



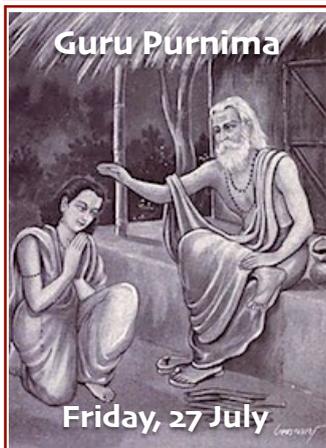
JUNE 2018 - Volume 16 Number 06

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

JULY 2018
Calendar

Birthdays



Guru Purnima

Friday, 27 July

Kyokai Events

1st (Sun)

NEW

**Half Day Retreats
at Zushi**

Cancelled for July!

<benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

14th ~16th

**Annual Summer
Outdoor Retreat**

See page 17 for details

**July Monthly
Retreat 2018**

Chanting, Reading,
Discourse by Swami
Medhasananda
Lunch Prasad
Afternoon Session
All are welcome!

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



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Be not a traitor in your thoughts. Be sincere; act according to your thoughts; and you shall surely succeed. Pray with a sincere and simple heart, and your prayers will be heard.

- Sri Ramakrishna

"Listen all of you to the true testimony of the saints, for surely they say what they actually see with their own eyes."

- Guru Nanak

Principal Speaker

Vivekananda Public Celebration in Tokyo 19 May 2018

'Swami Vivekananda and Japan'

by Swami Medhasananda

Today we have assembled here to celebrate the 155th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda and also 125th anniversary of his visit to Japan. We are holding this celebration not just because Swamiji was the founder of the worldwide Ramakrishna Order of which our Society is a branch, Swamiji was also one of the few eminent personalities of the modern world, who have impacted it with profound thoughts and ideas.

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• July 2018 •
Schedule of Events
Vedanta Society of Japan

1st (Sun)

Half Day Zushi Retreat
CANCELLED for July

5th~7th

Yoga Therapy Association Meeting in Sendai
Swami Medhasananda to Chant Vedic Peace Prayers

10th (Tue) 14:00~16:30

Study Class at Zushi

Please Contact: <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

14~16th

Annual Summer Outdoor Retreat

Venue: Lake Kawaguchiko (see page 17)

Please Contact: Shanti <vedantaharmony@gmail.com>

21st (Sat)

Embassy of India in Tokyo Discourse on Bhagavad Gita

(in Japanese only) (from 10:00~12:00)

Please Contact: <<https://www.gita-embassy.com/>>

22nd (Sun) (from 10:30~16:30)

Zushi Monthly Retreat

Speaker: Swami Medhasananda

Chanting, Reading, Discourse

27th (Fri)

Nara Narayan: Service to Homeless Narayan

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

28th (Sat) 13:30~17:00

Discourses in Osaka (In Japanese only)

Discourses on the "Bhagavad Gita" and "Upanishad"

For details please see: <<http://vedanta.main.jp/index.html>>

Every Saturday (10:15~11:30)

Yoga-asana Sessions at the Zushi Centre

Please Contact: Hanari (080-6702-2308)

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

Vivekananda and Japan (from page 1)

Swamiji's electrifying messages are sources of inspiration to millions of souls. It is worthy of special mention that Japan, which is largely a Buddhist country, where Shinto is also universally practised, was blessed by the visit of Swami Vivekananda, considered as the Second Buddha by many. This is a momentous event in the whole religious history of Japan of which only few are aware.

In the following talk we shall briefly narrate some of the aspects of Swami Vivekananda's visit to Japan:

Our latest investigation on Swamiji's voyage from Bombay to Kobe on his way to attending the world's first Parliament of Religions in Chicago in September 1893 shows that on May 31, 1893, Swamiji set sail from Bombay aboard the Peninsular. On June 13th he reached Hong Kong. At Hong Kong he transferred to the Verona and set sail for Japan on the 24th. On the 27th he reached Nagasaki, and on June 30th he reached Kobe. In proceeding on to Yokohama, Swamiji must have been made aware that a ship bound for Vancouver would depart Yokohama on July 14th. Even so, he appears to have had a prior intention of doing some sightseeing within Japan journeying from Kobe to Yokohama by road and rail. This truth appears in his letter of July 10th where he writes: "Here I gave up the steamer (at Kobe) and took the land route to Yokohama, with a view to seeing the interior of Japan"

Swamiji reached Kobe on June 30, 1893. From that day, until his departure from Yokohama on July 14th, he spent two weeks within the country, visiting cities like Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo and Yokohama.

