



APRIL 2021 -VOLUME 19 NUMBER 04

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

MAY 2021
Calendar



Birthdays

Sri Shankaracharya

Monday, 17 May

Sri Buddha Deva

Wednesday, 26 May

Zushi Events

COVID restrictions have been reimposed by the Japanese government, and precautions are in place. Our monthly programmes and classes will continue with advised precautions observed.

Details on page 02!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Spiritual practice means to keep the mind steady at His lotus feet and to be absorbed in His thoughts,"

- Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

"Realise the limitless latent possibilities that lie within you."

- Zarathushtra

Vedanta Society of Japan Celebrates Birth Anniversary Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva

On Sunday, the 4th of April, the Vedanta Society of Japan held its celebration of the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. This year according to the Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was on Friday, March 4th. Due to renewed COVID-19 precautions this celebration was not held on the usual 3rd Sunday's Zushi Monthly Retreat, as participation by devotees had to be restricted.

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Vedanta Society of Japan Events for MAY 2021

With a rapid rise in new COVID-19 infections, the government has once again imposed a state of emergency for residents of the Tokyo and Osaka areas. The Government of Japan urged residents to take all possible precautions against the spread of COVID-19, including travel, social distancing, mask wearing, and avoiding crowded areas.

As such, the Vedanta Society of Japan will continue to provide live-stream, video, and Zoom participation as noted in the schedule below. Attendance to programmes is restricted, so contact us if you wish to attend any of the programmes.

Swami Medhasananda, President
Vedanta Society of Japan

MAY Calendar of Programmes

* Contact about Zoom programming <zoom.nvk(at)gmail(dot)com>

1st (Sat) May ★ Video uploaded later

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

10:30 ~12:00 (In Japanese only)

5th (Wed) May ★ Zoom only - Video uploaded later

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~9:15 (in Japanese only)

9th (Sun) May ★ Live-streaming & Zoom

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

14:00 ~16:00 (in Japanese only)

* For Zoom contact: zoom.nvk@gmail.com

12th (Wed) April ★ Zoom

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~9:15 (in Japanese only)

16th (Sun) May ★ Live-streaming (Bi-lingual)

Monthly Zushi Retreat

AM Session - 10:30

PM Session - 14:30

19th(Wed) May ★ Zoom

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~9:15 (in Japanese only)

30th (Sun) May ★ Video later

Annual Swami Vivekananda Public Birth Celebration

Minami Otsuka Hall

2-36-1 Minami Otsuka, Toshima-ku, Tokyo

<https://www.toshima-mirai.or.jp/center/h_otsuka/>

Speakers / Cultural Programme / Book Shop

No admission fee - All are welcome

Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration (from page 1)

Observances began with mangalarati, chanting, reading from the Gita at 06:00. Afterward a few volunteers attended to the Annexe building shrine preparations of flower bouquets, food offerings, audio, and puja platform. Some lunch preparations had already begun in the Main Ashram kitchen, as well.

• Thought of the Month •

There is only one corner of the universe
you can be certain of improving,
and that's you own self.

Aldous Huxley

Puja

With the Annexe altar decorated, Swami Divyanathananda (Anirban Mhj) was assisted by Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) with the usual mantras and offerings of the puja. Bringing the Puja to a close Maharaj then asked the congregation to close their eyes and imagine Sri Ramakrishna present in the room with them and partaking of the offerings at the altar.

Arati

As the puja ended, arrangements were made to conduct Arati with the symbolic offerings of the five elements; fire, water, space or aether, earth and air. As Swami Divyanathananda made these offerings the congregation sang 'Khandana Bhava Bandhana' (Breaker of this World's Chains) a hymn by Swami Vivekanandaji led by Ms. Shanti Izumida on synthesiser:

*khaṇḍana bhava bandhana jaga vandana vandi tomāy |
nirañjana nara-rūpa-dhara nirguṇa guṇamay ||*

*mocana aghadūṣaṇa jagabhūṣaṇa cidghanakāy |
jñānāñjana-vimala-nayana vīkṣaṇe moha jāy ||*

