



JANUARY 2017 - Volume 15 Number 01

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

FEBRUARY Calendar 2017

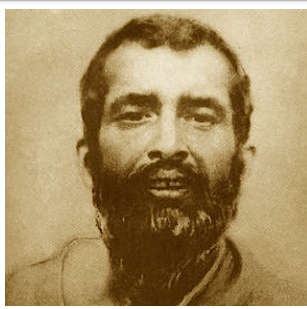
Birthdays

Swami Adbhutananda

Friday, February 10

Sri Ramakrishna Deva

Tuesday, February 28



Kyokai Events

14th (Tue)

Gospel Class at Zushi

At the Kyokai (from
14:00~15:30)

19th (Sun)

**Swami Vivekananda
Birthday Celebration**

At the Zushi Annexe
(from 10:45-16:30)

10:45 Puja, Arati,
Pushpanjali

12:30 Lunch Prasad

14:45 Reading, Discourse,
Music programme
Special guest: Flautist

**See page 6 for more
events & details**



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Many are the names of God and infinite the forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form you worship Him, through that you will realise Him."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"He who keeps my commandment loves me: and he who loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

- Jesus, the Christ

December Zushi Retreat 2016

'Jesus Christ in the Eyes of Hindus'

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda

First of all, rather than from any personal perspective, I would like to present a more generalised Hindu view of Jesus Christ, appreciating the fact that giving a talk on such a personality is so difficult. It is not a question whether one is a Hindu, a Christian, or a Muslim devotee; just to offer some true picture with confidence of such souls as Jesus is difficult unless one is highly advanced in spiritual life. Even for a Christian devotee it can be too difficult, so we can understand how difficult it can be for one of another faith.

(con't page 2)

In this Issue:

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| • Thought of the Month | ... page 4 | • Full February Schedule | ... page 6 |
| • Thus Spake | ... page 1 | • Christmas Eve at Zushi | ... page 8 |
| • Monthly Calendar | ... page 1 | • Padma Yoga Satsanga | ... page 8 |
| • December Zushi Retreat 2016 | | • Nishi Ogikubo Satsanga | ... page 9 |
| A talk by Swami Medhasananda | | • Event Photos | ... page 9 |
| "Christ in the Eyes of Hindus" ... | page 1 | • A Story to Remember | ... page 12 |

Christ in the Eyes of Hindus (from page 1)

If one from any faith is advanced in spiritual life, however, he may speak with some confidence and make some assessments about perfected souls of other faiths as well. Then again, among the devotees of such perfected personalities, opinions can be so different—and this applies to devotees of all religions—but since we are talking about Jesus, we see among Christians there are so many different views. From the Bible we can make some assessments, then there are Catholics and Protestants and so many sects with differing opinions. There are also those who belong to no particular sect, but consider themselves Christians with particular views. Therefore assessments of such great souls cannot be the same.

Jesus and the Ramakrishna Tradition

Jesus was actually an Eastern personality, yet we see how Christianity has been more cultivated and nurtured in the West. So we have Western points of view about an Eastern personality and naturally differences arise. Then there are opinions of different sects, and so many additional factors also come into play. So in such a discussion we must establish whether the speaker's attitude is that of a critic or of one who has a deep respect and appreciation for such a personality as Jesus. This is important to remember. If such respect and appreciation are evident, then differing details and such that may come up do not matter so much.

Sri Ramakrishna himself had a picture of a painting of Jesus saving the drowning Peter in his room at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, something unfathomable to orthodox Hindu priests of the day. Sri Ramakrishna would listen to Bible readings. He had profound respect for Jesus and he had the vision of Jesus. All of these things have been recorded. Being ruled by England many Western Christian missionaries came to India and preached to the people and constructed churches in Calcutta and elsewhere. Thus people became familiar with Christianity. Liberal minded Hindus, though not Christians, had a fair knowledge of Christianity, Jesus Christ and the Bible. There were some colleges run by Christian missionaries wherein Bible Studies was a

compulsory subject. Swami Saradanandaji studied at one such college. So many among the disciples and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna were familiar with Jesus and had great respect for Jesus too. Keshab Chandra Sen, one of the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj, was also a great devotee of Jesus Christ.

