



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter May 2023

Words to Inspire

"Buddha is the only prophet who said, "I do not care to know your various theories about God. What is the use of discussing all the subtle doctrines about the soul? Do good and be good. And this will take you to freedom and to whatever truth there is."
-----Swami Vivekananda

Steps to Realization

(Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda – Vol.1 – Raja Yoga)

Mumukshutva, means the intense desire to be free. Those of you who have read Edwin Arnold's Light of Asia remember his translation of the first sermon of Buddha, where Buddha says,

*Ye suffer from yourselves. None else compels.
None other holds you that ye live and die,
And whirl upon the wheel, and hug and kiss
Its spokes of agony,
Its tire of tears, its nave of nothingness.*

All the misery we have is of our own choosing; such is our nature. The old Chinaman, who having been kept in prison for sixty years was released on the coronation of a new emperor, exclaimed, when he came out, that he could not live; he must go back to his horrible dungeon among the rats and mice; he could not bear the light. So he asked them to kill him or send him back to the prison, and he was sent back. Exactly similar is the condition of all men. We run headlong after all sorts of misery, and are unwilling to be freed from them. Every day we run after pleasure, and before we reach it, we find it is gone, it has slipped through our fingers. Still we do not cease from our mad pursuit, but on and on we go, blinded fools that we are.

In some oil mills in India, bullocks are used that go round and round to grind the oil-seed. There is a yoke on the bullock's neck. They have a piece of wood protruding from the yoke, and on that is fastened a wisp of straw. The bullock is blindfolded in such a way that it can only look forward, and so it stretches its neck to get at the straw; and in doing so, it pushes the piece of wood out a little further; and it makes another attempt with the same result, and yet another, and so on. It never catches the straw, but goes round and round in the hope of getting it, and in so doing, grinds out the oil. In the same way you and I who are born slaves to nature, money and wealth, wives and children, are always chasing a wisp of straw, a mere chimera, and are going through an innumerable round of lives without obtaining what we seek. More we go towards happiness, the more it goes away from us. Thus the

world is going on, society goes on, and we, blinded slaves, have to pay for it without knowing. Study your own lives, and find how little of happiness there is in them, and how little in truth you have gained in the course of this wild-goose chase of the world.

Day and nights we see people dying around us, and yet we think we shall not die; we never think that we shall die, or that we shall suffer. Each man thinks that success will be his, hoping against hope, against all odds, against all mathematical reasoning. Nobody is ever really happy here. If a man be wealthy and have plenty to eat, his digestion is: out of order, and he cannot eat. If a man's digestion be good, and he have the digestive power of a cormorant, he has nothing to put into his mouth. If he be rich, he has no children. If he be hungry and poor, he has a whole regiment of children, and does not know what to do with them. Why is it so? Because happiness and misery are the obverse and reverse of the same coin; he who takes happiness, must take misery also. We all have this foolish idea that we can have happiness without misery, and it has taken such possession of us that we have no control over the senses.

Every being that is in the universe has the potentiality of transcending the senses; even the little worm will one day transcend the senses and reach God. No life will be a failure; there is no such thing as failure in the universe. A hundred times man will hurt himself, a thousand times he will tumble, but in the end he will realise that he is God. We know there is no progress in a straight line. Every soul moves, as it were, in a circle, and will have to complete it, and no soul can go so low but there will come a time when it will have to go upwards. No one will be lost. We are all projected from one common centre, which is God. The highest as well as the lowest life God ever projected, will come back to the Father of all lives. "From whom all beings are projected, in whom all live, and unto whom they all return; that is God."

KARMA YOGA ACTIVITIES

It is a great opportunity to provide your services to the Vedanta Society of Toronto. Kindly come forward and volunteer time towards maintaining and managing the facilities. If interested in volunteering, kindly contact Abhijit Bhattacharya on 416-569-9401, indicating the Services that you are interested in and days you can be available for volunteering.

THANK YOU!!

Reminiscences of Swami Tyagishananda

Swami Tyagishananda, had a picture of Swami Brahmananda in his room. Once during the maintenance of the room things were removed and the picture was not replaced. The brahmacharin who noticed this lapse brought it back regretting the inconvenience caused to him. The Swami merely said, "Do I need the support of an image after all these years."

His meditation could not be disturbed even with people moving around. He used to meditate outside the temple on the verandah near the place where people removed their slippers (this he started after a devotee reported that his sandals were missing; and interestingly he assumed the role of guarding the slippers in his own way with closed eyes).

