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日本ヴェダンタ協会ニュースレター

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

OCTOBER Calendar

Birthdays

There are no celebrated birthdays this October according to the Vishudha Siddhanta Almanac.

Kyokai Events

• Study Classes •

1st & 3rd Tues
of Each Month

Swami Medhasananda
Leads Sanskrit Chanting
and Study of 'The Gospel
of Sri Ramakrishna' with
explanations in Japanese.

SORRY!

CANCELLED for October

• October Zushi Retreat •

There will be

NO

**Zushi Retreat
this October**

• Sri Sri Kali Puja •

Thursday, October 23rd

Programme:

19:00 Puja,

Pushpanjali, Homa

21:30 Prasad

All are welcome!

Prior notification of
your intention to attend
and number in your
party is appreciated!

**<medhasananda (at)
gmail (dot) com>**

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## ✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"All teachers are one. The same power of God works through them all."*

*- The Holy Mother - Sri Sarada Devi*

*"With an open mind, seek and listen to all the highest ideals. Consider the most enlightened thoughts. Then choose your path, person by person, each for oneself."*

*-Zarathushtra*

Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines  
Manila Centre, Sunday, August 10, 2014

### "Love, Human and Divine"

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda

During my last visit in March the topic of my discourse was "Fulfillment of Life." We then said that there are some basic urges in our life and discussed how those urges can be fulfilled. We mentioned that the main urges are to live eternally, to have knowledge, to get joy and also to love and to be loved.

Today's topic is "Love; Human and Divine." In many of our scriptures we come across this word "love" and, yet, they say that we should be free from attachment. Now, what is the difference between love and attachment? We usually do not make any difference between love and attachment. We take it for granted that love means attachment. If there is no attachment how can there be love? But is there a difference?

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## **Love, Human and Divine** (from page 1)

### **Love or Attachment?**

Let us now try to discern the differences between attachment and love. This is most important especially for spiritual seekers who want to realize God. This is also important for those who want to know what attachment is and what love is.

Generally speaking, human love is not pure love, but mostly love with attachment and attachments are the cause of so many sufferings. They are great obstacles to spiritual life. What sorts of attachment are there?

Mostly we have attachments to family members, relatives and friends, but we also hold attachments for objects such as money, our house and car. We also cherish attachments to name, fame, power and position. The greatest attachment that we cling to, however, is our attachment to our own body and mind.

Love with attachment generally is on the plane of body and mind. That means that we love a person's body and mind and that person loves our own body and mind. There are several planes or levels of our personality such as body, senses, mind, intelligence, ego and the Self or Atman. When I say that attachment mostly affects body and mind, I actually include all the other levels except the spiritual level, or the Self or Atman. This combination of body, senses, mind, intelligence and ego is defined in brief as the "body-mind complex" on the philosophical level.

### **Symptoms and Features of Attachment**

What are the symptoms of attachment? When there is attachment we want physical nearness of our beloved, we want to be near the person whom we love. We also like to think and imagine about our beloved one; that kind of thought or imagination makes us happy and joyful. Another symp-

tom of attachment is that we want to control the beloved, and sometimes we also want to be controlled by our beloved. We always, however, expect a return of love from the beloved. We love and expect to be loved.

In attachment love begins, heightens, fades and sometimes ends. I am reminded of a story here: An old man visited an old friend who kept addressing his wife with expressions like: "Honey, please bring some tea." or "Darling, please give us some cookies." The old man was surprised and told his old friend, "After so many years of marriage you still have so much love for your wife and you always address her with such affectionate words!" The old friend answered in a whisper, "The fact is that I forgot the name of my wife!"

In attachment love is superseded by another love. For instance children have much love for their parents, but when they marry that love is superseded by the love for their spouse. And again that love for their spouse is superseded when they beget children. And finally love for their children is superseded when grand-children are born.

So the object of attachment does not remain the same, it changes.

You may be surprised to hear that at the root of all these kinds of love with attachment is actually self-love. It is believed that the greatest love in the world is a mother's love for her children. But even then, that is love for *her* children, not for all children. So the aspect of I and mine is there in such love.

### **Results of Attachment**

What are the results of attachment? Sadness, in the first place. We said before that love with attachment implies the physical nearness of our beloved. But what happens when there is a separation, temporary or permanent? Sadness. Attachment

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also results in jealousy, anger and sometimes even violence. Such love with attachment can cause us to lose our power of judgment and we may cause injustice or injury to others. It can make us blind, not in the physical sense, but in our capacity to assess things properly, of judging and acting properly.

