



January 2018 - Volume 16 Number 01

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

FEBRUARY 2018
Calendar

Birthdays

**Sri Sri
Ramakrishna Deva**
Saturday, 17 February



Kyokai Events

3rd (Sat) / 17th (Sat)
Embassy Discourses
**Bhagavad Gita
Upanishad**
Indian Embassy Tokyo
10:00 ~ 12:00
Photo ID required
<www.gita-embassy.com>

18th (Sun) 10:30am
**Zushi Monthly
Retreat**
**"Changing Oneself
Before
Changing Others"**
A talk by
Swami Medhasananda

**More Details on these &
other events on page 2.**



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"One must be very particular about telling the truth. Through truth one can realise God."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"Three things cannot be long hidden; the sun, the moon, and the truth."

- Gautama Buddha

December Zushi Retreat 2017 Public Celebration Zushi Centre Annexe Holy Mother Sri Sri Sarada Devi Birth Celebration

On Sunday, 17 December, the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat celebrated the birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sri Sarada Devi.

Mangala arati (morning worship) began at 06:00am in the Main Zushi Ashram attended as always by the volunteer devotees.

After an early breakfast the Main Ashrama was busy with the many chores and preparations for the celebration, such as the food and floral offerings for the altar. Over at the Annexe Building the platform was being assembled and puja vessels and utensils were buffed to a shine. Flower buds and leaves to be
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• Schedule of Events •
Vedanta Society of Japan

FEBRUARY 2018

3rd (Saturday)

Discourse on Bhagavad Gita

At the Embassy of India in Tokyo
(in Japanese only-from 10:00- 12:00)
Please Contact: <https://www.gita-embassy.com/>

3rd, 10th, 17th 24th (Saturday)

Yoga-asana classes

At the Zushi Annexe (10:15~11:45)
Please Contact: <http://zushi-hatayoga.jimdo.com/>

6th (Tue)

Gospel class at Zushi Centre

At the Kyokai (from 14:00~15:30)

17th (Sat)

Discourse on Upanishads

At the Embassy of India in Tokyo
(in Japanese only-from 10:00 - 12:00)
Please Contact: <https://www.gita-embassy.com/>

18th (Sun)

February Zushi Retreat 2018

“Changing Oneself Before Changing Others”

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Lunch Prasad

Afternoon Session

All are welcome!

Please contact (046-873-0428) regarding attendance.

23rd (Fri)

Nara Narayan: Service to Homeless Narayan

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



Holy Mother Birth Celebration (from page 1)

offered by the guests (pushpanjali) were sorted and placed in trays. The audio crew was setting up and checking audio/video gear. Folding chairs were placed in rows to accommodate the congregation.

At the altar Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) adjusted food and sweet offerings and completed floral offering and adornments of the photos of Sri Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and prostrated before the trio. After a few additional adjustments Maharaj signalled for three conch shell blasts to launch the puja. Then with the prescribed prayers and offerings Maharaj conducted the ritual worship. About 50 minutes later the ritual came to an end with mantra, bell and conch. Maharaj then prostrated and offered puja blossoms to Holy Mother's photo at the altar.

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 Izumi-

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Holy Mother Birth Celebration (from page 4)

da on synthesiser. The food offerings were then collected and taken to the nearby Main Ashrama kitchen, leaving but a few fruit items. Maharaj then prostrated before the altar again and joined the congregation in singing Sarvamangala Mangalye.

Summoning all to rise everyone got a splash of Ganges water from Maharaj, as space was cleared and flowers and leaves were passed out for the pushpanjali (flower offering). Maharaj led all in the pushpanjali mantras to the Holy Mother before each offered their prayers and flowers. Everyone then proceeded to the Main Ashrama for lunch.

The afternoon session began about 14:30 with a reading and Maharaj then gave a talk in Japanese on Holy Mother. Japanese devotees then sang Japanese devotionals composed by Ms. Shanti, followed by closing prayers and a meditation.

Tea was then served in the Main Ashrama.
About 40 people attended.

Vedanta Society of Japan at Zushi Christmas Eve 2016

On 24 December 2017, the Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual Christmas Eve celebration in the Annexe Building of its Zushi Centre to accommodate a larger gathering.

At around 7pm, Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) commenced a special worship of Jesus Christ. Lyric-sheets for were then past out for Christmas carols. Shanti Izumida led 'Joy to the World' on the synthesiser with English verses sung by Mr. Leonardo Alvarez and Brendan and they were followed by Japanese verses sung by all.

