



November 2018 - Volume 16 Number 11

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

December 2018
Calendar

Birthdays

**Swami
Premananda**
Sunday, 16 Dec

Christmas Eve
Saturday, 24 Dec

**Sri Sri Ma
Sarada Devi**
Friday, 28 Dec

Zushi Events

16th (Sun)
Zushi Retreat
(10:30-16:30)
AM Session
Lunch Prasad
PM Session
All are Welcome!

24th (Mon)
**Christmas Eve
Celebration at Zushi**
19:00-21:00
Please Contact: Ashram
046-873-0428

1st Tues(January 2019)
New Year's Kalpataru
11:30~14:00
New Year's Greeting
Zushi Centre
Walk to Kamakura Dai
Butsu, Catholic Church
and Shinto Shrine!

See Page 2 for details of
these and other events!

✠ Thus Spake ✠

"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved."

- Swami Vivekananda

"God enjoins you to treat women well, for they are your mothers, daughters and aunts."

- Prophet Muhammad

September Zushi Retreat

"Sri Krishna: incarnation of God" - Part I

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Sri Krishna's real birthday was the 2nd of September this year. In India the birthday of Sri Krishna is called 'Sri Krishna Janmashtami'. 'Janma' means birth and 'ashtami' the eighth day. In Indian tradition the birthdays of incarnations of God and sages are all decided according to our lunar calendar.

Purpose of Religious Holidays

What is the purpose of celebrating the birthdays of incarnations
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VEDANTA SOCIETY of JAPAN SCHEDULE of EVENTS
DECEMBER 2018

1st (Sat)

Discourse on Bhagavad Gita - At the Embassy of India in Tokyo

(in Japanese only) (10:00~12:00)

<http://www.gita-embassy.com/>

2nd (Sun)

Half Day Retreat at Zushi 14:00~16:00

Chanting

Reading on spiritual life

Discussion, Meditation, Tea and snacks

Please Contact: [benkyo\(dot\)nvk\(at-mark\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:benkyo(dot)nvk(at-mark)gmail(dot)com)

11th (Tue)

Gospel Class Zushi Centre

(14:00~16:30)

[benkyo\(dot\)nvk\(at-mark\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:benkyo(dot)nvk(at-mark)gmail(dot)com)

16th (Sun)

Monthly Retreat at Zushi

10:30 AM Session

Speaker: Swami Medhasananda

Chanting, Reading and Discourse

Lunch Prasad

14:30 PM Session

Chanting, Reading, Talk and Q&A

24th (Mon)

Christmas Eve Celebration

Zushi Centre 19:00-21:00

Please Contact: Ashram 046-873-0428

Worship / Reading / Discourse / Carols

Light prasad dinner

All are welcome!

Every Saturday - 10:45~11:45

Yoga-Asana Class - Zushi Annexe

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

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

NOTICE!

Nara Narayana → Cancelled this December

Sato: [urara5599\(at mark\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:urara5599(at mark)gmail(dot)com)

January 1st (Tuesday)

New Year's Kalpataru

11:30 ~ 14:00

New Year's Greeting Zushi Centre

→ Buddha in Kamakura

→ Catholic Yukinoshita Church

→ Shinto Shrine 'Tsurugaoka Hachimangu'

Please Contact: Kyokai (045-873-0428)

Sri Krishna (from page 1)

of God and sages? Are they just festivals? The image we have of 'festival' is enjoyment: a lot of decoration, glittering lights, loads of foods, feasts, fun and so on. A typical example is the Christmas celebration. The recent trend is to celebrate Christmas gorgeously, but 'without Jesus'. It seems most of us forget a holiday's real purpose and celebrate it just for fun. In fact, Jesus would not care whether Christmas Eve was celebrated or not. Krishna, himself, would not need a celebration either. Then why do we need these celebrations? For shopping? For parties? Social gatherings?

For today's celebration, as you can see, our devotees have beautifully decorated the altar. Many of them worked together and prepared food, fruits, flowers and so on to offer at the altar. But is this all? What is the real purpose of these celebrations?

(Attendee) "To think about God."

'Thinking about God' means not only having a mental picture of Him, but thinking about His teachings. But if we remember Him everyday, do we still need to do these special celebrations? And if we need the celebrations anyway, why?

(Attendee) "We can have His grace."