Unknowingly, the direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna led by Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) took their final vows of renunciation on Christmas Eve 1886. When they came to realise that it was Christmas Eve they were delighted, and since then every Christmas Eve is celebrated at Belur Math, Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission and all branches worldwide. During one such celebration these direct disciples also had the vision Jesus in a deep blue attire. The Belur Math celebration is now streamed on the Internet after evening vespers and anyone can see how beautiful the programme truly is. Even long ago in the older main shrine at Belur Math, when many of the direct disciples were still alive and not so many devotees would come, they celebrated with a respectful and worshipful attitude in the Hindu way; with a puja.

Once two Christian priests associated with a Christian college in Calcutta had heard about this tradition and, curious, came to witness the celebration. After watching the entire programme, they disapproved saying it was not correct to be done in the Hindu way and not observed in the proper Catholic style. At this the monks offered no reply. Apparently the two priests did not appreciate the respect and faith with which the programme was conducted, they were only concerned with the ritual. Rituals and other outward considerations are not as important as the love, faith and respect offered on the occasions of such festivals. This should always be our focal point, not only during ceremonies, but also during religious dialogues among various faiths.

Even among Hindus there are both liberals and those with exclusive, more fundamentalist opinions. Vedanta believes that all religions and prophets are manifestations of the same divinity; but not all Hindus believe in this precept. Some think that only Krishna,

(con't page 3)

Christ in the Eyes of Hindus (from page 2)

or only some other man of God, is to be respected and all other prophets are inconsequential. So when I say Hindus today, I am only referring to those many Hindus with a more liberal outlook of a Vedantic, inclusive outlook, and from their point of view Jesus was a great spiritual personality; as Krishna is, as Ramchandra is; as Buddha is. They all belong to the same category. This category is a very rare and special one, a category unto themselves; regardless of the country in which they are born or the faith to which they belong, they are very special, unique manifestations of divinity. In Hinduism we call these special ones Avatars, actually meaning "one who descends," more commonly referred to as incarnations of God. These Avatars are endowed with primary and secondary symptoms.

Deeper Implications of Words

Let us discuss these symptoms as criteria and decide how Jesus fits as an Avatar. In Christianity, Jesus is called "the only begotten son of God." This may be difficult to explain, but my impression, and maybe the simplest explanation is that we are all children of God, but Jesus is son in a very special

sense, gives us an understanding of "only begotten son." Then again, the question of understanding this phrase depends on one's advancement upon the spiritual path, with those further advanced receiving more light on the matter. Finally, what images we form are very subjective. So in putting such understanding into words, which is difficult, we can say "very special manifestation of divinity."

As one example from our Ramakrishna tradition, Sri Ramakrishna referred to Rakhal (Swami Brahmanandaji) as his 'spiritual son.'



What can we understand from such a statement? We can only take it at face value, that Rakhal is a son in a spiritual way. We hear, we listen and we read, but our comprehension of this statement by Sri Ramakrishna is very meagre I think. For another example, once Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, was presenting some monks with new cloths. However, while all these cloths were of simple cotton, the one she gave to Brahmanandaji was of silk! One monk then asked Mother why she was discriminating, "Are not the others also your sons?" Her answer was quite interesting, saying that while all the monks were indeed her sons, she emphasised that Rakhal was HER son! So here again, we see hidden meanings and implications in common words and phrases that are very difficult for us to comprehend.

Secondary Symptoms

So from the Hindu point of view of Avatars let us try to form a picture of Jesus Christ by the

primary and secondary symptoms ascribed to Avatars. The secondary symptoms include the performance of miracles. In the life of Sri Krishna we see baby Krishna slaying demons sent to kill him by the wicked King Kamsa. All these attempts failed and ended in the death of the attempted assassins.

