



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter April 2017

Words to Inspire

“God cannot be seen with the physical eye. In the course of sadhana a ‘Love-body’ is created in you, with eyes and ears of Love, and with them you see and hear Him”.

– Sri Ramakrishna

The sacred word Om is the indicator of both Saguna Brahman (Brahman with attributes) and Nirguna Brahman (Brahman devoid of all attributes). The scriptures of Vedanta make a distinction between meditation (dhyana) with the support of a symbol and right apprehension (nididhyasana). Right apprehension is direct and immediate knowledge of Brahman, while meditation is unbroken concentration on Brahman. Right apprehension of an object is determined by fact, whereas apprehension of an object in meditation is indirect and depends on the seeker’s mind, faith, and will. Meditation is recommended for those seekers who are not able to practice right apprehension. Such seekers are guided more by faith than by reason. Vidyaranya in his Panchadasi says: It is possible to overcome the mental creation by means of meditation on attributeless Brahman, which again is gradually and easily acquired by meditation on Brahman with associates..... The same idea is fully explained in the Atma Gita, which enjoins meditation on the attributeless Brahman on those who are unable to discriminate between Self and non-Self. Depending on his fitness, the seeker may practice meditation on Saguna Brahman or on Nirguna Brahman. In both cases, some symbol of the Ultimate is used to hold the

mind: the symbol that is recommended for use in the practice of meditation on the attributeless Brahman is Om. Though Vedantic texts mention several other symbols for meditation on the attributeless Brahman, such as the mind, the sky, the sun, and like tat (“That”) and sat (Reality), nonetheless, Om is considered the greatest verbal symbol of both Nirguna and Saguna Brahman. Shankaracharya, in his commentary on verse 5.1.1 of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, observes: Although the words Brahman, Atman, etc., are names of Brahman, yet on the authority of the Srutis [i.e., the Vedas] we know that Om is Its most intimate appellation. Therefore, it is the best means for the realisation of Brahman. It is so in two ways - as a symbol and as a name. As a symbol: Just as the image of Vishnu or any other god is regarded as identical with that god (for the purpose of worship), so is Om to be treated as Brahman. All prayer, contemplation, and meditation merge in Om, and Om finally merges in the silence of samadhi. As Sri Ramakrishna says: “The Sandhya [ceremonial prayer] merges in the Gayatri [the concentrated prayer of the Vedas], the Gayatri in Om, and Om in samadhi.”

From the book ‘Meditation & Its Practices’
by Sw Adiswarananda. Pg 112-113

Tax Receipts for Year 2016

The Tax Receipts for the donations made in Year 2016 have been mailed. If not yet received or any question regarding this, kindly contact the Treasurer of the Society, Anupam Talwar at talwar.anupam@yahoo.ca .

Scriptures and Spiritual Life

(Excerpt from a lecture by Swami Dayatmananda, from Vedanta Magazine, UK)

One day Sri Ramakrishna was listening to the reading of the Bhagavata in front of the Vishnu temple. He went into ecstasy and had the vision of Sri Krishna's luminous form. He saw that a beam of light like a cord came out of Sri Krishna's lotus feet and touched the book, whence it touched the Master's heart and remained simultaneously touching all the three of them for some time. There arose from that vision the firm conviction in his mind that, although the three, viz., the scripture, the devotee and the divine Lord, appear as different entities, they are one and the same thing; in other words, they are manifestations of the same Reality.

Thenceforward Sri Ramakrishna used to chant everyday: "Bhagavata, Bhakta; Bhagavan, meaning "The three - the Bhagavata (the scripture), the Bhakta (the devotee) and the Bhagavan (the divine Lord) - are One and the One is the three." (Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master).

Scriptures and religions

The foundation and life-breath of every religion is scriptures or holy books. They play a most significant role in society in general and among spiritual aspirants in particular. They mould the lives of spiritual seekers, inspiring, guiding and exhorting them until they reach the goal of life, i.e. God-realization. The moment these scriptures are taken away religions simply cease to exist, and without religion society slumps into chaos. This is the reason why some religions even worship a scripture as the highest form of God.

What is a scripture?

The scriptures are not human constructs. They are the records of the experiences of sages and saints who had direct realization of the Ultimate Reality. Only the scriptures can reveal the truth about God, after-life, and other worlds; for these truths are unavailable to the ordinary sense organs. Hence, we have no option but to put our faith in the scriptures. It is a psychological fact that we can only desire what we know. So how can we desire spiritual life without knowing about it? And without desiring the highest, life becomes joyless and barren. That is why we are advised to study scriptures daily.

