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The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Thus Spake

In the fullness of one's spiritual realization, one will find that He who resides in one's heart, resides in the heart of others as well—the oppressed, the persecuted, the untouchable and the out-caste. This realization makes one truly humble.

- Sri Sarada Devi

You must not throw cold water on anybody's project. Give up criticism altogether. Help all as long as you find they are doing all right, and in cases where they seem to be going wrong, show them their mistakes gently. It is criticising each other that is at the root of all mischief. That is the chief factor in breaking down organisations.

- Swami Vivekananda

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Monthly Program Schedule for February 2024

3rd (Sat)

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

10:30 ~ 12:00

(Japanese Only) (Video Uploaded Later)

7th (Wed)

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~ 9:30

Zoom (Japanese Only)

13th (Sun)

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

14:00 ~ 16:00

Livestream and Zoom (Japanese Only)

18th (Sun)

Swami Vivekananda Birthday Celebration

11:00 ~ 16:30

Livestreaming

Prior reservation is necessary. Telephone: 046-873-0428

21st (Wed)

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~ 9:30

Zoom (Japanese Only)

Swami Premananda

By Swami Divyanathananda during Monthly Retreat held in Oct 2023

Swami Vivekananda once mentioned about Sri Ramakrishna, that He was LOVE personified. In each of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna some or the other of His traits had manifested. The love or *Prema* aspect of Sri Ramakrishna had manifested in Swami Premananda. After the mahasamadhi of Swami Premanandaji, Mahendranath Gupta, or M, the chronicler of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna commented that the 'Love' aspect has left the Holy Order.

Early days

Premanandaji was born in a village called Antpur, some 30 miles from Calcutta. His pre-monastic name was Baburam Ghosh. His Mother, Matangini Devi was also fortunate to have come in contact with Sri Ramakrishna and later became one of His close devotees. From his adolescence itself he had shown interest in spiritual life. He would often dream of staying in a secluded place with an elderly monk, living a simple and austere life and performing spiritual practices.



In the presence of Sri Ramakrishna

After completing his elementary school in his village, Baburam went to Calcutta for higher studies and enrolled himself in the Metropolitan Institution, where M was the headmaster. It was here that he came in contact with Rakhai, and they became bosom friends. Rakhai had already started visiting Sri Ramakrishna by that time. During a conversation, when Rakhai was talking about The Master, Baburam expressed his interest to visit Dakshineswar.

On the appointed day when they arrived at Dakshineswar, Thakur gladly welcomed them and allowed them to spend the night there. The Master checked various limbs of his body, as he often did with newcomers, and was satisfied to find positive signs in his body. Incidentally, the place at Dakshineswar resembled his boyish dream and he was surprised that he had arrived at a place which he used to covet for secretly in his heart. Baburam, after returning from Dakshineswar, frequently visited the Master, and gradually was introduced to the other devotees too. Slowly, it was revealed to him that his association with the Master was not of this life only, but there were much deeper connections. Thakur also recognised him as a disciple belonging to his inner circle. Thakur had so much faith about his inner purity that he allowed him to touch him during ecstasy, for the Master could not bear the touch of impure persons. The Master used to say, 'Baburam is pure to his marrow. No impure thought can cross his mind'.

Closer association with the Master brought great *vairagya* in the heart of Baburam and he lost interest in his studies. He appeared in the Entrance Examination but couldn't pass the exam. Sri Ramakrishna was however pleased at this news, for he regarded these examinations and certificates as fetters which often bind a person. Sri Ramakrishna used to call him *Daradi*, that is companion of His soul. Earlier, once Thakur had begged Matangini of her son, and she readily agreed but prayed that she should not see the death of her son. Sri Ramakrishna had granted her prayer.

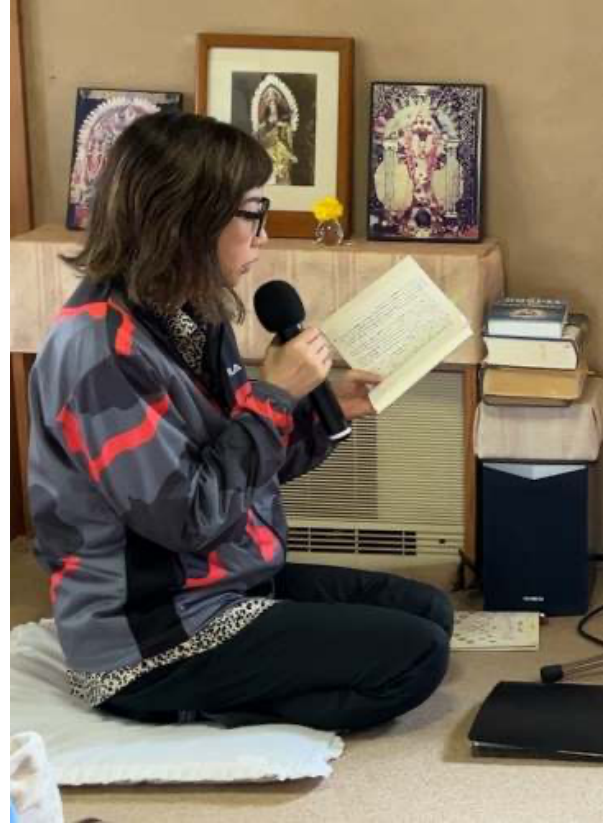
As a brother monk

After the Master's *mahasamadhi*, Baburam joined the band of young men who renounced the world and started staying at the Baranagar Monastery. One December, upon invitation of his Mother, all of them went to Antpur by train singing devotional songs on the way. In a cold night, they lit a bonfire in the courtyard of the house and sat for meditation. Narendra started talking about Jesus, laying great emphasis on renunciation. They decided to take the vow of sannyasa in front of that *dhuni* fire. Later they learnt that it was Christmas eve. After taking the sannyasa vows, Baburam became Swami Premananda.

