

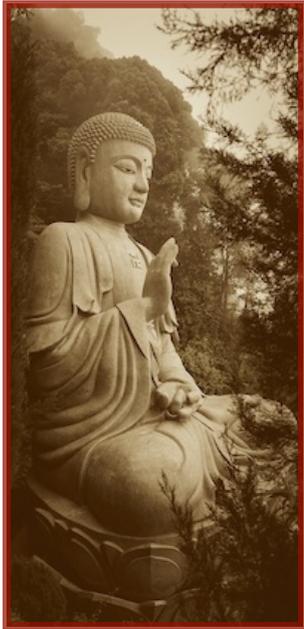


APRIL 2022 -VOLUME 20 NUMBER 04

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

**MAY 2022**  
Calendar



**Birthdays**

**Sri Shankaracharya**  
Friday, 6 May

**Sri Buddhadeva**  
Monday, 16 May

**Zushi Events**

## May Calendar Page 2

While many COVID restrictions had been lifted somewhat by the Japanese government, new Omicron variants require we continue to observe stringent precautions.



## ✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"You see, it is the nature of water to flow downwards, but the sun's rays lift it up towards the sky; likewise it is the very nature of mind to go to lower things, to objects of enjoyments, but the grace of God can make the mind go towards higher objects."*

— Sri Sarada Devi

*"Just as raindrops leak into the house which is not well covered with a perfect roof, so attachment, hatred and delusion enter the mind which is averse to subjective meditation."*

— The Buddha

April Monthly Retreat

PM Session Talk

### "Self-Effort and Divine Grace"

by Swami Divyanathananda

There are often two schools of thought regarding God realisation. According to one school, by determination and dedicated effort God can be realised. Whereas another school strongly affirms that God realisation is not possible without the grace of God. Now, which of these is true?

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## Vedanta Society of Japan

### Message Regarding Monthly Programmes for May 2022

*Although COVID restrictions imposed by the Japanese government with the recent wave of the Omicron variant have been partially lifted, many precautions will remain in place.*

*Vedanta Society of Japan continues to observe social distancing, mask wearing, and avoid crowding in programme areas. Although several programmes are cancelled for April, attendance to the Zushi Monthly Retreat and participation in Akhanda Japam remains space limited, so please contact us if you wish to attend either of these programmes.*

Swami Medhasananda, President  
Vedanta Society of Japan

### MAY 2022 Calendar of Programmes

7th (Sat) May

#### **Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy**

\* Video uploaded later

10:30 ~12:00 (In Japanese only)

11th (Wed) May

#### **Weekly Upanishad Study Class**

8:30 ~9:30 (in Japanese only)

15th (Sun) May

#### **Monthly Zushi Retreat**

#### **Buddha Celebration**

Special Guest Speaker:

**Jyokei Sato (Zen nun, Zentsuji Temple)**

14:00~16:30

\* RESERVATIONS REQUIRED TO ATTEND \*

Please contact prior to May 10th - 046-873-0428

Bi-Lingual Live Streaming [Click here](#) to go to YouTube.

18th (Wed) May

#### **Weekly Upanishad Study Class**

8:30 ~9:30 (in Japanese only)

22nd (Sun) May

#### **Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class**

Live Streaming [Click here](#) and Zoom

14:00 ~16:00 (in Japanese only)

\* For Zoom contact: zoom.nvk@gmail.com



## Self-Effort and Divine Grace (from page 1)

Through this discussion, we shall attempt to find a link between self-effort and divine grace.

Self effort and divine grace are not mutually exclusive of each other—rather, they are complementary; each supports the other. Often grace comes in the form of self-effort. In the beginning, self-effort is absolutely necessary. Without effort, we cannot make progress even in worldly achievements. For achieving anything great and worthy, we need to exert ourselves. The same law works in spiritual life as well. In the Bhagavad Gita too, we find Sri Krishna glorifying self-effort:

*uddhared ātmanātmānam nātmānam avasādayet  
ātmaiva hyātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanaḥ*

*Elevate yourself through the power of your mind, and not degrade yourself,  
for the mind can be the friend and also the enemy of the Self.*

### The Mind; Friend or Enemy

A controlled mind, a well-directed mind, can become a friend, whereas an uncontrolled mind may become one's own enemy. The mind can be nourished with holy and noble thoughts, and with discrimination it can be directed to lead a moral life. It is through this controlled mind, by which we can raise ourselves from our present condition.

Holy Mother too said, 'Everything depends on one's mind. Nothing can be achieved without purity of mind. It is said, "The aspirant may have received the grace of the Guru, the Lord, and the Vaishnava; but he comes to grief without the grace of 'one.'" That 'one' is the mind. The mind of the aspirant should be gracious to him.

