



September 2015 - Volume 13 Number 09

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

October Calendar

Birthdays

**Swami
Abhedanandaji**
Tues, Oct 6
**Swami
Akhandanandaji**
Mon, Oct 12

Kyokai Events

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

• Bhagavad Gita • Study

Oct 3 (Sat) 14:00 - 16:00
Indian Embassy Tokyo
日本語 only
(bring photo ID)

• **Swami Visits India** •
Oct 4th through Nov 7th.

• NO OCTOBER • Zushi Retreat

• **Yoga Asana** •
Zushi Centre
(Sun) 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th
At the Ashrama
14:00-15:30pm
Please Contact: Kyokai
(046-873-0428)

• **Nara Narayan** •
Service to
Homeless Narayan
Please Contact
Ms. Yoko Sato
090-6544-9304



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Nothing can be destroyed — those thoughts that caused evil in the past are also seeking embodiment, to be filtered through repeated expression and, at last, transfigured into perfect good."

- Swami Vivekananda

"Life is one eternal struggle between the forces of Good and Evil. The true Mazdayasni (Zoroastrian devotee) is he who harnesses evil to subserve the furtherance of that which is good."

- Zarathushtra

Public Celebration May 17, 2015
Auditorium, Indian Embassy, Tokyo

Swami Vivekananda: 152nd Birth Anniversary

Theme: "Indian Culture in Japan"

INDIAN PERFORMING ARTS IN JAPAN

By

Subha Kokubo Chakraborty

Good afternoon everybody! I stand before you today at the request of Swamiji Medhasananda, who invited me to speak to you about Indian Performing Arts. Frankly, however, when I received his request I was at a loss. I had no idea as to what I should say, and even now I am rather confused. If he had requested me to perform a dance on stage I could perhaps have

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Performing Arts (from page 1)

done it with some confidence, but giving a lecture on Indian Performing Arts in Japan is a subject outside my field of specialization. In any case I shall seek to summon up the wisdom I lack, deliver my speech without causing apathy to any of you, and thereby fulfill my responsibility.

I shall hereafter speak about Indian Performing Arts in Japan, a topic concerning both our nations. First of all, Classical Performing Arts in India are linked to music, and in Indian music we have the broad division of Hindustani and Carnatic Music. These two groups have their respective musical instruments, and these instruments differ from each other and both have a wide diversity. An instrument well known in Japan is the Sitar, which is an instrument of Hindustani music, and besides this we have the Tabla, which is used for maintaining the rhythm. In the case of Carnatic music the instruments are the Veena and Mridangam. A distinction exists between the music of the North and South of India, and yet both groups of instruments are important and indispensable.

The Veena in particular greatly resembles the Japanese Biwa, and the names of these two instruments are also similar. The Veena is seen in the hands of Saraswati the Goddess of Learning. When her worship entered Japan she was transformed into Benzaiten, who is one of Japan's Seven Deities of Good Fortune, and the Veena in her hand changed into the Biwa.

In ancient Japanese Shinto Shrines we often witness dances performed on stages, and these stages are associated with names such as Bugakuden, Kaguraden, Maiden, Haiden and a variety of others. Dance in all cases indicates a ceremony of offering to God. Since by means of dance we can surmount obstacles, secure bumper harvests, and attain household peace, from ancient times people experienced the presence of God

in nature, and with a deeply reverential attitude they performed ceremonial dances as offerings, dances that persist to this very day. It has been recorded that in the Hirabutai of the Itsukushima Shrine at Hiroshima, and the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu of the Kamakura Period, Lady Shizuka Gozen performed a dance of love for Minamoto no Yoshitsune. In the city of Toyota where I live the Sangen shrine is famous, and each year I go to there on a New Year's visit. In this shrine too there is a magnificent Haiden, that is, a hall of worship or Oratory, which greatly resembles the Kamomioya shrine in Kyoto, with reference to the placement of the building. Anyhow we are informed that since ancient times there existed an intimate link between Religion and Dance, and this is not something restricted to Japan alone as it concerns the whole world.

