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The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

February Calendar



Birthdays

Swami Adbhutananda

Tuesday, 3 February

**Sri Sri Ramakrishna
Deva**

Friday, 20 February

Zushi Centre Events

• **Upanishad Class** •
India Embassy, Tokyo
No Class in February

• **Study Classes** •
**'Gospel of
Sri Ramakrishna'**

Tuesday, February 17, only
main Zushi Centre with
Swami Medhasananda

• **February •
Zushi Retreat**

Sunday, 22 February
10:30 ~ 16:30

**"Service as a Spiritual
Practice"**

Swami Medhasananda

Lunch Prasad
Afternoon Talk

All are welcome!

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## ✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"In a conflict between the heart and the brain, follow your heart."*

— Swami Vivekananda

*"The higher we soar the smaller we appear to those who cannot fly."*

— Zarathustra

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi 163rd Birth Celebration  
Zushi Monthly Retreat, Sunday, December 21, 2014

## Some Interesting Episodes in the Life of Holy Mother and Their Significance

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda

When Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi were at Dakshineswar some aristocratic ladies of Calcutta would come to visit them. These visitors would often comment to the Holy Mother that everything about her husband was exceptional and wonderful except for the fact that the couple did not share a bed. That this common aspect of marriage was avoided was their only complaint about Sri Ramakrishna. Many Brahmo Samaj devotees also held an allegation against Sri Ramakrishna saying that he deprived his wife of a householder's life, family and children. But what was the reality?

## A Deprived Housewife?

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## Episodes (from page 1)

Sri Ramakrishna had asked that Sarada Devi come to Dakshineswar to take care of and serve him. Upon her arrival in Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna asked a vital question of her. Since he had been living an entirely spiritual life up to that time, but had married, he asked if she had come to 'drag him into worldly life'. As a wife has such rights over a husband, he wondered if she had hopes of leading a secular lifestyle with him as her husband, and if so, he was prepared to do so. From this we can understand what kind of freedom he offered to Holy Mother. He had no intention of forcing her to accept a monastic lifestyle, if she expected a usual marital relationship. She may feel that he would be talking about God, thinking about God, going to temple but not taking care of her - as his wife.

Holy Mother's answer was most significant. When asked if she wanted Sri Ramakrishna to live a householder's life, she said that no, she had come to help him in his spiritual journey - an exceptional answer indeed. Here

it is quite clear that there was no force or ultimatum involved, that the wife's consent was given willingly. This also shows the extraordinariness of Holy Mother. The answer was not just to please the husband, but came from within and from that moment on she followed what she said. Never saying anything against Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices, but rather being a willing partner in his spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna once formally worshipped Sarada Devi as the Divine Mother. This morning at breakfast I was asked why a young girl is selected to be worshipped during Durga Puja. What is the justification for this? An image of Mother Durga is made and we are to imagine the spirit of the Mother within that image, but

when a living child is worshipped there is no need for imagining the conscious spirit, as in the case of an idol. Sri Ramakrishna used two phrases to describe such worship - Anumāna Chaitanya and Pratyaksha Chaitanya. Images are only wood or clay or photos and spirit must be imagined (anumāna) in it, but when a living person is worshipped there is no need for imagining, that spirit is very much present (pratyaksha) there. This is why Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Holy Mother as the Divine Mother. Not only that, he also offered the fruit of all his spiritual practices and experiences at the feet of the Holy Mother. The greatness of Holy Mother is also reflecting in the fact that she reacted so naturally and accepted this worship.

In the Brahma Samaj's allegation that Sri Ramakrishna had deprived his wife of a normal family life, if there is deprivation, the person so deprived is saddened by it. Was any such sadness or regret expressed or shown by Holy Mother? Not at all. In fact she said that while she was living at Dakshineswar with the Master, "My heart was full of bliss." So rather than any feelings of being deprived, she was full of joy and bliss.

## Morality or Sympathy?

In another episode, a woman of low-caste in Indian society had left her husband and was living with another man as his mistress. Naturally, most people would look upon this woman with a measure of critical disrespect. In Indian society people look down upon such women. After some years, it happened that this woman's paramour decided to leave her. She then came to the Holy Mother in tears and told her sad story, confessing that she had left her husband for a man who was now intent on abandoning her. While most of us would simply reject or ignore her, what was Holy Mother's reaction?

