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Awake! Arise!

From the Editor ...

Greetings in the name of Sri Ramakrishna.

This quarter's newsletter features a number of articles that converge on the theme of **Spiritual Growth and Self-Realisation**.

It seems the purpose of human birth today, is to provide and enhance either comforts to our senses or to gratify the demands of our emotions. As if this does not suffice, we also try to justify ourselves by asking, "But I'm a householder, how can I be selfless, and reach spiritual growth, let alone self-realisation?"

Spiritual growth and self-realisation do not need any instrumentation. They do not need any other external assets besides concentration of the mind. By making the mind a friend, we can train ourselves to discriminate, to detach ourselves from transitory and never fulfilling pleasures of senses. Sadhanas such as worshipping, reading about God, meditating and rendering service and the like willingly, voluntarily, and consciously will lead us to the growth and realisation that we aspire to reach.

This is where *The School Called Earth* (p.3) sheds more light on. Mother Earth, through her lessons, enables us to progress to the stage of self-control—the gateway to liberation. She takes us to the pinnacle of success and to the abyss of failure just so that every experience becomes a catalyst for our growth. The lessons learnt in the school called Earth are internal, for none can teach us or can make us spiritual. There is no other teacher but our own soul.

Undertaking spiritual discipline or prayers, will ensure our progress to the goal of self-realisation much closer. Hence, the need for training the mind to grow from the inside out can never be emphasised more.

In *Practical Vedanta* (pp. 5-9), our revered Swami Sridharanandaji explains simply yet clearly. "The practice of Vedanta tells a change of perspective is all that is needed. It teaches that, we must fulfill our duties and liabilities of life. We cannot expect to run away without fulfilling them. So, every one must try to do them in a worshipful manner, as an offering to the Divine, and expect nothing in return. Do it with heart and soul, and by doing them with fullest, intellectual conviction our emotions and intellect are tied together. In short, to reach that goal of life, we'll have to divinise every moment of our lives by converting the concept of work into a concept of endless worship, an act that seeks no fruit of action," says Swamiji.

Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita says, "*Karmany eva' dhikaraste ma phalesu kadacana, ma karma phala hetur bhur ma te sango' stv akarmani*"

Seek to perform duty but lay no claim to its fruit. Be not the producer of the fruits of karma; neither shall you lean towards inaction (Ch. 2, verse 47).

Sri Ramakrishna clarifies this by saying, "A boat may be floating on water, but no water should be allowed to get into it. Man may live in the world, but no worldly desire ought to take possession of him."

HARI OM, TAT SAT.

RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA CENTRE OF QUEENSLAND INC.

Highlights

1. The Second Annual Concert

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Queensland celebrated its second annual concert on Saturday, 1st July, 2006 at St Aidans Anglican Girls School, Corinda. Emceed by Naren Sinnathamby, the programme commenced with the recital of bhajans by a group of children led by Lavanya Lingam. The official opening of the auspicious function began with the Mayor for Ipswich, Cr. Paul Pisasale, accompanied by Mr. Maha Sinnathamby, the President of the Queensland Vedanta Centre, and Reverend Swami Sridharanandaji, the President of Vedanta Centre of Sydney, lighting the traditional oil lamp. Swamis Atmeshanandaji and Chandrasekharanandaji recited the invocation prayer. In his address, Mr. Maha thanked everyone for joining in the celebration. A special thanks was given to the Lord Mayor for his presence and support. The news of the purchase of a property at Burbong Street, Chapel Hill was announced. It was another milestone to the society, earmarking its achievement. He once again thanked all for being supportive of the movement. Reverend Swami Sridharanandaji enlightened the guests of the principles on which the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement operated. Vedanta is a "Way of Life" he explained. Vedanta acknowledges that there are many different approaches to God, and all are valid. Any kind of spiritual practice will lead to the same state of realisation. Thus Vedanta teaches respect for all religions. With this as one of the mottos, the organisation invites people from all walks of life to come together to foster unity and prosperity. The Mayor touched on the importance of unity and self improvement. "We must overcome the barriers between one another so that multiculturalism can be fostered. This a vital ingredient for peace and tolerance amongst the many different people who exist in society," he added. The guests were entertained with classical music, dance and songs. Dr Ashim Majumdar, the Vice-President, recorded a vote of thanks, and the Treasurer, Mr Hari Raniga, made a special request from those who were present to pledge their support for the newly acquired property by participating in the "Drop by Drop We Fill a Vessel, Coin by Coin We Shall Collect Funds" Drive. The event concluded with a delectable vegetarian dinner catered by Bombay Dhaba and The Indus Indian Restaurant.

Without a doubt, the concert was adjudged a success. With an attendance of 350 over, the annual event was a tremendous result for the organising committee. As well as providing a great spiritual and social occasion for devotees of the Vedanta Movement and their family and friends, the proceeds has been channelled towards the repayment of the new premises. Again, the society thanks the collective support of all individuals and businesses in coming forward with their helping hand.

