



APRIL 2018 - Volume 16 Number 04

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

MAY 2018
Calendar

Birthdays

There are no birthday celebrations for **May of 2018** according to the **Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac**

Kyokai Events

6th(Sun) 14:00~16:00

NEW Half Day Retreats at Zushi

Chanting, Readings, Meditation, Discussions on Spiritual Life, Tea and light snacks.
<benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

Public Celebration Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary

Minami Otsuka Hall
Toshima-ku, Tokyo

India-Japan Relationship Talks & Cultural Programme

All are welcome!

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

✘ Thus Spake ✘

"Many good sayings are to be found in holy books, but merely reading them will not make one religious."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path."

- Gautama Buddha

March Zushi Retreat 2018 Celebrating Sri Ramakrishna's 183rd Birth Anniversary

On Sunday, March 18, the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat was the venue for a daylong programme in celebration of the 183rd birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. Although Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was on February 18, this year according to the Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac, the event is now customarily held on our March Retreat as slightly warmer weather prevails and the event is popular and enjoys the greatest attendance of all Zushi events throughout the year.

(con't page 5)

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• May 2018 Schedule of Events •
Vedanta Society of Japan

5th (Sat)

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/>

6th (Sun) (14:00~16:00)

Half Day Retreat at Zushi

Chanting, Readings on meditation and spiritual life
Discussion, Meditation, Tea and snacks
Please Contact: benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

8th (Tue.) (from 14:00~16:00)

Gospel Class at Zushi

Please Contact: benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

19th (Sat)

**Public Celebration: Swami Vivekananda's 155th Birth Anniversary
Commemorating Swami Vivekananda's Visit to Japan: 125th Anniversary**

Topic: "The India-Japan Relationship"
Venue: Minami Otsuka Hall
Time: 13:30 to 17:00 (Hall opens at 13:00)

Located in the Minami Otsuka Regional Culture Center
2-36-1 Minami Otsuka, Toshima-ku, Tokyo 170-0005
A short walk from JR Otsuka Station (Yamanote Line)
<http://www.toshima-mirai.jp/center/h_otsuka/>
All, with family and friends, are welcome to attend.
(poster pages 3 and 4)

25th (Fri)

Nara Narayan: Service to homeless Narayan

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

26th (Sat)

Discourses in Osaka and Kyoto (In Japanese only)

Monthly discourses on "Bhagavad Gita" and "Upanishad" are given in Osaka and Kyoto
For details please see <<http://vedanta.main.jp/>>

27th (Sun)

Satsanga in Sarasa (Details to be furnished later)

Every Saturday

Yoga-Asana Class - At the Annexe (from 10:45-11:45)

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

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



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: 155th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S VISIT TO JAPAN: 125th ANNIVERSARY

DATE: SATURDAY, 19 MAY 2018 1:30PM~5:00PM (Hall Opens at 1PM)

スワミー・ヴィヴェーカーナンダ第155回生誕記念祝賀会

スワミー・ヴィヴェーカーナンダ訪日125周年記念祝賀会

日時：2018年5月19日(土) 午後1時30分~5時(開場午後1時)

Venue: Minami Otsuka Hall, 2-36-1 Minami-otsuka, Toshima-ku, Tokyo

Speech: 'India - Japan Relationship'

場 所: 南大塚ホール：東京都豊島区南大塚 2-36-1

スピーチ: 「日本とインドの関係」

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: 155th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S VISIT TO JAPAN: 125th ANNIVERSARY

スワミー・ヴィヴェーカーナンダ第155回生誕記念祝賀会
スワミー・ヴィヴェーカーナンダ訪日125周年記念祝賀会



Website : vedanta.jp E-mail: info@vedanta.jp

ご家族、ご友人お誘い合わせのうえ、ご出席ください。心から歓迎いたします。

All, with family and friends, are cordially invited to attend!