In being kind to a person whom we love with attachment, we may be unkind and unjust to other persons. This has been best exemplified in India's famous epic, Mahābhārata, in which King Dhritarashtra, both physically blind and also blinded by his attachment to his son, Duryodhana, committed a grave injustice to the Pandavas, his own nephews, and finally caused the ruin of his dynasty. By pampering our children, whom we love so much, we may not elevate them – on the contrary, we may degrade them. Love with attachment may also compromise our own freedom and rob the freedom of the person whom we love as well. As we wish to control the person whom we love, we expect this person to have the same attitude and way of thinking that we have. But that seldom happens, and this is a cause for conflict and relational problems. For instance, sometimes a mother, out of attachment, still wants to control her son even after he marries, thus causing loss of freedom for him and her daughter-in-law as well.

Love with attachment in a spiritual seeker creates an obstacle to the realization of God. Where there is God, there cannot be any secular desire; where there is secular desire, there cannot be God. As long as there is attachment for secular things there cannot be love for God. Why? Secular things are temporary and finite. God is eternal and infinite. We cannot have equal love at the same time for that which is temporary and that which is eternal, the finite and infinite as well. These are absolutely opposite terms contradicting one another.

## Attachment Free Love

How can we make our love pure and free from attachment? As love with attachment implies so many problems, difficulties and troubles, is it possible to eliminate attachment from love and make love pure? Yes, it is quite possible! We can very well love without any attachment and have pure love. How can we do it? We can do it by sublimating attachment, by giving attachment a new turn; by spiritualizing it. Spiritualizing love means to love God and to love the manifestations of God.

All that we see, all that we perceive are manifestations of God. All objects and living beings are manifestations of God. We should feel that our relatives, friends, neighbors, our family members, all the objects and things of the world, are all manifestations of God, as the scriptures of Hinduism teach us.

In the Puranas there is a story of a Demon, Hiranyakashipu, and his son Prahlada, who was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu despite being born to a Demon. The Demon tried to persuade his son that Vishnu was an enemy, and he even tried to kill Prahlada only to be saved by Vishnu each time. Once Hiranyakashipu challenged Prahlada, and pointing to a pillar he asked him, "Is Vishnu there in that pillar?" Prahlada answered, "Yes, Lord Vishnu is also in that pillar." This angered the Demon who hit the pillar with a weapon. At that point Lord Vishnu appeared from the broken pillar. From this story we, too, should see the manifestation of God in everything and we should try to love accordingly.

Love with attachment is extended to the plane of body-mind complex. Spiritualizing love means that we should extend it to the plane of the Soul or Atman. We should think that God resides in others in the form of the Soul. The husband should love his wife not only on the plane of the body-mind complex, but also on the plane of Soul.

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## Love, Human and Divine (from page 3)

And accordingly the wife should love her husband not only on the plane of the body-mind complex, but also on the plane of Soul. Parents should love their children not only on the plane of the body-mind complex, but also on the plane of Soul. This way love is spiritualized, attachment is eliminated and it becomes pure love. Of course, it is easy to hear this, but difficult to practice.

## How to Love God

Before we extend our love to the manifestations of God, we should love God. How can we do it? How can we love God, whom we cannot see? Many of us like God, but do not love Him. We like many things, but only when our liking is focused on something it becomes love. On the contrary, when our liking is shared with many other things we cannot call it love. How then can we focus on God and develop love for Him?

There was a great householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, whose name was Balaram Bose, who, even before meeting the Master, had done a lot of spiritual practice. During one of his early meetings with Sri Ramakrishna, Balaram asked him why he could not see God, since he was praying so much and doing so much spiritual practice. Sri Ramakrishna in his turn asked Balaram if his love for God had the same intensity as the love for his children. Balaram at this point sincerely admitted that the amount of love he had for his own children was greater than the amount of love he had for God.

It is not easy to love God whom we cannot see. In the first place we have to be sure about the existence of God, and then the question of loving Him will come. For that we have to believe to the words of the Prophets, such as Jesus, Krishna, Mohammed, as reported in spiritual Scriptures. But why should we believe in what we do not see? We should believe in them

## • Thought of the Month •

"To be full of things is to be empty of God. To be empty of things is to be full of God."

