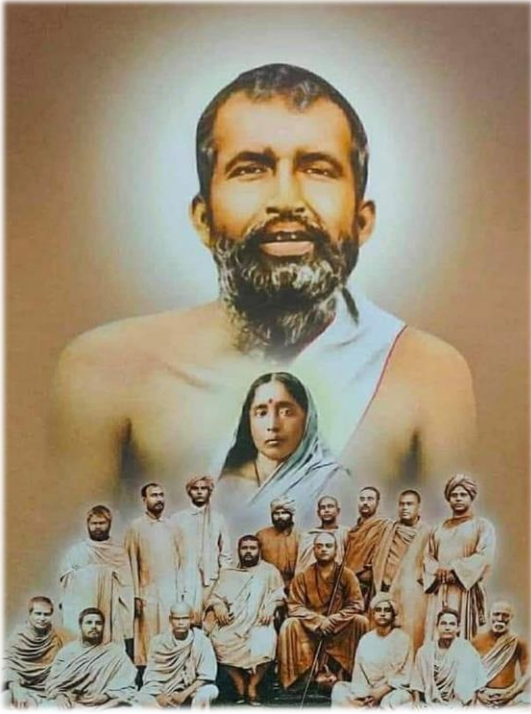




MARCH 2025 - VOLUME 23 NUMBER 03

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



## Thus Spake

“The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

“By constantly repeating, "I am free, I am free", a man verily becomes free. On the other hand, by constantly repeating, "I am bound, I am bound", he certainly becomes bound to worldliness. The fool who says only, "I am a sinner, I am a sinner", verily drowns himself in worldliness. One should rather say: "I have chanted the name of God. How can I be a sinner? How can I be bound?"

— Sri Ramakrishna

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# Monthly Program Schedule for April 2025

5th (Sat)

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

10:30 ~ 12:00

(Japanese Only) (Video Uploaded Later)

8th (Tue)

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

14:30 ~ 16:30

(Japanese Only) (Zoom)(Video Uploaded Later)

16th (Wed)

## **Monthly Upanishad Study Class**

8:30 ~ 9:30

(Japanese Only) (Zoom) (Video Uploaded Later)

20th (Sun)

## **Monthly Retreat at Zushi**

10:30 ~ 16:30

(Bilingual) (Livestreaming)(Video Uploaded Later)

\* Speaker: Swami Divyanathananda

27th (Sun)

## **Bhagavad Gita Study Class in Osaka**

14:30 ~ 16:30

(Japanese Only)

\* Contact: gita.benkyoukai.kansai@gmail.com

29th (Tue)

## **Akhand Japam**

05:00 ~ 20:00

\* Contact: vedanta.karmayoga@gmail.com

# Three Types of Joy

by Swami Medhasananda

Afternoon Session of the December Monthly Retreat at Zushi

Those who do not know what Sattvik Sukha is or Brahmananda, those who do not know what absolute joy is, and do not know that external sources of enjoyments cannot give us lasting happiness, their lives end in frustration. But greater frustration is of those who, while knowing the difference between absolute and temporal joy, couldn't strive to achieve it. The fact is most of the spiritual practitioners are not motivated enough to strive their utmost to achieve inner joy. The question is, why?

One reason is, Maya doesn't allow us to have strong motivation, otherwise, the play of maya will be over. This is one philosophical answer. But it may not be convincing to many.

Another reason is, we have a very deep and prolonged experience of enjoying secular joy. The deep samskaras are filled in us up to our throats. So, when spiritual samskaras try to enter, the samskaras of enjoyment push them out. There is an analogy in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. A devotee of Mother Kali was forcefully converted into Muslim religion, and he was ordered to chant the name of 'Allah' instead of Kali. The poor man, finding no other way, started doing it. But after chanting 'Allah' a few times, the name of Kali popped up from within. A Muslim policeman, whose duty was to make him repeat the name of Allah shouted at him. He said, 'what can I do, I am trying to chant the name of Allah but the Kali inside me is pushing out your Allah'.

So, this is the struggle. Our mind won't accept spiritual food in the beginning, but we shall have to negotiate with our mind and insert holy and noble thoughts into the mind. This we have to accept as a challenge.

