

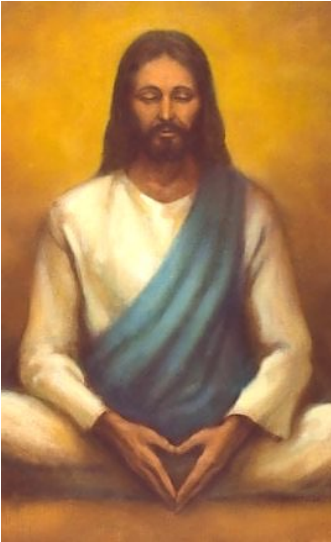


NOVEMBER 2020 -VOLUME 18 NUMBER 11

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

## December 2020 Calendar



## Birthdays

**Swami**

**Premananda**

Wednesday, 23 Dec

**Christmas Eve**

Thursday, 24 Dec

## Zushi Events

We are pleased to invite you to participate in a few monthly Zushi programmes again. Some classes both Streaming and Zoom!

**Details on page 02!**



## ✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing."*

- Swami Vivekananda

*"Woman is the teacher of gentility to man. She helps man to grow in moral height. She is the sustaining power of the life of man."*

- Zarathushtra

Zushi Monthly Retreat  
October 2020 - Afternoon Talk

### 'Importance of Assimilation in Spiritual Life'

Part 3 of 4

by Swami Medhasananda

What should we assimilate? We should assimilate Truth, God, and the spiritual teachings found in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (The Gospel)*. I quote now from *The Gospel, Chapter 40, "The Master at the Houses of Balaram and Girish"*:

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**Vedanta Society of Japan**  
**Calendar of Programmes**  
**DECEMBER 2020**

Since travel restrictions around Tokyo have been lifted, we are glad to announce that we have decided to re-open our monthly programmes for participation to all from July. In addition to our LIVE-STREAMING we will now offer some classes on ZOOM as well, to better facilitate Q&A. However, whether attendees arrive by public transportation or private vehicle, the following precautionary measures need to be followed strictly by attendees:

1. If you plan to attend scheduled events, please contact us at: <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>
2. Wear masks at all times in the Centre
3. Use the hand sanitiser provided at the entrance upon arrival
4. Carefully wash hands with soap and water and gargle with tap water (washrooms)

Swami Medhasananda  
President  
Vedanta Society of Japan

• **ZUSHI CENTRE PROGRAMMES for DECEMBER 2020** •

- December 5th (Sat) 14:00 to 16:00

**Baghavat Gita Study Class** (Livestreaming and Zoom) (zoom.nvk@gmail.com)

Please Note: *The Bhagavad Gita* class at the Indian Embassy, Tokyo, suspended since March of this year, will be resumed through live-streaming from the Society until further notice. Also, please have a copy of *The Gita* on hand to follow the Live Stream. If you plan to attend, please contact: <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

- December 13th (Sun) 14:00pm–16:00pm (Live Streaming and Zoom)

**The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class** (in Japanese Only)

If you plan to attend, please contact: <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

- December 20th (Sun)

**Monthly Zushi Retreat** (Livestreaming - discourse only)

11:00 to 16:30 (Bi-lingual discourse)

Topic: 'Assimilation in Spiritual Life' Part 4 by Swami Medhasananda

If you plan to attend please reserve, especially for lunch, at least 2 days before.

- December 24th (Mon) 19:00~21:00

**Christmas Eve Worship**

Please contact us if you wish to participate 046-873-0428 at least 2 days before.

- December 27th (Sun) 14:00 to 16:00 (Live Steaming)

**Half-day Retreat**

Zushi Centre (Japanese only)

<benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>



### **Assimilation - Part 3** (from page 1)

*(Master To Ram) "You are a physician. You know that medicine works only when it mixes with the patient's blood and becomes one with it. Likewise, in the state of Brahmajnana one sees God both within and without. One sees that it is God Himself who has become the body, mind, life, and soul."*

*M. (to himself): "Assimilation!"*

Previously we had discussed assimilation as it pertains to the eating of food and absorbing its nutrients, as only then can we get physical strength from food. In this case Sri Ramakrishna is talking to Ramchandra Datta, a doctor, explaining that when one takes medicine, and it mixes with and becomes one with the blood, then only can we see the effect. At the spiritual level there is the mind, buddhi (intellect) and ahankara (ego-self), and only when we can distinguish these teachings on these levels can we assimilate them. In our September talk we discussed the main obstacles to assimilation as explained by Pananjali. These are bodily disease, mental sloth, doubt, lack of enthusiasm, physical sloth, attachment to objects of the senses, wrong discrimination, wrong perception, and finally, after making some progress one then has a fall.

