



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

120 Emmett Ave. Toronto, ON M6M 2E6 CANADA

Tel.: 416-240-7262 Email: info@vedantatoronto.ca Website: www.vedantatoronto.ca

Newsletter April 2016

WORDS TO INSPIRE

"You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach you, none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your own soul."

-Swami Vivekananda

CHRIST, THE MESSENGER

(Delivered at Los Angeles, California, 1900)

The wave rises on the ocean, and there is a hollow. Again another wave rises, perhaps bigger than the former, to fall down again, similarly, again to rise — driving onward. In the march of events, we notice the rise and fall, and we generally look towards the rise, forgetting the fall. But both are necessary, and both are great. This is the nature of the universe. Whether in the world of our thoughts, the world of our relations in society, or in our spiritual affairs, the same movement of succession, of rises and falls, is going on.

We all know that God exists, and yet we do not see Him, we do not understand Him. Take one of these great Messengers of light, compare his character with the highest ideal of God that you ever formed, and you will find that your God falls short of the ideal, and that the character of the Prophet exceeds your conceptions. You cannot even form a higher ideal of God than what the actually embodied have practically realised and set before us as an example. Is it wrong, therefore, to worship these as God? Is it a sin to fall at the feet of these man-Gods and worship them as the only divine beings in the world? If they are really, actually, higher than all our conceptions of God, what harm is there in worshipping them? Not only is there no harm, but it is the only possible and positive way of worship.

So, we find Jesus of Nazareth, in the first place, the true son of the Orient, intensely practical. He has no faith in this evanescent world and all its belongings. The best commentary on the life of a great teacher is his own life. "The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." That is what Christ says as they only way to salvation; he lays down no other way. Let us confess in sackcloth and ashes that we cannot do that. We still have fondness for "me and mine". We want property, money, wealth. Woe unto us! Let us confess and not put to shame that great Teacher of Humanity! He had no family ties. But do you think that, that Man had any physical ideas in him? Do you think that,

this mass of light, this God and not-man, came down to earth, to be the brother of animals? And yet, people make him preach all sorts of things. He had no sex ideas! He was a soul! Nothing but a soul — just working a body for the good of humanity; and that was all his relation to the body. He had no other occupation in life, no other thought except that one, that he was a spirit. He was a disembodied, unfettered, unbound spirit. And not only so, but he, with his marvellous vision, had found that every man and woman, whether Jew or Gentile, whether rich or poor, whether saint or sinner, was the embodiment of the same undying spirit as himself. Therefore, the one work his whole life showed was to call upon them to realise their own spiritual nature.

You are all Sons of God, immortal spirit. "Know", he declared, "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you." "I and my Father are one." Dare you stand up and say, not only that "I am the Son of God", but I shall also find in my heart of hearts that "I and my Father are one"? That was what Jesus of Nazareth said. He never talks of this world and of this life. He has nothing to do with it, except that he wants to get hold of the world as it is, give it a push and drive it forward and onward until the whole world has reached to the effulgent Light of God, until everyone has realised his spiritual nature, until death is vanished and misery banished.

Let us, therefore, find God not only in Jesus of Nazareth, but in all the great Ones that have preceded him, in all that came after him, and all that are yet to come. Our worship is unbounded and free. They are all manifestations of the same Infinite God. They are all pure and unselfish; they struggled and gave up their lives for us, poor human beings. They each and all suffer vicarious atonement for every one of us, and also for all that are to come hereafter.

From 'The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda'..Vol.4

The Uplifting Power of Jnana (Spiritual wisdom)

(Based on a talk by Prof. Emeritus Narendra N. Bakshi at the Vedanta Society on January 24, 2016)

In a recent op-ed column in the New York Times, Roger Cohen wrote: “Here is a rough guide to the modern world: More efficiency, less humanity. Technology is principally at the service of productivity. Acts of irrational grace are not its thing. They have no algorithm.”

And that is the greatest conundrum. In our daily activities, how does one make wise decisions, full of grace and humanity rather than wrong, disruptive or destructive ones?