A brahmacharin used to come to wind the clock in his room every week. Once, seeing the Swami meditate, he did not enter for fear of disturbing him. When he came later, the Swami asked him reason for the delay. When he told the reason, the Swami only said if his meditation were to be disturbed by such small things then all his practice for so many years was futile. His power of concentration was immense.

While the Swami could chastise his wards rather strongly when the situation so demanded he could be completely calm even when a junior monk or brahmacharin would point a perceived shortcoming on his part. There was an instance when he was taking class for the students at the Vidyarthi Mandiram and, in a manner not unusual to him, lost all sense of time. The class which was supposed to end at 5 PM went past late evening – 8 PM or so. A brahmacharin overseeing the vesper service shouted at the Swami for a long time and took him on with the charges of irresponsible conduct and carelessness with regard to his duties as President of the Ashrama. Tyagishanandaji calmly listened to it and went away. Perhaps he saw that brahmacharin was right from his perspective. It was a different matter that while taking the class his mind had soared into great heights, and that forgetfulness was only due to his mind not remaining at the ordinary plane of keeping a watch on time. But his greatness lay in the fact that he never justified this, let alone making anything special of this nature of getting far-removed from day-to-day practicalities. He was, on the contrary, mindful of the lapse on his part.

Once a devotee named Rao, who always saw the Swami engrossed in normal chores like cooking and tending cows, asked in lighter vein, "Swami, what is the difference between a householder and you. We worry about our children and you worry about your cows". The Swami promptly replied: "Rao, there is an important difference. If tomorrow the headquarters asks me to leave to another centre I just take my loin-cloth and leave." He then made a gesture of wiping his hands sideways, implying finishing with a task for good (and not even taking the dust of that place). "Can a householder walk out of his home in this way", he said. The devotee was stunned by the way Tyagishanandaji said it and it was long-etched in his memory. He later recounted this incident to many, and it passed on as a strong lesson in renunciation. The same was the gesture made by the Swami when young monks and brahmacharins expressed their deep worries over the financial condition of the ashrama. He would merely say, "We are monks; if Guru Maharaj provides for the ashrama it is fine, otherwise we will walk out", wiping his hands sideways.

Even in last days of illness Tyagishanandaji never fell into a low mood or referred to the immense physical suffering he was undergoing. In fact it seemed that even in that situation he was completely a master of himself. During these days when a brahmacharin who was arranging his mosquito net while Tyagishanandaji was resting, softly asked if the Swami was getting disturbed. Tyagishanandaji opened his eyes and said, "The whole world cannot disturb me now".

Raja Yoga in brief

From the 'Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda'

There was a great god-sage called Nārada. Just as there are sages among mankind, great Yogis, so there are great Yogis among the gods. Narada was a good Yogi, and very great. He travelled everywhere.

One day he was passing through a forest, and saw a man who had been meditating until the white ants had built a huge mound round his body-so long had he been sitting in that position. said to Nārada, "Where are you going?" Narada replied, "I am going to heaven." "Then ask God when He will be merciful to me; when I shall attain freedom."

Further on Narada saw another man. He was jumping about, singing dancing, and said, "Oh, Narada, where are you going?" His voice and his gestures were wild. Narada said, "I am going to heaven."

"Then, ask when I shall be free." Narada went on. In the course of time he came again by the same road, and there was the man who had been meditating with the anthill round him. He said, "Oh, Narada, did you ask the Lord about me?" "Oh, yes." "What did He say?" "The Lord told me that you would attain freedom in four more births." Then the man began to weep and wail, and said, "I have meditated until an ant-hill has grown around me, and I have four more births yet!"

Nārada went to the other man. "Did you ask my question?" "Oh, yes. Do you see this tamarind tree? I have to tell you that as many leaves as there are on that tree, so many times, you shall be born, and then you shall attain freedom." The man began to dance for joy, and said, "I shall have freedom after such a short time!" A voice came, "My child, you will have freedom this minute." That was the reward for his perseverance. He was ready to work through all those births, nothing discouraged him. But the first man felt that even four more births were too long. Only perseverance, like that of the man who was willing to wait aeons brings about the highest result.

The Master and Buddha

From 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' - Friday, April 9, 1886

Narendra had just returned from a visit to Bodh-Gaya, where he had gone with Kali and Tarak. In that sacred place he had been absorbed in deep meditation before the image of Buddha. He had paid his respects to the Bodhi-tree, which is an offshoot of the original tree under which Buddha attained Nirvana.

MASTER (smiling, to M.): "He went there [referring to Bodh-Gaya]."