### **Indecisiveness**

Today we will explore some concrete examples based on our own experiences, because it is easier to understand such examples than those provided in scriptures. The first obstacle is indecisiveness. What I mean by this is our goal—I am not speaking here about a person wondering whether or not he/she should become a devotee or a worldly person. No, this is for devotees. There are many types or levels of devotees. One such type believes in God, goes to church or temple, and they pray. They mostly ask God for support or protection for themselves and their

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families, but they do not seek to go beyond this level. Such a devotee must ask himself if this is enough, or whether they should pursue moving beyond this level. They need to ask themselves, "Should I become a spiritual aspirant?" Confusion may come later from the question, "To what spiritual level shall I go?"

To answer this question, we need to know what a spiritual aspirant is. It is someone who thinks deeply about what life is. Someone who thinks about God, the universe, and one's own essence. He thinks about what his relationship with God, the universe, and himself, is. It is someone who sees God within and in others, and serves them with that awareness. It is someone who knows that the purpose of life is to attain bliss, freedom and supreme knowledge.

There are those who like to hear about God, and this is enough for them. They are satisfied with that because they are not very inclined to practice. Others may wish to delve deeper into spirituality, but they worry that such an effort may cause relationship troubles with their family, friends and work initially. Hence, they hesitate to embrace a serious spiritual life. This gives birth to indecisiveness about their goal in life.

### **Identity Confusion**

We all have an image of ourself. I am male. I am female. I am husband. I am a father. I am a wife. I am a mother. I am an American. I am a Japanese. I am a devotee, or even, I am a swami. Identity confusion comes from the identity we give priority to. If I think of myself as a loyal company employee or salaryman (Japan), my first concerns are for the welfare of my company. I am a Mitsubishi-man or Sony-man. As for myself, I am a monk, and further, I am a monk of a particular organisation, but going further, I am God's devotee. I am His child. Identifying as a devotee of God and a child of God is the highest identity we can make as a spiritual aspirant. The problem is that when we think in terms of an identity for ourselves, we rarely give priority to that utmost spiritual identity.

Suppose we identify ourselves as being a housewife, a salaryman, and so forth, we should be asking ourselves whether such an identity is eternal. For example, in this life one may indeed be a female, but after our death and rebirth, we do not know if we will be female or male, or what our nationality will be, or even what our race will be. While all these identities are not wrong, but they are but transitory and they will all disappear. We do not even need to think in terms of a next life, our self-identity may even change during this very life. For instance, a housewife may divorce, therefore her former identity is lost. Also, if a Buddhist converts to Christianity, then one's identity as a Buddhist is changed. Today, there are those who feel deeply that they need to change their physical gender, another change in self-identity. A yoga teacher will continue to teach as long as he or she has physical strength, but as strength diminishes, it is impossible to continue such work.

All these identities are transitory, even that of a monk or householder. There are cases of monks who have left their organisation and married. Also a householder may give up family life to become a monk. However, God is eternal. Hence, if one thinks of himself as a devotee or child of God, then that relationship will not change. Thus, this is the highest identity one can have.

Swami Vivekananda defined religion as: 'The Eternal relationship of the Eternal-soul with the Eternal Super-soul.' We need to give the highest priority to choosing which identity we want and adjust our other identities with that choice. Unless we decide, we remain indecisive and unable to assimilate all the teachings we discuss. This is very important for a spiritual aspirant, because if he wants to progress in spiritual life and fulfil this goal, he must give top priority to his

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## Assimilation - Part 3 (from page 4)

identity as a devotee and child of God, centering his life on God.

