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日本ヴェーダーンタ協会ニュースレター

The Vedanta Kyokai

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

Monthly Calendar



Yakuoin Yukiji Shrine
Mount Takao

Birthdays

Swami Ramakrishnananda
Sunday, August 8
Swami Niranjanananda
Tuesday, August 24

Events

• EMBASSY DISCOURSE •

Indian Embassy
1st Saturday, August 8, 2 PM

• KARMA YOGA •

Zushi Centre
2nd Saturday, August 14, 10AM

• AUGUST ZUSHI RETREAT •

3rd Sunday, August 15, 11 AM
Talk:
All are welcome!

✧ Thus Spake ✧

“God tells the thief to go and steal, and at the same time warns the householder against the thief.” ... Sri Ramakrishna

“All things appear and disappear because of the concurrence of causes and conditions. Nothing ever exists entirely alone; everything is in relation to everything else.” ... Lord Buddha

July Zushi Retreat Avatar, Incarnation of God A talk by Swami Medhasananda

I have not seen the film, but you may know of a very successful movie entitled “Avatar,” filmed at high cost using innovative technologies and screened in 3D. An “avatar” in the cyber-world is also a two-dimensional picture, a 3D game model or even just a username to represent a computer user’s alter ego. There is also a self-development course called “Avatar”. These, however, do not really reflect the Indian meaning or concept of avatar, except in the minimal sense of one species being transformed into another, as in the film, or simply any transformation. It is interesting that some words of Indian origin, such as karma, are attractive enough that, although often misused, are finding their way into popular vernacular.

Avatar is a Sanskrit word meaning to descend or descending; Incarnation is of Greek origin meaning to take the form of flesh. So in the word avatar we have some concept of above and below, from a higher position to a lower one, and in incarnation we have the idea of taking a flesh and blood form. The Hindu concept of avatar is a combination of these two.

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Avatar [from page 1]

It is imagined that God resides in Heaven above this earthly plane and when descends to this earth He is called an 'avatar'. Should the Lord descend without taking some form, it would be difficult to achieve His mission unless He is identified by those for whom He has descended. God needs to take some form that we can easily identify. That's why Swami Vivekananda said that if God wants to appear for the buffalos, He must take the form of a buffalo.

The Avatar in Religious Traditions

This concept of 'Incarnation of God' can be found in many religious traditions. In Christianity we see this concept. The famous Western philosopher Spinoza wrote of this concept of incarnation of God in Christianity. He said that God is manifested in everything, but manifested in Jesus Christ in the fullest way. This "manifested more fully in a human being" is the Hindu concept of incarnation. God is present in every one of us, to a greater degree than any animal being. Then among all human beings a greater manifestation is found in a sage, and in a personality like Jesus Christ, we see His fullest manifestation.

Christians, however, claim that Jesus is the "only begotten son of God"; the "only" incarnation of God. According to Islam, while Jesus is accepted as a prophet, their emphasis is on Muhammad as the "last" prophet. And the Buddhist tradition? When I had been referring to this concept of incarnation of God in my discourses here, I got the distinct impression that this concept was strange and unheard of to some in the audience. I was a little shocked that such a commonly discussed and debated subject in India would seem strange to an audience of the Buddhist tradition. The reason became apparent that the concept of incarnation was not discussed in the Shinto or Japanese Buddhist traditions. In fact, there is no God in the Buddhist tradition. Buddha did not teach of any God. So if there is no God, no incarnation of God is possible. Buddha only believed in the manifestation of pure consciousness and taught the way to attain to it.

For the common people, however, the concept of a Supreme Reality is hard to grasp, and it is even harder to have faith in it. People need some anthropomorphic form of God for refuge in times of trouble. Buddha himself took that position and became the focus of worship as God for the common followers of Buddhism. Interestingly, Hindus believe in Buddha as
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an incarnation of God, and in many Buddhist temples worldwide you will witness the same forms of ritualism as those practiced in Hindu temples—the same obeisance, the same chanting, incense, offerings, even the same festivals. Moreover, it is believed that Buddha also incarnates Himself as Boddhisattwas out of compassion to guide humanity and to show the path to enlightenment.

