



FEBRUARY 2017 - Volume 15 Number 02

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

MARCH Calendar 2017

Birthdays

**Sri Gouranga
Mahaprabhu**

Sunday, March 12

Swami Yogananda

Thursday, March 16



Sri Gouranga Mahaprabhu

Kyokai Events

7th (Tue)

Gospel Class at Zushi
(from 14:00~15:30)

19th (Sun)

**Sri Ramakrishna
Birthday Celebration**

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

10:30 Puja, Arati,
Pushpanjali

12:30 Lunch Prasad

14:45 Reading, Discourse,
Music programme

16:30 Tea

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



✧ Thus Spake ✧

“Beware, don’t involve yourself in worldliness on the plea of serving your mother!”

- Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

“Work becomes consecrated and purifying when it is done as service to Me.”

- Sri Krishna

January Zushi Retreat 2017

Public Celebration

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 165th Birth Anniversary

On Sunday, January 15, the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat celebrated the 165th birth anniversary of Holy Mother, Sri Sri Sarada Devi.

Mangala arati (morning worship) began at 06:00am in the Main Zushi Ashram attended as always by the volunteer devotees who stayed the night at the Centre or at Holy Mother House nearby, and the few who live in the general area.

After an early breakfast both the Zushi Annexe and the Main Ashrama were busy with the many chores and preparations for the celebration, such as the food and floral offerings for the altar, the platform assembly, puja vessels and utensils, trays of pushpanjali flowers for the congregation, along with seating and audio/video set-up.

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Holy Mother Celebration (from page 1)

At the altar Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) completed his floral adornments of the photos of Sri Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, dabbing each with sandal paste before prostrating.

With all the articles and utensils in place and the microphone adjusted, Maharaj signalled Ms. Sophia to the launch Holy Mother's Puja with three clear blasts from a conch shell. A gee-fuelled flame was lit, incense offered and Maharaj commenced with prayers and offerings. About 50 minutes later the ritual was came to an end with mantra, bell and conch. Maharaj then prostrated and offered puja blossoms to Holy Mother's photo at the altar.

Maharaj continued the puja with arati, offering Mother prescribed prayers and the symbolic offerings of the five elements to the continued tolling of conch, bells, and cymbals, as the congregation sang Khanda Bhava Bandhana accompanied by Ms. Shanti Izumida on synthesiser. Maharaj then prostrated before the altar again and joined the congregation in singing Sarvamangala Mangalye.

Maharaj went throughout the gathering sprinkling Ganga water on everyone, as space was cleared and flowers and leaves were passed out for the pushpanjali (flower offering). Summoning all to rise, Maharaj led all in the pushpanjali mantra to the Holy Mother before each offered their prayers and flower. Maharaj then gave a Japanese translations of prayers they then repeated, and food offerings were collected and taken to the Main Ashrama kitchen for final preparation of the prasad lunch that was ready to be served.

The afternoon session began about 14:30 with a reading from the Society's Japanese publication, 'The Life of Holy Mother.' Maharaj then gave a talk in Japanese highlighting the uniqueness of Holy Mother's lifelong example of service. (See 'Holy Mother, the Sublime Ideal' in this issue)

Japanese devotees then Japanese devotionals written by Ms. Shanti Izumida, followed by closing prayers and a meditation. Tea was then served in the Main Ashrama.

About 45 people attended.



Holy Mother, the Sublime Ideal

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda

Today with puja, arati and pushpanjali we celebrate the birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Why do we hold birth celebrations in remembrance of great souls? Of course we wish to remember such personalities, but also we get inspiration from their lives. In doing so we can advance a little further in our growth, and as we grow we become more perfected. We have read from books about Holy Mother and you have heard about her from me for many years. So now, may I ask you what impresses you most about her character? What impression did you get from first looking at her picture?

Devotee 1: The mercy of Holy Mother appeals to me most. When I first visited here 20 years ago I read where she said, 'If my son wallows in the dust or mud, it is I who have to wipe all the dirt and take him on my lap.' Up until that point I had felt that a sinner was just a bad person. But even such people can receive the Mother's compassionate love regardless of their past. Such people are changed by her love. I was very attracted to this idea of love.

Medhasananda: Yes, the Mother does not withhold her compassion and affection. She does not think about whether one is a sinner or not. This is impressive.

