



APRIL 2017 - Volume 15 Number 04

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

MAY 2017
Calendar

Birthdays

Sri Buddhadeva
Wednesday, May 10



Kyokai Events

7th, 14th, 28th (Sun)

Yoga-Asana

Zushi Annexe
14:00~15:30

21st (Sun)

May Zushi Retreat

10:30 ~ 14:30

AM Programme

Lunch Prasad

PM Programme

28th Sun

13:30~17:00

Public Celebration

Swami Vivekananda

Embassy of India

*Reservations required

**See page 2 for more
details and events.**



✧ Thus Spake ✧

“He is born in vain, who having attained the human birth, so difficult to get, does not attempt to realise God in this very life.”

- Sri Ramakrishna

“But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things will be added to you”

- Jesus, the Christ

March Zushi Retreat 2017

Celebrating Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary

On Sunday, March 19, the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat was the venue for a daylong programme in celebration of the 182nd birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. This event at the Society's Zushi Centre enjoys the greatest attendance of all Zushi events throughout the year.

From 05:00 volunteers began arriving at the shrine room of the main Ashrama building. At 06:00 the lights came on and Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) led mangalarati, chanting, reading from the Gita and bhajans.

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• Vedanta Society of Japan •

May 2017

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

May 6th (Sat)

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

(in Japanese only) Photo ID required (from 10:00- 12:00)

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

7th, 14th, 21st, 28th (Sun)

Yoga-Asana Class - At the Annexe

(from 14:00-15:30)

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

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

9th (Tue.)

Gospel Class at Zushi

(from 14:00~16:00)

Please Contact: benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

20th (Sat)

Discourse on Upanishad - At the Embassy of India in Tokyo

(in Japanese only) Photo ID required (from 10:00 - 12:00)

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

21st (Sun)

Zushi Monthly Retreat

(from 10:30~16:30)

"How to Cultivate Bhakti"

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

26th (Fri)

Nara Narayan:

Service to homeless Narayan

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

27th (Sat)

Discourses in Osaka

Only in the Japanese language

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

For details please see → <http://vedanta.main.jp/>

28th (Sun)

Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary Commemorative Celebration

At the Embassy of India in Tokyo / 13:30~17:00

Reservations Required this Year

Please send RSVP to <vcc.tokyo@mea.gov.in> by 17:00hrs May 25th.

Sri Ramakrishna (from page 1)

Later at breakfast the assigned tasks from the duty list were reviewed. Afterward the usual teams strung garlands and arranged bouquets in the Main Ashrama's Meeting Room, others coordinated food offerings from provisions also arrayed in the Meeting Room with those prepared in the Kitchen to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda on the altar in the Annexe Building.

Preparations were coming to a close at about 10:30am and the Annexe began to fill with devotees and friends and an air of anticipation. Bursts of excited chatter and laughter erupted for some time and then Maharaj asked for quiet in the crowded Annex room as it was nearly time to begin. He then added his own final touches and flowers to the altar, made pranam and took his seat on the platform. A conch shell (shankha) was blown to signal the beginning of the worship (puja). Maharaj made some final adjustments and began offering items in the prescribed method with mantras of the puja, accompanied by conch shells as he rang a handbell.

When the puja came to an end adjustments were made for Maharaj to then conduct Arati with symbolic offerings of the five elements; 1st fire, water, space or aether, earth and air, as the congregation sang 'Khandana Bhava Bandhana' led by Ms. Shanti Izumida on synthesiser. Afterward Maharaj then joined the congregation as Ms. Shanti continued with 'Sarva Mangala Mangalye' or Hymn to the Divine Mother:

At the conclusion trays of flowers and leaves to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna (Pushpanjali) were passed out. This took some time with so many in attendance, but once everyone had received their offering, all rose; and Maharaj led the congregation in the pushpanjali mantra to Sri Ramakrishna.

Afterward the food offerings were collected from the altar and sent to the Main Ashrama kitchen. The congregation recited a mantra and offered prayers with flower buds and leaf in hand that were collected afterward by volunteers. During the collection of patpanjali flowers, the homa-fire platform was prepared with the implements and items to be offered to the flames and a supply of warm ghee was prepared.

