



# Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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## Newsletter December 2016

### WORDS TO INSPIRE

“The mind will be steadied if one repeats the name of god fifteen or twenty thousand times a day. It is truly so. ...I myself have experienced it”

- Sri Sarada Devi

In Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother we have not merely two saints; they were the makers of saints. In fact, in such matters, to understand their real personality, only his or her own perception about the other should be considered as true guide.

She was a simple ordinary mother to those who came to her for advice and guidance and spiritual ministrations because in this way alone the Lord's descent on earth could be properly utilized. If God comes to the earth with his divine majesty, then we shall all be appalled and we shall not be able to approach Him.

Therefore, the Lord hides His majesty in forms that we may appreciate. In this instance God's divinity was clothed in motherly affection. Sri Ramakrishna sometimes could be stern, but the Holy Mother was never stern to anybody. There had been occasions when probably stern measures were necessary. But the Mother in her, that great motherhood, always controlled her. She said, ‘If a child smears itself with dirt, is it not the duty of the mother to clean it and it on her lap?’

This was the attitude of the Mother. Therefore, people flocked to her in hundreds. All of them were blessed by her not necessarily because of their intrinsic merit, but because of the abundance of her grace and compassion.

She knew her mission in the world that Sri Ramakrishna had passed on to her. Bit by bit he had trained her for the great role of the world teacher she

was to become afterwards. When she said, ‘I am a mere woman’, Sri Ramakrishna told her that more than what he had done she would have to do and actually we find that after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, the Holy Mother lived for nearly thirty-four years and those were eventful years so far as her spiritual ministrations are concerned.

She did not care for herself at all. While Sri Ramakrishna lived, she was all attention to him, to his personal comforts. She spared no pains to keep Sri Ramakrishna in a healthy state. Those who have seen the music tower in Dakshineswar where the Holy Mother stayed can have an idea in what conditions of discomfort she had to live in order to serve Sri Ramakrishna. It is a very small place and in that little room not only she would be there, several other lady devotees would also be there. She somehow managed to be there. She was the very personification of modesty, as it were. Self-abnegation was the breath of her life.

When she was very young, and the news of her husband's madness reached her ears at her village home, she had to pass anxious days but she never lost faith. Her faith triumphed when she came to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar and saw that he was not mad in the usual sense, but was intensely god-intoxicated. That faith she retained throughout her life.

- Swami Madhavananda

(From the book ‘Sri Sarada Devi - The Great Wonder’)

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Due to construction at the Vedanta Society, this year the Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held in the **Party Room in 85 Emmett Ave, Toronto on Sunday, December 18, 2016 at 11am**. Any member wishing to nominate an active and willing member of the Vedanta Society for the Executive Committee may do so by writing to the Society. All nominations must be received by December 11, 2016 and be duly proposed and seconded, and approved by Swami Kripamayanda. All our members and friends are requested to attend the meeting. If you are unable to attend, please fill in the proxy form included in this Newsletter and send it so that it reaches us by **December 17, 2016**.

**They may email the filled-in form to <[info@vedantatoronto.ca](mailto:info@vedantatoronto.ca)>**

## **Mahapurush Maharaj: Swami Shivananda** by Swami Atmajnanananda

It is extremely difficult to fathom the greatness of the direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. All were men of the highest realization and purity of character. Swami Vivekananda was the bearer of Sri Ramakrishna's message to the world and the inheritor of his spiritual power, and Swami Brahmananda was looked upon by Sri Ramakrishna as his very own spiritual son. Swami Shivananda, however, has the special distinction of being addressed, even by Sri Ramakrishna's other disciples, as 'Mahapurush', great soul, a name given to him by Swami Vivekananda himself in recognition of Shivananda's perfect celibacy in married life. More often, though, he was simply addressed by his brother disciples and others as 'Tarak-da', elder brother Tarak, an indication not merely of his being senior in age to almost all of the direct disciples, but also of their great reverence and love for him.

