



June 2015 - Volume 13 Number 06

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

JULY Calendar



Shukracharya & Kacha

Birthdays

Guru Purnima
Friday, 31 July

Kyokai Events

※ NOTE: All discourses and discussions are in the Japanese language.

* June Zushi Retreat *

Note: Second Sunday

Sunday July 12th - 11AM
"Challenges of Spiritual Life" - Part 2

All are welcome!

* 2015 Summer * Outdoor Retreat

At the ISE-JINGU
17 to 20 July (Mon)
(see page 9 for info)

* Upanishads Study * Bhagavad Gita Study

July 27th (Sat)
Indian Embassy Tokyo
日本語 only 13:30 - 17:30
(bring photo ID)



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"The Guru is the conveyance through which the spiritual influence is brought to you. Anyone can teach, but the spirit is transmitted only by the Guru to the Shishya, the disciple, and that will fructify."

- Swami Vivekananda

"Yea, when through the guru's grace, the Lord is enshrined in the mind, one gathers the fruit."

- Guru Nanak

Public Celebration May 17, 2015
Auditorium, Indian Embassy, Tokyo
Swami Vivekananda: 152nd Birth Anniversary
Theme: "Indian Culture in Japan"

The Development of the Practice of Yoga in Japan

By Kuniko Hirano

Director, Padma Yoga Ashram

Honorable Deputy Chief of the Indian Mission Mr. Amit Kumar and Mrs. Kumar, Swami Medhasananda Maharaj, Father Veliath, Mr. Chandrani, Ms. Shubha Chakraborty, and Friends, before I begin let me express my deepest gratitude for having received an opportunity to address this gathering on the occasion of the 152nd Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. It is indeed a great honor for me.

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Introduction

I am currently involved in directing and guiding the practice of Yoga at the Padma Yoga Ashram, and as a Visiting Fellow of the Institute of Asian Cultures of Sophia University I carry out research on Swami Vivekananda. Today, from the standpoint of my involvement in Yoga, I have chosen as the subject of my speech the Development of the Practice of Yoga in Japan.

My initial encounter with Yoga occurred more than 30 years ago. At that time, my mother happened to undergo a climacteric change that caused her to develop certain health disorders. On that occasion I and my mother came to know about Yoga, and accordingly joined a school of Yoga that lay in the nearby vicinity. As my mother pursued the practice of Yoga the stiffness of her body steadily disappeared and her body became much more flexible, and in due course her vitality returned and she was headed towards recovery. On observing this, my own interest in Yoga also deepened.

Over twenty years have elapsed since then, but on graduating from university I began studying the theory and practice of Yoga at a college affiliated to Kaivalyadhama Health and Yoga Research Center in India, in the city of Lonavla in the western Indian State of Maharashtra. Here I studied among other things traditional theories on Yoga as revealed in the Yoga Sutras dating back to the 2nd to 4th centuries of the Christian era, skills centered on literature associated with Hatha Yoga, which developed from the 13th century onwards and which focuses on bodily techniques, and Yoga as viewed from a variety of standpoints, such as those of Indian Philosophy, Logic, Physiology, and scores of other disciplines. At the Kaivalyadhama Health and Yoga Research Center, practical skills had to be performed an hour daily in the mornings and evenings,

and these included poses called ‘asanas’ and breathing techniques called ‘pranayama.’ On the advice of my college teachers I travelled with my student companions to see the Kumbha Mela festival, where practitioners of Yoga gather, and I must admit it was a happy and unforgettable experience for me. Since this experience of learning Yoga was something totally fresh, on returning to Japan I translated from English to Japanese and published a book by the founder of the Institute, namely Swami Kuvalayananda, entitled ‘Yogic Therapy: Its Basic Principles and Methods.’ Since then, I have been teaching Yoga at several institutes, I have had occasion to deliver lectures on Yoga at several universities, and I have conducted several consultations with students on Yoga in a variety of places.

