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## Newsletter September 2005

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*"Whatsoever the manner in which they approach Me, in that very manner I resort to them; for, O Arjuna, on all sides, men tread paths leading to Me."*

-Bhagavad Gita

#### Words To Inspire

I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnants of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."

The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: "Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me." 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 civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour 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.

-Swami Vivekananda, from *Opening Address at Parliament of Religions, Chicago 1893*

#### Mundaka Upanishad: The Basis of Knowledge

(Based on a talk delivered by Swami Dayatmananda, Head of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, UK on June 18th, 2005 at the Vedanta Society of Toronto.)

Friends, it's a great privilege for me to be here. We are going to study an Upanishad. To study any Upanishad is a wonderful treat by itself. The Mundaka Upanishad is one of the smaller and one of the most beautiful Upanishads. Some of the verses of this Upanishad are very memorable. Before we go into the points, we must have adequate background to be able to understand Vedanta properly.

What do we mean by Vedanta? Vedanta is the knowledge that helps us, or uplifts us. Of course, the technical definitions are there. But there is one definition of Vedanta that must be kept in our minds. Vedanta is that which helps us to become better - in whatever way, Swami Vivekananda preached a pure spiritual knowledge in America. But in India he spoke about cultivating the fields, becoming stronger, even by eating non-vegetarian food and trying to enjoy the world. Everyone preaches 'renounce the world'. Swami ji preached 'enjoy the world first, then renunciation will come'. The desire for God doesn't come out of frustration. Of course many people turn to religion when they are frustrated or suffering. That's not bad. But what is really better is being happy and wanting that happiness to expand. Religion is not that which tries to suppress us but that which makes us better. Only that which makes us better deserves to be called religion.

Upanishads are the very treasure houses of spirituality. To understand these Upanishads we must also have some background knowledge. There are four important points we must be thoroughly acquainted with. First point: there is only One Reality - call it Allah, Buddha or God. This word 'God' also confuses us. Suppose I ask the question, 'do you believe in God?' It can lead to the answers: yes, no or I don't know. But ask the same question in a different form. Ask them, 'do you want happiness?' Only one answer would come. That is because no one wants to be unhappy. Happiness is the common denominator of humanity. Happiness is the purpose behind all evolution. Why do we want to become happy? Because that is our nature: Satchitananda. We are of the nature of Sat-Chit-Ananda. Evolution progresses through these three steps. Sat: the survival for existence; next, Chit - the explosion of knowledge, stabilizing our existence and expanding our consciousness. It ends in Ananda - complete oneness with God - Bliss. Evolution always progresses in and through these three steps.

Second point: if God alone exists and nothing else, then everything is sacred. To the Vedic seers there was no such thing as maya. The concept of maya is a much later development. Shankaracharya only emphasized the term maya to point us towards the Reality. For example, right now, we are not in God - we are living an ungodly life. Let us turn our attention towards God. It is only to point that out. But the post-Shankarites went on pulling this term maya to such an extent, that we forgot Brahman. So if everything is God, can you say that anything is not sacred? In God's eyes nothing can be distinguished: this is a man, this is a woman, this is a saint, this is a sinner.

A child doesn't have that distinction. I will tell a true story - a thief broke into a house at night. Unfortunately there was a child of 5 lying on the sofa. The thief entered the ground floor and the boy suddenly awoke. The boy asked, 'Are you Santa Claus?'

'Yes, yes. I am your Uncle Santa Claus,' replied the thief. Then slowly the thief made friends with him and asked the child where his mother keeps all the jewelry. 'Oh, I know Uncle, I know. Come on, I'll show you.' So he gave him the key and the thief easily took all the jewelry. The boy was very happy he helped his Uncle. Next morning, the parents woke up and found their valuables missing. They asked their son, 'Where did the things go? Who took them all?'

The child said, 'I know, I know. Yesterday I gave Uncle Santa the key and he took everything.' In the eyes of the child, the thief doesn't exist. But the image of the thief is already there in adults. So he will also see this. Do you think, in God eyes, such a thing as a sinner exists? Do you think he's glaring down at you with a telescope looking for the smallest mistakes? In God's eyes everything is God.

In Holy Mother's eyes everything is holy. She is called Holy Mother because she sees only holiness in everyone. Do you think all those people that went to see here were holy people? Many robbers and sinful people were there - according to us. But according to her they were all her children - potentially divine.

God is one, who only sees Himself everywhere. A holy man is one who sees holiness everywhere. In India, there are wandering monks, and when they greet each other do you know what they say? Two psychiatrists met each other on the street. One greeted the other, 'You are fine. How am I?' The monks in India greet each other by saying, 'Is your vision clear?' Are you able to see God? What a wonderful expression! You know, if our sight is clear, not our physical sight but our spiritual insight, everything is God. That's what we are supposed to see.

The third point is: everything in this world is interconnected. Nowadays many people are awakening to the fact that the whole world is interconnected - holistic view; there is nothing superfluous; there is nothing unnecessary. Everything has its own function. Everything has a place in this world: the living and the non-living. These days we are awakening to the fact that in God's creation, everything is perfect. Nothing is unnecessary. We cannot destroy anything without destroying a bit of the fabric - without causing suffering to yourself and to others.

