# May 2015 - Volume 13 Number 04



# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

#### June Calendar

#### **Birthdays**

According to Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac there are no birthdays of note in the month of June 2015.

#### **Kyokai Events**

#### Bhagavad Gita Study

June 6th (Sat) Indian Embassy 日本語 only 14:00 ~ 16:00 (bring photo ID)

#### Yoga-Asana Class

June 7, 14, 21, 28 (Sun) 14:00 ~ 15:30 Zushi Centre Annexe

## Satsanga in Nagoya

June 13th

# Satsanga in Tajimi

June 14th

#### **Upanishads Discourse**

June 20th (Sat) Indian Embassy 日本語 only 14:00 ~ 16:00 (bring photo ID)

#### June Zushi Retreat

Sunday June 21st - 11AM Guest Speaker: Father Kawasaki of the Kamakura Yukinoshita Catholic Church

Theme: 'Concept of Purity in Christ' All are welcome!

### Nara Narayan

Service to the Homeless Contact: Sato-san 090-6544-9304

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# \*Thus Spake\*

"Everything depends on the 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 Vaishnavas; but he comes to grief without the grace of the one.'That 'one' is the mind. The mind of the aspirant should be gracious to him."

-The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

"If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

- Jesus Christ

Public Celebration 2015

#### Swami Vivekananda: 152nd Birth Anniversary

Auditorium, Indian Embassy, Tokyo

Theme: "Indian Culture in Japan"

The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai) held its annual public birth anniversary celebration of Swami Vivekananda at the Indian Embassy of Japan in Tokyo on May 17, from 2 p.m. The Celebration Committee of the Vedanta Society and the entire Society membership greatly appreciate the continuing cooperation and support of the Indian Embassy in offering the use of its excellent auditorium facilities for a number of such events.

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#### Swami Vivekananda (from page 1)

The programme began with an invocation of universal prayers in Sanskrit led by Swami Medhasanandaji of the Vedanta Society of Japan and four Japanese devotees.

This was followed by a bouquet offering at the feet of a standing photographic image of Swami Vivekananda by Sri Amit Kumar, Deputy Chief of Mission, Indian Embassy. Deputy Chief Kumar who was then called upon to release this year's Special Issue of the Society's 'Universal Gospel' before giving a brief welcome address outlining Swami Vivekananda's remarkable influence on Indian Society and his tireless activities in bringing his message of Universality and the manifestation of the Divinity already within each of us to the world. (Deputy Chief Kumar's comments are included in this issue of 'The Vedanta Kyokai'.)

Next, Buddhist priest and friend of the Society, Reverend Houken Suzuki, was called upon to officially release the latest audio CD from the Society entitled 'Mantram'. This CD

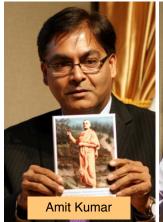
includes some of the most important mantras of both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, such as the Gayatri Mantra and the Mahamrityunjaya Mantra. Chanted by both Hindu monks and Japanese Buddhist priests, these renditions of revered mantras are steeped in authenticity and holiness.

Before launching into the various subjects on the theme 'Indian Culture in Japan' Swami Medhasanandaji led the audience in a brief meditation and chanting of 'Om'.

This set the mood for the first address of the day by Fr. Cyril Veliath S. J., professor at Sophia University, Tokyo. Fr. Veliath addressed the core of Indian Philosophy found in both Hinduism and Buddhism, and how these traditions have borrowed from each other over millennia. He then proposed that Indian thought found its way to Japan via a much assimilated version of Buddhism from China. He concluded his remarks noting that it is an inner beauty or beauty of the soul that the ancient mystics of India and Japan

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#### Swami Vivekananda (from page 2)

alike urge us to seek today. (Fr. Veliath's complete talk is presented in this issue of 'The Vedanta Kyokai'.)

