



MARCH 2017 - Volume 15 Number 03

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

**APRIL Calendar
2017**

Birthdays

Rama Navami
Wednesday, April 5

Sri Shankaracharya
Sunday, April 30



Sri Shankaracharya

Kyokai Events

4th (Tue)
Gospel Class at Zushi
(from 14:00~15:30)

19th (Sun)
**April 2017
Zushi Retreat**
10:30 ~ 14:30
AM Programme
Lunch Prasad
PM Programme

29th (Sat)
05:00~20:00
**Akhanda Japam &
Meditation Day**
Venue: Zushi Shrine
Meal to be served.

**See page 3 for more
details and events.**



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Form is confined to time and space and is bound by the law of causation. All time is in us, we are not in time. As the soul is not in time and space, all time and space are within the soul. The soul is therefore omnipresent."

- Swami Vivekananda

"Do not be proud of wealth, people, relations and friends, or youth. All these are snatched by time in the blink of an eye. Giving up this illusory world, know and attain the Supreme."

- Sri Shankaracharya

February Zushi Retreat 2017
Public Celebration

Swami Vivekananda's 154th Birth Anniversary

On Sunday, February, the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat celebrated the 154th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji).

Mangala arati (morning worship) began at 6:00 AM in the Main Zushi Ashram attended, as always, by the volunteer devotees. After an early breakfast both the Zushi Annexe and the Main Ashrama Kitchen were busy with preparations of food and flowers for the celebration. The platform assembly, puja vessels and utensils, trays of pushpanjali flowers for the congregation, along with seating and audio/video set-up, were all attended to with devotion.

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Vivekananda February 2017 (from page 1)

Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) led Swamiji's puja with prayers and offerings. About 50 minutes later the ritual came to an end with mantra, bell and conch, and 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 Khandana Bhava Bandhana accompanied by Ms. Shanti Izumida on synthesiser. Maharaj then prostrated before the altar again and joined the congregation in singing Sarvamangala Mangalye.

Space was cleared at the base of the altar 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. Afterward offerings were collected and

taken to the Main Ashrama kitchen for the prasad lunch to be served.

The afternoon session began about 14:30 with Maharaj leading the congregation in Vedic Peace Prayers and a brief period of silent prayer. One by one attendees read from the Vedanta Society of Japan's Japanese publication of a compilation of Swamiji's messages.

Maharaj then gave a brief discourse titled 'Swamiji's Gospel of Service' based on Swamiji's talks on Karma Yoga and applying his message to our everyday lives.

Members of the congregation then sang Japanese devotionals written by Ms. Yoko Sato, followed by closing prayers and a meditation. Tea was then served in the Main Ashrama

About 60 people attended the celebration. •

Swami Medhasananda Attends Kailas Yoga's Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Celebration

Report contributed by Hanuman of Kailas Yoga

Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was celebrated on March 1, at Yoga School Kailas in Yokohama.

Approximately fifty people took part in the celebration, including Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) and two devotees from the Vedanta Society of Japan, as well as Kailas members.

The programme included the singing of Sri Ramakrishna's (Thakur) favorite song, "Dub Dub Dub Rup Sagare Amar Mon", the familiar devotional song "Ramakrishna Sharanam," and several of Kailas' original songs.

Also featured were pushpanjali, a video on Ramakrishna made for the occasion by Kailas, and talks delivered by Maharaj and Mr. Keisho Matsukawa, the director of

Kailas. The celebration concluded after a delicious Prasad was served and enjoyed. We felt at one with our devotional thoughts on Thakur, sometimes with laughter and sometimes with tears in our eyes during the wide variety of activities and talks throughout the programme.