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## **Episodes** (from page 2)

Mother completely disregarded society's questions of morality. She felt such sympathy for this woman's predicament that she called upon the man and told him that it was for him the woman had left her husband, that she had also served him for years and that it would be very irreligious for him to leave her after all. The man understood Holy Mother's words, changed his mind and took the woman back. So we see here that sympathy outweighs morality considerations. So deep was Holy Mother's compassion.

### **A Thief's Offering?**

On another occasion beyond Holy Mother's hometown of Jayrambati there was a village where some Muslim residents known by the local people as being professional thieves lived. These thieves would come to visit Holy Mother in Jayrambati where she accepted them and treated them as her own children. Is it possible for an ordinary man or woman to accept and receive such people with an open mind and kindness? One such person came with some fruit to offer to Sri Ramakrishna and asked Holy Mother if she would accept his offering. "Of course I will accept it," she said. "You are showing respect and love. Of course I accept."

Observing this one lady, one of Holy Mother's relatives, asked why the Mother should accept an offering from such a person. "I know he is a thief," she said. Holy Mother then became very serious and scolded her saying, "Keep quiet! I know who is good and who is bad!" This means that outwardly one may appear as a thief, while inwardly maybe he was very different. Some external circumstances may have caused him to be a thief, but inwardly he may possess some noble qualities. Here again, we see that Holy Mother would not see the profession, but see the attitude and the feelings with which the offering was brought.

In the Mahabharata Sri Krishna was invited by King Duryodhana to visit him at his palace. At the same time Sri Krishna received an invitation from Vidura, a poor but great devotee.

Which invitation did Sri Krishna accept? Obviously, ordinary people would accept the King's invitation, but Sri Krishna accepted Vidura's invitation. Why? Because in Vidura's request there was love and respect and humility, while in Duryodhana's there was much show of pomp and ego. And this is why Holy Mother accepted the man's offering for the Master, because it came with love and respect which she acknowledged.

### **Mother Decides Motherliness**

In Dakshineswar while Holy Mother lived with the Master, generally she would prepare meals and carry the plates to the Master. One day a lady came, addressed her as Mother and requested that she be allowed to carry the plates to Thakur, Sri Ramakrishna. Mother agreed, but this lady was not of good character, and as we know Sri Ramakrishna could not accept food touched by such people, so Sri Ramakrishna refused to eat that food and asked Holy Mother why she had allowed such a woman to bring him the meal. "Didn't you realise her character?" he inquired. He further said that henceforth Mother was not to allow anyone else to serve his meals but herself.

There are three important things in this brief incident. Holy Mother was an obedient and faithful wife and whatever Sri Ramakrishna asked of her she would comply completely, 100% to the letter. There were, however, some exceptions. There were occasions when Holy Mother would not sacrifice her own power of judgement and she would express an independent opinion. This is one such occasion.

The second thing is that Holy Mother told the Master that when someone comes to her, addresses her as Mother, and requests her to do something, she must agree. This means that when it comes to the question of motherliness, she would not compromise with anyone and would act according to her own, independent opinion and judgement.

The third thing is that while Sri Ramakrishna demanded that only she prepare and serve his meals. Holy Mother's response was, "You are  
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## Episodes (from page 3)

not only my Thakur (Master), you are everyone's Thakur (Master)!" Meaning he was the Lord of all and if others wanted to serve Him, "Why should they not be allowed to do it? Why should such service be mine alone?" Meaning, there should be no monopoly. Holy Mother did not want to monopolise Sri Ramakrishna. The Master could not object to her pleading and began to eat.

## With Foreign Devotees

Sister Nivedita was a great Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda. The world knows about Mother Teresa coming from a foreign country and serving the people of Kolkata, but few know of Sister Nivedita, an Irish lady, and how she sacrificed her life to serve India and how much she impacted Indian leadership. She was a great thinker, a great writer, a great speaker and a tireless worker, yet so few know of her. She often visited Holy Mother when she stayed at the Udbodhan House in Calcutta and made the following observation: There other lady devotees would sit together and there was no atmosphere or acknowledgement among them that Holy Mother was special in her relationship with the Master, or that Mother had any special claim on Sri Ramakrishna as his wife. Strangers upon arrival would think that Holy Mother was simply another lady devotee of the Master. This is not only possible among those of complete egolessness, but harmonises with her earlier remark to the Master that He belongs to everyone.

