



March 2015 - Volume 13 Number 03

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

April Calendar

Birthdays

Sri Shankaracharya
Thursday, April 23

Zushi Centre Events

Hatha Yoga Class

April 5, 12, 26,
14:00 ~ 15:30
* No class on the 19th
Zushi Centre Annexe
Contact: 080-6702-2308

Gospel Study Group

4/7 (Tues), 21 (Tues)
10:00 ~ 12:00
Zushi Centre Main
Contact & application:
benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

April Zushi Retreat

4/19 (Sun) 10:30 ~ 16:30
Zushi Centre
Morning Session: Talk
Lunch Prasad
Afternoon Session: Reading, Talk, Q&A

Akhanda Japam

4/29 (Tues)
05:00 ~ 20:00
Main Kyokai Centre
Please inform Mr. Mitamura of times convenient to you at 090-7194-1274, or email
<dd94dd94@nifty.com>
by April 20th.

More Event Info Page 6



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"One who is really anxious to cross the ocean of the world will somehow break their bonds. No one can entangle such people."

- Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother

"The world is a prison for the faithful, but a paradise for unbelievers."

- Prophet Muhammad

Zushi Retreat March 2015

Celebrating Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva's Birth Anniversary

On Sunday, March 15, the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat celebrated the 180th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna.

Mangala arati (morning worship) began at 06:00am in the Main Zushi Ashram attended by residents, locals and volunteer devotees, some of whom had arrived a day earlier to get an early start on the many chores necessary to accommodate the celebration and the large number of guests expected with the nice spring weather.

After breakfast volunteers busied themselves with a variety of the usual tasks to prepare the Zushi Annexe building with the altar, food and floral offerings, worship platform, puja vessels and utensils, pushpanjali flowers for attendees, along with rows of folding chairs and audio/visual preparations.

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March Zushi Retreat (from page 1)

At the altar Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) added the final touches adorning the photos of Sri Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda with sandal paste before prostrating and signaling a conch shell (shankha) summons to signal to the start of the puja (worship). About 150 people were in attendance for the programme.

Maharaj conducted the puja assisted (Tantradharak) again by Mr. Anirban Mukherjee Arati, then commenced with symbolic offerings of the five elements to the continuing call of conch, bells, cymbals, and the congregation joining in singing Khandana Bhava Bandhana. Maharaj then sat at a harmonium to lead the congregation in singing Sarva Mangala Mangalye:

Om Sarva Mangala Mangalye
Shive Sarvartha Sadhike
Sharanye Tryambake Gauri
Narayani Namostu Te
Srishti Sthiti Vinashanam,
Shaktibhute, Sanatani
Gunashraye, Gunamayee,
Narayani, Namostu Te



Sharanagata Dinarta Paritrana Parayane
Sarvasyartihare Devi! Narayani! Namostu Te
Narayani Namostu Te
Narayani Namostu Te
Narayani Namostu Te

Flowers were then passed out for pushpanjali (flower offering) and Maharaj led all in a pushpanjali mantra to Sri Ramakrishna before each offered their prayers and flower. Food offerings were then collected and taken to the Main Ashrama kitchen where the prasad lunch was being prepared.

The Annexe platform was rearranged with items for the Homa fire with Mr. Mukherjee assisting again. Prayers and crescendos of flames and crackling gee ending with a cloud of steam and smoke as Maharaj doused the blaze. He then selected bits of ash and added more gee to make the vibhuti he then dabbed each attendee on the forehead after dabbing each of the three altar photos first. Everyone was directed to the main Ashrama building where a prasad lunch was being served.

The afternoon session began at about 14:30
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March Zushi Retreat (from page 2)

with Swami Medhasananda leading the congregation in chanting Om Sahana Vavatu. He announced his pleasure with the attendance of so many for the birth celebration of Sri Ramakrishna that included puja, arati, pushpanjali and homa (fire) in the morning session. He said that when he first arrived in Japan this ceremony had only included a modest programme of songs and a discourse. Then he introduced ritualistic worship and later added a homa ceremony. Gradually, the Retreat Programme included puja, arati, pushpanjali and homa in the morning session and after lunch prasada, a discourse and music programme in the afternoon. About 150 people attended the Celebration Programme.

Maharaj explained that in the early days the attendance was not so high, but gradually grew to the point where he felt larger quarters were needed so the increasing numbers of attendees could watch the programmes more conveniently. So the Society purchased a nearby property and built a small building

to accommodate more people comfortably. He admitted that attendance has grown so that even this new addition is not sufficient. 'Such are the dynamics of such an organisation,' he said. 'I suppose the opposite could have been true and had built a new building with fewer and fewer in attendance.'

