



October 2015 - Volume 13 Number 10

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

## NOVEMBER Calendar

### Birthdays

**Swami Subodhananda**  
Monday, Nov 23

**Swami Vijnanananda**  
Wednesday, Nov 25

### Kyokai Events

#### • Yoga Asana •

Sundays Zushi Centre  
1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th  
14:00-15:30pm  
Please Contact: Kyokai

#### • Sri Sri Kali Puja •

Tuesday 10th / 19:00  
Pushpanjali, Homa, Prasad  
Please contact Kyokai if  
you plan to participate.

#### • Zushi Retreat •

Sunday 22 November  
10:30~16:30  
Morning Session/Talk  
Lunch Prasad  
Afternoon Session

#### • Akhanda Japam •

23rd (Sun) Zushi  
5:00am-20:00pm  
Your participation is  
appreciated! Please  
Contact: Mitamura  
<dd94dd94@nifty.com>

#### • Nara Narayan •

Friday Nov 27th  
Service to Homeless  
Contact Ms. Yoko Sato  
090-6544-9304

**See page 9 for more  
EVENTS and details!**

## ✧ Thus Spake ✧

*“Always keep your power of discrimination awake. God alone is real, that is to say, eternal; everything else is unreal, because it will pass away.”*

- Sri Ramakrishna

*“Seek not for life on earth or in heaven. Thirst for life is delusion. Knowing life to be transitory, wake up from this dream of ignorance and strive to attain knowledge and freedom before death claims you,”*

- Sri Krishna

## July Zushi Retreat 2015 “Challenges to Spiritual Life” Part 2 of 3

*Part 1 of this talk by Swami Medhasananda was published in the June edition of ‘The Vedanta Kyokai’ and is available on our web site. The conclusion (Part 3) of this talk, given over the course of both June and July Monthly Retreats, will be presented when a final translation becomes available.*

### Time Management

Next we have the problem of having time for spiritual practices about which many aspirants complain. There are two reasons for not having the time to practice. One is a lack of motivation. We  
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## **Challenges** (from page 1)

are not motivated so we think we have no time. Yet, if something is very important or interesting to us, we will find time. Motivation is most important in spiritual life. Without motivation we cannot find the time for spiritual practice, and motivation comes from the understanding that spiritual life is most important for my life, as is food and drink for my health, and I must allot time for practice everyday come what may.

The next problem is our time management skills are not so good. This is a big problem for most people. We do not use so much of our time for important works, yet we spend a lot of time with unimportant things. What is important and unimportant are indistinguishable for us. This is why we cannot find time. This is very, very important. In published articles the CEOs and presidents of very large companies have said that though they are very busy, they set aside 30 minutes to an hour every day for quiet prayer, reflection or meditation. How is this possible with so many demands on their time? They are very strict about time management.

The third problem is our lack of concentration. That is, if we are good at concentrating we can satisfactorily complete a task that requires an hour or more in thirty to forty minutes.

The fourth problem is that we cannot focus on one thing and withdraw from it when required to focus on another task. The former job haunts us even when we take up the next job.

Mahatma Gandhi was incredibly busy with politicians, policy meetings and writings, receiving visiting guests, journalists, and so forth. Yet every morning he had time for prayer for about an hour. If there were many guests seeking an audience, he would allow each 5 minutes of his time, giving each his undivided attention and he would also carry a pocket watch to help him maintain his schedule of appointments.

On the other hand we sit in front of our computers and a few minutes leads to an hour; then one hour leads to two hours, and suddenly we don't where the time has flown. How many times a day, an hour, do we check our mobile phones and write and reply to messages. We must be careful and pay attention to how we manage our time. Because like the busy CEO, we have only 24 hours a day. CEOs do not have 36 hours a day, they have but the same 24 hours, yet see how they manage to do volumes of work and mind it. Such people never complain of a lack of time. It is we, who have much less work than them, who complain, either because we are not sincere or we are poor at managing time.

