



AUGUST 2017 - Volume 15 Number 08

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

SEPTEMBER 2017
Calendar

Birthdays

Swami Abhedananda
Thursday, September 14

Swami Akhandananda
Wednesday, September 20

Kyokai Events

2nd (Sat)
10:00~12:00

Discourse on Bhagavad Gita

Indian Embassy, Tokyo
日本語 only - Photo ID

Every Sunday
(14:00~15:30)

Yoga-Asana Class Zushi Centre

Please Contact Hanari
(080-6702-2308)

9th (Sat)
10:00~12:00

Discourse on Upanishads

Indian Embassy, Tokyo
日本語 only - Photo ID

23rd~24th Weekend

Namaste India

Yoyogi Park, Tokyo
Ganga Bookstore

Swami Medhasananda

visits India from September 13th to October 14th.



✧ Thus Spake ✧

“But child, don’t be worried. These earthly ties are transitory. Today they seem to be the be-all and end-all of life, and tomorrow they vanish. Your real tie is with God.”

- Sri Sarada Devi

“Our Present Life is a prelude to our Future Life. It is a pilgrimage of short duration to a higher life.”

- Zarathushtra

June Zushi Retreat 2017

Buddha Birth Celebration

“Noble Eight-fold Path and Japan’s Energy Crisis”

Guest speaker Rev. Kensho Sato

Shingyoji Temple in Fuchu, Tokyo

Summary Report by Ms. M. Fukuda and Ms.S. Yokota

Six years ago the Great East Japan earthquake occurred. Immediately, train services stopped and other public transport networks were all paralysed in and around Tokyo. That night millions of people were stranded at train stations and bus stops in throughout the region. It felt strange to see on the TV news that Shibuya Station, though crowded with a huge number of commuters unable to return home, remained brightly lit. To me it seemed so bright and so peculiar, taking into account that the northern part of Japan’s Honshu mainland, which is just a few hundred kilometres away from Tokyo, had been devastated by the disaster.

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Moderation (from page 1)

Then there was the catastrophe at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima. This was followed by planned power cuts and efforts by the entire nation to save energy. I believe that from this experience we have realised we don't actually need that much electricity. Now I wonder why we are again using just as much electricity as before the earthquake.

According to the teachings of Buddha, wanting more than necessary is greed and it is one of the kleshas or roots of our suffering. Greed is not a good thing and one should try to get rid of it. However, greed is sort of a habit to us - we are used to being greedy for such a long time that we can't stop being so easily, even if we know greed is not good in our mind. We can gradually reduce our levels of being greedy though.

Let us look at what Buddha did to attain enlightenment. He left his home and his family, and abandoned his social status as prince. He went into the forest by himself. He spent some time living an extremely ascetic life. It did not work though and he could not achieve anything. As a result, he taught the Middle Way: We should be away from the extremes of sensual indulgence and severe asceticism and take a path of moderation. In other words, we do not have to renounce our home or family, all we have to do is 'just do what we can.'

In addition, Buddha taught the Noble Eightfold Path consisting of eight practices as a way to get rid of kleshas.

The first practice is 'Right View' or gaining the right understanding of things. For example, if you start a new business you need to understand well what conditions you are in and what options you can take. Otherwise there is a high chance of the business ending up failing.

The next one is 'Right Intention'. A friend of mine, who is a successful entrepreneur,

gave me some tips on how to succeed in business including; Do not try to sell what you want to sell, but sell what your customers want to buy. Such thoughtful words! Less greed brings about more gain.

The third practice is 'Right Speech'. Don't lie. Avoid slander. Speak with compassion.

The fourth practice is 'Right Action'. No killing, no injuring, no stealing.

The fifth practice is 'Right Livelihood'. The legalisation of casinos is a topic we often hear discussed these days. They say it helps stimulate the economy, but gambling implies greed. Therefore in light of the teachings of Buddha, it is not good.

The sixth practice is 'Right Effort'. Whatever you want to achieve you need to make an effort.

The seventh practice is 'Right Mindfulness'. Never be absent-minded and remember what we have to. Always keep your word.

Lastly, 'Right Concentration'. Calm our mind down and stay focused. Developing concentration is not easy, but we can concentrate with practice and discipline.

