



# Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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## Newsletter February 2016

### WORDS TO INSPIRE

**“Religion is realization; not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be.”**

-Swami Vivekananda

How can we turn our mind to God? By holy company. It is not sufficient to merely visit the holy men now and then. You must observe their lives, receive instructions from them and mould your life accordingly. The great barrier that obstructs your correct vision of God is the doubts and confusions in your mind. They haunt the mind, swing it to and fro, and lead it to run after diverse objects. Drive them out with the sharp sword of discrimination. If you are not able to do so by your own strength, seek the aid of those who are adepts in doing it, the sadhus.

A beginner should sit beside holy men and listen to them with profound attention and retain their words of counsel in his memory. But it must not end there. He must try to realize what he learns from them. Bear in mind that neither talking, nor learning, nor study, will lead you to realization. You will have to practise and live what you hear and learn. But that is not at all possible without Brahmacharya and Sadhana. If you have the desire to turn your mind to God and realize Him, your Sadhana must go hand in hand with Brahmacharya.

Many attempt to realize God by studying the scriptures, but they do not know that without Brahmacharya and Sadhana no one can catch the spirit of the scriptures, much less realize God. Read The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and such other books and try to live according to their teachings. The more you read, the more light you will find in them. The knowledge of God derived from hearsay is quite different from that acquired by practising Sadhana. This again differs widely from the knowledge you acquire after God-realization.

Do you know what Nag Mahasaya used to say? ‘It is easier to earn fame than to renounce it. He who renounces it is really a great man.’ He also said, ‘An anchored boat does not move forward.’ He meant that a man whose mind is deep-rooted in lust and greed cannot move Godward unless he frees himself from their deluding influence through intense Sadhana. God and pleasure-seeking cannot go together. If you want the one, you have to banish the other.

Human birth is a rare privilege. Getting it, if you do not strive after God, you are surely very unfortunate. Your human birth will be in vain. Sri Sankara has said, ‘Human birth, desire for spiritual liberation and holy company are rare. Those who are blessed with all the three are the most fortunate.’

Do you know the object of holy company? The experiences of holy men are a great help to a Sadhaka. When you visit a new place, if you have the help of a good guide, you will be able to see within a short time all that is worth seeing there. You will also be saved from the dangers and difficulties into which strangers are likely to fall. Similarly, from the company of advanced Sadhakas you will be able to gather many valuable hints, and your spiritual struggle will be very much simplified. The intelligence of an ordinary man does not go very far. Life is short and many things have to be done.

So you must find out the best way of doing your work within as short a time as possible. Hence the need for holy company.

From *‘THE ETERNAL COMPANION - Life and teachings of Sw Brahmananda’*

## **Being Centered in Spirituality**

*(Based on a Talk by Swami Kripamayanda at the Vedanta Society on March 18, 2012)*

“Sri Ramakrishna was a great observer of human nature” says Swami Bhuteshanandaji. He continues, “Sri Ramakrishna often remarked that people are often running after worldly enjoyments and their minds are only at the lower levels. He had mentioned at length the condition of worldly men in bondage. They are absolutely forgetful of higher life and are busy satisfied with the lowest kind of enjoyments”. Once when Sri Ramakrishna was travelling in a carriage from Dakshineswar to Calcutta, he put out his head outside the carriage window. He saw the minds of the people walking the streets. All of them were worried, unhappy, troubled and their minds were focused only on desires for materialistic gains. Nobody was concerned about their spiritual growth at all. Due to this, they were in great bondage which led to their misery. This was the biggest concern of Sri Ramakrishna— how to uplift the minds of the people and make them conscious of the higher values.

Most of the people are not even aware of greater joy that comes from liberation and don't think of getting out of the bondage of samsara. They enjoy this type of life of bondage very much and thrive in it. Sri Ramakrishna says in one of his stories – The worm that lives in the cow dung, if taken out of it and kept in nice food, that worm will die. Another story is about the fisherwoman and the florist narrated by Sri Ramakrishna. There was a fisherwoman, who once while returning back after selling her basket of fish, got delayed and it was night. So she decided to halt at her friend's house in the town, the friend was a florist. Her friend welcomed her and provided her nice hospitality. But at night the fisherwoman could not sleep. She kept on turning her side trying to sleep. Then, at night, she approached her florist friend and asked her to bring her fish basket. She sprinkled some water in the basket and kept it near her bed. The smell of the fish made her comfortable and she slept and snored heavily throughout the rest of the night. The story tells us that worldly minded people do not like the spiritual upliftment and they feel comfortable in