*bhāsvara bhāva-sāgara cira-unmada prema-pāthār |
bhaktārjana-yugala caraṇa tāraṇa-bhava-pār ||*

*jṛmbhita-yuga-īśvara jagadīśvara yogasahāy |
nirodhana samāhitamana nirakhi tava kṛpāy ||*

*bhañjana-duḥkhagañjana karuṇāghana karma-kaṭhor |
prāṇārpaṇa jagata-tāraṇa kṛntana-kaliḍor ||*

*vañcana-kāmakāñcana atinindita-indriyarāg |
tyāgīśvara he naravara dehapade anurāg ||*

*nirbhaya gatasamśaya dṛṛhaniścaya-mānasavān |
niṣkāraṇa-bhakata-śaraṇa tyaji jāti-kula-māna||*

*sampada tava śrīpada bhava-goṣpada-vāri yathāy |
premārpaṇa samadaraśana jagajana-duḥkha jāy ||*

*namo namo prabhu vākya-manātīta manovacanaikādhār |
jyotira jyoti ujala-hṛdikandara tumi tamo-bhañjana hār ||*

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Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration (from page 3)

*dhe dhe dhe laṅga raṅga bhaṅga bāje aṅga saṅga mṛdaṅga
gāhiche chanda bhakatavṛnda ārati tomār ||*

jaya jaya ārati tomār hara hara ārati tomār śiva śiva ārati tomār ||

*khaṇḍana bhava bandhana jaga vandana vandi tomāy |
jay śrī gurumāhārājī ki jay ||*

Afterward Ms. Shanti continued leading the congregation with 'Sarva Mangala Mangalye' or 'Hymn to the Divine Mother':

*Sarva-mangala-mangalye Shive sarvartha-sadhike;
Sharanye Tryambake Gauri Narayani namo'stu te ||1||*

*Shristi-sthiti-vinashanam shakti-bhute sanatani;
Gunasraye gunamaye Narayani namo'stu te ||2||*

*Sharan'agata dinarta paritrana parayane;
Sarvasy'arti-hare devi Narayani namo'stu te ||3||*

*Jaya Narayani namo'stu te | Jaya Narayani namo'stu te ||
Jaya Narayani namo'stu te |||*

*Jai Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishnadev ki jai!
Jai Mahamayi ki jai!
Jai Swamiji Maharaj ji ki jai!
Jai Ganga Mayi ki jai!
Jai Sri Buddhadev ki jai*

Flower Offering

At the conclusion of Arati flowers and leaves to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna (Pushpanjali) were passed out to the few in attendance. All rose as Maharaj led the congregation in Pushpanjali Mantra and the Pranam Mantra to Sri Ramakrishna. Volunteers then collected the offerings from the congregation.

Homa-Fire

Soon the platform was arranged for the homa-fire. The swamis took their seats and made the necessary final arrangements of flowers, leaves, fruit, ghee and other items for offering took their places on the platform. Maharaj conducted the homa and as flames danced on the crackling offerings, he called upon the congregation to chant a mantra 108 times, as he continued adding more wood and offerings of leaves and flowers dipped in ghee to the excited blaze.

"Om Hrim Sarva Deva Devi Swarupaya Sri Ramakrishnaya Swaha" (108 times)

After Maharaj stood and offered the remaining ghee to the flames and offerings, a yoghurt mix to douse the fire was prepared. Maharaj then plucked a few bits of warm ash from the container and passed it to Swami Divyanathananda to prepare the vibhuti (ceremonial ash) to be dabbed on everyone's forehead.

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Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration (from page 4)

As the vibhuti was being prepared, Maharaj then introduced a special guest in attendance and asked him to address the congregation on this occasion. Devotees then received their vibhuti and offered prayers to Sri Ramakrishna and pranams to Maharaj, who encouraged those in attendance to stay for lunch prasad served in the Main Ashrama.

