



February 2018 - Volume 16 Number 02

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

MARCH 2018
Calendar

Birthdays

Sri Gouranga Mahaprabhu
Thursday, 1 March

Swami Yogananda
Monday, 5 March

Sri Ramanavami
Sunday, 25 March

Kyokai Events

18th (Sun) 10:30am

Zushi Monthly Retreat

Sri Ramakrishna Birthday Celebration
Zushi Centre Annexe

10:30 Puja , Offering, Homa, Pushpanjali

13:00 Lunch (Prasad)

14:45 Chanting, Reading Discourse by Swami Medhasananda

15:30 Special Sitar and Tabla Music Programme

All are welcome!

* Sorry, no parking!*

More Details on this & other events on page 2.



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"You will gain everything if you but take refuge in the Master. Renunciation alone was His splendor. We take His name and eat and enjoy because He renounced all."

- Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother

"Think of the feet of the Master in your heart. By constant remembrance of Him, you will cross the ocean of illusory matter."

- Guru Nanak

February Zushi Retreat 2018 **Swami Vivekananda's** Birth Anniversary Celebration

On Sunday, January 21, the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat celebrated the 155th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji).

At 6:00AM mangala arati (morning worship) began on a very cold morning at the Main Zushi Ashram. After breakfast both the Zushi Annexe and the Main Ashrama Kitchen were busy

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Vedanta Society of Japan
MARCH 2018

3rd (Sat)

Discourse on Bhagavad Gita

At the Embassy of India in Tokyo
(in Japanese only-from 10:00~12:00)

13th(Tue) 14:00~15:30

Gospel Class at Zushi

Please Contact: benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

18th (Sun)

March Zushi Retreat 2018

Sri Ramakrishna Birthday Celebration

Zushi Centre Main Ashram

06:00 Mangalarati (Main Shrine)

06:30 Chanting & Meditation

Zushi Centre Annexe Building

10:30 Puja , Offering, Homa, Pushpanjali

13:00 Lunch (Prasad)

14:45 Chanting, Reading & Discourse by Swami Medhasananda

15:30 Special Musical Programme

Sitar: Daikichi Yoshida

Tabla: Dinesh Chandra Dyoundi

17:30 Tea

18:15 Evening Arati

All are welcome! Sorry, no parking available

Live Streaming: from 10:20 at:

<<https://www.vedantajp-en.com>>

23rd (Fri)

Nara Narayana

Service to Homeless Narayan

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

24th (Sat)

Osaka and Kyoto Monthly Discourses

Japanese language talks on the "Bhagavad Gita" and "Upanishads"

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

Every Sat in March 2018

Yoga-Asana Class

Winter Location: Main Zushi Ashrama (NEW TIME: 10:15~11:45)

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



Vivekananda Celebration (from page 1)

with usual preparations of food and flowers for the celebration. The platform is assembled for the worship, and later serves as the speaker's podium. The puja vessels and utensils and trays of flowers and leaves for the congregation's pushpanjali, were laid out with care. The folding chairs were set up in rows of seating. The microphones and camera were set-up, along with the keyboard and all were checked and rechecked.

Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) led Swamiji's puja with prayers and offerings. About 50 minutes later the ritual came to an end with mantra, bell and conch, and Maharaj continued the puja with arati, offering Mother prescribed prayers and the symbolic offerings of the five elements as conch, bells, and cymbals tolled, and the congregation sang Khanda Na Bhava Bandhana accompanied by Ms. Shanti Izumida on synthesiser. Maharaj then prostrated before the altar again and joined the congregation in singing Sarvamangala Mangalye.

Space was cleared at the base of the altar and flowers and leaves were passed out for the pushpanjali (flower offering). Maharaj led all in the pushpanjali mantra to the Holy Mother before each offered prayers and flower.

A prasad lunch was enjoyed by all was served in the Main Ashrama.

The afternoon session began about 14:45 with Maharaj leading the congregation in Vedic Peace Prayers and a brief period of silent prayer. Attendees read from a Society publica-
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Vivekananda Celebration (from page 3)

tion on Swamiji's talks in both English and Japanese. Maharaj then gave a brief discourse on three of Swamiji's messages; 'Face the Brutes;' 'Don't Give Up!;' and 'Identify Yourself with Others.'

