



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

120 Emmett Ave. Toronto, ON M6M 2E6 CANADA

Tel.: 416-240-7262; Email: toronto@rkmm.org Website: www.vedantatoronto.ca

Newsletter December 2023

Words to Inspire

"Religion, like everything else, progresses in waves; and at the summit of each great wave stands an illumined soul, a mighty spiritual leader and teacher of men. Such a one was Jesus of Nazareth."

-----Swami Vivekananda

Jesus, the Incarnation

Jesus Christ was God — the Personal God become man. He has manifested Himself many times in different forms and these alone are what you can worship. God in His absolute nature is not to be worshipped. Worshipping such God would be nonsense. We have to worship Jesus Christ, the human manifestation, as God. You cannot worship anything higher than the manifestation of God. The sooner you give up the worship of God separate from Christ, the better for you. Think of the Jehovah you manufacture and of the beautiful Christ. Any time you attempt to make a God beyond Christ, you murder the whole thing. God alone can worship God. It is not given to man, and any attempt to worship Him beyond His ordinary manifestations will be dangerous to mankind. Keep close to Christ if you want salvation; He is higher than any God you can imagine. If you think that Christ was a man, do not worship Him; but as soon as you can realise that He is God, worship Him. Those who say He was a man and then worship Him commit blasphemy; there is no half-way house for you; you must take the whole strength of it. "He that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father", and without seeing the Son, you cannot see the Father. It would be only tall talk and frothy philosophy and dreams and speculations. But if you want to have a hold on spiritual life, cling close to God as manifest in Christ.

Philosophically speaking, there was no such human being living as Christ or Buddha; we saw God through them. In the Koran, Mohammed again and again repeats that Christ was

never crucified, it was a semblance; no one could crucify Christ.

The lowest state of philosophical religion is dualism; the highest form is the Triune state. Nature and the human soul are interpenetrated by God, and this we see as the Trinity of God, nature, and soul. At the same time you catch a glimpse that all these three are products of the One. Just as this body is the covering of the soul, so this is, as it were, the body of God. As I am the soul of nature, so is God the soul of my soul. You are the centre through which you see all nature in which you are. This nature, soul, and God make one individual being, the universe. Therefore they are a unity; yet at the same time they are separate. Then there is another sort of Trinity which is much like the Christian Trinity. God is absolute. We cannot see God in His absolute nature, we can only speak of that as "not this, not this". Yet we can get certain qualities as the nearest approach to God. First is existence, second is knowledge, third is bliss — very much corresponding to your Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Father is the existence out of which everything comes; Son is that knowledge. It is in Christ that God will be manifest. God was everywhere, in all beings, before Christ; but in Christ we became conscious of Him. This is God. The third is bliss, the Holy Spirit. As soon as you get this knowledge, you get bliss. As soon as you begin to have Christ within you, you have bliss; and that unifies the three..

From the 'Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda-Vol 8, Ch: The Divine Incarnation or Avatara'.

KARMA YOGA ACTIVITIES

It is a great opportunity to provide your services to the Vedanta Society of Toronto. We are inviting volunteers for various activities in the ashram, which includes:

Janitorial (cleaning carpets, floors, washrooms, Shrine area, Meditation room, dusting furnitures, etc.); Garbage / Recycling waste (preferably on Wednesday or Thursday every week); Kitchen and dining hall cleaning; Book-store assistance; Library assistance; Gardening / Snow cleaning

If interested in volunteering, kindly send email at toronto@rkmm.org or contact Abhijit Bhattacharya on 416-569-9401, indicating the Services that you are interested in and days you can be available for volunteering.

THANK YOU AGAIN.

Swami Vijnanananda on Holy Trio

ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA

When we saw the Master, he was of medium build and his complexion was not very fair. He appeared just like any other ordinary person but he had an unusual smile, the like of which I have not seen in anyone else. When he smiled, a wave of joy spread over his countenance and even over his entire body and the divine smile acted like a soothing balm to souls tormented by worldly cares and misery. He had a very sweet voice, so sweet that one wished to listen to him forever. It was as if nectar was being poured into one's ears. His eyes were very bright, and his sight was very sharp and full of compassion. When he looked at anybody it appeared as if he was peering into his innermost being.

