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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



## APRIL Calendar

## Birthdays / Pujas

### Rama Navami

(Devanāgarī)

Saturday, Apr 20

## Kyokai Events

### • April Zushi Retreat •

Sunday, 21 April

11am Discourse

All are welcome to attend!

### • Akanda Japam •

Zushi Centre Main Shrine  
Continuous spiritual practice  
29 April (Monday Holiday)  
5am-8pm (1-hour intervals)  
Contact Kyokai to participate

### • Annual Summer • Outdoor Retreat

26 ~ 28 July 2013

This year in Yugawara Town,  
Ashigarashima-gun,  
Kanagawa Prefecture  
at the Taikan-so (inn/spa).  
Reservation and other  
details coming in June.



## ✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"I am your true mother, a mother not by virtue of being your guru's wife, nor by way of empty talk, but truly the mother."*

- Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

*"Verily I tell you, even if Ravana himself came to me for sanctuary, I would accept him without hesitation."*

- Sri Rama

## Vedanta Society of Japan Celebrates Swami Vivekananda's 151st Birthday

On Sunday, February 17, 2013, the Vedanta Society of Japan celebrated the 151st birthday of Swami Vivekananda for their monthly day-long Zushi Retreat programme. Volunteers began the day before with cleaning and marketing chores.

The programme began at 06:00 with mangalarati, chanting, bhajans and meditation, followed by breakfast at 07:45. After breakfast the volunteers in attendance went about attending to the various chores in preparation and set-up of the temporary altar, worship platform, flowers and other articles used for worship, and seating in the Annexe Building. Downstairs a receptionist table, registration, and car park attendant were organised.

By 11:00 the altar had been prepared with food offerings and flower garlands and bouquets. Swami then conducted the puja and arati worship, ending with fresh flower buds being passed out to the entire congregation, who, with these in hand, were led in prayers of offering (pushpanjali).

(con't page 2)

## In this Issue:

• Thus Spake ... page 1

• Monthly Calendar ... page 1

• Vedanta Society of Japan Celebrates  
Vivekananda's 151st Birth Anniversary ... page 1

• Vivekananda's Teachings; the Ideal  
of Bhakti and Knowledge of Vedanta

A talk by Swami Shamanandaji ... page 3

• Thought of the Month ... page 4

• Swami Medhasanada Visits Manila ... page 5

• Religion and Non-Religion (Part 1)  
A talk by Swami Medhasananda ... page 6

• A Story to Remember ... page 10



Final Touches



Altar Ready

## Vivekananda Celebration (from page 1)

Swami then requested all to recess to the main Ashrama building of the ashrama where teams of volunteers would serve a lunch prasad buffet and seating had been prepared to accommodate the attendees in both in the dining area and the upstairs meeting room.

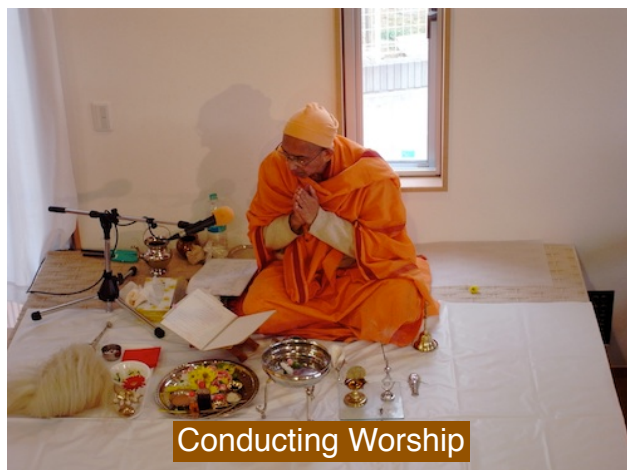
At 14:30 the swami again called the congregation to order and led them in Vedic peace chants to begin the afternoon session. After reading from Karma Yoga, Swami Medhasananda gave a warm, humorous, and informative introduction to the special guest speaker for the Afternoon Session, Swami Shamanandaji, a Japanese monk of the Ramakrishna Order, stationed at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. This Ashrama is dedicated to the study and practice of Advaita Vedanta, no images or idols are worshipped here, not even of Sri Ramakrishna; and no images are kept on the premises according to the

Ashram ideals set by Swami Vivekananda himself. Advaita Ashrama is a major publication centre of the Ramakrishna Order for books in English and Hindi, mainly through its branch in Kolkata, and also maintains a charitable hospital at Mayavati.