In the Hindu tradition there is a lot of scripture and much discussion and debate on this idea of incarnations of God. The Upanishads are regarded as the essence of the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita as the essence of the Upanishads and in Chapter IV of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says very clearly in verses seven and eight that:

'Whenever and wherever there is a decrease in dharma (religion), O Arjun, and a predominant rise of adharma (irreligion) – at that time I descend (incarnate) Myself, to reestablish principles of religion and to destroy the wicked.'

How Many Incarnations?

Different commentaries on the Gita explain this concept of 'incarnation of God'. One question that arises is: How many incarnations of God are there? The Christians tell us there is only one, Jesus. There has never been before His advent and his reappearance portends an apocalyptic end for all. According to some Hindu interpretations there are ten incarnations of God.

There is a very famous Sanskrit hymn called the Dasavatara Stotra composed by the celebrated poet, Jayadeva, of the Middle Ages. It says that Krishna first incarnated as a fish, then a tortoise, then a boar, a giant lion-man, a dwarf, Rama with an axe, Sri Rama, Balarama with plough, Buddha and at the culmination of this present yuga or age, Kalki will arrive to complete the present cycle of ages. Here we see a process of evolution; fish living in the water, then a amphibian, a mammal in the boar, the giant lion-man, then a dwarf man, Rama with an axe is still somewhat violent, the ideal character in Sri Rama, Sri Balaram then deals with human nature, and in Buddha the path and way to end suffering and to finding supreme consciousness is taught. The tenth avatar is said to be Kalki, and this school says there cannot be any other avatars afterward. Yet another scripture called the Bhagavata Purana professes the advent of 24 avatars.

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Avatar [from page 2]

Then according to the Bhagavad Gita, perhaps the greatest Hindu scripture, there is no limit to the number of incarnations of God, since He says therein that He descends to the earth whenever He feels the necessity. Once when Krishna and Arjuna are out for a walk, Arjuna praised Krishna as the Supreme Reality. Krishna did not respond to this, but as they approached a tree Krishna pointed to it and asked Arjuna what he saw there. "I see a huge tree," he responded. "What else?" asked Krishna. "I see the tree is laden with many, many black berries," he said. "No, observe more attentively," Krishna said. "You will see those berries are multitudes of Krishnas hanging on the tree of the Supreme Reality." From this remark we understand that there really is no limit to the number of possible incarnations of God.

Prophet or Incarnation?

Another question that arises is: What is the difference between a prophet and an incarnation? For example, Swami Vivekananda is regarded as a prophet. So what is the difference between Sri Ramakrishna, who is regarded as an incarnation of God, and Swami Vivekananda the prophet. The main distinction is that even though the level of spiritual realization is very high in the prophet, perhaps even that of a liberated soul from a previous birth – there was a time when the prophet was not a perfected soul. Until reaching perfection these souls were influenced and guided by the laws of karma, but the birth and death of an incarnation of God are not guided by the law of karma.

The Avatar directly descends into the form of a human being of His own sweet will. However, as long as He lives, His thoughts and works are generally controlled by the laws of cause and effect. If He overeats, He will suffer. If He does not sleep for a long time, He will feel drowsy. He is even subject to disease, pleasure and pain. As the Avatar lives as a human being, there will be some influence of Maya on Him, but Maya cannot control Him, rather the Avatar controls Maya. Sri Ramakrishna gave the example of the poison and the snake saying the poison is in the snake, but does not harm it. In the same way Maya is in the Incarnation of God, but is not affected by it.

Why Does God Incarnate?

