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The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES, AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



✧ Thus Spake ✧

God is in all men, but all men are not in God; that is why we suffer.

- Sri Ramakrishna

The way is not in the sky. The way is in the heart.

- Lord Buddha

JUNE Calendar

Birthdays

No birthdays listed
according to the Vishuddha
Siddhanta Almanac for
June 2013

Kyokai Events

- No June Zushi Retreat •
- **Launch of Year-long Swami Vivekananda 150th Birth Anniversary Events** •

Sunday 9 June 2~5 pm
INDIAN EMBASSY
AUDITORIUM, Tokyo
Guest Speaker

Swami Atmajnananandaji
Cultural Programme

See page 2 for more details.

- **Annual Summer •
Outdoor Retreat**

3 days and 2 nights
26 ~ 28 July 2013

Yugawara, Kanagawa Prefecture
at the Taikan-so Spa and
Inn.

Reserve now!



Zushi Retreat April 2013

The Power of the Name of God

(This talk by Swami Medhasananda is presented in two parts.)

Part I of II

Today's topic is of importance to every devotee of God. However, for those who do not believe in God, it will seem of no relevance. Basically, the name of God is a word and a word is an articulated sound. We can make many sounds that have no meaning, ha, hi, ho, but we use articulated sounds to convey ideas.

What is Sound?

In the Bible it is said that the universe is created through Logos. In Hindu scripture it said that 'shabda' or sound is Brahman. From aether, or akasha, the first element from which other elements were derived. What is the special feature of aether? Sound. The Lord first manifested Himself as 'akasha' or sound, followed by His other manifestations as fire, wind, water, and earth, followed. So we see how similar it is with the Bible's concept of 'logos,' or word.

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1863 2013

150th
Birth Anniversary Celebration of
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

スワミー・ヴィヴェーカーナンダ生誕 150 周年祝賀会

**Opening Ceremony of Swami Vivekananda's Year-long
150th Birth Anniversary Commemorative Celebrations**

"Unselfishness is God" - Swami Vivekananda

Date: Sunday, June 9, 2013. 2 p.m.- 5 p.m.
Venue: Indian Embassy Auditorium
2-2-11 Kudan-minami Chiyoda-ku Tokyo
Theme: 'Impact of Swami Vivekananda'
Speaker : Swami Atmajnananandaji
Monk in charge
Vedanta Centre of Greater Washington DC
: Professor Yasuyuki Nara
Former President Komazawa University
Chief Guest: H. E. Smt. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa
Ambassador of India

Master of Ceremonies: Professor Kathy Matsui and Ms. Satsuki Yokota

The Programme also includes cultural programme.

Exhibition: Books on Hinduism, Meditation, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in Japanese and English; CDs of devotional songs; Photos; Incense sticks; Rudraksha beads

All will be treated with light refreshment.

*No Admission charge.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Swami Vivekananda was a prophet of Modern India. He was a lover of humanity, a preacher of Universal Religion and a protagonist of internationalism. Both Eastern and Western savants hold Vivekananda in high esteem for his universal outlook, holistic approach and soul-stirring message. He founded the Ramakrishna Mission, an international spiritual organisation, in 1897 with the objective of realising the Self and serving humanity with a spirit of worship.

Power of the Name of God (from page 1)

How do we go from sound to articulated sound in the form of words? No one knows how words were first derived, but we see now sounds in the form of individual words and that each word has an individual meaning. This pattern is the same for every language, and in each one has to grow and be trained, because each tradition has its own ways of expression. Later, of course, we can combine two words to make new words and meanings. Another thing, as far as phonetics are concerned, you cannot differentiate between a word and its meaning, or the image associated with a particular word.

Words

In that sense, when we say the word 'love' some image arises; though it may or may not be a clear image, for example when the mother kisses the child or a friend embraces a friend. Such images may come consciously or they may come unconsciously, but along with them associated feelings also emerge. Similarly, when we say the word 'violence' or 'murder' immediately a different image and feeling arise. Both the words 'love' and 'murder' are only sounds, but see the difference in image. So continuously we are interacting with each other with the help of words. The use of an offensive word may end a longtime relationship. A single unguarded word can be the cause of a divorce.