### Wrong Perceptions

The next obstacle is wrong perception. I am the body. I am the mind. I am the intellect. These are not eternal. The correct perception is to think, 'I am the soul.' Additionally, whatever we perceive through the senses as being eternal is not eternal, because only God is eternal. Additionally, the idea that simply by reading spiritual or religious books one becomes spiritual is not true.

### Lack of Motivation or Enthusiasm

Some people may read spiritual books or hear spiritual talks, but motivation does not come from within to practice. Others have the motivation to practice, but they have no endurance and fail to continue with practices for very long. Correcting a lack of motivation can be remedied by keeping holy company and reading scriptures. Also daily reading of inspirational booklets such as Swamiji's (Swami Vivekananda), *'Arise, Awake, Stop Not Till the Goal Is Reached!'*, until the message becomes a part of you. Then the mind can be steadied and we can keep on going.

### Negative Mental Tendencies (Negative Samskaras)

Many times as we begin to practice and intend to think of spiritual things, suddenly worldly thoughts crop up in our minds. One of the reasons such disturbances occur is that our past secular tendencies (samskara) are working on the mind.

Samskaras are mental and emotional patterns or habits. In Western psychology there is the concept of the 'Id' as postulated by Freud, but it is not very clear. In Indian psychology and scriptures samskara is a widely recognised and understood idea. We find it mentioned frequently in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and in the writings of his disciples. The great Indian sage, Patanjali, also wrote of it in his works on Yoga. For the spiritual aspirant this struggle with samskara lasts as long as we live.

### Correcting Mental Tendencies

Patanjali tells us we can correct and transform our negative samskara by creating positive samskara. A young monk approached Swami Brahmanandaji saying, "We really want to progress in spiritual life and think of Sri Ramakrishna more, but we have such strong, secular, and bad samskaras that we cannot progress. Sometimes we feel so frustrated and feel so sad."

Brahmanandaji answered, "Do not feel frustrated! Do not feel sad! Try your best and try to form good, spiritual samskaras through spiritual practice, and you will get over these negative and secular samskaras."

### Pratipaksha-Bhavana

When negative images spring up in the mind, we have to counteract them with opposite positive images. This is called pratipaksha-bhavana in Sanskrit. If thoughts of cruelty arise, think of compassion. When worldly thoughts arise in the mind, try to see God in those thoughts and the persons or things associated with such negative and unclean thoughts as well. After all, everything is God. One concrete example of this occurred in Dakshineswar while Sri Ramakrishna was living there. An apparent madman had arrived in dirty clothes and in need of a bath about the time temple prasada was being distributed. The temple staff did not want to give

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### • Thought of the Month •

"A journey of a thousand miles  
begins with one step."

- Lao Tsu



## Assimilation - Part 3 (from page 5)

this man any prasada because he clearly appeared to be mad. Instead, they later gave the leftovers to the dogs. The man began to eat with the dogs, but the dogs did not seem mind sharing with him at all. Thakur (Ramakrishna) saw this and said to His nephew Hriday, "See, that man is a realised soul." Hriday then ran after the man and begged him to teach him something. The man agreed and said, "See that dirty drain water? See the clear waters of the Ganges? Do not differentiate between the two, see Brahman in the drain water and the Ganges."

Suppose we have some ill feelings about a person, we may change that feeling of hatred or dislike by recognising that God resides in that person too. All the negative images that arise in the mind will be purified and reduced if we practice seeing God in all such images. In other words let us spiritualise our every thought, good or bad, in this way. This is the practical method of pratipaksha-bhavana practice.

### Irregular Lifestyle

An irregular lifestyle is another obstacle we face, and we have discussed at length the importance of making and keeping to a daily schedule (May 2020 issue of *The Vedanta Kyokai*). As discussed, an irregular lifestyle adversely affects our ability to assimilate spiritual teachings. So create an ideal daily schedule to include specific times for meditation, study of scripture, some physical exercise, work, and Karma Yoga (right action as a form of prayer).