It is the same in my own country India. My expertise lies in the Classical Indian Dance called Bharatnatyam, and it is said that this dance originated from young women who specialized in performing dances within the temples, as offerings to God. It has endured until the present as one of the oldest of the performing arts, and I am almost at the end of this continuous line.

A statue of a dancing girl has been discovered among the ruins of Mohen-jadaro that is said to be around 5000 years old, and the history of Indian Performing Arts is also said to have begun at that time.

In historical chronicles of Japan such as the Kojiki and Nihongi, we have the legend of Amano-Iwato. It is a story where owing to the unruly behavior of her younger brother Susanoo, Amaterasu-ōmikami was forced to hide in Amano-Iwato. The world was enveloped in darkness, and since it was impossible to distinguish between day and night, it was converted into a world of gloom. Thereupon eight million gods gathered and thought up an ingenious plan. In front of Iwato, Ame-no-

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Ms. Kokubo Chakraborty demonstrates

Performing Arts (from page 2)

Uzume-no-mikoto performed a dance and organized a lively gathering. As long as Amaterasu-ōmikami lay hidden in Iwato the entire world was supposed to have been plunged in gloom, and yet, cheerful festivities appeared to be taking place outside. On hearing nothing but sounds of cheer and laughter, she wondered curiously as to what this could be about, and eventually she gently opened the door a little and peeped out. At this point, Amanotajikara-ono-mikoto, who was ready and waiting, pushed open Iwato. Thus says the legend. This was the beginning of performing arts in Japan, and Ame-no-Uzume-no-mikoto who conducted the first dance, is venerated as the goddess of performing arts dance, while Amanotajikara-ono-mikoto is revered as the god of sports.

India's great classical dances were originally four but recently they are viewed as being seven in number, and of them the dances well known in Japan are the Bharatnatyam, Odissi, and Kathak.

India being a vast country, apart from these classical dances there are an uncountable variety of folk dances that differ according to the State, and this again is a point of similarity with Japan. The Soran Bushi of Hokkaido, the Bon Odori, and the Awa Odori, are

all performed in festivals wherein people express their gratitude either to the Gods or Buddhas.

My own dance teacher Uday Shankar who happens to be the father of Mamata Shankar, pioneered the composition of 'Creative Dance' using Classical Dance as a base, and this has currently developed under the name 'Creative Dance' or 'Contemporary Dance.' Even the 'Tagore Dance' which is based on the musical compositions of Rabindranath Tagore who was the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, is referred to as 'Creative Dance' or 'Contemporary Dance.'

I had the experience of performing a dance as an offering at the Todaiji Temple in Nara, which is the world's largest and oldest wooden structure and which happens to be registered as a World Heritage Site. It was a totally novel and fascinating experience for me when compared with dancing on a stage. I cannot express myself suitably in words, but generally speaking it was a spiritual experience. I felt I had experienced something invisible, something transcending myself, but which nevertheless existed. The joy of offering a dance in the presence of that entity quite filled my heart, and evoked within me a truly momentous feeling.

Gautama Buddha founded Buddhism about 2500 years ago, and after elapse of about 1000 years around 552 AD the religion is said to have entered Japan, though there are diverse theories concerning this matter. Another 200 years later around 752 AD Todaiji was built, and the person who served as the Guru for the Daibutsu Kaigen or the Eye-Opening ceremony for the huge bronze statue of Buddha Vairocana at Todaiji was a Brahmin monk from India, namely Bodhisena. Records indicate that at the Eye-Open-

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Performing Arts (from page 3)

ing Ceremony dances of various nations were performed, and 1260 years later I too was able to offer a dance performance at that place.

The flow of time has a vast range, and the human mind can traverse great distances when reflecting on time. Yet I feel the heart and sensibilities of man are able to surpass time, so much so that even 1000 or 2000 years can be instantly compressed and recalled. That is to say, when in the presence of God, material time and mankind's mental time, or what I personally would refer to as spiritual time, do not coincide.

Each year I receive invitations for public performances. I perform on stages, and occasionally I even receive invitations to perform in temples, and on such occasions I dance to maximum satisfaction. Indeed, the feeling I experience when dancing in a temple is not the same as when I dance on a stage.

