



Vedanta Society of Toronto

(Ramakrishna Mission)

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Newsletter January 2009

Words to Inspire

As the lamp does not burn without oil, so man can not live without God. —Sri Ramakrishna

WORSHIP OF SHODASHI

(From 'Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play'—pages 350-352)

A little more than half of the Bengali month of Jaishtha 1280 (mid-May to mid-June 1873) had passed. It was the new moon night, an auspicious occasion for the Phalaharini Kali Puja. This special festival is also observed in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar.

The Master made a special arrangement for privately worshipping the Divine Mother as Shodashi in his room rather than performing it in the temple. At the right side of the worshipper's seat, a low wooden seat, beautifully painted with rice powder pigment, was placed for the goddess to sit on during worship. The sun had set and the new moon night arrived in a veil of deep darkness. Hriday was performing the worship in the Kali temple that night, so he helped with the preparations for the Master's worship as much as possible and then left for the temple. After the priest Dinu had finished the evening worship service in the Radha-Govinda temple, he came to help the Master prepare for the worship, and then he left. It was 9:00 in the evening when the preparations for the mystical worship were complete. The Master had sent a message to Sarada beforehand to be present during the worship, and now she arrived in the Master's room. The Master sat for worship.

The Master finished the preliminaries and sanctified the articles of worship by repeating the mantras. He then beckoned for Sarada to sit on the decorated wooden seat. While she was watching the worship, Sarada had already entered a semiconscious spiritual state. So without fully knowing what she was doing, she moved like one who is spellbound and sat facing north on the right side of the Master, who was seated facing east. According to the scriptural injunctions, he repeatedly sprinkled sanctified water on her from

the pitcher placed in front of him. He then uttered mantras and invoked the deity with the following prayer: "O Divine Mother Tripura-sundari! O Eternal Virgin, possessor of all power! Please open the gate of perfection. Purify her body and mind, and manifest Yourself through her for the welfare of all."

He then performed the ceremony of *nyasa* in accordance with the injunction of the scriptures, and worshipped Sarada with sixteen items as a veritable manifestation of the Devi. After offering food, he took some of it and put it in her mouth. Sarada lost outer consciousness and went into Samadhi. While uttering mantras in a semiconscious state, the Master also went into deep Samadhi. Thus, the worshipper and the worshipped became fully united and unified in the Atman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

Some time passed in this way. It was long after midnight when the Master gradually regained partial consciousness of the world. In that semiconscious state he offered himself to the Devi manifest in the person of Sarada, and then forever surrendered at her feet himself, the result of his sadhana, his rosary, and everything else. He then bowed down to her with this prayer:

"O Consort of Shiva, the most auspicious of all auspicious beings! O Doer of all actions! O Refuge of all! O Three-eyed goddess of golden complexion! O Power of Narayana, I salute You again and again."

The worship was completed. The Master's sadhana culminated in this worship of the Divine Mother in the body of a woman who was an embodiment of spiritual wisdom. Both his divine and human aspects had achieved ultimate perfection.

ANOTHER MILE STONE

(Based on Swami Kripamayananda's speech at the AGM of the Vedanta Society of Toronto on November 23, 2008)

We assemble here every year for the Annual General Meeting of the Vedanta Society of Toronto. The purpose of this meeting is to review the activities of the past year and compare the overall growth since 1968 when it was founded. It is also an opportunity for the members, devotees and friends of the society to come closer together. The Society was founded forty years ago in 1968 as a result of the hard work of a group of devotees and with the blessings of Swami Ranganathanandaji and Swami Bhasyanandaji Maharaj.

Ramakrishna order was founded much earlier when a group of disciples received ochre clothes from Sri Ramakrishna in his presence. Those disciples became monks after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna and started the Math under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda. Later, in 1897, after Swamiji's return from abroad the Ramakrishna Mission was started. Sri Ramakrishna once wrote on a piece of paper, "Naren will teach at home and abroad," meaning he will become the world teacher spreading the message of Vedanta to the rest of the world. He felt that the Truth of Vedanta is for all, not just for a few learned and ascetics.

Sri Ramakrishna's advent, it seems, was to bring the Vedanta of the forest to the humanity at large. Two of his foremost disciples, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda were the most important instruments to preach and exemplify the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Some of his teachings include taking the name of God, serving the devotees of God and worshipping God in man – *Shiva jnane jiva seva*. This is the highest form of worship, helping the needy

should be done as a humble service to God, and not as compassion.

The seed of this Truth is in the shastras (scriptures), Swami Vivekananda took this unique message of Sri Ramakrishna and preached it everywhere; he said that God is in front of us in various forms, serving fellow human beings unselfishly is worshipping God. Purity of mind is an essential condition of selfless service, one's heart becomes pure by such work, egotism is removed and you will feel oneness of all.

