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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

DECEMBER Calendar



Birthdays

Swami Premananda
Wednesday, 11 Dec

**The Holy Mother
Sri Sri Sarada Devi**
Tuesday, 24 Dec

Christmas Eve
Tuesday, 24 Dec

Swami Shivananda
Saturday, 28 Dec

Kyokai Events

• **December Retreat** •
11AM Sunday, 15 December
All are welcome!

• **Christmas Eve** •
Monday 24 December
19:00-21:00
Worship/Reading/Talk/Carols
Light Prasad Dinner
All are welcome!

• **New Year Kalpataru** •
New Years Day 2013 Zushi
Centre - 12 Noon

Annual programme includes a talk, lunch, walk to Kamakura Daibutsu to offer prayers there and at Kinoshita Catholic Church and on to Hachiman Shrine.



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Through love one acquires renunciation and discrimination naturally."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"Think of the feet of the Master in your heart. By constant remembrance of Him, you will cross the ocean of illusory matter."

- Guru Nanak

Sri Krishna Birth Celebration
August Zushi Retreat 2013 - Afternoon Session
Stories of Krishna; Their Meaning, His Message
A talk by Swami Medhasananda

As you know Mahamaya entraps everyone, so that we do not think the right thoughts and do not perform the right deeds, and in that way we fall into ignorance and trouble. We get attached. We become bound.

As we noted in the morning session (*see October issue*) Girish Chandra Gosh, the great dramatist, actor and playwright, was also addicted to drink and a rather bohemian lifestyle. Later through the influence of Sri Ramakrishna, however, Girish was transformed and became a veritable saint. Girish, however, said that Mahamaya could not bind Swami Vivekananda, because whenever She tried, Swami

(con't page 5)

In this Issue:

- | | | | |
|--|------------|------------------------------|------------|
| • Thus Spake | ... page 1 | A talk by Swami Medhasananda | ... page 1 |
| • Monthly Calendar | ... page 1 | • Thought of the Month | ... page 5 |
| • "Stories of Krishna; Their Meaning, His Message" | | • PM Photos August Retreat | ... page 7 |
| August 2013 Zushi Retreat PM Session | | • A Story to Remember | ... page 8 |

Krishna (from page 1)

Vivekananda became greater in size. The more rope she applied to the task of binding him, the bigger he would become, until, finally, Swami Vivekananda became infinite and Mahamaya could not bind the infinite. This bears similarity with the story of Krishna failing to be bound by his mother, Yasoda, as Krishna's real nature was infinity.

Krishna and Brahma

Where Krishna grew up, herding, tending and milking cows and preparing milk products were local professions, and many of his childhood friends were sons of cowherds. So as his friends would do, so would Krishna. In the mornings after milking, the boys would take the cows out for grazing, and while the cows fed, the boys would play, sing and dance. In the evenings they all would round up the cows and return and bed them in their sheds. There was no difference in daily behaviour between these village boys and Krishna.

In Hindu cosmology we find the lord of creation is Lord Brahma: The Lord who sustains this universe is Lord Vishnu, while Shiva's function is the destruction of the universe. Vishnu holds a special position among these three gods. Now Brahma of course knew that Vishnu incarnated himself as Sri Krishna and knew of the child's current situation and circumstances in Vrindavan. But Brahma also wanted to physically witness Krishna's condition and observed him playing with the cowherds and noted nothing special about the Krishna – no manifestation of divinity at all – just like any village boy. Some confusion grew in Brahma's heart and he wondered, 'Is this really the incarnation of God? I see just an ordinary boy having fun and teasing the others.'

It was not unusual for Sri Krishna to keep His true nature hidden, even to His parents to whom He would rarely reveal Himself as they would become confused, 'Has

God really incarnated as my son?' This was often the plight of Yasoda; one moment she could recognise Him and the next she became confused.