Date: Saturday, 19th May, 2018. 1:30 p.m.-5 p.m. (Hall opens at 1 p.m.)
Venue: Minami Otsuka Hall, 2-36-1 Minami-otsuka, Toshima-ku, Tokyo
Programme highlight: Speech 'India - Japan Relationship' ;Cultural Programme
日時: 2018年5月19日(土) 午後1時30分~5時(開場午後1時)
場所: 南大塚ホール: 東京都豊島区南大塚2-36-1
主なプログラム: スピーチ「日本とインドの関係」、文化交流プログラム

Speakers 講演者

Cultural Programme 文化交流プログラム



Mr. Raj Kumar Srivastava
Deputy Chief of Mission,
The Embassy of India, Tokyo
ラージ・クマール・スリバスタバ氏
駐日インド大使館首席公使



Prof. Fukunaga Masaaki
Visiting Fellow,
Sophia University
福永 正明氏
上智大学客員研究員



Swami Medhasananda
President,
Vedanta Society of Japan
スワミー・メダサーナンダ
日本ヴェーダーンタ協会会長



The Mayuka's Indian
Classical Dance group
ザ・マユカズ・インディア
ン・クラシカル・ダンス・
グループ

Exhibition: Books on Hinduism, Meditation, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in Japanese and English; CDs of devotional songs; Photos; Incense sticks.

All will be treated with a light refreshment.

*No Admission charge. Donation for the Celebration will be thankfully received.

展示物: ヒンドゥイズム、瞑想、ラーマクリシュナ、ヴィヴェーカーナンダに関する日・英両語による書籍。ほかに賛歌CD、写真、線香が展示されます。

参加された皆さんには茶菓をお出します。

※入場は無料です。この祝賀会に対するご寄付を有り難くお受けいたします。

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Swami Vivekananda was a prophet of Modern India. He was a lover of humanity, a preacher of Universal Religion and a protagonist of internationalism. Both Eastern and Western savants hold Vivekananda in high esteem for his universal outlook, holistic approach and soul-stirring message. He founded the Ramakrishna Mission, an international spiritual organisation, in 1897 with the objective of realising the Self and serving humanity with a spirit of worship.

About the Programme:

The purpose of the present programme is to pay tribute to the great Swami and to highlight the various facets of his personality and deliberate on his message, which not only helps us to solve the problems we face at different levels, but also elevates us to a higher state of consciousness.

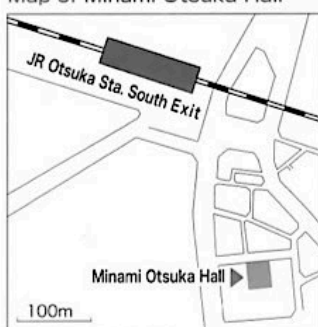
スワミー・ヴィヴェーカーナンダ (1863~1902)

スワミー・ヴィヴェーカーナンダは、近代インドの預言者です。彼は人類愛の人、普遍宗教の説教者、国際主義の提唱者です。東西の碩学(せきがく)たちは、彼の普遍的見解や統合的な手法、魂をゆるがすような説法を高く評価しています。1897(明治30)年に彼は、真我の実現および礼拝の精神で人類に奉仕することを目的とする、靈性に基づく国際的組織ラーマクリシュナ・ミッションを創設しました。

本祝賀会の目的:

本祝賀会の目的は、この偉大なスワミー(僧侶)に敬意を表し、彼の人格のさまざまな面を明らかにして、彼のメッセージを深く考えることです。私たちがさまざまなレベルで直面する問題を解決する助けとなり、私たちを、より高次の意識へと高めてくれるでしょう。

Map of Minami Otsuka Hall



For further details, please call:

Swami Medhasananda
(046)873-0428
Mr. S. Kar (045)264-4918
Mr. S. Brahma (03)3816-6075
Organized by: The Celebration
Committee in collaboration with the
Nippon Vedanta Kyokai (A branch of
the Ramakrishna Mission)
Supported by: Embassy of India, Tokyo
Office Address: Nippon Vedanta
Kyokai, 4-18-1 Hisagi Zushi-shi,
Kanagawa-ken 249-0001, Phone
(046)873-0428, Fax (046)873-0592

