



APRIL 2010 - VOLUME 08 NUMBER 04

the Vedanta Kyokai



NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



MONTHLY CALENDAR

• Birthdays •

No Birthdays for April 2010

• Zushi Retreat

Sunday, 18 April 11 a.m.

Memorial Service for
Long-Serving Society Secretary
Mr. Masanobu Osonoi

Talk: **Assimilation in Spiritual Life**

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



✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"God is in all men, but all men are not in God; that is why we suffer."
... Sri Ramakrishna*

*"Do you love your creator? Love your fellow-beings first."
... Muhammad*

Dear Devotees and Friends,

We have some very sad news to report:

Our beloved former secretary Mr. Masanobu Osonoi passed away suddenly at his home on Friday, March 12. Regretfully, we only learned of this on the morning of March 23rd.

As such we will hold a brief memorial service at our Monthly Retreat on Sunday the 18th of April as noted in the Monthly Calendar.

Swami Medhasananda, President

March Zushi Retreat "Self-Effort or Faith?" A Talk by Swami Medhasananda

Today's topic is "Self-effort or Faith?" But faith in what? Faith in God and in his grace. Faith regarding what? Faith in everything; every work, the fulfillment of every wish, the achievement of every goal and, finally, the realization of God.

What is self effort? It means that we should try our best with our mind, our intel-
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Self-effort or Faith [from page 1]

ligence and our body, as these are the instruments of our work aimed at reaching our goals in every sphere. These are then two different things; self-effort is based on our own actions, while faith is based on dependence on God. Dependence on God is well exemplified by the kitten completely relying on the mother cat.

In such example we see a representation of deep faith, not to be mistaken for simple belief, or shallow faith. A Sanskrit proverb says that a deer does not enter into the mouth of a sleeping lion. That means that if a lion wants to eat deer, it must exert itself and chase it down, the deer will not come by itself. English proverbs also say: "God help him who helps himself" and "As you sow, so shall you reap". There are also other proverbs in Japanese and other languages showing that self-effort is very important.

In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna advises Arjuna at last that he should have faith and let Sri Krishna, like any Guru, do what is necessary for his salvation; but Sri Krishna also says repeatedly that Arjuna should save himself, help himself; he must be up and doing and girding his loins for whatever tasks lie ahead.

Even in practical, material matters like earning money or achieving other worldly goals, we see that self-effort is also required. Sri Ramakrishna also gave the following example. Suppose there is a lake with many fishes in it. You will not get any fish, however, just by standing on the bank of the lake and repeat the word "fish". You will need to get a fishing rod, bait, etc., only then you will catch fish. In 1996 I went to France. Once there was a young man on a train with a guitar singing a song formed of just one word: "l'argent, l'argent, l'argent" (of money, money, money). But one will not get money just by repeating such word!

Swami Brahmanandaji said that Sri Ramakrishna had such a great spiritual power that he was able to give his disciples any amount of spiritual advancement. Nonetheless he always asked his disciples to exert themselves in order to advance spiritually by themselves. Holy Mother used to say that you can only get the beautiful smell of sandalwood by rubbing wet sandalwood against a stone slab. But you cannot get any sandalwood paste or its lovely smell if you do not perform these actions.

Swami Yatiswaranandaji, who later became a great spiritual teacher and authored the famous book "Meditation and Spiritual Life", once asked his guru Swami Brahmanandaji for some spiritual advice. Swami Brahmanandaji's answer consisted only of the following English words: "Struggle, struggle, struggle." Swami Vivekananda made this famous statement: "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached". There are no shortcuts, or dream-medicines or drugs that make us progress in spiritual life; only: struggle, struggle, struggle. They say that in order to achieve success in something one needs 90% perspiration and 10% inspiration. After all, even self-effort is a quality given by God; we should then use that power.

In the Mahabharata there is a character called Duryodhana who said, "I know what is good, what is ideal, but I do not strive for that. Then again I know what is bad, but still I cannot get away from it". Our problem is that we do understand the need for self-effort, but we allow ourselves to give up the effort after trying for some time. Our struggle is not sustained.

How can we help sustain our effort? Our problem is that our motivation is not sufficient. If our motivation is weak, our willpower also becomes weak, so improving our motivation and willpower is necessary if we want to sustain our effort. When we say that we have no time for meditation, the real problem is not the time; the real problem is the lack of motivation. If we are really motivated, definitely we can find some time for meditation.

How to enhance motivation and willpower? First, like it or not, we have to continue the practice. This is like taking medicine; we may not like it, but we know that it is necessary. Sometimes we think that we shall meditate when we get in the mood for it. Rabin-dranath Tagore, the great Indian writer, had a routine of sitting and writing every day, regardless of whether he was in the mood for it or not. We should then not wait for the right mood in order to tackle whatever effort we have to make, we should just go ahead and do it. This should be particularly be applied in the case of meditation: just sit for meditation regardless of the mood we are in. Other tools we can use for improved motivation and willpower are self-analysis, discrimination and prayer to God. Sri Ramakrishna had this beautiful advice: "If you lack motivation, pray

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Self-effort or Faith [from page 2]

to God that He may give motivation to you.” Not shallow or insincere prayers; if you pray deeply and sincerely God will give you the motivation.