As Maharaj conducted the homa soon the flames rose, then calling on the congregation to chant a mantra 108 times as he continued with the ritual additions to the controlled blaze as it danced. Windows and doors were kept ajar as the haze began to fill the room. Maharaj then stood offering more ghee, fruits and mantras to the flame. Sitting again he made few more offerings and the yoghurt preparation to douse the flames with great bursts of flame and smoke. Maharaj then prepared the vibhuti (ash) to be placed on everyone's forehead as they lined up to receive a dab of ash and offer prayer and pranam.

All were encouraged to stay for lunch prasad in the Main Ashrama before returning to the Annexe for the Afternoon Session.

After lunch, at about 2:45pm Maharaj welcomed everyone to the Afternoon Session and for the benefit of those who had arrived late and had missed the Morning Session, reviewed that the session had consisted of the ritualistic portion of the scheduled celebration including puja, arati, pushpanjali, homa and receipt of vibhuti.

Maharaj then led the congregation in Vedic peace mantra chanting, followed by attendees giving brief readings in English and Japanese from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Maharaj then called upon a devotee who offered a bhajan on Krishna which she performed a-cappella.

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Sri Ramakrishna (from page 3)

Ms Yokota then joined Maharaj on the platform to interpret and he explained that there are generally two sessions, morning and afternoon. He noted that generally the Morning Sessions of such celebrations are more crowded, but that today the audience of the Afternoon Session seemed to be greater. Maharaj continued that he could not be sure if this crowd is due to interest in the Afternoon Session and its Cultural Programme, or whether it is due to a holiday “traffic jam” (laughter). If that was the case, he was pleased that at least they could take advantage of the situation and join the Afternoon Session.

Maharaj then launched into his comments saying, “Any speaker would be enthused seeing such an audience, but despite this incentive, my time is limited so I must keep my comments short. This will possibly delight some of you (laughter). As we are celebrating Sri Ramakrishna’s birthday, of course, our talk as well is on Sri Ramakrishna.” He then gave a brief talk urging one and all to read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, because in doing so one gets more intimate glimpse of who this Prophet of Modern India is.

With his comments at a close, the stage was a group of Society devotees led by Ms. Shanti Izumida sang original devotional songs in Japanese, followed by a large group consisting mostly of Kailas

Yoga School members performing arrangements of their original compositions. After some technical juggling your reporter (Lonnie Hirsch) had time to sing a couple of his original songs with backtracks and a non-choral version of “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands,” with a ukulele, in English. After more technical adjustments a Bansuri and Tabla recital followed featuring Mr. Terahara on an Indian bansuri (bamboo flute), Mrs. Terehara on tanpura (stringed drone) and on tabla, Society friend and popular tabla teacher in Japan, Mr. Dinesh Dyondi. This concluded the scheduled programme.

Evening vespers (arati) in the Annex was rather well attended too and the cool evening air echoed in verses from ‘Khandana Bhava Bandhana’ sung by the remaining congregation again led by Ms. Shanti as Maharaj offered the five elements once again to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. This was followed by ‘Sarva Mangala Mangalye’ and ‘Ramakrishna Sharanam’.

Thought of the Month

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”

- Lao Tzu



Swami Medhasananda Makes Final Adjustments and Offerings at the Altar



Puja Begins



Puja Continues



Arati Begins



Pushpanjali



Homa Ends



Vibhuti (Holy Ash)



Kailas Group



Bansuri Recital

“Discovering Sri Ramakrishna”

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

It is difficult to explain who Ramakrishna is. He is a great man, of course. He's a great sage, of course. He is a great devotee, of course. He is a great jnani, of course. He is a great yogi, of course. In this way the great 'M' or Mahendranath Gupta, author of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, had hoped to define Sri Ramakrishna. Finally, he gave up, saying it is so difficult because he is infinite. He had tried, but he failed. What a wonderful way of explaining Sri Ramakrishna. It is so difficult because it is beyond our capacity. It is beyond our limited human intelligence to explain, because our intelligence is finite and he is infinite.

Some of you may think that, yes, devotees of Sri Ramakrishna may explain him in such a way and 'M' was a devotee. I ask of those who feel this way to explore this question and see what conclusion you reach. It is a question that should be explored by every one of you. You do not have to take what we say as valid or true, you have to examine it for yourself. I can tell you this, however, 'Who is Ramakrishna?' is a very interesting and captivating topic. It is only fair that I also warn you that if you pursue this question, there is every likelihood you will become trapped. If you do not want to be trapped, it may be better not to explore this question. He is a very poisonous cobra. If he bites you, then you are done. (laughter) People die from ordinary snake bites, but if bitten by Sri Ramakrishna, one becomes immortal. This IS the difference. The question for you then is whether you want to be mortal or immortal.