Now let us take a moment and think about this: We are using a lot of electricity for many purposes, but how much of it do we really need? When that earthquake caused such enormous damage to our society, we had to consider how we could stop requiring and using more than necessary. Based on that need, we had to figure out how to rebuild our life and society. However, too few of us pointed out the role of greed in our usage and habits.

Let us try to be less greedy, even if only bit by bit. Let us take the path of moderation by avoiding all extremes. Let us do what we can in our day-to-day life. This is what Lord Buddha taught us, and we will surely be the better for it. •

2017 Summer Retreat
Lake Biwa and Enryakuji
Summary report by Ms Atsumi Honda

The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai) held its annual summer retreat at Okubiwako Makino Grand Park Hotel in Shiga Prefecture from Saturday 15 July through Monday 17 July, attended by 52 people, 13 men, and 39 women.

On the first day, we met at Enryakuji, one of the most important monasteries of Japanese Buddhism, at 2 pm. First we visited the main hall (Kompon Chudo) where monks chant sutra every morning. The center of the hall was dimly lit by the Eternal Light, as has burned continuously for 1200 years without even once being extinguished. At Daikodo (Great Lecture Hall), Swami Medhasanandaji (Maharaj) chanted the sutra "Tri Sarana" (Buddhan saranan gacchami...) in a gradually louder voice four times. This was the most amazing Tri Sarana I had ever heard. We meditated there for about 15 minutes. I was glad that this retreat had started from Enryakuji. We left Enryakuji at 4 p.m. and went to the hotel.

At an after dinner gathering, Maharaj said "23 years ago, I came to Japan by the order of Sri Ramakrishna. I'm here in Japan by the mercy of Sri Ramakrishna. I am just an instrument of Sri Ramakrishna. There is no existence of me except Sri Ramakrishna." Maharaj also said, "The theme of this retreat is 'Awareness'. I propose to you that 'we came here to study' be our first expression of this awareness."

The second day began at 5 a.m. with meditation on the private beach of the hotel. It was sunny and everything was fine. Chanting mantras and reading scripture followed. The program went on to yoga asana guided by Ms Ryoko Umeda. Maharaj gave the first part of

his discourse followed by lunch and the second part in the afternoon.

In the evening, we went on a walk through a pine grove and we reached a small hill with a big tree. While we were having tea and sweets, Maharaj suggested that we study there. Then I remembered that at the beginning of this retreat, Maharaj had said, 'we came here to study' would be our first awareness. We sat down on the soft green carpet around Maharaj under the big tree. A gentle breeze stirred the leaves. This scene reminded me of a guru and his disciples from the Upanishad.

After dinner, an evening gathering (satsanga) was held. One participant, a Buddhist nun, sang beautiful songs like Amazing Grace and Brother Son Sister Moon. All of the participants were divided into Western and Eastern teams and each team would sing a song. The Japanese team sang songs like Sampo and Sukiyaki (Ue O Muite Arukou)

At 4:45 a.m. the following morning, we meditated in a restaurant. Heavy rains shut out the outer world and let us enter inner world. The next program was chanting and reading scripture, followed by yoga asana and a continuation of the discourse from Maharaj. After lunch a Q & A session was held and this session helped us to understand Maharaj's discourse more deeply.

I thank Maharaj and every member of the volunteer staff (especially Shanti Izumida and Atsushi Suzuki) and everyone else related to this retreat. Thanks to the grace of Mother and Sri Ramakrishna we could again enjoy precious moments during the Vedanta Society's 2017 Summer Retreat. •

“Self-Awareness and Practice of Higher Life”

By Swami Medhasanandaji
Summary report by Ms. Atsumi Honda

I. Introspection > II. Self-Awareness > III. Motivation > IV. Practice > V. Change

“The purpose of self-awareness is to support our life. If we practice every day (or at least once a week) it will help our life.”

“The highest purpose of self-awareness is to hear the voice of the spirit of the soul; it is the call of Krishna’s flute. When we become aware of the value of our thoughts and that idea becomes part of our consciousness, it is real awareness.”

I. Introspection:

“Without introspection, we cannot be aware.”

1) Every day, we must observe and analyze and understand our life style: our attitude, our thinking, our imaginings, our feelings and human relations. Understand how we act and behave at home and at the job.

2) Think about the purpose of our life: The purpose of our life is to realize we are ‘Sat Chit Ananda’ (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss).