Brendan, an English teacher from New Zealand, was then asked to read the Sermon on the Mount from the Bible, Matthew 5:6-16. Mr. Ishizuka, a Christian devotee, who joined the event again this year, also read the Sermon on the Mount in Japanese.

The congregation then sang 'Come All Ye Faithful' with Leonardo and Brendan leading

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Christmas Eve 2017 (from page 4)

the English verses and the congregation joining in Japanese verses.

Maharaj then welcomed one and all. He reminded us that though Christmas is celebrated around the world in many ways, including parties and enjoyments like shopping, the spiritual message is somewhat lost. "Fortunately" he said, "there are also devout Christians who gather in cathedrals and churches to hear and reflect on the meaning of this holiday in a solemn and profound way. Jesus sacrificed his very life out of love for the sake of mankind. He taught love of God, and love of all fellow beings. We, too, should sacrifice of ourselves in the service of others." Maharaj said that all the Ramakrishna Mission Centres celebrate Christmas Eve in a very solemn way. He pointed out that in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna the Master said God is one and the same, only their names are spelled differently. "God, the great entity," said Maharaj, "appeared as Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ, and in this age, Sri Ramakrishna."

Maharaj then commented that although the evening was of a small gathering, in a small building in the small housing community of Zushi, "but the congregation tonight is global!" This segued into introductions of visiting Indian devotees, another from Australia, one from New Zealand, Venezuela, and one missing from the USA.

Maharaj then introduced Mr. Alvarez, a Sophia University student and Catholic from Venezuela, give a brief talk on the "Similarities between Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna" in both English and Japanese. (His prepared talk will appear in its entirety in the February issue of 'The Vedanta Kyokai'.)

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Mr. Ishizuka

Christmas Eve 2017 (from page 5)



Carols

Before bringing the celebration to a

close, Maharaj, commenting on Leonardo's talk, recalled the words of Girish Chandra Ghosh when he said that Ramakrishna had not come to save pure souls like Brahmanandaji or Vivekanandaji, he came to save a sinner like me! "I wonder" he continued, "if Mary

Magdalene had not the same thought—that Jesus had not come to save holy men like Peter, John or Matthew, he came to save me!"



Christmas Prasad

Maharaj called for a few minutes of silent prayer. This was followed by one more carol, 'Silent Night' before the congregation moved to the main building and enjoyed a delicious Christmas prasad dinner.

Approximately forty people attended the programme.

Yamagata Satsanga

December 2017

Swami Medhasanandaji Maharaj visited Hiratsuka Nursery and Chitose After-school Club in Yamagata City on 8 December 2017. He talked to elementary school children one by one to bless them and spoke about India.

On the following day, Maharaj gave a discourse on Bhakti Yoga at a meeting held for the general public from 1:15 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Yugakukan Lifelong Learning Centre in Yamagata City, which forty-nine people attended. The programme included a Q&A session and meditation following the discourse.

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Yamagata Satsanga (from page 6)

Maharaj explained the differences between attachment and real love such as love of God, and how consciousness manifests itself between material and living things. Regarding the practise of bhakti yoga, he discussed meditation, chanting mantra, study of scriptures, and working as an instrument of God. How total surrender to and dependence upon Him can be achieved by offering all the results of what you do to Him; by maintaining constant recollection and connectedness to Him and in becoming unselfish.

The following is a condensed comment from Mr. Shunsei Takahashi, Ningen Kojo Kenkyujo (Human Development Study Group), the organiser of the event. "Bhakti yoga represents the path of devotion and is a way to become one with God through devotion and service to God. The concept of God and how to love Him in Bhakti Yoga may not be very easy to understand, but Maharaj's discourse helped us become more familiar with this yoga. It was good to have more of the audience outside of our study group than at past similar events. It was really impressive to hear everyone chant aum while meditating and feel the vibrations of our hearts become one. I thank Maharaj."

(Translated by Ms. Satsuki Yokota)

Sendai Satsanga

December 2017

On December 10, Maharaj gave a discourse on "Reincarnation and the Law of Karma" at a satsanga which Nintai-Yoga-Ryohoshi-Kai of Miyagi (Certified Yoga Therapists Group of Miyagi) organised at L Park Sendai in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture. The programme began with mantra chanting at 1 p.m., followed by the discourse, a Q&A session and a meditation practice that lasted 35 minutes, ending at 4:30 p.m. Approximately 60 people attended.

The following is a summary report from Ms. Miyako Sato, an organising member:

"There are quite a number of occasions and sources that teach how to live well; or what to eat and what to do for good health, including self-improvement TV programmes and books widely available in our day-to-day life. On the other hand, we do not hear about

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Sendai (from page 7)

how to die well very often. Many of us are likely to associate negativity or fear with death. To most people, death probably means the end of everything.

