



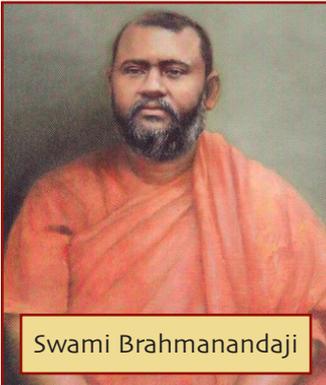
January 2014 - Volume 12 Number 01

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

FEBRUARY Calendar



Swami Brahmanandaji

Birthdays

Swami Brahmananda

Saturday, 1 Feb

Swami Trigunatitananda

Monday, 3 Feb

Swami Adbhutananda

Friday, 14 Feb

Kyokai Events

• **Swami Returns** •
Wednesday February 12

February
• **Zushi Retreat** •

Swami Vivekananda Birth Celebration

Sunday February 16

New Zushi Annexe

10:45 Puja, Arati
12:45 Lunch Prasad
14:45 Discourse,
Reading,
Devotional Music

All are welcome to attend!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach you, none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your own soul."

- Swami Vivekananda

"Alone let him constantly meditate in solitude on that which is salutary for his soul, for he who meditates in solitude attains supreme bliss."

- Guru Nanak

Vedanta Society of Japan Hosts Swami Vivekananda 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration in Osaka



(Story on page 2)

In this Issue:

- Thus Spake ... page 1
- Monthly Calendar ... page 1
- Vedanta Society of Japan Hosts Swami Vivekananda 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration in Osaka ... page 1
- "Introducing Swami Vivekananda to Korea" Keynote Speech at 'Vivek 150 ... page 1
- Anniversary Festival' by Swami Medhasananda ... page 3
- Thought of the Month ... page 7
- Christmas Eve at Zushi Centre ... page 7
- New Years Kalpataru at Zushi Centre ... page 9
- A Story to Remember ... page 11



Osaka (from page 1)

A Swami Vivekananda 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration for the people of the Kansai region of Japan was held at the May Theatre in Suita, Osaka on Saturday, November 30, and was attended by about 350 people.

The first part of the programme started at 2 pm, when Swami Medhasananda and a few devotees chanted Vedic mantras for the invocation. Then Mr. Aseem R. Mahajan, Consul General of India for Osaka-Kobe, offered flowers to the photo of Swami Vivekananda, followed by a welcome and introductory address by Swami Medhasananda, President of the Vedanta Society of Japan. Vedanta Society Secre-

tary, Mr. Kenichi Mitamura, then read out the Congratulatory Message from Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan.

Mr. Mahajan released a Japanese language version of *The Religion of Love* authored by Swami Vivekananda and gave a speech. Mr. J. S. Dayal, President of the Indian Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Keishin Kimura, President of the Japan Yoga Therapy Association, and Professor Akio Tanabe of Kyoto University then gave speeches respectively. Professor Tanabe’s thoughtful and inspiring speech on the relevance of Swami Vivekananda’s message for the young people of Japan was especially appreciated by all.

(con’t page 3)



Osaka (from page 2)

At 3:50 pm, the first part of the programme ended with the chanting of Universal Prayers in Sanskrit by the audience led by Swami Medhasananda.

During the tea break, all the attendees were provided a snack in the lobby, where a book stand was opened by the Vedanta Society for the day. The second part of the programme started at 4:20 pm with classical Indian dance, Bharatanatyam, performed by a dance group that drew a lot

of applause. An hour-long video on the life of Swami Vivekananda was then shown. The event ended with a Vote of Thanks given by Mr. Yutaka Oasa, the event's Organising Secretary.

Beautiful posters on the life and message of Swami Vivekananda were displayed in the foyer and books on Ramakrishna - Vivekananda literature were available for sale. Each attendee was also presented with a booklet entitled 'Arise and Awake' (in English and Japanese) containing many of Swami Vivekananda's inspiring messages. •



Vedanta Society of South Korea
'Vivek 150 Anniversary Festival' Keynote Speech
“Introducing Swami Vivekananda to Korea”
by Swami Medhasananda

I am immensely happy to take part in the 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration honouring Swami Vivekananda, the prophet of Religious Harmony, here in Seoul. I believe this celebration, which is being celebrated globally for about a year, will be considered a momentous, historic event in the spiritual history of this great country as had been the advent of Buddhism in the fourth century and Christianity in the nineteenth century.