What is the way to explore Sri Ramakrishna? I believe the best way is the study of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, because there are no interpretations, just quota-

tions. No glossary is necessary. No commentary is necessary. We hear directly what Sri Ramakrishna said. Studying the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is like sitting with God face to face. One need not meditate or perform a lot of penance, if we want to sit before God, study, do not simply read, the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Reading can be simply superficial, but study takes us deeper.

It is not like reading a storybook. With storybooks we read, lay it down and soon forget about it. The Gospel, however, one cannot forget. The minute one starts studying the Gospel, the slow poisoning starts! (laughter) Then one day we feel we have, indeed, been poisoned. Then there is no way back; no returning. We must just proceed. Parables, stories and examples in the Gospel are so interesting and easy to understand, but at the same time so deep, they penetrate and continue working on our subconscious minds. One cannot remain the same person. One is transformed. The person who studies the Gospel does not remain the same person, we may not be aware of the change, but it is sure to happen like this.

Let me offer some minor, yet, profound examples of this. As you know, Hindus do not believe that God lives far away in a place called Heaven, He lives in our own hearts. He is that near to us. He dwells within us in the form of the Soul, in Sanskrit called the Atman. Why can't we see this? The answer as many of you know is because of Maya and spiritual ignorance. Sometimes the word Maya is interpreted as the English word 'illusion', but this does not really convey the meaning. It is better to say that due to 'spiritual ignorance' or 'mystic illusion' we cannot recognise that

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Discovering Sri Ramakrishna (from page 6)

which is 'nearer than the nearest'. Why? Because of Maya.

Sri Ramakrishna gives a beautiful example of this from the Ramayana. The story goes that just before the coronation of Prince Rama, he had to be sent into the forest to fulfil a promise made by his father, King Dasaratha. He was accompanied by his wife, Sita, and his brother, Lakshmana. So these three were exiled from the kingdom for 14 years. As Rama's wife needs protection in the wild, Sita walks between Rama, in the lead, and Lakshmana, following. Sri Ramakrishna uses this image to illustrate that because of Maya we cannot see our Atman, saying that Rama is the incarnation of God, and Lakshmana, the symbol of Jiva, or the embodied soul, cannot see the incarnation of God because Sita, symbolising Maya, is between them. The point being that Rama is the symbol of God and we, the devotees, are symbolised by Lakshmana. So because of Maya we cannot see Atman inside of us.

If we read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, not only is there an abundance of wonderful stories and illustrative examples taken from everyday life, we find there is not much quoting from scriptures. These examples are so easy to understand and at the same time profound. In fact, the more you study the Gospel, the more you will become profound. In turn, the more you become profound, the more you understand the profound meanings contained in the Gospel.

There is another practical problem that occurs with householders mainly. They get confused sometimes when scripture says to love everyone, such as, 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.' We should then love everyone. The question naturally comes, 'What about wicked people?' If we consider that God is in them too, should we mix with such people indiscriminately? Sri

Ramakrishna's advise here is to 'Hiss but do not bite.' We should not harm others, but we should hiss to protect ourselves from being harmed by others.

There are a lot of examples on how to live a householder's life. Our problem is that we do not attempt to understand these in a deeper way. For example, Sri Ramakrishna says to live in the world like a boat on the water. The boat floats because it is on the water, but if the water is in to boat, what will happen? So there is nothing wrong in living in the world, but see that the world does not live in you. There is a difference between a boat on the water and water in the boat. If we want to practice this idea, then we find how difficult it is. Go ahead and enjoy one's life, one's family life, have fun, but always bear in mind, 'this also will pass'. Sometimes we think, 'Ah, let my days pass just as I am living today; no problems; a comfortable life. Let it just run like this.'