As we already mentioned, when irreligion prevails; when wickedness and vices prevail and wicked people
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become more powerful than the righteous, the Lord incarnates. When many people suffering from bondage desire freedom and liberation, the Lord comes to grant that freedom. When the multitudes become confused as to what is or isn't religion, such as these 'spiritual healing' practitioners as we see now-a-days on television - which has no real connection with spirituality - the Lord comes. When the people earnestly pray to be shown the way and suffer from a spiritual hunger, when this hunger and yearning for God reaches a near universal state with great numbers of people in the same condition, the Lord comes.

How can I love God?

When devotees are advised to grow love for God if they want to grow in spirituality and to realize God, the question that confronts them is, How can I love God when I cannot see Him? I love my husband; I love my wife; I love my children, because I can see them! This is a rational, natural question. Many people cannot make progress in spiritual life because of this difficulty, and since they cannot see God, they cannot cultivate a sincere love of God. So here is another justification for the incarnation of God; the people can see and love the avatar, or God, in human form. Loving the incarnation of God is the same as loving God. Sri Ramakrishna said that because the incarnation of God is nothing but God inside, it is the same as loving God. The Holy Mother once told a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, "My son, Sri Ramakrishna is just a human form, inside is nothing but God." As inside a pillowcase there is nothing but feathers.

This is the purpose of the Divine Incarnation; to show people the path, to reestablish religion, to guide seekers of the spiritual path, to teach them how to love God and how to acquire divine knowledge. When God appears in a human form, though already perfected, He too performs severe spiritual practice. Let us take the example of Sri Ramakrishna, who practiced for twelve severe years! Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ were no exceptions to this either. What is the justification for this if they are born perfected? Sri Ramakrishna has said that should one perform 1/16th of His spiritual practice, it will be enough for one's spiritual realization – but why 1/16th? or 1/100th? If we practice even 1/1000th of what Sri Ramakrishna practiced, our liberation is assured.

How is the Infinite Born Finite?

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• Thought of the Month •

"Reputation is what men and women think of us.
Character is what God and the angels know of us."

... Thomas Paine

Avatar [from page 3]

Men of science and learning in Sri Ramakrishna's time were faced with a puzzling and troubling question: How does the Infinite Lord become finite and appear in a limited human body? This was a topic of much discussion in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by 'M' and in The Great Master by Swami Saradanandaji. One example in the Gospel posits that if one wants to touch an ocean, is it necessary to dip your hand along the entire coastline? No, touching the ocean at any spot is enough. If we want to touch the Ganga, is it necessary to touch the entire course of the river from its source to the Bay of Bengal? Or is it enough to touch the river at Belur Math or Rishikesh? The entire river at any one spot is the Ganga. We have seen and touched the ocean if we touch it at any spot. In the same way, if one sees the incarnation of God, in whom God is manifested, then one may say one has seen God. It is in this sense Jesus remarked, "One who has seen the Son has seen the Father." A single dew drop can reflect the infinite blue sky. In the same way the finite man can reflect the infinite God.

In the Bhagavad Gita one verse reads; "I am Birthless. I am Eternal. Still, with the help of my Maya, I take the form of a human being." What Maya can or cannot do we cannot say, since everything is possible for Maya, since in Sanskrit it is stated, 'Aghatana ghatana patyasi?' or 'We are immersed in Maya, so how can we understand Maya?'

Mission of the Avatar

Every Incarnation of God has a special mission and before they appear as human beings we suppose a master plan is devised as to who will accompany Him, where and when they will be born and how they will help him. Before Sri Ramakrishna's birth he went to Saptarshi, the sphere of Seven Sages, and requested of one of the sages, "Will you not come with me?" This sage was Swami Vivekananda (Narendra). Thus the births of Rakhal, Narendra, Sarada Devi, none of these was left to random chance, but were key elements of a master plan for the incarnation to fulfill

a particular mission. This is true of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus and Sri Ramakrishna.

In the time of Buddha's birth, too, many animals were being slaughtered unnecessarily in the name of religious sacrifice and religious practice. So one of the purposes of Buddha's birth was to stop this. In the time of Sri Chaitanya's birth there was much suppression between differing castes and religious sects. So Chaitanya's mission was, in part, to teach equality and love of all people.