南大塚ホール地図



より詳しい情報を知りたい方は、

ここにお問い合わせ下さい:
スワミー・メダサーナンダ
249-0001 神奈川県逗子市久木
4-18-1
Tel : 046-873-0428
Fax : 046-873-0592
主催: 祝賀委員会
共催: 日本ヴェーダーンタ協会
(ラーマクリシュナ・ミッション日本
支部)、
後援: インド大使館

Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration (from page 1)

In the main Ashram Saturday night after supper the assigned tasks from the duty list were reviewed with the volunteers present who were to stay the night at both the Ashram and Holy Mother House a short walk away. The following morning Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) led mangalarati, chanting, reading from the Gita and bhajans at 06:00. Afterward the usual teams made floral and food preparations for the altar at the Annexe Building, while the raised platform, audio/visual and seating were set up.

After the altar photos of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda were adorned with flowers and garlands and offerings had been arranged, three bellows from conch shells (shankha) signaled the beginning of the worship (puja). Maharaj bowed in prayer, lit the ghee flame, offered incense and remained in silent meditation for a few minutes before launching into stipulated mantras and offerings of the puja. As the worship proceeded conch shells occasionally joined in as he rang a handbell. Before the puja came to a close he then asked the congregation to close their eyes and envisage Sri Ramakrishna present with them and partaking of the offerings. He then continued with ritual offerings and mantras.

As Maharaj concluded the puja arrangements were made to conduct Arati with symbolic offerings of the five elements; fire, water, space or aether, earth and air, as the congregation sang 'Khandana Bhava Bandhana' (Breaker of this World's Chains) a hymn by Swami Vivekanandaji led by Ms. Shanti Izumida on synthesiser:

khaṇḍana bhava bandhana jaga vandana vandi tomāy |
nirañjana nara-rūpa-dhara nirguṇa guṇamay ||

mocana aghadūṣaṇa jagabhūṣaṇa cidghanakāy |
jñānāñjana-vimala-nayana vīkṣaṇe moha jāy ||

bhāsvara bhāva-sāgara cira-unmada prema-pāthār |
bhaktārjana-yugala caraṇa tāraṇa-bhava-pār ||

jṛmbhita-yuga-tīśvara jagadīśvara yogasahāy |
nirodhana samāhitamana nirakhi tava kṛpāy ||

bhañjana-duḥkhagañjana karuṇāghana karma-kaṭhor |
prāṇarpaṇa jagata-tāraṇa kṛntana-kaliḍor ||

vañcana-kāmakāñcana atinindita-indriyarāg |
tyāgīśvara he naravara dehapade anurāg ||

nirbhaya gatasamśaya dṛṛhaniścaya-mānasavān |
niṣkāraṇa-bhakata-śaraṇa tyaji jāti-kula-māna||

sampada tava śrīpada bhava-goṣpada-vāri yathāy |
premārpaṇa samadaraśana jagajana-duḥkha jāy ||

namo namo prabhu vākya-manātīta manovacanaikādhār |
jyotira jyoti ujala-hṛdikandara tumi tamo-bhañjana hār ||

(con't page 6)

Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration (from page 5)

dhe dhe dhe laṅga raṅga bhaṅga bāje aṅga saṅga mṛdaṅga
gāhiche chanda bhakatavṛnda ārati tomār ||

jaya jaya ārati tomār hara hara ārati tomār
śiva śiva ārati tomār ||

khaṇḍana bhava bandhana jaga vandana vandi tomāy |
jay śrī gurumāhārājī ki jay ||

Afterward Ms. Shanti continued with 'Sarva Mangala Mangalye' or Hymn to the Divine Mother:

