



JUNE 2013 - Volume 11 Number 06

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

JULY Calendar

Birthdays



The Great Sage
Vyasa

Ashadha Purnima

Guru Purnima

Monday, July 22, 2013

Kyokai Events

• July Zushi Retreat •

'Understanding the Mind'
Swami Medhasananda
Sunday 21st 11am
Lunch Prasad
Afternoon Q&A
All are welcome to attend!

• Annual Summer • Outdoor Retreat

3 days and 2 nights
26 ~ 28 July 2013
Yugawara, Kanagawa at the
Taikan-so Spa and Inn.
Talk by Swami Medhasananda
Theme '**Divine Qualities**'
Details on Page 2



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"God is one's very own. It is an eternal relationship."

- Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for to them is given the knowledge of God."

- Sri Krishna



Vedanta Society of Japan Launches Opening Ceremony of Year-long Calendar of Events to Celebrate Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary at the Indian Embassy Auditorium in Tokyo

On Sunday, June 9, 2013 the Vedanta Society of Japan launched the opening ceremony of its ambitious year-long calendar of events across the Japanese archipelago celebrating Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary. With the support and patronage of the guest of honour, the Ambassador of India to Japan, H.E. Smt. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, and her embassy staff, the celebration was held in the filled to capacity Indian Embassy Auditorium.

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NIPPON VEDANTA KYOKAI

[Vedanta Society of Japan]

(A branch of the Ramakrishna Mission)

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Phone: 046-873-0428, Fax: 046-873-0592

**IMPORTANT
RESERVE NOW**

Outdoor Retreat of Japan Vedanta Society, 2013

From 26th July to 28th

Venue: Daikanso (大観荘)

We are pleased to inform you of our annual outdoor retreat. Programmes include meditation, chanting, devotional songs, discourse, etc., under the guidance of Swami Medhasananda. This is a great opportunity to develop your spiritual life away from the din and bustle of the city and family life. Everyone is welcome to participate!

Schedule

Date: From July 26th (Fri), 17:00 p.m. to July 28th (Sun) 17:00 p.m.

Venue: Daikanso (大観荘)

Address: 542 Miyakami, Yugawara-machi-, Ashigarashimo-gun, Kanagawa -ken 〒 259-0314

TEL: 0465-62-3785 FAX: 0465-62-2125 <www.daikan.net>

Programme: **AM (05:00-12:00):**

Meditation, morning prayer, breakfast, yoga exercise, discourse

PM (12:00-22:00):

Lunch, rest, discourse, Q & A, sightseeing. evening prayer, supper, get together, etc. ☆ Swami's lecture theme: "Divine Qualities" mostly in Japanese.

Access: **Train & Bus:** JR Yugawara Station (Tokaido-Line.) Take the bus for Okuyugawara Fudodaki from the No. 2 bus stop. Get off at the 13th bus stop "Fujiki-bashi"

Taxi: from JR Yugawara Station to Daikanso (¥1,200)

Car: Atsugi Inter-Change to Ishibashi Inter-Change to Yugawara

Car Navigator: Set to "Daikanso Yugawara-machi, Kanagawa-ken

Tel: 0465-62-3785

Fees: (Including accommodation, meals, yoga, lecture and misc.):

Adult: ¥22,000 two-night stay. / ¥15,000 one-night stay.

¥8,000 day-only trip. **All Student discounts 30% off**

☆ Payment on arrival. ☆ Donations for outdoor retreat are welcome.

Reservation: Contact Shanti Tel: 090-5575-0971 / Fax: 045-893-2832

* Please confirm your arrival and departure dates by July 10.

☆ **Please Fax: 045-893-2832 with this completed form by July 10**

You NEED: Please bring towels, toothbrush, sleepwear, umbrella, alarm clock, notebook & pen, shoes for walking on rough road, torch (flashlight). No summer shorts. Please bring comfortable wear if you choose to join in Yoga exercises (free). Please bring your copy of the Bhagavad Gita if you have one.

Silence will be observed at appointed times of the day.



Vivekananda's 150th Launch (from page 1)

Unlike past celebrations at this venue where a translated version (Japanese to English or English to Japanese) of a speech was projected onto a smallish screen to the left of the stage, a full-sized, drop-down, upstage screen was used, rendering scripts much easier for all to more comfortably read.

