



SEPTEMBER 2017 - Volume 15 Number 09

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

OCTOBER 2017
Calendar

Birthdays

There are no birthdays of note in October of 2017 according to the Vishuddha Shiddhanta Almanac

Kyokai Events

Swami Medhasananda

visits India from September 13th to October 14th.

Sundays (14:00~15:30)

Yoga-Asana Class Zushi Centre

Please Contact Hanari
(080-6702-2308)

15th (Sun) 10:30am

Zushi Monthly Retreat

Morning Session talk
"Divine Mother"

by Swami Medhasananda

12:30 Lunch

14:45 Afternoon Session

19th (Thur)

Sri Sri Kali Puja

Vedanta Society Annexe
19:00 Puja, Pushpanjali
(flower offering), Homa,
21:30 Prasad
All are Welcome! Sorry,
NO parking is available

More Details on page 7



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Where can we go to find God if we cannot see Him in our own hearts and in every living being."

- Swami Vivekananda

"Adore God as you would if you saw Him, for if you see Him not, He sees you."

- Prophet Muhammad

August Monthly Retreat 2017 Sri Krishna Birth Celebration

"The Bhagavatam and Sukadeva's Advice"
A talk by Swami Medhasanandaji

Among the God-men of India, two are most celebrated. Now before continuing we may ask, 'Who is a God-man?' If we just say God-men and move on, a lot of misunderstandings and lack of understanding may arise. That being so, we need to explain what is meant by a God-man. In India we are familiar with the word 'avatara.' When translated into English this word becomes 'incarnation of God,' yet even with this translation some confusion can occur, especially among peoples of other faiths, about the meaning of 'incarnation of God.'

God-men' Meaning

We can all agree that God is everywhere, omnipresent, therefore
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Krishna (from page 1)

in every human being as well, God is present. In this way we may say that all human beings are manifestations of God. But in one where the greatest manifestation of God occurs, we call him God-man. A very easy example is given in the power of reflecting light like that from the sun. Water, for example, can reflect sunlight, even sand can, but the greatest reflector at our disposal is a mirror. We can all agree on this. In the same way we all reflect God to some degree, but a God-man can reflect the divine qualities of God most clearly.

What are these reflected qualities? Purity, compassion, love, harmony; all the Sattvic qualities. God-men are the embodiment of all these qualities to the greatest degree, perfection. Among these God-men of the Hindu tradition, the two most celebrated are Sri Ramchandra (Rama) and Sri Krishna. Between these two comparisons can arise, but to a devotee, his chosen Ideal, or God as he worships, is the best, the greatest, and, of course, this is one way to look at it.

Perhaps from a more neutral point of view it is said that while Ramchandra was in-

deed a God-man, he was, however, not quite as perfect a manifestation. On the other hand, it is said that Sri Krishna represents the perfect manifestation of God. In the Bhagavatam it is written: 'Kṛṣṇas tu Bhagavan Svayam' or 'Krishna is God Himself.' Of course, devotees of Ramchandra may disagree (laughter), but from a neutral point of view, 'Kṛṣṇas tu Bhagavan Svayam' means that in Krishna we see the greatest manifestation of God.

The Greatest Manifestation

Why has Sri Krishna been referred to as the greatest manifestation of God? Because Krishna was perfect in all respects. Moreover, He could be embraced by all types of devotees. In Christianity the general idea is that God is worshipped as the Father. There is also an opinion and a tradition to worship God as the lover, as well, but that is not the general tendency. Then, too, there is worship of God as Mother, with Mother Mary as this divine aspect, which is similar to Mother worship in Hinduism.

In Hinduism, however, there remain many other aspects by which one can establish a human relationship with God, and God can

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Krishna (from page 2)

be loved and worshipped accordingly. For example, God can be loved as one's brother. God can be loved as one's child. God can be loved as one's Master. Of course, God can be loved as father, as mother, as sweetheart. And, of course, God can be loved and worshipped as one's friend as well. In Krishna all of these human relationships are possible. Krishna can be looked upon as father. He can be looked upon as one's child. He can be worshipped as one's friend, as many cowherd boys looked upon him as friend. His elder brother Balarama, a symbol of the ideal brother, worshipped Krishna. Krishna can also be worshipped as the Master.