The child Krishna also lifted Mount Govardhan with one finger to save the people below from being deluged by flood. That a child could accomplish such a superhuman thing, we find difficult to believe. We see in the lives of Avatars so many of such things. The thing is, many miraculous things can be performed by great yogis as well, by controlling nature, since such feats are guided by nature. No ordinary person, however, can perform such miracles. Magicians also perform wondrous tricks with great skill that look real to the audience. If such things can be

(con't page 4)

Christ in the Eyes of Hindus (from page 3)

performed by yogis and magicians, we cannot say that the main symptom of an Avatara is the performance of miracles. It is only secondary.

Jesus also performed many wonderful miracles, but from our perspective this cannot be the primary criteria by which to declare him a “very special manifestation of divinity” or “only begotten son.” So let us judge by what the motives are behind such miracles? For an ordinary magician, of course, they want to earn money. Some yogis, too, fall victim to name and fame, and this can be their motive. So first we must look at the motive and then the sense of agency in performing miracles. Of course the magician’s focus is “I am doing the magic.” In the case of the yogi, “I am showing superhuman power.” However in the case of an Avatara, for example in Krishna’s case, the motivation of was not for himself, but for saving people from their wicked king. Not one of Jesus’s miracles was done seeking money or personal name and fame or other such personal motive. Secondly, Jesus would never say, “I have done it.” He also gave all thanks and glory to God when he performed special acts. He declared himself to only be a channel and that it was the power of God through him that helped the suffering persons, and that they should be thankful to God. There was no sense of personal agency at all!

From the Hindu spiritual practice perspective, miracles are to be completely abhorred by spiritual aspirants as potentially bringing about their ruin. Acquiring name and fame or love for any temporal gains will cause their fall and thereafter they can never realise truth. This is why miracles are completely shunned in Hindu spiritual practice. In the cases of “incarnations of God” or “only begotten son” this is not the same, because they are not spiritual aspirants but already in the highest state of spiritual realisation and performing miracles for the sake of others. Such special manifestations of divinity are not concerned or affected by such temporal things like name and fame or personal gain.

Primary Symptoms

The primary symptoms are that such personalities live in a constant state of high spiritual consciousness and awareness. Here again we will glean from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, because he and Jesus are in the same category, wherein “M,” the writer of the Gospel, says that he never saw Sri Ramakrishna deviate from the state of God-consciousness for a single moment. Though we do not have such lengthy and detailed reportage about Jesus, we can well apprehend the same was true of him. Think about our consciousness of God and how very brief and unstable it is. Even in meditation our consciousness is unsteady and easily broken. Now consider when we are not meditating how completely forgetful about God we become.

Another symptom is one who adheres to the truth. From the life of Sri Ramakrishna we now how particular he was about the practice of holding to the truth in words, thoughts and deeds. Think of Jesus, when his life was threatened, did he deviate from the truth to save his life? Even his beloved disciple Peter would deny him out of fear, but Jesus held fast to truth. When Peter swore he would give up his life for Jesus, he said to Peter, “I tell you truly, Peter, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.” See the false bravado? Even such an advanced soul as a great disciple of Jesus, threatened with death, weakens and truth flies away. So even when their very existence is threatened, the “only begotten” will not compromise with truth. Knowing his fate, did Jesus fumble or deny when asked if he was Jesus? No, he answered, “Yes.” Did he run away like an ordinary person? No, truth made him fearless.

The third symptom is spiritual knowledge. The highest realms of spiritual knowledge

(con’t page 5)

• Thought of the Month •

“Reality is merely an illusion,
albeit a very persistent one.

