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Awake! Arise!

From the Editor ...

Welcome to another edition of AWAKE! ARISE!

Education, as we commonly perceive, is about school and university. They are associated with arts, science, commerce, vocation, etc. For such education society builds schools and colleges, so that intellectual progress and material growth of the nation is ensured.

In a world where erosion of universal friendship has become a common occurrence, spiritual education is slowly losing its grip. To fill this void, concrete, tangible institutions like schools and universities must be built to deliver spiritual teachings in a systematic and orderly manner.

The Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement, in coming forward to provide this form of teaching, has established centres all round the world. Incorporating truths found in all religions of the world with the philosophy of Vedanta, the movement has been instrumental in bringing together people of different faith. It has successfully established 82 centres world wide, promoting harmony and peace amongst man kind and running benevolent activities such as assisting the poor, the needy, the aged, the lowly, the afflicted and the sick .

The Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement of Queensland has been in existence since 1989. The movement, in line with all other Vedanta Centres around the world, has been primarily promoting the teachings of the Vedanta Philosophy and the concept of

Universal Religion as expounded by Sri Ramakrishna, his divine consort, Sri Sarada Devi and their illustrious disciple, Swami Vivekananda.

Currently, spiritual teachings and philanthropic works of the movement are being run from a rented premises and the need to establish a permanent centre has become its prime concern.

The establishment of a centre will bring significant impact to the organization and its activities. A permanent residence will mean a regular point for members and public to meet. It will also mean smooth and efficient running of activities. Most importantly, we will be blessed with the presence of a resident swamiji to guide us with our spiritual learning and practices.

Thousands of years ago the Rig Veda declared: "Truth is one, sages call it by various names." The world's religions offer varying approaches to God, each one true and valid, each religion offering the world a unique and irreplaceable path to God-realization.

The Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Queensland has to play its part in bringing harmony, peace and tolerance amongst different religions, creeds and denominations that exist in this region. The need for a centre cannot be over emphasized. It is now in our hands to actualize the dream. In the name of Sri Ramakrishna, let's gather force to make this dream come true.

Hari Om, Tat Sat.

RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA CENTRE OF QUEENSLAND INC.

Highlights

At the end of May, Swamis Sridharanandaji and Atmeshanandaji visited Brisbane. The swamijis were present for the evening prayers/ arati at the ashram on Thursday, 25th May 2006. On the evening of 26th, Swami Sridharanandaji delivered a talk on the topic, "What is Religion?" at the Hindu Mandir, 1173 Mt Cotton Road, Burbank.

The swamijis were primarily present to hold discussions and briefing with the public on the future development of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in Queensland. Hence, a public meeting was held on Sat, 27th May 2006 at Jamboree Heights State School at 11.30 am.

Welcoming the public, Mr Maha Sinnathamby, the President, said that the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement has been in existence for the past 21 years but to date it has not been able to acquire a permanent place to run its activities from. The time was ripe now for acquiring one, hence the public support is needed.

In his address, Swami Sridharanandaji reiterated the need for a centre in Queensland. Without a place of its own, the continuous operation of various activities of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre will not run smoothly or efficiently. Concerted efforts will have to be directed towards acquiring an ashram, and he urged all to give their undivided support in ensuring this arduous task comes to a completion. The Swamiji requested all to join force so that the next generation may enjoy and benefit the fruit of our labour. As Southeast Queensland is undergoing tremendous growth, establishing a centre will be a timely move, he added. The session concluded with lunch provided by the ashram.

Saturday, 1st July 2006 will see the **2nd Anniversary Concert of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement**. The celebration scheduled to be held at St. Aidan's Anglican Girls School, 10, St Aidan's Way, Corinda, will showcase an evening of spiritual talk and cultural program featuring talented artists in and around Brisbane. This will be followed by a scrumptious vegetarian dinner from renowned Brisbane restaurants.

Tickets are sold at \$40 for family and \$15 for singles. They are available from committee members including the following:

Mr. Som Parkash, Secretary - (07) 3345 7998; som1934@bigpond.net.au

Mr. Shyam Das - (07) 3844 2088, 0412 031 301; targettt@bigpond.com

Mr. Rajah Kunarajah - (07) 3381 9004, 0402 290 607; 10kms@optusnet.com.au

Proceeds from the ticket sales will go towards the building fund. Devotees and well wishers are humbly requested to purchase tickets for the worthy course.

