



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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The Master addressed Girish, all of a sudden before anybody had spoken a word, and said, "Girish, I find you say to one and all everywhere so many things about 'this' (that I am an incarnation of God); what have you seen and understood (about me) to make you do so?" Girish remained completely unmoved, and kneeling down on the ground near the Master's feet, said in a choked voice with his hands folded and face turned upwards, "What more can I say of Him, whose greatness Vyasa and Valmiki could not find words to express?" the Master was charmed at the fervent utterance of Girish, and blessing all the devotees assembled there through their representative Girish, said: "What more shall I say to you? May you all be blessed with the spiritual awakening."

-- (From 'Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master' p 1023)

Words to Inspire

(From the book 'Vivekananda: East Meets West' p. 2)

One day I found that my mind was soaring high in Samadhi along a luminous path. It soon transcended the stellar universe and entered the subtler region of ideas. As it ascended higher and higher, I found on both sides of the way ideal forms of gods and goddesses. The mind then reached the outer limits of that region, where a luminous barrier separated the sphere of relative existence from that of the Absolute. Crossing that barrier, the mind entered the transcendental realm, where no corporeal being was visible. Even the gods dared not to peep into that sublime realm, and were content to keep their seats far below. But the next moment I saw seven venerable sages seated there in samadhi. It occurred to me that these sages must have surpassed not only men but even the gods in knowledge and holiness, in renunciation and love. Lost in admiration, I was reflecting on their greatness, when I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into the form of a divine child. The child came to

one of the sages, tenderly clasped his neck with his lovely arms, and addressing him in a sweet voice, tried to drag his mind down from the state of samadhi. That magic touch roused the sage from the superconscious state, and he fixed his half-opened eyes upon the wonderful child. His beaming countenance showed that the child must have been the treasure of his heart. In great joy the strange child spoke to him, "I am going down. You too must go with me." The sage remained mute but his tender look expressed his assent. As he kept gazing at the child, he was again immersed in samadhi. I was surprised to find that a fragment of his body and mind descended to earth in the form of bright light. No sooner had I seen Narendra than I recognized him to be that sage. [Sri Ramakrishna later admitted that the divine child who brought about the descent of the sage was none other than himself]

For the love of God

[Based on Swami Kripamayananda's speech at the AGM of the Society on November 18, 2007]

The date 18th February 1836, the birth of Sri Ramakrishna, marks the unique day when, according to Swami Vivekananda, Satya Yuga started. Sri Ramakrishna is the unique spiritual personality whose life inspires us to grow inwardly towards our cherished goal of attaining peace and freedom. Sri Ramakrishna's unique life, his sadhana, his teachings, his inspiration, his sangha will last for ages. Like the message of Buddha, Christ and Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna's message is timeless. Swami Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Order to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna and to help us to mould our life according to his teachings. The nucleus of the Ramakrishna Mission was formed by Sri Ramakrishna himself by giving ochre clothes to his world-renouncing disciples in 1886. He entrusted the responsibility of these young devotees to Swami Vivekananda, saying, "I leave them in your care. See that they practice spiritual exercise and do not return home."

Swami Vivekananda came to the United States in 1893. After spreading the message of Vedanta in the West, he went back to India and in 1897 and established the Ramakrishna Mission, an organization whose aim was not only for the spiritual upliftment of one's own Self but also the welfare of the society with the motto of "*Atmano Mokshartham Jagad Hitaya Cha*" – for one's own liberation and the good of the world. He wanted people to become spiritually and mentally strong through the message of Sri Ramakrishna. He rarely used the name of his Guru during his lectures in the West. His main concern was the alleviation of the suffering of humanity in the same way as Buddha had done 2500 years ago.

As the years rolled by, numerous Vedanta Societies were formed throughout the world. Our society in Toronto was established by the

blessings of Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj and Swami Bhasyananadaji Maharaj and with the pioneering effort of three great dedicated devotees- Mr. Ramaswamy, Mr. Senathiraja and Mr. Menon. The Vedanta Society of Toronto was inaugurated on November 30, 1968. After Sri Ramakrishna's name was established in Toronto, it gradually started attracting more and more people. In 1989, Swami Pramathanandaji came to Toronto as the head of the Society and he did an enormous amount of work to ensure that the sapling that had been planted here grew into a tree and bloomed with flowers and fruits. The Vedanta Society as we see it today is no doubt with the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda but the gardener of this huge endeavor was none other than our dear and Revered Swami Pramathanandaji Maharaj.

