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The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



March Calendar



Birthdays

Gouranga Mahaprabhu
Thursday, 8 March

Swami Yogananda
Sunday, 11 March

Kyokai Events

• March Zushi Retreat •

**Sri Sri Ramakrishna 175th
Birth Anniversary Celebration
Concludes with Dedication
of New Annex Building**

Sunday, 18 March 10:30AM
Puja, Food Offering, Flower
Offering, (Pushpanjali) Homa
Fire

Prasad Lunch
Afternoon Session Speech
and Cultural Programme
All, are welcome to attend!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"The point is, to love God even as the mother loves her child, the chaste wife her husband, and the worldly man his wealth. Add together these three forces of love, these three powers of attraction, and give it all to God. Then you will certainly see Him."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"The mind is never satisfied even when it has an object of desire in its grasp, just as a pot that leaks is never filled with any quantity of water."

- Sri Chaitanya

Zushi Retreat January 2011

Swami Vivekananda

150th Birth Anniversary Celebration

The Vedanta Society of Japan celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda on Sunday, 18 January 2012. The day-long celebration began at 6AM with mangalarati, chanting, bhajans and meditation. Breakfast was served to morning attendees from 7:45. The majority of the congregation began arriving thereafter, helping with preparations.

From 10:45 the programme included meditation, puja, food offering, a flower offering (pushpanjali) and chanting participated by all. At 1PM a prasad lunch was served.

At 2:45PM the afternoon session began with selected readings from the works of Swami Vivekananda in both Japanese and English. Swami Medhasananda then offered some anecdotes on Swamiji, translated by Ms. Yoko Sasaki. This was followed by devotional songs and sitar performance by members of 'Darsanam' and a meditation, followed by tea. •

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Pictured here are Puja, bhajans and a guest performance for Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Celebration

Swami Medhasananda visits Philippine Center in January 2012

Reported by Enrico Colombo

Swami Medhasananda arrived at Manila airport on Wednesday, January 18, in the early afternoon and was received by some devotees who accompanied him to the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines Center.

After a small snack and a little rest he made himself available to meet those persons who had requested personal advice from him. At 7:00 PM Arati was celebrated in the shrine of the Center and it was followed by a reading of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna with comments by Swami.

Dinner was then served for some fifteen devotees and friends who had gathered at the Center for this first day of Swami's visit. This meal, like the ones served all the following days of his stay, was prepared by a few Indian lady devotees who took charge of providing delicious and healthy meals for Swami and the other devotees and friends. Swami Medhasananda finally retired in the quarters of the Manila Center reserved for the monks.

The following day, January 19, 2012, started with the morning session of chanting, reading of the Bhagavad-Gita with comments by Swami, meditation and breakfast. After a morning stroll in the vicinity of the Center, Swami had some discussions with devotees and made some preparations for the engagements waiting for him in the next days.

In the meantime some devotees went to the airport to receive two Japanese devotees arriving from Tokyo and accompanied them first to the residence of the Indian devotees hosting them, and then to the Center, where they happily saluted the swami.

Arati, with reading from the Gospel and comments, preceded dinner. The next day, after

morning chanting, reading with comments and meditation, all had a nice breakfast and then Swami, the two Japanese and two Italian devotees started for the airport where they boarded a budget flight to Cebu.

It was only a one hour trip and soon the flight landed at Cebu airport, where another Japanese devotee, as well as an Italian devotee, were waiting for Swami and his party. Lunch was taken at a local restaurant not far from the airport. Afterward a large car was put to use to ferry the visitors around on their short visit to Cebu.

Quite appropriately the visit started with a visit to the Magellan Cross and the Basilica of Santo Niño, a Catholic church, to which Cebuanos (inhabitants of Cebu) are very devoted. In fact, that it is probably worth sharing a few words about this famous church, which is revered symbol of Cebu.

When Magellan, a Portuguese admiral hired by the Spaniards, tried to conquer the Philippines for the Spanish King and the Catholic religion in 1521, he was finally defeated and killed by local tribe chieftain, Lapu-Lapu, in a battle which took place on the island of Mac-tan, very near Cebu.

Before this fatal battle Magellan had, however, erected a Christian Cross at the site of his first landing, which is present-day Cebu City. He had also donated a small wooden statue of Santo Niño (the Holy Child) to the wife of another tribal-chieftain, not hostile to him. After the defeat of Magellan, Spain sent four more fleets to try and conquer and Christianize the Philippines, but all were defeated by local tribes.

