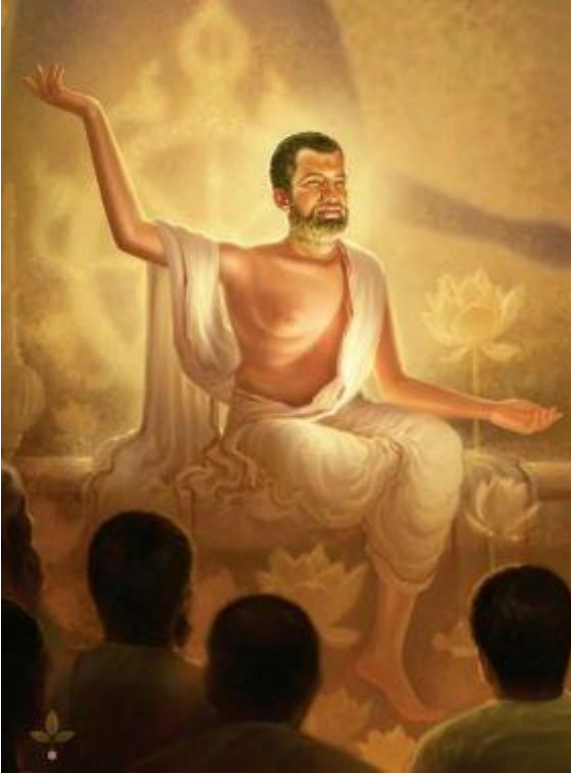




SEPTEMBER 2024 - VOLUME 22 NUMBER 09

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



## Thus Spake

Imagine a limitless expanse of water: above and below, before and behind, right and left, everywhere there is water. In that water is placed a jar filled with water. There is water inside the jar and water outside, but the jar is still there. The "I" is the jar.

— Sri Ramakrishna

Behind this mind of ours there is a subtle, spiritual mind, existing in seed-form. Through the practice of contemplation, prayer, and japam, this mind is developed, and a new vision opens up and the aspirant realizes many spiritual truths. The subtle mind leads the aspirant nearer to God, but it cannot reach God. Having reached this stage, the world no longer holds any charm and he becomes absorbed in the consciousness of God. This absorption leads to samadhi, an experience which cannot be described. It is beyond is and is not. There, there is neither happiness nor misery, neither light nor darkness. All is infinite Being — inexpressible.

— Swami Brahmananda

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# Monthly Program Schedule for October 2024

16th (Sun)

## Monthly Retreat at Zushi

10:30 ~ 16:30

(Bilingual) (Livestreaming)(Video Uploaded Later)

Speaker: Swami Divyanathananda

31st (The)

## Kali Puja

19:00 ~ 21:30

(Livestreaming)(Video Uploaded Later)

## SV Public Celebrations: Religion as Being and Becoming

by Swami Divyanathananda, on 1st June 2024

At the Embassy of India at Tokyo

**Religion is being and becoming, not hearing, or acknowledging. It is not an intellectual assent; but one's whole nature becoming changed into it. Such is religion. Love and charity for the whole human race, that is the test of true religiousness.**

Respected Moderator and participants of this seminar. What is religion? It is being and becoming. What does it mean? To be aware of our real nature, which is Sat-chit-Ananda, and then to become Sat-Chid-Ananda. Elsewhere, he has been said, Religion is the manifestation of divinity already in Man. One can manifest this divinity by controlling nature, external and internal. According to Swami Vivekananda it can be done either by work, or worship, or psychic control (meditation), or philosophy – by one or more, or all of these and to be free.

Free of what? The aim of religion is to free us from the bondage of I-ness and My-ness; from the bondages of the three Gunas- Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas; bondage of desire and attachment; bondage of our own samskaras.

Here Swamiji talks about controlling nature. We regard our body, senses, our house, family as our own although we know that when we will die, we shall have to leave all of these behind. Similarly, we identify ourselves with our mind. So, right now, we are under the control of nature, as our mind controls us. Although there is a spark of divinity in all of us, but because we identify with our body, our mind, our senses and ego, we become attached to them, and they govern us.