(Attendee) "We should show Him our respect."

(Attendee) "God's birthday is a very auspicious day, so it's a good day for us to think about what he taught and what he did."

(Attendee) "God's birthday is astrologically a very lucky day, so if we meditate on these days it can make a greater impact."

That's a very good answer. I've never thought about that (laughter). Here is another answer for me. If you remember God everyday, then we may not need special celebrations very much. However, we are likely to forget. Not every day, not very often we think about Him. Our work and other day-to-day business draw our attention so strongly we completely forget about God. Hence, sages started this tradition so that we can remember God at least one day a year. It is ideal to think about God everyday, but average people don't do so. Therefore we celebrate these birthdays for us to come together, remember Him and pray to Him.

Take a look at New Year's Day in Japan. It is the only day, out of 365 days in a year, people remember God, go to a shrine or temple, and pray to Him. If we did not have that tradition, when would we think of Him? No one would possibly go to a shrine a single day a year. As the Japanese saying 'kurushi tokino kamidanomi' goes, we pray to God for help only when we suffer, and yet even in this case we do not go to a shrine.

In India, there are a lot of incarnations of God, such as Krishna, Rama, Buddha, and a great number of sages including Vyasa. Additionally, we have Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda). At our Zushi Centre, as part of the celebration programme of these people's birthdays, we have discourses, devotional songs, reading from scriptures and chanting, as well as food. This is to remember God.

In other words, we remember God at such celebrations, and after a while we forget Him. When the next celebration comes, we again remember Him. We repeat this process of

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Sri Krishna (from page 3)

remembering and forgetting and gradually proceed to become a sincere devotee. We can only take a step-by-step approach as our spiritual levels cannot jump overnight. If you introspect, you will understand what I mean. As I said by way of introduction, I just wanted to explain the real purpose for celebrating Sri Krishna's birthday at the beginning of this discourse.

Thought of the Month

"May you live every day of your life!"

— Jonathan Swift

Incarnations of God

Now let's move on to today's topic: "Sri Krishna, incarnation of God". I don't think there is a common idea of 'incarnation of God' in Japanese and other cultures. However, in Hinduism we have a complete, detailed concept of God's incarnation. In the simplest explanation, God is omnipresent and manifests Himself in every living thing. He exists in non-living objects too, but is just not manifested. In living things, there is a difference in the degree to which He is manifested. He is manifested to a greater degree in sages, and to the highest degree in incarnations of God. Those incarnations have various characteristics of God, such as universal love, harmony, purity, compassion, and the willingness to help others.

In the common Indian tradition, there are thought to be ten incarnations, whereas in the Bhagavatam scripture, there are 24 and in the Bhagavad Gita, they are uncountable. When immorality, atheism and sin prevail on earth, God is incarnated. This incarnation aims, in part, to prove all the teachings of the scriptures are correct and true.

In modern Western philosophies, they doubt the existence of God itself and only believe in materialism, and this trend has widely spread. They reject scriptures saying those scriptures tell imaginary stories and are full of lies and wrong thinking. This was the circumstances of the time Sri Ramakrishna appeared. His mission was to authentically confirm that God exists and that what the scriptures say are all true and correct.

And for the same reason Sri Krishna was born, too. As we read earlier in the programme, it was during the reign of the evil, violent King Kansa, who even tried to kill his own sister and had her children killed. Krishna was born to eliminate such evil people and to protect the good and the innocent from them. The blessed Lord explained in the Gita the purpose of his being born thus:

'I am born again and again,
when immorality increases,
and evil people grow in number,
to punish the bad and save the good.
To lead the way towards Truth,
I am born again and again.'

This is the purpose of God being incarnated. Not only for punishing bad people and supporting good people, incarnations appear for leading us towards happiness and peace of mind and the Truth.

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Sri Krishna (from page 4)

Differences of Birth

What are the differences between average people, sages and incarnations of God?

Firstly, average people are born under the influence of the laws of Karma, whereas incarnations of God are born of their own will. Sages can be affected by the laws of Karma, but incarnations of God never are.

Secondly, sages can become widely known, and sometimes instantly famous, while they are alive, partly thanks to publicity, but their name and fame gradually diminish after they have died. This is just the opposite in the case of incarnations of God. While they are alive they may not be well known, but they gain more and more attention to become famous after death. How many people would have known of Jesus Christ, Buddha, Muhammad or Sri Ramakrishna when they were alive? And how many people know of them now? If we compare then we understand the veracity of the former statement about the difference between an ordinary person and an incarnation.