The Master was an embodiment of purity. In his company one felt as if all the impurities of one's mind had been washed away. His own ego was completely merged in the Divine Mother. Apart from Her it was, as though, he had nothing of his own. According to Vedanta, you will have to renounce world and then only it may be possible for you realize God. But the Master doesn't say so. He says, renunciation of the world is not essential. There is no harm if you live in the world in a detached way and be disinterested with regard to the fruits of your action. At the same time, he tells you to give up wealth and lust. The Master was one who knew the past, present, and future. So he said, 'He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna'. He had also said that he would be coming again. We understood very little of the Master. It was only Swamiji who comprehended him to some extent. Oh, how the Master loved us! We cannot love as intensely as he used to love us. We became mad for him after seeing him, but you are mad about him without seeing him, simply after hearing about him. Oh, how fortunate you are! Since you have taken refuge in the Master, you are on the right path. He came to the world to save people. Go on repeating his name and peace will be yours. All the sins of the body and the mind are washed away if one looks at him for some time. He can see through your mind, he understands everything. Confide in him. But don't approach him with selfish desires.

ON HOLY MOTHER

She indicates what should be our duty. That is exactly what we have got to do, my brother, that is what we are to do. Invoke the Mother. Everything will be all right then. The Master, on the other hand, is very strict. He is not moved until everything is done punctiliously. The Mother is very kind. When I chant the name of the Mother, I say, Ma Anandamayi (the mother, who is the embodiment of bliss). Her name confers devotion, faith, reverence, wisdom, wealth, and everything else. You will also find that she may give you both Riddhi (prosperity) and Siddhi (supreme fulfilment). The Mother's name gives me greater strength than the Master's.

The Mother is protecting us, whether we invoke Her or not. But if you invoke Her, you will be filled with joy all the more. You will get a wonderful delight if you can invoke the Mother, heart and soul. Earlier, I would not go to the Holy Mother frequently. Somehow Swamiji came to know of it. The Holy Mother was then at Balaram Babu's house. There Swamiji one day asked me, 'Peshan, did you go to make your obeisance to the Mother?' 'No, Sir,' I replied. 'How is that? Go immediately and make your obeisance to the Mother,' said Swamiji. Accordingly, I went up to make my obeisance to her. I decided that somehow I would touch the ground with my head before the Holy Mother and come back quickly. Seeing me bow down like that, Swamiji said from behind; 'Is this the way, to make obeisance to the Mother? Prostrate yourself before the Mother. She is none other than the Divine Mother. Saying this, he completely prostrated himself before the Mother. I couldn't imagine that Swamiji would come up behind me. I am always under the Mother's protective care. I have done something of all sorts (of spiritual practices) and now the Master and the Holy Mother are all that I care for. I have made them my sole refuge. And my only desire now is to spend the rest of my life chanting their names.

ON SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

You should worship Swamiji as Lord Siva. Swamiji used to say, 'My task here is done. But, as the Master desires, I am still working; my mind, however, is always established in Brahman.'

I have seen Swamiji meditating at midnight, his room bright with illumination. I used to sleep in the adjoining room. Once while going to the bathroom at night, I found his room all resplendent. I have noticed a special feature of Swamiji's lectures. While lecturing, he used to forget himself and would become an entirely different person. He had wonderful powers. Other people became like worms in his presence. Now the work is proceeding in accordance with what he said.

It was the Dussera day. The monastery was then in the house of Nilambar Mukherji. We were staying with Swamiji there. Swamiji in those days remained on a very high spiritual plane. As I touched his feet in obeisance that day, I received a shock like that of electricity. Anyone going near them (Swamiji and Raja Maharaj) would feel as if a spiritual aura engulfed them. Whoever entered that halo could feel as if an electric force was entering into him from outside. This could be felt immediately. Once some American Missionaries made a conspiracy to kill Swamiji. They invited him and offered him a glass of poisoned cold drink. Swamiji liked cold drinks. He was not at all aware of their evil intentions. He was glad to see the drink and as he took up the glass, he saw the Master standing before him and asking him not to drink it. He put down the glass and didn't drink it.

I was then at Belur Math, looking after the construction of steps leading down to the Ganga. One day, the sun was very hot and Swamiji was sipping a cold drink on the upper verandah. I too was feeling thirsty, when one of Swamiji's attendants came with a glass tumbler in his hand and said; 'Swamiji has sent you this cold drink.' I felt disappointed, for there were only a few drops of the drink. I felt hurt to think that Swamiji had thought it fit to indulge in a practical joke by sending me a few drops of cold drink when I was feeling so terribly thirsty. Anyway, I took those few drops as a consecrated drink sent by a great soul. But to my great surprise all my thirst was quenched. I was greatly relieved. It was an amazing experience.

Imitation of Christ

by Thomas à Kempis

Our inmost desires need to be examined and controlled

The Voice of the Lord: My son, there are many lessons that you have not yet taken in.

The Disciple: What are they, Lord?

