



September 2010 - Volume 08 Number 08

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



Birthdays

Krishna Janmashtami
Wednesday, September 1
Swami Advaitananda
Tuesday, September 7

Events

• September Zushi Retreat •

**Lord Krishna
Birth Celebration**
Sunday, September 19th

Guest Speaker:
Madhumangala Das
President ISKON Japan

All are welcome!

• Namaste India •

Vedanta Bookstore Booth
Yoyogi Park Event Space
Saturday & Sunday, September 25 & 26
<www.indofestival.com>



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"The purpose of one's life is fulfilled only when one is able to give joy to another."

... Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother

"The awakened sages call a person wise when all his undertakings are free from anxiety about results."

... Lord Krishna

August Zushi Retreat

The Divine Touch of Sri Ramakrishna

Part I of a two-part talk by Swami Medhasananda

A 'touchstone' is believed to be a stone that transforms whatever metal it touches into gold. When the famous Alexandria Library of ancient Egypt was burnt, only one book survived. It was not an important book and it was sold for a modest price to a person who was not a scholar. On the back of the book's cover, however, it was written that one could go to the Black Sea where many pebbles could be found on the shore: one of the pebbles was the touchstone. It could be recognized by touch: ordinary pebbles would be cold at the touch, but the touchstone would feel warm. The person who purchased the book, eager to become rich by transforming ordinary metals into gold, sold all of his possessions and went to the Black Sea in search of the touchstone. We shall now abandon the rest of the story; we just wanted to explain the reference to the "touchstone".

Common Touch/Divine Touch

Sri Ramakrishna once remarked: "Be gold, transform yourselves into gold by touching the touchstone." What is this "touchstone"? It is God: by touching, by realizing God, you become gold; meaning that you become spiritual. Not only by touching God, but also by touching God-men such as Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus one becomes gold. We

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Touch [from page 1]

shall mention later a few stories about Sri Ramakrishna, some of which have not been translated into English or Japanese.

Every day we have many occasions to touch one another, but we do not see any particular effects from these touches. But if you read the Bible you can find many examples of Jesus making people healed and perfect just by touching them. In the New Testament for instance there is the story of Jesus being approached by a man suffering from a skin disease saying to Jesus: "If you want you can make me clean." Jesus answered "I do." And by touching the suffering man he made him free from his disease. But Jesus not only cleaned and purified the man's body, he also purified his spirit. A woman who had suffered for many years from severe breathing problems was convinced that by touching the edge of the cloth worn by Jesus she would be cured of her illness. When she reached out, Jesus turned, recognized her faith and said, "My daughter, your faith has made you well." And at that very moment the woman was cured from her illness.

Material Miracles

In these examples we see two different cases: in one Jesus touched someone and in the other someone touched Jesus. Touching a God-man can transform an imperfect man into a perfect man, can transform a sinner into a saint. We consider a miracle something that happens that we cannot explain. For instance seeing or hearing something very far away, reading others' minds, dissolving something or materializing something from nowhere are regarded as miracles. Or cases of doctors diagnosing people with incurable diseases who later healed. These are examples of "miracles" involving secular, material things.

Sri Ramakrishna used to criticize such 'miracles' as not connected to spirituality, saying that those seeking these kinds of "miracles" cannot really become spiritual, cannot love God. Besides the acquisition of such special powers may beget pride in a person and eventually cause his spiritual fall. Jesus always said that the miracles he performed came from God, and were not from Jesus' powers. Jesus invited all to have faith in God from whom these powers came, and be clean in body, mind and spirit. Sri Ramakrishna, who criticized 'miracles', did perform miracles on many occasions for many people. Is this a contradiction?

Samskaras

Swami Vivekananda said that there are different kinds of miracles, but the greatest is to change, to purify the mind of a person from anger, pride, greed and jealousy. In Indian philosophy there is the concept of samskara, or deep mental impression resulting from repeating again and again the same thoughts or actions throughout several lifetimes, including the present one. This is a unique feature of Indian philosophy which explains many of our behaviors in this life. By thinking again and again good thoughts a good

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samskara is generated and conversely bad thoughts or actions in previous lives as well as in this one beget a bad samskara. Changing one's samskara is extremely difficult.