Key Differences

Let us look at a few more differences between sages and incarnations of God. Here is an interesting story. One day Holy Mother said to her lady attendant and Sri Ramakrishna's disciple, Yogin Ma, "Yogin, I went to many holy places including Varanasi, Vrindavan, Puri and saw so many sages, but compared with them Sri Ramakrishna is very special." At this Yogin Ma made a very interesting comment responding, "Mother, those sages do spiritual practice for their own salvation, but Sri Ramakrishna appeared to grant salvation." What a big difference!

Another difference I would like to highlight is, the impact sages can make is only at the dimension of religion, whereas incarnations of God make a much broader impact ranging from religion to society, culture, economy, philosophy and so on.

If you travel in Europe, you can see the huge influence of Christianity in architecture and art, such as beautiful churches, paintings and sculptures. That is the impact Jesus Christ made, and what would be left if we removed His influence from European culture? Likewise, if we remove Rama, Krishna, Buddha and other incarnations of God from Indian culture, what little of Indian cultural heritage would be left? This is a distinctive characteristic of incarnations of God.

Unique Characteristics

Each incarnation of God has unique characteristics and what are Sri Krishna's?

Attendee: Detachment!

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Sri Krishna (from page 5)

Sri Krishna has various characteristics of his divine personality and he shares some of them with other incarnations of God. But what is his uniqueness? For instance, one of Sri Ramakrishna's unique characteristics is renunciation. If he touched money he felt a strong pain. If there were just a few rupees under his bed, when he lay down he experienced a great pain. As for Sri Krishna, detachment is one of his most unique qualities. He loved Vrindavan so much, but when he had to leave it and move to Mathura to fulfil his duty he did not grieve at all, while the gopis (cowherd girls) wept bitterly to be soon separated from him. If need be Krishna would not hesitate at all to renounce the object of his greatest love in a single moment. He was so special in this respect.

(This concludes Part I - Part II will be presented in our December Issue)

Fukuoka Satsanga Fall 2018



From September 23rd (Sun) to 24th (Mon), Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) visited Fukuoka and gave a discourse titled 'Yama (restraint), one of the Ashtanga in Yoga-Sutra' for the Satsanga held at Kokoro Yoga Studio.

The comments below are impressions offered by participants:

"It is as if my first experience to learn such a deep meaning of Satya (truthfulness). I strongly feel that I will not tell any lies on any level of action, conversation, nor mind. I, especially want to feel the honesty of my heart continuously."

"I was impressed with Maharaj saying that the true power-spot is inside of myself."

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Fukuoka (from page 6)

“If water of a lake is dirty and the lake is choppy, we can’t find the jewel on the bottom of the lake. In the same way as it, we can’t find the Truth if our mind is not clean nor calm. This story made me a clear image of finding the Truth.”

“We should not say anything if it might hurt a person even if it is right. We should not do the idle talks. These stories are very precious ones for me.”

Translation Atsumi Honda

Satsanga in Yamagata Reported by Shunsei Takahashi

From October 26th (Fri) to 27th (Sat), Swami Medhasanandaji (Maharaj) visited Yamagata. On Friday Maharaj held a question and answer period for the staff of a nearby nursery. After that Maharaj talked about Indian culture briefly to first grade students at an afterschool child care centre.

On Saturday Maharaj gave a discourse on the Bhagavad Gita at the Hills Sunpia Yamagata Hotel in Yamagata City from 1p.m. to 4 p.m. 30 people attended the discourse. The following is a summary of the report provided by Mr. Shunsei Takahashi, the organizer of the Ningen Kojo Kenkyujo (Human Development Study Group), Iyasi-no Yoga (Healing Yoga):

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Yamagata (from page 7)

What is the Bhagavad Gita which survives all this time from more than 5000 years ago and still serves modern man. Why is this scripture sought by people? How we should utilize its wisdom as a way to define our life?

Addressing this topic Maharaj told us the way as follows:

“Don’t run away. Face the problem. Never give up and keep on.”

“The purpose of our life is to get the real freedom and be happy. The real nature of human beings is the Soul. Do our works as Karma Yoga. Work with non-attachment and selflessness and with the consciousness that ‘I am the instrument of God’. Our every power is from God. Every job is a job for God. Do our every work as if we were the instruments of God.”