Devotee 2: Having been married myself I was humbled to hear Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) and Ma's (Holy Mother) marriage was not like that of ordinary people.

Medhasananda: What impressed you most about their marriage?

Devotee 2: Their marriage was between saints which is extraordinary and meaningful, and although Holy Mother was herself the incarnation of Divine Mother, she took

care of Thakur like a devoted housewife. Moreover, Mother could easily hide her greatness from ordinary people, while Thakur did not. I am touched by this.

Devotee 3: Holy Mother is my own mother. So I do not worry about anything.

Medhasananda: There are differences between the Mother and your biological mother. What are the characteristics of each?

Devotee 3: Holy Mother is the mother of my soul. The mother that bore me as a child is a physical relationship. There is a sense of security in that a relationship with the Mother of my soul which can never be broken! I feel her kind presence and it seems she strokes my head out of affection.

Devotee 4: I think that since Holy Mother appeared as the Shakti (Divine Feminine creative power) of Sri Ramakrishna, I don't see her as human or ordinary in any sense. When meditating at the Holy Mother Temple in Belur Math I felt energy and love in Mother. She represents the ultimate essence of love in womanhood.

Medhasananda: For example, there is Holy Mother's love, an ordinary mother's love, a father's love, a friend's love, a husband's love, a wife's love. These are all examples of love. If Holy Mother's love is different, how is it different?

Devotee 4: Her love is completely different. This love is universal and freely given, not only to some, but fairly given to everyone.

Devotee 5: I like all of Holy Mother's various teachings, but the one that I take as a

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Sublime Ideal (from page 3)

commandment to myself is when she said, "I tell you one thing — if you want peace, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults." This simple teaching is hard to follow and I find I must reprove myself time and time again when I fail in that, and this helps me to grow and get peace.

Devotee 6: When Holy Mother addresses all as 'My Child' I feel wrapped a sense of security.

Medhasananda: Incidentally, the general impression when one sees a photo of Holy Mother is of a calm and quiet demeanour; so calm and quiet like a blue sky. When we look upon the blue sky we feel calm and quiet, don't we? In the Bhagavad Gita we find an interesting verse:

Karmani akarma yah pasyed akarmani ca
karma yah
Sa buddhiman manusyesu sa yuktah krt-
sna-karma-krt

This means: 'Those who see action in inaction and inaction in action are truly wise people, since they are always in a state of union with God.'

Continuous Service

Truly the best example of this is Holy Mother. Everyday from morning to night; from birth to death, Holy Mother had so much work to do that she did not know what taking rest was, yet she remain so quiet and calm. Is this not a wonderful characteristic of her nature? Of course, she remained the very manifestation of mercy, humility, enlightenment and infinite love. Yet, when we look at her photo, our first impression is of a vast, overpowering serenity and calmness. Sri Ramakrishna (Thakur) was not like this. Thakur was always talking, giving instruction and talking of God. But Holy Mother had no rest on every level, on the physical, the mental, the spiritual, or in talking to devotees; nev-

er a single moment of rest. Yet, we see in this person such quiet and calm.

What is Karma Yoga? We must work and we should work as worship. Then our work becomes free from stress and we can enjoy peace and tranquility. Holy Mother's life is a living example of the practice of Karma Yoga.

As we know through her biography Holy Mother was surrounded by people, some of whom were troublesome, difficult to handle, overly sensitive and consistently noisy. In our case, if people around us are quiet, we happen to be quiet, but that was not the case with Holy Mother. In spite of the presence of some boisterous people around her, she maintained her calmness and peace of mind. Yet, she continued to be engaged in serving the people physically, mentally and spiritually. This moment Holy Mother was found giving initiation and the next she was up and cooking for those she had initiated.

In one sense, however, Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji are ideals for monastics, but for householders, Holy Mother is the ideal to emulate. Work is absolutely necessary for our livelihood, but it makes us stressful. Modern life has become more stressful, because it has become faster and highly competitive. In olden times the pace of life moved more slowly. Nowadays we see so many commuters running for the train, though signs at the train station say, 'Please do not rush onto the train, wait for

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• Thought of the Month •

"Sunlight fell upon the wall; the wall
received a borrowed splendour.
Why set your heart
on a piece of earth, O simple one?
Seek out the source
which shines forever."