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The Beach at Cebu

Philippine Visit (from page 2)

Finally, after several years, a new Spanish fleet sailed from Mexico. Miguel Lopez de Legazpi was in charge of military operations and Friar Andres de Urdaneta, an Augustinian priest, was to supervise the Christianization of the population. This expedition reached Cebu in 1565 and managed to overcome the Filipino tribes when the Spaniards used fleet artillery to bombard and force the natives then dwelling in Cebu village to abandon the city and look for safety in the nearby mountains.

Spanish sailors then landed and ran a house-to-house search during which they found the statuette of Santo Niño left some thirty years earlier by Magellan, miraculously intact. Friar Urdaneta decided to erect a convent and a church, the dwelling place of the Santo Niño image, near the place where Magellan had originally landed and erected a Christian Cross.

A church was then built using available local materials, bamboo and lumber, but was later destroyed by a fire. A second similar church was built and also later burned down. A third church was then built in stone, but it collapsed after a few years. Finally, the present church was erected almost two centuries later, around 1740. During all these events the Santo Niño image remained undamaged. Cebuanos believe their Santo Niño has miraculous powers and are very devoted to it.

Swami Medhasananda arrived at the Basilica on the last day of Sinulog, the yearly nine-day celebration of Santo Niño that draws devotees by the tens of thousands. Accordingly, there was a huge crowd and it was impossible for the swami and his party to visit the chapel at the side of the main altar where the Santo Niño image is worshipped. However, he was



Swami Meets Village Children

able to see the image from a few meters away, in the main area of the church. He then commented that he had enjoyed the visit and the atmosphere surrounding Santo Niño.

From there the party moved to a site called Mountain View, high on the hills surrounding Cebu City. From there one can enjoy a panoramic view of the city and nearby Mactan Island and take a brief respite from the heat under the shade of dense vegetation and a cool mountain breeze.

Just before sunset Swami and party checked into their seaside hotel and then sat for chanting and meditation by the seashore, when darkness fell contributing to a peaceful atmosphere. Dinner was taken in a modest Filipino outdoor restaurant nearby, and soon after all had to hurry back to the hotel because of a brief, but strong, rain shower. The following morning Swami Medhasananda and two Japanese lady devotees paid short visits to the homes and families of the Italian devotees living nearby.

Afterward he and the entire party left on a nice boat trip to a small island. After arriving Swami declined an invitation to visit a local sea-side resort and instead walked to a small fishing village. There he was received in a friendly way by the local dwellers and soon a small procession of children and some local folks headed for the elementary school (Swami had wanted to visit a local church or chapel, but was told that none existed there, as the villagers were too poor to support one). At the school he had the children line up in front of him and distributed candies, teaching the children that they should not throw the paper wrappers on the ground. A donation for the school was made and the party walked back to the waiting boat.

(con't page 4)



Discourse at Manila Center



The Young Boys and Girls of the Choir

Philippine Visit (from page 3)

It took about thirty minutes for the boat to return to the starting point of the trip under bright sunshine. From there Swami and his party left for a quick lunch at a modest Chinese restaurant and then to the airport for the return flight to Manila.

All were back at the Manila Center on time for Arati, reading and meditation. Dinner brought their very busy day to a close, with another busy day ahead on Sunday, January 22.

After the morning functions Swami left for a devotee's house where he and several other devotees were invited for a lovely breakfast. At ten o'clock in the morning an informal meeting took place at the Center with the swami and about a dozen devotees to discuss the Filipino Center's activities and programs.

Swami took lunch at the Center with several devotees and had some rest before delivering a public talk in the afternoon. The talk on "Positive Living" started at 5:00 PM and was

attended by some thirty-five participants of quite a variety of nationalities including several Filipinos, Indians, two Japanese devotees, three Singaporean nationals, a Lebanese living in the Philippines and three Italian devotees. The discourse touched several practical aspects of life and was followed by the participants with great interest.

After a brief break for tea, coffee and refreshments, a choir of young boys and girls performed a few religious songs in Tagalog and English. Each member of the choir later received a booklet of Swami Vivekananda's famous sayings from the swami. A very lively question and answer session brought the public program to a close. Dinner was then served at the Center for the swami and some twenty devotees.

The following day, Monday, January 23, Swami Medhasananda and two Japanese lady-devotees left Manila for their return to Japan. •

[For more information on the Philippine Center visit www.vedanta-philippines.org].

