



# Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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## Newsletter September 2008

### Words to Inspire

**That which upholds is called dharma; all beings are sustained by dharma. Any thing that is capable of holding things together- know it for certain, that is dharma.**

(Mahabharata, 12.110.11)

### **The Way and the Goal of Morality**

(From The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda -- Prabuddha Bharata April 2008)

#### **Complex Social Structures**

Human society is a graded organization. We all know about morality, and we all know about duty, but at the same time we find that in different countries the significance of morality varies greatly. What is regarded as moral in one country may in other be considered perfectly immoral... So it is with duty. The idea of duty varies much among different nations... and yet we know that there must be some universal idea of duty. Two ways are left open to us - the way of the ignorant, who think that there is only one way to truth and that all the rest are wrong, and the way of the wise, who admit that, according to our mental constitution or the different planes of existence in which we are, duty and morality may vary. The important thing is to know that there gradations of duty and of morality-that the duty of one state of life, in one set of circumstances, will not and cannot be that of another....In the Hindu system of morality we find that this fact has been recognized from very ancient times; and in their scriptures and books on ethics different rules are laid down for the different classes of men-the householder, the sannyasin... and the student.

#### **One of the Causes of Differentiation**

According to the sankhya philosophy, nature is composed of three forces called, in Sanskrit, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. These are manifested in the physical world are what we may call equilibrium, activity and inertness. Tamas is

typified as darkness or inactivity; Rajas is activity, expressed as attraction or repulsion; and Sattva is the equilibrium of the two. In every man there are these three forces... So in all creation-in animals, plants and men we find the more or less typical manifestation of all these different forces.

#### **Encourage Everyone in their Struggles**

Unity in variety is the plan of creation. However men and women may vary individually, there is unity in the background. The different individual characters and classes of men and women are natural variations in creation. Hence, we ought not to judge them by the same standard or put the same ideal before them. Such a course creates only an unnatural struggle, and the result is that man begins to hate himself and is hindered from becoming religious and good. Our duty is to encourage everyone in his struggle to live up to his own highest ideal, and strive at the same time to make the ideal, as near as possible to the truth.

#### **The Goal of Morality**

The only definition that can be given of morality is this: That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral... The goal of all nature is freedom, and freedom is to be attained only by perfect unselfishness: every thought, word, or deed that is unselfish takes us towards the goal, and as such, is called moral.

# What should be the dearest thing for man

(A summary based on the talk given by Swami Prabuddhananda of Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco at the conclusion of the Retreat of the Vedanta Society of Toronto on June 22, 2008)

Let us continue with the questions you have, I will take up the question from Shankaracharya, “What should be the dearest thing for man?”. The dearest thing for all of us is our own selves - that with which we are most familiar, my name, “I” or “Me”; it is our awareness of the self as “me and mine”. In ordinary life it is connected with our physical body and mind. At birth a baby is not at all aware of its self; the self seems to be amorphous at that stage, but as it grows, slowly parents, teachers or neighbors begin to give it a shape. From limited experience, the baby’s experience expands; it becomes conscious of the outer world and finds its connectedness with the whole world.

According to our ancient scriptures we find support in favor of developing our ‘self’ into higher, more expansive plane. Our self-awareness affects our thoughts, personalities and relationships. In the Upanishads we read, “*na vā are patyuh kāmāya patiḥ priyo bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya patiḥ priyo bhavati*”, the husband is loved not because of the husband but because of one’s own self (for the sake of Self)”, similarly the wife is loved not because of the wife but because of the self, children are loved not because of the children but for the self. This Self is our true nature, it is said in the Upanishads that, the knowledge of Self can be attained through *śravaṇa* (hearing), *manana* (thinking) and *nididhyāsana* (reflecting). The Self is to be heard of, thought about and reflected upon. Reflecting on the statement, ‘self for the sake of the Self alone’, one’s quality of life is enhanced.

Sri Krishna gives us a secret formula for doing better; it is to do better than what we are already doing. That is our spiritual life; it is an improved ordinary life, an improved social or secular life. We are doing the same thing but in a better way with more skill we are expanding our ‘self’ leading to an improved quality of life in every aspect.

The only instrument through which we are operating is our self; improve that instrument. Improve your view of yourself. The result will be better, in terms of peace and love at work or in human relationships; this is true self improvement. Improvement of self should take priority in our lives.