Swami Shamanandaji's talk was on the "Ideal of Bhakti and Knowledge of Vedanta" (in this issue). His talk, in Japanese, was interpreted by Ms. Satsuki Yokota.

This was followed by a brief cultural programme featuring English traditional songs by Mr. Lonnie accompanied by a concert ukulele, and familiar Indian devotional songs by Swami Medhasananda on harmonium. After closing with a meditation, the remaining attendees went to the main Ashrama for tea at 16:30.

At 18:30 vesper service was conducted in the main shrine bringing the day's Monthly Retreat programme to a close. •



Conducting Worship



Pushpanjali

## Swamiji's Teachings: the Ideal of Bhakti and Knowledge of Vedanta

A talk by Swami Shamanandaji

“What we have of Swami Vivekananda’s teachings today are from written records of his discourses, letters and conversations. In any one discourse he touched on many topics. And while listeners to his discourses would universally enjoy them, when focusing on a single teaching, they would find difficulty in comprehending its depth and scope. This is because a particular subject not fully addressed in one discourse, and would also be further explained in other talks. For instance, books on Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga are derived from Swamiji’s many discourses, and if we want to understand one practice more deeply, one should study the others as well.

“So I would like to briefly talk on only the essence of his teachings, that which lay behind his discourses. Let us go back to one event of the days when Sri Ramakrishna was still alive. In his room at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna was talking with some disciples and devotees about Vaishnavism. This branch of Hinduism teaches three key practices; repetition of the Lord’s name, compassion for all living things, and service to Vaishna devotees. While speaking of compassion for all living things, Sri Ramakrishna suddenly went into samadhi. Later returning to a semi-conscious state of mind he murmured to himself, ‘Compassion for creatures! Compassion for creatures! You fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, you to show compassion to others! Who are you to show compassion? No, it cannot be. Not compassion for others, but rather the service of man, recognising him to be a veritable manifestation of God.’



"While other disciples had witnessed this, only Naren (Swami Vivekananda) recognised the deep significance of Sri Ramakrishna’s words. Vivekananda wondered at the beautiful harmonisation of the ideal of Bhakti with the knowledge of Vedanta. Swamiji went on to explain that Vedanta knowledge is generally regarded as a path requiring complete renunciation the world and human sentiments, but upon hearing Sri Ramakrishna’s words he understood that the ideal of Vedanta can be applied and practiced by everyone. He concluded that it be God’s will, he hoped to spread this message throughout the world. Later at the World’s Parliament of Religions held in Chicago 1893 Swami Vivekananda was able to attend as a speaker and did, in fact, preach this truth to the world.

"Today we have a large collection of books on Swami Vivekananda, but the basis of all these teachings is that everything this phenomenal universe is only a manifestation of God. Now let us think about the truth of this. Was this teaching to the world first from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna to Narendra’s ear. I am asking this because in India, if a spiritual teaching isn’t supported by scripture then it cannot be considered as spiritual truth. Actually, this teaching is as old as the Vedas themselves.

"For instance, let look at the Upanishads. The first line of the Isha Upanishad tells us everything in this world is covered with God: that God pervades everything. Mahatma Gandhi once famously remarked, 'If  
(con’t page 4)

## Swamiji's Teachings (from page 3)

all the Upanishads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the Isho Upanishad were left in the memory of the Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.' This is because this teaching is the essence of Hinduism.

"The Shvetashvatara Upanishad explains that God is behind everyone and that thus his face is everywhere. The next section says this Self-Illuminating Lord exists in fire, water, and even in the grass and trees. It then describes the Lord saying, You are a woman, You are a man, You are a boy, You are a girl, or You are an old person with a cane; that which takes many forms is only You.