- Rumi

Sublime Ideal (from page 4)

the next train,' as indeed, another train arrives barely two to three minutes later, yet we must run to catch this train as 'It's my train!'

Swami Saradanandaji made an interesting comment about Holy Mother. He said that though the atmosphere around Holy Mother was mostly disturbing for various reasons, she remained patient, calm and quiet, and a perfect example of inaction in action!

Some of the younger monks would also occasionally have problems, or maybe the work habits of one did not suit the work habits of another. Swami Saradanandaji would keep such monks with him there until their outlook was corrected. Rather than use himself, a highly advanced soul, as an example, Swami Saradanandaji would always instruct any monks in disagreements to look at Holy Mother. She had so much to do in loud, confined surroundings, and she remained patient, calm and quiet. See action in inaction and inaction in action! Holy Mother is a sublime, an ideal, example for us.

Subdue the Ego

We cannot become quiet and peaceful as long as we have strong ego. A strong ego causes anger, jealousy and other negative feelings which mar our good relationships and good work atmosphere. There are two ways of curbing our ego. One is to have the attitude that 'I am an instrument of God.' Everyone is God, so I will take care of God as His instrument.' Think that we are receiving both challenges, talents and power from God. If we practice this idea seriously, our conceit will shrink more and more until it disappears. We see this idea demonstrated in the life of Holy Mother.

We mentioned earlier that Holy Mother's love seems infinite, while that of ordinary people is limited. Ordinary people think, 'I love my husband, my wife, my family, etc.,



and I do not have any more love to offer to others.' Our capacity for love is exhausted, just in loving our family and friends! It is as if we think our love of family gets decreased if we love others. We think thus because our love is mostly an attachment which makes love limited and confined. But pure love has no boundary in this world—it is infinite because its source is infinite, which is God.

Be an Instrument of God

In the Bhagavad Gita we read, "One who sees me in everyone and everyone in me, that person is the greatest person." In other words, to see God in myself and see that same God in others. If we do so, the ego decreases. Everyone has an ego and everyone's ego is different. Where does this ego come from? Our ego is generated by our identification with the body-mind complex. We can reduce our ego by thinking, 'I am a tool of God. I will take care of God.' Can we practice this? Imagine the presence of your Ishta, your favourite deity, in everyone. For example, if you are a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, try to see Ramakrishna in everyone and then serve him according to your capacity.

Another way of curbing the ego is a little more difficult. That way is Jnana Yoga. 'I am pure consciousness.' I am neither body or mind, so who is doing the work? With this idea we get the same result of egolessness. We see inactivity in activity and activity in inactivity. This idea is a little more difficult to follow, however. For most people, I believe it is a bit easier to think that we are instruments of God; than we are God. Holy Mother's whole life was continuous service to God, as His instrument. •

• Vedanta Society of Japan •

MARCH 2017
SCHEDULE of EVENTS

4th (Sat)

Discourse on Bhagavad Gita -

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

5th, 12th, 26th (Sun)

Yoga-Asana Class -

At the Annexe (from 14:00-15:30)
Please Contact: Hanari 080-6702-2308 (羽成淳)

7th (Tue)

Study Class in Zushi

14:00~15:30

Please Contact: benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

10th~15th

Swami visits Korea

19th (Sun)

Sri Ramakrishna Birthday Celebration

At the Zushi Annexe (from 10:30-19:30)
06:30 - Mangala Arati
10:30 - Puja, Pushpanjali (flower offering), Homa
13:00 - Lunch Prasad
14:45 - Afternoon Session Discourse
15:45 - Special Music Programme
16:30 - Tea
18:00 - Evening Arati

All, with family and friends are welcome!

24th (Fri)

Nara Narayana

Service to Homeless Narayan
Please Contact: Yoko Sato (090-6544-9304)

25th (Sat)

Discourses in Osaka

(Japanese Language Only)

Discourses on “Bhagavad Gita” and “Upanishad”
are given in Osaka and Kyoto on a monthly basis.
For details please contact the Zushi Centre.

