



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter February 2025

Words to Inspire

"The position of the mother is the highest in the world, as it is the one place in which to learn and exercise the greatest unselfishness."
-----Swami Vivekananda

Sri Ramakrishna – The Incarnation of this Age

An incarnation of God, when he comes, is said to do two things. He inspires a return to proved moral standards—that is, he reestablishes a social climate helpful for spiritual aspiration. Hindus call this dharma. And he originates a new approach to God appropriate to his time and sphere of influence. Thus the God-man has a perennial function and a contemporary one.

Krishna gave approval to the classic pattern of life duties of the Hindu, and showed how these must be used to lead him to God-vision. Jesus confirmed the ethics of the Old Testament, while also bringing a new commandment which was to help a Western world grow away from savagery toward the ideals of humanity. Buddha re-established Vedic dharma and demonstrated to a ritual-ridden society that a man can achieve knowledge of the Godhead without priestly intervention, through self-struggle and identification with the Fullness within. Less complete manifestations of divinity do similar things, but with not quite so broad a result. Mohammed taught a creed of fraternity and respect for a common God among self-interested tribesmen. Shankara, coming a thousand years after Buddha, through a sheer tour de force of spiritual rationality, set up once more the principles of pure Hinduism, which had again deteriorated. St. Francis re-emphasized the simplicity, the human-heartedness of Christ at a time when his gospel was becoming depersonalized. In the sixteenth century Sri Chaitanya showed an age which had degraded religion by mixing sex enjoyment with worship, how to use the drive of the emotion of love as an aid in realizing God.

What was Sri Ramakrishna's function? Of course, no one can catch him in a net of his own personal evaluation. He is all one describes him to be, and always something else and much more. Even his own disciples, who possessed extraordinary insight themselves, were unable to gauge the full significance of their master. But some things seem clear.

Like all other incarnations, Sri Ramakrishna confirmed classic morality. Through his own actions he spurned the valueless additions to dharma but supported what was sound in it. Sri Ramakrishna was a man of the completest renunciation; yet he did marry, to confirm the virtue of the householder state. And, in accordance with pure tradition, he was a teacher, indeed an actual guru, to his wife, while at the same time worshipping her as a symbol of God the Mother. He showed how marriage, if not used for selfish purposes, can contribute to the spiritual advancement of each partner.

Sri Ramakrishna's contemporary message was: any religious faith, if sincerely followed, is a genuine avenue to God. The Hindu community had been arguing for centuries as to which is the correct view of God and man: dualism, qualified non-dualism, or non-dualism. The dualist preached that God is different from creatures and the universe, an all-powerful being outside them who must be worshipped, propitiated, prevailed upon to grant salvation. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have remained largely dualistic to this day. In qualified non-dualism the devotee feels that all things and people in the world are God's parts. According to the non-dualist viewpoint, however, there is nothing in the universe except God; appearance makes for apparent separations and differences; but this stems from ignorance, which can be removed in the highest vision of Divinity. A few Christian mystics—Eckhart seems to be one—are believed to have attained non-dualist experience.

Sri Ramakrishna showed that dualism, qualified non-dualism, and non-dualism are not contradictory standpoints, but rather positions on an ascending scale. Dualism is an authentic viewpoint, for God may be realized according to the desire of one who holds it. But this is a lesser vision; after attaining it, if one continues to persist, he will proceed through qualified non-dualism to gain the non-dual knowledge, through which he will see that God is not different from his creation."

From the book, 'A Yankee and the Swamis'

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 / General maintenance activities.

If interested in volunteering, kindly contact us at toronto@rkmm.org or contact Abhijit Bhattacharya on 416-569-9401.

THANK YOU AGAIN.

Talks with Swami Vivekananda

Place: Belur Math. Year 1901

Swamiji is much better under the Kaviraji treatment. The disciple is at the Math. While attending on Swamiji, he asked, "The Atman is all-pervading, the very life of the life of all beings and so very near, still why is It not perceived?"

