



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter April 2022

Words to Inspire

"Only God can know himself. Be a god, that you may know the infinite God. In that knowledge there is neither want nor fear. The very thought of such knowledge is uplifting".
—————Sw Brahmananda

Days with the Master

One peculiarity of the Master which I noticed was that he talked of nothing but God and religion with every kind of person who came to see him. But he was never a dry bore. During talks on the most exalted topics he created much laughter by cracking jokes. One day he said, "You know, there are various kinds of siddhas [perfected souls]. Do you know the meaning of siddha? Literally it means 'boiled'. As potatoes etc. when boiled become soft, so are men when perfected." Once I spent a night at Dakshineswar with several other disciples, and the Master seated all of us in meditation. While communing, each one with his Chosen Ideal, we would often laugh or weep in ecstasy. The pure joy we experienced in those boyhood days cannot be expressed in words. Whenever I approached Sri Ramakrishna, he would invariably ask me, "Did you shed tears at the time of prayer or meditation?" And one day when I answered "yes" to this, how happy he was! "Tears of repentance flow from the corners of the eyes nearest the nose," he said, "and those of joy through the outer corners." Suddenly the Master asked me, "Do you know how to pray?" Saying this he flung his hands and feet about restlessly, like a little child impatient for its mother, and cried out, "Mother dear, grant me devotion and wisdom. I don't want anything else. I cannot live without Thee." As he was thus teaching us how to pray, he looked just like a small boy. Profuse tears flooded his breast and he passed into deep samadhi. He appeared to be praying for me.

Talking of dreams one day, the Master said, "One may dream that someone has come and lit a lamp, or that something caught fire, or that one is calling oneself by one's own name. All these dreams are auspicious, the last one especially so." At that time whoever visited the Master was blessed with various spiritual visions during meditation. Sitting with half-closed eyes, people visualized their Chosen Ideal and talked with him. Seeing all this, the hairs of my body stood on end. Almost all of Sri Ramakrishna's intimate disciples attained the eight sattwic signs in some form or another. But Swamiji was exceptionally reserved and never yielded easily to any spiritual mood.

There was another day at Dakshineswar, during which several unforgettable incidents took place. The Master asked me to go with him to the big ghat, where he intended as usual to take his bath. When we came down the ghat steps, I saw the temple manager sitting at the edge of the water with one foot in the Ganges while he rubbed the sole of his other foot on the step. Sri Ramakrishna descended to the northern end of the bottom step and did not even glance at the manager. Beginning his bath, the Master put his foot in the water very carefully, and got in waist-deep, putting a little water on his head. This respectful and reverent manner of taking his bath fully tallied with his saying a few days earlier that the Ganges water was divine. Meanwhile an old Brahmin appeared on the steps of the ghat—he looked like a villager. He went up to the temple manager and started asking him questions in a loud voice, such as how much fish do you get from the temple pond, how much money do you receive by selling the fruits and vegetables grown in the temple garden, and so on. The Master overheard all this and looked at the old Brahmin obliquely with displeasure. After his bath I followed the Master back to his room and sprinkled a little Ganges water on his cloth; he then bowed down to the deities in the temples, returned to his room, and ate a little sacramental food. He was sitting on his cot enjoying a smoke when the old Brahmin appeared at his door and asked, "Is Harish here?" Instead of answering him, the Master said, "Well, you are a Brahmin and three-fourths of your life is already over; you have now entered the last part. And yet you do not remember your Chosen Ideal even on the banks of the Ganges. Fie on you, that you should inquire at such a sacred place how many fish there are in the pond and what quantities of vegetables and fruit grow in the garden!" The Brahmin however was evidently not in the least repentant and went away in annoyance. The Master asked me to sprinkle some Ganges water on the place where the old man had stood.

From the book '*Vedanta and the West*'.

KARMA YOGA ACTIVITIES

It is a great opportunity to provide your services to the Vedanta Society of Toronto. Kindly come forward and volunteer time towards maintaining and managing the facilities. If interested in volunteering, kindly 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!!