Before coming to the West Swamiji travelled all over India, he saw the greatness of human beings and their potential, in spite of their physical and mental sufferings. He said to one of his brother monks Swami Turiyananda; how his travel enlarged his heart and made him feel intensely for humanity. That feeling for others is the beginning of religion.

The goal of Vedanta is the realization of oneness of all creation, oneness of God and man, oneness of Jiva and Brahman. That oneness begins from unselfish service; concern, love and feelings for others. It is our privilege that we are associated with this ideal through the Vedanta Society of Toronto, a branch of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Sri Ramakrishna preached that God dwells in every human heart, whether they are in front of you or far away. You may see a person suffering in front of you or in Somalia, Italy or Bangladesh; if you feel for them and step forward to help them you are worshipping God and taking a step towards the Oneness of creation. Realizing the oneness of yourself with God is the goal of Vedanta.

If we want to progress in spiritual life we need to reflect the ideals in our daily lives by fulfilling certain responsibilities. In the Bhagavad Gita Arjuna asked Sri Krishna, "How does a perfected man conduct himself? How does he walk, how does he talk and how does he sit?" So it is our responsibility to follow the ideals that Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji have set for us. When we speak, walk or talk we should be mindful of our behaviour to reflect their standard.

The devotees have been continually supporting the society from the very beginning out of their love for Sri Ramakrishna. We all have come together to sustain the society through continued love between its members and creating a loving and welcoming environment in the society, this has been noticed by the guest swamis, devotees and friends and many of them have openly expressed their appreciations.

Our spiritual growth is our real growth. By chiselling out whatever is unimportant in our being or mind we want to form a beautiful sculpture, a divine form out of a marble slab, an image of a perfect human being. This is not possible without spiritual practices or without following the teachings of the great spiritual teachers. Vedanta Society of Toronto welcomes everyone to associate themselves with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swamiji for their personal spiritual growth and thus get the benefit of a broad and peaceful mind.

Along with our spiritual expansion we also need physical expansion. We have our regular Sunday services, scripture classes, guest speakers from time to time and celebrations.

The attendance varies from full capacity to overflow of capacity: in a space for 150, on special occasions we have seen about 500 people. In other areas, we have soup kitchen, the Food sharing group members are very appreciative of the quality of food we are able to provide. Presently, we are offering 4 days a month but at this difficult economic time, requests for more are possible as per the letter from the Food sharing group. We need more volunteers who can commit 3-4 hours on the soup kitchen day then only we can expand.

We also have a plan for building extension; and we would like to have a house for guest devotees who come from outside the city and wish to pray and meditate in the temple. More devotees from out of town look forward to visiting, the only Ramakrishna Mission in Canada if facilities are available.

We need to work on it with everyone's cooperation and we will succeed. We have the blessings of Swamis Ranganathanandaji, Bhasyanandaji who started the centre in 1968 and Swami Pramathanandaji who worked hard to raise this centre to this level. We have the blessings of the monks, devotees and members of the whole Ramakrishna Sangha. We have the blessings of Buddha, Jesus and all prophets and saints. We have the blessings of Swamiji and grace of Sri Ramakrishna. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is ever present -- loving, guiding, caring, and teaching us. When we have such blessings surrounding us and protecting us, a little self-effort will help us succeed in making our wishes come true: the growth of the society and its members will happen.

Thank you very much.

My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words, and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

-Swami Vivekananda-

SYMPHONY IN ARCHITECTURE: SRI RAMAKRISHNA TEMPLE - BELUR MATH (PART I)

Ramakrishna Temple, Belur (Belur Math as it is fondly called) is a place of international pilgrimage significant due to the fact that Swami Vivekananda placed the relics of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa here and envisioned a unique temple to house them.

Before his debut in the Parliament of Religions (1893) at Chicago, Swami Vivekananda had wandered about many historically important places of India looking for the signs of the greatness as well as for the reasons for the decline of her ancient culture.

Swami Vivekananda's pilgrimage took him to many parts of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu. He must have made profuse mental notes of his observations especially on the architectural monuments like the Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri palaces, Diwan-I-Khas, palaces of Rajasthan, ancient temples of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and other places.

During his tour in America and Europe, he must have come across buildings of architectural importance of modern, medieval, Modern, Medieval, Gothic and Renaissance styles.

To pay tribute to the multifaceted, all-embracing divine personality of Sri Ramakrishna, he envisioned a great edifice combining various architectural features of monuments in various parts of the world. It was Swami Vivekananda's desire that the new temple should embody the salient features of major temple architecture

of different religious beliefs so that every one who comes to the Ramakrishna Temple would feel at home and realise the underlying principle of the universal brotherhood and religion propounded by the Great Master.