Zushi Kalpataru New Year's Day 2017

On Sunday, January 1, 2017 the Zushi Centre held it's annual Kalpataru and New Year's Day observance. At 11:30 devotees, family members and friends assembled in the Main Shrine room and Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) led the assembly in chanting an extended daily-use selection of Vedic Peace Prayers. Adding to the the New Year atmosphere of good wishes and good will to all, Maharaj then led the congregation in a call and response chant of the Sarveshaam Shanti (Peace) Mantra in Sanskrit with verse translations in Japanese:

Om, sarveshaam svastir bhavatu,
sarveshaam shaantir bhavatu,
Sarveshaam poornam bhavatu,
sarveshaam mangalam bhavatu,
Sarve bhavantu sukhinah,
sarve santu niraamayaah,
Sarve bhadraani pashyantu,
maa kashchidh dukh bhaag-bhavet.

This was followed by readings in Japanese and English from the Teachings of Buddha, the Bible, and from the booklet Thus Sake Prophet Muhammad by various attendees.

Then Maharaj read from The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the chapter "With the Devotees at Dakshineswar" dated Friday, June 15, 1883 followed by after chanting:

Om sthapakaya cha dharmasya,
sarva dharma-svarupine;
Avatara-varishthaya
Ramakrishnaya te namah.

This was followed by another reading from the Gospel of Sri Sarada Devi and then Maharaj surprised both Mr. Alvarez and Mr. Lonnie by requesting them to sing Amazing Grace a-cappella ... the two had never sung together before but somehow managed an effort.



Maharaj then offered a few traditional Japanese New Year's greeting and phrases to the delight of all. Noting how in earlier eras the New Year was celebrated later throughout Asia. He then offered some light-hearted but instructive thoughts for New Year's regarding "Everyday is a new day" and thinking such, do not dwell on the past or future, but live each day well. Instead of thinking in terms of once a new year, think 'today!' and "Live today well." This includes adjusting one's lifestyle to practice living a better life; noting we can always call on God for the power to lead a better life, rather than calling on God for assistance with fleeting desires.

After a brief meditation Lunch Prasad was served from about 12:40, during which all enjoyed a each other's company and conversations.

At 2 PM a small party made the traditional pilgrimage on foot to Daibutsu (Buddha Statue) in nearby Kamakura. After Maharaj
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Zushi Kalpataru (from page 7)

led the group in offerings and prayers there, the group continued on to visit to Yukinoshita Catholic Church to offer more prayers. Later a few members continued on to the very busy Hachimangu Shrine where thousands continued coming to offer their traditional New Year's prayers. •



Group at Daibutsu (Buddha Statue) in Kamakura



Kamakura Daibutsu



Yamashita Catholic Church



Group Visiting Yamashita Catholic Church



Zushi Christmas Eve Celebration 2016

Why did Jesus Perform Miracles and What was the Meaning of His Crucifixion?

A Talk by Leonardo Alvarez

Jesus Christ was born in Israel about 2000 years ago. His mother had received a revelation from the Angel Gabriel, who told her that she was pregnant with the Holy Spirit and that she would give birth to the Son of God.

At that time Israel was part of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire had issued an order for all males to register for a census. His father, Joseph, along with his mother, Mary, were on their way to Bethlehem, where King David was born, as Joseph was of King's David lineage and had to register there.

However, on the way Mary broke water and was about to give birth to baby Jesus. They tried to go to a guest house close-by, but they were full. So they had no choice to go to a horse barn. There, in that very humble setting, was the son of God born. The first witnesses were a band of shepherds who had been told by an angel that the Saviour had been born in Bethlehem. Shortly after the 3 Magi reached, hailing from the East (literally from the side where the sun Rises (Matthew 2:1-12) – presumably from India or Persia – following a mystical star in the sky which informed them of the position
(con't page 11)

Jesus (from page 10)

where baby Jesus had been born. They brought with them Gold, which is a gift for kings and also symbolises virtue, Frankincense which was used in many ritualistic worships in the Near East and symbolises Divinity, and Myrrh, an embalming oil, which symbolises suffering and death – all of which are symbols of Lord Jesus' drama on Earth.

At that time, the ruler of Judea, the name for ancient Israel, was Herod the Great who was a despot. When he heard the news that a new king of the Jews had been born, he felt jealous and ordered all first born children under age 2 to be murdered as to ensure that Jesus would be killed and no other "king" except himself would rule. But Angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph and ordered him to go for exile in Egypt until Herod lived, thus escaping death. For the first 7 or 8 years of His life, Jesus and His family lived in Egypt. In due time, Angel Gabriel again told Joseph to go back as Herod had already died. From this we can say that early on, Jesus had experienced what it was to be a refugee.

