

Vedanta Society of Toronto



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Newsletter November 2006

Words To Inspire

***Yasmat trayo'pyasramino, jnanenannena canvaham;
Grhastenaiva dharyante, tasmata jyesthasrami grhi.***

***'The grhastha ashrama [householder stage of life] is the
greatest among the ashramas, because it is only the grhastha
who provides food and education to the people of the other three ashramas.'***

- Manu Smriti

□ What Manu has said above appears before us in a new language today. I am referring to the modern concept of citizenship. A Citizen is not concerned only with his or her own home. He or she thinks of the progress of the entire country. Only when anyone works with the idea that the country as a whole should progress, does he or she become a citizen, a true grhastha. So today, a grhastha stands for a citizen. By becoming a citizen, his or her mind will be broadened. He or she will then think in terms of the progress of all people and act accordingly. A grhastha, if he or she is not also a citizen, will remain a grhastha only in name; one imprisoned, as it were, in a home. The Parliament considers us as adults when we are twenty-one and gives us the right to vote. Nowadays, the age limit has been lowered to eighteen. But this is only an external criterion. Internally, we should have within us the sense of national and social responsibility. We should always be concerned about the progress of our

society. There must be a feeling that whatever work we do must have bearing on the welfare of society also. This is the true nature of a citizen.

□ There are two values in citizenship. One is freedom. A man or woman is free; a citizen is free. The second is responsibility. There must be the awareness of social responsibility along with freedom. A citizen should have a sense of national responsibility. It is only when these two values—freedom and responsibility—come together that an individual becomes a citizen, a true grhastha. Today, there is a need in our country to educate millions of our adults to become such citizens. The advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda was for this purpose. They educate people in the values of strength and self-reliance and a concern for others. They tell them to have faith and confidence in their inner, inherent, spiritual nature.

- Swami Ranganathananda

Spiritual Life - Part II

(Based on a talk by Revered Swami Prameyanandaji, Manager of Belur Math, India
delivered at the Vedanta Society of Toronto on June 18th, 2006)

□ An important point that we should remember in the context of our spiritual life is this: we should pray to God only for pure devotion. Sri Ramakrishna said: "I prayed to the Divine Mother, saying, 'Mother, here is Thy knowledge, here is Thy ignorance; take them both and give me pure love for You. Here is good, here is evil; take them both and give me pure love for You'."

□ We have seen in the accounts of Swami Vivekananda's life that his own father suddenly died, leaving the family in a state of utmost poverty. All Vivekananda's efforts to secure a decent source of support for the family failed. Out of distress, he approached Sri Ramakrishna and requested him to pray to the Divine Mother to remove his poverty. But Sri Ramakrishna told him: "Go to the Divine Mother in the temple and pray to Her yourself. She will surely listen to you." But when Vivekananda stood before the Mother, he saw Her divine splendor and felt Her living presence. Unable to ask Her for petty, worldly things, Vivekananda prayed only for Knowledge and renunciation, love and liberation. Sri Ramakrishna rebuked him for his failure to ask the Divine Mother to remove his poverty, and sent him back to the temple. But, again, Vivekananda could only pray for knowledge and devotion. Thrice he went to the temple and thrice he returned, each time having forgotten in Her presence why he had come. Of course, at last Sri Ramakrishna took pity on him and blessed him that the members of his family would not lack the bare necessities of life.

□ *Satya*, or truthfulness, has no substitute in spiritual life. Without strict adherence to truthfulness, the foundation of spiritual life cannot be laid; thus, the virtue of truthfulness is most important. If a man always speaks truth and tenaciously holds to

truth, he will realize God, for 'God is truth'. When Sri Ramakrishna renounced everything -- knowledge and ignorance, purity and impurity, good and evil -- with an offering of flowers at the Lotus Feet of the Divine Mother, he found that he could not say, "Here is Thy truth, here is Thy untruth -- take them both."

□ We are not capable of practicing hard austerities like the people of the past. And without austerities or self-regenerating spiritual action, God can never be realized. So Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly advises us to practice truth in thought, word and deed. The Lord who is *Satya-Svarupa*, the Essence of Truth, cannot be realized without truth. Swami Vivekananda used to say: "Everything can be sacrificed for truth, but truth cannot be sacrificed for anything."

