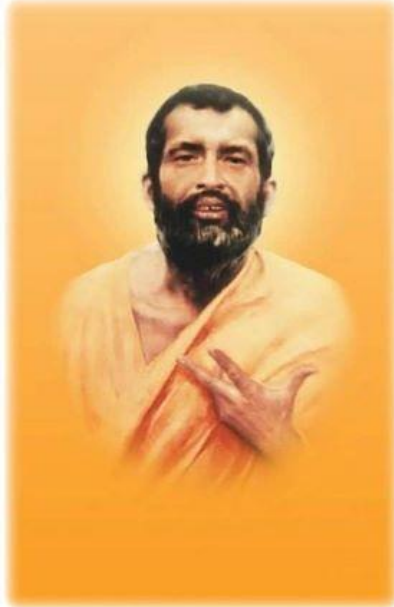




MARCH 2024 -VOLUME 22 NUMBER 03

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Thus Spake

A man is truly free, even here in this embodied state, if he knows that God is the true agent and he by himself is powerless to do anything.

- Sri Ramakrishna

All sentient beings are essentially Buddhas.
As with water and ice, there is no ice without water.
Apart from sentient beings, there are no Buddhas.
Not knowing how close the truth is, we seek it far away –what a pity!

- Hakuin

Kindness and love can buy you the whole world; lectures and books and philosophy all stand lower than these.

- Swami Vivekananda

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Monthly Program Schedule for April 2024

3rd (Wed)

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~ 9:30

Zoom (Japanese Only)

6th (Sat)

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

10:30 ~ 12:00

(Japanese Only) (Video Uploaded Later)

9th (Tue)

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

14:00 ~ 16:00

Livestream and Zoom (Japanese Only)

21st (Sun)

Monthly Retreat at Zushi

10:30 ~ 16:30

Livestreaming

Speaker: Swami Divyanathananda

24th (Wed)

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~ 9:30

Zoom (Japanese Only)

27th (Sat)

Bhagavad Gita Study Class in Osaka

14:30 ~ 16:30

(Japanese Only)

Contact: gita.benkyoukai.kansai@gmail.com

29th (Mon)

Akhand Japam

05:30 ~ 20:30

Contact: vedanta.karmayoga@gmail.com

The Teachings of Lord Jesus and Holy Mother

By Leonardo Alvarez on 24th December 2023

About Jesus' Mother, Mary, we do not have much information. We know that she was a very pure woman, that ancient tradition claims she was also born from the Holy Spirit (in Latin 'Regina sine labe originali concepta'), or that by becoming the Mother of Christ she was purified from all sins. But all in all, she received a special role from God, to bear His child, become the Mother of the Redeemer of mankind. She very meekly accepted it, and during her life, was the embodiment of meekness, modesty, imperturbable faith, patience and forbearance, all qualities that make her very similar to Holy Mother, Sarada Devi. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is on the Cross and he talks to His Mother and to His beloved disciple, John, saying: "Mother, here is your son. John, here is your Mother". Thereafter, the disciples



took care of Jesus' Mother and She became the source of inspiration of guidance and support for the nascent Christian movement, and according to some later on biographies, she was also the source of details in the Gospels. Today, at least for Latin Catholics, she occupies the same level as Jesus Christ, known as the Mother of God, and perhaps even more powerful and merciful than Jesus, when it comes to redeeming sinners. She is prayed to when there is no hope to get help from Jesus. That is why she is called "Mary Auxiliatrix". This belief is quite widespread among Catholics. In Venezuela, at the Church on Campus, there was a large painting of Mary Auxiliatrix, where she is shown holding the leg of a man who is destined to go to hell, and saving him from his fate, while at the same time, she stands on top of a snake, symbol of the temptation that led to the original sin, and she also carries Baby Jesus in her arms.