Krishna can be worshipped in all these aspects. Not only that, Krishna harmonises different paths of spiritual practices, Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Raja Yoga, the yoga of meditation. We can find references to all these in the Bhagavad Gita, which contains the teachings of Sri Krishna.

Nowadays, we in the Ramakrishna Mission speak a lot on the 'harmony of religions' as Sri Ramakrishna practiced and, later, Swami Vivekananda preached. Long ago, however, the seed of the 'harmony of religions' was sown by Sri Krishna. It is the birthday of that Sri Krishna we celebrate today.

Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavatam

There are two most famous scriptures associated with the name of Sri Krishna. One is the Bhagavad Gita and the other is the Bhagavatam. We often refer to them as Srimad Bhagavad Gita and Srimad Bhagavatam, and one may ask, 'Why Sri?' and 'Why Mat?' Sri is a Sanskrit word meaning beautiful, exquisite, splendid. Mat means 'exist.' In this way referring to the books, Srimad Bhagavatam and Srimad Bhagavad Gita, it means the most splendid, beautiful

book of God. They both refer to Sri Krishna.

While the Mahabharata consists of the Bhagavad Gita, the Bhagavatam is a book itself belonging to the category of the Puranas. In Hindu scripture there are so many categories; first of all being the Vedas and Upanishads the most ancient scriptures which contain the highest truth. Then there are the Darsanas, or six schools of philosophy, one being Vedanta, based on the Upanishadic parts of the Vedas. Next are the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. The next category are the Puranas; there are 18 Puranas. 'Pura opi nava', meaning ancient yet new, is the definition of the Puranas.

The Puranas

The basis of the Puranas is the Truth of the Upanishads, which is abstruse and subtle. While the Upanishadic truths are very important for human life, being philosophy, it is difficult for people to comprehend them, so most people tend to avoid or set it aside. Because the spiritual truths are so important for human life, the writers of scripture devised a way like that of sugar-coating a bitter pill. If the medicine is bitter, even though the patient knows he should take it, he does not feel like taking it. Pharmaceutical companies became wise to this and sweetened their bitter concoctions, especially for children.

The Puranas are like this bitter medicine that should be taken, yet disguised as so many interesting, beautiful and captivating stories that teach us the spiritual truths. So many secular things are also included regarding human life, material life, spiritual life, genealogical dynasties, statecraft, etc. Included are the duties of a king, or the duties of a householder, even what the duties of a monk are. All of these are included in so many stories, but if you boil it down or condense it, the precipitate or residue is that all life is non-eternal, and only God is

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Krishna (from page 3)

eternal. We should not be attached to that which is non-eternal, we should instead be devoted to God, who is eternal. That is the gist of these stories.

Vyasadeva

There are eighteen Puranas, all of which were composed by the great sage Vyasadeva. As such, the founder of Vedanta philosophy is also Vyasa. The epic Mahabharata was also composed by Vyasa. Of course, there is a difference of opinion whether or not these are the same 'Vyasa' or a generic name for a great sage.

Concerning the Bhagavatam; while Vyasa wrote many books on philosophy, according to one opinion, there was still some emptiness in his heart and he was not fully satisfied. Something was missing. In this state Vyasa consulted the sage Narada asking what he should do. Narada advised Vyasa to write an epic on the birth and divine play (lila) of Sri Krishna and by doing so he would feel fulfilled. So Vyasa began meditating on the birth and divine play of Sri Krishna and began composing the Srimad Bhagavatam. If we compare the Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavatam, the Gita is philosophy and related to the head, while the Bhagavatam is related to the heart and is pure and divine. Of course, philosophy is also there in the Bhagavatam, but we don't feel the presence of abstruse philosophy in these beautiful stories of Dhruva, Prahlada, King Bharata, and Sri Krishna.