- Meister Eckhart

as they were very pure, full of love, and had no selfish motivations. Although we do not see God, we have to believe the words of those Prophets.

One may object that they all these prophets lived a very long time ago, but in the modern age, too, Sri Ramakrishna validated their words and confirmed the existence of God. When Narendranath, who later became Swami Vivekananda, first visited Sri Ramakrishna he asked, "Have you seen God?" And Sri Ramakrishna answered: "Yes, I have seen God and I can show Him to you!"

Narendranath had previously visited other religious leaders, but none of them could say with conviction they had seen God; they all simply quoted from the Scriptures. But here was a man, Sri Ramakrishna, that himself had realized God, that is why his words were so convincing. And if you study Sri Ramakrishna's life you can see how sincere and very particular he was about truthfulness. There are many examples of that. Here is but one:

He once promised that he would visit a neighbor's house. He then forgot about it, but in the middle of the night he suddenly remembered this promise. Though everyone was sleeping, Sri Ramakrishna woke up some of the devotees and, with a lantern, they went to the person's house, where everybody was also fast asleep, pushed the door open a little and set his foot inside so as to to literally keep his word. An ordinary person would simply go on the next day and apologize, but Sri Ramakrishna could not break his promise, as he must always be absolutely truthful.

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## **Love, Human and Divine** (from page 4)

### **How to Love God**

There is another way to focus on God and develop love for Him: using reason. Nature cannot create itself; an object cannot create another object: there must be a subject to make an object. If there is a creation there must be a Creator. Who is then the Creator? We call Him God. Even if we are convinced that there is God, the next difficulty is how to love Him?

It is difficult to love something that is abstract: God is pure consciousness, with no form and only qualities (omniscient, omnipresent, etc.) Our mind always requires some object to think about and love; it will be easier for our mind to concentrate on some form. For this reason the Hindus have imagined and worshipped many forms of God. If we ask them what the justification of such imagination is, they will argue that in the initial stage of spiritual practice it is good to start by worshipping these images as forms of God, and after progressing along that path, finally focus on the formless aspect of God. Form leads us to formlessness – the worshipping of God with an image finally leads us to God without form, which is actually the real nature of God.

Another way to love God is to love the Saints. This is a very practical proposition. If you are uncomfortable about worshipping God with form, you can concentrate, respect and love great Saints and great spiritual figures such as Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Ramakrishna, Mohammed and so on. If you develop love for the saints, you will develop love for God, as inside saints there is only God, they are full of God. Saints have an outer form which is human, but inside there is only God – loving the saints equals loving God.

If you wish to touch the vast Pacific Ocean, what do you need to do? You do not need to sail its enormous length and breadth, it

is enough to go to a beach and touch the water, whereupon you have just touched the Pacific Ocean. Similarly, the saints are but beaches of an infinite ocean which is called God. If you love them, you love God. In this sense Jesus said that if you love the Son of God, you love God; if you have seen the Son of God, you have seen God. In the same way, devotees of Buddha, Krishna, Ramakrishna and so on may see and love God through them.

Yet another way to love God is to build up a relationship with Him. Do not look upon God with awe and fear, look upon Him with love. In Hinduism there are practical suggestions for this, such as looking upon God as our father, as our mother, as our master, as our friend, as our son or as our sweetheart. The commonest ways are to look upon God as our mother, father or master. In Hinduism it is very popular to look upon God as the Baby Krishna, and to nurse Him, feed Him, take care of Him in many ways, thus developing love for God. By superimposing those kinds of human relationships on God, we can actually develop love for Him.

Getting connected with God and remembering Him often is also a way to build a close relationship with Him. When we do spiritual practice, or we pray or go to the church once a week, we do remember God, but when we leave the church we often forget about Him. To avoid becoming “Sunday devotees” of God we should try to remember Him every day and throughout the day. How?

### **Remembering God**

Besides our regular prayer and meditation at appointed times, we should create occasions during the day when we may remember God. For example, when we get up from bed in the morning we should look at an image of God or of a Saint first. Then, whenever we eat or drink something, or take breakfast, lunch and dinner, we should

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## **Love, Human and Divine** (from page 5)

mentally offer that to God and take it as offered food. If we make this a habit it will serve two purposes. In the first place we shall get connected with and remember God on such occasions, and also we shall eliminate the possible impurities in the food we are partaking of.