Ordinary people are not able to understand this. Only a devotee who struggles in order to progress in spiritual life understands how difficult it is to change, to improve one's samskara. Swami Vivekananda said that if you inherited good samskaras this would prevent you from committing bad actions even if you actually mean to do so. And for one having inherited bad samskaras it is extremely difficult to do something good as so many mental resistances and temptations will prevent it. The greatest miracle then is to change by touch bad samskaras into good, spiritual samskaras. Sri Ramakrishna performed such miracles on many occasions, as to Sri Ramakrishna, the mind of a person was like a lump of clay, he would shape it as he wanted in the same way a potter shapes a pot.

The effects of material miracles, such as the healing of incurable diseases or satisfying desires, are temporary since a new disease may develop later and new desires will arise. But the effects of the highest type of miracles will change a person permanently making this person spiritual and giving him permanent peace, joy and divine wisdom. Here are some examples of types miracles performed by Sri Ramakrishna.

Kalipada Touched

One day a devotee brought one of his friends to Sri Ramakrishna. This friend was a very secular person addicted to drinking named Kalipada. He had a good income, but sometimes he did not support his family and, on the contrary, he lived in a hotel leading a very secular life. After the devotee introduced his friend, Sri Ramakrishna asked Kalipada, "What do you want?" Kalipada answered wickedly that he wanted some very good wine. Sri Ramakrishna did not mind this graceless answer since it was a frank expression. He then said to him, "Yes, I have a special wine, but can you bear it?" Kalipada became interested and asked about details of the liquor. Sri Ramakrishna explained that it was not a western kind of liquor; but it was a homemade drink and warned him that it had a very strong effect. Kalipada became even more interested and confirmed that he could handle a very strong drink and would enjoy becoming intoxicated and oblivious of the world. At this point Sri Ramakrishna touched him and immediately a great change happened in Kalipada who started weeping and would not stop.

This was no ordinary crying, it meant many things: Kalipada for the first time realized how low a level he had fallen and as he repented for the first time in his life the ideal of spiritual purity began appearing in his mind. As a matter of fact, we are all pure but our purity is covered by dirt. If we are fortunate enough to receive the divine touch of a Sri Ramakrishna, our purity and spirituality would immediately surface. Is this not the greatest miracle?

The Divine Effect

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Touch [from page 2]

Now let us try to understand this phenomenon of Sri Ramakrishna's divine touch. There are three elements: touch, transmission, transformation. The ordinary touches that occur every day among people are merely skin contacts: a body (a set of molecules) comes in contact with another and it does not generate much if any effect or change. However, on certain occasions some significant impact occurs. When a mother kisses her child, when a lover kisses the beloved, when a devotee kisses the hand of a Father (especially in the Christian tradition) or touches the feet of a Monk (like in the Indian tradition), definitely some impact is generated such as affection, love, purity. For instance, during one of my visits to the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines in Manila, a male devotee kissed my hand. I was not prepared for that, but I understand that such a gesture is part of the local tradition and surely some impact is expected, such as purity or grace.

What is at the root of this impact? It is in the mind, in the thoughts, and feelings of the persons concerned. So it is the thoughts and feelings of a mother kissing and hugging her child that have an impact on the child. How do the mind, thoughts and feelings of the mother impact the child? It is the vibration created by such thoughts and feelings that create an impact. However deep the impact generated by such thoughts and feelings is, the impact remains at the body and mind level and does not reach the level of the soul, the Atman. But the divine touch of a saint or of a God-man goes to deeper, different extents: it may have a purifying effect, or generate a transformation, or a vision of God or even union with God.

This effect cannot be generated by ordinary people with an ordinary body-mind complex; it takes the special body and mind of a saint or of a God-man to achieve such an impact. Similarly if you want to convey a high voltage current into an ordinary wire it will not work: the wire will be burnt: special wires are needed to convey high voltage electricity. In the language of Indian philosophy our body is made of three Gunas: Sattva, Rajas, Tamas. While Rajas is gross and Tamas is grosser, Sattva is subtle. The body of ordinary people is mostly made of Rajas and Tamas. Such a body can only recognize and transmit gross vibrations. By long and hard spiritual practice a body can become more and more Sattvic and therefore recognize and transmit subtler, spiritual vibrations.

This is how the transmission by touch works, but we should keep in mind that such transmissions not only depend upon the person who transmits by touch, but also on the person who receives such transmission. This explains why sometimes a devotee asks a holy person for grace but does not receive it. Although the holy person may transmit such grace, the recipient may not be ready to receive it. It is very difficult to judge from outwardly indications whether a person is ready or not to receive spiritual transmissions. But a saint or a God-man can see clearly into a person's deep thinking.