I believe that Holy Mother, Sarada Devi, is the same manifestation of the Saving Power of God, *Vidya Sakti*, embodiment of all Motherly features, *sattva*, compassion, forbearance, salvation and liberation. We know that she was born from Ram Chandra Mukhopadhyaya a very pious and generous man, and Shyamasundari Devi, also a very pious, generous lady with indomitable spirit. Though the family was poor, they would aid others as much as possible and were highly esteemed by the whole locality. Holy Mother often said that she had been born in such a family due to the sterling qualities of her parents.

Jesus' parents too were poor but extremely pious. We do not know if He actually had brothers and sisters like Holy Mother or Sri Ramakrishna did. Catholic tradition says that the reference to Jesus' brothers in the Bible, are a reference to members of his extended family, such as cousins. Instead, we have a picture that Saint Joseph, Mary's husband, was a lifelong celibate, self-controlled, pure, simple, pious hardworking man. He and Mary embody the ideal Christian family.

In today's talk, we will briefly compare the similarities between Jesus' life and teachings and those of Holy Mother. Had we had more information on Mother Mary, perhaps it would be a comparison

between the two Mothers of Mankind. When seeing the life of Jesus and Holy Mother, we see their limitless compassion for the suffering masses, and the willingness to suffer and even die to redeem the sins of others. Though Jesus died on the Cross to redeem the sins of mankind – of which Holy Mother also says that Sri Ramakrishna had taken upon himself the sins of humanity – Holy Mother took the sins of thousands of people whom she mercifully initiated, which would often cause unbearable pain, rashes and other diseases, which ultimately led to Her death.

Both their hearts were open to all of mankind. Jesus taught and blessed not only his disciples, but Roman soldiers, Samaritans – which are a sect different from Judaism with similar beliefs - Greeks and Syrians, and other people from the surrounding countries. Holy Mother too, embraced not only Indians, but Europeans as well, whether be British living in India, like a British woman who came for her blessings to cure her daughter, or a theosophist lady from Poland, as well as Swamiji's disciples from the West, such as Sister Nivedita, Sister Christine, Sara Bullock, among others.

They both came to redeem the fallen and the poor. Jesus was often seen at table with sinners, and when asked why, He would say: "I have not come to call righteous but sinners to repentance into the Kingdom of God". Holy Mother too, when monks tried to prevent Her from giving initiation to people because that would mean assuming their sins and aggravating Her health condition, She said: "Did Sri Ramakrishna come only to eat Rasagollas?" or "The body must die one day or another, let me give away my body by granting liberation for others. For this purpose alone I am born".

Now let us see some similarities between Mother's and Jesus' teachings.

Mother: Everything depends upon one's mind. Nothing can be achieved without purity of mind. It is said 'The aspirant might have received the grace of the Guru, the Lord and his devotees, but he comes to grief without the grace of 'one'. That 'one' is the mind. The mind of the aspirant must be gracious to him".

In this regards Jesus said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

And "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7.21).

Meaning, if we do not make efforts, then our mind will not be gracious to us, nor be open to receive God's grace either.

One should not make public one's spiritual practices, and private practice helps to build up the mind and character.

Mother said: "It is essential to perform spiritual practices in a secluded place. When the plant is young, fencing is necessary, but when it grows big, the cattle cannot do it any harm."

Jesus said: "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:6).

The need to give up attachment to worldly things.

Mother: "Whenever the mind goes after anything other than God, consider that as transient and surrender the mind at the sacred feet of the Lord. Husband, son, body, or whatever it may be, is all in Maya. All these are Maya's bondage. One cannot be freed unless one gets rid of bondage."

Jesus said: "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:37, 39).

Regarding peace of mind, the Mother said: “The less you become attached to the world, the more you will enjoy peace of mind.”

Jesus said: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Prayer helps to lessen the effect of one’s karma and difficulties in life.

Mother: “One cannot escape the effect of one’s past karma. But then, if a person leads a prayerful life, he gets off with only the prick of a thorn in the leg, whereas he was to suffer from a deep cut.”

