



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

120 Emmett Ave. Toronto, ON M6M 2E6 CANADA

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Newsletter October 2016

WORDS TO INSPIRE

“Is meditation an easy affair? Only regular practice will bring perfection in it. Remember, it is next only to Samadhi. Self-surrender and everything will manifest from within through your Sadhana. Leave everything to God. Resign yourself wholly to Him”.

--- Swami Brahmananda

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

A Sadhaka should first learn about the spiritual path from great soul, then methodically follow it. If he does it haphazardly, he cannot achieve much success. Again, if he gives up, he will have to put forth double the usual effort to gain the desired result. But no endeavour is lost. Lust, anger and greed gradually leave him who leads the spiritual life. Your mind is now covered by Rajas and Tamas. It must be made pure and subtle, and raised to the state of Sattva. Then you will find pleasure in Sadhana and will also feel inclined to devote more and more time to them. Later on, when the mind attains perfect purity, you will naturally devote yourself always to Japa and meditation. The mind is at present on the gross plane. Consequently, it leans towards gross things. But when it becomes awakened, it inclines naturally towards the spiritual. When it grows subtle, its capacity also increases and the aspirant is able to understand the subtle truths about God in a short time.

When you sit for meditation, first think of blissful divine form. This will have a soothing effect on your nerves and mind. Think of the form of your Ishta as smiling and full of bliss. Otherwise meditation will become dry and

tedious. Don't waste your time anymore. Now the senses are strong and must be kept under control. This is no doubt a troublesome task. But practice Sadhana continually for seven or eight years; then you will enjoy the fruits of your practices, the peace and bliss thereof.

Many women devotees have attained spiritual illumination. Should you not also strive for it? Women have greater faith than men.

That is why they succeed in a comparatively shorter time. Believe me, the Lord is always with you. If you practice a little, He will extend His helping hand to you. It is He who is protecting us all from miseries and troubles. How unbounded is His grace! How can I describe it to you? You have only been hearing of all these spiritual things. Now do some Sadhana and realize them. In the beginning, start with a method suited to your temperament. After you become established in that, you can approach God through all other methods. Learn to keep your feelings under control.

From the book, *'Meditation and Spiritual Life'*, by Swami Yatiswarananda

IMPORTANT NOTE

Vedanta Society will be closed from **August 15 to December 15, 2016** for Phase-2 Renovation Project. During this period only few activities will be conducted at the center in the **Main Shrine, entrance will be through the main door on Emmett Avenue**. 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:

Discussion on 'Complete works of Swami Vivekananda: every Wednesday @ 7.30pm after arati;

Scripture class: every Friday @ 7.30pm after arati;

Sunday Service: -every Sunday @ 11am;

Ramnam: Once every month, please see the calendar below for details.

Vigil: Once every month, if possible, please see the calendar below for details.

DURGA PUJA AT BELUR MATH



Durga Puja was first celebrated at Belur Math in 1901. Since then Durga Puja has been celebrated at Belur Math year after year, although for a few years after the first celebration in 1901, Pratima worship was not done. (In this connection it should be mentioned that Durga Puja was conducted on a small scale, without the image, by the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna during the early years of Ramakrishna Math at Baranagar.) It was Swami Vivekananda himself who started the first Durga Puja with the image at Belur Math. As a rule, Hindu Sannyasins do not conduct this kind of ritualistic worship. Why then did Swamiji start the new tradition?

One reason was to gain the acceptance of the local community for the new way of life that Swamiji and his monastic brothers were leading. The Hindu society in Calcutta had not fully accepted Swamiji's going to the West, and the rather unconventional ways of life at Belur Math which included disregard for caste rules and mixing with Western people. As a matter of fact, the celebration of Durga Puja helped to remove much of the misunderstanding and misgivings about the new monastic institution among the local people.