The usual answer would be that the more education and knowledge one has and the more experiences of life one has, one will be able to make wise decisions which are right and beneficent. However, when we look around, what do we see? We see a mess created all around the globe by educated and knowledgeable people. One wonders then, if education and knowledge by themselves are enough. Something is amiss here.

Bertrand Russel, British philosopher and mathematician sounded an alarm earlier when he said: “We are in the middle of a race between human knowledge as to the means and human folly as to the ends. Unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow.”

And that is what seems to be happening. Despite a tremendous increase in our knowledge in all areas, our follies also are increasing causing various tragedies and sorrows. A verse from Hitopdesha (8th century A.D.) sends a similar message but more bluntly:

*“Ahar nidra bhaya metheshu
samyam etat pashubhir naranam
Jnanam naranam adhikam vishesham
Jnana shuneya pashubis samana.”*

Food, sleep, fear and procreation are common to man and animals. Only man is endowed with jnana (wisdom). Man without jnana is equivalent to animal.” And, I will add one more category: sometimes even worse than animals.

All this begs a few questions: What is wisdom? How does one go about achieving wisdom? Is there an algorithm for that? And, when and how does one know that one has achieved wisdom? Does one go to school or some institution to gain wisdom? Can it even be taught?

Let us try to get some answers.

The dictionary defines wisdom as the power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action based on knowledge, experience and understanding, good judgement, and sagacity.

Now, this exactly is the domain and function of the critical faculty each human being possesses. It is called buddhi (intellect). Buddhi helps us to gain knowledge and learn from the various experiences of life. However, as we saw earlier,

that by itself is not enough. Vedanta tells us that buddhi needs to be refined and purified (satvika or pure buddhi) through spiritual discipline. Then, it becomes luminous and develops the power to discriminate correctly between what is right and what is wrong, thus arriving at the soundest course of action.

I want to relate an incident here which illustrates this point. The incident is about Swami Shivananda and was told to Swami Vidyatmananda by his guru.

“I was working on Vedanta Kesari. One day I requested Swami Shivananda to write an article for the magazine. He said he would. I bought a new notebook and a new pen for him for this purpose. After two weeks I inquired if he had written anything. Swami Shivananda said: “Abani, I wanted to write something and I thought of a subject. But as soon as I thought of a subject I immediately came to the conclusion. So what would I write?”

Sounds unbelievable and incredible. Imagine, the right answer or solution to any query available to us immediately – no studies, no researching from books in the library, no laboratory studies, etc.

Another example of such an incredible power is seen in the lectures of Swami Vivekananda and the reaction and response of the audiences in various American cities as reported in the newspapers. He delivered lectures at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893) and later many more on a lecture tour of various cities in the U.S.A. These lectures covered a variety of topics and all were delivered extempore.

As an example here is an excerpt from what the Free Press in Detroit reported about his lecture on February 11, 1894:

“... He showed himself to be one of the best of orators at the Congress, speaking faultless English without notes and with an utterance that many of his hearers declared would itself have been music had you not understood a word.

Since the Parliament, he has spoken to immense audiences in many towns and cities who have one opinion of praise and are enthusiastic over his magnetic power and his way of giving light and life to every subject he touches. Naturally, his views of great questions coming like himself from the other side of the globe, are refreshing and stirring to American people. His hearers are pleasantly astonished when the dark-hued dark-haired, dignified man arises in rich yellow robes and speaks their own language with fluency, distinctness and correctness.

... Nothing disturbs him; nothing ruffles the infinite calm which rests upon his features; nothing changes the placid conscientiousness of his inner life.”

All these characteristics are the result of one's attaining 'pure satvika buddhi' through spiritual discipline (becoming a yoga-samsiddha – one who is perfected in yoga, Gita IX/38). It is as if, when a question or query arises in the mind, the answer gets projected on the mental screen. The beauty is that the right solution or answer thus projected will always be constructive and beneficent.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there is no difference between pure buddhi and the Atman.

So, How Does One Achieve All That?

The answer was found by our ancient rishis (sages) and crystallized beautifully by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (almost 5000 years ago). Lord Krishna tells us in IV/38:

*“Na hi jnanena sadrsam pavitram iha vidyate
tatsvayam yogasamsiddhah kalenatmani vindati.”*

“Verily, there exists nothing in this world as purifying as jnana. He that is perfected in yoga realizes that, in one-self in due time.”