Like other disciples Baburam Maharaj also visited several places of pilgrimage and performed intense spiritual practices.

After Swami Ramakrishnananda was sent to Chennai by Swamiji, Swami Premananda was assigned the task of performing worship of Sri Ramakrishna. One day, Swamiji called him and said, till now you were worshipping Sri Ramakrishna in picture, now serve the living God in human beings. Go out in the neighbouring place and serve the sick and the afflicted. Swami Premananda obeyed his brother disciple's command and went out to the village, brought a few small boys who were poor and bathed them with soap and water, fed them sumptuously and sent them back to their homes.

Three days before Swamiji left his mortal body, he was strolling on the grounds of Belur Math and pointing to a spot, said, when I die, cremate me here. The day he passed away, he had breakfast and lunch with Swami Premananda and was in a very jovial mood, talking about various things. He also talked about his idea of starting a Veda Vidyalaya in Belur Math to Swami Premananda.



Swamiji had given two instructions to him. First, not to make disciples, and second, to manage the affairs of Belur Math. When Swami Brahmananda was the President, he used to be away from Belur Math for several months, monitoring various other centres which had started developing, and so Swami Premananda looked after the affairs of Belur Math. Apart from the daily ritualistic worship of Sri Ramakrishna at the Shrine, he would look after the kitchen and dining hall, serve the devotees every day, take care of the vegetable garden, and also guide and teach the young novices. In fact, one of his important tasks became to build up the life of the novices who left their hearth and home and took to the life of renunciation.

Mother of the Math

Swami Premananda's heart fully blossomed during his administration of Belur Math. He truly became the embodiment of love. What Swamiji preached as 'burning selfless love' fully manifested in the life of Swami Premananda. hundreds of laymen became devotees touched by his love. Attracted by His love, several young men would come to Belur Math and hear about the Master from his mouth. Many of them, touched by his unfathomable love and inspiring words of renunciation, left their hearth and home and joined the monastery as monks. Premanandaji also, keenly worked to mould their lives in every way. How to talk, how to walk, how to cut vegetables, clean the shrine, serve cows, serve food, etc. all these were taught by him. He would say, 'Remove the thorny bushes in the courtyard, the Master strolls in the courtyard, He will get hurt. Don't put too much lime in the betel rolls, the Master's tongue will burn. When you make sandal paste

for the worship, there should not be rough particles in it. He preferred to eat warm food, hence don't serve cold food to him. After dropping the mosquito curtain at night, massage His feet mentally. And if the Master wakes up in the middle of the night, he may want to drink water, so please put a glass of water near His bed.' In this way, he taught the novices, how to connect every work as worship to Sri Ramakrishna.

Although he was very much loving, but at times he could be stern too. Once a novice, while cutting fodder for the cows, out of carelessness cut his finger. Blood started oozing out of his hand. Premanandaji, incidentally was taking a round of the math looking after various departments. When he came near the cowshed, he saw this and instead of consoling, started scolding him saying, 'I have asked you to cut fodder, not your finger. You are so careless....' And so on. Then he took the novice to the dispensary for treatment.



Premanandaji was not one sided. He gave equal attention to all the spheres of the life of the novices. He stressed on all-round development. Once he discovered a brahmachari spending a lot of time in the garden. Seeing this, he immediately reprimanded him, saying, 'have you come here to work like a coolie?' The brahmachari answered that he doesn't know Sanskrit well. Maharaj immediately asked him to procure a Sanskrit textbook and instructed him to finish reading the book within 3 months.

Premanandaji was a doctor of the highest category as explained by Sri Ramakrishna. He taught the novices by sweet words, sometimes by cautioning, and if needed he could be harsh too. Sometimes by love, sometimes by sharp rebuke, sometimes even by taking them by the ears, he would teach them. Often it happened that those whom he would scold, he would serve an extra dish for him. So, in a way, it was a kind of privilege to be rebuked by him. The novices also clearly understood that all his scoldings and criticisms were for their good only, so they surrendered themselves at his loving feet and Maharaj also took their responsibility like a loving mother.

Swami Premanandaji taught and showed by his own conduct that service to devotees and service to God are not different. It is in this spirit that he acted with all and one, whomever he came in touch with. The world had become his own by the flow of his love. In those days several young men would come to the Math and some of them would come at odd hours, after the lunch was over or even after dinner. Often it happened that a few devotees appeared late in the afternoon, after the workers have cleaned the kitchen and were taking rest. So, Baburam Maharaj himself would start cooking. Sometimes he would give away his own plate and would himself remain hungry.