About the infancy of Jesus little is known. We know that Joseph taught Jesus carpentry to some degree. Also, one incident is mentioned, when Jesus was 12 years old, He and His parents went to Jerusalem, for the Passover festival, celebrating the liberation of the Jews from the Egyptians in ancient times, which at that time had been led by Moses. Once the Passover was over, Jews from many areas of Israel were going back to their homes, and Jesus' parents returned alongside a caravan of people. They thought Jesus was with them, but in fact He had remained in the temple of Jerusalem teaching others. Halfway along their journey, His parents realised that Jesus was not with them, and went back to look for Him. After two exhausting days they finally found Him, teaching at the Temple of Jerusalem. His mother told Him: "Why did you do this to

us? Don't you know your father and I were very worried and looking for you?". To which Jesus said; "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be at my Father's house?". (Luke 2:49).

From the age of 13 to 30 almost nothing is known about Jesus. The Gospel of Luke says that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man". (Luke 2:52).

When He was 30 years old, he began his ministry, beginning in Galilee. He brought forth the news that the "Kingdom of God had come," hence repentance from sin was necessary, but also God's mercy was upon them too. And Jesus began to perform many healing miracles.

This brings us to the topic of today's talk. Why did Jesus perform miracles and what is the meaning of His crucifixion?

Centuries Before the Advent of Jesus

To understand this, we have to go back at least 600 to 700 years before the birth of Jesus. The territory and people of Israel had been annexed first to the Assyrian and then to the Babylonian Empires. The people from these Empires were apparently religious people, but their religious practices had become depraved. For instance, they would have male and female prostitutes in their temples, and they would also make human sacrifices to their gods.

Israel was at a critical point. They had to maintain their traditions and their belief in the One God, whom they regarded as a transcendental yet personal, benevolent and loving, while strict and punishing entity. This idea of a One God which is beyond and above all worldly elements, was very unusual, since in most Near East religions their gods were bound by one physical attribute or other, for instance, the Sun, the Earth, Fire, Water, etc.. By worshipping these gods one could procure

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Jesus (from page 11)

worldly happiness quickly. These religious practices of the Babylonian empire, along with their power, riches, and glories must have been very tempting. Many were converting to the Babylonian depraved practices, as it is shown in the Old Testament. The Jews, had so far fostered deep spiritual practices, as it is attested to by an array of great prophets and saints they produced in the course of history. It is also stated by Cabalistic scholars, such as Aryeh Kaplan, who say all Jews used to practice meditation in ancient times. These spiritual Jews who laid utmost importance to purity, not only physical but mental, and who had very strict moral rules, were confronted with the laxer and tempting practices of Babylon and other surrounding empires.

Perpetuating the Faith

To get an idea of the faith of the Jewish people, we can look at one of their most important prayers, "Shema Israel" (Hear ye Israel) which encompasses the content and intensity of their beliefs. It is first found in the book of the Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and the Jewish people had been reciting since their days of captivity in Egypt:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord of our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates. So how were they to preserve their identity and practices with the imminent threat of losing them forever, like it had happened with the 10 tribes of Israel assimilated by the Assyrian Empire? At that time, the Jewish community was or-

ganised in two big castes. At the top were the priests, called the "Levites", whose main job was to conduct the ritualistic worships of God, spiritually guiding the community, systematising and teaching their religious and moral beliefs to the people and ensuring that they were being followed. The other caste was the working people, who were grouped according to the types of work their ancestors had done, and these were grouped into 12 main "tribes" of Israel. They were professions such as farming, trading, goldsmithing, carpentry, etc.

The Levites set to write an extremely detailed account of all the theology and moral rules the Jewish people should believe and follow. They were to memorise it and follow it to the letter. This way, they thought, they would be able to unify their beliefs and draw a clear line between what they believed and what the Babylonians believed. In these writings called "The Torah" Or "The Law" there were many good things, such as the 10 commandments (Exodus 20:2-17):

1. I am the Lord your God: you shall not have other Gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy
4. Honour your father and your mother
5. You shall not kill
6. You shall not commit adultery
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
9. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.
10. You shall not cover your neighbour's goods.