It was dream-like during the celebration, as if we were all within a scene described in "The Gospel of Ramakrishna" itself. •



• Vedanta Society of Japan •

APRIL 2017 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

1st (Sat)

Discourse on Bhagavad Gita - At the Embassy of India in Tokyo

In Japanese-language only (10:00~12:00)

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

2nd, 9th, 16th, 23th, 30th (Sun)

Yoga-Asana Class

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

Please Contact: Hanari 080-6702-2308 (羽成淳)

Link: <http://zushi-hatayoga.jimdo.com/>

8th ~10th (Sat~Mon)

Satsanga in Oita

Please Contact: 0972-62-2338 Jinen

4th (Tue)

Study Class in Zushi 10:00~12:30

Please Contact: <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

15th (Sat)

Discourse on Upanishad - At the Embassy of India in Tokyo

In Japanese language only (10:00~12:00)

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

16th (Sun)

Monthly Retreat at Zushi

At Zushi Centre (from 10:30~16:30)

Discourse by Swami Medhasananda

18th (Fri)

Nara Narayan: Service to Homeless Narayan

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

29th April (Sat) 05:00~20:00

Special Japam and Meditation Day

We hold Akhanda Japam (continuous spiritual practice of silent chanting of mantra, meditation or prayer) twice yearly at our Zushi Centre. Participants practice for one hour periods or more continuously in silence creating a holy atmosphere. You are welcome to join at a time of your convenience. This practice is quite easy and beneficial for beginners. If you would like to participate, please contact Suzuki-san at <ved-anta.karmayoga@gmail.com> as to a time convenient for your participation..

Date: April 29th (National holiday) 05:00~20:00

Venue: Kyokai Shrine

Note: Meal to be served.

‘Swami Vivekananda’s Gospel of Service’

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

The theme of today’s discourse is ‘Swami Vivekananda’s (Swamiji) Gospel of Service’. Swamiji placed a lot of emphasis on service. In fact, one of the founding principles upon which Swamiji established the Ramakrishna Math and Mission was based on this idea of service to the people. The two founding principles are “Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha”, meaning "For one's own salvation, and for the welfare of the world." The Ramakrishna Mission is famous in India for its many humanitarian and philanthropic services.

Unselfishness is God

The world knows of the important service Mother Teresa gave to India, but most have no idea how much the Ramakrishna Mission is serving in many sectors. In the health sector, education sector, cultural sector and spiritual sector of daily life, as well as during natural disasters and disease outbreaks, Indians know the depth and scale of service the Ramakrishna Mission provides. Why? Because one of the stated purposes of the Math and Mission is service to mankind. Swamiji expressed this idea again and again in his many talks.

One such message is, “Unselfishness is God.” So what is unselfishness? In Japanese the term ‘osewa’, meaning to serve others, is borrowed from Sanskrit which came to Japan via the spread of Buddhism through China and Korea. The Sanskrit word is ‘seva’, meaning selfless service. The importance Swamiji placed on service cannot be overstated. He even said, “Those who live for themselves are more dead than alive.” He also proclaimed, “They alone live, who live for others.” From this criteria let us judge for our-

selves whether we, the mainstream, are living or dead.

I would say that those who come here and help in whatever way are at least trying to do some selfless service. By this I do not mean service in an exclusive way, or solely a Vedanta Society activity. There are many other Buddhist groups and churches with many volunteer activities. One example of volunteer activity not affiliated with a religion is found in Yokohama’s Kotobukicho district where a group serves food once a week to the homeless. In charge of this group is one gentleman named Kondosan who has been doing this work quietly for years with great dedication. I really respect him. I do not know whether he engages in religious practice or meditation or not, but what he is doing, apparently selflessly, makes me believe he will go the same place a yogi goes upon his death. I am gladdened that in this country quite a few people are interested in such ‘osewa’ activities, and engage themselves in them when they get a chance.

A High-Tech Narrowing World

One has to be careful, however, of the many slow changes around us. Especially as so many technical innovations, facilities and comforts become available, I wonder whether people are losing sight of this idea of osewa. Slowly people are focusing more and more on themselves and less on others. One simple example of this are the cautions regarding the ‘selfie’ photo trend being posted on trains urging enthusiasts to be aware of the inherent hazards of such behaviour in crowded situations. In a sense we can say that the selfie is selfishness, focusing only on oneself. We

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Gospel of Service (from page 4)

used to take photos of others, now we have less interest in others and more interest in ourselves. Our world becomes more and more narrow.

