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日本ヴェーダーンタ協会ニュースレター

# The Vedanta Kyokai

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

## Monthly Calendar



## Birthdays

### Swami Saradananda

Monday, Jan 10

### Swami Turiyananda

Tuesday, Jan 18

### Swami Vivekananda

Wednesday, Jan 26

Zushi Retreat Celebration

Sunday, 20 Feb

## Kyokai Events

### • January Zushi Retreat •

#### Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, Birth Celebration

Sunday, January 16th

Mangalariti, Chanting, Bhajan 6 AM  
Puja, Food Offering, Flower

Offering, Reading from 11 AM

#### 'Mother's Method of Teaching'

Talk by Swami Medhasananda

Lunch / Afternoon Session  
Reading, Stories about Mother,  
Devotional Songs

All, are welcome to attend!



## ⌘ Thus Spake ⌘

*"Religion is realization; not talk, not doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes." ... Swami Vivekananda*

*"For me there is no Hindu and no Muslim. With all I am at peace. The God residing in us renders us incapable of hate and prejudice." ... Guru Nanak*

December 2010 Zushi Retreat

### "Bondage and Freedom"

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda

We can see everywhere the expression of the desire for freedom. We see mothers trying to prevent their small children from walking or running by themselves so to avoid their falls. Children, however, instinctively want to walk or run alone. Children want freedom and cry when their mothers do not allow them to go on by themselves. Later on, when children come of age to go to school, their mothers, fathers and teachers want to exercise controls over their behaviors that young children obviously would rather not have. And when children grow up to be young men and women the tradition has been that parents would look for a suitable husband or wife for them, but now young men and women want to choose their life partner without interference from their parents. Here too it is a matter of freedom. Likewise, after marriage, the wife wants to control the husband and vice versa, while each wants to enjoy their own freedom. Old people also want freedom as they do not like being dependent on their children or hospital personnel. When they suffer from some disease, they pray to God

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## **Bondage and Freedom** [from page 1]

to release them from this world of suffering. So desire for freedom is the highest wish of people, above desires for good food, dress and other enjoyments.

Even animals have the same instinct; for instance a bird suffers if we put it in a cage for our pleasure and create a condition of bondage even though food and shelter are assured for the bird. If we allow the bird to fly away free, how happy and glad it will be!

### **Which Freedoms?**

Freedom has become a universal idea since the French revolution around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>. century. The slogan of the French revolution was: equality and liberty. Since then, with few exceptions, the concepts of equality and liberty have influenced every political system of every country. For example, the Constitution of India states that the Indian Government will ensure political, economic, social, religious freedom and also freedom of expression.

Political freedom means that no country should be ruled by another country. Japan had the bitter experience of being ruled by another country, by USA, for about seven years after the second world war. And India had the ill luck of being ruled first by the Muslims and then by the British for about one thousand years. The British tortured, exploited and inflicted such humiliations to the Indian people that they suffered very much because of the foreign rule.

A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, who was spiritually, intellectually, ritually distinguished and very energetic, used to pray to Sri Ramakrishna: "Thakur, I do not want knowledge or devotion, nor do I want any spiritual experience or even liberation, I sincerely want only one thing: let me die in a free India." Sri Ramakrishna granted his prayer and before that monk passed away India became free.

Political freedom is necessary as it is important for the self-development of the persons, as individuals and also as a group. Social freedom means that no section of the society should oppress or exploit another section of the society. For example, in India there was so much caste oppression and in the USA there was legal oppression of black people by white people. Economic freedom means that everyone should be entitled to an opportunity to earn their

livelihood and live nicely. Intellectual freedom means that everyone should be free to express one's opinion, this also includes freedom of the press. Religious freedom means that every religious community should be free to practice its own faith. Yet sometimes that does not happen. For example, in the West Catholics try to dominate other sects and in Russia the Greek Orthodox Church tries to dominate. In Japan state Shintoism tried to dominate Buddhists during the Meiji Restoration in the latter nineteenth century.

