



August 2012 - Volume 10 Number 08

日本ヴェダンタ協会ニュースレター

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

September Calendar

Birthday

There are no Birthdays in September this year according to the Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac.

Kyokai Events

• September Zushi Retreat •

* SCHEDULE CHANGE *

Sunday 30 September

10:30 ~ 16:30

Speaker

Swami Medhasananda

"Attachment & Non-Attachment"

• Yamagata Satsanga •

Sunday 02 September

Place: Yamadera, Basho

Memorial Training Room

Call Mr. Takahashi

023-645-3282

• Nagoya Satsanga •

Saturday 08 September

Ms. Hanya 090-7301-6929

• Tajimi Satsanga •

Sunday 09 September

* Location to be Determined

Call Compass Corporation

0120-35-8558 or 0572-29-1554

Visits to India and Singapore
Swami Medhasananda will
be away 10~19 September

• Kansai Area Satsanga •

"Gita and Upanishads"

Saturday 22 September

Osaka Training Center

• Nara Narayana •

(Service to the Homeless)

Friday 28 September

Food Distribution

Call Ms. Sato 090-6544-9304



✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think.
Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far."*

... Swami Vivekananda

"Man is made by his beliefs. As he believes, so he is."

... Sri Krishna (Bhagavad Gita)

A Brief Report on the Formation of the Vedanta Society of Korea

On August 5, 2012 a meeting was convened by Mr. Digvijay Nath, an officer of the Indian Embassy Seoul, in a personal capacity, and attended by some members of the Indian community and Swami Medhasananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order and president of the Vedanta Society of Japan. Here they discussed formation of the Vedanta Society of Korea and the Celebration of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda in 2013.

After a brief introduction by Dr. Abhijit Ghosh, professor at a local university who had organised Vedanta lectures in Seoul in previous years, Swami Medhasananda informed the attendees that he had visited Korea several times before and gave talks in Ulsan, Busan, Seoul, and other places, but that so far no Society could be formed to study and practice the teachings of Vedanta as exemplified in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda on a regular basis.

He said that now is the right time to form such a Society, which would be highly beneficial for both Koreans and the members of the Indian community. He elucidated the special characteristics of Vedanta and the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He then explained why and how their teachings, which are universal, harmonious, rational, ancient, and yet, modern and deeply spiritual, will help sustain modern men in their stressful and peace-less lives. He further noted how Vedanta

(con't page 2)

In this Issue:

• Thus Spake	... page 1	May Zushi Retreat - Service to the Homeless - A Talk by Guest Speaker	Mr. Noboru Kondo	... page 3
• Monthly Calendar	... page 1	• August News Briefs 2012	... page 6	
• Vedanta Society of Korea Formed	... page 1	• Photos from Kumamoto	... page 8	
• Thought of the Month	... page 2	• Namaste India 2012	... page 9	
		• Story to Remember	... page 8	

Korea (from page 1)

Societies around the world have been of great moral and spiritual support to many people of various countries. He then offered various suggestions with regard to the formation of a Society, its management and programmes. All the attendees highly welcomed the formation of a Vedanta Society of Korea as suggested by Swami Medhasananda.

After discussions the following were unanimously resolved:

1. A Society to be formed and named "Vedanta Society of Korea" effective 5 August 2012.

2. Its objectives will be to study, practice, and spread the teachings of Vedanta, Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda.

3. Beneficiaries of the Society will be local Koreans and Indians, irrespective of caste or creed, and special attempts will be made to involve Korean nationals in this Society.

4. Presently the Society will undertake some modest programmes in view of its present limited resources and continue in this way until resources begin to grow and the Society officially becomes affiliated to the Ramakrishna Order.

5. The Programmes will include:

a) Regular monthly gatherings with the following format: readings from books on Indian philosophy, followed by discussions, short guided meditations or relaxation techniques.

b) Such gatherings are to be of a two-hour duration.

c) A book of proceedings will be maintained to record each gathering.

d) These gatherings will be held on the second Saturday of each calendar month from 3pm to 5pm.

e) Venue: Indian Cultural Centre of the Indian Embassy (awaiting permission)

f) Publication of books into the Korean language.

g) Creating a webpage.