Promptly at 2 p.m. the Vedanta Society's Swami Medhasananda led an invocation of Vedic Universal Prayers along with four devotees and Swami Atmajnanananda, one of the programmes special guest speakers. Shortly thereafter the speakers and special guests were seated at the podium, and Madam Ambassador was tasked with offering the traditional flower bouquet to the life-sized framed photo of Swami Vivekananda



positioned downstage-left for the entire event.

Event emcee Prof. Cathy Matsui then called upon Swami Medhasananda to read the Blessings message received from Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji, President Ramakrishna Math and Mission (in this issue). Celebration Committee Vice-President Prof. Tsuyoshi Nara was then called upon to read the brief message sent from Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (in this issue) in hopes that Swami Vivekananda's words of praise for the Japanese character may inspire the Japanese youth of today to regain their self-confidence.

Committee member Ranjan Gupta then presented guest speaker, Swami Atmajnanananda, with a wrapped copy of one of the Society's newest publications, 'The Prophet of Harmony -The Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda' in Japanese to officially unveil and release. Prof. Yasuyaki Nara, guest speaker, was then then asked to release 'Arise and Awake,' a bilingual small edition of inspiring and powerful messages from SwamiVivekananda, copies of which were given to all attendees. Ambassador Wadhwa was again called upon to release the Special Issue of the Society's 'Universal Gospel' and to give a brief message.

Swami Medhasananda then gave the wel-
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Vivekananda's 150th Launch (from page 3)

come speech. The first scheduled speaker was Prof. Dr. Yasuyuki Nara, former chancellor of Komazawa University, one of Japan's oldest universities, beginning in 1592 as a seminary for young Sōtō sect monks, one of the two Zen Buddhist traditions in Japan; Director for the Promotion of Buddhist Studies; and 'Seido' (Educational Advisor) of Sotoshu Main-Temple Eihei-ji. Dr. Nara's talk was entitled 'A Plea for Inter-Religious Harmony' wherein he discusses his exposure to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and other exponents of religious harmony and the lessons and hope of inter-religious dialog. (The complete talk will be presented in future issues of 'The Vedanta Kyokai'.)

The next speaker was Swami Atmajnananandanda, Head Monk of the Vedanta Center of Greater Washington, D.C., who talked on the 'Impact of Swami Vivekananda in the West' explaining how Swami Vivekananda's education had given him an understanding of the attitudes toward the East and West, allowing him to present the very highest teachings of Advaita Vedanta and become an instant celebrity and media sensation. As Swamiji gained experience and exposure in the West he tailored his message to address what he thought was the excess rajas of the West and excess tamas of India. The main emphasis of his teachings in the West was focused on the individual and that the development, transformation and realisation of one's divine nature. Swamiji's newfound fame and message of strength and

harmony followed him to India, where he returned a celebrity.

Atmajnananandaji's talk was followed by a concluding peace prayer from Swami Medhasananda in Sanskrit, with translation by Prof. Tsuyoshi Nara, and the audience standing and joining the prayer. The swami then requested all to return after a brief refreshment break to enjoy the cultural programme of song and poetry recitals and film segments on the life of Swami Vivekananda, as well as a 40+ member choral performance by Society devotees and Yokohama Kailas Yoga School members.

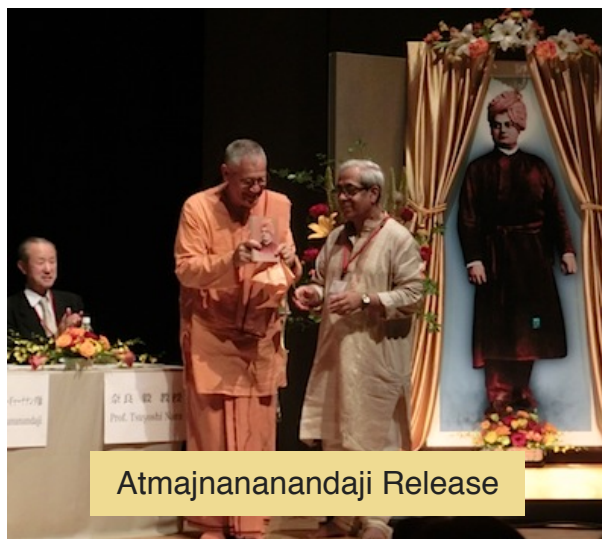
Again this year, a refreshment packet of samosa and a desert item was provided by Spice Magic in the foyer, and for the first time attendance of this event was so high that restaurant proprietor and Committee Secretary, Jagmohan Chandrani, ran out of supplies.