The Spread of Yoga

The person chiefly responsible for the collection, translation, and publication of various documents linked to Yoga in Japan, both traditional documents such as the Yoga Sutras, literature dealing with Hata Yoga, and others, and who tackled the topic in a scholarly manner, was Dr. Tsuruji Sahoda (1899–1986)). Dr. Sahoda, who was Professor Emeritus at Osaka University and an authority on Indian Philosophy, was introduced to Yoga at the age of 62 by an Indian national, on account of which he was able to reinvigorate his unhealthy body. A point Dr. Sahoda advocated was that people should embark on the practice of Yoga with their feet planted firmly on traditional Indian Thought. My mother, who regularly commuted to the Yoga classes of the Society of Yoga Zen Ashramites founded by Dr. Sahoda, noticed there on a certain occasion a book entitled MY MASTER, a publication of the Vedantic Society of Japan. On seeing the book she promptly purchased it, and later paid a visit to the headquarters of the Vedantic Society located at Zusshi. It was in this way that

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Yoga in Japan (from page 2)

our links with the Vedantic Society of Japan were born, and these links persist until today. For my mother, Dr. Sahoda was virtually a benefactor.

As Dr. Sahoda foresaw 35 years ago, Yoga today in Japan has witnessed a rapid diffusion. A wide diversity of classes, culture centers, sports centers, and other institutions are involved in Yoga practice, to the extent that there is scarcely an individual in Japan either young or old who has not come across the word.

In the website of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare that provides information concerning fitness issues, mention is made of Yoga on their website.

According to this website Yoga had its origins in ancient India, it is a form of ascetical discipline having a history dating back to around 3000 years, and in modern times it is practiced as a health routine for both body and mind.

Hence, while in India Yoga has a lengthy history dating back to the Indus Valley Civilization, in present-day Japan it is employed by most people for purposes of maintaining and promoting health, and the Yoga generally followed in Japan is mainly centered on practicing the ASANAS. Physicians related to the field of Psychosomatic Medicine and similar areas were already aware of Yoga contributing to the soundness of bodily and mental health, and recently physicians have begun using Yoga as therapy, by endeavoring to try it on patients. With regard also to Preventive Health Care for people living in an aging society, I feel sure the practice of Yoga is destined to increase ever more.

The Development of Yoga in Japan

Thus, it is believed that the philosophies and ascetical practices of Yoga entered Japan roughly around the 6th century through the medium of Buddhism, and that these philosophies and ascetical practices then exerted a variety of influences upon Buddhist monks. During the time of Kukai (or Kobo Daishi, 774-835), who was the founder of the Shingon Esoteric sect of Buddhism, Yoga was referred to in Japanese as 'Yuga,' and according to Dr. Sahoda, the religious content of Hatha Yoga has deep links to Shingon Esoteric Buddhism of Japan. The Japanese translation of the Sanskrit word 'Dhyana,' which happens to be an ascetical concept of the Yoga Sutras, is 'Zen' or 'Zenjo.' This concept was merged with Buddhism as a means of ascetical training. The relationship between Yoga and

Buddhism comprises a vast topic, and so due to the limited time at my disposal I shall hereafter confine myself to speaking of the principal advances made in modern Yoga.

Taisho to Meiji Eras

In days when Yoga in Japan was referred to as Yuga, the ascetical practices involved were mostly centered on meditation, and it is believed that using the body for ascetical practices began in the Taisho era. Here the pioneering figures were Tenpu Nakamura (1876-1978) and Kanzo Miura (1883-1960), and on the advent of the Showa era, the individuals who played a role in diffusing Yoga were Masahiro Oki (1921-1985) and Dr. Tsuruji Sahoda, whom I earlier mentioned.

1970~1990

Around the dawn of 1970 various groups appeared, and here among the principal individuals involved were Kou Hanari (1929-), Hodo Tahara, and Kazuo Banba

(con't page 4)



Yoga in Japan (from page 3)

(1937-2003). Banba had received training from Dr. Tsuruji Sahoda, and had also made an appearance in NHK television programs, and this resulted in a Yoga boom among the Japanese populace, which witnessed a wide dispersion. In 1974, rooms for Yoga practice were opened at culture centers, and hence, in the latter half of the 70s vast numbers of people flocked to culture centers in search of health and beauty. Today the activities of Noboru Watamoto (1935-2004), Junko Tomonaga (1944-), and Keishin Kimura (1947-) contribute to the diffusion of Yoga, and in 1980 a global gathering on Yoga was organized, for which B. K. S. Iyengar, the Yoga expert from India also made an appearance.

