



DECEMBER 2017 - Volume 15 Number 12

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

JANUARY 2018
Calendar

Birthdays

Swami Turiyanandaji

Monday, January 1

Sri Sri Swamiji

Monday, January 8

Swami Brahmanandaji

Friday, January 19

Swami

Trigunatitanandaji

Sunday, January 21

Swami Adbhutanandaji

Wednesday, January 31

Kyokai Events

1st (Mon)

New Year's Kalpataru

11:30 New Year's Greeting
Zushi Centre → 14:00
→ Buddha in Kamakura
→ Catholic Yukinoshita
Church → Shinto Shrine
'Tsurugaoka Hachimangu'

21st (Sun) 10:30am

Zushi Monthly Retreat

Sri Sri Swamiji

Birth Celebration

10:30 Puja, Pushpanjali
(flower offering)

12:30 Prasad

14:45 Reading, Discourse,
Music programme

16:30 Tea

**More Details on these &
other events on page 2.**



Wishing One and All Blessings for the New Year 2018!

✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Feel like Christ and you will be a Christ; feel like Buddha and you will be a Buddha. It is feeling that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God."

- Swami Vivekananda

"Reality can be experienced only with the eye of understanding, not just by a scholar."

- Adi Shankara

November Zushi Retreat 2017

Mindfulness & Meditation

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Mindfulness is a vast topic, as our discussion today also includes meditation and the effect of mindfulness and meditation on different levels of one's personality. Strictly speaking mindfulness does not include meditation, but in a comprehensive sense mindfulness includes meditation. Lots of interesting research articles and literature on this topic is also now available.

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• Schedule of **Vedanta Society of Japan** Events •

JANUARY 2018

1st (Mon)

New Year's Kalpataru

11:30 New Year's Greeting Zushi Centre →14:00

→Budda in Kamakura

→Catholic Yukinoshita Church

→Shinto Shrine 'Tsurugaoka Hachimangu'

Please Contact: Kyokai (045-873-0428)

3rd (Wed)

Nara Narayan: Service to Homeless Narayan

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

6th (Sat)

Discourse on Bhagavad Gita

At the Embassy of India in Tokyo

(in Japanese only) (from 10:00-12:00)

Please Contact: Kyokai (045-873-0428)

9th (Tue)

Gospel Class

At Zushi Centre (14:00~15:30)

13th (Sat)

Satsanga in Fukushima

<<https://yt-fukushima.jimdo.com/>>

21st (Sun)

Swami Vivekananda Birthday Celebration

At the Zushi Annexe (from 10:30-16:30)

10:30 Puja, Pushpanjali (flower offering)

12:30 Prasad

14:45 Reading, Discourse, Music programme

16:30 Tea

27th (Sat)

Discourses in Osaka

(Japanese language)

Discourses on "Bhagavad Gita" and "Upanishad" are given in Osaka on a monthly basis.

For details please see <<http://vedanta.main.jp/>>

Every Sunday

Yoga-asana Class

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

Please Contact: Hanari 080-6702-2308

*Link : <http://zushi-hatayoga.jimdo.com/>

Mindfulness & Meditation (from page 1)

This topic has three aspects: physiological, psychological and spiritual. We have observed that most of the studies being conducted are focused on the physiological and psychological aspects and are not much concerned with the spiritual, but our topic will focus on the spiritual aspect of mindfulness.

The Nature of Mind

Obviously, mindfulness concerns the mind. What is mind? This question in itself is a broad and abstract topic with lots of opinions, complexity and confusion. Some do not recognise mind as being something different from the body. They reason that if the body is not there, then mind is not there. Yet some say that, no, even if the body ceases to exist, mind continues to exist—meaning they believe mind is something separate from the body. Others say that mind and consciousness are identical.

According to another opinion subscribed to by the Vedanta, mind is just matter—it has no consciousness, no feeling, no faculty or power for thought, no emotion, no imagination and is only matter the same as a table or a chair. If this is so, how then does mind think and feel? The answer is that mind borrows its consciousness from the Atman or soul. Only the soul has consciousness.

In this sense mind, as matter, has a beginning and an end; it is conditioned by time and place. When mind starts acting by borrowing consciousness from the soul it has different features and acts in different ways. What these features of that mind are and how it acts, we shall try to explain in examining the nature of mind. We should try to remember that our examination of this nature of mind is with reference to meditation.