2. Installation of the Shrine

The Shrine of the Holy Trinity- Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda- was installed on Sunday, 6th August at the newly acquired ashram. The ceremony was conducted by Swami Atmeshanandaji with devotees and well-wishers joining in the pooja and prayers. It was a day filled with enthusiasm and high energy level from the start to the end, resulting in a totally invigorating experience to all present.

3. Working Bee

On 17th September, the committee gathered on a working bee to clean-up the ashram. This joint effort will be an on-going activity to ensure the maintenance of the property.

4. Diwali/ Deepavali Celebration

The Tamil Association of Queensland in collaboration with the Vedanta Centre of Queensland will jointly present a multi-cultural programme on 21st October at the Coffee Club Auditorium, RNA Showground. The event includes a spectacular sight of fireworks, multi-cultural dances, songs by media popular, Fairdinkum 'Manji', and Indian vegetarian dinner. Proceeds from the event will go towards Prince Charles Hospital Cardiac Unit, and the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre of Queensland.

The School Called Earth

(Adapted from: omsaimandir.org)

The lessons learnt in the school called Earth are very valuable and greatly contribute to the progress of our spiritual journey. The Earth is really an institution where we gain momentum on the journey toward self-realisation. In real sense, the experiences we gain here, in physical form, are meant to steer us toward the understanding that all physical and sense-perceived phenomena are perishable and ultimately lead us to misery and suffering.

The perception called “sorrow” and its binary opposition “happiness” are really educational tools. They teach us the lessons of equanimity and impermanence. Why are sorrow and happiness identified as perceptions? Generally, the term perception- awareness of things through the physical senses- is something that is subject to change. Our mistaken association with our bodies causes us to get so deeply involved with the opposites of joy and sorrow that we take them to be real. In reality, they are but only passing clouds. Go back on memory lane; wasn't every sorrow or joy we have experienced thus far have been temporary? Didn't they pass just the way they arrived? Some of these experiences lasted for a very long time, while others were of a much shorter duration. Yet, none seemed to be permanent. With each passing experience, however, we became wiser, more mature, and understanding. The transformation to these adjectives has been only possible because of life experiences. They are indeed great teachers.

Let's take the simple analogy of children. It is only when they are growing that they feel candies and toys are the purpose of life. Take a toy away from a child and he would think that it is the end of the world. As they grow, however, they realize that toys and candies are not everything. In a similar manner we, as adults, are attached to the bigger toys that this world offers, and as we grow spiritually we realize that all the material things we ran after all our lives were really only toys and candies in comparison to the real goal of life.

Mother earth is a great teacher in the universe. From her we learn life's lessons and get detached from the dualities that she throws at us and progress to the stage of self-control—the gateway to liberation. She tests us with failures so that they become the catalysts for growth. With every failure we evaluate its causes and make an attempt to learn from our mistakes and as a result we grow. Failure and the growth that result from it takes us a step closer to this goal.

Saints knew that suffering is a great means to get closer to the Lord. Take the example of Jesus. He was crucified and yet He smiled and prayed to God to forgive those who subjected His body to pain. He was a great master who maintained equanimity even in the face of physical death. The result? Today, He is universally recognized as one of the greatest masters and one who helps millions reach the shore of bliss.

The lessons learnt in the school called Earth are internal, though, and take place without our realizing it. Remember, no one fails in this school. The school is so built that all learn without fail and progress. Some souls complete this journey in one life, whereas others would require several lifetimes. Just as a child studies hard and gets promoted, if we undertake spiritual discipline or prayers, our progress will be much faster and the goal much closer. We are all in the stage of schooling. Let's welcome pains and sorrows with a smile and take them as life's experiences, for the more we experience the closer we get to our goal: perfection.

It is only by going through the school called Earth that we can enjoy the bliss offered by the supreme.

Happy Schooling!

The Story of Modern Man

God said, "Child reach out for the skies." Man said, "Nay, I shall build structures that shall accomplish that." Lofty constructions sprang, but collapsed shortly, shattering man's mighty ego. God asked, "Shall I help?" "No," said man, in his arrogance, "I shall build mightier ones." Trees thus disappeared and diseases grew.

The Lord said, "Accept my strength and be humble."

Man said, "No, I shall build atomic weapons that will control your entire creation." Weapons threatened to wipe out the entire human race, but man did not yield. God asked again, "Shall I use my powers to help?" "No," said man, "I shall now turn to nuclear forces." Darkness began to sway and fear gripped all.

God said, "Look inside and attain liberation. Inside you are all the treasures you seek." Man said, "I shall send spaceships to fathom your entire cosmos." The spaceships failed, and so did man's ambition. God asked again, "Let me show you the way?" "Come on," said man, "I know the way." Anxiety now became the norm and man lost his sleep.

The Lord commanded: "Trade in the currency of LOVE." Man said, "I have a better idea. I shall use "paper" as currency." Money then became the root of all evil. Friends turned into foes and LOVE vanished.