A Seeker of Samadhi Mahapurush Maharaj was born into a devout Brahmana family in 1854 in a small town east of Kolkata, called Barasat. Since his mother had prayed to Shiva for the birth of a son, he was given the name Taraknath, and was known simply as Tarak. Ramkanai, Tarak's father was not merely a generous man, he was also a great Tantric sadhaka. In fact, it was Ramkanai who recommended that Sri Ramakrishna wear an amulet containing the name of his ishta devata in order to cure him of the burning sensation he was experiencing at that time. Ramkanai used to visit the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, both in his capacity as attorney for the Rani Rasmani estate and as a spiritual seeker, and it was on one of those occasions that he met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time. The seeds of dispassion were sown in Tarak's life from an early age. Tarak was a good student in school, though he was rather indifferent to his studies. When his father's income fell due to lack of work, Tarak—who was in the tenth grade then—left school to take a job. He worked for the railways in northern India, and spent his spare time in spiritual practice. He spent long hours in meditation during this period, with the one desire of attaining samadhi. He would later say: 'Then the idea of samadhi would agitate my mind. How to be absorbed in the bliss of samadhi, forgetting the world—this keen desire occupied me most of the time. I was very fond of the meditation pose of Shiva and Buddha. I tried to attain samadhi month after month—I rarely slept at night. I had that one thought—how to attain samadhi.'

Tarak first met Sri Ramakrishna in May or June of 1880, in the home of Ramchandra Datta. The room was filled with devotees, and Sri Ramakrishna was speaking on the very subject that had become the passion of Tarak's life: samadhi. Tarak seated himself nearby and listened spellbound. As there was no opportunity for him to talk with Sri Ramakrishna during this first meeting, Tarak went to Dakshineswar the next month. As soon as he bowed

before Sri Ramakrishna, he experienced a tremendous reaction. He felt as if he had once more got his own mother back. He placed his head on Sri Ramakrishna's lap, and Sri Ramakrishna caressed him like a child. Many years later Tarak explained: 'At once I felt a deep attachment for the Master. I felt as if I had known him for a long time. My heart became filled with joy. I saw in him my tender, loving mother waiting for me. So, with the confidence, faith, and certitude of a child, I surrendered myself to him, placing myself entirely in his care. I was certain that at last I had found him for whom I had been searching all these days. From then on I looked upon Thakur as my mother.' Tarak's second or third meeting with Sri Ramakrishna was very much like that of his brother disciple Narendranath. Sri Ramakrishna went into an ecstatic mood in his presence and touched Tarak lightly on the chest. Tarak lost all outer consciousness of the world and remained absorbed in that joyful state for a long time. He recalled: 'As a result of Sri Ramakrishna's touch, everything became revealed to me. I realized that I was the Atman, eternal and free. I realized that the Master was the Lord born as man for the good of humanity, and that I was born on earth to serve him.' Not long after this incident, Sri Ramakrishna initiated Tarak by writing a mantra on his tongue, as he would often do. Once again, Tarak lost all outer consciousness of the world, and only regained his normal consciousness when Sri Ramakrishna touched his chest with his fingers. Tarak was the first of all the disciples to renounce the world. After his wife died in 1883, he quit his job and told his father of his decision. As his father was also a highly spiritual soul, he blessed his son, and with tears in his eyes said: 'May you realize God! I myself tried to renounce the world and realize him, but I failed. Therefore, I bless you that you may attain God.'

Tarak spent the next three years of his life, that is, up until the time of Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, living mainly at the home of Sri Ramakrishna's great householder disciple Ramchandra Datta. Here he cooked his own food and spent the greater part of his time in meditation and spiritual practice, either in some solitary place or in a nearby cremation ground. After Sri Ramakrishna was diagnosed with throat cancer and was moved to the Kashipur garden house, Tarak, along with many of Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples, moved into Kashipur to serve him. Here also Tarak spent all of his spare time in intense austerities in the company of Narendra and his other brother disciples. Sometimes they would pass entire nights in meditation, either in the Panchavati at Dakshineswar or at Kashipur itself. In the Joy of Sadhana Since Tarak had already decided to lead a monastic life years earlier, it was only natural that he would be one of the disciples to form the first monastery of the Ramakrishna Order. He had

