



JANUARY 2010 - VOLUME 08 NUMBER 01

the Vedanta Kyokai



NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Happy 2010

MONTHLY CALENDAR

• Birthdays •

Swami Vivekananda
Wednesday/Jan 06

Swami Brahmananda
Sunday/Jan 17

Swami Trigunatitananda
Tuesday/Jan 19

Swami Adbhutananda
Saturday/Jan 30

• Zushi Retreat

Swami Vivekananda
148th Birth Anniversary
Sunday, 17 January 10:30 a.m.

Worship, discourse, lunch and
afternoon music programme.

*All, with family and friends,
are welcome to attend.*

• Kansai 50th Celebration

[See page 8 for details]



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Many are the names of God, and infinite the forms that lead us to know Him. In whatsoever name or form you desire to call Him, in that very form and name you will see Him."

... Sri Ramakrishna

"Among things conducive to liberation, devotion alone holds the supreme place. The seeking after one's real nature is designated as devotion."

... Sri Sankaracharya

December Zushi Retreat Celebrates Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 157th Birth Anniversary

The Zushi Center held a day-long celebration to commemorate the birth of Sri Ramakrishna's wife and spiritual consort the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. Morning prayers (mangalaraty), chanting (Vedic peace prayers), bhajans (songs) and meditation began at 6 a.m. Breakfast was rather early so that volunteers could finish-up preparations and all was in place by 10:30 for a worship and offering service conducted by Swami Medhasananda. This was followed by Vedic chanting and readings from the Gospel of the Holy Mother in English and Japanese. The Swami then gave the following talk mostly in English that was interpreted by Ms. Yoko Sasaki:

Holy Mother's Last Message

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Shankaracharya was a great philosopher of Vedanta. There are hundreds of books about Vedanta, in different languages. Shankaracharya said that he could give a definition of Vedanta in just one line: The world is unreal (non-permanent), only Brahman is real; all Jivas, the embodied beings, are Brahman. This is the theoretical definition of Vedanta.

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Mother's Last Message [from page 1]

What is the practical definition of Vedanta? That we can find in a statement by the Holy Mother, I quote, "Just learn to make the whole world your own". Swami Vivekananda also gave the following definition: "Love all and serve all".

There are many who can give lengthly, learned talks on Vedanta, but who are also so observably narrow and selfish that we cannot say that they are really practicing Vedanta.

Holy Mother made a statement just five days before passing away in the following circumstances: A crying devotee asked Holy Mother at her death bed what would happen after she had gone. Holy Mother answered with the following statement, which includes the sentence I just quoted: "Why do you fear? You have seen the Master, Sri Ramakrishna. But I tell you, if you want peace don't find fault with others, find fault with yourself. Just learn to make the whole world your own. No one is stranger. The world is your own."

First of all she said not to fear as you have seen the Master. This means not only seeing the Master, but also understanding and following him. As we can also possess and view photos of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother we should then have no fear, but unless we understand and try to follow the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother there cannot be any real courage. We cannot get rid of fear.

Then Holy Mother tells us that if we want to find peace we should not find fault with others, we should

find fault with ourselves and learn how to make the whole world our own.

Everyone wants peace. Holy Mother's prescription for peace is very simple. She does not ask us to do spiritual practice, meditation, japam (repetition of mantra) and rituals for long periods. She prescribes none of all that, but bids us to not find fault with others. Soon we find this is actually a most difficult thing.

If we make a self analysis, we see how many times we find fault with those with whom we live. A wife finds fault with her husband; a husband finds fault with his wife; mother-in-law finds fault with daughter-in-law and vice-versa; and children do the same thing with their parents; all the time we find faults with our neighbors, with colleagues and with others.

Sometimes we may not give vent to our disapproval in order not to make our relationships difficult, but the canker remains. So when we try to practice Holy Mother's instruction, then we find how difficult it is. And finding fault in ourselves is also difficult. We are inclined to glorify whatever little virtues we have and ignore our defects. And we use the opposite standard when we judge others.

Why we have a natural tendency in finding faults with others? There are two main reasons: a spiritual reason and a psychological reason.

Holy Mother said that Mahamaya, the great power of delusion, has given people such a nature that they do not find faults with themselves, but in others, so that

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Mother's Last Message [from page 2]

people do not become liberated and the play of the world can continue. In fact if we should see our own faults we would try to rectify them ourselves.

By doing that in a serious way we would become pure. If we become pure, we become spiritual, and if we become spiritual, we then become realized. And this is what Mahamaya tries to prevent so that the world can continue. This is the spiritual reason of our finding faults in others.