"How are we to see God in everything? In the Prashna Upanishad, the Great Sage Pippalada teaches that a husband is loved not because he is a husband, but because he is Atman; a wife is not loved because she is a wife, but because she is the Atman. References to these and other verses found in the Upanishads can be found in Swami Vivekananda's discourses. It means that what we love is God. It doesn't matter whether it is a dog, a cat, or a plant, we love them because we see God in them, even without our being aware of this.

"In Hinduism one name for God is Hari, meaning one who enchants us. It means

that which enchants our heart is God. In the strictest sense we don't have to seek God, because it is God that attracts us. If we don't seek God, how can we see God? All of you are here today because you seek God. If we cannot even see God in this photo of Sri Ramakrishna, how can we see the plants, animals, and people around us as God?

"Finally, the essence of Swamiji's teaching can also be found in his poetry:

*Listen, friend, I will speak my heart to thee;  
I have found in my life this truth supreme —  
Buffeted by waves, in this whirl of life,  
One ferry alone takes us over the sea.*

*Forms of worship, control of breath,  
Science, philosophy, systems one and all,  
Renunciation, possession, and the like,  
All these are but delusions of the mind; —  
Love, love alone is the only treasure.*

*Ay, born heir to the Infinite thou art,  
Within the heart is the ocean of Love,  
"Give", "Give away"—whoever asks return,  
His ocean dwindles down to a mere drop.*

When we realise everything is a manifestation of God, we know all of creation and ourselves to be manifestations of God as well. We also come to realise Bhakti love and Vedanta knowledge to be one and the same. This venerable truth has been taught since ancient times and revived in the Modern Age by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Remember that hearing is one thing; understanding is another.

Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti. •



### • Thought of the Month •

"Everything you're looking for  
lies behind the mask you wear."

- Stephen C. Paul

## Swami Medhasananda Visits Manila in March 2013



Swami Medhasananda's ANA flight from Tokyo/Narita landed at Manila Ninoy Aquino International Airport on time the evening of Thursday, March 11, 2013. A small international party of devotees from the Philippines, India and Italy were waiting for him there.

As with all his Manila visits, Swami unfailingly and tirelessly conducted the morning and evening worships and arati, led readings, discussed and gave insights into the Gita and Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna; along with private meetings requested by devotees, and the customary public discourse.

In addition to all this, the focus of this visit was on preparations for the celebrations of the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda organised by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines in cooperation with the Indian Embassy in Manila. The planning of programmes and activities to celebrate Swami Vivekananda were then discussed at length with various devotees during the swami's stay, and were also the subject of a long meeting of the Organising Committee on Saturday afternoon, March 9.

The Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines, a non-profit organisation legally incorporated in 2006, and operating under the spiritual guidance of Swami Medhasananda, intends to celebrate Swamiji in a befitting way this year in the

Philippines, to coincide with celebrations held in India and many other countries throughout the year. This will not be an easy task for us, considering the limited resources of the Manila Society, as well as the fact that the name of Swami Vivekananda is not well known in the Philippines at present, a predominantly Roman Catholic country. However, during Swami's visit viable plans were arranged for such celebrations, which are scheduled to take place in Manila during the month of September.

Taking advantage of free time between various different engagements, Swami Medhasananda visited three Buddhist Temples during his Manila stay.

The first one, a huge and beautifully decorated temple not far from the Vedanta Society, seemed not very keen on welcoming visitors. Swami and an accompanying devotee were reluctantly admitted inside the Temple compound and received a rather cool reception during their short visit. It became apparent that this temple was reserved for the Chinese-Filipino community.

On the contrary on Sunday morning Maharaj and several devotees visited two more Buddhist Temples in the old city of Manila (present day Metro Manila is a

(con't page 6)





**Manila Visits** (from page 5)

huge conglomerate of several cities and it takes its name from one of them). The first Temple was very old and it had a nice atmosphere about it, with its wooden structure blackened by the smoke of innumerable incense sticks over the years. The reception there was quite friendly and Swami and his accompanying party were surprised to learn that the temple did not accept donations. All public, Chinese and Filipinos, were welcome there. After a short stay, a second temple was visited nearby.