The Cultural Programme began with the auditorium signal to return to seats. Ms. Satsuki Yokota was emcee for this segment of the day's events and introduced the theme of the programme: 'Swami Vivekananda's Love.'

The first of the two-part cultural presentation was an ambitious programme directed by Mr. Ranjan Gupta. This is accomplished with songs associated with

Swamiji's life, film clips from two separate productions on his life, and narrations of writings from reminisces, letters and historical accounts with recitations. (A detailed account of this programme may possibly be present-

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ed in future issues.)

Vedanta Society members and Kailas Yoga School of Yokohama members.

[illegible]



Congratulatory Message from the Prime Minister of Japan on the Occasion of the Opening Ceremony

I am happy to know that various functions to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, great spiritual leader born in modern India, are now being organized not only in India but also all over the world including our country of Japan.

Swami Vivekananda laid a philosophical foundation to realize world peace and harmonious human society by his preaching about the importance of religious harmony through dialogue at World Religious Parliament at Chicago City, U.S.A. in 1893.

Such a person landed and stayed in Japan for 3 weeks on his way to America and told to the Indian youth in those days about his experience how deeply he appreciated high moral sense of Japanese people and strong patriotic spirit of Japanese youth. Therefore, I earnestly hope that the Japanese people of present-day will remember Swami Vivekananda's laudatory words so as to regain their self-confidence and restart making various efforts for realizing prosperity of all the countries in the world and also happiness of whole human society.

Finally I sincerely pray that all the commemorative functions to celebrate this spiritual giant's 150th birthday anniversary may be carried out successfully.

Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan
May 21, 2013



14th May, 2013

Blessing

In 1893 June, during his historical journey to Chicago to attend Parliament of Religions Swami Vivekananda visited three of the larger cities of Japan: Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo, and acquainted himself with the customs and the culture of the people. In a letter written on July 10, 1893 from Yokohama to his Madras disciples Swami Vivekananda writes:

"The Japanese are one of the cleanliest people on earth. Everything is neat and tidy. Their streets are nearly all broad, straight and regularly paved. Their little houses are cage-like, and their pine-covered evergreen little hills form the background of almost every town and village. The short-statured, fair-skinned, quaintly-dressed Japanese, their movements, attitudes, gestures, everything is picturesque. Japan is the land of picturesque!" About Japanese he said "No nation, not Greek or another, has ever-carried patriotism so far as the Japanese, They don't talk; they act-give up all for country."

He got impressed seeing Japanese are fully awakened to the necessities of the present age and that noble mind severely criticised Indians for their crystalised superstitions and tried to elevate their minds from the inertia caused by the slavery of many centuries.

I am glad to know that Nippon Vedanta Kyokai (Vedanta Society of Nippon) is conducting Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary Commemorative Celebration in Tokyo on Sunday, 9th June, 2013. Also it pleases me to know that on this occasion a special issue of Magazine 'Universal Gospel' which is dedicated to Swami Vivekananda would be published.

I convey my affectionate blessings for the success of the Celebration and Magazine and pray earnestly to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda to shower their choicest blessings on all of you.

Swami Atmasthananda
President
Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission

Zushi Retreat April 2013
The Power of the Name of God

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

Part II of II

Japa and Sin

Japa, the repetition of God's name will help us to realise God. Interestingly, in Sanskrit, if we examine the origin of the word, we get to the meaning of the word. In one examination of Japa, the verb 'jap' means to utter. Another examination is to split ja and pa for 'janamanāshaka' and 'pāpamanāshaka,' the first one 'ja' meaning ending the cycle of rebirth - 'nashaka' meaning to destroy; then pa for pāpamanāshaka, meaning to destroy all sins.

We have established that we all seek eternal and steady joy and peace. However, as long as we have secular desires, we want to satisfy them. Yet every desire cannot be satisfied within a lifetime, so we have to take another birth. As long as we live, we enjoy a small quantity of joy and a large portion of suffering. Mankind lives in the hope for just that small measure of joy to continue. Though we have so much suffering, we live in the expectation of that morsel of joy. And as long as we have this human birth, we are subject to suffering. Again, as long as we have desires for secular enjoyments, we have to take birth again and again. Thus our rebirth cannot be stopped. By doing japa we can stop this rebirth.