Bible: “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19)

Mother: It is idle to expect that dangers and difficulties will not come. They are bound to come. But for a devotee, they will pass under the feet like water.

Jesus: “But not even a hair of your head shall perish. All the hairs of your head are numbered. Therefore, fear not.” (Luke 21:17).

Do not see the defects in others.

Mother: “When a man sees defects in others, his own mind first gets polluted. What does he gain by finding fault in others? He only hurts himself by that.”

Jesus: “Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgement, you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” (Luke 6:37-42)

There is a saying only reason you see defects in others is because you are not working to amend your own. If you tried to fix your own defects you would have no time or energy left to see defects in others.

The necessity of keeping the mind engaged in work and positive thoughts.

Mother: “One must perform work. It is only through work that the bondage of work will be cut asunder and one will acquire a spirit of non-attachment. One should not be without work even for a moment”. “Work saves the mind from going astray”.

Jesus: When an unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places, seeking rest, but finds none. Then he says ‘I will return to my house from which I came’. And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man become worse than the first.” (Matthew 12:43-45)

Idleness for the sake of religion is not good. As Swamiji said, some people become idle and rely on God (Daiva), saying that they have become *Sattvic*, when in reality they have become extremely *Tamasic*, almost dead, a sign of cowardliness. Behind the calmness of the Saint, lies a gigantic will force that can move the world and perform actions. Whereas the “*Tamasic*” dullness is powerless.

Necessity of prayer.

Mother: “You should work, no doubt, but prayer and meditation are also necessary. You must sit for meditation at least once in the morning and once in the evening. That will be the helm of a boat. When one sits for meditation in the evening, there should be self-examination in respect of the works done in the course of the day.”

Saint Paul said: “Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance.” (Ephesians 6:18).

And also “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” (2 Corinthians, 13:5)

Drawing on the importance of putting up a spiritual fight, this time I quote from Sri Ramakrishna:

“To arms! To arms, O man! Death storms your house in battle array!

Bearing the quiver of knowledge, mount the chariot of devotion;

Bend the bow of your tongue with the bow-string of love,

And aim at him the shaft of Mother Kali’s holy name.

Here is a ruse for the fray: You need no chariot or charioteer;

Fight your foe from the Ganges’ bank, and he is easily slain.

You must fight the God of Death with the weapon of God’s holy name.”

o

Saint Paul said:

Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power.

Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil.

For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.

Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground.

So, stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate,

And your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians, 6:10-17).

Jesus also said: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34)

In regards to the symptoms of spiritual practice, Holy Mother said: “As you progress in your spiritual practice, you will see the same Being in you as in Me, and that He is in all men, be they of the lowest castes. Then you will acquire humility”.

Jesus said: “I and my Father are One” (John 10:30). “I pray for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us” (John 17:20-21).

34 Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;

35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'
37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?
38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?
39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'
40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'
(Matthew 25:34-40 RSV-CE)

Also, one of the greatest Christian mystics of all times, Saint Therese of Avila said: "On this Earth, the body of Christ now is our body. He prays through us, works through us, sees through our eyes, speaks through our words, works with our hands, walks with our feet and loves with our hearts"
(Sayings of Saint Therese of Avila)

Mother said about Grace: "The grace of God is the thing that is needed. One should pray for the grace of God. One must pray sitting on the bank of the river. One will be taken across in proper time".

Jesus said something similar about being alert and praying, waiting until it is the proper time.

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.
2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.
3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them;
4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.
5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.
6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'
7 Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps.
8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'
9 But the wise replied, 'Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.'
10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut.
11 Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.'
12 But he replied, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'
13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

More on Grace and Liberation

Mother: "God-realization is just like a candy in the hand of a child. Some people beg the child to part with it. He does not care to give it to them. But without hesitation he hands it over to another whom he likes. All depends on the grace of God. He bestows his grace upon anyone he likes. Grace is the important thing".

