



MARCH 2016 - Volume 14 Number 03

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

## APRIL Calendar

### Birthdays



### Ramavami

Friday, April 15

### Kyokai Events

#### April Zushi Retreat

Sunday, April 17  
10:30~16:30  
Main Zushi Centre  
Morning Session  
Lunch  
Afternoon Session  
Tea

#### Service to Homeless Nara Naryan

Friday, April 22

#### Akhanda Japam

Friday, April 29  
05:00 ~ 20:00  
Sign up now!

**For Details and More  
Events See Page 4.**

## ✧ Thus Spake ✧

*“There is the real ‘me’ which nothing can destroy, and there is the phenomenal ‘me’ which is continually changing and disappearing.”*

- Swami Vivekananda

*“Brahman is the only truth, the world is illusion, and there is ultimately no difference between Brahman and individual self.”*

- Sri Shankara

### February Zushi Retreat 2016 Celebrating

#### Swami Vivekananda's 154th Birth Anniversary

On Sunday, February 21, the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat was the venue for a daylong programme in celebration of the 154th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji).

The floor of the shrine in the main ashrama began filling with devotees, who had stayed overnight or arrived by car from relatively nearby, as early as 05:00. Then at 06:00 the lights came on and Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) programmed mangalarati, chanting and bhajans. An hour was allotted for meditation followed by breakfast at 07:45. At breakfast Maharaj reviewed some final preparation assignments from the duty list.

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## Vivekananda Celebration (from page 1)

Thereafter the assigned tasks for the day's activities were attended to. An altar was set up and carefully draped by a small crew in the Annexe Building, as the audio/video team tested, adjusted and set lighting. The worship platform was assembled by others along with setting up the rows of folding chairs for attendees. Flowers of many sizes and colours were collected and teams strung garlands and arranged bouquets for the framed images of the Ramakrishna Order's Holy Trinity (Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swamiji). Small flower-buds and leaves selected and set aside in trays for offering after worship (pushpanjali), food dishes were arranged in the Main building and brought to the Annexe and arranged at the altar.

A conch shell (shankha) was blown to signal the beginning of the worship (puja) and Maharaj then took his seat on the platform and began employing the vessels and items of offering with the prescribed mantras of the puja.

As the puja drew to completion after about an hour, Maharaj prepared to conduct Arati. As the congregation sang Khandana Bhava Bandhana led by Ms. Shanti Izumida, Maharaj proceeded the symbolic offerings of the five elements concluding in unison. At the conclusion Maharaj fully prostrated and Izumida led the congregation in singing Sarvamangala Mangalye on synthesiser.

Flower buds and leaves were then passed out for each to offer as Maharaj walked among them anointed all with splashes of Ganges water. He then asked all to follow him, phrase by phrase, in repeating a Pushpanjali (flower offering) mantra dedicated to Swami Vivekananda, and a mantra invoking prana (primordial energy) before all made their offerings and a brief prayer at the altar.

The morning worship was followed by lunch prasada prepared again by Ms. Sophia Hazra and her team of volunteers. About 45 persons attended the programme.

The afternoon session began at 14:30 with the chanting of Om Sahana Vavatu:

*Om Saha nāu avatu  
Saha nau bhunaktu  
Saha vīryam karavāvahai  
Tejasvi nāu adhītam astu  
Mā vidviṣāvahai  
Om Shāntiḥ, Shāntiḥ, Shāntiḥ*

Translation:

*Om, May God protect us both  
(teacher and student),  
May God nourish us both,  
May we work together with energy and vigour,  
May our study be enlightening and  
not give rise to hostility,  
Om, peace (within), peace (with all),  
peace (with the universe)*

*Om! Śaṃ no mitraḥ śaṃ varuṇaḥ  
śaṃ no bhavatvaryamā  
śaṃ na indro brihaspatiḥ  
śaṃ no viṣṇururukramaḥ  
namo brahmaṇe  
namaste vāyo  
tvameva pratyakṣaṃ bhrahmāsi  
tvāmeva pratyakṣam  
brahma vadiṣyāmi  
taṃ vadiṣyāmi  
satyaṃ vadiṣyāmi  
tanmānavatu  
tadvaktāramavatu  
avatu mām  
avatu vaktāram  
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*