Mitakesan Outdoor Summer Retreat

Ms. Miwako Tanabe contributes her notes on

"Positive Way of Living"

Part II of a III Part Discourse by Swami Medhasananda

Negative Thoughts

Our thoughts affect our life. If we think positively we will live a positive life. If we think negatively, we will live a negative life.

We will now compare positive and negative thoughts first listing some of the characteris-

tics of negative thoughts.

- Have a lot of fear, stress, suffering and worry.
- Get tense and nervous, and want to run away as soon as a problem arises.
- Do not learn from own problems or mistakes in the past but repeat them.

(con't page 5)

• Thought of the Month •

"We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness."

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Positive Living (from page 4)

- Have too emotional and impulsive a heart.
- Speak and work without thinking about anything.
- Brood over a problem once it arises.
- Narrow-minded and selfish. Sometimes do something for others, but only with the thought of receiving something in return.
- Always finding fault with others.
- Just think about the past and future all the time, not putting much importance on the present or 'the moment', the only thing we can control.
- Seeking pleasure from sensations, such as taste, sound and sight. Want sensory freedom.
- Without thinking how one should use computers, the Internet and mobile phones, and to what degrees and for what purposes, one is actually being controlled by these "convenient" devices. We just use them as we want and are not aware of social codes or our own health being damaged by such indiscriminate use of gadgets.

Positive Thoughts

- Have peace in mind without fear or stress.
- Face problems and do not run away when they arise.
- Learn from problems and do not repeat the same mistakes.
- Have emotions, but can control them.
- Generous and unselfish.
- See the good characteristics of others instead of their drawbacks. Aware of our own faults.
- Focus on the present or 'live in the moment'.
- Free from seeking sensations. Can discriminate and control urges.
- Examine and use modern devices judiciously.

As we can see, negative thoughts lead to a negative life of bondage, disharmony, weakness, fear, suffering, sorrow. As a result, we exist in a dark and dull state, a state close to an animal's life. We waste our human birth. While positive thoughts, on the other hand, bring about a positive life of freedom, knowledge, fearlessness, harmony, happiness and bliss, resulting in a life of fulfilment.

Bhagavad Gita and the Trigunas

The Bhagavad Gita specifically discusses the Trigunas of Sattva (pure), Rajas (impulsive) and Tamas (dull) qualities we are all subject too. The Sattvic quality corresponds to a positive life, while rajasic and tamasic qualities result in a negative life.

By reading the Gita and understanding the differences between these three qualities, we will have a clearer picture of a positive life. Such study is like finding a guidance manual to living a positive life.

The following are the specific chapters and sections noting the Trigunas: Chapter 18 Section 20-22 (on Jnana or knowledge), Section 23-25 (on Karma or work), Section 26-28 (on doers), Section 30-32 (on intellect), Section 33-35 (on determination) and 36-39 (happiness and joy).

Among these, important is the advice on Sattvic happiness and joy. It says that they are like poison at first, but will eventually turn into nectar (Section 37) that can only be acquired through long periods of discipline (Section 36).

Real happiness cannot be obtained naturally or by meditating for a day. It requires daily spiritual practice, which may not be fun but tough, seeming like "poison". But keep at it, and it will turn into nectar. The swami said, "We can remember and chant these sections when we are in want of motivation to meditate or are feeling subject to a desire."

On the other hand, Rajasic happiness and joy are quite the contrary; being sweet at first but finally turning to poison (Section 38). If we only seek temporary results, it will take us a longer time to reach the final goal. In some cases we cannot get the desired results, which disappoints us. On the contrary, if we live a positive life, we will not be deluded with the goodness or pleasure of temporary results. We are aimed at our final goal and working hard to reach it.

It is natural to wonder why we automatically think in a negative way when we have a problem. The swami explained that what causes us to have negative thoughts is the Tamasic quality we have inside. We are affected by that quality. Humans and all the other beings have Trigunas each in different balances, and most people are more inclined to be Tamasic. So it is important to start changing the cause by reducing Tamasic tendencies and nurturing Sattvic qualities in our heart.

(con't page 6)



Learning for Positive Life (from page 5)

For a positive life, it is of import to learn from books and texts that show practical examples of such lives. We can call them “chicken soup for the soul”. We can read and learn from them, in the backdrop of our lives.

Swami recommended the following three books, pointing out that the key is what we cultivate from such books:

- *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* by Dale Carnegie
- *You Can If You Think You Can* by Norman Vincent Peale
- The Message of Swami Vivekananda

Also, it is good and practical to choose, write, see, remember and repeat, like mantras, those inspiring words that motivate us. Words have strength. Good words have good strength. Even having a phrase of good words in our heart makes a difference.