Next up was Mr. J. S. Chandrani, president of Japan Business Service, and founder of Indian Restaurants, 'Spice Magic Calcutta' < www.spicemagiccalcutta.com > . Mr. Chandrani's talk on the theme 'Indian Culture in Japan' dealt with the Avurvedic traditions of food health, safety, preparation and preservation originating in the vast and populous Indus Valley of the Bronze Age . This civilisation needed to provide its people with healthy nutrition. Ayurveda identified a balance needed in tastes or 'rasas' for good health and these principles continue to be applied to new-found ingredients from around the world. (Mr. Chandrani's talk will be posted in a future issue of 'The Vedanta Kyokai'.)

Ms. Kuniko Hirano, director of Padma Yoga Ashram, <a href="http://www.padma-yoga.jp">http://www.padma-yoga.jp</a>, then gave a talk on 'The Development of the Practice of Yoga in Japan'. She discussed her introduction to yoga through a condition her mother had contracted, prompting them to join a nearby yoga school. Her interest in yoga grew as her mother improved. She would later extensively study the theory and

practice of yoga in India. Ms. Hirano then discussed the rapid recent spread of yoga in Japan and notes that Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare now provides information concerning fitness issues and notes benefits of yoga on their website. She also discussed the history of yoga in Japan from the Meiji to Taisho eras, when the practice was known as 'yuga', up through today. Her conclusion encompassed need to include the study and practice the other yoga traditions expounded by Vivekananda for the holistic balance Hatha Yoga can provide modern man. (Ms Hirano's talk will be posted in a future issue of 'The Vedanta Kyokai'.)

Next, Ms. Subha Kokubo Chakraborty, director of Indian Classical Dance Troupe, gave an energetic talk on Indian Performing Arts in Japan. She began by noting that Classical Performing Arts in India are linked to broad divisions found in Hindustani and Carnatic music traditions, and that likewise in ancient Shinto Shrines dances were offerings to various deities and themes of nature and society. She went on to discuss four classic schools of Indian dance and her immense pleasure in offering of a 'contemporary' or 'creative' dance at the famous Todaiji Temple in Nara. She noted that all Indian Class-

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#### Swami Vivekananda (from page 3)

ical Dance traditions are more than mere offerings, but are narratives to God. Ms. Chakraborty said she is pleased there are many Classical Indian dance enthusiasts in Japan and hopes that this serious interest will lead to an 'important' and 'multi-layered' form of cultural expression in the future. Then stepping down from the speaker's podium, Ms. Chakraborty stood mid-stage and demonstrated several human emotions, such as love, grief, jealousy, reverence, etc., in dance poses and expressions to the delight of the assembly. (Ms. Chakraborty's talk will be posted in a future issue of 'The Vedanta Kyokai'.)

The planned Q&A session before the closing prayer was cut short when Ms. Kaoru Katori was prompted to give a brief overview on the preparation of Indian food.

There was a 30 minute recess with refreshments including a delicious samosa, a sweet-

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### Swami Vivekananda (from page 4)

desert and hot chai provided by Spice Magic Calcutta, with thanks to proprietors Mr. and Mrs. Chandrani. <www.spicemagiccalcutta.com>

At 4:30 the audience was summoned back to their seats in the auditorium for the Cultural Programme. Japanese devotees and members of Yoga School Kailas of Yokohama <a href="http://www.yoga-kailas.com">http://www.yoga-kailas.com</a> joined forces to sing Japanese devotional songs. This was followed by a talented Indian ensemble from Tokyo calling themselves 'The Weekenders' performing a variety of well received Hindi devotional songs.

As every year, each attendee was given a large envelope containing the 152nd Birth Anniversary Programme Guide, the Society's Bookstore Catalogue, a brochure on the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai and its activities, and a questionnaire to provide impressions of this

event and possible suggestions for the next event.