M. (to Narendra): "What are the doctrines of Buddha?"

NARENDRA: "He could not express in words what he had realized by his tapasya. So people say he was an atheist."

MASTER (by signs): "Why atheist? He was not an atheist. He simply could not express his inner experiences in words. Do you know what 'Buddha' means? It is to become one with Bodha, Pure Intelligence, by meditating on That which is of the nature of Pure Intelligence; it is to become Pure Intelligence Itself."

NARENDRA: "Yes, sir. There are three classes of Buddhas: Buddha, Arhat, and Bodhisattva."

MASTER: "This too is a sport of God Himself, a new lila of God. Why should Buddha be called an atheist? When one realizes Svarupa, the true nature of one's Self, one attains a state that is something between asti, is, and nasti, is-not."

NARENDRA (to M.): "It is a state in which contradictions meet. A combination of hydrogen and oxygen produces cool water; and the same hydrogen and oxygen are used in the oxy-hydrogen blowpipe.

"In that state both activity and non-activity are possible; that is to say, one then performs unselfish action.

"Worldly people, who are engrossed in sense-objects, say that everything exists — asti. But the mayavadis, the

illusionists, say that nothing exists — nasti. The experience of a Buddha is beyond both 'existence' and 'non-existence'."

MASTER: "This 'existence' and 'non-existence' are attributes of Prakriti. The Reality is beyond both." The devotees remained silent a few moments.

MASTER (to Narendra): "What did Buddha preach?"

NARENDRA: "He did not discuss the existence or non-existence of God. But he showed compassion for others all his life. "A hawk pounced upon a bird and was about to devour it. In order to save the bird, Buddha gave the hawk his own flesh."

Sri Ramakrishna remained silent. Narendra became more and more enthusiastic about Buddha.

NARENDRA: "How great his renunciation was! Born a prince, he renounced everything! If a man has nothing, no wealth at all, what does his renunciation amount to? After attaining Buddhahood and experiencing Nirvana, Buddha once visited his home and exhorted his wife, his son, and many others of the royal household to embrace the life of renunciation. How intense his renunciation was! But look at Vyasa's conduct! He forbade his son Sukadeva to give up the world, saying, 'My son, practise religion as a householder.'"

Sri Ramakrishna was silent. As yet he had not uttered a word.

NARENDRA: "Buddha did not care for Sakti or any such thing. He sought only Nirvana. Ah, how intense his dispassion was! When he sat down under the Bodhi-tree to meditate, he took this vow: 'Let my body wither away here if I do not attain Nirvana.' Such a firm resolve!

"This body, indeed, is the great enemy. Can anything be achieved without chastising it?"

KARMA YOGA ACTIVITIES

It is a great opportunity to provide your services to the Vedanta Society of Toronto. We are inviting volunteers for various activities in the ashram, which includes:

- Janitorial (cleaning carpets, floors, washrooms, Shrine area, Meditation room, dusting furnitures, etc.) Garbage / Recycling waste (preferably on Wednesday or Thursday every week)
- Kitchen and dining hall cleaning (cleaning the walls, floor, arrange chairs, table, arrange various utensils in correct place, replenish stock)
- Book-store assistance (arranging the books, helping out with stocks, replenish, inventory check)
- Library assistance (arranging the books, chairs, calling for book return)
- Lawn mowing, gardening, watering plants (during summer)

If interested in volunteering, kindly send email at toronto@rkmm.org or contact Abhijit Bhattacharya on 416-569-9401, indicating the Services that you are interested in and days you can be available for volunteering.

THANK YOU AGAIN.

Buddha's sermon to his first five disciples

Adapted from the book 'Buddha and my Heritage' by Swami Ranganathananda

The first disciples of Buddha were his five friends who supported him during his 6 years of dushkarak kriya (self mortification) named Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji. Buddha, after attaining bodhi, decided to seek them out; and learning that they had gone to Isipattana or Sarnath near Banaras, he decided to go there, about 144 miles from Buddha Gaya. Reaching Isipattana, he saw from a distance the five disciples sitting in a park there. And enfolding them in the love of his pure mind, he approached them. But at first they were not inclined to greet him and show due courtesies, because they had decided that he had fallen from the path. They addressed him by name calling him 'friend'; yet there was something compelling in the demeanor, in the dignity, in the poise of Buddha that made them receive him with love and reverence. He then said to them: 'Hear me, Bhikkhus, the Immortal has been gained by me. I teach, I show the Dharma.'