When the British ruled India there was, shall we say, a mutual hatred between Indians and the foreign rulers. In early Japanese history, too, there were similar feelings of fear and dislike toward foreigners. In India should one dine with a invading Muslims or Europeans he would lose his cast and may be ousted from Indian society based on the Caste system. This is why Swami Vivekananda commented that while religion in the West was very narrow, society was very broader. In India, on the other hand, while religion was very broad, society was very narrow.

Widows of upper-caste Hindus were very inhibited by caste rules and they feared the mere

## • Thought of the Month •

"Man is the only creature  
who refuses to be what he is."

— Albert Camus

touch of this or that, for example. Holy Mother was of the high Brahmin caste and married to Sri Ramakrishna who had passed away, so in this sense she was a very high-caste widow who was required to observe more stringent rules about food and drink. When Swami Vivekananda's western disciples began to arrive in India, Swamiji had a lot of worries and wondered how Holy Mother would receive them. Holy Mother was so far ahead of such ordinary mentalities that she not only accepted the foreign devotees all with love, but she dined with these devotees unhesitatingly.

When Sister Nivedita reported to Swamiji that Holy Mother not only accepted her with love and affection, but that she also ate with them, Swamiji was much relieved. Two of Swamiji's disciples, Sister Nivedita and Sister Christine, from America, worked for the uplift of the women of Calcutta through education. They would often visit Holy Mother as she lived nearby. Mother once asked about marriage in the West, and to demonstrate the Western marriage ritual the two ladies took the roles of husband and wife. The wedding vow they spoke concluded the phrase 'until death do us part.' Holy Mother was so pleased with the idea of being together until death separates them. She repeat the vow again and again excitedly exclaimed, 'Oh, how noble the vow is!'

Many Indians were fighting the British to drive them out of India. As part of this freedom struggle, Indians refused to use cloth machine woven in Britain. Among Holy Mother's devotees were such people. In such a situation she would say 'Those people (British) are my children, too.' So this is another example of going beyond one's society and country and embracing universal Motherhood. Yet her background was that of a widow of an upper-caste Hindu, born in a country village.

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### **Mother's Life an Example**

Universal motherhood, compassion, sympathy, her willingness to obey her husband, yet reserve the right to decide on issues of motherhood based on her own judgement; all these are character traits of Holy Mother. Then there is her keen power of observation.

At the end of the First World War, US President Woodrow Wilson in a 14 point declaration tried to establish the League of Nations to establish world peace. One of Holy Mother's disciples reported to her glibly, "Mother the League of Nations has been formed and from now on peace will reign in the world and there will no more war between nations." Then Mother remarked, "My son, they speak with their lips, they do not speak from their heart." The soon to follow Second World War proved that what Holy Mother had commented was correct.

These are just a few incidents to reveal how extraordinary Holy Mother was. Not just a religious leader; not just the wife of India's great seer and sage of the 19th century, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was a great spiritual leader in her own right. We need to study her, especially ladies will gain much from her understanding her attributes. Sri Ramakrishna gave many and spiritual instructions, Swami Vivekananda, too, gave many inspiring talks, but Holy Mother never spoke publicly. Her life was her message.

### **Positive Patience**

When I was working in our college administration at Belur, I had little to do with the many various personal problems involving students and their parents, etc. But since coming to Japan this has changed and I am consulted regarding some of the major problems and concerns of the lives of our members. In India I had never dealt with problems like divorce and other such human relationship problems. My observation is that in general for continuing human relationships, not only those between husband and wife, but between relatives, friends, coworkers, neighbours, and all such relationships, the biggest human problem is a lack of patience. Furthermore, this patience is more needful and fruitful with mothers and wives.

This was Holy Mother's strongest message. Constantly around her in tight quarters wherever she stayed were troublesome relatives; crazy, selfish, quarrelsome, and in spite of this Holy Mother always maintained patience. Not a negative - I'll grit my teeth and somehow endure this - kind of patience, but a positive, loving and nurturing patience. Is such patience possible without love? Without love it is an unhappy, negative patience that may end reach its breaking point at any time. To me this is Holy Mother's most important message.