God in his infinite compassion called yet again, "I love you. Let me show you how." The ego rose and man said, "I know what to do. I shall now trade electronically." Evil grew and trust was vanquished.

God said, "Let me reveal the secrets of my creation."

"No," said man, "Science knows." Science then took charge and man's unhappiness increased manifold. His own inventions, that were meant to be slaves, turned into masters—controlling man instead.

Man thus brought forth his own destruction. Realizing this, he wept and screamed, "Lord I don't know the way. I am lost; please help." Forthwith came the Lord's hand, wiped his tears, and said, "Come my dearest, I shall give you all you seek and more." Man finally said, "I surrender. All I need is you and the rest shall follow."

"Ah," said God, "Now you really know."

Surrender

Oh Lord, why should I pretend
that I usurp your power,
when all that vibrates
does so only at your Will.

Why should I make plans for the fu-
ture,
when all my days are decided by You.
Why should I think I, when all is You.

Please Lord, grant me the Grace
to always see clearly.
Provide to me Your Will

so that my every action
is in accord with
Your highest standards of
selflessness,
compassion, kindness and love.

It is You who are all.
This part of You recognizes Your
Glory
and humbly offers back to You
that which has always been Yours,
but I was too ignorant to see.

RAA

(<http://www.omsriram.com/page3.html>)

Practical Vedanta

by Swami Sridharanandaji

(a discourse at the Spiritual Retreat on 20 Aug 1995, Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore)

Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi,

It has been a matter of great fortune for me to be here with you again after a short span of time when I last visited you in 1993, almost two years ago. I never dreamt that it will be again possible for me to be with you so soon. The divine Mother's blessing may be working behind all this. I treat it as a matter of great joy that I will be able to interact with you again and discuss with you the most important aspect of Swamiji's teachings for the modern people.

We are generally prone to think that spiritual life is an excluded life, a life which has nothing to do with our day to day performance of duties. So when we say Practical Vedanta, it means, how can we practicalize the abstract conclusions that the Vedanta philosophy preaches. Last evening we developed the idea to what is spiritual life, and what is the goal. There are many people here today, many devotees, who did not have the opportunity of visiting us yesterday. So it might appear to be a bit repetitive for the friends who were present, but I think it is worthwhile repeating because that goes to build our *Samskara*. You know, spiritual life is nothing else but an effort to lift our level of awareness and consciousness to such a high level that we are always aware of an unshakable experience of bliss, tranquility, peace, happiness and joy. We generally feel that joy and happiness are only available to us when we interact with the objects of sense organs. That is, when we see a beautiful landscape, we enjoy ourselves. We hear music, we enjoy ourselves. So, we are made in such a way that we continue to interact with this world with our five sense organs and sometimes we are highly elated, happy and joyous. Sometimes when things do not happen our own way, we feel dejected and down cast.

So, as we are constituted, we keep on moving from heights of euphoric joy to depths of limitless despondency, desperation and depression. This is how the human life continues. The efforts of the world teachers have always been, to show a method or chalk out a way by means of which we humans, who are buffeted by the ups and downs of life are educated in a manner that we can raise our perspective of life to such a level that we are not at all touched, moved or disturbed by things happening around us. That does not mean my dear friends, that we become absolutely callous and insensitive to other's agonies, or that we become totally self-centered. It does not mean so. It means that we learn a new way, a new art of living by means of which though we are in this world and we are interacting with this world through our sense organs, but at the same time we continue to enjoy an unshakable bliss, an undisturbed tranquility, poise or peace within ourselves which cannot be reached by the worst catastrophe that may occur to us. So, the concept of Vedanta in practice, in short "Practical Vedanta", is nothing else but a methodology which is being placed before us following which, we, such mortal, frail humans, can build ourselves up to a height of equanimity and poise. So the false misconception that arises, when we talk about Vedanta philosophy and the practice of the Vedanta concepts, is that we think we will have to convert ourselves into an inanimate object or a callous person who is not at all interested in sharing and caring of others' worries and problems. Rather, on the other hand, probably we multiply and enhance our capacity of interacting with people, sharing their agonies and miseries when we are in a level which emanated peace and tranquility to a laden soul.

So with this as an introduction my friends, let us go into it because this is a retreat, where we are expected to spend our time in a very ennobling manner and during that period we should try to understand how to lead our lives, in this world, fulfilling our duties, but at the same time orientating our direction to that goal where nothing in this world will be able to shake us. Now, each and every spiritual discipline is based on certain rational concepts. This is the first thing. When we think of spiritual life, we must always remember, that there has to be certain concepts, certain ideas which will convince us intellectually and rationally. One must be convinced that what one is going to do stand the onslaught of reasoning and argumentation, so that doubts do not assail him later on, and stand in the way of his progress. That part is the intellectual aspect of that way of life.

