



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

120 Emmett Ave. Toronto, ON M6M 2E6 CANADA

Tel.: 416-240-7262; Email: toronto@rkmm.org Website: www.vedantatoronto.ca

Newsletter January 2022

Words to Inspire

"Bondage and liberation are both of Her making. By Her maya worldly people become entangled in 'woman and gold', and again, through Her grace they attain their liberation. She is called the Savior, and the Remover of the bondage that binds one to the world."
-Sri Ramakrishna

Steps of Hindu Philosophic thought

(CW: Vol-1 - Lectures and Discourses)

According to the Sankhya, perception occurs by the transmission of the vibrations which first come to the external sense-organs, from the external to the internal organs, from the internal organs to the mind, from the mind to the Buddhi, from the Buddhi or intellect, to something which is a unit, which they call the Ātman. The fine body, according to the Vedantists, is a material but transparent body, made of very fine particles, so fine that no microscope can see them. What is the use of that? It is the receptacle of the fine forces. Just as this gross body is the receptacle of the gross forces, so the fine body is the receptacle of the fine forces, which we call thought, in its various modifications. Force cannot exist without matter. It must require some matter to exist, so the grosser forces work in the body; and those very forces become finer; the very force which is working in a gross form, works in a fine form, and becomes thought. There is no distinction between them, simply one is the gross and the other the fine manifestation of the same thing. Neither is there any distinction between this fine body and the gross body. The fine body is also material, only very fine matter; and just as this gross body is the instrument that works the gross forces, so the fine body is the instrument that works the fine forces. From where do all these forces come? According to Vedanta philosophy, there are two things in nature, one of which they call Ākāsha, which is the substance, infinitely fine, and the other they call Prāna, which is the force. Whatever you see, or feel, or hear, as air, earth, or anything, is material — the product of Akasha. It goes on and becomes finer and finer, or grosser and grosser, changing under the action of Prana. Like Akasha, Prana is omnipresent, and interpenetrating everything. Akasha is like the water, and everything else in the universe is like blocks of ice, made out of that water, and floating in the water, and Prana is the power that changes this Akasha into all these various forms. The gross body is the instrument made out of Akasha, for the manifestation of Prana in gross forms, as muscular motion, or walking, sitting, talking, and so forth. That fine body is also made of Akasha, a very fine form of Akasha, for the manifestation of the same Prana in the finer form of thought. So, first there is this gross body. Beyond that is this fine body, and beyond that is the

Jiva, the real man. It is not that a man has a fine and also a gross body; it is the one body only, the part which endures longer is the fine body, and that which dissolves sooner is the gross. So far we see that man is a being, who has first a gross body which dissolves very quickly, then a fine body which remains through aeons, and then a Jiva. This Jiva, according to the Vedanta philosophy, is eternal, just as God is eternal. Nature is also eternal, but changefully eternal. The material of nature — Prana and Akasha — is eternal, but it is changing into different forms eternally. But the Jiva is not manufactured either of Akasha or Prana; it is immaterial and, therefore, will remain forever. It is not the result of any combination of Prana and Akasha, and whatever is not the result of combination, will never be destroyed, because destruction is going back to causes. The gross body is a compound of Akasha and Prana and, therefore, will be decomposed.

What comes after death? All these Vedanta philosophers admit that this Jiva is by its own nature pure. But ignorance covers its real nature, they say. As by evil deeds it has covered itself with ignorance, so by good deeds it becomes conscious of its own nature again. Just as it is eternal, so its nature is pure. The nature of every being is pure. When through good deeds all its sins and misdeeds have been washed away, then the Jiva becomes pure again, and when it becomes pure, it goes to what is called Devayāna. Its organ of speech enters the mind. You cannot think without words. Wherever there is thought, there must be words. As words enter the mind, so the mind is resolved into the Prana, and the Prana into the Jiva. Then the Jiva gets quickly out of the body, and goes to the solar regions. This universe has sphere after sphere. This earth is the world sphere, in which are moons, suns, and stars. Beyond that here is the solar sphere, and beyond that another which they call the lunar sphere. Beyond that there is the sphere which they call the sphere of lightning, the electric sphere, and when the Jiva goes there, there comes another Jiva, already perfect, to receive it, and takes it to another world, the highest heaven, called the Brahmaloaka, where the Jiva lives eternally, no more to be born or to die. It enjoys through eternity, and gets all sorts of powers, except the power of creation.

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!!