Grace and Bhakti through Virodha Bhava

From the book "THE GRACE DIVINE"

As the Bhakti cult developed in India, it was realised that even one who, inspired by hate or fear, or both, constantly has before his mind only the vision of Divinity, and nothing else, thinks of Him sleeping and waking and sees Him everywhere, also qualifies for the descent of grace.

This aspect of grace did not come to the notice of Valmiki, but Adhyatma Ramayana of a later period, uses the occasion of the killing of Maricha, to project his form of Bhakti. Maricha and Subahu were brothers. An arrow of Rama tipped with fire consumed Subahu on the spot. But the arrow aimed at Maricha was tipped with ice cold water (Varuna Astra); it flung him away at a great distance into the ocean. His life was preserved. He swam to an island; thereafter every moment of his life was spent in fear of Rama. He saw Rama's awe-inspiring form everywhere. The very syllable 'RA' sent waves of fear through his trembling body. Just as the love of God can stamp out every other thought in the mind except that of God, fear of God can also bring about a complete preoccupation of the mind with God and nothing else. Either state can qualify for the descent of grace. Maricha, according to Adhyatma Ramayana, fell in this second category and was redeemed by the grace of Sri Rama. "Be he a Brahmin, a Rakshasa, a sinner or one of unrighteous conduct, if at the time of leaving his body, he thinks of Rama he attains the Supreme Abode of Vishnu." "This is indeed a miracle performed by Rama", exclaimed the Devas when they saw a bright light leaving Maricha's body and entering Rama, "Maricha left his home and all his possessions and lived in the forest, constantly thinking of Rama in fear. In this way his sins were wiped off and when he died at Rama's

hands, it was Rama's form that he contemplated at the parting moment. Therefore, grace descended on him."

Rama's Grace bringing about Moksha or Salvation is described in a most direct and simple manner in the case of Jatayu. The bird was old and infirm. He had sacrificed his life for the Avatar and was about to breathe his last when Rama met him and understood his great act of sacrifice. In Valmiki, expression of gratitude by way of repayment of a good deed done, is given the highest place among the virtues of Rama. Sri Rama, without the least hesitation, commands Jatayu's soul to go to Heaven as a fitting reward for his services. He says to Lakshmana, "This King among birds, has sacrificed his life in my cause. Indeed, noble and heroic souls, followers of true Dharma who deserve all respect and devotion, are to be found everywhere and in every form of creation!" After lighting the funeral pyre for Jatayu, Rama utters the following invocation: "O King of eagles! I have now performed for you the supreme act of purification. By my command you can go to the highest of the worlds attainable by the performance of sacrifices and the giving of gifts."

In the Adhyatma Ramayana, Jatayu undergoes a transfiguration into the form of an attendant of Vishnu in Vaikuntha before ascending to the Highest Loka. Here there is no attempt to camouflage Sri Rama the Divine, as Rama the man, the Prince of Ayodhya. He functions openly and assertively as the Highest Divinity, performing an act of grace for redemption from the cycle of births. The sacrifice of Jatayu merited no less at the hands of the Avatar, who was Dharma personified.

Incarnate Teachers and Incarnation

Higher and nobler than all ordinary ones are another set of teachers, the Avatâras of Ishvara, in the world. They can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish. The lowest and the most degraded characters become in one second saints at their command. They are the Teachers of all teachers, the highest manifestations of God through man. We cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshipping them; and indeed they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship.