Afternoon Session

After lunch, at about 2:45pm Maharaj took his seat on the podium and asked Ms. Yoko Sasaki to join him as translator. After a Vedic chant and a few words of appreciation to those few who helped with the many celebration preparations in the Annexe and a special thanks to those who helped prepared the lunch prasad, Maharaj gave a talk on the elements and the basis of the Pranam Mantra to Sri Ramakrishna authored by Swami Vivekanandaji. *[This talk is included in this issue of The Vedanta Kyokai.]* ●







Zushi Centre PM Session 4th April 2021
Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary Celebration
Some Thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna
by Swami Medhasananda

This morning after the flower offering we chanted the Pranam Mantra:

Om sthapakaya cha dharmasya sarva dharma-svarupine;
Avatara-varisthaya Ramakrishnaya te namah

Salutations to He who came to reestablish true religion,
Salutations to Him, the embodiment of all faiths and religions,

The greatest of the incarnations of God
O Ramakrishna, I offer my salutations to You

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Some Thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna (from page 7)

This mantra was composed by Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) on one occasion, and Om Hrim Ritam, which we sang this morning, he wrote on another occasion. The Pranam Mantra was then added to Om Hrim Ritam later as verse five. In February of 1898 a close devotee, Nabagopal Ghosh, had set up a private shrine in his house not far from Belur Math and requested that Swamiji visit and inaugurate this shrine. While worshipping Sri Ramakrishna on that occasion, Swamiji instantaneously composed this two-line Pranam Mantra.

The Greatest Avatara

We acknowledge that all former incarnations of God; Krishna, Buddha, Christ, et al, have manifested to reestablish true religion. Why then did Swamiji refer to Sri Ramakrishna as the greatest of incarnations in this Pranam Mantra, though he had profound respect and appreciation for all the incarnations. What is it that we find in Sri Ramakrishna that we don't find in the other incarnations?

One is 'sarva dharma-svarupine', the embodiment of all religions. For example, Christianity was founded in Jesus Christ's message and we have no evidence that Jesus practiced Hinduism, although Hinduism had long existed. However, several years of Jesus' life remain obscure and there is one view that Jesus did visit India and learned the practice of yoga. Of course, not all subscribe to this view, yet it persists. Lord Buddha is the founder of Buddhism. Muhammad is the founder of Islam. We see that one particular religion, excluding all others, was founded by each.

On the other hand, we have Hindu incarnations such as Sri Krishna, Sri Rāma, and Sri Chaitanya. The Bhagavad Gita contains the teachings of Sri Krishna and find different yogas are mentioned therein; namely Raja Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga, etc., and their methods of practice. Of course there is no question of Krishna practicing Judaism, or those religions that had yet to be founded, like Christianity or Islam, but without a doubt, we find the synthesis of yogic practices in Sri Krishna's teachings.

Established the Harmony of Religions

However, for the first time in religious history we find in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, who is physically practicing different faiths and realising the Truth by each. Not only did He realise Truth by practicing the differing paths of Hinduism, such as Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Vedanta, but in addition to these various Hindu practices of Realisation, He also practiced Islam and Christianity in His own way. This justifies the last part of Swamiji's hymn that Sri Ramakrishna was 'avatara-varistha', meaning the greatest of the incarnations of God, because among all the other incarnations of God, it was only He who had practiced various faiths and realised Truth, and proclaimed in Bengali, his native tongue, "Jato mat tato path", or in English "As many faiths, so many paths of God realisation". All religions are but different paths to the same Truth. It is not the assertion of some scholar or intellectual who studied different religions and came to this conclusion—it is a conviction based on actual Realisation! That is why this statement is so profound and so appealing to all.

This statement also serves as the foundation of the 'harmony' that is needed so very much
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Some Thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna (from page 8)

in this divisive world today. When there were not so many gadgets of our technological advancement, people had better communication with each other, but with more and more of these modern gadgets in our hands, ever more people are estranged from each other. Each of us has become a sort of island to oneself. Like in a quote borrowed from Samuel Coleridge: 'Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink!', we may be amongst crowds of people, yet we can feel lonely. Isn't this a contradiction? How many people are suffering from this feeling social withdrawal and isolation, and they cannot communicate with others. In Japan this condition is called 'hikikomori', meaning pulling inward, being confined.