Three decades after the passing away of Swami Vivekananda, the idea was put into actuality by Swami Vijnanananda, another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, with the help of M/s. Martin Burn and Company, the then famous architect builders of Calcutta.

In his discussion with Mj. Herald Brown, the architect at Martin Burn Co., Swami Vijnanananda stressed upon the following three features that Swami Vivekananda wanted to incorporate in this temple monument.

1. *Nat Mandira* (Congregational Hall) and *Garbha Mandira* (Sanctum Sanctorum) should not be detached as in a Hindu temple but should be connected in a continuous space like that in a Christian Church.
2. *Garbha Mandira* should have a domical roof as introduced in Mosques through Islamic Architecture.
3. Other rendering & detailing should conform with traditional Hindu temple architecture.

First foundation stone for Ramakrishna Temple was laid by Swami Shivananda on 13th March 1929, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vijnanananda laid the foundation stone at the present site, 30 metres south of the first one on 16th May 1935. Construction was completed and consecrated on 14th January 1938.

BELUR MATH NEWS

Delhi centre held a public meeting, presided over by the Lt. Governor of Delhi, on 8 November in connection with the platinum jubilee of its TB clinic.

On 9 November, the sacred occasion of *Jugal Parikrama*, **Vrindaban** centre served drinking water and *batāsās* to about 10,000 devotees, and also conducted a medical camp in which 690 patients were treated.

Sri Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal, visited **Purulia** Vidyapith on 13 November on

the occasion of its golden jubilee and unveiled a life-size portrait of Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Atmasthanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for the proposed multipurpose building at the Gangail Road sub-centre of **Viveknagar** (Tripura) centre on 24 November and the foundation stone for the proposed temple at Viveknagar Math complex on 28 November.

CANADA NEWS

Vedanta Society of Montreal

The Holy Mother's birthday celebration is being observed by the Vedanta Society of Montreal on December 27, 2008 with Bhajan, Discourse and Arati. Swami Kripamayanandaji, President, Vedanta Society of Toronto will be the chief guest.

Vedanta Society of Winnipeg

Commemoration Ceremony of the 115th Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's Visit to Winnipeg in July 1893 and Swamiji's Birthday celebration.

Vedanta Society of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada observed a special program to commemorate the 115th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's visit to

Winnipeg in July 1893 and to celebrate Vivekananda's Birthday on 18th October 2008 at 3:00 pm at Aboriginal centre of Winnipeg.

The spiritual discussion on Swami Vivekananda and practical Vedanta was started just after garlanding of the Swamiji's statue by Rev. Swami Kripamayananda, President and spiritual head of Vedanta society of Winnipeg and Toronto followed by devotional songs.

Rev. Swami Kripamayananda, Pundit Machiraju, Mr. Bill Shed, Purna C. Bera and Nityananda Sharma spoke among others on the occasion where a significant number of devotees were present.

SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

Sri Sarada Devi Birth Anniversary was celebrated on **Sunday 21st Dec 2008 at 11:00 am**. The programme consisted bhajans, puja, havan, flower offering followed by prasad distribution. In spite of unfavourable weather condition, close to 125 devotees attended.

The **Christmas Eve** was celebrated on **Wednesday 24th Dec 2008 at 6:00 pm**. The

programme included reading from the Bible, Special worship of Jesus, carol singing, offering of lighted candles by the devotees followed by prasad distribution. More than 100 devotees participated.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary Celebrations will be held on **Sunday March 1, 2009 at 11.00 am**. The programme will

consist of bhajans, puja, homa, flower offering followed by prasad distribution.

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 24, 2009**, 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 18, 2009 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: The Soup is cooked at the Vedanta Society and now served four days a month (2nd and 3rd Tuesdays and Thursdays) at Roncesvalles Food Sharing, 263 Roncesvalles Avenue, Toronto M6R 2L9. 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, as well as other Vedantic materials.

Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher – Swami Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				<u>1</u> 5:00 pm Kalpataru Day Celebration	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>4</u> Winter Recess: NO LECTURE	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u> Last Day of Winter Recess
<u>11</u> 11am Guest Lecture: 'Prescription for Success: How Can Bhagavad Gita Help? ' By Prof. N N Bakhshi VVM- 1:30 pm	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>16</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>17</u> 11:00 am Swami Vivekananda Tithi Puja Celebration
<u>18</u> 11:00 am: Guided Meditation on Swami Vivekananda RAM NAM 5:00 pm	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u> <u>9:30am</u> Soup Kitchen	<u>23</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Viveka Chudamani'	<u>24</u> Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
<u>25</u> 11:00am Lecture: 'The Power of Swami Vivekananda's Message' VVM 1:00 pm	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u> 7:30pm Scripture class: 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'	<u>31</u>

It is love and love alone that I preach, and I base my teaching on the great Vedantic truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the Soul of the Universe.

We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet. –Swami Vivekananda