We complain that we don't have time to practice; we don't have time to study; we don't have time to meditate. This is because we are misusing our time. We are giving more time to unimportant things and less time to more important things. Hence, we must be more strict, more careful and watchful with our use of time. In doing so, we will find we have the time for most things. These are our two big problems; time reality and time management. If we have the motivation, we can manage things within the time available. To this end, begin with a schedule. If we have a schedule, we can manage our time from morning to night. Set times for meditation, yoga practice, study of scripture and all of your daily responsibilities, and be watchful. You will find that you have time for everything you need to do.

## **Regular Practice and Connectedness**

Next is regular practice. We have days when we practice, and days when we don't. We have days when we practice for only five minutes or others we practice for thirty minutes. We cannot make much progress with this inconsistency. We need regularity, day by day. If we find a reason to not practice one day, we will likely do the same the next day. So do not skip that first day, as resuming practice will become a problem. Do not stop practice for a single day. Even if you are such

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## **Challenges** (from page 2)

a busy person that you can only practice for five minutes daily, do not stop that five-minute practice. Do not stop for a single day. If we stop one day, it is easy to rationalise stopping the next day. If we do not eat from morning till night, we are motivated to eat quite a lot before bed! But this is not the way to motivate our spiritual practice; yoga, meditation and study.

Another obstacle is that we only think of God when we sit to meditate. We then rise and return to our secular life. One hour may be dedicated to meditation on God, yet twenty-three hours are devoted to secular activities. This cannot lead to a spiritual life. Attending a church on Sundays, while leading a secular lifestyle the rest of the week, is not leading a spiritual life. We must challenge ourselves to maintain connectedness to God, to Truth, to the Soul and to Atman.

What leads to this state? We may seriously devote an hour to meditation, but that is not sufficient if we think worldly thoughts for the rest of our day. Actually, such thoughts will then arise when we sit to meditate as well. We will remember events of yesterday; think of our schedule today; think about work. Even if we are serious about devoting time to meditation, we only appear to close our eyes and shut out the outside world, while inside we are thinking of work. Our job at the magazine, our accounts, shopping, all intrude on our meditation. So we should think of God even at work. Think of God when we are with others. Think of God when taking a walk; when bathing too. Little by little we gain connectedness with God. This is the challenge.

Think of God at all times, not only during meditation. In doing so our meditation becomes deeper and deeper. If we think, 'OK, I will meditate deeply for 30 minutes,' it is not possible to meditate deeply. It cannot be done. So think of God at all times. Repeat any name of God. Repeat a mantra. We can create a feeling of connectedness to God by

thinking of God throughout our day. Repeat to yourself, Rama, Rama, Rama; or Shiva, Shiva, Shiva; or Namuamidabutsu, Namuamidabutsu (Merciful Buddha); or Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; or Allah, Allah, Allah; or Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna. Or you can chant the names; Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna; Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna. Repeat from the heart, on the way to work, when at work, when we drive or ride. The challenge is in keeping connectedness. How to we keep connected?

Constantly think of yourself and God; yourself and Truth. Little by little our meditation grows deeper. This helps the mind to focus on God during meditation. Not only that, when get connected our heart is in a quiet state. Further, if we chant our mantra even while at work, the mind becomes quiet. Our work will improve too. Not only our spiritual life; it helps our work. How? Because calmness is important. We get silence in that connected state. The moment our mind becomes connected to truth, it becomes quiet. Please try it. The more we get connected by repeating God's name or our mantra, we will feel more and more tranquility. We will get stable, abiding happiness.

## **Reachable Goals and Practical Methods**

By only practicing little by little, we cannot expect to suddenly get great results. We need these two, reachable goals and practical methods. This is not difficult. Chant the Lord's name when we can. When riding the train, at work, walking, before meals, even while taking a bath. Is this unreasonable? Can we do it while washing and cleaning? Of course we can.