Such is the power of words. In our ordinary lives we see the power of words. We should then be able to understand our discussion of the power of the name of God. I

remember in my childhood a couple of us were sometimes quarrelling when we would use the Bengali word 'boka,' meaning foolish. Generally, this Bengali word does not mean so much between friends, but when I used the English word 'idiot' with the same meaning, immediately the other person became very angry. Interestingly the words have the same literal meaning, but in different languages apparently carried different weight even though both were mere sounds.

Names



We give everything names. In front of me is a mic, and this is a table, we are in a room. Why do we apply a particular name to a particular thing? Because without names we cannot make distinctions between one

thing and another. If we mean a particular thing, then we must use a particular word. We may sometimes be able to use words like 'this' and 'that' and 'these' and 'those,' but not constantly, since everything near us cannot be named 'this' and everything not near us cannot be referred to as simply 'that,' 'those,' 'them,' or 'they' not enough meaning is conveyed.

The same applies to people. 'Man' or 'woman' or 'girl' or 'boy,' which are common nouns, are insufficient. We may even add 'young' to describe or qualify the woman or man, but even this isn't accurate enough, we must use a particular name. That's why we all have names and we have to have one otherwise there cannot be

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Power of the Name of God (from page 3)

effective communication and interaction. When we mention a name we get an image of that person.

When the child is born we give it a name to distinguish it from others. At first the child hasn't developed the consciousness to identify itself with that name, but other people identify the child by that name. As the child grows, it slowly identifies itself with that name. This is two-way identification. I identify myself with my name, and others also identify me by my name – and that is how we interact.

We become so identified with our names that if our name appears in the newspaper we become happy. How much money do some people spend on spreading or advertising their names. This is the desire for name and fame. We are so keen that everyone knows our name, of course, in a manner of our liking. Hence we take care so that we are not talked about in a negative way. So in criticism or in praise, it is the name that is focused upon. Sometimes we undertake an adventure which may involve risk of life and may even result in perpetuating our name. Thus, the name becomes even more important than the person himself, and for that some are even ready to sacrifice life.

Names and Their Images

Now let us focus on the word 'God' and also God's different names and their impact on us as devotees. In different languages and traditions there are different expressions meaning 'God.' In Sanskrit there is 'Ishvara' or 'Bhagavan,' in Japanese we use 'Kamisama,' in English they say 'God' and in Arabic it is 'Allah.'

When we utter these words, some sort of image arises in our minds leaving an effect upon us, especially upon devotees. If I say 'ningen' (person) or 'dobutsu' (animal) an image comes. Now if I say 'Kamisama' the

same image does not arise as from the word 'dobutsu,' does it?

Now what may be the effect upon us of repeating a name of God? God, God, God, or Allah, Allah, Allah. Another consideration is the names of different aspects or forms of God. As we know, in Hinduism there are many Gods and Goddesses, millions and millions. Most popular among them are Shiva and Vishnu and Ganesha, Durga and Kali. Of late, in Japan Ganesha, especially, is becoming popular. Funny, at a Yoga seminar I recently attended there was an image of Ganesha in the shirshasana posture or headstand!

Anyway, there are many Gods and Goddesses and they have many names, sometimes 10, or 100, or even 1,000. One spiritual practice of the Hindus of South Indian is to simply chant 'Sahasranama,' the thousand names of Vishnu to a melody. The same applies to the thousand names of the Goddess Durga. Also, there is the repetition of the names of the incarnations of God, the Avatars, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus or Sri Ramakrishna in respective religious traditions. If you visit different Hindu temples in India you may hear the continuous chanting and chanting of the names of God with great devotion and fervour.

So there are the various names of God, and the names of many different Gods, and one God with many names, and the incarnations of God. The interesting thing is that according to Hinduism all these are but various manifestations of the same God. Many people believe that Hindus have so many gods and goddesses, but what they don't know is that all these are but manifestations of one God. Here is the key differences between Shintoism and Hinduism; while Shintoism has various gods and goddesses, there is no concept of these being different manifestations of the one God.

Mystic Syllables

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Power of the Name of God (from page 4)

While there are names of God, God also manifests in mystic syllables or sound symbols. Om is one such Vedic syllable, and in the Tantric tradition there are many more mystic syllables, some of which you might have heard during in our homa fire ritual. For example, the syllable 'Hrim' is the symbolises the Divine Mother.