Another reason was Swamiji wanted to institutionalize respect for divinity of motherhood and sanctity of womanhood. Swamiji saw that one of the main reasons for the advancement of Western people was the elevation of women in the West, and one of the main reasons for the backwardness of India was the neglect of women in this country. Worship of the Divine Mother, especially the Kumari Puja, would create the awareness of the potential divinity of women and a respectful attitude towards them.

A third reason was supernatural. A few days before Durga Puja in 1901, Swamiji had a vision of Durga Puja being done at Belur Math. More or less at that time, Swami Brahmanandaji saw in a vision Mother Durga coming across the Ganga from Dakshineswar to Belur Math. Swamiji asked Raja Maharaj to make preparations for Durga Puja immediately, although only a few days were left to begin the Puja.

The main problem was to get a clay image for worship. Enquiries at Kamartuli (the street in Kolkata where artisans make clay images) revealed that there was a single beautiful image of Durga in a shop. The person who had ordered it had not turned up, and so the artisan agreed to sell it to the monks.

Apart from the image, a lot of other things had to be collected for the elaborate ritualistic worship. Under able direction of Swami Brahmanandaji everything was done well at short notice.

The first Durga Puja at Belur Math was conducted in a huge Pandal (decorative shed) on the open ground to the north of the old shrine. The invocatory worship on Shashthi (the 6th day of the lunar month) was on 18 October 1901. The Pujari was Brahmachari Krishnalal and the Tantradharak was Isvar Chandra Chakravarty, the father of Shashi Maharaj. Sitting under the Bel tree (which now stands in front of his temple) Swamiji sang Agamani songs welcoming the Divine Mother.

The householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and orthodox Brahmins of nearby area had been specially invited, and thousands of people, irrespective of the distinctions of caste or religion, attended the three-day festival. On the night of Navami Swamiji sang many songs in praise of Divine Mother, some of which used to be sung by Sri Ramakrishna.

Holy Mother and Durga Puja

When Swamiji decided to celebrate Durga Puja at Belur Math, one of the first things he did was to seek the approval of Holy Mother Sarada Devi who was then staying at Baghbazar in Kolkata. Swami Premananda went to Mother, and Mother whole-heartedly approved the proposal. On Shashthi day She came with other women devotees and stayed at Nilambar Babu's garden house nearby. Mother attended the awakening ceremony

that day and attended the Puja on all the three subsequent days. Since Sannyasins cannot undertake this kind of ritualistic worship, Swamiji decreed that the Puja should be done in the name of Holy Mother. This became a tradition which continues to this day. Swamiji looked upon Sri Sarada Devi as the divine counterpart of Sri Ramakrishna, born for the awakening of womankind in the modern world. In a letter to Swami Shivananda written in 1894 from America, Swamiji had given expression to his conviction about the Divinity of Holy Mother as follows: "Brother, I shall show how to worship the living Durga (Jivanta Durga), and then only shall I be worthy of my name. I shall be relieved when you have purchased a plot of land and established there the living Durga, the Mother (i.e. Sri Sarada Devi)." The presence of Holy Mother, the Living Durga, during the Puja must have given boundless joy and satisfaction to Swamiji and the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Holy Mother attended the Durga Puja at Belur Math in 1912 and in 1916 and perhaps in some other years also. Each time Mother stayed for a few days and blessed Her monastic and lay children.

Chandipath

During the nine days of Navaratri the book Chandi is recited everyday morning. This recital is done along with worship of the Goddess Chandi. In Belur Math this is done during the first five days at a corner of Natamandir and from the 6th at a corner of Durga Mandap itself.

Shashthi : the 6th day

This is a very important day when ritual preparations are made to begin the Durga Puja proper. These preparations are mainly three: Kalparambha, Bodhan, Adhivas and Amantran.

Kalparambha: This ritual is done early in the morning. It is mainly an act of making the samkalpa or "sacramental intention", the firm determination to conduct the Puja properly during the three days. The ritual consists of installing the ghata, water-filled copper pot, at a corner of Durga mandap and offering worship to Durga and Chandi.

