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# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



## Thus Spake

In this world  
Hate never yet dispelled hate.  
Only love dispels hate.  
This is the law,  
Ancient and inexhaustible.  
You too shall pass away.  
Knowing this, how can you quarrel?

- Buddha

One of the signs of God-realization is joy. There is absolutely no hesitancy in such a person, who is like an ocean in joyous waves. But deep beneath the surface, there is profound silence and peace.

- Ramakrishna

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# Monthly Program Schedule for June 2024

1st (Sat)

## Swami Vivekananda Birthday Celebration

Venue: Vivekananda Culture Center, Embassy of India

8th (Sat)

## Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

10:30 ~ 12:00

(Japanese Only) (Video Uploaded Later)

12th (Wed)

## Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~ 9:30

(Japanese Only) (Zoom)

16th (Sun)

## Monthly Retreat at Zushi

10:30 ~ 16:30

(Bilingual)(Livestreaming)

Speaker: Swami Divyanathananda

19th (Wed)

## Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~ 9:30

(Japanese Only) (Zoom)

25th (Tue)

## Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

14:30 ~ 16:30

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

29th (Sat)

## Bhagavad Gita Study Class in Osaka

14:30 ~ 16:30

(Japanese Only)

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# Sri Ramachandra: An ideal character

Talk by Swami Divyanathananda on 21st April 2024  
At the Vedanta Society of Japan

You all know, in almost all the branch centres of Ramakrishna Mission, we sing the Ramnam Sankirtanam on Ekadashi days. A small ritual is performed in the evening in front of the picture of Rama-Sita-Hanumana and the kirtan is sung in chorus by Monks and devotees. Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, the first President of the Ramakrishna Mission started this practice and slowly the other branch centres started following.

Sri Kshudiram Chattopadhyay, the father of Sri Ramakrishna had his ancestral house at Dere village. Raghuvir, another name of Sri Ramachandra was their family deity. He had a very deep devotion to his deity. We know that due to a tragic incident, when Kshudiram had to leave his native village, depending entirely on his family deity Raghuvir, he left his land and house inherited from his forefathers and settled down at Kamarpukur, at the invitation of his friend Sukhalal Goswami.

When Sri Ramakrishna was practicing sadhanas of various paths and faiths, he remembered his family deity Raghuvir and wanted to get the vision of his blessed form and started worshipping and meditating on his form with heart and soul. One day, when he was walking along the panchavati, he had a vision that Sita Devi had merged in his body.

Now, we shall narrate the story of Ramayana in brief.

There lived a sage called Valmiki. He had attained an extremely high state of mind through spiritual practices. One day, Sage Narada came to his hermitage. Narada was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. Valmiki wanted to know, whether there lived an ideal man, who possessed all the divine qualities that we can imagine and which the scriptures mention. Narada described to him about Rama. He was the son of Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya. Brahma infused special power in sage Valmiki and asked him to spread the story of Rama for all of humanity. Thus, came Ramayana, the great epic depicting the life and deeds of Rama.

Dasaratha, the king of Koshala, whose capital was Ayodhya, was a mighty king. He was unhappy about one particular thing - he did not have any children. He decided to perform Ashwamedha Yajna and the putrakamesti rite. Those elaborate sacrifices and rites used to be performed by persons desiring children. After the sacrifice was successfully completed, a god appeared in front of him and handed over a bowl containing rice pudding to be fed to the queens. Dashratha had three queens- Kausalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra. After partaking the consecrated food, Rama, Lakhmana, Bharata and Shatrughna are born. They grew up under the loving care of their parents.

One day, the sage Vishwamitra arrived at the court of Dasaratha. Vishwamitra was planning to perform some sacrifices. But he was afraid that the demons called Maricha and Subahu would interfere and not let him finish the rituals related to the sacrifices. So, he came to Dashratha seeking for help. He requested that Dashratha allow Rama to go with Vishwamitra to protect him and his fellow ascetics from the demons. At first, Dasaratha was hesitant, because Rama was still a child but upon the advice of Sage Vasistha, the family teacher of Dasaratha, he gave his consent. Vasistha assured Dasaratha that it will do Rama great good. Rama will learn life lessons under the sage, he will see life of ascetics in the forest. By living a life of austerities in his youth, he will become spiritually strong. Added to that, Vishwamitra would teach him archery and also about other weapons. He will also earn the blessings of Vishwamitra. King Dasaratha agreed. Rama went with Vishwamitra, accompanied by his younger brother Lakshmana. On the bank of Sarayu river, Vishwamitra, initiated them with a sacred mantra.

