



May 2019 - Volume 17 Number 05

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

June 2019
Calendar

Birthdays

**NO BIRTHDAYS IN JUNE
THIS YEAR ACCORDING TO
THE VISHUDDHA
SIDDHANTA ALMANAC.**

Zushi Events

2nd Sunday

Zushi Half-Day Retreat

14:00~1600 / Contact
[benkyo.nvk.@gmail.com]

11th Tues

Gospel Class

14:00~1600 / Contact
[benkyo.nvk.@gmail.com]

16th Sunday

June

Monthly Retreat Buddha Celebration

10:30~16:30
Speaker: Jyokei Sato,
A nun with the 'Zentsuji'
Buddhist Temple
of Kagawa, Shikoku

24th (Fri)

Nara Narayan

Service to Homeless
Contact: Yoko Sato
urara5599(at mark)
gmail(dot)com

Every Saturday

Yoga Asana Class

Zushi Annexe (10:15~11:45)
Contact: <http://zushi-hatayoga.jimdo.com>



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Every wave of passion restrained is a balance in your favour. It is therefore good policy not to return anger for anger, as with all true morality. Christ said, "Resist not evil", and we do not understand it until we discover that it is not only moral but actually the best policy, for anger is loss of energy to the man who displays it. You should not allow your minds to come into those brain-combinations of anger and hatred."

- Swami Vivekananda

"No one can call himself pure until he has met and overcome the evils and temptations that beset his path, and subdued and turned to nobler channels the passions with which he is born."

- Prophet Zarathushtra

Programme

Vedanta Society's Yearly Public Celebration in Tokyo
Swami Vivekananda: 156th Birth Anniversary
Mahatma Gandhi: 150th Birth Anniversary

On Sunday, 26 May the Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual public celebration of Swami Vivekananda's (Swamiji) birth anniversary in Tokyo. This year the Society elected to also fete the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi as he was a

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Public Celebration Programme (from page 1)

world renown reformer who said that after reading the works of Vivekananda his love for his nation became a thousand-fold. We post here the programme for the event and the few photos available at this time. Our JUNE PDF issue of 'The Vedanta Kyokai' will present a more thorough pictorial account and more celebration speeches.

Programme start 1PM:

Invocation:

- Swami Medhasananda and devotees

Offering of Bouquet to Swami Vivekananda and

Release of Special Edition of 'Universal Gospel' and Speech:

- Mr. Sanjay Kumar Verma, Ambassador, Embassy of India, Tokyo

Main Speakers and Theme: 'Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi'

- Dr. Vivek Pinto, Ph.D., Visiting fellow Institute of Asian, African & Middle Eastern Studies, Sophia University Tokyo
- Professor Masahiko Togawa, Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa / Professor Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Impromptu Guest:

- Mr. Masayuki Taga, Consul General of Japan, Kolkata, India, who gave brief remarks on the Early India/Japan Relationship in the Modern Era with such notable names as Okakura Tenshin, Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda.

Vote of Thanks:

- Mr. Atsushi Suzuki, Secretary, Vedanta Society of Japan

3PM Recess and Refreshments

3:20 Cultural Programme:

- Indian Devotional Songs
- Japanese Devotional Songs
- Indian Classical Dance

Vote of Thanks and Close:

- Mr, Ranjan Gupta, Member, Celebration Committee



Ambassador Verma Offers Bouquet and Releases Special Edition of 'Universal Gospel'

[The following is from Dr. Pinto's prepared text and slide presentation]

Dr. Vivek Pinto, Ph.D.
Visiting Fellow, Institute of Asian, African & Middle Eastern Studies
Sophia University
Tokyo.

Mahatma Gandhi: Does His Life Matter Today and
How Relevant is it to Contemporary Japanese Society?

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I thank Swami Medhasanandaji, President, Vedanta Society of Japan (Nihon Vedanta Kyokai), and Members of the Organising Committee of the Vedanta Society of Japan for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts on such an important topic.

Also, I am deeply grateful to each of you for having time on a Sunday to come and listen.

This year, 2019, marks the 150th birth anniversary of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), the architect of India's nonviolent political struggle and visionary moral-philosopher activist.