What is this 'pāpa' or sin? Swami Vivekananda gave a beautiful definition of pāpa. He said that anything that makes your body, your mind, your spirit, narrow and weak is sin. If we reason about this in our lives, we can see how this definition applies and how true it is. Again, what is the origin? Desire. It is because of desire that we cannot control our senses and mind and let loose our six negative passions or emotions, and this even increases desires of kama (lust), krodha (anger), lobha or (greed), moha (attachment), mada (pride), and matsarya (jealousy). Our desires feed these six negative impulses. Again, not only are they difficult to control, they increase in intensity.

Then we commit sins; consciously or unconsciously. In this way we committed many sins in past lives and continue to do so in this life as well. Yes, we do good things and create good karma as well, but proportionately, I wonder if the sins are not more in number.

The Name of God Purifies and Protects

Now our challenge is to clean, to clear away sin accruing from bad karma. How do we purge past bad karma when everyday we are doing things and perhaps creating new bad karma. So we have to deal with accumulated karma, be aware of everyday karma, and stop making negative future karma. That is the challenge we have to accept to become pure. Without becoming pure, we cannot know Truth. The Bible says, 'Blessed are those who are pure in heart, for they shall enter into the kingdom of God.' We see that repetition of God's name, that is, japa, will help us to become free from sin; accumulated sin, everyday sin, and stop from accumulating sin.

How does it work? God is pure. God's name, which is synonymous with God, is also pure. So the more and more we repeat God's name, the purer we become. If you want to clean the ink-pot to use it for another purpose, must you use dirty water or must you pour much clean water into it to get it clean? The first few rinses won't result in a clean ink-pot. We must clean the ink-pot of our mind with a constant flushing of clean water. What is this clean water? - the name of God. One verse in Bengali says that If you chant God's name even once

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• Thought of the Month •

"Once you make a decision,
the universe conspires to make it happen."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Power of the Name of God (from page 9)

with faith, it will remove more sin than one man can create. There are many verses like this and all reflect the effect of God's name.

You may think that God just a word like 'man' or 'woman,' and that the names 'Shiva' or 'Durga,' 'Krishna' or 'Buddha,' are just like the names Tom or Harry, but it is not the same; the former has a tremendous potentiality. Have you seen, for example, an old, dilapidated house with a tree growing up through it? The origin of this tree is but a small seed. The tiny seed may have arrived by the wind or bird droppings. It finds its way into the soil and bursts its way up through the concrete, cracking and crumbling all structures in its path. Such is the power of such a small, weak seed.

I went for a Satsanga in Yufuin and along the pathway through the brush we were walking at the time there were concrete slabs. All these slabs were lying evenly except for one that was askant. I thought someone may trip on it, so I attempted to flatten it down like the other, but I couldn't. Soon the devotee had gathered around me wondering what I was up to. They helped me lift the slab and beneath it we saw that a bamboo shoot was pushing its way upward. See the strength of that little shoot! And I needed assistance to lift the slab! God's name is like that. It is not insignificant, it is not small. It is great. It has tremendous potentiality. So if we do japa with faith, in the long run the effect will be both 'janamanāshaka' and 'pāpamanāshaka', that is, we will expiate our sins and finally put an end to our repeated cycle of birth and death.

Then our desire for enjoyments will be reduced. Once we develop a taste for the name of God, develop love for God, our love for transient things of the world will be reduced. Now you may say, 'Yes, I love TV, I love sushi, I love clothes, I love my house, I love my relatives, and I love God, too!' That is not what is really meant by 'love of God.' That is just 'tsuki' in Japanese, to like, enjoy or prefer. So you may more accurately say that you like God and love a family member more. Yes, we may like many things, and

even like God, but it is not 'love of God.' So the more we grow love for God, the less we cherish desire for the enjoyment of secular things and finally it will cease. You may not necessarily give up those things of the world, but you will find a new attitude towards them. You will see things and relationships from a different angle. It is a new and challenging orientation, but highly effective, in that you start connecting everything in your life, your people, your belongings, your work, your desires become connected through God. Or in other words, you can spiritualise your day to day life and, thus, become deeply spiritual.

