



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter May 2015

WORDS TO INSPIRE

**“Those whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened never make a false step.
Fully awakened souls are beyond virtue and vice.” -Sri Ramakrishna**

Harmonizing Work and Worship

The relationship between social work and the worship of God evolves in three stages: work and worship, work as worship, and work is worship. In the first stage, the two acts are completely separated. An act of service is doing good to others; an act of worship, doing good to oneself. Service is performed in the outside world; worship is performed inside a temple or church. Service is going outward; worship is going inward. In this way, the two activities are locked in their separate boxes.

"Work as worship" is an attempt to take them out of their boxes. This stage applies Swamiji's ideal of service to one's daily life. Of course, it requires intense practice, a conscious effort not to treat man and God as if they were two separate entities, but to try to see the Living God in those served. In this stage, motives are watched and sincere effort is made not to let self-interest intrude.

The final stage, "work is worship," is the culmination of Swamiji's concept of service. Those who have realized God live in this stage; they see Brahman everywhere as the Living Spirit and, as such, automatically worship God in man. Sri Ramakrishna was a perfect example of this. He was so finely attuned to the all-pervading Existence that several remarkable incidents occurred. Once, when another man was slapped hard on the back, the Master's own back became red and swollen. Another time, while he saw someone trampling over a field of newly grown grass, he felt as if someone were trampling over his own chest. Thus he saw God in the animate and inanimate.

Most of us, obviously, have not reached this final stage. As spiritual seekers, we still find ourselves torn between work and worship. Although we are in full agreement with the concept of serving God in man, we often wonder how much precedent it should take over the contemplative aspects of spiritual life. We feel the danger of becoming too involved in the external at the expense of the internal. It is difficult enough to focus the mind on God in meditation, so why scatter it further by going out into the world? Why actively seek what feels like an obstacle to spiritual growth?

Swami Vivekananda was well aware of the schism that develops between service and meditation. He stood for harmony of the different Yogas. He insisted that the two ideals, internal and external, be given equal status. He felt so strongly about it that he included both, side by side, in the motto of the Ramakrishna Order: For one's own liberation and for the welfare of others. "Is it a religion," he pointedly asked, "that fails to remove the misery of the poor and turn men into gods?" (CW6.235).

The highest goal in life is the realization of God. Any purposeful act should be leading us towards that. It must be a means to that. So service must be looked upon as a spiritual discipline. Once realization is achieved, serving God in man comes naturally, and there is no conflict between work and worship: every act becomes a form of worship.

-From '*Vedanta and Ramakrishna*',
by Swami Swahananda.

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Practical Vedanta

(Based on a lecture by *Swami Vidyathananda* at Vedanta Society of Toronto on June 23, 2012)

Let us understand the terms very clearly-

a) What do we mean by Vedanta? &

b) What does the practice of Vedanta mean?

To understand Vedanta, we have to understand the 3 basic tenets—

1) To understand your inner Self through the process of *neti-neti* Atman or Not this-not this. We filter the thoughts that come to our minds by negating the bad thoughts with the good or spiritual thoughts.

2) The next is understanding '*Sarvam khalu idam Brahma*'— Everything that we see is Brahman or God.

3) The third, which is also one of the Maha-vakyas says *Aham Brahmasmi*— I am Brahman or the Ultimate Reality.