Part I

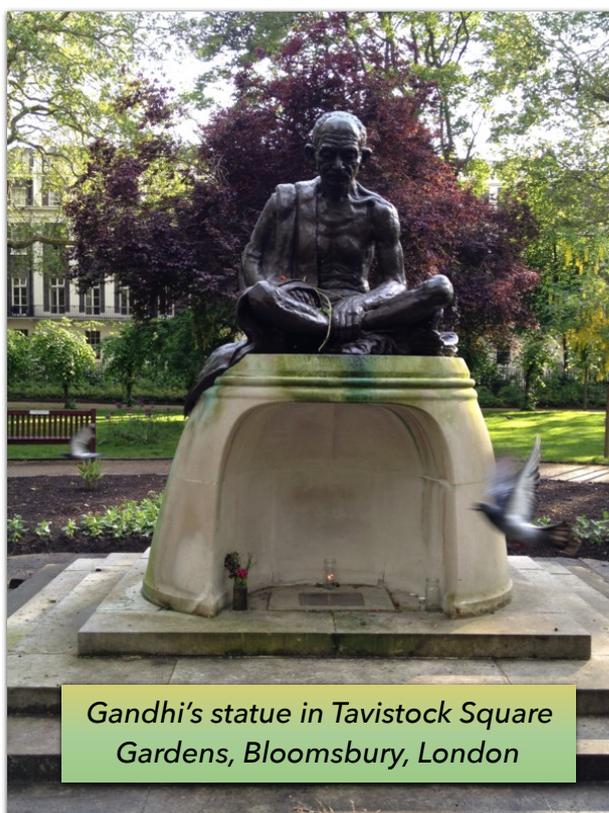
Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 and was assassinated on 30 January 1948, by a right-wing Hindu nationalist. 'Mahatma' (great soul in Sanskrit), is the title given to Gandhi by Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali polymath and Nobel Prize winner in Literature in 1913.

Gandhi was not born as a Mahatma, but became one. This means there was a process. It is this process which concerns us and forms the first part of this talk. Gandhi evolved from being a lawyer to a formidable, nonviolent political leader of a mass political, freedom movement. It ended British rule in India through a remarkable nonviolent struggle and the world was shocked!

If these were the only facts, then Gandhi would be confined to the dust bin of history, as history has done to many others like him. But it hasn't. The validity of my statement is that the world over people are talking and learning from Gandhi, even today a century and a half later.

It was not long ago that former President Obama was asked, "Who is the one person you would like to have a meal with?" Obama pondered for a while and replied, "Gandhi." And then added, "It would be a pretty small meal, because he [Gandhi] did not eat a lot."

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*Gandhi's statue in Tavistock Square
Gardens, Bloomsbury, London*

Mahatma Gandhi (from page 3)

Gandhi's statue in Tavistock Square Gardens, Bloomsbury, London. It was sculpted by Fredda Brilliant and installed in 1968. The hollow pedestal was intended, and is used, for people to leave floral tributes

For purposes of brevity, I have summarised four important aspects of Gandhi's life which have deep and enduring significance and drawn contemporary relevance of each:

1. A Soldier in the Freedom Struggle

2. A Driver for Social Change

3. A Religious Philosopher and Activist

4. A Prophet

1. Gandhi's struggle for freedom was fundamentally shaped by his ardent passion to fight injustice, oppression, racism and discrimination. It took place in South Africa where Gandhi lived for 21 years from 1893-1914. Two examples, among others, in Gandhi's life may illustrate this intense hunger for freedom from racial prejudice and equality

a.) He was thrown out of the train in Pretoria in June 1893, for sitting in a first-class compartment, even though he held a valid ticket.

b.) He was kicked off the footpath near President Kruger's house in July 1893.

In both cases, Gandhi refused to take recourse to violence to redress the situation. But, it set Gandhi to thinking what the alternative to violence is, and obviously, it is nonviolence. Was it that simple? No, but he began and never gave up, despite failures.

He started with Indian and Chinese community leaders, to petition for better treatment for the "semi-slaves," as was the condition of indentured labourers who toiled in South Africa. The demand was plainly treat us as "citizens of the British Empire." Appealing continued for quite a while, but was of no avail.

It is then that Gandhi hit upon the idea that laws had to be intentionally and firmly disobeyed openly to get justice and those disobeying had to be prepared to pay the full, legal penalty. This meant going to jail and enduring hard labor, social humiliation, and penury. Yet, all this had to be "resistance rooted in love of the opponent and nonviolence." This was the birth of 'satyagraha'. It startled South Africa, as it would the British in India and gradually the world.

Contemporary international relevance: The Gandhi-an method of satyagraha has been (con't page 5)



Gandhi as a satyagrahi in South Africa, c1912, when he gave up European dress.