A man went to a Zen Master for advice. The Master asked him how he could help and the man explained, 'My house is very small with one room. I have my family. My sister's family has been forced to move in with us and we went from 3 to 6 people living in this room. Now my brother's family has also had some trouble and have come to live with me. Now there are 9 people living in our little room and it has become a hell. Can you give me some advice?' The Master answered that he would offer some advice on the condition that his advice be followed to the letter. The man promised that however difficult it may be, he would follow his advice. The Master then said that he understood the man had some cows and goats. The man answered that he did have some livestock he kept in sheds nearby. The Master then advised that he bring them into his house, too. The man had promised, so for two weeks they all - men and animals - dwelt in the already overcrowded room with all the dirt, foul smells and noise, making homelife complete chaos. Then the man returned to the Master in tears, saying he really didn't know what hell was until living in these conditions and that he was surely going mad. The Master now advised the man to return the animals to their sheds and report back to him in a week. A week passed and when the man arrived the Master asked him how he was. The man replied with a smile, 'Oh, even with nine people sharing the same space, I find it so comfortable!'

So when you find yourself surrounded by various troubles, consider the troubles Holy Mother confronted and yours will fade by comparison! •



## **Zushi Retreat December 2014 Celebrating Holy Mother Sri Sri Sarada Devi's Birth Anniversary**

On Sunday, December 21, the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat celebrated the 163rd birth anniversary of the Holy Mother, Sri Sri Sarada Devi.

Mangala arati (morning worship) began at 06:00am in the Main Zushi Ashram attended by

residents and volunteer devotees who had spent the night at the Centre or at Holy Mother House nearby so that they might get an early start on the many chores necessary to accommodate the celebration and guests.

After breakfast volunteers busied themselves with a variety of tasks to prepare for the prasad lunch, and in the Zushi Annexe building, the altar, food and floral offerings, platform, puja vessels and utensils, pushpanjali flower trays for



the congregation, along with seating and audio preparations.

At the altar Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) made final adjustments, put finishing touches on offerings and adorning the photos of Sri Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda with sandal paste before prostrating and signalling the blowing of conch shells (shankha) to summon the start of the puja (worship).

Maharaj conducted the puja unassisted and from

time to time the hilltop residential area echoed with the occasional clarion sound of conch and bells. 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 Sarvamangala Mangalye.

Flowers were then passed out for pushpanjali (flower offering) and Maharaj led all in a push  
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## December Retreat (from page 6)

panjali mantra to the Holy Mother before each offered their prayers and flower. Food offerings were then collected and taken to the Main Ashrama kitchen where the prasada lunch was about to be served.

The afternoon session began at 14:30 with chanting and reading 'Jayrambati 14 March 1913' from 'The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi'. Maharaj then gave a talk in English he titled, 'Some Interesting Episodes

in the Life of Holy Mother and Their Significance,' (in this issue) interpreted by Ms. Satsuki Yokota.

Upon the completion of the discourse a group of three Japanese devotees were called upon to lead the congregation in singing the Japanese devotionals, 'Watashi no Okasan' (My Mother) and 'Nagai Aida' (Long Time) written by Ms. Shanti Izumida. At the conclusion of these songs the lights were dimmed for a meditation and closing Vedic chant. Tea was served thereafter. •

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## Swami Medhasananda Visits Seoul, South Korea November 2014

Submitted by Trishul (Seoul National University)

Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) visited Seoul from November 7-11, 2014. Maharaj has been making visits to Korea for some 15 years, and his most recent trip follows a successful stay the previous year for a series of events celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

On Sunday afternoon Maharaj gave a class at J-Yoga Studio, where he was introduced and translated by Jina Lee. Approximately 30 people attended the talk on Vedanta philosophy, which was preceded by introductory chants and followed by a guided meditation and a Q&A session.

Maharaj gave a talk on Monday at Seoul National University entitled, "Vedanta: Flower of Indian Wisdom," introduced by Professor Travis L. Smith; this talk was interpreted into Korean by Jina Lee for the benefit of those not proficient in English. Though this lecture was attended by only 10 to 12 university students, it was well-received and followed by a lively Q&A session.

Given his audience and context, Maharaj conducted his lecture like a university class, making use of the lecture hall's

whiteboard to illustrate his points. Afterwards, he took a brief tour of the SNU campus with some students and professors.

Following the earlier talk on Sunday, a meeting was held of the nascent Vedanta Society of Korea, where plans were discussed for placing the Society on a firm footing for the future.

It was resolved that members Abhijit Ghosh, Viveka Kim, Jina Lee and Travis Smith would manage programmes throughout the year and help coordinate the swami's next visit. Accordingly, the Society has been officially opened for membership, and will hold regular classes on the Bhagavad Gita monthly, beginning in March 2015. Maharaj's next visit is tentatively planned for June, when he would potentially lead a retreat. Maharaj hopes to visit Korea twice per year going forward: once in the spring for a retreat and again in the fall for a public programme.

