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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

JANUARY Calendar

2015
Happy New Year



Birthdays

Swami Turiyananda

Sunday, 4 January

Sri Sri Swamiji

Monday, 12 January

Swami Brahmananda

Thursday, 22 January

Swami Trigunatitananda

Friday, 23 January

Zushi Centre Events

• **Upanishad Class** •
India Embassy, Tokyo
January 17, 14:00~15:30

• **Study Classes** •
**'Gospel of
Sri Ramakrishna'**
1st & 3rd Tues of each
month at main Zushi Centre
with Swami Medhasananda

• **January** •
Zushi Retreat
Sunday, 18 January
10:30 ~ 16:30
**Sri Sri Swamiji Birth
Celebration**
Puja, Pushpanjali
Lunch Prasad
Afternoon Talk
All are welcome!
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✧ Thus Spake ✧

"All teachers are one. The same power of God works through them all."
- Sri Sarada Devi

"All my authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."
- Jesus Christ

November Zushi Retreat 2014 **Don't Just Look for God, See God!** A talk by Swami Medhasananda

The real nature of Brahman, gods and incarnations of God are the same, 'Sat-Chit-Ananda,' or Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute. The only difference is whether God is with form or without, or whether God is manifested or unmanifested; transcendental or immanent.

Can we see God? There are saints who urge us that God can be experienced; that God can be seen. One can see God when one attains samadhi and one's mind, heart, and soul merge with Brahman, the Atman. Thus, through the practice of Jnana Yoga, for example, one merges with Brahman in samadhi. Again, by the practice of Bhakti Yoga one can see Shiva or Krishna or Jesus or Sri Ramakrishna, of which there are documented evidences. How can this be?

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See God (from page 1)

Obviously, we can see Sri Ramakrishna by his photograph, and we can see representations of other manifestations like Lord Buddha in statues. Yes, when we see the photograph, the image, that representation of God is living with us. We do not have to visit, for example, Belur Math to have this vision of Sri Ramakrishna. When we look at the photo of Sri Ramakrishna, we can feel that God has a living presence and that He is with us.

God Always Exists

God exists anywhere and everywhere. It is not even essential to see any particular visual representation of God like a photo or an image to feel the presence of God, because God is omnipresent. He is simply anywhere and everywhere. Every animate and inanimate object is nothing but He.



Reference to concept of three types of knowledge, namely Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic, which is discussed in Chapter 18 of the Bhagavad Gita, may be interesting in this context. What is Sattvic knowledge, Rajasic knowledge and Tamasic knowledge? The idea that God can only be present in a particular image is Tamasic knowledge. That Sri Ramakrishna can only be seen in a particular photo is Tamasic knowledge. The idea that Lord Buddha can only be seen in a statue in a particular temple is Tamasic knowledge. This contradicts the spiritual truth that God is omnipresent.

In the Upanishads it is said that all of existence, all creatures and all things are Brahman. Here is a quote from the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 13 Verse 13, 'Sar-

vatha pani padam thath, Sarvatho akshi siro mukham, Sarvatha sruthimalloke, Sarvamavrithya thishtahi,' meaning, 'Everywhere are his hands and feet, eyes, heads, and faces. His ears too are in all places, for he pervades everything in the universe.' Krishna is everywhere and in everything. Krishna is in the water. Krishna is in the soil. Krishna is in the mountain top, too. Also in the Upanishads we find the statement 'Sarvam khalu idam Brahma,' meaning all this multiplicity in the form of universe or creation is essentially Brahman.

In the Shvetashvatara Upanishad we find these principles presented in a poetic style. In describing the omnipresence of

Brahman we read:

'You are woman; you are man; you are boy and you are girl; you are the shivering old man helped by a stick; you are born in the form of this world.' In the Isha Upanishad the first verse reads: 'īśāvāsyam idam sarvam, yat kiñca jagatyām jagat' meaning everything

of this universe is from Brahman, animate and inanimate alike. Scriptures are full of descriptions of the omnipotence of God. Jesus says, 'Split a piece of wood and I am there. Lift a stone and you will find me there.' The Prophet Muhammad says, 'The spirit of Allah is all pervasive.'

We clearly see from all these quotes that God is not only to be found up in a Heaven only or in a photo or image or temple or place of pilgrimage. Quite the opposite, because God is omnipresent.

The Rajasic idea of knowledge is that God can be found here and there, but the Hindu God is one God, and there is a

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See God (from page 2)

Christian God, but they are separate Gods.

So what is the Sattvic knowledge of God? God is omnipresent. God is everywhere and anywhere. All are but different manifestations of the same God. This is Sattvic knowledge, which is true knowledge.