Members of the congregation then sang Japanese devotionals followed by closing prayers and a meditation. Tea was then served in the Main Ashrama.

About 45 people attended.

January Zushi Retreat 2018 **Swami Vivekananda Birth Celebration** Afternoon Session Talk by Swami Medhasananda

In India spiritual holidays are noted by the Indian lunar calendar, for which dates change from year to year, and this year Swami Vivekananda's (Swamiji) birthday was on the 8th of January. Dates on the solar or Gregorian calendar remain the same each year, and Swamiji's solar calendar birthday is 12 January. The government of India has designated January the 12th as Youth Day. In Japan our holidays include coming of age day, senior day, the Emperor's birthday, etc., as most holidays have become secularised here with no connection to religion. This is rather special in that many people observe different religions in India such as Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists, and they are rather sensitive about other religions. And even though Swami Vivekananda was a Hindu monk, no religious group objected to his birthday being observed as Youth Day.

Swamiji's message is so universal, so powerful, and at the same time so energetic, that he is regarded as the hero of the young. Irrespective of faith, group or society, it is accepted that Swamiji is a source of inspiration to all youth, not only of India, but of the entire world. Some of us here today may think that we are not young, so why should we celebrate Swamiji's birthday? (laughter) Well, he has a message for everyone and everyone can get inspiration and guidance from him.

We read some of Swamiji's quotes earlier such as, 'The remedy of weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength;' then again, 'You may have faith in millions of gods, but if you have no faith in yourself, there is no salvation for you.' It would be better for such a person to play sports and become strong. In good health; strong in body and mind, one can understand the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads better. This is a revolutionary way of thinking. Swamiji said, 'The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.' No conventional monk or religious figure would declare such an idea. There is Jesus Christ's Gospel, Sri Ramakrishna's Gospel, and the gospel of Vivekananda is the gospel of strength.

Today I thought I would recite some stories from Swamiji's life and discuss their import. These stories are well known and for many of you here they will not be new, but though they may be old, it is better that we review them and discuss their significance on such an occasion as today. This first story was narrated by Swamiji in a talk he gave in New York.

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Swamiji Stories (from page 5)

It is called 'Face the Brutes.' As it happened, after the death of Sri Ramakrishna most of His disciples were traveling as wandering monks. When Swamiji was walking along a street in Varanasi, the most famous holy place of India, he was passing the Temple of Durga Mandir, also known as the monkey temple, as it is infested with monkeys. As Swamiji was walking along group of aggressive monkeys began to chase him. There were some large and brutish monkeys among them and Swamiji, startled and frightened, began to run. The monkeys chased after him. Suddenly, a voice rang out, 'Don't run from them. You cannot escape them by running. Face the brutes!' That advice had come from an old monk, and when Swamiji turned to face them the monkeys stopped and fled instead.

There is a natural human tendency to avoid and escape problems. Our body and mind seek that which is comfortable, and anything adverse, anything difficult, we try to avoid. Think of flowing water. If there is an obstruction the flow of water will take a different course. In our human lives, if we simply try to avoid problems, such problems will not disappear, however, but take on bigger dimensions. So it is better to nip them in the bud, face them when they are small and do not allow them to grow. Solve the problem. The positive side is that by trying to solve the problem, by facing difficult situations, we become stronger.

Swamiji said again and again that we have infinite power within ourselves. One of the great occasions to manifest this power is when we have troubles in our life. When we have problems in our life we must exert strength to work on them. In that way, when we exert ourselves to face problems, that power manifests. So if we want to develop further; if we want to grow stronger, it is better to welcome difficulties. We should welcome problems and not try to avoid or run from them. Do you know an example of a man who became great without facing any difficulties? The greater one becomes, the greater the difficulties he faced. If everything is smooth and comfortable what happens? There is a Japanese kotowaza (saying) that 'the company president's son is a fool.' The meaning here is that being spoon-fed and spoiled from birth, and having never suffered any material want, such a person has not had a chance to grow as a person.

There are two sides to this. If we do not try to solve problems when they come, the situation may grow and become more difficult. The other point is that by trying to face and solve the problem, our inner power manifests. Then we can come to know how much power we have and our self-confidence grows. This is the great effect of the idea to 'Face the Brute' from Vivekananda.