The following are more books with messages Swami recommended:

- Ningendamonon by Mitsuo Aida
- Books by Tempu Nakamura
- Books by Konosuke Matsushita and his message: if you want to succeed, you have to continue until you do succeed.
- Chapter 6 Section 5-6 of Bhagavad Gita: we will be our own best friend if we can control our mind and feelings, and our own worst enemy if we cannot.
- Chapter 18 Section 37-38 of Bhagavad Gita, which is useful when we are yielding ourselves to desires.

The swami then quoted the following inspiring

messages:

- “You can if you think you can.”
- “Live in the present moment.”
- “Hope is life, despair is death.”

Later he emphasised Swami Vivekananda’s words:

1. “Strength is life, weakness is death.”
2. “All power is in you, manifest it.”
3. “Faith in yourself and faith in God, this is the secret of success.”
4. “Do not run away but face it!”

Swami said that people can be categorised into the following four types:

1. One type of person just lives flowing along the current of the river of life, without thinking about self-development. Most people are of this type.
2. Another type reads and learn from books, but do not practise what they have learnt.
3. Yet another type meditates and engages in spiritual practice, but cannot continue to do so for a long period of time, gradually losing motivation.
4. Finally there are those that live an ideal life for householders. They have a positive life seeking both secular and spiritual development. They hope for a better present life, while seeking to realise God at the same time.

He asked which type we think we belong to? “Do you not belong to the 3rd type who needs continuous motivation?” he said. “In such cases the books and messages just mentioned earlier will be very helpful.”

This is the end of Part II. Part III will be presented in a later edition of The Vedanta Kyokai. - editor



Ramakrishna Temple • Belur Math



Guest House • Belur

Pilgrimage to India

reported by Miwako Tanabe

On 28 September 2011, eight devotees went on a pilgrimage to India along with Swami Medhasananda, flying Air India and leaving Narita Airport at noon for New Delhi. Out of the party made up of one gentleman and seven ladies, one was going abroad for the first time and were traveling to the country for the first time.

At 5 pm on the same day, we arrived at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi, then went on to the local Ramakrishna Mission. It was located near the station called Ramakrishna Ashram Marg. On the walls inside the station were murals of Sri Ramakrishna! Also in the square outside was a statue of Swami Vivekananda! We were very glad to see these and, at the same time, surprised to know how close spiritual masters were to Indians in day-to-day life. Swami Medhasananda stayed at the Ashram while we lodged at a nearby hotel.

The next day, we flew to Varanasi (Banaras), a holy place, where we took a boat on the Ganges visiting temples here and there. After going to a Vishnu Temple, we paid a visit to the Kedar-nath Temple. According to Holy Mother, visiting there begets the same merit as going to the Kedar Nath Temple in the Himalayas. Early the next morning, we visited the Vishwanath (Lord of the Universe) Temple and Annapurna (Consort of Shiva and Goddess of food) Temple, amid the excitement and enthusiasm of devotees. Thanks to Maharaj and the guide, temple security let us in to the areas only open to Hindus. When I bowed to the Goddess Annapurna, I was overwhelmed with Her sweet energy. In the afternoon, we went to the Durga Mandir, the famous temple regarding the story about Swami Vivekananda and monkeys there; the Hanuman Temple (the great devotee of

Rama), where Tulsidas, the great Medieval poet-saint exercised spiritual practice; and Banaras Hindu University with a wide range of studies at the vast campus and the huge Shiva Temple (Birla Mandir).

On the following day, we took a small bus from Banaras, running along the motorway for six hours to Bodh Gaya, where Buddha attained enlightenment. It is the most important holy site for Buddhists and it was Swami's first visit there. We went to the Sujata Temple, where Buddha, when weakened, was fed with a bowl of milk porridge, and then to the Mahabohdi Temple, where there still remains a bodhi tree, although not the original one under which Buddha attained enlightenment. In the 52 meter tall tower of the temple, a golden statue of a sitting Buddha is enshrined. We paid homage along with many Westerners and religious visitors from different countries. I felt enormous energy from people from different cultures respecting Buddha as a spiritual mentor. Maharaj said that Buddha, one of the ten incarnation of God, was worshipped by Hindus too. There the Hindu and Buddhists perform rites in their own traditional ways every day.