Our next problem is concentration. Concentration is necessary for meditation. In our spiritual lives meditation is very important. Concentration during japa and prayer is a problem we all share. At the time of meditation we are to concentrate on our chosen ideal. This is meditation. But what is

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### **Challenges** (from page 3)

our experience? We cannot focus so well. Other thoughts arise. What is the most practical method to remedy this? Divide the mind into two parts. The good mind and the restless (con't page 4 mind. Use the good mind to observe and to control the restless mind. No other method is practical. It is not mysterious at all. There is no mystic connection. Practicing pranayama and such techniques gets one no real results.

Another idea is the practice of Hatha Yoga. At a 3-day Retreat in Beppu I asked what they believed in. I asked if they thought the care and welfare of others was important to them. Most everyone agreed that that was important, along with meditation and yoga. I asked if meditation can be replaced by the practice of yoga and there was no answer. Well, no, yoga cannot be substituted for meditation. Hatha Yoga is focused on the body. Meditation is focused on the mind. Of course, through Hatha Yoga we can get some calmness of mind, but it does not last. The moment we engage in work that tranquility is gone.

This type of misunderstanding is widespread. Sometimes even the yoga instructor teaches that meditation is not necessary. I was surprised to hear such teachings. With the

practice of Hatha Yoga one gets the results of meditation? No, this is not true at all. Yes, with the practice of this yoga we get some calmness, but the source is the mind. Mental tranquility does not come through body training, for this another practice is necessary and that practice is meditation.

Our challenge in meditation is concentration. How we can divide the mind into two parts, the good and the naughty mind, and like two parents, control the mischievous child mind. We need the good mind to control the bad mind. That way our thoughts will be directed to truth and focused. This focus can be interrupted when busied with efforts toward festivals and retreats, and work related thoughts creep in. This disturbance is not good. So at such times, stop meditation, make memos of relevant ideas for later, and return to meditation. If such thoughts continue to interrupt, it can tire us. Take control of the mind. We all experience this occasionally.

In our usual meditation the mind can drift off and we pull it back. Not only when we are deep in meditation and we catch the mind wandering, but right from the beginning; when we sit for meditation do not think of anything else but truth. Not relatives, work, schedules, the past, the future, think of no-

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## **Challenges** (from page 4)

thing else. Only Truth remains. Without this kind of thinking it is not possible to concentrate. When we sit for meditation, everything else is nonexistent. If we are not strict with our mind, we cannot control it. Let one part of your mind control the other part. Like children, the mind needs parenting. It is natural. It is difficult. There are times when the mind seems uncontrollable, just like when the mother fails to control the child. But don't give up, the mother never gives up on the child.

## **Faith**

The next obstacle is a lack of faith. Faith is important for progress and success in spiritual life. There are four types of faith: faith in God or belief in God; faith in the scriptures; faith in one's guru; and faith in oneself. A devotee should cultivate all four of these types of faith. However, if one's faith is not grounded in patience, it may prove to be vulnerable, and finally, not conducive to spiritual practice.

There was once a devotee who complained to God. 'Dear Lord, I do not miss my prayers, not even for a single day. Sometimes I fast; I read the Bible religiously; I go to church; I give donations. Still I have so many troubles. I do not have much money. My daughter is grown-up, but not yet married, as I have not yet found a suitable husband. My son is unemployed. But this other person, my neighbour, Lord, he doesn't remember You at all! He does not pray; he does not go to church; he does not read the Bible; he does not even believe in You, yet he is so well off?! His financial condition is so good. He has a very nice family and their house seems full of enjoyment. So Lord, what is the utility of calling on You?'

