



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

DECEMBER 2019 - Volume 17 Number 12

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

JANUARY 2020
Calendar

Birthdays

Swami Saradananda

Wednesday, 01 January

Swami Turiyananda

Thursday, 09 January

Sri Sri Swamiji

Friday, 17 January

Swami

Brahmananda

Sunday, 26 January

Swami

Trigunatitananda

Wednesday, 29 January

Zushi Events

1st (Wed) 11:30~14:00

New Year's Kalpataru

Greeting Zushi Centre

Visit to Kamakura:

Buddha Statue

Yukinoshita Church

Shinto Shrine

Please Contact: Kyokai
(045-873-0428)

15th (Sun) 10:30~16:30

Sri Sri Sarada Devi Birth Celebration

Zushi Centre Annexe

11:00 Puja, Arati,

Pushpanjali

12:45 Lunch Prasad

14:45 Afternoon Session

Discourse / Music

Programme

More events & details
on page 2



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"The mind is like milk. If you keep the mind in the world, which is like water, then the milk and water will get mixed. That is why people keep milk in a quiet place and let it set into curd, and then churn butter from it. Likewise, through spiritual discipline practiced in solitude, churn the butter of knowledge and devotion from the milk of the mind. Then that butter can easily be kept in the water of the world. It will not get mixed with the world. The mind will float detached on the water of the world."

- Sri Sri Ramakrishna

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Mammon."

- Jesus, the Christ

November Monthly Retreat 2019
AM Session

'The Spiritual Journey'

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Today I will speak about the 'spiritual journey'. Spiritual has been transliterated as スピリチュアル in the Japanese phonetic alphabet of Katakana, since the Japanese word, 靈的 (reiteki), carries many connotations that can lead to misunderstandings.

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THE VEDANTA SOCIETY of JAPAN
CALENDAR of EVENTS

JANUARY 2020

1st (Wed) 11:30 ~ 14:00

New Year's Kalpataru

Greeting Zushi Centre

Buddha in Kamakura → Catholic Yukinoshita Church → Shinto Shrine 'Tsurugaoka Hachimangu'
Please Contact: Kyokai (045-873-0428)

3rd (Fri) - 16:00

Nara Narayan: Service to Homeless

Food Distribution in Yokohama

Contact: Yoko Sato

urara5599(at mark)gmail(dot)com

5th (Sun) 14:00~16:30

Half Day Retreat at Zushi

Chanting, Readings on Spiritual Life

Discussion, Meditation, Tea and snacks

Please bring your Japanese copy of: 'Meditation And Spiritual Life' by Swami Yatiswarananda

Contact: benkyo.nvk(at mark)gmail(dot)com

11th (Sat) 10:00~12:00

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

(in Japanese only) Bring photo ID.

Please Contact: <https://www.gita-embassy.com/>

14th (Tue) 14:00~16:30

Gospel Class at the Zushi Centre

Contact: benkyo.nvk(at mark)gmail(dot)com

19th (Sun) 10:30~16:30

Sri Sri Sarada Devi Birthday Celebration

Zushi Centre Annexe

06:30 - Mangala Arati

11:00 Puja, Arati, Pushpanjali (offering of flowers)

12:45 - Prasad

14:45 Reading, Discourse, Music program

16:30 - Tea

All are welcome!

1st, 2nd, and 4th Saturday in January

Yoga Asana Class

Zushi Annexe (10:30~12:00)

Contact: 080-6702-2308 (Hiroto Arai)

Email : ochanomizuyoga(at mark)gmail(dot)com

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

The Spiritual Journey (from page 1)

It is said, 'Life is like a journey!' From our birth to our death, we have many experiences; we meet many different people; we travel from place to place. If we think of life in this way, life is indeed a journey, and in our lives we undertake many journeys. Many images come to mind when we say 'journey', and as we continue our discussion, the idea of a spiritual journey may become clearer.



There are three types of journey. One is simple travel from one location to another. Another type is the religious journey one may take for pilgrimage. Lastly, is the spiritual journey.

Simple journeys are external in nature. Religious journeys, such as pilgrimages, are also external in nature. There are many modes of transport to accommodate our external journeys, both simple and religious. We can walk, cycle, or take buses, automobiles, trains, or airplanes to travel from one place to another. The spiritual journey, on the other hand, is an inner journey. There is a big difference between our normal journeys and our spiritual journey.