Once a devotee, who came from far South India, fell asleep in the upper veranda. Premanandaji when he saw this, put up a mosquito curtain and began to fan him. A devotee belonging to a rich family would sometimes come to Belur Math and often stay there at night. Swami Premanandaji asked a brahmachari to arrange for a quilt instead of a blanket, for the blanket is coarse and the devotee might feel uncomfortable. He had such deep insight. In fact, Swami Premanandaji would give service to the devotees as a very high form of service. Once it was raining outside and shoes of the devotees were getting wet. One brahmachari

were bringing them inside with his feet. Premanandaji saw this and said, you should carry the shoes of the devotees on your head! Baburam Maharaj's loving service did not confine only within Belur Math. Often, he was seen carrying some food grains and vegetables to the nearby houses to distribute them.

During those days, India was under British rule and some young men, who were formally associated with the freedom movement, joined the monastery. Hence, the government kept a watch on Belur Math. On one occasion, under the instructions of the higher officials, a police spy in plain clothes came to the Math. It was hot summer and he was sweating. Exhausted, he sat on a bench and was resting. Out of somewhere a monk came and started fanning him and offered him a glass of water. He was none other than Baburam Maharaj.

Once a young man, in his prime youth fell into evil company. Gradually he was getting drowned into darkness. Fortunately, through one of his friends, he came in contact with Premanandaji. Though Maharaj knew about his ill conduct, he did not show the least sign of annoyance towards him. Rather, in his usual way, he talked to him very affectionately. Now this young man felt that because of his moral lapse, almost all around him, even his most near and dear ones, had shunned his company and looked down at him. Yet here is a man who although knowing about his past actions, showed him so much love. It did not take much time for him to understand that Baburam Maharaj's love was pure and unselfish. Maharaj loved him irrespective of his character. Gradually because of holy company, the mind of this young man became pure, dispassion towards the world rose in him, and he renounced the world to become a monk of the Ramakrishna Mission.

It was arranged that in the evening there would be scripture classes in the visitor's room at Belur Math. Sometimes, Swami Premananda would also join. Once he came but saw no one there and the room was dark. He naturally became annoyed. He sent for the brahmacharis and enquired the reason for their being absent. One of them said that often devotees come and sleep in this room, so they find it difficult to hold the class there. Swami Premanandaji said, 'The devotees are tormented with hundreds of problems. Finding this holy atmosphere they forget their worries and troubles and doze off to sleep. Let them sleep. However you all have renounced the world to awaken people from slumber of ignorance. Seeing you awakened, they will rise'.

Premanandaji played a key role in building up the character of the newly joined monks. Once, he sent a set of instructions to a brahmachari who was doing relief work.

1. Unless very urgent, one should refrain from talking.
2. If you cannot keep quiet, recite aloud the verses from the Bhagavad Gita or Swamiji's poems.
3. Always keep yourself engaged in good thoughts and deeds.
4. Lust, anger and greed are the roads to hell. So, shun them by all means.
5. Give to charity according to your ability.
6. One who can work silently behind others without wanting to be noticed, is a real *karmayogi*. Those who cannot work without recognition are not.
7. Unless you are ill, you should not regard any food as blunt and tasteless. If you develop the habit of taking delicious food year after year, then you will lose the ability to take simple food.
8. Year after year taking good bedding and clothes donated by rich persons, one gets used to them. So, be careful.
9. You may take service from others while ill, but you should be careful not to do so when you are in good health.
10. Serve others whenever you get an opportunity. Out of good fortune you have inherited the religion of service as preached by Swami Vivekananda.

Premanandaji would say:

- Knowing everybody as Thakur's child, you should regard all as your very own. Give love to all, give whatever you have without seeking any return.
- The mind needs to be engaged in something or the other all the time. If it be so, let it be engaged in the thought of God and service to His devotees. This is sadhana, Tapasya, Yoga. May you all be inebriated with this love. Throw out all ideas of 'me' and 'mine'. When all littleness and narrowness from the heart is thrown out, the real stuff will awaken from the heart and you will enjoy divine bliss.
- Our very nature is to love. We do not love anybody after judging strength and faults of others.
- Make this entire world your own by love. Let there be no adversary or enemy. Let the entire world be united by love.
- Make your life a Temple. Purity and love should be your motto.

Again and again Premanandaji would try to drive home in the minds of brahmacharis as well as devotees to meditate and bring into practice the idea of 'Not I, but Thou' as preached by Sri Ramakrishna. This lower 'I' is the root cause of all troubles. To devotees he would say, 'Not My house, my family, my children but Your house, Your family, Your children'. Once when a devotee told him, 'Sir, Sri Ramakrishna has made you great!' He said, 'No, Sri Ramakrishna did not make us great. He made us nobodies. You also have to become nobodies. Drive out all vanity from your heart. The Master used to say, When the ego goes, all troubles cease.

Just as his name was Premananda, he was actually an embodiment of love. Often he was referred to as the Mother of the Math. He would always try to drive the idea into the mind of others, that real greatness lies in killing the lower ego and awakening divine love in our hearts.

It is said that only a jeweller can understand the value of a jewel. Likewise, the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna understood the heights of each other's greatness. Once, after not meeting each other for a long time, when Turiyanandaji met Premanandaji, the former prostrated himself before the latter, saying, 'Brother, none can surpass you in regards of humility!' Once in front of Swami Brahmanandaji, Premanandaji said, 'Brother, let us get rid of this gerua cloth. It advertises that we are monks!' He was in such a mood that even the traditional monastic robe became a barrier to efface his vanity!