Selfish people have always been around and they have had at least three companions; friends, family and themselves. Today their world has narrowed to two; myself and my cell phone. When in the Philippines I learned that the wife of an employee of a famous establishment in Manila wrote a satire about her mobile phone. The theme of this satire was “I have become redundant”, wherein she lamented that her husband paid more attention to the cell phone at their bedside than to her. It is true, isn't it? We have become more and more self-centred in our world.

Here is the reason we have so much stress, tension, mental problems and relational problems. The more selfish and self-centred we become, the more depressions develop. In Japan this is a serious problem with the government estimating some 600,000 people avoid all social contact and shut themselves in their homes. In Japan this is called 'hikikomori' or social withdrawal. This phenomenon arising in such an advanced nation drew a lot of attention and was even published in the newspaper in India. So it is urgent that people of both advanced countries and developing countries of the world be aware of this trend of the 'me-and-my-mobile'.

Become Great

In the Bhagavad Gita it says that that yogi is the greatest who regards the happiness of others as his own and the suffering of others as his suffering. It doesn't say the criteria is to be immersed in samadhi all the time. In fact, the greatest yogi is not such a person, but one who regards the suffering of others as his own and the

happiness of others as his own. Who is the greatest example of such a yogi in history? According to Swami Vivekananda Lord Buddha is that example.

One of the most important remedies for stress, the onset of depression and melancholy is to go beyond oneself, to expand oneself and identify oneself with others. The more we think of others, the more we expand ourselves and forget about our sufferings. By doing so we will become cured in a natural way without the help of medicines. Addressing self-centredness early, one may avoid the doctor or psychiatrist. At any rate, do not go to a spiritualist or seek out some power-spot when feeling chronically depressed. Just identify more with others and think how you may help and serve others. Trying to make others happy and joyful is the surest way to make ourselves happy and joyful.

Buddha's Teachings

How is it that we may help and serve others. The teachings of Buddha give us are some beautiful examples of such service and help:

“There are seven kinds of offerings that can be practised even by those who are not wealthy. The first is the physical offering. This is to offer service by one's labour. The highest type of this offering is to offer one's own life. The second is the spiritual offering. This is to offer a compassionate heart to others. The third is the offering of eyes. This is to offer a warm glance to other, which will give them tranquility. The fourth is the offering of countenance. This is to offer soft countenance with a smile to others. The fifth is the oral offering. This is to offer kind and warm words to others. The sixth is the seat offering. This is to offer one's seat to others. The seventh is the offering of shelter. This is to let others spend the night at one's home.”

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Gospel of Service (from page 5)

For example, when one comes to our Society and labours in the kitchen, or gardening, or cleaning, or preparing for events such as today, these are all this type of physical service. But there are also some kinds of offerings that can be practiced by anyone in everyday life that does not involve any expenditure or labour.

Observed Osewa

We see signs posted at each end of commuter train cars in this country instructing that these seats should be yielded to the elderly, injured, pregnant and mothers with small children, and this is generally observed. On top of this, what impressed me while commuting was observing two friends board the train with only single seats available; one would stand and the other would sit and continue their conversation, soon a neighbouring passenger would then quietly move to a seat elsewhere so that the two could sit together and chat. The seat was not verbally offered, but silently offered. This offering of one's seat, seen often here, impresses me so much, and I consider such small acts and gestures as truly indicative of a great aspect of the culture of this country.

Also, there is no cost involved in sharing a smiling face. Is it not a charity and a service? Using kind words is also easy to do, and these are small things to be sure, but done to make others feel comfortable and happy. Such small gestures have a great role to play in everyday life. Smiling is also good exercise for the face, without which some of your facial muscles will not move resulting in a constant frown. Laughing is good, too, to resist facial paralysis. Swami Vivekananda once observed, if one feels sad-faced, he should not show that face to others, because it will have a negative impact on them. Who does not like a smiling face? Think about our own impressions, don't we all like to see the smiles of others. Irrespective of age or gender, we all like smiling faces. Good looking or not, smiling is divine. Certainly we all like to see smiling faces and according to Bud-

dha it is one form of charity; a gift to others that costs us no money.