True Devotion

Marks of True Devotion

Vedanta teaches that the ultimate spiritual Reality is self-existent and self-effulgent. It transcends all names and forms, but takes on forms for the sake of devotees. Sri Ramakrishna compares the formless Reality to the water of the ocean and God with form to blocks of ice in that water. Just as water freezes at places in the ocean due to intense cold, so the formless spiritual Reality assumes divine forms due to the cooling influence of the devotee's love. As sincere seekers keen on making progress in the realm of the Spirit, we need to understand an important point. The formless aspect of God may seem intellectually more satisfying than God with form; yet if we are body-conscious and are swayed by desires, we will find the way of devotion to a divine form more beneficial than the way of Knowledge involving the formless God. Says Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (12.5-6): "The task of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest (the indefinable and incomprehensible Absolute) is more difficult; for the ideal of the Unmanifest is hard to attain for those who are conscious of their bodies and attached to them. But those who consecrate all their actions to Me, regarding Me as the Supreme Goal, and who worship Me, meditating on Me with single-minded concentration-to them whose minds are thus absorbed in Me, verily I become before long the Saviour from the death-fraught ocean of the world."

Sri Ramakrishna emphasized the way of devotion because it is more suited to the present age: "To follow jnanayoga in this age is very difficult. First, a man's life depends entirely on food. Second, he has a short span of life. Third, he can by no means get rid of body-consciousness; and the Knowledge of Brahman is impossible without the destruction of body-consciousness. The Jnani says: 'I am Brahman; I am not the body. I am beyond hunger and thirst, disease and grief, birth and death, pleasure and pain.' How can you be a Jnani if you are conscious of disease, grief, pain, pleasure, and the like? A thorn enters your flesh, blood flows from the wound, and you suffer very badly from the pain; but nevertheless, if you are a Jnani you must be able to say: 'Why, there is no thorn

in my flesh at all. Nothing is the matter with me.' Therefore bhaktiyoga is prescribed for this age. By following this path one comes to God more easily than by following the [other paths]."

The Time Factor

Until the right time comes, however, God remains just a three-letter word to many people and they remain impervious to spiritual teachings. According to Sri Ramakrishna, as long as we have not had our share of enjoyment in the world, our mind does not turn toward God. Again, God is in no great hurry to wean us from sense enjoyment and direct our minds to Him. As Sri Ramakrishna says, the mother is busy with her cooking, and the child remains happy playing with its toys. When the child no longer wants the toys, throws them away, and cries for its mother, she comes running, takes it on her lap and begins to nurse it. Similarly, when we develop dispassion for sense objects and yearn for God, the source of supreme Bliss, He quickly responds to our prayer.

Two Common Types of Devotees

Some people pray to God to rid them of their physical or mental affliction. Some others pray to Him to fulfill their worldly desires for name, fame, power, position, or prosperity. These are two of the four kinds of devotees mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita, 7.16. They are "the afflicted" and "seekers of prosperity." True love of God is different from such devotion. Says Swami Vivekananda: "Wherever there is any seeking for something in return, there can be no real love; it becomes a mere matter of shopkeeping. As long as there is in us any idea of deriving this or that favour from God in return for our respect and allegiance to Him, so long there can be no true love growing in our hearts. Those who worship God because they wish Him to bestow favours on them are sure not to worship Him if those favours are not forthcoming." However, in the long run, such devotion too has its positive side: it inculcates and strengthens in people the habit of turning to God. When dispassion for worldly objects begins to awaken in them, they will turn to God for the sake of devotion.

From Darkness to Light

by Swami Ranganathananda

There will ensue the full manifestation of the glory of human nature, lighting up every aspect of human life, individual and collective. Education is to dispel three kinds of darkness. The first is physical darkness, the darkness which obstructs man's physical movements. The next is mental darkness proceeding from ignorance about the physical and the social world and their laws. And the third is spiritual darkness proceeding from ignorance about the laws that govern the spiritual world, the inner world of man.

The first darkness is removed by health and wealth; the second is removed by secular education. And the third is overcome only through religion which comprises spiritual knowledge accompanied by striving. This striving or sadhana is the very essence of religion. Temples and churches, rituals and ceremonies, etc. constitute but the externals of this sadhana. The inner core of this sadhana consists of control of mind, loving remembrance of God, and meditation. All such sadhana is a movement of the finite to the Infinite. Strive towards the Infinite, says the Upanishads, for therein alone is bliss. There is no bliss in the finite. Attachment to the finite is worldliness; and this worldliness is what obstructs the growth of the soul. Education must remove this obstruction; for all education is a movement from darkness to light. This is the deepest prayer of the human heart: *Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya* - 'Lead me from darkness to light.' Through such education the home becomes a centre of delight, where each heart opens to the other and all open to the world of man outside. This is the achievement of true universality. The mother is the symbol of this universality in the limited sphere of the family. She accepts every one in the family, and rejects none.