Now some pertinent questions follow about Swamiji's itinerary. What places of interest he visited; how long he stayed here and there; what his modes of transport were; what sorts of food he was introduced to; how much things cost; who he interacted with and what they thought of him? Regretfully, we have very limited sources of first-hand data to throw much light on these questions. We do, however, have the aforementioned letter written by Swamiji to Alasinga Perumal of Madras, his devotee and one of the sponsors of his trip to the USA, from the Oriental Hotel in Yokohama dated July 10, 1893, relating some of his travel experiences in Japan. This was the first correspondence Swamiji sent to his circle in India since he had left the shores of his Motherland more than a month before.

Let us begin by quoting the first-hand description of Japan given by Swamiji in that letter:

"The first port we touched was Nagasaki. We landed for a few hours and drove through the town. What a contrast! The Japanese are one of the cleanliest people on earth. Everything is neat and tidy. Their streets are nearly all broad, straight, and regularly paved. Their little houses are cage-like and their pine-covered evergreen little hills form the background of almost every town and village. The short-statured, fair-skinned, quaintly-dressed Japanese, their movements, attitudes, gestures, everything is picturesque, Japan is the land of the picturesque! Almost every house has a garden at the back, very nicely laid out according to Japanese fashion with small shrubs, grass-plots, artificial waters, and small, stone bridges.

Here I gave up the steamer and took the land-route to Yokohama, with a view to seeing the interior of Japan. I have seen three big cities in the interior—Osaka, a great manufacturing town, Kyoto, the former capital, and Tokyo, the present capital. Tokyo is nearly twice the size of Calcutta with nearly double the population.

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Vivekananda and Japan (from page 1)

The Japanese seem now to have fully awakened themselves to the necessity of the present times. They have now a thoroughly organised army equipped with guns, which one of their own officers has invented, and which is said to be second to none. Then, they are continually increasing their navy. I have seen, a tunnel nearly a mile long, bored by a Japanese engineer.

The match factories are simply a sight to see, and they are bent upon making everything they want in their own country. There is a Japanese line of steamers plying between China and Japan, which shortly intends running between Bombay and Yokohama.

I saw quite a lot of temples. In every temple there are some Sanskrit Mantras written in Old Bengali characters. Only a few of the priests know Sanskrit. But they are an intelligent sect. The modern rage for progress has penetrated even the priesthood. I cannot write what I have in my mind about the Japanese in one short letter. I only want that numbers of our young men should pay a visit to Japan and China every year. Especially to the Japanese, India is still the dreamland of everything high and good."

From the above we know for certain that Swamiji's first encounter with Japan took place in Nagasaki. He managed to find a few hours here to see the city by a horse carriage. This very first exposure to Japan made him realise with wonder how different this place was from those ports of call from Ceylon to Hong Kong he had seen on the voyage, so much so that in narrating his visit to Nagasaki in his letter he exclaimed, "What a contrast!"

Now let us begin with some conjecture on a tentative itinerary which Swamiji might indeed have followed during his visit to Japan. We have already mentioned that Swamiji reached the port of Kobe via Nagasaki on June 30th. Swamiji spends July 1st and 2nd in collecting a passport needed for inland travel in Japan and for some sightseeing in Kobe. Then from the 2nd or 3rd to the 5th or 6th of July he was sightseeing in Osaka and nearby Kyoto. On the 6th and 7th or 7th and 8th of July he travels by trains some 20 to 22 hours from Osaka/Kyoto to Shinagawa. Then from the 7th or 8th to the 13th of July he was registered at the Oriental Hotel in Yokohama and sightseeing in Tokyo, Yokohama and Kamakura, and also preparing for his departure to the USA via Vancouver. From the port at Yokohama on July 14th Swamiji boards the 'Empress of India' bound for Vancouver, B.C., Canada, arriving there on July 25th.