I am reminded of the story of a music teacher. One young man approached him and requested him to teach him some classical music. The teacher asked, 'do you have any previous training in music?' When the student said no, the teacher agreed to teach him with some fees. After a few days, another student approached this teacher. But this student had some training in music before. In this case, the teacher charged him double the amount of the previous student. He said, the charge will be more, because he will need to struggle initially to make the pre-trained student forget his earlier lessons, then only he will be able to teach afresh.

Among the apostles of Sri Ramakrishna, it was easier to teach to Swami Adbhutanandaji because he didn't have any prior education, and so he had not read any philosophical books or any scripture and so his mind had not been pre-conditioned.

The second reason is, in our minds, there is more rajas and tamas. Also, nowadays we want

to get results immediately. Nowadays we have instant tea and instant coffee. But in spiritual life progress is not possible overnight. Our scriptures say that often it takes several lives to attain spiritual maturity. This is another reason for the lack of motivation.

Another reason is, in case of secular achievement, we put all the effort required. For example, a student undertakes education for several years before getting a degree from a college or university. For achieving an Olympic medal, the participants spend several hours of practice every day. So why do we expect to get the desired results in the spiritual domain quickly without sustained efforts for a long time? Can we expect to attain devotion or purity of mind without spending some time every day for spiritual practices?



After starting to do meditation for a few days, the devotee complains, “Why is my mind not getting focused? Why don’t I get concentration?” And so on. We should understand that we had allowed our mind to go in whatever direction it wanted all these years, and now when we have started doing some meditation, we can’t expect to achieve a great amount of focus or concentration in just a few days. Moreover, throughout the day, if we spend all the time in secular thoughts and actions, then we can’t expect to attain depth in meditation during the hours assigned for meditation.

In America, once the media persons took an interview of Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj. During those days, Pandit Ravishankar, the sitar maestro, had become very famous. One of the interviewers asked Maharaj, ‘Well, how one can get spiritual experience?’ Maharaj answered, ‘For that, one has to go through some spiritual practice and a set of

disciplines every day.’ The moment he said, discipline, the interviewer reacted, saying, ‘No

we don't like discipline.' Then Maharaj said, 'Have you heard about Ravishankar? Do you know how many years of practice he has put in bringing the kind of music from his sitar that you hear today?' So, people want the fruits, without putting in the required hard work, especially in spiritual life.

Also, the environment that we live in is so deeply secular that it is very difficult to keep up the motivation. In Japan, I have seen that since most of the people have no interest in religion and spirituality, so when one of them tries to do some spiritual practice, or starts going to a spiritual place, others around him look at him with in a strange way, as if he has become insane. So, in a country like Japan, trying to lead a spiritual life is like going against the current.

Once I had the opportunity to take part in a Shinto ceremony, where they do a procession and take the palanquin on their shoulders. From time to time, they stop in a place and drink sake. I was part of the procession. One young man asked me, who I was. I introduced myself as a monk from India and told him something about the life of monks. But when I mentioned that we don't marry, that we are celibates, he was extremely surprised. So, not marrying for spiritual life is considered to be strange among many people. Even some religious leaders consider Jesus as an imperfect person, because he didn't marry.

This problem is seen in families too. There surely are some families where all the family members have a deep interest in spiritual life. But this happens rarely. More often than not, people who do spiritual practices are looked upon in a strange way by those who are not interested in spirituality. So, in our age, to carry on spiritual practices is like going against the current. But those who are sincere and strong won't mind criticisms from other people. They will persevere and carry on.

When Mahendranath Gupta, or 'M', the chronicler of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna started going to Dakshineswar to be in the company of Sri Ramakrishna, M's wife didn't like that and was so upset with this, that she threatened to commit suicide if he didn't stop going there. When M reported this matter to Sri Ramakrishna, the latter said that if one's wife says like this, then one need not keep relations with such kind of wife! Then M asked if someone's mother forbids her son to visit a holy person, what should be done? Sri Ramakrishna said that such a mother is the embodiment of avidya. Then he elaborated, saying follow your parents in all other aspects, however, if they stand in your way of spiritual life, then there is no harm if you disobey them. Sri Ramakrishna also gave some illustrations from the Puranas which supported this. For example, For Rama's sake Bharat did not obey his mother Kaikeyi. The gopis did not obey their husbands when they were forbidden to visit Krishna. Prahlada disobeyed his father for God.