The programme ended successfully with a 'Vote of Thanks' by Mr. Kenichi Mitamura, Secretary, Vedanta Society of Japan. Programme MCs Professor Kathy Matsui (English) and Ms. Satsuki Yokota (Japanese) presented the whole programme efficiently and gracefully. •



# Swami Vivekananda's 152nd Birth Anniversary Celebration Opening Address

Sri Amit Kumar, Deputy Chief of Mission, Indian Embassy, Tokyo

Swami Medhasananda, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. Konnichiwa!

At the outset I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Vedanta Society of Japan for organising this event at the Embassy on the 152<sup>nd</sup> Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

Friends, Swami Vivekananda was one of the great visionaries of India. His messages and teachings continue to inspire us even today. They were relevant for the times he lived, and they continue to be relevant today and for the times to come. Such is the universal appeal of his teachings.

The decade of 1860-70 was a momentous decade for India, with the births of Rabindranath Tagore in 1861, Swami Vivekananda in 1863 and Mahatma Gandhi in 1869 and all these leaders went on to shape and influ-

ence the destiny of India in innumerable ways.

Swami Vivekananda did not live long, but had a remarkable influence on Indian society. At that time, his philosophy transformed society and helped the nation regain its confidence. At a time when the self-esteem of our people was low and many Indians looked at the West for idols and role models, Swami Vivekananda enthused self-confidence and pride in Indian society. Swami Vivekananda spoke for the masses, formulated a definite philosophy of service and organised large scale social service.

Swami Vivekananda was actively conscious of the caste discrimination prevalent in India. He held the neglect of the masses and inferior position of women in society as the two causes of India's downfall. He devoted

#### **Opening Address** (from page 5)

his energies to these causes. He also criticised Indians for their blind adherence to old superstitions, trying to ape the West and for their caste prejudices.

Swami Vivekananda blended deep spirituality with an intense spirit of critical inquiry. He often spoke of the need for education by which character is formed, strength of the mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.

Swami Vivekananda's speeches at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 created a sensation. With his simple words, though delivered with fierce intensity and message of Universality, he became the most visible and recognised fig-

ure at the Parliament of Religions. He argued that religion is about selfrealisation; not talk, not doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful thev may be. It is about being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging. For him, religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.

Deputy Chief Kumar

Swami Vivekananda had also travelled briefly to Japan on his way to the Parliament of World Religions at Chicago. He visited a number of Japanese cities, Nagasaki, Kobe, Yokohama, Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo. Swamiji was impressed by positive qualities of the Japanese character, such as patriotism, hard work, power of assimilation, cleanliness and aesthetic sense, to name but a few. But he also left a deep impression on the Japanese friends who met and interacted with him. Another visit to Japan never materialised though two learned Japanese Buddhists had visited India in 1901 to invite him to attend the forthcoming Congress of Religions there.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, during his address to the joint session of In-

dian Parliament in 2007, quoted Swami Vivekananda, who guided Tenshin Okakura, a Renaissance man of early modern Japan. Prime Minister Abe said, 'Okakura was guided by Vivekananda and also enjoyed a friendship with Sister Nivedita, Vivekananda's loyal disciple and a distinguished social reformer. The spirit of tolerance is one of the many contributions that India can make to world history."

Abe also said "Help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissension," quoting from Swami Vivekananda's 1893 speech at Chicago, and said that they now hold relevance that is even more compelling than before.

Many scholars have described Swami Vivekananda's life as a blazing comet

> across the sky of our lives, full of brilliance and hope for all humanity. He promised to remain 'a voice without a form inspiring men everywhere' and for all times to come.

In conclusion, I would like to again thank the Vedanta Society of Japan for their tireless

efforts to spread the message of Swami Vivekananda.

Thank you!

(This transcript was sourced from Mr. Kumar's prepared remarks.)

#### Thought of the Month

Ego says, "Once everything falls into place, I'll feel peace." Spirit says, "Find your peace, and then everything will fall into place."

