



June 2019 - Volume 17 Number 06

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

July 2019  
Calendar

## Birthdays

**Guru Purnima**  
Tuesday, 16 July

**Swami  
Ramakrishnananda**  
Tuesday, 30 July

## Zushi Events

13th~5th July  
**Annual Outdoor  
Summer Retreat**  
**Theme:** Practice of  
Pantanjali Yoga; How it  
Helps in Our Lives  
**Programme:**  
Pilgrimage, Discourse,  
Outdoor Meditation,  
Yoga, Chanting, Songs  
and more  
**Venue:** Zentsū-ji  
3 Chome-3-1 Zentsujicho,  
Zentsuji, Kagawa  
765-0003  
**Contact:**  
**vedantaharmony(at**  
**mark)gmail(dot)com**

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 ✧

*"God Himself will think about your morrow if you completely surrender yourself to Him. God is our very own. You can exert force on Him."*

- Sri Ramakrishna

*"This divine illusion of the Gunas is indeed hard to surmount; those who take refuge in Me alone get over this."*

- Sri Krishna

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

*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 world renown reformer who said that after reading the works of Vivekananda his love for his nation became a thousand-fold. The following is the presentation by Professor Masahiko Togawa of the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.*

**'Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi'**  
by Prof. Masahiko Togawa

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## **Vivekananda & Gandhi** (from page 1)

Swami Vivekananda introduced Hinduism as the Universal religion at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893. He initiated the revolutionary movement of Hinduism and was passionately involved in solving the problem of poverty in India. He also expressed his deep empathy toward “discriminated minorities” in society. Vivekananda was a harbinger of such movements known as the Khilafat movement, The Salt March, Harijan Movement, the Charkha and other constructive programmes attributed to Mahatma Gandhi.

### **Let us trace back Vivekananda’s life and find out how it influenced Gandhi.**

First, we shall see an incident Vivekananda described in his memoirs. In the course of his wonderings as a monk, he was in a certain place where people came to him in crowds and asked for his instruction. They made him talk for three days and nights without giving him a moment’s rest. When all the visitors had left, a poor man of low-caste came up to him and said he was much pained to see how Vivekananda had not had any food for three days. “You must be very tired and hungry. Indeed, I have noticed you have not even taken a glass of water.” he said. Vivekananda thought that the Lord Himself had come in the form of this low-caste man to test him.

When Vivekananda then asked him, “Can you give me something to eat?”, the man replied. “Swamiji, my heart is yearning to give you food, but how can you eat Chapatis baked with my hands!”

“I shall gladly take the food cooked by you.” Vivekananda insisted.

Hearing this, the man shrank in fear; he was a subject of the Maharaja of Khetri and was afraid that if the latter came to hear that he, the cobbler, had given Chapatis to a Sannyasin, he would be severely dealt with and possibly banished from the state. However, out of the kindness of his heart, even though he feared consequences, he brought Vivekananda some baked chapatis. Vivekananda shed tears of love and gratitude as he partook them, and thought, “Thousands of such large-hearted men live in lowly huts, and we despise them as low-castes and untouchables!”

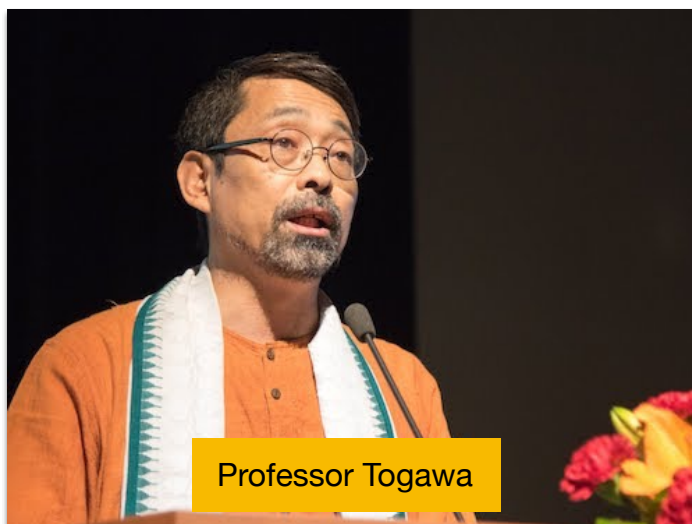
Vivekananda introduced Hinduism to Western Nations as a logical and systematic Universal Religion and shared its highly sophisticated spirituality with the world. The movement for religious revolution initiated by Vivekananda gave confidence to the people of India. It encouraged them to reconnect themselves to their spiritual heritage and stand up against the oppression they had been experiencing for many decades under British rule. According to Shomita Bose, an Indian research scientist, Vivekananda’s Neo Hinduism encompassed diverse and conflicting beliefs within Hindu society and brought the people back to their firm spiritual foundation.