The psychological reason is that we feel that we are superior to others. By finding defects in others we feel that we are free from such defects, or at least we are affected by them in a lesser way. So we now see that the root problem is our ego, which is the greatest obstacle in spiritual life.

The reason the Mother's prescription to not find fault in others is not so easy to implement is that our ego is concerned, and getting rid of the ego is definitely not easy.

Listen to this anecdote. There was a road side restaurant where many travelers would eat, but at one point however the number of customers started decreasing. After several unsuccessful attempts to improve the situation, the owner decided to consult a Zen master who lived in the vicinity. He visited the master and

openly explained the problem. The Zen master suggested that the name of the restaurant should be changed. The owner of the restaurant was surprised, but the master explained that the new name of the restaurant should be "Six Stars Restaurant" and that the signboard displaying this new name should display a logo of only five stars.

The owner was again confused at such a suggestion, but the Master invited him to try his method and come back later to report the result. What happened was that many travelers passing by noticed the mistake in the restaurant sign and went into the restaurant to call the owner's attention to it. But once they were in the restaurant, they were so impressed by the nice way it was arranged and the pleasing smells that they would stay and order a meal. After a short time the restaurant's business soared again. This story is just one example about the human nature's inclination to point out the mistakes of others.

Swami Vivekananda also indicated another psychological reason. He said that we see imperfections in others as we ourselves are imperfect. He gave this example: Suppose that a child is in a room where some money was left on a table. A thief enters the room and takes the money. The child will never think of that person as a thief, as the concept of stealing is not in the mind of the child. Such concept is there in the mind of an adult, but not in a child's mind. So Swamiji said that we should cry when we see imperfections in others, because as long as we see imperfections in others, it means that we also have imperfections.

How to get rid of this problem? First we should use discrimination, impressing again and again on our mind that finding faults in others is not good, it means degrading ourselves, becoming narrow.

When we take some nice food we enjoy it. But if there is someone not eating, he then is not enjoying it. But in the case of fault finding both the person pointing out someone else's faults and the one listening to the criticism enjoy it. This is like a spicy sauce for the conversation.

But there is also the positive method, which consists in finding virtues and good things in others. This will not only elevate us, but it will help in elevating others as well. Great men will always find good things in others.

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Mother's Last Message [from page 3]

There is a famous anecdote about Girish Chandra Gosh, a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, a play writer, actor and artist, who was at the same time a heavy drinker. When under the effect of alcohol, he sometimes verbally abused Sri Ramakrishna.

One time Sri Ramakrishna sent one of his young devotees to Girish Chandra Gosh in order to ask him to purchase some candles for him. When the young devotee reached the house of Girish in Kolkata, he found him intoxicated. Girish was very happy when the devotee told him that Sri Ramakrishna had requested some candles from him. But he expressed his happiness in using abusive language towards Sri Ramakrishna. This saddened the young devotee very much. Girish however had the candles purchased and given to the devotee, who returned to Dakshineswar to Sri Ramakrishna and complained about the behavior of Girish Chandra Gosh.

Sri Ramakrishna asked his young devotee if the verbal abuse by Girish was all he had done and the devotee had to admit that Girish had also prostrated himself several times in the direction of Dakshineswar, where Sri Ramakrishna lived. Sri Ramakrishna then pointed out to his devotee how he had reported the foul language used by Girish, but not his show of devotion and respect.

Flies often land on filth, but bees never do. They only alight on flower. Our ideal should be that we behave like the bee, not like a fly. It is a challenge for us how to find virtues and good aspects in others.

Here is a story about a monastery where five or six Catholic monks lived together. Plenty of devotees used to visit that monastery at one time, but later the number of devotees started to decrease. The monks tried different ways to stop the decline in devotees, but none worked.

So the abbot, the head of the monastery, went to the bishop and asked for advice, and at the same time he presented his complaints about the other monks pointing out the defects in each of them. The bishop listened and then he surprised the abbot by saying that a saint was there among the monks of his monastery.

The abbot returned to the monastery pondering the information received from the bishop and then reported it to his brother monks. Starting from that moment all the monks tried to find out who the saint among them was, and started seeing the virtues and good qualities of each brother monk, something they had completely ignored until then.

Since the incident the attitude of each monk towards one another changed completely and mutual respect and love started developing, completely changing the atmosphere of the monastery. And as a result of the changed atmosphere the devotees started coming again to the monastery.