In the latter half of the 1980s Yoga advanced into the world of fitness as well, but in 1995, in the wake of the Tokyo Subway Sarin Attack, the word Yoga came under suspicion due to media influence. Institutions teaching Yoga were closed, and rooms for Yoga practice disappeared.

2000 to Today

In such a situation, Yoga, which in 2003 had entered the USA as an issue related to fitness, received a new image mainly among the youth. This led to a rekindling of interest in it, and after 2004, Yoga Fests, consisting of gatherings of guides and teachers were organized, at levels that transcended differences among miscellaneous schools. In 2003, the Japan Yoga Therapy Society was formed, and we now look forward to the contribution of Yoga in the field of Integrated Medicine.

Thus, we believe that from the period of the 70s to the time of the rekindling of the Yoga boom today, Yoga in Japan, while having as its main purpose the attainment of stability of mind and body, is endowed also with a specific aspect, an aspect that has been cultivated via its encountering the culture of Japan. On the other hand

also, along with the general increase in interest in India that has appeared in recent times, people having an interest in Yoga has also increased, due to the fact that they came into contact with it either via their interest in Indian Yoga schools or in Hindu groups.

The growth of Yoga in Japan has been marked by diversity. Foreign students, not merely from Japan but from China, Korea, Thailand and other nations as well, flock to India to avail themselves of the nation's Yogic expertise, and there are also individuals who direct and guide people with regard to Yoga on a global level. Professor Aikata Hiroshi, who is Japanese, is my senior. However he is based in Thailand and he directs the Thai people in Yoga, and while travelling back and forth between India, Thailand, and Japan, he provides people with a wide variety of opinions and views.

Learning the Yoga of Vivekananda

In a book of Swami Vivekananda entitled Raja Yoga, he makes the following statement:

"Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one or more or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion." [CWSV, Vol.1: 257]

Vivekananda offers us 'Work' or Karma Yoga, 'Worship' or Bhakti Yoga, 'Psychic Control' or Raja Yoga, and 'Philosophy' or Jnana Yoga, and these are correspondingly presented in his lectures under the titles, Raja Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga, respectively.

During my early encounter with the thought of Vivekananda, I was intrigued with the fact as to how the Yoga of Viveka-

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Yoga in Japan (from page 4)

nanda differed from the Yoga generally practiced by people in Japan, where the focus was on bodily techniques. However, by studying ancient texts such as the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads and others, I was able to deepen my grasp of India's traditional Yoga techniques. Yoga was initially a spiritual discipline that targeted the realization of enlightenment and firmness of heart. By encountering the world of Yoga we witness in daily life, I may say that I was able to greatly widen my comprehension of it. I was able to perceive also the analogy between the Yoga traditions promoted by Vivekananda and the asceticism and thought preached by Japanese Buddhism, and the fact that my interest deepened, not just with reference to Hinduism, but with Buddhism as well, came as a great surprise to me.

Conclusion

Dr. Sahoda emphasizes the following point. "Yoga is a road to happiness, for which vast numbers of refined and conscientious saints and ascetics of India have dedicated their lives in opening up, and at times they have done so even at the risk of their lives. In following the path of Yoga, whatever is the case, we have to adhere by its traditional standards. We live in this modern society, in the midst of the confusion existing between this Philosophy and our everyday lives. Regardless of whether we study and practice Yoga for just a few years or a even few decades, we

cannot create a Yoga discipline that is divorced from the Indian tradition" [Sahoda 1986: 4]. *For those of us who practice Yoga, these words may well serve as an admonition.*

The Yoga taught by Vivekananda conforms to the Indian tradition, and I believe it enables us to deepen our grasp of traditional Yoga. Studying the teachings of the ancient forerunners of the Indian people, will serve to vivify our ability to locate different types of Yoga in the modern world.