Another example comes from trekking in the Himalayas. We know that to hike up a mountainside we need lower body strength and strong lungs. In India many places of pilgrimage are in the Himalayas, such as Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri, Yamunotri, etc. It has become a little easier to visit these places because of buses, whereas before one had to trek on foot. I have had the experience to hiking some 8 kilometres to Kedranath in the snow, and returning again on foot.

In another story, Swamiji was on pilgrimage in the Himalayas. There people of all ages and from different parts of India were also trekking from one pilgrimage site to another. One old man had made it quite far up the mountain when he became fatigued and began

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Swamiji Stories (from page 5)

panting with exhaustion. He was at the point of giving up and said so aloud. Swamiji approached him and turned facing back down the path behind them and said, 'Dear fellow, look at the great distance you have come. It is you who has covered this distance and it is you who must go yet a little further. Having covered such a great distance, why should you give up?' This is another lesson from Swamiji, 'Don't give up.'

When we look back at our lives, we see a story of our giving up on many things. For instance, upon hearing a professional singer we want to try to sing. We start some voice training and learn some songs, but give up. We see someone playing the piano beautifully and decide to learn to play, but soon give up. Then here in Japan we take English lessons in our school years, but this is not sufficient to converse in English—so we they take a correspondence course or go to an English conversation school and begin to learn. Then we give up. Then we see that yoga is very good for body; it's popular and many of my family and friends are doing it. We visit a yoga group and start to practice, but soon give up. In this way we think, 'Ah, meditation is good.' The Vedanta Society monk said it is great for the body and mind. It improves our concentration and helps our work. We start this practice, too—then give up. In this way our lives are full of stories of giving up. What do you think? Isn't it so? Swamiji's advice is, 'Don't give up!' When we look at the lives of the greatest individuals, we see that what they started, they saw through to the end. They did not give up as we do.

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Swamiji Stories (from page 6)

Suppose that though we have given up on some pursuits, we have continued with some good things. If we routinely give up on practices, there is a chance that progress made in some of our good pursuits can be lost too. We may drop good habits one by one. Meditation, yoga, language study, rising early in the morning, reading scripture, one by one they fall away. Swamiji's advice should always be ringing in our ears. 'Face the brutes! Don't give up!'

Thought of the Month

No act of kindness,
no matter how small,
is ever wasted.

- Aesop

When Swamiji returned from the West he had become quite a celebrity and many people of different ages and backgrounds sought an audience to see and hear him. One young man came to see him and said that he had visited many places and had met many religious persons. He continued, 'I have closed the door and closed my eyes and meditated. But I still do not know truth.' He said further that he had found no peace. 'Please show me the way,' he petitioned.

'My dear friend,' Swamiji replied, 'you should do the exact opposite of what you have been doing thus far.' His advice was to open the door, open his eyes and see what is all around him. 'See how many people are waiting for your help,' he continued. 'How many people are suffering! Go! Serve them! Help them! I guarantee that you will get peace!'

Is this not the most unexpected advice from a monk? Most monks would advise just the opposite saying to try harder and that more efforts were needed. It is not that by meditation we cannot get peace, so why can't we get peace? It is a problem that many of us have though we meditate. The reason for this is that most of us are not prepared for meditation and sitting for meditation is an invitation to sleep. It is also a very good time for thinking of our schedule. These are the two most common; a time to sleep, or if we remain awake, it is a time for thinking of our daily schedule. The reason for this is that we have not prepared for a good meditation. That is why Patanjali recommended so many steps before Jnana; yamas, niyamas, asanas, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, and next dhyana or meditation. In these there are so many disciplines of body, sense and mind.

In this way, there are times when an aspirant that practices long hours of meditation becomes a little egotistic and selfish. He thinks himself superior to others. He thinks he has no concern with another person. If an aspirant fall into this attitude, it is very difficult to find mental peace. This is why Swamiji recommended us to go out and be of assistance to others. In serving others we become unselfish and our egotism eliminated, and so we can get mental peace.