Fourth point is: everything has a meaning. Are you happy? That question has a meaning. Are you unhappy? That also has a meaning. So you are posted somewhere else? A meaning is there. You are married to somebody whom you don't like? Again, a meaning. One devotee used to come to our Centre. I asked him why he came. He said, 'Swami, this samsara, this family life, is horrible.' Many realize this after a long time. There was a couple - married for a long time. They had a quarrel. The husband got angry. He shouted to the wife, 'I was a fool when I married you'. The wife answered, 'Yes dear. It was unfortunate, that I didn't notice it at that time.' It's a bit too late. So this devotee is telling me about his sorrowful family life. To my question, he said, 'you know, my wife, she's always screaming at me. I get peace of mind here.' I said, 'God bless you. She's the greatest devotee of God. It is because of her that you have become a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. She's your first guru. Yes.'

Through happiness and unhappiness both, everything in life is carrying us towards God. . One of our Swamis had put it beautifully. Happiness pulls us towards God. And unhappiness pushes us towards God. But both are taking us to Him.

Mundaka means shaven-headed - meaning those who have renounced the world; monastics. This Upanishad is for those who have shaven off their attachments. It is for those who desire to attain to the higher life, by giving up the lower life. The condition for attaining the higher life is renouncing the lower life. Detachment is not cold

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giving up. It is attachment to a higher step. What do you do when you want to climb a staircase? You proceed up, step by higher step. In the same way, detachment means relinquishing the things which are holding us down, and taking up things of higher value. Upanishad means that knowledge which will give us direct experience. Vedanta doesn't believe in liberation by faith. What is termed 'living vicariously' does not exist in Vedanta. One must have knowledge through direct experience. But since we do not know what this knowledge is, one is supposed to go to a teacher and be very near to him. What is nearness? It is not physical proximity - but openness of the mind; without any prejudice, to be able to receive the teaching which flows directly from the experience of the teacher into the heart of the student. This is called guru-sishya-samparka: the spiritual relationship between the guru and the student. The teacher and the student relationship becomes effective only when both the channels are completely open and connected. A teacher brings out the knowledge within himself and it automatically flows from his heart into the heart of the student with suitable characteristics. All the disciplines we are supposed to practice are for the sake of making ourselves ready to receive. This is the fact that devotees often do not seem to realize. We pray, 'Thakur please bestow your grace on us'. But is Thakur not willing to bestow His grace upon us? He is ready. Always ready, like a Mother, waiting for us to wake up, so that He may feed us.

May we be fortunate enough to see what is good, to hear what is good, to do what is good. The goal of life is to manifest our potential divinity - to see God. '

(To be continued).

### Belur Math News

Delhi Ashrama organized a meeting in memory of our late President Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj on 15 May, which was presided over by Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India. The General Secretary gave the welcome address. Sri I K Gujral, former Prime Minister of India, and Sri L K Advani, former Deputy Prime Minister of India, reminisced about their association with Revered Maharaj. The entire one-hour programme was telecast live on Doordarshan's national channel.

The Governing Body of Ramakrishna Mission has decided that the newly created Vivekananda deemed university, named Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute, will be treated as a branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission.

The Vedanta Society of Kansas City, USA, has been made a sub-centre of Ramakrishna Math under Vedanta Society of St. Louis, USA.

A new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission has been started at Aurangabad in Maharashtra.

### Past Events

This year's Annual Retreat was held June 18th & 19th, with Swami Dayatmananda, Head of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, London, UK as special guest. With the Mundaka Upanishad as the focus, the event was well-attended and all enjoyed the spiritually uplifting atmosphere.

Guru Purnima was observed on July 21st. The special programme included puja, bhajans, meditation, readings, flower offering and distribution of prasad. Over 150 devotees paid homage to Sri Guru Maharaj with their gracious attendance.

Swami Baneshananda, Head of Vedanta Gesellschaft, Germany, visited Toronto from August 17th to the 24th. Many attended and enjoyed an informal talk he delivered at the Centre on the evening of August 21st.

### Upcoming Events

*Annual Seminar 2005*

**'Harmony of Faiths'**

A One-Day Interfaith Service With  
Invited Guests Representing  
Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism.

**Saturday, September 10th**  
8:30 am - 4 pm

Registration is \$30.  
Special discounts for students.  
Lunch and Tea are provided.

**Please notify the Centre by  
September 4th if you are planning to  
attend.**

**Swami Vivekananda Statue  
Dedication Ceremony**

**Sunday, September 11th,**  
11 am - 1 pm

A special programme of worship, talks,  
devotional music and prasad.

*Special Guests For Both Events:*

**Swami Amarananda**  
Minister of the Centre Vedantique  
Geneva, Switzerland

**Swami Sarvadevananda**  
Assistant Minister, Vedanta Society of  
Southern California, Los Angeles, USA

The Vedanta Society of Toronto will celebrate **Durga Puja Mahashtami** on Tuesday, October 11th at 6:30 pm. The special programme will include homa, worship, bhajans, flower offering and distribution of prasad.

**Vijaya Dashami** will be celebrated on Thursday, October 13th at 6:30 pm

### Regular Services

**Regular Services resume September 10th.**

**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 new class schedule will begin September 18th. 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.

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