Thus, let us also remember God when we leave home and when we drive cars. Again this will get us connected with Him, but also it will make us feel protected. And we should remember God when we start out work and we should also have an image of our chosen deity on our computer desktop, so that we shall see Him and remember Him frequently. And let us again remember God when our work is over and when we return home; let look at an image of God or of a Saint when we go to bed.

By doing such small practices throughout the day we can get mental peace and remain calm and quiet during our day and at work, and also develop love for God, which would otherwise seem to be difficult. It will be a great help to achieve concentration for those who do daily meditation. If you think of God only for a short time during your daily meditation and forget about Him during the rest of the day, concentration during meditation will be extremely difficult.

The above kinds of connectedness with God will be a great help for us, not only for spiritual practice and for achieving love for God, but also for controlling stress and keeping mental peace. If we identify ourselves with work at all time we shall be subject with the stress involved in the work itself, but if we focus on God every now and then and eliminate our identification with work, we can control the tensions from our work. This is mental withdrawing from work, from the outside, and refocusing on the inside, trying to see God within us.

## **Chanting God's Name**

But the easiest way to connect with God is to chant the name of God, to repeat His name as many times as possible throughout the day. If you are initiated by a guru you can repeat your mantra, otherwise simply repeat the name of your chosen deity: Buddha, Buddha, Buddha ... Jesus, Jesus, Jesus ... Mary, Mary, Mary ... Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna ... Krishna, Krishna, Krishna ... etc. This is the simplest way to get connected with God. When you drive or are in the middle of other activities you cannot afford to stop and meditate, but you can still chant the name of God and be connected with Him.

And try to see the presence of God in all His manifestations; in every being, in every object, and in every situation. In that way we can sublimate out attachments and spiritualize our love. Once a lady devotee of Sri Ramakrishna told him that the face of her nephew child appeared to her whenever he tried to meditate on God. That was a clear case of attachment; that was why her mind recalled her nephew instead of God during meditation. Sri Ramakrishna then suggested to His devotee to look upon her nephew as Baby Krishna, and serve Him and nurse Him accordingly. In this way attachment would be transformed into spiritual, pure love. Indeed, following this advice the devotee not only became free from attachment, but made great progress in spiritual life.

## **Practice Transforming Attachments**

The love that Jesus and Sri Ramakrishna felt for their disciples was very intense, but at the same time free from attachment. The monks of the Ramakrishna Order or the Catholic priests and nuns who work in hospitals look upon the patients as Sri Ramakrishna or Jesus himself. Those working in schools or other educational institutions look upon the children and students in the same way. The same thing can be practiced by the devotees and householders who should try to see God present in

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## **Love, Human and Divine** (from page 6)

their children and spouses.

But what will happen if a spouse looks upon the partner as a manifestation of God, but the partner does not reciprocate? That does not matter! One should sincerely keep looking upon the partner as a manifestation of God regardless of the partner's reaction. In the long run that approach will definitely have an impact on the partner as well.

Let us then try to look upon others as manifestations of God without expecting

that others reciprocate, without worrying whether others reciprocate or not. Let us do this, and in this way our human love can become divine love, our human love can be free from impurity and attachment. Our love will then not be blind; it will not cause injustice to others, on the contrary, it will give freedom to others and we can ourselves enjoy freedom. It will also be a source of pure joy.

Finally, there is a sense of fulfillment in this kind of love, which will elevate both the lover and the beloved, the person who loves and the person who is loved. •

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## **Swami Medhasananda Visits Manila from August 7~11, 2014**

Swami Medhasanandaji arrived in Manila in the early afternoon of Thursday, August 7, 2014, on a direct flight from Tokyo Narita. Some devotees received him at the airport and accompanied him to the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines Manila Centre, where Swami had a late lunch and a short rest.

At 7:00 PM the day's program started with Arati songs, reading from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna with Swami's explanations and a meditation session. Maharaj then shared a tasty prasada dinner, as always prepared by Indian lady devotees, with some devotees and friends from India and the Philippines. A short reading session concluded the day's activities.

On Friday, August 8, the programme started at 6:30 AM with Vedic Chanting, reading from the Bhagavad Gita with Swami's explanations, and a meditation session. Breakfast followed and Swami Medhasananda spent the rest of the morning in private meetings with various visitors.