Mahatma Gandhi (from page 4)

effectively used by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the 1960s in the U.S; by ship yard workers in Gdansk, Poland, in the 1980s through Solidarność, a Polish non-governmental trade union movement, under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa; and in the Philippines by the successful nonviolent resistance in 1986 and ouster of Ferdinand Marcos. There are a few others.

2. As a Driver for Social Change, Gandhi's struggle in India had two important aspects: Challenging India's pernicious caste system and enabling gender equality.

a.) India's debilitating caste system is probably known the world over. Those of the lowest caste were not allowed to enter Hindu temples. This was a humiliation to Gandhi and he resolved to try and change the situation. The initial method, as always, was dialogue. In this case, it was Brahmins who were opposing reforms tooth and nail. Dialogue failed and slowly Gandhi and his colleagues launched the Vaikom satyagraha, Kerala, in March 1925, to permit temple entry to the lowest castes in Hinduism.

"We are endeavouring to rid Hinduism of its greatest blot. The prejudice we have to fight against is an age-old prejudice. ... The end is to get all such roads throughout Travancore to be opened up to the [lowest castes], Gandhi said addressing the satyagrahis.

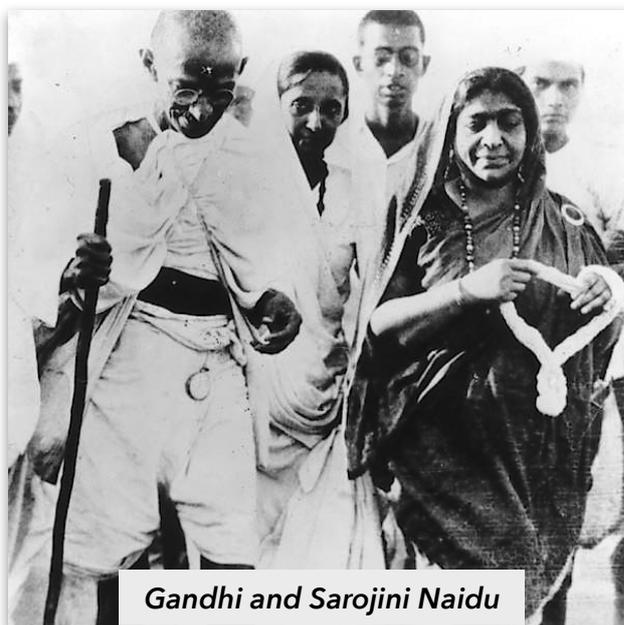
Contemporary relevance: The Vaikom satyagraha is a milestone in the current struggle at Sabrimala temple, Kerala, which banned menstruating women from worship. In 2019, the Indian Supreme court held that "any exception placed on women because of biological differences violates the Constitution."

b.) Gandhi's satyagraha campaigns always called for gender equality and his wife, Kasturba, together with other women, invariably played an active role. In 1925, Sarojini Naidu, a poet and activist for Independence from Hyderabad, presided over the Indian National Congress in Kanpur. This was largely at Gandhi's insistence.

Contemporary relevance: It is by and large accepted in India that women must play a co-equal role in politics as in every other field. Whether there are institutional mechanisms to enable this is a question which cannot be gone into here.

3. Gandhi as a religious philosopher diligently engaged in inter-faith dialogue. He forged strong and enduring friendships not only with Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, Jains, Sikhs, and Jews, but also with atheists and agnostics. This was largely because he lived in and learnt from the diaspora (dispersion of people from their homeland), in South Africa and studied holy texts other than those of Hinduism.

For Gandhi, there were no majority and minority religious group. All Indians were one
(con't page 6)





Prayer Meeting at Birla House

Mahatma Gandhi (from page 5)

people. In fact, all of humanity was one for Gandhi.

As an activist, Gandhi was the first one to go into areas where religious fundamentalists had started riots and created an atmosphere of fear and hate, as in Naokhali (now in Bangladesh), in October-November 1946, and call for peace.

“To me God is truth and love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness . . . God is conscience,” Gandhi wrote in 1909.

At Gandhi’s prayer meetings bhajans or hymns, together with scripture for various religions, were sung and read, respectively.

Contemporary relevance: Gandhi was a practicing and believing Hindu, but refused to define citizenship on the basis of religion. Religion was a basis for unity and harmony, trust, enhancing community and democracy, not sectarianism.