No man can really see God except through these human manifestations. If we try to see God otherwise, we make for ourselves a hideous caricature of Him and believe the caricature to be no worse than the original. There is a story of an ignorant man who was asked to make an image of the God Shiva, and who, after days of hard struggle, manufactured only the image of a monkey. So whenever we try to think of God as He is in His absolute perfection, we invariably meet with the most miserable failure, because as long as we are men, we cannot conceive Him as anything higher than man. The time will come when we shall transcend our human nature and know Him as He is; but as long as we are men, we must worship Him in man and as man. Talk as you may, try as you may, you cannot think of God except as a man. You may deliver great intellectual discourses on God and on all things under the sun, become great rationalists and prove to your satisfaction that all these accounts of the Avatâras of God as man are nonsense. But let us come for a moment to practical common sense. What is there behind this kind of remarkable intellect? Zero, nothing, simply so much froth. When next you hear a man delivering a great intellectual lecture against this worship of the Avatâras of God, get hold of him and ask what his idea of God is, what he understands by "omnipotence", "omnipresence", and all similar terms, beyond the spelling of the words. He really means nothing by them; he cannot formulate as their meaning any idea unaffected by his own human nature; he is no better off in this matter than the man in the street who has not read a single book. That man in the street, however, is quiet and does not disturb the peace of the world, while this big talker creates disturbance and misery among mankind. Religion is, after all, realisation, and we must make the sharpest distinction between talk; and intuitive experience. What we experience in the depths of our souls is realisation. Nothing indeed is so uncommon as common sense in regard to this matter.

Avatāra – the greatest Teacher

From the book, "Meditation and Spiritual Life", by Swami Yatishwarananda

The greatest Teacher is, of course, the avatāra, the Divine Incarnation, who is able to bring illumination to thousands of people. Swami Vivekananda used to say that avatāra is a kapāla-mocana, one who can alter the destiny of people, one who can wipe out what is written on their foreheads, that is, their karma. No ordinary teacher has such power of transformation. Jesus had the power to bring divine Light to those simple fishermen who attained illumination at his touch. He also had the power to transform impure souls whom people call sinners. When he told them, 'Thy sins are forgiven; thy faith has made thee whole, go in peace', they at once felt freed from all impurities.

But Jesus himself passed through initiation. What else was that scene of baptism in Jordan when, we are told, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him and he heard a voice saying 'This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased'.

In modern times an increasingly large number of people regard Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation. He too received initiation from a human teacher. We are told that before he

took up his work as a priest in the Kāli temple, he was initiated by a Tantric teacher (by name Kenaram Bhattacharya) of Calcutta. When the teacher uttered the mantra in his ears, Ramakrishna gave a loud shout and was absorbed in ecstasy. The teacher said he had instructed many disciples but has never encountered anyone like Ramakrishna.

Our spiritual teachers tell us that divine Grace comes in the form of self-effort, spiritual yearning and striving. These enable the spiritual seeker to experience that direct form of divine Grace which brings about the union between the soul and God or Brahman. Hindu scriptures say:

A man should uplift himself by his higher Self. Let him not weaken himself. The lower self, if properly cultivated, acts and his friend; if neglected, it acts as his enemy.

To men, their mind alone is the cause of bondage or emancipation.

Narada's Ego Subdued

Once upon a time a Narada was performing a penance in the cave of Himalaya Mountain. Indra becoming fearful sent Kamadev to obstruct his penance. But Kamadeva was unsuccessful in his attempt as the place where Narada was doing penance was the same place where Lord Shiva did penance. After the completion of his penance, Narada became arrogant that he had defeated Kamadeva. He went to Kailash Mountain and narrated about his feat to Lord Shiva. Narada was naïve not to realize the fact that it happened only because of the divine power of Shiva.

Lord Shiva listened to his arrogant statement. He advised Narada not to reveal this secret to anybody. But Narada went to Brahmaloaka and boasted about his feat to Lord Brahma.

Lord Brahma listened to his boisterous statements and advised him not to reveal this to anybody. But Narada was not satisfied. He wanted to give the news of his achievement to Lord Vishnu. So, he went to Lord Vishnu's abode and boasted about his feat of defeating Kamadeva. Lord Vishnu with a desire to subdue his inflated ego, manifested his illusionary power with the blessings of Lord Shiva.