accompanied Baburam—later Swami Premananda—along with Narendra and others, to his ancestral home in Antpur, and was present on that auspicious Christmas Eve when they vowed to live the life of monks. Because of his great devotion to Shiva, as well as his calm, dispassionate nature, he was given the name Shivananda by Narendranath. Since he was already free of all social responsibility and attachments to the world, Shivananda, who was later more commonly known as Mahapurush Maharaj, became the first resident of the newly formed Baranagar Math, along with Swami Advaitananda. Here, he and his brother monks practised intense spiritual disciplines, often spending entire nights immersed in meditation. As was his nature, Mahapurush Maharaj remained indrawn much of the time. This period of his life was one of great austerity, simplicity, and joy. We relate few incidences from the later part of his life.

There are a few small incidents that show us how this wonderful humility of Mahapurush Maharaj remained with him throughout his life. Once, when Swami Swaprakashananda was staying at Belur Math and performing the worship of Sri Ramakrishna, he went to make pranams to Mahapurush Maharaj after the evening worship was completed. As the swami was sitting in an indrawn mood, Swaprakashananda very quietly made pranams without touching his feet and then walked away. As Swaprakashananda was leaving the room, Mahapurush Maharaj called out to him and asked, ‘Have you made pranams over there?’ He was referring to the room where Swami Vivekananda stayed before his sudden passing away in 1902. After learning that he had not, Mahapurush Maharaj became displeased and scolded him saying, ‘You

should always make pranams there first and only afterwards here. Do you not know that Swamiji—the veritable Shiva—is residing there? If you make pranams there, it is enough. What is there to bow down to here?’ Perhaps the greatest example of his humility was the attitude he showed at the time of becoming president of Belur Math. His regard for Brahmananda was so great that he could never think of himself as the president. In his mind that position always belonged to Brahmananda. After Brahmananda passed away, he said: ‘Maharaj is gone. I have no desire to continue living. The Math belongs to Maharaj. He was its head, he was its charm, he was its wealth. He was everything to the Math. We are his servants and are working according to his wishes.’ Mahapurush would only agree to take the position of president as a representative of Brahmananda. He never looked upon himself as the actual president or thought of himself as a guru, though he initiated large numbers of devotees and monks into spiritual life. There are no doubt many more aspects of Mahapurush Maharaj’s life that are worthy of discussion: his great forbearance in the face of terrible physical suffering and disability, his immense kindness toward the devotees and young monks, his deeply indrawn and spiritual nature, which made samadhi and other great heights of spiritual experience something quite natural to him, and several more. While there is no space here to include the many incidents we read about these aspects of his life, we hope that sharing a few of them helped us be closer to a soul whose ‘home is that high Power from which proceed name and form’, as was told of Mahapurush Maharaj by Sri Ramakrishna.

## RENOVATION UPDATE

Work completed includes - demolition & disposal of existing interior framing, erecting steel posts, installation of mezzanine floor steel beam, windows installation/brickwork, sewage plumbing completed and inspected by City, layout and framing of interior partitions & elevator shaft, exterior brickwork, window/door, creation and inspection of HVAC platform, purchase and installation of HVAC in process, interior framing (bulkheads, ceiling), drywall installation/ taping(fire rating, walls, ceilings), placed order for vent manufacturing, exterior doors. The work is expected to be completed by mid-Feb 2017. Current roof repaired, new roof quotes reviewed by the committee, Trustees and EC, finalized roofer, roof to be replaced during summer of 2017.

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

Building Committee comprises of the members which includes Shankar Sanyal, Shanti Ghosh, Jitendra Sheshgiri, Vikas Ojha and Abhijit Bhattacharya. Advisory board includes Utpal Banerjee and Anupam Talwar.