Just take the example of Kalipada. Outwardly he appeared like a very secular person, but Sri Ramakrishna could see

that inwardly he was very pure and therefore ready to receive his divine touch. In fact the occasional touch performed or received by a saint or God-man, such as the contact a barber might receive while trimming Sri Ramakrishna's hair for example, does not automatically generate spiritual impact. That only occurs when a saint or God-man deliberately intends such an impact by touching a person.

Vivekananda Touched

In the case of Swami Vivekananda there are at least four recorded cases where Sri Ramakrishna applied his divine touch to him. The first happened during the second visit of Narendranath Datta (later Swami Vivekananda) to Sri Ramakrishna. After being touched Naren saw the walls of that room and all other items there move and disappear into a void, including his own body. He became scared and he screamed to Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you doing to me, I have my father, my mother, I am going to die!"

So at the very beginning of their relationship Sri Ramakrishna wanted to give Swami Vivekananda the experience of nirvikalpa samahi, but the latter was not prepared, so he became terrified. Then Sri Ramakrishna touched Naren again to make him regain his normal condition.

On the second occasion Narendranath experienced Sri Ramakrishna's divine touch he had resolved to be very careful and not allow Sri Ramakrishna to affect him so much. But this did not work as Naren lost outer consciousness immediately after being touched and his mind focused deep on an inner-consciousness. In this state Sri Ramakrishna asked Swami Vivekananda who he was, what the purpose of his present incarnation was, and how long he would stay in this body. Swami Vivekananda answered all these questions.

On a third occasion Sri Ramakrishna was visiting a devotee's house in Calcutta where he meant to meet Narendranath and ask him to sing some songs. But on that day Naren had a very painful headache and would not come. So Sri Ramakrishna asked some devotees to go and help him come to the devotee's house. Narendranath, helped by the devotees and walking like a blind man, finally arrived and met Sri Ramakrishna. When Sri Ramakrishna touched Naren's head immediately his pain disappeared and he was able to sing for a long time.

The fourth incident of the 'touch' happened in Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna was explaining a point in scripture that as a result of following the path of Jnana Yoga, if one experienced nirvikalpa samahi, one would see everything as God. Not only that God resides in items, but that all things are made entirely of God. Hearing this, out on the veranda Naren and another person named Hazra, who was a sort of a Doubting Thomas, began laughing, 'How can this be? This jug is God, this pot is God? Nothing can be more preposterous.' Hearing the laughter Sri Ramakrishna inquired as to what they were talking about and upon being told the Master immediately touched young Naren. That touch revealed the everything was indeed God. A car wasn't

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Touch [from page 2]

a car; the road wasn't a road; all was God. Later upon arriving at home the food his mother served him wasn't food, the plate wasn't a plate, his mother wasn't his mother; all was Brahman. The effect of this touch lasted for days and Vivekananda could no longer deny the truth of the scriptures. This is another example of touching by Sri Ramakrishna.

[Part II of 'The Divine Touch of Sri Ramakrishna is continued in the October Issue of 'The Vedanta Kyokai']

Vedanta Society's Golden Jubilee Closing Ceremony **A Brief Welcome by Professor Sister Junko Shioya** Chairperson of the Board of Trustees Seisen University

I feel happy that the Vedanta Society of Japan is celebrating the Closing Ceremony at Seisen University after several events of their yearlong Golden Jubilee Celebration.

I do not have much knowledge about Hinduism, but I have been fond of India since I was a young girl. Before I was aware of it, through the guidance of God, I was endowed with the opportunity to travel to India with students of Seisen University. Since the students who travel from Japan to India are not very familiar with religion, they ask the people in India questions about religion. Then most of the locals respond that religion is a way of life and this deepens the students' interest.

Christianity in India is a very old tradition within Asia. In Kerala, South India, most Christians say, "We received this belief from

• Thought of the Month •
**Expectation is the greatest impediment to living.
In anticipation of tomorrow, it loses today.**

... Seneca

Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ."

Most Japanese, who feel that religion is not part of their life, will be able to broaden a new perspective on life through their encounter with the religions of India. I found the following words of Swami Vivekananda and empathized with them very much "As you get older, you realize that you search all the more for greatness within small things. Will religion achieve something? Yes. That is, it gives people eternal life. The ideal of all the religions is one, that is to gain freedom and eliminate unhappiness."