While at college in India, I recall my professor often saying that Yoga was both an Art and a Science. It creates no divisions between Spirit and Flesh. Hence, to realize the techniques of the type of Yoga that sustains a balance between these dual aspects of people, and simultaneously exerts good influences upon them is, I believe, vital for a proper grasp and practice of Yoga. I desire that places where such knowledge is provided increase in number, and I believe that promoting scientific research concerning Yoga, is also a vital necessity.

In recent times Yoga has transcended religions and dispersed over the entire world. I wish to conclude my address with the hope that hereafter in Japan too, many more people may receive the benefits of Yoga.

Thank you all for your attention. •

April Zushi Retreat 2015

"Challenges of Spiritual Life"

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj)

Part One of a Continuing Discourse

We may attend churches or temples of various religious traditions for long periods and participate in various programmes offered therein, and yet, feel we do not make much spiritual progress. Why so? What are the symptoms of spiritual progress? These are dispassion, more

self-control and more peace. But why has this blessed state not occurred? Why has the quality of our spiritual life not improved much? Why has our former nature not changed much, even after visits to places of worship over a long period?

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Challenges of Spiritual Life (from page 5)

Why is it that we continue to have many negative things in our life ?

We need some serious introspection to get the answers to these vital questions. We want to fill the barrel with water and pour more and more water into it, but the water level remains the same. So there must be some holes in the barrel. Unless we, ourselves, plug them, our spiritual level cannot rise. Our discussion today is on the challenges of spiritual life and how to transform our secular into a spiritual nature and be more detached, pure, peaceful and joyful. If we do not know where our lacunae lie, where the holes are, like the water level, our spiritual level cannot rise.

So first be introspective and ask yourself these vital questions regarding your spiritual life: What is spiritual life? How can my visit to a religious society help to fulfil that goal?

Love of God or Tradition

At this point we must make clear the difference between so-called religious life and genuine spiritual life. We become religious when we go to temples; join in religious festivals; toss ¥100 or ¥200 into the saisenbako (donation box); offer prayers for our family members and ourselves; and then return home full of satisfaction. But what spiritual life? Spiritual life involves deeper questions related to our lives and their appropriate answers. What are these deep questions? They are, for example: What is my true nature? How can I control my mind? How can I get abiding peace and happiness? What was my state before birth? After death, do I really cease to exist? Does something of me remain or continue after death? Have I had past lives? Is there an afterlife?

Religious life is more ceremonial, ritualistic and centred on our own body-mind complex and that of others. Even though they have relations with God, God is looked upon as a grantor of their various desires and not those of others. Of course many who go to temple on special days mostly as tradition, also find God as their source of solace, refuge and inspiration when

they are in trouble. Once the danger has passed, however, God is forgotten and left all alone in the temple (laughter). For those without such faith, however, trouble finds them in total despair.

Spiritual life, on the other hand, requires deep thinking about life itself. Now the question arises as to why spiritual life is more important than religious life? The answer is because observing religious rites and traditions alone does not bring us eternal peace or eternal happiness, though it may bring momentary joys and peace. However, even if we must strive to live a religious life, it is far better than living a secular life, which is centred mostly on satisfying the senses and most often leads to suffering. Because while leading a religious life we may even get a glimpse of real peace and joy.

Set Reachable Goals

The ultimate goal of spiritual life is to attain enlightenment. But we should try to reach this goal by degrees, thinking of reaching the goal in one big leap is clearly impractical. So we should first set a reachable goal in our spiritual life and thus proceed to the ultimate goal, slowly but steadily. If we set our goals too high and, consequently, cannot attain them, our confidence is shattered and we may even totally give up spiritual practice. What is an example of such a reachable goal?

Suppose you usually get up at around 7 o'clock in the morning. But being inspired by reading a book or hearing a talk extolling early morning meditation – known as Brahmanuharta – you decide to meditate at 4AM from the very next day. There is a fair chance either you cannot get up at that time or if you force yourself to

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• Thought of the Month •

“Faith is an oasis in the heart
which will never be reached
by the caravan of thinking.”