6. Original Committee Members:

- Dr. Abhijit Ghosh (Asst Professor Dong Seoul University) - Chief Coordinator
- Mrs. Kasturi Dey (IT Consultant) - Coordinator (Indian)
- Miss Horimy - Coordinator (Korean)
- Mr. Sumit Arora & Mr. Shakti Rana (Officer Indian Embassy)



• Mr. Partha De - Webpage

7. Swami Medhasananda will be spiritual advisor of the Society.

8. A bank account will be opened and donations are to be deposited in this account for any activity that needs funding and a proper accounting of these monies shall be maintained by Ms. Kasturi Dey.

9. Swami Medhasananda and Prof. Abhijit Ghosh shall meet the Ambassador of India to explore the availability of the Cultural Centre for the proposed monthly meeting of the Society.

10. Celebration of Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary to be held with a suitable programme during 2013 & 2014. Those scholars who are familiar with Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda should be involved as translators of their books into Korean. Plans need to be made for a mass awareness, especially among the youth, of Swamiji's messages of global peace and harmony by organising many events throughout Korea and, finally, a closing celebration in Seoul to strengthen Indo-Korean relationships in collaboration with the Indian Embassy, Seoul. The proposed date of the launch of birth anniversary events is June 8, 2013.

At the end of the meeting, Swami Medhasananda informed the members that he may visit Seoul twice a year for promoting the activities of the Society. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to Mr. Digvijay Nath Kakkar and his wife, Mrs. Urmila Nath, for organising this important meeting. •

• Thought of the Month •

"The value of an idea lies in the using of it."

... Ralph Waldo Emerson

May Zushi Retreat
Service to the Homeless
Guest talk by Mr. Kondo, Chief Organiser, Kotobukicho Park

On May 20, Swami Medhasananda introduced the Monthly Retreat's guest speaker saying, "Hello, everyone. We are going to hear from Mr. Noboru Kondo who about his services to the homeless. who has been doing this job with love and total dedication for about 20 years. Let me explain why we chose this subject first. The Vedanta Society of Japan is a branch of Ramakrishna Mission. The Ramakrishna Order has two purposes, which Swami Vivekananda, one of Sri Ramakrishna's first disciples and founder of the Order, decided upon. The first purpose is to understand or realise one's real nature and the other is to serve others selflessly. The Order provides spiritual services rather than social ones, where we serve the poor and the needy seeing God in them. There are two sorts of worship too. Firstly, creating an altar in a temple for worshipping God. Secondly, worshipping a living God by seeing Him in the poor, sick and needy, and providing food if He is hungry, clothes if He does not have them, and medical treatment if He is sick. People are basically selfish, yet when we serve others we have our hearts purified and become selfless. Swami Vivekananda said selflessness is God. In the Ramakrishna Order, we watch over the sick in our hospitals each day with the idea of worshipping God in them. Kondo-san has the same idea of service when he serves the homeless. I hope we are inspired upon hearing his talk."

Mr. Kondo's Talk

My name is Noboru Kondo. I am 63 years old and from Kyushu. My father already passed away and my mother and brothers are in my hometown. I work for the day labourer union of Kotobukicho, aka the town of day labourers. There are many such places across the country, four of which are very large. The largest is Airin, or what they used to call Kamagasaki, near Shin-Imamiya Station in Osaka, with population of, probably, more than 20,000. The second largest is San'ya in Tokyo, and the third is Kotobukicho. Kamagasaki and San'ya have long been around as such, San'ya, in particular, is known historically as a 'ninsoku-yoseba,' or a prison for petty offenders to do manual labour, while Kotobukicho is rather new. The government call these three 'sandai yoseba,' or the three major day-labourer towns. The fourth largest is Sasajima area in Nagoya. Yoseba means a 'place people gather' and they are called such since day labourers, mainly in the construction sector, go there for work and recruiters go there too to hire them. There are some yoseba, in particular, in and west of the Kanto area, including Shuri, Okinawa, far to the southwest.