Is this reaction not the exact opposite of the intended purpose of all these gadgets? Improved communication was intended, and the result is quite different. In fact, all the recent technological advances intended to provide us more time for relaxation have had the opposite effect and we have become ever busier. No day; no night; no Saturday; no Sunday; everyday is a day of work. Because of this, we have to think how we can bring harmony to people; harmony to religion and religion; harmony to country and country. Hence, we need the philosophy of harmony postulated by Sri Ramakrishna, "Jato mat tato path"; this is the 'Mantra of Harmony'. It is in this sense we may proclaim Sri Ramakrishna is the greatest of incarnations, because He embodied and propounded this philosophy.

Full of Sattva Alone

There is another explanation as well. We have some idea of the three gunas—sattva; full of all good qualities, balance and peacefulness, rajas; qualities of action, ambition, etc., and tamas the qualities of inaction, dullness, etc., of the Samkhya philosophy. In the lives of other incarnations, such as Sri Krishna and Rama, we see the predominance of the qualities of sattva, but we also see traces of rajas in them, as they both were great fighters. But in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, there was no tinge of rajas or tamas, but sattva alone. It is in this sense as well that we can regard Sri Ramakrishna as the greatest of incarnations.

Again, unlike Rāma and Krishna, there was no pomp, grandeur or charisma about Him, neither did He make any display of supernatural powers. Outwardly He was poor, born in a remote, rustic village, and practically illiterate. He was the priest of a temple compound near Calcutta and became known locally as 'the crazy brahmin,' while inwardly He was the bearer of the very highest of divine qualities.

We may justify our view in this way, but for all devotees of God, their chosen ideal is supreme and we pose no objections to this at all. To the devotee of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is the greatest incarnation; to the devotee of Buddha, Buddha is the greatest.. We know Vivekananda obviously had great respect for Christianity, Islam and Buddhism as well. Regardless of this, Swami Vivekananda's assertions about Sri Ramakrishna in his Pranam Mantra are justified by the two points noted above.

The Giver of Liberation

Once Ramakrishna's spiritual consort Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi commented to some

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Some Thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna (from page 9)

women devotees, "You see, during pilgrimages I have seen some holy men, but no one can compare them with Ramakrishna." Did she make this comment out of love and respect for her husband, or was there some other valid reason? Upon hearing Mother's comment, Yogin Ma, a highly evolved spiritual soul and female attendant of Sarada Devi, said, "How can the such holy sadhus compare with Sri Ramakrishna? Those sadhus are striving to get the experience of samadhi and to get liberated, but Sri Ramakrishna is the giver of liberation, the bestower of the experience of samadhi!" So how, indeed, can there be a comparison with Sri Ramakrishna and other contemporary holy men! Swami Shivanandaji, one of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples, said that by one touch, by one glance, or by a mere wish, Ramakrishna could give the highest of spiritual experiences to others.

Most will recall that Narendranath, Swami Vivekananda's pre-monastic name, could not accept the Vedantic truth that Brahman is omnipresent and pervading everything and everyone. In fact, Naren made fun of such an idea and joked about it. "Is this pot also Brahman? Is this jug also Brahman? Is it possible? Is it not a sacrilege?" Sri Ramakrishna overheard these remarks and touched Narendranath in a semi-ecstatic mood, who then experienced that verily everything is made of pure consciousness, Brahman. This experience continued for about one month. He could not distinguish between animate and inanimate, the living and non-living, cars, iron railings, food, the one who serves the food, as all were pure consciousness, Sat-chit-ananda.

We distinguish between the living and the non-living, but what is the line of demarkation? How can we really distinguish between animate and inanimate? Each atom of a so-called inanimate object is full such tremendous potential, is it not? For example by a mere touch Sri Ramakrishna gave Vivekananda the full conviction of the Vedantic Truth, Sarvam Khaluidam Brahman - Brahman pervades everything, everywhere, thus eliminating the difference between animate and inanimate.