"Life has mainly four stages: birth, growth, decline and death. No one can avoid death once we were born, as it is a matter of course. In this regard, living well means the same as dying well. To die well, we should have knowledge of death, courage and peace of mind to mentally prepare ourselves for death and face it.

"The soul exists inside each of us and has the nature of infinity, eternity and bliss (sat-chit-ananda) in contrast to the body being finite and not free in nature. Only a few people try to learn about themselves during their lifetime. Most do not know how wonderful things are inside themselves! So they try to find or create what they can enjoy externally. Actually, external enjoyment is just a reflection of the internal.

"Reincarnation does not mean negativity. In fact, it has a positive connotation as it is like taking off an old piece of clothing and putting on a new one, so that we can restart the walk to liberation in a new body. We need to be reborn repeatedly to get our soul purified through discrimination of the real and the unreal and gradually proceed along the path to liberation."

(Translated by Ms. Satsuki Yokota)

Pilgrimage to Southern India - Part 2

(Submitted by Ms. Miwako Tanabe)

The 8th day: the 20th of September The Corridor Temple at Rameshwaram

We prepared for departure after greeting the altar in Mr. and Mrs. Dey's house nearby the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. In the meantime Maharaj (Swami Medhasanandaji) happily told us of his visit to a somewhat nearby school in the name of Sri Ramakrishna the day before and addressing its students.

The next destination was Rameswaram, a town on Pamban Island in the southeast Indian
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Pilgrimage (from page 8)

state of Tamil Nadu. We went by bus and traveled 430 km and crossed the 2km iron bridge, also named 'the Pamban bridge', and arrived at the state hotel by the sea. Here, we were very much indebted to a monk who happened to be with us at the Chennai Math. The cheerful, very open-hearted Swami Pranavanandaji, had come to Rameshwaram for relief activities of the great cyclone disaster in 1964. After that he chose to stay and serve for the welfare of Rameshwaram, though he resigned from the Ramakrishna Mission. Now he organises an ashram called Ramakrishna Village and continues service activities for this region. A formerly poor village has produced many great men including Mr. Abdul Kalam, a famous space scientist and former President of India, and has been transformed. I saw the people here greeting us with smiles and friendliness when they saw Pranavanandaji. This is proof of how he and his service have naturally blended into this place.

Thought of the Month

You can't go back
and change the beginning,
but you can start where you are
and change the ending.

- C.S. Lewis

Pranavanandaji came earlier than the appointed time and talked a lot about this place. He told us that Khudiram, Thakur's father, came here on foot for pilgrimage, taking a year to walk back and forth; Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) came from Kashmir by foot in 1892 and begged and meditated for 10 days here; Holy Mother also came here and worshipped at Rameshwaram Temple and visited the sacred bathing location of Agnitheertham.

In the evening we went to Agnitheertham several hundred meters away from the hotel on the sandy beach. Then we went to Rameshwaram Temple, also known as Ramanathaswamy Temple, which makes this city a sacred place. The temple's corridor is very famous worldwide for its length and beauty; the total length is 1.2 kilometres and it has 1212 beautifully sculptured stone pillars and 1212 ceilings with different "yantra" depicted. It was made of stone which was brought from the Himalayas by boat (We can see it on the cover photo of the book "A Search in Secret India"). 100,000 visitors had come the day before, which took them 10 hours to enter the temple. Only Hindus can enter the shrine, but we were allowed to visit the next morning even though we were not Hindus by birth:

Maharaj told us the story of this temple's two Shiva Lingam. One was made by Sita, and this is the main image of the temple. When Holy Mother came here to worship the Shiva Lingam, suddenly she said, "I have worshiped this Shiva Lingam before." According to this statement, it was confirmed that the Holy Mother was Sita, herself in one of her previous incarnations.

The temple seemed to have various shrines, as well as stone walls—one depicting Swami Vivekananda's speech at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893. Also there's a cave shrine where Patanjali is said to have entered and shut the door behind him, and it is believed that he is still alive in this cave.

The 9th day: the 21st of September From Dhanushukodi to Madurai

We headed for Dhanushukodi, a fishing village at the tip of Panban Island about 16km from Sri Lanka, where Rama, with the help of monkeys, once made a stone bridge to rescue Sita from Ravana, King of Demons. In recent years, NASA technology has proved that there is a real stone bridge on the ocean floor. It is said that the Indian government

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Pilgrimage (from page 9)

and the Sri Lankan government plan to rebuild the bridge in the future with Japanese technical assistance. We walked along a beautiful sandy beach and Maharaj and Prana-vanandaji sprinkled us with holy seawater. It is a sacred place filled with an atmosphere giving us a glimpse of the essence of the soul.