What is the uniqueness of the Vedanta Society? What are the special qualities of our members and friends? Every visiting Swami has enormous praise for the Toronto Centre, especially the fact that so many devotees visit the Centre and work, helping each other in performing duties at the Centre without any intention of gaining name or fame. The beauty and uniqueness of the devotees of Ramakrishna Mission is that we care for all, we love each other, and we accept each other. Even though every one of us has our own egos to deal with, we see each other in the light of Sri Ramakrishna. We may not be totally free from ego, but we embrace all as our own. That is the beauty and uniqueness of the devotees of the Vedanta Society in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission Centres all over the world.

Do devotees of the Vedanta Society have any impact on society at large? Does it help to be a devotee of the Vedanta Society? Certainly, it

does! It does because by comparing with others we can see a difference. We often hear people saying about one or other of the devotees – “This person is selfless, this person is very loving, this person talks very nicely, this person is very rational” – This is the uniqueness of Ramakrishna devotees. When we come to the Centre, we get here fully charged with spirituality. When we go to Belur Math, we say that we have gone to recharge our batteries. One of the devotees who attends the Sunday lectures here said to me, “Maharaj, when I go to work every Monday, people ask me, ‘Where did you go yesterday that you look so happy, even though it’s a Monday?’”. This is not an initiated devotee but she loves Sri Ramakrishna. To love Sri Ramakrishna we need not be initiated; we need not even do japam. But we need to have love for his ideals, share his love for God, and also his teachings like: Love everyone. God resides everywhere. Try to analyze the reality of the things of the world. Don’t be attracted towards the material aspects of the world. Be attracted to God because that is real joy and nothing else is real. When we are inspired by the words of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother, any person that comes in contact with us can feel that inspiration and catches it.

As devotees of the Vedanta Society, we want to alleviate the growth of the Society, and we have to take part in this growth through volunteering, good work and through toleration. Swami Vivekananda did not like the word toleration, rather preferred the use of the word acceptance. Acceptance is a much better concept but we must first make sure that we are tolerant. We have to be able to accommodate the views of others who do not share our views. And then with this toleration we will grow to accept others as he or she is.

The number of Vedanta Societies in the West is growing. But what is the real growth of a spiritual organization? It does not merely lie in numbers. It lies in the quality of devotees that visit the Centre. If we can improve ourselves, we can improve our society, we can make the world better. A monk should grow, a devotee should grow, every member of the Society should grow, and whoever is connected with the society should grow. Growth lies in the improvement of the individual quality of members of society and not merely in the number of members or the number of people coming to the Centre. This growth is possible only by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna. We need his guidance and blessings and if we pray to him sincerely, we will be able to achieve the growth that we desire.

Finally, one of the striking aspects about our Centre is the wonderful relationship between members of the monastic order and the devotees. I feel that it is Holy Mother who is inspiring you to give love and affection to us who have given up our homes and families. We have renounced our mother, father, sisters and brothers and now due to your love and affection we have hundreds of mothers and sisters and brothers showering their collective love upon us, as much as, if not more than what we received in our homes. Thank you very much for your continued support by visiting the Centre on special occasions, for Sunday lectures, volunteer work, and for all the times that you helped us out in difficult situations. The Society is inseparable from you, and hence we continue to need your constant support for the growth of the Society. I can only pray to Thakur, Ma and Swamiji, Buddha and Christ, to the Supreme Brahman, that “Lord, please fill our hearts with love, with purity, with kindness, and may we grow in love for You!”

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A Profile of Revered SWAMI ATMASTHANANDAJI MAHARAJ, 15th President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

Swami Atmasthanandaji, the new President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, was born in 1919 at Sabajpur, near Dhaka. He received mantra diksha (spiritual initiation) from Swami Vijnananandaji (a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) in 1938 and joined the Ramakrishna Order at Belur Math on 3 January 1941 at the age of 22 years. In 1945, Swami Virajanandaji, the then President of the Order, gave him Brahmacharya vows, and in 1949 Sannyasa vows and the name Atmasthananda.