There are many scholars of the Bhagavatam that explain the stories in such a beautiful way that hundreds of people will attend an exposition on the Bhagavatam for a week or a month, because people are extremely fond of the stories of Krishna. The stories of the baby Krishna being so naughty, playing many pranks and misbehaving so badly are somehow so sweet that even after hearing them hundreds of times one still feels like hearing them again.

Vyasa Teaches Bhagavatam to Sukadeva

One may ask how the Bhagavatam became popular, and this too is an interesting story. As we noted earlier the Bhagavatam was written by Vyasa. He then taught and passed it on to his son Sukadeva who is revered to be one of the greatest paramahansa, among monks. He was a great devotee and at the same time a great jnani. He was pure and perfect. While, of course, he had a body, he was not conscious of it for even one second, he was constantly established in the idea of Pure Consciousness. Don't ask if it is biologically possible, but it is said that Sukadeva remained in his mother's womb for 16 years. (laughter), as he did not want to be born because the whole world is full of Maya. He was eventually born quite mature and immediately wanted to go into the forest.

Now, his father, Vyasa, himself a great sage and jnani, nevertheless felt some attachment to this unique young son, and seeing him leaving for the forest, he called after him to please return. Even when Shiva, the God of renunciation and wisdom whom monks worship remarked, 'He, himself, knows the truth and that Suka, as well, knows the truth. 'But,' he continued, 'I am not sure if Vyasa knows or not.'

As he had no body-consciousness, Sukadeva remained naked and walked about so. We have such consciousness and so need to dress, but if one has no such consciousness, what is clothing to him? He would not talk either. What was there for him to talk about? He could not be bound by anything and was completely free and blissful. He was handsome like a cupid. When he would walk naked in the street, children would think him mad. Young women, on the other hand, would be so attracted to his beauty they felt compelled to follow him. Only great jnanis like Vyasa could fathom the spiritual depth of Sukadeva. From this description we can

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Krishna (from page 4)

get an idea what Sukadeva was. Now, Vyasadeva first taught his completed Bhagavatam to Sukadeva, and Sukadeva then explained it to King Parikshita. Let me explain how this came about.

Parikshita's Curse

In the Mahabharata we know of the Kurukshetra War wherein the righteous Pandavas defeated the wicked Kauravas and took the throne of Kuru. The five Pandava brothers, Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva made Yudhishtira the Emperor and the others assisted in other roles. After many years of rule Yudhishtira said that he would renounce the throne and begin the practice of 'vanaprastha' (retiring to a forest) one of the four ashrama (stages) of Hindu life. In India these four stages of life are practiced and vanaprastha is the third stage after the bachelor and householder stages, wherein one resigns and practices meditation for liberation. So with this idea in mind, the five brothers go to the Himalayas with their wife, Draupadi. What then happened to them is but another story.

Before setting out to the Himalayas the brothers coronated Arjuna's grandson, Parikshita as king. While Parikshita was still in his mother's womb, for some reason (yet another story) he was to be killed, but was saved by Sri Krishna. Parikshita became a great warrior and later a virtuous king, ruling efficiently and everyone was happy with him. The sages too approved of him. One day he went into the forest for hunting and became very thirsty. Searching for water he found an ashram and thought it a good place to get some water. Then he saw a sage sitting under a tree absorbed in meditation. He was called Shamika and he, though a householder, was a very respectable sage.

The king, being thirsty, asked Shamika for water once. There was no answer. He

Thought of the Month

"Teach us to give and not to count the cost."

- Saint Ignatius

asked a second time, still no answer. The third time, no answer at all! At this the king lost his patience and became very angry as he thought the sage was ignoring him, the king. Parikshita was otherwise a very self-controlled and thoughtful person, but in this state he found a dead snake and in anger wrapped it around the neck of that sage like a garland and left. Shamika had a young son named Shringi who was playing with his friends. Other friends witnessed what Parikshita had done and reported it to Shringi. They explained that the king had asked for water but that Shamika was deep in meditation and could not answer. "Then the king placed a dead snake around your father's neck!" they exclaimed. Hearing this Shringi, the son of a great sage and not just an ordinary child, became furious. Running to his father he witnessed the snake garland and immediately issued a curse upon the king that within seven days the king would be bitten by a snake and killed.