When they did not seem to have been convinced of his spiritual bonafides, he said again, in a gentle tone of authority: 'Are you conscious, O Bhikkhus, that I have not spoken to you in this manner before?' They understood that he spoke from the depth of personal realization, and became receptive and attentive. The Master then imparted his realizations to them and, through them, to humanity in two well-known discourses, the first of which is the Dharmacakra-pravartana-Sūtra and the second, the Anātmalaksana-Sūtra delivered five days later.

Addressing the five on the first occasion, the Buddha said: 'These two extremes, O Bhikkhus, are not to be approached by him who has withdrawn (from the world). Which two? On the one hand, that which is linked and connected with lust through sensuous pleasures, and is low, ignorant, vulgar, ignoble, and profitless, and on the other hand, that which is connected with self-mortification, and is painful, ignoble, and profitless. Avoiding both these extremes, the middle road (madhyama pratipada) bringing insight, bringing knowledge, leads to tranquility, to highest knowledge, to full enlightenment, to peace. And what middle road leads to peace? It is indeed this Noble Eightfold Path, namely, right outlook, right will, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right absorption. This middle road leads to peace.

'Now again, this is the Noble Truth as to sorrow (dukkham ariya saccam): birth (jāti) is sorrowful, decay is sorrowful, disease is sorrowful, death is sorrowful, union with the unpleasing is sorrowful, separation from the pleasing is sorrowful, the wish which one does not fulfil is sorrowful – in brief, desire-ridden transient individuality (pañca-upādāna khandha) is sorrowful.

'Again, this is the Noble Truth as to the origin of sorrow (dukkha-samudayam ariya saccam): it is this recurring craving (tanha) associated with pleasure and attachment, seeking enjoyment everywhere, namely, the craving for sense-pleasure (kāma tanha), the craving for separate earthly existence (bhava tanha), the craving for heavenly existence (vibhava tanha).

'Again, this is the Noble Truth as to the cessation of sorrow (dukkha nirodham ariya saccam): It is the cessation of this very craving, so that no remnant or trace of it remains, its abandonment, its renouncement, liberation (mukti) from it, detachment (an-alayo) from it. 'And this once more is the Noble Truth as to the road leading to the cessation of sorrow (dukkha-nirodha-gāmini patipada ariya saccam): It is indeed that Noble Eightfold Path (maggo)....

'As soon as my knowledge and insight (nana dassanam) concerning these Four Noble Truths were pure, I knew that I had attained supreme and full enlightenment (sammā-sambodhim).... The knowledge now as a thing seen arose in me. The liberation of my mind (me ceto vimutti) is established, separate existence is here ended, there is not now-re-birth.'

In the second discourse, the Buddha stripped the notion of individuality of all its unreal elements:

'Rūpam (material form) is an-atta (not the self); vedanā (sensation) is an-atta ...; sanna (perception) is an-atta ...; samkhara (pre-disposition) is an-atta ...; vinnanam (consciousness) is an-atta (not the self).

"Again what think you Bhikkhus? Is the material form permanent (niccam) or impermanent (a-niccam)?" "Impermanent, revered Sir." "But that which is impermanent, is that suffering (dukkham) or happy (sukkham)?" "Suffering, revered Sir." "That then which is impermanent, is suffering, and by nature changeable (vi-parināma dhammam), is it proper to regard it thus: This is mine, I am this, this is my self (etam mama, eso'ham asmi, eso me atta)?" "No indeed, revered Sir." "Is sensation permanent? ... Is perception permanent? Is pre-disposition permanent? ... Is consciousness permanent? ... That then which is impermanent, suffering and by nature changeable, is it proper to regard it thus: 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self?':No indeed, revered Sir."

'And so, Bhikkhus, all material form whether past, future or present, whether within us or external, whether gross or subtle, low or high, far or near is to be regarded with right insight as it really is (yathā bhūtam) thus: This is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself ... All sensation ... gross or subtle, all perception ... gross or subtle, ... all predisposition ... low or high, ... all consciousness ... far or near is to be regarded with right insight as it really is thus: This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my Self.

'Regarding them thus, O Bhikkhus, an instructed ariyan disciple becomes indifferent to (nibbindati) material form, becomes indifferent to sensation, becomes indifferent to perception, becomes indifferent to consciousness. Becoming indifferent, he becomes free from desire (vi-rajjati); through non-desire (vi-rāgo) he is liberated.

'When he is liberated, there arises in him the knowledge, "I am liberated". He knows "jāti (birth or separate existence) is ended (khina); brahmacariya (the holy life) has been lived; karaniyam (what ought to be done) has been done; there is nothing beyond (nāparam) this state (itthattāya).'