Bodhan: This rite is performed at the Sandhya or dusk. The word 'Bodhan' literally means 'awakening'. As already mentioned elsewhere, the Hindu mythology holds

that all gods and goddesses go to sleep for six months during the southward journey of the Sun. Autumn (Sharat), during which Durga Puja is done, falls in the middle of this period. Hence it is necessary to first of all awaken the deity Durga. We have already mentioned that the awakening of Durga was first done by Sri Ramachandra who wanted to propitiate the Goddess before fighting Ravana. The ritual of Bodhan consists in installing a water-filled copper vessel at the base of the Bel (Bilva) tree (or, as is now done at Belur Math, keeping a branch of the Bel tree in the pot) and praying to the Divine Mother to awaken.

Adhivas and Amantran: These rites follow Bodhan. Adhivas means "invocation". Through Bodhan the Devi has awakened: now the awakened Devi has to be invoked in the Bel tree or branch of the tree. Adhivas is also a ritual of sanctification. The actual ritual consists of the following main steps.

1. Devi Durga and the Bel tree are first worshipped
2. Twenty-six sacramental things (mangalik dravya) are sanctified by touching Devi Durga and the Bel tree with them.
3. To ward off evil effects, a red coloured thread is tied around the altar where Puja is done.

The above ritual is followed by Amantran which literally means "invitation". Through this rite the Devi is invited or entreated to accept the Puja the next day (Saptami).

After this, Devi is worshipped with five items and Arati is done to Her.

Saptami Puja

The important point to note here is that a living medium is necessary to invoke the indwelling of a deity. It is through a living medium that Divinity manifests itself. On the sixth day Divinity was invoked in the Bel tree or a branch of it. On the seventh day the Deity is invoked in a group of nine plants known as Navapatrika. The nine plants, which include a branch of Bel tree also, are bundled together, given a ceremonial bath, covered with an orange coloured cloth and installed on a wooden seat on the right side of the image of Durga. This is followed by Mahasnan (great bath) on a mirror, using various materials. After this, consecration and divinization of the image, known as pranapratishtha, takes place. This is followed by elaborate worship of the Devi with sixteen

items (shodashopacharapuja). The other deities, attendants and other objects associated with Devi are then worshipped. The Seventh Day's Puja is concluded with bhog (food offering) and Arati to Devi.

Ashtami Puja

As on Saptami, on Ashtami also, Mahasnan and Shodashopacharapuja are done. In addition, nine small pots with flags of different colours attached are installed and the Nine Shaktis are invoked in them and worshipped. After this sixty-four yoginis are worshipped. Then one crore yoginis are worshipped. This is followed by worship of Nava Durga (nine aspects of Durga) and Goddesses Jayanti, Mangala, Kali, Bhadrakali, Kapalani, Durga, Shiva, Kshama, Dhatri, Svaha and Svadha. Ashtami Puja is concluded with Bhog and Arati.

Kumari Puja: Worship of a young girl, treating her as Devi, is also a part of Ashtami Puja. Sri Ramakrishna has said that the Divine Mother manifests herself more in a pure-hearted girl and that is why Kumari Puja is done. He used to bow down before little girls looking upon them as manifestations of the Divine Mother. When Durga Puja was done at Belur Math for the first time, Swami Vivekananda worshipped several Kumaris. Now only one Kumari is worshipped. The same kinds of offerings made to the Devi are given to the Kumari also, and finally Arati is performed. Even senior monks offer flowers at her feet.

Sandhi Puja: The last 24 minutes of Ashtami and the first 24 minutes of Navami (a total of 48 minutes between the two lunar days) constitute the Sandhi or "Sacred Juncture". It is considered to be a most auspicious time. At this time Durga is worshipped as Chamunda (that is,

Kali who killed the demon Chanda and Munda). This Puja is considered to be the highest point in the whole Durga Puja and the most important ritual.