How did these come about? Om was revealed in the hearts of sages. We mentioned that God first created this universe with the element of sound. There are three basic or fundamental sounds of ah, u, ma. These combined become Om. According to the Vedas God created this universe with Om. So this Om is also the root of all sounds, not only of human languages, but all the sounds in nature have there basis in Om.

Again, how did we come to know of this Om? First, it was revealed in the heart of sages in deep meditation. In Sanskrit 'Anāhata Dhvani' means that all general sounds have some material origin. For example, when I tap this table the sound comes. When I speak air vibrates through and my vocal cords, employing first physical energy, air, then the mechanism of vocal cord vibrations, the shapes of the mouth, and then we hear human sounds. This Om, however, is not of material origin.

The same can be said of the mystic Tantric syllables. People didn't sit around a fire imagining and coming up with such terminologies. For example, when sages deeply meditated on the Divine Mother, from deep within he heard the sound 'hrim.' These are sounds associated with God, but are mystic syllables.

Tradition of Repetition

In every tradition we find the repetition of God's name. In all religions we find different spiritual practices, such as forms of ritualism, prayer, meditation, repetition of

the name of God, and discrimination in various combinations and manifestations. But we don't all these in each, for example meditation is not found in all religions, such as Christianity and Islam. Yet in almost every religious tradition we find the repetition of name of the Lord. I gave you many examples of the names of God, both with and without form, and of incarnations in the Hindu tradition. In Buddhism we find meditation in the Zen tradition, but only mantra chanting for long periods in the Nichiren tradition. We also find repeating of the Lord's name in both Christian and Islamic traditions, and of course, Hindu. So in every tradition we find repetition in common, the difference is the emphasis of the individual.

Purpose of Life

We may ask if this chanting of God's name is just ritualism, or imitation, and if it even has a purpose. The answer is, 'Yes, it has deep meaning and significance, and has a great effect on the individual.' This is what I would like to discuss. Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, often said, "Japat siddhi! Japat siddhi! Japat siddhi!" Meaning that through the practice of Japa alone, one may realise one's goal in spiritual life. What is this goal of spiritual life?

Even before becoming monks, we occasionally studied the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, and have continued to do so for many years. As a young man, I always felt uncomfortable with one particular statement from Sri Ramakrishna declaring the purpose of life is to realise God. When we are young we think, 'Why should the realisation of God be the purpose of my life? Why is it not to become a scholar, or a writer to bring name and fame, or strive to hold a high post by which to amass a lot of wealth? Why not be the discoverer of something spectacular? Why should God realisation be the purpose of life?'

Now, after many years and working through this ministry I feel, 'Yes, Sri Rama-

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Power of the Name of God (from page 5)

krishna's statement makes sense.' The reason is that I see that everyone is seeking sustained joy and peace. I ask, 'Is there anyone here who does not want sustained joy and peace?' I know there is none. We try different methods to get it, but to no avail. Finally, we understand, there is no way can get that sustained joy and peace without the realisation of Truth or God.

The following idea is conveyed in the Upanishads:

*'O children of immortality listen,
I have a message for you.
If you want to overcome death and sufferings,
you have to know Truth, you have to know Brahman.'*

*'Without knowing that Supreme Reality,
There is no overcoming death.
There is no other way, for it is the only way.'*

This is why Sri Ramakrishna said the purpose of life is to realise God. You may call it God, or you may call it Truth, it doesn't matter. Or you may call it the realisation of our real nature, or Atman, it is all the

• Thought of the Month •

"Be kind whenever possible.
It is always possible."

- Dalai Lama

same. Because the nature of all this is 'Sat Chit Ananda' or Absolute Bliss, Existence and Consciousness, and until we realise that, we cannot get eternal joy or eternal bliss.

The reason is very simple and logical; a worldly thing, which is itself temporary and finite, cannot produce that which is eternal; how then can it produce eternal joy or eternal happiness? Yet, somehow we expect to find it, and this is the greatest irony and tragedy in life. The time of death comes and there remains some unfulfillment. No matter how much name and fame, or riches we have achieved, even for the greatest achievers there remains something undone, unfulfilled at the time of death, and that is unmistakably this realisation of God or the Self.

