



MARCH 2018 - Volume 16 Number 03

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

APRIL 2018
Calendar

Birthdays

Sri Shankaracharya

Friday, April 20



Kyokai Events

1st (Sun) 14:00~16:00

NEW

Half Day Retreats at Zushi

Chanting, Readings,
Meditation, Discussions
on Spiritual Life, Tea and
light snacks.

<benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

15th (Sun) 10:30am

Zushi Monthly Retreat

Main Ashrama
AM Session; Chanting,
Reading and Discourse
Swami Medhasananda
Lunch Prasad
PM Session
All are welcome!

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



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Know that all sins and all evils can be summed up in that one word—weakness. It is weakness that is the motive power in all evil-doing. It is weakness that is the source of all selfishness. It is weakness that makes men injure others. It is weakness that makes them manifest what they are not in reality."

- Swami Vivekananda

"All impure thoughts, impure words and impure deeds, spring from a lack of Knowledge and Wisdom."

- Zarathushtra

February Zushi Retreat 2018

'Change Oneself Before Changing Others'

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

There is a Bengali story that tells of marriage negotiations regarding a young man and young woman. An elderly relative had the idea that it may be good for the couple to make check-list of their likes and dislikes now rather than after marriage.

(con't page 3)

In this Issue:

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| • Thus Spake | ... page 01 | • Schedule of Events APRIL 2018 | ... page 02 |
| • Monthly Calendar | ... page 01 | • Thought of the Month | ... page 06 |
| • Zushi Monthly Retreat February | | • Japan Yoga Therapy Society | |
| Talk by Swami Medhasananda | | Talk n Tokyo | ... page 07 |
| 'Change Oneself before Changing | | • Sapporo Satsanga | ... page 08 |
| Others | ... page 01 | • Story to Remember | ... page 10 |

• April 2018 Schedule of Events •
Vedanta Society of Japan

1st (Sun) - 14:00~16:00

🌸 **NEW** 🌸

Half Day Retreat at Zushi

Chanting, Meditation, Readings on Spiritual Life, Discussion.
Tea and snacks, Please Contact: benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

7th (Sat) 21st (Sat)

**Discourse on Bhagavad Gita (7th) and Upanishad (21st)
At the Embassy of India in Tokyo**

(in Japanese only) (from 10:00~12:00) Bring photo ID.
Please Contact: <https://www.gita-embassy.com/>

10th (Tue)

Study Class at Zushi 10:00~12:30

Please Contact: benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

15th (Sun)

April Zushi Retreat

Main Ashrama (from 10:30~16:30)
Speaker: Swami Medhasananda
Chanting, Reading and Discourse

27th (Fri)

Nara Narayan: Service to Homeless Narayan

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

27th-29th (Fri~Sun)

Satsanga in Oita

Please Contact: 0972-62-2338 Jinen

Every Saturday (from 10:15~11:45)

Yoga-Asana Class - At the Zushi Annexe

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

30th (Mon-Holiday)

Akhanda Japam (Japam and Meditation Day)

Date: April 30th (National holiday) from 05:00~20:00

Venue: Zushi Main Shrine

Note: Meal to be served.

We hold Akanda Japam (continuous spiritual practice of silent mantra chanting, meditation and prayer) in our main Zushi shrine twice a year. Participants meditate continuously hour by hour in a quiet, spiritual atmosphere. Participants are only required to practice for one hour, but you may participate for longer periods or stagger your time slots if you wish. You are encouraged to join at a time convenient to you. This practice is easy for beginners.

Please inform us of the hours you wish to participate by 20 April. Single hourly units are fine, but more than one hour is preferable. Contact: Shanti <vedanta.karmayoga@gmail.com>

Change Oneself (from page 1)

The young couple sat before the old man who noted that food was important and asked the young man, "Do you like chiles in your dishes?" The young man answered that he could not bear hot, spicy foods at all.

The young woman answered, "I require at least seven chiles in my dishes."

The young man was then asked how many spoonfuls of sugar he required in his tea. "Only one," was the answer.

The young woman answered, "Seven!"