'As you know we have a special cultural programme today,' he continued, 'but before that I want to speak briefly on Sri Ramakrishna. Because along with the worship rituals of puja, homa, pushpanjali and lunch prasada on such an occasion, we should also partake of some spiritual nourishment in the form of a discourse.' Maharaj then gave a brief talk on Sri Ramakrishna's acclaimed use of similes. (This talk is included in its entirety in this issue of The Vedanta Kyokai.)

Upon the completion of the discourse the Special Music Programme began. Two Indian devotees sang a devotional song and Mr. Samudra Dutta Gupta followed accompanying himself on harmonium. An ensemble of Japanese devotees offered a song and were joined by more devotees and members of the Kailas Yoga School leaving just a few people in their seats to enjoy the song. Then the special guests, Tokyo Weekender, a group of Indian musicians and singers gave a wonderful 50-minute performance that was well received by all who managed to stay to the end of the programme.

After fruit juice and cookies were served the evening vesper service commenced in the Annexe which was followed by a short meditation. Then teams of volunteers dismantled, disconnected, wrapped up, washed up and put away this and that, and vacuumed the Annexe. •





March Zushi Retreat 2015
Celebrates Sri Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Celebration

“Sri Ramakrishna's Use of Irrefutable Similes to Teach”

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

In modern Bengali literature there was a versatile and reputed writer named Prathamath Bishi. He was raised and educated in an institution, later known as Viswa-Bharati University, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, the literary genius of India and an eminent educationalist. Bishi made a significant remark about Sri Ramakrishna and His Gospel. While he acknowledged the greatness of the traditionally well-known Sanskrit poet Kalidasa for his creative use of similes, Bishi remarked that Tagore had surpassed even Kalidasa; but that no one could surpass Sri Ramakrishna in His command of similes; not Kalidasa, not even Tagore. This is a great compliment to Sri Ramakrishna's effortless artistry coming from Bishi when we consider he was nurtured by the Tagore tradition. However, if we read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we can understand for ourselves how apt this remark from Bishi was.

One great difference between the similes used by Kalidasa and Tagore and those of Sri Ramakrishna is that those of Kalidasa and Tagore mostly require us to use our power of imagination to fully appreciate them. The similes of Sri Ramakrishna, however, do not require us to imagine, because his examples are common to the experiences of our daily lives. In this sense they are quite simple, yet very profound. Another characteristic of the similes used by Sri Ramakrishna was that sometimes He would use many similes, one after the other, to bring home a single point. Then again he would present these similes with such gestures and postures that they deeply impressed and were easily recalled by everyone.

Poets imagine and ponder their words, yet all of Sri Ramakrishna's similes were based on deep realisations and not mere imagination.

This is why while we may enjoy the similes of creative writers while we read them, we rarely remember or use them later. Yet, while we may enjoy the similes of Sri Ramakrishna for their mystic charm, they also impress us so much that we spontaneously remember them. Coming from common daily activities and observations, his similes instruct us on leading a life of values – both moral and spiritual. So we cannot afford to forget those instructed by Sri Ramakrishna either.

Let us give some examples of Sri Ramakrishna's similes here:

Conflicts abound between spiritual seekers as to whether God has form or no form. The Semitic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam do not believe in God with form and zealots even destroy images of God. Hindus, as we know, believe in God with forms and at the same time they believe in God without form. How this is reconciled addresses the harmony of religions. This is not only a question for scholars to consider, but is a problem for the harmony of the present-day world. Sri Ramakrishna gave a beautiful example which reconciles these two; God with form and without form. An example of these two aspects reconciled is H₂O as unseen water vapour and visual water. Is H₂O chemically different in the form of vapour and water? There is no difference, their nature is the same. Then again, water can become ice and take a different name and different form, but its nature remains H₂O.

(con't page 5)

• **Thought of the Month** •

Real knowledge is to know the extent
of one's ignorance.

- Confucius

APRIL ANNOUNCEMENTS

• SOCIETY ACTIVITIES •

4/4 (SAT) 14:00 ~ 16:00

India Embassy Tokyo 03-3262-2391

Bhagavad Gita Study (free)

Contact: Zushi Centre 046-873-0428

* NOTE: Photo ID is required for entry to Embassy

4/5, (Sundays) 12, 26, 14:00 ~ 15:30

Hatha Yoga Class

*** No class on the 19th**

Where: Zushi Centre Annexe

Contact: 080-6702-2308

4/7 (Tues), 21 (Tues) 10:00 ~ 12:00

Tuesday Gospel Study

Location: Zushi Centre Main

Contact & application:

<benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

Monthly on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday -

Any changes will be noted on homepage.