The very important meaning of this story is that if we try to see the good aspects of those who live near us, immediately our relationship with them will become better. In that way we can really love others. As Holy Mother says, just try to make the whole world your own, and you can do that by growing and practicing mutual love and respect.

What is the basis of love and respect? It is the fact that we are all connected with each other, through Atman consciousness, through God. This is what Vedanta teaches, that is why Holy Mother's statement "Try to make the whole world your own" is practical Vedanta.

This ended the swami's talk, which ran a little late, and the congregation ambled downstairs where one by one they picked up trays and were served portions of a delicious lunch prasad.

At about 2:45 the shrine bell rang signaling the start of the afternoon session. A few minutes later Swami called the session to order and led those present in a prayer. This was followed by more readings from the Gospel of the Holy Mother in English and Japanese. Swami then continued:

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Mother's Last Message [from page 4]

I shall now tell you one or two stories from Holy Mother's life. It is very difficult to tell stories about Holy Mother in order to show her uniqueness and greatness as in fact she led a very simple, ordinary life.

In Sri Ramakrishna's life we see that he could not suppress his spiritual feelings and often entered into samadhi. From that people could immediately understand his evident spiritual height. But Holy Mother was so careful in suppressing her spiritual feelings that nobody could understand her spiritual height. That is why it is difficult to identify special events or stories in her life.

Holy Mother had some pet cats in her house. There is a big difference between how pet cats are cared after here in Japan and in India where cats do not receive so much attention and often obtain their food by stealing it in the house or from neighboring households. Pet cats in Holy Mother's house were something special, however.

I explain this statement by telling you this short story. Once Holy Mother invited Swami Shivananda and Swami Subodhananda, which were both direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, for lunch. Swami Subodhananda had a kind of child-like nature. When food was served and they started eating, the pet cats were sitting near the plates and one of them took a piece of fish from Swami Subodhananda's plate and he gave it a slap.

Swami Shivananda said to Swami Subodhananda, who was nicknamed Koka, meaning baby: "Koka, What have you done?" he said. "Don't you know that Gods and Goddesses sometimes live in Holy Mother's house in the guise of cats?" This caused Swami Subodhananda some serious embarrassment.

Then Holy Mother came to Subodhanandaji's defense saying that he had done the right thing as that cat had become quite naughty. This is why I stated that cats in Holy Mother's house were special.

Here is another story about Holy Mother's cats. A monk living in Holy Mother's house did not like cats stealing food and sometimes he beat them, although that pained Holy Mother. One time Holy Mother had to go to Kolkata from her village house and that monk, named Gan, was left in charge of taking care of the household, including the pet cats.

She explained to the monk that he should please avoid beating them and also he should feed them to prevent them from stealing food from the neighboring houses. From Gan's expression Holy Mother understood however that he was not really convinced, so she explained again using a different logic. She said, "Gan, I also live in those cats." Upon hearing that statement the monk's attitude towards the cats changed completely, to the point that after Holy Mother had left for Kolkata, he, himself a strict vegetarian, prepared fish to feed the cats.

Holy Mother's statement that she lived in the cats was not however only an instrument used for the sake of the argument; it was, in fact, a reality. We believe Holy Mother's real nature was divine, that of Divine Mother. But She appeared like an ordinary village widow, with no special features to distinguish her from others. Here is a story about that.

Her relatives living in that village were quite narrow and quarrelsome and gave her many difficulties. A monk attending on her sometimes complained that he had to do a lot of work and had also to confront the worldly quarrels by her relatives.

Comparing the calm, quiet and spiritual atmosphere of Belur Math and other ashrams the monk felt that the atmosphere in Holy Mother's village was not really fit for spiritual practice and for a monk to live in. On one occasion he even stated that he would not be able to continue his work attending Holy Mother at her village, considering that the errands he was carrying out and his involvement in the quarrels of the village people were not compatible with his life choice to become a monk. Holy Mother answered: "My son, you are doing my work."

[cont page 6]

Mother's Last Message [from page 5]

And suddenly the monk saw that Holy Mother's appearance as a village widow disappeared and the effulgent form of a Goddess took her place; a form so bright that the monk had to close his eyes. Holy Mother then asked the monk: "Why did you close your eyes?" After a while, when the monk again opened his eyes he saw Holy Mother had return to her form as an ordinary village widow. Holy Mother had impressed on the monk the idea that he was not serving an ordinary woman, but the Divine Mother.

There are many more stories like that about Holy Mother, but let us move on to our music programme ...