Once Swami Shivanandaji was sitting for meditation in the Panchavati, the small grove of trees next to the Kali Temple compound at Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna lived. Once Sri Ramakrishna happened to be passing by there when he stopped and glanced at Shivanandaji. At that moment Shivanandaji felt his kundalini rising and he burst into tears, rejoicing in the overwhelming spiritual experience. Such spiritual experiences require years and even lifetimes of spiritual striving and practice, but Sri Ramakrishna had bestowed that experience on Swami Shivanandaji by a mere glance. Sri Ramakrishna was like a huge spiritual dynamo, both generating spirituality and bestowing spiritual experiences.

The Master of Parables and Examples

In His teachings, Sri Ramakrishna made use of parables so that His message could be impressed upon the audience and be understood properly. The use of many parables is a common method adopted by the great spiritual teachers, such as Buddha and Jesus. In The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we find many parables quoted, and it has been noted that He would

use appropriate gestures and postures to make the content lively and dramatic. He would also modulate His voice to fit the parable's characters. All in all, He would impart His message by

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Some Thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna (from page 10)

parables much like a grand actor. In fact, a spiritual teacher must employ some of these techniques, a little gesture, a little posture, a little voice modulation, as it has a lasting impact upon an audience. Sri Ramakrishna was the master of this technique. The greatest stage actor, director, acting coach and writer of the time was Girish Chandra Ghosh, who was also one of the foremost householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He once commented that he had also learned about acting from Sri Ramakrishna.

Many abstruse points of philosophy Sri Ramakrishna would explain with the help of examples and parables. His powers of observation were so keen. Once He was explaining the Purusha and Prakriti phenomena of the Samkhya philosophy to the devotees. Purusha is unattached, always calm, quiet, serene and unaffected, and it is Prakriti that is always active with the play of the three gunas; sattva, rajas and tamas. Sri Ramakrishna explained this by saying suppose there is some special event or occasion like a marriage ceremony of a young daughter about to take place. The mother and housewife is awfully busy planning, instructing, and seeing to all the preparations, and taking care of the guests. The master of the household on the other hand, remains quiet and relaxed smoking his hubble bubble (hookah) on a cushion. The busy housewife (Prakriti) occasionally approaches the master and reports about the progress of the many proceedings, and the master (Purusha) nods in acknowledgement uttering, hmm, hmm, as if remaining unaffected by all that is happening around him. This is how Sri Ramakrishna explained Purusha and Prakriti. If we study the Samkhya school of philosophy regarding Purusha and Prakriti it appears to be quite difficult to properly comprehend. Yet by this simple example, Sri Ramakrishna brought the point home.

God is Everything and Everywhere

Saying that it is God who is behind everything and everyone, verily, it is He who has become everything. Sri Ramakrishna gives a concrete example stating that it is God who is the patient, it is He who is the disease, it is He who is the doctor, and again, it is He who is the medicine. Next, He told a parable:

One landlord, or Zamindar, for some reason became angry with one of his tenants. In fact, he became so angry he started beating that tenant. A holy man happened to be present and being very compassionate sought to intercede, asking the landlord to stop the beating. At this the landlord not only did not stop beating the tenant, but he began beating the holy man as well. The holy man was beaten so badly he fell unconscious.

Seeing this some bystanders alerted inmates of the holy man's ashrama that their brother monk had been beaten unconscious by the landlord. Soon some monks from the monastery ran to the spot, retrieved their brother, and carried him back to the ashrama. There they began nursing his wounds, fanning him, and wiping his face with a wet cloth. When the monk appeared to be regaining consciousness, they decided to feed him a little milk. The monk then slowly opened his eyes, but the other monks were not convinced he had truly regained consciousness and decided to ask him some questions. In a loud voice one monk asked "Maharaj, do you recognise who is feeding you milk now?"

In a very feeble voice the wounded monk answered, "Yes, I do."

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Some Thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna (from page 11)

Not convinced by this response they pressed further, "Then who is it that is feeding you milk right now?"

Again in a feeble voice he answered, "The one who beat me is now feeding me milk."

The point here is that there is only one, the one who beats and the one who nurses; the good, the bad; the male, the female; people of different countries; devotees of different religions. It is only He who has taken all these forms. 'It is the same Rāma who is in every pot.'