To commemorate the 2nd anniversary function, a souvenir magazine is being produced. If any business organisation would like to put in an advertisement, please contact Rajah Kunarajah (as above).



Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna



Sri Ramakrishna was born Gadadhar Chatterjee in 1836 at Kamarpukur about sixty miles from Calcutta. His parents, Khudiram and Chandramani, were poor and made ends meet with great difficulty.

Gadadhar was the pet of the whole village. He was handsome and had a natural gift for the fine arts. He, however, disliked going to school and when asked why he did not want to go to school, his reply was : The so-called education is for earning money only ; I don't care for this kind of education.

He loved Nature and spent his time in fields and fruit gardens outside the village with his friends. Gadadhar lost his father at the age of seven. He became more serious from now on, but he did not change his ways and habits. For instance, he would not go to school, Instead, he was seen visiting monks who stopped at his village on their way to Puri. He would serve them and listen with rapt attention to the arguments they often had among themselves over religious issues.

Gadadhar had now attained the age when he should be invested with the sacred thread. When arrangements were nearly complete for this, Gadadhar declared that he would have his first alms as a Brahmin from a certain Sudra woman of the village. This was something unheard of ! Tradition required that it should be a Brahmin and not a Sudra who would give him the first alms. This was pointed out to him but he was adamant. He said he had given his word to the lady and if he did not keep his word, what sort of Brahmin would he be then ? No argument, no appeal, no amount of tears could budge him from his position. Finally, Ramkumar, his eldest brother and now the head of the family, had to give in.

Meanwhile, the family's financial position worsened everyday. Ramkumar ran a Sanskrit school in Calcutta and also served as priest in some families. What he earned was pitifully small and he could not send any money home regularly. He decided to bring Gadadhar to Calcutta. His plan was to try to make him study Sanskrit. Perhaps he could also do some priestly work and make some money of his own. Gadadhar arrived, but he lost no time in making it clear that he was not going to study. He, however, did not mind doing some priestly work, not for money but for the pleasure of it.

About this time, a rich woman of Calcutta, Rani Rashmoni, founded a temple at Dakshineswar. She approached Ramkumar to serve as priest at the temple of Kali and Ramkumar agreed. After some persuasion, Gadadhar agreed to decorate the deity. When Ramkumar retired, Gadadhar took his place as priest.

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When Gadadhar started worshipping the deity, he began to ask himself if he was worshipping a piece of stone or a living Goddess. If he was worshipping a living Goddess, why should she not respond to his worship? This question nagged him day and night. Then, he began to pray to Kali - "Mother, you've been gracious to many devotees in the past and have revealed yourself to them. Why would you not reveal yourself to me, also ? Am I not also your son ?"

He would weep bitterly and sometimes even cry out loudly while worshipping. At night, he would go into a near-by jungle and spend the whole night praying. One day he was so impatient to see Mother Kali that he decided to end his life. He seized a sword hanging on the wall and was about to strike himself with it when he saw light issuing from the deity in waves and he was soon overwhelmed by those waves. He then fell down unconscious on the floor.

Gadadhar was not, however, content with this. He prayed to Mother Kali for more religious experiences. He especially wanted to know what truths other religious systems taught. Strangely enough, as if directed by some invisible power, he reached the goals of those experiments in no time.

Soon word spread about this remarkable man and people of all denominations and all stations of life began to come to him. From now on he came to be known as Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and like a magnet he began to attract real seekers of God. He taught ceaselessly for fifteen years or so through parables, metaphors, songs and above all by his own life the basic truths of religion.

He passed away in 1886, leaving behind a devoted band of young disciples headed by the well-known scholar and orator, Swami Vivekananda.

What did Sri Ramakrishna teach?