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But, the most important part is actualization, realisation and practicalisation of those ideas into material practice in one's life. So two main streams follow: One is the intellectual conviction of the philosophy of the religious faith and belief that I happen to hold very close and dear to my heart, and secondly, the methodology of converting that intellectual concept or rational conviction into one's day to day life through one's behaviour pattern. Until and unless the intellectual conviction is given a concrete form through one's behavioural pattern, it will not change one's personality. It will not remain an intellectual gymnastic in the level of intellect, where the being of the human will be different from its own intellectual convictions. Then rises the problem of a split personality known as schizophrenia. That means that I am willingly and knowingly, instead of integrating my personality, disintegrating it into two compartments. This is one of the biggest pitfalls in practicing religious views or religious values. That is why so much importance has been given to the actualization, realisation and practicalisation of those ideas in one's day to day life.

Swamiji tried very hard to convey to his audience the importance of realisation. It is so important that he explained at one point in time, religion is nothing else but realisation. There by he always insisted that the human being must try to live the ideas which he holds very dear. He must learn to realize it, to actualize it, and totally change his or her behaviour pattern in this world. This concept is found very much in our scriptures by the word, *acaryasamhita* meaning the behaviour pattern, the code of conduct. Just to substantiate this statement, let us look back to various forms of religious thoughts that are prevalent in human society. We know Christ preached. Not only preached, he lived the life. He spoke about the Father in Heaven whom we call the Divine, the God. And he said he was born as the son of man, but he made himself into the Son of God. He was one with his father in heaven, born for the purpose to make a mortal human being reach that height. To convince people that he was the Son of God, he gave the Ten Commandments. What are those commandments? If you go through them, it is nothing else but certain disciplines that a human being must impose on himself or herself, so that, that disciplined attitude makes him or her a wonderful receptacle of those noble ideas reflecting through one's personality. That is why Swamiji kept on saying that qualitative improvement of human personality is the goal of life.

Qualitative improvement of life, by mastering the external forces of nature is very much required to lift human beings from the dirt and squalor of poverty and ignorance. But much more essential is to improve the quality of human personality. If that human personality has not been able to master its faults and foibles, then when power, position and authority comes to that human, he would not know how to use it for the betterment of the whole human society. He will be guided by his own faults and foibles and weakness. Instead of becoming a leader of society, he will become a leader of a section of people in whom he has his personal interest involved or with whom he has some personal weaknesses. Therefore, the qualitative improvement of human personality is much more essential than the improvement of material comforts of life known as the improvement of quality of life. So my dear friends, when we are here on such an occasion we must pay enormous sincere, dedicated, unwavering attention to this purpose of qualitative improvement of our own personality.

The second misconception that arises is, that we always think, that to be a better specimen of human being, we have to be monks. We have to run away from the duties of our lives and spend our times in cogitating, meditating and etc. and etc., totally undisturbed by the affairs of the world. That is the most predominant misconception that we have, whenever we talk of renunciation or *vairagya*. This misconception has to be removed. So the question is, it is good and easy to say that we must get rid of this misconception, but how do we go about it? How do we get rid of it? Being in that surrounding where we find ourselves bound by to various sorts of attachments and foibles and frailties of human being, how can we lift ourselves? This the most important question that I always hear from our friends, devotees, and admirers that, "Swamiji it's so good for you. You are a Swami, so, you can always reach the goal, what about ourselves?" I tell them, in a joking manner, but there is an element of truth in that joke, "What makes you so despondent, my dear friend? What makes you so disheartened, that you feel that it is not reachable because you belong to this world. Look at me, have pity on me. You have to run a family of say five persons and look after their interest. You have an assured income. You know that you will have that much of money on the first of every month if not the day before and you can plan your budget according to your means, and lead a moral and ethical life, but of struggle. And look at me, I have no such set of distinct earning every month. I have to look after a family of 350 people. Whether I am alive or dead, I have to find about one million rupees on the first of every month to pay my salary bill. So by comparison, I am worse than you are! I have a safe and secure liability staring at me.

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And I have no safe or secure assets to meet those liabilities. I have to depend on the Divine to help me out in my problems. So problem wise, don't come and tell me that your problems are more in magnitude than mine. But I don't feel despondent or disheartened!

Just now you recited the second chapter where this very idea has been highlighted, i.e. how to live in this world, with what attitude you should live, and that it is this which causes the bondage in you. This is the secret of practice of the Vedantic principles in our day to day lives, known as Practical Vedanta. So let us now get into the practical part of it.