Sarva-mangala-mangalye Shive sarvartha-sadhike;
Sharanye Tryambake Gauri Narayani namo'stu te ||1||

Shristi-sthiti-vinashanam shakti-bhute sanatani;
Gunasraye gunamaye Narayani namo'stu te ||2||

Sharan'agata dinarta paritrana parayane;
Sarvasy'arti-hare devi Narayani namo'stu te ||3||

Jaya Narayani namo'stu te |
Jaya Narayani namo'stu te ||
Jaya Narayani namo'stu te |||

At the conclusion trays of flowers and leaves to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna (Pushpanjali) were passed out. To save time this year, once everyone had received their flower bud and leaf for offering, all rose and Maharaj led the congregation in the pushpanjali mantra to Sri Ramakrishna, and the offerings were collected then, rather wait for everyone to individually make their offerings at the altar.

Soon the platform was arranged for the homa-fire. As the homa flames rose, Maharaj called upon the congregation to chant a mantra 108 times, as he continued with the ritual additions to the dancing blaze. Maharaj then stood offering more ghee, fruits and mantras to the flame. Then a yoghurt mix preparation to dowse the flames was prepared. Maharaj then plucked a few bits of smoldering ash from the container to prepare the vibhuti (ceremonial ash) to be placed on everyone's forehead.

Maharaj then took the opportunity to release a new Japanese language book from the Vedanta Society of Japan: 'Reisei no Hikari' (Spiritual Light) A paperback of insightful lectures by Swami Bhuteshananda, the long serving Vice President and President of the Ramakrishna Order, offers the swami's deep understanding of scripture and contemplative spiritual life, and offers answers to spiritual questions asked by modern-day people.

Everyone then queued up to received their bibhuti and offer prayer to Sri Ramakrishna and pranams to Maharaj, who encouraged all to stay for lunch prasad in the Main Ashrama before returning to the Annexe for the Afternoon Session.

(con't page 7)

Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration (from page 5)

After lunch, at about 2:45pm as various mic and instrument settings were checked, Maharaj led the congregation in Vedic peace mantra chanting. Maharaj then addressed the congregation:

"Welcome to today's birth celebration of Sri Ramakrishna. The actual date was about one month ago, but we did not hold our celebration then as it was cold—not only cold, but extraordinarily cold this year. So that everyone is more comfortable, it has become our tradition to celebrate Sri Ramakrishna's birthday for our monthly Zushi Retreat in March."

"In India there are some religious celebrations where the major attraction is a cultural programme and a monk is invited to speak as well, but with the expectation that the monk will talk very briefly. (laughter) His presence is required to grace the occasion. That is all. This afternoon's main attraction is also a cultural programme, but ritualistically I am required to say something, despite the morning session being distinctly ritualistic. As this is a programme at an ashram, I believe some talk is necessary, because many here have a real interest in hearing some spiritual discourse even though we are running late." Maharaj then gave a talk on Sri Ramakrishna's advice to householders (in this issue of The Vedanta Kyokai).

With his discussion coming to a close, the stage was set for Samudra Dutta Gupta to sing. Next the young daughter of a devotee, Miss Ashmita Pal, played a number by Tagore on piano. Then a group of Society devotees led by Ms. Shanti Izumida sang original devotional songs in Japanese, accompanied by Dinesh Dyonidi on tabla. This was followed by a very large contingent of Kailas Yoga School members and Society members performing arrangements of original compositions. Another devotee, Mr. Lonnie, sang a devotional song by Rabindra Danks recorded by the Vedanta Society's Hollywood Men's Choir and a well-known gospel number. This led to the main attraction performance by Mr. Daikichi on sitar and Mr. Dinesh Dyonidi on tabla.