- Albert Einstein

Christ in the Eyes of Hindus (from page 4)

flow from them. We see how little is actually recorded from the words of Jesus, but what few we have are so full of spiritual wisdom—I need not explain. We see in Jesus’s words, as in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the Bhagavad Gita, so much spiritual wisdom. Not mixed or adulterated words, but pure spiritual wisdom, and spirituality for the sake of spirituality. The few words of Jesus we have are full of that spiritual wisdom. One such example of such deep spiritual wisdom and enlightenment is, “The Kingdom of God is within You.” Another is “Love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Discipline and Compassion

The next sign or symptom is immeasurable or infinite love for the people in general and especially for the afflicted. See the difference? With ordinary people their capacity for love is exhausted just among family and friends, as if they had no love left to offer others. With avatars, however, their love is all embracing and knows no limitation or discrimination, as is their compassion for the fallen. While we discriminate between good people, bad people, saint or sinner, Avatara do not. Rather, they have greater compassion for those who have fallen. In this regard Jesus offers a profound statement, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” So God has appeared more for sinners; the fallen and the weak, than for the saintly, so that they may become righteous people. The same sentiment was expressed by Girish Chandra Ghosh, the well-known devotee of Sri Ramakrishna about the latter’s Avatarhood.

One idea in the Bhagavad Gita is that God comes to punish the wicked and to save the saints. However, are not the wicked children God’s children, too? So God comes to discipline rather than punish so that they may reform themselves, if not in this life then in the next. There is also the view that the divine Mother Durga as Chandi comes to destroy demons. Sages said in a hymn to Mother, “How great you are, Mother! On one hand you protect us, and on the other you are gracious to the demons you are killing.”

How can it be explained? When the demons are killed by the Goddess Chandi herself they do not go to hell, they go to heaven. So the showing of grace has forms that are quite different than our conventional way of thinking about God’s grace.

In the Bible we read how Jesus had special compassion for the fallen. There is the story of the woman who had committed adultery. When the villagers were going to stone her to death, Jesus said, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her.” Thankfully, the villagers, through introspection, stopped what they were about to do and went on their way one by one. Everyone of them had committed some sin it would appear, and were honest about it. Finally, Jesus told her to not live a life of sin anymore! That woman, though not clear whether she was Mary Magdalene or not, became a very devout follower of Jesus.

Other Symptoms

Avatara also can know the inner thoughts of people. Jesus could tell people what they were thinking and whether they were speaking the truth or not. He could also tell someone’s past, present and future. As we see this in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. In the Bible Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” He also said that John the Baptist was Elijah who had come. Such statements are hints that he knew his own past life and that of others. In the Gita we have Sri Krishna telling Arjuna that yes, both of them had past lives, but Arjuna did not remember them, and that He knows of them all.

Incarnations are the givers of peace. There are many examples of them giving peace to so many peace-less people. They come to redress the causes of suffering, that we may become peaceful. Jesus says, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” No ordinary yogi or monk can do this, they are burdened with their own worries and griefs. How can they remove another’s burdens?

(Conclusion on Page 7)

• Vedanta Society of Japan •

FEBRUARY SCHEDULE of EVENTS 2017

4th February (Sat)

Discourse on Bhagavad Gita

At the Embassy of India in Tokyo
(in Japanese only) (from 10:00-12:00)
(photo ID required)

Please Contact: <https://www.gita-embassy.com/>

14th (Tue)

Gospel Class at Zushi

At the Zushi Centre (from 14:00~15:30)

5th, 12th, 19th, 26th (Sun)

Yoga-Asana Class

At the Zushi Annexe (from 14:00-15:30)

Please Contact: <http://zushi-hatayoga.jimdo.com/>

18th (Sat)

Discourse on the Upanishads

At the Embassy of India in Tokyo
(in Japanese only) (from 10:00-12:00)
(photo ID required)

Please Contact: <https://www.gita-embassy.com/>

19th (Sun)

Swami Vivekananda Birthday Celebration

At the Zushi Annexe (from 06:30-16:30)

06:30 Mangala Arati (Main Ashram)

General Celebration

10:45 Puja, Arati, Pushpanjali (flower offerings)

12:30 Prasad

14:45 Reading, Discourse

Music program

Special guest: Flautist

16:30 Tea

18:00 Arati (Main Ashram)

24th (Fri)

Nara Narayan:

Service to Homeless Narayan

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

28th (Tue)