That is called Mabuhay Temple and it is impressive for its dimension and very modern design (Swami was informed that it took ten years to build it). Mabuhay Temple is run by a Buddhist order of nuns from Taiwan. Swami was warmly received

by a nun and several Filipino students, and was admitted to the main hall where a Sunday morning lecture in English was about to end. Later, Swami was invited to taste a sample of the vegetarian food served in the restaurant located inside the temple compound.

Sunday's morning short "pilgrimage" was then completed with a visit to the Manila Hindu Temple, a place of worship of different Hindu Deities, where Swami Medhasananda had given a public talk several years ago.

This temple was very crowded with members of the Indian community on the occasion of the Maha Shivaratri being celebrated on that day. Swami Medhasananda and his party were also warmly received and given some Prasad.

On the same day, Sunday March 10, 2013, in the afternoon, Swami delivered a public lecture at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre on the theme: "The Synthesis of Paths of God Realisation According to Swami Vivekananda". This talk was followed in closely by some thirty people.

Swami Medhasananda left Manila after his busy visit on Monday morning, March 11, bound for Japan.

*This report was submitted by Enrico Colombo*

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## **Religion and Non- Religion**

### Discourse at Mitakesan Summer Retreat

*This is Part I of a 2-Part report on a discourse Swami Medhasananda gave at the Summer Retreat of 2012:*

### **Part I**

#### **1. Philosophies supporting religion and non-religion**

God is also referred to as Brahman, Pure Consciousness, Absolute Reality, Eternal Entity and the Super Soul in scriptures. Taking that into account, non-religion means not believing in God or Spirit, and

religion means believing in them. Non-religion stands on the philosophy that it is not Spirit which is the origin for all, but matter and Spirit is produced by matter. On the other hand, the spiritual philosophy underpinning religion is that all originates from Spirit, or God, the Creator whose nature is Pure Consciousness. A

(con't page 7)

## **Religion and Non-Religion** (from page 6)

typical example of the first theory is Communism.

### **2. Traditional Belief**

Unlike the present-age, in the past most people believed in religion, that is God, Spirit, Eternal Entity, Absolute Reality and their lives were God-centred. Let us explore why a sizeable number of modern people do not believe in God any more:

#### **a. Scientists.**

Scientists have been declaring that God does not exist, saying, “It is impossible to prove that God exists, hence He does not exist”, or “We have tried examining if God exists in intellectual, scientific and material manners and have found that He does not”. Without investigating and analysing for themselves, people believe what the scientists say, as they do with superstition, behaving and believing as if scientists are the prophets of modern times.

#### **b. Total atheists.**

Many people think that they do not need God and are able to solve all problems by themselves with money or the help of experts. These days, even once intractable diseases can be cured with medication, for example, which may bring about this idea.

#### **c. Life full of worldly pleasures.**

Moreover, as a matter of course, the elaborate arrangement of and easy access to secular pleasures push people away from God and they do not think of Him anymore.

These first three factors are quite common in many countries. Next, let us look at the reasons for people becoming non-religious that are specific to the Japanese.

#### **d. Weakening of Buddhism.**

The tradition of monasticism with the ideal of celibacy has drastically changed, partly because Buddhist monks are now allowed

to marry. In order to support their family they have to devote parts of the time they used to spend in spiritual practice. Consequently, they now have less time to guide devotees. Even with beautiful images of Buddha decorating temples, many Buddhist temples cannot create that special spiritual ambiance temples should have, as there is no regular meditation and other spiritual practices. As a result, devotees do not feel like visiting these temples.

e. Shinbutsu Bunri Rei or the Ordinance Distinguishing Shinto and Buddhism by Meiji Government.

During the Meiji Restoration for modernising the country in 1868 under the leadership of the Emperor, the government needed a new norm and set Shintoism as the state religion, in which the Emperor was adored as God. This led to Haibutsu Kishaku Undo or Anti Buddhist Movement, which lowered the status of Buddhism and weakened it to a great extent.

f. Humanity Declaration by the Emperor Showa.