There are four different ways of achieving freedom. The path of devotion, called Bhakti Yoga, the path of knowledge, called Jnana Yoga, the path of action, called Karma Yoga and the path of meditation, called Raja Yoga.

In the path of devotion, we make our chosen ideal the polestar of our life, the object of our love. We meditate on His form and chant His name; do all work as an offering to him. We look at the world outside as the manifestation of God. This is the way of devotion.

The path of Raja Yoga calls for various steps for purification of mind, called Yama and Niyama. These have to be practiced, and along with that, we have to practice sitting quietly every day and meditate on God removing all other thoughts.



In the path of Jnana, we are to discriminate always between the real and the unreal. We have to remain as a witness, reminding ourselves of our real nature, which is Sat-Chit-Ananda, and in this way, we detach ourselves from the phenomenal world. We first hear about the Truth, called Shravana and then deeply contemplate on that, called Manana and finally, focus on that, called Nididhyasana. This path demands control of all the senses and a deep yearning for realizing the Self.

In the path of action, we, being instruments of God, do everything as an offering to Him. In this way, work becomes worship. Gradually just by doing all activities in this way, our individual ego merges into the consciousness of God and we achieve freedom.

If we just hear and talk about religion, and do not try to practice anything, then we are merely in the plane of theory. It can be compared to only hearing about milk from somebody and not actually drinking it ourselves.

What are the practices?

1. To clean our mind by controlling anger, egoism, greed and other negative emotions;
2. To focus on God, the Ultimate reality, and
3. Practicing unselfishness

Now I shall cite an illustration to show what happens to a person when he attains spiritual realisation. This illustration is taken from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. A monk daily used to go for begging alms. One day, as he went out, he saw a rich man beating his servant severely. The monk went forward and tried to stop him. The rich man was so angry, that he then started beating the monk. There was nobody to stop him from doing so. The beating was severe and after some time, the monk fell on the ground, unconscious. After one day, somebody discovered the monk, who was lying there and reported the matter to the monastery. The other monks brought him back and started nursing him. A fellow monk was feeding him milk drip by drip. Slowly the monk regained consciousness. A senior monk asked, who is feeding milk to you? The monk said, one who was beating me, is feeding me milk now. Thus, the monk had realized the Unity of existence.

Sri Ramakrishna, the spiritual teacher of Swami Vivekananda was a saint of a very high order and now regarded as a great spiritual teacher of mankind all over the world by thousands of people. He got the vision of the Divine Mother by intense yearning and then practiced the various paths of Hindu religion too. After that He followed the paths laid out by Islam and Christianity and had the realization of both with their personal as well as impersonal aspects. His life is a living demonstration of the principles contained in the scriptures. His individual consciousness was merged into the divine consciousness, and He felt oneness with all. There was no trace of any 'me and mine' in His thoughts. To Him, all livings being were the embodiment of God. Since Sri Ramakrishna had attained the acme of spiritual realization, when Swami Vivekananda asked him directly, Sir, have you seen God? He could say with conviction, 'Yes, I have seen, more clearly than I see you, and if you want I can show you too!' To Sri Ramakrishna religion and spirituality were not mere theory. So God is neither a myth, nor a conception, but a reality who can be realized by anyone, provided he strives hard by practicing the Yogas as discussed above.

Now, there are some common questions which come to our mind regarding religion. Are there many religions and do they lead to different goals? Why there is so much fighting amongst the followers of different religion? According to Swamiji, all religions are true and they are different paths to the realisation of the same Go. So it is always wise to practice one's own religion without criticizing other religions.

Then, are Gods different? The God of the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians? As the Sun, which rises in India, in Japan, or USA, is the same Sun, so followers of all religions

worship the same God though they call Him by different names.