This concluded the scheduled programme for the day that about 130 people attended. •

March Zushi Retreat 2018
Sri Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration - Afternoon Session Talk

'Advice to Householders' by Swami Medhasananda

"In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna one topic is discussed on many occasions. That topic is how householder devotees can get greater peace and greater devotion to God. Sri Ramakrishna did not appear only for great souls like Swami Vivekananda or Swami Brahmananda, He appeared more for the householders, for the far greater numbers of people who were steeped in worldly life. Girish Chandra Ghosh once said, 'Sri Ramakrishna was not born for a saint like Vivekananda, He was born for a sinner like me!' I believe that all incarnations of God come more for the people who have lost their way; those without any peace; those distressed.

Advice to Householders (from page7)

“On one such discussion in the Gospel, a devotee asks what the way is for householders to get liberation (freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth). Monks focus on spiritual practices; they have time; they have motivation; they have no family or obligation in that sense. But what about householders who have lots of obligations, families, work-life; yet, still aspire to a higher, God-centred life? What is the way for them? Sri Ramakrishna recommended four ways for such seekers.

Thought of the Month

"Everything comes to us
that belongs to us,
if we create the capacity
to receive it."

- Rabindranath Tagore

"These four begin with 'holy company' and this is important to pursue even though it may not always be possible in one's daily life. What is meant by 'holy company'? If you discuss politics with a monk, one cannot say that was time spent in holy company. It is expected that one should discuss spiritual subjects and one's problems in life with a monk. People know that one of the main causes of our sufferings are our attachments; attachment to family; attachment to name and fame.

"So people need an example of one who is practicing renunciation and detachment, as example of how one's life can be a God-centred life. A genuine monk leads such a God-centred life and a life of renunciation. So in holy company one experiences two kinds of inspiration: One is to lead a life of detachment and the other is how to live a God-centred life.

"The third thing derived in holy company is guidance. A lot of things bring conflicts regarding a householder's duty, moral and spiritual life. In India it is a common practice for householders to consult a monk with their problems, including husband and wife relationships. Devotees sometimes consulted Sri Ramakrishna, himself, regarding conflicts among family members. After Sri Ramakrishna passed away this duty fell to Holy Mother. These are the benefits of holy company.

"The next important thing for a householder devotee to do is to occasionally seek out and stay somewhere in solitude, not for sightseeing, but for being engaged in spiritual practice. We cannot do so in our daily family lives, so we should make an effort to seek solitude and do spiritual practice. This means to get up early in the morning, to meditate, chant the name of the Lord or one's mantra, and read some scripture. In this way we can develop good habits that we can continue upon our return home.

"As you may know, our Society holds an annual Outdoor Summer Retreat. Our devotees come to our monthly Retreats, like today, in the morning, spend the entire day and return home in the afternoon. When devotees attend our Outdoor Retreat, they have to leave their families and live for two or three days in a spiritual atmosphere. This leaves a great impact on participants. Why is it necessary to be away from one's family? Does not God live everywhere?

"Of course it is true that God exists everywhere, but we do not always feel this. At home

(con't page 9)

Advice to Householders (from page 8)

there is a 'home vibration.' When we visit an ashram there is an 'ashram vibration.' Even if we practice at home, we are under the spell, as it were, of our home vibration; our relationships and routine work life. If we want to develop a spiritual life, we need to be away from that home vibration on occasion and try to practice in seclusion or in an ashram atmosphere.



"Sri Ramakrishna said that the third way is 'vichāra' or discrimination between the 'real' and the 'unreal'. In this regard, I can share my experience with you. Before coming to Japan I was working in a famous educational institution of the Ramakrishna Mission which was completely residential. When the boys returned home for summer vacation I felt the atmosphere there to be very calm and quiet, yet I felt the urge to visit another ashram. This was because

no matter how calm and quiet the school and its ashram were at this time, for me it still held a 'work vibration.' In such a situation it is difficult to have real self-introspection. So I had to leave my working centre and go to another ashram, where I had no obligation or duty to perform and I could live and do my spiritual practice freely, including deep introspection.