After lunch and a short rest Maharaj and a few others visited the new house of some devotees. Due to Manila's heavy traffic the

visit took a long time and Swami and his party were back at the Centre just on time for the usual evening vesper activities.

On Saturday, August 9, the early morning program followed the usual pattern of Maharaj's visits, with chanting, reading from the Gita, comments, meditation and breakfast. This weekend day allowed several people to come to the Centre and greet Maharaj during the day.

After the evening program Swami Medhasananda and a few others visited the house of some devotees who were hosting a Lord Satyanarayan Puja. The worship was attended by some fifty people and Maharaj was asked to give a talk as the worship came to an end. A transcript of this talk 'Faith' also appears in the September Issue of 'The Vedanta Kyokai' English-language newsletter of the Japanese Society. The celebration concluded with a sumptuous prasada dinner with many different vegetarian preparations offered by the hosts and some also brought by visiting devotees. Maharaj and company returned to the Centre in the late evening.

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## **Manila Visit** (from page 7)

On Sunday, August 10, the morning mangalaraty, bhajans and meditation programme was followed by breakfast and the visits of many more devotees and friends. At 10:00 AM an informal meeting of the members of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines took place at the presence of their Spiritual Advisor, Swami Medhasananda Maharaj.

After lunch Swami helped with the distribution of free powdered milk for the children of indigent families living in the vicinity of the Centre. The monthly distribution of powdered milk for children has become a regular activity of The Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines.

At 4:30 PM the Society's public programme started with a few songs by Fili-

pino and Indian singers and at 5:00 PM Maharaj gave his talk on the theme "Love, Human and Divine." The talk held the rapt attention of a numerous audience of Filipino and Indian devotees and friends. *(This talk, too, is published in the September issue of 'The Vedanta Kyokai')*

This was followed by a short break for tea, coffee and refreshments, and concluded with a Question and Answer session and a brief guided meditation.

Several visitors then stayed at the Centre and shared a dinner with Maharaj, who after the long day retired to his quarters about 10:30 PM.

On Monday, August 11, Maharaj left the Centre in the early morning accompanied by some devotees to the airport for his morning flight back to Japan.

## - NEWS BRIEFS - JULY AND AUGUST 2014

### **4 July (Friday)**

General Meeting of the Japan Yoga Therapy Society in Tajimi, Nagoya:

About 1500 people attended the General Meeting of the Japan Yoga Therapy Society. Most attendees were Yoga teachers. As spiritual advisor, Swami Medhasananda invoked Vedic Peace Prayers opening the session, and later on gave a short speech on Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) showing slides on Swamiji's 150th Birth Anniversary Commemorative Celebration. The Vedanta Society of Japan's Japanese-language publications were also sold at the venue.

### **24 August (Sunday)**

Padma Yoga Satsanga, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo:

At a Satsanga (Retreat) held by the Padma Yoga Ashram at the Tempu Kaikan in Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, Medhasanandaji gave a discourse on "The Essence of the Upanishads" followed by a Q&A session and a guided meditation. Fifty-six people joined, some of whom after the event provided comments like, "It was easy to understand" and "Would like to continue to attend discourses on the Upanishads" and "Now I see the Upanishads in a new light, which I used to think was difficult and complicated."



### **30 August – 31 August (Saturday & Sunday)**

Imabari Satsanga in Ehime:

#### **30 August (Saturday)**

A Satsanga was conducted at Fuzokuji Temple in Imabari, Ehime-prefecture (Shikoku Island). Here Swami Medhasanandaji gave a discourse "How to Meditate; Starting Today" followed by guided meditation.

#### **31 August (Sunday)**

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## NEWS BRIEFS (from page 9)

The following day the Shanti Yoga Shioji, held an Autumn Retreat at the Asakura Fureai Koryu Centre in Imabari from 5 am to 4 pm organised by Ms Noriko Shioji and staff. Swami Medhasanandaji gave the discourse, "How to Live a Happy Life."

The programme started with a meditation in a field on a hillside at 5 am, when it was still dark. The retreat was attended by 20 people, from those in their twenties to those in their seventies, and from yoga beginners to regulars who had met each other occasionally through yoga lessons. One of the organising staff members said, "We all had a great time feeling connection to each other and sharing the motivation for meditation."