While Narada was returning from Vaikuntha Loka, he saw a beautiful city. This city was ruled by a king named SheelNidhi. The king had a daughter and her Swayamvar was being organised. Numerous kings had arrived to take part in that Swayamvar. Narada, curiously entered the place where Swayamvar was being held. The king requested Narada to study the lines of the palm of the princess. Narada was infatuated by the princess beauty. He returned back to Lord Vishnu and expressed his desire of marrying that princess. He also requested Vishnuji to make him as handsome as himself (Vishnu). Lord Vishnu made Narada's whole body very beautiful except his face. Which he made like a monkey. Narada being unaware of this happily went back to Swayamvar site. Narada sat among the kings – his face resembling like a monkey. Lord Vishnu too was present there. The princess saw Narada, whose face was looking like a monkey. She was amused. Ultimately, she put the garland around the neck of Lord Vishnu and went to Vaikuntha Loka alongwith him.

Some of the Shiva's gana too were present there in the guise of a brahmin. Their names were Marud ganas. When they saw Narada to see the reflection of his face in the water.

When Narada saw his face in the water, he saw that he was looking like a monkey. He became very furious and cursed the Marudganas to be born as demons, even though being brahmins by birth.

Furious Narada then went to Lord Vishnu and cursed him- "You too would suffer due to separation from your wife, during your incarnation of Ram and the monkey would come to your help. Lord Vishnu accepted Narada's curse without any hesitation. He then removed the illusionary powers by which Narada's mind was influenced. Now, Narada regretted his actions. Lord Vishnu told Narada that everything happened because of Shiva's divine illusions.

"You did not pay heed to his advice and hence Shiva by his illusions, has taught you a lesson. Shiva is beyond the reach of the three basic qualities-Satva, Rajas and Tamas. Therefore, you must worship and contemplate on the name of Shiva. All of your sins will be destroyed.

Swami Madhavananda - Message

Belur Math: Saturday, the 12th January 1963

In the present age there is no necessity for severe bodily austerity. Moreover, the Lord cannot be attained by mere external austerity. As one can enter water by holding the chain, so also constantly repeating His blessed name one should progress spiritually. All the powers of God are undoubtedly in His name. What is wanted is faith in His name and concentration too. Vibhishana (the younger brother of Ravana) wrote the Rama-nama in the corner of a friend's cloth and advised: "Putting faith, walk on the waters of the ocean without the fear of drowning."

But then, don't lose hope because nothing has been achieved. Unless the tendencies of the mind are kept off, you should know, that Lord's vision or His grace is not obtained. Hari Maharaj would say: "God is surely not a snake that He comes as soon as the mantra (charm) is chanted!" God is our nearest and dearest, compassion incarnate, a veritable image of love. He must be bound only through love.

He is inside, outside, and everywhere. It is like soaking the lemon in its juice itself. So, though thought of God effort must be made now to build up life in a new way. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Sa Sha Sa - Endure, endure, endure." Even in the worldly life, to bear and forbear is absolutely necessary. Righteous action, righteous thought and prayer - through these, devotion to God is generated. At first it was quite difficult to make fire. In the Vedic age two pieces of wood were rubbed together and fire was produced. It will not do to allow this fire of devotion-cum-faith to extinguish. How much hope and encouragement Sri Ramakrishna has given! How feeble is man, and how many improper things he does! How feeble is man, and how many improper things he does! But through his own effort and God's grace, he can attain Him, the Lord. Through God's grace alone the right Guru is got. Gaining from him the great mantra, the dear name and form of God, spiritual endeavour must be made. There should be real effort to have His vision. Purity, patience, and

perseverance - Bear in mind that in order to build up spiritual life these three things are especially necessary.

Don't give up after a little struggle on achieving no progress. Go on sincerely practising. Do not lose patience. There will be not a moment's delay when fitness (to receive the Lord's grace) is attained. With the whole mind He must be called on. His name contains all powers. Even while moving about, repeat the Lord's name. Such a restlessness for the vision of God is needed as the vehement struggle for a little air when pressed under water.