On the other hand, to hold Hinduism as a foundation of life, however, could lead to the exclusive religious supremacy of Hinduism. Richard King, an American researcher of India, points out that Vivekananda’s talks and his writings show that he regarded Hinduism as the one and only religion which encompasses the diverse religions of the world.

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## **Vivekananda & Gandhi** (from page 2)

Contrary to Richard King's observation, we read in Vivekananda's letter to his Muslim friend the following passage: "Our aim is to lead humankind to a place where there is no Vedas, no Bible, and no Koran. But it must be accomplished through harmonizing the Vedas, Bible, and Koran." The principal idea of Hinduism is to respect all religions as equally valid. Vivekananda's message that inspired the people of India under British rule is still very relevant today when modern India faces globalization.



**Let us study the message Vivekananda intended to convey by tracing his life story, starting with his childhood:**

Prior to taking up his monastic name, Vivekananda was born Narendranath Datt and called Naren for short. He was the oldest of three brothers and two sisters. Full of curiosity and energy, he actively engaged in fencing, wrestling, and other physical activities. He loved to cook and sing as well. With his astounding mental capacity, he memorized Sanskrit Grammar and classic literature, graduated from high school in a short period, and entered the prestigious Presidency College.

Vivekananda used to say; "All the knowledge I have, I owe to my mother." He inherited his spiritual tendencies from his pious mother, who was thoroughly familiar with the Ramayana and Mahabharata and often quoted from them freely. His grandfather, Durgacharan, also had a strong religious tendency and eventually renounced the world to become a monk.

Naren did not believe in superstition. One day, he heard an old man warning the children not to climb a certain tree because the ghost would attack them. While all the children stayed away from the tree, Naren went ahead and climbed it, saying, "Don't take someone's words for truth. Verify it for yourself." He even broke a branch. No ghost!

Yukichi Fukuzawa, a Japanese enlightenment thinker, had a similar episode. He peeked into a small shrine and found a rock sitting in the center as a holy relic. People were bowing and offering a prayer to it. He replaced the rock in the shrine with a random rock he happened to find just to see what would happen. No wrath of God was visited upon him.

Naren's father, a lawyer, received many customers to his legal office. He prepared different water vessels to suit each visitor's caste. No one could touch water that was not prescribed for his caste. Naren was warned not to touch the different water vessels, but he tried them all, and asked, "What is the difference?"

Throughout Naren's life, we see how he would gladly share food and water with people of

## **Vivekananda & Gandhi** (from page 3)

all castes and religions. His spirit of service to all mankind grew steadily through his experience.

As a young man, while he was studying Western logic and philosophy, Naren was strongly influenced by the Brahmo Samaji movement in India. He became keenly aware of the social injustice in India. His love of all the people of India grew stronger in his heart.

### • 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

## **India's social reform movements in the 19th Century:**

England won the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and commenced colonial management of India. By 1857 British India was established which brought to India many Western technologies and much Western knowledge. Under the British rule, the national consciousness of the people of India increased. It culminated in a modern social movement led by Ram Mohan Roy, dubbed Father of modern India.

Ram Mohan founded the crusade called 'Brahmo Samaji' to reform Hinduism to a more rational and intellectual religion. He pointed out the erroneous convention called 'sati' which prompted the wife to join her deceased husband in his funeral pyre. He elevated women's status in society and promoted their education and developed a movement against the practice of child brides. Owing to his effort, the sati prohibitive law was enacted in 1829.

It was Maharshi Debendranath Tagore who succeeded Ram Mohan's movement upon the latter's death. Debendranath's approach to revolutionizing Hinduism was to establish Vedanta philosophy as its foundation. Debendranath's right hand man, Keshab Chandra Sen, developed the Brahmo Samaji movement to such a level that it covered all parts of India. He was also the man who discovered Ramakrishna as a unique spiritual genius.

Keshab disagreed with Debendranath's rejective attitude toward Christianity. He eventually parted with Debendranath and established a new "Brahmo Samaji of India" movement.

However, a group of young members such as Pandit Shivanath Shstri and Ananda Mohan Bose revolted against this movement, a Sadharan Brahma Samaji movement was created by them.

The movement that Ram Mohan started was a forerunner of Modern India, but its intended goal had not yet been realized. It never became widely supported by common people of India.

## **Vivekananda meets his guru, Ramakrishna:**

In his college years, Naren appreciated thought provoking books such as Utilitarianism by

## **Vivekananda & Gandhi** (from page 4)

John Stuart Mill and Social Evolution by Herbert Spencer. He joined in Brahmo Samaji and Brahmo Samaji of India movements. However, he could not satisfy his deepest spiritual yearning. Then he met Ramakrishna.