The Decay of the Priest Caste

However, there were many rules which were also discriminatory. In their zeal for "purity," they placed more emphasis on the physical than on the spiritual (though the latter was also important). Some of these practices were salubrious. Like washing hands before eating and taking a

(con't page 13)

Jesus (from page 12)

bath every day. Others however, doomed people to be outcasts. Those with skin diseases were excluded from their communities until they were completely healed. But at that time, there was no known cure for many of these diseases. Hence many would not be able to reintegrate into their communities. Being an outcast in Israel was worse than being dead. If they would not heal within a period of 1 to 3 weeks they would be considered outcasts and would have to tie bells to their clothing and say in a loud voice "Unclean, Unclean!" (Lev 13:46) whenever they would pass through a Jewish encampment. A similar fate was for women who would have had some sort of bleeding diseases.

The ancient Jewish people believed in a sort of karmic retribution. They thought that if they were faithful to God, followed the 10 commandments, and led good lives no diseases or calamities would befall them. They saw their own fate, such as being slaves of the Babylonian empire, as retribution for their sins. At the individual level, if someone had any of these then incurable diseases, they saw this as a punishment from God. All in all, the priest caste was imposing a double discriminatory rule upon the people. They would first discriminate based on disease, and then further discriminate based on an alleged spiritual impurity. This type of "No-touchism" was very prevalent.

Also, it must be said that the priest caste did not work, nor did they own any land. They were supported by the other 12 tribes, which had to frequently give them gifts such as money and food of the best quality. The only condition required of them, instead, was they should keep themselves pure. However, by the time Jesus was born, the priest caste had greatly degenerated. They were imposing heavy taxes on their people, while they would not work. They would judge and repress the people, who were devout to

God and took their unfair judgments as divine punishments. They would also twist the laws they had written. For instance, whatever was offered at the temple, was said to be God's, hence it could not be given back. This way, some shrewd priests would avoid their filial duties of supporting and sending money to their parents, by offering that money to the altar, which was then said to be God's, hence it could not be used for anything else but for the priests' own expenses.

Jesus Came to Restore Spirituality

Jesus came to first teach what true spirituality and worship was. When the priests would see that Jesus' disciples would not wash their hands before eating, they would say that they were impure. But Jesus retorted saying that they who keep a cup clean on the outside are full of impurity inside. And it was the inner purity which was of utmost important, not the bodily purity.

Jesus was also healing a great number of people with skin diseases. This liberated them from being outcasts and thus be able to return to society. The same is for women with blood diseases, the blind, the lame, and those with psychiatric illnesses, which were thought to be possessed "by demons".

This greatly angered the priests, because Jesus was destroying their authority by liberating people of the oppressions of their rigid and merciless laws. They condemned Jesus for curing people on the Shabbat, the 7th day of the week, which supposedly was only for worship of God, and when no "work" was to be allowed. For them doing good was not allowed on the Shabbat, but Jesus healed people nonetheless on that day and made their hypocrisy come to light, because as He pointed out, the priests themselves would save their sheep and cattle if they had fallen into a hole on the Shabbat day. Also priests had their priestly duties to do

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Jesus (from page 13)

on the Sabbath, thus contradicting their own rules about not working on the Sabbath. Therefore they had no moral right to criticise Jesus' saving lives and curing people on the Sabbath.

As a consequence, people were greatly losing respect and doubting the authority of the priests. The people of Israel thought that only through the priests they could get close to God. For instance only the priests were able to go into the "Sanctum Sanctorum" of the Temple and offer sacrifices and oblations to God. Likewise all offerings had to be done in the Temple of Jerusalem by the priests, otherwise that person would be excommunicated or even put to death.

Controversial Teachings

Jesus came with very controversial teachings. He would say to them "For the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), "Ye are gods" (John 10:34). Meaning that Divinity is within. The Heaven which they wanted to reach was not in the other world, nor in a temple. Rather, already within themselves laid Divinity itself.

To a Samaritan woman He said: "Woman believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." (John 4:21-24)

If you stress that your true identity is Divine, that the Divine principle is already within you, hence you do not need any intercession by the priests, nor need you go to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship God, and all you need to do to lead a pure and prayerful life, while doing as much

good as you can to others, you will pose a threat to established authority.

These are the two great commandments which Jesus took from the Old Testament: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your thoughts and all your might. And you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:30). By practicing this alone you will be saved. It is not that easy however, because it implies a great deal of sacrifice and renunciation, and not hypocritical religiosity which was rampant at that time.