As you know, day labourers are basically hired and laid off each day, or only hired for a short term projects, such as a week or ten days. When the employment term expires, the contract is over with no severance allowance. No bonus and no pay raise. They are only used for the convenience of employers. And why does this occur in the construction sector? This sector has a massive hierarchical structure with general contractors at the top and many layers of companies all the way down to the bottom,

where very small construction companies employ day labourers for the following reasons. When building something with concrete, the foundation piles are first set in the ground then a concrete 'box' is formed upon them, which requires the most people. After the forms are assembled, concrete is poured into them, which also needs a large number of labourers so that it is completed before the concrete sets. Once the structure is built, however, only workers with special skills for interior and exterior are required and there is no more need for many labourers. If construction companies were to hold as permanent employees those who are only necessary for early stages of construction, they would have to pay regular wages and lose profits. So, they need a pool of workers for the initial work only. They recruit them, have them work for a week or ten days on a contract basis, and pay them. That is it.

In this short-term employment, there used to be only one day or so between hirings before the bubble economy collapsed, while the periods between jobs is now very long. Some day-labourers only work a few days a year, or do not even work a day for three months. It is not that they are being lazy, but that there is no work. There are both a public job centre and a private job agency in Kotobukicho, both of which do not really function as such, since with no vacancies, no jobs at all are posted there on so many days.

They cannot live on daily wages anymore. When the economy was buoyant before the burst of the bubble economy, in particular in the eighties, the town centre was so busy, crowded with workers early in the morning.

(con't page 4)

Kondo (from page 3)

Recruiters even spoke to me about needing workers. No one worried about how to make money to live. Now there is no work at all. In the nineties, the bubble economy collapsed and jobs dramatically decreased in number.

The construction sector used to have the largest workforce in Japan, approximately seven million. It has remarkably declined with about 550,000 construction companies decreasing to 100,000. Most are very small to mid-sized ones and not economically strong, so go bankrupt easily if they are short of funds. Then day labourers have difficulty being paid. As a union, we provide labour consultation service. Before the collapse of the bubble economy, we handled about 100 consultation cases per year, among which non-payment of wages was the highest in number. Next was industrial accidents. Construction accidents cause about 40% of the fatalities nationwide, many of which are falling accidents. Although industrial accidents are legally compensated for, subcontracting companies do not report to authorities in many cases, fearing they would have a bad reputation among original contractors. Instead, they let the injured stay at their dormitory saying they will pay them even if they cannot come to work. Next was assault, such as being punched at accommodation or a construction site. We have not had many consultations since the bubble economy burst, though. We now have only a few cases a year, which means day labourers do not come to us for advice on work-related issues, worrying that they may lose the job or have their wages reduced by taking action. Due to a smaller number of jobs, they just have to put up with such hardships and feelings of frustration.

There are 122 cheap rooming houses, or *doya* (reversed spells 'yado' meaning accommodation) in Kotobukicho, some of these are eight- or nine-storied. Yet, it is a town of 6,500 people that only takes about 15 minutes to walk around. With money in hand, anyone can stay at one of these houses, as they do not require a deposit or guarantor. If one has run out of money, however, one has to leave. Hence, with no work and no money at hand, they have to go to the streets to sleep. There was a sharp increase in the number of such people across the country after the collapse of the bubble economy.

We have been doing these activities since then. Why do we as a labour union run a soup kitchen? Day labourers are actually our col-

leagues, senior and junior fellows. In the morning they have breakfast and leave their accommodations to look for a job. In the afternoon, they are in the streets if they were unable to find any work. So we go on night patrol visiting those in the streets across Kanagawa prefecture, which is as important as providing a soup kitchen. In the first place, it is very strange that anyone need sleep in the streets.

With tens of thousands of people sleeping in the streets with no money in hand since the burst of the bubble economy, we were often told that supporting them is wrong, since they are just lazy. I do not think this is right. If they are really simply lazy, that would mean there has been a sudden increase in the number of lazy people across Japan since the collapse of the bubble economy. This is absolute nonsense.