Scriptures and faith

The scriptures contain nothing but truth. They only speak of God and the after-life. Hence regular and devout study of the scriptures fosters faith, and faith inspires us to lead a pure and holy life. Negligence of the study of scriptures slowly but surely erodes our faith in God, moral life and ultimate justice. Without deep faith one cannot pursue spiritual life. Anyone can verify the truth of this statement.

Saints and scriptures

When asked by Swami Shivananda, the then President of the Ramakrishna Order, what he was doing, a monk informed him that he was reading the Upanishads. In reply the Swami said: "What will you gain by reading the Upanishads? Study our lives." The Swami, of course, is not denigrating the study of the scriptures. He is merely indicating that the life of a saint is a living and moving scripture. Scriptures contain essentials and non-essentials. It is easy to confuse one with the other. Also, the scriptures contain seemingly contradictory statements. This is because they have to speak to different types of aspirants. Inability to understand this may lead to confusion and harm. Misinterpretation of the scriptures can also lead to fanaticism and evil. But if one can learn scriptures from a spiritual person one can get the essence. That is why one is advised to seek and study scriptures under a competent spiritual teacher.

Scriptures as the best form of holy company

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a spiritual aspirant must cultivate holy company. One of the best ways to cultivate holy company is a daily study of the scriptures with devotion. Especially these days when genuine spiritual persons are rare to come by, the best way is to keep holy books nearby. And holy books are available in millions. The Taittiriya Upanishad repeatedly warns its students not to neglect regular study of the scriptures. The Upanishad equates the study of scriptures with austerity and exhorts the students not to neglect scriptural studies no less than thirteen times!!

What do the scriptures teach?

Every scripture must teach these following five truths: the nature of God, the nature of the individual soul, the goal of life, the way to the attainment of this goal, the various obstructions that bar us from reaching it and ways of overcoming them.

The way to study scriptures

It is unwise to read scriptures in any way one likes. They must be read for Truth and guidance, and not for intellectual stimulation. In fact, the intellect can never grasp the Truth of Reality. When a spiritual aspirant practises spiritual disciplines sincerely and with devotion a special capacity called Medha, which enables him to understand spiritual truths, arises in him. So one of the Vedic Peace Chants says: "May what we both study reveal the Truth!" The Imitation of Christ also advises us: "Look for truth in the Bible; not eloquence. Every verse should be read in the spirit with which it was written. If you want to make your Scripture reading worthwhile, read with humility, simplicity, and faith."

BUILDING RENOVATION UPDATE

Building committee includes *Shanker Sanyal, Shanti Ghosh, Jitendra Sheshgiri, Vikas Ojha and Abhijit Bhattacharya*. Advisory board includes *Utpal Banerjee and Anupam Talwar*.

Work Completed:

Main Shrine all work completed except carpeting, Interior rooms completed, Downstairs Kitchen completed, Upstairs kitchen, dining hall, Guset Swami room and Mezzanine floor now under final completion, Washrooms completed, Elevator installation completed, commissioning and inspection by TSSA will be completed by mid-April, Installation and commissioning of HVAC completed, Audio-Visual installation 90% completed, Security cameras installed, Fire Alarm & API-monitoring installation completed, commissioning and inspection in process.

Next steps (April-1 to 20):

All inspections listed above including final building inspection to be completed by mid-April, Roofing work to commence on April 1 and scheduled completion by mid-April, Awning for patio, ramp and all external doors to commence in May 2017.

We are trying to get the Occupancy Certificate from the City by April, 2017.

Safety Norms:

Due to renovation work, all devotees are requested to kindly follow the safety rules and avoid the construction areas. In case of any doubts kindly approach the other members for guidance. Vedanta Society is concerned with the safety of all, but is not responsible for any accidents caused to any occupants during their visit.

FINANCIAL UPDATE-BUILDING RENOVATION

Total Estimated Project Cost :		\$1,400,000	
General Contractor	Paid till date	\$ 722,000	
	Balance		\$ 380,000
Other Payments	Paid till date	\$ 112,000	
	Balance		\$ 180,000
Total		\$ 834,000	\$ 560,000

Balance to complete the project is \$560,000, to be paid by end of June, 2017. Due to your extreme generosity, the shortfall of \$80,000 that we had last month has been filled. However, we have no reserve at this point, and need to provide for repayments of interest free loans raised to date of \$163,000. Therefore, appeal to all for your continued financial support to the Society.