Khalil Gibran

rise you will simply doze off. After a few days of such results you may totally give the idea of practicing never to resume it again. So for the first few weeks set your alarm to wake at 6AM for meditation. When you can do this steadily, set your next goal for 5AM. If you practice thus, you may finally reach your goal of rising at 4AM to do your spiritual practices. Similarly, if you want to practice continuously for two hours at the very outset, you may fail. So first set the goal for thirty minutes, then by degrees you will be able to meditate for longer periods of time. The same applies to the practice of austerities, purity, study of scriptures, etc. The golden rule is to set reachable goals and slowly raise the bar as applicable.

The True Nature of Spirit

Spiritual life is centred on the spirit, while religion is a belief system centred on God. So first we must understand what spirit is, what God is, and what their connections are. When we think of our personality, we imagine a combination of the body, the senses, mind, intelligence and the ego. Of all the aspects of our personality, the unknown is the soul, or Self or spirit. It is the substratum of our personality. The nature of the soul is consciousness. While the nature of the other aspects of our personality are just matter. If this is so, how then can the body move, the eyes see, the mind think, because, after all, they are all matter and matter cannot move on its own, cannot see, cannot think.

The answer is that the spirit lends its consciousness to the body, senses, mind, so that they can work. What is God? God is consciousness at the macro level, while consciousness at the micro level is Self. The names of God may be many, for example, God, Allah, Ishwara (Supreme Soul), but the basic nature of God is the same, and is consciousness at the macro level.

What is the purpose of spiritual life? To realise consciousness both at the micro level and at the macro level, meaning total identification of one's self with that consciousness. Now our self image is not that of consciousness, but that of body, mind, etc. Under the influence of Maya we have become hypnotised and think we are

the body-mind entity. From this basic illusion wrong ideas and habits follow. We become attached to the temporal and get conceited. Body-mind and everything related to them have become all in all to us. The challenge of spiritual life is to transform our attitude to ourselves. That is; we are not body-mind which are but matter, we are Atman, the Spirit which is pure consciousness; which is Satchitananda, Existence, Knowledge, Bliss absolute. This is the goal of all the Yogas—Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga.

If we take up our spiritual life seriously and start practicing, only then we realise how difficult it is. Because in every moment of our striving we experience that our Atman consciousness is obstructed by our body consciousness, and we become prey to greed, attachment and aversion. However, as a spiritual seeker we should be ready to accept the challenge, because if we give up we end in suffering, but if we succeed the end is bliss.

Real Fun or Mere Reflections

When we undertake spiritual practices as explained before, we need to reshape our former ideas and attitudes in a number of ways. For example: What is real joy and what is its source. Let us take a common example: The moon is reflected on a lake and fishes entertain themselves by playing in its bright reflection. In the daytime there is no moon reflection for the fish to play in. Why? The real moon is up in the sky, not shimmering upon the surface of the water, and it does not come out in the morning. The fish do not have this understanding and they feel sad and distressed.

Where is our real fun to be found? It is not outside. The fun we find outside is but a reflection of fun. All of us, from morning to night, from birth to death, enjoy mere reflections of true joy; reflected joy. Not real joy, but imitations. Not real gold, but imitation gold. The real golden ornaments are locked up in an iron safe in a bank, while we are all happy with receiving imitation golden ornaments. Some who look on are also fooled and believe them to be genuine, but they are just imitations. The fun we often

(con't page 8)

Challenges of Spiritual Life (from page 7)

enjoy is also imitation joy, not real joy. Real joy is inside. The source of real knowledge is also inside. As the Bhagavad Gita tells us, the greatest joy ensues from the Atman which is inside of us. So we have to tap the source of joy which is within to experience real joy.

The Uncooperative Mind

Next is an uncooperative mind. It has been said that though one may have received the grace of God; one may have received the grace his spiritual guru; one may have received the grace of many holy ones; the aspirant comes to grief without the grace of the one. What is that 'one'? That one is our own mind. The grace of the mind, that is, the co-operation of our mind, is of the utmost necessity in our struggle for a higher spiritual life. But we feel that, though strange indeed, instead of being a helpmate, it is our own mind that creates all sorts of obstacles in our spiritual journey.