Moreover, in times of danger the name of God helps us. For example, during provocations and temptations or where there is risk of life. Japa helps us overcome these situations provided we are in the habit of doing japa. When faced with adverse situations our mind starts doing japa. Let us call it 'japa-stat.' There is a thermostat in the refrigerator, and when the temperature rises the mechanism to launch the cooling process begins. So we need to practice japa to establish this 'japa-stat' in our lives. Japa invokes God's help. Japa connects us with God. If we are struck down and in trouble repeat, for example, Holy Mother's name sincerely and with faith and she sends help. This has happened in many lives, and, of course, mine as well.

Control of Mind

Take it from me. If you practice repeating the name of God, your mind will become calm and quiet. Everyone's problem is in controlling the mind. The one best and easiest way is to chant the name of God. Sometimes we have unwanted samskara (impressions) deep in the mind. They create problems in our life again and again. How do we change these? One way is by repeated chanting the name of God. By God's grace such samskara will be eliminated in course of time.

That is why both Holy Mother and Swami Brahmanandaji gave so much emphasis on japa, and not so much on meditation. We have Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga and Karma Yoga, and Swami Brahmanan-

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Power of the Name of God (from page 9)

daji coined another, Sahaja Yoga, or simple/easy yoga. We all can't sit in meditation for hours; there is work, and family duties, and just being busy, and above all, such tremendous body consciousness.

Requirements

Hence in this modern era, for many the best practice is Swami Brahmanandaji's Sahaja Yoga, that is, japa. No fixed time is required; no fixed place, no fixed dress, no fixed situation at all. It is anytime, anywhere, anyone-can-do-it, spiritual practice that requires only four things. These are faith, concentration, perseverance, and repeat as often as possible. You must believe that God's name has tremendous power. It will purify me. It will help to control my mind. It will help me end the cycle of rebirth. It will help me to realise God. This is the faith we need.

Concentration is important, too. If we are repeating the mantra but at the same time our mind is running here and there it does not yield much result - some concentration is needed. If you are driving a car you may not concentrate that much on repeating God's name, nor is it advisable to do so. But if you are sitting and not engaged in a particular task you can concentrate. We must use our common sense. Keep part of the mind on japam while running machinery.

Perseverance is also needed. We cannot plant a seed today; see a tree the next; expect to see flower buds on the tree by the third day and enjoy the fruit of the tree on the fourth day. Don't think that by repeating God's name a few times you will get results, we need perseverance. On the other hand, with such tremendous faith, one may be liberated with a single utterance of God's name. Of course, this is an ideal case.

If you repeat God's name initially without much faith or concentration it will still have an effect! As Sri Ramakrishna said whether you go to bathe in the Ganga or you were walking along the bank and were pushed into the river, either way the effect is the same; you have bathed in the Ganga. Voluntary pursuit of spiritual practice is best. So

practising with faith, concentration, perseverance and as often as possible is best.

There is one side practise, too. That is a little bit of discrimination. Without some discrimination; practising japa is like filling a bathtub with a leaky plug, when you come back in 20 minutes for your bath, the tub is empty. When we chant God's name, we must also control desires or there is no effect. The practise of the control of desires is thus important and helps us to realise the effect of japa.

Methods of Japa

There are three ways to do japa. Vāchika is audible repetition; Upamshu is when the lips move but create no sound, and Mānasika or mental japa. Among these three Mānasika Japa is best because unlike Vāchika, it can be done anywhere in complete privacy, even in a crowd. Some use beads as well, but it is better not to do it before public gaze. One should not practise Vāchika japa in all circumstances. For example one's initiation or Diksha-mantra should not be repeated aloud. However, we may chant other mantras aloud, for example during group chanting. Audible repetition of one's Diksha-mantra may be necessary only in special cases when the mind is too disturbed and not fixed at all due to some disturbance or problem. In such cases, just be sure no one is around and keep the voice down, and it can be effective in quieting the mind. When the mind quiets a bit, then one may return to Mānasika Japa practice. The advantage of Upamshu japa is that it can be also practised anywhere without drawing much attention from others.

Other than privacy, another reason why Mānasika japa is good is because our mind may wonder even while practising Vāchika or Upamshu japa. But when we do japa mentally there is less likelihood of our mind wandering, even though it does and can happen. For the most part, however, when our mind is focused on Mānasika practise and we practise this way for long periods, our minds finally enter into 'ajapa-japa,' that is, a part of our mind will do japa in spite of where we are or what we do. This is the ideal state and goal of the practise of japa.

