

Voice of the Worldwide Vedanta Movement

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In This Issue:

- Q&A with Swami Bhuteshananda
- Practice of Spirituality
- Worship the Visible God

and more...

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*Cover: Home of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Boston,
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About Contributing to *Global Vedanta*

Global Vedanta will gladly consider articles, poetry, humor, etc., submitted for publication. The subject matter should be religious, cultural, or educational and must appeal to a general and broad-minded readership. Articles should be entertaining, and yet substantial, and be within 2000 words in length. Articles accepted for publication *may* require a release signed by the author.

EDITORIAL

HAPPINESS: THE GOAL OF LIFE

There are what are called Gross Domestic Product (GDP) indexes. GDP is a monetary measure of the market value of goods and services produced by a nation during a specific period of time. Reading these indexes, we arrive at conclusions pertaining to who is progressing, rich, and happy. Then there is the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a measurement of human development. A long healthy life, being educated, and having a decent standard of living are key factors of the HDI. To make things even better there is a 'World Happiness Report' whereby countries are ranked according to their quality of life. Nevertheless, it has been found that higher GDPs or HDIs do not absolutely correspond with higher happiness, nor does a low GDP or HDI score invariably make one unhappy. People want happiness—it is human nature; no one wants unhappiness—that would be abnormal. These indexes are also subject to hundreds of political, national, social, educational, psychological, and cultural factors in addition to the environmental and economic, which complicates the readings. Happiness is basically subjective and to have an objective index runs into much difficulty. The pursuit of happiness has been the dream of saints and philosophers, politicians, and statesmen, collectively, as well as everyone who can dream and hope, on the individual level. It is a fact that many aspects of life flourish in happiness; unhappiness and sadness bring a host of mental and physical problems. Some aspects of life, however, do flourish in struggles and troubles.

Pleasure and Happiness

People have been trying to understand what happiness is for thousands of years, with each solution adding further to its mystery until life has become mysterious and mystifying. What makes one person happy makes another sad. If we

could have understood what life is, then our conceptions of happiness and experience would have changed drastically. We would have pursued happiness more intelligently. People are simply driven by nature to avoid the unpleasant and to pursue the pleasant. Happiness happens to be a means to understand life; it cannot be an end in itself. Besides, in this world of the dualities, joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure, and so on are a natural fixture. Nobody gets one thing only for any length of time. Things change, and sometimes suddenly; the wheel revolves. This world would not be a nice place if we got stuck in either endless happiness or endless misery. We wouldn't evolve psychologically, spiritually. Swami Vivekananda says, "The goal of life is knowledge", and "pleasure is not the goal." Pleasure and pain are changing and are impermanent. Besides, this pursuit of happiness through pleasure has been tried for thousands of years. The error we make is to equate happiness with pleasure. Pleasure is short-term, while happiness is long-term; pleasure is visceral, while happiness is mental; pleasure is 'take', while happiness is 'give'; pleasure is 'alone', while happiness is social (groups); pleasure is from substances that lead to addiction, while happiness is not from substances; pleasure is dopamine, while happiness is serotonin. Another method is that of appreciating micro-experiences of happiness. Being good and doing good to others is one of the easiest ways to happiness.

The Bhagavad Gita enumerates types of happiness according to the three gunas (qualities of the body and mind) thus, "That which is like poison in the beginning but comparable to nectar in the end, and which comes from the purity of one's intellect—that joy is spoken of as born of sattva; that joy is referred to as born of rajas which, arising from the contact of the (sense and motor) organs and (their) objects, is like nectar in the beginning

but like poison at the end; that joy is said to be born of tamas which, both in the beginning and in the sequel, is delusive to oneself and arises from sleep, laziness, and inadvertence." (18.37-39).

Acquiring Knowledge

To acquire knowledge is the goal of life. One must first know that the goal is within—in the core of one's being. We somehow get the impression that the journey is in the external world, running to libraries and so on. Swamiji says, "The infinite library of the universe is in the mind". Knowledge is in consciousness and the nature of this consciousness is bliss. To reach the goal, knowledge, there are various methods, called Yogas. The easiest one for most of us is through Karma-Yoga. Karma is the most powerful instrument we all possess. Swami Vivekananda, in his opening lines in *Karma Yoga* says, "The word Karma is derived from the Sanskrit word *Kri* to do; all action is Karma. Technically, this word also means the effects of actions. In connection with metaphysics, it sometimes means the effects, of which our past actions were the causes. But in Karma Yoga we have simply to do with the word Karma as meaning work." Life, which includes personalities, skills, thinking, willingness, loving, and so on, is the result of karma. Look around and we see that this world is made for and by karma. If we stop doing karma, we die. We are born to work. Mostly karma is subconscious and a little of it is conscious work. If this is the case, then it will be a hopeless trap and we would be caught in a loop from which there is no escape from karma and its effects. But this is not the case, if we know how to work. The *Bhagavad Gita* declares, "*Sarvam karma-akilam partha jnane parisamapyate*; O Partha, all karmas in their totality culminate into knowledge" (4.33).