Once, a lecture was in progress, where Premanandaji was the speaker. In the middle of his talk, one of the audiences got up and said, 'Maharaj, please tell us something about divine love.' Maharaj without stopping continued his talk. That person again said the same thing. This time he became a bit excited and said, 'I am afraid that none of you are fit to possess divine love. For getting divine love, one should give one's head. Meaning the idea of 'Me' and 'mine'. Then the audience kept quiet.

Above, we have given some glimpses of his unalloyed love. Just as bees come from all directions by the attraction of honey, in the same way hundreds of young men came to Belur Math attracted by the magic of his love. Many of them become monks and offered their life at the service of Sri Ramakrishna. By his magic touch, non-believers became great devotees, sinners became purified and ordinary men became great. We offer our devoted pranams to the great Soul.

How to make our Meditation Deeper?

By Swami Medhasananda during Monthly Retreat held in Dec 2023

Our topic today is how to make our meditation deeper. Meditation means deep thinking on a holy theme. Let us first have a small session of meditation here. Before you start your meditation, those of you who already have some chosen deity as an object of meditation, you can focus on that chosen deity. Those who have not, I give you two alternatives, either of which you can choose as a theme of meditation. One of them is: imagine a full moon in a clear sky. You should think that it is a symbol of consciousness. Other alternative is meditation on a steady flame of a candle or, an oil lamp which does not flicker. This also should imagine as a symbol of consciousness. So now let us do meditation for six minutes. Please sit straight, with your spine straight and your two palms resting on your lap, or knees. Then close your eyes. First please do some rhythmic breathing three times. Inhale and then deeply exhale for six to eight seconds.

[All do some breathing exercise followed by chanting of Om and then meditation]

Now let us start our discourse. Deep thinking can be done on a secular subject or matter or on a spiritual subject or spirit. However, results of deep thinking of the said two themes are so different! By deep thinking on a secular subject, for instance, science and technology, sociology and any such subject one can invent something, offer solutions to existing problems, but one cannot have peace of mind. On the other hand, if one thinks on a spiritual subject deeply one can have sustained peace and joy. There are several books on meditation, for example chapter six of Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali Yoga Sutra, Swami Vivekananda's introductory chapter on Raja Yoga and Meditation and Spiritual Life by Swami Yatiswarananda. There are more books on meditation, but the books listed above are really very helpful.

Some illustrations of good meditation can be cited. In the Bhagavat Gita, for example one illustration is given. A flame is lighted in a room, where there is no wind. Since there is no wind, the lamp doesn't flicker. Another illustration, which is often cited is, when a person has deep meditation, then if a snake crawls over the body of that person, he won't feel the presence of the snake on his body. Then if a bird sits on the head of the person meditating and look for food from the hair of the person, he won't have the perception of the movement of the bird.

Somebody asked Swami Saradanandaji, one of the direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and later General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, 'Maharaj, in our case, when we sit for meditation, usually it takes a long time for us to make the mind calm, but what about you?' Saradanandaji replied, 'No, it never happens to me. The moment I sit for meditation, immediately it becomes very deep'.

Now, let us discuss the purposes of meditation. If we enquire, there are several purposes of meditation:

- Some people do meditation to prolong their youthfulness. Especially actors and actresses often attempt doing meditation for such purposes.
- Some doctors, advice those patients, having high blood pressure or heart related problems, to do some meditation. Then for patients, who have psychosomatic diseases, doctors advise them too to do meditation. I had a chance to visit one hospital at Mitaka. I saw that in that Hospital, , one separate room was allotted for meditation.

Anyways, the deeper and actual purposes of meditation are:

- To control one's mind, to control anger, greed, lust, etc. and sublimation of one's ego. The purpose of meditation is also to clean the mind. Every day we collect some wrong impulses from our surroundings and meditation helps to clean our mind from wrong impulses.
- Another purpose of meditation is to enhance our concentration, so that it can help learning any subject, or to do a task more efficiently.
- One purpose of meditation is to be freed from tremendous pressure and tension that comes almost every day in our life.
- Some persons do meditation to get mental peace.
- Some undergo meditation to gain occult powers, which gives one name and fame and one can earn money also by using those occult powers.

But the higher and deeper purpose of meditation is to know who we are, what our real nature is and also how to be free from repeated birth and death. Thus, meditation may be regarded as the panacea of all mental diseases and some physical diseases too. It also helps to face some adverse situation boldly. It is also a great aid for self-development. Those who meditate, generally practice meditation for one, two or three of these reasons mentioned above. Though in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religions meditation is very common, but in Semitic religions, there is no emphasis on meditation but on prayer. However, intense prayer leads to meditation.

In modern times, meditation has become a global phenomenon. All over the world, many people are practising meditation. What did lead to such circumstance? When Swami Vivekananda preached Vedanta in the West and taught about meditation, people got an idea about meditation and how to practise that. Swamiji himself demonstrated how to do meditation. The picture of Swami Vivekananda worshipped in our shrine is a picture taken of him while he was doing meditation in England and went into deep samadhi. Thus, people got a chance to witness what deep meditation is. Later, other teachers, like Paramahansa Yogananda and Mahesh Yogi and others also taught meditation and popularised it in the West.