The Lord: You have to learn to bring your desires wholly into line with my will. You must be no lover of your own ends, but a man who endeavors with all his heart to do what pleases me. You are often full of enthusiasm for some scheme, but you must stop and consider whether your real motive is to honour me or bring yourself some advantage. If you are doing it for me, you will be content whatever I decree; but if there is any suggestion of personal gain, you'll find yourself burdened and hindered. So take care not to throw yourself wholeheartedly into any scheme until you have first consulted me, or later on you may find yourself regretting and hating it, though you were so enthusiastic and pleased with it first. You're not meant to go off at once after every impulse that looks good one, nor should you run away at first sight from every unwelcome sensation.

It's a good thing to apply restraint sometimes even to desires and enthusiasm that are entirely praiseworthy, otherwise your very impatience may disturb the quiet of your thoughts and your lack of discipline create a problem for the conscience of others; you may even collapse in confusion if you meet with opposition. There are even times when you must apply force and use all your strength to resist your natural desires; you must pay no attention to what human nature wants or does not want but make it your business to see that the body is subject to the spirit, even against its will. It must be punished and made to accept its servitude, until it is ready for anything, and learns to be content with little and pleases with humble things, and not to grumble at things that do not suit it.

On Developing Patience and Resisting Desires

The Disciple: O Lord God, I can see that patience is essential in this life, for there is much that goes against the grain. Whatever I do to ensure my peace, I find that fighting and suffering are inevitable.

The Lord: That is so, my Son; but I do not want you to look for the sort of peace that never feels temptation and where obstacles are unknown. I want you to be able to feel that you have attained peace even when you are challenged by troubles and put to the test by all kinds of opposition. You say that you're not able to bear very much, but in that case, how will you endure the fire of purgatory? One must always choose the lesser of two evils and so you should try to submit quietly to these present evils for God's sake, so that you may escape punishment in the future that will last forever. Do you imagine that worldly people have little or nothing to endure? That is not true even of those who live the softest life. But they have a good many pleasures, you say, and do just as they please, and so they do not mind their troubles much. Even supposing they do have whatever they want, how long do you think it will last? The people that rise to greatness in this world will vanish away like the smoke, and there will be no remembering the delights they once enjoyed. Even while they are still alive, they are not left to enjoy their pleasures in peace but are prey to bitterness and restlessness and fear. Often the very thing they expect to give them pleasure brings the pain of sorrow instead. They show no restraint in pursuing pleasure, and so it is only to be expected that in the end they should find pain and bitterness. These pleasures are so short lived, so deceptive, so base, so uncontrolled, and men are so blinded and intoxicated that they cannot see it; like dumb beasts, for the little pleasure that this short life can give, they are prepared to incur the death of the soul. My Son, do not follow the counsel of appetite. Turn thy back on thy own liking. Have all thy longing fixed in the Lord; so he will give thee what thy heart desires. If you really desire to experience joy and abundant comfort from me, you must scorn every earthly interest and cut off every base delight. Then you'll find blessing and wealth of spiritual comfort; and as you detach yourself from the comfort of created things, you'll find sweeter and more effective the comfort that comes from me. But you will not find this comfort without a certain amount of distress and effort first. Ingrained habit will stand in your way, but a new and better habit will defeat it. Your natural self will rebel, but the burning desire of the spirit will bring it under control. The old Serpent will provoke and irritate you, but prayer will put him to flight, and useful work block up the door against him.

Bethlehem

The West Bank city of Bethlehem, about 9km south of Jerusalem, is celebrated by Christians as the birthplace of Jesus Christ. The city of Bethlehem (in Hebrew its name means "house of bread") perches on a hill at the edge of the Judean desert. Here Mary gave birth in a cave used for animals. The local shepherds came to worship the baby, and the Three Wise Men from the east came to pay homage and present their gifts. 1000 years before Christ, Bethlehem was the birthplace of David, Israel's second king. David was anointed as king by the prophet Samuel after being brought in from tending his father's sheep. The Gospel references to Christ's birth are sparse. The physician Luke gives most information: "And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to David's town of Bethlehem — because he was of the house and lineage of David — to register with Mary, his espoused wife, who was with child. She gave birth to her first-born Son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the place where travelers lodged." (Luke 2:4,7). The cave where the birth took place and the manger stood can now be visited underneath the huge Basilica of the Nativity. This is the oldest complete church in the Christian world.

Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus the Christ

Adapted from the book, "The Great Master", by Swami Saradananda

A year after, the mind of the Master again looked forward to the vision of the divine Mother through another path. He had by that time become acquainted with Sambhuchandra Mallick who read the Bible to him. Thus he came to know of the pure life of Jesus and of the faith he founded. Scarcely had that desire arisen in his mind when the divine Mother fulfilled it in a marvellous way and blessed him. He had, therefore, no need to make any special effort for it. The event happened thus: The garden house of Jadunath Mallick is situated to the south of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar; the Master used to go there now and then for a walk. Jadunath and his mother had great devotion to the Master from the time they first had seen him. Therefore, even if they were not present in the garden at the time of the Master's walk there, the officers would open the door of the parlour and ask him to sit and rest there for some time. There were some good pictures hanging on the walls of that room. One of those pictures was that of the child Jesus in his mother's lap. The Master used to say that he sat one day in that parlour and was looking intently at that picture and thinking of the extraordinary life of Jesus, when he felt that the picture came to life, and effulgent rays of light, coming out from the bodies of the mother and the Child, entered into his heart and changed radically all the ideas of his mind! On finding that all the inborn Hindu impressions disappeared into a secluded corner of his mind and that different ones arose in it, he tried in various ways to control himself and prayed earnestly to the divine Mother, "What strange changes art Thou bringing about in me, Mother?" But nothing availed. Rising with a great force, the waves of those impressions completely submerged the Hindu ideas in his mind. His love and devotion, to the Devas and Devis vanished, and in their

stead, a great faith in and reverence for Jesus and his religion occupied his mind, and began to show him Christian padrees offering incense and light before the image of Jesus in the Church and to reveal to him the eagerness of their hearts as is seen in their earnest prayers. The Master came back to Dakshineswar temple and remained constantly absorbed in the meditation of those inner happenings. He forgot altogether to go to the temple of the divine Mother and pay obeisance to Her. The waves of those ideas had mastery over his mind in that manner for three days. At last, when the third day was about to close, the Master saw, while walking under the Panchavati, that a marvellous god-man of very fair complexion was coming towards him, looking steadfastly at him. As soon as the Master saw that person, he knew that he was a foreigner. He saw that his long eyes had produced a wonderful beauty in his face, and the tip of his nose, though a little flat, did not at all impair that beauty. The Master was charmed to see the extraordinary divine expression of that handsome face, and wondered who he was. Very soon the person approached him and from the bottom of the Master's pure heart came out with a ringing sound, the words, "Jesus! Jesus the Christ, the great Yogi, the loving Son of God, one with the Father, who gave his heart's blood and put up with endless torture in order to deliver men from sorrow and misery!" Jesus, the god-man, then embraced the Master and disappeared into his body and the Master entered into ecstasy, lost normal consciousness and remained identified for some time with the Omnipresent Brahman with attributes. Having attained the vision of Jesus thus, the Master became free from the slightest doubt about Christ's having been an incarnation of God.

Saint Nicholas

Saint Nicholas, also called Nicholas of Bari or Nicholas of Myra, one of the most popular minor saints commemorated in the Eastern and Western churches and now traditionally associated with the festival of Christmas. In many countries children receive gifts on December 6, St. Nicholas Day. He is one of the patron saints of children and of sailors.

According to tradition, he was born in the ancient Lycian seaport city of Patara, and, when young, traveled to Palestine and Egypt. He became bishop of Myra soon after returning to Lycia. He was imprisoned and likely tortured during the persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Diocletian but was released under the rule of Constantine the Great. He may have attended the first Council of Nicaea (325), where he allegedly struck the heretic Arius in the face. He was buried in his church at Myra, and by the 6th century his shrine there had become well known. In 1087 Italian sailors or merchants stole his alleged remains from Myra and took them to Bari, Italy; this removal greatly increased the saint's popularity in Europe, and Bari became one of the most crowded of all pilgrimage centres. Nicholas's relics remain enshrined in the 11th-century basilica of San Nicola at Bari, though fragments have been acquired by churches around the world. In 2017 researchers dated one such relic fragment, a piece of hip bone, from a church in the United States and confirmed it to be from the 4th century.

Nicholas's reputation for generosity and kindness gave rise to legends of miracles he performed for the poor and unhappy. He was reputed to have given marriage dowries of gold to three girls whom poverty would otherwise have forced into lives of prostitution and to have restored to life three children who had been chopped up by a butcher and put in a tub of brine. In the Middle Ages, devotion to Nicholas extended to all parts of Europe. He became the patron saint of Russia and Greece; of charitable fraternities and guilds; of children, sailors, unmarried girls, merchants, and pawnbrokers; and of such cities as Fribourg, in Switzerland, and Moscow.