While there are several modes of transportation for ordinary journeys, there are only two modes of travel for the spiritual journey, one is the mind and the other is intelligence. We also need to make arrangements for money, clothing, scheduling, ticketing, and so forth for ordinary journeys. The same would apply for religious journeys. On the other hand, no money is required for the spiritual journey, so regardless of one's financial status, this journey can be undertaken by the poor and the rich alike. The spiritual journey, however, requires quite different considerations and preparations.

The preparations for the inner journey, Yama and Niyama, are the ethical precepts set forth by Patanjali. Within Yama there are *ahimsā*, or non-violence, *satya*, or truthfulness, *asteya*, or non-stealing, *bramacharya*, or celibacy, and *aparigraha*, or the non-receiving of gifts from others.

In Niyama we have *shaucha*, or outer cleanliness and inner purity, *santoshā*, or contentment. *Santoshā* means to be satisfied with one's current condition. Of course we need money for food, clothing, a place to live, but *santoshā* means we are to be content with that which we need to live a good life and to not crave for things beyond those needs. We must recognise the difference between two words here; need and greed. Greed being that which is beyond our basic needs. We are to discern between these two on a daily basis. The third *niyama* is *tapas* or austerity. To practice at least a simple example of austerity daily, such as meditation, one should wake a little earlier. If one wishes to be comfortable, one can continue to sleep, but if we chose to get up earlier for meditation, sacrificing longer sleep, this is the practice of austerity. Other more rigid types of austerities would include vows of silence or fasting. Next is *svādhyāya*, or the study of the Absolute Truth as laid out in scriptures, and its cognition. Lastly is *Ishvar*

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The Spiritual Journey (from page 3)

Pranidhana, meaning to concentrate or keep one's thoughts on God.

Yama and Niyama are preparations for the inner journey, and there are others too according to Jnana Yoga. The first of these is viveka, discrimination of the real from the unreal, the eternal from the temporal, absolute from the relative. It is practiced by concentrating on that which is real, eternal and absolute. Another practice is renouncing the desire of enjoyments in this world or in heaven. Next is control of the mind and control of the senses. When the mind goes to objects of the senses, we are to withdraw the mind from these objects. Then we are to revere and to honour God, the guru, and the scriptures. Next is titikṣā or forbearance, to be patient and practice during hardships.



These are the kinds of preparations we are to follow in order to embark on the inner journey. On simple journeys we can go along with friends and family members, but what about on our spiritual journey? The inner journey must be taken alone. On some sightseeing tours we are led by a guide who explains various highlights along the tour, but who is our guide on this inner journey? Our guide is the Guru, or spiritual teacher. In fact, God appears in the form of the Guru to guide the disciple, and at the end of the spiritual journey, God and Guru become one.

Another consideration is time. We take trips in terms of hours, days or weeks. There are, however, no such time limits regarding our spiritual journey. We may not complete this journey during our current lifetime, and may have to pick-up where we left off even over several lifetimes.

Usual journeys have various purposes such as for study, or business, or enjoyments like tourism, and so forth. The spiritual journey is only undertaken to know Truth and to gain eternal happiness, knowledge and freedom; to be free from suffering and ignorance.

The last point is the final goal or destination of the usual journey is this location or that location. The goal or destination of the spiritual journey is God-realisation, knowing God's nature and our own true nature or Self, and the relationship between the super soul, that is God, and our individual soul. Swami Vivekananda liked the Kaṭha Upanishad very much, and therein we find two verses regarding the spiritual journey. The coverpage of the Bhagavad Gita published by our Society shows a grand chariot with a charioteer and a team of horses, and the charioteer holding the reins of the horses is Sri Krishna and the rider is Arjuna, the warrior. Although there are celestial chariots that soar across the heavens, this chariot, like us mortals, remains earthbound on a road. The Kaṭha Upanishad incorporates the recognisable image of the chariot here to illustrate one's spiritual journey.

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The Spiritual Journey (from page 4)

Metaphorically the chariot is the aspirant's gross body; the charioteer is the bodhi, the intellect; the reins of the horses are manas, the mind; the horses are indriya, the senses; the road represents the object of the senses; and the passenger is the jiva-atman, the individual soul. The destination or objective is to realise Paramātmān, the supreme Self. We are all equipped with a body, mind, intellect, senses and an individual soul, but are we able to use these to reach spiritual realisation?

• Thought of the Month •

"The two most powerful warriors are patience and time."