Jesus said:

1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.
2 After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3 And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place;
4 and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went.
5 Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.
6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?'
7 They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'
8 And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.'
9 And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.
10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.
11 And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder,
12 saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'
13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?
14 Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you.
15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'
16 So the last will be first, and the first last."
(Matthew 20:1-16)

Universality of the teachings of the Avatars.

Mother said: "Sri Ramakrishna never cherished any parochial or one-sided view. Brahman exists everywhere. The prophets and incarnations are born to show the way to benighted humanity. They give different instructions according to different temperaments. There are many ways to realize Truth. Therefore, all these instructions have their value".

Jesus said: "And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at the table in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29).

In this way, God comes again and again, when religiousness declines and evil increases, to save humanity. This Truth, which Holy Mother has said is also found in the Gita (Ch 4. 7-8).

*yadā yadā hi dharmasya / glānir bhavati bhārata
abhyutthānam adharmasya / tadātmānam srijāmyaham*

Whenever there is a decline in righteousness and an increase in unrighteousness, O Arjun, at that time I manifest Myself on earth.

*paritrāṇāya sādḥunām / vināśhāya cha duṣkṛitām
dharma-samsthāpanārthāya / sambhavāmi yuge yuge*

To protect the righteous, to annihilate the wicked, and to reestablish the principles of dharma I appear on this earth, age after age.

Message on Kalpataru Day

By Swami Medhasananda 1st January 2024

Today, there is a small gathering, but it is a global gathering. We have one person from Venezuela, two from Germany, we have Indians and of course Japanese. Today is very special and many persons observe this day by visiting temples. Especially in Bengal, devotees visit the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, Kalighat, Belur Math and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna visit the Cossipore Garden House for obtaining blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, because on this particular day, in 1886, He had bestowed special grace on His devotees.



When I came to Japan, one thing impressed me, and that is on 31st December, buses and trains were available throughout the night, so that people can visit Temples. Today too, many people visit Buddhist Temples, Shinto Shrines, Churches, etc. I should say that even though many people do not visit temples during the year, at least for one day in a year, they will visit Temples.

In our Organisation, the Ramakrishna Mission, this day is observed as Kalpataru day.

The idea of Kalpataru is of a legendary tree, a wish fulfilling tree, under which if one comes, his wish will be fulfilled. Sri Ramakrishna, as you know, spent his last days at the Cossipore Garden House in Kolkata, and on this day, he bestowed special blessings on some of the devotees who were present there. Those who had secular desires, he blessed them so that they may fulfil them, and those who had yearning for devotion and knowledge, He blessed them for attaining knowledge and devotion. All of them had a special experience when Sri Ramakrishna touched them. Since Sri Ramakrishna became Kalpataru on that day, this day is observed every year as the Kalpataru day.

Some of you may be thinking, that it would have been nice if you had found a wish fulfilling tree, under which if you sit, your wishes would be fulfilled. But there is a danger. I shall explain it with the help of a story.

A traveller, unknowingly sat under a wish-fulfilling tree. He was tired, and hence took rest under the tree. He thought, 'it would be nice if somebody brought some food and water.' Immediately, one person came with some food and water. He was amazed! Anyways, he partook of them and appeased his thirst and hunger. Then he thought, 'It would be nice if somebody massaged my feet, for they are paining due to long walk.' Immediately, two persons came and started massaging his legs. He felt very relaxed and comfortable. Suddenly, one thought crossed his mind, 'If a tiger comes now, what will happen?' Immediately a tiger came from somewhere and ate the traveller.

Therefore, if we are not prepared, there is a risk if we sit under a wish-fulfilling tree. Whatever we pray to God earnestly, He will fulfil. But it is possible that we fall in trouble after our prayers have been answered. So it is better to pray to God and to depend on Him to take care of you. Girish Chandra Ghosh, a playwright of Bengal and one of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna said, God shows his mercy when he fulfils our prayers, but He shows greater mercy when He doesn't fulfil our prayers. So if we pray, and find that our

prayer was not answered, then we should understand, that that desire for which we had prayed would have brought us trouble.