Stop Searching and See God

So now that we understand that God is everywhere, and everything is God. Let us stop searching for God, and see God. Is it not logical? So if God is everywhere and everything, let us just open our eyes and see Him. However, even if these logical ideas are found in scriptures, can we really experience this or not?

We can recall from the life of Sri Ramakrishna in his worship of Mother Kali how he pleaded and pleaded for Her living vision; to know if She was real or imagined; if She was only stone formed into an image or if She truly existed. Finally his entreaties were answered. Does this mean that for Sri Ramakrishna, Mother Kali was revealed only in Her image? No, it was revealed that not only is the Mother in her image; Mother is the door, the room, the altar, and both object of the worship and the worshiper.

It would be the height of sacrilege in a Hindu household or a temple to give a bit of food items being prepared for the deity to anyone, any person or animal, before being offered to the deity. It happened however, that once Sri Ramakrishna, as priest, was in the Mother Kali Temple at the time, when he was observed by temple staffers offering a cat, which had perchance wandered into the inner sanctum, a bit of food prepared for Mother Kali. Such outlandish behavior enraged them, and they complained to the temple owner about the scandalous actions of this temple priest. Sri Ramakrishna later said that he had seen the living presence of Mother

• Thought of the Month •

"Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark."

- Rabindranath Tagore

Kali in the cat and so offered the food to Her. As the real purport of such behaviors by a temple priest was beyond the understanding of common people, like the temple staffers, it was not unnatural that this act of Sri Ramakrishna angered them.

Again, from the point of Jnana Yoga, it also means that Brahman is in all; everything is Brahman. This when applied to the partaking of food ; the dishes are Brahman, the food is also Brahman; the people eating the food are also Brahman. Before partaking of a meal in the Ramakrishna Order there is the practice of chanting from the Bhagavad Gita, which speaks of this idea:

Om Brahmārpaṇaṁ Brahma havir,
Brahmāgnau Brahmaṇā hutam,
Brahmaiva tena gantavyaṁ,
Brahma-karma-samādhinā.
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.

The verse means: The hand, the meals, the people, the act of eating, the fire of digestion, all are Brahman. Although this is part of a mealtime tradition, we practice this ritualistic chanting everyday and try to visualise it.

Experiencing this Truth is Rare

But as to really experiencing it, as done by Swami Vivekananda, this is really the rarest of the rare. Let me recount a story in this regard:

In his living quarters at the Dakshineswar Temple, Sri Ramakrishna was once instructing visitors how the scriptures declare that all is Brahman; that everything is Brahman. This is an idea that most people

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See God (from page 3)

cannot grasp. They say, 'Why is everything God? How is God everything? A desk is a desk! A person is a person! A thing is a thing! An animal is an animal! I cannot see what you mean! How is it possible!' Beautiful people and the not so beautiful; saints and sinners; the works of all these; people of all the various levels; all is Brahman? How can Brahman, the Infinite, be limited to a cup or a plate, a piece of clay on this spot in time and space.

When Swami Vivekananda boldly declared in America, 'I am He,' many considered such ideas blasphemy. It is unspeakable for a devotee to declare oneself as God, as Swami Vivekananda often did. Not God is in me, but I am God. If we say God is in us, few would object; but to say, 'I am God,' is another matter. Many thought this was taking the place of God, and as such, was but a blasphemous conceit. So while the idea that God is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and that He created Heaven and Earth is universally acceptable, the idea that 'I am God' offends some. 'You are but a person,' they declare, and Swamiji responds, 'I am God.'

Back to our story; Swami Vivekananda, then the young Narendranath was visiting Dakshineswar when he heard Sri Ramakrishna's words, 'Sarvam khalu idam Brahman' (Verily, all is Brahman). Immediately, he went out to the veranda where Hazra, a rather troublesome character, was seated. Naren, skeptical of the Master's words, said loudly, 'How can this be? This jug is God, this cup is God and we too are God; nothing can be more preposterous!' They then burst into laughter at the very idea. Hearing this Sri Ramakrishna when out to the veranda and asked them in a semi-conscious state what they were taking about. He then touched Naren and the laughter and talking ceased. The touch had an overwhelming effect on Naren,

which completely transformed his personality.

Naren soon left for his home in Calcutta. He later he would say that along the way he didn't see the carriages as mere carriages, the people as people, buildings as buildings. Nothing was of substance, everything was consciousness. The cart had a shape, but it was made of consciousness. People had forms, but the forms consisted of consciousness. Buildings were but outlines, made of consciousness. He returned home hungry and his mother served him food. Looking at the food, he saw it too was consciousness. Imagine. Curry made of consciousness; beans and rice of consciousness. Water only consciousness. His mother serving him was but consciousness.