- Marianne Williamson

## Swami Vivekananda 152nd Birth Anniversary Celebration 'Indian Culture in Japan'

By Guest Speaker Fr. Cyril Veliath S. J.

Swami Vivekananda on a certain occasion is said to have made the following statement, "The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him - that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free." This statement clearly expresses the profound mystical experience of the Saint, namely his ability to see and adore the Supreme God in every human being. Yet, when we reflect further on this statement, we see that the Swami here is not merely describing his mystical insight, because these words imply something much more profound and farreaching than that.

This statement constitutes one of the most vital truths of Hinduism, and one of the key elements of Indian philosophy. It is a truth concerning the relationship that exists between God, who is the Supreme Spirit (or Brahman), and the Eternal human Soul (or Atman). It is a truth that was revealed to us by mystics of the ancient Upanishadic Civilization, seers of the caliber of the eminent Yajnavalkya and Uddalaka Aruni. This same truth was transmitted to the far corners of India and Asia, by means of celebrated Indian epics such as the Ramavana and Mahabharata, and sacred scriptures like the Puranas. In the middle ages and later periods of history, world-renowned philosophers and thinkers, intellectual and spiritual giants of the stature of Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha, Nimbarka, Chaitanya and others, made efforts to spread this truth among the common people, and finally in the 19th and 20th centuries, this truth was diffused worldwide, through the efforts of gifted poets, philosophers, educationists, saints, statesmen and lawyers of the ability of Tagore, Aurobindo, Gandhi, and Radhakrishnan, not to mention Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda. Here, the role played by Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda is utterly unique in the sense, that they were the only Saints in the long history of the South Asian subcontinent, who included two foreign religions, that is Christianity and Islam, as also reflecting this Supreme Truth.

On studying the lengthy course of Indian history, we notice that at various periods during these many centuries, this truth spread out from the shores of India and travelled to many nations in East and Southeast Asia. Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia are all nations that received this truth, but among them, the nation that concerns us the most, is undoubtedly Japan.

When did Indian Philosophy touch the shores of Japan? Although authentic details are impossible to obtain, we may safely assert that Indian thought entered Japan along with Buddhism. Buddhism, after surviving for approximately thousand years in India, journeyed by way of Nepal, Tibet, China and Korea into Japan, where it was welcomed by some and rejected by others. Some saw the worship of Buddhist deities as being an insult to the local gods and as a cause of diseases and catastrophes, but such feelings soon vanished, and the religion in course of time gained esteem among the Japanese people. Buddhism possessed an ability to assimilate the teachings of other religions. Prince Shōtoku of Japan, who was the regent in 593 AD, spoke of certain scriptures that emphasized the values of citizens and rulers. and he wrote a constitution of seventeen articles, where Buddhist teachings were integrated with Confucian concepts that were imported from China. On reading this "Seventeen-Article Constitution" of Prince Shōtoku, we are struck by the fact that it reveals concepts of harmony, goodwill, and good governance, the same concepts that are extolled in great Indian epics, like the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

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#### **Indian Culture in Japan** (from page 7)

This tendency of Buddhism to absorb and assimilate was revealed also during the religion's sojourn in India. During its thousandyear history in South Asia, Buddhism and Hinduism experienced a massive influencing and borrowing from each other. The result was that a wide variety of Hindu deities, concepts, and philosophies entered Buddhism, and moving by way of Nepal, China and Korea they eventually reached Japan. The teachings of the Upanishads on the allpervading Spirit (Brahman), and Eternal Soul (Atman) that I mentioned earlier, and their accompanying concepts of Maya (illusion) and Vidya (true knowledge), have a similarity to the teachings of certain Buddhist schools of Japan. Speaking of the San-

ron or "Three Treatise School" of Japanese Buddhism that is based on the philosophy of the Indian thinker Nagariuna, the late Professor Takakusu Junjiro of Tokyo Imperial University said, that through his teaching, Nagarjuna extended further in Japan the

famous "Neti Neti" or way of negation, of the eminent philosopher Yajnavalkya. He goes on to say that it would be hard to grasp the Truth preached by the Buddha without having reference to Brahmanism (by Brahmanism he meant the teaching of the Upanishads on the Atman and Brahman).