Characteristics of the Avatar

Each Incarnation of God also portrays a particular characteristic. For Sri Krishna this was the spirit of non-attachment. How much He loved the cowherd boys and milkmaids of Vrindavan and how much they loved Him. The gopis (milkmaids) would gather and grab the wheels in an attempt to hold back the chariot taking Krishna from Vrindavan to Mathura. Yet when He was called away, Krishna would immediately leave them and Vrindavan behind without a second pause or a single tear. God can be worshipped as the Master. God can be worshipped as a friend. God can be worshipped as a child. God can be worshipped as a lover. All these different religious ideals we can also see in the life of Sri Krishna. Buddha's characteristic was knowledge and compassion. Jesus brought the message of love, forgiveness and prayer. Sri Ramakrishna taught us renunciation, humility, the harmony of religions and the Motherhood of God. Never before in the history of religion has this last characteristic been observed.

In this regard, I may mention that a Western devotee wrote a very interesting article for which she had created a questionnaire on the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi and received responses from some 300 devotees. The survey shows that among Western devotees the Holy Mother is more popular than Sri Ramakrishna, and it has been observed in the article that the age of Sri Ramakrishna has passed and that the age of Sri Sarada Devi has begun. The concept of God as Mother seems to be more approachable than a Fatherhood figure for many westerners, especially the ladies. This is the first time in history we see an Incarnation of God worship the Divine Mother as His Chosen Ideal, and certainly unique and unprecedented is the worship of His own wife as the Mother of the Universe.

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Avatar [from page 4]

So we see that each Incarnation of God assumes particular characteristics and these characteristics seem perfectly suited to that particular age and the people of that age. In Western thought we find the Irony of Fate and the Irony of Character, but here we have the Irony of Recognition. It is often asked, 'Why are so many Incarnations Indian?' Well, it can be answered that while there is a lot of religion in India, there is also a lot of vice. In fact, it is joked, there is so much wickedness there that it is necessary for God to reappear again and again in India. Another response is that considering the lot of Jesus who was born elsewhere, at least crucifixion is not likely in India. Joking aside, we can also say that few people can recognize the Incarnation of God without having themselves developed spirituality.

Impact of the Avatar

The Incarnation trains disciples so that they may carry on His mission after He passes on. The Incarnation cannot live super extended life spans and it is necessary for others to preach His message. It is also not possible for one person to travel to many countries and to cater to the many spiritual needs of peoples or differing natures. The Incarnation's disciples are much better suited for this task.

The characteristics of the Incarnation's teachings are that they are simple, yet profound. The more we meditate on them, the more we get light from them. They are very powerful. Why? When the same words are uttered by a lesser sage or a common man, the impact is not the same. Sri Ramakrishna had very little formal education, but great scholars and saints would come and listen to what he had to say. One such scholar said, "Do you know why I come here? I know and have studied much the same in scripture, but I want to hear these very words from your lips."

There is a huge difference in impact between the words of lesser saint and the words of an Avatar. If I say, "Sisters and brothers of Japan!" there is little or no impact; but when Swamiji said, "Sisters and brothers of America!" what a tremendous impact it had, because Swamiji's statement was one of realization. He truly saw the same Atman in everyone, he was established in that, and this statement carried tremendous appeal, motivating the entire audience of thousands to stand and applaud for two minutes.

Eternal Redeemer for All

In making a particular point Avatars employ the use of a story, a parable or an example to simply express an idea. In the Bible we find many parables. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we find many stories and examples. Symbolism is also used. "Seek and ye shall find" and "Knock and the door shall be opened unto you" are examples of ideas expressed symbolically. We also find that the Avatars do not place much importance on ritualism, placing more importance on the core of religion, on spirituality. Their love doesn't discriminate between the saint and the sinner. They are rather more concerned with the sinners, sufferers and the weak at heart.

These Incarnations of God can also transmit spirituality. As simply as I pass a fruit to you, the Avatar can pass spirituality to another. They all manifest the power of redemption and can make the sinner a saint. They can remove the sins of the sinner and make him free and pure. We find many examples of this in the lives of Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Sri Ramakrishna.