They proceeded farther south, deeper into the forest. Vishwamitra informed them about the existence of Taraka Demon, and asked him to kill it, which Rama did. Next day, they came to another place. Vishwamitra gifted him various weapons. At his command, several angels descended and gifted various other weapons. Rama prayed to them to stay in his memory. He prayed that they may come, whenever he remembered them, whenever he needed them.

Then Vishwamitra started the sacrifice. Demon Maricha and other sons of Taraka started creating disturbance. Rama and Lakshmana killed them. Vishwamitra's sacrifice was completed successfully. Under the guidance of Vishwamitra, Rama learned not only archery and other weapons, but also took lessons on Indian scriptures, and the rich cultural heritage of India.

After the sacrifice, accompanied by Vishwamitra, they reached the Kingdom of Mithila, where Janaka was the ruler. In his palace, there was the Haradhanu, the great arch, which he had inherited from his ancestors, and it is said that Gods had gifted that bow. It was extremely heavy, and nobody could even lift it. King Janaka had declared: Anyone, who can lift the bow and string it will earn my daughter Sita for marriage. Before Rama, so many kings had come to Mithila, but none could even lift the bow up. At the command of Vashishtha, Rama, easily lifted that bow and as he tried to string it, it broke into two pieces. Accordingly, he earned Sita as his wife and brought her to Ayodhya. In the kingdom of Ayodhya, the formal wedding ceremony took place. Janaka had other daughters also and they were married to Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna.

King Dasharatha was advancing in age, so he decided to retire and declare Rama as the crown prince, who was competent to lead the kingdom. However, the day before the anointment of Rama, Dasharatha was reminded by his youngest wife Kaikeyi of a promise he had made to her a long time ago. She sought two boons: Rama should be sent to the forest for fourteen years, and Bharata her son should be anointed as the crown prince. Naturally, Dasaratha was shocked. How could he ask his beloved child to go into exile and live in the forest?

However, when Rama came to know about this matter, he was not in the least perturbed. He was willing to relinquish his position of the heir to the throne for his brother Bharata and got

ready to go into exile, so that his father could keep his promise. Sita, being his wife, decided to accompany him and so did Lakshmana, his devoted brother. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana donated their wealth to the people of Ayodhya and started for the forest.

Dasaratha, his elder wife Kausalya, and the entire kingdom was in a state of deep sorrow at the thought of exile of their beloved Rama. Sita and Lakshmana. The citizens of Ayodhya were unable to separate themselves from Rama. So, they accompanied Him to some distance in the forest. Then Rama pleaded with them to go back and assist Bharata in running the Kingdom. The Brahmin priests were willing to stay with him, but Rama persuaded them to go back too.

While leaving, Rama requested his father not to abandon his younger wife Keikayi, for he was afraid that Dasharatha might not treat her well. To Kausalya, he begged not to say harsh words to his father. This too shows his greatness. His unbounded compassion even towards those due to whom innumerable sufferings are waiting for him.

When these incidents were taking place, Bharata was away from the kingdom. When he came back and came to know what had transpired, he was shocked. He immediately started for the forest, met Rama and pleaded him to come back. But Rama affectionately asked him to return. Bharata brought the 'paduka' slippers of his elder brother back with him to Ayodhya, and installed them on the throne and served the kingdom as Rama's representative.

Rama, along with Lakshman and Sita went deeper into the forest, visited the hermitages of many sages, and after ten years settled at Panchavati, in the Dandaka Forest. In that forest lived Surpanakha, an ugly demon. She was enchanted by the beauty of Rama. She proposed to marry Him. At Rama's order, Lakshmana cut off her nose. Enraged by anger and remorse, Surpanakha approached her brother Ravana, and demanded a revenge of this incident. Now, she knew that Ravana had great infatuation for women and hence she eulogised the beauty of Sita to Ravana. Hearing the description of Sita from her sister, and more out of infatuation, rather than for revenge, Ravana decided to abduct Sita.

Ravana sought the help of another, demon, Maricha. Maricha, however warned him that abducting Sita will only bring him trouble. However, Ravana was adamant and didn't follow this advice. Maricha took the form of a golden deer and allured Sita to have it. Sita pleaded to Rama to catch it for her. Rama chased it till a long distance and at last killed it. While dying, Maricha imitated the voice of Rama cried out, 'Oh Sita, Oh Lakshmana!'. Sita heard the voice and was horrified. He asked Lakshmana to go and look into the matter. Lakshmana, apprehensive of some danger, drew a circle with a chalk around the house and asked Sita not to cross it; if she would remain within the circle, she would be safe.