Let us also offer some sweet words. In my experience, on my limited visits to America I found that most Americans offer a smile and a bright, "Hello!" or "How are you?" and "How are you doing?" Whether that person is known to them or not; even strangers passing each other in the street. This plays a great role in engendering good feelings with others.

The Greatest Gift

According to Indian tradition we say there are different ways of giving gifts. One is 'annadāna' the giving of food. Another is 'pranadāna' or the giving of life; for example a doctor treating a patient without accepting a fee. There are also life threatening situations wherein one saves another's life. A third is 'shikshadāna' or the giving of an education. The last is 'dharmadāna' or to impart spirituality. All these gifts are considered great. It is good to feed the hungry. It is certainly good to save a life. It is good to teach others. It is good to impart spirituality, too. In order to consider one of these 'the greatest gift' we have to take into consideration the duration of the effect.

The effect of giving food to a hungry person lasts until hunger returns. Pranadāna is a great gift, but that person most likely will be born again. Giving an education, too, is great because one's whole life is benefited with better earnings. So the effects of all these gifts are limited to this life. The gift of 'dharmadāna' is considered greatest gift because it offers liberation; freedom from birth and death and the secession of all suffering. This gift solves all one's problems for eternity.

Develop Love

What is the most important motivating factor for such gift giving? Love! If we have love, then seva becomes natural. If

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Gospel of Service (from page 6)

there is no love, then it becomes mechanical and difficult to continue doing. So our basic efforts must be in developing love for others. Our motivation cannot be because Swami said this or that; or that we will gain some physical rewards; or that we may gain some name and fame. So if we want to serve others, we have to develop love for others. This is at the root of the motivating power of service.

Think of a mother's seva for her children. How hard she works at caring for and bringing up a child. No matter how difficult it may be, she doesn't feel it a tiring chore to serve her children. She does not feel it mechanical either. Why? Because she has tremendous love for the child.

All these practices of serving will be easier if we develop that love. The Vedanta says to see that same Self that is within you in others. See the same God in you in others. Then we can love others: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself'. Our countries may not be the same. Our races may not be the same. Hence, what can be the common bond of love? From the point of Atman or God, we are all the manifestation of the same Atman or God.

Just think of a monk like me. I have come to Japan and outwardly there are great differences between us. I was born in a village in India, and Japan is vastly different physically, linguistically, culturally and even the climate. Yes, there are some similarities, but mostly the two countries are quite dissimilar. Before coming here I never knew of any of you, but now I do not think in terms of you are foreigners and I am Indian. How is this possible? Because I try to see the same Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother in you all, and I think that you all are my relatives. This is one example of motivation for love and service. If we try to develop this attitude in our lives, who is the foreigner, the stranger? With love no one is a stranger. Remember Holy Mother's last words, "No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own." If we develop this 'love' all kinds of gifts will be easier

for us to offer. We can smile. We can use sweet words. We can help a distressed person more spontaneously.

