



# Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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## Newsletter June 2017

### Words to Inspire

"I do not know what the scriptures say about God, but I believe that if Sri Ramakrishna was able to love me as he did in the same way that I love myself, then he must be God. He loved me in this way."

-- Girish Chandra Ghosh

One unique aspect of the lives of almost all the Prophets and Incarnations of God is their tremendous charisma to draw a group of disciples, who are generally found to be men of high spiritual calibre, and inspire lifelong allegiance and loyalty in them. After the passing away of the Prophet, his disciples serve as his apostles or messengers, and interpret and carry his message to people living in nearby and far off places. Sri Ramakrishna had sixteen young disciples whom he trained from their early youth, and who later formed a monastic order in his name, and several enlightened householder disciples. The foremost of his disciples was Narendranath, later known by his monastic name Swami Vivekananda, who spread his master's message in different parts of India and the world. The discipleship of Swami Vivekananda was Sri Ramakrishna's greatest asset. No other prophet in human history ever had such a brilliant, learned, loving, devoted, multi-faceted genius and visionary like Swami Vivekananda as his disciple. It is, however, to be noted here that although Narendra accepted Sri Ramakrishna as his Guru or spiritual teacher at the impressionable age of eighteen, he had difficulty in accepting Sri Ramakrishna as *Avatara* till the last days of Sri Ramakrishna on earth. One day during his terminal illness at Cossipore, Sri Ramakrishna told Narendranath, "Some people call me God." Narendra told him bluntly, "Let a thousand people call you God, but I will certainly not call you God as long as I do not know it to be true." Later on Narendra must

have got the incontrovertible proof of the *Avatarahood* of Sri Ramakrishna through some direct transcendental experience, which he never divulged to anybody. This is clear from the fact that the same person who doubted the *Avatarahood* later wrote, as Swami Vivekananda, sublime hymns and songs on Sri Ramakrishna, which are now sung in thousands of homes and hundreds of Ashramas, in which he describes Sri Ramakrishna as "God of the New Age, God of the World" [jrimbhita yuga isvara, jagadisvara] and as "the greatest of all Incarnations" [*avataravaristha*]. What was the reason behind Narendra's hesitation in accepting Sri Ramakrishna as *Avatara*? In this context, it should be pointed out that the *Avatarahood* of Sri Ramakrishna was not a dogma propounded by his disciples. Long before the disciples started gathering around him, he had been openly declared to be the new Avatar by several eminent scholars like Vaishnavacharan, Narayan Sastri, Gauri Pandit of Indesh, and others. Narendra knew all this, he was also aware of the supernatural events in the Great Master's life. One day the well-known Brahma Samaj leader Vijaykrishna Goswami had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna in Dhaka and proved to himself that it was not an illusion, by actually touching the figure. Later when he narrated the event before Sri Ramakrishna at Cossipore in Calcutta, Narendra, who was also present there, said, "I too have seen him many times; how can I say I do not believe your words?"

From the book 'The Light of the Modern World'  
by Sw Bhajananda pg 44-46

### IMPORTANT NOTE

The renovation at Vedanta Society is expected to be completed and Occupancy certificate obtained shortly. 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.

## Symbols in Hindu Spirituality

(Excerpted from the article by Swami Swahananda, from the archives of Vedanta Society of Southern California.)

The original Greek word *Symbolon* means a sign by which one knows or infers a thing. Symbols express the invisible by means of visible or sensory representations—the immaterial via the material. All our contact with the outside world is based on symbols. Languages are nothing but symbols. “We think in symbols, we act in symbols, we live in symbols, we learn in symbols.

Hinduism has made use of symbolism profusely with a definite purpose that of setting forth in visible or audible likeness what cannot be really or fully expressed or conceived. The highest reality in Hinduism is Brahman, the all-pervading divine Ground, which is absolute and indefinable. Brahman has been described as *Satchidananda*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss absolute. But even these conceptions are difficult and elude our comprehension. So the Upanishads have prescribed for meditation the more tangible symbols of prana, the vital energy; *vayu*, the wind; *akasha*, the all-pervading ether; *aditya*, the sun; and so forth.