There were only a very few people, if any, in the streets before. In the nineties, we suddenly started to see more people in the streets for economic or unemployment reasons. We held the first soup kitchen on December 1, 1993, around which time we saw people sleeping anywhere, in parks, on river banks, and in subways. Nowadays, ours is an ageing town, where more than half of the homeless are over 60 years old. Going back to the first soup kitchen, then chairman of the social club for the elderly called Kunugi-kai, called for co-operation to help the homeless, saying he could not overlook the situation any longer. Various groups of the local community came and worked together to hold the first soup kitchen. At that time we just put big bowls on the ground to prepare food, compared to a variety of equipment we use now. We provided 250 portions then.

We neither mean to continue the soup kitchen for good, nor think we have to. In fact, we believe that we must create a society, as soon as possible, where no one needs a soup kitchen. If there are many jobs posted in Kotobukicho, then they would be able to work and obtain accommodation and food for themselves. Moreover, we would meet fewer people on night patrol. Fewer people would need free coupons called *pan-ken* (bread coupons) worth 680 yen plus sales tax, issued by Yokohama City daily, which can be redeemed for things other than liquor and cigarettes in town. These free coupons come with an accommodation coupon, which can be redeemed for rooms costing 1,300 yen or less per night at establishments the city has made agreements.

(con't page 5)

Kondo (from page 4)

A maximum of more than one thousand people receive such coupons. If fewer people needed such coupons, we would be happy to stop holding the soup kitchen. It is wrong that anyone continues to need a soup kitchen these days.

For the past 19 years, each and every year we discuss whether or not we should hold a soup kitchen again the following year. The number of the portions we provide increased remarkably from 250 at the beginning to 650 last Friday. This coming Friday it is probably over 700. That does not mean 700 people will come. At the soup kitchen of Kotobukicho, they can eat as much as they want until the food is finished. We make porridge on site, but the record is 8 bowls eaten by one fellow at a single sitting.

At first, we held the soup kitchen in winter. We wanted them to have a warm, filling meal at least once a week, as it is especially hard and discouraging to be hungry in the coldest season. We are asked why once a week and the answer is, if we do so too often, they may be less independent and motivated, and would not look very hard for work and a place to sleep.

We provide food at 1 p.m. on Fridays. While queuing and waiting, they exchange information with each other. Most of those in the streets in Yokohama change places from day to night. Spending time by themselves, they cannot obtain information. So they exchange information about jobs, government measures, and attack incidents, such as jobs to remove debris in the nuclear power plants and having stones thrown at when sleeping in a park. As they live separately, they encourage each other by saying they get full for the day and will see them again the next week.

In history, Kotobukicho became *yoseba* as there were no plants and factories to work for throughout the country after World War II, as they were destroyed in bombings, while Yokohama was in large part under military administration after 1958. Therefore, workers came there from across the country hearing that there were unloading jobs. In those days *yoseba* was at Noge in front of Sakuragicho Station on the old JNR line, where day labourers from across the country were picked up in cars and taken to work sites. As the job centre and agency moved from Noge to Kotobukicho, the recruiting point gradually moved there in time. That is how Kotobukicho became the town of

day labourers.

Unfortunately, jobs have never increased in number since the nineties. Workers are introduced to jobs by *yakuza* (gangster) recruiters, as well as via job centres and agencies, but even such recruiters are now gone. On the other hand, since the March 11, earthquake last year there has been an increase in jobs in the nuclear power plant, which are very dangerous though. It is said that if one is exposed to 7 Sv or more of radiation, chances of death are nearly 100%. They hear that in that plant, at 10 Sv, they will definitely die, but still they go there, as there are no other jobs. Those without close connections to family mainly take such jobs. Such recruiters now go to Kotobukicho, where there are many unmarried men. Workers are usually paid about 10,000 yen daily for construction work, but 12,000 to 13,000, even up to 70,000 yen for the power plant jobs. They need to secure approx. 3,000 workers at all times as they have to rotate them after a certain point of time considering annual radiation exposure limits.

