



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

120 Emmett Ave. Toronto, ON M6M 2E6 CANADA

Tel.: 416-240-7262; Email: info@vedantatoronto.ca; Website: www.vedantatoronto.ca

Newsletter February 2017

WORDS TO INSPIRE

“What am I? It is all He. I am the machine and He is its Operator. It is God alone who exists in this [meaning his body]”.

--- Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna said about himself: “There is no pretence [hypocrisy] here.” True religion is a matter of experience; it is not show business. People observed that the Master was married but not a regular householder; he was a monk but did not wear an ochre cloth. Neither was he shaven-headed, nor had he any tuft of hair. His body was not besmeared with ashes, nor was he a hemp smoker like some other monks. What kind of sadhu was this?

He did not sit on a tiger skin or cover his body with holy marks or use rudraksha beads while repeating the mantra or quote Sanskrit shlokas from the scriptures. He did not practise hatha yoga or give any medicines or amulets to cure diseases. He went to Calcutta by horse carriage and visited his devotees there. He talked about God and enjoyed good food. He lived in a beautiful room near the Ganges in Dakshineswar. His room was decorated with pictures and his bed was clean and tidy. While talking about God, he sang and danced. He laughed, made jokes, and had fun. He ate like other people, chewed betel rolls, and smoked a hubble-bubble. It is hard to recognize such a person to be an avatar. Yet there was such an attractive power in the Master that anyone who saw him could not forget him. Once he went to see a play in a Calcutta theatre. While there, he said to Baburam and M.: “Don’t make a fuss if I fall into an ecstatic mood or go into samadhi. Then the worldly people will take me for a cheat.”

Devotees who were pure and simple and had spiritual insight recognized the Master’s divinity. Durga Charan Nag said: “After visiting the Master a few

times, I realized that he was Lord Narayana Himself; He was secretly enacting His divine play in Dakshineswar.” Someone asked, “How did you know this?” Nag Mahashay replied: “The Master, out of his mercy, revealed to me his divine nature. Can anyone know him without his grace? A man can practise austerities for a thousand years, but without God’s grace, no one can understand Him.”

On another occasion, the Master asked Nag Mahashay: “What do you think of me?” He saluted the Master with folded hands and replied: “You cannot hoodwink me anymore. Through your grace I have come to know that you are that Supreme One.”

Immediately the Master went into ecstasy and touched Nag Mahashay’s chest with his right foot. Suddenly, Nag Mahashay also went into ecstasy. He saw a divine light engulfing all the moving and unmoving objects of the world.

Once the Master asked Ram Chandra Datta: “What do you think of me?” Ram replied: “Master, I read in the Chaitanya Charitamrita about the signs manifested in Gauranga. Now I see those signs in you, so I consider you to be Gauranga.” Sri Ramakrishna was silent for a moment and then said, “Well, the Bhairavi Brahmani used to say the same thing.” Ram later said: “From then on I knew that he was God”..

From: *How To Live With God*
by Swami Chetanananda – Pp. 135-136

Prayer as a Spiritual Discipline

*(Excerpt from the article by Swami Bhajanananda
published in 'Living Wisdom: Vedanta in the West')*

There is hardly anyone who has not prayed at some time or other in his life. Prayers may be grouped into two main divisions: secular and spiritual. For our purpose, here is only to study the second type of prayer, namely, spiritual prayer—prayer practiced as a spiritual discipline.

Prayer represents the first stage in the aspirant's struggle for higher consciousness. The fulfillment of a spiritual need such as purity or devotion may be the primary motivation to pray, but the act of praying serves as a technique of concentration and takes the aspirant nearer to God. A true spiritual aspirant prays not only for the fulfillment of his inner needs, but also because he knows that the very act of praying will take him closer to God. And, as he advances on the path of prayer, this aspect of concentration becomes more important than fulfillment of needs.

All the great religions of the world teach prayer. In Hinduism prayer once dominated the life of the people during the Vedic period. But later on worship, meditation, and self-inquiry almost completely replaced it. It may be said that in modern times Sri Ramakrishna has revived it. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna one finds the Master recommending prayer on several occasions. Once a devotee asked him, "Then what is the way, sir?" Sri Ramakrishna answered, "Prayer and the company of holy men." After explaining the benefits of holy company, the Master continued, "There is another way: earnestly praying to God. God is our very own. We should say to Him: 'O God, what is Thy nature? Reveal Thyself to me. Thou must reveal Thyself to me; for why else hast Thou created me?'" "One should pray to God with a longing heart. God certainly listens to prayer if it is sincere. There is no doubt about it." What Sri Ramakrishna meant was that through sincere prayer everyone could overcome his inherent limitations and gain spiritual experience by God's grace.