Child-like Faith

The important thing in spiritual life is faith. One who is purer, one who exudes simplicity, can have real faith. This is why it is referred to as 'the simplicity of a child.' Children don't show any doubt; whatever the child's mother says, the child believes. If the mother tells the child that an unrelated person is his uncle, the child will believe that person is his uncle 100%. If the mother warns, 'Don't go there, ghosts are there!' The child will not go there believing he will find ghosts there. There is an old story recounted by Sri Ramakrishna that goes:

Once a child was walking to school. Along the way to the school there is a path through a forest. The forest was thick and dark with trees on both sides, as he was completely alone on this path he became frightened.

Later he would tell his mother that he felt frightened walking alone through the forest. "Why should you be afraid?" his mother said. "You have Madhusudan dada (elder brother) with you?" Madhusudan is the nickname of Krishna as 'the slayer of the Demon Madhu.' "If you have trouble in the forest," the mother continued, "just call on Madhusudan dada and He will help you! He will escort you! Do not fear!"

The child believed his mother's words and when passing through the forest on his way to school again, he became frightened and began to cry, "Madhusudan dada, Madhusudan dada, Madhusudan dada! Where are you? I am afraid!" But Madhusudan dada did not appear. The he cried louder, "Madhusudan dada, mother said you would come! Where are you! I am so afraid!" After a few more tears, Lord Krishna as Madhusudan appeared. Comforting the child the Lord asked, "Why do you cry? I am here and will always be here to escort you, so do not be afraid!" After that, every day the child passed through that forest the Lord would appear and escort him.

There is another very touching story also told by Sri Ramakrishna to impress this idea of faith. There was an era when many countries including India, when it was quite common for the marriage of young girls to be arranged, known today as 'child marriage':

At that time one girl had been married to an elderly man, and though still quite young she became a widow when the husband died. The girl still had no idea the meanings of marriage, or husband, or of wife, nor did she understand that she had lost her husband. As she grew older she observed other young

ladies with their husbands apparently very happy. One day she asked her father, "Father where is my husband? I see other happy couples together? Where is my husband? Why is he not here?"

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Some Thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna (from page 12)

Seeing no other way to pacify the girl, her father said, "My child, Govinda is your husband. Call on Him and He will appear." [Govinda being another nickname for Krishna.]

The girl retired to her room. In tears she began to cry, "Govinda! Where are you? You are my husband, but you are not here by my side." She continued crying for a few days pleading for her Govinda to be with her. Finally, Lord Krishna appeared, saying, "I am Govinda, your husband, do not cry anymore."

Of course these are matters of faith. The mother assuring her son that his elder brother Madhusudan would be his protector when he feared his walks through the forest. Here too, the child not realising her promised husband had died, is told by her mother that her husband is Govinda. Convinced of this, she cried until Govinda appeared. These are examples of child-like faith, as adults if we were told Madhusudan or Govinda was there for us and would come to our rescue, would we believe it? No, because we have lost that simplicity, that faith of a child. The older we grow, the more doubts and confusions creep inside us.

Faith and Lack of Faith

The following parable told by Sri Ramakrishna shows an example of both faith and the lack of faith:

Once a man was about to cross the sea and King Vibhishana [who became King of Ceylon after his demoniacal brother Ravana was killed by Lord Rāma in the epic Ramayana] wrote Rāma's name on a leaf, tied it to a corner of the man's attire and said to him: 'Don't be afraid. Have faith and walk across the water. But look here—the moment you lose faith in what I have tied to your cloth, you will drown!'

The man continued walking easily upon the water. Suddenly he had the intense desire to see what was tied to his cloth. He untied it and only found a leaf with the name 'Rāma' written on it. 'What is this?' he thought. 'Just the name of Rāma?' As soon a doubt entered his mind he sank and drowned.

There is also the following story of faith and the lack of faith, which was not, however, authored by Sri Ramakrishna:

A milkmaid lived on one side of a river and she supplied a Brahmin on the other side of the river with fresh milk daily. So every day with her milk pot she would wait for the ferry to carry her and the milk across the river. The boatman was not very punctual and there were times when the milkmaid would deliver the milk to the Brahmin quite late. Once the Brahmin became annoyed and expressed his exasperation with the milkmaid, "Why are you delivering this milk so late?" he complained. "Should you not be more regular with the deliveries?"