The images of the deities themselves and the articles they carry also signify particular qualities or powers. Thus Brahma—God in his creative aspect—has four faces to give out the four Vedas. From the Bhagavatam we learn that Vishnu—God in his aspect as Preserver—has a discus, a club, and a conch shell, thus indicating his authority and power. The garland he wears symbolizes the variegated *maya*—the universe of name and form—and his sacred thread the Om, the sound-symbol of Brahman.

Shiva is one of the most popular deities in Hindu worship. In one of his forms he is depicted with his three-pronged trident with which he has killed the demon of ego. The trident bespeaks his government and authority. The three prongs represent nonattachment, knowledge, and *samadhi*—that is, spiritual absorption. Shiva has three eyes with which he sees the past, present, and future. His third eye is the eye of knowledge.

Shiva as the Lord of the universe rides on the bull of dharma, whose four feet represent truth, purity, kindness, and charity. His symbol of destruction is the battle-ax. Shiva is the chosen ideal of the yogis; to the devotees of Shiva the constantly burning *dhuni* fire - symbolizes the fire of dispassion which burns all

worldly attachments and desires. The ashes represent what is left after the universe of diverse names and forms dissolves in the realization of the underlying Unity. Shiva here is the all-destroyer, for he dissolves all diversities in the one absolute Existence.

As Nataraja, Shiva dances. Nataraja means “Lord of the stage of this transitory world.” His dance represents his five activities: *shrishti*, creation and evolution; *sthiti*, preservation and support; *samhara*, destruction and evolution; *tirobhava*, veiling, embodiment, and illusion; *anugraha*, release from transmigration, grace, and salvation.

Shiva is the real guru, the teacher, for he teaches by being what he teaches. This idea is the keynote to the Nataraja symbol. The drum in the upper right hand means that God, or guru, holds in his hand the cause of the world—sound. The fire in the upper left hand represents the light of the Atman. The Ganges on his head represents wisdom, which is cooling and refreshing; and the moon represents the ethereal light and bliss of the Atman, the Self.

One foot crushes the demon *Muyalaka* (or *maya*, the great illusion which is the cause of birth, death, and rebirth); the other foot, to which the remaining left hand is pointing, is raised upward and represents *turiya*—the superconscious state, beyond waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep, beyond the mind and the world.

The second right hand bestows fearlessness and peace. The place of the dance, the theater, is the body—of the individual as well as of the cosmos. The body is spoken of as a forest because of its many components. The platform of the theater is the cremation ground, where all passions and all names and forms, which constitute the vision of this illusory world, are burnt away. The circle of flames within which Shiva dances has been interpreted by some to be the dance of nature contrasted with Shiva’s dance of wisdom. Others have identified Shiva’s dance with the mystic syllable Om, the fiery arch being the hook of the ideograph of the written symbol.

The form of Kali, the Divine Mother, has given rise to much symbolic interpretation. She dances on the breast of the inert Shiva, her husband. Shiva here represents the transcendent aspect of Spirit and Mother Kali, the world-producing supreme Power, the dynamic aspect.

Kali's dance indicates that the whole universe of ever-changing diversities is an appearance of the one immutable supreme Spirit. Amidst all changes, Shiva remains unchanged.

In addition to form symbols, sound symbols or mantras play an important part in the Hindu religion. The sound symbols, like the form symbols, are embodiments of consciousness through which God may be communicated. In the scriptural teachings concerning mantras, it is pointed out that every form has a corresponding sound, and every sound must have a corresponding form.

The most important mantra is the Om, or *Aum*. It represents the undifferentiated Brahman. As the personal God, its three letters A, U, M, represent his aspects of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and their powers. The vibration of Om is the sound-Brahman or the first manifestation of the primordial Person. Om is the ground sound and ground movement of nature. Out of Om everything else has evolved. It is a symbol of universality. Every uttered sound is produced from the strokes of the vocal organs and broken into parts. But Om is the universal unstruck sound behind all broken sounds. As an effective spiritual practice, repetition of the sacred syllable Om with steady and lengthened utterance is prescribed.