In short, the Vedanta preaches that this whole universe in its essence is nothing else but the Brahman, the Divine. If we can conceive that, which is beyond all descriptions directly and straight away, it's good enough. But as we are dependent on our five sense organs to interact with this world and gain experience, so we also conceive of that Supreme sublime being known as the Brahman, as Parameswara or my Ishta as a person such as Sri Ramakrishna, The Holy Mother, or Sri Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, Christ, Buddha. They have divinised themselves and though being human beings, have transcended the limitations of the name, on form and the limitations of this ego, and they have immersed themselves in the divine. So the first and foremost lesson that comes from it is, that the whole universe is nothing else but the manifestation of the divine in which ever form that appeals to me. There is no regimentation about it. You can choose any of such manifestation as your Ishta, as your chosen deity, who will help you to lead a life by means of which you will reach that state which is known as *Moksha* or *Mukti*. In content it means, *Atyantika dukha nivritti paramasukha prapti*. So if that is my goal reaching *Atyantika dukha nivritti paramasukha prapti* where *dukhasya atyantika* that means, I would not understand when you come and tell me, "I am very, very miserable. I am unhappy. I am absolutely down and under." I would say, "What do you mean by unhappiness? I don't know what unhappiness is!" The very concept of unhappiness has disappeared from my thought process. That very same person who is absolutely saturated in misery; that person can lift himself up to such a level of awareness that misery has no meaning for him. He doesn't understand what misery is. That is the position of the mind known as *Atyantika dukha nivritti*. And looking at it from the positive point of view, it is *parama sukha prapti*. That is, I continue to enjoy such an indescribable bliss all the time so that I am not only saturated in that joy, but I emanate it. It overflows me and it spreads around all over the world as *Atyantika dukha nivritti parama sukha prapti*. That is the content known as *Moksha* or *Mukti* or Nirvana.

So our goal is, to reach that level of awareness by being in this world, living in this world, and by performing the duties that have been bestowed on to us. But I have learned the technique, that method, the tact and the trick of playing the game in such a manner instead of getting stuck in this world. I free myself from these worldly things and lift myself to a level where I am untouched by any misery and I can share the joy which I have been able to gather for myself with all my fellow beings. That is the highest goal of the human life. Not only do I enjoy it myself, but I share it with others as well.

How do I do that? Look at what Sri Ramakrishna has to say. What an observant person He was. We just wonder the way He picked up homely things as an excellent example for the highest spiritual or philosophical teachings. He said, the raw jackfruit emanates certain exudations, as it were, which gets stuck to our fingers and it makes our fingers absolutely immobile and we cannot cut that jackfruit. But the mothers know the trick of the trade. They know the game, how to play. They have a little oil rubbed on their palm and their fingers and then peel the raw jackfruit. That glue like thing which is exuded by the raw jackfruit, doesn't stick on to your skin because of that layer of oil, and your fingers are absolutely free so you can continue to do your duties. Similarly, there is also a method of performing the duties of our lives in such a manner that instead of leading us to inevitable bondage to this world of ours, it helps us to raise ourselves towards that goal of *Atyantika dukha nivritti parama sukha prapti*, that goal known as Nirvana, *Moksha* or *Mukti*. By living in this world, by performing the duties of life and in the process of performing, we only need a little change of perspective. We need to learn the trick of this trade. So my dear friends, it does not need any instrumentation. It does not need any other external assets.

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All that it needs is, little changes in our perspective towards life. It starts from here, substantiated and strengthened by the emotional attachment to my *Ishta*. How come? What do we do? Today, when we are active in our day to day life, we plan our programme in such a manner – I do this and I expect this by way of a result. So I do this with a portion of my mind expecting the results thereof. And when that result does not come to me, I am sad, I am miserable, I am irritated, I am angry, I am tending to lose my head. Why? Because, my expectations are not fulfilled. That means, with this attitude of day to day working, I have almost mortgaged and bartered myself in the form of expecting the results to my liking which seldom happens. All of us know, it seldom happens. But, repeatedly, we go through this mistake over and over again. We never stop to wait for awhile and to analyze and find out, why is it that we are so miserable. We have no time to stop and think and say, “I am miserable because, I have been expecting something which is beyond my control.” It is as simple as that. Our expectations know no stopping. They just do not stop and we keep on building expectation after expectation. By coincidence if it is fulfilled, I am euphoric. I am on top of the world, only for a few seconds. Then I crash down again when a bigger expectation does not get fulfilled. So what am I doing? I am bartering away, mortgaging away, I am hypotaticating, the *Ananda* which is my birth right to these petty expectations.

The practice of Vedanta teaches that, you must fulfill your duties and liabilities of life. You cannot expect to run away without fulfilling. So, please try to do it in a worshipful manner, as an offering to the Divine, and expect nothing in return. Do it with your heart and soul. Do it with fullest, intellectual conviction. Your emotion and your intellect are tied together, so convince yourself, this is the way to live in this world. Do it as an offering to the Divine.

What happens? The simplest thing is I saturate myself with the concept of the Divine all the time of my life. What would be the end result? The simplest answer is, to a plain glass of water, which is tasteless, you keep on adding sugar. And the water gets sweeter and sweeter and sweeter.

So today I am working in this world: I am conducting myself in fulfillment of my duties and liabilities with an expectation of results coming to me – *Phalakanksa*. I am absolutely bartering myself, expecting the results according to my likes and my dislikes. Often I am disappointed. Whereas, now what will happen? Whatever I do, I do it in a spirit of worship, and I am not bothered. I am only mindful that I do it perfectly, thoroughly, with whole of my heart and my being. And I am continuously reminding myself, this is the type of worship which I am entitled to do, because I have converted my duties of life, the work of life into an avenue of worshipping the Divine. In this process, as I add sugar to the tasteless water, I add the continuous awareness of Divine within myself to saturate my being with the concept of the Divine, being worshipped by me, in performing my day to day duties.