The devotee then heard the voice of God, 'Well, your neighbour does not bother me with every little need or worry, "God, I need this! God, I need that!"' (laughter)

Well, it is a joke, but the important thing is this; God sees all clearly, whether He answers

our prayers or not, we should not care. We have to believe in God. Whether God is satisfied or not with our prayer, and even if not a single wish is granted in our darkest hour, believe in God. Everything happens to support our love of God. Swami Adbhutanandaji once said that everything comes if we only have belief in God, but our patience soon runs out. In order to know God's will, we must depend on God and for that we have to wait and wait and wait. Soon we cannot endure, and that is not depending on God.

## **Loving the Ideal**

The next point is loving God. For most people loving God is difficult. How can I love one whom I have never seen or met? The solution is holy company. In holy company, little by little, our love for God will grow. Moreover, love of God will increase more and more if we read about God; hear about God; think about God; visit holy places; and above all, have the holy company of monastics and devotees.

Love for God makes our meditation become much deeper. Deeper meditation, in turn, makes our love for God deeper. Once a senior monk of our order was asked, 'Why is it that my meditations are not getting deeper?' The senior monk replied, 'It is because you do not love Sri Ramakrishna deeply.'

This is very true. Suppose if you love a person deeply; your whole mind is focused on that person without any effort given to it. A mother's love and her focused thoughts on a child, irrespective of various duties she has to perform and works she is engaged in, is a typical example explaining this point.

Now consider our state of mind when go into the temple and sit in front of the altar. Our minds are roaming here and there. If we really love God and believe in his presence in the shrine, our meditation should be deeper. This does not always happen, so the criterion of deep meditation is deep love of God and vice versa. **[End of Part 2]**

## 2015 Summer Outdoor Spiritual Retreat in Ise

Report submitted by Ms. Atsumi Honda



The Society's annual outdoor summer spiritual retreat took place at Futamigaura in the city of Ise, Mie Prefecture for four days from 17 July to 20 July. The home of the ancient Ise Jingu (Shinto Shrine of Ise) was chosen for this year's retreat in the context of pilgrimage.

Although a typhoon hit Ise on the 17th, 40 people from 12 prefectures in total joined the four-day retreat. On the first day, it had completely stopped raining by the time we visited the Outer Shrine, the Geku of Ise Jingu. We enjoyed the guided tour by an easy to understand guide and a cool, comfortable breeze.

This year's theme of discourses given by Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) during the retreat was on the Laws of Karma, Reincarnation, and Methods and Impact of Meditation. Also we had the privilege to chant along with Maharaj the Gayatri Mantra and Mahamrityunjaya Mantra from MANTRAM, a new CD recently released by

the Vedanta Society of Japan featuring chants and mantras from Buddhist and Hindu monks. (Available soon for download at CDBaby.com)

On the 18th, we meditated on Futamigaura Beach starting before sunrise. In the afternoon, we had a lecture by the special guest speaker Takeshi Yamamoto, President of Geku Sando Hattenkai (Outer Shrine Approach Development Organisation) who talked about Ise Jingu and how words relative to it and Shintoism had been formed.

On the 19th, we watched the sun rising between the Meoto Iwa or Wedded Rocks,  
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### • Thought of the Month •

"The journey of a thousand miles  
begins with one step."

- Lao Tzu



two rocky outcrops in the sea joined by a shimenawa, a heavy woven rope of rice straw. In the evening we walked along the beach enjoying a relaxing time.

The rest of the daily programme included meditation, prayer, Yoga Asana, reading the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and singing devotional songs. As the schedule was not as full of activities as last year's retreat, we had more time to visit with many other devotees from all over Japan, which is one of the most enjoyable parts of this yearly satsanga.

On the last day, we visited the Inner Shrine, Naiku of Ise Jingu dressed in formal dark suits. We first watched a performance of a mystical Kagura or Shinto music and dance, then solemnly paid our respects to the shrine.

Maharaj said staying nights at a spiritual retreat is a valuable opportunity, as it makes a deeper impression than a regular day trip retreat. In fact, the retreat held in the spiritual atmosphere of Ise was wonderful and began and ended in harmony. •



Classroom session above. Futamigaura Beach meditation below.