Perseverance is also very important in self-effort, it is necessary because the results we are striving for may not come quickly or some failure may happen. We should not lose heart. We planted a kaki (persimmon) tree in our garden eight years ago and still it does not bear fruit. If it were a mango plant it might take even more time. It happens in many cases that people lose heart and become dispirited if they do not get results. There are other instances of devotees who despite their many spiritual practices and devotions find themselves receiving all manner of personal, family and work problems and this sometimes induces them to give up their spiritual practices saying, “That person doesn’t believe in God and seems so happy, while I who believe am miserable!”

Faith is the key. Achievement of desired results does not solely depend on one’s self-effort, the grace of God is also a factor. After Sri Ramakrishna passed away and his monastic disciples were devoting almost all their time to spiritual practice in efforts to reach their spiritual goals, Swami Vivekananda explained to them that God-realization was not a commodity one could buy with a certain amount of spiritual practice; the grace of God was also necessary. There are many wonderful statements about faith. The scriptures say that whatever sin one has committed, by chanting the name of God even once that person may be saved. A Bengali song addresses Mother Durga saying: “I committed many sins, but I chant your name before passing away and I expect that you will give me liberation”. And Jesus said that by having faith as great as a grain of salt one can ask a stone to move and it will move. In the Bhagavad Gita it is said that if a person surrenders completely with faith, the Lord will maintain what that person has and will supply more if needed. Why do the desired results sometimes not come even to a person of faith? The reason is that such a person’s faith is not deep.

Once two monastic disciples of Swami Vivekananda became very sick and suffered from fever for a long time. No medicine had any effect. Swami Vivekananda then instructed one of his brother disciples to give them some water that had been used for Sri Ramakrishna’s worship, which is regarded as very holy. This, too, did not cure the monks, so Swami

Vivekananda concluded that the remedy he had prescribed did not work for lack of faith. He resolved then to give the two holy water that he himself would use for Sri Ramakrishna’s Puja the following day. Swamiji himself delivered the holy water to the monks who drank and began improving that same afternoon. This is faith.

Sridhar Swami was a great sage and scholar who wrote a beautiful commentary on the Bhagavad Gita. He was a householder but his wife passed away while giving birth to a child. At that time he had already been thinking about giving up the world and embracing the life of a monk. However, with the loss of his wife and a newly born baby to nurse, he sat and wondered how he would care for the baby. Suddenly a small lizard egg fell to the ground and a newly born small lizard came out of it. Soon after that an insect then came near the baby lizard and was eaten by it. So Sridhar Swami reflected that the Lord provided food for everyone. So he concluded that he should not worry about his own newborn, as the Lord would take care of him. He then embraced the life of renunciation. This is faith.

One should be aware that God will provide whatever one needs, even material things necessary for ordinary living, provided that one has got completely rid of ego and the sense of I-ness and my-ness and has therefore surrendered completely to God. On the contrary, as long as one has the feeling that one should strive and work, one should do so. Saying that the Lord will provide while under the spell of one’s ego is hypocrisy. It is said that faith does not come as long as we have a sense of ego and our mind is not pure. So we should first make our mind pure, eliminate the ego, and grow our devotion to God. This needs a lot of spiritual practice and struggle. As Krishna told Arjuna, ‘Whatever you do offer it to me. Have faith in me. Surrender to me. Worship me.’ Not the personality Krishna, but the divine entity. When one totally identifies oneself with God, one becomes God. When we have totally surrendered to our chosen deity, be it Krishna, Buddha, Christ or Sri Ramakrishna, then this grace comes.

In a deep forest a man was making some special arrangements to worship Mother Kali. Many ingredients and items are necessary for that worship, some of which are rather difficult to find. Finally the man collected all the necessary items and prepared for the worship. However, a tiger suddenly came along and killed him. Another man who had observed the frightful episode from up a tree at the approach of the tiger,

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Self-effort or Faith [from page 3]

casually came over, performed some purifying ceremonies and sat upon the corpse to perform the worship of Mother Kali. Soon She appeared saying She would grant him a boon. The man, a bit confused, said to Her, 'May I ask You one question, Mother? I am speechless with amazement at Your action. The other man worked so hard to get the ingredients for Your worship and tried to propitiate You for such a long time, but You didn't condescend to show him favour. And I, who don't know anything of worship, who have done nothing, who have neither devotion nor knowledge nor love, and who haven't practised any austerities, am receiving so much of Your grace.' The Divine Mother said with a laugh: 'My child, you don't remember your previous births. For many births you tried to propitiate Me through austerities. As a result of those austerities all these things have come to hand, and you have been blessed with My Vision. Now ask Me your boon.' "

In a similar case there was a spiritual aspirant was worshipping Mother Kali and She soon appeared. He was surprised as he knew many devotees that struggle for a very long time and still do not get the vision of Mother. She could see what was passing in the devotee's mind and asked him to follow Her. They walked for a while and finally Mother indicated a huge heap of bones, like a small hill, and asked if he knew what it was. She then explained that these were the bones of bodies he had left behind after performing lots of spiritual practices to propitiate the Divine Mother. This story means that the grace received by the devotee was the result of many lives of spiritual practice. This story is an exemplification of the theory that grace is conditional; that it comes after a long exertion by the devotee. On the other hand, another theory says that if grace is conditional, it is not grace. They say that God is like a child. He may not give something to one who wants it, but He may run after someone else and give him something even if it was

not requested.