# Discourse on the Kalpataru Day

by Swami Medhasananda

1<sup>st</sup> January 2025 at Zushi



Today is a special day. The first day of 2025. This day is also observed by the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna as the Kalpataru Day, because on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1886, before his passing away, He blessed the devotees for their spiritual realisation. Kalpataru is a legendary tree, and it is said that if one sits under this tree, whatever one's wishes are, they will be fulfilled. Here, Sri Ramakrishna is the kalpataru tree and it means that if we pray to him, our spiritual wishes will be fulfilled.

It is a practice among many people to make some resolutions on the New Year Day and then try to follow them. For us devotees, what should our resolutions be? Last year, we had resolved **to sit in meditation for at least 10 minutes every day**. That helps to control our mind. Needless to say, it has many other benefits too. Because nowadays, the main problem in our generation is of less concentration. Especially, because there are so many distractions from the excessive use of mobile phones and the internet. Moreover, our patience, perseverance and confidence have all gone down. One thing that we should add to our resolutions is **self-introspection**. This is very very important for our life. We should practice self-introspection every day for some time. Because in modern generation, most of our thinking and actions are superficial. We lack dept in our thinking and activity. So, our resolution should be: **let us be deep, instead of being superficial**.

Also, sometimes we thoughtlessly imitate others. Instead of imitating, let us imbibe only the good things from others after carefully thinking. Imitation is a thoughtless act, whereas imbibing is thoughtful.

It is a practice among a herd of sheep to follow what the first sheep has done. In a herd of sheep, all of them will follow blindly what the first sheep has done. Suppose if we put a small barrier in front of the first sheep, the first sheep will jump over the barrier. Then even

if we remove the barrier, the second sheep will also jump over the now non-existent barrier. And the rest will also follow the same way. This is an example of blind imitation. In a similar way, we imitate what the Europeans and Americans are doing in fashion, design, lifestyle, etc. But, in America itself, there are people, who do not imitate others.

Once Bill Gates was invited to give a talk at a convocation in Harvard University. He said, instead of measuring our accomplishments in terms of our career, let us judge, how much we are doing for the society, how much we are doing to reduce the inequality among people. What a wonderful message! This was also what Swami Vivekananda said. But we often judge a person by his personal career related accomplishments.

So, we have to analyse our ways and manners and find out, am I a deep-thinking person, or I am one, who blindly imitates others? We can learn something good from others and not just imitate, like sheep. All thoughtful people introspect, whereas superficial people are carried along by the flow of society.

## Discourse on the Holy Mother

by Swami Medhasananda

Holy Mother's Birthday Celebrations, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2025 at Zushi

It is really difficult to say something about the Holy Mother. We can enjoy Her love, but it is impossible to explain what it is. However, I have to say something on the Mother as a part of Her birth anniversary celebration today.

Girish Chandra Ghosh, the celebrated playwright of Bengal of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who led a bohemian life in his youth but later became a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, once asked the Holy Mother, 'Mother, are you my real Mother, or Mother owing to your becoming the wife of Sri Ramakrishna, my Guru, or because of establishing a mother - son relationship with you? Holy Mother's unequivocal answer was, 'I am your real Mother'.

In the Durga Saptashati, we find the following verse:

या देवी सर्वभूतेषु मातृ-रूपेण संस्थिता।  
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः॥

*Ya Devi Sarvabhuteshu Matri-Rupena Sansthita,  
Namastasyai, Namastasyai, Namastasyai, Namo Namah.*

O Goddess, who abides in all beings in the form of the mother,  
I bow to you, I bow to you, I bow to you again and again.