### **Ideal Freedoms**

Now let us imagine that there is an ideal country where all the above freedoms, political, social, economic, intellectual and religious, are granted and constitutionally guaranteed. Will the people of such a country enjoy a sense of fulfillment? Will they feel fully satisfied with all these freedoms ensured?

Quite possibly, no, they won't. Because despite enjoying all of these freedoms, people will still feel a sense of bondage, not externally, but internally. People are bound by the shackles of their own desires and passions: by greed, by anger, by egotism and by jealousy. At least some people would feel that unless freedom from desires and passions was achieved their lives could not be fulfilled and they could not be truly happy and peaceful in spite of all the other freedoms enjoyed. Pondering this reality, people will come to realize that the root of all their suffering is this repeated cycle of births and deaths. After being born as a human being, one eventually realizes that all troubles, desires, evil propensities of mind, disease, old age, death, fear, hatred, anxiety, are the cause of one's suffering.

A moral person then wants to become free from the evil tendencies of the mind. And a spiritual person wants freedom from desires and liberation from the repeated births and deaths. So an ideal country would be one where there is not only striving for political, social, economic, intellectual and religious freedoms, but also where there is striving for freedom from desires and repeated births and deaths. Spiritual desire means the desire to become free from evil desires and to become free from repeated births and deaths.

### **Religious vs Spiritual Freedom**

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## Bondage and Freedom [from page 2]

There is a difference between religious freedom, the freedom to practice one's own religion, and spiritual freedom, which is freedom from desires and from repeated births and deaths, otherwise known as liberation. In our congregation, a spiritual congregation, we concentrate on spiritual freedom.

Let us ponder as to why all people, in every country and of every historical era, feel the basic urge for freedom at different stages of life? It is because our real nature is Atman, which is eternally free. Atman is eternally pure, wise, joyful, and eternally free. Our real nature is freedom and that is the root of our desire for freedom at every level and in every aspect. But only a very few people are given to realize that real freedom is spiritual freedom, and that all other freedoms are inferior, temporary and finite.

Swami Turiyananda said that people who really want spiritual freedom are very rare. Most of us suffer from a dichotomy, a pull towards two opposites: a swinging between freedom and bondage. On one side we really want a family life, the love of friends and relatives, money, name and fame, love of the world, and on the other hand we also want freedom. On one side we have our Shiva nature (eternally free), and on the other side we have our Mahamaya nature (bondage). Our suffering comes from these opposing natures.

### Bondage of Desire

Our condition of bondage is caused by Mahamaya, binding us with desires. Although our real nature is eternally free, we are caught in bondage by Mahamaya. Why does Mahamaya, our mother, bind us, Her children? Because She wants to play. The joy of God is infinitely greater than the ordinary joy of the world. Mahamaya knows that if Her human beings should taste the joy of God, then no one would want to have a worldly life and Mahamaya would not be able to play any more.

The Bhagavad Gita analyzes beautifully how our mind is bound: 'The three Gunas of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas born in Prakriti, bind down the immortal, eternally free soul to the body in its embodied state. Among these, Sattva is luminous and harmonious due to its essential purity. It binds the soul, O sinless one, with the feeling "I am happy, I am full of knowledge". Know Rajas to be passion-based, and

productive in longings for unattained objects and attachment for those in one's possession. It binds the (action-less) soul, O son of Kunti, by entangling it in action through the feeling "I am the doer." As for the Guna known as Tamas, it is ignorance-born and is productive of delusion in all beings. It binds the soul with the obsession of a disposition characterized by negligence, indolence and sleepiness.'

Our ego is at the root of our bondage, under the influence of spiritual ignorance that is Maya. Ego means I-ness and my-ness, which is limited to our body and mind, without any reference to our Atman. I-ness and my-ness is the ignorant, unwise, finite, shallow, inferior "I".