Sri Ramakrishna Tithi Puja

06:00 Puja (Main Ashram)

Christ in the Eyes of Hindus (from page 5)

There are two types of people the Avatara come to help; the afflicted and spiritual seekers. They come to show the way of spirituality. Their lives are full of examples of showing the path of enlightenment to spiritual seekers. Spiritual seekers are not ordinary afflicted people; their goal is spiritual fulfilment. For example, Sri Ramakrishna's disciples were seeking enlightenment and Sri Ramakrishna showed them the way to that. Jesus' sermon on the mount is an example of the highest spiritual instruction to his all-renouncing close disciples.

Avatara are givers of liberation. Jesus' utterance that one will "go to heaven and be with God," appears to a Hindu the state of liberation. Only these special manifestations of God have the power to liberate others. Some very highly enlightened yogis can liberate some very few people, but they are like small row boats, while the incarnations are like vast ocean liners that can ferry hundreds of thousands across the ocean of worldliness.

Although these special manifestations of God have so many wonderful qualities, they are absolutely free from ego. They always maintain the attitude: "I am nothing. God is using me as His instrument," and "God is operating through me." As Sri Ramakrishna would say, "O Mother, I am the machine and Thou art the operator." In the Bible we see so many such examples of Jesus saying, "I am not to be praised—Praise God," meaning; if you are healed, give praise to God and not to me, as it was His power and not mine.

Two Special Symptoms

The final two symptoms of the incarnations of God are that no matter the particular place or particular time wherein they lived,

after their passing their influence continues to grow and their teachings continue to spread. Their message is not confined to a particular place or time. In every tradition there are many saints and yogis. How many later-day people know of them? Think of Jesus; think of Sri Krishna; think of Buddha; they lived so long ago, and not only are they not forgotten, their influence remains and spreads, encompassing the whole world. Does this take place with ordinary monks or other spiritual persons? No.

My last point about the primary symptoms of these special manifestations of God is that though their primary objective is spiritual, their impact is not limited to moral and religious areas. They also have an amazing



impact on art, architecture, culture and literature. What a great impact the births of Buddha and Jesus had on literature, on music, on sculpture, on painting, on architecture. If we exclude the impact of Jesus on Western culture, how little would remain of classic Western civilisation? The same is true of India.

If we exclude the impacts of Buddha, or Sri Krishna or Sri Rama, how little would remain of classic Indian culture!

This is truly amazing. Although these Avatara are primarily religious personages, how expansive and all encompassing their impacts become. Such impacts are very unique and special indeed!

Jesus, a Very Special Manifestation

So from the Hindu perspective, the idea that Jesus is the "Only begotten Son of God" to us is acceptable as we understand it to mean that Jesus was a very special manifestation of divinity, an incarnation of God.

Thank you very much. •

Vedanta Society of Japan
Celebrates Christmas Eve 2016

On 24 December 2016, the Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual Christmas Eve celebration in the Annexe Building of its Zushi Centre to accommodate a larger gathering.

At around 7pm, Maharaj commenced a special Puja to worship Jesus Christ, followed by the singing of Christmas carols by the congregation accompanied by Shanti Izumida on the synthesiser. There were English and Japanese readings from the Bible.

Then Mr. Leonard Alvarez, a PhD research student at the Sophia University in Tokyo and devout Catholic from Venezuela, gave a talk on the Message of Jesus Christ. He explained the backdrop of the days Jesus lived in which helped the audience gain an in-depth understanding of the importance of his teachings.

After singing a few more carols, the congregation moved to the main building and enjoyed a delicious dinner prasad.

Approximately forty people attended the programme.

(Christmas Eve photos from page 10)

Padma Yoga Satsanga

4 Dec 2016

Summarised Report by the Organiser, Ms Kuniko Hirano

We met Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) at Ocha no Mizu Station in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo on December 4, 2010. We held a workshop with 23 participants sponsored by Padma Yoga Ashram from 2:15 pm to 4:45 pm. The theme was "The Practice of Vedanta." The Padma Yoga Ashram has held a workshop with Maharaj almost once a year, this time was the thirteenth event.