4/11 (Sat) to 12 (Sun)

Satsanga in Oita

Theme: "The Secret of Life"

Contact: 'Jinen' 0972-62-2338

4/18 (Sat) 14:00 ~ 16:00

Upanishads Study Series

Embassy of India: 03-3262-2391

Contact: Zushi Centre 046-873-0428

* NOTE: Photo ID required for entry to Embassy

4/19 (Sun) 10:30 ~ 16:30

Monthly Zushi Retreat - April 2015

Location: Zushi Centre

Morning Session: Reading / Talk

Lunch Prasad

Afternoon Session: Reading/ Talk / Q&A

4/24 (Fri)

Homeless Narayana Service

300 sets of underwear to be distributed and food served ...

Continuing Swami Vivekananda 150th Birth Anniversary Activities

Contact: SATO 090-6544-9304

4/25 (Sat) & 26th (Sun) 10:00 to 16:45 (2hr lunch)

Satsanga in Sapporo

Theme: "Bhagavad Gita" intensive course

Venue: Sapporo, Nishi-ku, Kotoni Station

Capacity: 15 people (already filled to capacity)

*** Summer Satsanga in Sapporo**

*** 8/2 (Sun) 13:30 to 16:30** (tentative)

Theme: undecided

Venue: L • Plaza,

4th Floor, training room

Capacity: 60 people

Contact: Tanabe 080-1180-8121

4/29 (Tues), 05:00 ~ 20:00

Special Japam and Meditation Day

Venue: Kyokai Centre - Main Shrine

Note: Meal will be served.

Contact: Please inform Mr. Mitamura of times convenient to you at 090-7194-1274, or email <dd94dd94@nifty.com> by April 20th. The schedule is prepared in one hour units, but your participation for more than one hour is appreciated.

We hold Akhanda Japam (continuous spiritual practice of silent chanting of mantra, meditation or prayer) twice yearly. Participants practice for one hour periods or more continuously in silence creating a holy atmosphere. You are welcome join at a time of your convenience. This practice is quite easy and beneficial for beginners.

Similes (from page 6)

This is so logical and so convincing it cannot be contradicted. Sri Ramakrishna silenced many doubting seekers just by giving this example. Do you need any imagination to understand this phenomenon? It is a plain fact, H₂O as vapour, water and ice.

Then there is contention if God, Isha, Allah, Kamisama, etc., are different. Many people think all these are separate and different entities, fighting over which is true and which is false. Sri Ramakrishna reconciled this contentious issue too, with a very simple example. He said three devotees, a Christian, a Hindu and a Muslim, went to collect water at the same pond. When asked the Muslim would say he was collecting 'pani'; the Christian would say he was collecting 'water'; and the Hindu would answer 'jal'. Though the Muslim will argue it is pani and nothing else, and the Christian will argue that it is water, etc. Are these three really different substances? Of course not, it's just the same water called by different names. Thus Hindu's Ishwara, Islam's Allah and Christianity's God are not different, they are one and the same entity only named differently. Do you need any power of imagination to understand this example? Even a child can understand it. Isn't fighting over the name of the same Almighty ridiculous?

There is another beautiful example offered by Sri Ramakrishna resolving doubt regarding how God, the Infinite, be worshipped in a finite image. It is one that I like most and have quoted many times. In 19th century India the Brahmos did not believe in worshipping God with form, much like Christians and Muslims. They are confused as to how any image could represent the Infinite. Keshab Chandra Sen was the famous leader of the Brahmo Samaj at that time. He had great respect and love for Sri Ramakrishna whom he often visited. Once he exposed his doubt to Sri Ramakrishna saying, 'Revered Sir, you say that your Mother has created this uni-

verse, but your Mother Kali is so small, so finite, how is it She created the entire universe? How can I believe this?

Earlier today we chanted the Divine Mother's hymn, namely, Sarva Mangalye. In this chant there are three words, namely, "Shristi-sthiti-vinashanam" meaning, Mother You are the creator, sustainer and destroyer of this universe. So Keshab asked how is it this small image could create this whole universe? To this Sri Ramakrishna gave a beautiful, yet convincing, simile telling Keshab the sun is so huge yet looks like a small disc in the sky. And why is this? Obviously, because it is so far away. No intelligence is required and this question should never even appear on a quiz. Sri Ramakrishna then continued explaining to Keshab that as he was far away from Mother Kali his understanding of the Mother was very limited and that is why he thought Mother Kali is so small and finite. 'The closer you come to Mother Kali,' the Master said, 'the more and more you understand the Mother; the more and more you will grasp Her infinite nature.'