Continued on next page...

Incorrect and Correct Life

If we don't know how to work or have incorrect knowledge of life and inadequate knowledge of what constitutes karma, then we become trapped and then the world works on us. "The bee came to sip honey, but its feet stuck in the honey-pot, and it could not get away." This is the reason that whatever karma we do binds us even more. If we look around, we will also find many bee carcasses in the honey. We should have been warned. To know how to work is Karma Yoga. From karma comes knowledge, and knowledge gives real happiness. If we selfishly work for happiness derived from pleasure, we get trapped. If we can use the great power of karma, we can have the power of the world with and in us. Instead, "We are all beggars. Whatever we do, we want a return. We are all traders. We are all traders in life, we are traders in virtue, we are traders in religion. And alas! We are also traders in love."

Life cannot exist in a vacuum, nor can karma. Life and karma are the obverse and reverse of the same thing. Modern knowledge proves that all life is linked to every other life; thus, we also are linked to all others by karma. Each individual life-karma is like a center operating in ever-increasing concentric circles. These concentric circles are intersected by

other, innumerable, concentric circles of an almost infinite number of centers. The patterns are mind-boggling, complex, staggering to the imagination. As life and karma are dynamic so are these concentric circles. We are connected to each and everything around us—animate and inanimate! We are one with the universe! The power of the universe flows through the center of each and every concentric circle. As karma leads to knowledge, these concentric circles lead us to knowledge of the universe.

Thus, karma performed correctly will purify the 'center' by being performed consciously. Purification means becoming unselfish. Swami Vivekananda sums up his first chapter of *Karma Yoga* thus, "We may all hope that some day or other, as we struggle through the path of life, there will come a time when we shall become perfectly unselfish; and the moment we attain to that, all our powers will be concentrated, and the knowledge which is ours will be manifest." The Bhagavad Gita (6.21) states, "When one experiences that absolute happiness which can be intuited by the intellect and which is beyond the senses, and being established (thus), this person surely does not swerve from Reality." This is the goal—absolute happiness by experiencing the Reality, the Truth of life. This is the real index of happiness—not that of an imperfect economic model.



Why is that when you pray to God you're praying. But when He talks to you, you're crazy.
—*Healing Through Humor* by Charles Frances Hunter p. 60

Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother Says

- *Do you know how to live in the world? According to time, place and persons, we should adjust and live, and be flexible.*
- *There is no treasure equal to contentment and no virtue equal to fortitude.*
- *You see, my son, it is not a fact that you will never face dangers. Difficulties always come but they do not last forever. You will see that they pass away like water under a bridge.*
- *Don't be afraid. Human birth is full of suffering and one has to endure everything patiently, taking the name of God. None, not even God in human form, can escape the sufferings of the body and mind. Even Avatars, saints, and sages have to undergo the ordeal of suffering, for they take upon themselves the burden of sins of omission and commission of ordinary human beings and thereby sacrifice themselves for the good of humanity.*
- *If you are always engaged in some work, you can maintain a balanced mind and thus, through work, the binding nature of the work is removed.*
- *The mind is everything. It is in the mind alone that one feels pure and impure. A man, first of all, must make his own mind guilty and then alone he can see another man's guilt. Does anything ever happen to another if you enumerate his faults? It only injures you.*

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Q&A WITH SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA CONTRIBUTED BY SWAMI VIMOHANANDA

How to concentrate the mind — Analysis of the mind — Difference between dhyana and nididhyasana — What places are most suitable for meditation? — Aspects of japa — The mind as guru — Control of speech — Swami Bhuteshananda's tapasya — How Swami Turiyananda meditated — Three signs of spiritual progress — Becoming like our ideal — Dealing with desires — How to cultivate yearning.

Q: It is very difficult to concentrate the mind. What should we do?

A: When we try to meditate, various kinds of thoughts keep emerging and disappearing. It is not surprising that we lose ourselves in those thought currents. Only after some time do we become aware that we have been thinking of everything except God!