All these meditations were taught and practiced for some higher purpose, but nowadays, people often undertake meditation for getting rid of mental tension. The purpose has become quite narrow and superficial. One example is a Vipasana meditation. Training camps are organised for the practice of them. However, most of such meditation practices are body centric for example, watching the mind while walking, or while taking food, etc. There is no doubt, that such practices have some positive effects. But soon after the participants come out of the camp, most of them don't practice any more, and hence, the good effects do not last long.

We shall restrict our discussion on meditation on a holy form since for most of us, meditation on the formless aspect of God (Brahman consciousness) is difficult.

Before a spiritual aspirants start doing meditation, certain points should be made clear to the practitioner.

- First, about the purpose of meditation. The initial purpose is controlling the mind and to get peace. But for a spiritual aspirant, it cannot be the final goal. So, the final purpose is to realise God/ Brahman, and to get liberation from the cycle of birth and death.
- The second point is one must do meditation regularly and sincerely. One cannot afford to skip meditation for a single day, and also it should be done seriously.

- The third point is, one should allot a fixed time and a fixed duration.
- About the object of meditation, there should not be any ambiguity about it. It may be a God, or Goddess or a saint, a symbol, after consultation with a teacher. Hinduism gives a lot of freedom in choosing our object of meditation.
- For doing meditation, the practitioner should sit erect, without moving any part of his body, eyes closed, arm resting on the lap. After that he is advised to breathe deeply. This helps to calm the mind.

Now the question is how to start the meditation. The mind of an average person is restless, it is always wandering. How to focus the mind on the object of meditation? This is a great challenge. Unless we solve this problem meditation may be just the play of a restless mind.

There are several suggestions to make the mind calm during meditation. Swami Vivekananda suggested, just allow the mind to wander and you watch it. To do that, you have to divide your mind into two. One part is wandering, while another part is watching it. Then you will see that a cinema is going on inside your mind. The difference between this movie and an actual movie is, in an actual movie there is some consistency, but in the movie going on inside our mind, there is no consistency. This moment it is in Tokyo, the very next moment it is in India. Next moment, you reach a restaurant and the next moment you suddenly remember an incident which happened thirty years back. Let the movie go on, only you should be careful not to attach yourself to any thought. You may give suggestions to your mind- 'Mind, I am watching you! You are bringing various images. Let me see the next image you bring to me.' This is a way to bring the mind back onto track. If we continue watching the mind like this as a witness, that is, without attaching ourselves to any of these passing thoughts you will find in course of time that the number of thoughts are getting reduced. Moreover, you will also find, between two successive images coming in front of the mind, there is a gap, an interval. In that interval, we can get an idea of stillness. The challenge, however, is how to prolong this gap. So, in this way you can still the mind.

There is another approach, and that is, before starting your meditation, tell your mind very strictly, 'Mind, I shall not allow you to think either of the past or the present, or future. Two things-brooding and planning should not be allowed during meditation.'

There was a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, by the name of Swami Bodhatmananda. He was the first Principal of the Probationers' Training Centre. I had the opportunity of meeting him once. One brahmachari, who after becoming a monk became Swami Chetanananda, asked him, 'Maharaj, how do you start your meditation?' Swami Bodhatmananda was a very scholarly monk and at the same time, very spiritual too. He answered, 'Before starting my meditation, I read two verses, which describes the impermanence of this world. If the world is illusory, then all problems which we encounter in our day-to-day life are also illusory. If the world has no real existence, then the problems also have no real existence. So, I first send some strong suggestions to the mind about the transitoriness of the world, and then I sit for meditation. Because often it happens that during our meditation, we start thinking about our problems and try to solve them too. But it is not enough to think about the transitory nature of the world, one should also think that the Lord alone is real.'

There is still another approach. Beforehand you select some interesting portions/passages of a scripture, e.g., Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and read some of those passages before you start your meditation. Next, close your eyes and try to visualize/remember which you just read. This is one way to focus during meditation. How does it help? If we don't do this kind of meditation, the mind has its own thoughts and it is inclined to think them which are mostly Rajasik or Tamasik . There are two alternatives. Either you allow the mind to wander and go on thinking at random, or you direct it to think in a given way. The mind always needs some thoughts to think. So, if we don't supply positive thoughts to the mind, it will itself pick up thoughts which are mostly negative.

Next point is, how to start the meditation. One way is to practice mental worship. The ritualistic worship that we do outside, the same thing, we can do mentally. In ritualistic worship, we decorate the image of the God or Goddess with flowers, we burn incense sticks, we offer food, followed by arati with the help of five items. In the same way, you visualise the Image of your chosen deity and mentally offer flowers, burn incense, then offer food, and mentally do the arati. This is called mental worship. Although the items with which you perform the mental worship are the objects of senses, but since they are being offered to your chosen deity, it helps us to focus our mind on Him. This is an effective way to withdraw our mind from its usual thoughts and shift it to thoughts of God.