On special days like this, it is natural for us to pray. Because almost every one of us have stress and trouble in our life, and we have our near and dear ones, for whom we have worries and anxieties. So, we can't help praying, but let us also keep this fact in mind, that although God listens to our prayers, He doesn't grant them all for our own good.

Today is a day of prayer and resolution. I discussed about prayer, now I shall talk about resolutions. We should have resolutions not only about improving standard of life, but also about improving quality of life. Many persons have many types of resolutions. Some people might want to control their anger, some want to control ego, some jealousy, etc. some want to help the suffering people, etc. So different people have different kinds of resolutions.

All these resolutions are great, but what is the best resolution? If we water a plant, we don't water branches and leaves, but we water the roots of the plant. Because, if water is poured on the roots, it will reach the other branches of the tree.

This time, when I visited India, while returning, I stayed for some days in our branch centre at New Delhi. One monk in that centre, contacted a person, and requested him to help me at the Airport. This person is a top executive of the Union of stall-owners at airports all over India. He met me at the Airport, and after clearing through the various counters there, wanted to share some of his problems. He said, 'Maharaj, I have lot of stress'. I gave him some suggestions. He was already an initiated disciple into our Order, and I believe, he was doing some spiritual practices.

I just wanted to share this small experience, because now-a-days this kind of stress has become a common problem. Now, you are all seated in front of me, and listening in a relaxed way. But If you compare it with your workplace, the situation will be different. It is no way different from the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

I would like to discuss about how to get relieve from stress from our life. As you know, just by wishing, 'I want to get rid of stress', stress won't go away. We understand this very well when we want to earn money. Money doesn't fall from the sky. We must work every day-whether we like it or not, whether we are feeling alright or not. But it is a matter of pity, that although we want to get relief from stress, we are not willing to work for it.

Now, I shall tell you of a very simple practice, which you could resolve to continue every day and it will help you physically, mentally, in your work, in learning something, in your relationships. So, it will help you in at these five levels. But the condition is that you must practice it consistently, day after day. The practice is, sitting quietly for ten minutes, preferably in the morning, without moving the body, and thinking of something holy, for instance of God. If you do it consistently, I am sure, it will make a transformation in your life.

To conclude, we have talked about two things today - prayer and resolution. Start on both of these from today itself. Then you yourself will see the benefits.

Photographs from Holy Mother's Birthday Celebrations in January 2024





Swami Vivekananda and Mayavati Advaita Ashram

By Swami Shamananda on 17th February 2024

Mayavati is the only branch which Swami Vivekananda visited, because during that time no other branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission existed in India. The idea of founding a branch centre at Mayavati began when Swamiji was visiting the Alps in Switzerland. During that visit he thought of starting a branch in the midst of mountains in the Himalayas. Swamiji's British disciples, Mr. and Mrs. Xavier responded to the call and started looking for a place in Almora. But since Almora was too crowded, they began looking for a place elsewhere where there would be solitude. They found a place situated at 130 kms. away from Almora, which was a tea plantation. They brought the land. March 1899 was the beginning of Advaita Ashrama. Swami Vivekananda visited Mayavati along with Swami Shivananda, another of his brother disciples, in 1901 and stayed there for 15 days.



Why did Swami Vivekananda name this Ashrama at Mayavati, Advaita Ashrama? One reason is, because he was very fond of Advaita philosophy, and the second reason is, he wanted at least one branch centre which is fully dedicated to the Advaita philosophy. Another reason is, he wanted a place, where there would be no religious confrontations and Universal and pure truth would be taught. Swamiji said this about the Ashrama: "The purpose is to train secrets of truth and to bring up children without fear and without superstition. They shall not hear about The Buddha, the Christ, Shiva or Vishnu; none of these. From the beginning, they shall learn to stand up on their own feet. From their childhood they shall be taught that God is the Spirit and should be worshipped as Spirit".