### Three Attachments

How is our ego limited to our body and mind? We often identify ourselves with our body, with those who are related to our body and with the things we love. These three attachments; body, family and relatives, and the things we love, grow from the root of our ego. Love itself is not bad; it is not an obstacle to freedom; rather, it is noble, if it is universal. But problems start when love is focused on a particular person or on particular things: then love becomes an obstacle to freedom. Swami Turiyananda gave a beautiful example: "When you bathe in the Ganges or in the ocean, millions of tons of water are on and around you. You do not feel any pressure from all that water, but if just a pot of water is placed on your head, then you feel the burden." Accordingly there is no feeling of pressure, of bondage, if universal love is there, but if love is only focused to someone or something then you feel the burden. So when love is focused it leads to bondage; when love is universal it leads to liberation.

It is said that among animals, monkeys display the greatest parental love and attachment. Should her cub die the mother will still carry it even though its flesh is gone and only the skeleton remains. However, if the mother's life is jeopardized, she will not even hesitate to abandon the skeleton. It is also to be noted that only human beings have the concept of bondage and freedom; other animals do not have it. Animals have their own intelligence and emotions, but not conscience; so they cannot compare the condition of freedom with that of bondage. Only human beings make such comparison and understand that the condition of

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## Bondage and Freedom [from page 3]

freedom is much better than the condition of bondage, so that they strive for that.

### Let Go of Attachments

How to get rid of the bondage? A king once asked this question to a monk. The monk agreed to teach him how to get freedom and led the king to the hall of the royal palace. The monk then asked the king to catch hold of a pillar, which the king executed. "This is bondage" the monk commented and then asked the king to let go of the pillar; once the king complied the king commented: "This is freedom". So it depends on us whether we want to continue holding fast to the pillar while crying that we want freedom, or whether we actually let go of it and get freedom. So it is up to us to let loose of attachments and become free, but sometimes we hold on so tightly that we cannot.

We hold husband, wife, and children so tightly, and at the same time we cry that we want freedom! The above example may be furthered by adding a man holding on to the pillar and at the same time wanting to let loose of it. He was not able to let loose of the pillar and he cried for help. Hearing this some people came and pointed out to the man that he was the one holding onto the pillar and he should, therefore, be the one to let it go. But the poor man retorted that he was just not able to let go. At this point another person came, saw the whole thing, and then hit the head of the person with a stick. Because of the pain the man finally let go of the pillar. The person with the stick represented the Guru. And sometimes it is Nature that gives us shock therapy, creating a situation of such utter suffering that we seek to be free from bondage as a result. In either case, however, it is God who acts through both the Guru or Nature.

The drama of life is the continued repetition of our becoming attached and falling into trouble with no end to suffering because of it. The cycle of rebirth is due to desires, which are followed by some actions (karma); then karma gives some results, with some of our desires fulfilled and others not fulfilled. Then new desires come, we want again to experience a new kind of joy, or we want to avoid undesired experiences. As our desires are not fulfilled in this life and with old age our body is in too weakened a condition to satisfy our desires, that is why we have to discard of our old body and get a new one. More lives are needed in order to satisfy the unfulfilled

desires of the previous life and also to reap the fruit of the actions we performed before.

### Rebirth

How does rebirth take place? We are formed by gross body, subtle body and inside it there is Jivatman. With death our gross body is discarded, destroyed, and cannot be reborn. What is reborn is our subtle body with Jivatman in it. After passing away the departed soul lives for a short time in a spirit body. Then it goes to heaven or to hell to enjoy or suffer the actions performed in the past life. According to one view, it is said that if one performed mostly good deeds in one's past life and only few bad actions, the soul will first spend a short time in hell and later go to heaven for a longer time. The opposite happens if one did mostly bad deeds and few good ones in one's past life, first he enjoys a short stay in heaven, followed by a longer period of suffering in hell. No new actions or new work, can be performed either in heaven or hell. After exhausting the fruit of one's past life, a new birth as a human being takes place, where the individual strives again for liberation.