First, let us all believe that the grace of God is already upon us. Sri Ramakrishna said, the wind of divine grace is blowing, let us unfurl our sails. We all have got a human birth, a little of thirst for knowledge is also there, and we all, as devotees we also enjoy 'holy company' from time to time—all these are sure signs of God's grace. But the responsibility to make use of these opportunities lies with us. Regular spiritual practices,

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## Self-Effort and Divine Grace (from page 3)

study of scriptures, discrimination between what is eternal and what is ephemeral, following a moral path and self-introspection are the practices which we are to undertake sincerely and methodically. The more we do, the more our mind will be purified and calm, the obstructions to spiritual life will lessen slowly and God consciousness will become stronger in our life.

An incident in the life of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, one of the foremost apostles of Sri Ramakrishna is worth mentioning here. Swami Brahmanandaji and Swami Subodhanandaji were staying together and practicing spiritual practices and austerities at Vrindavan. Vijay Krishna Goswami once came to meet them and finding Swami



Brahmanandaji performing hard spiritual practices, asked him, ‘Has not Sri Ramakrishna done everything for you? What is the need of performing so hard spiritual practices?’

Swami Brahmanandaji replied, ‘Yes, it is so, I am doing all these to be able to retain the grace which He had showered upon me’.

Sri Ramakrishna often used to give the example of the pearl oyster. The oyster floats on the surface of the ocean with its shell wide open, waiting for a little drop of swati-rain. When one drop of rain falls, it gulps it down its throat and goes deep into the ocean bed for a pearl to be formed. In the same way, we have received the grace of God, now we must dive deep by doing spiritual practices sincerely. At the right time, the pearl, meaning realisation of God, will be experienced by us. Christ also said, ‘Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.’

What is the need of self-effort? Spiritual practices are meant to remove impurities, to make the mind pure and one-pointed. God dwells in our heart. Impurities, born of desires and attachments obscure Him. When the impurities are removed, He will shine in His own glory.

(con’t page 5)

## Is Grace Necessary?

Dictionary definitions of grace are ‘unmerited favour of God’, and ‘a divine regenerating, strengthening influence’. Two beings are involved here. God, the omnipotent, the ever merciful, and the spiritual aspirant, who is weak, who is bound by limitations. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, ‘Maya appears to be stronger than God Himself’. What is Maya? It is something, which appears to be real, but not actually real. The unreal things of the world, allure us every moment. However often we may say and think that they are but transitory, it is Brahman alone behind all these names and forms which is real. Yet, Brahman still remains very far from us. This is Maya. To free ourselves from Maya, we must surrender to Him. In the Bhagavad Gita there is a wonderful verse:

*daivī hyeṣhā guṇa-mayī mama māyā duratyayā  
mām eva ye prapadyante māyām etāṁ taranti te*

*My divine energy Maya, consisting of the three modes of nature,  
is very difficult to overcome. But those who surrender unto Me cross over it easily.*

Moreover, we have been born innumerable times, sometimes in a human body, sometimes in animal bodies. So, all our thoughts and emotions stored from our past lives have been deposited in our subconscious mind and are in seed form. These are called samskaras. As a consequence, when we try to advance towards God, our own secular samskaras drag us from behind. Hence, not only our own effort, but God’s grace is necessary.

Somebody asked Holy Mother, can God be realised by japa and other austerities? Holy Mother replied, ‘No, God can be realised by His grace alone.’ However, spiritual practices are necessary to remove impurities from the mind. Even after hard spiritual practices, the aspirant can feel that God is still far away. Actually, in all his efforts, his ego consciousness persists. He feels, ‘I shall meditate, I shall try to control my mind,’ and so on. All this time, he feels, he can do everything by himself. Only when he has strived his utmost and still cannot realise God, he understands the limitations of his efforts. It is then he piteously craves for God’s mercy and surrenders himself completely. It is then that the Grace of God descends upon Him.

When a farmer starts farming, he puts in all his effort, sowing the seeds, watering, applying manure, etc. But ultimately if it doesn’t rain, he cannot get the crop. Just as, rainfall is necessary for the crop, So the grace of God is also necessary for success in our spiritual life. Actually, in our spiritual journey, God makes us do a little spiritual practice. When we move one step, He moves ten steps, as Sri Ramakrishna said. There is joy in striving.

There was a conversation between Swamiji and Sharat Chandra Chakraborty on this subject of Self-Effort and Divine grace. We reproduce it here:

### • Thought of the Month •

“Will is to grace  
as the horse is to the rider.”

