able to shake off the attachments that bring so much pain and suffering to me.

To conclude: let us make an effort to, one, forget the good that we have done to others; two, forget the bad others have done to us; three, remember that everything changes; and four, remember that God is the eternal, unchanging presence in our lives. If we do these four simple exercises with patience and perseverance, we will be able to make significant progress in spiritual life.

“Om Jananim Saradam devim Ramakrishnam jagadgurum, paada padme tayoh shritva, pranamami muhur muhuh”

“If you want peace, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own”

“Even water, which has a natural tendency to flow downwards, is drawn up to the sky by the sun's rays. In the same way, God's grace lifts up the mind which has got a tendency to run after sense objects”

- Sayings of the Holy Mother

BELUR MATH NEWS
A Brief Report of Flood Relief Work 2009
in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka

More than 50 villages bore the brunt of the worst floods in hundred years caused by the recent week-long torrential rain in 20 districts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka which rendered lakhs of people homeless and hundreds dead, and wrought unimaginable

devastation. Four of our centres started conducting relief operations for the flood victims in the affected areas of these two states. A brief report as on 10 October 2009 is given below. The relief work is being extended to cover the other affected areas also.

Andhra Pradesh

Hyderabad centre has distributed 1290 family kits (each kit containing rice, *dal*, sugar, salt, spices, matchbox, candle, mat, bathing soap, washing soap, cooking pots and buckets) to the victims of 3 villages in Mahaboob Nagar district.

Kadapa centre has distributed 3000 food packets (each packet containing 5 *chapatis*, *puliyogare* and pickle) and 5000 pouches of drinking water to 3000 victims

belonging to E. Tandrapadu and a cluster of other villages of Kurnool district. Cooked food (*khichuri*) is also being distributed in the above area. Besides, rice, *dal*, oil, etc. are being distributed to 650 families at Sultanpur village of Mahaboob Nagar district.

Vijayawada centre provided shelter to about 200 victims at its school premises. Survey is being conducted in some of the affected areas.

Karnataka

Belgaum centre : Cooked food twice a day is being served to about 110 victims at Beeranagaddi village of Gokak Taluk in Belgaum district. Thick plastic tent materials were distributed to 150 families in Bellary district. Besides, 150 sets of utensils (each set containing 3 cooking vessels, 2 steel plates, 2

steel spoons, and 1 water storing vessel) were also distributed among the victims at Koppal district. The centre is conducting survey in other affected areas. Arrangements have been made to distribute 5000 blankets to the flood victims in Karnataka.

AN APPEAL BY THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
FOR FLOOD RELIEF IN INDIA

While thanking all who contributed for this noble cause, we request others to come forward and do their bit, to help us in this noble endeavour. Online donation facilities also available through our website (<http://www.belurmath.org>).

Donations can also be sent either by cash or cheque or demand draft drawn in favour of "RAMAKRISHNA MISSION", Payable at Kolkata to:

THE GENERAL SECRETARY,
Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah, WB, 711 202, INDIA
Ph : (91-033)2654 9581 / 9681; Fax : 2654 9885,
e-mail : relief@belurmath.org; rkmrelief@gmail.com

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Kali Puja was held on **Saturday, October 17, 2009 at 6:30 pm**. The programme consisted of puja, bhajans, reading and flower offering followed by prasad distribution.

Memorial Service for Revered Swami Sarvagatanandaji was observed on Monday,

October 12, 2009 at 4:00pm. Swami Tyagananda, Head of our Boston Center and Swami Yogatmananda, Head of our Providence Center were present and shared their reminiscences of **Swami Sarvagatanandaji**.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sri Sarada Devi Birth Anniversary will be celebrated on **Sunday 13th Dec 2009 at 11.00 am**. The programme will consist of bhajans, puja, homa, flower offering followed by prasad distribution.

Christmas Eve will be celebrated on **Thursday 24th Dec 2009 at 6pm**. The programme includes devotional songs, carols, reading from the Bible, worship, offering of lit candles by the devotees 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 14, 2009**, 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 15, 2009 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 five days a month 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.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher- Swami Kripamayananda,
Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<u>1</u> 11 am Talk: <i>'Divine Love'</i> VVM 1:30 pm	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u> 9:30 am: Soup Kitchen	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Vivekachudamani'</i>	<u>7</u>
<u>8</u> 11 am Talk: <i>'Erasing 'I'</i>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> 9:30 am: Soup Kitchen	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>14</u> VIGIL 6am to 6pm
<u>15</u> 11 am Talk: <i>'Detach and Rise'</i> VVM 1:30 pm RAM NAM 5:00 pm	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u> 9:30 am: Soup Kitchen	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Vivekachudamani'</i>	<u>21</u> 10 am: Soup Kitchen
<u>22</u> 11 am ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u> 9:30 am Soup Kitchen	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>28</u>
<u>29</u> 11 am Talk: <i>'Possibilities of God Realization'</i> VVM 1:30 pm	<u>30</u>					

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Vedanta Society of Toronto's Annual General Meeting will be held on Sunday, November 22, 2009 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 8, 2009 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 to attend, please fill in the proxy form (which can be down loaded from our website) and send it so that it reaches us before November 22.