Those living in the streets are not entitled to welfare benefits, as they do not have an address. If one does not have an address, one cannot renew one's driving licence or even receive their social security. So, Naka-ku (Naka Ward), Yokohama, allowed such people to register the Kotobuki Seikatsukan (community centre) as their address. In Osaka, however, there was a similar place with 3,000 people registered. It became an issue, and as a result, authorities deleted the registration of about 200 people at their discretion. Then the personnel from Naka-ku came to Kotobukicho to investigate how as many as 100 people had registered their addresses as Seikatsukan, and deleted 53 registrations, even though it was Naka-ku who had first encouraged them to do so.

According to Basic Resident Registry guidelines, an address shall meet one of two requirements: the resident in fact resides at the stated location or that they intend to live there. For instance, the address of an unmarried person on board a ship overseas will be the home port where the ship is moored, as the ship is moving. People forced to live in the streets, which should be regarded as a special case too. It is now realised that due to severe unemployment, they have difficulty meeting either requirement without a job. When we hold our soup kitchen, we put a desk in the corner to provide consultation services about life, law,

(con't page 6)

Kondo (from page 5)

and health issues.

When such visitors go to the city council, we accompany them to file applications properly. In Japan being in the streets makes it difficult to return to society. They have no chance to be given a permanent job, and hence can only do part-time work to save money. Without a guarantor, they cannot rent a flat, and in turn cannot get a proper job.

Each year all the cities, towns, and villages nationwide conduct a survey on homelessness in January and announce the results in April. The recent survey showed a reduction of 9,700 of such people. The survey is conducted during business hours, however, and may not include those sleeping on cardboard outside at night. I suspect the actual number is one and a half times or double the published figures. Yokohama City announced 600. The biggest support centre is there in Kotobukicho, which accommodates 250, including space for 20 women and children. Although this facility is not large enough, the city has no plans to build more.

A society that forces its people into the streets is wrong. Everyone has a fundamental right to work, live, and eat so they may complete their lives. Here in Japan, however, tens of thousands cannot stand by themselves. We can only do a bit to help, but would like to let you know what is happening to them and how they live. Forty-five 8th grade students from a Christian junior high school are coming to the soup kitchen each week for the next four weeks, totaling 180 students. I would like to let more people know how they may come to serve the soup kitchen in Kotobukicho.

Children throw stones at those in the streets who have nowhere else to go, saying they are lazy. They have been attacked in about twenty locations, three of whom were murdered. The children who killed them, when taken into custody, said all they done was get rid of rubbish. They did not consider they had taken the life of another human being. When people are in the streets for economic reasons, it is not their fault in most cases. In local communities, leadership and parents alike criticise them. Upon hearing that the homeless are lazy, occupying parks without permission and that they should leave, and other such sentiments, children naturally conclude that they are a nuisance and throw stones at them. These days they even cycle in to do so. The youngest culprit was 10 years

old.

Except for that period of time in summer, it is always winter in the streets at night and many die. We have been visiting those in the streets in Kotobukicho, and many more places, both in the city and around prefecture since 1993.

Regrettably, we can only carry out a very small range of activities. So, we would like to let more people know what is happening to those in the streets in Kotobukicho. I am not sure if we have enough assignments at the soup kitchen for more people to take, but whoever wants to come, just come. It is necessary to let more people know about Kotobukicho. •

August News Briefs 2012

Summer Retreat to Mitake-san

Our Annual Summer Outdoor Retreat to Mitake-san July 29~31 was a great success again, and we will include a report in upcoming issues of The Vedanta Kyokai as a translation is made available.

Swami Visits Seoul

In addition to his busy Satsanga Schedule across Japan, during August Swami also visited Seoul, Korea 4~8 Aug. We have included a report on this eventful visit to Seoul on page 1. Additionally, we can add that on 5 August Swami gave a talk on "Positive Living" at the Indian Hall. On 7 August, Swami and Dr. Abhijit Ghosh, Chief Coordinator of the Vedanta Society of Korea, informed the Indian Ambassador of the formation of the new Vedanta Society and explored the Society's use of the Embassy's Cultural Centre for its monthly Retreat. We can now confirm that the Embassy has granted this permission. Congratulations to all!