The next day, we visited the Vishnu Temple in Gaya, where in his dream Khudiram, the father of Sri Ramakrishna, worshiped the God who appeared in his dream and told him that He would be born as his son.

On 3 October, we went back to the ashram in Banaras to finally fly to Kolkata. We would be able to experience what we read in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and other books. I felt that I had finally come so far.

(con't page 8)



Ganges River • Varanasi

Pilgrimage (from page 7)

When Swami took us into Belur Math, I felt a gigantic gravity there, a great power we can never understand with our limited knowledge of reality. How could a merely one hundred year old ashram be that powerful? I was assured that it was a manifestation of Thakur himself. Later we were shown the room where Swami Vivekananda lived. Fortunately, we had the chance to meet President Maharaj and pay our respects to him.

On the second day, we visited places associated with Thakur, such as Dakshineswar, the Cossipore Garden House, Mother's House at Udbodhan, the house where Vivekananda was born, Balaram Bose's house, M's (Mahendranath Gupta, the recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) house and Girish Ghosh's house. The Cossipore Garden House, where Thakur passed away, did not make me sad but was so enchanting I wanted to stay there longer. At M's house his grandson came and looked glad to see Maharaj again after a long absence. The chapel in this house was filled with so much love for Thakur I shed tears. I saw a photograph of Totapuri, who initiated the Master into the practice of Vedanta. I had valuable experiences like fine gems everywhere I went.

We also travelled to Jayrambati, Mother's birthplace, and Kamarpukur, Thakur's birthplace, about a three hour journey from Belur Math. There the ambience was different from that of Belur Math. Jayrambati was full of Mother's compassion, where her presence was vibrant and, at the same time, I felt Thakur was present through Mother. It seemed that Mother and Thakur were one. In Kamarpukur I was delighted to watch them worship Raghuvir and Sitara with my own eyes.

We also visited the house where Swami Medhasananda was born and were welcomed

there.

During this pilgrimage, we could experience the biggest festival in Bengal, the four day long Durga Puja. The clay temple of Goddess Durga, lovingly crafted anew each year, was bigger than I had expected, and looked every bit an embodiment of beauty and strength. The Puja was observed solemnly and spectacularly. On the last day the festival culminated with the immersion of the image of the Goddess in the Ganges. There were long queues for the river boats and Belur Math was crowded with so many people. Thanks to Maharaj, we could have seats right next to swamis to watch the best part of the immersion ceremony. With breathless anticipation, the crowd awaited Mother Durga being carried to the bank against fireworks in the sky. Brahmacharis and swamis looked so happy, singing, dancing, jumping and playing drums. I was impressed how enthusiastic they were about the Mother Goddess.

During the twelve day pilgrimage, I had more experiences and met more people than I could write here. Some of us got sick, which gave us the opportunities to take care of each other. When we heard one of us who had been feeling poorly say, "I am glad to feel like I have new family members" when she recovered, we were all filled with joy.

Maharaj made all the plans and arrangements so that we could have as many experiences as possible. He looked after those who got ill and cared about those who went on a next journey. I felt his concern and affection was as strong as a family member. I appreciate it from the bottom of my heart.

I had the chance to watch different ways of worship at different temples in this country. On the wall in New Delhi we saw the mural

(con't page 9)



Phalgu River • Gaya

Pilgrimage (from page 8)

where Ramakrishna was standing with temples of different religions behind, together with the founders of those religions. "As many faiths, so

many paths..." I learnt from the journey that various experiences would lead us to God and Truth following each one's way of realisation. •

Ma Durga Immersion Ceremony



• Story to Remember •

The Jewel

Once upon a time there dwelt an old King in a palace. In the center of a golden table in the main hall, there shone a large and magnificent jewel. Each day of the King's life, the stone sparkled more resplendently.

One day a thief stole the jewel and ran from the palace, hiding in a forest. As he stared with deep joy at the stone, to his amazement the image of the King appeared in it.

"I have come to thank you," said the King. "You have released me from my attachment to Earth. I thought I was freed when I acquired the jewel, but then I learned that I would be released only when I passed it on, with a pure heart, to another.

"Each day of my life I polished that stone, until finally this day arrived, when the jewel became so beautiful that you stole it, and I have passed it on, and am released.

"The jewel you hold is Understanding. You cannot add to its beauty by hiding it and hinting that you have it, nor yet by wearing it with vanity. Its beauty comes of the consciousness that others have of it. Honor that which gives it beauty."

- Thaddeus Golas

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