I want to share my thoughts with you in this respect: There are many, many people who are only focused on their family. They have no connections with anything or anyone else. The centre of all their thoughts and works are on their family alone. Of course there is a purpose behind this, but how does it happen? It happens when they think that in doing so they will find happiness. But do they really find happiness? I doubt it, because in focusing exclusively one's family, we become very attached to family. The more we are attached, the higher the risk, the greater the possibility of facing pain, sufferings, frustrations.

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Swamiji Stories (from page 6)

There are others who of course also take care of their families, but at the same time they find some time to help others in different ways. Some find time to volunteer with NGOs. Some offer help at their church, temple, or associations and societies like our Vedanta Society. Of course, volunteering time and effort becomes more challenging when offered in addition to keeping up with their own jobs and looking after their own families. Yes, it is challenging, but we must see the outcome of such efforts and then we come to understand. One concrete example can be seen in some of our devotees. How much peace did they enjoy before coming and serving our Society in various ways? If we compare our happiness; our peace, level before helping out, we can see a change in our personal lives.

Maybe, if we focus only on our own family, we live like a frog in well. But when we identify ourselves with other through osewa (service) in different ways, we live more like a fish in the ocean.

Today we discussed three important stories, incidents and advice from Swamiji's life: Face the brute!; Don't give up!; and Identify yourself with others, be unselfish and serve others. Let these three continue ringing in our ears even after leaving here today.

Zushi Christmas Eve Celebration **Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna; Singular Similarities**

From prepared remarks by Leonardo Alvarez

"First and foremost, the purpose of this talk is to try to vouchsafe for inter-religious dialogue and comprehension. I am a Catholic, trying to be devoted to Lord Jesus, but at the same time I am living here at the Vedanta Society of Japan.

"If you ask me why, I can safely say that more than learning about Indian philosophy – which I want to do anyways – is to learn how to lead a spiritual life. And for that you need an environment which is helpful to create a sort of routine and mindset. That is why an ashram/monastery is a good place to do so and Maharaj (Swami Medhasananda) has been kind enough to let me stay here.

"I do not think that any religion is superior to any other. Sri Ramakrishna pointed out, in a state of Samadhi talking with the Divine Mother 'Oh Mother, everybody thinks their clock is right.' Then he added, 'But the truth is that no religion is perfect and complete.'

"These kinds of teachings, among many others, really drew me close to Sri Ramakrishna. See, he is a Hindu Brahmin and a priest, and yet He has the courage to say that the Hindu religion is not supreme, nor any other religion. Rather, he said that each of these religious paths, if followed sincerely, will lead the devotees to the same Supreme Reality. He said just as many Catholics call water 'aqua,' the Hindus 'jal,' the Muslims 'pani,' etc., so different people from different religions call the same Supreme Reality by different names. What is more, He practiced all these paths and realised their Truth on His own.

"Now that being said, let me start with today's topic which is the similarities between
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Christ and Ramakrishna (from page 8)

Thakur (Ramakrishna) and Lord Jesus. Christians believe that Jesus is God incarnate, and ever increasingly Hindus believe that Sri Ramakrishna is also God incarnate.

Conception

“The births of incarnations are fraught with miraculous stories. Jesus’ parents Joseph and Mary, were engaged, but yet to be married. However, one day Mary received an ‘annunciation’ from Archangel Gabriel, who told her that she would give birth to the Son of God, and that she would be hence pregnant by the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:26-38)



Leonardo Alvarez

“After a few months, Joseph realised that Mary was pregnant. In those times and culture, adultery meant death by lapidating (stoning). Joseph being a just man, had decided to scorn Mary in secret and separate from her. However, that night he had a dream wherein an Angel appeared to him and told him not to repudiate Mary, but to embrace her, as she was pregnant with the holy spirit, and would give birth to a divine child whose name should be ‘Jesus,’ which means ‘God saves.’ (Mathew 1:20-22)

A similar story of the birth of Sri Ramakrishna is also recorded. His mother, Chandramani, is said to have been going to the local temple, when she suddenly saw an effulgent light coming from the Shiva Lingam out of the temple. That light entered into her and she immediately felt had become pregnant.