Translation:

*Om, may Mitra be propitious to us.  
May Varuna bless us.  
May the blessings of Aryama be with us.  
May the Grace of Indra and Brihaspati  
be upon us.  
May Vishnu,  
the All-pervading be propitious to us.  
Salutations to Brahman.  
Salutations to Thee, O Vayu!  
Thou art the visible Brahman.  
Thee alone shall I consider as the visible  
Brahman.  
I shall declare: - Thou art the "righteous."  
Thou art the "good." May That protect me;*

(con't page 3)

## Vivekananda Celebration (from page 2)

*May That protect the speaker.  
Please protect me.  
Please protect the speaker.  
Om Peace Peace Peace.*

*Om! pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam  
pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate  
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya  
pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate  
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*

Translation:

*Om! That (Brahman) is infinite,  
and this (universe) is infinite.  
The infinite proceeds from the infinite.  
(Then) taking the infinitude of the infinite  
(universe),  
it remains as the infinite (Brahman) alone.*

Then followed a reading from 'Arise Awake - Messages of Swami Vivekananda,' a collection of Swamiji's teachings in a Japanese and English language publication by the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai (Vedanta Society of Japan), from the section titled 'Messages' the first few paragraphs subtitled 'Strength and Faith' in both languages.

Maharaj then interpreted a few comments on Swami Vivekananda in Japanese before taking to the harmonium and leading the congregation in singing Mūrta-Maheśvaram by Sarat Chandra Chakravarty:

*mūrta-maheśvaram  
ujjvala-bhāskaram  
iṣṭam amara-nara-vandyam  
vande veda-tanum ujjhita-garhita-  
kāñcana-kāminī-bandham*

*koṭi-bhānukara-dīpta-simham aho  
kaṭi-taṭa-kaupina-vantam  
abhīr-abhīr-huñkāra-nādita-  
dīnmukha-pracaṇḍa-  
tāṇḍava-nṛtyam*

*bhukti-mukti-krpā-  
kaṭākṣa-prekṣaṇam  
agha-dala-vidalana-dakṣam  
bāla-candra-dharam  
indu-vandyam iha  
naumi guru-vivekānandam*

Translation:

*Lord Siva incarnate,  
resplendent like the sun,  
adored by gods and men as their  
Chosen Ideal.  
The embodiment of the Vedas  
who has overcome the bondage of the much  
censured lust and gold.*

*Brilliant with the rays of a million suns,  
the lion among men,  
who has nothing but a loin cloth to wear.  
Who is dancing the violent dance of Shiva,  
the quarters reverberate with the cry of  
"fear not, fear not".*

*A mere compassionate glance of whose eyes  
is enough to impart both enjoyment and  
liberation,  
who tramples with ease the hordes of vice.  
Who is the veritable Shiva with  
the crescent moon on the forehead,  
and who is worshipped by Indu (composer).  
I bow to the Guru, Vivekananda.*

A husband and wife then offered an Indian devotional song and she sang another solo and preparations were made for Maharaj's talk on Vivekananda (in this issue of *The Vedanta Kyokai*).

Afterward the talk the platform was converted into a performance stage and a young Indian family performed a traditional devotional song with mother on harmonium, father on tabla, young son on vocal and the even younger daughter keeping time on a bell. Ms. Shanti Izumida then led a group of three in singing from her collection of original Japanese songs. Finally, Mr. L. Hirsch, sang a few songs from the Hollywood men's choir of the 1970s written by Ralph (Rabindra) Danks, along with his original and adaptations of traditional compositions.