### In Other News

During his visit to Japan from Saturday, 30 August to Wednesday, 3 September, at a recep-

tion honouring Mr. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, at the Hotel Okura, PM Modi presented Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan with copies of the 'Bhagavad Gita' and 'Swami Vivekananda and Japan,' special Ramakrishna Mission publications, the latter based on archived data and information provided in a similar Vedanta Society of Japan publication.

At the Indian Embassy Prime Minister Modi also presided over an event installing a plaque to commemorate the renaming of the Indian Embassy's Cultural Centre to 'Vivekananda Cultural Centre.'

Also on Tuesday, September 2, Swami Medhasanandaji attended a party organised by the Indian Ambassador to Japan, Smt. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, honouring the visit of Prime Minister Modi, where the swami presented PM Modi with a two-volume copy of his distinguished study, 'Varanasi, at the Crossroads.'



Prime Minister Modi met with Japan's political leadership and the Indian Community at the Hotel Okura and again at an Indian Embassy's new Vivekananda Cultural Centre and a party during his 5-day visit to Japan.

## "Faith"

*A talk by Swami Medhasanandaji following the Satyanarayana Puja at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines August 9, 2014*

It is very good that a monthly Satyanarayana Puja has been introduced by devotees here in Manila, it is important that this should be continued on a regular basis and not discontinued. This is really challenging as the community is fluctuating, with members coming and going. If this can be done, however, it is really a great service to the community, especially for the children of the community.

The first generation of Indian expatriates is surely familiar with Indian culture, but their children who grow up in a foreign country have no idea about Indian traditions. Being exposed to a different type of cultural background they often ask what the justification of these rituals is. Parents, too, working in a dif-

ferent atmosphere, more material and secular, may slowly lose their urge and motivation for their spiritual traditions, even without being aware of it. So it is really necessary and helpful for both parents and children to be exposed to Indian culture in order to maintain their identity as Indians.

Indian culture has a very special and unique character. Let me mention that during the final day of the recent Soccer World Cup, followed by millions and millions of people all over the world, there was some Vedic Chanting ("Om asato maa sadgamaya ...") before the prize-awarding ceremony. This indicates how the universal aspect of Indian culture is appreciated.

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## **Faith** (from page 9)

So our duty is to maintain and continue these kinds of Indian traditions, culture and spirituality. Indian culture is based on spirituality. If you want to study Indian culture, you have to study Indian spirituality, which is at its root. Indian spirituality is broad, universal, rational, and, although it originated a long, long time ago, it is still valid.

Concerning ritualism, we should not just follow it as a tradition, but we should try to understand the rational of it, as it will be more effective if we follow traditions with knowledge. Religion is mostly rituality, but unless we achieve spirituality, it is not much help for the deeper problems of our life, namely, fear, stress, anxiety, doubts and sufferings. Ritualistic worship alone is not enough and we need to understand the philosophy of it. In fact religion starts with ritualism and ends in philosophy. Swami Vivekananda said that it is better to be born in a church, but it is better not to die in it. What he meant is that we should transcend a particular faith or mode of worship and become universal, and that is possible if we go beyond ritualism and focus on spirituality.

What then is the difference between religion and spirituality? Religion mainly is visiting a temple, taking part in rituals and offering fruits, flowers, etc., chantings and prayers, mostly for ourselves and our family. If God grants our prayers we think God is kind, if He does not, we grumble and complain.

Spirituality is focused on the deeper questions of our life. What is God and what is the relationship between God and myself? Who am I and what is the purpose of my life? How can I get peace and joy? These are the deep questions relating to our lives. It is important that we should slowly turn our thoughts onto spiritual life.

In modern times the younger generations may not show particular interest in religious matters, but in their own way they are still searching for answers to the deeper questions of life. Thus in a conventional sense they may not be considered religious, but they are spiritual in their own way. This kind of ritualistic Puja we had here tonight is excellent, but it should not be an end unto itself. We should seek answers to the meaning of life, to the deeper questions involved in our lives.

There are a lot of misconceptions and criticisms about God. Those who criticize do not really know what they criticize. On the other hand those who believe in God often have not a very clear idea about what God is. If we analyze, God is a symbol of an Entity which is infinite, eternal, full of joy and freedom. The idea of God sitting on a throne in the sky and ruling the universe is a very foolish idea, and in fact those who criticize God have often such an idea of Him.