4. As a prophet, Gandhi is particularly relevant to the current environmental challenge.

India has made tremendous strides since 1947 and seen many beneficial changes in different sectors of the economy. Yet, Gandhi’s warning is yet to be seriously listened.

What is that warning? Gandhi said in 1928, “God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the west. . . . keeping the world in chains. If [our nation] took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.”

India’s industrialization has come at a terrible price. It has some of the most polluted cities on earth.

(con’t page 7)

Mahatma Gandhi (from page 6)

Gandhi wanted to see a different India which is yet to be born. “Unless poverty and unemployment are wiped out from India, I would not agree that we have attained freedom,” was Gandhi’s “Advice to Constructive Workers,” in 1947.

Part II

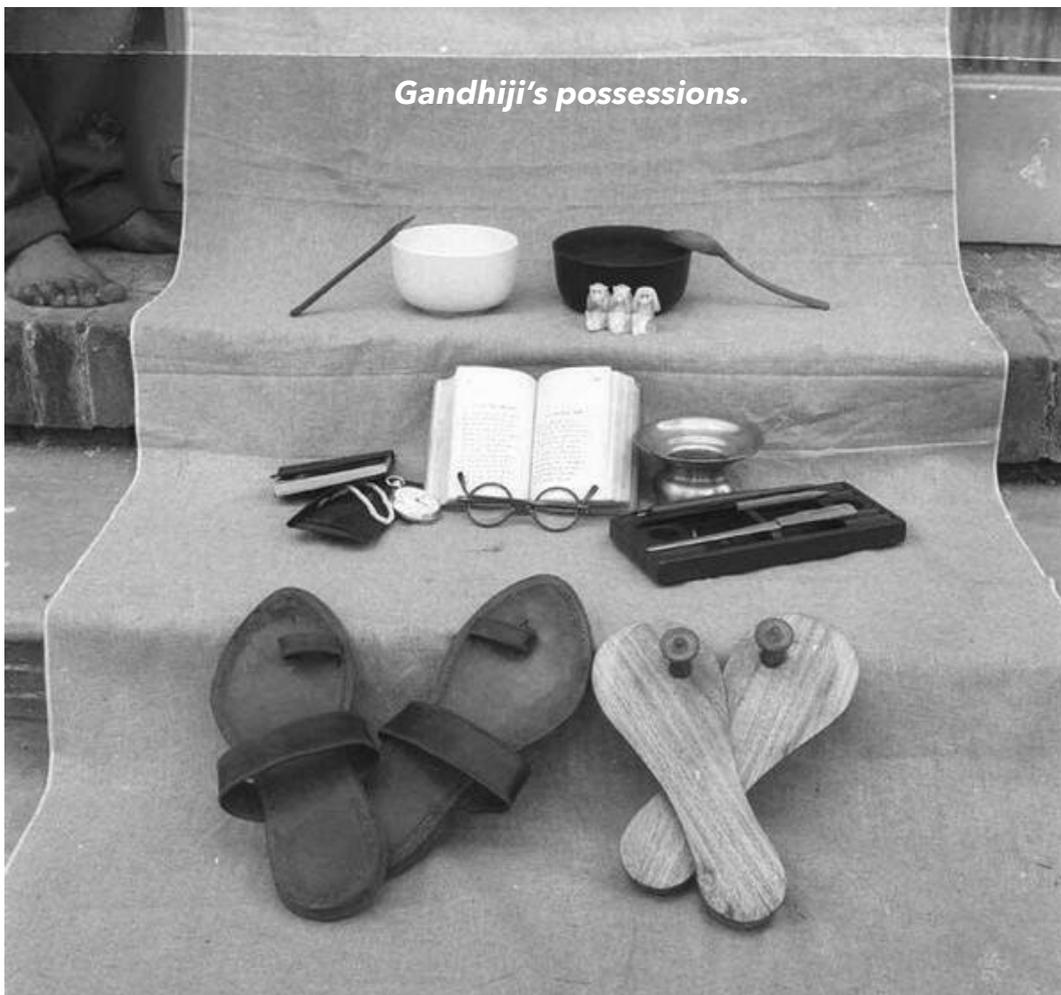
Let me now come to the second part of my talk: What is the contemporary relevance of Gandhi’s life and thought to Japan. I will share my thoughts in all humility and frankness on two aspects.

1) The heavy accent on material possessions and 2) the acceptance of foreigners.