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDAR

| Events | Date & Time |
|-----------------------|---|
| Buddha Jayanti | May 5, 2023 – 6:30 pm <i>Also puja will be streamed live on YouTube.</i> |
| Guru Punima | July 3, 2023 – 6:30 pm <i>Also puja will be streamed live on YouTube.</i> |
| Annual Retreat | July 22 and 23, 2023 <i>Both days 8.30am to 4.30pm. On-site only, this will not be streamed on YouTube.</i> |

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. For details, please see the 'Calendar of Events' on the next page.

VIGIL: A vigil consisting of japa and meditation will be observed, from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, for date kindly see 'Calendar of Events', on next page. To participate, please call the centre @416-240-7262.

RAM NAM: For the date and time of the monthly Ramnam, please see the 'Calendar of Events' on the next page.

BOOK STORE: Limited number of books are available for purchase.

DAILY BREAD FOOD BANK: Daily Bread Food Bank has actively started. We would like to encourage people to donate.

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 instructions. Appointments for interviews should be made in advance with the Swami at 416-240-7262.

DAILY MEDITATION: Meditation is done at the Centre every morning from 6:00 am to 7:00 am. Devotional singing and meditation time in the evenings is from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm.

SOUP KITCHEN: For details on Soup Kitchen, please see the 'Calendar of Events' on the next page for details.

Buddha was a great Vedantist (for Buddhism was really only an offshoot of Vedanta), and Shankara is often called a "hidden Buddhist". Buddha made the analysis, Shankara made the synthesis out of it. Buddha never bowed down to anything — neither Veda, nor caste, nor priest, nor custom. He fearlessly reasoned so far as reason could take him. Such a fearless search for truth and such love for every living thing the world has never seen. Buddha was the Washington of the religious world; he conquered a throne only to give it to the world, as Washington did to the American people. He sought nothing for himself. –

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda/Volume 7/Inspired Talks/Friday, July 19



Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher- Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 2023

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|
| | <u>1</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>5</u> 6:30pm Buddha Jayanti | <u>6</u> |
| <u>7</u> 11:00am <i>Guided Meditation on</i> <i>Buddha</i> | <u>8</u> | <u>9</u> | <u>10</u> | <u>11</u> | <u>12</u> 7:30pm Scripture class 'Uddhava Gita' | <u>13</u> 6 am to 6 pm VIGIL |
| <u>14</u> 11:00am <i>Lecture:</i> <i>'Desireless Bhakti'</i> 5:00pm Ram Naam | <u>15</u> | <u>16</u> | <u>17</u> | <u>18</u> | <u>19</u> 7:30pm Scripture class (ONLINE ONLY): 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' | <u>20</u> |
| <u>21</u> 11:00am <i>Lecture (ONLINE ONLY):</i> <i>'Human body-its real</i> <i>purpose'</i> | <u>22</u> | <u>23</u> | <u>24</u> | <u>25</u> | <u>26</u> 7:30pm NO Scripture class | <u>27</u> |
| <u>28</u> 11:00am <i>Lecture (ONLINE ONLY):</i> <i>'God's grace'</i> | <u>29</u> | <u>30</u> | <u>31</u> | | | |

ANNUAL RETREAT 2023 (Onsite only)

Vedanta Society invites all to participate in the "Annual Retreat" to be conducted on July 22nd and 23rd, 2023 (8.30am to 4.30pm), onsite only. Other details will be communicated in the June Newsletter. ALL are requested to mark these dates in their calendar and participate.

VIVEKANANDA DINNER 2023

Vedanta Society invites all to participate in the "Vivekananda Dinner" to be held on a weekend in September 2023. Other details i.e. Date & time, Venue, Program details, Ticket amount, etc. will be communicated in the future Newsletters. ALL are requested to attend and make this event a grand success.

AN APPEAL FOR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL (Year 2023) & DONATION

Vedanta Society appeals to the devotees and well-wishers to kindly come forward and donate generously through online means. Our thanks to those who have responded to our appeal and kindly donated to support the Society. With the current scenario, devotees and well-wishers can donate online through our website PayPal link <http://newsite.vedantatoronto.ca/donate.shtml> using Credit / Debit cards. Through PayPal you could also setup recurring monthly donations.

All members who have not renewed their membership for the year 2023, are requested to send their details by email to toronto@rkmm.org i.e. Name, Address, Mobile - Home phone numbers, email address and amount paid. Please pay the annual subscription through our website PayPal link as mentioned above. This will help us to issue the annual tax receipt.