3. Check the condition of our mind, and we will find how much ego and anger we have. We will then be aware of our weaknesses, contradictions and ignorance.

II. Self-Awareness:

“We first become self-aware that we don’t want to change, to cure ourselves, to gain peace or freedom, because changing is very difficult to practice. Let us first face this. There are hints to assess our self-awareness.”

1) Our condition is just like being half sleep and half awake.

2) We want relief, not a cure.

3) We like to criticize others, but don’t like to be criticized.

4) Our real friends and enemies are within ourselves.

III. Motivation:

“How much power our mind and brain have.”

1) The mind is both the biggest trouble and the best support.

2) Every happiness and truth is within ourselves.

3) We recognize non-existence as existence.

4) We are dying.

5) We are a slave of the body, mind, feelings and emotions, because we identify ourselves as body and mind.

6) We are enslaved by our samskaras (impressions on the mind left from past experience).

IV. Practice:

Self-Awareness (from page 4)

“We have a lot of disharmony inside us.”

- 1) *We have time to practice to meditate and to study.*
- 2) *Fill the brain with positive ideas.*
- 3) *Awareness of value of human life.*
- 4) *Make a schedule (including meditation, introspection, study, and physical exercise.*
- 5) *Mindfulness (focus now.)*
- 6) *Work as an instrument of God.*
- 7) *Depend upon God for the result.*
- 8) *Pray for and help others.*
- 9) *See the good qualities of others.*

V. Change:

“Try to be a bee and not be a fly.”

- 1) Positive thinking and acting is life, while negative thinking and acting is death.
- 2) We have to become positive for mental, physical, intellectual and spiritual health.
- 3) In this case, there is no other way, no other option for us.
- 4) Be positive.
- 5) We are all lions, none sheep.

Thought of the Month

“The unexamined life
is not worth living.”

— Socrates

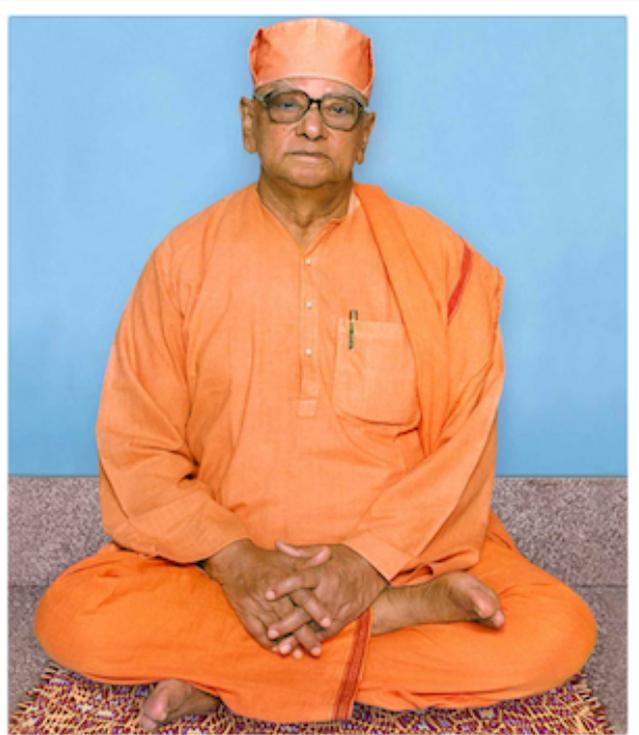
Revered President Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj Passes Away

With deep sorrow we announce the passing away of Swami Atmasthanandaji, President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on Sunday, 18 June 2017 at about 5:30 PM at Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan Hospital, Kolkata. He was 98 years of age.

He became the General Secretary of the Math and Mission in 1992 and continued to be in that post for five years till 1997 when he became a Vice-President of the Order. He was elected President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission on 3 December 2007.

Swami Atmasthanandaji travelled extensively in various parts of the country and visited many branches of the Order and some unaffiliated centres. In 1998, he visited various places in the USA, Canada, Japan and Singapore. He also went to Malaysia, Fiji, Sri Lanka and

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President Atmasthanandaji (from page 5)

Bangladesh at different times. In all those places, he spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta. He also gave mantra diksha to many spiritual seekers.