### Environment

In the book *Meditation and Spiritual Life*, wherein the spiritual discourses of Swami Yatiswaranandaji are recorded, he notes that since there is more worldliness in the West, people say it is more difficult to practice spiritual disciplines there than in Asia or India. The swami said that this idea is not true, and that one can also practice spiritual disciplines in the West as well. If one lives in a worldly environment, we must see how we can protect ourselves from worldly influences and avoid situations not congenial to spiritual life, or in other words we should exert our will power more in such situations. Moreover, a spiritual teacher can be consulted about navigating spiritual obstacles that arise.

Some people cherish the idea that later in life when their work schedule relaxes, or when their personal situations are more favourable, then they will think of God. Swami Turiyanandaji liked to quote a Sanskrit verse that says he who wants to bathe in the ocean, but waits to do so when the waves subside, can never bathe because the waves never subside. Sometimes our situation just never seems to improve, and the so called 'ideal environment for spiritual practice' may hardly appear. So if one wants to bathe in the ocean, jump now in spite of the waves! If one truly wants to practice spiritual disciplines, one should start now, despite obstacles. If we keep postponing our practice until a more favourable situation arises, there is every possibility we may never realise such a chance during our lifetime, as we cannot postpone our death indefinitely.

### What it Means to Practice

In Chapter One of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, the aphorism 'Samadhi Pada (about enlightenment), in *Sutra 1.14*' we read:

*'sa tu dīrghakāla nairantarya satkāra-āsevito dr̥dhabhūmiḥ'*:

- sa tu = and that (practice)
- dīrghakāla = long time
- nairantarya = without interruption, continually
- satkāra = with devotion, sincerity, respect, reverence
- āsevita = practiced, cultivated, done with assiduous attention
- dr̥dhabhūmiḥ = stable, firmly rooted, on firm ground

(con't page 7)

### **Assimilation Part - 3** (from page 6)

This sutra translates as: “Practice becomes firmly grounded when it is cultivated for a long time, uninterruptedly, with earnest devotion”. Think about the person who wants to become a doctor and how he has to study intensively for seven to eight years. The goal of God-realisation is the highest of human achievements, so the effort must be even greater. So as Patanjali says, we must practice continuously with reverence and love for a long time before we get established in spirituality.

In Vedanta, regarding the practice of thinking of Brahman, there is the idea of *asupte* and *amrite*. ‘*asupte*’ comes from the word ‘*supti*’ (sleeping) and ‘*asupte*’ meaning until sleeping, so the meaning of *asupte* is therefore, from the moment one wakes up till one sleeps. ‘*Āmrite*’ comes from the word ‘*mrite*’ meaning death and ‘*āmrite*’ would mean until death. Practice. Practice. Practice. Struggle. Struggle. Struggle. We must do this for a long time until we reach our spiritual goal. It is the only way—to continue the struggle. There are three levels, body, mind and speech of our personality. While we undertake our spiritual practices these three levels have to be in harmony with each other; what one studies, thinks and speaks must be in line. How can we recognise contradictions in what we think, speak and act? It can be done through introspection self-analysis.

#### **Faithfully Practice One**

There are several kinds of practice we have discussed. You do not have to practice all these, but pick one that appeals to you to begin with and practice sincerely. Swami Shivanandaji (a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) said that if one sincerely practices even a single teaching from Sri Ramakrishna, the purpose of life will be fulfilled for him. In *The Gospel* there is an example that shares this advice from Swami Shivanandaji. It is of the oyster that receives but a single drop of Swati rainwater (a conjunction of stars), closes its mouth, and goes to the bottom of the ocean, where it creates a pearl.

There have been many tales created featuring Hafez, the saintly Persian Sufi poet (1315-1390). In this tale Hafez was poor and a bit eccentric. He did not do much spiritual practice, but nightly he would visit the tomb of an Islamic saint, light candles and pray there.

One day he realised he had fallen in love with a very beautiful woman of the night, who was the favourite of a very wealthy clientele. So popular was she that she had become wealthy herself. Her fees of course were much too high for the poor Hafez, so he could not approach her. So in order to curry her favour he would arrive very early in the morning and clean her yard before the servants woke. This continued for several days and when the servants mentioned the matter to their mistress, she instructed them to hide next time and capture the do-gooder.