In Hinduism, *parthana*, the Sanskrit word for prayer, always means petitionary prayer and has

been given only limited importance. It means asking God for help to free oneself from the hold of the senses and turn away from the darkness of ignorance to the light of truth. It is the first stage in the struggle for higher consciousness in which the aspirant, realizing his limitations, opens his heart to divine power and light. It is in effect a movement from God to the soul.

Worship is offering something to God—it may be a material object or one's own body, mind, and soul. Worship shifts the focus of man's activities from the ego to the divine and detaches the soul from external objects. It is primarily a movement from the soul to God.

As a result of these two movements, the soul draws closer to God. This act of approaching God is what *dhyana* or meditation means.

So then, prayer, worship, and meditation represent three degrees of the development of intimacy between the soul and God. One begins spiritual life by asking God for favors, then starts offering things to him, and finally succeeds in going nearer to him. These three steps also represent three stages in the progressive transformation of the aspirant's consciousness.

Parthana or prayer is "speaking to God." Just as a child speaks about its needs to its parents or a student seeks guidance from a teacher or a servant places his problems before his master, so does the soul speak frankly to the Lord about its difficulties, needs, and wishes. It is this "speaking" to God and dependence on his grace that distinguish prayer from other disciplines.

Though God is unseen, prayer is not a monologue. It is a mystic interior exchange with the unseen divine Partner going on through the medium of faith. A true devotee does not feel that God is unknown or does not respond. His burning faith makes God a living presence. It is this continual exercise of faith that makes prayer a spiritual discipline.

Talks with those whom we love are always personal and informal. The interior conversation with God, or prayer, too must be intensely personal, natural, and

spontaneous. Prayer can be done in two ways: externally and internally. In external prayer one stands or sits before an image or picture of the Lord, preferably in a temple or one's own private shrine, and gazing at the image pours forth one's heart in a fervent appeal. In internal prayer one sits with closed eyes, visualizes the Lord's image in the heart, and appeals to him mentally.

Meditation is the conscious, self-directed focusing of a continuous stream of thoughts on a mental object. The main difficulty is in concentrating the mind at a higher center of consciousness. For this two conditions are to be fulfilled. The higher spiritual center should be developed and made active to some extent. And then the will and mental energies must be given a higher turn. Prayer accomplishes both these tasks. Prayer is the best way to stimulate the

heart center. You will find prayer quickly gathers up the energies at the heart center and you feel a new access of strength. Prayer not only detaches the will but focuses it upward. As the aspirant goes on praying intensely, he finds that gradually prayer merges imperceptibly into dhyana, or true meditation.

One may begin with a petitionary prayer using many words. But as prayer gains in intensity and depth, words drop away by themselves, leaving only a silent aspiration in the heart. Then the inner Image becomes still and the mind flows in silence toward it. Prayer has transformed itself naturally and spontaneously into meditation. This is the ultimate goal of prayer.

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 includes – Installation of HVAC ducts and connecting them to the units, interior framing (bulkheads, ceiling), drywall installation/ taping (fire rating, walls, ceilings), cabling for Audio-Visual, Security cameras installation, API-alarm monitoring system, demolition of temporary wall, Washroom downstairs tiling, plumbing completed, WR to start functioning in next week, Side door area tiling completed, 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 of HVAC and vents, purchase of appliances, purchase of Audio-visual products, purchase of security cameras, purchase of 75% of the furniture, purchase of lift, doors and windows, repaired the roof, installation of fire alarm system.

In process work includes: Upstairs kitchen hood & suppression system, Lift installation, upstairs WR tiling, flooring, exterior doors purchase and installation, fire alarm system synch with the Alarm monitoring, Burglar alarm system monitoring. Roofing Company has been selected and awarded, roofing likely to be done in May-June 2017. Awning for ramp, side door and windows ordered, installation in May with Roofing work.

The estimated time of completion is around end-March, 2017, and obtaining the Occupancy Certificate from the City may take another few weeks i.e. early-April 2017.

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.