Swamiji:— Do you see yourself that you have eyes? When others speak of the eyes, then you are reminded that you have got eyes. Again when dust or sand enters into them and sets up an irritation then you feel quite well that you have got eyes. Similarly the realization of this universal Atman which is inner than the innermost is not easily attained. Reading from scriptures or hearing from the lips of the preceptor, one has some idea of It, but when the hard lashes of the bitter sorrow and pain of the world make the heart sore, when on the death of one's near and dear relatives, man thinks himself helpless, when the impenetrable and insurmountable darkness about the future life agitates his mind, then does the Jiva pant for a realization of the Atman. Therefore, is sorrow helpful to the knowledge of the Atman? But one should remember the bitter lessons of experience. Those who die, merely suffering the woes of life like cats and dogs, are they men? He is a man who even when agitated by the sharp interaction of pleasure and pain is discriminating, and knowing them to be of an evanescent nature, becomes passionately devoted to the Atman. This is all the difference between men and animals. That which is nearest is least observed. The Atman is the nearest of the near, therefore the careless and unsteady mind of man gets no clue to It. But the man who is alert, calm, self-restrained and discriminating, ignores the external world and diving more and more into the inner world, realizes the glory of the Atman and becomes great. Then only he

attains to the knowledge of the Atman, and realizes the truth of such scriptural texts as, "I am the Atman," "Thou art That, O Svetaketu," and so on. Do you understand?

Disciple:— Yes, sir. But why this method of attaining Self-Knowledge through the path of pain and suffering? Instead of all this, it would have been well if there had been no creation at all. We were all at one time identified with the Brahman. Why then this desire for creation on the part of the Brahman? Why again this going forth of the Jiva (who is no other than Brahman) along the path of birth and death, amidst the interaction of the dualities of life?

Swamiji:— When a man is intoxicated, he sees many hallucinations; but when the intoxication goes off, he understands them as the imaginations of a heated brain. Whatever you see of this creation which is without a beginning, but has an end, is only an effect of your state of intoxication; when that passes off, such questions will not arise at all.

Disciple:— Then is there no reality in the creation and preservation etc., of the Universe?

Swamiji:— Why should not there be? So long as you identify yourself with the body and have the ego-consciousness, all these will remain. But when you are bereft of the bodyconsciousness and devoted to the Atman and live in the Atman, then with respect to you none of these will remain, and such questions as whether there is any creation, or birth or death—will have no room. Then you will have to say, —"Where is it gone, by whom is it taken, wherein is the world merged? It was just observed by me and is it non-existent now? What a wonder!"— Vivekachudamani, 483

From the book "*Talks with Swami Vivekananda*"

Swami Adbhutananda

One day, a rich devotee of Lata Maharaj [Swami Adbhutananda] saluted him, as is usually done in Bengal, by raising and joining the two hands above his head.

At this Lata Maharaj said, 'Look here, Sir, one should bow down to Sadhus and monks and to gods and goddesses. He (the Master [Sri Ramakrishna]) used to say, "This sort of axe-raising salutation brings no merit."'

Another devotee present on the occasion was amused at this and asked with a laugh, 'What is this "axe-raising salutation," Maharaj?'

Lata Maharaj: 'The kind of salutation that you usually do by touching the forehead by joined and upraised hands is what he termed "axe-raising" salutation.'

One day Girish Babu [Girishchandra Ghosh] saluted Sri Ramakrishna thus. Immediately the Master bent himself at his waist and saluted Girish. We were witnessing the scene. At this Girish bent himself lower and saluted. The Master lowered himself still more. This competition ended when Girish fell flat on the ground and bowed to the Master.

Then Sri Ramakrishna blessed him.

It is for this Girish Babu used to say, "This time Master conquered the world with humble salutation. As Krishna, he conquered the world with the sound of his flute; as Chaitanya with the Lord's name; in this incarnation by bowing down to people."

From the book, '*Swami Adbhutananda As We Saw Him*'.

Saraswati puja at Belur Math

(Vedanta Kesari, November-December 1989)

I first came to know of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in 1899. Belur Math was dedicated by Swamiji in the same year, but at that time I was not so anxious to meet him. Towards the end of the year I went to Belur Math [from Varanasi], but I could not meet Swamiji as he had already left for Europe and America. In 1900 I finished some relief work in Rajputana and then went to Vrindavan. While I was there I heard that Swamiji had returned to Belur Math from the West. At this time Swami Saradananda wrote to Swami Kalyanananda [in Vrindavan], "Those who want to meet Swamiji can come." But I decided to go to Varanasi first. There I found that the sevashrama was in a rented house and that Charu Babu [later Swami Shubhananda] was managing everything by himself. I did not want to leave him when he was so hard-pressed.