When our karma is exhausted by enjoyment in heaven or suffering in hell we again take birth as a human being to seek our liberation. So this human life is called karma-bhumi meaning we can do new works and at the same time we can enjoy and suffer. When one seeks liberation the general meaning is to no longer to have a gross body. One will not be born again with a gross body. This is the general meaning of mukti or liberation: no more birth in a physical body. How to achieve that? First of all one has to become free from desire; desire for worldly enjoyments, knowing that such enjoyments are infinitely less than the joy of God; knowing that the joys of having a family with a spouse and children are infinitely inferior to the absolute bliss of being in the company of God.

### Negative and Positive Concepts

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#### • Thought of the Month •

*The seat of knowledge is in the head,  
of wisdom, in the heart.*

*... William Hazlitt*

## Bondage and Freedom [from page 4]

The desire for Mukti, or liberation, generally has a negative connotation because it implies the desire to be free from the sufferings of human life. Taking a human birth involves great sufferings on both physical and mental planes with doubt, anger, pride, greed, and fear. As Buddha said, "sarvam duhkham", or "all is suffering", even enjoyment is full of suffering. Because all is suffering, we seek nirvana or mukti or liberation. This is a negative concept of mukti. But the positive approach is that I want to experience the joy of God, the joy of being in the company of God. Otherwise if my goal is only to get rid of suffering, then again we seek worldly enjoyments until the new sufferings come; like one of the two birds of the Mundaka Upanishads, or, as I said earlier, until nature hits us in the head with a stick.

Desire for divine joy or the desire to be in the constant company of God is a far greater, positive concept of Mukti, which gives us real motivation to cope with whatever struggle is necessary - the struggle to purify our mind; the struggle to control our desires; the struggle to restrain ourselves and the struggle to grow love and constant remembrance of God. Thus one becomes inclined to accept the challenge of spiritual struggle. Without positive motivation the spiritual struggle wanes and no joy is found in spiritual practice. By achieving Mukti through spiritual struggle and God's grace, one becomes free from desires and thus avoids being reborn in a gross body since one's karma has been exhausted, burnt up, also by the grace of God.

## States of Mukti

What is the state of Mukti? One idea of Mukti is being in the company of God and another is to be one with God. Living with God is the aim of the bhaktas, the devotees who want to "taste sugar", while becoming one with God is the goal of the jnanis, the followers of the path of discrimination and knowledge who want to "become sugar".

Let me explain this state of Mukti of which there are four kinds:

- 1) Saalokya Mukti means liberation allowing living in the same region as God.
- 2) Saaroopya Mukti means liberation having a form similar to God.
- 3) Saameepya Mukti means liberation living close to God.

4) Saayujya Mukti, the Mukti of the jnanis means becoming one with God.

It is said that devotees already experience the first three kinds of Mukti of the bhaktas because:

- 1) This universe belongs to God, so the devotees live in the same region as God
- 2) God has already created human beings in His own image, as the Bible says
- 3) God is everywhere, so devotees live close to Him.

However there is little awareness of this on the part of many devotees. We do not understand the implications or significance of these kinds of Mukti. For this awareness, for this understanding, spiritual struggle is necessary.

It is the fourth kind of Mukti mentioned above, Saayujya Mukti, becoming one with God, that the Jnanis long for.

## Classes of Mukti

Again, there are three classes of Mukti. One is mukti while living in a body; what is known in Hindu scripture as 'Jivanmukti'. This means not being affected by desires and the world, always full of bliss and feeling one's connectedness with God both inside us and outside us. A person of such experience is called a Jivanmukta. Another type of mukti is Videha Mukti or liberation after death, which is a gradual process. According to one Upanishad, when a pure soul leaves the gross body, first the subtle body goes on to a 'Heaven of the Ancestors'. These ancestors are celestial beings and not our common ancestors. From there the subtle body goes to the 'Heaven of the Moon' and from there on to the 'Heaven of Sun'. Subsequently follows the heavens of Brihaspati, Hiranyabarbh, that is of Brahma, also known as Sri Ramakrishna Loka, or Krishna Loka, or Buddha Loka, where they remain eternally. Why this gradual passage through the different regions? That is because they have to be born once again if, during this process, some desires surfaces. Finally there is Saayujya Mukti of the Jnani. That means becoming one with the Supreme Reality, one with Brahman, one with God.

