



OCTOBER 2017 - Volume 15 Number 10

TheVedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

NOVEMBER 2017
Calendar

Birthdays

Swami Subodhananda
Wednesday, November 1st

Swami Vijnanananda
Friday, November 3rd

Kyokai Events

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

23rd (Thurs)

Akhanda Japam At the Zushi Centre (from 5:00am-20:00pm)

24th (Fri)

Nara Narayan: Service to Homeless Narayana

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

More Details on these and
other events on page 2.

swastikas

⌘ Thus Spake ⌘

"One should feel a yearning for God like the yearning of a man who has lost his job and is wandering from one office to another in search of work."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"For, whatever object a man thinks of at the final moment when he leaves his body – that alone does he attain, O son of Kunti, being ever absorbed in the thought thereof."

- Sri Krishna

October Zushi Retreat 2017

Divine Mother

(Part One of Two)

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Seven devotees and I just returned from a pilgrimage to India where we visited many temples. Among these were three very famous temples dedicated to the Divine Mother all located in south India. One was dedicated to Devi Kamakshi in Kanchipuram, near Chennai in the state of Tamil Nadu; another was the Meenakshi Temple in the city of Madurai also in the state of Tamil Nadu; and the other was the temple dedicated to Kanyakumari Devi in the city of Kanyakumari again in the state of Tamil Nadu.

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• Schedule of **Vedanta Society of Japan** Events •

November 2017

4th (Sat)

Lecture at Yoga Therapy Association

Association Members

5th~26th Every Sunday (14:00~15:30)

Yoga-Asana Class - Zushi Centre Annexe

Please Contact Hanari (080-6702-2308)

12th (Sun) (13:30~16:30)

Satsanga in Kumamoto

Please Contact: Kajiwara (0967-22-3359)

17th (Tues) Second Tuesday each month (14:00~16:00)

Weekly Study Group 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'

Scheduling conflicts can occur so please confirm at <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

18th (Sat)

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

(in Japanese only) (from 10am~12pm)

Please Contact: Zushi Centre (045-873-0428)

19th (Sun)

Monthly Retreat at Zushi

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

Please notify of attendance: (046-873-0428)

23rd (Thurs)

Akhand Japam

At the Zushi Centre (from 5:00am-20:00pm)

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 <vedanta.karmayoga@gmail.com> as to a time convenient for your participation.

24th (Fri)

Nara Narayan: Service to homeless Narayan

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

25th (Sat)

Discourses in the Kansai Area (in Japanese language only)

Place: Osaka Training Center (13:30~17:00)

Monthly discourses on "Bhagavad Gita" and "Upanishad"

26th (Sun)

Nihon Yoga Zen Doyukai in Kakegawa, Shizuoka Prefecture

Check <www.vedanta.jp> for further details.

Divine Mother (from page 1)

In the Indian Hindu tradition prayer and meditation to the Divine Mother is very popular. In the Christian tradition we see most of the emphasis is on Jesus Christ, but there is significant worship of Mother Mary. In some areas across the Americas there is more emphasis on the worship of Mother Mary. So we see some similarity with the Indian tradition in the worship of Mother in Christianity as well, but the worship of Mother in India runs much deeper and is founded more on a profound philosophy. In Japan prayer to goddesses is not that common, although there is some worship in the Shinto Amaterasu and the Buddhist Kannon.

Concept of Mother Worship

In India, however, there may be many temples to Shiva or Vishnu, but invariably there will be temples to Mother nearby or images dedicated to Mother within such temples. In Shiva temples there will be images of Parvati or Durga. In temples dedicated to Vishnu images of Lakshmi will be found. In Rama's temples definitely one will find images of Sita. This is why we see the influence of Divine Mother everywhere in India.

The philosophical foundation for worship of the Divine Mother is based on two principles of Samkhya cosmology or creation of the universe. These two principals are Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is pure consciousness and prakriti is the power or energy. In the presence of Purusha, Prakriti creates, sustains and destroys this universe. In Vedanta, however, Purusha is called Brahman and Prakriti is called Maya or Shakti. Additionally, according to Vedanta this Brahman and Maya are not different, but the same principle. When Brahman does not act, or the principle is inactive, it is called Brahman. When this



principle is active it is called Maya. In other words Brahman has two aspects, one aspect is un-manifested or the Ultimate Reality, the other aspect is the manifested. This manifested aspect creates, preserves and destroys.