This is an extremely profound verse and the key words to understand are jnana and yoga-samsiddhah. What exactly do they stand for?

Jnana

Jnana here means spiritual knowledge, wisdom and understanding. The capacity to handle life successfully depends on this 'light of knowledge,' sometimes also called jnana agni (fire of wisdom). If this jnana agni is burning bright, one can withstand any nonsense of life. One will not be disturbed by life's ups and downs and thus, anxiety disappears. This strength comes from the knowledge of the Atman (that is, one's own Divine nature).

“Atmana vindate viriyam.” (Katha Up. II/4)

“Strength comes from the knowledge of the Atman.”

The unique quality of the strength of this energy is that it is entirely constructive and beneficent for it is the strength of love. In the words of the Gita, such a person is called a 'sthita prajna – a person of steadfast wisdom.' Such a person is constantly established in the awareness of his Reality (constant integrated awareness). The Bhagavad Gita describes the qualities of such a person in detail (II, 54-72).

We can compare this scenario with a petroleum refinery. The crude oil by itself cannot be used for any useful purpose. It has many undesirable characteristics. The function of the refinery is to refine the crude and convert it to desirable and useful products. For example, the crude oil enters in the reactor of the refinery and outcome products such as gasoline, diesel, heating oil, propane, butane, etc. These are all useful and desirable products which we use in our daily life. However, crude oil properties vary from good to bad. The refinery takes in any quality of crude (from good to bad, to really bad) and delivers only desirable and useful products. Similarly, a wise person (sthita prajna – a person of steady wisdom) when faced with adversity, anger, ups and downs of life, or any kind of positive or negative perturbances will not

be overwhelmed by them. And the response will always be good, just, calm, helpful and beneficent.

Yoga –samsiddhah

Yoga-samsiddhah literally means 'perfected in yoga.' The verse says one who has attained perfection in yoga, develops jnana (spiritual wisdom) over time. This development of jnana takes a special kind of effort. One practices diligently spiritual discipline (more about that later). This spiritual discipline is indicated by the term yoga here. In this discipline, all our actions are performed to the best of our ability, with enthusiasm, in an unselfish manner and the results (fruits of actions) are offered to the Divine.

Lord Krishna defines yoga as (Gita II/50): *yogah karmasu kaushlam*. A life where all actions are performed with skill (because one is connected with the Divine at all times), is called a life of yoga. Another name of such a lifestyle is 'yukta.' Essentially, one dedicates all actions and thoughts to the Divine. Thus the whole life gets divinized. Every act in daily life can be sanctified by dedicating it to God. Such a life also is called a life of 'yagna.' This is how character is formed. This is how one develops compassion, dedication, largeness of mind and heart and service.

Some Steps to Achieve Jnana and Yoga

As has been said earlier, jnana (spiritual wisdom) essentially is the art and science of making right decisions. Slowly, the mind develops steadiness and equanimity, is not ruffled by various ups and downs of life and is able to overcome various negativities of the mind. This is dharmic or righteous living. Ultimately, as the buddhi (and the mind) become pure, it develops tremendous power of concentration and one-pointedness and the veil of maya (ignorance, nescience) is rent asunder and one experiences one's Real Nature, that is when the experience of 'Aham Brahma Asmi – I am Brahman' takes place.

Thus, the life of dharma leads one to *amritam* (immortality) as the famous prayer tells us: *Mrtyor ma amritam gamaya*. For answers we go to the greatest and best-loved devotees of Bhagavan Rama, Hanumanji. His qualities for this job are:

- He is foremost amongst the wise (*buddhi matam varishtam*).
- He is a source of immeasurable strength (*atulita bala dhaman*).
- He has complete mastery over his senses (*jitendriyam*).
- He is foremost amongst the knowledgeable and the wise (*jnaninam agraganyam*).
- He is highly knowledgeable (*vidya van*)
- He is extremely smart (*ati chatur*)
- He guides us along the right path (*kumati nivar sumati ke sangi*)

It is our prayer to Hanumanji to help us in overcoming all these negative tendencies. Through his Grace and as one progresses toward developing pure buddhi through sadhana (spiritual practice), the influence of all these negative qualities becomes weaker and weaker over time and ultimately disappears.