1. Sri Ramakrishna taught no creed or dogma. His only concern was man's uplift. According to him, there is infinite moral and spiritual potential in man. To develop that potential is man's foremost duty in life. He taught man to strive to develop that potential without wasting time over sense pleasure or religious quibblings.
2. Religions are like so-many paths leading to the same goal, i.e., God. Man reaches his religious goal when he attains his highest moral development.
3. God is both personal and impersonal. It is difficult to conceive an impersonal God, so to begin with, God has to be thought of as a person. Can anyone think of the white color without thinking of a white object? One can look at the morning sun, but not at the midday sun. Similarly, when God is manifest in a person we know what God is like, otherwise God is impersonal and beyond thought and speech.
4. Be in the world but not of it. Perform your duties as well you can, but do not count too much upon the fruits of your action. Rather, surrender them to God. Try to feel as if you are only a tool in the hands of God.
5. Religion is an experience. religion makes no sense unless its truths are experienced. Is your thirst satisfied unless you drink water when you are thirsty?
6. God is everywhere but He is most manifest in man. So serve man as God. That is as good as worshipping God.

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Prayer– its Conditions and Fulfillment

As the Rig– Veda was full of prayers, in ancient India, prayer governed the life of people during the early Vedic period. Over the years, however, when other paths such as Yoga, Meditation, Jnana etc came into being, prayer came to be less emphasized. Among the Vedic prayers only the Gayathri has survived to this day. According to Swami Bhajananda in **Sadhana** - a Commemorative Souvenir, Sri Ramakrishna may be said to have revived the ancient Vedic tradition prayer in the modern age.

The tradition was continued by Holy Mother and several of the Master's disciples, notably by Swami Shivananda, more commonly known as Mahapurush Maharaj. Swami Brahmananda also placed great importance to prayer in his teachings. Even Swami Turiyananda, who generally spoke about knowledge, has in his letters advocated prayer as a means of overcoming obstacles

Being a Disciple of Spirituality, whenever a devotee asked Sri Rama Krishna "Sir, What is the way (upaya)?" his most common answer was "The way is prayer". Again and again, Sri Ramakrishna gave the assurance "**God listens to prayer if it is sincere.**" Even self realisation and God realisation are possible through prayer. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Through prayer the individual soul can be united with the Supreme Soul. Every house has a connection for gas and gas can be obtained from the main storage tank of the gas company. Apply to the company, and it will arrange for your supply of gas. Then your house will be 'lighted' (Gospel p. 205). The company is **God** and the application is the **prayer** .

What is Prayer?

Prayer is not a mere wish. A passing wish, although addressed to God, does not become prayer. Prayer is an intense desire that stems from the deepest longing and acute need of the soul. Everyday a number of wishes rise in the mind. The soul ignores most of these wishes which remain only for a short time in the mind and then disappear. However, there are a few desires which arise out of the acute need of the soul. The soul chooses these by an act of WILL. Such an intense desire supported by a strong will when directed towards God, in the form of a supplication, seeking divine assistance, becomes prayer.

The need for the Divine Grace

We need to seek the divine assistance in the fulfilment of our desires because human effort is inadequate. Seeking God's grace is important because of the inherent limitations of the soul. Every being is limited by time, space and causation. Every living being has also limitations of power, of knowledge and of joy. It is because of these limitations that we are unable to fulfill all our desires. In contrast, God is unlimited by time, space and causation, and He is omniscient, omnipotent and the embodiment of boundless bliss. He can "do, undo or modify" anything as He pleases. Therefore, without the grace of God, however intense a desire may be, it cannot transform into a prayer.

Prayer is an attempt to open the soul to this divine Source of infinite power, infinite knowledge and infinite bliss. This interior opening is not like opening a physical door. Rather, it is like knocking at a closed door to open it for us. The inner door is the door of the heart, and the 'somebody within' is God as the antaryamin, inner Controller, the supreme Self, who dwells in all beings. It is the knocking at the inner door, calling out to the Inner Controller, in a spirit of submission, self-surrender, that is known as prarthana or prayer.

(Adapted from the writings of Swami Bhajananda in '**Sadhana** - a commemorative souvenir' -Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Sikra Kulingram, West Bengal)

Is the Soul Immortal?

(By Swami Vivekananda)

“None has power to destroy the unchangeable” - Bhagavad Gita.