Is this answer not convincing? Remember this answer came not from a scholar, but from a nearly illiterate person like Sri Ramakrishna. Someone witnessing the torrential downpour of similes from the Master's lips asked Him in sheer amazement, 'Revered Sir, do you prepare your similes beforehand?' Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'No. Even if I do, I forget them. Mother is everywhere, so wherever I go, Mother supplies me. An endless supply of knowledge comes from the Mother.' So these are examples of the similes supplied by Mother Kali, the source of all, that Sri Ramakrishna used to remove doubts from people, especially spiritual seekers, and to lead them on the right path of knowledge. There are hundreds of such examples in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. In fact, I wonder if perhaps there is any page in the Gospel where we don't find an example of a simile.

(con't page 8)

Similes (from page 7)

Today's congregation consists mostly of householders, and I believe the following examples to be very relevant to your lives. Sri Ramakrishna did not advise that one and all should give up hearth and home, go into the forest, or become a monk of the Ramakrishna Math or a nun of the Sarada Math. No. He said if you have family and children, it is in no way objectionable. But, and there is one "but" if you want peace, and remember, "if" you want peace there is something which you must also consider which Sri Ramakrishna advises us on. If you want money, Sri Ramakrishna has no advice for you, and you should seek that advice elsewhere. And though He would often say Taka Mati Mati Taka, in Bengali meaning 'soil is money and money is soil,' some today jokingly interpret this having to do with price of real estate becoming so expensive. [Laughter]

I know, when we are young and in our twenties, we don't feel the necessity of peace, until we have a romantic idea, a rosy picture of life wherein everything is fun. But after we start a job and then after marriage, peacelessness ensues. Slowly at first and increasing year by year. After the birth of children, and especially when they do not obey you, this peacelessness grows. Then human relationships, the relationships between husband and wife, wife and husband, their relationships with their children, relationships with colleagues, with the boss, become the main causes of peacelessness.

Here, Sri Ramakrishna has advice for those who really feel the necessity of having peace. What is this advice? Non-attachment! Many times Sri Ramakrishna gives this advice to His householder devotees for attaining peace. There is nothing wrong if you have a house, family, money, car, job, all this is fine, but be unattached to all these things. It is simple, but most important advice.

Many devotees would visit Swami Bhuteshanandaji at Belur Math when he was President Maharaj of the Order. As family

people and being troubled with many problems they would often ask, 'Maharaj, how can we get peace?' Obviously, this is a common plight of householder devotees. Bhuteshanandaji would simply answer, 'Be unattached!' They would reply, 'Oh, Maharaj, that's so difficult ...' 'OK,' he retorted, 'then don't expect peace! If you don't try to practice non-attachment, then be happy with peacelessness.'

In fact, I wonder how many people really want peace. Perhaps for 99% of the people, it is only lip-service. 'I want peace' they claim. But, really, in their hearts they don't want peace. They thrive in peacelessness, they enjoy peacelessness. If they find themselves in prolonged periods of peace, they may wonder what to do with that peace. Hence, for them it's better to have worries. This is why they never seriously try to solve the problem of peacelessness. I believe such people should be more introspective regarding their real intention.

Sri Ramakrishna gives many examples of this to explain the idea of non-attachment and to practice it, but the main point is for us to be unattached. One such example is a boat on the water. If the water is in the boat, the boat will sink. If there is no water in the boat, it will float nicely. So see that you are in the family, but that the family does not enter into you. It seems a difficult proposition and paradox, nevertheless, think deeply about the meaning of this example and you will understand what non-attachment is. If you are both in the family and the family is in you, then there is no practice of non-attachment. If you are in the family, yet the family is not in you, meaning you develop the idea of detachment within yourself, then this is non-attachment.

There is a very well known Bengali philosophical folk song, called a Baul Gaan song, starting with, 'Amar Jemon Beni Temni Rabe' the gist of which means I shall do everything, but I shall not get attached to anything and continues:

(con't page 9)

Similes (from page 8)

'I shall bathe, but not dampen my hair.
I shall cook, but not touch the rice pot.
Neither shall I be chaste nor unchaste,
Yet I shall not leave my husband!'