# Mother's Grace

by Swami Nirvikalpananda

*(Swami Nirvikalpananda is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order)*

## Undaunted Prayer

There was an old man named Habu Munda who belonged to the Santal tribe and lived near the village of Jayrambati. He was around eighty years old, very lean and thin, and seemed to be a beggar in appearance. He would come to the Matri Mandir (Sri Sarada Devi's temple) every day, but would never enter inside the temple. Standing below the stairs, he would talk to Mother pleadingly—sometimes crying, sometimes getting angry—and act like a mad man. Without entering the temple he would touch the last step of the staircase with his forehead and leave the place. What surprised everybody was that not even heavy rains or winter cold could deter him from coming to the temple after evening arati to make his prayers! Also, if any devotee, seeing his sad, beggarly appearance, would try to give him some money, he would not accept it, and would show them the temple's donation box. One day Swami Dhireshananda came to Jayrambati and saw Habu acting abnormally outside the temple. The swami came to Rammay Maharaj (Swami Gaurishwarananda, the then-president of Jayrambati ashrama), complained about him, and asked Maharaj to take some action immediately. Habu was called and asked why he behaved in this way and what he wanted. Thereupon the old man related his story in his mixed Santal-Bengali tongue. It so happened that when Habu was a child he had come to Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, at Jayrambati along with his father at the time when Mother's new house had just been completed. There is a custom in the Santal community that when a guest comes to one's house for the first time, the host should call the guest near and ask about his or her home, well-being, requirements, and so on. So Habu too expected Mother to call him to her side, but Mother, being too busy with the house-opening ceremony, failed to give any special attention to him, which hurt him. But he happened to meet Sharat Maharaj (Swami

Saradananda), who asked him to go once more to Mother. This time too when he went to her, she didn't pay him any attention, which pained him immensely. He returned with deep sorrow to Sharat Maharaj, and said emphatically that henceforth he wouldn't go to Mother unless she herself called him. Then Sharat Maharaj told him with affection that if he prayed to Mother wholeheartedly she would definitely bestow her grace on him. The child believed this completely and started praying to Mother. Later on he came to know that Mother had left the world. Thenceforth he started coming to the temple and praying to Mother from outside to call him near her. Hearing this tale of unheard prayer, Swami Dhireshananda, though a staunch Vedantin, couldn't restrain his tears. Sometimes when Rammay Maharaj saw Habu, he would tease him, saying, 'Why are you wasting your time? Mother won't call you!' At this, Habu would affirm with conviction, 'No, Mother will, Sharat Maharaj has told me!' After some days, Habu's grandson came to the ashrama with the news that his grandfather was bedridden and wanted to see Rammay Maharaj. But since Maharaj was not well enough to travel, he asked us to go to see him. So some of us sadhus went to see the old man. As soon as he saw us he said with brightened eyes, in broken Bengali, 'Mother came! She gave darshan and called me to herself!' and repeated these words several times with unbounded joy, his face beaming with bliss. Mother had finally heard the prayers of her son and had given him her blessed darshan. How long could she restrain herself from answering the cries of her child? She had come to take him in her arms. After hearing this from us, Rammay Maharaj understood that this was the final moment, and had someone bring him charanamrita (holy water) from Mother's temple before he breathed his last. In Habu Munda we see a wonderful example of faithful prayer and devotion. And we also witness the compassionate grace of the Holy Mother, who is also the Divine Mother of the universe.

## UPCOMING EVENTS CALENDAR

| Program detail   | Date & Time                             | Venue Address  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Annual General Body meeting</b>                               | <b><u>December 18</u></b><br>11:00am    | <b>Party Room in 85 Emmett Ave,<br/>Toronto</b>                                |
| <b>Christmas Eve &amp;<br/>Holy Mother Birthday Celebrations</b> | <b><u>December 24</u></b><br>4.30pm     | <b>Arya Samaj Mississauga</b><br>405 Watline Ave, Mississauga ON L4Z 1P3       |
| <b>Kalpataru Day Celebration</b>                                 | <b><u>January 1, 2017</u></b><br>4.30pm | <b>Sindhi Gurmandir Temple</b><br>207 Queens Plate Drive, Toronto, ON, M9W 6Z7 |
| <b>Swami Vivekananda birthday<br/>Celebration</b>                | <b><u>Jan 21 or 22 (TBA)</u></b>        | <b>To be announced</b>   |