Ramakrishna lived in a simple country folk's way of Bengal and taught in his local Bengali. He was known for his profound spiritual wisdom and his frequent ecstatic raptures. Naren had visited many so-called spiritual gurus and asked each one the same question. "Have you seen God?" Ramakrishna was the only one who readily replied, "Yes, I see God as clearly as I see you, even more clearly. People shed tears for women, children, and money. But who would cry as intensely to see god? If you truly want to see God, cry for God with all your heart."

Naren had many hours of conversation with Ramakrishna and became completely devoted to him. On his deathbed, Ramakrishna told Naren, "Go and do great work with the power I have given you."

After his guru's departure, Naren took up his monistic name of Vivekananda and spent several years on the road as a wandering monk. He saw poverty-stricken villages and desperately deprived men, women and children. He saw unfair treatment of religious minorities. He also met with many local rulers to discuss the needs of their people. One such ruler, Katouli Maharaja, along with others, helped finance Vivekananda for his trip to attend the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893.

Vivekananda remained in Europe and the U.S.A. for the next three years during which he acquired disciples such as Sister Nivideta, Josephine MacLeod and many other staunch supporters. Vedanta Society of New York was founded by him in New York in 1894.

In 1897, as he returned to India, he founded Ramakrishna Mission in Calcutta which engages in various forms of humanitarian, social service activities. Today, it serves millions of people in many parts of the world without any distinction of caste, religion, or race. Vivekananda visited European countries and the U.S.A. again in 1899. He engaged in discussion with notable scholars and intellectuals during this visit which made a great contribution toward mutual understanding of Western and Eastern thoughts. Vivekananda passed away in 1902 at the age of 39.

## **Daridra Narayana**

One criticism made by many theorists of Vivekananda's message after India won independence from England, was that in comparison to Ram Mohan's movement, Vivekananda put too much weight on religion. They also considered the Ramakrishna Mission's activities to be a step backward from the social revolution movement. They pointed out that Vivekananda did not directly deal with the method of solving social problems and averted the people's minds from political problems by only preaching religious ideals. Their criticisms stem from their inability to comprehend Vivekananda's true intention.

There is an episode in his later years which reveals what he intended to share with humanity.

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## **Vivekananda & Gandhi** (from page 5)

A young boy named Keshta of the Santal people was working at the Belur Math. The Santal people were outside of Hindu society. One day, Vivekananda offered some food to Keshta, but he refused to take it, saying, "I can't eat food that contains salt touched by other people or I shall lose my caste status." Vivekananda, then, prepared the food himself and served it. He spoke to Keshta about the spirit of "daridra-narayan" - seeing God in the poor - and expounded the following;

"How is it that in this country no one seems to be concerned about the poor and destitute? It is they who are the backbone of this country. Thanks to them we get to eat. If all the workers stopped their manual labor even for one day, the entire city would be in chaos. Yet, who cares about them? Who would share their joys and sorrows personally? Many people converted to Christianity in large groups in Madras because they were not receiving proper respect from Hindus. They were attracted to Christianity not because they were poor and hungry, but because the Hindus had no empathy for them. They'd say, 'Don't touch me' and 'You contaminate me' all day long. Isn't there a religion in this country that cares enough about people in need?"

Researchers of Modern India appraise Vivekananda as a nationalist. They see the parallel between Advaita Vedanta philosophy and the ideal of National Unity of India. Vivekananda's plea was to have profound empathy toward the people of India and to serve those who were helpless in the face of hardship. This attitude is an indispensable condition in which a national movement could grow. Gandhi recognised it as the foundation for his movement.

### **Now let's take a look at how Vivekananda influenced Gandhi: Vivekananda's ties with Gandhi**

Gandhi reformed Indian National Congress, and after 1920, led the racial movement into truly nationwide movement.

Gandhi went to Africa as a lawyer in 1893 and stayed there for 21 years until his return in 1914. He organised "Satyagraha" – the insistence of truth - movement to protest against the blatant racial discrimination he experienced in Africa. He became a leader of Satyagraha in India in 1915. A popular mass movement, 'The March of Salt', was organised by him to protest against unfair taxation. He successfully mobilised illiterate and politically apathetic people to join this nationwide movement. He was a leader of anti-British struggle who led India to win its independence in 1947.

Great effort was initiated by him to abolish discrimination and harmonise Hindus and Muslims. He objected to the separation of India and Pakistan, but was assassinated by a Hindu youth who was dissatisfied with Gandhi's concessions to Muslims.