Miracles as Teaching Tools

This was the message Jesus wanted to ultimately teach by performing miracles. By healing the diseases of the people of Israel he returned to them their dignity and place in society. At the same time, He taught that God's love and mercy is above and beyond human rules. Also, that true cleanliness does not lie so much as in following external rules, but in leading a life of inner purity.

For instance he taught: "Nothing that enters a man from the outside can defile him, because it does not enter his heart, but it goes into his stomach and then is eliminated." He continued: "What comes out of a man, that is what defiles him. For from within the hearts of men come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, arrogance, and foolishness. All these evils come from within, and these are what defile a man." (Matthew 15:17-20)

Or the true meaning of adultery "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28). He even opened the doors to monastic life wide, first and foremost through His own example. His famous words are "For there are eunuchs, who were born so from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs,

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Jesus (from page 10)

who were made so by men: and there are eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 19:12). Before Jesus, only a few select members of the Jewish community, usually the prophets and some of their disciples would lead celibate lives, but after Jesus came it became a path many would choose, especially in the first centuries of the development of the Christian movement.

A Living Example

In other words, He liberated man from the bondages of external laws, and taught a new spiritual system, based on inner purity, on mercy, humbleness and loving our neighbour as the self.

All of Jesus’ teachings were already in the Old Testament. That is why he said “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” (Matthew 5:17). He was the living example of all that was pure and holy. Also, he taught men fearlessness because, He criticised the hypocrisy of the priests and tyrants of the time, like a lion, well knowing that He would have to give up His life for that reason. In other words, He lived His life based on Truth, and He showed that it is better to sacrifice everything for Truth than to live like a slave with untruth.

We can compare man made rules, which people are forced to follow and can be thought of as “The path of man,” to what which Jesus taught as the “Path to God”

The Crucifixion

Lastly, what does His crucifixion mean? We can read it merely as a story; This poor fellow, who in spite of being the Son of God, tragically died on a cross for humankind. And it ends there. But I believe Jesus’ life is a metaphor of the inner processes which each devotee must go

through in order to reach God. His Passion is the Passion that we all must go through, it is the several “deaths” we must experience to become “Perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Lord Jesus said: “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24). To give up our desires, our selfishness, our lust, etc. is painful, is hard. To give up what is pleasant, but harmful, is in a way a crucifixion. As St. Paul said: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). We die to the sin which limits us to the finitude of the flesh, to be born anew into the Spirit of everlasting life.

This Jesus spoke very clearly about it as it is attested in the Gospel of John. He said to Nicodemus, who was a High Priest in Jerusalem: “Amen, amen I tell you. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). To which Nicodemus retorted: “How can an old man like me be born again? I cannot enter into my mother’s womb again!” and Jesus replied that he did not mean a physical rebirth. He said: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). In other words, Jesus was speaking about an inner death and rebirth, a transformation that must happen at a mental and spiritual level. This means that if anyone wants to be a true disciple of Christ, he or she must undergo that inner spiritual change, otherwise the Lord’s life and death as portrayed in the Bible will remain merely a beautiful and tragic story with not much relevance to our daily lives. His message must come alive by means of us trying to live up to that standard, which He set with his own example.

As a final comment we can say surely say that the appeal of these teachings and His life is universal and that is why His message rapidly spread through the then known world and is still very much alive today. Thank you. •

• **A Story to Remember** •

The First Principle

When one goes to Obaku Temple in Kyoto he sees carved over the gate the words "The First Principle" in Japanese.

The letters are unusually large, and those who appreciate calligraphy always admire them as being a masterpiece. They were drawn by Kosen two hundred years ago.

When the master drew them, he did so on paper, from which workmen made the larger carving in wood. As Kosen sketched the letters, a pupil was with him who had prepared several gallons of ink for the calligraphy. This bold pupil never failed to criticise his master's work.

"That is not good," he told Kosen after the first effort.

"How is this one?"

"Poor. Worse than before," announced the pupil.

Kosen patiently prepared one sheet after another until eighty-four First Principles had been accumulated, still without the approval of the pupil.

Then, when the young man stepped outside for a few moments, Kosen thought: "Now is my chance to escape his keen eye," and he wrote hurriedly, with a mind free from distraction. "The First Principle."

"A masterpiece," pronounced the pupil.

Seven Zen Stories

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