Meanwhile Shamika had regained normal consciousness and learning of his son's curse, became very upset. 'My son,' he implored, "what have you done? Do you not know what a great king Parikshita is?" Shamika was deeply saddened by this, but nothing could be done as the curse must be fulfilled. A message was sent to King Parikshita explaining what had happened to warn him, the thinking being that at least the king should be made aware of what was about to happen to him.

Parikshita Repents

Meanwhile a very repentant Parikshita re-
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turned to his kingdom. He regretted being impatient that in his thirst he had failed to realise that Shamika had not disrespected him, but was deep in meditation and had not heard his requests for water. Surely Shamika did not deserve such a humiliating and disrespectful act to be committed upon him as to place a dead snake around his neck. 'I deserve punishment for this offence,' he thought.

At this time the message from Shamika arrived and Parikshita thought to himself, 'Well done! This curse is perfectly justified and I deserve it. I have only seven-day's time,' he thought, 'let me prepare for death.' He then made arrangements to abdicate his throne, giving up all attachments to the kingdom and to set about living his final days in such a way as to be liberated at death. He then went to the bank of the Ganga for spiritual practice.

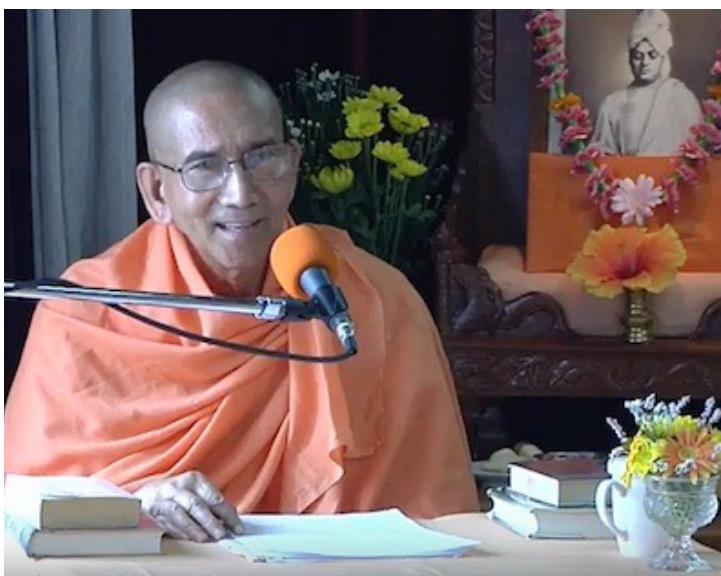
Meanwhile people had learned of the events and curse prompting many great sages to join Parikshita on the bank of the Ganga. One purpose was to witness what would happen to Parikshita, because the Lord Himself had once saved him from death while in his mother's womb. 'Let us see,' they thought, 'if Sri Krishna helps him again to survive!' Seeing them gather nearby Parikshita said that while they never visited him as king, he was pleased to have them near and was indeed lucky to have been cursed. 'I now have one question for you all,' he said. 'How should I live these seven days to attain the spiritual goal and liberation?'

Today we can think of the Titanic and its destiny with an iceberg. There was such pride in this ship and its construction, scale, quality and grandeur. But we know that pride comes before a fall. Boarding the Titanic on its maiden voyage was a very expensive ticket purchase as well. While the first class passengers list was a who's who of the rich and prominent, even 3rd class or steerage tickets were pricey. As the passengers were drinking, singing, dancing and generally merrymaking, the captain announced that they had hit an iceberg and a leak had developed. As the volume of gushing water increased, the

captain realised that the Titanic was in danger of sinking. He ordered that the insufficient number of lifeboats available be lowered and boarded with 'women and children first.' It soon became apparent that most passengers and crew would be lost. Yet even with death immi-

nent, while some panicked with fear, many other passengers decided to just continue their merrymaking till the end ... we can't know for sure, but I do not recall reports of some people meditating or praying in the face of imminent death. (laughter)