Afterwards we headed for Madurai, a major center of Dravida Culture in ancient and medieval times. We arrived at the Madurai Ramakrishna Math at 2 p.m. We stayed at a guesthouse, which is attached to an elementary school called the Ramakrishna Math Sarada Vidyalaya. We were surprised to find it was next to classrooms, we also found pictures of gods and goddess on the outer wall, classroom pictures of Holy Mother and Swamiji, and the names of holy rivers given to each classroom.

In the early evening, we visited Meenakshi Amman Temple. The temple has 12 Gopurams (monumental gatehouse tower) with a height of 40 to 60 meters that were visible from anywhere in the city. The very symbol of Madurai is this temple. We were blessed to be able to enter the shrine where non-Hindus are not generally permitted.

The 10th day: the 22nd of September Madurai Sightseeing and Shopping

We had a free morning and at the elementary school they held Navaratri (Festival of Nine Nights or Durga Puja South Indian style) and we spent our time watching children perform plays on Sri Krishna. Next there was a very interesting interactive session between local devotee and us, the Japanese devotees, conducted by Maharaj. In the afternoon we went shopping and visited the Gandhi Museum with members of the Math staff. At evening arati we dedicated Japanese songs and "Rama Krishna Sharanan".

The 11th day: the 23rd of September Go to Kanyakumarika

"Today is the day we go to Kanyakumari!" Kanyakumari is a place where the three oceans (Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and Bengal Bay) comes together, and in India it is said that such a place is very sacred. It's also the only place in India where the sun rises over the Bay of Bengal and sets behind the Arabian Sea. And, more than anything, it is the memorial spot where Swamiji decided to travel to the West. We listened to the story about this place from Maharaj.

Swamiji, who was told his mission by Thakur saying, "You must work as hard as possible to be a shelter for people," wandered across India thinking "What is it that can I do for India?" He then eventually came to the southernmost tip of India, Cape Comorin. The Sacred Rock here, is now called Vivekananda Rock, on which the Kanyakumari goddess left a footprint in the past. Swamiji deeply meditated on Thakur's message to be a "shelter for the people." Swamiji swam the 550 yards (about 500 meters) out to sea, where the sharks swim, and onto the Rock. There he buried himself into deep meditation for three days on 25 December 1892. Finally, he reached the conclusion that the Motherland's poverty, ignorance and bondage were not due to "religion," as often told, but because "real religion was not known." Having no money, he then decided to cross the ocean to the United States. Instead of teaching spiritual knowledge from India, he thought that America should give India skills, science and charity. This idea of "We give you, you give us" is

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Pilgrimage (from page 10)

unique to Swamiji. Maharaj himself came to this place in 1972 and stayed for half a year.

The 12th day: the 24th of September To Vivekananda Rock

Early in the morning we went to a small temple made of stone, lit with candles where we meditated for a while. This Kumari Amman Temple, popularly known as Kanyakumari Temple, counts on tradition, and men wear a doti leaving their upper body shirtless. After breakfast we left for Vivekananda Rock..

We took a ferry from the pier near the temple and arrived at the Rock within 5 minutes. First, we visited the Shrine of the Goddess Kanyakumari called "Shripada," then to the Vivekananda Rock Memorial Temple, right next to it. Before entering Maharaj told to us that it was not easy to build this memorial hall. Vivekananda Kendra, the organisation for the memorial construction had organised "Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee" and overcame various obstacles. For example; the inevitable salt damage; rock strength had to be determined and according to the survey conducted, it was found to be one solid rock that could withstand construction; a positive impression of the local people was necessary as there are many Christians and they were critical of Hindu constructions. Also, some people wanted to build the great man's memorial on the southern not the northern end; and so on. Then there were negotiations with local and state governments. But they practiced Swamiji's message to "Be strong!" They also overcame the problem of fundraising to establish a coupon system that anybody could buy from one rupee. It was so nice an idea that people all over India bought coupons for construction of a memorial to honour a hero of their Motherland, India. Currently Vivekananda Kendra is looking after Vivekananda Rock; managing the ship business from Cape Comorin and the guest house where we stayed; as well as holding lectures on yoga and holistic health and running schools in various parts of India. I, in fact, came to this rock in 2009 without knowing anything about Swamiji. After I learned of Thakur, Mother and Swamiji, I dreamed that there might be one more visit in my life, and this time that dream became a reality. I'm here, together with my Guru.