The meaning of the verse is all mothers of this earth are but manifestations of the Divine Mother. As long as we are spiritually ignorant, it is impossible for us to realize the import of this verse. In this context let me share with you a vision a disciple of the Mother, who later became a monk, had about her. He was quite dynamic, straightforward and to some extent stubborn. He used to serve the Mother lovingly at Jayrambati, Her native village. One day Mother asked the devotee to pluck some flowers and bring them to her. Though he did not understand the purpose of it, he did as directed by the Mother. Then Mother started the daily worship of Sri Ramakrishna and asked that devotee to sit near her.

After the worship was over, she told the devotee, “I shall teach you a mantra and you should repeat that”. Then pointing to a picture of Sri Ramakrishna hung on the wall, she said, “He is your chosen deity, and also your Guru” Then that devotee started arguing, ‘Why should He be my Guru? You have initiated me, so you are my Guru.’ Holy Mother replied, ‘No, I am not your Guru, I am your Mother.’ The devotee continued arguing, “How is it? My Mother lives in my native village. How can you be my Mother?” Then Holy Mother said, “Look at me and see, whether I am your mother or not.” The devotee looked at Her and saw her own mother sitting there and became so much moved at this vision that he immediately prostrated to Holy Mother and since then offered her body, mind and everything at the feet of the Holy Mother.

Now, let us discuss the differences between Holy Mother and an ordinary mother? If we study the biography of Holy Mother, we shall find there are lots of differences between Holy Mother and ordinary mothers.

It is said that among all types of love, mother’s love for the child is the greatest. For example, if the baby is attacked by an animal, its mother even risks her life to save her child. But at the same time, we should note such risking of life occurs only in the case of one’s own baby. But Holy Mother would show her love to all without making any discrimination; hence her love was universal. In Her times there were elaborate and stringent rules and customs especially for Brahmin widows, regarding caste-systems, cleanliness, food and drinks, eating together etc. Though Holy Mother usually followed them but, if needed, she would not hesitate to disregard them for showing her motherly love. When foreign devotees of Swamiji, namely, Mrs. Sara Bull, Miss Margaret Noble, Miss Josephine McLeod, came to show their respect to the Holy Mother for the first time, She not only cordially received them but also had dined fruits etc, together, which though shocking to her Indian devotees and companions, immensely pleased the foreign devotees.

Then there was a Muslim, named Amzad, who lived near Jayrambati. Amzad was in the habit of stealing to meet his ends and often he would be put into prison. Mother knew this well, yet whenever Amzad visited Her, she would treat him as Her own child, and she used to say, ‘As Sarat (Swami Saradnanda-ji, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, a highly venerated monk and also the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission) is my son, so also is Amzad.’



Most significant difference so as far as the power is concerned, while common mothers' power is quite limited, Holy Mother, the embodiment of Primordial Energy, in other words, Adya Shakti or Parama Prakriti, has the infinite power of creating, sustaining and destroying the universe as well as giving one supreme knowledge, devotion and also liberation from the cycles of birth and death.

Another special trait of Her was that while an ordinary mother would look after the well-being of her child in this life only, Holy Mother looked after the well-being of Her children not only in this life, but also in the life after. In addition to that, Holy Mother looked after the well-being of Her children not only as long as she was in Her mortal body, but also after she left her mortal frame. She often used to assure Her devotees saying, 'My child! Always remember, you have a Mother, and if none else, I shall be with you always'. This is an assurance which becomes a source of strength and encouragement in our tumultuous life. This is not merely an empty statement but a fact. Let me give some illustrations of it.



I have had the rare fortune to see about five of the monks, who were very close to Her and had the rare privilege of serving Her as Her attendant. One of them was Swami Saradeshnananda-ji (Gopesh Maharaj). I met him when he was living his last days in the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama in Vrindavan and was bedridden. When I asked him to tell something about Holy Mother, he only remarked, "Ma to nitya" meaning 'Mother is eternal!' Her presence is not conditioned by time and space.