God is only one. His names are many. By whichever name you may call on Him, He will be attained. Sri Ramakrishna after practising various spiritual disciplines declared from his own realizations, "To whichever path you may adhere, God can be certainly reached." But how few really want Him! Sri Ramakrishna as a result of his actual experiences has told which thing is correct and which not. By practising which discipline the fruit is gained quickly, and again, why there occurs delay - all that he has unmistakably pointed out.

Man, to be sure, is not born a paramahansa (a perfect soul). There will be a little or more of blunder, defect and failure. But man does not turn imbecile on that score! Swamiji has exhorted: "One should never look upon oneself low." Rather one ought to think - There is nothing impossible for me. Through the Lord's grace I will do everything. Swamiji has also said: "The world is nothing but God." The Yogi sees only one God everywhere. Ordinary men see merely the world. Everyone perceives according to one's tendency and outlook. Our present tendencies are in keeping with fruit of actions done in the remote past. And in keeping with our present actions, the future tendencies will be formed. Therefore, there is nothing to despair. He, the Lord, exists inside, outside, everywhere - as if in concealment, watching the play, performing magic. Hence, like a little child plainly entreat, "pray pull me up by the hand. I am so ignorant."

Meaning of Japa

Up till now, I did not know how to meditate or do japa. The next morning, after offering my pranams to Mahapurush Maharaj, I asked him how I should meditate and perform japa. He replied affectionately: "To utter the name of the Lord again and again with devotion is japa. Repeat His name with deep love. The Master Himself is the living and ever-awakened Lord. In this age the holy name of Sri Ramakrishna is the great mantra, so repeat His name in silence. Also pray to Him in all earnestness, saying: 'My Lord, how much You have suffered by assuming this human form of Yours for the salvation of the world! I am an unworthy person, without penance, without worship, and without wisdom, devotion, faith, and love. Kindly give me knowledge, devotion, faith, love, affection, and purity. Be kind and manifest Yourself in my heart. May my human life be fruitful! One of Your sons has taught me to pray to You in this way. Please be kind to me.' "As you pray to Him again and again in this way, His blessings will shower down upon you. Gradually the mind will be calmed, and it will settle down in meditation and prayer. You will feel devotion and joy in your mind, and your heart will be filled with hope. After praying in this way, do japa, repeating the holy name of Sri Ramakrishna as instructed by me. Meditation will gradually come on its own after you have done japa for some time. While you are performing japa, think intently that He is looking at you with love in His eyes. Such imagination for a long time is a kind of meditation. Again, while continuing to do japa, pray to Him: 'My Lord, please favour me so that I may be able to meditate on You.' "He will grant your prayer. Know it for certain. He is truly the Guide, the Lord, the Father, Mother, Friend, and Saviour. To imagine His form or virtues in any way is meditation. Meditation has many steps and many forms. Do it this way now. In course of time He will, if necessary, guide you from within. Seek Him with great earnestness. Cry for Him. By crying again and again the dirt from your mind will be removed, and He will manifest Himself in your heart. Such things cannot be achieved in a day. Continue doing this and pray. You will surely get a response, and you will derive great joy. In this age, the name Ramakrishna is the holiest of all the mantras, even without 'Aum' or any other addition."

From the book 'In The Divine Realm' by Sw Apurvananda

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Events	Date & Time
Sri Ram Navami	April 10, 2022 – 11:00 am
Buddha Jayanti	May 15, 2022 – 11:00 am

Master's Sadhana of Dasyabhakti

From the book 'Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master', by Swami Saradananda

When we were with the Master, he told us time and again those events of the time of his Sadhana in order to bring home to us the necessity for intense eagerness of heart for the realization of God, and said regretfully, "People shed floods of tears at the death of their wives, children, and the like, or at the loss of worldly possessions, but who do so because they have not realized God? Yet they say, 'We called on Him so much and still He did not show Himself.' Let them but once weep for God with such eagerness and let me see whether He keeps Himself back without revealing Himself." These words used to sting us to the quick. When we heard them, it became clear to us that he could speak so assuredly, only because he had found them true early in his life.

