



# Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

120 Emmett Ave. Toronto, ON M6M 2E6 CANADA

Tel.: 416-240-7262; Email: [toronto@rkmm.org](mailto:toronto@rkmm.org); Website: [www.vedantatoronto.ca](http://www.vedantatoronto.ca)

## Newsletter October 2017

### Words to Inspire

"As you go on practising spiritual disciplines, you will find that He who is within me, He who is within you, is also within the carrier, the cobbler and the pariah."

---Sri Sarada Devi

### The Festival at Panihati

Sri Ramakrishna was still in a semi-conscious state. After a few minutes, he said to the devotees: "Tell me your doubts. I shall explain everything." Govinda and the other devotees looked thoughtful.

GOVINDA: "Revered sir, why does the Divine Mother have a black complexion?"

MASTER: "You see Her as black because you are far away from Her. Go near and you will find Her devoid of all colour. The water of a lake appears black from a distance. Go near and take the water in your hand, and you will see that it has no colour at all. Similarly, the sky looks blue from a distance. But look at the atmosphere near you; it has no colour. The nearer you come to God, the more you will realize that He has neither name nor form. If you move away from the Divine Mother, you will find Her blue, like the grass-flower. Is Syama male or female? A man once saw the image of the Divine Mother wearing a sacred thread. He said to the worshipper: 'What? You have put the sacred thread on the Mother's neck!' The worshipper said: 'Brother, I see that you have truly known the Mother. But I have not yet been able to find out whether She is male or female; that is why I have put the sacred thread on Her image.'

"That which is Syama is also Brahman. That which has form, again, is without form. That which has attributes, again, has no attributes. Brahman is Sakti; Sakti is Brahman. They are not two. These are only two aspects, male and female, of the same Reality, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute."

GOVINDA: "What is the meaning of 'yogamaya'?"

MASTER: "It signifies the yoga, or union, of Purusha and Prakriti. Whatever you perceive in the universe is the outcome of this union. Take the image of Siva and Kali. Kali stands on the bosom of Siva; Siva lies under Her feet like a corpse; Kali looks at Siva. All this denotes the union of Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is inactive; therefore Siva lies on the ground like a corpse. Prakriti performs all

Her activities in conjunction with Purusha. Thus, She creates, preserves, and destroys. That is also the meaning of the conjoined images of Radha and Krishna. On account of that union, again, the images are slightly inclined towards each other.

"To denote this union, Sri Krishna wears a pearl in His nose, Radha a blue stone in hers. Radha has a fair complexion, bright as the pearl. Sri Krishna's is blue. For this reason Radha wears the blue stone. Further, Krishna's apparel is yellow, and Radha's blue.

"Who is the best devotee of God? It is he who sees, after the realization of Brahman, that God alone has become all living beings, the universe, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. One must discriminate at first, saying 'Not this, not this', and reach the roof. After that one realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof, namely, brick, lime, and brick-dust. The devotee realizes that it is Brahman alone that has become all these—the living beings, the universe, and so on.

"Mere dry reasoning—I spit on it! I have no use for it! (The Master spits on the ground.)

"Why should I make myself dry through mere reasoning? May I have unalloyed love for the Lotus Feet of God as long as the consciousness of 'I' and 'you' remains with me!

(To Govinda) "Sometimes I say, 'Thou art verily I, and I am verily Thou.' Again I feel, 'Thou art Thou.' Then I do not find any trace of 'I'. It is Sakti alone that becomes flesh as God incarnate. According to one school of thought, Rama and Krishna are but two waves in the Ocean of Absolute Bliss and Consciousness.

From "*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*" Originally recorded in Bengali by M., a disciple of the Master.

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### 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 on page 4.