The elder then inquired as to their preferred hardness or softness of a bed mattress. The young man answered that he preferred his mattress a little hard, while the woman said she desired a very soft mattress.

This story illustrates how when two such people live together with such diverse aptitudes, likes and dislikes, obviously problems in communication arise. Also, before relationships are entered into, it may be hard to assess another's likes and dislikes. Only when a relationship is established can one know of another's likes and dislikes. Another aspect is that most parents want their children to grow-up in a particular way. Children, however, cannot always obey and follow the instructions of their parents, often resulting in mistakes, deviations and failures. Parents then want to reform or change them. Such troubles arise between wives and husbands, parents and children, brothers and sisters, between friends, and teachers and students. In one way, too, between doctor and patient.

In all these there is an expectation to reform or change the behaviour of others. So when the person in question does not change as expected, problems arise within relationships. Sometimes this desire for change is mutual; wife wants to reform

husband and husband wants to reform wife. Friends want to change other friends. Such expectations can be one-sided. Especially with regard to parents and children or teachers and students, the desire to change another is more one-sided. With respect to this desire to reform or change others, expected results are very few indeed. So the reform of others is a very difficult proposition.

The question then arises as to why this perception of changing others mostly does not work. In this connection let me repeat a story you may have heard before: There was a Muslim wise-man, Mullah Nasiruddin, of present day Iraq/Turkey border region. A very unique character, sometimes he would speak like a wise-man and sometimes like a fool. People respected and loved him despite his rather strange ways. One day people found him a very pensive mood. Curious, one after another the people asked him what made him so thoughtful and pensive.

Nasiruddin said, "My brothers, I see so many imperfect things in this world." [This as we also see in America, in India, and elsewhere today, terrorism, killings and the launching of missiles.] "And I am thinking," he continued. "There are so many traits and imperfections. I am pondering how I can change and reform this world very deeply now." The people were satisfied with this answer and left him with the remark, "God speed, Mullah Sahib!"

The following year, however, Nasiruddin was found on the same spot in the same pensive mood. The people again noted his thoughtful mood and pointed out that the year before he had said he was contemplating how to change the world. "What makes you so thoughtful now?" they asked. He answered that the year before he had thought to change the world, which proved to be very difficult to accomplish, so now he was thinking on how to change the society to which he belongs. The people were satisfied with this

(cont page 4)

Change Oneself (from page 3)

idea too, and all wished him, "God speed, Mullah Sahib!"

One year later, Nasiruddin was again on the very same spot in the very same mood. The people then approached him saying that two years earlier he had told them was contemplating how to change the world's society. The following year he had told them his thoughts were on changing his society. "Please tell us dear Mullah, what are your present thoughts?"

"Yes," he replied. "First I thought to change the world, and that proved to be an impossible task. Then I thought to change society, and that, too, proved to be most difficult. Therefore, now I am pondering how to change members of my own family. I see many faults and imperfections in them. I must change my family to become a perfect family." Again, the people wished him God speed.

But the following year the people found him in the same place in the same attitude. "Oh dear Mullah Sir, first you told us changing the world was impossible; then that changing society was impossible. What happened regarding members of your own family? We see that you remain very pensive. What is the matter now?"

"You are all correct," he answered. "First I had hoped to change the world; then thought to change society; then tried to correct and change behaviours of my family members. All these attempts failed, so now I contemplate how to change myself."

This story conveys an important message, and in this context I will tell of another incident. Swami Shivanandaji, better known as 'Mahapurush Maharaj,' was one of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples and later became President of the Ramakrishna Order. At Belur Math it is quite common for



family members and individuals to visit seeking the blessings of the resident monks. One couple came to visit Shivanandaji and asked, "Please, Revered Maharaj, bless my child that he may become perfect." It is natural for parents to seek such blessings from monks. But instead of giving the usual blessing that the child be a good student, or a good person, etc., Shivanandaji said, "First, you should try to become perfect yourselves. Then your son can become perfect!"

What a blessing! If the parents become perfect, there is a great probability that the child will become perfect too.