Being pressured by Allied occupation forces after Japan's defeat in World War II, the Emperor, who had been regarded as a living God, declared himself to be an ordinary man. This made people frustrated, distrustful and suspicious of religion and God, in general.

g. The long tradition of offering food to and praying at home before their Butsudan (Buddha altar) is disappearing.

h. No religious teachings

Moreover, there is now hardly any scope for the learning of religious teachings, either at school or at home.

The current trend is that the average person's faith in God is somewhat shallow and superficial. For most people praying once a year is considered enough at a Buddhist temple or Shinto shrine on New Year's day  
(con't page 8)

## Religion and Non-Religion (from page 7)

or at the time of carrying *mikoshi*, or portable shrine. However, when in trouble they pray. Many do not care for God unless a very serious problem arises. The modern age, however, is full of trouble, from mental to physical, and of problems relating to family, human relationship, job hunting, etc. On such occasions people are satisfied with a temporary prayer, and seek help and support from crazes including power spots and spiritual healing, but one get lasting joy and peace thus?

### 3. A Story about the Existence of God

Let us recount here a beautiful and meaningful story about the existence of God. A young king ordered an old minister to prove within a week that God existed, that He was omnipresent, and that He was almighty. Failing which the minister would otherwise be hanged the king declared. Frightened, the minister was desperately trying to find the answers but could not. Observing the plight of his master, the minister's servant then offered him help, saying "I will answer for you." A week thus passed.

On the final day, the king's court was full of curious people when the minister appeared with his servant and informed the king that his servant would reply to the king's questions, to which the king agreed. In Indian tradition someone asking a question is looked upon as a student, and someone answering as a teacher. Referring to this tradition the servant demanded that he be seated on the throne and that the king sit lower position, to which the king also had to concede. Therefore, as the teacher, the servant was seated upon the throne, and as a student, the king stood aside.

Then the servant requested someone to bring some milk. He asked the king, "O King, is there butter in this milk?"

The king answered, "Yes, but we cannot see it."

"Why not?"

"Because something has to be done to milk to make butter visible. Butter only appears when milk is processed."

"That's right," the servant said, "And it is true of God as well. If one wants to see God, there is a method for that. It is spiritual practice."

For the second question the servant used a candle to explain. "As candlelight shines in all directions and fills the room without generating force, so God pervades the universe in the form of consciousness."

For the third question, the servant said, "The answer is the fact that though I am an ordinary servant, I am seated here on the throne, and you, though the king, are seated lower than me. Thus, God makes the impossible possible. He is truly Almighty."

### 4. Argument in Favour of the Existence of God

As this story tells us, ways of proving spiritual matters are unique ones. Whether we believe in a God of superstition or the God of truth, we have to verify beliefs on an individual basis. If we do not do it for ourselves, we cannot have a deep faith in either a God of superstition or the God of truth, can we?

How then can we investigate spiritual matters, such as whether God exists? We have to remember that the ways of proving material things are completely different from those means of proving spiritual things. This is because:

a. Spiritual things are so subtle that normal tools (e.g. reasoning, scientific apparatus) cannot prove them;

b. Matter is finite, limited by time and space, whereas spirit is infinite. It should be obvious that a finite tool cannot be ef-

(con't page 9)

## Religion and Non-Religion (from page 8)

fectively used to measure the infinite.

So we need to follow the three following special methods to effectively verify the existence of God:

- (i) Scriptures and saints' experience
- (ii) Logic
- (iii) One's own experience

Scriptures including the Bible, Vedas and Upanishads contain spiritual truths. We have to be careful, though, in that scriptures may take the help of imaginings, or parables, or stories to make these spiritual truths understandable to all.

Believers often refer to the testimony of Jesus Christ, Ramakrishna and other spiritual or realised persons regarding the existence of God. How then can their experiences work as a proving tool? Becoming spiritual, one needs to become moralistic. In other words, one cannot develop spirituality, if first of all he is not moralistic. To be truly moral means being always righteous - with no pride, no anger, no jealousy, no illusion, no lust, and practising truth at all times. Therefore realised persons never lie. They cannot. This alone is sufficient reason to trust them.