Halfway between the sound symbols and the anthropomorphic symbols there is another type called the aniconic symbols. The Shiva lingam, a symbol of Shiva, and the *Narayanasila* or the *salagrama*, a symbol of Vishnu, are examples of these.

Lingam means the place of mergence, in which all manifestations are dissolved and unified. The *salagrama* represents the Absolute with attributes. It is a black and egg-shaped stone, and represents Hiranyagarbha, or the primordial Golden Egg, the undifferentiated Totality. The idea is that out of Hiranyagarbha the whole universe has become differentiated in course of time.

A Hindu temple itself is a symbol of the body: the human body is considered to be the temple of God. "This body of ours is a temple of the divine," says the *Maitreyi Upanishad*. God resides in the heart of man, and the sanctum sanctorum of the temple represents his heart. The heart is a cave, and the king of the dark chamber is God. Hence the sanctum sanctorum is purposely kept dark without any windows. Lights in the temple represent the light of the soul. The clarified butter often supplied to the lamp stands for regular spiritual practice.

With these and many more symbolic representations, Hinduism and other religions try to bring the divine within the grasp of the devotees and help them to keep their minds recollected in God. As the devotees' spiritual life deepens, their vision of the Deity changes. God, who was first considered to be outside of oneself is next seen as the indwelling Spirit, then as immanent in all creation, and ultimately as the transcendental Brahman. Thus the devotee gradually climbs the ladder of spirituality and finally attains the vision of the Supreme.

### **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 Remaining:**

Main entrance & Side entrance, Elevator inspection, Roofing (nearly completed), Awning, Signage, Fire & Building inspection (scheduled shortly). We need volunteers to tidy up the place and start regular operations. Kindly contact Abhijit Bhattacharya on cell-416 569 9401, to enroll your services during weekends. ***We are trying to obtain the Occupancy Certificate from the City at earliest possible.***

#### **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.

### **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.**

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## Significance of Snana Yatra

A very special and sacred festival of [Lord Jagannath](#) held in the full-moon day of the month of Jyestha. This festival is known as 'Devasnan Purnima' or 'Snana Yatra' (Bathing Festival). There is a general belief that the devotee washes away all his sins if he gets a vision of the Lord on this day, therefore, it attracts thousands of pilgrims from all over the world. According to Skanda Purana when King Indradyumna installed the wooden deities he arranged this bathing ceremony. On the previous day of Snana Yatra the [images](#) of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra along with the image of Sudarshana are ceremonially brought out from the inner sanctum of the main temple in a procession (called 'Pahandi' in local language) to the Snana Mandapa (Bathing pandal). This bathing platform is situated to the north-east of Ananda Bazar and besides the outer wall of the [temple](#) (called Meghanada Pacheri in local language). The length and breadth of this bathing platform is 76 feet. It is at such a height that visitors standing outside the temple also get a clear view of the Deities.

### Three Deities on the Snana Mandap

On this auspicious day the Suaras and Mahasuaras go in a ceremonial procession to fetch 108 pots of water from the Golden well (called 'Suna Kua' in local language). The holy water drawn from this well once a year. During the entire process all of them cover their mouths with a piece of cloth so as not to contaminate it even with their breath. Then all the pots filled with water are preserved in the Bhoga Mandap. Then the priests purify the water with Haladi (turmeric), Java (whole rice), Sandal (Chandan), flowers and perfumes. The filled and purified water pots then carried from Bhoga Mandap to the bathing platform by the Suaras in a long single line queue. This ritual is called 'Jalabhisheka'. 'Jalabhishek' consists of two words 'Jala' and 'Abhisheka'. In local language 'Jala' means water and 'Abhishek' means Bath. This Abhisheka is accompanied by chanting of vedic mantras by the priests, kirtana and blowing of conch shells.

At evening, after the bath ritual, the Deities assume the special elephant form which is otherwise known as 'Hati Vesha'. Lord Jagannatha and Lord Balaram dressed like elephant, and Goddess Subhadra wears a lotus flower vesha.



*Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra in their elephant form (Hati Vesha)*

After Snana Yatra, the deities are supposed to fall ill (fever) and do not return to their pedestal. The Deities are kept on a special sick room called the 'Ratan vedi' inside the temple. They stay away from the public view for a period of 15 days. This period is known as '[Anasara](#)'. During Anasara the Deities offered only fruits and water mixed with cheese and Dasamula medicines to cure from fever. The Deities are treated by the Raj Vaidya (the King's physician) with specific medicines (Dasamulas). During all these days the daily rites of the temple remain suspended. Due to the sacred bath with 108 pitchers of water, the colours painted on the images fade out. The Daitas repaint the images with new colors and on the 16th day the Deities appear in their new forms after colouration become ready for the public view. The festival of the first appearance of the Lord Jagannath to his devotees is called 'Netrotsava' (festival for the eyes) or 'Nava Yauvanotsava' (festival of the ever new youth).

### **FINANCIAL UPDATE-BUILDING RENOVATION**

<b>Total Estimated Project Cost :</b>		<b>\$1,400,000</b>	
<b>General Contractor</b>	Paid till date	\$ 970,000	
	Balance		\$ 175,000
<b>Other Payments</b>	Paid till date	\$ 220,000	
	Balance		\$ 75,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$1,190,000</b>	<b>\$ 250,000</b>

*Balance to complete the project is \$250,000, to be paid by end of June, 2017.*

## UPCOMING EVENTS CALENDAR

Program detail	Date & Time	Venue Address
<b>Guru Purnima</b>	<b>July 9, 2017 at 11 am</b>	<b>Vedanta Society of Toronto</b>
<b>Shri Krishna Janmashtami</b>	<b>Aug 14, 2017 at 6:30pm</b>	<b>Vedanta Society of Toronto</b>
<b>Annual Seminar with Swami Sarvapriyananda and others in the panel of speakers</b>	<b>Sep 9, 2017 at 9 am</b>	<b>Vedanta Society of Toronto</b>

## REGULAR PROGRAMMES

**SCRIPTURE CLASS:** Friday Scripture Classes begin at 7:30 pm, following the regular evening prayer at 6:00 pm. The class, held at the centre, is open to all interested persons.

**VIGIL:** A vigil consisting of japa and meditation will be observed, from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, for date kindly see 'Calendar of Events', on next page. To participate, please call the centre at 416-240-7262.

**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.

### **The Teachings of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu:**

"If a creature adores Krishna and serves his guru, he is released from this world of illusion and attains Krishna's feet and leaving these temptations and religious system based on caste, the true Vaishnava takes refuge with Krishna."

"Ye the children of Amrita, have recourse to Sri Krishna-Name and arrest the perverted current of life and redirect it towards the Eternal Source."

"Vain are the pedigree, scholarship, recitals, of Mantras, and austerities in a man who lacks faith in and devotional love for God."

"Service to God is only the noble virtue that unites all beings together, inspiring in one the presence of the Divinity."

"The essence of all religious principles in the age of Kali is chanting of the holy names of the lord. One cannot be delivered by following any other religious principles."

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# Vedanta Society of Toronto

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

**June 2017**

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture Class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>3</u>
<u>4</u> <u>11:00am</u> Lecture: 'Destined to Realize' by Prof. V. Kumar Murty	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture Class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>10</u>
<u>11</u> <u>11:00am</u> Lecture: 'Jagannath- The Lord of the Universe' <u>5:00pm</u> <b>RamNam</b>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u> No Scripture class	<u>17</u> <u>6am to 5pm</u> <b>Annual Retreat</b> by Rev. Swami Sumanasananda of Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban (Day-1)
<u>18</u> <u>6am to 5pm</u> <b>Annual Retreat</b> by Rev. Swami Sumanasananda (Day-2)	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>24</u> <u>6:00am to 6:00pm</u> <b>VIGIL</b>
<u>25</u> <b>SUMMER VACATION BEGINS</b>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u> No Scripture class	

Vedanta Society of Toronto will be closed for the summer vacation from June 25 to Sep 8, 2017. During this time, Sunday service and Scripture classes will remain suspended. Newsletters will not be published for the months of July and August, 2017.

*Vedanta Society of Toronto wishes you a pleasant & safe summer.*