Other examples offered by Sri Ramakrishna include water on the lotus leaf. Water does not stick to or permeate this leaf. The jack-fruit too, does not stick to one's hands, if first one smears his hands in oil. Thus practice of non-attachment involves one's a change in attitude. How do we change this attitude? Remember that our relationship with God is eternal, and our relationship to our family, no matter how deep that relationship is, is only for this lifetime - only until death. If this idea is not in focus, then we are not practicing non-attachment, but giving up on our family. The negative aspect of renunciation is we give up our attachments for worldly things, while the positive aspect is we develop attachment to God. If this positive aspect is not there, then non-attachment becomes only a negative thing and oppressive.

Again in a simple way, Sri Ramakrishna advises us how to grow our attachment to God with the example of a toothache. We have all suffered from a toothache and were still able to attend to many duties. Even while attending to our duties and busy with other affairs, one part of the mind is always occupied with the toothache. In the same way, in whatever activities we do, let one part of our mind get connected with God, by way of remembering Him or repeating His name

Another question that confronts devotees is which is better in matters of day to day life and spiritual practice, self-effort or dependence on God? Sri Ramakrishna gave a beautiful example of this pointing out the behavioural differences between a kitten and a baby monkey. The kitten depends totally on its mother and will stay wherever the mother cat places it, be it a warm bed or a dirty place. The kitten will just stay there and mew any of its needs. The infant monkey, on

the other hand, clings to its mother and risks falling off sometimes.

Sri Ramakrishna said there are two types of devotees. One says, 'I have to do it;' I have to practice this discipline or that, observe this ritual or that, and always worries about his life. The other simply depends on God. To me, I see that at least initially, we can have both of these attitudes. In the beginning it is difficult for us to depend on God entirely, but slowly, as we proceed, we develop the attitude of dependence on God.

My final example today is that we may read thousands of books or attend hundreds of lectures, but unless we practice these teachings there is no real progress, no real transformation in our lives. Sri Ramakrishna emphasised the necessity of putting this idea into practice by giving us the example of butter in milk. Where do we get butter? Does anyone doubt that we get butter from milk? Suppose you want butter and before you there is a pot full of milk, do you sit and repeat to this pot, 'I want butter, I want butter?' Will the mere wish or repetition of the word butter for any number of times produce butter for you? Say it, plead it a thousand times, 'I want butter,' will you get any? No. Of course not. There is a process for making butter from milk which we must follow to get butter.

In the same way, if we repeat endlessly we want peace, no peace will ensue. There is a process for attaining peace that one must follow. One cannot say, 'I do not want to do anything special for attaining peace. I just want peace. Does peace to rain down from heaven for you? [Laughter] No, we have to do something for it. We have to set the milk to curd and churn this curd into butter. We must take all this trouble, if we want to taste butter. We will get butter, no doubt about it, but we must put effort into the process. In the same way, we may say we want peace, but we are not willing to do what is necessary to get peace. How then can we get peace?

(con't page 10)

Similes (from page 9)

If for nothing else, please read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna to enjoy these examples and try to understand their profundity. There are many, some of whom don't even believe in God, who are amazed at the literary value of the Gospel of Sri Rama-

krishna, not what the Master says about God, but for its literary value. So I request you all, whether for literary enjoyment; for good guidance on how to lead a good life; or for how to get peace in your life, please read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna; not once, but again and again. •

• Story to Remember •

The Poor Man's Wealth

Ramchand and Premchand were neighbours. Ramchand was a poor farmer and Premchand was a landlord.

Ramchand used to be very relaxed and happy. He never bothered to close the doors and windows of his house at night. He had deep, sound sleeps. Although he had no money he was peaceful.

Premchand was always very tense. He was very keen to close the doors and windows of his house at night. He could not sleep well. He was always worried that someone might break open his safe and steal his money. He envied the peaceful Ramchand.

One day, Premchand called Ramchand over and gave him a boxful of cash saying, "Look my dear friend. I am blessed with plenty of wealth. I find you in poverty. So, take this cash and live in prosperity."

Ramchand was overwhelmingly happy. He was joyful throughout the day. Night came and Ramchand went to bed as usual, but this night he could not sleep. He got up and went and closed his doors and windows. Still he could not sleep. He began to keep watch over the box of cash. The whole night he was disturbed and sleepless.

As soon as day broke, Ramchand took the box of cash to Premchand. He handed the box back to Premchand saying, "Dear Friend, I am poor, but your money stole my peace away from me. Please bear with me and accept the return of your money."

Moral Stories

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