Just before the Durga Puja celebration in 1901, I felt an intense desire to see Swamiji, which I expressed to Charu Babu. He gave me fifteen days' leave, and I left for Belur Math. After arriving at the Howrah [railway] station, I went first to see Holy Mother at her residence in Bosepara Lane in Baghbazar. However, I found that she was then staying at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house in Belur. From there I went to Belur Math. I arrived the day before Durga Puja, but I had not been aware that the Divine Mother would be worshipped at the Math. I noticed that a grand preparation for Durga Puja was going on and Swami Brahmananda was quite busy. As I was already acquainted with him, I bowed down to him, and as far as I remember, it was he who introduced me to Swamiji. I first saw Swamiji in his room. He was shaven-headed and wore only a loin-cloth. After I bowed down to him he inquired about the activities at Varanasi.

Saptami Puja ended with great festivity. The resolution mantra was said in Holy Mother's name. Krishnalal Maharaj [Swami Dhirananda] was the worshipper and Swami Ramakrishnananda's father was the prompter. Swamiji enjoyed the first day's worship. But on the second day he had an attack of asthma. When he had these attacks, he would gasp and wouldn't speak, but as soon as the attack passed he would again become cheerful and jovial. On the evening of the third day there was a performance of the drama Nala-Damayanti. While watching the performance Swamiji looked very happy and even cut jokes. Physical sickness or suffering could not make him depressed, nor could it diminish his love and concern for his disciples. Once, when he was ill with a very high fever, one of his attendants became sick. He noticed that many people were in his room to serve him, so he asked some of them to go and serve his attendant.

On the fourth day the image of Mother Durga was carried to the Ganga for immersion. Swami Brahmananda

danced in front of the Divine Mother to the accompaniment of music. We were deeply moved to see this sight. Swamiji also enjoyed Maharaj's beautiful dance from the upper veranda of the monastery.

Swamiji's health improved after Durga Puja. He made arrangements at the Math for Lakshmi Puja, and after that for Kali Puja in an image. It is hard to describe the joy and festivity of Kali Puja. That night, before the worship, Swamiji began meditating in front of the image. He then went into samadhi and lost all outer consciousness. After some time Swami Premananda chanted Sri Ramakrishna's name in Swamiji's ear and slowly brought him back to normal consciousness. A few days later Jagaddhatri Puja was held at Swamiji's parental home in Simla, Kolkata. We were all invited. Swamiji himself made all the arrangements, and we had a wonderful time. Swamiji also started Saraswati Puja at the Math in an image. Previously Saraswati Puja had never been performed in an image at the Math.

Swamiji gave the highest place to sannyasa. While initiating a brahmachari into the vows of sannyasa, he would say, "I shall sacrifice you to the Master [as a goat is sacrificed to a Deity]." Before the ceremony he would meditate and create a spiritual atmosphere. Then he would recite the sannyasa mantras and others would repeat them. After that he would ask the monks to offer their sacred thread and hair into the fire. Then he would tell them, "From today you are beyond caste and you can accept alms from any person in the world."

One day, while I was staying at Belur Math with Swamiji, I expressed my desire to receive sannyasa from him. He said, "Will you be able to beg food from door to door?" I replied, "With your blessings, surely I can." He then said: "Stay here. You will get your final vows in time." At that time Swamiji had planned to visit Mayavati, but the visit was postponed. Then I again asked him to initiate me into sannyasa. Swamiji decided to initiate me on Lord Buddha's birthday and asked Swami Bodhananda to make all the necessary arrangements. The night before, I passed in great anxiety. I was supposed to get up early. I woke up at 2:20 a.m., and thinking that it was 4:10 a.m., I asked Swami Nishchayananda to ring the bell. When Swami Bodhananda started for the shrine on hearing the bell, Swamiji inquired, "Who is going to the shrine at this time of the night?" Bodhananda told him about the bell, and Swamiji remarked, "The boy has become very nervous." Some time later, however, Swamiji came to the shrine and performed the Viraja Homa. After pouring oblations, Swamiji said, "From today all your worldly duties are over." He gave me my monastic name "Achalananda". I was Swamiji's last monastic disciple.

Ma Sarada in Bangalore

From the book, 'The Early history of the Ramakrishna Movement'.