Those devotees who want to experience deep meditation should be interested in this, since the common experience for all who attempt meditation is that we cannot concentrate. Why is it that we cannot concentrate? Meditation takes place at the mind level, so naturally the nature of mind is concerned here. What is the problem? Why is it the mind cannot be concentrated for meditation?

In answering this we need to examine the nature of mind. Not only meditation, but if one wants to perform one's work with fewer mistakes, with concentration and perfection, this topic should be of interest. Why we cannot concentrate during work; why we make so many mistakes; why we are so forgetful regarding such ordinary things—we are not discussing disease related forgetfulness here—but why we cannot remain focused on tasks.

I shall try to explain the reasons for this which, I believe, reflect what most of us experience.

The Material Mind

First of all the mind constantly moves from one subject to another subject. Basically, all these subjects are secular and not spiritual in nature. The nature of these secular subjects is that they are non-permanent, non-eternal and finite. Examples of these subjects are money, name, fame, home, food, drink, enjoyments, relatives, friends, works, etc. These are all material things.

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Mindfulness & Meditation (from page 3)

Why is the mind naturally attracted to material things and not to spiritual things, such as gods, Atman, Brahman, etc.? Why is a special effort required to direct the mind toward the spiritual? This is exactly what happens when we sit for meditation, we try to direct our mind to God—we set aside a special time to practice and make a special effort, yet even then it is not possible. Why is this? The answer is quite simple. Since the mind itself is matter, it is naturally attracted to matter and not to spirit.

Thought of the Month

“You cannot be both unhappy and fully present in the Now”

– Eckhart Tolle

Naturally, if everyone in attendance were of the same faith, for example, we would feel attracted to each other. If we meet someone from the same country, or even the same neighbourhood, we naturally feel like meeting and talking with that person. A natural affinity and attraction is there. So material attracts material, but spirit is something different. Spirit attracts spirit.

This is why when we sit for meditation the mind, again and again, goes to something which is material in nature. Yet we have to direct our mind to spirit, because that is the only way by which we can become perfect and get greater peace, joy and knowledge. It is the only way; and if it is the only way, we have to understand why it is so challenging. We should not become disappointed if our thoughts stray during meditation, just think of it as natural. Now we have to accept the challenge because there is no other way to reach the goal.

The next thing to observe is that when the mind goes to something, it takes the form of that something. If during meditation we remember a friend, our mind takes the form of that friend and all our associations related to that friend will come up in the mind. Our love of this friend or our quarrel with this friend, whether or not we want to meet this friend and all manner of related thoughts will arise. Then from this new aversions and desires arise!

If one remembers work during meditation, immediately we think of what we need or should do to accomplish that work. We forget meditation and planning starts—schedules and so forth. We forget about God and our whole mind becomes the work.

Mindfulness Techniques

To illustrate what is meant by mindfulness let us borrow from a story by Leo Tolstoy. The story starts with these three questions:

What is the most important time for you?
What is the most important work for you?
Who is the most important person for you?

We should not casually respond to these questions, but instead, we should ponder our answers a more deeply. We find the answers given by Tolstoy are quite interesting.

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Mindfulness & Meditation (from page 4)

In answer to the first question, Tolstoy says that now, this very moment, is most important. Why? Because the past is gone and out of our control. Likewise, we have no control over the future either. The only time which we have control over is now—this very moment. That is why the most important time for each of us is now. We hear this same message from many quarters. The Buddha advised that focusing on the Now will benefit all levels of one's personality; the physical, mental and spiritual. More recently, there is a book, a best-seller, titled 'The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment' by Eckhart Tolle, which is worthwhile reading.

The next question asks what 'the most important work is' for each of us, and the answer is that work which we are engaged in at the moment! Not taking care of wife, husband, parents, a work related chore, but the work we are doing just now is the most important for us, even if such work is apparently very insignificant.

The third question asks who the most important person to us is, and we may offer many answers from guru to relatives and friends for various reasons. The answer, however, is the person in front of you now—the person you face at the moment. This is the most important person to you. So focus on that person and attend to him with all your mind and power.

These three things are important in the practice of mindfulness. This is a practical application of the 'Here and Now'—right this moment, the work I am doing now, and the person before me now!