It is interesting to note that Gandhi used to read Vivekananda's collection of lectures while he was working in Africa. He describes his experience as follows; "I have read all of Vivekananda's writings with utmost attention. My love for my country increased a thousand-fold after each reading. No one needs to have a commentary about Vivekananda's books. We all are fascinated by his words."

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## **Vivekananda & Gandhi** (from page 6)

When Gandhi came back to India from South Africa to attend the National Conference in 1902, he attempted to meet Vivekananda in Calcutta. "Who would not want to see Vivekananda after studying about the Brahmo Samaj? I rushed to Belur Math. I was impressed by the silence at the Math."

Vivekananda made an appeal for compatriotism as a way of transcending discrimination and the disparity of wealth in India. He acquired this point of view through conversations with his guru Ramakrishna, which he tried to spread throughout India. It formed a foundation for the development of social campaigns in India.

Gandhi was fascinated by Vivekananda, whose central idea was based on the universal spirituality of the traditional religion of India. Gandhi put into practice the ideal he learned from Vivekananda and led the people's movement toward the independence of India.

Thank you. •

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Tokyo Public Celebration 2019  
Swami Vivekananda: 156th Birth Anniversary  
Mahatma Gandhi: 150th Birth Anniversary

### **A Brief Impromptu Message by Mr. Masayuki Taga,** Consul-General of Japan, Kolkata, India

Thank you very much Swami Medhasanandaji and members of the Japan Vedanta Society for inviting me to today's function. It is really my honour and pleasure to attend such an auspicious occasion in celebration of the 156th Birth Anniversary of Swamiji (Vivekananda).

As I just noted in Japanese, I would like to mention a little of the long historic relation between India and Japan. Buddhism came from Hinduism, and we too have separate temples to worship various aspects of the Lord in Japan. Like in the Ueno area of Taitō, Tokyo there is the Shinobazu no Ike (Shinobazu Pond) and at its centre on Benten Island stands Benten-dō, a temple dedicated to the goddess Benzaiten, much like the Hindu goddess of knowledge and learning, Saraswati. Then there is the Shibamata Taishakuten in Katsushika, Tokyo much like temples dedicated to Indra in India.

In more recent history, however, I believe ties were strengthened with the visit of Okakura Tenshin to Calcutta, India in 1902. His very purpose to visit Calcutta was to invite Swamiji (Vivekananda) to Japan. Swamiji's health would not allow this visit, but through Sister Nivedita and Swamiji, Okakura became acquainted with the Tagore family. From this meeting many Japanese artists and intellectuals began important and enduring exchanges with Indian artists and intellectuals.

I will not take up much of your time to speak on Swamiji and Gandhiji because Professors Pinto and Togawa are quite prepared to address you on this subject,. I just want to say, thank you, and that I am very honoured to be asked to attend and to offer a few words on this occasion.

Thank you very much. •





Welcome



Invocation - Vedic Peace Prayer



Flower Offering & Universal Gospel Release - H.E. Sanjay Verma



Consul General Taga



Prof. Togawa's Speech in Japanese - Projection in English



## Scheduled Speakers







Kailas Yoga School of Yokohama



Kokubo Subha Chakraborty - Indian Classical Dance Troupe



Group Photo - Conclusion

• A Story to Remember •

**Buddha's Enlightenment**

The Buddha decided he had to leave his royal responsibilities and his family in order to realize full enlightenment. He left the palace secretly, and set off alone into the forest. Over the next six years, he met many talented meditation teachers and mastered their techniques. Always he found that they showed him mind's potential but not mind itself.

Finally, at a place called Bodhgaya, the future Buddha decided to remain in meditation until he knew mind's true nature and could benefit all beings. After spending six days and nights cutting through mind's most subtle obstacles, he reached enlightenment on the full moon morning of May, a week before he turned thirty-five.

At the moment of full realization, all veils of mixed feelings and stiff ideas dissolved and Buddha experienced the all-encompassing here and now. All separation in time and space disappeared. Past, present, and future, near and far, melted into one radiant state of intuitive bliss. He became timeless, all-pervading awareness. Through every cell in his body he knew and was everything. He became Buddha, the Awakened One.

After his enlightenment, Buddha traveled on foot throughout northern India. He taught constantly for forty-five years. People of all castes and professions, from kings to courtesans, were drawn to him. He answered their questions, always pointing towards that which is ultimately real. Throughout his life, Buddha encouraged his students to question his teachings and confirm them through their own experience.

"I can die happily. I have not kept a single teaching hidden in a closed hand. Everything that is useful for you, I have already given. Be your own guiding light." - *Lord Buddha's final teaching before leaving his body at the age of eighty.*

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