Spiritual Talks of Swami Adbhutananda

Recorded by Swami Raghavananda

(From *Vedanta and the West*, Nov-Dec 1959)

The Master used to say about Swamiji [Swami Vivekananda]: “He has nothing that he calls his own. He who calls nothing his own, what does he have? He possesses God directly.” What devotion Swamiji had to Sri Ramakrishna! One time the Master gave him a pair of shoes to wear, but [out of reverence] Swamiji never wore them. Others learned devotion from him.

Sri Ramakrishna used to send me to bring Swamiji to him, and Swamiji would say: “Why does he want me? He has so many devotees. . .”

Swamiji said at one time: “He alone is my refuge. When he [Sri Ramakrishna] comes again, I will also have to come.”

When Swamiji came back from America I hesitated to approach him because he had received such worship in the West. Swamiji took me by the hand and said: “I am still that same Naren and you are that same Leto. What you see is all the will of the Lord. It is the play of the Lord’s power.”

How can worldly people understand and judge spirituality? Keep your spiritual moods inside. Humility, and so on, are all in the inner attitude. Sri Ramakrishna did not let us practice external austerities. Deben Thakur [the father of Rabindranath Tagore] used to wear a cashmere shawl, but his mind was on a high plane. Worldly people considered Sri Ramakrishna to be a dandy. Wear clean clothes, keep your body clean and your mind cheerful.

God does not look to the caste or lineage of a man. He sees his deeds. Dear to him is his devotee. It is the deeds that make a man either great or small.

Orthodox Brahmins used to speak ill of Sri Ramakrishna because he was not strict about caste. Hirananda once brought some sweets for him from the shop of a Mohammedan. The Master ate the sweets

and said: “They are pure because they have been brought by a devotee.”

God’s main teaching is: “O man, call on Me! Love Me! You have no other refuge but Me.” Never forget Him, and you will live happily. Forget Him, and you will suffer. Always pray that your mind may be fixed in Him.

Girish Ghosh once said: “What can I do? He [Sri Ramakrishna] only showed me his grace when I became old. If I had been younger I would have set the example of *sannyas* {monastic life}.” Girish Ghosh used to say: “Nobody understands my life; only the Master understood.”

Sri Ramakrishna often repeated: “Every being is Narayana [the Lord]—saint Narayana, sinner Narayana, hypocrite Narayana, and so on. If you associate with the drunkard Narayana, you also will become a drunkard. So bow down to this kind of Narayana from a distance.”

Only through the meritorious deeds of many past lives can one get a Vivekananda as a brother-disciple. The Master asked him to look after the rest of us, and what did he not do for us! Yes, I worship Vivekananda! . . . At the Baranagore Math, Vivekananda would meditate the whole night while we would fall asleep.

Everybody was not allowed to visit the Holy Mother during those days. Only Harish [a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna] and I were free to do so. Later on, when I did not visit her often, she said: “Why don’t you come and see me? I am still the same mother to you.”

The Lord is pleased if you please his devotee.

UPCOMING EVENTS CALENDAR

Program detail	Date & Time	Venue Address
Maha Shivaratri Celebration	<u>February 26, 2017</u> 5:30 pm	Vedanta Society of Toronto
Sri Ramakrishna Birthday Celebration	<u>March 5, 2017</u> 10:00 am	Sindhi Gurmandir 207 Queens Plate Drive, Etobicoke M9W6Z7

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 is closed currently due to renovation, which is expected to be completed around **end March, 2017.** During this period only regular few activities will be conducted. Since this is a construction area, there are restrictions towards moving about inside the temple. 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.

Scheduled Regular Activities (please see the calendar on page 6 for details):

Scripture class: Fridays @ 7:30pm

Ramnam: Once every month

Vigil: Cancelled in this month due to ongoing building renovation work.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

February 2017

RENOVATION IN PROGRESS AT VEDANTA SOCIETY

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u> 7:30pm Scripture Class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>4</u>
<u>5</u> 11:00am Lecture: 'Set Limits to understand the Limitless'	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> 7:30pm Scripture Class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>11</u>
<u>12</u> 11:00am Lecture: 'The Miracle of Sri Ramakrishna: Shepherd becomes a Saint'	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u> 7:30pm Scripture Class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>18</u> NO VIGIL THIS MONTH
<u>19</u> 11:00am Lecture: 'How to Attain Shiva?'	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>25</u>
5:00pm RAMNAM						
<u>26</u> NO LECTURE Maha Shivaratri celebration at VST at 5:30 pm	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>				

AN APPEAL FOR DONATION – ASHRAMA RENOVATION

Vedanta Society is currently executing the Phase-2 Renovation Project, 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.