This indicates that we are not being alert while meditating and are being dragged in various directions by our minds. By cultivating the habit of introspection, we can prevent ourselves from being swept away. We can then gain control of the mind; it can no longer rule over us.

I have noted one peculiar characteristic of the mind. It seems to be divided into two parts—one part witnesses the activities of the other part. If the part which is the witness always keeps an eye on the part which is being witnessed, we cannot be swept away by our thoughts. That is why Swamiji has said that while trying to meditate, the first step is to let the mind drift and see where it goes. He says: "Let the mind run on and do not restrain it; but keep watch on your mind as a witness watching its action. This mind is thus divided into two—the player and the witness. Now strengthen the witnessing part and do not waste time in restraining your wanderings. The mind must think; but slowly and gradually, as the witness does its part, the player will come more and more under control, until at last you cease to play or wander." (CW, 6: 135)

It is extremely difficult to stop all mental modifications. Also, some people think that if they do this, they will become inert. But this is not true. We can never become inert. On the other hand, when we stop all thought waves, we will attain samadhi.

The mind ceases to function in the following three states: when we are unconscious, or in *sushupti* (deep sleep) or in samadhi. In *sushupti* this happens of its own accord, while samadhi has to be attained through sadhana.

Q: What is the difference between *dhyana* and *nididhyasana*?

A: *Dhyana*, or meditation, is achieved when the mind is directed in an unbroken flow toward the object of meditation. This is achieved through repeated attempts to concentrate on only one object and ward off all other thoughts. But *nididhyasana* is achieved when the mind becomes absolutely calm.

The Mundaka Upanishad (2.2.4) says: "Om is the bow; the atman is the arrow; Brahman is said to be the mark. It is to be struck by an undistracted mind. Then the atman becomes one with Brahman, as the arrow with the target." Here by the atman is meant the jivatman or the individual soul. Only if the mind is undistracted, that is, concentrated, can the jivatman reach Brahman. Here, "an undistracted mind" denotes the process of meditation. And "when the arrow becomes one with the target" denotes *nididhyasana*. The aspirant has to maintain this state by effort. Only by repeated practice can one become established in this state.

Q: What kind of place is suited for practising meditation?

A: Meditation can be practised in mountains, fields, and riverbanks. The seaside may not be conducive due to the strong winds there. Again, a completely windless place is also not good. A cave is a very good place for meditation.



Swami Bhuteshananda
1901–1998

Mahapurush Maharaj said that one shouldn't meditate in the open when there is bright moonlight. The reason for this is that in such an environment the mind is attracted to enjoyments.

Again, different holy places are conducive to practising different kinds of spiritual disciplines. The Himalayas are favourable for meditation on the Atman. On the other hand, Puri is good for those who want to worship the Lord through devotional singing (*bhajan-kirtan*).

The main requirement is earnestness. If that is present, one will succeed even when conditions are not favorable. Just look at the Master's life; he performed all kinds of sadhanas living in Dakshineswar alone. We should hold on firmly to God and practice spiritual disciplines sincerely. If the mind is concentrated, meditation follows spontaneously.

I remember an incident in this connection. When I was in Uttarkashi, I noticed that a young monk would keep on changing his place of meditation. An old monk asked the young monk the reason for this. The monk replied: "Wherever I sit, I hear birds in the trees making various types of sounds. That disturbs me." At this the old monk said: "My son, try to stop the noise your mind is making. Actually, that is the cause of your disturbance."

Q: Why are we asked to perform japa inaudibly and without moving our lips and tongue?

A: To control the mind. As the mind begins to come under control, japa becomes inaudible and the movement of the tongue and lips is reduced. In the beginning, we adopt the reverse process. However, in order to make the mind concentrated, it is best not to move these two.

Q: It is said that before doing japa on a rosary, we should perform japa on our fingers. Why is that?

A: Yes; doing japa on the fingers is best. The more we take the help of external things, the more will our minds be distracted.

Q: Often, when we try to do a great deal of japa, we utter the mantra at great speed. Is that recommended?

A: No. Repeat the mantra at the normal speed. The number of times you repeat the mantra is not important. What is important is concentrating the mind on God at the time of performing japa. Just remember that you all belong to the Master!

Q: It is said that the mind itself is the guru. What does that mean?

A: You have not expressed it correctly. What happens is that finally, the mind becomes the guru. That means, when the mind becomes absolutely pure, whatever thought arises in it is as good as the guru's instructions.

Q: How can we understand that the mind has become pure?