But this quality has to transcend the limits of the family. It should also manifest in every member of the family, in every citizen of the country. Our hearts have to embrace not only the children of our own homes, but also the children of all homes. This is the true education of the citizen in whom is developed the urge to protect and to cherish, which is the characteristic of the mother-heart.

Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda

by Haripada Mitra

Swamiji's patriotism was very profound. This I mentioned even earlier. Once that topic was broached, and somebody told him that though it was a duty for lay people leading a social life to have love for their country, a Sannyasin should be above any attachment for his own country and that he should rather love all countries and pray for the good of all. I shall never forget the burning reply that these words evoked from Swamiji. He said, "How can a man who does not feed his own mother look after other people's mothers?" Swamiji admitted that there were many defects in our current religious practices, habits, and social customs; and he would say, "It is our bounden duty to try to rectify them by all means; but that does not mean that it is necessary to tell the English people about all these things by publishing them in the newspapers. There is no greater fool than one who washes one's dirty linen in public."

"About works also, it should be understood that nobody can wholly avoid doing something or other, and no work can be either wholly good or wholly bad. If you undertake a good work, you are bound to do some amount of bad work along with it. As a result, along with the happiness derived from the good work, some amount of unhappiness and dissatisfaction also will come inevitably. If you want to avoid that much of evil, you will have to give up the hope of deriving the apparent happiness from sense-enjoyment, that is to say, you will have to give up all selfish motives and go on doing your works out of a sense of duty. That is what is called 'work without motive' (selfless work). While instructing Arjuna about this in the Gita, Shri Krishna says, 'Work, but dedicate its fruit to Me, that is to say, work for Me'."

I asked Swamiji one day whether the instruction of Shri Krishna to Arjuna, just on the eve of the battle of Kurukshetra was a historical event. What he said in reply is very charming: "The Gita is a very old book. In ancient times there was no such fuss about writing histories or getting books printed; and so it is difficult to prove the historicity of the Gita to men like you.

Still I see no reason why you should rack your brains about the truth of the event recorded in the Gita. Even if somebody were to prove to you with incontrovertible facts that the Gita represents the actual words of Shri Krishna as told to Arjuna, will you really believe in all that is written in that book? Should even God Himself incarnate and come to teach you, you will challenge Him to prove His Divinity, and you will apply your own arguments to disprove His claim. So why should you be worried about the authenticity of the Gita? If you can, accept as far as it lies in your power the teachings of the Gita and actualize them in your life. That will be a real benefit to you. Shri Ramakrishna used to say, 'If you happen to be in a mango garden, eat as many of the luscious fruits as you can; what need have you to count the leaves? It seems to me that any belief or disbelief in the events recorded in a religious book is determined by a personal equation. When somebody falls into certain circumstances and finds that his condition is similar to some incident mentioned in the book concerned, he believes that the incident must be true; and then he eagerly adopts the means prescribed by the book for tiding over the difficulty.'")

One day he explained to us in a very attractive way the need for conserving one's physical and mental energy for the adequate discharge of one's duty. He said, "One who wastes one's energy in dabbling in other people's affairs and in other aimless activities can hardly have any energy left for performing a desirable duty. The sum total of the energy that can be exhibited by a person is a fixed quantity. As such, if it finds an outlet in a useless way, it can no further be drawn on for any purposeful activity. One requires tremendous energy to realize the deeper truths of religion. That is why the religious books of all races advise the aspirants not to waste their energy in the enjoyment of sense-objects, but to preserve it through continence and other means."

Intense Yearning

From the book – Meditation and Spiritual Life, by Swami Yatiswarananda

We must cultivate an intense yearning for God. Prahlada was a great example. From his childhood, he had intense devotion for Vishnu. His demoniacal father tried all in his power to turn the boy to the worldly path. But the boy went on with his ecstatic praising of the Lord. When the Lord appeared before him and asked what he wanted, Prahlada said, "May I think of Thee with that strong love which the ignorant cherish for the things of the world, and may that love never cease to abide in my heart." In modern times, Sri Ramakrishna stands as an unparalleled example for the intensity of yearning for God. His longing for the vision of God in all His aspects was so great that he didn't sleep for six years. He spent his time day and night in various spiritual moods which were so intense that people thought that he had become mad. His was indeed divine madness. The following passage from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is a typical example.