That is the reason, why there is no ritualistic worship or ceremony at Advaita Ashrama. Swamiji himself said, "It will be doing violence to the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta to worship any image or picture or to practice any religious ceremony or ritual other than Viraja Homa (a sacrifice done before the sannyasa ceremony). The important thing here is, those who will be taught at Advaita Ashrama will be taught to stand on their own feet. From their very childhood they would know that God is Spirit and He will be worshipped as Spirit- that is the idea".

What did Swami Vivekananda mean by standing on one's feet? Having faith in one's self? Having faith in one's limitless powers? One's limitless nature? He stressed on this kind of faith in our own self again and again. Some of his quotation on this subject are given below.

"All the difference between man and man is owing to the existence or non-existence of faith in himself. Faith in ourselves will do everything".

"The history of the world is the history of a few men, who had faith in themselves, and that faith calls out the divinity within".

“Look back on yourselves from the state of the amoeba to the human being; who made all that? Your own will. Can you deny then that it is almighty? That which has made you come up so high can make you go higher still”.

“True religion comes not from the teaching of men or the reading of books; it is the awakening of the spirit within us, consequent upon pure and heroic action”.

“Have faith in yourself first, that’s the way. Have faith in yourself. All power is in you. Be conscious and bring it out. Say, I can do everything”.

“True faith and true religion means awakening our true Self. Those who have awakened to their own spirit alone can stand on their own feet”.

To fully grasp the meaning of Swamiji’s words, we have to read them again and again. By doing so, by and by we shall understand their true import. Swami Vivekananda spoke about Advaita Ashrama in the following words:

“In whom is the universe, who is in the universe, who is the universe; in whom is the soul, who is in the soul, who is the soul; knowing that Truth -- and therefore the universe -- as our Self, alone extinguishes all fear, brings an end to misery, and leads to infinite freedom.

“Wherever there has been expansion in love or progress in well-being, of individuals or numbers, it has been through the perception, realisation, and the practicalisation of the Eternal Truth--the oneness of all beings. Dependence is misery. Independence is happiness. Advaita is the only system that gives us complete control over ourselves, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run, attain to absolute freedom.

“Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it has not been more operative and useful to mankind at large.

“To give this ONE TRUTH a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expiration. “Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practiced nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone”.

There are many buildings in the present Advaita Ashrama. The main building and the quarter for monks. In front of the main building is the office of the Prabuddha Bharata. The editing of this magazine is done at Mayavati, while the printing is done in Kolkata. There is also a guest house and a hospital. All these are surrounded by greenery and mountains. To the north, one can see the Himalayan range. In the Ashrama we have a vegetable garden, a pond, and an orchard. I have just told you, why the Advaita Ashrama is in the Himalayan mountains. Once, we had a monk as a guest and I was taking him to a place, to show him. As we were going up in the mountain trail, there were trees on both sides, green lush and above us was the sun which was very strong. Then the monk said, in the Vedas it is stated that the trees and the nature around are all vibrating and this is what the Vedas meant. Whether we are aware of it, whether we feel it or not, actually we get an impact of that. It has also been scientifically proven, that when we stay close to nature, surrounded by trees, a part of our brain becomes active, and we feel at ease because of that. For this reason, the Ashrama is located in the mountains, close to nature, away from people. So that it makes the ambiance peaceful and congenial for meditation. Sri Ramakrishna himself prescribed that one should practice spiritual disciplines in an isolated place in the beginning.