A: Whatever thoughts or emotions you consider impure now, when they absolutely cease to arise in your mind, you can be sure that your mind has been purified.

Q: What is meant by control of speech?

A: Not talking unnecessarily. When I was in Uttarkashi, I once decided that I wouldn't talk unless it was necessary. After

this I noted that I didn't have to speak for days on end. If we are alert, we will notice that we actually need to speak very little.

Q: Maharaj, then it seems that you lived there completely alone! (laughter)

A: Why so? Many other monks used to live there.

Q: When you went to beg for your alms, didn't you have to say "Om namo Narayan Hari"? (It is customary for monks to say this when they beg for alms.)

A: That too wasn't needed. I would just stand in line, and when my turn came, would extend my bowl. Then I would be given alms without my asking for it. I would eat it sitting on the banks of the Ganga and then return to my cave.

Q: Didn't the other monks talk with you and with each other?

A: They would talk, but not unnecessarily. And if someone talked a lot, the other monks didn't like to mix with him. So, you see, I didn't have to talk very often. I hadn't taken a vow of silence. Control of speech is achieved when one stops talking unnecessarily.

Speech is just the gross and outward manifestation of thought, which is more subtle. It is easy not to talk, but very difficult not to think! Thought waves keep arising in our minds one after another. And what is surprising is that we often lose ourselves in our thoughts! Only after some time do we realize that we were thinking absolutely useless thoughts. This happens when we are not alert. We are then pulled by the mind in whichever direction it takes us. If we keep a watch on the mind, it will not be able to rule over us.

As I have mentioned before, the mind seems to be divided into two: the subject mind and the object mind. When the subject mind is alert, then there is no chance of our losing ourselves in unwanted thoughts. That is why Swamiji asked us not to start meditating as soon as we sit down to perform our spiritual practices.

For some time, we should just be the witness and see how the mind is acting.

Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda) was like an unsheathed sword! I have seen him toward the end of his life; then also he was extremely alert. He would sit as you see him sitting in his photograph that is worshipped—absolutely straight. He would never lean against anything. Generally, he would speak very little, but when any spiritual matter was discussed, he could talk for hours. And he was deeply meditative. He would meditate deeply on the Upanishadic verses.

Whatever you do—whether it's practicing discernment, studying the scriptures, or performing spiritual practices—try to completely lose yourself in that activity. Some rare souls don't have any need to study the scriptures, but for ordinary people like us, it is very much necessary.

Q: How to understand whether we are progressing toward God or not?

A: As we progress, three things will happen: Our love for God will increase; our doubts about spiritual truths will be removed, and our attraction to things that are inimical to spiritual progress will lessen.

Q: I couldn't understand this clearly, Maharaj.

A: To understand this is not so easy. For that you have to free your mind from attraction and aversion. The mind that is colored by these two can't grasp these signs. You can understand these things only when the mind becomes calm.

Q: Regarding the first sign: it is quite difficult to know whether our love for God is increasing.

A: That's true. The third sign is easier to detect. It is easier to know whether our attraction for worldly pleasures is decreasing or not.

Q: You also said that as we progress, our ideas about our ideal will become clearer day by day. Will this happen by itself?

A: Yes. It is an internal process. The fact is, we have embarked on a very long journey. Progress is slow. Again, sometimes we experience retrogression. So, it becomes extremely difficult to know how much we have really progressed. But as we progress, we will become more and more like our ideal. If the Master is our ideal, we will gradually become pure and spiritual like him.

Q: Can we attain yearning for God-realization by making the right kind of effort?

A: Is there any other way? Tell me, can there be another way?

Actually, if we feel that we are progressing gradually, then we gain faith and strength. If we are climbing a mountain and have to climb only uphill, it will be very difficult for us to proceed. But if our path also has some downhill stretches, we will find the journey easier. The most important thing is to have faith and keep alive the will to progress.

Also, if we see a brother monk striving hard, our enthusiasm for sadhana increases. We think, "If he can do it, why can't I?" This is one of the great advantages of living in a monastic order.

Q: Sometimes we find that after progressing in spiritual life to some extent, we are unable to go forward. It seems we become stuck somewhere. Why does this happen?

A: It is the ego which creates this obstacle.

Q: But was it not with the help of this ego that we progressed initially?

A: You progressed with the help of your pure "I."

Q: Isn't it very difficult to progress without experiencing something? We have only heard about spiritual truths and have to pin our faith on that.

A: What you say is true. However, what is the way out? We will have to strive with what we have in hand. What is the use of thinking about that which we don't have?