(This ends Part 1 - Part 2 will appear in the June 2013 issue of The Vedanta Kyokai.)

Synthesis of Paths of God Realisation According to Swami Vivekananda

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda Given in Manila on March 10, 2013

I have been visiting Manila for about a decade, sometimes twice a year, and on this occasion I am happy to be here again and share whatever I know about Vedanta. I am also happy to visit Manila at this time of the year, as Japan is now cold and here I get some relief from winter.

Maybe few people of this country know who Swami Vivekananda was. Very briefly; Swami Vivekananda is a Prophet of Modern India and this year we are celebrating his 150th birth anniversary. In India this is being celebrated in a very large way. The Celebration Committee Chairman is the Prime Minister of India and the celebra-

tion was inaugurated by the President of India. The government are spending considerable funds to celebrate this special event with different philanthropic and religious projects in collaboration with the Ramakrishna Mission, the organisation founded by Vivekananda.

This anniversary is celebrated also in different parts of the world. In the USA Swami Vivekananda, commonly known also as "Swamiji," gave a speech in 1893 at the First Parliament of Religion held in Chicago which as if overnight, made him a

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Synthesis (from page 6)

celebrity. To commemorate this historic event a plaque was placed at the site of that speech, a portion of Michigan Avenue there was renamed Swami Vivekananda Street, and a Chair in Swamiji's name was created at Chicago University. In Japan also we are organising several programs and this Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines is planning different programs which will be held from 13th to 15th September. On this occasion a meeting will be organised, where distinguished guests will be invited to speak and a cultural program will be held. An exhibition will be also organised, and some service to the needy will be performed.

One may ask whether these celebrations are merely ritualistic or there are some special grounds for them. For us the celebrations should represent an occasion to critically assess the life, teachings and contributions of Swami Vivekananda. What then is his contribution to India and to the world at large? And what is his relevance today?

Swamiji's contribution to India is in itself a very big topic, as in fact, there was not a single Indian national leader in politics, social service, education or religion, who has not been impacted by Swami Vivekananda, including Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, the sage and philosopher Aurobindo, Prime Minister J. Nehru, and many others.

More importantly for this country I should rather discuss Swamiji's contribution and relevance to the world at large. Firstly, Swami Vivekananda tried to bring awareness of the divinity in each individual, and the means of its manifestation. For him religion was not dogma, not philosophy, not ritualism, not scripture; it was just this important concept: "Religion is the manifestation of divinity which is already in man." Please try pondering on that concept and meditate on it and a flood of light will dawn on you. How non-sectarian is such a

definition! Irrespective of how rich or famous we may be, life is meaningless unless we are aware of our divinity, and manifest it. Without this we cannot overcome our fears, sufferings or anxieties and get a taste for real and sustained joy and peace.

Swamiji's second main contribution is the harmony of religion. This harmony of religion will lead to harmony at other levels, such as family life, community life, social life, and international life, as well. What should be the basis of this harmony? Humanism involved harmony as we are all human beings. Karl Marx tried to harmonise proletarians worldwide on the basis of poverty, but such concepts of harmony were limited to a specific category of beings. Humanism omitted animals and nature from its concept of harmony. Marx preached harmony for the poor, but excluded the rich and middle class.

Swamiji said that the true basis of harmony is inter-connectedness: that is his third main contribution. At the level of consciousness we are all interconnected: human beings, animal beings, inert nature. From the point of view of Vedanta philosophy, consciousness is everywhere. In some cases it is just latent. Take an atom – if we break it what tremendous energy is released! Based on such concepts harmony is possible through consciousness. In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna was first to talk of this harmony among all other philosophers and religious leaders. He, for the first time, elucidated many concepts of harmony. Each chapter of the Gita, sermons from Krishna, is treated as a path of realisation. So there are so many paths of God realisation. It is true however that all these were within the fold of Hinduism, as at that point in time there was neither Christianity, nor Buddhism, nor Jainism, nor Islam. So Sri Krishna for the first time set an example of this harmony of religions in ancient India.