"Self-introspection is extremely important to understand the direction of our life; what the goal of our life is. I am swimming in the current of life, but in what direction? Is there a point toward which I am swimming, or am I just drifting here and there? I wonder if there is any direction at all, or am I like a rudderless boat. Such introspection becomes difficult for us, unless we are away from our home or work vibration, and try to ponder about why we are living—about what the purpose of our life is. Who am I? I really want joy and peace, but do I get it?

"I was shown a chart or graph regarding suicide rates around the world by a devotee, and the ratio of suicides in Japan is alarmingly high. This devotee also said that in addition to economic reasons, he felt one of the main reasons for Japan's high suicide rate was that people do not know why they live. They do not know the purpose of their life, and as such they reason and come to the negative conclusion that there is no difference between life and death. Hence, what fun is there in continuing to live like everyone else does? So it is important for us to ponder the purpose of our life and get a positive answer and to live accordingly.

"The question of why am I living is organic, but there is a difference in whether we want to suppress this question or whether we want to get an answer to it. Some people are afraid
(con't page 10)

Advice to Householders (from page 9)

to face this fundamental question and want to suppress it, as otherwise it may lead to uncertain situations. But what ultimately happens? When people reach the threshold of death and are asked how fulfilled their life was, most would say they were not really very happy. They wanted love, but did not get it; they wanted peace, but did not get it; they wanted joy, but did not get it; though they pursued these things diligently throughout their life. The real lacuna, however, is that they never inquired whether their search was made in the right or the wrong direction.

"So if we leave our home vibration and go to some solitary place, then we can quietly introspect about the above points that may bring real change in our life. One advantage, at least, of those who visit a monk or ashram or holy places like a church or temple where talks about a peaceful and spiritual life are held, and not merely funeral ritual services, is that they can hear discussions about the solutions to these deeper questions which we face. The Upanishads say that among thousands upon thousands of people very few even get a chance to listen and hear of Truth. Then again, among the thousands who do hear of it, very few want to practice and achieve it. Of those who do practice, few realise Truth in their life. So may your visit here today, and attending this ceremony and what you take from this talk, be the beginning of the beginning of a higher life.

"The fourth way Sri Ramakrishna prescribes is *prārthanā* or prayer. Prayer to whom? Sometimes we pray for a job or other business concern. Children also pray to their mother or father to purchase their favorite foodstuff. But here, *prārthanā* means prayer to God. Why do we pray? Because we believe there is someone that hears our prayer; has the power to fulfil our prayer; and fulfils our prayer. One Muslim was praying in a very loud voice, 'Allah, Allah, Allah!' Someone reproached him saying that one need not pray to Allah in such a loud voice, as He hears the quietest prayer, too. God can even hear the footsteps of an ant. God hears all sincere prayers.

"We have to depend upon God to fulfil our prayer or not, and when and to what degree He will fulfil it. For many of our devotees, if God fulfils our prayer, then God is good, if God does not fulfil, then God is not good. Not only that; some even complain and are piqued with God that they pray and God does not fulfil their prayers, while others, who do not pray at all, get all their wishes and requirements.

How and when one's prayer will be fulfilled is determined by God. One devotee wanted the freedom of India during that era when it was a dependent country. He prayed very fervently to God to liberate and give freedom to India. God appeared to the man and said, 'OK, India will be liberated after one-hundred years.' The devotee protested saying that he would not still be alive to enjoy the freedom of India by that time.

"What are the subjects of prayer? If we go to a Shinto Shrine or Buddhist Temple we can get '*Ōmikuji*', random fortunes on strips of paper to tie on designated tree branches, or '*Ema*' small wooden plaques to write our prayers or wishes where '*kami*' or deities are believed to receive them. Such prayers are usually for business matters, family matters, finding a husband or a wife, or passing school exams, etc. This also happens in India. So secular prayers are quite common, but in these places of worship do you come across the prayers, 'God give me devotion!' or 'God, give me more power of discrimination!' or 'God, give me liberation!'