Q: The devotees try to remember God constantly, while the jnanis discriminate "not this, not this". Are these fundamentally the same?

A: Yes. The first one is a positive approach, while the second one is negative. The jnani tries to reach the ultimate Reality by negating everything.

Q: How to keep intact or increase our spirit of renunciation?

A: By discrimination.

Q: Can it be done even without being in the company of someone who has burning renunciation?

A: Why? Don't you have (tapping with his finger on the right side of his forehead) this? If you always discriminate and try to remember what the aim of human life is and why you have become a monk, everything will fall in place.

Q: Holy Mother has said, "If you become desireless, you can attain illumination right now." (*The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, p. 310)

A: Yes, I tell the devotees something similar. I say, "There is a simple way in which you can attain peace." At this they eagerly ask me to reveal that secret. In answer I say: "Don't desire anything; don't expect anything." On hearing this, they begin to sulk! But this is the only way. Desires lie at the root of all kinds of disquietude.

Q: What lies at the root of desires?

A: Awareness of imperfection. Whenever we think that we are unfulfilled, we seek fulfilment. If we can realize that we are already perfect, we won't desire anything.

Q: All worldly desires can never be satisfied. So, what is the way out for those who have such desires?

A: They can either lament or try to seek real fulfilment. We automatically give up lower things when we attain something higher. A person who has tasted

sugar candy syrup won't like molasses. So, if we can't get rid of desires, it is better to desire higher things.

Q: When we were at home, we thought that jobs, relatives, and worldly connections are impediments to spiritual progress. We have left all that, but still why can't we genuinely yearn for God?

A: Do you think that yearning is some kind of ripe fruit that will fall from the tree into your lap? True yearning comes only as result of performing sadhana for many lives. And what is needed most is God's grace. According to the Master, yearning for God-realization is like the eastern horizon turning red. Then one knows that the sun of God-realization will soon rise. (See *Gospel*, p. 674) So if a person has true yearning, he has achieved everything.

(In a very affectionate tone) Try to find out why you don't yearn for God, and pray to the Master that you may have yearning. Spend more time in prayer, japa, and meditation.



Sri Ramakrishna Teaches

God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, times, and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole-hearted devotion.... One may eat a cake with icing either straight or sidewise. It will taste sweet either way.

PRACTICE OF SPIRITUALITY

SWAMI APARANANDA

"The practice of a spiritual path leads the human mind to know the Divine Reality which transcends the limitations of time and space." says Sri Ramakrishna.

The question of acquiring learning about the Ultimate Reality or Truths of the internal world became a subject of study in ancient times. It led the human mind to proceed onward after gaining the knowledge of the transitory nature of the world, where everything is ever-changing and perishable, including life. All the hopes and aspirations of life built up one after another suddenly disappear. Any person who is a genuine seeker of truth could not stop there. It was quite natural for some great minds in ancient times to follow the path of '*neti, neti*' (not this, not this), to find out the ultimate cause of the universe through a process of elimination.

It is evident from the Upanishads that in finding out the Ultimate Reality by following the path of '*neti, neti*', people quickly became introspective. These spiritual aspirants recognized that, of all the entities of the world, it was their own body and mind which were directly connected with the world, rather than other external objects, which were not the connecting links for gaining knowledge. It would therefore be possible to acquire the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality of the universe if one would continue the search for it through the knowledge of the powers of one's own body and mind.

The investigation and understanding of "What am I?" became the aim of the follower of the path of knowledge. Just as by pressing one grain of rice from the cooking pot with the fingers one sees if the entire pot of rice is cooked, so also, if one becomes aware of Divine Consciousness (Brahman) existing within oneself, one can see that the same Divine Consciousness exists in all animate and inanimate objects.

The spiritual seekers who followed either the path of knowledge or the path of devotion had to give up, to a certain

extent, their usual belief in the reality of the universe of experience.

The complete cessation of all mental modifications through the process of intense renunciation makes a person eligible to attain the super-conscious state (*nirvikalpa samadhi*). The nature of the spiritual being, the answer to "What am I?" is ultimately revealed to a follower of the path of knowledge, by the method of practicing '*neti, neti*' after learning it from a competent preceptor or knower of the truths of the Upanishads.