Should we then give up on trying to accomplish our journey, or try to find a solution for it? The key to a solution is to first probe our mind as to why it behaves like a foe instead of being a friend.

Firstly, our mind is habituated to some ways of life; some ways of thinking, acting and behaving. The mind revolts if we want to bring about change in that, especially if it involves a little hardship. It always prefers an easy and comfortable way because of our tamasic state of mind, or in other words, it is mental laziness! Outwardly one may be very active, yet suffer from mental laziness. Mental energy is more important than physical energy; mental smartness is more important than physical smartness. By showing enthusiasm and a readiness to transform oneself, both physically and mentally, for a higher goal without paying heed to the complaining mind, one can overcome the problem of the mind's reluctance and laziness.

Next is the mind's propensity to go outside; to get attached to material things which are gross. But in spiritual life one has to turn one's focus to the Atman which is inside and subtler than the subtlest. Initially, this is really a difficult exercise and the mind declines to undertake it; even if we force it to do so, it fails. But if we practice with perseverance and understanding, the mind slowly gives in, as our mind has a tremendous capacity that remains unexplored.

The third reason is the mind wants freedom. We have given our mind a free hand over such a long period; whatever it wanted, good or bad, we gave our consent to it. The mind, though our slave, has become our master, creating lots of problems for us. Nevertheless, the essential prerequisite of a spiritual life is the practice of purity and focusing on the spirit, which is impossible without control of the mind.

Hence, such importance has been given to the control of the mind in spiritual practice. Since the mind has enjoyed freedom so far, it is difficult to rein it in. The mind abhors any discipline like meditation which curtails its freedom. Nevertheless, though the initial stage of meditation often turns into a fight against a turbulent mind, if we persist, the mind finally gives in and becomes a great help in our spiritual pursuits.

So the three reasons the mind does not cooperate are; 1) that it has become habituated to somethings and does not like change; 2) mind always seeks outside stimulation; and 3) the mind wants freedom and does not want to be controlled. We must face these challenges effectively as explained above otherwise we cannot make spiritual progress.

(This concludes Part One of yet to be completed topic. Part Two will be published in the July Issue of The Vedanta Kyokai.)

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• A Story to Remember •

Ryonen's Clear Realisation

The Buddhist nun known as Ryonen was born in 1797. She was a granddaughter of the famous Japanese warrior Shingen. Her poetical genius and alluring beauty were such that at seventeen she was serving the empress as one of the ladies of the court. Even at such a youthful age fame awaited her.

The beloved empress died suddenly and Ryonen's hopeful dreams vanished. She became acutely aware of the impermanency of life in this world. It was then that she desired to study Zen.

Her relatives disagreed, however, and practically forced her into marriage. With a promise that she might become a nun after she had borne three children, Ryonen assented. Before she was twenty-five she had accomplished this condition. Then her husband and relatives could no longer dissuade her from her desire. She shaved her head, took the name of Ryonen, which means to realize clearly, and started on her pilgrimage.

She came to the city of Edo and asked Tetsugya to accept her as a disciple. At one glance the master rejected her because she was too beautiful.

Ryonen went to another master, Hakuo. Hakuo refused her for the same reason, saying that her beauty would only make trouble.

Ryonen obtained a hot iron and placed it against her face. In a few moments her beauty had vanished forever.

Hakuo then accepted her as a disciple.

Commemorating this occasion, Ryonen wrote a poem on the back of a little mirror:

In the service of my Empress I burned incense to perfume my exquisite clothes,
Now as a homeless mendicant I burn my face to enter a Zen temple.

When Ryonen was about to pass from this world, she wrote another poem:

Sixty-six times have these eyes beheld the changing scene of autumn. I have said enough about moonlight, ask no more. Only listen to the voice of pines and cedars when no wind stirs.

101 Zen Stories

Issued by: **The Vedanta Society of Japan** (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)
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