Next Buddha appeared and after his passing some religious conferences were held-

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among the followers of Buddhism. Such conferences were also held among Catholics under the auspices of the Catholic Church. What was the purpose of these conventions? They were aimed at reconciling opposing views about how to interpret the teachings of Buddha or Christ and how to bring greater harmony among their followers. These attempts at establishing harmony were, however, confined within a particular fold of religion, either Buddhism, or later on, Christianity. In 1893 Americans organised for the first time in history a World Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

Its objective was noble and great. Representatives from all religions of the world were invited to speak about their religion, so that Americans would learn about the different religions existing in the world. At the same time different religious leaders would have a chance to get to know each other and, to some extent, to exchange opinions. Harmony of religions in the true sense of the term, however, was not really the objective and there was a sort of “hidden agenda,” which consisted of an attempt to establish the supremacy of Christianity.

Swami Vivekananda participated without a formal invitation from the Parliament of Religions authorities. Interestingly this “uninvited” speaker stole the show, as they say, when he spoke after postponing due to some stage-fright for a few times. In Caesar’s fashion; “veni, vidi, vici” or, I came, I saw, I conquered, Swami Vivekananda remembered Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, and delivered with feeling, authority and realisation a short and warm address, which immediately had an electrifying impact on the audience and was greeted with a great applause. In his speech Swamiji said with firm conviction:

“The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the

world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: ‘Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me.’ Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.”

Thus, this Gospel of Harmony was preached and proclaimed for the first time on the world stage. What was the background of this message by Swami Vivekananda? In Indian scriptures called Upanishads, going back at least four thousand years, this concept of harmony was very much there: “The Truth is one; the sages call it by various names.” God is one, the Supreme Reality is one, names and forms are different. This concept is often forgotten, not practiced, even in India, and the result is orthodoxy, bigotry, sectarianism, and caste-ism.

In the modern age, a saint, Sri Ramakrishna, appeared in India, who practiced and realised this truth. He first practiced different paths of God realisation according to Hinduism, and later on practiced also Christianity and Islam and had visions of Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad. Thus after realising God in different ways he came to this very important conclusion: “As many faiths, so many paths.” It is the same concept expressed by the Upanishads: the Truth, God, or Supreme Reality is one; there are several roads which lead to Him. Sri Ramakrishna would say:

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“Never limit God”. Because of our ego and ignorance, we often limit God. We say: “God is just this, God cannot be anything else.” When we say that, when we believe that only our religion, Prophet, or Scripture are true, and God, Prophets and Scriptures as conceived by other religions are not true, we limit God.

To say that God is only formless and cannot have form, or God has form and cannot be formless, or God has just one form and cannot have other forms, is to limit God. God is infinity: how can we limit infinity? If we accept that God is eternal, infinite, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, how then can we limit God? This is a true blasphemy!

So Sri Ramakrishna invited every devotee to follow one's path and one's own idea of God, without criticising others. This wonderful idea preached by Sri Ramakrishna is the basis of the Harmony of Religions of today. Sri Ramakrishna reached this conclusion not because of intellectual speculation, but because of realisation! Sri Ramakrishna taught and trained Swami Vivekananda, his first disciple, about this concept of Harmony of Religions, which explains how Swamiji could later preach it.

And there are a few issues regarding this concept that needed be solved to make it become practicable. First of all there is the question of how God can have form, or many different forms, and at the same time be formless. Different religions have opposing views about this matter. Hinduism and Shintoism believe in God with form and also in many Gods and Goddesses. Semitic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, do not believe in God with form. Unless we reconcile these two opposing views there cannot be any true harmony of religions. Listen to a story told by Sri Ramakrishna:

‘Four persons in a forest had seen an animal on a tree. Each of them, however,

claimed that the animal had a different colour. One claimed it was red, another yellow, still another blue, and green. They asked the opinion of a man who had been sitting under that tree in order to clarify the question. The man explained that all four people were correct; that he knew that animal well; and that it was a chameleon, an animal that can assume many different colours or even no colour.’