The visible universe of experiences including all animate and inanimate objects, is founded on Divine Consciousness—Absolute Existence, Absolute Consciousness and Absolute Bliss—as experienced by the seers of Truth. This visible universe of experiences has come into existence by the creative power of the Divine Being—a conscious, cosmic, intelligent Being known as Brahman. That Divine Being, although existing everywhere, expresses Itself most prominently in a human being—as the Innermost Self. This interest in the Self, Soul, or Atman is pivotal to Vedanta philosophy. The realization of the eternal Self is the goal of all activities of humankind. Whatever takes one towards that realization is spiritually beneficial. Vedanta is human-centered, but a human is nothing but the embodied soul. The paths of yoga help a human being to unfold that Divine Consciousness, revealing the true nature of the inner world.

The yoga system of Patanjali (author of *The Yoga Aphorisms*) deals in detail with the internal mental world. This visible universe and its experiences are nothing but a display of mental modifications, and behind it exists the Purusha (the free Soul). Practical courses to realize these divine truths are discussed in the aphorisms in detail.

It can be inferred from the Upanishads; the path of knowledge was fully developed before every aspect of the path of

devotion had reached its completion or perfection. The path of devotion uses the method of '*iti, iti*' (this and this) to find out the ultimate cause of the universe through a process of inclusion.

The traveler on the path of devotion, as denoted by the opposite drive of 'this and this', has the actual knowledge of the transience of the world, still he or she believes in God, the Creator of the world, and has the conviction of the reality and existence of the world as created by God. Consequently, a devotee looks upon the world and all things and persons in it as related to God and considers everything to be their very own. Anything that stands in one's way to relate to God is shunned. The immediate aim is to discover a divine form of God as one's religious chosen ideal and to acquire more and more absorption on that divine form with a loving attitude, meditation on that divine form, and also to perform every action for God's delight.

As the devotee goes deeper and deeper into meditation, one perceives the divine form of God to be more and more living within the mind (in the beginning the 'form' appears within the mind for a short while and disappears, but through practice the image of the divine form in the mind stays for a longer time and at last becomes steady.) When the devotee is able to retain the living form of the divine for a long time, one's knowledge of the reality of the physical world changes. Just as in the waking state one perceives the objects all around, similarly, in the meditative state one perceives the "divine form" as a living one, and the meditative world appears to be more real and true. The devotee vividly perceives the waking state to be nothing but a mental creation! The mind becomes very steady; one does not feel any restlessness in the mind. The mind becomes very strong and shortly after, through the grace of God,

Continued on next page...

THE RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA SOCIETY OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

A BRIEF HISTORY BY SWAMI TYAGANANDA



The Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Boston is a branch of the Ramakrishna Order founded by Swami Vivekananda. Headquartered at Belur Math on the

bank of the sacred Ganges in India, the Ramakrishna Order has branches all over the world. Started in 1909 after the ones in New York (1894) and San Francisco (1900), the Boston branch is the third oldest in North America, and the first founded after Swamiji's *mahāsamādhi*.

New England's Vedanta roots go back to 1893 when Swamiji came to Boston and taught Vedanta even before he became a renowned religious figure at the World Parliament of Religions held



in Chicago that year. After the Parliament, he stayed for extended periods in various parts of New England, including Boston. Later, two other disciples of Ramakrishna, Swamis Saradananda and Abhedananda, visited Boston and gave classes on Vedanta.

In 1909 Swami Paramananda built the first permanent Vedanta center in Boston, and in 1941 Swami Akhilananda moved it to its present location at 58 Deerfield Street. After Akhilananda's passing in 1962, Swami Sarvagatananda led the Vedanta Society for forty years until his formal retirement in 2002. Swami Tyagananda is currently the head of the Vedanta work in Boston.

In addition to Sunday satsangs, weekday scripture classes, and bi-weekly meditations, the Society continues to provide spiritual guidance and help to whoever seeks it. All the programs at the center are also streamed live and available as audio podcasts. Besides Harvard and MIT, where the Vedanta swamis have been chaplains for decades, the Society is also a resource to students on campuses throughout Massachusetts.

Practice of Spirituality continued..

God's divine form becomes all-pervading consciousness, and the physical world disappears. One feels one's unity with one's divine ideal for good and abides in the world of "joy". Or it may be said that

the very intense love for one's chosen ideal shows that divine plane, and being merged in it, one experiences oneness with God, as did the *Gopis* of Vrindavan (companions of Lord Krishna).

These are the two ways laid down by the scriptures for the spiritual aspirants treading the path of knowledge and of devotion to reach their ultimate goal.