Another method is, decide some interesting episodes from the life of your chosen deity, either Sri Ramakrishna, or Sri Rama or Sri Krishna. There are several interesting episodes from their lives. Beforehand, you decide, which episode you would like to take up for meditation. For example, we may take up one episode from the life of Swami Vivekananda (formerly Narendranath). Narendranath had gone to Dakshineswar to meet Sri Ramakrishna, and after some time, Sri Ramakrishna took Narendranath to a private chamber and started praising him as one of the seven sages. But Narendranath had no idea of that. What he knew about himself was that he was the son of Biswanath Dutta. Narendranath also felt that Sri Ramakrishna was crazy, just like others talked about him, otherwise, why would he say such meaningless words, like 'I know, you are one of the seven sages!' and so on. In the next meeting, we find Sri Ramakrishna touching Narendranath, and immediately, Narendranath found himself in a different state, where the world was vanishing from his eyes. He became afraid, he felt he was about to die. He cried, 'Oh! What are you doing? I have a father and mother! In the third meeting, Sri Ramakrishna touched Narendranath and he became completely unconscious.

Then there are descriptions of Sri Ramakrishna's meetings with Girishchandra Ghosh. So, there are so many episodes, from which you select beforehand and during meditation, you visualize one or two of those episodes. These kinds of meditations help us greatly in withdrawing our mind from the gross world and helps us to turn our focus on our chosen deity.

After that, what should we do? It is generally advised that we repeat the name of our chosen deity and at the same time, meditate on His form. Or, sometimes, without repeating the name of the Lord, we may just meditate on the form and also contemplate on His/Her divine attributes.

Now, the question is, how to prolong the meditation? Those who must go for work outside every day, for example, a businessman, or a company worker, a trader, a teacher, etc. it is difficult to find long times for meditation. For monks, it is easier to find long times for meditation, but for householders it is difficult. But householders also, if they are earnest, they can sit for meditation for longer durations on weekends and on holidays. Now, how to prolong your meditation? One way is, you can repeat the mantra several times, say two thousand, or three thousand times, repeating it slowly, distinctly, and not very fast.

Then, there is another way, which I have already discussed: you can select an episode from the life of your chosen deity and contemplate on that episode. There is still another method: you can perform mental worship, and you can prolong the mental worship. Let us suppose, you are doing arati, and you are doing arati with a flower. You first start with hibiscus, then rose and then with lotus. With each of these flowers, you do arati and you can do it for a long time. There is no need to finish it quickly. Then, you imagine, you have lighted a homa fire, and that homa fire is named after your chosen deity. In the homa fire, you start offering various items. What do you offer? You offer your body to the homa fire. Offer each part of your existence to the homa fire. First, offer the physical body, as an oblation to the fire. When the body is being offered in the fire, imagine that it is being purified by the fire. Then you imagine that you are offering your prana, the vital energy into the fire and it is being purified. After that, all the senses-the ear, the eyes, all are being offered in the fire.

Then, what comes next? The mind. The mind is comprised of two parts: the conscious mind and the subconscious mind. While you are offering your mind, imagine that all your attachments, desires, ego, anger, hatred, jealousy, doubt, vanity are being offered to the fire and are being burned. This kind of imagination plays a great role in our day-to-day life. Most of the time, we live in imagination. Imagination on secular thoughts will make us all the more secular, while imagination on spiritual subjects will help us to become spiritual. Imagination plays a great role in our spiritual life. We can take the help of that trait of the mind, which loves to imagine, to turn our mind to the spiritual direction.

Then let us also offer Buddh, intelligence, in the homa fire and purify it. Then comes Chitta - memory. We have so many memories in our life. There are some memories, which are injurious to our spiritual life. Let us burn all these memories. Then finally, our Ego(I consciousness and My consciousness). Let the Ego also be offered in the homa fire and be purified. In this way, you should take different layers of your existence and offer them to the homa fire. Some of them, you purify, and some of them, you just burn. However, for this kind of meditation, you should allot sufficient time. When you add these components, for example mental worship, and mental homa, it helps not only to prolong your meditation, but also helps to make your spiritual life deeper.

Even in the ritualistic worship that we perform, one part is mental worship and there are mantras which describe the mental worship. Purification of body and mind is an important factor in spiritual life. There is dirt accumulated for so many lives. It is not a child's play, to purify the body and mind. These kinds of suggestions which have been given above are helpful in our spiritual life.

The next point I would like to discuss is, about distractions. When we want to sit for meditation for a longer duration, we will find that it is not an easy task, and we encounter several obstacles to long and deep meditations. What are they? The first is, lack of motivation. We are not motivated enough to lead a deep spiritual life. So, first we must grow in our motivation to meditate for a long time and also deeply. Not only for a long duration, but the mind feels reluctant to sit for meditation even for a short while. Why is it so? It is because, the mind doesn't want to be disciplined. It thinks, if we sit for meditation, the freedom that we enjoy will be curtailed. The obstructions come from one's own mind. Let us take an illustration from our day-to-day life. There are some parents, who pamper their child too much. Then when they want to control them, they find it so hard! In the same way, we go on pampering our mind for a long time and then we find it hard to discipline it.

Now, I have a question- what are the symptoms that the mind is reluctant to meditate? Such kinds of thoughts as, 'today I am very tired'. Or, 'today I don't have time', 'today my mind is very restless'. These are the excuses, that our mind gives us. But it is just the opposite. If we find our mind to be restless, then that should be the reason for us to meditate. For, if the mind is calm and quiet, then there is not so much need for meditation.

Then even if you force yourself to sit, then you will surely sit, but you will think of thoughts other than God. Somehow, you will sit for half an hour, and then will get up. Or, you will feel sleepy after starting the meditation.