Now Sita was completely alone. Ravana grabbed this opportunity, came in the disguise of a mendicant ascetic and asked for some alms. Sita, while giving the alms, out of carelessness, crossed the boundary drawn by Lakshmana. Ravana abducted Sita. Sita was totally helpless. However, on the way she threw some of her ornaments on the way, hoping Rama would find them and so get to know the direction she was being taken in.

Now we shall discuss about Hanuman, who played a key role in the Ramayana. Hanuman has earned great devotion in the hearts of Indians owing to his pristine purity, unalloyed devotion to Sri Rama and his great physical strength. He was a lifelong celibate. Hanuman was the son of Anjanadevi and was born by the grace of Vayudeva, the God of wind.

In those days, there was a tribe called vanaras, who were different from the Aryans and their physical features were also a bit different. They ruled the kingdom of Kischindha. Sugriva, belonging to the royal family of Kischindha was driven out from the Kingdom by his brother Vali. Hanuman was one of Sugriva's companions.

When Rama and Lakshmana were travelling various parts of India in search of Sita, they arrived where Sugriva was staying in exile. He saw them from a distance and sent Hanuman to find out who they were. Hanuman's courteous manner of and refined speech impressed Rama very much, and Hanuman was also impressed by the inner character of Rama. Then Hanuman revealed his true identity and took them to the place where Sugriva was. Sugriva wanted his Kingdom back and Rama wanted help in his search for Sita. The two parties forged a friendship.

In order to help find Sita, Sugriva sent his vanara comrades in all four directions. Hanuman was sent to the south. Hanuman gave a big leap taking the name of Rama and crossing the sea reached Lanka. He searched for Sita and found her at Ashoka grove. Upon meeting her, Hanuman handed over Rama's ring to her. When the demons of Lanka saw Hanuman, they tried to catch him. Finally, after lot of struggles they could catch him. They tied him up and brought him to the court of Ravana. Hanuman actually wanted to meet Ravana. He admonished Ravana for abducting Sita. The demons put fire on the tail of Hanuman. Hanuman escaped and flew all over Lanka, spreading that fire through the entire territory of Ravana. Finally, Hanuman came back to Rama and gave him the good news about the well-being of Sita. Rama ordered Sugriva to get his troops ready for heading towards Lanka.

Vibhishan was the brother of Ravana. He tried hard to persuade Ravana to return Sita back to Rama but in vain. Finally, he left Ravana's side and sought refuge in Rama. Rama forged a friendship with him.

A bridge was built over the ocean and using that, Rama, Lakshmana and the vanara army marched forward and reached Lanka. At first Rama tried to avoid war and bloodshed. He calmly asked Ravana to return his wife. Ravana was adamant. A war followed. During that war, Rama had to meet various obstacles. Once Lakshmana became unconscious by the Shakti missile of Meghnath, the son of Ravana. By the assistance of Hanuman, who brought the Sanjivani medicine, Lakshmana was cured.

Finally, in that war, Ravana was killed, and Sita was united with Rama.

Rama put Vibhishana on the throne of Lanka and came back to Ayodhya with Sita and Lakshmana. By then, fourteen years of exile was over. Dasaratha had passed away long ago after grieving for Rama. Bharata had been waiting for Rama and others to come back. Rama was crowned king of Ayodhya.

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Now we shall discuss some features about the character of Rama.

He was adept in use of various weapons, especially archery. He had thorough knowledge in scriptures as well as knowledge of literature and music. However, in spite of possessing so many qualities, he was humble, affectionate and easily approachable.

Another name of Rama is Purushottama, the greatest among men, who possessed all the divine qualities. Establishing Dharma and following the truth was the keynote of his life. He resolved to go into exile so that his father may keep his promise.

Though he was living in the forest as a hermit, but since he was a kshatriya, he didn't hesitate to kill the demons who were disturbing the sages. For the same reason, he killed Vali too.

He relinquished his opportunity of becoming the crown prince and created space for his younger brother Bharata to sit there. However, on another side, Bharata had so much respect and love for his elder brother that instead of sitting on the throne, He installed Rama's slippers on the throne and ruled the kingdom as his representative.