We should always think that God has three aspects. One is manifested (like Vishnu, Narayana, Durga, etc.) and God has also a human manifestation like Krishna, Rama, Buddha, Jesus, etc., and there is still the unmanifested aspect of God. We should be careful not to concentrate only on the manifested aspects of God, we should always be aware that God has both manifested and unmanifested aspects.

My Guru, Swami Vireswaranandaji, a disciple of Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna, used to say: "If you think of Sri Ramakrishna only as an image, you will never really make any progress in spiritual life. You should always keep in mind that at the back of the manifestation of Sri Ramakrishna there is Infinity." This is not true of Sri Ramakrishna only; it is true of Jesus, Buddha, Rama and Krishna.

Prayer is an important part of our spiritual life and there are different aspects of prayer. I shall tell you a story. The story is about the prayer of the frog. One evening a Christian Father, a spiritually advanced soul, was praying in his room when he heard that many frogs were croaking loudly outside in a pond nearby. Feeling disturbed by the noise he opened his window and shouted: "Stop!" Immediately all the frogs became silent.

Pleased, the Christian Father resumed his prayers, but suddenly he heard a voice saying: "Why did you stop those frogs from croaking? They are also praying in their own way." The Christian Father understood the message and he again opened the window and ordered: "Start!" And the frogs went back to their croaking. The Christian Father went himself back to his prayers, which became very deep and a rare experience for him.

The story means that we have our own way to pray and we should not criticize other forms of prayer. It also means that we should live in

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harmony with all, humans, animals and nature alike. And that there should be harmony among the different religions: we should respect all types of praying, without criticizing them.

Sri Ramakrishna stated wonderfully: "As many faiths, so many paths." Vedanta and Bhagavad Gita postulated the same principle, which today is still very important and needed. Here is another story: about prayer and simple faith.

There was a farmer, a very devoted Christian, who grew vegetables and used to take them to the market every day by horse carriage. He would also bring a copy of The Lord's Prayer, a prayer to God as taught by Jesus, with him on the carriage and read it during the trip. This had been his practice for many years.

One day, however, he forgot his prayer book and only realized it after he had already gone quite a distance towards the market. He felt very bad about it. So he said to God: "Lord, You know my memory is very weak and I do not remember the prayers in the book which I forgot at home. So I shall slowly recite three times the letters of the alphabet from first to last: A, B, C, D... and You please organize the letters into a prayer Yourself."

That evening the Lord asked the angels what the best prayer was among the thousands and thousands recited by so many devotees that day. Each angel suggested a single prayer, but the Lord stated that the aforesaid farmer's prayer had been the best one. The meaning of this story is that prayer should be done with simple faith.

And here is one more story about faith. There had been no rain for a long time in a village which caused great sufferings for the villagers. There was a belief that if every single villager should go to the church and pray for rain, rain would come. So it was decided that one day all the villagers should go to the church and pray to the Lord for rain. One young boy was carrying an umbrella with him. The villagers laughed when they saw this as the sun shone brightly and there was not a single cloud in the sky. They asked the boy if the umbrella was for protection from the bright sunshine, but the boy answered that, since the entire village was going to pray for rain, he would certainly need the umbrella on his way home as it would be raining.

Why are most of our prayers not answered? Because we pray without really believing that our prayers will be answered by God. Here is another story about an event which really happened:

One day a person went to the ocean to enjoy a swim. He started swimming and did not realize how far he had swum from the coast and suddenly he became aware that a strong current was pulling him towards the open sea, making it impossible for him to swim back to shore. He was scared since no one was in the area and he thought that he was surely going to drown and die. From the bottom of his heart he started praying: "If someone can help me, please help me!" At that moment a dolphin appeared and started slowly pushing him towards the shore until he reached land.

Also an incident happened to me when I was the principal of a residential college in India, before I was posted to the Japan Vedanta Society. One day our college was hit with a pretty bad case of food poisoning and fifty of the students living in the dormitory were affected and had to be immediately hospitalized in different medical centers. In such a case the responsibility would not fall to the college staff, but to its principal. Also, the college was operated by the Ramakrishna Mission, which enjoys a very good reputation and is highly respected: if something bad were to happen it would immediately draw the attention of the media and reflect badly on the Mission. Worse, if even one student lost his life, the parents would suffer enormously from the loss of their child. So I still remember how fervently I prayed to Sri Ramakrishna for the health of those students. And, by Sri Ramakrishna's grace, all of them recovered and returned safely to the college.