It is customary to perform bali or animal sacrifice at this sacred juncture. When the first Durga Puja was celebrated at Belur Math in 1901, Swami Vivekananda wanted to have bali done. But Holy Mother prohibited it and, in obedience to Holy Mother's injunction, animal sacrifice is never done at Belur Math. Instead, a banana is 'sacrificed' as a symbolic bali.

Navami Puja

As in Ashtami, during Navami also Mahasnan and Shodashopacharapuja are offered to Devi. In addition, bali and Homa are performed. In Belur Math for bali white pumpkin and sugarcane are offered. The Homa (fire sacrifice) is a combination of Vedic and Tantric traditions.

Dashami Puja

In the morning a brief Puja, Shital bhog (cooling food offering) and Arati are first done. Then the Pujari and Tantradharak circumambulate the altar and perform the visarjan ritual. In this ritual the Devi, who had been invoked in the Navapatrika and consecrated Image, is entreated to return to Her celestial abode. The Divine Mother, however, dwells for ever in the hearts of devotees. In the evening the Image of Durga along with Navapatrika is taken in procession to the river bank and immersed in the river. The water taken from the spot, known as Shanti Jal is sprinkled on the devotees who embrace one another as an expression of their solidarity as children of the same Divine Mother. And thus the holy Durga Puja comes to an end leaving joyous memories in the souls of people.

RENOVATION UPDATE

Permit from the City has been obtained. Work for Phase-2 renovation has started in August and expected to be completed in next 4 months. Packing and moving has been completed. Demolition work and new layout has been completed. Major equipment has been ordered. Pictures related to the work have been on the website.

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.

UPCOMING EVENTS CALENDAR

Program detail	Date & Time	Venue Address
Durga Puja	<u>October 9</u> <u>Maha Ashtami</u> 10am	Sindhi Gurmandir Temple 207 Queens Plate Dr, Etobicoke, ON M9W 6Z7
	<u>October 10</u> <u>Maha Navami & Vijaya Dashami</u> 10am	
Kali Puja	<u>October 29</u> 5:30pm	Sindhi Gurmandir Temple 207 Queens Plate Dr, Etobicoke, ON M9W 6Z7
Annual General Body meeting	<u>December 18</u> 11:00am	To be announced
Christmas Eve & Holy Mother Birthday	<u>December 24</u> 4.30pm	To be announced

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: A vigil consisting of japa and meditation is observed from 6:00am to 6:00pm. *This will be held in the Meditation Room adjoining the Main Shrine, entrance will be from the Main Door located on Emmett Avenue.*

Due to constraint for space and likelihood of work going on Saturdays, the Vigil may be cancelled on certain months. Kindly see the '*Calendar of Events*', on the next page, for this month's schedule.

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. *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.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

October 2016

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
RENOVATION IN PROGRESS AT VEDANTA SOCIETY						<u>1</u>
<u>2</u> NO SUNDAY LECTURE	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u> No Scripture Class	<u>8</u>
<u>9</u> <u>10:00am</u> MAHA ASHTAMI Venue: Sindhi Gurmandir Temple	<u>10</u> <u>10:00am</u> MAHA NAVAMI & VIJAYA DASHAMI Venue: Sindhi Gurmandir Temple	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture Class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>15</u> NO VIGIL THIS MONTH
<u>16</u> <u>11:00am</u> Lecture: 'The Supreme Power' Venue: Vedanta Society of Toronto <hr/> <u>1:30pm</u> VVM Venue: TBD	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture Class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>22</u>
<u>23</u> <u>11:00am</u> Lecture: 'From Womb to the Tomb' Venue: Vedanta Society of Toronto <hr/> <u>5:00pm</u> RAMNAM	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture Class: 'Vivekachudamani'	<u>29</u> <u>5:30pm</u> KALI PUJA Venue: Sindhi Gurmandir Temple
<u>30</u> NO SUNDAY LECTURE	<u>31</u>					

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.