So Brahma wanted to test the boy. What was the method of testing? As we said, the boys would take the cows out to graze and engage in fun. So while the boys were playing they noticed that no cows were visible and they became very concerned. Now Brahma had taken all the cows, put them in a cave and put them to sleep. Krishna told the other boys to stay put while he searched here and there. But He could not find the cows and He decided to return to His friends only to find they were missing too. Gone. Brahma had gathered up the boys too, and put them to sleep in the cave with the cows. Krishna couldn't understand what had happened to them all. So He stopped, meditated and with divine insight immediately understood that Brahma had played a trick on Him.

At that he resolved to teach a Brahma lesson and that very evening Krishna recreated all the cows and friends out of Himself. As a result the friends rounded up the cows and returned as they do every evening. The only difference was that the parents of these friends suddenly felt a special attraction and love for the returning children. They were at a loss to explain this special love and affection that they felt.

This condition continued for one year. Brahma returned then only to find the same boys playing the same games and tending to the same herds. At this Brahma Himself became confused and went to the cave where he had put the boys and cows to sleep one year earlier, only to find all were still in sleep. Brahma immediately understood what Krishna had done and though he may look very ordinary, He was God Himself. Krishna then said to Brahma, there is none in this universe who are not Me; as I am in everything. At this Brahma offered prayers for forgiveness

(con't page 3)

Krishna (from page 2)

saying he was sorry to not have recognised Krishna for who He was. This also explains the special love the parents felt, since their children were manifestations from Krishna Himself and not from Maya.

Krishna and the Sage

There are many stories of Krishna's life as he grew, studied, trained in spiritual, musical and martial disciplines; becomes a warrior and kills the evil King Kamsa; releases His imprisoned parents and becomes King of Mathura. Krishna then married and led an ordinary householder's life. One famous sage was curious as to how Krishna was getting along as a householder. The sage went to the palace and said to Krishna that he would like to stay for lunch and would also like to be served in various ways by Krishna, if Krishna were willing to do so. Krishna agreed saying that as a householder it was His duty to serve guests, especially a revered holy man.

The sage then instructed that neither Krishna nor His wife should partake of any food until the sage had been satisfied with it. The queen herself then prepared many dishes and began to feed the sage. He then instructed Krishna and his wife to fan him as he ate. Then suddenly the sage demanded that they all go on an outing by chariot, with the exception that the royal couple should be harnessed to the chariot and not horses. Krishna gladly agreed, if doing so would please the sage and began pulling the chariot. Naturally, not being familiar with this type labour, there were falls, stumbles and missteps. Krishna's subjects witnessing their King and Queen toil so began to criticise the sage severely. "What kind of sage is this?" they scowled.

Suddenly the sage called out 'Stop' got down and fell at Krishna's feet. 'Lord forgive me,' he said. "I was just testing whether now as a householder, you were doing your duties perfectly or not." Krishna had passed the sage's test.

Krishna and Sudama

Another time while Krishna was a student of scripture under a famous sage and teacher, Krishna had a friend named Sudama. He was a very kind, conscientious, but very poor, brahmin. His wife would always complain about their poverty and constantly ask how she was expected to manage the family without money, while his friend had become wealthy as king. She pestered him again and again to go to his friend the King and beg some money, but Sudama would not do so. Finally, Sudama agreed to go see Krishna, but did not promise to ask for any money. Sudama saw this an opportunity to both oblige his wife with a visit to the palace, and as a chance to visit his beloved friend. Sudama told his wife he would go, but that he should not go empty handed. But being so poor they had no special gift to give the King.

His wife tied some puffed rice into the corner of Sudama's cloth, and he felt satisfied that at least he could offer something to Krishna upon his arrival. With this he proceeded on to the palace. Learning of old friend's arrival, Krishna rushed to meet and embrace him. He brought him upstairs to His living quarters, had relax him on cushions and tended to him in various ways. They had just begun to recount shared memories, when Krishna asked, 'Friend, have you brought anything for me after so long?'