It is also alleged that Religion has become the cause of lots of fighting and bloodshed, so all religions should be banned. Then one may raise a question- scientists invented weapons which have caused deaths of millions of people and can destroy the whole world within a few minutes. Then should science also be eliminated? It is absurd and foolish to say so. The responsibility of killing millions by weapons goes to scientists and persons with vested interests, and not to science. Similarly, religion is not responsible for the many massacres which the world has witnessed so far, but it is the fanatics who are responsible for these massacres committed in the name of religion.

On the other hand, one should consider that religion and religious practices have brought and are still bringing and will continue to bring so much peace and solace to millions and millions of people throughout the ages all over the world.

Again, from the point of view of fulfilment in our life, which is one of the most important aspects of our life as a human being, it is neither money, nor name and fame, neither family, nor creature comforts that bring fulfilment in our lives. It is spirituality, the core of religion alone that can bring fulfilment.

Finally, one may ask, what are the symptoms of a truly religious person, because we see so many so-called religious persons, but they are found to be doing unethical things and are very superficial and secular minded.

We conclude today by giving answer to this vital question. It is important for us to know the criteria of a truly religious person so that we can recognise such a person and we can also try to be like him for our own benefit. These criteria are:

1. One who knows the true meaning and purpose of life.
2. One whose heart is pure.
3. One whose life is focussed on God or the Supreme truth and finally,
4. One who is unselfish and is always ready to help others without expectation of any return.

We find such persons among all religions of the world and such a person becomes a blessing to himself and also to society.

# Buddha and His Teachings in the Eyes of a Hindu

by Swami Medhasananda

At the Main Alter of the Zentsuji (善通寺) Temple

First, the head priest of Zentsūji, H.E. Suwa Geika addressed the crowd with a few words, and then Maharaj was called to the podium of the reliquary hall (舍利講 - Sharikō in Japanese), that also serves as an altar for worship in the main temple.

Maharaj greeted everyone saying “Namaste” with folded hands, and then chanted three prayers and asked those present to repeat after him. The first one was the well-known Buddhist prayer of taking refuge in the Three Treasures:

*Buddham Sharanam Gacchami* (I take refuge in Lord Buddha)

*Dharmam Sharanam Gacchami* (I take refuge in His Teachings)

*Sangham Sharanam Gacchami* (I take refuge in the monastic community)

Then followed two Vedic prayers:

*Asato mā sadgamaya* (From evil lead us to good)

*tamaso mā jyotirgamaya* (From darkness lead us to light)

*mṛtyormā 'mṛtaṁ gamaya* (From death lead us to immortality)

*om sarve bhavantu sukhinah* (May all be happy)

*sarve santu nirāmayāḥ* (May none suffer from illness)

*sarve bhadrāṇi paśyantū mā kaścidduḥ khabhāgbhaveta* (May all see what is auspicious, and may none suffer)

*om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ* (Om Peace, Peace, Peace)

Following this, Maharaj's addressed the crowd:

Five years ago, I had the privilege to talk here before you. Just as today, this has been done thanks to the help and collaboration of all here at Zentsūji, and my special thanks go to H.E. Suwa Geika and Satō Jōkei. Although there are 88 sacred temples here in Shikoku, this one in particular has a special meaning, being the birthplace of Kūkai (空海: Sea of Emptiness), otherwise known as Kōbo Daishi (弘法大師: The Great Buddhist Evangelist). I consider Kōbo Daishi to be at par with Shankaracharya of India, because of his many contributions in the field of religion in this country, and coincidentally, both of them were also born around the same time.

Recently I got to know about the way Japanese people used to refer to India in ancient times, that is “Tenjiku” (天竺). Do you know what these two Kanji mean? ‘Ten’ (天) means ‘heaven’ and ‘Jiku’ (竺) means ‘highest’. If you ever visit the Himalayas, places



like Rishikesh, Belur Math and Bodhgaya, you will understand why India indeed is the “Highest Heaven.” When visiting Bodhgaya you will find Japanese, Thai, Chinese, Tibetan and other temples from each Buddhist denomination have been built there and to this day, Buddhist and Hindu priests do ritualistic worship by turns at the Mahabodhi temple, erected on the place where Lord Buddha attained Enlightenment, which shows the harmony of religions in India.