I convey these tales because we all see problems and wish to change them, but we forget our own responsibility in regard to solving the problems and in mending matters. This is the focus of our talk today. First let me change myself before attempting to change others. The problem is that no one wants to change. This is the great contradiction! We want to change others, but do not want to change ourselves. So the problems continue; quarrels continue, and finally, there is the possibility of separation. Instead, we must develop relationships, if we wish to live peacefully and happily. We are all social beings. We are not living in caves or on islands alone. We must try to think on how to continue with better relationships, and how to develop more constructive and positive relationships.

(con't page 5)

Change Oneself (from page 4)

This is the most important thing to accept—our own responsibility for our relationships; to understand this and to act accordingly is the most difficult to do. We must ask ourselves why is it that we do not want to change ourselves? It is certainly necessary to change ourselves, but from our own experiences we find that this is most difficult. What is the psychological reason for this? We must consider this. We cannot avoid communication with others. If we are in a family, of course we have to communicate. There is communication between husband and wife and parents and children. Even if one lives alone, there must still be some communication at work for example. Everywhere, as long as we are in a society, we must communicate with each other, and because of this we see many problems. We must consider why we cannot see our own responsibility, and almost always think that someone else responsible for the bad relationships we develop with others.

In thinking about this problem, I consider the reason for our unwillingness to change ourselves is self-love and ego. If we each try to introspect ourselves, we may arrive at the same conclusion. 'Because I love myself and think of myself as infallible, obviously it must be the other person's fault—the other person's mistake.' Because of our ego, we cannot judge clearly our own mistakes and responsibility. 'I am perfect, therefore the other person is at fault.'

Here are some of the symptoms of our inflated ego. One example of this is that others must like the same things that I do. Secondly, we do not respect the beliefs of others. Thirdly, we want our own freedoms, but do not allow the same freedoms to others. These are some the symptoms of the ego in us. People displaying these symptoms of ego and self-love are usually found complaining and grumbling about others. One example of

this type of grumbling and complaining is when someone says, "You (others) do not understand me!" Such a person does not ask himself, 'If he (someone) does not understand me, what is it about me? Do I understand him?' If we think another's opinion is wrong, there is also a possibility that others will think the same thing about me.

It has been said that the ego is like wine. If we drink wine, our judgement becomes deluded. The same can be said of an egotistical person. Of course we all have ego, unless we have become a sage, but I am talking of those with excessive egos. Like wine intoxication, such people are drunk on their egos. In spiritual life as well, ego is a big obstacle. The ego is like a curtain because of which and we cannot see God inside us. Ego is also the greatest obstacle in forming good, positive, constructive, healthy and happy relationships.

Let me request that if we find ourselves experiencing bad, unfriendly or strained relationships, the very first thing we should try understand is that one of the main factors behind such improper relationships is our own ego. So, 'I must try to change myself,' should be our approach. Surely the other person also bears responsibility and may have the same problem of an inflated ego, but we know we cannot control the other person. 'At least changing myself is in my own hands!' Consequently, as Mahapurush Maharaj said, "If we can reform ourselves and work to make us perfect, obviously, an impact will appear on others." So let the process start from 'myself'.

Think of a handshake! If we always wait for the other to extend his hand first, the resulting handshake does not become smooth. Again, let the process start from oneself. Let me first extend my hand and be ready to shake the other's hand. Everyone must think on his own how to curb one's ego. I am 100% sure that if we do this, the results will be great. 'It will

(con't page 6)

Change Oneself (from page 5)

help me to become a better man or woman. It will help me to inculcate better and healthier relationships. It will help me to become a good devotee, as well.' There is another question in relationships and that is 'anger.' If we try to analyse this, again we find the ego.

We may also ask, 'Why should I first try to curb my ego, especially in relationships, rather than asking others to eliminate their ego?' This beautiful expression, 'Be the change you want to see in others,' gives the answer.