In some case, even after attaining Brahmaloka souls, known as Bodhisattva in the Buddhist tradition, are born again out of compassion for a suffering humanity. Or God wants them to take a new birth in order to help fulfill His mission by His

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## • A Story to Remember •

### The Shopkeeper

A heavy-built tall man was passing through the market of Kufa, his step firm and assured. He had fine figure and sun-burnt face; encounters of the battle-field had left their marks on him and the corner of one of his eyes was slit, and his cloth was worn and tattered.

A shopkeeper in the market threw a handful of sweepings onto the man to amuse some friends. The man continued his walk in the same assured and firm manner, without raising an eye-brow or looking towards the shop-keeper. When he went away, a friend of the shopkeeper asked, "Do you know who you have just insulted?"

"No, I did not recognise him," the shopkeeper replied. "He was a passerby like thousands of penniless others passing this way everyday. Pray tell me, who was this man?"

"Strange! Didn't you recognise him?" the friend gasped. "He is Malik Ashtar, the renowned Commander-in-Chief of Ali."

"Strange!" he pondered. "He was Malik Ashtar! The same Malik whose bravery turns the heart of lion into water and mention of whose name makes his enemies tremble with fear?"

"Yes, that was Malik himself"

"Woe is me! What have I done? He is sure to punish me severely. I must run to him immediately to apologise and beg him to forgive my behaviour."

Saying this he dismissed his friends and locked the shop in a panic. Running he saw Malik turning towards a mosque. He followed him into the Mosque and saw that he had started praying and waited till he finished his prayers. Humbly introducing himself saying, "I am the man who insulted you to impress my friends and I am sorry to have acted so disrespectfully to you"

Malik stood and looked down at him, "But, by Allah, I did not come to the mosque but for your sake. I realized that you were a very ignorant and misguided man to give trouble to people without any cause. I felt pity on you and came here to pray for you and ask Allah to lead you onto the right path." Momentarily he added, "And, no, I was not considering the intentions you feared of me."

Taken from: Anecdotes of Pious Men by Br. Mutahhari

### Bondage and Freedom [from page 5]

will when He himself appears as a human being. There are examples like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Premananda, who were summoned by God to take birth in order to help with His mission. This class of souls, known in Hindu scripture as Ishwarakoti, are totally free from desires even from their birth. Their only desire is to help humanity by showing the path to liberation.

### God's Grace

Our final point is mukti and God's grace. Sri Ramakrishna repeated several times that one cannot attain liberation without God's grace no matter how hard one struggles. So the grace of God is very important for liberation. Sri Ramakrishna also said that God's nature is like a child's. A child may have some jewels and refuse to give them to those who ask for them while, at the same time, giving away his jewels to someone who never asked for them. So what is a devotee to do? Should we just keep quiet and wait to receive God's grace?

No, one cannot depend on God in that way,  
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## Bondage and Freedom [from page 6]

because such dependence on God is the last word in spiritual practice. One should strive for spiritual awakening by performing spiritual practice; by purifying one's mind; by controlling mind and senses; by discriminating; by growing love for God with prayer and chanting His name and meditating on Him. In that way one should prepare oneself and present one's case before God for His consideration. And, finally, if God wants, mukti will be granted.

Controlling desires, becoming free from karma and its effects, and attaining Mukti is so hard and difficult that we sometimes feel that there is no hope for us. It seems as soon as we control one desire, another springs up to bind us. It is said that when God incarnates and appears as a human being, He grants liberation to many people. Jesus said again and again that he was authorized by God to grant spiritual realization to anyone he wants. Once Holy Mother commented to Jigin Ma, one of her woman attendants, that she had seen many monks, but that none could be compared to Sri Ramakrishna. Jigin Ma observed that the reason for this was while average monks and sadhus want to attain their

own liberation, Sri Ramakrishna came to give them liberation.