With Krishna's wife, Rukmini, fanning the two men and amid all the grandeur and luxury of the palace, Sudama was deeply ashamed to show his puffed rice. Krishna then began inspecting his friend and noticed the tied corner of his cloth. Krishna then asked if his wife had not sent along anything with him for this visit and the puffed rice was discovered. Krishna remarked how pleased He was with this and ate a handful. As he reached for another handful, Rukmini said, 'Lord, one handful of this rice is enough.'

(con't page 4)

Krishna (from page 3)

Krishna then asked Sudama if there wasn't perhaps another reason for his visit, but Sudama told himself that he would not say that his wife had instructed him to ask for money. After some time he took his leave of Krishna to return home. As he turned into his street he noticed a grand home where his shanty had stood, and his wife running to greet him dressed in jewels and a fine sari. The meaning behind Rukmini's caution to limit Krishna's partaking of the puffed rice from Sudama's wife became clear; for whatever one offers to the Lord, the Lord repays many thousand fold. Even materially, whatever little we give to the Lord with love and devotion, the Lord gives back a thousand fold.

Let the Cow Die!

Krishna plays different roles in many different stories. In another Krishna asks Arjuna to go with him to beg for food. Arjuna agrees and they change into beggar's garb to begin. Their first stop was at the house of a very poor brahmin, who had deep devotion to God. He had no wife or family and only one cow that he was very attached to. When Krishna and Arjuna arrived he apologised for having nothing but some milk to offer. Krishna expressed his great joy in accepting the milk as the brahmin served them both and the pair left satisfied. On their way Krishna said, 'Let that cow die!' Arjuna was shocked and surprised at this since the cow was the only possession of the poor brahmin, but he said nothing. Next they approached grounds of a rich man's grand house and Krishna asked to meet the lord of the house, but was refused by the gatekeeper. After a lot of persuasion they were finally permitted to enter.

When the rich man saw the two beggars approaching, he demanded to know who had let them in, and he told them that he had no alms to offer and to get out! Krishna agreed to leave and, again, as the

pair were on their way Krishna said, 'Let him have even more riches!'

Arjuna became more confused, 'Lord, what is this? The poor brahmin only has a cow and you say that it should die. Here this rich man has much money and property and you say he should have more? Not only that, the rich man refused to offer any alms and drove us off!'

Knowing the Lord would not do anything thoughtlessly, Arjuna asked what the reason for this was? Krishna answered, 'Look, that the brahmin is my great devotee, but that there is one obstacle to his realisation of Me, and that was the cow. I said let the cow die so that this obstacle would be removed. How much more rewarding is the realisation of God to the joys of owning a cow? Further, the rich man is already forgetful of Me and doesn't think of Me at all. If he is already forgetful, may he be more forgetful since he is happy with that.'

So we see how difficult it is to understand the Lord's way. We see others enjoying their lives, while devotees who serve and offer prayers and spiritual practice, to us come no end to troubles. Who knows in what ways the Lord purifies and makes us spiritual? So strange is His ways. 'Let the cow die.' Is it easy for us to accept this? It is very difficult, but if you have strong, strong faith in God, then know, whatever God brings to us is for our own good. Only with strong faith can we pass such tests, otherwise we fail.

God and His Name

Then with regards to God and His name, we recently gave a talk on the Power of God's Name. Here is one story about that as well. On the occasion of Krishna's birthday, his wife wanted to donate gold equal to Krishna's bodyweight to all brahmins. As king there was no problem of gold supply, so Krishna agreed to her plan. So they asked Krishna to sit on the weight pan on one side of the balance scale and began

(con't page 5)

Krishna (from page 4)

placing gold ingots on the other side. However, no matter how many ingots the placed on the weight pan the scale wouldn't budge.

A great devotee witnessed the whole thing and asked the queen, 'What are you doing? Can you really weigh the Lord of the universe with any amount of gold? Remove all this gold. Instead write the name of Krishna upon that tulsi leaf in sandalwood paste and place it on the weight pan.' Doing so, the scale was immediately balanced, proving the name of the Lord and the Lord Himself are one and the same.