To curb our ego we must practice patience. We should bear with situations we find ourselves in that we do not like. There are four important practices necessary to learn to have patience. These are to ignore, to adjust, to forgive and to forget. If we apply these important practices we can achieve a 'positive patience'. There is also 'negative patience,' wherein one is bound to be patient or compelled to endure from some outside influence. Positive patience should come from within. For example we can just ignore things like someone forgetting to turn off the lights, and only if it happens continuously do we need to mention it to that individual. In family relationships as well, if the wife or husband always wants to find fault with the other at every instance, then the relationship becomes bitter. Ignore minor things.

Let us adjust ourselves by being ready to change because the situation, the people and place around me demand it, though we must be firm in our principles. Let us try to be like the willow tree and not like the oak tree. Let us try to bend if needed, but not break.

Next is to forgive. Suppose someone frequently makes the same mistake; I do not mind or complain to that person and the other person does not complain to me, because we both realise we both make

Thought of the Month

"Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."

— George Bernard Shaw

mistakes. This is mutual forgivingness. Another thing is to not hold on to or drag out reproaches for mistakes, but to forget about it. What often happens in quarrels is that one will recite a long list of offences the other has done—even those committed long ago. This means we haven't really forgotten; we are keeping it all in mind—so try to forget mistakes so that they may also forget and forgive our mistakes. A person with a big ego cannot ignore; he cannot adjust; he cannot forgive; and he cannot forget.

So these are all practical things we should be aware of and practice in our relationships. What was Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's last piece of advice to a visitor? "I tell you one thing," she said, "if you want peace, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own." If we have a big ego, we cannot see our own defects, we can only see the defects of others. So the way to reduce the level of my own ego is to see my own faults. What did Jesus say? In the Sermon on the Mount he told us to not judge others and we will not be judged by God. Again he asks, "Why do you pay attention to the speck in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the log in your own eye?"

When a person does not see another's good qualities and only sees their bad qualities, and at the same time this person sees only his own good qualities and not his bad qualities—this too is a symptom of the ego. A person with a big ego has the

(con't page 7)

Change Oneself (from page 6)

nature of a fly. A fly is fond of dirty things. So let us all have the nature of a bee and only be fond of flowers.

My last point in today's talk is to give more and take less—to be less demanding. A person with a strong ego is always de-

manding. His wants are always in terms of taking. Having patience and forbearance and by ignoring, adjusting, forgiving, forgetting, by seeing the good qualities in others, and by being less demanding; all these are the means by which we can curb our ego. In this practice let us be motivated by this watchword: 'Be the change you want to see in others.' •



Tokyo Yoga Therapy Society Group

Swami Medhasananda Addresses
The Japan Yoga Therapy Society
in Tokyo November 2017

On Monday, November 4 (Sat) from 3 pm to 5 pm, at the Tokyo Yoga Therapy Training Center in Akabane, Kita-ku, Tokyo. A lecture on The Vedanta Society of Japan's publication, 'Rebirth and the Law of Karma,' was given by Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj). The organizer of the Satsanga was Zenju Matsushima, manager of the Center. Twenty-one people participated, including therapists who study yoga therapy.

(con't page 8)



Tokyo Yoga (from page 7)

In the lecture room on the 2nd floor of the Center, Maharaj's talk started with three key questions: 'What is the meaning of living well?' and 'Will everything be over with our death?' and 'Can't death be avoided?'

The talk focused on the differences in three kinds of bodies; the gross body, the subtle body, and the causal body, and the soul. Three kinds of karma, and their cause and impact on our lives, and the affirmative idea of rebirth were also discussed. The participants listened intently and took notes earnestly.

Maharaj signed copies of 'Rebirth and the Law of Karma' for all the people who bought the book and spoke to each of them at the book space set up in the Center. I felt the accord between organizers, staff and participants to Maharaj was a warm and friendly. •

Reported by Yuko Nitta (translated by Atsumi Honda)

Swami Medhasananda Visits Hokkaido **Two-day Sapporo Satsanga** December 2017

A two-day satsanga was held at Ms. Yoshiko Iwai's house in Sapporo City, Hokkaido on December 2nd and 3rd. The theme of the discourse was 'Triguna of the Bhagavad Gita', the organizers were Ms. Iwai and Ms. Miwako Tanabe. There were 13 participants.