In Tantra, however, Maya or Mahamaya has two aspects; one being un-manifested, which is similar to the Brahman of Vedanta, while the other manifested aspect, though still Mahamaya, is called by many names like Durga, Kali, Chandi, Parvati and other names such as the ones of the temples named earlier in Tamil Nadu. All of these, however, can be manifested or unmanifested. Durga can be Pure Consciousness, the Ultimate Reality, while in another aspect can create, preserve and destroy. The same principles apply to Kali as well.

In the songs of Ramprasad and in the pages of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna one can get many explanations of these concepts. In the Gospel Sri Ramakrishna explains that Kali and Brahman are not different. However, some Vedantists do not subscribe much reverence to Kali. On the other hand, followers of Kali and Durga do not hold the same reverence to the ideas of Brahman of Vedanta. In other words, Vedantists follow the path of Jnana Yoga and Bhaktas follow Bhakti Yoga. This can create some conflicts between the Bhakta and Jnani. Sri Ramakrishna stated that there in fact no such difference between the two principles, and quoted a

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Divine Mother (from page 3)

popular song verse 'Kali is Brahman and Brahman is Kali'. When Kali is not manifested, it is Brahman. When Brahman is manifested, this is called Kali. This is so simple, and at the same time true. Sri Ramakrishna practiced both Vedanta and Tantra and realising that Kali and Brahman are the same, asked why the followers of one should argue with the other?

Mahamaya

There is a book called the Chandi. The Bhagavad Gita is but a part of the epic Mahabharata. Similarly the Chandi is part of the Purana called the Markandeya Purana. The Chandi contains many verses which explain and describe the nature of Mahamaya or the Divine Mother.

Also, as we know, in the Mahabharata there is the tale of the fighting of two clans, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Arjuna belonged to the Pandava family and was a great hero and, at the same time, a very virtuous person. Just before the great battle ensued Arjuna became confused about his role. Would he have to kill relatives who had joined the Kaurava forces? This, of course, because the of killing family members, or anyone for that matter, is violence that incurs great sin. Arjuna then petitioned his charioteer, Lord Krishna,

about this dilemma giving many arguments as to why he should not join in battle and kill members of the opposition, especially possible family members.

Now, on the other hand, the Kaurava King was a very evil person and Arjuna, belonging to the warrior-ruler Kshatriya caste, is duty bound to destroy evil persons and their supporters. Arjuna appealed to Krishna, 'Lord, my intelligence has been deluded (moha). So please guide me as to what I should do.'

The Chandi

In the Chandi, as well, there is the story of King Suratha who's forces were defeated by his enemies. Upon returning to his capital the king's ministers decided that the king had been too weakened to continue ruling. Consequently they seized power. Then under the pretext of a hunting trip, the king went out into the forest. In this forest the king found an ashrama where a sage, named Medhas, was residing. Seeing the calm and quiet atmosphere of the ashrama, the king was very impressed and decided to first inspect the surroundings and then pay his respects to the sage Medhas. While going about viewing the ashrama, the king was preoccupied with concerns about his family, kingdom and his possessions such as his pet elephant and savings and other events at the capital.



There suddenly appeared before him a very sad looking person and the king asked who he was and why he looked so sad and worried. The man answered, 'My name is Samadhi and I am of the Vaishya caste.' In answer to why he looked so sad,

Divine Mother (from page 4)

Samadhi replied that he had been a very rich person, but that his relatives were so greedy his wife and son drove him out of his home. Samadhi then continued that even though his family had stolen all his wealth and property, his was still worried about their welfare. The king was surprised that Samadhi still worried about them, and said that he should instead be angry with them. Samadhi agreed, but said he could not.