The afternoon session continued with a few songs from the swami, Shanti-san, Mr. Amano and Lonnie, and ended with a meditation led by the swami. •

• Thought of the Month •

"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."

... A Course in Miracles



• A Story to Remember •

The Tamarind Tree

One bright and cool summer day the Buddha took a walk along the forest path, simply enjoying the beauty of the earth. At a cross road, he saw a man in grief praying earnestly.

The man recognized the Buddha and fell on his knees. He cried, "Lord Buddha, life is indeed bitter and painful! I was once a man with great wealth, living a life of ease and happiness. By trickery and deceit, those I trusted and loved took everything from me. I am now a wretched man with no one to turn to. How many more times must I be reborn into this world of suffering before I can be liberated?"

Pointing to the mango tree by the road, the Buddha said, "Do you see that mango tree? You must be reborn as many times as the number of mangoes on that tree before you know the bliss of liberation from the sufferings of this fleeting world."

Seeing that there are at least dozens of mangoes hanging on the tree, the man gasped, "But Lord! I have lived a righteous life in accord with the precepts! Why am I condemned to suffer so much longer?"

The Buddha sighed. "That is the way it must be." And he continued his walk.

He came across another man praying by the road and this man too, fell on his knees and cried, "Lord Buddha, life is indeed bitter and painful. I have lost all those I loved to the king of death. I am now forlorn and lonely. Life is full of anguish. How many more times must I be reborn into this world of suffering before I know the bliss of liberation?"

The Buddha pointed to the field of wild flowers along the road and said, "Before you know the bliss of liberation from the sufferings of this fleeting world, you must be reborn as many times as the number of flowers in that field."

Seeing so many hundreds of flowers in the field, the man cried, "But Lord! I have done many good deeds and have followed you teachings by heart. Why must I endure so much more suffering?"

The Buddha sighed, "That is how it must be." And he continued on his way.

When he came across a tamarind tree another man fell down on his knees and cried before him, "Oh Lord! Life is full of suffering! During the days I toiled like a slave under the scathing sun; at night I have nothing to sleep on except a pile of grass on the cold, damped earth. Life is nothing but hunger, thirst and loneliness! How many more times must I be reborn into this world of suffering before I know the bliss of liberation?"

The Buddha looked up to the tamarind tree; each branch of it bearing many stems with each stem bearing dozens of leaves. The Buddha said, "Look at that tamarind tree. Before you know the bliss of liberation from the sufferings of this fleeting world, you must be reborn as many times as the number of leaves on that tamarind tree."

As the man looked up at the tamarind tree and its thousands of leaves, his eyes filled with tears of gratitude and joy. "How merciful!" he said as he prostrated to the ground at the Buddha's feet.

To this day the tamarind's seeds are the symbol of faithfulness and forbearance.

... Traditional Buddhist Lore

日本ヴェーダーンタ協会創立50周年記念関西地区祝賀祭
Hearty Welcome to Golden Jubilee Celebration in Kansai: Vedanta Society of Japan
 Website (Eng.): <http://en.vedanta.jp/goldenjubilee> or (Japa.) <http://ja.vedanta.jp/50> E-mail: goldenjubileenvk@gmail.com

後援：在日インド総領事館、在日インド商工会議所、神戸インド人会、
 神戸インド人倶楽部、関西日印文化協会
 日時：2010年1月24日(日)午後4時より
 場所：帝人ホール

大阪市中央区南本町1-6-7

主賓：ヴィカース・スワループ

インド総領事閣下

2009年度アカデミー賞受賞映画「スラムドッグ\$ミリオネア」の
 原作小説家。邦題「ぼくと1ルビーの神様」

入場料無料

すべての来場者に記念図書と軽食を呈致致します

プログラム：

平和の祈り

講演：

：ヴィカース・スワループ インド総領事閣下

：ムケーシュ・パンジャールビ 在日インド商工会議所会頭

：木村慧心 (社)日本ヨーガ療法学会理事長

：清上富夫 大阪外国語大学名誉教授

関西日印文化協会会長

文化行事：

インド舞踊 — シュバ・小久保・チャクヴァルティ女史とその一行

シタール演奏 — アミタ・ライ (アミット・ロイ)

タブラ伴奏 — 小村隆

近代インドの預言者スワミー・ヴィヴェーカーナンダ師に関する
 展覧会 (午後3時開催)