Maharaj thanked one and all for attending and invited them to enjoy tea and snacks in the main ashrama, and, if possible, to join the evening vesper service to be held in the main shrine from 6:15 PM. •

# Vedanta Society of Japan Schedule of Events

## April 2016

**2nd (Sat)**

### **Discourse on Bhagavad Gita**

At the Embassy of India in Tokyo

Bring photo ID / in Japanese only / from 14:00- 16:30

**3th, 10th, 17th, 24th (Sun)**

### **Yoga-Asana Class**

At the Annexe (from 14:00-15:30)

Please Contact: Hanari 080-6702-2308 (羽成淳)

**10th (Sun)**

### **Satsanga in Oita**

Please Contact: Jinen 0972-62-2338

**12th (Tue)**

### **Study Class in Zushi**

14:00~16:30

Please Contact: benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

**16th (Sat)**

### **Discourse on Upanishad**

At the Embassy of India in Tokyo

(in Japanese only) (from 14:00- 16:30)

**17th (Sun)**

### **April Zushi Retreat**

Kyokai (from 10:30~16:30 )

Speaker: Swami Medhasananda

**22nd~24th (Fri-Sun)**

### **International Joint Congress in Omiya**

<http://www.yogatherapy.jp/omiya2016/>

**22nd (Fri)**

### **Nara Narayan: Service to homeless Narayan**

Please Contact: Yoko Sato (090-6544-9304)

**29th (Fri)**

### **Akhanda Japam (Special Japam and Meditation Day)**

Akhanda Japam is continuous spiritual practice of silent mantra chanting, meditation or prayer from 5 AM to 8 PM twice a year. Participation is in one hour intervals.

You can join at an hour or more that is convenient for you.

It is also easy for beginners and meals are served.

Please contact us by April 20th if you would like to participate,

Contact: Mitamura (dd94dd94@nifty.com) by April 20th.

※ NOTE: Most discourses and discussions are now in the Japanese language.

### **Some Messages from Swami Vivekananda**

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

The personality of Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) is like an iceberg. We can see the tip, but most remains underwater and unseen. While the observable aspects or manifestations of Swamiji's personality become the subject of much discussion, analysis and debate, we have no idea at all of that which remains unseen. It has been said that only another Swami Vivekananda could know what this Swami Vivekananda really was. However, it is not impractical or useless to try to understand what little portion of Swamiji's personality has been revealed to us.

What is important about Swamiji is his tremendous power to inspire people. This is clearly evident with regard to Indians, but even in foreign countries, for example here in Japan, I have met some young people who have confided, 'Swami Vivekananda is my hero.' This surprised me so, because they did not know us nor had they any contact with our Vedanta Society, yet they considered Swamiji as their 'hero.' Swamiji's message transcends the barriers of religion, country and race, and people from various countries and religions can derive inspiration from him.

His call was a call of the spirit to the spirit within us; a call of the soul to the soul; and not surprisingly we hear many utterances least expected to be coming from the lips of a monk. One example would be that the accepted criteria of a theist is one who believes in God and an atheist is one who does not believe in God, but Swamiji's definition is just the opposite. Swamiji said that a real theist is one who believes in himself, and one who believes in God, but does not believe in himself is an atheist. Most monks would ask of us to respect the gods of temples and God in Heaven,

but Swamiji said that his God are the downtrodden, poor and exploited people all over the world. From these we see how different Swamiji was from the ordinary ranks of monks we often encounter.

Still another example is that monks and priests preach that we must do our spiritual practice and suffer in this world and that our reward will be waiting for us in Heaven. Swamiji would say, 'I do not believe in this God who makes me suffer in this world, yet promises happiness in an afterlife.' This statement does not mean he does not believe in God; it does not mean that he does not believe in spiritual practice or austerities—what he means is that we should take care of this life and God will support us in our endeavours.

I just spoke of Swamiji's power to inspire people, and in fact, he has and continues to inspire millions and millions of people, including myself even after his passing away more than a hundred years ago. Let me give a couple of examples:

There was a young Indian woman amputee, having lost her leg due to some accident, but she climbed the world's highest peak, Mt. Everest. How did this apparently impossible feat become possible? While she was climbing her sherpa guide observed that every now and then she would stop; bring a booklet out from her pocket; read a little bit; put the booklet back and resume climbing. This activity irritated the sherpa a bit, as he felt it was delaying their schedule and the weather was getting worse the higher they climbed. Finally they reached the top, where she made a small altar and placed the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy

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## Messages (from page 5)

Mother (Sarada Devi) and Swamiji along with a small flag of India and one of her sponsor, the famous Tata Company.