At Bangalore the Mother stayed for about a week. One afternoon she was taken by Swami Vishuddhananda in a carriage to the cave temple of Gavipura, a short distance behind the Ashrama. The Mother got down and visited the temple and then returned to the Ashrama by the same carriage. The whole time spent outside was not long. But, whereas at the time of their going out, there was none there at the Ashrama besides the inmates, when they returned they found the whole compound crowded with a number of visitors. At the sound of the Mother's carriage they stood up instantaneously and then prostrated themselves on the ground. The Mother, who was visibly moved by the sight, alighted from the carriage and stood there motionless for about five minutes, extending her right arm in benediction. Perfect silence reigned all around, and the whole atmosphere was charged with awe. Then the Mother silently walked to the Ashrama and sat in the central room, where the devotees gathered. Here again was enacted that speechless transmission and imbibition of transcendental bliss that the scriptures speak of. There was no question and no answer, and yet all doubts were resolved. Breaking that tangible silence, the Mother said to Swami Vishuddhananda who was by her side, 'What a pity, I don't know their language! What solace they would derive, if I could but speak a few words!' When Swami Vishuddhananda translated this for the devotees, they said, 'No, no; this is all right. Our hearts are full indeed. No words are needed on such an occasion.' Wonderful are the ways of the Mother and wonderful are those of her children!

Here is another incident. There is a small hillock behind the Ashrama building and within its own compound. A short while before dark, the Mother climbed the hillock along with one or two others and sat on its top enjoying the beauty of the setting sun. When Swami Ramakrishnananda heard of this, he said in amazement, 'Indeed! The Mother has become a dweller on the mountain (Parvatavasin[1]) and hurried towards the place. He was stout, and began to pant as he climbed that low hillock; but undaunted he went up straight to the Mother, prostrated himself there and laying his head on her feet chanted three well-known verses from the Chandi beginning with Sarvamangala-mangalye which are used as mantras for the salutation of the Divine Mother:

'O auspicious One, Thou art the source of all auspiciousness-Thou art the accomplisher of all cherished desires. Thou art the giver of refuge. Thou possessest the eye of wisdom and beautiful form. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.

'O eternal One, Thou art the energy of creation, preservation and destruction. Thou art the abode of threefold Cosmic energy and Thou art also its manifestor. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.

'O Mother, Thou art the saviour of the distressed and of the careworn, who take refuge in Thee. Thou art the remover of misery of all. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.'

And he prayed 'Grace! grace!'. The Mother caressed his head, as though pacifying an importunate son, till Swami Ramakrishnananda felt himself fully blessed.

There was a funny incident at Bangalore. One day the Holy Mother, dressed in her own simple way, sat at one side of the central room and women visitors came to pay their respects to her. With them came a rich woman wearing fine clothes and costly ornaments. She took her seat in the centre of the room. A little later a group of women came, and finding the wealthy lady in the centre mistook her for the Mother. Therefore, they proceeded to salute her. The lady's protests were of no avail; the new-comers pressed on to touch her feet. At this the aristocratic lady jumped up and remonstrated vehemently. By that time, however, she was completely surrounded, and there was a scamper for the first touch of her feet, so that she had to extricate herself somehow and walk out. The Mother sat quietly at her corner all the while; and though she did not grasp one word of what the ladies spoke, she understood with a quiet smile the farce that was going on in front of her.

Girish Chandra Ghosh's son

Girish Chandra Ghosh, the famous dramatist, had once entreated the Master to be born as his son. The Master had then turned down the request. And yet when this child was born after the Master had left this world, Girish was firmly convinced that the Master had really answered his earnest prayer and blessed him by being born in his house. He, therefore, took the utmost care of the boy whose appearance and deportment so fascinated and attracted visitors that they could not resist the temptation of taking him in their arms and kissing him. And whenever the Holy Mother happened to come to this house, the boy rejoiced in sitting on her lap. Girish's son, then in his third year, had not quite learned to speak and expressed himself through gestures. That day, at Sourindra Thakur's house, the boy became anxious to see the Mother who was upstairs. He pointed towards her room and went on saying 'ooh, ooh'. At first none understood him; but at last one of the Mother's attendants guessed his meaning and carried him upstairs. The boy saluted the Mother by falling at her feet, and coming down pressed his father with his usual gestures to go up. At this Girish burst out crying, 'O my dear, how can I possibly go to see the Holy Mother; for I am veritably a great sinner.' But as the boy was insistent, Girishchandra at last took him up in his arms and walked into the Mother's room, shaking and trembling all over. Falling at her feet with tearful eyes and a voice choked with emotion, he said, 'Mother, it is because of this child that I have had now a glimpse of your blessed feet.'