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## Swami AKHANDANANDA – an indefatigable Karma-yogin

Sri Ramakrishna had attracted Gangadhar's (later Swami Akhandananda) inmost being. During his visit to Dakshineswar on a Saturday, Sri Ramakrishna initiated Gangadhar by writing the holy mantra on his tongue. "Do you know how to pray?", the Master asked him one day. Then like a disconsolate child, he began to weep and pray: "Mother, give me knowledge; give me devotion. I want nothing else, Mother." His cloth had slipped off, and he appeared to Gangadhar just like a child. With tears flowing from his eyes the Master passed into samadhi. Whenever Gangadhar stood outside the shrine of Kali, he would only see the matted golden hair of the recumbent figure of Shiva. The face could not be seen. Sri Ramakrishna was aware of the boy's particular devotion to Lord Shiva. One morning, after the boy had spent the night at Dakshineswar, the Master very affectionately took him inside the shrine and said, "See, Shiva full of consciousness." Gangadhar saw the image of Lord Shiva living and breathing. "Look, how Shiva, full of life and consciousness, is lying down", continued the Master. Gangadhar perceived this to be actually so. In the middle of July 1890, Swami Akhandananda, prepared to accompany Swami Vivekananda. On the day appointed for their departure, they went to salute Holy Mother. She said to Swami Akhandananda, "My son, I'm handing over to you our greatest treasure. You are familiar with the Himalayas. See that Naren does not suffer from hunger." With the blessings of the Mother, the two brothers, carrying begging bowl and staff, set out on their pilgrimage to the sacred shrines of northern India. After a while, Swamiji said to Swami Akhandananda, "You see, the company of brothers is a hindrance to my tapasya. I cannot do my Sadhana unless I sever this golden chain that binds me to you. I shall now live alone, and nobody shall know of my whereabouts." At this Swami Akhandananda replied, "All right, but you may be sure that if I fail to find you, though you be in the nether world, then Gangadhar is not my name."

Once Swami Akhandananda was living as a highly honoured guest, in the palace of the Maharaja of Khetri. His close contact with the Raja began to bring a noticeable change in the later's daily life and character. It had been the Raja's habit not to leave his bed until late in the morning. One day, Swami Akhandananda quoted a Sanskrit verse: 'Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune, forsakes even her husband (Narayana), if he wears shabby clothes, does not clean his teeth, eats too much, uses harsh words, or lies in bed when the sun rises or sets'.

It was the month of July 1897, and relief work at Mahula was carried on with full vigour. One day at noon, on his way back from the house of a cholera patient, Swami Akhandananda saw a little girl of five or six at the door of a house chewing uncooked rice grains. She was no stranger, for she went everyday with other people to the

relief centre for her ration of rice. But this day, she was alone and unable to find her way home. Swami Akhandananda took the child to Mahula, where she was given a bath and some food. She remained there for the night; and when her people came the very next day for their rations, she went away with them. Swami Akhandananda learned that the girl was an orphan of an aboriginal tribe, which made him think deeply about how such helpless children could be protected and given education. He saw the need for an orphanage and wrote to Swami Vivekananda about it. In the meantime, the selfless service of Swami Akhandananda attracted few poor young men, who came forward to help the Swami to set up the first orphanage. Swami Vivekananda's letter came, which provided Swami Akhandananda with complete support and blessings. At this time, Swami Akhandananda's state of mind was such that, whenever he saw a dirty, ill-fed, and ill-clad boy on the street, he would take him to the ashrama, and with all affection, remove the dust and dirt from his body, rub him with oil, and bathe him in warm water and soap, and while doing so, recite with deep feeling the Purusa-sukta – 'That God with thousands of heads, eyes, and feet, who covers the whole universe...'. Looking at this selfless service, the District Magistrate was very appreciative and promised all help. The ashrama and orphanage started growing and in 1909 the ashrama shifted to another place, Sargachhi, a mile and half away. One evening, someone asked him why he chose to dwell in a remote village. In reply, he said: Swami Vivekananda has asked us to work especially for the poor and said that the soul of India is in the villages. He wanted the country to be self-supporting. Swamiji spoke of an ideal combination of 'Islamic body and Vedantic brain' – harmonious development of brawn and brain. So I chose a remote village, started cultivating the land and teaching the poor villagers some lessons by the kindergarten method and few skills related to cottage industries, like weaving, tailoring, etc., to make them self-supporting and independent.

The Swami's relationship with the villagers, whom he served, was not formal or superficial, but was of the heart and soul. They were the objects of his worship. They courteously called him 'Baba' (Father). Swami later said: I am an expert housewife-father and mother in one. The Master's touch has transformed us into gold. Where did this intense feeling come from? Nothing avails without heart, there must be awakening of the heart. Nothing can be done merely sitting with closed eyes. The Master cannot be attained that way. If that were possible, we could have passed our days in the Himalayas. One professor, seeing the youthful activity of the Swami, said to him, 'Swami, the energy you have is enough to inspire the whole country!'