If you probe deeply why mind acts in that way, you will find that under the influence of *avidya maya*, the mind doesn't want to progress in the path of spirituality. If you become spiritual, you will break the shackles of maya and will be free, which the *avidya maya* doesn't want. So, *avidya maya* creates these obstacles through mind of which we should be aware.

Let us now discuss distractions during the time of meditation. There is a Sanskrit word, *Pratyahara* which means, withdrawing the mind from what the mind runs after. It generally runs after secular thoughts. So whenever the mind runs after such thoughts, we should withdraw the mind from them. This is *Pratyahara*.

There is a very interesting method. You will be surprised to find, how it helps to control the distractions happening during meditation. In this method, if you find that the mind is repeatedly going away from the thought of God, instead of controlling it by *Pratyahara*, just spiritualise it. In other words, whatever image the mind brings before itself, think that it is divine.

In Ishopanishad, there is a verse:

ईशा वास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्
Īśā vāsyamidam̐ sarvaṁ yatkiñca jagatyāṁ jagat

Everything in the world is to be covered by Brahman. So, in whatever thought the mind runs after, instead of withdrawing, think that object to be divine. Suppose the face of the person whom you love appears again and again. If you fail to withdraw your mind from the thought of that person, then think that he is not just a person of flesh and bones but try to bring the consciousness of God in that person. If you do that, then the secular part of the person will fade away, and the spiritual part of that person will become more prominent. Because, basically, everything is Brahman, but appears in different names and forms. But we fail to see the Brahman aspect, and instead see only the differentiating name and form.

The next question is, how to make our meditation deeper? For that one very helpful advice is, we have to develop love for God, then it will be easier to think of Him. Because, logically if we analyse, we find, those whom we love, we think of him/her more often. So, if we have love for God, then we can meditate on his name and form without much strain. But the challenge is, how to love God. That itself can become a theme of a discourse, but in short, I shall give some guidelines.

First of all, read more books and reminiscences about your chosen deity. For example, if Sri Ramakrishna is your chosen deity, read his biography, read books on his reminiscences, etc. Then, prayer is one very effective way. Pray to him as ‘Oh Lord! increase my love towards you’. Next thing is, communion with God throughout the day. How can we do that? We can keep a connectedness with our chosen deity through repetition of the mantra. As many times as possible, please repeat the mantra. Whether you are initiated or not, it does not matter. If you are initiated, then you already have the holy mantra, and if you are not, then just repeat the name of any God, whom you adore. You can do it throughout the day. But many persons, casually or superficially repeat the mantra in the morning, and then the whole day, they never remember God, and they expect that the meditation will be deeper! If twenty-two to twenty-three hours you spend in secular thoughts, then obviously, those thoughts will come during your meditation.

There are quite a few devotees, who complain, why they are not able to meditate deeply. In my opinion, this question itself is ridiculous. If we think of God just for ten/fifteen minutes in twenty-four hours, and rest of the day you are engrossed in secular thoughts/habits, how can we expect to meditate deeply? So, our suggestion is, keep recollection of God intermittently throughout the day. Thus during the time of meditation, we will be able to meditate more intensely.

Whenever you do any work, work in the spirit of Karma Yoga. Instead of doing only Karma (work), do Karma Yoga.

Another suggestion for deeper meditations is, your lifestyle should be balanced. In Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6, verses 16, and 17.

नात्यश्नतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनश्नतः ।
न चाति स्वप्नशीलस्य जाग्रतो नैव चार्जुन ॥

nātyaśhnatastu yogo`sti na chaikāntam anaśhnataḥ
na chāti-svapna-śhīlasya jāgrato naiva chārjuna

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।
युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥

yuktāhāra-vihārasya yukta-cheṣṭasya karmasu
yukta-svapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkha-hā

The meaning of the above verses in brief are, one who works too much or one who does not work at all, one who eats too much or, one who doesn't eat at all, one who sleeps too much or one who doesn't sleep at all - for such a persons, Yoga is not possible. So, if want to make your meditation deeper, you will have to be careful about your lifestyle.

The final point, about which one should be careful is, not to work at cross purpose. For instance, our mind is generally restless, and the purpose of meditation is to make it calm. But if during the day we indulge in practices, which may make our mind more restless like internet surfing, gossiping how can we expect our mind to become calm? The same thing goes about purity of mind. We do meditation for making the mind pure, but if we do such activities which may make our mind more impure, then how can we hope to attain purity of mind? Shankaracharya says, that through different external organs, like eyes, ears, etc. vibrations enter our mind. These vibrations are like food for the mind. If the impure vibrations enter through our senses, then the mind will become more impure. So, we must become more careful about what we let into our minds.

In conclusion, if we try to practice sincerely some of the practical hints about meditation discussed above we can experience a deep meditation which will lead us steadily and surely in the path to our spiritual goal of experiencing supreme peace, joy and truth.

• Thought of the Month •

Truth gives no advantage. It gives no higher status, no power over others. All you get is truth and freedom from the false. Truth cannot be harnessed for a purpose. It must be wanted for its own sake. You do not get power to help others too. Because there are no others. You divide people into noble and ignoble and ask the noble to help the ignoble. You separate, you judge and condemn, and in these you deviate from truth.