There are several schools of Indian Classical Dance, and almost all of them concern the performance of narratives related to God. They are not just offerings made to God but also essentially a communication with Him, and their ultimate purpose is to develop a unity with Him.

In dance, Philosophy is an exceedingly vital element, but I believe the heart is even more so.

Today the world of dance is unfolding in the name of Art, and dancers who display their techniques on glittering and magnificent stages are not rare. Even among the Japanese, magnificent dancers are gradually beginning to emerge.

If India and Japan were to deepen their mutual understanding we will be able to turn out ever more superb performers, even in the world of dance.

I now come to the conclusion of my talk. In 1893, during his trip abroad, Vivekananda stopped in Japan. During the approximately three weeks he took to travel from Nagasaki to Yokohama he visited the major cities of Japan, and thereby expanded his knowledge. Japan in those days was greatly inclined towards western culture. Vivekananda concisely and positively assessed the scenery and settings of the Japan of those days and unceasingly expressed his feelings, and among his expressions we have the following sentiments. "Setting aside its spirit Japan is greatly digesting the knowledge of the west, and it possesses a pure Art. Young Indians wishing to go abroad for study should go not to England but to Japan." Don't these words hold true even today?

I have absolutely no basis for saying this, but while perusing the life of Subhash Chandra Bose, I reckoned these words of Vivekananda were deeply engraved within his heart. Over a hundred years ago Swamiji declared that India should imitate Japan, and currently many Japanese are learning Indian Classical Dance. Proceeding from the past, the cultures of India and Japan have synchronized and created an important culture in multilayered form, and this history is now continuing to advance even more. It is my heartfelt desire that the cultures of both nations become genuinely united.

Thank you all for your kind attention. •

[This concludes the series of talks presented at the Indian Embassy celebrating Swami Vivekananda's 152nd Birth Anniversary in Tokyo May 2015.]

June Zushi Retreat 2015
“The Purity of Jesus Christ”
by Father Yamaguchi

Father Michitaka Yamaguchi of the Yuki-noshita Catholic Church in nearby Kamakura was invited to give a talk at the Vedanta Society's Zushi Centre Monthly Retreat on June 21, 2015. Father Yamaguchi arrived accompanied by a few Christian devotees about which Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) was very pleased. Thanking him for agreeing to visit and address the congregation Maharaj said, “As many faiths, so many paths.’ Although religions have different paths to enlightenment they share the same purposes. We do not have to change our religion from one to another, but should practice ours more to be a better devotee. It is important, though, to get inspired by other religions.”

Maharaj explained to the gathering how he met Fr. Yamaguchi saying that on the Society's annual visit on New Year's Day to temples and churches of different religions in Kamakura to pay respect and practise the concept of religious harmony, they have been visiting the Yuki-noshita Catholic Church for the last 16 years. This New Year's day Father Yamaguchi was engaged in an activity and praying for peace in front of the Church when he arrived with some devotees. So the two met and talked for a while starting to build a friendly relationship.

Maharaj then formally introduced Fr. Yamaguchi to the gathering by highlighting from his biography his education, joining the priesthood, postings and works overseas, and his activism. Father Yamaguchi then talked for about 40 minutes summarised as follows:



“Good morning. Today I am talking of Jesus Christ's purity as requested and this is the first time I have discussed this topic.

“I am a Catholic Father and activist. I engage in activities mainly in poor countries and places hit by disasters such as Tohoku (Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011). I now think my activities are based on Jesus's purity. I majored in architecture at university, then worked on land development and architecture when I began to wonder if this world should be like it is. Born a Catholic, I naturally engaged in Church-based activities. Among Christians, peace building, protecting human rights and environmental protection, are the three main themes and therefore these are the areas in which I have been working. When I

was young there were not as many NGOs as now and activities such as dialogue with the poor were mainly done by the Christians. I was born in Kamakura, but Buddhist temples were not engaged in such activities, while Christian churches were. So I joined them.

“Purity means no presence of mistake or error, or anything that stands against the Truth created by God or given as a message from God. While it is rather difficult for us to live this way, we can at least see in the Gospel (New Testament) the example of Jesus and His life. He often referred to His different teachings to His disciples and the poor His message of ‘love.’ The practice of His love, however, needs to be based

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Purity of Jesus (from page 5)

on Jesus's purity and innocence.