Another time while Holy Mother was staying in Calcutta a young monk advised a young boy to go to Holy Mother and ask for initiation from her. The young boy was not convinced, but having great respect for Swami Turiyanandaji, he decided to ask Turiyanandaji if he should take initiation from Holy Mother. When the two presented the question to Turiyanandaji he became rather excited and told the boy that the young monk was a true friend in advising him to take initiation from Holy Mother. "Holy Mother has come to grant liberation to people," he said. "Why are not thousands and thousands coming to seek liberation from Her?" This means that Holy Mother incarnated to grant liberation and people should have taken advantage of this rarest of opportunities.

Even though Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna, these two Divine Incarnations, have left their mortal bodies, their spiritual power is still very active and here even now. Anyone who wants to take refuge in Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother and is willing to perform a little serious spiritual striving will get liberation by their grace. That was the advice given again and again by the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. •

## Impressions from Swami Medhasananda's 8<sup>th</sup> Talk on Vedanta in Kumamoto

by Ms. Yukie Ashida / Executive Committee

The theme of the subject this time was "Knowing the Nature of Your Own Self or Atmanam Vidhi", but stated more simply as, Who am I and Why am I Alive? As humans we are knowledgeable about so many things, yet so many of us are not sure of who we are or why they were born into this world. I believe that people are born to this world to be happy. Therefore, I need to know about myself and the purpose of my own life in order to live better and be truly happy. Swami Medhasananda's talk explained some of this to me.

To know about ourselves, we should know what personality is based on. Maharaj said that our personalities are "souls", which are eternal and do not change, unlike our ever-changing bodies and minds.

How can we know our real nature or soul then? I learned that it is important to first "discriminate" and practice "introspection" in our minds. Our soul, the source of our personality, is the inner self or "atman," and the only

existence in reality; all of the other stuff, our bodies and minds, are non-existent. Furthermore, I understood that our souls serve as "co-ordinators of the Self" and are reborn many times (reincarnation) until we realise our Self. Only when we attain realisation does the cycle of birth and rebirth end. I learned that in other words, "we live to know our true nature".

There was a key phrase in Maharaj's words: "Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman)", which represents the true nature of humans. I learnt that bliss is something to look for inside and not outside of us. I deeply felt that if we understood this fact about human nature, it was important to manifest the "divinity" in each and every one of us. I learnt that Brahman is real existence, knowledge and bliss. Brahman is "Absolute Truth", omnipresent, eternal, infinite and not confined to time or space or causation.

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## **Impressions** [from page 7]

I understand that in our day-to-day life one should remember that "no one is a stranger" and that everyone and everything is connected at the soul-level. I would like to live my life, come what may, recalling Maharaj's words "I am Brahman" and thinking positively.

## Vedanta Society Celebrates Christmas Eve 2010 **"Worshipful Character of Jesus Christ"**

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda

"Jesus Christ was born more than two-thousand years ago. Apparently he was the son of a carpenter. But there have been many carpenters and sons of carpenters; no one remembers them and no one worships them. There must have been something unique in the character of Jesus which made him worshipful; which made Him immemorial on this earth. The reason for His immortality is His spiritual character, His divinity. God's special power was manifest in Him. He was destined; He was empowered by God to lead humanity; to show humanity the path to peace, the path to spiritual illumination. This is why people all over the world worship Him and celebrate His birthday. Many people take refuge in Jesus Christ for mental peace and spiritual realization.