In India, we also consider Lord Buddha as an Avatara, an Incarnation of God. We celebrate His birthday, day of enlightenment and day of final nirvana as the ‘Vesak Day’, that falls on the full moon of the first lunar calendar month in India. Not only that, this celebration is also carried out in Hindu temples and organizations, such as the Belur Math and other centers of the Ramakrishna Mission in India and Vedanta Societies around the world.



To our understanding, Lord Buddha came at a time where Hindus had overemphasized Vedic rituals enjoining the sacrifice of animals to please the Gods. Having deviated, Buddha’s purpose was to return the people back to the true religion, that of self-realization. Hence His teachings are very systematic, practical and logical. He said ‘our problem is suffering, how can we get rid of it? – cosmology and other secondary questions can wait.’

This however, is nothing new in Hinduism. Lord Buddha was himself a Hindu, brought up in the philosophical traditions of the Upanishads and the Vedas. From ancient lore, our scriptures have stressed that in this world suffering is plenty, joy is very little. Yet we keep on craving for life, for attachment. This is called ‘Tṛṣṇā’ in Sanskrit or ‘Taṇhā’ in Pali, the language in which Lord Buddha spoke to the people, and it means ‘thirst for’ or ‘attachment’ to life, desire and enjoyments.

At the center of this lies the misconception that if we devote all our time, energies and money for our family alone and no one else, we will be very happy. However, the truth is exactly the opposite, since focusing only on our family and our small circle of friends, we become mean, selfish, attached, and finally become disappointed and frustrated. To love our family is very good, but we should also love the whole world.

To expand our love and compassion towards others, Lord Buddha spoke of 7 types of offerings one can do without using any money:

1. The first is the **physical** offering. This is to offer service by one's labor. The highest type of this offering is to offer one's own life.
2. The second is the **spiritual** offering. This is to offer a compassionate heart to others.
3. The third is the offering of **eyes**. This is to offer a warm glance to others which will give them tranquility.
4. The fourth is the offering of **countenance**. This is to offer a soft countenance with smile to others.
5. The fifth is the **oral** offering. This is to offer kind and warm words to others.
6. The sixth is the **seat** offering. This is to offer one's seat to others.
7. The seventh is the offering of **shelter**. This is to let others spend the night at one's home.

We may add another one, that is to pray every day for the happiness of all. These practices will bring about great results, such as reducing our ego and attachment, purifying our hearts and we will experience the joy of sharing. In a similar line, Swami Vivekananda said that 'God is unselfishness.' So, the more we think of and live for others, the closer we shall be to God.

Lord Buddha also said that the best way of achieving bodily and mental happiness, is to think of and work for the happiness of not only our family, but that of all people. But we must put these ideas into practice. You see that the practice of Goma (Homa in Sanskrit) is done regularly. The meaning behind it is that regular practice ensures that we retain the meaning of these teachings and eventually brings forth results, which are purity, egolessness and bliss. Unless we practice unselfishness, stress, sadness and suffering will follow us until death.

Let me end this talk by repeating, all together, the Vedic prayer for everyone's happiness:

*Sarve bhavantu sukhinah* (May all be happy)

*sarve santu nirāmayāḥ* (May none suffer from illness)

*sarve bhadraṇi paśyantū mā kaścidduḥ khabhāgbhaveta* (May all see what is auspicious, and may none suffer)

*om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ* (Om Peace, Peace, Peace)