However, not knowing what was happening to her son, Naren's mother became so worried that he looked as if he were asleep while eating. She wondered if he might be dying. Naren kept seeing everything as made of consciousness for about two weeks. When he saw iron fences in a park, he hit his forehead against them to know whether they were made of iron or of consciousness. Naren, later Swami Vivekananda, then concluded that it was not imaginary. Neither were the words of the Upanishad that say: 'Sarvam khalu idam Brahman'. He learned that one could actually experience it; that it is not about what sages had experienced in some distant past, but now in the modern age.

When Swami Brahmanandaji was teaching his disciples, he would ask them if they had any difficulty with meditation or other problems. One of them replied, 'Maharaj, when you ask us if we have problems or difficulties, we feel so encouraged that you take such care of us.' He said, 'Yes, sometimes I ask, but at other times I feel you are all God. When I have this feeling, to whom shall I teach since you all are God?'

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See God (from page 4)

Here is a story in relation to this idea: A devotee was taught by his guru and believed that everything was Vishnu, or God.

One day when he was making bread for himself, a dog came, took a piece of bread and ran away. In India traditionally this bread is brushed with butter when served, which tastes better, but the dog took it away before he could butter it. The devotee then ran after it with a pot of butter in his hand, shouting, 'Wait, Lord, wait! I haven't buttered it yet! Let me do so for you, so it will taste better!' That is faith. God is everywhere, not only in pictures or images of Him, nor in the 88 temples of Shikoku Hachijūhakkasho; God not only resides in Benares, Jerusalem, Rome or Mecca, but anywhere and in everything.

See Holiness Everywhere

Sri Ramakrishna liked a song very much and would ask Swami Vivekananda to sing it. Now I will ask someone to read the translation. The original one is in Hindi and is a very good one. (*A Retreat attendee then read in Japanese*):

*'Whatever it is is You.
I have attached my heart to You.
Whatever it is is You.*

*I can only see You, as everything is You.
Oh my lord, my heart's lover.
You are home to everything.
Do You really reside in every heart?
You have entered all hearts.
Whatever it is is You.*

*You control anyone at will, whether he is wise
or fool, Hindu or Muslim.
Whatever it is, is You.
In Heaven, Kaaba or anywhere are you.
Everyone has to bow their head to You,
as whatever it is is You.*

*I see You as far as I can see,
from earth to the highest Heaven, and from
the unworldly to the deepest abyss.
Whatever it is is You.*

I understand that after all consideration.

I saw it without doubt.

I can see nothing comparable to You.

It was shown in Jafar that You are everything.'

If we think this way, we cannot say this place is holy and that place is unholy. Every place is holy. Everywhere is God. Here is an interesting story about Guru Nanak the founder of Sikhism. One day he left for Mecca on pilgrimage. When he got near Kaaba, he felt tired and slept. While he was sleeping, his legs moved to the direction of the Kaaba Mosque. Then a Muslim clergyman became very angry when he saw Nanak's feet facing in the direction of a holy place. Nanak woke up and said, "OK, can you please turn my legs to the direction which is not holy?" Hearing that, the Muslim, still very angry, moved his legs to the opposite direction. Then the clergyman had the vision that the Kaaba Mosque had also moved to that direction. He thought he might have made a mistake and moved them to another direction. Again he had a vision that the Kaaba Mosque had moved to that direction. It is a real story. What does this mean? Everywhere is God and everyone is God.

Swami Vivekananda experienced and taught this. The Scriptures also say so. So why is it we do not understand? Because our heart is not pure. And what is impurity? Impurity is pride. It is greed. Impurity comes from the ego that professes 'I am body, I am mind, I am intelligence,' which results in a finite me, an immature me; a small, ignorant me. This is ego. If we get rid of ego, we can experience God anywhere. When Sri Ramakrishna touched Vivekananda, his ego was so thin it immediately vanished. We, however, have a very thick layer of ego. If we want to see God we have to think of God and Truth at all times. Our ego disappears bit by bit, if we practice focusing on God.

We need to embrace two practices to see
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See God (from page 5)

God. One is trying to get rid of the ego and the other is to keep thinking of God. Then we will finally have the vision that everyone is God. We will not think this person is a sinner and that one a holy one anymore. Everything is Ramakrishna. Everything is Krishna. Everything is Jesus.