There was a famous saint, Bijoy Krishna Goswami, who often said, 'This day shall also pass.' So as we say have all sorts of fun, but just remember 'this day shall also pass.' Good days shall also pass. Bad days shall also pass. This life shall also pass, unless we get freedom. In Hinduism 'liberation' is the ideal, not going to Heaven. Of course not going to Hell, but also not to Heaven. Hinduism says we must continue and continue until we get liberation. So until then let us also remember, 'This too shall also pass.' If we really remember this, we can practice non-attachment. This life; this family; my youth; old age; the Vedanta Society; the Ramakrishna Mission; Japan; Buddhism; man's life; woman's life; salaryman's life; retirement; all shall pass. Only one thing is true; liberation and being one with God—one with Truth. •

Swami Medhasananda Gives Talks in Seoul, Korea and Shanghai, China

Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) visited South Korea from the 9th to the 12th of March 2017. At the invitation of the Silver Lining Association, Maharaj gave a welcoming address and a talk on 'Positive Living' for the group's '2017 Yeongwol International Hope Concert and International Yoga Meet', on the 11th and 12th. In accepting Silver Lining Association's request Maharaj sent them the following note:

"Modern civilization as we see is leaning towards a fast, competitive and sensual life resulting in the prevalence of peacelessness, affecting people physically, mentally and spiritually. Unless Western practicality is judiciously combined with Eastern wisdom, a civilizational balance at both the micro and the macro cannot be achieved. Eastern wisdom emphasises a definite purpose of life which is at the same time fulfilling. In order to do this, it recommends a way of life that gives equal emphasis on body, mind and spirit.

"This 'way of life' was internationally recognised when the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization resolved to observe an International Day of Yoga in 2015. This holistic way of life based on Yoga, though originated in India, has now become a subject of global interest.

"I am happy to know that the Silver Lining Association is holding an international seminar at Yeogwol for three days starting from 10 March 2017, to deliberate on different aspects of Yoga through inspiring Yoga sessions with various renowned Yoga leaders in order to help making modern human life more mentally and physically balanced.

"My sincere prayer is that this international seminar be a grand success.

With Maharaj's participation at the Yoga Meet completed, he then moved to Sanghai where he was hosted by Mr. Alarka Kundu, an Indian senior officer in a company living there. Maharaj gave a talk at a dinner party on 'Positive Living' before a group of Indians on the evening of the 14th and returned to Japan on the 15th. •



Silver Lining Address



Silver Lining Address



Host and Friends



Maharaj visits an old river town area of Shanghai and a Buddhist Temple and environs.



A Story to Remember

Reminiscences on Swami Vivekananda from Swami Bodhananda

One day we were accompanying Swamiji (Vivekananda) for a walk along the Ganges side. When we came in front of Dakshineswar Temple, Swamiji began to talk on Sri Ramakrishna. Very rarely he used to talk about the Master. At every time he used to begin speaking, he used to become so emotional that it made it impossible for him to talk.

This day he told us that he was all devotion, inside and all knowledge outside, while Sri Ramakrishna was just the opposite. Then in his genial humour he remarked, 'I have wrecked all the prospects which a promising life held out for me, by being a slave to the love of an illiterate Brahmin priest.' It is not possible for me to give an idea of his intense love towards Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji did not describe him as an avatar or popularise the Master as such. He used to say that whether he was an avatar or something more, he did not know! To describe him was to belittle his greatness.

Swamiji had an extraordinary love towards his brother disciples. His veneration for Sri Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), knew no bounds. One day the Marwaries of Calcutta held a picnic on the banks of the Ganges in the Math. Swamiji was taking a stroll in the evening along the banks there, and in the presence of so many people, pointing to Sri Maharaj he declared, 'He is our Raja (King), and we are all his servants.' Swamiji had an unbounded regard for the personality of Sri Maharaj. He used to say that Sri Maharaj had the raja-buddhi (wisdom of a king) in him. Swamiji knew that Sri Maharaj was the best person to be at the head of the religious order, so Swamiji appointed him as the first President of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Swamiji was enjoying tolerably good health. The end came too soon. That day when he gave up his body, he had taken a class on Panini's Grammar. He had gone out for a long walk in the evening with Swami Premananda. I remember as he came back from the walk we were sitting on the verandah of the Math, around the tea table. Swamiji had mounted the stairs; but he came a few steps down and addressing us said, 'The malarial season is coming. So those of you who have holes in the mosquito curtains, better have them mended.' These were the last words I heard from him. He went up and you know how the end came.

Sri Maharaj had gone the previous day to Calcutta on business. Immediately word was sent to him. I remember how his body was trembling when he got down from the boat. He went straight up and catching hold of Swamiji's feet began to weep like a young child. You must remember that Sri Maharaj had always possessed a strong personality and would never give vent to his emotions ordinarily. This time he was so overpowered with feelings that he held Swamiji in embrace for a long time and he had to be forcibly taken away.

An excerpt from Vedanta Kesari, September 1972

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