Parikshita's behaviour was the extreme opposite of most men. He gave up his kingdom and attempted to fix his mind on the truth. More than this, he wanted to know the way to accomplish this from the gathered sages who thought hard on the advice they could give Parikshita to attain his goal in just seven days. With Jnana Yoga, Bhakti



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• Vedanta Society of Japan •

October 2017
SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

**Swami Medhasananda visits India
from September 13th to October 14th.**

Every Sunday (14:00~15:30)
Yoga-Asana Class - Zushi Centre
Please Contact Hanari (080-6702-2308)

15th (Sun)
October Zushi Retreat 2017
10:30 Morning Session
“Divine Mother”
Talk by Swami Medhasananda
12:30 Lunch
14:45 Chanting, reading, discourse, songs
16:30 Tea
18:00 Arati

19th (Thur)
Sri Sri Kali Puja
Vedanta Society Annexe
19:00 Puja, Pushpanjali (flower offering), Homa,
21:30 Prasad
All are Welcome!
Sorry NO parking is available at Zushi.
Notification of your participation will be appreciated.

27th (Fri)
Nara Narayan:
Service to homeless Narayan
Please Contact: Yoko Sato (090-6544-9304)

28th (Sat)
Discourses in Osaka
(Only in 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/>

Krishna (from page 6)

Yoga, Raja Yoga and Karma Yoga, what could be attained in such short time? Long periods of practice and growth are required for these. It seemed impossible! Parikshita looked upon them expectantly, but there was only a confusion of ideas. At that moment Sukadeva appeared and all the sages fell silent and stood in reverence of his greatness. Extremely happy was Parikshita as he thought how fortunate he was to receive the darshan of such a soul so close to his death. Parikshita then asked him the same question, 'Dear sir, how can I attain to the truth before death, which is very near?'

Sukadeva's Advice

Sukadeva answered Parikshita with three pieces of advice. 'Shravana - listen about God; Kirtana - chant and repeat the holy name of God; and Manana - remember the divine play of God.' Sukadeva then said that to accomplish these three in so short a time, 'I shall narrate to you the story of Sri Krishna as told to me by my father Vyasadeva.' For seven days everyone was absorbed in the story of Sri Krishna as narrated by Sukadeva. As the story came to a close on the seventh day, Sukadeva told Parikshita to focus his whole mind on Sri Krishna. Parikshita did so and his body consciousness dissolved and he became absorbed in 'Krishna Consciousness.' This Krishna Consciousness is the same as Atman Consciousness, being basically of the same nature. In this state on the seventh day the snake, in the person of Tashaka, arrived and bit Parikshita, but the creature may as well have bitten

corpse, as Parikshita, absorbed in Krishna Consciousness, remained unaware of the burning pain of the poisoning even as death claimed him.

In answer to our earlier question as to how the Bhagavatam became popular; one person amongst those gathered was a professional scripture commentator. He listened carefully to the entire narrative of Vyasa's Bhagavatam, and made it popular with his recitals and the story spread throughout the land.

What is our lesson from this story? It is important because a doctor may declare that a patient has a terminal illness and only one month to live, or half a year or only ten days left. Parikshita's story can be taken up as a symbolic story for us. Parikshita had seven days, but we never know when we will die. Everyone should be prepared for death. That is why the three pieces of advice are so important. For everyone who is aware that this life is very limited and that the time of death is uncertain, we should listen about God, Shravana; we should chant and repeat the name of God, Kirtana, and we should be in constant remembrance of God and truth, Manana. These are the three ways we can get prepared for a decent life; prepare for the realisation of truth; and enjoy mental peace. In practicing these three, we will be well-prepared for our eventual death as well.

On the occasion of Sri Krishna's birth anniversary let us remember this most important advice given to Parikshita by Sukadeva. •

Mitaka (Tokyo) Satsanga

Summary of Mr Sakae Machida's report

On Sunday July 23, Swami Medhasanandaji (Maharaj) gave a discourse titled "How to Achieve Happiness in Life" at an Inochi No Gakko (The School of Life) session held at Sarasha in Mitaka City, Tokyo. The event talk began at 4 pm and lasted until 6 pm, the time it was originally planned to end. Thirteen people attended.