That booklet she read from while climbing contained messages from Swami Vivekananda. Later she was interviewed and asked what was so special to her about Vivekananda. She answered, 'Vivekananda was an extraordinary person. Everything about him was far removed from the ordinary. Rarely do we find a person who is so heroic. I needed that spirit in climbing Everest.' We have to imagine what a tremendous spirit she had, this woman had lost a leg and had climbed Everest with a prosthetic limb. 'What is this spirit?' she asked. 'The power to conquer and to not give up,' she answered. Don't run away from a bad situation; face it!

Most of us want to be great, but why don't we become great? Especially when we are young—the age of dreams, most of us dream of being great somehow. As life progresses, finally, we understand we are ending our lives as ordinary people. There are those few, however, who want to become great and do become great. What is the difference between these two groups? Let me ask you, what makes this difference?

'Those who do not give up until they succeed,' answers one woman.

Yes, that is correct. The difference is in possessing this undaunted spirit of not giving up!

With most people, if there is something wrong, if there is some obstacle, immediately they want to give up and try something else. They then try a different endeavour. If found to be problematic, troublesome or just not as interesting as they first thought it to be, they give it up again. So we must learn to continue to the end, 'Let my body fall, I shall see it through to the end!' It is this spirit that is lacking. Those who become great, do not give up. This was amply illustrated in the case of Ms. Arunima Sinha, the young woman, who, while facing a very trying situation,

## • Thought of the Month •

Your inner voice is the voice of divinity.  
To hear it, we need to be in solitude,  
even in crowded places.

- A. R. Rahman

even the possibility of death, did not give up her historic Himalayan trek and conquered Mt. Everest.

Most of us are like drawing room communists, drawing room philanthropists, drawing room yogis or drawing room idealists; in that most of our idealism starts in discussion and ends in discussion, rarely ready to face any challenging situation in reaching our target. We advance little. Ms. Sinha, our Everest conquerer continues regarding Swamiji's unique personality, 'Swamiji is so soft and so loving like a flower. Where do you find such a rare combination?'

In the famous Indian newspaper, The Times of India, published an article a few years ago on January 12, entitled 'Happy Birthday, Naren', using Swamiji's pre-monastic name on the occasion of his birthday according to the Gregorian calendar. In the article the author, who was presumably in his 60s, writes that when he was 16 years old he picked up some books containing the messages of Swami Vivekananda, and was still continuing to read and get inspiration from Swamiji's teachings. Just to quote him: 'I picked up Vivekananda's thoughts one day in class XII (12th grade), and haven't been able to put them down since.' He went on to say that although he could not practice all that Swamiji taught, still he received a lot of guidance and inspiration on various occasions throughout his life. He found answers to questions of what is right and what is wrong, what is moral and immoral, and what is his duty and what is not. He learned what Swamiji said was the greatest sin. Some people say telling lies is the greatest sin, others say stealing, but Swamiji said, 'Fear is the greatest sin.'

Do you see how different his answer is? It  
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## Messages (from page 6)

is a profound statement. If we try to meditate on this: fear is the greatest sin, we will get a lot of understanding and light from it. Swamiji said, 'Fear is at the root of all the sins that we commit.' Swamiji also said that if you must do something wrong, do it like a hero. If you become a thief, become a great thief, a distinguished thief. Most of us become moral due to pressures from family and society, we fear that our wrongdoing may become detected. In other words, it is fear that pushes us to be moral. However, we cannot truly be moral if we are pressured by fear to act in this way or that. So the writer of the article continues, 'Since then I've ensured that I do not commit the sin of being fearful.'

He goes on to say that not many people have much ambition. Some want to be great and succeed, while most fail, but many have no ambition at all. Swamiji's message is, 'I will die a thousand deaths than lead a jelly-fish existence.'

Then again he continues, 'When I was at my most despondent and wondering to whom should I turn for help, I would remember Swamiji's words: "Human help I spurn with my foot. He who has been with me through hills and dales, through deserts and forests, will be with me, I hope."' Swamiji means here that it is God who has been with him and that help will only come from God. If you have to seek help, seek it from God. Don't really depend on any human being for help, as there is every chance that you may be disappointed. Our friends may fail us, but God never. Only we should have patience enough to get it or the wisdom enough to detect it.