He was an ideal in matters of loyalty too. In forging friendship also, he was loyal. He forged friendships with Sugriva and Vibhishana.

He had good a sense of diplomacy. When Vibhishana came and sought surrender at Rama's feet, Rama called all his vanara companions and placed the problem before them. He wanted to have a consensus of all his followers and didn't want to take any decision like a dictator.

When Bharata became angry with his Mother Kaikeyi, for sending Rama to exile, Rama pacified him and asked Bharata not to show disrespect for his mother.

Rama cared even for his enemies' welfare. When Ravana was killed, Vibhishana refused to perform the last rites of Ravana. Rama admonished him and said, He himself would perform the rites if Vibhishana didn't.

After Sita was rescued, we can imagine the happiness of Rama, in the thought of again joining with her wife, after the long separation. But He was also aware of the pulse of the nation. He knew that citizens of Ayodhya may question the purity and chastity of Sita, being away at Ravana's Kingdom. A pyre was lit in front of all, and when Sita entered the fire, Agni, or the God of fire came out and escorted Sita back to Rama, saying, she belongs to you. Rama again accepted her with joy and happiness.

Jatayu was the bird who tried to save Sita when Ravana was abducting her. Ravana mortally injured him, and he was lying helplessly, with broken wings, waiting for Rama before dying. Rama bestowed his grace and showed him the path of Vaikuntha.

There was a woman called Shabari who belonged to a tribal caste. Her guru was Matanga. Before departing from the world, Matanga told her that one day Rama would come to her

cottage and that she should wait for him. For eleven years she lived on austerities, thinking only of Rama. Finally, Rama came to her cottage, while he was searching for Sita. Upon seeing Rama, Sabari addressing Rama said, 'By your soft glance bestowed on me as a benediction, my load of Karma has been extinguished and I am now pure. Your grace (prasād) has descended on me. I shall now go to the highest of the worlds from where there is no descent.

तमेव शरणं गच्छ सर्वभावेन भारत ।  
तत्प्रसादात्परां शान्तिं स्थानं प्राप्स्यसि शाश्वतम् ॥ 18.62॥  
tam eva śharaṇaṁ gachchha sarva-bhāvena bhārata  
tat-prasādāt parāṁ śhāntiṁ sthānaṁ prāpsyasi śhāśhvataṁ

Surrender exclusively unto Him with your whole being, O Bharat. By His grace, you will attain perfect peace and the eternal abode.

In case of other devotees and companions who surrendered at the holy feet of Rama, e.g., Sabari, Ahalya, Jatayu, Rama bestowed his grace and gave them freedom from the cycle of birth and death. In case of Vibhishana, he showed his grace by showing him the way to lead a noble life. He offered him the rulership of Lanka. He bestowed grace upon Vibhishana by freeing him from Demonic and cruel persons when he had sought refuge in him.

Before admitting him, He summoned a meeting of all Vanaras, where Sugriva was the Chief Judge. Rama said, 'Once a person has surrendered to me, it is immaterial whether his past was good or bad. His real designs may be concealed. But this makes no difference to me. If fully contrite, making his submission with folded hands, when a man begs for forgiveness and seeks my protection, I will not hurt him even if earlier he has acted as an enemy.' The doctrine of surrender and obtaining divine grace is given in the words of Rama.

Thus ends the story of Ramayana in brief and a brief sketch of Lord Ramachandra's exceptionally noble character.

• Thought of the Month •

Concentrate every minute like a Roman—like a man—on doing what's in front of you with precise and genuine seriousness, tenderly, willingly, with justice. And on freeing yourself from all other distractions.

- Marcus Aurelius



# Report from Ms. Sawako Uchiyama of Fukuoka Satsang

Dear Maharaj.

Thank you very much for the great time we had the other day.  
I will submit this report.

Start at 7:00

Talk on meditation 7:10-7:45 pm

Sit in lotus, half lotus or seiza.

Eyes closed, not leaning against a wall.

Close the fingers between the hands, palms up.

Decide on the object.

Sacred object (God, Jesus Christ, Buddha, etc...)

Eternal objects (the sky, a full moon, a candle flame, etc.)

Morning is preferred. Same time every day, about 10 to 15 minutes.

Meditation is just as important as eating a meal every day.

It is important to do it every day.

Meditation with everyone 7:45-8:05 a.m. 20 minutes

Chanting of Om by Maharaj.

Chanting time 8:15 - 8:45 am

Morning prayer chanting,

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6, 10-25.