I am privileged to have been born in India where Swami Vivekananda was also born; I am privileged to belong to a non-sectarian organisation founded by Swami Vivekananda with the twin ideals, 'Self-

realisation and Service to the world'; and I am very privileged to be engaged in propagating the message of Vedanta expounded by the Great Swami in countries other than India. That is why, I suppose, organisers of this event have asked me to give the keynote address for today's programme.

These questions may be reasonably asked at the outset:

a. 'Why have this celebration in Korea, where even the name of Vivekananda is almost unknown, or at best little known?'

(con't page 4)

Korea (from page 3)

b. 'Is it just a ceremony, mere ritualism concerning the local Indian community in which the Koreans with Indian connections are attending, while average Koreans have no interest in it?' or

c. 'Has it real significance for Koreans as well?'

I shall try to examine these questions in this talk.

There are some mythological and historical references of the Korea-India relationship in ancient times, most important of which is the advent of Buddhism in Korea from India via China. This made a deep and permanent impact on Korea in every sphere of life which is evident even today.

In recent years, Korea-India relations have entered into a new phase, especially in the economic and political sectors, where people to people relationships between the two countries have been augmented. I know this both from official sources and also from my personal encounters. The numbers of Koreans visiting India in a short ten to fifteen year period has increased remarkably. These are all new developments in the historical relationship between Korea and India which are not only welcome, but should be further promoted in areas that are mutually beneficial.

Dear Friends, it is in this backdrop of bilateral relationships when new areas of such a relationship are being explored that I would like to draw your attention to one such area, which is not generally emphasised, if not ignored. And that is how India's rich tradition of spiritual wisdom, its most distinguishing and enduring feature – forming the very basis of Indian Culture and Civilisation and the core of Indianness – can be of some help to modern Korean Society. Because in spite of remarkable progress in material life, Korean Society is showing signs of serious lacuna.

For example, the individual's life is not really peaceful, but rather stressful. Family relationships are strained. A kind of mental sickness is becoming common, with the number of cases of people taking one's own life increasing alarmingly. The root cause of this scenario appears to be a fast and competitive life and the pursuit of sensual pleasures in imitation of the cheaper sides of Western culture. Thus, while the sole emphasis on material prosperity and its focused pursuit enhances the standard of living on the one hand, it becomes a source of peace-less-ness and disharmony in individual and social life. How this contradiction can be addressed and solved has been a challenging issue for modern societies, including Korea.

Moreover, so far as personal lives are concerned, some basic questions that confront a man are not taken cognisance of, hence becoming the root cause of unfulfillment in spite of being materially well off. These are:

- a. Who am I?
- b. Why am I living?
- c. What is the purpose of life?
- d. How can life be fulfilled?
- e. How do I face the vicissitudes of life?
- f. How can I control my mind and become strong?
- g. How can I attain sustained peace?

These questions, we often ignore, are so vital for our lives and should be answered satisfactorily. Otherwise life becomes directionless and unfulfilled. Secondly, one cannot do away with work, but work causes stress and tension. How to do work without being stressed or, in other words, how to maintain the equanimity of mind in an active life?

Thirdly, in modern times another significant trend, which is becoming evident, is that people are shying away from organised religion in growing numbers. Many people

(con't page 5)

Korea (from page 4)

don't want to be members of any religious organisation, since most of such organisations suffer from some chronic limitations, as Vivekananda had observed that Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. Hence the question is being asked increasingly: Can one practice and become spiritual without becoming a member of any organised religion? What is the difference between religion and spirituality? Why are universal love and harmony, which is the essence of all religions, wanting in most religious organisations and rather supplanted by dogmatism, sectarianism and intolerance.

Moreover, there is competition to enhance the numbers of followers by hook or crook; a focus on temporal matters and infighting. Worst of all there is the preaching of violence toward others in the name of religion that is taking root within the religious fold. What are the solutions to these pitiable conditions?

We can get satisfactory answers to these vital questions from Swami Vivekananda, a modern exponent of India's tradition of spiritual wisdom, who has been regarded as the greatest spiritual ambassador of Modern India. Vivekananda's talks and writings, which are based on the Universal Message of the ancient Indian philosophy of Vedanta, are characterised by rationality, universality, modernity and practicality.

Swamiji was not only a man of religion, but much more than that. He was a humanist, a social reformer, an educationist, a patriot and a world citizen. He was also the founder of a great organisation.

He not only advocated the harmony of religions but was also a relentless advocate of the synthesis of traditionalism and modernism, material prosperity and spiritual values, East and West, and also localisation and globalisation.