“Revered Sir,” she replied, “I have to bring you milk from across the river and the boatman is not very punctual.”

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Some Thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna (from page 13)

“What!?” exclaimed the Brahmin. “People cross the entire ocean of worldliness by chanting the name of Hari, the Lord, and you cannot simply cross this river!”

After this admonition the milkmaid arrived with her delivery quite regularly, and the Brahmin became curious. He asked the milkmaid. “What happened? Your deliveries were always so irregular and now you are so punctual. How did this happen?”

To this the startled milkmaid replied, “Why Sir, it was you who taught me the way!”

“What did I teach you?”

“The other day you said that if I chant the name of Hari,” she answered, “I can cross the river. Since then I walk across the river daily chanting the name of Hari. That’s all!”

“Is that so?” the astonished Brahmin exclaimed. “OK, show me then.”

“All right, follow me, it’s easy.”

When they both arrived at the bank of the river, the milkmaid began chanting, “Hari, Hari, Hari” and stepped from the riverbank crossing the river.

Witnessing this, the Brahmin of little faith and much doubt, began chanting, “Hari, Hari, Hari”, yet pulling up his cloth to not get it wet, he stepped into the flowing waters.

“That will not do!” called out the milkmaid. “You are chanting Hari, Hari, Hari and at the same time you worry your cloth will get wet? You cannot cross that way!”

So here we have someone whose belief was so shallow. It will not do! We have to believe deeply and then we can cross this ocean of worldliness by chanting the name of Rāma, or Krishna, or Ramakrishna.

We have discussed above several parables from Sri Ramakrishna and their implications. Nevertheless, the one we can take home with us today, is that it is the Lord alone who has become all these names and forms. So we do not have to seek God, we have to see God. Do not search for God, but see God! For this we need faith. Faith in the words of the scriptures; faith in the words of the Guru; faith in God; and finally, as Swami Vivekananda added, “Faith in oneself”. ●

● A Story to Remember ●

Four Classes of People

by Sri Ramakrishna

“In this creation of God there is a variety of things: men, animals, trees, plants. Among the animals some are good, some bad. There are ferocious animals like the tiger. Some trees bear fruit sweet as nectar, and others bear fruit that is poisonous. Likewise, among human beings, there are the good and the wicked, the holy and the unholy. There are some who are devoted to God, and others who are attached to the world.

“Men may be divided into four classes: those bound by the fetters (entanglements) of the world, the seekers after liberation, the liberated and the ever-free.

- Among the ever-free we may count sages like Nārada. They live in the world for the good of others, to teach men spiritual truths.
- Those in bondage are sunk in worldliness and are forgetful of God. Not even by mistake do they think of God.
- The seekers after liberation want to free themselves from attachment to the world. Some of them succeed (in this lifetime) and others do not.
- The liberated souls, such as the Sādhus and Mahātmas, are not entangled in the world, in 'woman and gold.' Their minds are free from worldliness. Besides, they always meditate on the Lotus Feet of God.

“Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net. Some of them try to free themselves from it, and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that struggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, 'Look! There goes a big one!'

“But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into the mud with the net in their mouths and lie there quietly, thinking, 'We need not fear any more; we are quite safe here.' But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.

“The bound souls are tied to the world by the fetters of 'woman and gold'. They are bound hand-and-foot. Thinking that 'woman and gold' will make them happy and give them security, they do not realise that it will lead them to annihilation.

“When a man thus bound to the world is about to die, his wife asks, 'You are about to go, but what have you done for me?'

“Again, such is his attachment to the things of the world that, when he sees the lamp burning brightly, he says: 'Dim the light. Too much oil is being used.' And he is on his death-bed!

“The bound souls never think of God. If they get any leisure they indulge in idle gossip and foolish talk, or they engage in fruitless work. If you ask one of them the reason, he answers, 'Oh, I cannot keep still, so I am making a hedge,' When time hangs heavy on their hands they perhaps start playing cards.”

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