- Nisargadatta Maharaj

Report and Some Photos from Christmas Eve



On 24 December 2023, the Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual Christmas Eve celebration in the Main Ashrama Building of its Zushi Centre. The entrance of the building was illuminated. The altar was set up at the back of the Main Shrine room with the sliding doors (soji) to the Meeting Room removed for seating there. The altar was framed in garlands with colored lights and hibiscus and featured the print of Jesus Christ in Yoga Posture and on the tier below the Madonna and Child.

An array of flowers, bouquets, leis, candles, cookies, candies and a birthday cake were offered extending out to the floor. The items for worship were laid out to the left of the altar and offerings. At about 7PM the candles on the altar were lit. Swami Divyanathananda performed the arati of Jesus Christ.



When the worship came to an end, carols were sung intermittently during the the programme that followed. Professor Steve Morgan led the carol in English while Ms. Shanti Izumida did the same in Japanese with the accompaniment of the keyboard. Swami Medhasananda read some passages from the 'Holy Bible' in English and Mr. Kazuiki Tajima read the Japanese translation of it.

Maharaj then released the second volume of the 'Ramakrishna no Kaisoroku' (Japanese translation of the Ramakrishna as We Saw Him).

Next Mr. Leonardo Alvarez gave a brief but lively talk on Jesus Christ and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi both in English and Japanese, which was greatly appreciated by the attendees.





Finally, the congregation spent a few minutes in silent prayer, after which offerings were collected and taken to the kitchen. The celebration programme concluded with the congregation singing English and Japanese verses of 'Silent Night'. A delicious Christmas prasad dinner with many desserts was served to all attendees.

Approximately 28 people attended the programme.

Report and Some Photos from Kalpataru Day

On Monday, the 1st of January 2024 the Vedanta Society of Japan observed its annual New Year's Day and the Kalpataru Day at its Zushi Centre. Some of the Devotees gathered in the Main Shrine room for meditation and the morning chanting.

At around 11:30 am in the main shrine, after reciting the Peace Mantras in Sanskrit, selected passages from different Scriptures namely, Lord Buddha's Teachings, The Bible and the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna were read both in English and Japanese by some of the attendees.



Next Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) welcomed one and all with a solemn New Year greeting, adding he was pleased that attendees had chosen to start the New Year in a spiritual way. He then briefly recounted the significance of the Ramakrishna Order's observance of New Year's Kalpataru Day. Kalpataru is the Wish Fulfilling Tree of Indian lore, and on the 1st of January 1986, Sri Ramakrishna, who was terminally ill in the Cossipore Garden House near Calcutta, came

down from his bed and blessed the householder disciples who had assembled there saying "Be Consciousness." Then Maharaj observed that the New Year should start with a new resolution by us for example, to spend at least ten minutes every day preferably, in the morning for sitting quietly, which will prove to be highly beneficial to one's life in the long run provided one does it regularly and sincerely.



Swami Divyanathananda then led the gathering in singing bhajan with playing the harmonium which was followed by a short silent prayer.

Then lunch prasad was served to all attendees.



At around 2 o'clock Maharaj led the group on a walk to Kamakura where they worshipped at the Great Buddha Statue (Kotokuin) where a group photo was taken showing about 25 devotees. Many then continued on to pay respects at the Catholic Church Yukinoshita. Along the way the final Kalpataru Day visit was paid to the traditionally crowded Tsuruoka Hachimangu Shrine (Shinto).



• Story to Remember •

First Meeting with Bokhar Rimpoche

One day, I was feeling very disturbed. I drove down to Mirik to meet Bokhar Rimpoche. The monastery was situated in a valley at a height of 5000 feet, overlooking a beautiful lake. The first time I entered into the monastery, a wave of peace engulfed me.

I entered a small room, which was warm and filled with sweet smell of incense. Bokhar Rimpoche was in his late-fifties, his face radiant with a calm spiritual glow. I respectfully bowed down at his feet. A cool peaceful sensation filled my entire being. After a few minutes Bokhar Rimpoche inquired: “Where have you come from?”

“Siliguri”, I replied.

“Was the drive ok?”

“Yes, it was ok.”

“Do you have any questions?”

“Yes. How to attain enlightenment?”

Bokhar Rimpoche thought for a few seconds and then replied: “I don’t get many people here who ask me this question. In fact I am here to answer this very query of a spiritual seeker. But day in and day out I get people who ask me about solving their material problems, how to please the gods and reap good fortune. But rarely do I get someone who is interested in the highest truth.”

He understood my spiritual quest, he knew the depths of it and he acknowledged the importance of it. I quickly explained to him the spiritual experiences I was going through and asked him for guidance.

“When you drove down to the monastery today, if you saw something amazing on the way, and you stopped, what would have happened?”

“I wouldn’t have reached the monastery.”

“And if you encountered an obstacle, bad road and didn’t want to go forward?”

“That would have stopped me from reaching here as well.”

“Good and bad experiences keep happening on the path. But you should not stop driving. The supreme teaching is to be without attachment or aversion. If you like something, it becomes a problem, if you dislike an experience, it becomes a problem. Just watch them with compassionate awareness and soon you will be steadfast in reality. As you walk the road changes, the scenes change, everything changes.”

“Thank you so much for your guidance and blessing. There is a sense of timeless peace in this room.”

“Well, you are free to visit me whenever you want. Even if I am not here, you can sit here and meditate. The doors of this room are open to those who are sincerely trying to attain enlightenment.”

(adapted from <https://innerspiritualawakening.com/enlightened-master-bohkar-rimpoche/>)

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