Avatar as Cultural Icon

And although the Avatar is born in a particular age in a particular country, He is for all people in all ages. Jesus is not the monopoly of Christians. Buddha is not the monopoly of the Buddhists. Sri Ramakrishna is not the monopoly of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. These Avatars, Incarnations of God, appear for all people, of all countries and of all ages in time. Yet, at the time of their birth their impact is not so great. The real impact of the Avatar is like a snowball effect, growing larger and larger with the passage of time, while the impact of ordinary holy personalities fades rather quickly.

The impact of the Avatar, however, is not only felt on the spiritual level, but on the plane of society and culture. Think of Jesus; of Buddha; of Krishna. What tremendous impacts they have on society and culture. In the rich cultural heritage of the world; in literature, art, music, dance and even architecture, if you omit the influence of Jesus or Buddha, very little would remain. So any crazy person or even a spiritual leader who claims for himself or his disciples claim for him, Avatarhood, it is not really so, since the avatar, as we have described above, is a unique spiritual phenomenon appearing only occasionally over hundreds of years. ●

• A Story to Remember •

God, Make Me a TV

A teacher from Primary School asks her students to write an essay about what they would like God to do for them... At the end of the day, while marking the essays, she read one that made her very emotional. Her husband, who had just walked in, saw her crying and asked her, 'What happened?'

She answered, 'Read this. It's an essay from one of my students.'

'Oh God, tonight I ask you something very special:

Make me into a television. I want to take its place and live like the TV in my house; have my own special place, and have my family around ME—to be taken seriously when I talk ...

I want to be the centre of attention and be heard without interruptions or questions.

I want to receive the same special care that the TV receives even when it is not working.

I want to have the company of my dad when he arrives home from work, even when he is tired.

And I want my mom to want me when she is sad and upset, instead of ignoring me...

And... I want my brothers to fight to be with me...

I want to feel that family just leaves everything aside, every now and then, just to spend some time with me.

And last but not least, ensure that I can make them all happy and entertain them...

Lord I don't ask you for much... I just want to live like a TV.'

At that moment the husband said, 'My God, poor kid. What horrible parents!'

The wife looked up at him and said, 'That essay is our son's!'

... Cyber-Anonymous

Swami Medhasananda Welcome Address 30 May 2010

Golden Jubilee Closing Ceremony & Swami Vivekananda's 148th Birthday Celebration

Revered Swami Smaranandaji Maharaj, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission; His Excellency Sri H. K. Singh, Indian Ambassador to Japan; Revered Peter Takeo Okada, Archbishop of Tokyo; Revered Ryojun Sato, Buddhist Master of the Jodo Sect; Dr. Yasuji Yamaguchi, Professor of Meiji University; Sister Junko Monica Shioya, Chairperson of the Board, Seisen University, and host of today's programme; other distinguished guests and dear friends: On behalf of the Organizing Committee I cordially welcome you all to this historic occasion, the Closing Ceremony of the yearlong Golden Jubilee of the Vedanta Society of Japan, a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, a spiritual and philanthropic organization headquartered in India with branches around the world.

We are immensely happy that His Holiness Swami Smaranandaji came all the way from India to bless this occasion and deliver the benedictory address. We are also honored by the august presence of the Revered Archbishop Okada, Revered Ryojun Sato and Professor Yamaguchi, all of whom will address this assembly.

We are delighted to announce that Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, India's most eminent santoor player, and his associates, and Sri Kalakrishna and his famous dance troupe have all come to Japan to perform in today's programme, and we heartily welcome them all.

On such an important occasion as the final celebration of our Golden Jubilee, denoting fifty years of service here in our home, the Land of the Rising Sun, it is only fitting that we remember and pay homage with a grateful heart all those who have contributed and still contribute in various ways to the birth and growth of this Society as we see it today.