After serving the Order at Belur Math and the branches at Deoghar Vidyapith and Mayavati Advaita Ashrama, he got the opportunity to serve Swami Virajanandaji, the then President of the Order, for a long time. He spent several years in his holy company in the solitude of Shyamla Tal in the Himalayas. In 1952, he was posted to Ranchi TB Sanatorium branch as an Assistant Secretary. He worked hard to expand its services in many ways. He was sent to Rangoon (Yangon) Sevashrama as its Secretary in 1958. He developed the Sevashrama hospital and it soon became the best hospital of Burma (Myanmar) at that time. When military rulers took over Rangoon Sevashrama, he returned to India in 1965. He was posted to Rajkot branch as its head in 1966. The beautiful temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Rajkot Ashrama was built on his initiative.

He was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1973. In 1975, he was appointed an Assistant Secretary of the twin organizations. He was also appointed Secretary of the relief operations of the Math and Mission. Under his stewardship, the Math and Mission conducted massive relief and rehabilitation operations in various parts of India, Nepal and Bangladesh. He became the General Secretary of the Math and Mission in 1992 and continued to be in that post for five years till 1997 when he became a Vice-President of the Order.

As a Vice-President of the Math and Mission, he travelled extensively in various parts of the country and visited many branches of the Order and some unaffiliated centres. In 1998, he visited various places in US, Canada, Japan and Singapore. He also went to Malaysia, Fiji, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh at different times. In all those places, he spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta and also gave mantra diksha (spiritual initiation) to many seekers.

BELUR MATH NEWS

Swami Atmasthanandaji was elected President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission on 3 December 2007. He is the 15th President of the Order

The 98th **Annual General Meeting** of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 16 December. It was chaired by Swami Atmasthananda, President, Ramakrishna Mission. In all, 133 monastic members, 60 lay members and 56 associates participated in it.

Smt Pratibha Patil, President of India, presented the *National Teachers' Award*, comprising a certificate, silver medal and Rs. 25,000/-, to Sri Chandra Sekhar

Chattopadhyay, a teacher of our **Narottam Nagar** school, at a function held at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, on 5 September, the National Teachers' Day.

Bangladesh Cyclone Sidr Relief:

A brief report on this relief work could be available from the following link –

http://www.belurmath.org/relief_news_archives/relief_latest_news.htm

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Christmas Eve was celebrated on **Tuesday, December 24, at 6 pm**. The programme included puja, singing of carols, and distribution of prasada. More than 100 devotees and friends attended.

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.

VIGIL: On **Saturday, January 19**, a vigil consisting of japa and meditation will be observed, from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. To participate, please call the centre at 416-240-7262.

RAM NAM: **Sunday, January 13**, at 5:00 pm.

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 instruction. Appointments for interviews should be made in advance with the Swami at (416) 240-7262.

DAILY MEDITATION: Meditation is observed at the Centre every morning from 6:00 am to 7:00 am. Devotional singing and meditation is held in the evenings from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

DAILY BREAD FOOD BANK: Many less fortunate families are dependent on the food bank for their daily nutrition. Please help us by contributing non-perishable food items that we may pass along to the Daily Bread Food Bank.

SOUP KITCHEN: This month, the Soup Kitchen will be held on **Thursday, January 10, 17 and Tuesday January, 20**. Please contact the Centre if you are interested in participating. *Donations for the Soup Kitchen will be highly appreciated.*

BOOK STORE: The Book Store is open after Sunday Services and special programmes, and arrangements can be made by phone for weekday and Saturday visits. We carry selected titles from the Ramakrishna Vivekananda literature collections, as well as other Vedantic materials

Special Event

January 1, 2008- 5pm: Kalpataru Day Celebration

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	-	<u>1</u> 5pm Kalpataru Day Celebration	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>6</u> No Lecture	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen <i>Swami K leaves for Montreal</i>		<u>12</u> Winter Recess Ends <i>Swami K returns from Montreal</i>
<u>13</u> 11 am Lecture: The Art of Happiness 1:30pm:: VVM 5pm:: Ram Nam	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u> 9.30 am Soup Kitchen	<u>18</u> 7:30pm scripture class: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna	<u>19</u> 6am-6pm Vigil
<u>20</u> 11 am Lecture: Overcoming Anger	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u> 9.30am Soup Kitchen	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u> 7:30pm scripture class: Tattvabodha	<u>26</u>
<u>27</u> 11 am Lecture: Swami Vivekanandas Message to the West	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u>		

They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.
This is the gist of all worship – to be pure and to do good to others.
Purity, patience, and perseverance are the three essentials to success, and above all, love.

-Swami Vivekananda

Members are requested for renewal of their annual membership