□ After making all preparations by avoiding wickedness, by developing peace of mind and tranquility, and by the practice of truth, we must form a clear conception of what Truth, Reality or God is. The Vedanta says that 'Truth is One' and 'God is the all-pervading Reality'. If God alone is Truth, other things must be understood as merely apparent reality or, better yet, as intimately related to God. Take, for example, electricity. The same electricity flowing through different lights and gadgets may be manifesting in different ways, but everywhere the same electricity is present. It is the electricity alone that makes the others conspicuous. When the electricity is withdrawn, they are reduced to a pack of straw, as it were. Thus, as God is all-pervading, whatever we do or think must have a spiritual basis. We should try to spiritualize all our actions and try to see Spirit shining everywhere. In doing so, there will be no attachment, but equal love and sympathy

for all beings.

□ Dividing life into sacred and secular, work and worship, the active life and the contemplative life is artificial and a waste of time for a spiritual aspirant. Aspirants who look upon their prayer time as sacred and all other times as secular only practice self-deception. What they accomplish during prayer and meditation is negated by what they do at other times. Therefore, we should try to integrate our whole life by spiritualizing all our duties. All actions are but different modes of worship. In the *Bhagavata*, it is said that when a man reaches the first state of devotion he does not care much for God's devotees, as his mind is on God alone. When he reaches a still higher state, he loves God, and he loves the devotees of God too. In the third state, the highest stage, his devotion for God, for the devotees, and for all living beings springs equally strong.

□ The person who succeeds in spiritualizing his or her life and activities by subduing the lower nature and developing the higher one becomes a source of blessedness. Every moment is a moment of worship. If that person is a mother, for example, and she has prepared dinner for her children, that is worship. To whom is that worship offered? In the first state of devotion, it is to her children. In the second state, it is to God-in-man. And in the final state, it is to God Himself. Thus, there comes a sea-change in her attitude. This is the practical spirituality which Vedanta teaches.

□ This is the culmination of the practice of the presence of God. The devotee no longer practices the presence of God; rather, he or she sees Him everywhere, for 'all that exists is He'. The devotee does not require the creation of the presence of God through an act of imagination. The devotee just goes about and sees Him everywhere and in everything. Sri Ramakrishna loved to hear Vivekananda sing a song which expresses the state of the devotee who has come to realize the abiding presence of God in everything:

I have joined my heart to Thee; All that exists art Thou.

- *Thee only have I found, for Thou art all that exists.*
- Reaching such a state, a devotee can worship in any way he or she likes. Ramprasad, the Bengali mystic and writer of songs about the Divine Mother, speaks of this in his famous song:

*Listen, O my mind,
Worship the Mother Divine
in any fashion you like,
Repeating day in and out
The Mantra given by the Guru.*

*Let lying down be considered as prostration,
And sleeping as meditation on the Mother.
And as you go about in the city,
Think that you are making a circuit of the
Divine Mother.*

*Whatever you hear by your ear
Are all Mantras of the Mother.
Mother pervades everything;
In eating, think you are giving
Oblation to the Mother.*

- Here is the fulfillment of spiritual life. There is no other way. We should convert the twenty-four hours of a day into spiritual life. Then only can we proceed -- and, by the grace of the Lord, surely we shall succeed! ~

Belur Math News 

Swami Vivekananda's Statue Installed in India's Parliament House

- In a befitting tribute paid to Swami Vivekananda, the illustrious son of India and great spiritual luminary, a life-size statue of Swamiji was unveiled at the Parliament House of India in New Delhi.
- The 82-inch-high bronze statue was formally unveiled by the Vice President, Sri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, at a simple but impressive function held on August 23, 2006.

Created by Sri C. D. Dakshinamoorthy (a well-known sculptor from Chennai) and donated by Sri L. M. Singhvi (a former member of parliament and ex-High Commissioner to London), the statue has been installed in a prominent place along with the statues of some other great men and women of India like Sri Aurobindo and Ahalya Bai Holker.

□ A host of dignitaries who attended the function included the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh; the Lok Sabha Speaker, Sri Somnath Chatterjee; the Union Defence Minister, Sri Pranab Mukherjee; the Opposition Leader in Lok Sabha, Sri L. K. Advani; the UPA Chairperson, Smt. Sonia Gandhi; several Central Government Ministers; and many others.

□ The unveiling ceremony was telecast live by Doordarshan Television.

In The News

Statue of Famous Monk to be Erected in Halifax

From the Chronicle Herald
(Halifax, Nova Scotia), Sept. 9, 2006
By Lois Legge, Features writer

Swami's words of an earlier Sept. 11 warned against religious fanaticism

□ He called for an end to religious fanaticism. He spoke about the holiness and purity of all faiths. And he spread the ancient Hindu philosophy of universal acceptance.

□ Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda first brought those ideas to the west more than 100 years ago to be precise, on Sept. 11, 1893, during the World Parliament of Religions convention in Chicago.

□ In this century, Sept. 11 has become synonymous with tragedy, fear and religious fanaticism.