“Love’ as translated in the Bible originally as ‘agape’ This Greek word has an image of devotional love; love given even at the sacrifice one’s own life. Jesus lived that agape. He could do so with His purity.

“I also wanted to clarify the image of today’s Catholic Church. In general, it is thought of as being very institutional, with a centralised Vatican and hierarchy of bishops, priests, nuns and all. Historically, in the beginning of our church, it was not like this. Jesus very simply gave information and taught the way to become enlightened, the way to reach the final goal.

“Paul said in Hebrews 4:15, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” (New International Version) The Bible only brings us Jesus’s last three years, when He taught people on streets, criticised the establishment and recruited disciples. During those years He and His disciples suffered a lot and were oppressed. He was eventually put on trial and was executed on that same day.

“We can see from the Gospel how He struggled with inner conflict. He wondered so many times if He should go one way or the other; if He might lose or surrender to the Devil. He hung on and never surrendered each time, however, continuing to say “Yes” to God thinking He should complete the mission given by God. He was betrayed and denied even by His disciples towards the end and went to the cross by Himself. He always said ‘Yes’ even in the hardest of times.

“As a result, He rose again from the dead right after He died, which is at the centre of Christianity. Then God, the Father, replied ‘Yes!’. Jesus had continued to say yes to God even though not sure if that was

right. Finally, the Creator said ‘yes’ which meant He had been correct. He responded because Jesus was pure.

“In 1 John 3:3-5 it says, “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that He appeared so that He might take away our sins. And in Him is no sin.” (New International Version) In those days of the Old Testament, there were detailed laws and rules, which the Jewish respect and follow even now. I would not say they are not important in Christianity, but in Jesus’s teachings practising love is more important. He said, “My law is to love.” To love needs purity though.

“What is the definition of purity in these modern times? It depends on who does what, where and/or when. For instance, farming is a noble profession and when farmers work with their boots and trousers in mud they do not think it as dirty. If they do not take them off before going straight to their bedroom the mud would be considered dirty. So how we can be pure depends. Just following rules do not represent this purity.

“As Maharaj said a little while ago, ‘As many faiths, so many paths,’ Jesus Christ did not say ‘do this and that.’ He just told parables and asked His disciples what they thought about them. He showed the paths intending that each and every one of us should take the path we want. We have to practise love though, for which we need purity. That purity does not have to be perfect, but we have to seek that purity that suits us. We must strive to find it thinking

(con’t page 7)

• **Thought of the Month** •

“Be not afraid of life.
Believe that life is worth living, and
your belief will help create the fact.”

- Henry James

Purity of Jesus (from page 6)

for ourselves. That is my interpretation.

“Let me give you one more quote from the Bible, Matthew 15:18-20. ‘Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.’ (New International Version) So people get others dirty. The food entering the mouth is not dirty, but what comes out of the mouth can be dirty. If what comes out of it is not dirty, that helps maintain purity.

“If we all do nothing and live seriously holding purity in an isolated place, that would make no sense. We have been given life and how we can make the most of it matters. Attaining enlightenment for ourselves is one of the ways, but does that mean thinking about ourselves and not others? I say what we do can make a positive influence on others. In seeing us and how we live, some may like it and want to follow it as well. We should try not to get others dirty by what comes out of us as much as possible.

“When I studied in India my professor used to say that some people criticised me for visiting slums and red-light areas. They would say, ‘Did he come from Japan just to go to that area where the girls are.’ But I was very much impressed or interested in what those ladies were thinking, their history and experiences. Some were kidnapped or cheated and brought there from somewhere else. I was very happy to be

with them. Slowly my colleagues and professors came to know of my activities, but they encouraged me to continue. Why? Because they said someone may ask themselves why did this Japanese come to Pune to associate with such people in such a critical area. Then they will discover I am a Christian, not so concerned with conversions to Christianity, but with helping others. Seeing this they may say ‘I’, as a Hindu, a Muslim or a Buddhist, ‘can do these works too.’ So I continued my activities with this idea of sharing, so that we can all become truer to our faiths.