At the same time in 1835, Sri Ramakrishna’s father, Kshudiram, was performing a ceremony for his ancestors at Gaya. Later when he fell asleep, he had a dream wherein Lord Vishnu appeared and told him that He would be born as his son.

“So the stories of the miraculous pregnancies by the Spirit are shared by them.

Childhood

“Being God incarnates, they could not be as ordinary children.

“For instance, when Jesus was 12 years old, the whole family being of the Jewish faith went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. When the festivities were over, Jesus’ parents headed back thinking Jesus was in the same caravan with them, but half-way they realised he was not. They went back to Jerusalem and after two days of frantic searching they found him in a temple preaching. All the people listening to him were amazed and wondered how so much wisdom could be in such a young child.

“When Mary found him, she scolded him saying, ‘You have made me and your father very much worried.’ And he replied ‘Did you not know that I must abide at my Father's house?’ (Luke 2:46-50)

(con’t page 10)

Christ and Ramakrishna (from page 9)

“Similar extraordinary potentialities were shown by Sri Ramakrishna at an early age. For instance, when he was a boy of nine years Sri Ramakrishna was dressed up to play the role of Shiva at a village play. When it was his turn to then sit in meditation, the young boy entered into Samadhi, and could not be brought back to normal consciousness. Then and there the play had to be stopped.

“Sri Ramakrishna was very much loved by all the local people in his community, was always fond of worshipping the local gods and deities, reading from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

“So for both Jesus and Sri Ramakrishna, their inclination towards religion was very intense from their very childhood.

Tapasya (Spiritual Disciplines)

“The life of Jesus from ages thirteen to thirty is shrouded in mystery. The only thing that is written in the Bible is that ‘And so Jesus advanced in wisdom with the years, and in favour both with God and with men.’ (Luke 2:52).

“In Israel, as it was in India, marriage would be prearranged at an early age by parents. In ancient Israel boys were thought to reach puberty at the age of 13, and at that time they were supposed to get married. Jesus probably knowing this, left his home at age 13. Some say that he travelled East, because He had to summon ‘All of the Tribes of Israel’. The kingdom of the North had been totally assimilated by the Syrian Empire and many were scattered along the Arabic peninsula. Also, a diaspora of Jews had reached northern India in Kashmir a few decades before Lord Jesus’ death.

“Some say that Jesus went to India to practice austerities and also visited the Himalayas, but there are no physical proofs of His stay in India. The so-called gospel of ‘St. Issha,’ which tells of Jesus’ time in Arabia and in the Himalayas said to have been found by the Russian explorer, Notovich, in a Buddhist Monastery was later found to be false. Swami Vivekananda also said this was false when Swami Abedhananda mentioned it to him in a letter.

“But it is almost certain that Jesus could not have stayed exclusively in the Jewish world at that time, so the idea of Him going to India does not sound too implausible.

“In Sri Ramakrishna’s case there are far more detailed accounts of His early youth. He did not close His eyes for 6 years intend upon a glimpse of the Divine Mother. He trained with the Bhairavi Brahmani, a tantra ascetic and teacher. He also trained under the Vaishnavas, worshipping Krishna and Rama. Then He also studied Vedanta under Totapuri, a monk of the Dasnami Order, finally reaching nirvikalpa samadhi. After that, He almost gave up the body, but a command from God told Him: “Keep your consciousness half on Me, half on the body,” and in doing so He was able to remain embodied.

“He also then practiced Christianity and Islam, and with each reached the same experience of the Ultimate Reality, thus realising that all religious paths are true. It must be noted that overall, all Paths are indeed true, but the differences are in the details, which should be overlooked if one wants to be established in harmony.

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Christ and Ramakrishna (from page 10)

Limited Formal Education

“In later years when Jesus was preaching in Jerusalem, people wondered at it. It is written, ‘The Jews were amazed and asked, “How did this man attain such learning without having studied?” (John 7:15)’

“To which He replied, ‘My teaching is not My own, it comes from Him who sent Me.’ (John 7:16) But it is also highly probable that Jesus heard many teachings from the temple priests, since he was often seen in the temples discussing religion with the people gathered there.

“With Sri Ramakrishna the situation was much the same: ‘You know that I am a fool,’ He said, ‘but my Mother provides me all wisdom. Mother Saraswati sits on my tongue.’ Yet, here again, he heard so many scriptural recitals throughout his youth, and he had memorised most of them because he had a perfect memory—whatever he heard just once he would remember perfectly.