So now the practical aspect of the teachings of the Vedanta gets a little clearer; that is, instead of doing it with the expectations of the results thereof, I now educate myself to do and perform all the duties of my life in a spirit of worshipfulness, an endless, relentless effort to convert my life into a worship of the Divine. The concept of work disappears. Today we classify it as work and worship, as two distinct compartments of life. But the concept of work slowly breaks its boundaries and transforms itself into a concept of endless worship of the Divine. Every moment of my life is nothing else but an endless worship of the Divine, and the endless worship of the Divine helps me to divinise my being. As we sweeten the water with additional sugar, I am now saturating my being with the awareness of the Divine. As a time comes, the water is fully saturated with the awareness of the Divine. When you boil that sweetened water, it absorbs further sugar. So, you extend your capacities to the utmost limit of your possibilities and capabilities, and as you expand yourself you absorb more Divine ideas within you.

And then what happens?

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If you place a crystal of sugar in the sugar-saturated solution you get pure crystal sugar the next morning. Similarly, you continue to expand your heart and soul and your intellect, to the extent that you see and, serve the Divine every movement of your life as if the Divine is present in you in this form. By extending your parameters to the extent that you are capable of, you super saturate yourself with the awareness of the Divine. The Divine concepts in you crystallizes in such a manner that you are aware you are the Divine and the whole cosmos as Divine. This awareness of Divine transforms the human personality, full of faults and foibles and frailties and weakness, into a Divine personality, by performing, the daily call of your liabilities and duties. So the trick, the perfect methodology has now been placed. Don't perform the duties of life with expectations of results thereof. Perform duties of life with an attitude of worshipfulness of the Divine. In this process, we are Divinising ourselves. We will be able to reach that ultimate goal where *Parama sukha prapti* will be as concrete as you hold something within your palm. "*Hastamalakavat*" - it is absolutely within your grip.

All that is required is a little change of perspective. See what Sri Krishna says, "*Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam*". 'Yoga' means a particular technique. 'Karma Yoga' is a particular technique, a methodology, a procedure. By means of which, this Karma which has the inherent capacity of binding myself down on this world, this Karma will lose its hold of binding me down to this earth and this world. This very Karma will lead to realisation and liberation of the Atman from the cage of being a human. Acharya Shankara in a masterful fashion interprets these three words, '*Yogah Marmasu Kaushalam*'. He says, '*Tat hi kaushalam*' – that is the trick of the trade. That is the procedure. That is the methodology. Yani, by means of which *bandha svabhavani karmani*, *bandha svabhava svarupa karma*. Karma leads to *bandhana*. And what is the bandhana? That tread which blinds us down, is the expectations of results thereof. *Bandha svabhavani karmani*, *svabhavat nivartate*. This very Karma can be performed with a little twist of you understanding your personality.

From now onwards, we are not going to perform our duties of life with expectation. We will reach *Nirvana*, *Moksha* or *Mukti*, *paramasukha prapti*. That is our expectation. To reach that goal of life, we'll have to Divinise every moment of our lives by converting the concept of work into a concept of endless worship. And this is what Sri Krishna has taught us in the Gita and this is what Sri Ramakrishna taught Swami Vivekananda. You remember that incident one day, when they were reading a Vaishnava Shashtra where it said, *Jive Daya*, and Sri Ramakrishna shuddered as it were. He said, "What an awful statement to make! Who are you to have compassion on the children of the Divine? They are verily the Divine. You can achieve that Divinity by serving them – *Shiva jnane, jiva seva*." This is the essential methodology, enunciated by the Vedantic principles of seeing the Divine around us and serving the Divine every moment of our lives. In the process we Divinise ourselves and reach the goal of *Atyantika dukha nivritti*, *paramasukha prapti*.

Well, dear children of the Divine,

let us join in our prayers that may Sri Ramakrishna, The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and our dear Swamiji help us lead such a life in the world which does not make us worldly, but allow us to reach that level of spiritual realisation of the Oneness of the universe, in the form of the divine which I happen to choose and love most.

Thank you.

The Hindu calendar is laden with auspicious days. With recent celebrations that we have had, it is hoped that the article appended below will enlighten us as to why, when and how some of the auspicious days came into practice.