WORSHIP THE VISIBLE GOD

SWAMI ASHOKANANDA

From a talk given on November 21, 1954

If you say, "Well, we are small people, average people, why talk [of] all these big world problems and so on and so forth?" My friends, even a small man is part of this big world. It is through the aggregation of these small units that this big world has been made. If I, a small man, behave with those who are my friends and relatives in the right spirit, if you, the small man behave accordingly, and if he, the small man behaves accordingly, then just imagine how these small men can change the world. And this is what is called for. When I look at my friends and my relatives, my family members and so on and so forth, if I can see in the face, in this face the face of God; if whatever I do unto them I feel I am doing unto God Himself, visible God, visible God sitting at dinner, visible God for whom I clean the room, visible God to whom I am addressing my words, if I can fill myself with that spirit, with that attitude; and you do it, and he does it, and she does it, the whole world will change in no time.

If you think there is an easier way of doing it you are welcome to it. I don't see any other way. I do not see any other way. Man will have to take to this religion, whether they like it or not if they want to save themselves. I do not see that man is doomed to destruction in very near times. Men would live on. And if man lives on, and man has too much vigor in him, then



Swami Ashokananda
1893–1969

men must take recourse to these means of living true religion. And I repeat again, I see this as the only religion which will appear as true and effective in this age.

Wisdom has, for its most important ingredient, the sense of proportion. Ancient souls we are. It gives us the status of looking the whole universe in the eye, even the Lord Himself, if need be. If I were a being of 70–80 years – nothing – just a speck of dust. But not me, who required 8 millions of births to become what I am!

—Swami Ashokananda

A devotee took a tiny banyan seed and said to Mother, "Look, Mother, it is tinier even than the tiniest seed we know. From this will spring a giant tree! How strange!" "Indeed, it will," Mother replied. "See what a tiny seed is the Name of God. From it in time come divine moods, devotion, love, and spiritual consummation."

—Sri Sarada Devi



The census taker comes to the Jones house. "Does Louis Jones live here?" he asks. "No," replies Jones.

"Well, then, what is your name?"

"Louis Jones."

"Wait a minute—didn't you just tell me that Jones doesn't live here?"

"Aha," says Jones. "You call this living?"

— <https://www.theje.com/rain-and-the-census/>

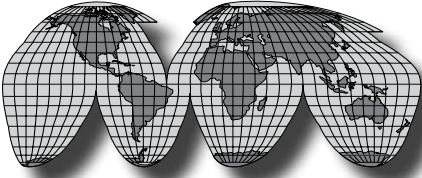


Once there was a golfer whose drive landed on an anthill. Rather than move the ball, he decided to hit it where it lay. He gave a mighty swing. Clouds of dirt and sand and ants exploded from the spot—except the golf ball. It sat in the same spot. So, he lined up and tried another shot. Clouds of dirt and sand and ants went flying again. The golf ball didn't even wobble. Two ants survived. One dazed ant said, "Whoa! What are we going to do?"

Said the other ant, "I don't know about you, but I'm going to get on that ball!"

—*Healing Through Humor* by Charles Frances Hunter p. 172

VEDANTA NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



**Celebration of Durga Puja
in Mauritius 2023**

The Ramakrishna Mission, Mauritius, celebrated the Durga Puja October 20th to 24th 2023 with the usual fervor and devotion. The colourful life-size image of Mother Durga was made in-house and the decorations were procured from India. Swami Krishnarupananda, head of the Mission in Mauritius conducted the worship of the Mother during those five days. The worship was also accompanied by an evening Arati of the Mother which has now become popular among the devotees, devotional songs and discourses. The puja culminated with Vijaya Dashami on the last day, namely on the 24th October 2023, with the immersion of the image of Goddess Durga at the Flic en Flac beach. About 4,800 people attended puja this year. Every day, food prasad and sweet prasad were distributed to all devotees present.

The Mission also celebrated Lakshmi Puja and Kali Puja on October 28 and the November 12, 2023 respectively.

Annual Book Exhibition in Mauritius 2023

After a gap of three years owing to the Covid pandemic, the Ramakrishna

Mission, Mauritius, was able to organise its Annual Book Exhibition over three days from the 2nd to 4th December 2023. This exhibition aims to encourage people to read books and grasp the lofty messages that are transmitted in these books. The books came from a wide panoply of mission publications covering important themes like Prayers, Hinduism, Scriptures, Philosophy, Values, Culture, Yoga and Meditation. Books for children were also available. Many people like to come to the exhibition to discover the various books available and enjoy the unique spiritual atmosphere prevailing at the ashrama.