(con't page 11)

Advice to Householders (from page 10)



"The most common type of prayer is for such temporal wishes. Is it not wiser to pray to God for peace and joy? Prayer for purity; prayer for knowledge; prayer for eternal peace; prayer for discrimination; and prayer for devotion; these are the real prayers Sri Ramakrishna meant by 'prayer' and wanted the devotees to bear in mind and practice.

"God is omnipotent; so has the power to grant all prayers, so why do we pray for trifling things. As Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Suppose you meet a king and he offers to grant your prayer, would you say, "O Lord, will you give me some pumpkin, papaya and banana!" Or would you ask for something very special and not commonly available from the produce grocer. You got a very special opportunity to have an audience with the King and you ask for insignificant things like papaya and pumpkin?' Most of us, however, are like this with our usual prayers. Let us then pray for something higher, something greater, something endurable.

"The best prayer is, 'Lord, I don't want anything mundane! I only want You.' God symbolises the highest joy, the highest beauty, the highest peace, the highest knowledge. According to Hindu scripture, God is Sat-Chit-Ananda, absolute joy, absolute existence, and absolute knowledge. There are two well-known prayers which I would like to mention: One was offered by Ahalya, who for some misdeed was turned to stone. Lord Rama touched the stone and she was returned to herself praying, 'Lord, I do not care if I must be born again as a pig, please do not let me forget you, and let my mind be fixed on your lotus feet.' Another is the prayer of Kunti, mother of the five Pandava brothers of the Mahabharata Epic. As you know, it is common when we are having good days, we become forgetful about God, but in our days of suffering or distress we remember God. As we say in Japanese, 'Kurushī no toki ni Kami da no mi.' Kunti's prayer to God was to not get any joy, to not enjoy any comforts of life, instead she asked the Lord to send her sufferings. Why? She said, 'Because in days of my suffering, I will always remember You.'

"This ideal may be a little far flung, as householder devotees have many obligations to family, to husband and wife which have to be met. That is fine, but do not only pray for material things, also pray for purity, for abiding peace and abiding joy, and knowledge. Ask, 'O Lord, Please see that I never forget You. Please do not make me forgetful about You by Your world bewitching Maya.' At least we can add these to our usual prayers so that we do not forget God. Is this way of prayer acceptable to you? (applause)

"In conclusion let me repeat the four things for householders to get more peace and more devotion to God and greater knowledge of God. The first is to seek holy company. Then to occasionally go to a solitary place and think of God. Next, the third thing is discrimination and self-introspection. The fourth thing is prayer—in addition to our normal prayers, we can add some spiritual prayers, too, to begin with." •

Fukushima Satsanga Winter 2018

On January 13, Swami Medhasananda Maharaj gave a discourse titled "Inner Peace" at the training hall of pharmaceuticals company, Nippon Zenyaku Kogyo, in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture.

It was a very cold, but very clear day. Approximately 50 people attended, 70 percent of whom were yoga teachers or students. There were people from different backgrounds as well, including school teachers, those from Sri Lanka and those coming from distant regions in Japan, which demonstrated how much this event had stimulated interest among people seeking inspiration. Thanks to the detailed and thoughtful arrangements by the organisers, Ms. Miyo Tanji and other staff members, the event was a great success.

This was the first time Maharaj had talked in Fukushima. As an introduction to the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and people related to the twin organisations, he first explained that the Math and Mission were founded with a view to realising one's true nature, and to serving God we see in others by serving them. He touched Swami Vivekananda's relationship with Japan, too.

After the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and the consequent nuclear power plant disaster, people in Fukushima have continued to feel anxiety about their everyday life and future. Having experienced these disasters, they know how easily happiness

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can be lost in a moment, and they seek ways to relieve their sadness and anxiety and regain happiness and peace of mind.