The writer says that there are times when he is criticised or blamed for one thing or another and in considering how to react he remembers Swamiji's words again: 'Tell my friends that a uniform silence is my answer to my critics. If I give them tit for tat, it will bring me down to a level with them.' It takes tremendous mental strength to practice this, because our natural tendency is to react in kind. If someone says something harsh, we are likely to reply harshly. Swamiji's method is to keep quiet.

Why? Because the truth will take care of itself. Truth will prevail.

The author of the article says further that he tried very hard to live a good, ideal life, but had neither money nor fame. He began to wonder if his life was worth living. He then found an appropriate answer from Swamiji. 'Swamiji told me to wait,' he says. "Wait, money does not pay, nor name; fame does not pay, nor learning. It is love that pays; it is character that cleaves its way through adamant walls of difficulties. Was it ever in the history of the world that any great work was done by the rich? It is the heart and the brain that do it ever and not the purse."

Swamiji also says, 'This I have seen in life — he who is over cautious about himself falls into dangers at every step; he who is afraid of losing honour and respect, gets only disgrace; he who is always afraid of loss, always loses.' These are but a few examples of how Swamiji's message inspires, give light and guidance throughout said author's journey of life.

His messages were many, but I consider his most important is that all the power is within us and we must manifest it. Whatever we want—peace, joy, strength, wisdom, the source is within. Ordinary people always seek knowledge, strength and joy from outside. The advice of Swamiji is to seek these within, because the perennial source and very nature of our soul is; absolute existence, absolute knowledge, absolute power, absolute freedom and absolute bliss.

What is the purpose of our temple and mission? To help us realise our true nature, the Atman, and to get connected to it. Why? In doing so we will get knowledge. We will get the bliss of true happiness. We will get everything which is important for our life. To achieve this, we may choose from Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Raja Yoga or Bhakti Yoga or a combination of them all and practice. In doing so you will find power, bliss and happiness within. This is the timeless and greatest message of Swami Vivekananda for all of humanity.

Thank you. •



**Worship**



**Arati**



**Pushpanjali**





## • A Story to Remember •

### **You Are the Holiest in the Land**

Emperor Aurangzeb tried everything in his power to convert the Hindus to Islam. The task was first tried with the Kashmiri Brahmins because it was thought that if they converted, the rest of the people would follow more easily. There was talk that the Brahmins might be persuaded by bribes. Also, several Muhammadan countries were nearby and if all else failed, they could be overcome by force.

During this time, the Brahmins had a vision that in this last age of the Kali Yuga, Guru Nanak was spiritual king and would protect the right of freedom of worship. Guru Teg Bahadur was ninth in the line of Guru Nanak and lived at Anandpur. They resolved to go to him and ask for his protection. After a very hard journey, the Brahmins arrived at the Guru's court and told him their sad story. They said, "Your very name has the power to bring comfort to those in need. The purpose of your life is to protect religion. Please help us to save our faith."

The Guru sat silently absorbed with their request. His son, young Gobind Rai, came in and, seeing his father sitting quietly, went up to him. The Guru said nothing, but tenderly embraced the boy. Gobind Rai said to him, "Papaji, you are so quiet. What is the matter?"

The Guru looked upon his son with compassion and said, "The Kashmiri Brahmins have come to find the holiest man in the land. If he is willing to give his life for their faith, they will be freed from the tyranny of the emperor."

The boy gazed at his father and said, "Papaji, you are the holiest in the land."

When Guru Teg Bahadur heard these words from his son, he foresaw all that was to happen. He told the Kashmiri Brahmins to go to Delhi with a proposal for the emperor: "Guru Teg Bahadur, ninth Sikh Guru, is now seated on the throne of the great Guru Nanak. First make him a Muslim and then all the people, including ourselves, will adopt the faith." So began the course of events which led to the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur.

Near the end of the emperor's conversion demand, as Guru Teg Bahadur was about to be beheaded, he tied a small note on a string around his own neck. With a knowing look, he told the watching crowd that he was about to perform the miracle they had all been waiting for. They all expected his note and string to have magical powers and would prevent the executioner from cutting off his head. Then up and down swung the executioner's axe and off came Guru Teg Bahadur's head. After his head was severed, the note was read aloud. It said, "I gave up my head, but not my faith."

- A Story from the Sikh Tradition

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