the world of the senses that they live in. Sri Krishna says in the Gita— Among thousands of people only a handful strive for spirituality and amongst the striving seekers, only a very few get the vision of God. Our senses are

made to go outward, not inward. Due to this we seek pleasures outside of us, forgetting the inner bliss. But there are few wise people who, desirous of immortality, start exploring the spiritual world. There is the inner voice which directs the mind and tells it about the farce that exists in the outside world. Also when we say that we love the food or a beautiful scene, is that love externally generated? No, in fact the love that flows towards anything also emerges from inside us. It is the same love of our inner Spirit that reflects through our senses towards the external objects. The wife loves her husband not as husband but as the same Spirit or Consciousness that is in her. How do we know that this is right? Just imagine if you are full and someone offers you more of the same delicious dish. Will you love to eat that? No, for certain. So, this indicates that the love is not in the food, but inside our soul.

However, the question still remains— how to focus on the spiritual life? The inner Spirit is so subtle that it is very difficult to get a glimpse of it. Sri Ramakrishna says— ‘That which is pure mind is also pure buddhi (intellect); that again is pure Atman.’ The way to realize this Spirit or Atman is to keep holy company. What can holy company do if our minds are worldly? By following holy company, one starts absorbing the purity of these holy persons and thus our minds start becoming purer.

There is a limit to enjoyment of external objects through our senses— hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling and touching. When we are young, the senses are strong and through them we can enjoy the external objects. But as we grow older our senses become weaker and weaker. If the desires have not become less and we still crave to enjoy the sense objects, we will be unable to enjoy. This becomes the cause of frustration and suffering. When death approaches, the body of every one has to die and disintegrate. If there are deep unfulfilled

desires remaining even at the time of death, we get dragged again into the cycle of birth and death. Therefore, if we want to make our lives spiritual, we have to start when we are young and when our senses are strong. We all know from our experience that restraining the senses and controlling the mind is extremely difficult. Controlling the outgoing senses seems almost impossible. How then can we remain established in the Atman? However, there is a hope for those who try for self-control. Sri Ramakrishna said– I have lighted the fire, it's for you to come and enjoy its warmth. I have built the mould, it is for you to come and cast yourself. I have cooked the food, it is for you to come and enjoy it. If we read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we can find so many such sayings. He gives us complete assurance for going forward on the spiritual path. In the Taitriya Upanishad, Bhrigu asks his father Varuna to teach him Brahman (Supreme Being) that is, to lead him into spiritual life. Varuna says– That from which the whole universe has come into existence, in which the whole universe is sustained and where the whole universe will finally merge into– try to know that; that verily is Brahman! Now, in order to know Brahman, meditation or Tapas is required. Bhrigu goes for meditation. First time he gets the answer 'body is Brahman'. His father denies and asks him to meditate further. Second time he gets the answer 'Prana is Brahman', then mind, then intellect and then finally he gets the answer 'Atman' or Spirit is Brahman'. This indicates that 'Mental joy is greater than sensual joy', 'Joy of intellect or deep thinking is greater than mental joy', but the real joy is 'the joy of Atman'. Sankaracharya says that the real grace of God can be ensured if we get these 3 things– Manushyatvam– human birth, Mumukshutvam– desire for liberation or desire for getting the joy of the Atman, Mahapurusha samshraya– association of holy person. In spite of getting these three great blessings, if a person does not practice and utilize his human birth to become free from the cycle of samsara in this life, then he is the biggest fool. Sri

Ramakrishna says– Unfurl your sail– practice spirituality. Again He says– Merely by saying Siddhi (hemp), you won't get intoxication, for that a person has to actually try that then he will get the real intoxication. Similarly by merely sitting on the boat he will not get across, even though he might be the best boat. He has to put efforts to sail the boat. Only then he will be able to get across the ocean.

Sri Ramakrishna says – I have practiced sixteen annas (100%) of spirituality, you have to do only one anna of practice to get the glimpse of the Spirit. This is so big assurance to all devotees who follow Sri Ramakrishna. We only have to start practicing, help will surely come. We can take out a little time in the morning and evening from our busy schedule and meditate on the Ideal or chant some verses from the scriptures and try to understand its meaning, that itself will give us tremendous peace.