On observing the history of Japanese Buddhism, we notice that several popular Hindu deities were deeply venerated in Japan. Brahma, the Creator and first God of the Divine Triad (the other two being Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer), was known and revered in Japan as Bonten. The Vedic God Indra, who is the most celebrated deity of the Rig Veda, was adored as Taishakuten, while Kubera or Vaisravana the Lord of the Yakshas or spirits, was honored as Bishamonten. The Japanese people also worshiped certain eminent goddesses of India. The Goddess Lakshmi or Shree, the consort of Vishnu, who symbolizes good fortune and beauty, was venerated in Japan as Kisshoten or Kichijoten. The Goddess Saraswati too had a massive following of devotees in Japan, as a deity who grants eloquence in speech, wisdom, longevity, victory in battle, and safety from natural disasters. She was known as Benzaiten, and while in sculpture and painting the Indian Goddess Saraswati is shown holding a veena or sitar, Benzaiten is usually shown holding a Japanese lute named biwa.

An aspect of Japan that is universally admired is the concept of bushido, or the 'Way of the Samurai.' Nitobe Inazo in his famous

> book has described a Samurai as pos-

an absolute moral standard, a standard that transcends logic, and that it is their duty to transmit to their children these moral standards through the model of their own behavior.

sessing eight principal virtues, namely: rectitude or justice, courage, benevolence or mercy, politeness, honesty and sincerity, honor, loyalty, and character and self-control. Bushido teaches that people should behave according to

While bushido is something uniquely Japanese, yet we notice here a striking similarity to certain aspects of Indian philosophy. In the ancient Vedic Civilization, which was the first civilization created by the invading Arvans after the Indus Valley Civilization, the life of the common man was governed by what we call the concept of Rta. The Sanskrit word Rta meant that there was a fixed order in the nature that surrounded us, and everything in nature moved according to fixed

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#### Indian Culture in Japan (from page 8)

laws. For example, the sun always rose in the east and set in the west, the waters of rivers always flow in the same direction, and the rains always fell at fixed times during the year. In other words, the nature that surrounded us was systematic and orderly, and not something disordered and confused. Since we human beings were a part of nature, we too were expected to live in harmony with it. That is to say, we too as far as possible had to adjust our lives, so as to live in accordance with nature's laws. For the ancient Indians, nature was a living being and not something lifeless or unconscious, and so like all living beings it was entitled to receive love and respect. Rta was viewed as a physical law. That is to say, it was a law that governed the body, and not the mind or soul. In due course however this understanding of Rta drastically changed and a new concept was born, a concept we call Dharma.

Dharma was concerned not just with the human body but with the human mind and soul as well, and later this word became synonymous with religion or God. In a battlefield, a follower of Dharma would never fight an enemy who was weak or powerless, he would always assist the poor and the oppressed, and he would never utter a falsehood. In other words, a lover of Dharma would possess the qualities of a Samurai. In the Bhagavad-gita, it was because of Dharma that Prince Arjuna initially refused to fight the battle. He refused because he knew that in doing so he would be forced to kill vast numbers of innocent people, people he loved and respected. In other words, Arjuna and other heroes of the Indian epics were like the Samurai of Japan. They were inspired by the same eight qualities as those Japanese warriors, qualities that have been described in detail by Nitobe Inazo in his celebrated book.

These links between India and Japan extend even into the field of the performing arts, for much has been written concerning the similarity of Japanese Kabuki to Indian Kathakali. The colorful costumes and masks, the graceful and dignified gestures, and the refined movements of actors and dancers, constitute the mutual heritage of these two great classical art forms, of India and Japan. It is intriguing to note that both these art forms arose in the 17th century, both concerned mythological and folk narratives, and Kathakali like Kabuki, also traditionally had males playing female roles.