□ In fact, the Swami's speech at the Sept. 11 opening session of the convention, which included religious leaders from across the world, seems both profound and prophetic given the history of world affairs.

□ "Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilization, and sent whole nations to despair," he told the gathering.

□ "Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time has come and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal."

□ He went on to say that no religion is better than another; that "holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world."

□ But Basu calls Vivekananda's words "the gift we did not open." People of different faiths are still often more concerned with the rituals than the substance of their religion, he says.

□ "If you really go to the philosophy of all religions, they are essentially the same. All religions (say) we are essentially divine, we are the children of the God, nobody disputes that. But when it comes to how we worship, whether we bow three times or four times, whether I go to this building or that building, that's where our difference comes so that's why that we say the biggest gift that he gave us, we did not open it," says Mr. Basu.

□ "And if we had opened that and used what he told us, then we would not have the animosity of infighting in our society."

(to be continued)

Past Events

- This year's **Durga Puja** was celebrated with due solemnity and grandeur. Over 400 devotees attended Mahashtami on Sep. 30th, and over 250 attended the Dashami event on Oct. 2nd.
- On Oct. 21st, **Kali Puja** was celebrated with ritualistic fervour and reverence. Over 200 devotees attended the special worship.



Regular Services

(Please refer to the Calendar of Events on the back page for all of this month's event times.)

Daily Meditation

Meditation is held at the Centre every morning from **6 am to 7 am**. A prayer service of devotional singing, chanting and meditation is held every evening from **6 pm to 8 pm**.

Bookstore

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

Vivekananda Library

A library of roughly 750 books are available for borrowing. Lending hours are Sundays, 10am - 11am and 4pm - 6pm. Please call ahead for all other times.

Ramanama Sankirtan

Singing of Ram-Nam, following a short puja of Sri Rama, is held one Sunday every month.

Vigil

The Centre conducts a silent vigil of intensive meditation from **6 am to 6 pm** once a month. For participation, please call the centre.

Sunday Service

Lectures are given every Sunday at **11 am**, generally by Swami Kripamayananda. 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

An educational programme for young people ages 4 - 17 -- teaching Indian Spirituality, History, Values, Sanskrit, Music and Yoga -- is usually held twice a month. Classes are from **1:30 pm to 4:00 pm**. Please see the Calendar of Events for dates.

Vivekananda Seminar

Swami Kripamayananda leads a 'Vivekananda Seminar' twice a month at the University of Toronto, Mississauga Campus (Erindale), hosted by the Department of Historical Studies. Please see the Calendar of Events for date and time.

Volunteering

For those who wish to volunteer their time and energy to the Centre, we dedicate Saturday mornings from 10 am - 2 pm to **Ashram Seva**. Keeping the Society's premises clean and orderly greatly benefits all. If interested, please call the Centre.

Daily Bread Food Bank

The Centre is a regular contributor to the Daily Bread Food Bank serving the Greater Toronto Area. We accept all donations of non-perishable food items throughout the year.

Soup Kitchen

The Centre runs a Soup Kitchen service for the needy, usually once a month. Volunteers gather at the centre at **9am**. Please refer to the Calendar for this month's date.

Interviews & Instruction

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

Calendar of Events

November 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u> Scripture Class: <i>Life of Swami Vijnanananda</i> 7:30 pm	<u>4</u>
Video: Holy Mother <u>5</u> Sri Sarada Devi (a talk by Swami Areshananda, a direct disciple of Holy Mother) 11 am	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> Scripture Class: <i>Tattvabodha</i> 7:30 pm	<u>11</u> Vigil 6 am - 6 pm
Lecture: <u>12</u> Who Am I? 11 am Vedanta Vidya Mandir 1:30 pm	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u> Vivekananda Study Circle (UTM, North Bldg, Rm. 262) 3 pm - 5 pm	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u> Scripture Class: <i>Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna</i> 7:30 pm	<u>18</u>
Annual General Meeting <u>19</u> 11 am Ram Nam 5 pm	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u> Soup Kitchen 9 am	<u>24</u> Scripture Class: <i>Tattvabodha</i> 7:30 pm	<u>25</u>
Lecture: <u>26</u> Five Spiritual Helpmates 11 am Vedanta Vidya Mandir 1:30 pm	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>	<p>UPCOMING EVENT:</p> <p>Public Celebration: HOLY MOTHER'S BIRTH ANNIVERSARY SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17th 11 am</p>	
<p>Notice for all Members: If you are a member and are unable to attend the AGM, proxy forms can be downloaded from the website, or picked up from the Centre.</p>						

God is a comedian playing to an audience too afraid to laugh.