He was one of the key persons to organize Pallimangal (integrated rural development) activities in Kamarpukur and Jayrambati, a youth training centre at Saradapitha (Belur) and many other social service programmes.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj Elected President

After serving as a Vice-President for a decade, Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj was elected President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at the meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Math and the Governing Body of the Mission held on 17 July 2017. He is the 16th President of the Order.

At the age of 22 he joined the Mumbai Ashrama as a Brahmacharin, on the sacred birthday of Sri Ramakrishna in 1952. Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj, the seventh President of Ramakrishna Order, visited Mumbai Ashrama the same year and gave him Mantra Diksha. He also received Brahmacharya vows from Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj in 1956 and Sannyasa ordination in 1960.

He first visited Belur Math in 1954 along with Swami Sambuddhanandaji, then Head of the Mumbai Ashrama. During this time he attended the concluding celebrations of Holy Mother's Birth Centenary and consecration of Holy Mother's Temple at Jayrambati. He was transferred to the Kolkata branch of Advaita Ashrama in 1958. Advaita Ashrama, being chiefly a publishing house, he enthusiastically worked to improve the standard of publications, which received a lot of appreciation.

He was posted to Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, an educational complex near Belur Math, as its Secretary in 1976. During his long tenure of about 15 years there, educational and rural welfare work of Saradapitha saw tremendous development. He, along with monastic assistants, took up extensive relief operations during the devastating floods in West Bengal in 1978. From Saradapitha, he was posted to Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, as its Head in December 1991. The construction of the present magnificent Sri Ramakrishna Temple in Chennai Math was begun during his tenure.

He was appointed a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1983. In April 1995, he joined the Headquarters as an Assistant Secretary, and after about two years, he took charge as General Secretary of the twin organizations. As General Secretary, he steered the worldwide Ramakrishna Movement for ten long years until May 2007 when he was elected as a Vice-President of the Order.

Serving both as General Secretary and later as Vice-President, he travelled extensively in India and different parts of the world and visited branches of the Math and Mission and also unaffiliated centres in several places. Through those visits he endeavoured to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta among a vast number of people. He has also given Mantra Diksha to many spiritual seekers and contributed a number of articles to various journals of the Ramakrishna Order.



Photos from Swami Medhasananda's Visit to St. Petersburg, Florida June 19~22 (Story in July Issue)



Dr. Goswami

Swami Medhasanandaji



Yoshiko Carlton

Swami Ishtanandaji



Koto



On the Beach

Photos from Swami Medhasananda's Visit to
Sao Paulo, Brazil - June 23-24 (Story in the July Issue)



Sao Paulo Congregation and Talk on 'Positive Living'



Swami Nirmalatmanandaji



Shankar Maharaj translates from English to Portuguese

Photos from Swami Medhasananda's Visit to
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - June 25~30 (Story in the July Issue)



Swami Medhasanandaji gives talk on 'Positive Living.'



Devotional Song Programme



View of Christ the Redeemer from devotee's hotel.



Swami Nirmalatmanandaji Conducts Arati

Photos from Swami Medhasananda's Visit to Berkeley Center, California - June 25~30 (Story in the July Issue)



Introductions and Talks by Visiting Swamis



Cultural Programme



Lunch Prasad



A Story to Remember

Absense of Knowledge

Once upon a time there was a forest where the birds sang by day and the insects by night. Trees flourished, flowers bloomed and all manner of creatures roamed about in freedom. All who entered there were led to Solitude which is the home of God who dwells in Nature's silence and Nature's beauty.

But then the Age of Unconsciousness arrived when it became possible for people to construct buildings a thousand feet high and to destroy rivers and forests and mountains in a month. So houses of worship were built from the wood of the forest trees and from the stone under the forest soil. Pinnacle, spire and minaret pointed towards the sky; the air was filled with the sound of bells, with prayer and chant and exhortation.

And God was suddenly without a home.

God hides things by putting them before our eyes!

Hark! Listen to the song of the bird,
the wind in the trees,
the ocean roar;
look at a tree, a falling leaf, a flower,
as if for the first time.

You might suddenly make contact,
with Reality,
with that Paradise,
from which we,
having fallen from childhood,
are excluded by our knowledge.

Says the Indian mystic Saraha:

"Know the taste of this flavour
Which is the absence of Knowledge.

- Prayer of the Frog by Anthony de Mello

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