Prayer and Discrimination

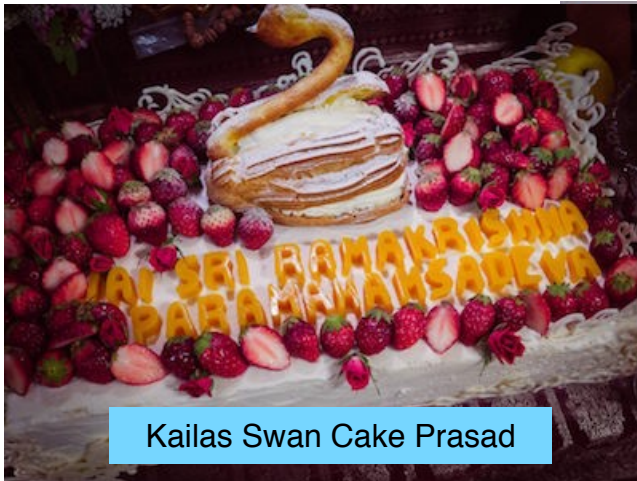
For those who want to practice this gift giving (o sewa), while there may be several things to be cautious of, the most important thing we must be very watchful of is the ego. Because from the ego comes, jealousy, envy, anger, hatred and conceit. The most practical way to avoid the effects of the ego is to practice the attitude of being an instrument. Hence we all should pray, 'O Lord, save me from my ego.' In this way we can avoid ego problems occurring in our spiritual lives; causing problems with others and problems for our Society, which we are trying to help, and finally, problems for ourselves. The ego emerges so relentlessly and unknowingly that we must keep checks on it. So let us practice the instrument attitude while we offer our service: 'Lord I am your machine, your instrument. You are the operator. See that I don't develop any ego while serving your devotees, your Society, the combined You'.

Our discussion today mostly concerned Karma Yoga, the teachings of Lord Buddha, Bhagavad Gita and Swami Vivekananda on selfless service with some common, practical examples of practice. If we are discriminating and watchful about the ideals and methods of our service and pray for God's help, we can perform selfless service in a purer way to the benefit of not only our spiritual progress, but for the benefit of others and the institutions we serve, and for greater society as a whole. •

Thought of the Month

"The mind is susceptible to suggestions.
It learns whatever you teach it."

- Swami Brahmanandaji



Kailas Swan Cake Prasad



Kailas in Prayer

Swami Vivekanandaji Birth Celebration Photos



Zushi Annex Altar



Vivekananda Puja



Pushpanjali Mantra



Lunch Prasad Served



'Gospel of Service' Talk



Cultural Programme

A Story to Remember

Surdas and the Guru

There once lived a seeker of God called Surdas. He was eager to study and understand spirituality. He approached a Guru and requested he teach him spiritual practice, so that he could get close to God.

The Guru was well aware of Surdas' defect of anger. He knew that this would prevent Surdas from feeling closeness with God. So the Guru decided to first prepare Surdas before teaching him serious spiritual practice. "Dear Surdas," said the guru, "chant the Lord's name during all your activities for a month. Then take a bath and come back to me."

Starting the very next day, Surdas chanted God's name during all his activities. After a month, he went to a river, took a bath and put on fresh clothes to visit the Guru. On the way to the Guru's ashram his clothes got dirty as a sweeper was sweeping the street carelessly. Surdas was furious and shouted at the sweeper, "What you are doing, you fool? Now I have to go back, wash and dry these clothes and bathe again! Such waste of time!"

The Guru had observed the scene and when Surdas reached the ashram, he said, "Dear Surdas, you are not yet ready for further spiritual practice. Chant the God's name during all your activities for another month, take a bath at the end of it and come to see me."

Surdas accepted the Guru's wish and went back to chanting along with his daily activities. When that month was over and Surdas was returning to the hermitage eagerly, a similar incident happened. This time, the sweeper accidentally brushed his dirty broom against Surdas. Again, Surdas became furious at the sweeper and again, the Guru sent him back and asked him to chant the Lord's name for another month.

At the end of the third month, Surdas was on his way to visit the Guru, when something unusual happened. The sweeper saw Surdas approaching and remembered the way Surdas had berated him even though what had happened had been an accident. He noticed that Surdas was once again wearing clean, new clothes. This time, before Surdas could do or say anything, the sweeper, who was furious at Surdas, intentionally poured all the garbage from his can onto Surdas' head.

But this time, Surdas joined his hands in Namaskar and said, "I thank you. You are my master. You taught me how to overcome anger." The sweeper was surprised and hung his head in shame. When Surdas reached the Guru's ashram, the Guru was waiting for him. The Guru was pleased and patted Surdas on the head, just as a mother pats her child on his achievement.

- Stories of Gurus and Disciples

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