We especially recall the late Swami Ranganathanandaji, former President of our Order, a highly respected religious leader, author and orator of international repute, who came to Japan 1958 to deliver a series of lectures on Indian spiritual and cultural values. During this visit he inspired a committed group of Japanese and Indians in Tokyo to found a Society to practice and preach the profound teachings of Vedanta as exemplified by the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, the God-man, and Swami Vivekananda, the Prophet of Modern India.

The present Society was formally inaugurated at the Asia Centre in Tokyo on May 2, 1959 by Swami Nikhilanandaji, Head of the Vedanta Society of New York, in the presence of a distinguished gathering among whom were Sri CPN Singh, the then Ambassador to Japan, Mr. Nikki Kimura, Professor Emeritus of Kisshyo University, and Professor Hajime Nakamura, the celebrated Indologist, all of whom had a fairly good idea about Sri Ramakrishna and the Ramakrishna Mission. Professors Kimura and Nakamura became President and Vice-President respectively of the

first Managing Committee, while Mr. Sumitra Rao, a retired officer of the British Indian Army stationed in Japan, became its first Secretary. We humbly remember the long and dedicated service to our Society rendered by Mr. Rao and also that of Mrs. Haru Nakai who joined the Society a little later. Today we mention with a heavy heart that Mr. Masanobu Osonoi, who succeeded Mr. Rao as Secretary in 1988 and who gave the Welcoming Address of the Opening Ceremony of our Golden Jubilee passed away only recently after service the Society for over two decades.

The Society was made an official branch of the Ramakrishna Order in 1984 and Swami Siddharthanandaji was assigned as the first resident monk and president of the Society headquartered in Zushi City near Kamakura. After successfully accomplishing this task he returned to India in 1993 due to failing health and passed away a few years later. We remember with respect and gratitude the pioneering role Siddharthanandaji played as the Society's first president.

During our first 50 years there have been many members, friends and well-wishers of our Society, both Japanese and non-Japanese, especially Indians, who have been deeply involved with the Society and have contributed to our undertaking of numerous activities. A brief account of these activities can be found in the brochure which has been distributed to you today.

As already mentioned, this Society's association with the Indian Embassy in Tokyo began right from its inception with the Indian Ambassador gracing the inaugural meeting of the Society in 1959. Since then most of the ambassadors and other embassy staff have been supportive of our cause. In January 2009 when I first placed the matter of this celebration before Ambassador H.K. Singh, his response was immediate saying "Swamiji, we shall offer you all the help you need for this programme." He then made a very significant remark adding, "We ambassadors come and go back to India, but Swami Vivekananda is the eternal Ambassador of India." True to his word His Excellency and his colleagues, especially Deputy Chief of the Mission, Sri Sanjay Bhattacharyya, and First Secretary, Mrs. Paramita Tripathi, have given unstinting support whenever needed during the various events of this yearlong celebration, including sponsorship and hosting of the opening ceremony and the recent exhibit extolling the roots and growth of the Indo-Japan Relationship. It is with the special recommendation of the Embassy that we received financial support from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi, for today's cultural programme.

Apart from the ceremony itself, there were three main objectives of the Golden Jubilee. The first is to reach out to as many people of this country as possible and to propagate the message of harmony and universalism as

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Jubilee Welcome Address [from page 7]

espoused by Vedanta and exemplified by its modern proponents Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. The second objective is to propagate a message of broad-based spiritual values to bring peace and joy and renewed hope to the lives of all. Our third goal is to promote the deepening relationship between Indian and Japanese communities.

I believe many of you know that Swami Vivekananda paid a visit to Japan in July of 1893 on his way to Chicago to attend the World's First Parliament of Religions where he distinguished himself with his magnetic personality and brilliant speeches to the attendees. Swami Vivekananda highly appreciated the many sterling qualities of the Japanese he observed during his visit. Tenshin Okakura, the famous art critic and scholar, later went to Belur Math to invite Swamiji to revisit Japan. Unfortunately, this return visit could not take place due to Swamiji's failing health. The Indo-Japanese relationship pioneered by these two great personalities was further strengthened by the repeated visits of the poet, Rabindranath Tagore.