Sadhana of the Dasya-bhava:

The Master did not rest satisfied with having only the vision of the divine Mother during the first four years of his Sadhana. His mind was naturally attracted towards Raghuvir, his family Deity, after he had had the vision of the divine Mother when he was in the Bhavamukha state. Knowing that with the help of devotion it was possible to have, like Mahavir, the vision of Ramachandra, he engaged himself in Sadhana, assuming Mahavir's attitude, for the purpose of attaining perfection in the Dasya-bhava. The Master said that, thinking of Mahavir incessantly at that time, he became so much absorbed that he forgot altogether for some time his separate existence and individuality. "At that time," said the Master, "I had to walk, take my food and do all other actions like Mahavir. I did not do so of my own accord, but the actions so happened of themselves, I tied my cloth round my waist so that it might look like a tail and walked jumping; I ate nothing but fruits and roots, which again I did not feel inclined to eat when skinned. I spent much of my time on trees and always cried, 'Raghuvir, Raghuvir', with a deep voice. Both my eyes assumed a restless expression like those of the animals of that species, and it is marvellous that the lower end of the backbone lengthened at that time by nearly an inch. When we heard the last-mentioned fact, we asked, "Sir, does that part of your body continue to be so even now?" He said, "No, in course of time it assumed slowly its previous natural size when the mastery of that mood over the mind had ceased."

Vision of Sri Sita:

An extraordinary vision and experience came to pass in the life of the Master when he practised the Dasya-bhakti. That vision and experience was so novel, so different from his previous ones, that it was deeply imprinted on his mind and was always fresh in his memory. He said, "One day at that time I was sitting under the Panchavati—not meditating, merely sitting—when an incomparable, effulgent female figure appeared before me illumining the whole place. It was not that figure alone that I saw then, but also the trees and plants of the Panchavati, the Ganga and all other objects. I saw that the figure was that of a woman; for, there were in her no signs of a goddess, such as the possession of three eyes, etc. But the extraordinary, spirited, and solemn expression of that face, manifesting love, sorrow, compassion, and endurance, was not generally seen even in the figures of goddesses. Looking graciously at me, that goddess-woman was advancing from north to south towards me with a slow, grave gait. I wondered who she might be, when a black-faced monkey came suddenly, nobody knew whence, and sat at her feet and someone within my mind exclaimed, 'Sita, Sita who was all sorrow all her life, Sita the daughter of king Janaka, Sita to whom Rama was her very life!' Saying 'Mother' repeatedly, I was then going to fling myself at her feet, when she came quickly and entered this (showing his own body). Overwhelmed with joy and wonder, I lost all consciousness and fell down. Before that, I had had no vision in that manner without meditating or thinking. That was the first vision of its kind. I have been suffering like her all my life perhaps because I saw first of all Sita, who was miserable from her birth."

Important Notice – 2021 Tax receipts

The Tax receipts for year 2021 are already dispatched by email or mail. If you have not yet received the same or if there are any concerns, please contact us at toronto@rkmm.org before April 20, 2022.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher- Swami Kripamayananda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 2022

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 7:30pm Scripture class (Online only): 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	2
3 11:00am Lecture: (Online and in person): 'Maryada Purushottam – Sri Ram'	4	5	6	7	8 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Uddhava Gita'	9
10 11:00am (Online and In person) Sri Ram Navami Puja and RAMNAM	11	12	13	14	15 7:30pm Scripture class (Online only): 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	16 6 am to 6 pm VIGIL
17 11:00am Lecture: (Online and In person) 'Healing power of Silence'	18	19	20	21	22 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Uddhava Gita'	23
24 11:00am Lecture (Online and in person): 'Thoughts on Bhagavad Gita'	25	26	27	28	29 7:30pm Scripture class (Online only): 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	30

AN APPEAL FOR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL & DONATION

In these difficult times going through around the world, our attendance has significantly dropped at the Centre and maintenance costs are ongoing, 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 <http://newsite.vedantatoronto.ca/donate.shtml> using Credit / Debit cards. Through PayPal you could also setup recurring monthly donations.

All members who have not renewed their membership for the year 2022, 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.