From the book, "**Swami Akhandananda**", by Swami Annadananda.

# **A Simple Superstition**

*(Excerpted from article by Swami Yukatmananda from the archives of Prabuddha Bharata)*

## **The Reality behind Names and Forms**

According to Vedanta the Spirit alone is the ultimate Reality; the differences we see around are due to our distorted vision. Just as during twilight we see a snake in a rope, even so, because of ignorance of our real nature, we see differences in the world, which is in reality nothing but Brahman. The Spirit alone is the abiding reality. The apparent differences are based on names and forms. Everything we perceive is composed of five factors: being (asti), the ability to be cognized (bháti), attractiveness (priya), form (rupa) and name (náma). The first three pertain to Brahman and the other two to the world. In other words, minus name and form, the world is nothing but Spirit.

Other names and forms are real to us because our own name and form are real to us in the first place. Body-based differences are real to us as long as our own body is real to us. The external world appears as it does because of our identification with our bodies. Our perception of the world stands to change if our perception about our own selves undergoes a change.

We are basically the Spirit, but somehow have come to identify ourselves with our body and mind. 'Through ignorance we have joined ourselves with a particular body, and thus opened ourselves to misery. This idea of body is a simple superstition. It is superstition that makes us happy or unhappy. It is superstition caused by ignorance that makes us feel heat and cold, pain and pleasure. It is our business to rise above this superstition,' says Swami Vivekananda.

## **Body and Pain**

Only a man of knowledge is fully above body-consciousness. Till we gain spiritual knowledge ourselves, the body continues to be real to us and this impermanent world an abode of misery. People, however, do not easily realize the miserable nature of the world. Those who look upon themselves as organic entities keep dancing to the tune of their desires, and believe that everything is fine. Delusion cannot go any further. Anything that comes into being must perish (yaj-janyam tad-anityam). That applies also to the body and the sense enjoyments that result from it.

## **Pleasure Not the Goal of Life**

Making sense pleasure a goal of life can only compound man's misery. Lasting happiness is possible only in the Infinite, not in the finite, says the Chandogya Upanishad.

The body may be a vehicle for sense pleasure, but it is more a source of pain when it contracts diseases. Nothing is comparable to the misery of the sense-bound man when his sense desires are intact, but the body is not fit enough to satisfy them.

## **The Sixfold Attribute**

Human beings or animals—every body is characterized by six attributes: it (1) comes into being (jáyate), (2) has an objective existence (asti), (3) grows (vardhate), (4)

undergoes modifications (viparinamate), (5) decays (apaksiyate) and (6) dies (nasyati).

All bodies decay and die and those of holy men and incarnations are no exception. Great souls too get diseases, but how they face them holds a lesson for humanity.

## **Great Souls' Attitude towards Diseases**

Sri Ramakrishna, who was worshipped as an incarnation of God in his own lifetime, had throat cancer during his last days. What is of significance is this: even with excruciating pain from throat cancer, Sri Ramakrishna ceaselessly talked of nothing but God, sometimes by signs if could not speak audibly. He believed helping anyone sincerely interested in advancing towards God. This moment he would talk with the doctor about his pain and the next moment his mind would soar in samadhi to superconscious realms of divinity.

Swami Vivekananda contracted asthma and diabetes during the last part of his life. In his own words, 'I had such a spell of asthma that I felt like dying. But from within, with every breath arose the deep-toned sound, 'I am He, I am He'. Resting on the pillow, I was waiting for the vital breath to depart, and observing all the time that from within was being heard the sound of 'I am He, I am He!' I could hear all along 'The Brahman, the One without a second, alone exists, nothing manifold exists in the world.'

Parenthetically we mention here the purifying effect the contemplation of these holy forms can have on us. Our mind cannot but think of the pure and strong mind that animated those external forms, and get purified in the process.

