



NOVEMBER 2022 -VOLUME 20 NUMBER 11

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Birthdays

Swami Premananda
Thursday, 1 December

Sri Sarada Devi
Thursday, 15 December

Swami Shivananda
Monday, 19 December

Swami Saradananda
Wednesday, 28 December

Thus Spake

Living in solitude now and then, repeating God's name and singing his glories, and discriminating between the Real and the unreal – these are the means to employ to see Him.

— Sri Ramakrishna

I am the mother of the wicked, as I am the mother of the virtuous. Never fear. Whenever you are in distress, say to yourself, I have a mother.

— Sarada Devi

The man who gives way to anger, or hatred, or any other passion, cannot work; he only breaks himself to pieces, and does nothing practical. It is the calm, forgiving, equable, well-balanced mind that does the greatest amount of work.

— Swami Vivekananda

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Vedanta Society of Japan

Message Regarding Monthly Programmes for December 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. Attendance to the Zushi Monthly Retreat and participation in other programs remains space limited, so please contact us if you wish to attend either of these programmes.

Swami Medhasananda, President
Vedanta Society of Japan

DECEMBER 2022 Calendar of Programmes

3rd (Sat) December

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

* Video uploaded later

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

7th (Wed) December

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

18th (Sun) December

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi Birthday Celebration

Bilingual Live Streaming [Click here](#) to go to YouTube

11:00 ~ 16:30

*Prior reservation is necessary. Tel: 046-873-0428

24th (Sat) December

Christmas Eve Worship

Bilingual Live Streaming

19:00 ~ 21:00

*Prior reservation is necessary. Tel: 046-873-0428

The following is Part two of the interview with Swami Medhasananda which was published in Anjali – the magazine of the Bengali Association of Tokyo in Japan.

Fulfilling the desire of Swami Vivekananda “to do something for Japan.”

An excerpt from the interview of Swami Medhasananda Maharaj for ‘Anjali.’

The interview was conducted by Mr. Ranjan Gupta & Mr. Sanjib Chanda.

(Continued from the previous issue of October 2022 ...)

Gautam

Thank you Maharaj.

Now perhaps our readers would be keen on knowing when exactly the Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai) commenced, and how it was launched. At that time this name also was non-existent, and there could have been some other name. How did it begin?

Maharaj

As a matter of fact certain Indians in Japan and certain Japanese scholars as well had some knowledge about Swami Vivekananda, and as I stated earlier Okakura Tenshin sailed for India in January. So, through him and by way of other such links people came to know about Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and the Ramakrishna Mission. Also, there was a Professor Kimura who had journeyed to India for his studies, and who eventually became a lecturer in Pali at Calcutta University. During his residence in Calcutta he had visited the Belur Math and acquired some knowledge of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and in due course he returned to Japan. That is to say, there were indeed Japanese intellectuals who knew about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Ranganathannandaji, a speaker of international renown and monk of the Ramakrishna order who later served as President of the Order, was sponsored by the Government of India as a cultural ambassador, in order to deliver talks on Indian culture and civilization in foreign lands. He rendered numerous speeches in diverse areas of East Asia including Japan, and in several leading Japanese universities as well. A talk was also arranged at the Indian Embassy in 1958, where he suggested for the first time the idea of setting up an organization to propagate the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Vedanta. Under the inspiration of Swami Ranganathanandaji, Professors Kimura and Hajime

Nakamura (a leading Japanese scholar on India), both of whom had relatively good relations with the Ramakrishna Mission, Mr. Sumitra Rao (a retired military officer and member of the Allied forces), and some other Japanese and Indian well-wishers who had participated in the meeting, took an interest in the matter. The society was eventually formed in Tokyo as a private group, with Professor Kimura as President, Professor Hajime Nakamura as Vice President, and Mr. Sumitra Rao as Secretary. This society was initially labelled the Tokyo Ramakrishna Vedanta Kyokai, and Swami Nikhilanandaji, an eminent monk and scholar who currently served as head of an American Center of the Mission, launched the society at the Indian Embassy in 1959. That is how the society commenced as a private body. Since the society was run by devotees it had its own limitations, and yet in spite of many constraints they managed to run it successfully as a private group, as for example by publishing bulletins, conducting regular meetings in rooms requested in schools, and so on. They also invited monks to give talks. It continued thus for some years, and finally in 1974 it acquired its first building in Zushi. That was the first house owned by the society, and Mr. Chellaram, the owner of a shipping company based in Hongkong, donated a lump sum of money for the building of the house. As for the regular expenditure regarding the running of the society, Mr. Rao used to travel to diverse places including areas in Osaka and Kobe, in order to solicit donations from Indian businessmen.