The Origin of some Poojas

by Sri P.K Ramakrishnan on Vijayadhasami Day 8th Oct, 2000

Saraswathi pooja

Vedic Aryans first settled on the banks of a river in the Kashmir Punjab region. The water of that river was tasty or **saras** in Sanskrit. So they called the river Saraswathi. The rishis did meditation and tapas on its banks. They got revelation of the vedic mantras, "**rushayo mantra-drushtarah**" and they attributed their knowledge to river Saraswathi. Therefore, they elevated Saraswathi as the goddess of knowledge. Saraswathi is personified as **veena-pusthkaadhaarinee** - that is holding the veena and pusthakam. Veena represents music and pusthakam represents literature. Singing and bringing out literature are the functions of **mukham**, which is the part of the body above the neck. Purusha-sooktham compares the **viratpurusha** or cosmic being with a human body. The four castes correspond to four parts of the body of the cosmic being. The Brahmana caste is its mukham. Purushasooktham describes this as "**braahmanosya mukhamaaseet**". Saraswathi, being the originator of sangeetham and sahyam, becomes the goddess of Brahmins. In North India and Bengal, Saraswathi is worshipped on Vasantha Panchami day. This falls sometime in February - March. Vasantha is the spring season when shoots, leaves and flowers spring forth from the trees. So also knowledge sprouts from the brain. That is why Saraswathi is worshipped in spring.

Durga pooja

Again Purusha -sooktham says "**baahoo raajanyah kruthah**". Rajanya means Kshatriya. Kshatriyas are the arms of Viratpurusha. Arms are meant to protect the body-one for defence and the other for preventive offence. Similarly, it is the duty of Kshatriyas to protect the social system and maintain law and order. For this, they need strength or valour or Sakthi. That Sakthi is idolized as Durga. Durga means impregnable-"**dukhena ganthum sakyaa**". The Puranas say that once upon a time there were some demons who oppressed the gods and people. Mahishasura was the foremost among them. The Gods pooled their energy and created Durga to kill them. Durga killed Mahishasura on a Dasami day. Hence that day was called Vijayadasami. Kshatriyas worship Durga during Navarathri and take out a procession on Vijayadasami day in her honour. You can see this practice wherever Kshatriyas were powerful as in Mysore, Baroda, Nepal etc. In Mysore, Durga is worshipped as Chamundi.

Durga pooja in Bengal

Durga puja is the most popular pooja in Bengal. There is some historical background for this. In ancient times, Aryans migrated to Bengal from Kanyakubja or Kanauj, which is situated south of Delhi. The Kshatriyas among them who wore titles like Sena and Pala became Sen and Pal in Bengal. Names like Ugrasena and Sisupala of Srikrishna's time are examples. These Kshatriyas first became kings of small principalities. Later they became zamindars. They worshipped Durga in their palaces. Because of their affluence and influence, Durga worship became popular among the local people. With the disappearance of the zamindari system, patronage shifted to the local population. They started saarvajaniik or community poojas with their own contributions. Each locality spends enormous amounts of money. Of late some big business houses have started patronizing these poojas.

Navaraathri

Discussion on Durga pooja and Saraswathi pooja in the South will not be complete without mentioning Navaraathri Kolu. Beginning on the Prathama after Mahalaya Amavasya, replicas of animals, men and idols of gods are arranged on a structure with steps starting with the smallest at the bottom and ending with the biggest at the top. This really represents the beings in the cosmos. Kolu -the display of the idols- continues for nine days. On Vijayadasami day the Kolu is removed. These "Kolu" days are utilized for social interaction among ladies of the locality. This practice is not followed in Kerala except among Tamil Brahmins who had earlier migrated from Tamil Nadu.

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Shift of Saraswathi Pooja, Lakshmi Pooja and Ayudha Pooja to Mahanavami day in South India

In North India and Bengal all these poojas take place on different days spread over the year. But in South India, Saraswathi, Lakshmi and Ayudha poojas are performed on Mahanavami day due to historical reasons. During the Middle Ages, the Vijayanagar Kingdom was the most powerful kingdom in India. The Maharajas of this kingdom spent lavishly on Durga pooja and Dusserah procession. The non-Kshatriyas, not having enough patronage, decided to shift their poojas to take place on one day- the Durga pooja day. Hence on Mahanavami day where poojas are conducted in homes, the idol is worshipped chanting by Durga-Lakshmi-Saraswathyai namaha. Durga-Lakshmi-Saraswathi represent the feminine counterpart of the Trimurthi. Unlike other common people, the Vysyas being very affluent did not depend on the patronage of the king and continued to have the Lakshmi pooja separately on Diwali or Deepavali day. Everywhere on Saraswathi pooja day students are forbidden from studying. They restart their study on Vijayadasami which is called Vidyardham. Workers worship Ayudham or tools in workshops and factories. Nowadays, vehicles also are worshipped as tools of transportation. In Kerala only Saraswathi is worshipped on Mahanavami day. The source of patronage was Namboodiri Brahmins and Maharajas who were well versed in music, arts and literature.

Lakshmi pooja and Diwali/ Deepavali

Lakshmi means splendour. So the goddess of wealth is called Lakshmi. A Vysya's profession involves the creation and distribution of wealth. Those who created wealth were the karshakas or farmers. Those who distributed wealth were the vaniks or traders. The traders represent the other thigh of Viratapurusha. They perform Lakshmi pooja on Diwali or Deepavali day. That is the last day of their year. They want to do brisk business on that day. Even the Stock Exchange is open on that night. The next day is their New Year Day when new books of accounts are opened. Traditionally, in Bengal, Lakshmi pooja falls on Pournamasya day following Vijayadasami. The traders do this pooja in their homes. It is not a saarvajanik pooja. In most parts of North India there is an overlap of Lakshmi pooja and celebrations welcoming Sri Rama on his return from **vanavasam**. In Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra there is only Lakshmi pooja, and Deepavali not connected with Sri Rama's return.