The boy did not live very long; he died at the age of three.

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Events	Date & Time
Saraswati Puja	Feb 2 @ 11am <i>Also Puja will be streamed live on YouTube.</i>
Maha Shivaratri	Feb 26 @ 6.30pm <i>Also Puja will be streamed live on YouTube.</i>
Birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna	Mar 1 @ 11am <i>Also Puja will be streamed live on YouTube.</i>
Ram Navami	Apr 6 @ 11am <i>Also Puja will 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 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: Please see next page for details.

The Mother

From the book, '*Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi*', by Swami Gambhirananda

Swami Vivekananda came back to the Math in October, 1898, after his visit to Amarnath and Kshirbhavani in Kashmir. He was in bad health then. On the second day of the Durga worship he, along with Swamis Brahmananda, Prakashananda and Vimalananda, went to Baghbazar to make his obeisance at the feet of the Mother. There he fell prostrate before her. The Mother stood at a corner, covering her entire body with a wrapper. Her talks with the Swami were in a very low tone, so that they had to be repeated more distinctly by Brahmachari Krishnalal. When the Swami prostrated himself, the Mother blessed him by touching his head with her right hand. Then this loving and world-famous son of the Mother complained with an air of petulance, 'Such indeed is your Master, Mother! Just because a Fakir's disciple in Kashmir used to visit me, the Fakir cursed me saying, "He shall have to leave this place in three days with stomach trouble." And sure enough, it happened just as he had said — I had to flee away helter-skelter! Your Master could do nothing whatsoever.' The Mother had her answer communicated, 'It's an occult science. One can't but bow down before it, my boy! They didn't, in fact, come to destroy. Our Master heeded even such things as the cry of a lizard or a sneeze. And we hear that Sankaracharya too, allowed his body to be afflicted with a disease. It is known to you that as the result of a curse from his cousin Haladhari, the Master had hemorrhage from his mouth. Your suffering from disease is the same as the Master suffering from it.' The Swami, still in a mood of irascibility, protested that he was not ready to accept all this despite the Mother's argument, and in fact the Master was nothing. Then the Mother answered with some amusement, 'Is there any other way out, my son? For, sure enough, you are tied to his hem-string.'

Sister Nivedita, after returning from Kashmir, took up her residence with the Mother who was very kind to her and treated her like a daughter. But she soon realized that the stay of a foreigner in a brahmin family could complicate matters for the Mother's relations who had to move amidst orthodox people; and hence, though the Mother said nothing, she, of her own accord, shifted to another house on the same lane.

Soon came the day (12th November, 1898) of the annual Kali worship, and the monks at the Belur Math made preparations for the purpose. The Mother went there in the morning with the picture of the Master which she worshipped daily. After alighting from the boat at the monastery at Nilambar Babu's garden house, she proceeded on foot to the newly bought land and after cleaning a spot with her own hands, worshipped the Master there. At noon she returned to the monastery where she took some prasāda. In the afternoon, Sister Nivedita took her along with Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda, and Saradananda to 16 Bosepara Lane, where the Sister's Girls' School was formally declared open by the Mother.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher- Swami Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						<u>1</u>
<u>2</u> 11:00am Saraswati Puja	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u> 7:30pm Scripture class 'Uddhava Gita'	<u>8</u>
<u>9</u> 11:00am Lecture: 'Milestones in Spiritual Life' 5:00pm RAMNAAM	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u> 7:30pm Scripture class 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>15</u> 6am to 6pm VIGIL
<u>16</u> 11:00am Lecture: 'Motive of Creation'	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u> 7:30pm Scripture class 'Uddhava Gita'	<u>22</u>
<u>23</u> 11:00am 'Guided Meditation'.	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> 6:30pm Maha Shivaratri	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u> 7:30pm Scripture class 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	

Soup Kitchen Dates (Starts at 9.30AM)

Main coordinator: Sayan Roy 416-305-4637

Please contact the coordinator for Soup Kitchen dates on email r.sayandip@gmail.com.

AN APPEAL FOR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL for the Year 2025 & 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 have not renewed their membership for the year 2025, 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.