Maharaj started his talk as usual with a universal Vedic Peace Prayers. Vedanta is the essence of the Veda, it discusses the truth about Brahman, the Universe, and the Atman and their relationships. It prepares the necessary objectives to practice with the goal of enlightenment. We must focus on discriminating between the real and the unreal, what is truth. This can be done through control of the mind and senses. He also advised us on methods to control our minds with regular practice.

We were lectured in easy-to-understand Japanese, occasionally accompanied by humour. At the time of the subsequent question and answer, each participant spoke. One attendee stated, "When I got into the talk, my heart felt lighter." Another said, "I thought JnanaYoga was very abstract, but in today's talk it became easier to understand." Many impressions, such as "Maharaj's message that the real power spot is inside of ourselves was very impressive" were voiced.

Maharaj then led us in a guided meditation before our gathering came to an end.

(Padma Yoga photos on page 9)

Nishi Ogikubo Satsanga

11 Dec 2016

Summarised Report by the Organiser, Ms Takako Hirose

On December 11th (Sun), at the Yoga Group's year-end party was held at our Centre in Nishi Ogikubo. This year Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) was asked to visit and he talked on the theme 'Meditation' which was followed by Q&A and a guided meditation. There were 28 participants.



Maharaj asked us whether we were really willing to make time to practice meditation on a regular basis, because we need regular practice of meditation in order to make progress and get happiness. It is most important to commit oneself. With a concrete method of meditation, schedule, environment, and preparation, surely results will follow. Participants gave such comments as "I changed my thinking and became more positive" and "I became able to meditate happily."

Padma Yoga Satsanga





Christmas Eve



Puja (Worship)



Mezzanine View of Altar



Christmas Carols



More Carols



Closing Remarks



Invitation to Prasad Dinner



Serving Prasad



• A Story to Remember •
“The Baal Shem Tov and the Doctor”

Once, a famous doctor met one of his patients on the street. Without a word of greeting, the doctor said, "I told you not to walk on that leg until it heals!"

"But it IS healed," said the man.

"Impossible! I saw the wound in that leg. It will take months!"

"I went to another kind of healer, doctor. I went to a mystical rabbi, the one they call the Baal Shem Tov." The doctor narrowed his eyes, then simply walked away.

A week later, the doctor rapped loudly on Baal Shem Tov's door. When the door opened, he said, "I hear you claim to be a healer!"

The Baal Shem Tov looked at his visitor. "God is the healer, my friend. Come in!"

The doctor did not move. "Let us examine each other," he said. "Whoever best diagnoses the sickness of the other will be proved the better doctor."

The Baal Shem Tov smiled. "As you wish. But please do me the favour of coming in!"

Once inside, the doctor began his examination of Baal Shem Tov. The doctor poked him, pinched him, gazed in his ears, and tapped on his knees. After an hour, the doctor said, "You have no sickness that I can find."

"I am not surprised that you could not find it," said Baal Shem Tov. "I so desire the presence of God that my heart cries out in pain when I can not feel it. My sickness is this constant yearning for God." Baal Shem Tov looked at the doctor a long while. "Let me now examine you." Baal Shem Tov took the doctor's hands and gazed into his eyes. At last the rabbi said, "Have you ever lost something very valuable?"

"As a matter of fact," said the doctor, "I once had a large jewel, but it was stolen from me."

"Ah! That is your sickness!" said Baal Shem Tov.

"What? Missing my diamond?"

"No. My sickness is yearning after God. Your sickness is that you have forgotten that you ever had that desire."

The doctor sucked in a breath. After a moment, a tear flowed down his cheek. One tear turned to many. Still holding the hands of Baal Shem Tov, he began to sob. "Please," he said. "Teach me how to yearn!"

"With God's help," said Baal Shem Tov, "your healing has already begun."

- by Doug Lipman, The Hasidic Stories (dot) com

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