We, the present generations of Japanese and Indians, can achieve much to our mutual benefit by treading that path first trekked by these great pioneers. Our Society, a branch of the Order founded by Swami Vivekananda, is committed to following and to achieving that which he and the other pioneers of this relationship defined and dreamt for us. We believe these efforts will pave the way for a new kind of leadership, one urgently needed in the present day world by Japan and India along with China, the three great Asian nations of the world.

It is appropriate that I now briefly mention the other events organized this past year to celebrate our Golden Jubilee.

The Opening Ceremony was held last year on June 14, at the new auditorium of the Indian Embassy in Tokyo, also co-hosted by the Embassy. The programme included speeches by distinguished speakers including Swami Bhaskaranandaji, Minister in Charge of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington, who has had a long association with our Society, and Bishop Kazuhiro Mori of Tokyo, followed by a beautiful cultural programme. The Opening Ceremony was attended by a large number of both Japanese and non-Japanese from a broad cross-section of society.

An exhibit focusing on the India-Japan Relationship and its pioneers, Swami Vivekananda and Okakura Tenshin, was held on the 26th and 27th of September 2009 at the very extensive 'Namaste India' event in Tokyo's Yoyogi Park and drew huge crowds. Organized by our Society, this was the first such exhibit in Japan.

Later this year, a more detailed version of the same exhibition, inaugurated by His Excellency Ambassador Singh, was held at the Indian Embassy Art Gallery from the 7th to the 11th of April. Fortunately, this exhibit coincided perfectly with the vibrant display of sakura blossoms that line the moat fronting the Embassy, a popular 'hanami' or blossom viewing spot drawing vast numbers of visitors.

These two exhibitions drew more than four thousand visitors, most of whom had little knowledge of the deep relationship between India and Japan or the personalities of Vivekananda and Okakura Tenshin. Hundreds of handwritten comments from these guests revealed that they greatly appreciated the concept and quality of the exhibits and were deeply impressed by the depictions of various facets of the Indo-Japan Relationship and the wonderful personality and inspiring message of Swami Vivekananda.



The Society, in collaboration with Darshanam, an enterprise dedicated to presenting Indian culture through the music of renown sitarist, Pandit Dr. Chandrakant Sardeshmukh, and his wife Pooja organized a charity concert of Indian Classical Music in Nishi Kasai, Tokyo, on

November 27, 2009, to raise funds for the Golden Jubilee. The artists, who performed free of charge for this event, were sitarist Dr. Sardeshmukh, santoor player Mr. Setsuo Miyashita, and tabla players Mr. Kul Bhushan Bhargava and Mr. Dinesh Chandra Dyoundi. Kuchipudi dancer, Mrs. Ranu Bhattacharyya, and Odissi Nachuni teacher, Ms. Kazuko Yasunobu, and her students Harumi, Sumika, Yuko and Yuu, also all gave outstanding performances.

The Society also held a Kansai Chapter Celebration supported by the Consulate General of India in Osaka on January 24th of this year for the people of Osaka, Kobe, Kyoto, Nara and vicinities. This programme, which included a speech by Sri Vikas Swarup, Consul General of India, Osaka-Kobe, and the celebrated author of the Oscar winning film, Slumdog Millionaire, also featured a highly enjoyable cultural programme. This event was the first of its kind to be organized by the Society in Kansai and created quite a stir, drawing an audience of nearly 500.

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Jubilee Welcome Address [from page 8]

During our yearlong celebration the Society also initiated regular philanthropic service by taking part in a food and clothing distribution programme for the needy and homeless, whom Vivekananda advised us to serve by looking upon them as the living God or 'Daridra Narayana'. We would like to continue this service as a regular activity of our Society.