The 13th day: the 25th of September To Trivandram

We left the state of Tamil Nadu and entered Kerala state for the last destination. The bus ran about 100 kilometres, and finally arrived at a major city to the north on the west coast, Trivandram. This city boasts many modern and Western-style buildings and our last accommodation was a hotel like a modern hotel in Tokyo. In the afternoon we went on a 'backwater cruise,' a recently popular sightseeing activity. Our party boarded two small boats and went along the Neyyar river together like a twin boat. We went through mangroves and palm trees, and experienced the great nature of this water district.

The last day: the 26th of September From Trivandram to Chennai

Leaving the hotel at 4:30 a.m., we had a long bus journey, de-boarding only for mealtimes and teatimes. It was amazing that the driver could drive the bus for the entire 734 kilometres alone! Returning to Chennai Math safely at 9 p.m. and after dinner, we had a chance to meet one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order and the Revered Swami Gautamanandaji, President of the Chennai Math. He is 89 years old and told us how important it is to keep the mind young. "Tonight is my last night in South India," I lamented. Mrs. Dey, whom we have been calling 'Didi' (sister), visited our rooms and wished us of each farewell.

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Pilgrimage (from page 11)

**The 27th of September
From Chennai International Airport to Belur Math, Kolkata**

Our pilgrimage to South India, so full of new and amazing experiences for us all, had finally ended. This morning we left along with Maharaj and we departed with Mr. and Mrs. Dey, who led us about sometimes strictly, sometimes gently and supported us like family members. In front of the Chennai airport, Didi embraced each of us and again bade us farewell with tears in her eyes. In return we expressed our hope to meet again. We also heartily thanked the bus driver who had safely driven us such a long way. On this journey of pilgrims, while each participant may have had their own thoughts and expectations, each wished to go forward with steady steps and God's protection. We appreciate Thakur, Mother and Swamiji's unseen help and guidance and appreciate Maharaj's and Mr. and Mrs. Dey's loving service, not seeking a return. I appreciate the affection and help of all who participated in the pilgrimage and I wish peace for all people.

Part 2 concludes my report on the pilgrimage to South India.



Rameshwaram



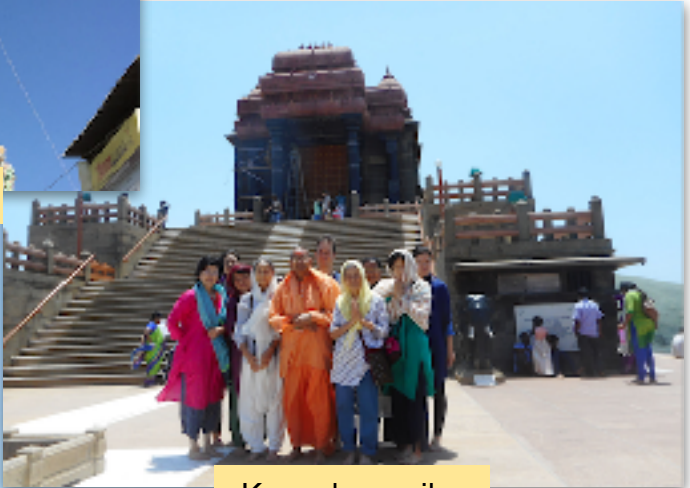
Pamban Beach



Madurai Math



Madurai Gopuram



Kanyakumarika



Temple to Goddess Kanyakumarika



Belur Math with President Smarananandaji Maharaj

• A Story to Remember •

The Rooster and the Fox

A rooster was perched on a branch of a very high tree, crowing loudly. His powerful exclamations were heard throughout the forest and caught the attention of a hungry fox who was out and about looking for prey.

The fox saw how high the bird was positioned and thought of a sly way to bring the rooster down for his meal.

"Excuse me, my dear proud Rooster," he gently spoke, "Have you not heard of the universal treaty and proclamation of harmony that is now set before all beasts and birds and every creature in our forest. We are no longer to hunt or prey nor ravish one another, but we are to live together in peace, harmony, and love. Do come down, Rooster, and we shall speak more on this matter of such great importance."

Now, the rooster, who knew that the fox was known for his sly wit, said nothing, but looked out in the distance, as if he were seeing something.

"At what are you looking so intently?" asked the fox.

"I see a pack of wild dogs," said the rooster, "I do believe they're coming our way, Mr. Fox."

"Oh, I must go," said the fox.

"Please do not go yet, Mr. Fox," said the rooster, "I was just on my way down. We will wait on the dogs and discuss this new time of peace with all."

"No, no," said the fox, "I must go. The dogs have not heard of this treaty of peace yet."

Be cautious of curious offers of friendship. - an Aesop Fable

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