"Our Order, the Ramakrishna Order, has a special relationship with Jesus. First of all, the actual founder of our religion, Sri Ramakrishna, believed in the harmony of religions. Though He was a Hindu ascetic, He practiced the paths of both Islam and Christianity, concluding in visions of Muhammad and Jesus. Jesus appeared to Him and merged into His body. So in our missions, our headquarters and our branches we celebrate Christmas Eve. Additionally, and although it transpired unknowingly, the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, including Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda and other great leaders, took their vows of monastic life on Christmas Eve. Later on they were very happy to realize that these solemn vows were taken on such an auspicious day.

## **Hidden Ideas**

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*I will study the teachings of the Vedas more deeply and try hard to practice them each day to better understand the path to truth. I thank Maharaj for the wonderful talk and am very grateful that I had the chance to join in and receive his guidance.*



"His Sermon on the Mount is very famous, and He gave a wealth of spiritual advice to His disciples on that occasion. Today I would like to examine Jesus' teaching: 'Blessed are the pure at heart, for they shall see God.' The simple meaning is that those people who have purity of heart are very lucky, because they shall see God. Blessed in the dictionary means 'lucky', but there is also an implication of grace. In this statement from

Jesus certain concepts and important ideas are there. We shall try to focus on the ideas hidden in this statement."

"One idea is 'blessed', another is 'those people' (the lucky ones), then 'purity of heart', and finally the 'seeing of God.' In this statement, 'those people' are those who have faith in God; who have love for God; who have respect for God; and those who want to see God; realize God.

"What is God? God is the Supreme Reality who is all pervading; who knows everything; who sees everything; who is all powerful; who creates, sustains and destroys; who is eternal; who is infinite and pure consciousness. He is that which lives in us in the form of our soul, the Self, and also in others. He resides in every being and everything.

## **Who Wants to See God?**

"In the statement, 'Blessed are the pure at heart, for they shall see God.' Why do devotees want to see God? Why do they want to realize God? Some people have a tremendous love for God, and out of this love

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### **Character of Christ** [from page 8]

they want to see God. They have no want, no desire, no prayer; they just want to love God for the sake of love. Then there are others who want to overcome their sufferings and get joy and peace. They want to become free from ignorance. They want to become wise. They want to become immortal by transcending death. They want to enjoy freedom by becoming free from bondage. By seeing or realizing God, one can get eternal joy; one can become wise; one can become immortal; and one can become free. Devotees want to see God just for these great experiences.

"Is the realization of God a very common, natural thing, or is it something special? As we know, there are many who want to see God, but few who succeed. Who can realize Him? Jesus says they are 'pure at heart'. Purity of heart and purity of mind are the same thing. It follows that the reason we cannot see God; though He is very near to us; though He is inside us; He is outside us; He is omnipresent and therefore everywhere; is because of impurities of the heart and mind. What is the condition of seeing God? Purity. What is the criteria of seeing God? Purity.

### **What is Purity?**

"What does 'purity' mean? In the ordinary sense, purity of water would mean water free from dirt, germs and bacteria. This we call clean or pure water. Similarly, a pure mind would mean a dirt-free mind. What is the dirt of the mind? They are pride, anger, greed, delusions, etc. Why are these called dirt of the mind? Because they are injurious to the mind and obstruct our vision. Dirty spectacles impair our vision. Dirty water is injurious to our health. In exactly the same

way the dirt of mind is injurious to our spiritual health. It obstructs our right thinking, right action and right emotion. So we must clean our mind; make our mind pure.

"A scientist is more concerned with reasonings of the brain, while the devotee is more concerned with the mind. A spiritual person must control anger, greed and other dirt. The root of this dirt is our small 'I'; our finite 'I'; our bound 'I'; our selfish 'I'; the 'I' that focuses on body and mind conditioned by time and space. This 'I' is confined within myself, my relatives, my friends and the things dear to me. This 'I' causes pain, suffering, fear, anxiety and frustration.

"Above all, these impurities obstruct the vision of God who is inside us. So we have to eliminate this errant idea; this small concept of oneself. We have to transcend the small 'I' and to replace it with the big 'I'; the finite 'I' with the infinite 'I'; the ignorant 'I' with the wise 'I'; the bound 'I' with the free 'I'; the selfish 'I' with the unselfish 'I'; and then only can we become free from the dirt and become clean and pure at heart.