1. Gandhi’s material possessions consisted of the bare minimum. I attach here a photograph of his possessions.

Gandhi lived a very simple and frugal life. This was in keeping with his principle of needs and wants. I may want many things, but do I really need them. In today’s context, this has the added meaning of what toll do our (including my) constantly expanding needs and wants take on the planet. Are most Japanese materialists?

(con’t page 8)



• Thought of the Month •

Start by doing what's necessary;
then do what's possible;
and suddenly
you are doing the impossible.

- St. Francis of Assisi

Mahatma Gandhi (from page 7)

An example may explain my concern: When I ask my students what are your hobbies? Most reply: Shopping! What does that tell you?

2. Japan has a rapidly shrinking work force and aging society. This means that foreigners will increasingly have to enter the labor force. Japan is very ill-prepared to really accept foreigners, especially as laborers. “Between 260,000 and 340,000 foreign workers could enter Japan over the five years starting in fiscal 2019,” according to Nikkei Asian Review, November 13, 2018.

What does this mean? It candidly means that Japan will have to face the same question that Gandhi confronted in South Africa in 1893. Labor rights, discrimination, and socio-economic equality are areas which are of immediate concern.

The color of one’s skin and race play a predominant part in social acceptance. Rights of foreign workers will be a pivotal issue in the years to come. I cannot predict the future, but dare I say that Japan may be ripe for Gandhian satyagraha in the foreign labor sector.

Already there are reports of foreign laborers committing suicides and being harshly treated by Japanese employers. There is a silent form of apartheid or separateness being practiced today.

Let me conclude by a jocular story from Gandhi’s life, as Gandhi had a very sharp sense of humor.

In 1930, a woman came to see Gandhi and sought his advice on how to stop her child from eating sweets. She said: “He’s a good boy, but when it comes to sugar, he becomes a liar and a thief and a cheat and I’m afraid it will ruin his life. Please, Gandhiji, tell him to stop.”

Gandhi looked at the boy for a long time and told the mother: “Come back to me in two weeks time.” Two weeks later the woman returned with her child. She reminded Gandhi of her request.

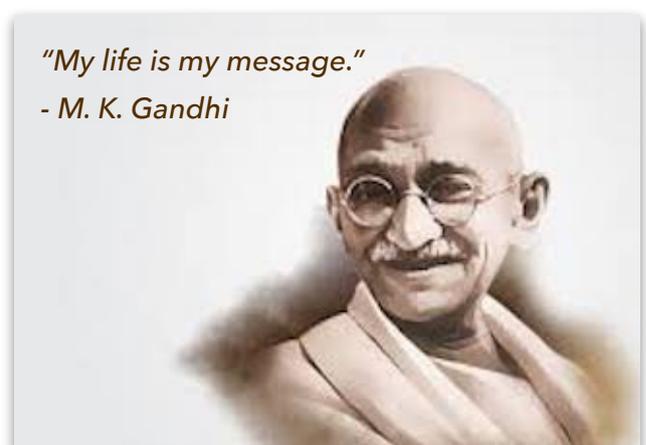
“Yes, of course I remember,” said Gandhi. “Come here, child.” He motioned the boy forward. He looked the boy squarely in the eye and said, firmly, “Don’t eat sugar.”

“That’s it?” said the mother. “That’s all you’re going to say?” She was flabbergasted. “Why didn’t you just tell him that two weeks ago?”

“Because,” replied Gandhi, “Two weeks ago I was still eating sugar myself.”

If there is one message in Gandhi’s life and for contemporary society it is: Gandhi would never do anything without himself having acted upon it. “My life is my message,” Gandhi unceasingly said.

Thank you for your time and attention. •



Vedanta Society Bookstore Report

Research Congress of The Japan Yoga Therapy Society
Held in Hiroshima 18~20 April 2019
Reported by Miwako Tanabe

The Research Congress of the Japan Yoga Therapy Society was held in International Conference Center Hiroshima. Swami Medhasanandaji (Maharaj), resident monk and president the Vedanta Society of Japan and spiritual advisor to the Yoga Therapy Society, set up a bookstore to sell and introduce books, CDs, meditation mats, incense and general goods again this year. We set up shop on April 18, and sold goods on the 19th and 20th. For three days, Ms. Hisako Kobayashi from Fukuoka and I, Miwako Tanabe, from Tokyo worked there as day-long volunteers. Six members of the Japan Yoga Therapy Society also helped us in selling when they were not engaged in meetings. The eight of us worked together and were able to complete the tasks.