## REGULAR PROGRAMMES

**SCRIPTURE CLASS:** Every Friday at 7:30 pm, following the regular evening prayer at 6:00 pm. *This will be held in the Main Shrine area; entrance will be from the Main Door located on Emmett Avenue.*

**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. *This will be held in the Main Shrine area; entrance will be from the Main Door located on Emmett Avenue.*

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

### **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.

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

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

## IMPORTANT NOTE

Vedanta Society's Renovation Project Phase-2 is supposed to continue until Feb15, 2017. During this period, only a few activities will be conducted at the Centre in the **Main Shrine**. Since now the Centre is a construction area, there are restrictions towards moving about inside the building. Members and Devotees are requested to follow the **CAUTION** signs inside the temple. 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 or 905-799-0023.

## AN APPEAL FOR DONATION – ASHRAMA RENOVATION

Vedanta Society plans to start the Phase-2 Renovation Project in May 2016, which is estimated to cost \$1.4M. Members and Devotees are requested to come forward and donate generously for this purpose. The proposed Phase-2 includes : Prayer hall expansion, relocate the stairs for fire safety enhancement, Mezzanine floor expansion, Increased number of washrooms, New Lift for elder & physically challenged devotees, new flower room, new book store, new guest rooms for visiting Swamis, more multi-purpose meeting rooms (Vidya Mandir, spiritual discussions, library), Energy efficient kitchens with better equipment and washing facilities, Energy efficient lighting, better heating-cooling & ventilation, better security and safety (CCTV cameras, alarms) and better audio-visual facility.

# Vedanta Society of Toronto

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

### December 2016

| Sun   | Mon       | Tue       | Wed       | Thu       | Fri  | Sat   |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|---|
|   |           |           |           | <u>1</u>  | <u>2</u> 7:30pm<br>Scripture Class:<br>'Gospel of Sri<br>Ramakrishna'  | <u>3</u>  |
| <u>4</u> 11:00am Lecture:<br>'The Seasons of Life'  | <u>5</u>  | <u>6</u>  | <u>7</u>  | <u>8</u>  | <u>9</u> 7:30pm<br>Scripture Class:<br>'Vivekachudamani'               | <u>10</u><br><b>NO VIGIL<br/>THIS MONTH</b>   |
| <u>11</u> 11:00am Lecture:<br>'The Message of Christ'   | <u>12</u> | <u>13</u> | <u>14</u> | <u>15</u> | <u>16</u> 7:30pm<br>Scripture Class:<br>'Gospel of Sri<br>Ramakrishna' | <u>17</u>   |
| <u>5:00pm</u><br><b>RAMNAM</b>  |           |           |           |           |  |   |
| <u>18</u> 11:00am<br><b>ANNUAL<br/>GENERAL<br/>MEETING</b><br>At 85 Emmett Ave, Party<br>Room | <u>19</u> | <u>20</u> | <u>21</u> | <u>22</u> | <u>23</u> 7:30pm<br>Scripture Class:<br>'Vivekachudamani'              | <u>24</u> 4:30pm<br><b>HOLY MOTHER'S<br/>BIRTHDAY<br/>&amp;<br/>CHRISTMAS EVE<br/>CELEBRATION</b> |
| <u>25</u><br><b>WINTER<br/>RECESS<br/>STARTS</b>  | <u>26</u> | <u>27</u> | <u>28</u> | <u>29</u> | <u>30</u>  | <u>31</u>   |

*Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year!*

*May peace and spiritual blessings be yours in the coming year and always!*

THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF TORONTO WILL BE OBSERVING WINTER RECESS  
FROM SUNDAY, DEC 25, 2016 TO SATURDAY, JAN 07, 2017.  
NO SUNDAY SERVICE AND SCRIPTURE CALSS DURING THIS PERIOD