In the world of physics there is the example of water, whose chemical formula is H₂O. It assumes different forms at different temperatures. The same water, H₂O, can be solid, as ice, or liquid, as water, or even as an invisible vapour in the air. On the physical plane then it is possible for the same entity to have different forms, or even no form. This can easily be understood on the plane of matter. In the case of God one can rationally accept that He can have form and at the same time He can also be formless, but one needs really to realise Him in order to fully understand that. The question and necessity of realisation then comes. Sri Ramakrishna achieved this realisation. He realised God with no quality and no form as pure consciousness, which is known in Indian scriptures as Brahman. On the other hand, he had visions of the same God as Mother Kali or Krishna, etc.

Another issue concerns the relationship between human beings and God, between the jiva or embodied soul in Indian philosophy, and Brahman, the super soul. Here again there are opposing views. According to some, man and God, Jiva and Brahman, are two entirely different entities. Some others believe that they are not entirely different and view man as part of God. Others again view man and God as basically the same entity. How can we reconcile these different views?

In the Ramayana, a great Indian epic, one of the characters is a monkey, known as Hanuman, a devotee of the God-incarna-

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tion Rama. Rama asked his devotee how he looked upon Rama. Hanuman answered: "My Lord, when I look upon myself as just a body I feel that you and I are different. But when I look upon myself as a body-soul combination, as an embodied soul, then I feel that You are the Whole and I am a part. Then again, when I look upon myself as pure consciousness, then I do not see any difference between You and me." This is how the three opposing views can be reconciled.

A further question is about why there should be different paths of God-realisation. Christians and Muslims mainly emphasise the path of devotion towards God. In Buddhism, as originally preached by Buddha, the emphasis is mainly on knowledge, not devotion. Hinduism accepts all different paths: devotion, knowledge, meditation and selfless service (Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Raja Yoga, Karma Yoga). How can these different paths be reconciled? What is the reason behind the existence of different paths?

The explanation is that there are different aptitudes and abilities among human beings. So different paths are there to suit these differing aptitudes and abilities. Sri Ramakrishna gave as an example, that a mother cooks the same fish in different ways in order to make it acceptable to the different tastes and digestive powers of her husband and children.

In religion the same principle can be put forward. Men have different temperaments and kinds of mind. Some are prevalently rational, others are prevalently meditative or discriminative or emotional. Different religious paths are then available to fit different temperaments and aptitudes. This is how the different paths can be justified and, again Harmony of Religions is made possible at the social level. At the individual level, the same person can practice different paths, or Yogas.

Swami Vivekananda designed the emblem of the Ramakrishna Order and Mission, established by him to represent the harmony of different path of God-realisation. In the emblem one can see wavy waters, a lotus, the sun, a snake, and a swan. Each of these is a symbol. The wavy waters symbolise Karma Yoga, action. The lotus is a symbol of Bhakti Yoga, devotion. The sun is a symbol of Jnana Yoga, knowledge. The snake is a symbol of Kundalini, The sun is a symbol of Jnana Yoga, knowledge. The snake is a symbol of Kundalini, Raja Yoga, meditation. The swan is the symbol of paramahansa, realisation. With the help one or two or even of all these Yogas, or paths, one can realise God; this then symbolises harmony as conceived by Swami Vivekananda.

One more problematic issue regards the existence of only one Incarnation of God, or more than one Incarnation. According to Christianity Jesus is the only Son of God, which is quite similar to the idea of Incarnations of God. Hinduism believes that there are many Incarnations of God. In the Bhagavad Gita the Lord says, "I incarnate Myself in different ages." Both views at least accept that God incarnated Himself as a man: to that extent we can harmonise these different views.

The last point is how practicing religions with different ideals can be reconciled. This issue is very important for Harmony of Religion. Here are three practical ways. In the first place all regions focus on some essential factors: purity, love of God, charity. That is something they all have in common. Also people belonging to different faiths should try to emphasise those points on which they can agree, rather than on those of disagreement when they meet. Finally, we should give more emphasis on practice, rather than arguments. The more we practice the more we are in a position to accept and appreciate the faiths of others. The less we practice, the more we argue, and that is when more possibilities of discord and disharmony arise.