If we try to think on these tenets, we realize that these are the end products of the enquiries conducted by the high spiritual souls. To understand Vedanta, we must try to think about the questions which these high souls have asked to come to their conclusions. If we think about the first tenet -What is the Atman —*neti, neti* or not this, not this. The question that might have been asked was 'What is my real nature'? Similarly *Sarvam khalu idam Brahma* —Everything that we see is God — this is an answer to a question — 'What is the nature of this world'? *Aham Brahmasmi* must be an answer to the question- 'What is the relation of this world with me'? If we see these questions— What is my real nature, What is the nature of this world and What is the relation of this world with me— we find that Vedanta does not subscribe to any particular religion, it is practical approach to life or self-analysis. Vedanta inspires these questions and the practice of Vedanta involves trying to find answers to these questions through our every activity. If we further deeply analyze these questions we find one thing common— Real nature, real world and relationship with me. If we try to summarize these questions into one sentence, then Vedanta may be said to be the pursuit of reality. We feel that this podium is real, the paper is real, etc. So practice of Vedanta involves finding the relationship between the subject and the object and trying to arrive towards a working definition of what is real. Now let us try to find out the criteria of what is reality. Suppose we are in deep sleep and see a tiger chasing us. After a while when our sleep breaks, we find that this was a dream. This experience which terrified us did not last. Even in waking up situation, we find so many experiences which we think to be real at that time, but which does not last after a

while. Swami Vivekananda, during his childhood wanted to become a coach-driver. He was fascinated by the turban and clothes of the coachman. But when he grew up, that did not happen. So every experience that we have is a passing one. When we progress, we feel that the experiences were just passing and not exactly permanent. So whatever is permanent is real. When we pause to reflect, we find that most of our experiences do not remain permanent, but they develop our capacity to deal with situations in our life. It gives us the capacity to withdraw our mind from the activities of the world. We have to remember that it does not make our mind dull or inert as in our sleep, but gives us the tenacity to think what is permanent and what is not. It helps us not to identify ourselves with the pleasant or unpleasant experiences of the world, but to withdraw and think about the reality. Therefore the criteria for reality is permanence. Vedanta describes this permanence as 'Vidya' and what is impermanent is 'Avidya'. This means that we are instinctively asserting the statement that my real nature is not my identification with the situations.

Swamiji said— The ideal man is he who, in the midst of the greatest silence and solitude, finds the intense activity, and in the midst of the intense activity finds the silence and solitude of the desert. He has learnt the secret of restraint, he has controlled himself. He goes through the streets of a big city with all its traffic, and his mind is as calm as if he were in a cave, where not a sound could reach him; and he is intensely working all the time. That is the ideal of Karma-Yoga, and if you have attained to that you have really learnt the secret of work. Most of the time our emotions are swayed by the situations that we see around us. The more we come near to our nature, we become more unaffected by the changes in situations around us. Therefore the process of enquiring into our nature is not what we do exclusive through meditation but it is something to be done at every moment of our existence. It means to actually enquire into the real 'I' in the midst of our work. So here we go back to *Neti-neti* Atman or we start distinguishing the false identification of ourselves with the work and start recognizing our real nature. When we deal with the world, it is in terms of a) Activity and b) People around us. Activity involves service and other regular work, through which we interact with the people around us. The cause of all joy and sorrow is the desire for recognition that we seek through our activities. What is real about the work we do and the

people we interact with? After sometime we start feeling the emptiness behind this work. People work in different professions and deal with various kinds of people through our work. We must realize that every activity we do is part of a larger base system. The moment we start feeling every moment of our activity as affecting the whole system, then the meaning of our action becomes much more permanent and deeper than just a means of earning my individual livelihood. Work in its real nature is participation in a much larger way towards the good of the society. When we do some action, most of the time we expect something in return. If we get more than our expectation we become happy, if we get less, then we become sad. There may be friendship between two persons and due to exchange of harsh words, their friendship breaks. If we enquire into the permanence of this friendship, we find that it never existed at the first place. It is just two different persons coming together and at some time both of them identified themselves with their bodies and senses and there the trouble started. This could have been avoided if each of them would have seen

through the perspective of the other person. This is the secret of service. The first relief mission of Ramakrishna Mission was conducted by Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He nursed the orphan children and served food to the hungry people during the famine. He completely identified himself with the anguish of the affected people and became one with them. He himself was a realized soul and that is why he could identify his soul in these hungry poor people. This is nothing but the second tenet - *Sarvam khalu idam Brahma*— Everything that we see is Brahman or God or our own Soul. So the solidarity or oneness of the Universe is the final goal. We have to rise above our actions and elevate our association with the society above the body mind complex. The moment we start feeling this oneness with all, this world becomes heaven and the relation between us and the world becomes divine, due to which we realize that *Aham Brahmasmi* – I am God.