Swami Medhasananda departed November 11, 2014 for Japan leaving behind in Korea a newly energized Vedanta group that eagerly awaits his next visit. •



Zushi Centre  
Christmas Eve Celebration  
Wednesday, 24 December 2014



The Vedanta of Japan held its annual Christmas Eve Celebration at its Zushi Centre on Wednesday, 24 December from 19:00.

As Christmas Eve usually falls on a day of Japan's workweek, the Aratrik Offering is scheduled to begin at 19:00, late enough to allow for workers to arrive from the cities and conclude early enough to allow everyone to return home.

Ashram Building displayed a "Merry Christmas" message over the front door this year. In the main shrine room an

alter was again set up with the 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 along with cakes and sweets of many varieties.

As the candles were lit, the congregation of about 35 attendees was called to order and Swami Medhasananda conducted a worship.

At the conclusion of the worship Swami briefly discussed the tradition of the Vedanta Societies worldwide celebrating Christmas and the congregation sang Christmas carol verses led by Ms. Shanti Izumida. Verses from Mathew were read in English and Japanese, more carols were sung.



Noting that while the Society would welcome a Christian clergyman to come to speak, they are all quite busy on Christmas Eve.

He was, however, very pleased to have a Catholic devotee and philosophy student at Sophia University, Mr. Leonardo Alvarez, speak on the theme, 'Christ's Mercy and Love.'



At the conclusion of Alvarez's interesting, example-filled talk 'Silent Night' was sung. Food offerings were then taken to the kitchen and shortly afterward everyone was then invited downstairs to the dining area for a delicious prasad dinner and sweets. •



Zushi Centre  
**New Year's Kalpataru**  
January 1, 2015



On Thursday morning January 1, the Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual New Year's Kalpataru from 11:30 am.

This year again the programme started with Vedic Peace Chants led by Maharaj and joined in by all the participants. Readings from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Buddhist scripture in English and Japanese with commentary by Swami Medhasananda then followed and prayers were recited.

As is the Zushi Centre tradition, after the lunch prasad Maharaj and about fifteen participants started out for Kamakura on foot at about 14:00.

They first visited the Kotokuin Temple making offerings to the Great Buddha, and took a tea break with snacks on the premises.



As it was getting dark and colder, about ten remaining members then visited the Catholic Yukinoshita Catholic Church nearby and had a photo taken with two priests.

Those who remained continued up to the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, the final stop. A memorable start to the New Year was had by all. •



## • A Story to Remember •

### Sufi: The Tale of Three Questions

A certain Sultan owned everything a man could wish for and still he did not know the purpose of life. The answer to three questions made his life difficult:

1. What should I do?
2. With which people should I do the things God asks me to do?
3. When should I do it?

The Sultan asked the advice of all kinds of wise people, and then he was told that there was a Chishti dervish, who lived far away, and who might give him a satisfactory answer. The Sultan immediately left and after a journey of several weeks he met the dervish. The dervish was cultivating his own land. He was a simple man, but no simpleton, as he was reciting a Persian quatrain over and over again:

Kaarist waraai 'elm raw aanraa baash  
Dar bande gohar mabaash raw kaan raa baash  
Del hast maqaame gaah begozaar o biao  
Jaan manzele aakherast raw jaan raa baash .

There is a work beyond knowledge, realise that, go!  
Do not work to get jewels, be the mine, go!  
The heart is a temporary abode, leave it and come!  
The soul is the final abode, realise that, go!

The Sultan was however not interested in Persian poems and asked his three questions to the dervish. The dervish did not answer him and continued with his work. The Sultan became angry and said: "Don't you know who I am. I am the Sultan of Sultans". But this did not make any impression as well and the dervish continued doing what he was doing.

A heavily wounded man suddenly appeared and dropped to the ground at the feet of the dervish. The dervish said to the Sultan: "Help me carry this man to my place!"

"I'll help you," the Sultan said, "but will you answer my questions afterwards?"

"Later!" the dervish said. Together they carried the wounded man to the hut of the dervish and took care of him.

"And now I'd like to receive the answers to my questions," the Sultan said.

"You can return to your palace," the dervish said, "because you have already received the answers to your questions. As to what to do, you should do what comes to you on your path. As to with whom you should do it, the answer is with those who are present. And as for the when to do it, you should do it the moment it takes place".

The Chishti Sufi

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