Today's Ceremony, the final event of our Golden Jubilee, is being held in the auditorium of Seisan University, as you can see. We are immensely thankful to the authorities of the university for kindly lending this auditorium for our ceremony and to the university's Department of Global Citizen Studies for their co-organizing efforts. We are also most thankful for our very distinguished speakers of different faiths to address us on the very important subject of 'Peace and Harmony' in addition to hearing their remarks on the Society's Golden Jubilee, and for the performances by eminent artists for our Cultural Programme, which we are all looking forward to.

On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee, the Society has published important titles such as the Upanishads, Swami Vivekananda and Japan, Inspiring Messages, pocket editions of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and a CD of Japanese devotional songs. Today we release the biography of Swami Vivekananda, Inspiring Messages Volume 2, a DVD on Swami Vivekananda with Japanese sub-titles, and a CD on the Mantras and Hymns of Shiva, the great God of the Hindus. Also released today is the Golden Jubilee Issue of the Society's bi-monthly magazine, The Universal Gospel, with more than 300 pages of various features and articles. While some of these titles were meant for sales revenue, some were distributed free.

One can easily presume from this brief report that without the sustained labour of love by a team of dedicated volunteers it would have been impossible to organize our Golden Jubilee events. Our Society, which otherwise has very limited resources in this country, is truly very fortunate to have such a motivated team of volunteers who quite literally devote their time and energies in spite of life's various preoccupations to make our Golden Jubilee successful. No words are enough to express our gratefulness to them all. Nevertheless, all credit for the success of these celebrations, whatever it may be, goes to them. May God bless them.

Donors, advertisers in our souvenir publications and other well wishers and friends have all contributed to organizing our ambitious Golden Jubilee Celebration. Two projects of the event, namely to install a statue of Swami Vivekananda in a suitable location and to open a city center for the Society in Tokyo, have yet to be realized. But we sincerely hope that with the active support of you all, we can achieve these objectives as well.

We can conclude by saying with a sense of satisfaction that our objectives of reaching out to as many Japanese people as possible to propagate the elevating messages of peace and joy and renewed hope into their modern-day lives, as

espoused by Vedanta, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, and to deepen the relationship between Indian and Japanese communities, has been fulfilled to some extent. We are now committed to follow-up work along these lines as our Golden Jubilee Celebrations come to a close and we humbly seek your continued support and co-operation.

After all is said and done, all of us who have been involved in this celebration ought not forget even for a moment that it is the Lord of all who has been doing His work through us, making us His instruments. In closing may I borrow and paraphrase from Thomas Kempis in his Imitation of Christ and sincerely pray, 'O Lord, bless those bearing Thy cross and grant us the strength and motivation that we may bear it until the end.' •

Swami Attends Annual Yoga Therapy Society Meet

In July of last year Swami Medhasananda was invited to give a talk in Sapporo City on the northernmost island of Hokkaido for the Japan Yoga Therapy Society. The Japan Yoga Therapy Society is a nationwide organization. This year the Society chose to have its annual meeting in Kanazawa City in Ishikawa Prefecture on the Japan Sea coast of Japan's main Honshu Island on June 26th. Serving in the honorary capacity of spiritual advisor to the Yoga Society, the swami was invited to attend again this year and offer the opening prayer.

The Vedanta Society of Japan took this opportunity to supply copies of its recently released Japanese language editions of "Swami Vivekananda and Japan" and "Inspiring Messages Vol. 2" to the large audience of yoga instructors and students. Some 1200 copies each of the booklets were distributed. The Vedanta Society also set up a one-day exhibit on Swami Vivekananda and shop to sell books, CDs and other articles which was well attended and very busy indeed.

Singapore Visit

Swami Medhasananda took some much needed time off and went to the Ramakrishna Mission Singapore where he stayed from 22 June to 1 July. While there the swami gave a talk on the Ramakrishna Movement in Japan.

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A Branch of the Ramakrishna Mission
4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi City,
Kanagawa-ken, Japan 249-0001
Phone: 81-468-73-0428 Fax: 81-468-73-0592
Website: <http://www.vedanta.jp>
Email: info@vedanta.jp