In the great Sanskrit epic, the Mahabharata, the story is told how the hero, Yudhishtira, when asked by Dharma to tell what was the most wonderful thing in the world, replied, that it was the persistent belief of mankind in their own deathlessness in spite of their witnessing death everywhere around them almost every moment of their lives. And, in fact, this is the most stupendous wonder in human life. In spite of all arguments to the contrary urged in different times by different schools, in spite of the inability of reason to penetrate the veil of mystery which will ever hang between the sensuous and the supersensuous worlds, man is thoroughly persuaded that he cannot die.

We may study all our lives, and in the end fail to bring the problem of life and death to the plane of rational demonstration, affirmative or negative. We may talk or write, preach or teach, for or against the permanency or impermanency of human existence as much as we like; we may become violent partisans of this side or that; we may invent names by the hundred, each more intricate than its predecessor, and lull ourselves into a momentary rest under the delusion of our having solved the problem once for all; we may cling with all our powers to any one of the curious religious superstitions or the far more objectionable scientific superstitions but in the end, we find ourselves playing an external game in the bowling alley of reason and raising intellectual pin after pin, only to be knocked over again.

But behind all this mental strain and torture, not infrequently productive of more dangerous results than mere games, stands a fact unchallenged and unchallengeable the fact, the wonder, which the Mahabharata points out as the inability of our mind to conceive our own annihilation. Even to imagine my own annihilation I shall have to stand by and look on as a witness.

Now, before trying to understand what this curious phenomenon means, we want to note that upon this one fact the whole world stands. The permanence of the external world is inevitably joined to the permanence of the internal; and, however plausible any theory of the universe may seem which asserts the permanence of the one and denies that of the other, the theorist himself will find that in his own mechanism not one conscious action is possible, without the permanence of both the internal and the external worlds being one of the factors in the motive cause. Although it is perfectly true that when the human mind transcends its own limitations, it finds the duality reduced to an indivisible unity, on this side of the unconditioned, the whole objective world that is to say, the world we know is and can be alone known to us as existing for the subject, and therefore, before we would be able to conceive the annihilation of the subject we are bound to conceive the annihilation of the object.

So far it is plain enough. But now comes the difficulty. I cannot think of myself ordinarily as anything else but a body. My idea of my own permanence includes my idea of myself as a body. But the body is obviously impermanent, as is the whole of nature, a constantly vanishing quantity.

Where, then, is this permanence?

There is one more wonderful phenomenon connected with our lives, without which "who will be able to live, who will be able to enjoy life a moment, "the idea of freedom?"

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This is the idea that guides each footstep of ours, makes our movements possible, determines our relations to each other - nay, is the very warp and woof in the fabric of human life. Intellectual knowledge tries to drive it inch by inch from its territory, post after post is snatched away from its domains, and each step is made fast and ironbound with the railroadings of cause and effect. But it laughs at all our attempts, and, lo, it keeps itself above all this massive pile of law and causation with which we try to smother it to death! How can it be otherwise? The limited always requires a higher generalisation of the unlimited to explain itself. The bound can only be explained by the free, the caused by the uncaused. But again, the same difficulty is also here. What is free? The body or even the mind? It is apparent to all that they are as much bound by law as anything else in the universe.

Now the problem resolves itself into this dilemma: either the whole universe is a mass of never ceasing change and nothing more, irrevocably bound by the law of causation, not one particle having a unity of itself, yet is curiously producing an ineradicable delusion of permanence and freedom, or there is in us and in the universe something which is permanent and free, showing that the basal constitutional belief of the human mind is not a delusion. It is the duty of science to explain facts by bringing them to a higher generalisation. Any explanation, therefore, that first wants to destroy a part of the fact given to be explained, in order to fit itself to the remainder, is not scientific, whatever else it may be.

So any explanation that wants to overlook the fact of this persistent and all necessary idea of freedom commits the above mentioned mistake of denying a portion of the fact in order to explain the rest, and is, therefore, wrong. The only other alternative possible, then, is to acknowledge, in harmony with our nature, that there is something in us which is free and permanent.