Live in the Now

Recently Vipassana meditation, which comes from Buddhism, has become popular in many countries. Vipassana teaches this mindfulness through various applied practices. In essence what it teaches is; when you eat, focus on eating; when you work, focus on working. Vipassana sets out detailed exercises in order to accomplish this.

Most of us give little thought to our food while eating, and we may watch TV or chat. The practice of Vipassana says, no, just focus on eating. For example, sit and see the food in front of you; see the colours; smell the fragrances; think that you are sitting there to eat a meal; then place your hand on the table and pause; then touch the utensils and pause; pick up some food and pause; bring the food to your mouth and stop again; open your mouth and stop; place that morsel on your tongue, close your mouth and stop; bring your hand back to its original position on the table. Then sense the food and flavour, but stop, we are not eating yet; then begin chewing and stop; then swallow. Continue with this process for a while. By doing so, we learn to focus on what we are doing at every moment without thinking of other things.

Stay focused at each step. When we pick up a morsel, do not think of eating the food yet. Of course, by employing this method of eating, some time will be required to eat and quick meals will be difficult. In one sense such practice is very mechanical and even boring, but we must consider the effect of it. We are training the mind to live in the present, to stay in the now.

(con't page 6)

Mindfulness & Meditation (from page 5)

There are simple physical exercises too, such as inhaling and exhaling for practicing mindfulness. We are to just focus on the expanding and contracting movement of the chest during respiration. Walking as well. We follow the mechanical movement of the leg and pause. Focusing on such common functions and not projecting on results, but pausing and being focused on the action helps train the mind. This is a central point of mindfulness.

Vipassana has become popular by people to relieve stress. Many people do not actually suffer from stress as such, but rather, suffer the effects of failing to live in the now. Most are dwelling on the past or worrying and planning for things that have not yet occurred. Through this Vipassana training of mindfulness they will be helped in two ways. Firstly, it helps them stop thinking about the past or the future. Secondly, it helps them focus on what they are doing now. So it stops the wandering of the mind and focuses the mind on the task at hand.

This is the aim of the mindfulness technique taught by Vipassana, to help us live in the now. This will help us do our work with greater concentration, hence more perfectly. This training of the mind also helps us to have good meditations. If we go through the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples we find again and again examples of the need to focus the mind. For example Swami Brahmanandaji said that a person who cannot concentrate on their day to day works, cannot have a good meditation.

Improved Meditations

For devotees who hope to have deep meditations, it is important to practice these mindfulness techniques. Two things are most important; awareness and mindfulness. For mindfulness, awareness is also key; 'Why am I doing this work?' and 'What is the purpose of this work?' To practice these two we need to make a complete daily schedule. With awareness make a schedule, and item by item as we complete our schedule, be aware of why we are doing the work. Mindfulness alone will not help, awareness and making a daily schedule are very important—these are all inter-connected.

In offering advice to all, spiritual seekers or not, a balanced lifestyle is also important for any serious practice. With too much eating, too much sleeping, too much working, too much waking, too much fun; being immersed in such lifestyles one cannot practice mindfulness. Why? Because the practice of mindfulness requires strength of mind. If we overindulge ourselves, our strength of mind is dissipated and we do not have the power of mind to practice mindfulness. A balanced lifestyle helps us to organise our mind; to control our mind; and to focus our mind. With such practice we become masters of the mind and not the slaves we now are.

For the practice of deep meditation we need two more things. First is discrimination between the real and the unreal—the finite and infinite—non-eternal and eternal. We must practice this discrimination, secondly, we need to focus on the infinite and the eternal. We also have to think of God at other times of the day—not only during meditation, by repeating the name of God and praying to Him. With this practice one can have a good, concentrated meditation. While devotees are often advised to practice discrimination and to think of God throughout the day, what is not often advised is the practice of mindfulness while engaged in works.

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Mindfulness & Meditation (from page 6)

While for everyone the practice of mindfulness is important, for devotees the practice of mindfulness along with practicing discrimination between real and the unreal and focusing on the real, and thoughts of God throughout one's day are key to deep meditations. •

Annapurna Farm Satsanga

Kikuchi City, Kumamoto

On November 11, 2017 we invited Swami Medhasanandaji (Maharaj) to give a discourse on Yama and Niyama at a small satsanga held at the Annapurna Farm in Kikuchi City, Kumamoto.