AN APPEAL FOR DONATION

Vedanta Society appeals to the devotees and well-wishers to kindly come forward and donate generously, so that we can pay-off all loans and build up funds to secure ourselves for our regular operations. The financial details and loan requirements are provided above.

IMPORTANT NOTE

The renovation at Vedanta Society is expected to be completed and Occupancy certificate obtained by mid-April, 2017. Devotees are requested to kindly volunteer and participate in cleanup and arranging the furniture, etc. so that normal activities can begin at earliest. Kindly call the following numbers for any further information regarding the Society's activities: 416-240-7262 or 647-990-1418 or 416-569-9401. Till the Occupancy Certificate is obtained, all devotees and visitors are requested to follow all CAUTION signs. Vedanta Society of Toronto is not responsible for any injury caused to anybody in the premises.

UPCOMING EVENTS CALENDAR

Program detail	Date & Time	Venue Address
Vivekananda Public Speaking competition	May 13, 2017 Details will be provided in May 2017 Newsletter	Vedanta Society of Toronto
Buddha Jayanti	May 14, 2017 Details will be provided in May 2017 Newsletter	Vedanta Society of Toronto
Annual Retreat by Rev. Swami Sumanasananda of "The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa", Durban, South Africa	June 17 & 18, 2017 Details will be provided in May 2017 Newsletter	Vedanta Society of Toronto

REGULAR PROGRAMMES

SCRIPTURE CLASS: Every Friday at 7:30 pm, following the regular evening prayer at 6:00 pm.

VIGIL: There will be no Vigil due to on-going construction at the Centre.

RAM NAM: For the date and time of the monthly Ramnam, please see the 'Calendar of Events' on the next page.

BOOK STORE: The Book Store will remain closed during the renovation phase.

DAILY BREAD FOOD BANK: Daily Bread Food Bank has been suspended for renovation.

INTERVIEWS/INSTRUCTION:

Swami Kripamayananda will be happy to give Interviews to those interested in knowing more about Vedanta and meditation. Individual interviews are also given for Spiritual instructions. Appointments for interviews should be made in advance with the Swami at 416-247262.

DAILY MEDITATION: Meditation is done at the Centre every morning from 6:00 am to 7:00 am. Devotional singing and meditation time in the evenings is from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm.

SOUP KITCHEN: Due to renovation, the soup is not cooked at the Vedanta Society.

"RAMNAAM" is a liturgical composition expounding the glory of Sri Rama through a series of names that suggestively highlight the main incidents in the life story of this Divine Incarnation.

Swami Brahmananda, the first President of the Ramakrishna Order, once heard this composition being sung during one of his pilgrimages to South India. He was so thrilled by the charm of the melody, the exquisiteness of the sentiments, and the fervor of the devotion from this Hymn, that he made its chanting a regular feature, especially of the Ekadashi Prayers in the branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Today, this Ramanam Sankirtanam has become a paean of pure joy for hundreds of thousands of devoted men, women and children all over India and abroad.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

April 2017

RENOVATION IN PROGRESS AT VEDANTA SOCIETY

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						<u>1</u>
<u>2</u> <u>11:00am</u> Lecture: 'Free while living' by Prof. V. Kumar Murty (Venue: Vedanta Society premises)	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u> <u>6:00pm</u> Ram Navami Celebration and Ram Naam (Venue: Vedanta Society premises)	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture Class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>8</u>
<u>9</u> <u>11:00am</u> Lecture: 'Purushottama' (Venue: Vedanta Society premises)	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture Class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>15</u> <u>6:00pm</u> Bhakta Milan- Gathering of devotees (Venue: Vedanta Society premises)
<u>16</u> NO SUNDAY LECTURE <u>12:30pm</u> 'Kirtan' by Bangladesh Canada Hindu Cultural Society & Sri Ramakrishna Pathachakra (Venue: Vedanta Society premises)	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture Class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>22</u> <u>11:00am</u> Spiritual Talk by Rev. Swami Yogatmananda, Vedanta Society of Providence, US
<u>23</u> <u>11:00am</u> NO SUNDAY LECTURE "Celebration for the completion of renovation of the Society building"	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>29</u>
<u>30</u> <u>11:00am</u> Lecture: 'Adi Shankara' (Venue: Vedanta Society premises)						