Sri Krishna says, “*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*” . Yoga is skill in work. Swami Vivekananda says, Jñāna Yoga (the realization of a man’s own divinity through knowledge), *Karma Yoga* (realization through work and performance of duty), *Bhakti Yoga* (realization through devotion to, and love of, a Personal God) and *Raja Yoga* (the realization through meditation) can quicken the process of self-development. These are all different roads leading to the same centre, God. Centre yourself there and then expand; the self awareness becomes wider.

The goal of life for a religious Hindu is to attain mokṣa, freedom. Dedicated spiritual aspirants such as monks and nuns are often criticized as selfish for not being helpful to others but for thinking just about themselves. Upanishads ask us to reflect on scriptural statements and remind us that the true nature of our self is God. Our *svarūpa* is *Brahman, Ātman*. If we don’t take care of our selves now, we will forget our true identity. A life devoted to realizing one’s true nature is a worthwhile life, it is our birthright. We do not have to beg for this. That is why the spiritual instructions for us is “*sarveṣu kāleṣu māmanusmara yudhya ca*”—Sri Krishna says, “Always think of me and fight the battle of life”. Sri Ramakrishna said if one holds on to a post while spinning round and around he will not feel dizzy. A healthy conception of self has a similar effect in life. The nature of the Self is ever pure, ever blessed, ever free, *Nitya śuddha Buddha mukta*. Our goal is to become that Self, all pervading *Ātman, Brahman*. The Upanishad says, ‘Thou art That’. Assert that and all weakness will go.

Our *svadharma* is the sphere of our life. Sri Krishna says in the Gita, “*Svdharme nidhanam śreyaḥ*”. You are given a garden, and you know that is the only thing available to you in this life, so you till the garden as best as you can. Sri Krishna warns us not to go to others’ gardens. Your *svadharma* is for you, remain there in your own sphere; don’t be tempted by others’ *dharmas*.

The primary realm of self-awareness starts with social life. Our social lives train us to include

others from within our own families and then the families further expand through marriage. The husband's or wife's family becomes a part of one's own family. Thus, one expands from own families, to neighborhoods to the wider world.

As awareness increases, the distress of others affect us because we have become more socially conscious.. Social expansion is good but self-development should come first otherwise the small self "me" will make us self-centered. When we include our husband, wife, children and others in our sphere, our self expands. It is not giving up anything in a negative way, it is expansion. Swamiji's ideal of man-making religion and man-making education is nothing but his concept of developing ourselves.

Physically speaking man-making may mean developing through secular education but in spiritual life we go inward. At psychological level we have to guard our territories; others cannot enter there, similarly I cannot enter into others' territory. But I can expand my territory. The whole process of man-making is expansion. All our growth is expansion; be inclusive; become unselfish.

Try to remember your true identity at all times and then expand your consciousness. Forgetting our true identity may cause psychological problems which result from self-alienation. So confirm your self-identity and expand it; Break the barrier down through the yogas and discover your immensity. From the identity with the little self, we will grow bigger and bigger by breaking the barrier. Break whatever limits you, like the *upādhis* (limiting adjuncts); this is the method for our growth in life according to Jñāna Yoga. My true nature is trying to express itself but other things are obstructing it and this I cannot bear. An example is given in the scripture of a caged lion which cannot bear the bars, so it constantly tries to come out. Come out in the open like the lion out of its cage.

In his lecture on 'God in Everything', Swamiji says, "Give up the world". What does this mean? It means giving up our wrong ideas, false notions, and ignorance about the world; taking up a more realistic ideal and increasing our self-awareness. What is giving up really? It is giving up that cage and stepping into *mokṣa*, freedom. When freedom comes, expansion follows. So, Shankaracharya answers the question, "what should be the dearest thing for man?" It is the attainment of a life that is

entirely devoted to the good of oneself. Whatever I do, it is for my self; that is the dearest.

The national ideal of India is "renunciation and service", wherever one lives that ideal, is service to the country. What is negated here is the smallness of one's self. There is an ancient statement, "what is my selfishness is your good" (*svārtho yasya parārthaha*). Swamiji puts it very forcefully: for one's own enlightenment, for one's own freedom and for the good of others include all in your self.

Life is for One's own liberation (*mokṣa*) and good of others: '*ātmanomokṣārtham jagad hitāya ca*'. When I am working for my *mokṣa*, all others are included there. By definition *mokṣa* means cutting the barriers between you and me. In a very simple and beneficial way, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi said, "Make the whole world your own; no one is a stranger". Stress this. This is breaking all the barriers. In the whole world wherever you go, you see your own people. Wherever you are, you are working for your own people.