In the Chandogya Upanishad, there is the story of Satyakama. The story tells, how Satyakama took four hundred cows from his teacher, which were quite lean, and was asked to return when they became one thousand. He spent several years in the midst of nature rearing the cows until they turned to one thousand, and suddenly a cow came to him and said, 'we are one thousand now, let us go back to the house of our Guru.' That cow began to teach Satyakama about Brahman. Then when they were in a fireplace the following night, the fire started speaking to them. What I am trying to impress upon you all is that, nature speaks to us. Now think - The first rishis - where from did they gain so much of knowledge? There were not so many written scriptures then. There were two sources- the first was nature and the second was they themselves.

Swami Vivekananda said, none can teach you, none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher by your own soul. The real knowledge comes through communion with nature. That is why, Advaita Ashrama is located close to nature. It is difficult to find a similar Ashrama in India. For the last two years, Mayavati Advaita Ashrama has been conducting spiritual retreats for the guests during the guest season. These retreats give an opportunity to practice spiritual discipline for the devotees in the midst of nature, in the Himalayas. Every time devotees from very far come and join the retreats. One will be impressed to find the earnestness about spiritual life among the Indian people.

What devotees can learn from nature depends on their degree of spiritual evolution. The more worldliness recedes from the heart of men, the more purified one's heart becomes, more will one be able to commune with nature. That nature itself shows man it's own true nature, Sri Ramakrishna said, pure mind and pure intelligence is same. The scripture called Advaita Deepika says, the only way to get enlightenment is through purity of heart. Christ also said, blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Now, how to purify the mind. We have seen, all religions speak about the importance of purity of mind. The path for purification of heart according to Buddhism is called "The eightfold noble path." To have:

Right views,
Right thoughts,
Right speech
Right actions,
Right livelihood,
Right efforts,
Right mindfulness, and
Right concentration.

If we conduct ourselves in the right way and lead the right lifestyle, it will purify our heart and lead us Godward, and then we shall truly understand what God is. It has taken two million years for development of mankind from homo sapiens to the modern man.

What has brought about that development of man? What is that force? It is not that something from outside has helped the development. It is something which is found inside man. Our progress means that we are not getting something new, rather, we are manifesting something which is already within us. Just like, from the seed you get the plant and the flower. Everything is contained within the seed. When it is manifested as plant or flower, we see the outer manifestation.

Process of evolution means manifestation of the true nature, concealed within man. There is nothing unknown to us, only that it is being gradually manifested in this world. Spiritual problems mean that we need to know what is hidden, but we cannot clearly express in words. What is hidden, cannot be perceived by mere intelligence. It is not something physical, or material. What is limited is material, but what is unlimited is spirit. What is unlimited has no shape, and what has no shape cannot be known. Because knowledge imposes a limit on things and only then we can know it as something. It is for this reason that, whether you call it as spirit, or Atman or Brahman or God, it is something that cannot be known. Sri

Ramakrishna said, the only thing that cannot be expressed is Brahman. One cannot know it with the mind, but those who have achieved purity of mind can realise it. In fact, many people have realized Brahman. For that reason, we have to lead the righteous lifestyle. Because, if we do not lead a righteous lifestyle, our mind won't be purified, and we won't be able to reach enlightenment.

The fact that somebody has led a righteous lifestyle shows that he/she has advanced to that level. Whether it is being done consciously or unconsciously, everybody tries to manifest this divinity. Swamiji said, "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy - by one, or more, or all of these - and be free. This is the whole of religion."

He also said, "Religion is the manifestation of divinity already in man". It is for this reason that religion is not just to believe in God, but to become God. When one realises truly that God is within oneself, then comes the end of religion.

Swamiji also said that end of all religion is to realise God in one's soul. When one does that, then one attains freedom. What we truly are, is God in evolution. This evolution will continue until that God fully manifests in us. When God manifests, then we will realise that we are God and this world is also God.

Those who live in the world, have to take both- The world and God and according to their strength they will do what they think is the best. The important thing is to continue in this search. The quest for the spirit is a long journey. What is guiding us in this path is God who dwells in us. Let us walk, until we reach the final destination. After staying for forty years in India, I feel that the history of India is a religious history. When men first came to India, religion was already with them. That religion which sprang in the Vedic age and the age of the Upanishads has continued without break till now. Therefore, the religious disposition has taken a deep root in the minds of Indians.