When I had visited Australia last year I met Revered Swami Shridharanandaji, Head of the Vedanta Society of Sydney and the senior most monk of our Order, when he narrated his reminiscences about the old day monks of the Ramakrishna Order. One of these is as follows:

Although he had never met the Holy Mother, he got the opportunity to serve Swami Shantanandaji, one of the close disciples of Holy Mother, who once became her attendant. Shantanandaji was leading a retired life in Varanasi when it was found that he had contracted Tuberculosis, a contagious disease but it was kept secret to him. There was no effective treatment of that disease at that time. The Belur Math authorities finally decided to send him to a TB Sanatorium located in a beautiful natural setting of mountain for treatment and relaxation. Shridharanandaji, then Brahmachari Salil, was living with him as his attendant with whom Shantananda-ji would often share his food. When the car carrying Shantanandaji and Brahmachari Salil came near the gate of the sanatorium Shantananda-ji noticed that on the board at the entrance was written, 'King George Edward VII TB Sanatorium'. Shantanandaji instantly realized that he had contracted TB and that he was brought there for

treatment. Soon after settling there Maharaj became serious and almost stopped talking with Brahmachari Salil for three consecutive days which made the Brahmachari extremely worried. After three days, Maharaj became his own self again and on being asked divulged the reason for his silence to Salil. He said that he was very much worried about Salil, with whom he had often shared his food, lest he also contract the T.B. So, during the last three days he was piteously praying to the Holy Mother so that Mother would protect Salil from being affected by the said disease. Finally, Mother appeared before him the previous night and assured him and granted his prayer, which greatly relieved Shantananda-ji.

I shall close my talk after narrating to you the last illustration of Mother's vibrant presence though she is not in her mortal frame. This illustration is thrilling and at the same time assuring.

Revered Swami Ranganathananda-ji was a monk of high order and orator of international fame. Before becoming the President of our Order, he was one of the Vice Presidents and used to stay at the Hyderabad ashram. At that time three local lady devotees had made up a plan for visiting Belur Math, Kamarpukur, the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna and Jayrambati, the birthplace of the Holy Mother Sarada Devi. One of the ladies met revered Maharaj and told him, "Maharaj, we have got permission to stay in Jayrambati for three days." Maharaj replied, "Very good. It is a privilege to stay with Maa for three days!" The devotee said, "Maharaj, how nice it would have been if Mother was in her gross body now also." Maharaj said emphatically, "What do you mean? Mother is still there. Don't worry." The devotee thought, Maharaj was comforting her. But Maharaj now said in a serious tone, "I am telling you Mother is still there."

The next day, the devotees set out for their pilgrimage. They reached Belur Math and within a few days, they were at Matri Mandir in Jayrambati. Eventually, three days passed there too. On the night of the final day, after prasad, two of the devotees retired to bed. But the third devotee, who had met Revered Ranganathanandaji, was not feeling sleepy and she slowly walked to the temple which was already closed. She was rather sad, for having to leave Jayrambati. She was talking to herself: the old house and the new house where the Holy Mother used to live, the road where she walked, the river Amodar where she used to bathe--everything was there, except the Mother. Tears rolled on from her eyes. She took some dust from the Holy ground of Jayrambati's and tied it in her cloth, thinking perhaps the rest of her life she would have to pass with the memory of this visit as this might be her last one to the Mother's native village. It was pitch dark, and the places around were so quiet. The lady was about to walk back to her room when she saw something very astonishing and beyond her imagination.

What did she see? She saw that the Mother was sitting on one side of the temple and was cleaning the place around the temple. It was dark all around, for it was night, but the place where She was sitting was illumined by the divine light. The woman stood dumb thinking, Mother had left her mortal body so many years ago, so how was it possible that She was there now? The lady became speechless when Mother looked at her and said addressing her,

“Come, my dear child! Come, and sit here.” Her words were full of love and compassion. The lady saw that Mother was approaching her. The lady then regained consciousness and said to the Mother, “Mother, please sit down. Let me clean the place.” On hearing this, Mother laughed, and said, “When the daughter goes to visit her mother, does the mother let her daughter do any work?” Then the lady said, “Okay Mother, shall I call then the Swamis who are residing here?” Mother replied, ‘See, my boys are tired, after working all day, and are taking rest now. Let us not disturb them.’”