Diwali/ Deepavali in the South / Narakachaturdasi.

In South India, Deepavali falls on Naraka Chaturdasi day whereas in other parts, it falls on Amavasya day. Naraka means hell or misery. Narakasura thus means the demon of misery. The legend in South India is that Satyabhama who accompanied Srikrishna killed Narakasura. She was an avathar of Lakshmi in the same way as Srikrishna was an avathar of Vishnu. This can be interpreted as the goddess of prosperity killing the demon of misery. Naraka was killed on Chaturdasi day. He obtained a parting boon that he would be remembered on that day. Taking oil bath in the early hours of Narakachaturdasi/Deepavali is in his honour. The subsequent celebrations of wearing new clothes, feasting and fireworks are part of Lakshmi pooja. There is no Brahminical ritual involved in Deepavali celebrations. In certain years, Deepavali (Chaturdasi) and Amavasya fall on the same day. At such times, orthodox Brahmins skip the Deepavali part and attend to duties enjoined on them for Amavasya. This is because Deepavali is essentially a festival of the trading community. Though South Indians use the terminology, Deepavali instead of Diwali, they do not traditionally put a row of deepas or lighted lamps outside their houses on this day. They do it on Karthik Pournima day.

Kaali Pooja

Kaala is masculine and Kaali is feminine. They are personifications of Kaala, which means time. "**Kaalo jagadbhakshakaha**" means Kaala devours the universe. Kaala and Kaali both mean killer. In the Brahminical system Kaala and Yama are the same. Srikrishna says in the Gita- "**Kaalah Kalayathaamasmi**" meaning "of the reckoners, I am Kaala". The god Kaala reckons every second of our existence. He is our timekeeper. When our allotted time is over he takes us away. Yama is the other name of Kaala. Yama means Controller. What does he control? He definitely controls the population! In the tribal system, Kaali is the counterpart of Kaala. She is worshipped by the Panchamas or outcastes. They are the keepers of burning ghats. Kaali worship is carried out in the burning ghats. She has a ferocious look wearing a garland of skulls and showing her drooping tongue. In Kerala there are two types of Kaali- Bhadrakaali and Roudrakaali. The first is auspicious and the other ferocious.

THE THREE CLASSES OF PHYSICIANS

(Wednesday, June 25th, 1884. Bengal, India)

The Master said: "There are three classes of physicians. The physicians of one class feel the patients pulse and go away, merely prescribing medicine. As they leave the room they simply ask the patient to take the medicine. They are the poorest class of physicians.

Likewise, there are teachers who give only instruction, but do not stop to see whether their teachings have produced a good or bad effect. They do not think at all about the disciple.

"There are physicians of another class, who prescribe medicine and ask the patient to take it. If the patient is unwilling to follow their directions, they reason with him. They are the mediocre physicians.

Likewise, there are mediocre teachers. They give instruction to the student and, further, try to persuade him in various ways to follow the instruction.

"Lastly, there are physicians of the highest class. If the patient does not respond to their gentle persuasion, they even exert force upon him. If necessary, they press their knees on the patient's chest and force the medicine down his throat.

Likewise, there are teachers of the highest class, who even exert force to direct the mind of the pupil toward God."

QUOTES ON PHYSICIANS

by Sri Ramakrishna

The Master Said to Narendra:
"Have you become an experienced physician?"
Quoting a Sanskrit verse he said, "He who has killed only
a hundred patients is a novice in medicine;
but he becomes an expert after killing a thousand."

"It is God Himself who has become the physicians.
Therefore one must believe all of them.
But one cannot have faith in them
if one thinks of them as mere men."

"Prayer and the company of holy men is the way.
You cannot get rid of an ailment without the help of a
physician.
But it is not enough to be in the company of religious
people
only for a day. You should constantly seek it,
for the disease has become chronic."

"God laughs on two occasions. He laughs when the
physician says
to the patient's mother, 'Don't be afraid, mother;
I shall certainly cure your boy.' God laughs to Himself,
'I am going to take his life, and this man says he will
save it!'
The physician thinks he is the master, forgetting that
God
is the Master. God laughs again when two brothers
divide
their land with a string, saying to each other, '
This side is mine and that side is yours.'
He laughs and says to Himself, 'The whole universe
belongs to Me,
but they say they own this portion or that portion.'"

"Why doesn't God free us from the world?
Ah, He will free us when the disease is cured.
He will liberate us from the world when we are
through with the enjoyment of 'woman and gold'.
Once a man registers his name in the hospital,
he cannot run away. The doctor will not let him go
away unless his illness is cured."

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