- Leo Tolstoy

In regard to this the Kaṭha Upanishad contains the following verse:

ātmānaṁ rathitaṁ viddhi śarīraṁ rathameva tu
buddhiṁ tu sārathiṁ viddhi manaḥ pragrahameva ca

[Know that the Atman is the rider in the chariot, and the body is the chariot, Know that the Buddhi (intelligence, ability to reason) is the charioteer, and Manas (mind) is the reins.]

indriyāni hayānāhurviṣayāṁ steṣu gocarān
ātmendriyamanoyuktaṁ bhoktetyāhurmaniṣinaḥ

[The senses are called the horses, the objects of the senses are their paths, Formed out of the union of the Atman, the senses and the mind, him they call the "enjoyer".]

— Katha Upanishad, 1.3.3-1.3.4

This charioteer in this verse has to be endowed with vijnana, the power of discrimination between the real and the unreal. This intelligence, which is the charioteer endowed with vijnana, has to be able to discriminate between the unreal and the real, and discard all that is temporal and focus on Truth, the Eternal, and the Infinite alone. Next comes the mind, symbolised by the reins, but this mind has to have the capacity and the ability to control the senses.

Negatively speaking the unprepared mind cannot control all the stimuli from the senses, and from desires and attachments. On the positive side, if we are able to control the senses, we can acquire the power of concentration on Truth. We need to bear this in mind. Another purpose for control of the mind is to succeed in studies as academicians do, or for anyone who wants to achieve something great, or even any worker who wants to perfect his work. but on the other hand, the devotee uses this power to concentrate on Truth. Their objectives for control of the mind are not the same, but both are doing so. The big difference between these purposes of control are in their results, while control of the mind is practiced and applied to secular matters, do not do away with the practitioner's ignorance and sufferings, and last only for one's lifetime. The devotee, however, controlling the mind and concentrating on Truth, the eternal, the infinite, and finally succeeding in it, will do away with spiritual ignorance, or illusion and sufferings, and enjoy eternal bliss.

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The Spiritual Journey (from page 5)

What are the obstacles to our spiritual journey? We all experience obstacles in our usual travels, for example delays are caused by sudden accidents, or an electricity failure, or we run out of gasoline. There are many reasons we are delayed in reaching our destination. In the spiritual journey too, one can face many obstacles, so please do not become too disappointed or dejected. Remember, most people have never even heard the concept of a spiritual journey, in this regard we are lucky. There are others who hear about taking the spiritual journey, but have no interest in it whatsoever. If they are in a place where such a discussion is heard, they want to get away as soon as possible.



In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we read of this. Devotees from Calcutta would sometimes bring friends to Sri Ramakrishna's (Master) room where He was discussing spiritual matters and the devotee would listen intently. But as the Master would continue speaking, the devotee's friend, who had no interest in spiritual discussions, would lean in and whisper to the devotee, "When can we leave?" and "Can we go now, it's getting late?" Finally, such friends would tell the devotee that they would rather go and wait for him by the boat.

A lack of motivation is another obstacle. There are many cases wherein the aspirant has motivation in the beginning, but it gradually diminishes. Also sometimes the aspirant has a lot of interest in spiritual matters, but later some other interest makes their religious interest secondary. There are others who are lethargic and whose interest is only superficial. As Patanjali explains, disease is another obstacle for the spiritual journey, because the diseased body is too weak to do sustained spiritual practises. We need to be physically fit first.

Some spiritual aspirants are quite impatient, as they meditate for a week and complain about their lack of progress in spiritual life. For example, they cannot concentrate during meditation. Of course, the spiritual goal cannot be reached with so brief an effort. It's not possible. In India the President and Vice-President Maharaj's of our Order give initiation to many devotees, and some later complain to them that they cannot meditate properly, that they cannot get peace of mind. The problem with such devotees is that they have not practiced with sincerity for very long and their effort is too superficial. Our spiritual journey requires perseverance and practice over a long period. The other thing that is needed is yearning. One may have patience, but lack yearning, which has been highly emphasised in 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'. One without the other will not maintain us on our spiritual journey.

Also, there are so many temptations we must be wary of. If we are not careful, we may fall from the path and lose our objective. One great temptation to the advanced traveller is the acquisition of supernatural powers described by Patanjali in his 'Yoga Sutras'. If we are unable to

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The Spiritual Journey (from page 5)

renounce hankering after such powers, we will be unable to reach our destination.