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Power of the Name of God (from page 10)

So even in sleep if we have an undesirable dream, ajapa-japa will come to our rescue and makes us cautious.

Some people may think that if they do not chant or repeat the name of God loudly, the Lord will not hear. One Muslim devotee was chanting the name of the Lord very loudly, "Allah, Allah, Allah!" when someone commented, "Why are you shouting like this? God's ear is very sensitive as He can even hear the footfall of an ant."

Types of Japa

1. Nitya Japa is daily recitation, done either mentally (Mānasika), or with light whispering lips (Upamshu, or audibly (Vāchika).

2. Naimittika Japa is done on special occasions, or for specific times or events. For example during a lunar or solar eclipse, or on the 11th day of the dark fortnight or bright fortnight.

3. Kāmya Japa is done when one has a specific desire in mind, for example when one wants to get more money, name, fame or revenge to an enemy, or even to be cured from an illness – almost all secular desires. There are special mantras to be recited to these ends.

4. Prāyaschitta Japa is done to atone for one's wrong doings and eliminate sins.

5. There is also another type of Ajapa Japa not mentioned earlier that is repeating the mantra with the breath as one inhales and as one exhales.

6. Viloma Japa is done to counter effects of black magic. The method of doing Viloma Japa is unique. For example, the mantra 'Namah Shivaya,' is to be practised in the opposite reading of 'Yavashi manah,' to counter a spell or curse.

7. Likhita Japa is the practise of repeatedly writing the mantra.

As you can see there are many types of

japa, that is repetition of God's name, but our main purpose of japa is to make ourselves pure, to grow our love for God, and to get connected to God so that we may realise Him. This is our purpose, and for this purpose, of all these different japas the practise of Mānasika Nitya Japa is all we need. It is the safest, too.

Some confusion can arise with mantras as to the name of God one wishes to use in the mantra. Specifically, this confusion can arise when there are many choices of name before us. In Islam we may not be faced with this problem as there is only one acceptable name, 'Allah.' In the Christian tradition as well there are but a few, they recite prayers to Christ, ave Maria, etc. Then in Buddhism the spectrum opens and there are several choices of mantra according to the tradition of the particular sect.

In Hinduism there are a lot of choices. There are Shiva mantras, Vishnu mantras, Ganesha mantras, Durga mantras, Kali mantras, etc. Of course, one good effect of such a wide variety to choose from is that we may choose according to our own religious inclination. On the negative side – some may become confused in making a choice. After repeating a montra for some time one may think that it is not personally suitable, and think it better to change mantras.

This is where the idea of taking initiation, or 'Diksha,' comes into play. During the initiation ceremony we are given a specific mantra. We can decide on a mantra by ourselves, but still we cannot become free from doubts about the correct choice of mantra. That's why it is advised that we should stick to the mantra we receive from the Guru through initiation. In the Hindu tradition, the name of God or the mantra has two parts. One is the seed (vija) and the other is the name (namah). Why is it called vija? Because from this mystic syllable the seed of spirituality sprouts. We may not understand it at first, but through practise we will realise it. The mystic powers associated with mantras come through a succession of gurus and this is another justification for initiation.

Counting

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Power of the Name of God (from page 11)

Should we keep count of our repetitions or not? Our minds have so many distractions, yet our purpose is to concentrate. We cannot suddenly change from a condition of total distraction to one of total concentration, so we count to lessen our distractions. With one part of our mind we count, with another we chant the name of God. If we do not keep the mind busy with counting it will move on to total distraction. So counting is advised to reduce, not stop, distractions.

Why is one-hundred and eight repetitions advised. Generally, our mind is very reluctant to do this type of practise or to become subject to spiritual discipline. So it is advised to repeat the mantra at least 108 times. That is the least we can do. We begin repeating once, twice, three times, and on to ten times and the mind jumps in, 'OK. Enough for today! You have already chanted 10 times. Get up! Get up, you have a busy schedule to keep today.' Hence, the recommended 108 times is a means to ensure that we do the basic minimum of japa.