## **The Ideal before Us**

For the sense-bound the body maybe just an instrument of sense enjoyment, but for the discriminating it is a vehicle for getting rid of worldliness and realizing our true, divine nature with the help of spiritual disciplines. 'The body is primarily an instrument for the practice of dharma,' goes the well-known saying. Thus the body deserves to be taken care of even as a vehicle is properly maintained to serve its purpose. The Katha Upanishad compares the human body to a chariot in which dwells the individual soul. Proper nutrition and regular exercise help the body remain fit for spiritual practice, whatever be our path: karma yoga (selfless work), jnana yoga (discrimination), raja yoga (mind control) or bhakti yoga (devotion). A spiritual aspirant takes care of his body and undergoes treatment for his ailments so that his body continues to be a fit instrument for spiritual practice and service to others, rather than being a burden to anyone. A true devotee of Sri Ramakrishna will not pray as much to be rid of diseases as to get strength to suffer them. His ideal will be to keep his mind in bliss even if the body is subject to afflictions and pain.

### **Need for Mind Training**

The connection between the body and the mind is so subtle that they have strong mutual influence on each other. According to Vedanta, we are primarily souls, but have put on a subtle body and a gross body. That we have a subtle body is evident from our dreams: then we are able to perceive through our five senses even when the body and external senses are inactive. The subtle body is composed of our mind, buddhi, prana and subtle sense organs. In deep sleep we are detached from the subtle body also and remain one with ignorance covering the Atman.

The aforementioned superhuman feats of detachment from the body is a result of a strong will power, a strong, purified will that could detach itself from the body-mind complex and root itself in the Atman, the divine core behind them. Will being the dynamic aspect of buddhi, strengthening it means awakening the buddhi and directing it towards the Atman, which is what spiritual disciplines are about.

We saw that the Katha Upanishad compares human body to a chariot. The rest of the allegory will facilitate better comprehension: The soul is the master of the chariot, buddhi (discriminative faculty) is the charioteer, manas (mind, the deliberative faculty) is comparable to the reins, and the sense organs to the horses. The Upanishad stresses the need to rein in the horses so that the master could reach his destination. But this reining in needs to be done by the charioteer, who needs to be wide awake all the

time; he cannot afford to be sleepy or sloppy. Controlled senses and a wide awake buddhi help one reach the goal of human life, which is God-realization or Self-realization.

### **The Glory of the Self**

Swami Vivekananda never thought it was too early to teach anyone about the glory of his real Self. He held faith in one's real Self as fundamental to any great accomplishment. 'To preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life' was his ideal in life. Nothing could be a better antidote to the 'simple superstition' of the body idea than struggling to anchor oneself in one's real nature and organizing one's life accordingly.

Mind training involves a lot of patient struggle and persistence. Giving it a different turn is comparable to reversing the course of a river. 'But even a little of this practice does not go waste but saves one from great fear,' assures Sri Krishna. And 'if one spends this rare human birth without efforts towards God-realization, such a life amounts to suicide, since one kills one's own self by holding onto things unreal,' cautions Sri Shankara. Swamiji's words come as a great booster in our struggle: 'Drive out the superstition that has covered your minds. Let us be brave. Know the Truth and practise the Truth. The goal may be distant, but awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached.'

## **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 associated with the renovation of the Vedanta Society of Toronto has been completed successfully. The final handing over final administrative paper work is expected to be completed before end October 2017.

Donations are required for ongoing maintenance of Ashram, facilities and functions, as well as repayment of interest free loans of \$170,000 from our members in coming years.

Vedanta Society of Toronto sincerely, thanks all our members, patrons & devotees for your patience during this long process. We hope that you will now take advantage of the new campus and help us to maintain it.

Thank You again.

***Building Committee***

*"Work and worship are necessary to take away the veil, to lift off the bondage and illusion."*

- **Swami Vivekananda**

## UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Program detail	Date & Time
<b>Vivekananda Public Speaking Competition</b>	<b>Oct 7, 2017 @ 11am</b>
<b>Senior's Day</b>	<b>Oct 8, 2017 @ 10.30am</b>
<b>Kali Puja</b>	<b>Oct 19, 2017 @ 6.30pm</b>
<b>Annual General Meeting (AGM)</b>	<b>Nov 26, 2017 @ 11am</b>
<b>Birthday Celebration of Holy Mother</b>	<b>Dec 9, 2017 @ 11am</b>
<b>Christmas Eve Celebration</b>	<b>Dec 24, 2017 @ 6pm</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. For details, please see the 'Calendar of Events' on the next page.