主催者：近代インドの著名な預言者スワミー・ヴィヴェーカーナンダ師
 (1863-1902) によって創設されたラーマクリシュナ・ミッションは、インド
 に本部 (<http://www.belurmath.org>) をもち、その日本支部として「日本ヴェー
 ダンタ協会」が存在しています。なお、当協会は、創立以来日本社会への
 奉仕を実施しながら今年で丁度創立50周年を迎えますので、それを記念し
 2009年6月より1年間様々なプログラムや祝賀行事を催してきております。

祝賀の目的：当協会による日本社会への奉仕が50年目を迎えることを祝う
 以外に、今後1年間私達が催す様々な祝賀行事の主目的は、ヴェーダーン
 タや聖ラーマクリシュナやヴィヴェーカーナンダ師の言葉を日本の人々に伝
 え、強い精神力と知恵と平和な心を人々の日常生活にもたらすことにありま
 す。それ故、皆様もこの尊い使命に参加し、私達の目指す目的達成に力を貸
 して下さいますよう、心よりお願い申し上げます。

祝賀行事やプログラムに関する詳細は、当協会のホームページ
<http://ja.vedanta.jp/50> をご参照下さい。

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案内図



Sponsored by: Consulate General of India, Indian Chamber of
 Commerce-Japan, Indian Social Society, Kobe, India Club, Kobe,
 Kansai Japan-India Cultural Society, Osaka

Date and Time: Sunday, 24 January, 2010 at 4:00 p.m.

Venue: Teijin Hall

1-6-7 Minamihonmachi Chuo-ku Osaka

Chief Guest: Hon'ble Sri Vikas Swarup

Consul General of India, Osaka

(Author of 'Q and A' filmed as Slum dog
 Millionaire - awarded Oscars in 2009)

Admission Free

All attendees will be presented with an inspiring book and treated
 with a light refreshment

Programme:

Peace prayer

Speeches:

: Hon'ble Sri Vikas Swarup, Consul General of India

: Mr. Mukesh Punjabi, Chairman, Indian Chamber of Commerce-Japan

: Mr. Keishin Kimura, President, Japan Yoga Therapy Association

: Professor (Dr.) Tomio Mizokami

Professor Emeritas, Osaka University of Foreign Studies and
 President, Kansai Japan-India Cultural Society

Cultural events:

Bharatanatyam dance – Ms. Subha Kokubo Chakravorty and her troupe

Sitar – Mr. Amit Roy-A veteran Indian Sitar player

Tabla – Mr. Komura Takashi

Exhibition on Swami Vivekananda, the Prophet of Modern India
 (opens from 3pm)

Organiser - Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai),
 a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission with Headquarters (<http://www.belurmath.org>) in India and many branches around the world
 was founded by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), the celebrated
 prophet. The Society has been celebrating the Golden Jubilee on
 completion of fifty years of its service in this country with various
 programmes and projects for one year since June, 2009.

Purpose of the Celebration: Apart from celebrating 50 years of serv-
 ice in Japan the main objective of the celebration events is to propa-
 gate the elevating message of Vedanta and Ramakrishna - Vivekananda
 in this country for bringing mental and spiritual strength, wisdom and
 peace to the lives of the people. We earnestly appeal to you to become
 a part of this noble mission and help us to achieve the goal.

For Details of the background of the celebration and its programmes
 and projects please visit <http://en.vedanta.jp/goldenjubilee>

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MAP



Zushi Centre Celebrates Christmas Eve

The Vedanta Society of Japan held their annual Christmas Eve Celebration at the Zushi Centre from 5:30 p.m. starting with Aratrik Bhajans and prayers led by Swami Medhasananda.

From 6:45 the congregation began seating in the main shrine room where a special alter had been assembled for the occasion. This shrine featured the familiar picture of Jesus in meditation. Below this was another picture depicting Mother Mary and the baby Jesus described in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. This shrine was adorned with flowers and candles and cakes and candies and to represent wine referred to so often in the Bible, grape juice.

The swami conducted a worship and offering, then gave a welcome and led a prayer. Then Shanti-san led the first of four carols

during the ceremony on keyboard, with Lonnie singing a verse in English and the congregation finishing with verses in Japanese.

There were Bible readings from the New Testament in both languages featuring excerpts from the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer and the Good Samaritan with comments by the swami.

Swami then gave a brief talk on the reasons behind the custom of celebrating Christmas Eve at Ramakrishna Mission centres worldwide, and characteristics of the spiritual personality of Jesus. This was followed by silent prayer and more Christmas carols.

A delicious dinner prasada was served about 9 p.m. and enjoyed by all.



Issued by: The Vedanta Society of Japan
(Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)

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