When you say *jagad hita*, good of the world, include yourself there too. First think of yourself and then spread out; otherwise problems may come in the name of doing good to others. An image is given by one of the Christian mystics: to draw a circle, you must hold the compass firm in the centre of the circle, then stretch the radius to whatever length you wish, you will get a good circle. But if the centre is not firm, the circle will be irregular. Similarly in case of emergency in flight, put the oxygen mask on yourself first, then on the child. A firefighter must protect himself first before helping others.

What we are doing in spiritual life or good social life is expanding our consciousness of the Self and removing the obstacles from realizing our true nature which is Brahman. Once a devotee was asked, "Have you realized Brahman?" The devotee replied, "I don't know that, but all these 60 or 70 years I have lived for the ideal, worked for the ideal and I am going to die for the ideal". It is a great feeling of peace and satisfaction when one can say: "Yes, I have done it".

So, that is the answer to Shankaracharya's question, 'What should be the dearest thing for man'. You are that, ever-pure, ever-free, ever-blessed -- children of immortal bliss. The dearest thing is to realize one's own true nature, the Self.

# Quantum Leap

## Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Some Western Women

- Rini Karmakar, Undergraduate Student, Montreal -

She is endearingly and blessedly known as "Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi." She was the rightful spiritual consort of Sri Ramkrishna. Sri Sarada Devi was born on December 22, 1853, in a kind-hearted, God-fearing, poor Brahmin family at Joyrambati, adjoining Kamarpukur, the birthplace of Sri Ramkrishna in West Bengal, India. As a child, Sarada was devoted to God and married Sri Ramkrishna at the age of six, according to the custom prevalent in India in previous days. At the age of eighteen, she walked all the way to Dakshineswar to meet her husband, who at that time had reached the highest state of realization about God through meditation, self-contemplation and intense practice of several spiritual disciplines. Sri Ramkrishna taught her how to lead a spiritual life while discharging her household duties. Sarada Devi served Ramkrishna as his devoted wife and disciple, while remaining a virgin nun and following the spiritual path. In 1872, on the night of the Phalarini Kali Puja, Ramkrishna ritualistically worshipped Sri Sarada Devi as the Divine Mother, thereby attributing universal Motherhood latent in her. When the disciples gathered around Sri Ramkrishna, Sarada Devi learned to look upon them as her own children.

When Sri Ramkrishna passed into Mahasamadhi in 1886, Sarada Devi went into pilgrimage and then she started living at Kamarpukur in privacy. Later on, the disciples of Ramkrishna brought her to Kolkata which marked a turning point in her life. She then began to accept spiritual seekers as her disciples and became the open portal to immortality for hundreds of people. The great universal mother-heart, endowed with boundless love and compassion embraced all types of people either from India or from the West, including many who lived sinful lives. When the western women disciples of Swami Vivekananda came to Kolkata, the holy mother Sarada Devi accepted them with open arms as her daughters by utterly ignoring the restrictions of the conservative society during that time. She always held progressive views and whole-heartedly supported Swami Vivekananda in his magnanimous plans for rejuvenation of India; uplift the masses and education of women with the help of western women.

Sister Nivedita, an Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda formerly known as Miss Margaret Noble, came to India in 1898 at Swamiji's Call to serve the Indian people particularly the Indian Women. Swami Vivekananda was a bit anxious how to make a place for her in a conservative Hindu society in India. But Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi cordially accommodated Miss Noble in her own room. It meant tremendous courage and extreme broadmindedness on the part of the Holy Mother. Although she belonged to an Orthodox Brahmin family and lacked modern education, but she had an extremely modern mind. Sister Nivedita rented a house at Bosepara Lane in northern Kolkata for the proposed girls' school and requested the Holy Mother to

inaugurate it. On the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1898 Sri Sarada Devi went there accompanied by Swami Vivekananda, Brahmananda and Saradananda. There Sri Sarada Devi performed the worship of Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa dev and then she declared the school open which was a memorable event in the history of women's education in India. The Holy Mother Sarada Devi not only accommodated Sister Nivedita, a pure-breed western woman in her own room but closely associated with the school started by Sister Nivedita for the prosperity and education of Indian Women. No one was a stranger to her and she felt they were all her children. Many of the western devotees recalled their meetings with Holy Mother with intense feeling and many made a point to meet her. Miss Josephine Mcleod, and American devotee of Swami Vivekananda visited her many times. One day, after a visit to the Holy Mother in Kolkata, Miss Josephine Mcleod returned to the Belur Math in the evening. After returning to her room, she was saying to herself by absorbed in thought, "I have seen her. Holy Mother! I have seen her." These words of Miss Mcleod reflected how far her conscious self was hypnotized by Sarada Devi's motherly love and affection coupled with divine grace. In November 1898, Mrs. Ole Bull, and American devotee of Swami Vivekananda persuaded the Holy Mother to have her photograph taken.