### **Achieving Purity**

"Cleaning the water, or cleaning our spectacles or our room is easy. Physical cleanliness is easy. The cleaning of mind is much more difficult and a long and sustained effort is necessary. This effort is call spiritual struggle. The reason for this is that the layers of dirt are very thick. Our focus on our body and mind is very deep rooted.

"Those are indeed lucky people who are pure at heart. Luck generally means achieving something by chance. There is a chance factor in good luck that cannot be reached by effort. Now is purity of heart a matter of

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## **Character of Christ** [from page 9]

chance in achievement? In a few cases we must say, yes, it happens like that. As you know the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were all very pure at heart from their very childhood. Then again, the explanation for this is that they had completed their struggles and had achieved purity in their previous life. They are born pure from their childhood.

## **The Struggle**

"For most people, however, the purity can only be achieved through long and continuous struggle. Sometimes after a little struggle we may achieve purity, but some trouble may reappear and another fall may come. So we must struggle and work on pride, anger, greed, delusions and so on for a long time. Not only purity of mind, but purity of body, purity of vital energy and purity of senses; because they are all interrelated.

"How do we perform this struggle? We do it by controlling body; controlling senses; controlling mind; by practicing virtues and avoiding vices. Jesus suggested many practical ways to practice these virtues. The more one walks toward the east, the more the west will become distant. Likewise, the more one practices positive things, the more those negative and harmful things will be left behind. So Jesus said "Blessed are those who do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." It is the struggle for a virtuous and moral life.

"Jesus also said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God' and "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." In this way one may practice humility and egoless-ness. Jesus advises again and again to practice love, compassion and forgiveness to counteract selfishness, anger and jealousy. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is another very famous quote from Jesus. "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." If you forgive men then the heavenly father will also forgive you. He said, 'Bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you.'

Muhammad also said the same thing in the Quran. Sri Sarada Devi said, 'My son, if someone injures you, do



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not ask God to give him punishment. Rather, forgive him, and better is to pray for him.'

## **Purity, Surrender and Perfection**

"Jesus advised to replace this desire for worldly things with the desire for spiritual things. The desire for material assets need to be replaced by the desire for spiritual assets. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal"; meaning these are eternal qualities.

"Importantly, while we struggle for purity of heart, we should shun those things which will cause the dormant, impure tendencies in us to arise again. Thus, in our struggle for spiritual purity, we cannot indulge in sensual pleasures at the same time. Because in such

cases, the spiritual struggle ends in vain. So Jesus advises, '... and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil ...'.

"Such purity of heart cannot be achieved without deep faith in God and dependence upon God. We need to surrender our everything to God, so Jesus said, '... Lord thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven ...'

## **Our Original Nature is Perfect**

"This struggle for purity will finally lead us to the struggle for perfection, and this is the goal of our human life. Obviously, when we become perfect, we will realize God. Who is our ideal in this struggle for perfection? It is God, Himself, who is our ideal in the struggle for perfection. Jesus says, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.' Our very nature is perfect, so naturally we have to become perfect. It is interesting that people in churches talk so much of the sin within us. Yet in the Bible, I have not found anywhere where Jesus says that we are all born of sin and, therefore, all sinners. I have found no such statement by Jesus in the Bible. Rather, He says the Kingdom of Heaven is within us.

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## **Character of Christ** [from page 10]

"Likewise, Vedanta says that our very nature is purity. The dirt of our minds has been superimposed upon us. Just remove the dirt and the perfection of our original nature will shine. This is why Swami Vivekananda said that it is a sin to call man sinners. So on this Christmas

perfect, as Jesus was perfect; as God is perfect; and as our very nature is pure and perfect. Then we shall be blessed with the realization of God. •



Eve let us pray that we become pure at heart and

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