Update on Building Project

The Architect has submitted the documents to the Committee of Adjustment for City's approval. Based on the time taken for the approval, the Construction is expected to begin by mid-July 2015.

Appeal for Earthquake relief in Nepal

We are deeply shocked and saddened by the devastating earthquake which struck Nepal and adjoining areas claiming thousands of lives and bringing unprecedented misery to survivors. Agencies from all over the world are rushing to their aid by trying to provide relief in whatever way possible. Ramakrishna Mission, following our tradition, has launched massive relief operations in the earthquake affected areas.

We, at Vedanta Society of Toronto, are keen to contribute to these relief efforts organized by Ramakrishna Mission.

Therefore, on behalf of our Society I appeal to you to come forward with your donations to support this worthy cause. You may donate in the form of cash, cheques (made in favour of the Vedanta Society of Toronto) or online. Tax receipts shall be issued for all donations received. Please mention 'Earthquake Relief' in the memo line of the cheque.

We look forward to your support.

'I Must Go to Make Room'

During the spring of 1902, Josephine MacLeod was in India. She later wrote about the last time she saw Swamiji. We note again his love and insightful consideration of his disciples in his final conversation with her.

She writes:

I saw Swami off and on all that year [1901-02]. One day in April he said, 'I have nothing in the world. I haven't a penny to myself. I have given away everything that has ever been given to me.' I said, 'Swami, I will give you fifty dollars a month as long as you live.' He thought a minute and then he said, 'Can I live on that?' 'Yes, O yes,' I said, 'but perhaps you cannot have cream.' I gave him then two hundred dollars, but before the four months were passed he had gone.

In the same vein, Swamiji consciously withdrew himself from affairs of the Math, saying: 'How often does a man ruin his disciples by remaining always with them! When men are once trained, it is essential that their leader leave them, for without his absence they cannot develop themselves.' Sri Ramakrishna had foretold that when Naren knew who he really was, he would refuse to remain a moment longer in the body.

Sister Nivedita wrote: During the last year of his life, a group of his early comrades were one day talking over the old days, and the prophecy that when Noren should realise who and what he had already been, he would refuse to remain in the body, was mentioned. At this, one of them turned to him, half-laughing, 'Do you know yet who you were, Swamiji?' he said. 'Yes, I know now,' was the unexpected answer, awing them into earnestness and silence, and no one could venture at that time to question him further. On Buddha Purnima, in May 1902, Swamiji gave monastic vows to the last of his disciples, Swami Achalananda. This young monk had been staying at Belur Math since the fall of 1901. Once he heard Swamiji say, 'You will see, after two hundred years people will desperately cry for a hair of Vivekananda's.' One day Vivekananda told Achalananda to bring flowers and put them at his feet. Then he told him to bring more flowers and put them at the feet of Swami Brahmananda. Swamiji said: 'Remember, the Guru and the President [of the Order are one]. Henceforth, worship the President every day.'

In May, Swami Brahmananda mentioned to Swami Sadananda that Swamiji would slip away from them, even as Sri Ramakrishna had done, for he was seeing Ramakrishna in Swamiji every day.

Swami Sadananda also had a premonition that Swamiji would not live long, because his love and his compassion for others were expanding so much, it was hard for him to control them. This Divine Love!

Swami Sadashivananda recalled in his reminiscences: Swamiji's health broke down completely and he [said to] Swami Shivananda, 'This is a shattered body. How long can you keep it going? And supposing this body is no more. Nivedita, Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) and others will obey me. They will die in harness and can never falter in carrying out my words. They are my only hope.' In this way he would give us also hope and benedictions. ...