“So both Jesus and Sri Ramakrishna studied the scriptures in an un-orthodox way and were given Divine Knowledge beyond all scriptures by God Himself.

Fearlessness in Establishing Truth

“Another common feature was that both were fearless in establishing the truth. Even at the risk of their lives.

“For instance, take the event where Jesus cast the moneychangers out of the temple with a whip, and he did not allow people to carry things through the temple. He said, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of thieves!’ (Matthew 21:13). For this reason, among many others, some in the local leadership came to hate him and even sought to kill him.

“Likewise, in Sri Ramakrishna’s life it is recorded how once inside the Kali Temple, Rani Rashmoni, the builder of the temple compound of Dakshineswar, was meditating. Suddenly, Thakur stood up and slapped Rani Rashmoni, exclaiming, ‘To think of lawsuits in the temple!’ Indeed, at that moment she was not thinking of the Deity, but of some pending lawsuits. Rani Rashmoni could have had him expelled from the temple, but Rani knew He was correct. Sri Ramakrishna is said to have repeated this behaviour on other occasions correcting devotees.

“This shows that they both had an uncompromising attitude towards Truth, regardless of the consequences.

Renunciation

“Both Jesus and Thakur called for a total renunciation of passions, lust, selfishness, and attachments to wealth, money and family.

“While Jesus was still speaking to crowds, His mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to Him. Someone told Him, ‘Look, your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’”

(con’t page 12)

Christ and Ramakrishna (from page 11)

“Jesus replied, ‘Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?’ Pointing to His disciples, He said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.’ (Matthew 12:48-50) ‘He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.’ (Matthew 10:37) ‘He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.’ (Matthew 10:39)

“So, his disciples, it is not certain whether all of them were unmarried, but it is certain that most if not all of them eventually left their families and lived as monks, and revolutionised the world. Up to that time monasticism had not been prevalent in the Judaic religion nor in the region, but after his coming, a strong wave of monasticism swept the Middle East and then Europe for over 1500 years.

“Sri Ramakrishna’s renunciation was extreme. To Him both a lump of gold and a lump of earth were the same. The touch of money physically pained him. Someone once tried to give him a money gift, and when he learned it was 10,000 rupees (quite a sum at that time), he fainted. Later he refused it and Holy Mother refused it as well. He could not lay up stores. If he carried even a mango in his hand, he would lose his way and become dizzy.

“When his nephew, Hriday, was driven out of Dakshineswar for some outrage, a staff member mistakenly ordered Thakur to leave as well. Whereupon He simply grabbed a towel, threw it over His shoulder and started to walk away – the temple manager, Rani’s son-in-law Mathur Babu, soon corrected the mistake. On another occasion Mathur Babu wanted to test Him and took Him to see prostitutes. When He realised what Mathur was up to and saw the women He said, ‘Oh, Mother!’ and went into Samadhi.

“During his long period of Sadhana, if a woman were to touch him, his skin would get bruised. When he and Holy Mother slept in the same room and shared the same bed, once the thought came to his mind: ‘See, here you have a female body. The world goes mad for physical enjoyment. You can have it now.’ But then he asked his mind, ‘What do you want, physical enjoyment or God?’ He knew then he wanted God and entered into a deep Samadhi that lasted until the next morning—so deep it was very difficult to rouse him back to the physical plane.

Welcomed Sinners and the Afflicted

“In Jesus’ time it was thought that sinners were doomed by God and that people should not get close to them. Once eating with tax collectors and sinners the Pharisees (ancient Jewish sect) asked him why he was eating with sinners, so He said: ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick do. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’ (Mark 2:17)

“At that time, people with sicknesses were considered outcasts, people who had been cursed by God. Leprosy, blindness, muteness, dumbness, deafness, all of these were seen as curses from God either because of the wrongdoings of the person himself or herself, or because of his or her parents or family members. Most if not all of the people Lord Jesus healed belonged to this category. He restored dignity and hope to those who

(con’t page 13)

Christ and Ramakrishna (from page 11)

thought had been lost forever, and proved that before God, all his children are equally loved by Him.