The Master (to Bankim and others): One must have for God, the yearning of a child. The child sees nothing but confusion when his mother is away. You may try to cajole him by putting a sweetmeat in his hand; but he will not be fooled. He only says, 'No, I want to go to my mother.' One must feel such yearning for God. Ah, what yearning! How restless a child feels for his mother! Nothing can make him forget his mother. He, to whom, the enjoyment of the worldly happiness appears tasteless, he who takes no delight in anything of the world -money, name, creature comforts, sense pleasures- becomes sincerely grief-stricken for vision of the Mother. And to him alone, the Mother comes running, leaving all Her other duties. Bankim (to the Master): 'Sir how can we develop divine Love?'

Master: Through restlessness- the restlessness of a child for his mother. The child feels bewildered when he is separated from his mother and weeps longingly for her. If a man can weep like that for God he can even see Him. At the approach of dawn the eastern horizon becomes red. Then one knows it will soon be sunrise. Likewise, if you see a person restless for God, you can be pretty certain that he hasn't long to wait for His vision.'

Knowledge is power

A wonderful verse from The Upanishads, beautifully explains the greatness and uniqueness of a Knowledge.

*Naasti vidya samo bandhuh, naasti vidya samah suhrit;
Naasti vidya samam vittam, naasti vidya samam sukham.*

There is no relative equivalent to knowledge, there is no friend equivalent to knowledge. There is no wealth equivalent to knowledge, there is no happiness equivalent to knowledge.

Knowledge is the absorption and realization of the information we acquire. As Albert Einstein said, "Any fool can know. The point is to understand." There is a major difference between reading a book and "living" the book. On this note we may refer to what Sri Ramakrishna said, "In the scriptures you will find the way to realize God. But after getting all the information about the path, you must begin to work. Only then can you attain your goal."

Knowledge must be acquired for the right purpose. Knowledge must enable a person to use the power of discrimination. 'Hamsa-vahini' Goddess Saraswati has a swan as her carrier. The legendary swan is capable of separating water from milk and take only the wholesome milk. The swan thus symbolizes discrimination between right and wrong or good and bad. The true seeker of knowledge has the uncanny ability to discriminate pearls from pebbles, good from evil.

There is a story of a Zen master who was wise and humble. One day a scholar came to the wise person. After greeting him, the Zen master asked, Sir, what brings you here? The scholar started nonstop describing everything he knew about Zen philosophy, his credentials and the list of his knowledge. Lastly, he said, I want you to teach me Zen.

The Zen master said, Sure but first join me for a cup of tea. The professor gladly accepted. The Zen master served the tea. He poured his visitor's cup full and kept on pouring. The scholar watched the overflowing. Tea spilled out and ran over the table.

Stop! The cup is full!" said the scholar. "Exactly," said Zen Master Just like this my friend you are full of your own opinion, and speculation how can I show you Zen unless you empty your cup first. Open your mind.

According to Sri Ramakrishna, only two kinds of people can attain self-knowledge: those whose minds are not overcrowded with thoughts borrowed from others; and those who, after studying all the scriptures and sciences, have come to realize that they know nothing.

The Upanishads distinguishes between the Higher knowledge or *Aparâ Vidya* which is the knowledge of that Unchangeable and the Lower knowledge or *Para Vidya* is the knowledge about our material world subject to constant changes.

That Knowledge which purifies the mind and heart alone is true Knowledge, all else is only a negation of Knowledge.

Sri Ramakrishna said, "Sarada is Goddess Saraswati indeed. She can place the highest knowledge of God in the hearts of her followers".

Nistarini Devi

Once, a cat and her kittens took shelter in Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar. This made him anxious, because he felt the cat family would not get proper food at the temple. So, he asked a devout lady disciple, "Will you do something for me?" She readily replied, "Whatever it is, I will do it." He told her about the cat and her kittens and asked her to take them home with the command, "Remember that they have taken refuge here. See that they get the best of care." The lady happily took them home.

On her every subsequent visit, Sri Ramakrishna would ask her in detail about the cats: Were they getting proper food? Had the kittens grown? What would she do with them? And again, he would remind her, "Remember, they took refuge here." The lady did her best to care for the cats. Later, when the mother cat was dying, she poured Ganga water into her mouth, repeating Sri Ramakrishna's name.

Pleased with her devotion Sri Ramakrishna blessed her, "May all good attend you. May you have Ishta-darshan." Much later, while repeating her mantra the lady had the vision of her chosen deity Lord Rama. As she bent down to do pranam, she saw her dear guru, Sri Ramakrishna in place of Lord Rama. He smilingly told her, "Now you know who I am!"