King Suratha and Samadhi then went to pay their respects to the sage, Medhas. Suratha then explained to the sage that he had been driven out by his ministers, yet still he worried about the affairs his palace and kingdom. He continued that Samadhi too had been driven out by his own family and yet he continued to worry about their welfare. We both know we should not worry and that it is because of our tremendous attachment that we feel sad. 'Why and how does such strong delusion (moha) come to bring us suffering?' he asked.

The Nature of Mahamaya

This is the same question we all have, is it not? The sage answered that it is because of the influence of Mahamaya that all people are deluded. He went on to say that it is again only by Mahamaya that one can be liberated from the delusion. He continued that Mahamaya not only deludes the ignorant and the masses of ordinary people, but even the wise jnani. 'She has such power,' he said.

The king asked, 'Who is this Mahamaya? How was she born? What is her nature?'

The sage answered that Mahamaya is eternal, the very universe is Her form. She is all-pervading, yet appears again and again in Divine forms. She appears to perform many missions. So the sage tells them that though She is eternal, in another aspect She is born. In the Bhagavad Gita

Thought of the Month

"Great men are they who see that spiritual is stronger than any material force
- that thoughts rule the world."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

we have the same in the idea of Avatar, or incarnations of Brahman, where Sri Krishna explains that Brahman is born again and again to establish Dharma, to punish the wicked, and to guide devotees on the path of spiritual perfection. In the same way the Chandi instructs that the Divine Mother is actually Brahman and that Brahman appears as Mahamaya to perform the same religious mission.

Mother Answers

Next the sage Medhas narrated tales of Mahamaya. There is always fighting between the demons and the gods. Sometimes the gods are victorious and at other times the demons (asura) win. When the demons win they always capture the heavens and drive out the gods, because the heavens are where the objects and places of greatest enjoyment are. The differences between the gods and demons are that the demons are very selfish and believe only the enjoyment of the senses. They have no sense of morality. While the gods also experience sense enjoyment, it is not the most important thing to them. The gods also have spiritual ideas and their hearts are purer, as they believe in Brahman. Their faith, respect and purity is much greater than that of demons. Also the gods think of the benefit and welfare of humanity. If we look around this modern world, we can identify many of us as having a demonic nature. So some may look like human beings, but their nature is that of a demon, while others may look

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like humans, but possess the nature of a god.

On one occasion when the gods were driven out of heaven, they prayed to Mahamaya for protection from the demons. At this Mahamaya appeared and destroyed all the demons and assured the gods that if they called on Her for protection in the future that She would appear. This has happened many times.

Chandi Hymns and Verses

In many hymns in the Chandi the Divine Mother is praised and Her great glory has been narrated in detail. The gist of these being that every animate and inanimate thing we see are all actually different forms of Mahamaya. Everything; the good, the bad, pure, impure, is Mahamaya. It is She who binds; it is She who frees. Whatever prayer one has, Mahamaya fulfils that prayer. Whatever danger one is in, let him pray to Mahamaya and She will help. As human beings we have no end of sufferings and no end of troubles. Mother's temples are always full of people praying. This is the gist of the many hymns or verses to Mahamaya in the Chandi a few of which I will now translate for you:

Devi, we offer pranam (bow) to you.
You always do good to us,
So we offer pranam to you.
You are the Creator,

We offer pranam to you.
You are the Sustainer,
We offer pranam to you.
We offer pranam to you again and again.

You are the Destroyer,
We offer pranam to you.
You are the Eternal,
We offer pranam to you.
You are calm and quiet,
We offer pranam to you.
You are beautiful and pleasant,
We offer pranam to you.
All success is you,
All growth is you,
You are the Goddess Lakshmi
(both fortune and misfortune)
We offer pranam to you.

Only with your help can we cross the ocean of worldliness.
You are the embodiment of energy,
In one aspect You are very calm and quiet,
In another aspect You are very violent.
You are the refuge of this universe.

You are also in the form of actions.
You are Maya.
We offer pranam to You.
You are in the form of consciousness in every being.
We offer pranam to You.
You are in the form of intelligence in all,
We offer pranam to You.
We offer pranam to you again and again.

[Conclusion to '**Divine Mother**' in the November Issue of The Vedanta Kyokai.]