The possible places of interest Swamiji had visited in Japan include the following which were most popular sightseeing place during Swamiji's visit to Japan:

- *In Kobe: Hyogo Daibutsu and Nofukuji Temple
- *In Osaka: Osaka Castle, Osaka Iron Works, Osaka Cotton Spinning Company, Tenmangu Temple and the Match Factory
- *In Kyoto: Sanjyusangen-do Temple, Kiyomizu dera, Yasaka Jinja, Chion-in Temple, Hokoji Temple, Higashi Honganji Temple, Nishi Honganji Temple, Kinkakuji Temple
- *In Nara: Todaiji Temple, and Kasuga Taisha Shrine
- *In Tokyo: Sensōji Temple (Asakusa-Kannon), Tōkyo Imperial Palace, Senkakuji Temple, Tsukiji-Honganji Temple
- *In Kamakura: Daibutsu, Enkakuji, Tsurugaoka-Hachimangu Shrine

What modes of transport were common in Japan during Swamiji's visit, which Swamiji possibly utilized?

In addition to trains powered by steam engine, the wheeled rickshaw drawn mostly by

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Vivekananda and Japan (from page 4)

men called a 'jinrikisha', as horses were reserved for military use, was becoming common and popular. Not only was it used for local transport of passengers and goods, sometimes they were hired for transport to more distant locations as well. One contemporary traveller observed the following regarding the 'jin (person) ricksha':

"Jinrikisha runs through the centre of the town. We cannot see anything when the jin rikisha runs fast, as if we are in our dream world. The driver runs just like a horse with a smile and a jump. The jinrikisha fee is 0.1 yen a time and 0.75 yen to 1 yen per day. If we hire a strong man or 2 drivers, we can move on 70 kilometres a day. Now there are a lot of jinrikisha in every town and county in Japan."

According to one account there were 46,000 jinrikisha in Tokyo by 1872.

Swamiji offered but short descriptions of what he saw in Japan with some observations in his letter already quoted. We shall now present some of these observations in greater detail, as well as some newer ones occasioned by his reflections on Japan made later in India.

In one expressive sentence penned by Swamiji, his deep appreciation of and love of Japan is clear when he writes in a letter dated June 18, 1901 to Okakura Tenshin,

"Japan to me is a dream—so beautiful that it haunts one all his life." Swamiji was greatly impressed by the beautiful landscape of the country and the houses; the cleanliness and orderliness of the people and their environs, the tidy and broad streets, the beautifully dressed people, the nice hair style and graceful and elegant kimono of the ladies. He also observed the engineering skills, modernised military and weaponry, match factories, etc., and that the Japanese seemed to be bent on making everything they wanted and needed in their own country. It is also amazing that Swamiji made the following profound political observation, after noticing Japan's efforts to become strong and modernise like Western nations: "Having achieved that goal to a great extent, Japan is waiting for international recognition and appreciation of its accomplishments, thus raising its political and diplomatic status on the world stage."

Swamiji appreciated Japanese food in general and specifically mentioned 'daler jhol' (miso shiru), a soup made with fermented soy bean paste, which he remarked could be easily digested. He also remarked in one letter dated April 24, 1897: "Japan is an example of what good and nourishing food can do," which is self-explanatory.

Swamiji was not only fond of, but a lover of Japanese painting, about which he made several remarks later, such as: "They are a great nation because of their art."



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Vivekananda and Japan (from page 5)

Swamiji later reminisced that during his visit to Japan he was so enamoured by a Japanese painting that he felt like buying it with what money he had for the trip to Chicago and simply return home.

Swamiji saw many temples in Japan and obviously the most famous of them were in Kyoto. He was surprised to see some Sanskrit mantras written in old Bengali characters. The reason being that the Siddham script of Sanskrit, which became current in Japan, looks similar to old Bengali script which was derived from the former script. Swamiji remarked about religion in Japan during an interview about his experiences in Japan: “Japanese Buddhism is entirely different from what one sees in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). It is the same as Vedanta. It is a positive and theistic Buddhism, not the negative atheistic Buddhism of Ceylon.”

Swamiji definitely came across Buddhist priests with whom he must have tried to interact with, but presumably with not much success because of the language barrier. He did, however, comment about them saying: “Only a few of the priests know Sanskrit, but they are an intelligent sect. The modern rage for progress has penetrated even the priesthood.”

Incidentally, when Swamiji was travelling around the Tokyo-Yokohama area in the second week of July, Okakura Tenshin was living at that time in that area. He had been appointed as Principal of the newly established Government Art College and until recently was busy in preparing lots of Japanese art objects for display at the Colombian Exposition in Chicago. He himself, however, did not go there. Japanese delegates to the Parliament of Religions had either already departed or were about to set sail soon. It would appear, however, that neither Swamiji nor Okakura or even the Japanese delegates were aware of each other at the time.