On this occasion, she was dressed by Sister Nivedita, three pictures were taken and the second one was the one most often worshipped by her devotees. All of these events clearly stipulate how much she loved everybody including western women. The Belur Math as the Ramkrishna order of monastery (came to be known) was formally dedicated by Swamiji on 9th December 1898. During 1899 the Holy Mother visited the Belur Math accompanied by sister Nivedita and some other western disciples of Swami Vivekananda. When she first placed her feet at the Math grounds, Swami Vivekananda received her with great reverence and humility. Regarding the Belur site, the Holy Mother remarked, "Now my children have a place to lay their heads. At last the Master has bestowed his grace upon them."

Sister Nivedita who came in close contact with the Holy Mother, wrote, "She is the very soul of sweetness-so gentle and loving- and merry as a girl." Holy Mother Sarada Devi's all embracing love knew no boundary of country or language. All western women devotees who met her felt she was their own, like a child at her feet. In the history of humanity there has never been another woman who looked herself as the mother of all beings including animals and birds and spent her entire life in serving them as her children by undergoing unending sacrifice and self-denial. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi left the mortal world on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 1920. With the advent of the Holy Mother, the spiritual awakening of women in modern time had begun. Sri Sarada Devi was an essential part of same power like the master Sri Ramkrishna that descended on earth to show beacon light to the world and to guide humanity to the heaven of peace and bliss.

## SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

**Guru Purnima** was celebrated on **18<sup>th</sup> July 2008**. The programme consisted of bhajans, worship, flower offerings followed by the prasad distribution. About 200 devotees attended the programme.

The **Krishna Janmashtami** was held on August 24, 2008 at 6.00 pm. The programme included bhajans, worship, flower offerings followed by the distribution of prasad.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Durga Puja (Maha Ashtami)** will be held on October 07, 2008 at 6:00 pm. The programme will consist of bhajans, worship, flower offerings followed by the distribution of prasad.

**Kali Puja** will be celebrated on October 28, 2008 6:30 pm. The programme will include bhajans, worship, flower offerings followed by the 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, September 13, 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 September 14, 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday) a month at Roncesvalles Food Sharing, 263 Roncesvalles Avenue, Toronto M6R 2L9. This month, the Soup Kitchen dates are September 9, 11, 16 and 18. 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 VIDYAMANDIR:** The classes begin on **September 14**. Please contact the society at [vedantavidyamandir@gmail.com](mailto:vedantavidyamandir@gmail.com) for more information or at 416-240-7262 as soon as possible if interested to register your child.

# Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### September 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u> 40 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary "Communicating Vedanta" 8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<u>7</u> 11:00 am -Lecture: "Holy Mother and the Probelm of Alienation" By Swami Prabhananda	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u> 9.30am  Soup Kitchen	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u> 9.30am  Soup Kitchen	<u>12</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna	<u>13</u> Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
<u>14</u> 11:00 am - Lecture "A Visit to India" 1:30 pm : VVM 5:00 pm: Ram Nam	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u> 9.30am  Soup Kitchen	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> 9.30am  Soup Kitchen	<u>19</u> No Scripture class Retreat at Dunnville, ON begins	<u>20</u> Retreat at Dunnville, ON by Swami Sridharananda
<u>21</u> NO LECTURE Retreat at Dunnville,ON by Swami Sridharananda	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: Tattvabodha	<u>27</u>
<u>28</u> 11:00 am - Lecture: "The Need of Guru" 1:30 pm :VVM	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>				

The 40th Anniversary Seminar on Saturday September 6, 2008 from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm. on 'Communicating Vedanta', with **Swami Prabhananda**, *General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* as the Chief Guest; **Swami Tyagananda**, Minister, Vedanta Society of Massachusetts, Boston; **Swami Yogatmananda**, Minister, Vedanta Society of Providence; and **Swami Atmajnanananda**, Resident Minister, Vedanta Society of Greater Washington DC as the speakers.

*Vedanta Society of Toronto*