Holy Mother's Puja at the Vedanta Society of Northern California in San Francisco, January 1, 2024, Kalpataru Day



*If you must be mad, be it not for
the things of the world. Be mad with the
love of God.*

—Sri Ramakrishna

Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Seattle

The Vedanta Society of Western Washington celebrated Durga Puja on October 22, 2023; Christ Puja on December 24, 2023; Kalpataru Day on January 1, 2024; and Holy Mother's Birthday on January 3, 2024. The pujas were all well attended and streamed live on YouTube.



**Durga Puja
October 22, 2023**



**Christ Puja
December 24, 2023**



**Holy Mother's Birthday
January 3, 2024**

IN MEMORIAM



Swami Manishananda
June 11, 1949 – January 14, 2024

Swami Manishananda (Jim Ramage Austin) passed away at 1:10 am (Pacific Time) Sunday, January 14, 2024. The Swami was suffering from dementia for a few years. For his own safety, and to render professional help, the Swami was housed at an assisted living facility in Bothell, near Seattle, since April 2023. He contracted Covid at the facility and despite the best medical assistance, his body began failing and he finally succumbed to it.

An initiated disciple of Swami Vividishananda, Swami Manishananda was born in Seattle on June 11, 1949. He

graduated from Roosevelt High School in Seattle in 1967. He attended the University of Washington for a brief time before moving to Eastern Washington to live in the wilderness as a recluse for about two years. In the 1970's, he became associated with Vedanta by providentially reading the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* which was recommended to him by the owner of a used bookstore. Swami Vividishananda invited him to live as a pre-probationer at the Vedanta Society of Western Washington (then The Ramakrishna Vedanta Center) in 1973. After his guru suffered multiple strokes Swami Manishananda and others served him with diligent care and love.

Swami Manishananda took his *brahmacharya* vows in 1981 becoming Vinayachaitanya. He was ordained a monk at Belur Math by Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji in 1994. The Swami regularly spoke at the Center and led the singing at the Ramnam and pujas. He was extremely active and talented in many areas. For more than three decades he helped built, maintain, and manage Tapovan, the Society's retreat property near Arlington, Washington.

Swami Manishananda is remembered by all as a friendly and gracious host and was sought after by the young and the old. He was a fine guitarist and tabla player, an avid outdoorsman and fisherman, and above all a dedicated monk who gave his life in service to the Ramakrishna Order.

The Self is never born, nor does It ever die, nor, having once been, does It again cease to be. Unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval, It is not slain when the body is slain. • Weapons cut It not; fire burns It not; water wets It not; the wind does not wither It. • This Self cannot be cut nor burnt nor wetted nor withered. Eternal, all-pervading, unchanging, immovable, the Self is the same for ever.

From the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 2, Verses 20, 23, 24.
Translation by Swami Nikhilananda

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A doctor opened his new office and began receiving patients. His first patient of the day came in and sat down on the examination table, adjusting himself on the white paper.

"Doctor, I hurt all over!" he said.

The doctor looked at him and said, "That's not medically possible. Show me where you hurt."

"It's true!" The patient insisted. "When I touch my leg – ouch! When I touch my arm – ouch!"

The doctor wiped his brow and sighed, "Sir, I know for a fact that your body is fine."

"How can you say that Doctor? Everything hurts when I touch it!"

"Because your finger is broken."

— <https://www.theje.com/the-doctors-new-patient/>



A motorist, after being bogged down in a muddy road, paid a farmer \$200 to pull him out with his tractor. He said to the farmer, "At those prices, I should think you'd be pulling people out of the mud day and night."

"Can't. At night I haul water to the hole."

—*Healing Through Humor* by Charles Frances Hunter p. 170

CONTRIBUTORS



Swami Aparananda is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Mission who was head of the Vedanta Society of Berkeley from 1985 to 2014.



Charles Mathias is a devotee and the Secretary of the board of directors of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Seattle, and a gifted cartoonist and artist. The cartoons contained in this issue of *Global Vedanta* are his contributions.



Swami Satyamayananda is the Minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington and also serves as editor-in-chief of *Global Vedanta*.



Swami Tyagananda is the Swami-in-charge of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Boston, Massachusetts.



Swami Vimohananda is the Minister-in-charge of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada.

"If you practice spiritual discipline for some time in a solitary place, you will find that your mind has become strong, and then you can live in any place or society without being in the least affected by it. When the plant is tender, it should be hedged around. But when it has grown big, not even cows and goats can injure it. Spiritual practices in a solitary place are essential."

—Sri Sarada Devi