***Vivekananda Dinner 2016 ***

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Saturday, June 11, 2016, 5:30 pm.

at Bombay Palace Banquet Hall

200 Advance Blvd. Brampton, Ontario, L6T 4V4 Canada - (905) 799-9777



- ❖ **Chief Guest** : REV. SWAMI ATMAGHANANANDA,
President, Ramakrishna Math, Kanchipuram, TN - India
- ❖ **Keynote speaker** : PROF. MANJUL BHARGAVA, Princeton University
(Recipient of 2014 Fields Medal)
- ❖ **Classical Dance by** : SANJUKTA BANERJEE & Saugandhikam Dance Academy
- ❖ **Flute Recital by** : DEEP GANGULY
- ❖ **Music Ensemble** : VARAGUNAN MAHADEVAN

For details Contact :

Menaka Rajasingham - 416-444-4952
Jitendra Sheshgiri - 647-300-2661
Chitra Ghosh - 905-799-0023
Indrani Sanyal - 647-308-8325

Suman Sinha - 647-773-0314
Abhijit Bhattacharya 416-569-9401
Asha Burman - 416-494-1765
Vikas Ojha - 416-243-8394

Vedanta Society of Toronto
120 Emmett Avenue, Toronto M6M 2E6 - 416-240-7262 - www.vedantatoronto.ca
Email : Vivekanandadinnertoronto@gmail.com

There Is No Higher Virtue Than Charity – Swami Vivekananda

Souvenir Advertisement options :

1. Back colour Page : \$5,000 Includes 4 Complimentary tickets
2. Back Inside colour page : \$4,000 includes 3 complimentary tickets
3. Front inside colour page : \$3,000 includes 2 complimentary tickets
4. Full page colour inside : \$2,000
5. Full page B/W inside : \$1,000
6. Half page B/W : \$500
7. Quarter page B/W : \$300

IMPORTANT EVENTS OF THIS MONTH

RAM NAVAMI will be celebrated on **Friday, April 15, 2016 at 6:30pm**. The programme will consist of Ram Nam, devotional songs, puja and Prasad distribution.

UPCOMING EVENTS

BUDDHA JAYANTI will be celebrated on Sunday, May 22 at 11 am with Puja, songs and Prasad.

REGULAR PROGRAMMES

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

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

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 416-247262.

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.

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 offered serving meals at Syme Woolner Neighborhood & 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*

BOOK STORE: The Book Store is open after Sunday Services and special programs, 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.

AN APPEAL FOR DONATION – ASHRAMA RENOVATION

Vedanta Society plans to start the Phase-2 Renovation Project in May 2016, which is estimated to cost \$1.4M. Members and Devotees are requested to come forward and donate generously for this purpose. The proposed Phase-2 includes : Prayer hall expansion, relocate the stairs for fire safety enhancement, Mezzanine floor expansion, Increased number of washrooms, New Lift for elder & physically challenged devotees, new flower room, new book store, new guest rooms for visiting Swamis, more multi-purpose meeting rooms (Vidya Mandir, spiritual discussions, library), Energy efficient kitchens with better equipment and washing facilities, Energy efficient lighting, better heating-cooling & ventilation, better security and safety (CCTV cameras, alarms) and better audio-visual facility by which all the devotees in the building will be able to enjoy the event.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

April 2016

Sunday	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Friday	Saturday
					<u>1</u> Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>2</u>
<u>3</u> <u>11am Lecture:</u> 'How to become a Seeker'	<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>6am to 6pm</u> Vigil
<u>1:30 pm</u> VVM						
<u>10</u> <u>11am Lecture:</u> 'God and His devotee: Sri Rama and Sabari'	<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>6:30pm</u> RAM NAVAMI	<u>16</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>17</u> <u>11am Lecture:</u> 'Story of Hanuman'	<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> <u>7:30pm</u> 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>23</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>1:30 pm</u> VVM						
<u>24</u> <u>11am</u> Vedanta Vidya Mandir PRADARSHANAM	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen By Patanjali Yoga group	<u>29</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani ,	<u>30</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen