



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter March 2017

WORDS TO INSPIRE

“The most important thing is faith. As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love; As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain; And faith is the root of all. If one has faith one has nothing to fear”.

---- Sri Ramakrishna

Up till now, I did not know how to meditate or do japa. The next morning, after offering my pranams to Mahapurush Maharaj, I asked him how I should meditate and perform japa. He replied affectionately: “To utter the name of the Lord again and again with devotion is japa. Repeat His name with deep love. The Master Himself is the living and ever-awakened Lord. In this age the holy name of Sri Ramakrishna is the great mantra, so repeat His name in silence. Also pray to Him in all earnestness, saying: ‘My Lord, how much You have suffered by assuming this human form of Yours for the salvation of the world! I am an unworthy person, without penance, without worship, and without wisdom, devotion, faith, and love. Kindly give me knowledge, devotion, faith, love, affection, and purity. Be kind and manifest Yourself in my heart. May my human life be fruitful! One of Your sons has taught me to pray to You in this way. Please be kind to me.’ “As you pray to Him again and again in this way, His blessings will shower down upon you. Gradually the mind will be calmed, and it will settle down in meditation and prayer. You will feel devotion and joy in your mind, and your heart will be filled with hope. After praying in this way, do japa, repeating the holy name of Sri Ramakrishna as instructed by me.

Meditation will gradually come on its own after you have done japa for some time. While you are performing japa, think intently that He is looking at you with love in His eyes. Such imagination for a long time is a kind of meditation. Again, while continuing to do japa, pray to Him: ‘My Lord, please favour me so that I may be able to meditate on You.’ “He will grant your prayer. Know it for certain. He is truly the Guide, the Lord, the Father, Mother, Friend, and Saviour. To imagine His form or virtues in any way is meditation. Meditation has many steps and many forms. Do it this way now. In course of time He will, if necessary, guide you from within. Seek Him with great earnestness. Cry for Him. By crying again and again the dirt from your mind will be removed, and He will manifest Himself in your heart. Such things cannot be achieved in a day. Continue doing this and pray. You will surely get a response, and you will derive great joy. In this age, the name Ramakrishna is the holiest of all the mantras, even without ‘Aum’ or any other addition.”

From the book ‘*In The Divine Realm*’
by Sw Apurvananda. Pg 46-47

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 .

The Healing Power of Silence

(Excerpt from the article by Swami Shraddhananda from the archives, Vedanta Society of Southern California)

Silence seems to be a necessary factor in our lives, yet we do not always realize the implications of the quietness we unconsciously seek and enjoy when we take a walk in a solitary meadow or in a forest or on a mountain. These quiet recreations may not occur very often, but when they do we cannot forget the spell that such solitary communion with nature leaves upon us. Our nerves are soothed, energy is regained, and the total effect is bracing to our bodies and minds. The experience of deep sleep proves our need for silence. We may be very busy throughout the day, but at night we hanker for that hour when everything—our sense perceptions, responsibilities, thoughts, worries, emotions, desires, hopes—is left behind. Even though we leave everything behind, including body consciousness, we enjoy the experience. However, sleep is not emptiness. The sages of the Upanishads had great insight into the study of sleep. According to them, sleep leads human consciousness close to the Ground of universal Existence, which is infinite calmness. That is why, when we come back to the waking state, we return refreshed and at peace. God has combined noise and silence, activity and rest; it is the plan of nature. Look at the boundless space outside. And what is this vast space? Is it not characterized by an immeasurable silence? Throughout the universe there is great activity; there are innumerable interactions throughout life, mind, and energy on one side of the picture, but there is also another side. Behind all these cosmic activities there is the vast silence of limitless space and time. Time, like space, is inexhaustible. Like a river it flows continuously, without any regard for what happens within it. Thus space and time are both silent sentinels of these cosmic activities which we call the world processes. That is the plan of God. All this refers to external silence, the quietude of our surroundings. More important than outward silence is inward silence, and that is not so easily available to us. Just as when we look outside and see a vast universe interwoven with activities and quietude, our internal world has both action and silence. When we look into the mind we ordinarily see only the surface phenomena—thoughts, feelings, and desires. We must make additional effort to experience that inner silence, the silence of the mind; we must silence our inordinate desires and passions. The background of silence escapes our notice. If we can come in touch with that inner realm of silence, our mental troubles can be healed. Here is a simple practice for experiencing inner calmness: it consists of watching the mind and trying to see what is going on within. In itself, watching the mind will gradually lead us to the experience of inner silence. Next we can substitute simple “watching” with an active effort to concentrate. In general, concentration means fixing the mind on a particular object without allowing it to wander from thought to thought. But a spiritual perspective in this practice is essential if we wish to reach the quiescent Consciousness that illumines our bodies, minds, and the world

of our experience. Spiritual life is essentially a life of silence. It means learning to experience deepening, chastening states of inner quietude. What does love of God imply? Experiencing that calmness which can cure our ignorance. The more we love God, the more we become silent in the spiritual sense. There is no longer any “noise” from the turbulent mind. In the Upanishads, God is described as Shivam shantam, the essence of goodness, the essence of silence. Love for God makes our lives quiet. Not that we become like stone; spiritual tranquillity is not inertia. It is marked by the highest wisdom and clarity of insight. External noise and perplexities do not disturb us anymore; we find harmony and peace. The whole world’s tremendous activity appears to us to be the silent play of God. The healing power of spiritual silence can also be found through unselfish actions. If we can dedicate our actions to God without considering ourselves the doers or the enjoyers of work, then this detached attitude serves to make us calm and creates an abiding calmness in the background of our lives.

Finally, there is the Vedantic way of approaching the silence of our being through reflective analysis of the “seer and the seen.” We read in the Upanishads, “This Atman is eternally silent.” The Atman, our true Self, is the eternal subject, the “seer,” and everything else is the object, the “seen.” What we call movement—noise, distraction, or activities—all belong to the realm of objective experience. Behind this objective experience there is the eternal Witness which is our true Self, and the more we grasp this fact, the more we partake of the nature of the Self. By separating the subject from the object, we can eventually become centered in the Self. The Atman is never an object of thought. Nothing can disturb its silent majesty. It precedes all other facts.

So in Vedanta we say, “I am not this, I am not this.” Then when we discover our true Self, we find that it can never actually be confused with the non-Self. No illness, no passion, no death, no frustration, no suffering can ever disturb the eternal stillness of the Self. That is the end of all ignorance, or maya. We have reached the center of tranquility, the source of infinite security and happiness. We have attained the culmination of healing by being one with Silence, untouched by any noise or imperfection.

When we finally know this truth, we will also know that what we had previously eliminated as not being part of us is actually within us. There is no such thing as duality. There is only one homogeneous unity, and that is the Self. Distinctions of external and internal vanish at that stage, and it is no longer necessary to call the Self “silence” because without the opposition of noise, or movements, there cannot be any concept of “silence.” Through all these stages, silence becomes a progressively greater healing power in our lives until ultimately it reaches its culmination in the Truth, which is our true Self.

Dive Deep Said Ramakrishna

(Excerpted from an article by Swami Shraddhananda, from the archives of Vedanta Soc. of Southern California)

Spiritual progress depends to a considerable extent upon one's earnest personal endeavor. "Arise, awake! Approach the wise teachers and learn from them," the Katha Upanishad says. Throughout the Bhagavad Gita we find Sri Krishna exhorting his disciple Arjuna in a similar strain: "O mighty descendant of Bharata, arise; shake off all doubt and hesitation and hold fast to the practice of yoga." The same voice has been heard once again in our own age in this simple teaching from Sri Ramakrishna: "Dive deep."

Sri Ramakrishna took this expression from two popular Bengali religious songs in which the spiritual quest has been compared to the search for precious gems on the bottom of the sea. One of the songs begins thus:

*Dive deep, O mind,
dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love.*

The two simple words "dive deep" are an incentive to engage in spiritual struggle. Sri Ramakrishna used them as a stimulus for devotees to take up spiritual practices with all their strength. It is interesting to note that Sri Ramakrishna employed this simple maxim as a powerful corrective to three principal religious aberrations that he observed.

The first of these can be called a superficial fidelity to religion. Vast is the difference between make-believe formality in the name of religion and a genuine spiritual hankering. When we do not care to know the true meaning and goal of religion and consider it merely a customary fashion, then religion loses its spiritual power either for the individual or society. It becomes just a series of mechanical activities in a temple or a church—a bundle of idle speculations on the life beyond, or some unquestioned ritual, performed because of some vague, otherworldly fear. Whenever a great religious teacher has appeared, his first duty has been to point out the difference between lifeless customs and a living fervor for spiritual life. This was evident in Buddha when he denounced the traditional followers of the religious patterns of his time. The Bhagavad Gita shows that Sri Krishna also made the distinction between genuine spiritual seeking and formal religion based on ritualistic sacrifices. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we find numerous instances of the saint's eloquently drawing the distinction between formal piety and an honest spiritual quest. For religion to be a mighty fact of life rather than a futile conjecture, its votaries must "dive deep."

It was not that Sri Ramakrishna did not recognize the value of rituals and customary religious observances in certain contexts, but compared to the ultimate goal of life—the realization of God—formal religion was, according to him,

of little worth. "God can be seen," Sri Ramakrishna said. "He can be touched. We can even talk with God." He is the most essential power in our lives, the most important element in our thoughts, aspirations, and actions. We may cite one simple illustration that Sri Ramakrishna used to give: When you add zeros successively to the digit one, you get figures whose value increases proportionately: a hundred, a thousand, a million, etc., while any number of zeros without the digit one before them are of no value. Similarly, God is the numeral one in all the values of life. If you leave Him out of the picture in life's pursuits, those pursuits become a string of worthless zeros. When Sri Ramakrishna said, "Dive deep," he was careful to describe the full implications of this phrase. "Now dive deep into the Ocean of God. There is no fear of death from plunging into this Ocean, for this is the Ocean of Immortality," he assured us. We have nothing to fear from the spiritual struggle. It will not land us in darkness and uncertainty. The sacrifices we make during spiritual practice will be more than compensated when we become illumined.

The second religious aberration that Sri Ramakrishna noticed was the confusion of spiritual wisdom with intellectual sophistry. For many people religion is equated with a sort of intellectual understanding of the scriptures or system of philosophy. Their emphasis is on argumentation rather than on actual practice, on reading books rather than on contemplation. An intellectual grasp of religious issues is, of course, good. But here great caution is necessary. Sri Ramakrishna liked to illustrate the folly of mere religious intellectualism by likening it to counting the leaves, trees, and branches of a mango orchard. Such idle counting is foolishness. It is wiser to eat the mangoes. Similarly, since the aim of human birth is to love God, one should seek to attain that love and be at peace. "What need is there of your knowing the infinite qualities of God? You may discriminate for millions of years about God's attributes, and still you will not know them." "Dive deep" would be Sri Ramakrishna's pronouncement to these theoreticians; religion does not consist of books, but in transforming the words of books into living truth.

The third aberration that Sri Ramakrishna was at pains to correct was a lukewarm attitude toward spiritual practice. Some people realize the importance of spiritual disciplines and also understand the difference between a mere intellectual interest in religion and a real longing to realize God. Yet for some reason they cannot exert themselves as much as they should. As Sri Ramakrishna put it, they are "lukewarm." Lukewarm exertion in spiritual practice is a great danger. And here, too, Sri Ramakrishna would employ his pithy, imperative sentence, "Dive deep."

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 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, Downstairs WRs functioning, Upstairs WRs will be functioning shortly, 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 90% of the furniture, purchase of lift, doors and windows, repaired the roof, installation of fire alarm system, Painting completed.

In process work includes: Upstairs kitchen hood & suppression system, Countertops & cabinetry, Lift installation, flooring upstairs dining hall, mezzanine floor, 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.

****Delays are due to below reasons:**

Obtaining City Permit – applied in Feb 2016, received in end Aug 2016 – Project started Sept 2016

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

Few major spend items included in above payment (Tax not included):

1. Elevator	\$ 30,000
2. Fire Alarm system	\$ 35,000
3. Roof	\$ 90,000
4. Audio Visual	\$ 40,000
5. Furniture	\$ 30,000
6. Appliances	\$ 20,000
7. Ramp and Side Door Awning	\$ 25,000

Devotees may sponsor in full or partial for any of the above items.

Balance to complete the project is \$560,000, to be paid by end of June, 2017. Current funds available (including interest free loans) \$480,000.

We are short of about \$80,000 which we need immediately.

UPCOMING EVENTS CALENDAR

Program detail	Date & Time	Venue Address
Ram Navami Celebration and Ram Nam	<u>April 5, 2017</u> 6:00 pm	Vedanta Society of Toronto
Bhakta Milan (A gathering of devotees)	<u>April 15, 2017</u> 6:00pm	Vedanta Society of Toronto
Kirtan by Bangladesh Canada Hindu Cultural Society & Sri Ramakrishna Pathachakra	<u>April 16, 2017</u> 12:30pm	Vedanta Society of Toronto
Talk by Rev. Swami Yogatmananda, Vedanta Society of Providence, US	<u>Saturday, April 22, 2017</u> 11:00 am	Vedanta Society of Toronto
Celebration for the completion of renovation of the Society building	<u>Sunday, April 23, 2017</u> 11:00 am	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 Kripamayanda 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.

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

March 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: <i>Vivekachudamani</i>	<u>4</u>
<u>5</u> 10:00am Sri Ramakrishna Birthday Celebration Venue: Sindhi Gurmandir 207 Queens Plate Drive, Etobicoke M9W6Z7	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> 7:30pm NO SCRIPTURE CLASS	<u>11</u>
<u>12</u> 11:10am Lecture: <i>'Spiritual preparations'</i> by Prof.V. Kumar Murty (Venue: 75 Emmett Ave., Apt – 2209)	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u> 7:30pm Scripture Class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>18</u> NO VIGIL THIS MONTH
<u>19</u> 11:00am Lecture: <i>'Spiritual practices'</i> by Prof.V. Kumar Murty (Venue: TBD) 5:00pm RAMNAM	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>25</u>
<u>26</u> 11:00am Lecture: <i>'Spiritual experience'</i> by Prof.V. Kumar Murty (Venue: TBD)	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	

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.