I was particularly impressed with what he said about satya or truthfulness. To practise satya, we have to convey what we heard, saw or read as it is. Hiding it when we shouldn't, or telling a different story means telling a lie. Moreover, when we tell someone, we have to do so in a manner that we do not hurt them. How difficult not telling a lie!

One of the attendees shared his opinion saying, "The world we live in is like a sea of lies. Society, politics, business-everything exists based on lies."

Hearing this Maharaj responded, "The practice of truthfulness is the most difficult tapas in this age of Kali Yuga. Many people are just being washed away down the river called life, without knowing what to do. What matters is, first we need to be aware."

After the discourse, we enjoyed home-made cake and soya milk chai. Then we spent the evening with Maharaj taking part in arati and having dinner together.

Contributed by Ms Ravi Masaki

Kumamoto City International Center Satsanga

Swami Medhasanandaji (Maharaj) gave a discourse on Reincarnation and the Laws of Karma in Japanese at the Kumamoto City International Center in Kumamoto Prefecture on November 12th, This is the 13th Vedanta Seminar held at the Center.

Prior to the discourse, Mr. Jamura expressed his gratitude to the Vedanta Society of Japan for their support for those affected by the 2016 Kumamoto earthquakes and shared assistance activities he and his friends had offered.

Maharaj spoke on life and death and drew attention to how we should think deeply about life, as well as how to live well and die well. He said death is a necessary part of the process for liberation as most people cannot attain liberation just in one life, and explained previous lives, the current life and the results and relations of those lives. What impressed me most was, we do not have to be afraid of death and by gaining knowledge of death and getting prepared for it, we can die with courage and in peace. 'All I have to do now is just practise this for the rest of my life,' I thought.

The meeting was attended by approximately 65 people, many of whom were young or came to this seminar for the first time, thanks to the thought-provoking topic. We all had a meaningful time. After the discourse, Maharaj and devotees enjoyed dinner together, wherein each devotee shared their opinions and feelings on his talk.

Contributed by Mr. Toshihiro Kajiwara



Annapurna Farm



• A Story to Remember •

The Messiah in Disguise

The Guru meditating in his Himalayan cave opened his eyes to discover an unexpected visitor sitting there before him—the abbot of a well-known monastery.

“What is it you seek?” asked the Guru.

The abbot recounted a tale of woe. At one time his monastery had been famous throughout the western world. Its cells were filled with young aspirants and its church resounded to the chant of its monks. But hard times had come on the monastery. People no longer flocked there to nourish their spirit, the stream of young aspirants had dried up, the church was silent. There was only a handful of monks left and these went about their duties with heavy hearts. Now this is what the abbot wanted to know: “Is it because of some sin of ours that the monastery has been reduced to this state?”

“Yes,” said the Guru, “a sin of ignorance.”

“And what sin might that be?”

“One of your numbers is the Messiah in disguise and you are ignorant of this.” Having said that the Guru closed his eyes and returned to his meditation.

Throughout the arduous journey back to his monastery the abbot’s heart beat fast at the thought that the Messiah—but the Messiah himself—had returned to earth and was right there in the monastery. How is it he had failed to recognize him? And who could it be? Brother Cook? Brother Sacristan? Brother Treasurer? Brother Prior? No, not he; he had too many defects alas. But then the Guru had said he was in disguise. Could those defects be one of his disguises? Come to think of it, everyone in the monastery had defects. And one of them had to be the Messiah! Back in the monastery he assembled the monks and told them what he had discovered.

They looked at one another in disbelief. The Messiah? Here? Incredible! But he was supposed to be here in disguise. So, maybe. What if it were so-and-so? Or the other one over there? or... One thing was certain: If the Messiah was there in disguise it was not likely that they would recognize him. So they took to treating everyone with respect and consideration. “You never know,” they said to themselves when they dealt with one another, “maybe this is the one.”

The result of this was that the atmosphere in the monastery became vibrant with joy. Soon dozens of aspirants were seeking admission to the Order—and once again the Church re-echoed with the holy and joyful chant of monks who were aglow with the spirit of Love. Of what use is it to have eyes if the heart is blind?

'The Prayer of the Frog' by Anthony de Mello

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