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Synthesis (from page 6)

So far we saw how harmony of religious paths, of yogas, and Harmony of Religions is possible. But why should we practice a harmony of religious paths such as knowledge and devotion like Hinduism or Christianity, at all? In the first place we should remember that no Yoga, or path to God-realisation, is exclusive of other Yogas. For instance a follower of mainly the path of unattached work, Karma Yoga, can also usefully avail himself of the aspects of other Yogas. We all feel the natural urge to love. The highest form of love is the love for God. We all also feel the urge to know. This urge is there when we are children and remains there throughout life. This urge can be best fulfilled when we know God, the Supreme Reality. And it is very natural for all to feel the urge to work, and in fact, we cannot escape work. The highest form of fulfilment of this urge to work is to do unselfish work, by doing work for God, by serving others seeing God in them. Also, we all feel the natural inclination to think, and in fact, we think of something at all times. How this inclination can be fulfilled in the best possible way? By thinking about God, the Supreme Reality.

So, to summarise, if you want to fulfil the urge to love in its highest form practice Bhakti Yoga, the path of devotion. If you want to fulfil the urge to obtain knowledge in its highest form practice Jnana Yoga, the path of knowledge. Karma Yoga, the path of unselfish work, is the highest manifestation of the urge to work. How then to avoid the possible pitfalls existing in practice of the different Yogas, or paths to God realisation?

If we exclusively follow the path of Bhakti, the path of devotion, there is a risk that we can become fanatical or much too emotional. In Jnana Yoga, always discriminating and centring to oneself, the risk is we may become heartless, dry, and selfish. In Karma Yoga, the path of selfless work, the risk is in developing a desire for name and fame. In Raja Yoga, the path of meditation,

the possible pitfall is becoming too focused on the body, on the need to clean and purify it. By practicing one path, or one Yoga, to the exclusion of all others there is a possibility to meet one of these pitfalls. It is then better to practice all paths or all Yogas judiciously to avoid these risks. This will also make spiritual practice become more interesting. How can we do this?

Look at the day-to-day schedule of our Ramakrishna Order. In the morning we get up and do meditation; then we offer food to God with burning of incense sticks; and during the day so many different works are there; and at the same time we always remember God as part of our life and try to discriminate between what is permanent, eternal and what is temporary. This is how we practice the harmony of all Yogas.

Devotees can follow the same pattern to practice too. We discussed how to practice the harmony of the Yogas, or religious paths to God realisation. We can apply this to the practice the Harmony of Religions. Nowadays, we cannot lead an isolated, solitary life. Modern times and technologies force us to come together, to live closely together. If we do not know how to interact with others in a right way, our close proximity to one another may lead to a relationships of tension or even bitterness, instead of friendliness, from which many undesired things may follow.

Swamiji's message of harmony is very important in this sense that it is understood by such distinguished modern day personalities as Japanese Prime Minister Abe, and American President Obama, both of whom quoted from Swami Vivekananda while addressing the Indian Parliament during their respective visits to India.

Harmony of Religions is important and necessary so that we can live peacefully, harmoniously, as followers of different religions, and also learn from each other. We should maintain our identity and at the same time we should learn from others.

(con't page 12)

Synthesis (from page 11)

The same principle of Harmony of Religions should also be extended to other levels of our life; to family life, community life, society life, and at the international level. Thus it is possible to establish perfect harmony. How do we do that?

As we said before we should realise the presence of consciousness in us first, and then realise the presence of the same consciousness in others. We should realise that we are all interconnected through consciousness. Let us focus on this idea, understand it, realise it and finally, practise it.

I close by quoting from Swami Vivekananda to show his deep faith in and commitment to the Harmony of Religions which should be imbibed by us all:

“I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque

of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian’s church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhist temple where I shall take refuge in the Buddha and his Law; I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the light that enlightens the heart of everyone.

Not only shall I do all this, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God’s book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book: the spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, an infinite number of pages remain to be yet unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them and stand in the presence but open ourselves to the infinite future, with taking all that was in the past, enjoy the life of the present and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutations to all the Prophets of the past, to all the Great Ones of the present, and to all that will come in the future.”•

• A Story to Remember •

HEALING

To a distressed person who came to him for help the Master said, “Do you really want a cure”

“If I did not, would I bother to come to you”?

“Oh, yes. Most people do”.

“What for”?

“Not for a cure, that’s painful, but for relief”.

To his disciples the Master said, “People who want a cure, provided they can have it without pain, are like those who favor progress, provided they can have it without change”.

Anthony de Mello, S.J.



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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