In 1978, Swami Bhutesanandaji who currently served as Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Mission arrived in Japan at the invitation of the society, in order to meet its members and deliver spiritual discourses. He subsequently paid nine more visits to Japan, and thus paved the way for the affiliation of this private group as one of the accredited branches of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1984. Affiliation with the Mission implied that from then onwards a monk of the Ramakrishna order would be deputed to take charge of that private group/society, which would henceforth be considered a branch of the Mission. After this affiliation, Swami Siddharthanandaji (whom older Indian residents of Japan like yourself may perhaps have known), assumed charge of the Center as its first President. He thereupon introduced the daily schedule of the Mission Center, namely meditation, prayer and so on of the Ramakrishna Mission.

In the meantime another edifice, the main building of the society that lies in the vicinity of the first building (which is referred to as Mother's house), was erected at a site around 10 minutes walking distance away, thanks to a lump sum donated by Mr. H. R. Gazria and Mrs. Haru Nakai. Mrs. Nakai was for long a resident of the first building, and served as translator/interpreter. Besides assisting the society in a variety of ways, she also obtained donations from other sources.

Gautam

Thank you Maharaj. You have clearly elaborated the history, and we can well understand that it was all about fulfilling Swami Vivekananda's dream or final wish. Now could you please inform our readers briefly regarding the activities this society is involved in on a regular basis?

Maharaj

From the very beginning Siddharthanandji devoted a great deal of his time and energy to learning Japanese, since it would obviously be hard to undertake Missionary work in Japan without a knowledge of the Japanese language. In fact he even enrolled in a Japanese language school and did very well in the examinations, and devotees began visiting the place from other parts of the country in growing numbers. Although Siddharthanandaji learned Japanese quite well, yet after nine years he had to return to India for reasons of health, since during the last few months of his stay in Japan he was unable to do much owing to his having fallen ill. Finally however he returned to India in 1993, and informed the people at the Mission Headquarters that once they had decided his substitute, he would guide him to Japan and introduce him to the devotees in Japan.

Now, just to give you a brief account of myself, I was a student at institutions run by the Ramakrishna Mission, for three years in a school and another three years in a college named Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir in Belur, now one of the most reputed colleges in India. This college is fully residential, and only for boys. After my post-graduation I joined the same college as a teacher in 1973, and then joined the Ramakrishna order as a *bramachari* (monastic novice) in 1974.

In 1980 I was appointed principal of the college, and continued in that capacity till 1993. Hence, I had close interactions with students, the non-teaching staff, and professors. My world was mainly academic, and I had no contact with devotees. In 1993 however those at the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission appointed me head of the Vedanta Society of Japan, and as you can imagine, for me to be sent to Japan as a resident monk was definitely challenging, since Japan differed from India in a multiplicity of ways. The nature of my regular job too was slated to be altered, in the sense that I would now have to interact with the foreign devotees, both male and female.

Siddharthanandaji as promised accompanied me, stayed in Japan for almost three weeks, and then departed. I was then left all alone, with hardly any knowledge of either the country or the devotees with whom I had to interact.

Furthermore, the incumbent General Secretary of the Mission informed me of his judgment that for the past 8 to 9 years not much growth had been observed at the Center, and hence he requested me to focus on the Center's growth. Consequently, I arrived at the decision that if I devoted the utmost time at my disposal to learning Japanese other crucial issues would be neglected, and the state of the society would remain as it was, with no growth. Accordingly, from the very start I focused on the Center's growth. Of course, learning to converse in Japanese and forming a rapport with our Japanese devotees were other exigencies, and over the years many other activities too came to be undertaken.

I shall now present an overview of the activities of the society. First of all, we have a shrine. The Shrine is the place where we meditate along with the devotees in the mornings and evenings, recite mantras, and read the scriptures. However, the Shrine remains open from early morning to late evening, so as to enable anyone who desires to enter and meditate. Also, we conduct monthly retreats (as they do in Christian Churches on Sundays). My predecessor Siddharthanandaji had initiated a tradition wherein a whole day's retreat would be conducted once a month, and this tradition still continues. The schedule consists in chanting Vedic mantras, reading scriptures, discourses on spiritual subjects, questions and answers, lunch prasad, and devotional songs, and we also offer monthly discourses on the Bhagavad Gita at the Indian Embassy. Besides all this I visit many groups in different parts of the country, in order to conduct spiritual programs for them. In fact, before the Covid pandemic began, I used

to visit these groups almost every month. Generally it was for a three-hour program, consisting of chanting, discourses on spiritual themes, questions and answers, and guided meditation. For several years I paid regular visits to diverse groups in various parts of Japan, such as Oita, Fukuoka, Kumamoto, Osaka, Yamagata, Sendai, Sapporo, Inamari, Tajimi, Nagoya, Hamamatsu, and Okinawa, besides Tokyo (where multiple groups exist), and there I explicated the message of the Vedanta, Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda. We also organize Summer Retreats for devotees. Here we rent rooms in hotels or guest houses of temples once a year, where participants could reside for about 2 to 3 days and attend this intensive program from dawn to 9:00 PM. The program includes meditation, yoga, exercises, sight-seeing, night get-togethers and so on. Our aim is to provide them an experience of intensive training for about 2 to 3 days away from their own homes, in order that they may acquire a glimpse of what an ideal life is, and how it ought to be lived.