The last and greatest obstacle to reaching our destination is pride and conceit. One may come to think he has advanced to the heights with the greatest of yogis; that he has progressed very far compared to others. Such pride is the last and greatest obstacle we may encounter on our spiritual journey.

Who is that person that can reach the final destination of the spiritual journey? The person who does not give up the spiritual journey or other spiritual struggles! There are ups and downs on this journey, but in spite of a slip or fall one must get back up on the path. The person who does not give up finally reaches the goal. It might not be in this lifetime or some next life, but let us not give up. There are five practices for such people. The first is self-effort, the second is strong motivation, the third is yearning, the fourth is patience, and the fifth is reliance on God and leaving the results to God.

When we read about the lives of great souls like Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) and Master Mahasaya ('M'), we see they encountered and persevered through many great obstacles. Swamiji's father passed away and the family suddenly found itself financially destitute with legal problems, but Swamiji persevered. So we too must not give up until we reach the goal. Perhaps the famous quote from Swamiji which is most relevant to today's talk is: "Arise and awake, stop not till the goal is reached!"

Thank you. •



Assistant Minister, Swami Diyanathananda
with Ms. Shanti

Tajimi Satsanga November 2019

Reported by Ikuko Nakamura

A satsanga in Tajimi was held at the 'Kokeizan Tokurin-in Temple', in Tajimi City of Gifu Prefecture on Saturday November 30th, sponsored by 'Compass Corporation'. This year the 13th Satsanga was held with Compass staff Ayaka Kondo and Erika Manya as leaders. Participants included 40 adults and 5 children.

The satsanga began with a beautiful Hymn by the Vedanta Society's new Assistant Swami, Swami Divyanathanandaji (Anirban Maharaj). Swami Medhasanandaji (Maharaj) then explained that on health grounds he had gone to India in March and returned to Japan in the last week of May when he felt better. Although the Tajimi Satsanga is held in June every year, but this year it

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Tajimi Satsanga (from page 7)

had to be postponed until November. He told us that due to the grace of Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) he was very happy to be able to come to Tajimi and hold a satsanga this time with the help of many devotees.

The theme of the Maharaj's discussion was "What Can We Learn from Nature and Animals?" In learning from Maharaj's remarks we learned about how to live in peace, full of happiness. He explained to us it is important to learn from nature by not merely seeing, but also closely observing nature and animals around us.

He spoke of the story of the '24 Teachers of the Avadhuta' as narrated by Sri Krishna in the Srimad Bhagavatam:

"My bliss and contentment are the fruits of self-realization. Soul (Atman) alone is my Guru, yet I have gained necessary wisdom from the whole of creation. I have taken the shelter of twenty-four gurus, I shall elaborate the same for you."

Maharaj explained this story illustrated how the earth, sky, water, fire, moon, sun, plants, animals and others dedicate their existence to teach us the folly of worldly attachments. Human beings are not aware how much we receive from them all, and we live on to become ever more selfish. The important practice for humans is to serve others without seeking return, and this will gradually lead us to a non-selfish existence. He also shared two other related old Indian tales.

A Q&A period followed the talk and Maharaj addressed questions from the participants. All were filled with gratitude having learned much about spiritual practice and for hearing stories that teach from Indian culture. •

Translated and edited by 'The Vedanta Kyokai'



Swamis and Volunteers



Kokeizan Tokurin-in Temple



Swami Divyanathananda



Discourse



Dining Together



Book Sales

● A Story to Remember ●

Nature as Guru

A lecturer explained how a fraction of the enormous sums spent on arms in the modern world would solve all the material problems of every member of the human race.

The inevitable reaction of the disciples after the lecture was: "But why are human beings so stupid?"

"Because", said the Master solemnly, "people have learned to read printed books. They have forgotten the art of reading unprinted ones".

"Give us an example of an unprinted book".

But the Master wouldn't give one.

One day, in response to their persistence, he said: "The songs of birds, the sounds of insects are all trumpeting forth the Truth. The grasses and the flowers are all pointing out the Way. Listen! Look! That is the way to read!"

Morsel:

We see but dimly through the mists and vapors;
Amid these earthly damps
What seem to us but sad, funeral tapers
May be heaven's distant lamps.

- Longfellow (1819-1892)

- from Wisdom Stories by Anthony de Mello

Postscript:

In the Srimad Bhagavatam we find Lord Dattatreya says: "With humbleness and full devotion, I looked upon the whole of God's creation as my various Gurus; trying to gather Wisdom from them and realizing my goal of Spiritual Enlightenment.

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