– Saint Augustine

## **Self-Effort and Divine Grace** (from page 5)

*Disciple: But does not Shri Ramakrishna mean to say, "All these attachments vanish through the grace of God when one prays to Him?"*

*Swamiji: Yes, it is so, no doubt, through His mercy, but one needs to be pure first before one can receive this mercy—pure in thought, word, and deed; then it is that His grace descends on one.*

*Disciple: But of what necessity is grace to him who can control himself in thought, word, and deed? For then he would be able to develop himself in the path of spirituality by means of his own exertions!*

*Swamiji: The Lord is very merciful to him whom He sees struggling heart and soul for Realisation. But remain idle, without any struggle, and you will see that His grace will never come.*

*Disciple: Everyone longs to be good, yet the mind for some inscrutable reasons, turns to evil! Does not everyone wish to be good—to be perfect—to realise God?*

*Swamiji: Know them to be already struggling who desire this. God bestows His mercy when this struggle is continued.*

### **Grace Is Not Unconditional**

However, as Swamiji has said, grace is not unconditional. There are divine laws working behind the flow of divine grace. Just because, we are putting self-effort, doesn't qualify us to receive His grace. In the Bhagavad Gita, the lord says, He is seated in the heart of every man, and makes them work like machines.

*īshvaraḥ sarva-bhūtānām hṛid-deśhe 'rjuna tiṣṭhati  
bhrāmayan sarva-bhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā*

*The Supreme Lord dwells in the hearts of all living beings, O Arjun.  
According to their karmas, He directs the wanderings of the souls,  
who are seated on a machine made of material energy.*

So, concentration, discrimination, prayer, japa, whatever we are doing, it is He who makes us do them all. So we can only wait for His grace, while not giving up our own self-efforts.

From the above discussion, we may reasonably conclude that both self-effort and divine grace are necessary for success in spiritual life like the two blades of a pair of scissors. There is no conflict between the two. Let us keep striving with dogged tenacity. Ultimately, it is God's grace which will take the boat of our life to the other shore of eternal peace, joy and freedom. •



## *Spiritual Retreat ('Satsanga')*

### 靈性修養会（サットサンガ）

*Vedanta Society of Japan, Zushi*

*Date : Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2022*

日本ヴェーダーンタ協会、逗子

日時：2022年4月17日（日）

### Programme

#### **Main Ashram**

10:30 Offering  
Chanting and Meditation

12:30 Lunch

#### **PM Session**

14:00 Chanting, Reading  
Talk by Swami Divyanathananda

Topic: **“Self Effort and Divine Grace”**

Interpreter: Leonardo Alvarez

Devotional Songs

16:00 Tea

18:30 Evening Arati

Meditation





Reading Before Talk



Swami  
Divyanathananda with  
Leonardo Alvarez  
Interpreting to  
Japanese

Lunch Prasad



Swami Leads  
Lunch Prayer



## • Story to Remember •

### **Sri Shankaracharya Accepts a New Disciple**

In the early part of the 9th century, when Adi Shankaracharya was wandering in the southern part of the India with a few close disciples, he happened to pass through a village called Sri Bali (Shivalli, near Udupi in present day India).

In that village there was a pious and learned Brahmin named Prabhakara, he had a 13 year old son who had a pleasant, angel like face, but his actions appeared rather strange to the people around. The boy was now 13 years old, but had never spoken a word. So they thought that the boy was simply an idiot.

When Prabhakara (the boy's father), heard of this sage who would be visiting his village, he went to see Adi Shankara and requested him to come to his house and bless the unfortunate child. Lord Shankara visited the brahmin's house and saw the child sitting outside quietly. When the boy caught sight of this true sage, he prostrated at his feet.

Lord Shankara knowing the child to be a spiritually advanced soul, asked the boy, "My child! Why don't you talk?"

"What about?" The child replied to everyone's surprise. "It is of no use to speak when 'that' (referring to God) can't be grasped through words"

"Tell me, who are you?" questioned Lord Shankara with the intention of letting everyone know about the greatness of the child. Instead of answering directly, the boy composed 12 Sanskrit verses summarising the teachings of Vedanta on the nature of the 'Self', thus answering Adi Shankara's question. Lord Shankara took him as his disciple with his parents' consent and walked on to the next village with Prabhakara's son among the group of disciples.

Later Adi Shankara established 4 monasteries, and named the boy who was now called 'Hastamalaka' as the head of the Dwaraka Monastery. Hastamalaka also wrote extensively on spiritual subjects, and his Guru Shankara also wrote commentaries on some of the works of Hastamalaka.

- Aumamen.com

The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)  
4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi-shi, Kanagawa-ken 249-0001 JAPAN  
Phone: 81-46-873-0428 Fax: 81-46-873-0592  
Website: <http://www.vedanta.jp> Email: [info@vedanta.jp](mailto:info@vedanta.jp)