Sri Ramakrishna says – the gist of Gita is what we get by repeating the name GITA ten times. It becomes TAGI-TAGI-. 'Tagi' implies Renunciation'. What is to be renounced? We have to renounce lust, anger and greed. How do we renounce them? They are very much a part of our being. Unless we are aware of the Atman, the pure Spirit as our essence, it is extremely difficult to be free from these strong impurities which Sri Krishna calls 'gateways to hell'. So, what is the way? This question was asked to Sri Ramakrishna many times in the Gospel. He emphasized on 'Chanting God's name, holy company, discernment between real and unreal and renunciation'. Detachment is the key, but how to detach? Sri Ramakrishna explains this in his very simple way– 'No need to detach, just consider your children, family members and relatives as God and serve them'. In this way you will not have to put in extra efforts to focus your mind on God. While feeding your child, think that you are feeding baby Krishna. When our actions are directed all to God, automatically the feelings of lust and anger and greed will wear away and we will experience the divine bliss.

## A Christian Devotee Meets Sri Ramakrishna

by Swami Prabhananda (from *Vedanta Kesari*, Sep 1975)

Persuaded by the elderly devotees, Sri Ramakrishna, who was suffering from what was called 'clergyman's sore throat' had in 1885 moved to Calcutta for better and more systematic medical treatment by experts. Some doctors in Calcutta examined him and diagnosed his ailment as cancer. Although there was no known cure for it in those days, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, the leading homoeopathist, came forward to treat him to the best of his ability. In spite of himself the patient frequently entered samadhi in divine emotion; but he also talked to people who needed his help. On an autumn morning, 31st October 1885, there came to the saint a stranger. Brown-complexioned and large-eyed, the thirty-five-year-old new arrival had a beard and wore European dress. With a hat and a walking stick in hand, he entered Sri Ramakrishna's room. As was his wont, Sri Ramakrishna was the first to greet the stranger politely. The new arrival returned the greetings and took his seat on a carpet on the floor. He introduced himself as Prabhudayal Mishra. He was born of a Christian family and belonged to the Quaker sect. After a preliminary exchange of words, Mishra gave expression to a religious sentiment by quoting Tulsidas, 'It is Rama alone who dwells in all beings.' The highly spiritual soul that Sri Ramakrishna was, he could see the ins and outs of the new arrival. Presently Sri Ramakrishna, appreciating Mishra's attitude, said to the younger Naren, within Mishra's hearing, 'Rama is one, but He has a thousand names. He who is called God by the Christians is addressed by the Hindus as Rama, Krishna, Isvara, and by other names. A lake has many ghats. The Hindus drink water at one ghat and call it Jal; the Christians at another, and call it Water; the Mussalmans at a third, and call it Pani. Likewise, He who is God to the Christians is Allah to the Mussalmans.' Each individual may have his own way, but all paths have but one goal and that goal is God-realization. Mishra was full of glowing ardour and expressed his devotion for Sri Ramakrishna in many ways. Sri Ramakrishna asked: 'Do you see visions?' Mishra: 'Sir, even when I lived at home I used to see light. Then I had a vision of Jesus. How can I describe that beauty? How insignificant is the beauty of a woman compared with that beauty!' Wonder-struck at such words from the lips of a lay devotee the onlookers waited for further elucidation. Mishra gave out other glimpses of his religious life. Renouncing his family he was practicing yoga in a lonely cave. One day he was blessed with a vision. He saw a beautiful garden by the side of a rivulet. There he saw seated a yogi merged in deep samadhi. The shining countenance of the yogi dazzled him. All this happened but once, and however hard he tried, he could not experience it again. Since then he had been moving about in expectation of meeting that yogi. Today he recognized in Sri Ramakrishna the blessed figure of the yogi of his vision. Evidently Mishra's earnest efforts and determination had