“Control our mind by practicing meditation and controlling our desires. Desires and attachments can be controlled by renunciation. Spend your daily life on the middle path. The preparation of our death is not only thinking about how to live, but also how to die. Having courage, relief, and knowledge are necessary for that preparation.

Rarely have we heard such precious words. I thank Maharaj.

Translated by Atsumi Honda

Satsanga in Sendai Reported by Miyako Sato



On Oct. 28, (Sun) from 1:30p.m.to 4:00p.m., Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) gave a discourse about ‘The purpose of our life’ at the Shoke Building in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture. The organizer was the Japan Association of Yoga Therapists, Miyagi. After the discourse attendees practiced meditation and had Q&A time with Maharaj. From 5:00p.m. they had a supper meeting at an Indian and Nepalese restaurant near by.

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Sendai (from page 8)

The following is a summary of Ms. Miyako Sato's report and descriptions of her impressions:

At the age of around 40 thoughts about the purpose of our life become deeper than that of our youth. We should cherish our time of life because we were born as human beings and those births mean we were given special opportunities.

What should we use our time for? People have desires such as living long, gaining knowledge enjoyments, getting freedom and working. In Indian philosophy these desires are thought to be from the soul which exists in a deeper place than in the mind. That is to say, we should follow the way which is thought in the soul level, or we can't get the real satisfaction.

The ways in which we can actually proceed in this practice is by making daily schedule, taking the time for meditation, continuing this practice and challenging it again and again.

In his discourse, Maharaj taught us the meaning of living at the soul level and how to practice living there. Making daily a schedule; going to bed at fixed time; having meditation time in the morning; studying scriptures and practicing those teachings on our daily life with deep introspection. The purpose of our life is to live in the soul level. I think it means transcending beyond the relative and worldly world and living freely and generously. The meditation as a yearly event was precious moment for me and my mind became calm. I could have very good time. Thank you very much.

Translated by Atsumi Honda

Japan Vedanta Society Celebrates **Sri Sri Kali Puja**

The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai) observed Sri Sri Kali Puja in the Annexe adjacent to its main Zushi Centre this year on Tuesday evening, 6 November at 7 p.m. As the venue is rather far from Tokyo and on a weekday night, every effort is made to ensure the puja is conducted with few delays.

This year Kali Puja was again conducted by Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj). At the conclusion of the offering of five symbolic elements of earth, water, air, fire and ether. Ms. Shanti led the congregation in singing 'Om Sarva Maṅgala Māṅgalye.' The pushpanjali (flower offering) followed with Maharaj first leading the congregation verse by verse in the pranam mantra to Kali Ma.

The platform was then arranged and Maharaj conducted the Homa (fire ritual) with the entire congregation joining in prescribed chanting. After Vibhuti (sacred ash) had been prepared everyone received a dab on the forehead and offered salutations to Kali Ma.

A light prasad dinner was served at about 9:30 p.m. in the main Ashram building, with attendees finding seating available in both the Ashram and the Annexe. About 140 people attended. •

Kali Puja - Zushi 2018







• A Story to Remember •

The Absense of True Knowledge

Once upon a time there was a forest where the birds sang by day and the insects by night. Trees flourished, flowers bloomed and all manner of creatures roamed about in freedom.

And all who entered there were led to Solitude, which is the home of God who dwells in Nature's silence and Nature's beauty.

But then the Age of Unconsciousness arrived when it became possible for people to construct buildings a thousand feet high and to destroy rivers and forests and mountains in a month. So houses of worship were built from the wood of the forest trees and from the stone under the forest soil. Pinnacle, spire and minaret pointed towards the sky; the air was filled with the sound of bells, with prayer and chant and exhortation.

And God was suddenly without a home.

God hides things by putting them before our eyes!

Hark! Listen to the song of the bird,
the wind in the trees,
the ocean roar;
look at a tree, a falling leaf, a flower
as if for the first time.

You might suddenly make contact
with Reality
with that Paradise
from which we,
having fallen from childhood,
are excluded by our knowledge.

Says the Indian mystic Saraha:
"Know the taste of this flavour
Which is the absence of Knowledge."

The Prayer of the Frog - Anthony de Mello

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