#### • Thought of the Month •

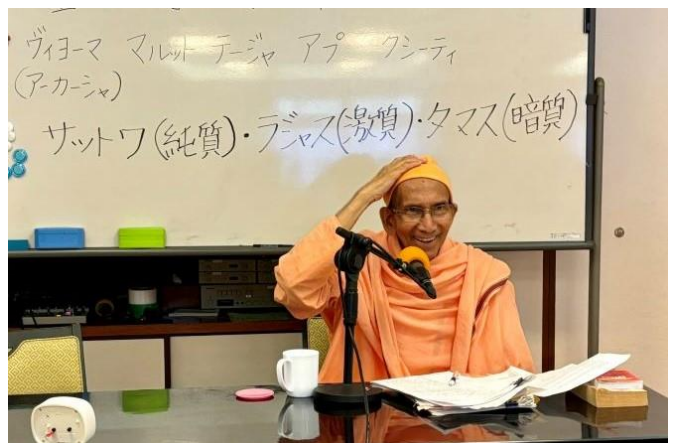
"I beseeched him fervently thus: 'It is my great desire that I should actually experience your gracious wisdom. Kindly fulfill my desire.' Sri Ramana spoke kindly as follows: 'Is it the body in front of me which desires to obtain my grace? Or is the awareness within it? If it is the awareness, is it not now looking upon itself as the body and making this request? If so let the awareness first of all know its real nature. It will then automatically know God and my grace. The truth of this can be realized even now and here.' " — Ramana Maharshi magazine



# Photographs from the Annual Outdoor Retreat

At Zentsuji From 5<sup>th</sup>~7<sup>th</sup> July 2024

(this is the second set; more will be published in the next newsletter)







• Story to Remember •

## GURU BHAKTI

THERE WAS ONCE a man of good spiritual impressions who used to attend Satsang classes where he heard that the Guru's Grace was indispensably necessary for God-realisation. He began to search for a Guru to receive instructions and practise Sadhana. He came across many Sadhus but found some fault or other with every one of them. He had a perverted intellect and a narrow-minded, fault-finding nature. Therefore he was not able to find a Guru. As long as one does not crush one's pride of intellect and learning and become like a child with intense faith, one cannot find a suitable Guru.

One day, while sitting in his house in a sorrowful mood, his wife asked him the reason for his lamentation. He replied that he could not find a Guru who would show him the way to God. His wife suggested that they should both go to the forest at night and sit on the wayside, and the man who happened to pass that way first should be taken as their Guru. The husband agreed.

the next day they went to the jungle and sat on the side of a pathway. It so happened that a thief with some stolen ornaments was hurrying that way. The couple at once caught hold of his feet and took him as their Guru. They begged him to teach them the Guru Mantra.

The thief was very surprised and also frightened. They narrated the whole story to him. He was moved by their faith and expressed the truth that he was a thief. The couple, however insisted that he teach them the Guru Mantra. The thief was alarmed that if he tarried any longer he would be caught. In order to get away somehow, he asked them to bend down, close their eyes and catch hold of their ears. He asked them to remain in that posture until he again ordered them to stand. They obeyed him and assumed the position. They remained like that throughout the night and the next day also. The couple did not take any food or water. In the meantime the thief was caught and put into prison.

Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi were very much moved by their faith. Lakshmi became restless and prayed to the Lord to give them Darshan. Lord Vishnu appeared before them.

On seeing the Lord the couple were pleased but did not open their eyes. The Lord requested them to stand up but they replied that they would not do so without the permission of their Guru.

Thereupon the Lord appeared before the ruler of the country in a dream and asked him to release the thief from prison. The Rajah thought that the dream was false, but when it was repeated thrice, he at once released the thief. Then the Lord appeared in the dream of the thief and told him to go to the place where the couple still remained as he had ordered, and ask them to open their eyes.

Upon his release the thief immediately proceeded to the jungle and asked the couple to open their eyes and stand up. They did so and explained how the Lord had given them Darshan. The thief too revealed to them his dream and about his release.

A voice from heaven was heard: "I am very much pleased with the intense faith you have in your Guru. Do Bhajan, Japa and meditation regularly. I will give you Darshan and liberate you from the cycle of births and deaths."

From that day onward the thief also left his habit of stealing and became a devotee of Lord Vishnu. The couple commenced regular Sadhana and Bhajan and became liberated souls while living.

Devotion and obedience to the Guru can achieve anything. Guru Bhakti is the supreme purifier and illuminator. It is devotion to the Guru alone that makes the life of the aspirant blessed and fruitful.

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