That is why the great Indian contemporar-

ies of Swamiji, including Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Jawaharlal Nehru, and world thinkers like Leo Tolstoy and Romain Rolland had a profound respect and appreciation of Vivekananda. In fact, Rabindranath Tagore once wrote to Romain Rolland, "If you want to know India, study Vivekananda. In him everything is positive and nothing negative".

World leaders like, President Barack Obama of the USA, have mentioned Swamiji with appreciation in a recent speeches. On January 28, 2013, the British Parliament passed a motion recognising the "valuable contribution" made by Swamiji "to interfaith dialogue at the international level, encouraging and promoting harmony and understanding between religions." And according to a report, Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, said that he does not go to bed without reading some pages of Vivekananda's works.

Let me quote some of Vivekananda's sayings, without offering explanations due to time constraints, which will throw some light on the important issues we raised earlier:

a. About Life:

This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest of are more dead than alive.

b. About Religion:

Religion is not in doctrines, nor in intellectual argumentation; it is being and becoming; it is realisation. Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal.

c. About Changing One's Religion:

Do I wish that the Christian become a Hindu? God forbid! Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist become Christian? God forbid! The Christian is not to become a

(con't page 6)



Korea (from page 5)

Hindu nor a Buddhist, nor are a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others, and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.

d. About Faith:

Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith in God - this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods the foreigners have introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves and stand upon that strength and be strong.

e. About the Remedy of Weakness:

The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength. Teach men of the strength that is already within them. Strength is life; weakness is death!

f. About the Way of Making an Individual and a Nation Great:

Three things are necessary to make every man great, every nation great. (1) Conviction of the power of goodness (2) Absence of jealousy and superstition (3) Helping all who are trying to be good and do good.

From these few specimens of Swamiji's messages which I have just quoted, you will find that while they are deeply spiritual and profound, they are, yet, very powerful messages to which Romain Rolland, the distinguished writer and Nobel laureate of France, drew our attention. Moreover, even though the Swami offered his messages more than 100 years ago, they are so very relevant today.

Swamiji was a champion of the harmony of religions and talked about it on many occasions, especially at the world's first Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. Swamiji's historic speech at this Parliament has been adjudged as the best among all speeches delivered and documented so far throughout the world ac-

Korea (from page 6)

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According to "Intelligent Life" the British bi-monthly lifestyle and culture section of the famous magazine "The Economist."

In his speech Swamiji said: "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."

Why this speech created such a great impact was because Swamiji's pronouncements were based on his personal realisation of what his mentor, Sri Ramakrishna, the celebrated saint of Modern India, proclaimed, "As many faiths, so many paths."

Dear Friends, I hope this deliberation has been able to justify the rationale for the present celebration, which should be viewed as the starting point of serious study of Swami Vivekananda in this country. Such study and its follow-up will substantially help the personal and social lives of the people of this country and elevate them.

And the best way to study Vivekananda is not to study about Vivekananda, but to study his works like Karma Yoga or Jnana Yoga. So far as I know, at present only a few works of Ramakrishna - Vivekanan-

• **Thought of the Month** •

"Men are slower to recognise blessings than evils."

- Titus Livy

da and Vedanta literature are available in the Korean language, demanding more production of such publications.

I hope and pray that the Vedanta Society of South Korea, founded only last year, which organised this great event in collaboration with the Indian Embassy and many others, will be instrumental in propagating and practicing the message of Vedanta and Vivekananda in this country, thereby rendering yeoman's service to this land and its people. I request all of you present here, especially the teachers of Indology and leaders of the yoga groups of Korea who have some familiarity and appreciation of Indian spiritual and cultural traditions, and also all members of the Indian community, to extend your support and goodwill to this fledgling Society in achieving its great mission.

Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti, Hari Om!
Kamsahamnida! (Thank you!)



Christmas Eve at Zushi Centre

The Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual Christmas Eve celebration at the Zushi Centre from 7:30 PM on 24 December 2013.

Volunteers arrived early to decorate the main Ashram Building with lights and the upstairs balcony of the Ashram displayed a "Merry Christmas" message that could be seen from trains or traffic in the ravine below. In the main shrine room an altar with an image of a meditating Jesus Christ on the top tier and a copy of the image of Mother and Child noted in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna just below.

(cont page 8)

Christmas (from page 7)

Leis, bouquets and potted poinsettias carefully prepared and laid out, and cakes and biscuits and fruits and candies of many varieties were unwrapped and prepared for offering. As the candles were lighted and the electronic versions of votive candles were switched on, the congregation was called to order and Swami Medhasananda conducted a worship.