Kailas Yokohama Fetes Sri Krishna Birth

Swami Medhasananda reports that he and a couple of Society members attended a very nice programme celebrating the birth of Sri Krishna on 9 August at the Kailas Yoga Centre in Yokohama. Swami performed arati (vespers) and all participated in chanting and bhajans. The swami gave a talk on Sri Krishna followed by another from the Centre's director and instructor Mr. Matsukawa. Everyone then partook in a delicious prasad dinner.

Swami Visits Manila

Swami visited Manila, Philippines, August 22~27 and we will publish a report on this visit in future issues of The Vedanta Kyokai.

- ed

"Positive Living" Discourse at Indian Embassy's Cultural Centre, Seoul, Korea



Group Photo Seoul Indian Cultural Centre

Namaste India

Tokyo's Yogogi Park - September 22nd (Sat) and 23rd (Sun)

Enjoy a bit of India right here in Tokyo! And don't forget to stop by the Vedanta Society's "Ganga CD/Book Shop" while you're there!

Incredible India
Namaste India 2012 日印交流と親善のために
インドへの航空券が300円割引で当たる!!
日本最大級のインド・フェスティバル

ナマステ・インディア 2012

ナマステ・インディアはインドと日本の相互理解を深めるための文化交流イベントで、今年で20回目になります。
今年のナマステ・インディアは、日印国交樹立60周年記念公式催事として開催されます。

9/22 sat・23 sun
入場無料
開場 10:00 AM ~ 8:00 PM
(9/23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
Tama Park
JR山手線・原宿駅(徒歩5分)、有明公園・代々木八幡駅(徒歩5分)
メトロ千代田線・代々木公園駅(徒歩5分)又は明治神宮前駅(徒歩5分)

第二会場 たばこと塩の博物館 (入場料100円が必要です)
Tabako & Salt Museum
東京都港区南青山1-16-8 JR南青山駅又はメトロ南青山駅(徒歩10分) メイン会場へ徒歩5分

お問い合わせ
NPO日印交流を盛り上げる会 TEL. 025-752-2396
ナマステ・インディア実行委員会 TEL. 090-6943-1406
www.indofestival.com





Photos from
Swami Medhasananda's visit to
Kumamoto Prefecture
on Kyushu Island
22 ~ 24 June



- 22 June - Aso City, Kumamoto
- 23 June - Kikuchi Valley
&
Anapurna Farm, Kumamoto
- 24 June - Kumamoto City,
Kumamoto Prefecture



• A Story to Remember •

Cows And Cucumbers

Gopal Bhar lived next door to a rather poor couple who were in the habit of day-dreaming. One day the husband said to his wife: "If I had some money, I would buy a few cows."

"Then we would have a lot of milk," said his wife. "I could make plenty of butter and ghee and we could send some milk to my sister, too."

"Send milk to your sister!" exclaimed her husband. "How dare you suggest such a thing!"

"But we would have milk to spare," said his wife.

"We'll sell it!" said her husband. "I don't want any more talk on the subject and to make sure you don't carry milk to her when I'm away, I'm going to break every pot in the house!" And picking up the four or five pots they had, smashed them on the floor.

Gopal Bhar, who was passing by at that time, asked his neighbour why he was breaking the pots. When he learnt the reason, he smartly picked up a stick and started wildly beating the air around him with it.

"What are you doing?!" asked his neighbour, puzzled.

"Driving away your cows!" said Gopal. "They're eating all the cucumbers in my garden."

"Eating you cucumbers!" exclaimed the neighbour, indignantly. "But you don't even have a garden!"

"I'm going to have one soon," said Gopal, "and I'm going to grow cucumbers in it," and he began striking out with the stick again.

Embarrassed, the couple realised that Bhar was trying to show them how foolish it was to live in a world of make-believe and felt ashamed of themselves.

- Traditional Indian Lore

Issued by: The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)
4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi-shi, Kanagawa-ken 249-0001 JAPAN
Phone: 81-46-873-0428 Fax: 81-46-873-0592
Website: <http://www.vedanta.jp> Email: info@vedanta.jp