helped him develop the sense of surrender to the will of God, and he was blessed with some spiritual experiences. Firm in his convictions he narrated his experiences and to convince the listeners Mishra soon afterwards took off his trousers and showed those present the gerua loin cloth he was wearing. Sri Ramakrishna went out to answer the call of nature. On his return he disclosed to the devotees the vision he had seen a few minutes earlier. He said: 'I saw him (meaning Mishra) standing in a heroic posture.' As he uttered these words he went into samadhi: he was standing facing the west. Standing transfixed he looked like a picture on canvas, with the twitch of a smile lingering on his lips. After a while Sri Ramakrishna slowly regained partial consciousness. He gazed at Mishra and began to laugh. Sri Ramakrishna muttered 'Are you keeping well?' as if Mishra was an old acquaintance. His ecstatic mood lingered on. After a while he took hold of Mishra's hands. He shook hands with Mishra and said, 'You will get what you are striving for.' Sri Ramakrishna was still standing. His mind was swinging between semi-consciousness and bhava-samadhi, and his face was reflecting the joy of the God-consciousness he was experiencing. The captivating smile on his lips stole Mishra's heart. Struck with wonder and awe Mishra, with folded hands, said: 'Since that day (the day on which he had seen Sri Ramakrishna in a vision) I have surrendered to you my mind, soul and body.' All through, Sri Ramakrishna continued laughing, still in ecstasy. It seems Mishra saw in Sri Ramakrishna in \*samadhi\* his chosen ideal Lord Jesus Christ. Overwhelmed he began to utter words of praise and offered a sincere prayer. Then addressing the devotees he said, 'You do not recognize who he is. He and Jesus Christ are one. Jesus Christ used to be in such a state of ecstasy as you have seen in him today. I have already seen both Jesus Christ and Paramahamsadeva in a vision. He is the present Jesus Christ.' The devotees were charmed to hear of such revelations from a Christian devotee. Sri Ramakrishna asked the devotees to attend to Mishra. Impressed by what Mishra had said, Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda), the leader of the young devotees who had rallied round Sri Ramakrishna, put searching questions to get all he could out of the yogi that Mishra was. Profoundly moved by his sincerity and achievements, Narendra paid his homage to Mishra by saluting him. The other young devotees present in the room followed suit. Sri Ramakrishna presented pomegranate and other fruits to Mishra who was highly pleased and distributed Sri Ramakrishna's prasada among the devotees. Swami Saradananda has recorded that the devotees and Mishra took sweets and fruits, the prasada of Sri Ramakrishna together in one and the same plate. This significant meeting fulfils Sri Ramakrishna's prophetic statement that sincere aspirants, whoever they might be, would come to him for guidance in their pilgrimage to the Universal God.

## **IMPORTANT EVENTS OF THIS MONTH**

**Saraswati Puja** will be celebrated on **Sunday, February 14, 2016 from 1:30-2pm**. The programme will consist of a few songs, hymns, puja and offering of flowers to Saraswati by students of Vedanta Vidya Mandir, their parents, teachers and devotees.

**Guest Lecture: Swaroop Dogra** will deliver a talk on **Sunday, February 21 at 11 am** on '*Sikhism- Origin & Essence*'

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

**MAHASHIVARATRI** will be celebrated on Monday, March 7 at 6:30 pm.

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION** will be held on Sunday, March 13 at 11 am.

## **REGULAR PROGRAMMES**

**SCRIPTURE CLASS:** Every Friday at 7:30 pm, Devotional singing and meditation time in the evenings following the regular evening prayer at 6:00 pm. is from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm.

**VIGIL:** A vigil consisting of japa and meditation is observed from 6:00am to 6:00pm. For the date of this month's vigil, please see the 'Calendar of Events' on the next page. *To participate, please call the Centre.*

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

### **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 instruction. Appointments for interviews should be made in advance with the Swami at 416-240-7262.

**DAILY MEDITATION:** Meditation is done at the Centre every morning from 6:00 am to 7:00 am.

**DAILY BREAD FOOD BANK:** Many less fortunate families are dependent on the food bank for their daily nutrition. Please help us by contributing non-perishable food items that we may pass along to the Daily Bread Food Bank.

**SOUP KITCHEN:** The Soup is cooked at the Vedanta Society and offered serving meals at Syme Woolner Neighborhood & Family Centre, 2468 Eglinton Ave W, Unit 3, Toronto, ON, M6M 5E2. Please contact the Centre, if you are interested in participating. *Donations for the Soup Kitchen will be highly appreciated*

**BOOK STORE:** The Book Store is open after Sunday Services and special programs, and arrangements can be made by phone for weekday and Saturday visits. We carry selected titles from the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, as well as other Vedantic materials.

## **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 by which all the devotees in the building will be able to enjoy the event.

# Vedanta Society of Toronto

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

### February 2016

Sunday	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Friday	Saturday
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u> Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>6</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>7</u> 11am Lecture: 'Struggle-Struggle- Struggle!'	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>12</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>13</u> 6am to 6pm <b>Vigil</b>
<u>1:30 pm</u> VVM						
<u>14</u> 11am Lecture: 'Sarada-Saraswati'	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>19</u> 7:30pm 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>20</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>1:30 pm</u> <b>Saraswati Puja</b> & VVM						
<u>21</u> 11am Lecture: 'Sikhism-Origin & Essence' by Swaroop Dogra	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen by Patanjali Yoga group	<u>26</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>27</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>5pm: Ram Nam</u>						
<u>28</u> 11am Lecture: 'Why to live?'	<u>29</u>					

Tax Receipts for your donations made in 2015 will be mailed by February 7. If you do not receive it by Feb 15, please let us know; we will send you duplicate copy. If there is any discrepancy in the tax receipt, please inform us asap so that we can rectify and send you the receipt by return mail. Regarding tax receipts, please contact us by email or by phone.