This fortunate lady was Nistarini Devi, the wife of Sri Ramakrishna's eminent householder disciple, Nabagopal Ghosh. Sri Ramakrishna said about her, "She is a great soul, a partial incarnation of Divine Mother...her hand is endowed with divine power capable of defying even Death... Through the influence of his wife, Nabagopal escaped from Maya." At the Radharaman temple in Vrindaban, Holy Mother saw her in a vision fanning Lord Krishna.

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Events	Date & Time
Kalpataru Celebration	Jan 1, 2022 – 12:00 pm
Swami Vivekananda Birthday Celebration	Jan 23, 2022 – 11:00 am
Saraswati Puja	February 5, 2022 – 11:00 am
Maha Shivaratri	March 1, 2022 – 6:30 pm
Sri Ramakrishna Birthday Celebration	March 6, 2022 – 11:00 am

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 the date kindly see 'Calendar of Events', on next page. To participate, please send an email to <toronto@rkmm.org>

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

BOOK STORE: The Book Store has re-opened and 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 @ 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: Soup Kitchen activity still remains suspended due to Covid pandemic

Why we disagree

Chicago Lectures by Swami Vivekananda – September 15, 1893

I will tell you a little story. You have heard the eloquent speaker who has just finished say, 'Let us cease from abusing each other,' and he was very sorry that there should be always so much variance.

But I think I should tell you a story which would illustrate the cause of this variance. A frog lived in a well. It had lived there for a long time. It was born there and brought up there, and yet was a little, small frog. Of course the evolutionists were not there then to tell us whether the frog lost its eyes or not, but, for our story's sake, we must take it for granted that it had its eyes, and that it every day cleansed the water of all the worms and bacilli that lived in it with an energy that would do credit to our modern bacteriologists. In this way it went on and became a little sleek and fat. Well, one day another frog that lived in the sea came and fell into the well.

'Where are you from?' 'I am from the sea.'

'The sea! How big is that? Is it as big as my well?' and he took a leap from one side of the well to the other.

'My friend,' said the frog of the sea, 'how do you compare the sea with your little well?'

Then the frog took another leap and asked, 'Is your sea so big?'

'What nonsense you speak, to compare the sea with your well!'

'Well, then,' said the frog of the well, 'nothing can be bigger than my well; there can be nothing bigger than this; this fellow is a liar, so turn him out.'

That has been the difficulty all the while. I am a Hindu. I am sitting in my own little well and thinking that the whole world is my little well. The Christian sits in his little well and thinks the whole world is his well. The Mohammedan sits in his little well and thinks that is the whole world.

Important Notice – Tax receipts

As the year end approaches, you are requested to send your donations for 2021 no later than January 15, 2022 if you want these included for 2021 tax receipt. If cheques are being mailed, please make sure they are dated for 2021 and they are received by January 15, 2022. As you can appreciate it is a two-week process after all receipts have been deposited to prepare tax receipts. We strive to have these ready by the end of January for timely distribution, therefore your cooperation in this is very much appreciated.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher- Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 2022

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						<u>1</u> 12:00pm Kalpataru Celebration
<u>2</u> NO SUNDAY SERVICE	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>8</u> 6 am to 6 pm VIGIL
<u>9</u> 11:00am Lecture: 'Let us be One'	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Uddhava Gita'	<u>15</u>
<u>16</u> 11:00am Lecture: 'True Maturity' 5:00pm RAMNAM	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>22</u>
<u>23</u> 11:00am Swami Vivekananda's Birthday Celebration	<u>24</u> Winter Vacation Begins	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>

A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

May peace and spiritual blessings be yours in the New Year and always!

Winter vacation- January 24 to February 28, 2022

The Vedanta Society regular activities will continue until January 23, 2022. From Jan 24 until Feb 28, the Vedanta Society activities will remain suspended for the Winter Vacation, except the Morning and Evening prayers. Vedanta Vidya Mandir classes will continue in January as per the scheduled programme. There will be no Newsletter published for the month of February 2022.

AN APPEAL FOR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL & DONATION

In these difficult times going through around the world, our attendance has significantly dropped at the Centre and maintenance costs are ongoing, 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 are requested to renew their membership for the year 2022. It may please be noted that the Annual Membership fee from 2022 will be \$100. Please fill in the Membership form and mail to the Vedanta Society or email to toronto@rkmm.org. Please pay the Annual Membership through our website PayPal link as mentioned above. This will help us to issue the annual tax receipt.