New Testament selections from Matthew in both English and Japanese were read and then elaborated upon by the swami, and a brief talk on origins of the Christmas Eve Tradition of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission were interspersed with Christmas carol verses in both English and Japanese led by Mr. L. Hirsch and Ms. Shanti Izumida.

After a concluding prayer and meditation, everyone was invited downstairs to the dining area for a delicious prasad dinner and sweets.



New Year's Kalpataru at Zushi Centre

On Wednesday morning January 1, the Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual New Year's Kalpataru from 11:30 am. This year the gathering was attended by guests who reside in Japan to work or study from Venezuela, Morocco, Korea, China, and, of course, India and Japan. The programme



started with Vedic Peace Chants led by Maharaj and joined in by all the participants. Scripture readings in English and Japanese then followed and Buddhist prayers were recited.

Two Moroccan students were invited to come forward and explain and show Islamic



ways of prayer and prostration. They also offered some very beautiful chanting and, although most people did not know the exact meaning, their hearts were touched. Next, a young Korean was also asked to explain and demonstrate how to



greet relatives in person on New Year's Day. Bowing with dignity was included in the greeting, which seemed very similar to that of Japanese culture. Leonardo, an ardent Christian devotee and student offered a Christian prayer.



Swami gave a short discourse saying, "The Ramakrishna Mission respects all religions as do the Vedanta Societies worldwide, as branches of this Mission. Here, the Vedanta
(con't page 10)





New Year's (from page 9)

Society of Japan too, puts the images of Jesus Christ and Buddha on the walls of our chapel. We worship them and celebrate



their birthdays as well. We do not have or display Islamic images following their traditions, but read from the Quran once a week".

After the lunch prasad, Maharaj and about



The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter - December 2013 Volume 11 Number 12

twenty of the participants left the Zushi Centre at around 2 pm and headed for Kamakura on foot. They first visited the Kotokuin Temple making offerings to the Great Buddha, and took a tea break with snacks next to the kiosk on the premises. Then they took a bus to Kamakura Station to visit the Catholic Yukinoshita Catholic



Church nearby. As they left the church, it was already dark outside. They walked again up to the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, where they parted. Everyone had enjoyed a wonderful New Year's Day full of diversity and harmony, regardless of culture or religion.

Swami Medhasananda later commented how pleased he was to have Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Korean prayers shared by practitioners for the first time at the Zushi Centre on this special New Year's Day. ·



• A Story to Remember •

On Waking Up

Spirituality means waking up. Most people, even though they don't know it, are asleep. They're born asleep, they live asleep, they marry in their sleep, they breed children in their sleep, they die in their sleep without ever waking up. They never understand the loveliness and the beauty of this thing that we call human existence. You know, all mystics - Catholic, Christian, non-Christian, no matter what their theology, no matter what their religion - are unanimous on one thing: that all is well, all is well. Though everything is a mess, all is well. Strange paradox, to be sure. But, tragically, most people never get to see that all is well because they are asleep. They are having a nightmare.

Last year on Spanish television I heard a story about this gentleman who knocks on his son's door. "Jaime", he says, "wake up"! Jaime answers, "I don't want to get up, Papa". The father shouts, "Get up, you have to go to school". Jaime says, "I don't want to go to school". "Why not"? asks the father. "Three reasons", says Jaime. "First, because it's so dull; second, the kids tease me; and third, I hate school". And the father says, "Well, I am going to give you three reasons why you must go to school. First, because it is your duty; second, because you are forty-five years old, and third, because you are the headmaster". Wake up, wake up! You've grown up. You're too big to be asleep. Wake up! Stop playing with your toys.

Most people tell you they want to get out of kindergarten, but don't believe them. Don't believe them! All they want you to do is to mend their broken toys. "Give me back my wife. Give me back my job. Give me back my money. Give me back my reputation, my success". This is what they want; they want their toys replaced. That's all. Even the best psychologist will tell you that, that people don't really want to be cured. What they want is relief; a cure is painful.

Waking up is unpleasant, you know. You are nice and comfortable in bed. It's irritating to be woken up. That's the reason the wise guru will not attempt to wake people up. I hope I'm going to be wise here and make no attempt whatsoever to wake you up if you are asleep. It is really none of my business, even though I say to you at times, "Wake up!" My business is to do my thing, to dance my dance. If you profit from it, fine; if you don't, too bad! As the Arabs say, "The nature of rain is the same, but it makes thorns grow in the marshes and flowers in the gardens."

by Anthony de Mello

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