Next, there are many stories of the love of the gopis for Sri Krishna, as well as His love for them. Many wondered why so much attention was given to this love of the gopis compared to other devotees. There was some jealousy, too. Krishna told those concerned He understood this. Some time later Krishna fell ill with fever that gradually worsened to become a complicated disease, so much so that Krishna was about to die. Many physicians were consulted, but no cure could be found. Finally, Krishna said He knew of a cure. 'If the dust of the foot of my devotee is applied to my forehead,' he said. 'I will be cured.' Everyone wants the dust of the feet of the Lord, but what devotee will provide the dust of their feet to the Lord. It is a sin to even think of such a thing. Surely one will go to hell in committing such an act. When word reached the milkmaids, however, they all volunteered to offer the dust of their feet regardless of the consequences. 'It doesn't matter what will happen to us,' they said 'if our beloved Krishna will be cured.' Here we see that the devotees have no concern for their own well-being, but for the welfare of their beloved Lord.

There are three types of devotee. One type has many prayers he wants the Lord to grant, and he does not think of the happiness of the Lord, but only himself. The

• Thought of the Month •

"Experience teaches only the teachable."

- Aldous Huxley

second type, a little higher, thinks, 'OK. Let me be happy and let the Lord be happy.' He performs some service and makes offerings accordingly. But the greatest devotee thinks not of himself at all. He thinks, 'Let the Lord be happy.' All he does is for the Lord without a thought for himself.

In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we read that three friends had ventured into the forest. They suddenly heard the roar of a tiger. One friend, not knowing the efficacy of prayer, thought they would surely be killed. The second friend said, 'Why should we die here? Let us pray to God. He will surely appear and protect us.' The third friend said, 'Why should we trouble God with this, let us climb the trees.' This is love of the Lord. Even if through prayer the Lord will come and protect him, he doesn't want to bother the Lord. So let us not bother the Lord, let us climb the trees. The same with the gopis – they cared not what would happen to them, they only wanted to serve Krishna. The greatest devotee serves the Lord and doesn't think about himself.

Krishna's Ego-less-ness

After the Pandavas were victorious over the Kauravas in the battle of Kurukshetra, Yudhishthira became king. On that occasion there was a very big festival and sacrifice with arrangements made for many royal visitors from neighbouring kingdoms and their entourages. On this day Krishna asked for the job of shoe keeper. This is the ego-less-ness of God. Not only was Sri Ramakrishna a brahmin and an incarnation of God, but to eliminate the feeling that he was superior to a sweeper, he secretly visit the dwelling of the sweeper and

(con't page 6)

Krishna (from page 5)

cleaned the toilet there using his own hair.

This is not possible by reading of scripture or hearing about it in a lecture, here actual practice is necessary. I really appreciate when devotees come to our centre and clean the toilets. Most prefer helping in the kitchen and running the vacuum which fine, but our toilets sometimes are not so well tended to. Someone then opts to clean the toilets. This dignity of labour in the idea of service, and service with the idea of worship. I am happy to say that this idea is very visible in Japan. This is idea of ego-less-ness is also in service to the Lord.

Draupadi was shared wife of the five Pandava brothers. She was not only very beautiful, but very spirited as well as highly spiritual. She had received two boons from a god. One was when she wanted to prepare a meal, all she had to do was prepare the vegetables and add water. The meal would cook itself. The second boon was that as long as she did not partake of that food, no matter how many guests arrived and were fed, the pot would continue to provide servings, being exhausted for the day once Draupadi took her meal.