I pray that this Golden Jubilee Celebration will bring forth "Freedom" and "Happiness" to a world where unhappiness and sufferings still seem to prevail. ●



Island Hopping

21 Aug:	Visit to Tajimi
Discourse:	Hataraki to Shiawase (Work and Happiness)
Organizer:	Ms. Rie Ueno and her group
Attendees:	About 20
Time:	From 4 PM to 6:30 PM
22 Aug:	Visit to Nagoya
Discourse:	Doshite Watashi ga Ikite Imaska? (Why am I Living?)
Organizer:	Ms. Hanya Akemi and her group
Attendees:	About 35
Time:	From 1:30 PM to 4:30 PM
29 Aug:	Back to Tokyo
Discourse:	Right Desire; Wrong Desire
Organizer:	Ms. Yasuko Yamade & Ms. Kumiko Hirano of Padma Yoga
Attendees:	About 28
Time:	From 2:30 PM to 4:30 PM

● A Story to Remember ●

Atheism

To the disciples' delight the Master said he wanted a new shirt for his birthday. The finest cloth was bought. The village tailor came in to have the Master measured, and promised, by the will of God, to make the shirt within a week.

A week went by and a disciple was dispatched to the tailor while the Master excitedly waited for his shirt. Said the tailor, "There has been a slight delay. But, by the will of God, it will be ready by tomorrow".

Next day the tailor said, "I'm sorry it isn't done. Try again tomorrow and, if God so wills, it will certainly be ready".

The following day the Master said to the disciple, "Ask him how long it will take if he keeps God out of it".

Wisdom Stories by Anthony de Mello <soulwise.net>

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9/25 sat・26 sun
入場無料

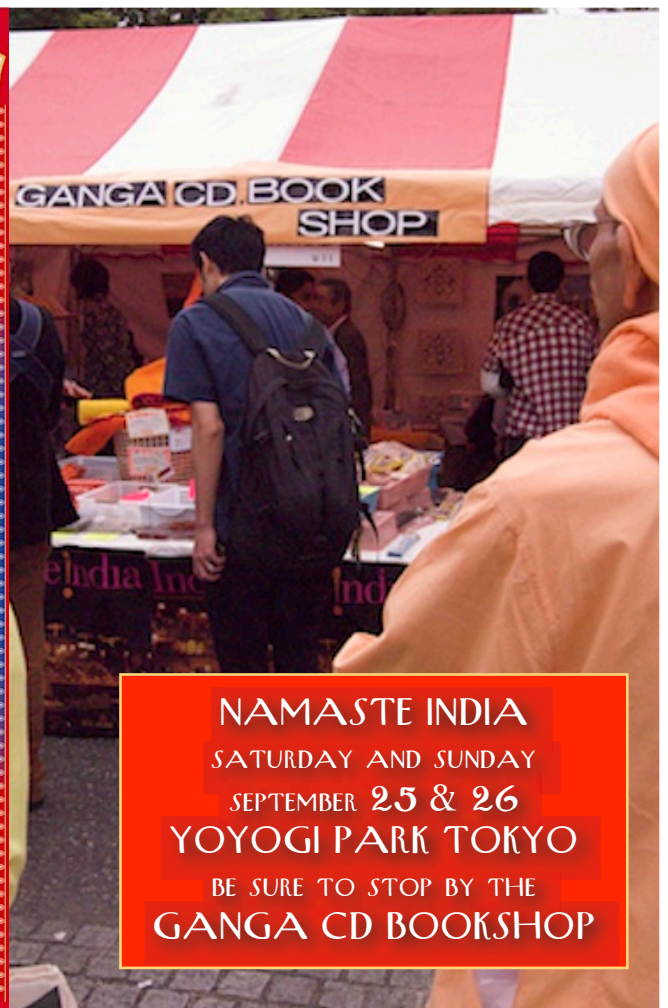
開場 10:00 AM ~ 8:00 PM
(9/26は ~ 7:30 PMまで)

メイン会場 東京都代々木公園イベント広場
Tokyo Yoyogi Park
JR山手線 有楽町線(徒歩3分)、有田急線・有田本線(徒歩5分)
メトロ丸根線・代々木公園駅(徒歩3分)又は有楽町線有楽町線(徒歩3分)

第二会場 たばこと塩の博物館 (入場料300円が必要です)
Tobacco & Salt Museum
東京都台東区神田1-16-8 JR浅草駅又はメトロ浅草駅(徒歩7分) | メイン会場へ徒歩5分

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A Summary of a Report on the 2010 Outdoor Summer Retreat
Mountain Reflections by Ms. Noriko Suzuki



For two nights and three days, the Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual Outdoor Summer Retreat (a spiritual retreat of meditation and study) again this year at the Nobori Inn lodgings near the Mitakesan Shinto Shrine in mountainous region of Ome in Tokyo Prefecture. Guests were not required to attend all three days and a total of about 35 people attended, with 23 attending the entire retreat schedule.