A Sunrise Meditation



Hatha Yoga Session



Formal Wear for Kagura Performance



# Vedanta Society Schedule

NOVEMBER 2015

Sundays/ 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th

**Yoga-asana Session** at the Zushi Annexe -14:00am-15:30pm

Please Contact: Kyokai (046-873-2832)

7th (Sat) **CANCELLED**

Discourse on Bhagavad Gita at Indian Embassy

8th (Sun)

**Satsanga in Padma Yoga Ashram**

For details in Japanese: <<http://www.vedantajp.com/スケジュール/特別プログラム/>>

10th (Tues)

**Sri Sri Kali Puja**

At the Zushi Annexe 19:00 Puja, Pushpanjali (flower offering), Homa

21:30 Prasad

All are Welcome!

Prior notification of your participation will be appreciated. <medhasananda@gmail.com>

14th (Sat)

**Discourse on Upanishad** Embassy of India in Tokyo

(in Japanese only) 14:00 - 15:30

Please Contact: Kyokai (045-873-0428)

15th (Sun)

**Monthly Zushi Retreat**

(10:30am-16:30pm)

Morning Session / Talk

Lunch Prasad

Afternoon Session

Please Contact: Kyokai (046-873-0428)

21st (Sat)

**Satsanga in Yamagata**

Please Contact: Takahashi 023-645-3282

22nd (Sun)

**Satsanga in Sendai**

Please Contact : Miyako Sato/佐藤美弥子<miyadevi@m6.gyao.ne.jp>

23rd (Sun)

**Akhandam Japam** at the Zushi Centre (from 5:00am-20:00pm)

Your participation is appreciated at an hour of your convenience!

Please Contact: Mitamura <dd94dd94@nifty.com>

27th (Fri)

**Nara Narayan:** Service to homeless Narayan

Please Contact: Yoko Sato (090-6544-9304)

28th (Sat)

**Discourses in Osaka** (Japanese language)

Discourses on “Bhagavad Gita” and “Upanishad” are given in Osaka and Kyoto on a monthly basis.

For details please see <<http://www.vedantajp.com/スケジュール/特別プログラム/>>

29th (Sun)

**Satsanga in Kumamoto**

For details in Japanese: <<http://www.vedantajp.com/スケジュール/特別プログラム/>>

## • A Story to Remember •

M asks (humbly), "How ought we to live in the world?"

MASTER: "Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all - with wife and children, father and mother - and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.

"A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her Master's children as if they were her own. She even speaks of them as 'my Rāma' or 'my Hari'. But in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all.

"The tortoise moves about in the water. But can you guess where her thoughts are? There on the bank, where her eggs are lying. Do all your duties in the world, but keep your mind on God.

"If you enter the world without first cultivating love for God, you will be entangled more and more. You will be overwhelmed with its danger, its grief, its sorrows. And the more you think of worldly things, the more you will be attached to them.

"First rub your hands with oil and then break open the jack-fruit; otherwise they will be smeared with its sticky milk. First secure the oil of divine love, and then set your hands to the duties of the world.

"But one must go into solitude to attain this divine love. To get butter from milk you must let it set into curd in a secluded spot; if it is too much disturbed, milk won't turn into curd. Next, you must put aside all other duties, sit in a quiet spot, and churn the curd. Only then do you get butter.

"Further, by meditating on God in solitude the mind acquires knowledge, dispassion, and devotion. But the very same mind goes downward if it dwells in the world. In the world there is only one thought: 'woman and gold'.

"The world is water and the mind milk. If you pour milk into water they become one; you cannot find the pure milk any more. But turn the milk into curd and churn it into butter. Then, when that butter is placed in water, it will float. So, practise spiritual disciplines in solitude and obtain the butter of knowledge and love. Even if you keep that butter in the water of the world the two will not mix. The butter will float.

- Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Chapter 1, Master and Disciple

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