Maharaj said that true happiness and joy are within us. "We cannot get them automatically though and need to work hard for them. For good health, many of us make efforts in terms of the body, but do nothing in terms of the mind and heart. It is good for everyone to sit silently with their eyes closed and meditate for at least 10 to 15 minutes a day, introspecting and focusing themselves on the eternal. If you want true happiness, you should try to control desires and get rid of attachments. It is important to realise that our true nature is the soul or Atman and that it is eternal and infinite."

Maharaj referred to some quotes from the Bhagavad Gita, including "You are a friend to yourself, and a foe to yourself." He gave encouraging slogans too, such as "80 percent of your worries do not actually occur," and "your own pace, your own way, your own time." We repeated these words out loud in unison, which gave us great strength.

Maharaj concluded his comments saying, "Understanding what we discussed today will motivate us to practise it. By practising repeatedly, we will change so that we can be 'a friend to ourselves'."

There followed a Q&A session, guided meditation practice and a book signing.

In the evening some 17 people enjoyed a get-together dinner at a local Italian restaurant. During the dinner Maharaj showed the Mission's logo on the back cover of a book published by Japan Vedanta Society and said, "The encircling serpent in the picture is indicative of Raja Yoga or focused meditation. The wavy waters represent Karma Yoga, where we see God in others and serve them. The lotus flower symbolises Bhakti Yoga, love for and devotion to God. The rising sun is the symbol of Jnana Yoga and means the light of Knowledge appearing from the darkness of ignorance. When we complete any one of these four Yogas, we will attain to the swan in the middle that stands for Paramatman (Supreme Self), in other words, Absolute Reality, Absolute Knowledge, Absolute Bliss, or Satchitananda. We will be a friend to ourselves then and get true happiness."

When the get together came to an end, it was snowing outside and the ground was covered with snow. We left the restaurant thanking Sri Ramakrishna for the great day and hoping to have the next Satsanga with his holy company soon. •

(The original Japanese was contributed by Ms Shanti Izumida and the English translation was by Ms Satsuki Yokoda)

Osaka Gathering March 23, 2018 - At Ashoka Restaurant Osaka



March Zushi Retreat 2018 - Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration



• A Story to Remember •

The Clock in the Town Square

The old clock had always been up there on the courthouse facing the town square. Its chiming each and every hour on the hour had in its consistency assured the townspeople that all was well—that time was passing as it should.

The clock had become a landmark of the town and had been part of the community for as long as anyone could remember. As the decades passed the town grew and became the county seat of a prosperous and rapidly growing district. This brought an influx of new people and ideas.

A new city council, anxious to improve the image and standing of the town, called a meeting of the townspeople to discuss a new courthouse. Some citizens remarked that removal of the clock from its place in the town square would be unacceptable to the very nature and tradition of the place. They objected because people had come to depend upon and revere the clock on the building, not only as a symbol of stability, but a guardian of punctuality.

Some noted that while the clock was easily visible from across the square, those passing nearby or racing up the broad courthouse stairs displayed considerable discomfort trying to look up at the time. Others agreed that given the age of the old clock, it should be set lower for easy viewing, access and repairs. Finally, nearly everyone agreed that the clock would be removed from the old courthouse and set within the townsquare atop a new fountain.

The courthouse was demolished and construction of the new glass and steel building began in earnest. The clock was removed and placed in the centre of the square upon a rotating pedestal for everyone's convenience. With these changes, however, the atmosphere of the square was not the same, and worse, the prestige and authority of the old clock was now constantly challenged.

Passersby would check their watches and dispute the old clock's accuracy, and rather than adjust their watches accordingly, they would take advantage of the easy access and move the big hands of the clock to reflect time as they saw it. After all, they trusted their timepieces and viewed resetting the old clock as a service to the community.

Before long no one could trust the accuracy of the hourly chimes, and with the constant meddling, the old clock broke down beyond repair and was scrapped. The town square having lost its community distinction was soon developed into a shopping centre. Long term residents of the town lamented the loss, the authorities called it progress.

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