Chanted in Sanskrit by everyone, followed by chanting in Japanese translation.

Breakfast 9:00 - 9:40 a.m.

Egg sandwich, strawberries, hojicha tea

Walk 9:45-10:40 a.m.

Dazaifu Red Bridge, near the river, around Kanzeonji Temple.

Lecture 10:50 - 12:20

"The Way of Happiness" about reincarnation and the law of karma

Q&A 12:20-12:30 p.m.

Book sale 12:30pm - 1pm

1:00 p.m. Retreat ends.

Thank you very much.

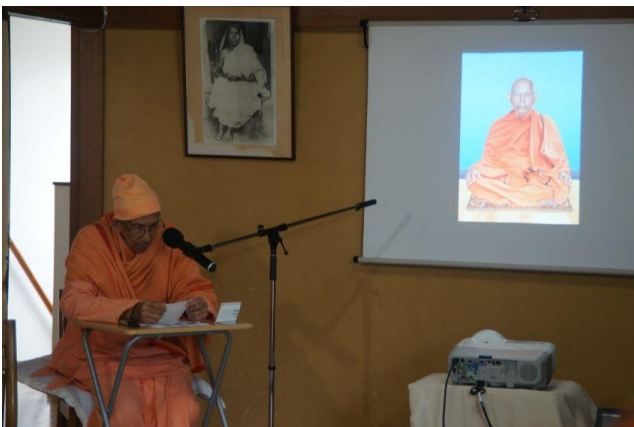
We look forward to seeing you again next year.

## Photos from the Satsang at Fukuoka





## Photos from the Spiritual Retreat at the Kyokai in April





## Photos from Maharaj's visit to Kikuchi, Kumamoto

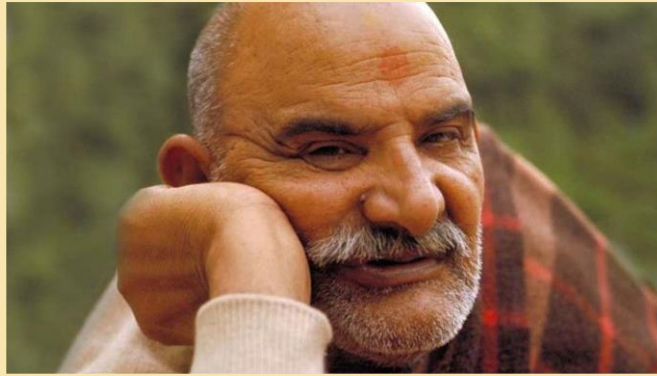






• Story to Remember •

## How Neem Karoli Baba got his name



This is how Maharajji became known as Neem Karoli Baba, which means the sadhu from Neem Karoli (or Neeb Karori).

This was many years ago, perhaps when Maharajji was in his late twenties or early thirties. For several days, no one had given him any food and hunger drove him to board a train for the nearest city. When the conductor discovered Maharajji seated in the first-class coach without a ticket, he pulled the emergency brake and the train ground to a halt. After some verbal debate, Maharajji was unceremoniously put off the train. The train had stopped near the village of Neeb Karori where Maharajji had been living.

Maharajji sat down under the shade of a tree while the conductor blew his whistle and the engineer opened the throttle. But the train didn't move. For some time the train sat there while every attempt was made to get it to move. Another engine was called in to push it, but all to no avail. A local magistrate with one arm who knew of Maharajji suggested to the officials that they coax that young sadhu back onto the train. Initially the officials were appalled by such superstition, but after many frustrating attempts to move the train they decided to give it a try.

Many passengers and railway officials approached Maharajji, carrying with them food and sweets as offerings to him. They requested that he board the train. He agreed on two conditions:

- (1) the railway officials must promise to have a station built for the village of Neeb Karori (at the time the villagers had to walk many miles to the nearest station), and
- (2) the railroad must henceforth treat sadhus better.

The officials promised to do whatever was in their power, and Maharajji finally reboarded the train. Then they asked Maharajji to start the train. He got very abusive and said, "What, is it up to me to start trains?" The engineer started the train, the train traveled a few yards, and then the engineer stopped it and said, "Unless the sadhu orders me, I will not go forward." Maharajji said, "Let him go." And they proceeded.

Maharajji said that the officials kept their word, and soon afterward a train station was built at Neeb Karori and sadhus received more respect.

*(From Miracle of Love: Stories about Neem Karoli Baba, by Ram Dass.)*

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