The following is a summary of Ms. Tanabe's report:

This was the second 'Bhagavad Gita' scripture discourse in Sapporo. It has been realized after two and a half years since the last time. Over the two days we had morning prayers and Gita chanting. There were discourses both morning and afternoon. In the evening of the first day we enjoyed devotional songs, arati (vespers), and meditation. At the end of the second day we had Q&A time. This satsanga had a great variety of times spent with Swami Medhasanandaji (Maharaj).



Maharaj first said "Since the scriptures are very subtle, it is difficult to understand 100%. But please do not worry if you do not understand. Based on what you learned today, listen to talks about the scriptures over and over." More will become clearer and clearer.

In addition, Maharaj said "If you do not become happy after studying the truth, there is no meaning to that study. Today's study is for the support of life and for the study of happiness!"

(con't page 9)

Sapporo (from page 8)

In the discourse, Maharaj explained in detail about triguna (3 gunas), and then talk on about triguna as mentioned in the Gita, while reading along in the Gita. Finally, Maharaj talked about salvation and transcendence, and compared to Sattva to living in a golden cage; Rajas to living in a silver cage; and Tamas to life an iron cage, with the soul as a bird.

“The bird is now in the cage for the play of life, but in reality he is free. So even if it is a golden cage, he has to be released from the cage to be free,” one way is by the practice Jnana Yoga. Another way is by transforming our self-consciousness to God-consciousness by working as a tool of God and serving others as God.”

Participants sang three Indian devotional songs and one Japanese song. Maharaj sang “Ananta Rupini” and “Dub Dub Rupsagore” and playing the harmonium. I was impressed.

Lunch was handmade by participants, including meals by Ms. Iwai on both days, using the abundant foods of Hokkaido generously, they were Sattvic meals and my heart and body were delighted. In the evening we had a dinner at an Indian restaurant.

Among the participants, there was a person who met Maharaj by chance in India and decided to participate in satsanga this time, and also a participant who attended with her parent, and another who attended with her husband. Also, there was one person who participated from Osaka, as this satsanga was a valuable opportunity for holy company. Even those who participated for the first time, I thought that it wonderful to positively ask questions and gradually deepen our understanding.

Participants made the following comments:

"In Sapporo, there are few opportunities to hear discourses directly from Maharaj, and I found it most stimulating this time!"

"I got motivated!"

"Not only the discourse, but also listening to and singing songs was a very interesting experience."

(Translated and summarized by Atsumi Honda)



• A Story to Remember •

Fishy Morality

Once a renowned philosopher and moralist was traveling through Mullah Nasiruddin's village, and stopping to pay his respects, he asked Nasiruddin if he could recommend a good place to dine. Nasiruddin suggested such a place and the scholar, hungry for conversation as well, invited Nasiruddin to join him for dinner.

Much obliged, Nasiruddin accompanied the scholar to a nearby restaurant where they asked the waiter about the special of the day.

"Fish! replied the waiter. "Fresh local fish!"

"Bring us two," they requested.

A few minutes later, the waiter brought out a large platter of freshly grilled fish. One of the fishes was quite a bit smaller than the other one, and without hesitation, Nasiruddin took the larger of the two fish from the platter and put in on his own plate.

The scholar's smile quickly faded and was transformed into an expression of intense disbelief. He then proceeded to lecture Mullah Nasiruddin in great detail that what he just did was not only flagrantly selfish, but that it violated the principles of almost every known moral, religious and ethical code of conduct.

Smiling, Mullah Nasiruddin sat and listened to the philosopher's heated, extemporaneous lecture quite patiently. When the scholar had finally exhausted his resources, Mullah Nasiruddin calmly asked him, "Well, good Sir, what would you have done?"

"I, being a conscientious person of manners and culture, would have taken the smaller of the two fish for myself, leaving the larger one for my guest," said the scholar.

"Very good then, Sir! Here you are," Mullah Nasirudin replied, as he placed the smaller fish on the gentleman's plate.

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