In addition to that, we also celebrate the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, with special programs including ritualistic worship. Since Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda believed in the harmony of religions, we also celebrate the birthdays of Jesus Christ and the Lord Buddha, which is a unique feature of our religious organization. Similar celebrations are held in all branches of the Ramakrishna Mission, both in India and abroad. We also offer personal interviews, since there are people who wish to consult us about their personal problems, either mental, spiritual, or others. They also have their own spiritual and philosophical issues that they wish to discuss with us. Aside from all this, we have numerous publications. Publication is vital in order to reach those who are interested, and so we have about 50 publications in Japanese. In contrast to our publications in non-Indian and non-English languages, the number of publications in Japanese is currently the maximum. We also publish a bi-monthly magazine in Japanese.

We also conduct public celebrations related to Swami Vivekananda, and what is significant is that unlike other foreign centers, most of our communications are bilingual. All our websites and most of our modes of communication are in English and Japanese, thereby enabling non-Japanese who are interested to become aware of our activities, and participate in them.

Each morning we transmit inspiring messages in Japanese to subscribers, and thereby provide mental, intellectual, and spiritual support to people of this country. Thanks to this activity, at least 50,000 Japanese have gained some knowledge of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, or to some degree have gained an awareness of them. Certain yoga groups study Swamiji's yoga series. For example, one of the biggest yoga groups of Japan has included the four yoga books of Swamiji in their syllabus. Each month we also conduct welfare activities for the homeless in one of the public parks of Yokohama, activities we refer to as "Homeless Narayana. Here we supply foodstuffs and secondhand garments for their use, and this year the Rachana Club of Tokyo collected old clothes and sent them to us for distribution among them. On a few occasions we also sent a great many relief items to victims of the tsunami of 2011. Thus, despite our scanty means and limited number of hands, we participate symbolically in these types of social services as well. Although in India the extent of such philanthropic activities is vast, yet for obvious reasons we cannot do much in foreign countries. We also have a library comprised of both reading and lending sections.

(To be Continued ...)

Some Photos from Swami Medhasananda's Trip to Manila

Swami Medhasananda went for a trip to Manila from 19th to 26th September. Swamiji has been involved with the Vedanta Movement in the Philippines for about two decades. Swamiji's first visit to the Philippines took place in 2002 at the invitation of Colombo brothers (Enrico Colombo and Carlo Colombo) living in Manila. Since 2002 and until 2016 Swamiji has visited Manila once or at times twice yearly and has given public discourses, held free of charge in various locations.

Through Swamiji's relentless efforts and with the help of the Columbo Brothers and other devotees, The Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines in Manila was established in 2006 and inaugurated in 2007. Since September 2016, the Society has been under the spiritual ministry of Swami Udaarananda. This year, Swamiji's trip to Manila was for visiting the Society and meeting his close and old acquaintants. Below are some photographs from the trip.





• Thought of the Month •

“The root of peace of mind is compassion. As soon as most of us are born our mothers take care of us and give us our first lessons in compassion. Without this we would not survive. This is how our life begins.”

- Dalai Lama

• Story to Remember •

King Shibi and the Dove

There was once a very kind and generous king called Shibi. One day he was sitting on his palace terrace when a dove flew straight into his lap, and lay trembling there. “Grant me refuge!” pleaded the dove to the king. “Fear not, little dove, for I will protect you,” said the king.

Then a hawk arrived, in pursuit of the dove. “Give me my dinner,” said the hawk to the king. “I cannot allow you to eat this dove,” said King Shibi, “for I have granted him protection.” “Then what am I supposed to eat?” asked the hawk, “I am starving and will surely die if I don’t get a meal soon. And my family will starve too, if I cannot bring this dove to them.”

The king offered the hawk all kinds of alternative foods, but the hawk refused, saying “I only eat fresh meat.”

“Then have some of my flesh,” said the king. The courtiers cried out in alarm. “Bring some scales!” commanded the king, and they brought out a huge set of scales and placed them in the centre of the terrace. On one side of the scales the king placed the dove, who was still trembling with fear. Then King Shibi took his sword and began slicing pieces of flesh off his own thigh and placing them on the other side of the scales, aiming to equal the weight of the dove. But however much flesh he added to the scales he could not equal the bird’s weight. It was very strange.

Despite the wailing of his courtiers and the extraordinary pain of his open wound, the king kept slicing. Eventually, unable to equal the dove’s weight, the king climbed up onto the scales, declaring to the hawk: “Eat me! Spare the dove!”

At that moment the birds transformed. The dove revealed himself as the god Agni, god of the fire. The hawk revealed himself as the king of the gods, Indra. “We came to test the extent of your goodness,” Indra declared, “and we are more than satisfied!” Indra healed the king’s wounds and the two gods disappeared, leaving all the humans astounded by the events.

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