Okakura Tenshin, the eminent Japanese scholar whose role in the promotion of Japanese Arts, and whose links with Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore are well known, wrote on one occasion the following words:

"In all circumstances serenity of mind should be maintained, and conversation should be conducted as never to mar the harmony of the surroundings. The cut and color of the dress, the poise of the body, and the manner of walking, could all be made expressions of artistic personality. These were matters not to be lightly ignored, for until one has made himself beautiful, he has no right to approach beauty."

Swami Vivekananda in the following statement uses words, which, though not the same as those of Okakura Tenshin, nevertheless bear a close resemblance to them, since they concern our attitude to the people and nature around us:

It is our own mental attitude, which makes the world what it is for us. Our thoughts make things beautiful, our thoughts make things ugly. The whole world is in our own minds. Learn to see things in the proper light.

What these two thinkers primarily say is that it is our attitude that counts the most. What is our attitude towards the people and nature around us? Do we adopt an attitude of welcome and acceptance? Do we have a desire to learn from the other? Are we able to perceive the grace and beauty that are present within the people and nature that surround

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#### **Indian Culture in Japan** (from page 9)

us? These are issues we need to ponder over.

Speaking of literature, Jagannatha Pandita, the Indian poet and literary critic of the 17th century who served in the court of the Emperor Shah Jahan, describes beauty by the Sanskrit word Ramaniya. According to him, Ramaniya would be something that evokes a feeling of happiness by its very presence. The Indian scholar Rustam J. Mehta makes a distinction between the words Saundarya or

loveliness, and Lavanya or grace, and he goes on to explain that Lavanya would be inner beauty, or beauty of the soul. It is this inner beauty that the ancient mystics of India and Japan urge us to seek, a beauty that is revealed in a multitude of ways. It is revealed in the Tea Ceremony, in beautiful Saris and Kimonos, in dances and dramas like the Kathakali, Kabuki, and Noh, in martial arts like Judo, Karate, and Kalaripayattu, and most of all, in the welcoming smiles and kindhearted behavior of the people we see around us. •

## A Story to Remember

#### **Bumblebee and Earthworm**

There was a very close friendship between a bumblebee and an earthworm. Once Bee said to Worm, "Why do you live in muck and faeces? Come to my garden. There are roses and agaves and jasmines. You'll be thrilled by their fragrances."

Worm gave it serious thought and said, "OK, I'll go and visit this garden." But thought, "What if there's nothing for me to eat there? I may starve to death." As a precaution he secretly rolled up two small balls of familiar filth and stuffed them into his nostrils.

Bee, unaware of this, asked him to climb onto his back and off they flew. In the garden the air was sweet and fragrant. Bee placed Worm on top of a rose and said, "This flower is called a rose, what do you think of its fragrance?"

Giving the air a sniff, Worn retorted, "It's nothing special. It is the same odour I've grown accustomed to." Worm seemed not to be impressed at all.

Bee was confused, "Why does my friend fail to enjoy the fragrance?" he asked himself. Then he took a closer look at Worm and noticed the balls of filth stuffed up his nostrils. Bee devised a plan for removing them, and taking Worm to a pool of water, he let his friend slip and fall into the water. Bee then landed upon Worm's back pushing his head underwater. Water rushed into Worm's nose and throat and made the shocked earthworm burst out with violent gaging and sneezing. This procedure forced out the mess that was blocking Worm's nose.

Bee quickly lifted Worm from the water and returned his gasping friend to the rose, "Ah ... Ah," cried Worm. "What a scent! It's fabulous ... I never realised ... The scent of roses is truly wonderful." Worm praised all the flowers no end.

Bee scolded his friend, "The fragrance was always here, but it was you who chose not to enjoy it. You stuffed your nose with muck and excreta." Bee then took Worm to savour the scents of the other flowers in the garden.

Guru and Disciple, Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj

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