Swamiji was not only a monk, he was a patriotic monk. As a patriot he would often ponder how his motherland could be raised from its current pitiable condition under British Imperial rule and be transformed into a great nation, as it had been in the past. This would enable India to share her priceless heritage of spirituality with other nations of the world. His visit to Japan and observations of the Japanese gave him five important clues in achieving his mission of regenerating India.

The first of these was the strong faith that the Japanese have in themselves. The second was the tremendous love of the Japanese for their country and their apparent willingness to sacrifice everything for the sake of their country. Thirdly, the Japanese had fully awakened themselves to modern times, namely to transform from a medieval country to a modern nation. Fourthly, though the Japanese learned and had borrowed much from the advanced countries of the West and adapted these ideas and technologies, yet they remained distinctly Japanese all the same and did not turn into Europeans. And finally they instituted a theoretical, practical and universal education in all sectors to prepare the people for a necessary transformation of their country.

In fact, universal education introduced by the Meiji Administration was the most important single factor which transformed Japan into modern country within a remarkably short period.

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Vivekananda and Japan (from page 6)

Swamiji explained some of these points in reply to a question put to him by a reporter of a newspaper in India asking, “What is the key to Japan’s sudden greatness?”

Not only in his letter written from his hotel room in Yokohama, but in his private conversations and in interviews with the media in later years, Swamiji repeatedly advised Indians to visit Japan. For example, on one occasion he remarked, “*If I can get some unmarried graduates, I may try to send them over to Japan and make arrangements for their technical education there, so that when they come back they may turn their knowledge to the best account for India.*”

While reading this account a question almost inevitably crosses one’s mind, as did the Indian reporter who asked next:

Reporter: “Is it your wish that India should become like Japan?”
Swamiji: “Decidedly not! India should continue to be what she is. How could India ever become like Japan or any nation for that matter?”

In fact what Swamiji really meant here is that a nation, like an individual, should imbibe the good qualities which it lacks from others and enrich itself. Thus, mutual giving and taking will make all nations great without losing their own characteristics or national identities. Just as Swamiji had observed, that while Japan had learned much from Europe, it had maintained its own identity.

However, there is a pertinent question as to why Swamiji thought it would be better to seek the assistance of Japan, rather than from a highly developed Western nation like England or the USA. The answer is because, while in Japan, Swamiji got the impression, “that India was still a dreamland of everything high and good to the Japanese.” He explained this further in one of his letters to Miss Josephine MacLeod on June 14, 1901, “The help that Japan will give us will be with great sympathy and respect, whereas from the West, unsympathetic and destructive.”

Towards the end of the same letter Swamiji made a highly significant remark saying, “Certainly it is very desirable to establish a connection between India and Japan”, which was later reiterated by Rabindranath Tagore and put into practice.

It is clear from Swamiji’s comments on Japan vis-a-vis India, expressed since his visit to Japan in July 1893 and much later, that he had a firm belief it would do good for Indians if they imbibed the positive qualities of the Japanese without abandoning their own national characteristics. Here we see Swamiji not just in the role of a traditional religious leader, but the mentor of a nation; not only thinking in terms of spiritual regeneration, but also concerned with the material rejuvenation of his country.

Here we must point out that in spite of his high appreciation of Japan, Swamiji was sceptical and even critical of Japan on two scores. The first was from an off-hand comment he made in Bengali which apparently aired his scepticism about the long-term prospects of Japan borrowing culture from the West, though it had yielded immediate and positive results. Swamiji’s scepticism was later proved when Japan, following the path of imperialist Western nations, turned into such a nation itself and finally suffered greatly.

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Vivekananda and Japan (from page 7)

The second observation regarded the state of monasticism in Japan about which he made the following critical remarks: "Modern Buddhism - having fallen among races who had not yet come up to the evolution of marriage - has made a travesty of monasticism. So until there is developed in Japan a great and sacred ideal about marriage (apart from mutual attachment and love) I do not see how there can be great monks and nuns."

Thought of the Month

"There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self."

- Aldous Huxley

It is certain during his short visit to Japan, he was pained to observe that though Buddhism was still prevalent in Japan, monasticism, one of the most important aspects of Buddhism, had been corroded to a great extent, and in its place a priestcraft had emerged. Whatever those reasons may be for this corrosion of the monastic ideal, this has adversely affected the religious sequence of events in Japan with far reaching results.