This year morning yoga lessons were offered by three yoga teachers from Tokyo Yoga Center including owner and master instructor Messrs. Hanari, Arai and Mamesawa. Also this year a priest from the One Dharma Society hermitage in Kamakura (not far from the Vedanta Society's Zushi Center), Master Mitiyoshi Yamashita, was guest lecturer.

Our daily schedule began at 5:20 AM with meditation

followed by chanting, bhajans, and Bible and Gita readings under Swami Medhasananda's guidance. Participation in hatha yoga exercises afterward was a choice left up to the individual. After breakfast the swami conducted a lecture series with a question and answer session. Silence was observed as much as practical to do so.

After a period of free time for study or exploring the mountains, foods offered at the shrine were then used to make lunch prasad. After lunch we had more free time and gathered again for discourse followed tea in the late afternoon. Afterward all would take a walk with the swami, returning for evening worship, reading and meditation. After dinner we would get together and each introduce ourselves to the group tell stories, sing and thus have fun.

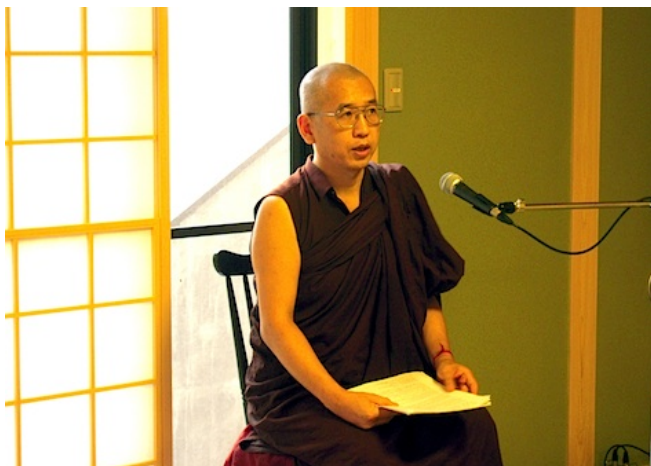
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Mountain [from page 6]

As I understand it, the purpose for holding these Retreats are motivational:

1. To move away from the secular to the spiritual
2. To be free from the distractions of routine home life
3. To be given the opportunity and guidance to reflect on the Self

The swami designs the schedule and offers guidance throughout to implement these goals. Continual practice of introspection and reflection are very important, and such retreats can play a large role in restoring those fading feelings of spirituality in our everyday lives.

The swami's retreat lecture was "The Best Way to Work". Some points made in the lecture series were that we waste a lot of energy with 'busy work' and the stress it creates. We need to analyze and make sense of the work we do, realizing that we are always at work as our bodies are working every moment of the day. The swami elaborated on the following techniques and said that by practicing, we can work confidently while we eliminate stress and anxiety:

1. To focus on the moment during work and even under undesirable conditions.



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2. To pull the mind back from its noise and confusion with thoughts of peaceful environs and God.

3. To control desires by placing limits on such basics as eating and drinking, balancing firmness and flexibility.

4. To realize that the major cause of our suffering is selfishness. See that the same God is in everyone and treat all accordingly and serve them as far as possible.

5. To control the mind through meditation. Reflect upon the meanings of passages in scripture and chant the name of God.

6. Get connected with God throughout the day. Perform your duties and offer all successes and failures to God.

Master Yamashita gave a talk on Zen meditation. He said that in Buddhism "I" is where all the trouble starts and is the source of all suffering. He described what he called the "thinking mind" and also discussed breathing and meditation techniques. All joined in a meditation at the close of his talk.

At the end of the retreat Swami Medhasananda asked us for our impressions about the retreat. Most thought that 3 days of introspective silence and group participation in the daily programs of meditation and reading and worship were very helpful to the spirit. Everyone also thought the Mitakesan environment was very positive and conducive. The swami suggested that it would be good to recall this retreat often as we settled back into our everyday lives. •

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