But it is not the body; neither is it the mind. The body is dying every minute. The mind is constantly changing. The body is a combination, and so is the mind, and as such can never reach to a state beyond all change. But beyond this momentary sheathing of gross matter, beyond even the finer covering of the mind is the Atman, the true Self of man, the permanent, the ever free. It is his freedom that is percolating through layers of thought and matter, and, in spite of the colourings of name and form, is ever asserting its unshackled existence.

It is his deathlessness, his bliss, his peace, his divinity that shines out and makes itself felt in spite of the thickest layers of ignorance. He is the real man, the fearless one, the deathless one, the free.

Now freedom is only possible when no external power can exert any influence, produce any change. Freedom is only possible to the being who is beyond all conditions, all laws, all bondages of cause and effect. In other words, the unchangeable alone can be free and, therefore, immortal. This Being, this Atman, this real Self of man, the free, the unchangeable is beyond all conditions, and as such, it has neither birth nor death.

"Without birth or death, eternal, ever-existing is this soul of man."

Books

A large selection of books is now available for purchase. The selection includes, books on Vedanta, Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavadam, Hindu Temples, Hindu Culture, meditation, stories on Hindu mythology, and Yoga. Besides these, there are also books on Daily Thoughts and Prayers and Brief Dictionary of Hinduism (A) - the definitions and pronunciations of 600 terms and proper names.

These books are predominantly works and scholarly writings from well known swamijis including the first and foremost revered, Swami Vivekananda, and many others, as well as numerous eastern and western writers.

All books can be made available either at the monthly meetings or can be ordered in from Sydney at your request which can be bought directly by cash or cheque from:

Vedanta Centre of Sydney
Email: vedasyney@gmail.com
PH: 02 97059050
FAX: 02 97059051

Quotes from the Holy Trinity

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

1. All religions are true. God can be reached by different religions. Many rivers flow by many ways but they fall into the sea. They all are one.
2. There is one whom you may call your own, and that is God.
3. He is born in vain, who having attained the human birth, so difficult to get, does not attempt to realize God in this very life.
4. A truly religious man should think that other religions also are paths leading to truth. We should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions.
5. To become great, one must be humble. The tree laden with fruit always bends low. So if you wish to be great, be lowly and meek

Sri Sarada Devi

1. "I tell you one thing-if you want peace, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own."
2. "God is one's very own. It is the eternal relationship. He is everyone's own. One realizes him in proportion to the intensity of one's feelings for him."

Swami Vivekananda

1. Ninety percent of thought-force is wasted by the ordinary human being, and therefore, he is constantly committing blunders; the trained man or mind never makes a mistake.
2. The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength. Teach men of the strength that is already within them.

RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA CENTRE OF QUEENSLAND INC.

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Obituary

With deep sorrow we wish to announce the sudden demise of Dr.Ambigapathy Periasamy, a member of the Management Committee of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Queensland, during the early hours of 5th June 2006. In him, we have lost a dedicated and sincere member of the Centre.

Dr.Ambigapathy (Ambi as he was fondly called) suffered from cancer but passed away due to heart failure. The late Ambi migrated to Brisbane from Malaysia several years ago. He was a very humble person but never felt shy or embarrassed about letting us know of his humble backgrounds. By dint of self-effort and sincerity he overcame seemingly unsurmountable difficulties and established himself in life as an environmental scientist. After he came to Australia and did his Doctoral studies, he went back to his home country, Malaysia, and served in prominent positions before finally settling in Brisbane. He was an example of how self-effort combined with Divine Grace could help an individual against all odds.

Although unwell for the past year and half, Ambi did not spare any efforts in helping the Centre whenever there was a need. On Saturday the 3rd of June, he attended a prayer meeting at the home of Mr.Rajah Kunarajah. Though we could see that he was suffering, he bore it all with great courage and participated in the singing and chanting.

Ambi is survived by his wife and four young daughters. May all of us pray to Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda to grant his soul peace and tranquillity and endow his family with strength and courage to bear this irreplaceable loss.

Swami Atmeshanda
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Queensland INC

Quotes from Swami Vivekananda on life & death

Death being so certain, it is better to die for a good cause.

Each soul is potentially divine.

Believe that the soul is immortal, infinite and all powerful.