Yet, if we can chant the mantra with full concentration, however, even once is enough. Holy Mother, in fact, gave this advice to one devotee. He had asked, 'Mother, how many times should I repeat the mantra?' 'My child,' she replied, 'even once is enough.' Such power holds the name of Sri Ramakrishna, that once is enough. When this was reported to Swami Saradanandaji, he said, 'If you have that much faith and concentration, OK, once is enough.' But for most of us, once is not enough and it is recommended that we practise japa as much and as often as possible.

But why 108 times, why not 107 or 106? One simple explanation is that 100 is a symbol of completeness or wholeness. Then there are the five elements of ether, fire, water, earth and air. Then there is our sun and moon and the self. These 108 can also go many cycles of 108. How do we keep count? There are different ways. One technique to count with the joints of the fingers on each hand. There are rosary beads. Some even use pebbles.

So we count the mantra to keep the mind free from distractions. But as our power of concentration increases, the act of counting itself becomes the distraction. Once this happens to you, stop counting. Keep track of the first 108 to obey the instructions of the guru, but after that you need not count. Do, however, keep track and maintain how many minutes you practise. Try to concentrate more on the mantra.

Concentration

What should we concentrate on when we practise? This question was brought to Swami Brahmanandaji. The disciple said he had the mantra but wasn't sure whether he should concentrate on the meaning of the mantra or the deity of the mantra for example Shiva. The answer is to concentrate on the deity. If, however, one wants to focus on the Supreme Reality or Pure Consciousness at the macro level one may repeat only Aum. If we cannot focus on the deity of the mantra, then try to focus on the sound of the mantra even if it is chanted mentally.

With one part of the mind we may chant and with another part of the mind we may hear it and thus concentrate on the mantra. This is the advice provided by a Vaishnava saint. Thus one can effectively concentrate on the mantra. Once the power of concentration on the mantra has developed, one may focus on one's chosen ideal more easily.

At times if you cannot concentrate at all in japa, then just look at your chosen deity in a photo or image and do japam. This may help in achieving a focused japa, and we tend to practise japa at other times with greater ease.

When repeating the mantra, we should do it mid-speed; counting neither too slow nor too fast. One may resolve to complete 10,000 repetitions of the mantra and then speed through the mantra repetitions. So the aspirant races to complete his resolve as quickly as possible, and comes away satisfied even though this was not done with concentration. So it is advised to do japa with medium-slow speed – not too fast or too slow. God does not see how many times

(con't page 12)

Power of the Name of God (from page 12)

we do japam, but with how much devotion and concentration and faith we do it.

Conclusion

By doing japa, that is repeating the name of God in the form of a mantra, we can become pure, grow devotion to God, control our mind, get support for God during our troubles, and finally, get eternal peace and joy and highest wisdom by realising Him, provided we do it with faith, with love, perseverance, while at the same time try and control our desires. This is how the power of God's name manifests.

In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna there is a story. Rama and Lakshmana were visiting a lake in the forest. Lakshmana saw a very thirsty crow eager for a drink of water. Yet, again and again it went to the edge of the water, but would not drink. Lakshmana asked Rama about it and he said, "Brother, this crow is a great devotee of God. Day and night it repeats the name of Rama. Its throat is parched with thirst, but still it won't drink for fear of missing a repetition of Rama's name."

This is the ideal of repeating the name of God which we should aspire to, and which will help us to fully realise how great the power of the name of God is. •

• A Story to Remember •

A Wise Counting

Emperor Akbar was in the habit of putting riddles and puzzles to his courtiers. He often asked questions which were strange and witty. It took much wisdom to answer these questions.

Once he asked a very strange question. The courtiers were dumbfounded by his question.

Akbar glanced at his courtiers. As he looked, one by one the heads began to hang low in search of an answer. It was at this moment that Birbal entered the courtyard. Birbal who knew the nature of the emperor quickly grasped the situation and asked, "May I know the question so that I can try for an answer".

Akbar said, "How many crows are there in this city?"

Without even a moment's thought, Birbal replied "There are fifty thousand five hundred and eighty nine crows, My Lord".

"How can you be so sure?" asked Akbar.

Birbal said, "Make your men count them, My Lord. If you find more crows it means some have come to visit their relatives here. If you find less number of crows it means some have gone to visit their relatives elsewhere".

Akbar was pleased very much by Birbal's wit.

Moral: A witty answer will serve its purpose.

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