“The Asian Church (Catholic) has based a triple dialogue on this idea. The first is to dialogue with the poor and marginalised. The second is to dialogue with local cultures, so-called ‘inculturation,’ or the

adapting of the way of presenting teachings to suit various cultures. The third is to dialog with other faiths to build understanding and the foundations for peace.



Fr. & Sw. sharing views on “Purity”

“Pope Francis almost every week says that a religious institution should be like a hospital on the front lines of society to receive anybody; those who are suffering, have problems or are looking for something to help them get out their crises. To do this, Pope Francis says that those of us who practice religion must make space available for those who need rest; those who need to hear about God; those who need to be cured.”

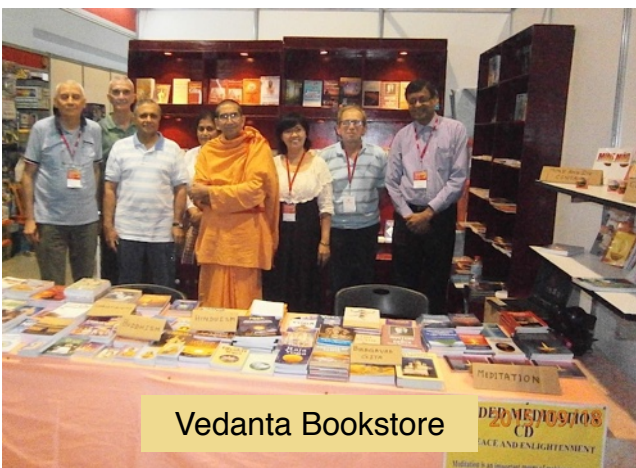
A brief Q&A followed Fr. Yamaguchi’s talk. Maharaj then pointed out similar Vedantic concepts of purity; thanked the Fr. and extended an invitation to visit again; and closed the morning session with a favourite Bible quotation from Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure at heart, for they shall see God.” •

Swami Medhasananda Visits Manila

The Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines participated in the Manila International Book Fair for the ninth consecutive year, presenting its Vedanta and philosophy books to the over one hundred thousand visitors who crowded the huge exhibition hall near the Manila Asia Mall, facing Manila Bay.

For the first time this year two public programs were arranged for Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) to address on the book fair premises.

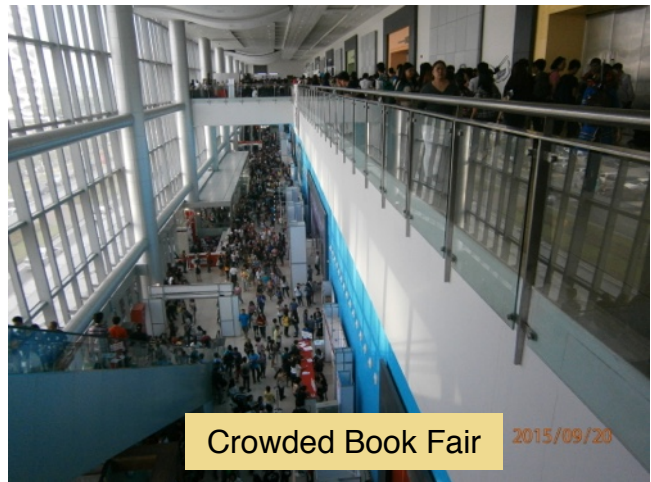
On Friday morning, September 18, he gave a public talk at staging area inside the main exhibition hall about “The Mind and Its Control” (a brief synopsis follows). The lecture was attended by some forty people, prevalently Filipinos, and was followed by a lively Q&A session.



After the talk Maharaj had a very simple and informal lunch of Filipino preparations in the company of several devotees and friends mostly from the Philippines and India.

Soon after that, preparations were started for the second program to be led by Maharaj in a private meeting room on the top floor of the book fair exhibition area. This consisted of a guided meditation session which was attended by some thirty people.

All participants to the two events were given a souvenir eco-bag displaying the image of Swami Vivekananda and a brochure of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines.



All in all this first occasion to present Vedanta ideas and to introduce the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines to the larger public of the Manila book fair by Maharaj was successful and is intended to be repeated in the future.