“In Sri Ramakrishna’s case we can see the same thing. Thakur blessed the fallen, for instance at the Star Theatre when He went to see a play by Girish Ghosh, he blessed the actors and actresses known for their bohemian lifestyles.

“He also blessed drunkards; abusers of wives; rich men, totally engrossed in their riches; ‘English-educated’ Indians proud of their knowledge; lustful men; trouble makers like Hazra; pseudo-Vedantists, like a monk who was having an affair with a woman; and Yogis who had acquired occult powers, and were being led astray by their attachment to these occult powers. All these came in throngs to Thakur and He rejected none. The only condition was that they love God.

“Usually ‘holy men’ in India would scoff such people, but Thakur let them close to Him. He would later on say that because he had assumed the sins of Girish and these other people that he had developed his fatal throat cancer. This too is a kind of Crucifixion.

Perseverance

“In India the Spiritual path is often called the ‘Razor Blade Path’ because it is very narrow and difficult, and the slightest deviation may mean degradation.

“Sri Ramakrishna was very intent on this and suggested that young people practice a lot of spiritual disciplines before going out into the world, otherwise they would get lost in it. He gave as an example how a young plant should be protected with a fence, otherwise it may be eaten by goats and cattle. But once the plant grows to be a large and robust tree, even an elephant cannot bring it down.

“Similarly, just as the young plant, in the initial stages of spiritual discipline one must be extremely careful and protect oneself from temptations. After some years of real struggle and effort, then one may become stronger and have more degrees of freedom even amongst temptations. Care should be always be exercised until the very end because the power of Maya (illusion) is so great.

“Jesus also said something similar: ‘He who perseveres unto the end shall be saved.’ (Mathew 24:13)

Refuge in Faith

“Jesus and Sri Ramakrishna’s universal message of love and acceptance is evident. Both have instructed that no matter how lowly a sinner we may be, there always remains hope of salvation for us. As the Gita says, ‘Even if you be the lowest of sinners, if you take refuge in Me, I shall take you swiftly across this ocean of death.’

“Jesus said much the same thing: ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me shall live, even though he dies.’ (John 11:25).”

“Sri Ramakrishna said, ‘If you desire to be pure, have firm faith, and slowly go on with your devotional practices without wasting your energy in useless scriptural discussions and arguments. Your little brain will otherwise be muddled.’ Again, he assures us, ‘Yearning is all you need in order to realise Him.’

“Thank you.”

• A Story to Remember •

How the Ground Squirrel Got Its Stripes

Long ago in ancient India the vengeful King of Lanka, Ravana, kidnapped the Princess Sita, wife of Sri Rama, from their kingdom of Ayodhya. In response Sri Rama set off to rescue Sita with the monkey king, Hanuman, leading a great army of monkeys.

The army traveled south and came to the sea they would have to cross to reach Ravana's kingdom. Sri Rama began to dry up this ocean but the Sea King rose up and pleaded, "Without the waters the all sea creatures and plantlife will perish, please have mercy and build a bridge." So Sri Rama ordered the monkeys to construct a stone bridge that could support his entire invading army.

Monkey after monkey set to work moving huge stones and boulders to the seashore and Sri Rama was most pleased. Rama then noticed a small brown squirrel rushing up and down from the hills to the shore carrying little pebbles in her mouth. The monkeys also saw the squirrel and grew irritated. "Get out of our way," they scolded. "Your pebbles are too small. They are not needed."

"I am helping to build the bridge to save Queen Sita," pleaded Ms. Squirrel. "We must rescue Queen Sita!" This caused several monkeys to roar with laughter, mocking the little squirrel. At the same time however, others realised that the little pebbles were needed to keep the larger stones in place and the bridge from collapsing into the sea.

Lord Rama called out, "Monkeys, never denigrate the weak or ridicule the deeds of those not as strong as you. Each serves according to his strength and capacities, and each is needed."

Holding the little quirrel in His palm, Sri Rama thanked her and stroked her back with His fingers and wiped tears from her eyes. From that day forth all ground squirrels bear the marks of Sri Rama's appreciation; stripes on their furry backs and white eye-rings.

A Tale from the Ramayana

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