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Events	Date & Time
Volunteers Day Musical narration of Ramayana by Pt. Narendra Datar	Dec 10 @ 11am <i>The event will also be streamed live on YouTube.</i>
Christmas Eve	Dec 24 @ 5:30 pm <i>The event will also be streamed live on YouTube.</i>
Kalpataru celebration	January 1, 2024 @ 12 noon <i>The event will also be streamed live on YouTube.</i>
Birthday celebration of Holy Mother	January 7, 2024 @ 11am <i>The event will also be streamed live on YouTube.</i>
Birthday celebration of Swami Vivekananda	February 4, 2024 @ 11am <i>The event will also be streamed live on YouTube.</i>

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 @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: Limited number of books are available for purchase.

DAILY BREAD FOOD BANK: Daily Bread Food Bank has actively started. We would like to encourage people to donate.

INTERVIEWS/INSTRUCTION:

Swami Kripamayanaanda 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: For details on Soup Kitchen, please see the 'Calendar of Events' on the next page for details.

Holy Mother – Spiritual communication

Swami Gambhirananda has written: 'Whether it was due to the basic unity of the Indian culture or the Mother's incomprehensible power of transmitting ideas, she could make the newcomers understand the mantras and the process of Japa and meditation without the help of interpreters, whose assistance she took for other purposes.' According to the attendant Ashutosh, Holy Mother's attendants had to act as interpreters during her conversation with South Indians. However, he has written: 'At the time of initiation, no help from us was required in explaining the process of japa, mantra, etc.; all could follow Mother's words. In this connection we may recall the experience of the English-speaking Devamata (Laura Glenn). She visited Calcutta and had the good fortune of living in the company of Holy Mother for a few days. She wrote: 'We had no common tongue, but when there was none to interpret for us, she spoke that deeper wordless language of the heart and we never failed to understand each other.'

We can mention here another similar experience.

Sister Sunanda Devi has written:

'I remember very well the conversation between my mother and the Holy Mother. My mother did not know Bengali, nor did the Holy Mother know Tamil; still both of them carried on a conversation for a long time interspersed with laughter now and then. From the way the conversation was carried on, it was clear that each understood the other, and language was not a problem between them.

Incomprehensible though it is, the truth of such incidents cannot be denied. Swami Gambhirananda, the biographer of Holy Mother, has written: 'Many were initiated by her at this place (Madras). One of them was Justice Sundaram Iyer's wife. One woman devotee, initiated by Holy Mother stayed with her for three nights.

Another person blessed by Holy Mother was Muthuswamy Iyer. He was then a boy of about seven years. Holy Mother made him sit on her lap and combed his hair and fed him with sweets and fruits prasad. Interestingly, all his life he did not cut his hair that was touched by Holy Mother.

From the book 'Holy Mother, Swamiji and Direct Disciples at Madras'.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher- Swami Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					<u>1</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class 'Uddhava Gita'	<u>2</u>
<u>3</u> <u>11:00am</u> Lecture: 'Facing the difficulties of life'	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>9</u> <u>6am to 6pm</u> VIGIL
<u>10</u> <u>11:00am</u> Volunteers' Day Musical narration of Ramayana by Pt. Narendra Datar	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class 'Uddhava Gita'	<u>16</u>
<u>17</u> <u>11:00am</u> Lecture: 'The Significance of the Sermon on the Mount' <u>5:00pm</u> RAMNAAM	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u> <u>7:30pm</u> Scripture class 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>23</u>
<u>24</u> <u>5:30 pm</u> Christmas Eve	<u>25</u> Winter recess begins	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u> NO CLASS	<u>30</u>
<u>31</u> NO LECTURE						

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

May peace and spiritual blessings be yours in the coming year and always!

Winter Recess: from Dec 25, 2023 to January 4, 2024

The Vedanta Society will have winter recess from December 25, 2023 to January 4, 2024. Vedanta Society activities will remain suspended during the Winter recess except the Morning and Evening prayers.

AN APPEAL FOR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL for the Year 2024 & DONATION

Vedanta Society appeals to the devotees and well-wishers to kindly come forward and donate generously through online means. Our thanks to those who have responded to our appeal and kindly donated to support the Society. With the current scenario, devotees and well-wishers can donate online through our website PayPal link <https://vedantatoronto.ca/donate> using Credit / Debit cards. Through PayPal you can also setup recurring monthly donations.

All members who would like to renew their membership for the year 2024, are requested to send their details by email to toronto@rkmm.org i.e. Name, Address, Mobile - Home phone numbers, email address and amount paid. Please pay the annual subscription through our website PayPal link as mentioned above. This will help us to issue the annual tax receipt.