**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 has reopened and books are available for purchase.

**DAILY BREAD FOOD BANK:** Daily Bread Food Bank will be started from October 2017.

#### 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 416-240-7262.

**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:** Soup Kitchen has now started at the Vedanta Society, please see the 'Calendar of Events' on the next page for details.

## Dakshineswar Kali temple

The Dakshineswar Kali Temple was founded around the middle of the 19th century by Rani Rashmoni. The Rani was a Mahishya by caste and was well known for her philanthropic activities. In the year 1847, Rashmoni, prepared to go upon a long pilgrimage to the sacred Hindu city of Kashi to express her devotions to the Divine Mother. Rani was to travel in twenty four boats, carrying relatives, servants and supplies. According to traditional accounts, the night before the pilgrimage began, Rashmoni had a vision of the Divine Mother, in the form of the goddess Kali in a dream and reportedly said, "There is no need to go to Banaras. Install my statue in a beautiful temple on the banks of the Ganges river and arrange for my worship there. Then I shall manifest myself in the image and accept worship at that place." Profoundly affected by the dream, Rani immediately looked for and purchased a 20-acre plot in the village of Dakshineswar. The large temple complex was built between 1847 and 1855. The 20-acre (81,000 m<sup>2</sup>) plot was bought from an Englishman, John Hastie and was then popularly known as Saheban Bagicha, partly old Muslim burial ground shaped like a tortoise, considered befitting for the worship of Shakti according to Tantra traditions. It took eight years and nine hundred thousand rupees to complete the construction, and finally the idol of Goddess Kali was installed on the Snana Yatra day on 31 May 1855, amid festivities at the temple formally known as Sri Sri Jagadishwari Mahakali, with Ramkumar Chhattopadhyay as the head priest. On 31 May 1855 more than 1 lakh Brahmins were invited from different parts of the country to grace the auspicious occasion. The next year, Ramkumar Chhattopadhyay died, the position was given to Gadadhar (later known as Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa). Rani Rashmoni lived only for five years and nine months after the inauguration of the temple. She seriously fell ill and died in February 1861.

The garbha griha (sanctum sanctorum) houses an idol of goddess Kali, known as Bhavatairini, standing on the chest of a lying Shiva, and the two idols are placed on a thousand-petaled lotus made of silver. Close to the main temple are the row of twelve identical Shiva temples built facing the east in the typical aat-chala Bengal architecture. To the North east of the Temple Complex is the Vishnu Temple or the Radha Kanta's Temple.

# Vedanta Society of Toronto

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

### October 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<u>1</u> <u>11:00am</u> <b>Lecture:</b> <i>'Real Wealth'</i> <b>VVM:</b> 1:30pm to 4pm	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>6</u> <u>7:30pm</u> <b>Scripture class:</b> <i>'Vivekachudamani'</i>	<u>7</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>8</u> <u>10:30am</u> <b>SENIORS DAY</b> 	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>13</u> <u>7:30pm</u> <b>Scripture class:</b> <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>14</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen  <b>6:00am to 6:00pm</b> <b>VIGIL</b>
<u>15</u> <u>11:00am</u> <b>Lecture:</b> <i>'Kali the Divine Mother'</i> <b>VVM:</b> 1:30pm to 4pm	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u> <u>6:30pm</u> <b>KALI PUJA</b> 	<u>20</u> <u>7:30pm</u> <b>Scripture class:</b> <i>'Vivekachudamani'</i>	<u>21</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>22</u> <u>11:00am</u> <b>Lecture:</b> <i>'Faith takes you to the goal'</i> <u>5:00pm</u> <b>RamNam</b>	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>27</u> <u>7:30pm</u> <b>Scripture class:</b> <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>28</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen
<u>29</u> <u>11:00am</u> <b>Lecture:</b> <i>'God &amp; Liberation'</i>	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u> <u>9.30am</u> Soup Kitchen				

'God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope.'

...Sri Ramakrishna