How are prayers answered? Our mind is a part of the universal mind. If there is serious yearning, such yearning is perceived by the universal mind, which sends help and support. That is how a prayer is answered. There is no mystery in it, there are no occult powers. The reason is simple: the prayer must have serious yearning and simple faith.

However, is only faith in God enough to become perfect and succeed in life? Swami Vivekananda said that two things are necessary to become great: faith in God and faith in yourself; you may believe in millions of Gods, but, unless you have faith in yourself, you cannot do

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anything great. Old religions say that he who does not believe in God is an atheist; but new religions say that he is an atheist who does not

believe in himself. So we should try to remember this wonderful advice from Swamiji if we want to become great: faith in God and faith in ourselves. •

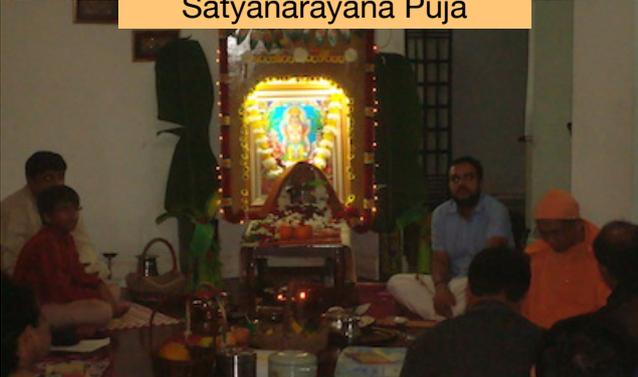
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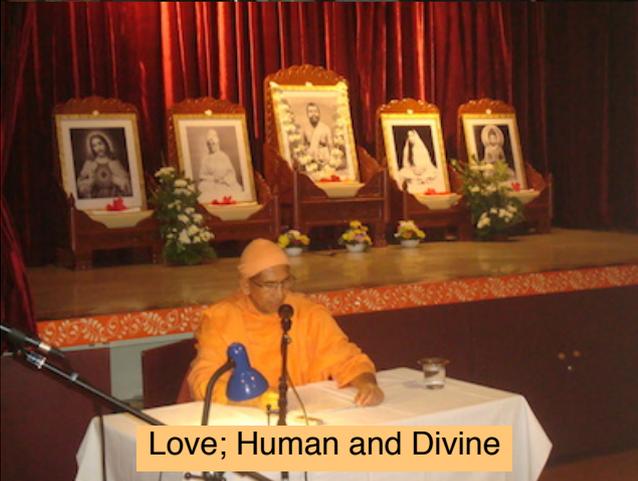
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Devotional Songs



Powdered Milk Distribution



Love; Human and Divine



## • A Story to Remember •

### God Hears Our Prayers

The village priest was a holy man, so each time the people were in trouble they had recourse to him. He would then withdraw to a special place in the forest and say a special prayer. God would always hear his prayer and the village would be helped.

When he died and the people were in trouble they had recourse to his successor, who was not a holy man but knew the secret of the special place in the forest and the special prayer. So he said. "Lord, you know I am not a holy man. But surely you are not going to hold that against my people? So listen to my prayer and come to our assistance." And God would hear his prayer and the village would be helped.

When he too died and the people were in trouble they had recourse to his successor, who knew the special prayer but not the place in the forest. So he said. "What do you care for places, Lord? Is not every place made holy by your presence? So listen to my prayer and come to our assistance." And once again God would hear his prayer and the village would be helped.

Now he too died and when the people were in trouble they had recourse to his successor, who did not know the special prayer or the special place in the forest. So he said. "It isn't the formula that you value, Lord, but the cry of the heart in distress. So listen to my prayer and come to our assistance." And once again God would hear his prayer and the village would be helped.

After this man died, when the people were in trouble they had recourse to his successor. Now this priest had more use for money than for prayer. So he would say to God, "What sort of a God are you that while you are perfectly capable of solving problems that you yourself have caused, you still refuse to lift a finger until you have us cringe and beg and plead? Well, you can do as you please with the people." Then he would go right back to whatever business he had in hand. And, once again, God would hear his prayer and the village would be helped.

-from 'The Prayer of the Frog' by Fr. Anthony de Mello, SJ

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