As for the second point, let me give an example of application of logic. Suppose being conscious is being human and not being conscious is being a computer. What is the difference? Human beings can work by themselves whilst computers cannot on their own, they need commands, the input of data. They cannot turn themselves on nor can they input data on their own. They are switched on by human beings, who have consciousness. Matter cannot work by itself, or create itself without something (or someone) with consciousness behind or initiating it. By thinking logically like this, we can conclude that the creation of this universe needs a creator who has consciousness. As a result of this logical discrimination, we call this consciousness at the micro level God.

Finally, we need to have our spiritual experience to have conviction about the existence of God, and for that we need to practise different kinds of spiritual yoga. To get butter we need to process the milk. To examine spiritual things, we need a special practice. The problem with scientists is they want to verify spiritual truth by following the methods of reasoning alone. Spiritual truths cannot be perceived by reasoning alone, as after certain point reason itself has to be transcended. To transcend reason one needs to specially train one's body, sense, mind and intelligence, which scientists fail to recognise. Hence spiritual truth always appears as an illusion to them.

Sri Ramakrishna did not study much, but he experienced spiritual truth for himself. "Are you a mere stone statue? Or a real Goddess (Satchidananda)?" He only wanted to confirm this one thing with Mother Kali. He just kept praying for that experience. The twelve years he spent in this quest was really tough, but one day the spiritual light (jyoti) appeared before him and he became convinced of the reality of God. Ordinary people gain knowledge first, then experience - first flowers, then fruits. This is something interesting about Sri Ramakrishna, that he gained fruits first, then flowers. He had the realisation first and then he understood that his experiences were the same as what scriptures described and was very pleased.

Swami Vivekananda had been studying different scriptures while he was prosecuting his college studies. When he started studying western philosophy, he began to question the existence of God. So he visited many religious leaders asking if they had seen God, none of whom could answer in the affirmative and only referred to scriptures to explain the existence of God. One day he went to Sri Ramakrishna and asked the same question, to which the latter answered without the slightest hesitation, "Yes, I have seen God. I can make you see

(con't page 10)

## Religion and Non-Religion (from page 9)

Him, too.”

“You must realise whether or not there is a God,” were Swamiji’s words. If you want to know America, is studying about America sufficient? Visiting there will be a lot more powerful and convincing experience. Experience is the most powerful knowledge. The books on atheism scientists write without undertaking any spiritual practices can sell temporarily, but people forget them after a while. On the other hand, the

teachings by Buddha, Jesus Christ, Ramakrishna, et al, spread far and wide and are followed long after they have died. What is the difference? It is the truth which they themselves realised, and experienced truth, or anubhava, is so powerful. This is the third criterion to prove the existence of God. •

*Part II of this discourse will be presented in the next issue of The Vedanta Kyokai. This talk was translated from the original Japanese report by Ms. Miwako Tanabe by Ms. Satsuki Yokota.*

### • A Story to Remember •

#### Understanding Prayer

When Brother Bruno was at prayer one night he was disturbed by the croaking of a bullfrog. All his attempts to disregard the sound were unsuccessful so he shouted from his window, “Quiet! I’m at my prayers.”

Now Brother Bruno was a saint so his command was instantly obeyed. Every living creature held its voice so as to create a silence that would be favorable to prayer.

But now another sound intruded on Bruno’s worship— an inner voice that said, “Maybe God is as pleased with the croaking of that frog as with the chanting of your psalms.”

“What can please the ears of God in the croak of a frog?” was Bruno’s scornful rejoinder.

But the voice refused to give up: “Why would you think God invented the sound?”

Bruno decided to find out why. He leaned out of his window and gave the order, “Sing!” The bullfrog’s measured croaking filled the air to the ludicrous accompaniment of all the frogs in the vicinity. And as Bruno attended to the sound, their voices ceased to jar for he discovered that, if he stopped resisting them, they actually enriched the silence of the night.

With that discovery Bruno’s heart became harmonious with the universe, and for the first time in his life, he understood what it means to pray.

- from “The Prayer of the Frog” by Anthony de Mello

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