Maharaj did not want to conduct the event with much formality. Rather, he requested the participants to sit close to him and encouraged them to give their opinions on his talk frankly. He emphasised that for the purpose of spiritual practice, each one of them should look at what was being discussed for themselves and reflect upon it, instead of just listening to it. He added that through expressing their opinion and confirming it themselves, the talk would become more practical for them.

In the beginning, Maharaj asked us to consider how happiness and pleasure differ. Each participant was requested to give their own answer, to which he would respond one by one so that everyone there had the opportunity to exchange opinions with him. It seemed to me as if they were exploring truth in the form of dialogues as in Upanishad.

Maharaj and all the participants discussed from different perspectives: self, anger, sources of attachment; distinguishing the eternal from the temporary; and how to live a day-to-day life for spiritual growth. With up-close dialogue and in-depth learning, we had a most meaningful time. •

(Translated and summarised by Ms. Satsuki Yokota)



Hamamatsu Satsanga



Hamamatsu Satsanga

On August 6, Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) was invited to give a discourse on "Good Wishes and Bad Wishes" at a study session held at Fukushi Koryu Centre (Social Welfare and Exchange Centre) in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Prefecture. The event was organised by Yoga Ryohoshikai Shizuoka (Yoga Therapy Group, Shizuoka) and included a Q&A session and guided meditation practice following the talk. The following is a summary of Ms Akiko Yamauchi's report on the discourse:

"We have many wishes. Some wishes are seen as good and some as bad, but what is the criterion for deciding whether a wish is good or bad? It is not how convenient the results are after the wish is met for us, it is rather how our current life ends. Will we enjoy real pleasure, or have sufferings or hardships in a rebirth? Real pleasure means knowing the real Self (inner self or real nature of the soul) and that is also the purpose of life. So wanting to know the real Self or to attain enlightenment is a good wish.

"There are good wishes and bad wishes about loving someone or doing work too. If we know the real meanings of love and work, and love others and do work accordingly, we will feel less stressful, less anger, as well as become more liberated." ·

(Translated and summarised by Ms. Satsuki Yokota)

Outdoor Summer Retreat 2017 Lake Biwa and Enryakuji



• A Story to Remember •

Uncontaminated Family-men

When it was argued that a family-man (Grihastha) may remain in the family, but may have no concern with it and consequently may remain uncontaminated by the world, an illustration was cited to refute such an argument, which is as follows:

A poor Brâhmana once came to one of those family-men, who are unconcerned with family affairs, to beg some money. When the beggar asked of him some money, he replied, 'Sir, I never touch money. Why are you wasting your time in begging of me?'

The Brâhmana, however, would not go away.

Tired with his importunate entreaties the man at last resolved in his mind to give him a rupee and told him, 'Well, sir, come tomorrow, I shall see what I can do for you.'

Then going in, this typical family-man told his wife, who was the manager of all his affairs and he being unconcerned, 'Look here, dear, a poor Brâhmana is in great difficulty, and wants something of me. I have made up my mind to give him a rupee. What is your opinion about it?'

'Aha! what a generous fellow you are!' she replied, in great excitement at the name of a rupee. 'Rupees are not, like leaves or stones, to be thrown away without any thought.'

'Well, dear,' replied the husband, in an apologising tone, 'the man is very poor and should we not give him less than a rupee.'

'No!' replied the wife, 'I cannot spare that much; here is a two-anna-bit and you can give him that, if you like.'

The man of course had no other alternative, being himself unconcerned in all such worldly matters, and he took what his wife gave him. Next day the beggar came, and received only a two-anna-bit.

Such uncontaminated family-men are really henpecked persons who are solely guided by their wives, and as such are very poor specimens of humanity.

- Sri Ramakrishna; His Life and Sayings by F. Max Müller

The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)
4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi-shi, Kanagawa-ken 249-0001 JAPAN
Phone: 81-46-873-0428 Fax: 81-46-873-0592
Website: <http://www.vedanta.jp> Email: info@vedanta.jp