We shall not enter into that debate now, but it is enough for us to now that we must try our best and struggle. It is said that the grace of God is always blowing like a breeze and if we want to catch it, we need to set our sail. M, the recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, said that we enjoy the sunlight and asked if sunlight was created by us. Obviously not. We need water, have we created water? No. The trees, likewise, are important for us, but we did not create them. M.'s conclusion was, "Is this not proof enough that we are already getting the grace of God?" Because we are living, this is a sufficient proof that we are receiving God's grace.

Swami Vivekananda summarized the concepts of faith and grace in the following nice way; "It is not enough to have faith in God, faith in the Scriptures, faith in the spiritual Teacher, you must have faith in yourself. You may believe in millions of gods, but if you have no faith in yourself, there is no salvation for you."

We should then have faith in our own power, which in itself is a gift of grace from God. This faith in us is important for our self-effort. It is said in the Gospel that if one advances one step towards God, God will come ten steps closer to him. That one step is what is important, that is self-effort. •

• Thought of the Month •

"For every disciplined effort there is a multiple reward."

...Jim Rohn

Swami Medhasananda Visits Manila in March

Swami Medhasananda reached Manila by a Philippine Airlines flight from Tokyo soon after 1 o'clock in the afternoon of Saturday, March 13 and was received at the airport by four devotees.

It was a hot summer day in Manila and Swami mentioned soon after stepping out of the arrival building of the airport

that he was reminded of summers in India.

He had left Zushi extremely early that morning in order to catch his flight to Manila and now a very busy schedule awaited him. He would offer Arati later that day at the newly renovated building of the Ramakrishna Vedanta

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Manila Centre [from page 4]

Society of the Philippines. He then read and commented on few pages of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Shortly thereafter he had dinner with some thirty devotees and friends who had joined him at the Society's Centre. Next morning, Sunday, after a delicious breakfast offered by some devotees, Swami was back at work.

The main reasons for the visit to Manila were to inspect the renovated building of the Society and planning for its dedication ceremony scheduled for Sunday, June 6, 2010. All this was done in detail on Sunday morning at the Society's building with about a dozen devotees and friends, both Filipinos and Indians and a couple of Italians, in attendance.

Obviously the dedication of the building represents a very important event in the young history of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines which was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 2006 and acquired a plot of land and a very old and rather dilapidated building in 2008. Discussions and planning about the June celebration, to be



attended by Swami Smarananandaji, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, his secretary, Swami Medhasananda, and a few other very distinguished guests, went on for a long time with great fervor and concentration by all those present.

After a quick lunch and a brief rest Swami Medhasananda was back at the Centre where he delivered a talk (*Presented in the May issue - Editor*) to over forty persons attending, about evenly split between Filipinos and Indians.

Dinner took place at the residence of a devotee and was attended by Swami Medhasananda and several others who had already participated in the morning planning session at the Centre. Just before dinner the plans for the dedication of the Society's building were again reviewed and some new suggestions were presented and discussed. All this resulted in a very late evening dinner closing a very long day.

On Monday morning, March 15, after another excellent breakfast prepared by other devotees, Swami summarized the plans and discussions of the previous day and was accompanied to visit the hall of the University of Makati,

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Manila Centre [from page 5]

which had been tentatively designated to host the afternoon session of the dedication ceremony scheduled for June 6. Swami Medhasananda was pleased with the facilities of the university and was rather impressed to learn that the University of Makati (owned by the Municipality of Makati, one of

the several boroughs forming Metropolitan Manila) is attended by twelve thousand students.

Maharaj then returned to the airport to catch his Philippines Airlines back to Tokyo leaving the serious and challenging job of preparations to the devotees and friends of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines for the dedication ceremony of their Centre. •



• A Story to Remember •

The Bandit

Buddha was once threatened with death by a bandit called Angulimal. "Then be good enough to fulfill my dying wish," said Buddha. "Cut off the branch of that tree."

One slash of the sword, and it was done! "What now?" asked the bandit.

"Put it back again," said Buddha.

The bandit laughed. "You must be crazy to think that anyone can do that."

"On the contrary, it is you who are crazy to think that you are mighty because you can wound and destroy. That is the task of children. The mighty know how to create and heal.

From the book 'Buddha, His Life Retold' by Robert Allen

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