Whoever has seen the Swami even once can testify that he has seen a man who could love and who came to teach love to the world. How many youths have renounced everything to join the order of monks only because of this divine love of the Swami! Even to this day this love compels them to sacrifice their own lives to serve others.

In late June, one week before his passing away, Swamiji asked his disciple Swami Shuddhananda to bring him the almanac. Swamiji opened it and read a number of pages. He asked Shuddhananda to put the almanac in a certain place. He kept it in his room and was seen looking at it over the next several days. The young monk did not realize that Swamiji had now fixed the date of his departure. Swami Shivananda once reminisced: 'A few days before his passing away, Swamiji declared, standing in this very courtyard of the Math that the [spiritual] current that has been released will run unimpeded for seven or eight centuries, nobody will be able to stop it. 'What Great Love He Had for Us!'

At Belur Math one day [29 March 1902], while Sister Nivedita was distributing prizes for some athletics, I was standing in Swamiji's bedroom, at the Math, at the window, watching, and he said to me, 'I shall never see forty.' I, knowing he was thirty-nine, said to him, 'But, Swami, Buddha did not do his great work until between forty and eighty.' But he said, 'I delivered my message and I must go.' I asked, 'Why go?' and he said, 'The shadow of a big tree will not let the smaller trees grow up. I must go to make room.'

-From *Prabuddha Bharata*, June 2002

ANNUAL SUMMER RETREAT

Annual Summer Retreat will be held on Saturday June 20 and Sunday June 21 from 9 am to 4pm. The theme of the Retreat is: 'Sri Ramakrishna as a human being'. This year SWAMI SHANTARUPANANDA, head of the Vedanta society of Portland, Oregon, USA will be the guest speaker.

Registration Fee for each day is \$40 and for both days it is \$75. Venue of the Retreat will be Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Toronto.

UPCOMING EVENTS

International *YOGA DAY* will be celebrated on June 14, 2015.

REGULAR PROGRAMMES

SCRIPTURE CLASS: Every Friday at 7:30 pm, following the regular evening prayer at 6:00 pm.

Devotional singing and meditation is held in the evenings from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

VIGIL: A vigil consisting of japa and meditation is observed from 6:00am to 6:00pm. For the date of this month's vigil, please see the 'Calendar of Events' on the next page. *To participate, please call the Centre.*

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.

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

SOUP KITCHEN: The Soup is cooked at the Vedanta Society and offered serving meals at Syme Woolner Neighbourhood & Family Centre, 2468 Eglinton Ave W, Unit 3, Toronto, ON, M6M 5E2. Please contact the Centre, if you are interested in participating. *Donations for the Soup Kitchen will be highly appreciated*

INTERVIEWS/INSTRUCTION:

Swami Kripamayanda 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.

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.

DAILY MEDITATION: Meditation is observed at the Centre every morning from 6:00 am to 7:00 am.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Parking on the road beside the Vedanta Society which is a Fire Route and which belongs to the West Park Hospital, is strictly prohibited. West Park Hospital has informed that they are going to give tickets @ \$250.00 for illegal parking on the road as well as in their property other than the designated parking area.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS May 2015

Sunday	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Friday	Saturday
					<u>1</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>2</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>3</u> <u>11am</u> BUDDHA JAYANTI Celebration (No lecture)	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>9</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen <u>6am-6pm</u> VIGIL
<u>10</u> <u>11am</u> Lecture: 'The Glory of Saundarya Lahari' by Dr Alakananda	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>15</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>16</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>17</u> <u>11am</u> Lecture: 'Why Truth?' by Swami Vidyanathananda	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>22</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>23</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>24</u> <u>11am</u> - Video 'The Ramakrishna we worship' Video by Sarvadevanandaji	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>30</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>31</u> <u>11am</u> Lecture: 'Only Strong Can Realize the Self' <u>5pm</u> Ram Nam						

"Repeat His name often. The repetition of His name will purify your body and mind, washing away all impurities" –Swami Shivananda