Another Satsanga was held at the Manila Vedanta Society Center on Sunday, September 20. 'If You Want Peace' was the talk given by Maharaj. Prior to the talk, a group of Philippine attendees sang devotional songs and Mr. Salil sang Tagore songs accompanying himself on lap steet guitar. At the break attendees were served tea and snacks, followed by a Q&A session and a guided meditation. About 30 people attended this session.

During the five-day duration of the fair the Manila Society sold 332 books and CDs and all of its available stock of incense sticks (116 packets).

(Prepared by Enrico Colombo, Cebu, PH)



*The following is a brief synopsis of the talk 'The Mind and Its Control' by Maharaj,
courtesy of Mr. Anand Chiplunkar, Manila, PH:*

The Mind and Its Control

by Swami Medhasananda

SMX Convention Center, Main Exhibition Hall, Stage Area

Friday, September 18, 2015 from 10:00 AM to 12:00 Noon

- A controlled mind is my greatest friend and an uncontrolled mind is my greatest enemy.
- Symptoms of an unfriendly mind: restlessness, disobedience, meaningless thoughts, negative thoughts, impulsiveness, desires, impurities like anger or pride and stress.
- Symptoms of a friendly mind: concentration, obedience, meaningful thoughts, positivity, peaceful.

Techniques to control the mind:

A) Practices:

- Divide the mind into two: the conscious mind (voice of God) should control the naughty mind
- Control thoughts
- Make a schedule, covering all day and, if possible, the full week
- Bind or chain the mind or else it wanders
- Allow every day for three most important things:
 - 1 - Spiritual health: sitting silently for a while without moving, thinking something great or spiritual;
 - 2 - Physical health: exercise the body;
 - 3 - Intellectual health: reading serious books and avoiding unnecessary pastimes such as vain TV programs.

B) Living well in the 'now':

- Avoid brooding about the past and worrying about the future.
- Remember Tolstoy's questions:
 - What is the most important time? NOW, the time that you are living now.
 - What is the most important person? The person which is IN FRONT of you at the moment.
 - What is the most important work? The work that YOU ARE DOING NOW.

C) Controlling anger and pride:

- Wait for at least 5 minutes before expressing anger

- Thinking that I am always right triggers pride and ego. Think to the contrary that my talent and efficiency are gifts from God
- Do not think that you are superior to others
- Do not make comparisons with others or criticize others
- Spend time every day to focus on good thoughts;
- Concentrate, meditate on positive topics you have selected;
- Power or words: read and think of inspiring words that motivate. Here are some examples of inspirational statements:

1) You are what you think: the remedy of weakness is not brooding over it but thinking of strength.

2) There are two types of joy: the first appears nectar and later becomes poison; the second appears as poison but later becomes nectar.

3) Just for today:

- strictly follow a schedule
- meditate
- allow time for serious studies
- allow time to exercise the body
- do introspection about your own life
- whatever happens don't complain or redress or criticize
- do not talk unless asked
- do not watch TV, read newspapers or use a mobile phone; enjoy freedom from these chains.

• • •



More Manila Visit Photos



Filipino Singers



Manila Center Group



Mr. Salil



Evening Arati (Vespers)



Q&A



Q&A



Office Visit

2015/09/18



Swami w/ Musical Family

This is a group photo from 2-day visit, August 29 and 30, to Imabari City on the north-eastern tip of Shikoku Island and the 2nd largest city in Ehime Prefecture.

On the 29th Swami Medhasananda delivered a talk on “Positive Living” and gave a Guided Meditation. On the 30th the swami spoke on “Ways of Peace.”



• A Story to Remember •

The Destiny of Man

The digit one may be raised to a figure of any value by adding zeros after it; but if that one is omitted, zeroes by themselves have no value. Similarly, so long as the jiva (individual soul) does not cling to God, who is the One, he has no value, for all things here get their value from their connection with God.

So long as the Jiva clings to God, who is the value-giving figure behind the world, and does all his work for Him, he gains more and more thereby; on the contrary, if he overlooks God and adds to his work many grand achievements, all done for his own glorification, he will gain nothing there from.

- Sri Ramakrishna, from The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

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