

VEDANTA CENTER OF ATLANTA

Br. Shankara

May 19, 2019

What Deserves Your Attention?

GOOD MORNING... ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Seva Saturday for this month** was yesterday. A great deal got done, as you can see by looking around at the grounds and buildings. A heartfelt THANK YOU to the devotees who came, and served their Center so very well!
- **A Memorial Day Retreat** is planned for **Monday, May 27**. Sw. Sarvadevanandaji has asked us to join in a tradition of reading from Swami Vivekananda's CW on that day. Reading material will be provided — we'll start at 10:30am. When we're finished reading there will be a short worship, followed by a potluck lunch.
- **Please mark your calendar for a weekend Retreat** on the 20th and 21st of July. **Swami Chandrashekharanandaji**, who is Head of the Portland, OR Vedanta Society, will visit with us on that Saturday and Sunday to offer his wisdom on Karma Yoga.
- **Bookshop note: Cash will be accepted** for purchases only on Sundays, and on Tues.

and Wed. evenings. Otherwise, please bring a check to buy books; or. you can use PayPal.

- **Please note that your Center will be closed in August — no activities except Arati.** This will be our routine, each summer.

CHANT • SONG • WELCOME • TOPIC

May is a month for study of Jnana Yoga (*advaita vedanta*). As a jnana yogi, you practice discrimination, reason, detachment, and *satyagraha* (insistence on Truth). The goal is freedom from limitation (*mukti*). Our teachers say that all miseries in life are caused by seeing *inaccurately*. An earnest and persistent jnani may break through this misapprehension (Maya) and see only the Divine Presence everywhere, in everything and everyone.

When we learn to see *accurately*, what will we see?

Swami Vivekananda said: “Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter. ...

“Each (one of you) is only a conduit for the infinite ocean of knowledge and power that lies behind mankind. ...”

You are a conduit for an infinite ocean of knowledge and power, **and yet:** Though you may start each day with clear priorities and a plan of action, often – by the end of that day – you can hardly say where the time went.

What happened? The short answer is you got distracted: In the moment, something else seemed more important than what you intended; or, an incident occurred that left you feeling angry, dejected, worn out. Either way, the day is gone and you’re not much closer to what you planned than you were in the morning.

Must this continue? Why are we so easily distracted, and why does what happens frustrate, confuse, even anger us? Here’s one explanation, from Swami Yogeshananda’s article, “*A Closer Look Through the Looking-Glass*”:

“In a lecture in which he clarifies the ... doctrine of Maya, Swami Vivekananda says, ‘I may be dreaming all the time. I am dreaming that I am talking to you and that you are listening to me.

No one can prove that it is not a dream. ... We are walking in the midst of a dream, half-sleeping, half-waking, passing all our lives in a haze; this is the fate of every one of us... When we dream, the things we see all seem to be connected; during the dream we never think they are incongruous. It is only when we wake that we see the want of connection.

When we wake from this dream of the world and compare it with the Reality, it will be found all incongruous nonsense, a mass of incongruity passing before us, we do not know whence or whither, but we know it will end; and this is called Maya.”

In today’s talk we’ll look further into Swami Vivekananda’s definition of Maya, and discuss Adi Shankaracharya’s explanation of how we can wake from Maya’s spell.

Shankara says that — **with sustained attention** — *viveka* (discrimination between the unreal and the real), and *vairagya* (release of worldly desires and attachments), will certainly lead an aspirant forward in spiritual life.

And so, at last, to realization, and life as a *jivanmukta* — one who is liberated while still embodied.

Let's further define and discuss these two components of a jnana yogi's sustained attention, these practices that are central to Shankara's teachings:

Viveka = discrimination between relative reality and the highest truth (Absolute)

The Absolute is:

Infinite, unchanging, undivided —
Existence Knowledge Bliss Absolute

The Absolute is unknowable by the impure mind. So, how can we discriminate? The best we can do is say, "that's not It, that's not It (*neti, neti*)! What's NOT IT?

All that is Relative:

Within the Relative are —

- Time space and causation (*Maya*) = Finite, constantly changing, and *Soham*, identified as a "separate I" (I — me — mine)

- *Ishwara & Ishwari* — rulers of maya, from time to time they take human form as Divine Incarnations

Vairagya = release of worldly desires and attachments — detachment from the rajasic and tamasic activities of the mind
Self-control, with your senses under restraint, yields serenity of mind. You attain clarity of vision and peace of mind when you have learned to control your attention.

For the purposes of the rest of this talk, this assertion is made:

You are your attention, and until you achieve final realization of the truth of your being, it is the only thing you can truly control.

Behind Maya, which is a projection of the impure mind and is your apparent reality, is **the Atman**, Pure Consciousness, the Unchanging **Witness of change**... this Consciousness, Awareness, Witness are all the same ...

We experience It from moment to moment as **Attention**, which we can deliberately “focus” here or there, or allow to be distracted by Desire, Attachment, and Aversion ...

So the question we want to answer is: “What Deserves Your Attention?”

Each of the yogas, as a spiritual practice for gaining control of your attention, has a different answer:

- ❖ Jnana, the path of Knowledge, says: Only the highest Truth: “I am Brahman” – all else is a misapprehension and a superimposition on the Reality (snake, rope) = *neti, neti* to the snake **and** the rope (both within Maya; anything that you can perceive or think about is, by definition, within Maya) ...
- ❖ Bhakti, the path of Devotion: The Lord alone is worthy of my attention; that is All I wish to see. Ultimately, through self-surrender, I will realize my Oneness with that Living Divine Presence and be free ...
- ❖ Raja, the path of Meditation or psychic control: the Raja yogi says, “I practice disciplines which disallow the ability of the world to capture and hold my attention. I turn my Attention to the Atman within ...”
- ❖ Karma, the path of Action: I pay Attention only to the action itself, with no attachment to the action or the results of action. This yields peace of mind, and finally, full

control of my attention. I become like an expert dancer; I cannot put a foot wrong ...

Bhagavad Gita contains instruction in all four yogas. It is Sri Krishna's Instruction Manual for playing the "Game of Human Life."

Through spiritual practice as taught by Adi Shankaracharya, Sri Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna, and others, you can learn to control our attention, and thereby your senses and your mind. You make a very deliberate and steady transition from living even an extraordinary worldly existence to abiding in an ever higher Truth: Knowledge of the Self, the Atman.

Last word to Vivekananda; he defines the limitations that we become free of when we achieve *life's only purpose*:

*"This eternal play of light and darkness — indiscriminate, indistinguishable, inseparable — is always there. A fact, yet at the same time not a fact; awake and at the same time asleep. This **is** a statement of facts, and this is what is called Maya.*

We are born in this Maya, we live in it, we think in it, we dream in it. We are philosophers in it, we are spiritual men in it ...

Nay, we are devils in this Maya, and we are gods in this Maya.

Stretch your ideas as far as you can, make them higher and higher, call them infinite or by any other name you please, even these ideas are within this Maya. It cannot be otherwise, and the whole of human knowledge is a generalization of this Maya trying to know it as it appears to be.

This is the work of Nâma-Rupa — name and form. Everything that has form, everything that calls up an idea in your mind, is within Maya; for everything that is bound by the laws of time, space, and causation is within Maya.”

As was gestured to in the Introduction:

An earnest and persistent jnani may break through this misapprehension, this Maya, and not only realize but *become* Brahman — the Divine Presence, the Absolute — everywhere, in everything and in everyone.

**Q&A AND DISCUSSION —
REGULAR CLOSING PRAYER**