The Kaurava cousins were very jealous of the Pandavas. The eldest Kaurava brother was the very wicked and evil Duryodhan. One day a very short-tempered sage named Durvasa visited Duryodhan's palace and people would always be wary of his anger when in his presence. Durvasa received a welcome and was fed and he felt very pleased with Duryodhan. As it was in his power, Durvasa then asked if there was any wish that Duryodhan wanted granted in return. Knowing of Draupadi's boon, so wicked was Duryodhan that he replied, 'Dear sir, the Pandava brothers are staying in a forest nearby, please go and be their guest, but after 2PM.'

Of course lunch would be finished by that time and this would cause great trouble for the Pandavas who were living in exile and

would have nothing more to feed the sage. Duryodhan intended that an angered Durvasa would curse and perhaps even kill the Pandavas.

The sage, a simple man and unaware of this plan, went to the Pandava hermitage in the forest with his disciples. He announced they would go to the river to bathe and be back for a meal. Draupadi became very concerned since the Pandavas where provided their meals by the boon of Akshaya Patra and there was no time to procure food and prepare it for the sage, and his anger would surely ruin the Pandavas. Draupadi wondered what she could do since there was no food left in the cooking pot. With great yearning she began to call on Krishna, knowing He always protects his devotees when they are in trouble. 'We are deep trouble now' she said. 'Please come. Please come and save us. There is no one else who can save us from this great danger.'

Suddenly Krishna appeared and said, 'I am feeling very hungry, have you nothing to eat?'

'No, Lord, that is why I called on you,' she cried.

Krishna said, 'Check the pots carefully and bring me anything that remains.'

In the rice pot she found but a grain or two of rice, in another she found a bit of spinach. Krishna insisted that she bring these to Him. Krishna ate and then drank a great quantity of water. With this He gave a belch of satisfaction and a full belly. Meanwhile, down at the river Durvasa and his disciples finished their baths and ritually offered prayers before heading back to the Pandava encampment. While chanting their prayers to God, they all suddenly felt as if they had enjoyed a satisfying meal. They belched. Durvasa said, 'If we go now, we'll not be able to take any food. If they have prepared food and we cannot eat, Bhima the great warrior will be very angry

(con't page 7)

Krishna (from page 6)

with us. Let us run away!'

This is how the Lord protects the devotees when we call upon Him with great yearning.

Main Messages

I have told you some stories about Krishna, but what is his main message? Three things are there. First of all, we should try to control our mind and senses. Try to become pure in body and mind. The

next message is to do anything, but get unattached. Do your duty to everyone. Do your work. Have relationships with others. To all these things get yourself unattached. Thirdly, while working or performing your duties, try to think of me. Try to get connected to me. This is Karma Yoga.

Throughout His life, Krishna taught these three things either through the Bhagavatam or the Bhagavad Gita. So let us also cultivate these sterling qualities of purity, non-attachment and getting connected to God even during work, and become spiritual. •

Photos from August Retreat
Celebrating Sri Krishna's Birth Anniversary
PM Session / Walk to Zushi Beach



• A Story to Remember •

Remembering God

The Indian sage, Narada, was a devotee of the Lord Hari. So great was his devotion that one day he was tempted to think that in all the world, there was no one who loved God more than he.

The Lord read his heart and said, "Narada, go to this town on the banks of the Ganges for a devotee of mine dwells there. Living in his company will do you good "

Narada went and found a farmer who rose early in the morning, pronounced the name of Hari only once, then lifted his plough and went out to his fields where he worked all day. Just before he fell asleep at night he pronounced the name of Hari once again. Narada thought, "How can this rustic be a devotee of God? I see him immersed all day in his worldly occupations."

Then the Lord said to Narada, "Fill a bowl to the brim with milk and walk all round the city. Then come back "without spilling a single drop." Narada did as he was told.

"How many times did you remember me in the course of your walk around the city?" asked the Lord.

"Not once. Lord." said Narada. "How could I when you commanded me to watch that bowl of milk."

The Lord said, "That bowl so absorbed your attention that you forgot me altogether. But look at that peasant who though burdened with the cares of supporting a family, remembers me twice every day?"

- Anthony de Mello, "The Prayer of the Frog"

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