Seeing Past Apparent Contradictions

We may find contradictions, however, in our day-to-day life in seeing God in everything. Here is another interesting story told by Sri Ramakrishna:

A devotee was taught by his guru that everything was Brahman. One day he heard the shouts, 'Look out!' 'A mad elephant is coming!' 'It's dangerous, run away now!' Remembering his guru had said everything was God, he reasoned that the elephant was God, too. Hence he started to pray to God and sing devotional hymns from the scriptures standing directly in the path of the oncoming elephant. When it came upon him, it wrapped its trunk around the devotee, picked him up and tossed him to one side. Being seriously injured, he fell unconscious. When the guru heard about the accident, he had the devotee brought to his ashram where he was given some water and milk. When the devotee regained consciousness a brother disciple asked, 'Why didn't you run away from the elephant? Didn't you hear the warnings?' He answered in a weak voice, 'I didn't run because our guru has taught us that everything is Brahman.' Hearing this the guru said, 'My son, you are correct, but why did you think only the elephant was Brahman? Why didn't you reckon the mahout shouting warnings was also Brahman? He told you to run, but you didn't listen.'

As given in this story, everyone and everything is God, yet we have to be mindful, discriminate and introspect. Otherwise we could have problems in our behavior pat-

terns. Sri Ramakrishna gave an example of water. Our scriptures say water is all Vishnu, or God. Although dirty water is also Brahman, we do not drink it. We have different kinds of water to use depending on the quality of the water, such as for drinking and washing dishes. He gave another example: Everything being God means tigers and lions are also God. If you go to a zoo and ask the staff to open the cage and let you in so that you can hug the tiger, the tiger-god will eat you.

If we try to be pure at heart and think of God being everywhere, what will happen as a result? What motivates us to do so? It is that we will finally get rid of all bad feelings such as hatred, anger and greed, and obtain universal love and bliss. We will feel bliss seeing God everywhere. How do we get to see God then? First, we must believe in Him. Next, we must like Him. Then our love for Him grows. Finally, we want to see Him. At that phase, we have to see Him not only in images and temples, but everywhere. I would like you to understand that. Swami Vivekananda said that God is in front of you. Believe that and serve Him.

This means, the poor, the ill and everyone, are all God. He is not only in the images in temples, but is in front of you. There is a large temple to Shiva in South India, where you can see a quote from Swamiji in large text, the gist of which is: 'Those who worship Shiva only in images alone are secondary, and those who worship Shiva in everyone and serve them are primary. They worship Shiva most.' This idea is the same as saying worshipping Shiva, Jesus, Buddha or Sri Ramakrishna only in temples is not the best form of faith. Seeing God in everyone and everywhere is best. Thinking that way we should try to serve others. Merely visiting temples to worship God is not enough, but see Him in everyone and serve everyone. If we do not, we are in a sense at a kindergarten level in terms of worship. So we need to progress onward from there. •

SWAMI MEDHASANANDA'S VISITS NOVEMBER 2014

(We hope to present brief summaries of these visits once reportage is available)



November 2, Satsanga in Yamagata



November 6~11, Seoul, South Korea



November 29 Meiji University, Tokyo

• A Story to Remember •

The Falcon & the Branch

Once there was a king who received a gift of two magnificent falcons. They were peregrine falcons, the most beautiful birds he had ever seen. He gave the precious birds to his head falconer to be trained.

Months passed, and one day the head falconer informed the king that though one of the falcons was flying majestically, soaring high in the sky, the other bird had not moved from its branch since the day it had arrived.

The king summoned healers and sorcerers from all the land to tend to the falcon, but no one could make the bird fly.

He presented the task to the member of his court, but the next day, the king saw through the palace window that the bird had still not moved from its perch.

Having tried everything else, the king thought to himself, "May be I need someone more familiar with the countryside to understand the nature of this problem." So he cried out to his court, "Go and get a farmer."

In the morning, the king was thrilled to see the falcon soaring high above the palace gardens. He said to his court, "Bring me the doer of this miracle."

The court quickly located the farmer, who came and stood before the king. The king asked him, "How did you make the falcon fly?"

With his head bowed, the farmer said to the king, "It was very easy, your highness. I simply cut the branch where the bird was sitting."

Moral:

We are all made to fly — to realize our incredible potential as children of the Creator. But at times we sit on our branches, clinging to the things that are familiar to us. The possibilities are endless, but for most of us, they remain undiscovered. We conform to the familiar, the comfortable, and the mundane. So for the most part, our lives are mediocre instead of exciting, thrilling and fulfilling. Let us learn to destroy the branch of ignorance we cling to and free ourselves to the glory of flight!

- author unknown

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