Once a young woman from South India came to Mayavati and stayed there for a few days. When I looked at her face, I was amazed. Because, her face showed features which were very religious. Typically, to have such a religious countenance, one should have undergone spiritual practices for a long time. But she already had that religious countenance. Perhaps she had cultivated such qualities in her previous life. We also see such faces when we visit temples in India, where many people go for worship. It is because such devotees with a religious temperament existed in India in large numbers that religious traditions have sustained in India for such a long time without any break.

In India, householder devotees are greater than monks. That is because, without the support of householder devotees, the monastic organisations can not be sustained. On the other hand, if there are no monasteries and temples, where will the householders go for peace of mind? The first monastery of the Ramakrishna Mission, which was founded in Baranagar, was founded for this reason. A bird needs both its wings to fly. If one goes to many places of pilgrimages in India, one will find many monastic organisations and temples. One should remember that these monastic organisations are supported by many devotees. Swami Vivekananda said, the backbone of India is religion and as long as she doesn't forget religion, she will live for long.

• Thought of the Month •

I believe in thinking independently. I believe in becoming entirely free from the holy teachers; pay all reverence to them, but look at religion as an independent research. I have to find my light, just as they found theirs. Their finding the light will not satisfy us at all.

- Swami Vivekananda

• Story to Remember •

The Distant Inheritance

There is a man in utter poverty. With great difficulty he is carrying out his living. When he is in this condition, a multimillionaire has been travelling and somehow he came in contact with this person in a passing manner, and that man of unlimited wealth leaves in his will his entire fortune to this man as a legacy and he says in his will that this man has to come to the place where the rich man was living and establish his identity and claim this fortune. And he also says where the man is to whom he is leaving the will.

Then the rich man dies and the solicitors who have got the will in their hands, send word to the poor man that he has to come there and get the wealth. News reaches him, You are the richest man in the world. You have inherited unlimited wealth and unlimited property. Now this man knows that he is a multimillionaire. So he will have no wants. He can buy anything that he wants. But at the moment he is actually penniless. He has to work hard for his livelihood. In his present condition he cannot even get bread by merely saying that he is the richest man. Yet, undeniably it is a fact that he is the richest man, though he is not able to make use of his wealth. We all too are Nitya Shuddha Atman. But if a mosquito bites us we get malaria and have to go to a hospital and take quinine. Yet, it is the real fact that we are Satchidananda Atman. This fact is true at all times. But practically it is of no use. We are unable to make use of it, because our condition is such.

Now what does this man need to? Suppose the place where he has to reach in order to claim the will is 5,000 kilometers away. Now he has to work hard to meet his expenses of travel. Nobody will trust him and advance him money, simply because he says that he is the richest man in the world. He has to work hard and earn his passage-money. It may take him six months or even two years. And then he has to purchase the ticket and undertake the trouble and face all the hazards in the travel, and when he actually reaches the place and proves his identity, the fact of his being wealthy then turns into a concrete, practical, effective, living fact.

Fact is there always. Even before he reached the place where he has to claim his wealth, he is the richest man. Similarly even now the fact is there that we are the Satchidananda Atman. But if the self-same fact has to become a vibrant, thrilling and vital experience and fully effective, Sadhana needs to be performed. Sadhana is the claiming of the wealth on the actual spot. Unless this is done, the fact of his being wealthy is useless to him. That is the condition of the Jiva, who is in full possession of the knowledge that he is the richest man. Such knowledge is useless to him until the condition of the will is fulfilled.

What are the conditions to be fulfilled? Doing hard labour, earning passage-money, and undertaking the journey and reaching there are the conditions to be fulfilled. And what is that in our context? That is Yoga or Sadhana and everything that Yoga implies.

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