Namaste India Tokyo 2017 Vedanta Society Bookshop



The annual festival 'Namaste India' was held at Yoyogi Park in Tokyo on the 23rd and 24th of September 2017. The Vedanta Society of Japan participated with its Ganga CD & Book Shop again this year.

On the morning of the first day, it was still raining when volunteers were setting up goods in the shop. Afterwards, it stopped raining by the time the park opened, and for the rest of that day and the second

day the weather and temperature was just right for many visitors, as well as the volunteer shop staff to work in the market stall tent in the outdoors.

Many people came to the shop as always, and this year in particular, more of them purchased the Kyokai's books and CDs. Actually, we put a sign "Japanese branch of Ramakrishna Mission" at the entrance of the shop, which was done for the first time ever, and therefore the sign may have attracted those interested in spirituality. It seems that the activities we have been doing for many years to raise awareness of the importance of spirituality in Japan are bearing fruit with both the Mission and the Vedanta Society of Japan (Kyokai) becoming known to ever more people.

Thanks to the help of approximately 20 volunteers in total during the Namaste India event, our shop was busy and popular as always in spite of the fact that Swami Madhasananda (Maharaj) was away in India. Also, many Kyokai devotees and friends helped with preparations before the festival and with unloading and unpacking of the shop equipment after the event. We sincerely appreciate everyone's valuable assistance in making our participation in the event successful again this year. •





Japan Vedanta Society Celebrates
Kali Puja

October 19, 2017

The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai) observed Sri Sri Kali Puja in the Annex adjacent to its main Zushi Centre this year on Thursday, October at 7 p.m.

The Puja was conducted by Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj). At the conclusion of the offering of five symbolic elements Ms. Shanti led the congregation in singing 'Om Sarva Maṅgala Māṅgalye.' The pushpanjali (flower offering) followed with Maharaj first leading the congregation verse by verse in the pranam mantra to Kali Ma.

The platform was then arranged and Maharaj conducted the Homa (fire ritual) with the entire congregation joining in prescribed chanting. After Vibhuti (sacred ash) had been prepared everyone received a dab on the forehead and offered salutations to Kali Ma. A light prasad dinner followed at 9 p.m. in the main Ashrama building. About 100 people attended the puja in rather inclement weather. •





• A Story to Remember •

Accepting the Inevitable

Lord Buddha instructs the grieving mother, Kisa, who returns empty-handed but wiser from her quest to bring back simple mustard-seeds as proof of those untouched by death, to fulfill the Lord's promise to restore the life of her child:

"Dear girl, the life of mortals in this world is troubled and brief and inseparable from suffering, for there is not any means, nor will there ever be, by which those that have been born can avoid dying. All living beings are of such a nature that they must die whether they reach old age or not.

"As early-ripening fruits are in danger of falling, so mortals when born are always in danger of dying. Just as the earthen vessels made by the potter end in shards, so is the life of mortals. Both young and old, both those who are foolish and those who are wise – all fall into the power of death, all are subject to death.

"Of those who depart from this life, overcome by death, a father cannot save his son, nor relatives their kinsfolk. While relatives are looking on and lamenting, one by one the mortals are carried off like oxen to the slaughter. People die, and their fate after death will be according to their deeds. Such are the terms of the world.

"Not from weeping nor from grieving will anyone obtain peace of mind. On the contrary, his pain will be all the greater, and he will ruin his health. He will make himself sick and pale; but dead bodies cannot be restored by his lamentation.

"Now that you have heard the Tathagata [a term Buddha used to refer to himself], Kisa, reject grief, do not allow it to enter your mind. Seeing one dead, know for sure: 'I shall never see him again in this existence.' And just as the fire of a burning house is quenched, so does the contemplative wise person scatter grief's power, expertly, swiftly, even as the wind scatters cottonseed.

"He who seeks peace should pull out the arrow of lamentations, useless longings, and the self-made pangs of grief. He who has removed this unwholesome arrow and has calmed himself will obtain peace of mind. Verily, he who has conquered grief will always be free from grief – sane and immune – confident, happy, and close to Nirvana, I say" [Translation by Allen, 1991].

From 'Diverse Expressions of Grief' - by Hilary Dockray.

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