The highlight this year was the release and sales of the newly published 'Patanjali Yoga no Jissen' (The Practice of Patanjali Yoga) in Japanese. Maharaj could not attend this time and Mr. Keishin Kimura the Chairperson of the Society released the book on behalf of Maharaj.

Soon after the opening ceremony had started on the 19th, Mr. Kimura introduced the book to the participants. He chanted the same Vedic mantras which Maharaj had chanted every year. Mr. Kimura chanted the mantra with folded hands and the book upon his chest. The contents of the book are based on Maharaj's discourses concerning Pantanjali's Yoga Aphorisms (Sutras), and I think the release there was very suitable.



We had set the newly released books up most appealingly as possible and sales started. We were very surprised when the books sold out in 3 hours and we took orders for more. As the result, we sold 183 books including orders. I had been a little nervous about the responsibility to run the shop because we were only volunteers and Maharaj was not there to offer his help. But everything, including unpacking and set-up preparations, sales transactions, tear-down, re-packing, meals, and contacts with the Japan Yoga Therapy Society all ran smoothly and safely.

The cooperation and confidence between the volunteers were splendid. Each volunteer could easily convey to customers things they themselves had been interested in and studied. Their words easily transmitted to customers lead to purchases. I was strongly impressed to see this state of affairs. I think this shop was a place where every volunteer did her very best from the bottom of her heart and trusted each other, and those attitudes lead to the manifestation of each's inner power. In other words, it is certainly Mother's grace that we have continuously opened a shop for this Congress these 5 or 6 years.

(con't page 10)



Vedanta Society Bookstore Report (from page 9)

Even though sales at the Congress haven't always gone so smoothly every year, by doing so continuously year after year, we get the privilege to taste that which only people who do a thing continuously can taste.

Although this location was relatively unknown to us, everything went well. The impression of Seva (respect and dedication) in Hiroshima was that everything seemed to move along automatically. In this way I realised that “Thakur and Mother operate us after all”. When Maharaj goes out alone, he often says “I don’t go out alone, but as three”. Likewise, I feel I might have been with Thakur and Mother in Hiroshima. It was as if I was on a wave automatically propelled by Thakur. I feel that I want to be on Thakur’s wave not only in the sevas and service of The Vedanta Society of Japan, but also in my daily life.

I deeply thank the volunteer staffers in Hiroshima and those at the Zushi Vedanta Centre who conducted all the preparation and settlement activities.

[Translation: Atsumi Honda]

• **A Story to Remember** •

I Am the Thief Turned into Gold

In Gazipur there was a saint living by the side of the Ganga and for many days a dacoit (thief) had been watching the goings on at the saint's dwelling. A lot of devotees came and some gave offerings to the saint. The thief thus came to learn that the saint possessed some silver vessels. He thought that there must be quite a treasure there and he broke into the saint's dwelling. When the thief broke in, there were a lot of utensils in the entryroom where the vessels were kept. As he tossed the best items into his bag it made a clatter.

The saint heard the noise and said: "What is this? Has some animal wandered in?" So he just came out of his meditation and saw the thief there, and when the thief saw the saint had spotted him he dropped the bounty and took to his heels. Immediately the saint grabbed the abandoned bag of utensils and ran after the thief calling to him to stop. He then overtook the thief and said: "Why are you afraid? These are yours, and if you return with me, some more I will give you." And thus the thief was sent on his way with all the items the saint possessed in his house.

Years later, when Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) was on a pilgrimage to Kedar, Badri, etc., he saw a sadhu lying on the ground in that icy region. In those days the travel conditions were quite different than now altogether. At that time there was no proper route and no proper facilities, and it was with great difficulty that Swamiji was progressing on his pilgrimage. It was on his way in that icy region that he saw the sadhu lying cold and helpless and Vivekananda gave him his own blanket.

The sadhu then looked up and finding that Swamiji was a spiritual man began to narrate something of his past life. "Have you heard of Saint Pavahari Baba?" he asked Swamiji. He then told him about the incident that had happened in the life of Saint Pavahari Baba.

He continued, "I am the thief from that day and when Saint Pavahari touched me a transformation came over me and changed my life. I repented my action bitterly and since that time I have been trying to atone for my sins."

This is the power of saints. Constant recollection of the truth 'God is Everywhere' is a wonderful method of progressing in our attempts to commune with God and ultimately become one with Him.

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