When Mother’s work was completed, there was more conversation between them. The woman was surprised to see that the Mother was speaking to her in Telugu, her mother tongue. She was full of astonishment as her seeing the Mother and talking to Her was so real as she was completely conscious of every other thing around her. Hence it was neither a dream nor a hallucination. When she was thinking thus, Mother told her, “Now go my child, go to your room and take some rest, as you will have to return tomorrow.” Then the lady started walking towards the guest house. After a while she gazed back and saw that Mother was still looking at her until she reached the guest house.

The other two ladies were thrilled when they heard the entire episode from their friend and decided not to divulge it to others. All the three ladies returned to Hyderabad, and after a few days went to the Ashrama. After offering their pranams at the temple they met Revered Ranganathananda-ji. When that devotee, who had disbelieved the presence of the Holy Mother in Jayrambati but later had the experience of the vibrant presence of the Mother there, touched Maharaj’s feet, to her surprise, he said, ‘What? Do you believe it now?’ The woman asked, ‘Maharaj, how did you know about what had happened in Jayrambati during our stay there?’ Maharaj bypassed the question and sang two lines of a Bengali song:

ডাক দেখি মন ডাকার মতো, কেমন শ্যামা থাকতে পারে !

*Dak dekhi mon dakar moton, Kemon Shyama thakte pare.*

Oh mind! How long can the Mother hide Herself from you if you call on Her with a yearning heart?

• Thought of the Month •

One must take the firm attitude:

‘What? I have chanted the Mother’s name. How can I be a sinner anymore?  
I am Her child, heir to Her powers and glories.’

If you can give a spiritual turn to your tamas, you can realize God with its help. Force your demands on God. He is by no means a stranger to you. He is indeed your very own.

- Sri Ramakrishna



## Some Photographs from the Kapataru Day









## Some Photographs of the Holy Mother's Birthday Celebrations







## ALL FOR A SINGLE PIECE OF LOIN-CLOTH

A SADHU under the instruction of his Guru built for himself a small shed, thatched with leaves at a distance from the haunts of men. He began his devotional exercises in this hut.

Now, every morning after ablution he would hang his wet cloth and the kaupina (loincloth) on a tree close to the hut, to dry them. One day on his return from the neighboring village, which he would visit to beg for his daily food, he found that the rats had cut holes in his kaupina. So, the next day he was obliged to go to the village for a fresh one.

A few days later, the sadhu spread his loincloth on the roof of his hut to dry it and then went to the village to beg as usual. On his return he found that the rats had torn it into shreds. He felt much annoyed and thought within himself "Where shall I go again to beg for a rag? Whom shall I ask for one?" All the same he saw the villagers the next day and re-presented to them the mischief done by the rats. Having heard all he had to say, the villagers said, "Who will keep you supplied with cloth every day? Just do one thing—keep a cat; it will keep away the rats."

The sadhu forthwith secured a kitten in the village and carried it to his hut. From that day the rats ceased to trouble him and there was no end to his joy. The sadhu now began to tend the useful little creature with great care and feed it on the milk begged from the village. After some days, a villager said to him: "Sadhuji, you require milk every day; we can supply your want for a few days at most by begging; who will supply you with milk all the year round? Just do one thing—keep a cow. You can satisfy your own creature comforts by drinking its milk and you can also give some to your cat." In a few days the sadhu procured a milch cow and had no occasion to beg for milk anymore.

By and by, the sadhu found it necessary to beg for straw for his cow. He had to visit the neighboring villages for the purpose, but the villagers said, "There are lots of uncultivated lands close to your hut; just cultivate the land and you shall not have to beg for straw for your cow." Guided by their advice, the sadhu took to tilling the land. Gradually he had to engage some laborers and later on found it necessary to build barns to store the crop in. Thus, he became, in course of time, a sort of landlord.

And, at last he had to take a wife to look after his big household. He now passed his days just like a busy householder. After some time, his Guru came to see him. Finding himself surrounded by goods and chattels, the Guru felt puzzled and enquired of a servant, "An ascetic used to live here in a hut; can you tell me where he has removed himself?" The servant did not know what to say in reply. So, the Guru ventured to enter into the house, where he met his disciple. The Guru said to him, "My son, what is all this?" The disciple, in great shame fell at the feet of his Guru and said, "My Lord, all for a single piece of loincloth!"