The following morning the servants brought him to the lady who asked him of his purpose. He answered that he liked her very much, but that he was too poor to approach her. Pleased, she ordered her servants to bathe and clothe him and she told him that she would meet him later that night. He was very excited throughout the morning and throughout the afternoon, but when evening came he suddenly remembered his practice of going to the tomb and lighting candles. This created a great inner struggle within him, should he meet his favourite lady as he had anticipated, or go to the tomb as was his practice. Since he had not missed a single night going to the tomb, he finally decided to run there first.

Upon his arrival he found two men there drinking spirits poured from an earthen jug and singing and dancing very happily. They offered the poet a drink, but he declined saying that he did not drink alcohol. Many times they entreated him, but he did not relent so they dashed the

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### Assimilation Part - 3 (from page 7)

cup they had prepared for him to the ground. Seeing their disappointment, the poet relented and asked for a little sip. The moment he took a sip, he too began singing and dancing, because the drink he took was not alcohol, but the nectar of divine love.

In the meantime the lady of the night had been looking for him and found him at the tomb. Seeing her, he gladly offered her a sip and she accepted. The moment she tasted that nectar, she too became joyful and danced. As it happened, the two other men were, in fact angels. Hafez and the lady had both been transformed by his single devoted practice of lighting candles at the tomb of the saint without fail.

*[Swami Medhasananda then announced that he would continue the topic of 'Assimilation in Spiritual Life' again in a Part Four.]*



VEDANTA SOCIETY CELEBRATES

## KALI PUJA

The Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual Kali Puja on 14 November this year observing national COVID 19 guidelines. Due to this special situation a modest programme was conducted with restricted admission at the Centre's Annexe building from 6.30pm to 8pm.

The ritual worship was performed by Swami Diyanathananda under the guidance 'tantradharak' of Swami Medhasananda. The ritualistic offerings of the puja and arti were followed by pushpanjali (flower offerings by attendees) and bhajans (devotional songs).

At the close of services attendees were offered a take-away dinner prasad. Volunteers later had prasad at the ashrama. •







## ● A Story to Remember ●

### A Quarrel among the Senses

From the Chandogya Upanishad 5.1.6-15

Once upon a time all the sense organs had a dispute among themselves as regard to who was superior. Each one boasted saying: "I am superior, I am superior." It went on until finally they all decided to approach Prajapati, their father. They asked him: "Sir, who is the best among us?"

Prajapati replied: "He by whose departure the body looks the worst - he is the best among you."

Following his words the organ of Speech first departed, and having stayed away for a whole year it returned and said, "How have you been able to live without me?"

The other organs replied: "We lived like a dumb being who lives without speaking, but by breathing with the prana, seeing with the eye, hearing with the ear and thinking with the mind we lived." Then the organ of speech returned to the body.

It was then the turn of the Eyes to depart, and having stayed away for a year it returned and said, "How have you been able to live without me?"

The other organs replied: "We lived like a sightless being without seeing, but by breathing with the prana, speaking with the tongue, hearing with the ear and thinking with the mind we continued to live." Then the Eyes returned to the body.

Then Ears departed, and having stayed away for a year it returned and said to the other organs, "How have you been able to live without me?"

They replied: "We all lived like a deaf being without hearing, but by breathing with the prana, speaking with the tongue, seeing with the eye and thinking with the mind life went on." Then the ears returned to the body.

The Mind then went out. After being away for a whole year it came back and said, "How have you been able to live without me?"

The other organs replied: "We lived like a child whose mind is not yet formed, without thinking, but by breathing with the prana, speaking with the tongue, seeing with the eye and hearing with the ear we lived on." Then the Mind returned to the body.

Now, when the Prana, or breath was about to depart, the other senses, they all gathered round him in tears and said: "Revered Sir, be thou our lord; thou art the best among us. Do not depart from us."

The organ of Speech then came and said to Breath, "Sir, that attribute of being most excellent of which I once professed is thine." So said the Eye, the Ear, and the Mind. Hence, these are not simply sense organs, but they are all signs the Prana, or life - for Prana alone is all these.

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