However, we have no idea of what those fortunate Japanese who chanced to meet Swamiji, an unknown monk at that time, during his visit to Japan, had thought about him. Only this much is recorded—that at least some of them held him in such high esteem that they referred to him as the Second Buddha, as noted earlier.

Though Vivekananda could not revisit Japan in spite of the cordial invitation from Okakura Tenshin and Reverend Oda of Japan owing to his failing health, the country was very much in his mind even unto the last, as on the day of his passing away he was heard to say: "I want to do something for Japan". The wishes of such great souls do not remain unfulfilled. In the present case Swamiji's wish was fulfilled when a Society was started in 1959 by some devotees, which later became The Vedanta Society of Japan in Zushi City, Kanagawa Prefecture, an official branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, propagating and implementing the messages of Vedanta and Ramakrishna/Vivekananda in various ways in this country.

Again, if we were to analyze the trends of the Indo-Japanese relationship in recent years, it would be evident that what Swamiji had hoped for about a century ago is now actually taking place. While Japan has been largely contributing to the material welfare of India, by lending both financial and technical assistance, India is also lending spiritual support to many people of Japan, who visit India on pilgrimage to places associated with Lord Buddha, as well as to various religious organisations and ashramas to derive spiritual inspiration.

The Indo-Japanese relationship is not restricted to economic and spiritual areas alone, but also extends to cultural sectors – especially, the traditional health-care system, food and performing arts.

Swamiji's repeated advice to Indians, given personally or through interviews published in newspapers, to visit Japan did not go in vain either. In fact, if one goes through the newspapers and journals published in Bengal after Swamiji's passing away in 1902, one will find plenty of such reports of people visiting Japan for various purposes, including receiving training in various cottage industries. Some of them wrote books or articles in magazines on their experiences in Japan.

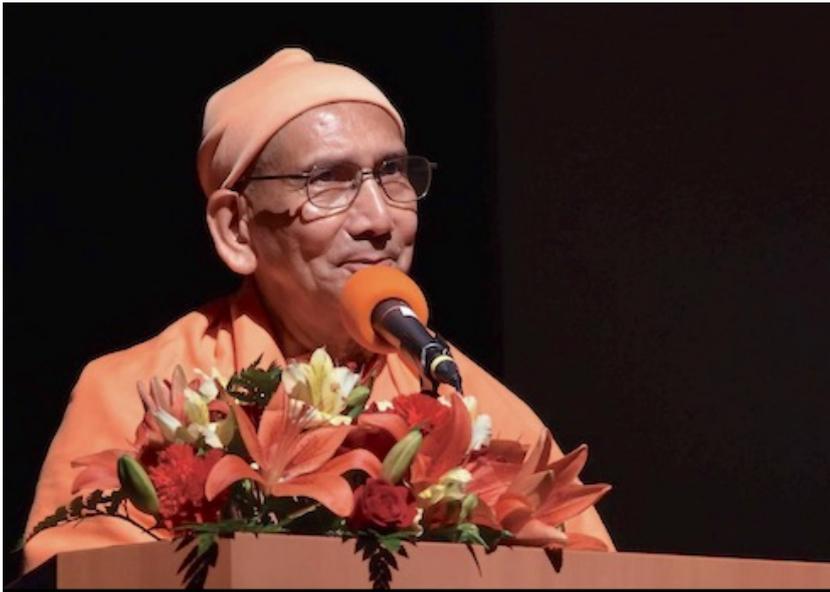
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Vivekananda and Japan (from page 8)

It is interesting to note here that even before Rabindranath's visit to Japan for the first time in 1916, his son Rathindranath Tagore had visited this country in 1906 with a group of 15 young men.

Now greater numbers of young Indians in connection with information technology are visiting Japan and are being impacted by this country, thus fulfilling the long cherished wish of Swamiji.

For the sake of truth we must mention here that more than one hundred years after



Swamiji's visit to Japan, there have been significant changes in the Japan he had seen and what it has become today. While, unfortunately, some aspects of its wonderful tradition and culture have lost importance, it retains some of them today. In short Japan has been passing through a critical era presently. However, it is evident that Japan has been facing serious problems, not only in the economic front, but in the social, religious and cultural fronts as well.

On the other hand, is there any scope of studying and implementing the profound messages on various subjects Swami Vivekananda delivered for the benefit of the Japanese?

We can identify at least five areas in which Vivekananda's ideas can contribute substantially to Japanese Society namely; by imparting a genuine and broad-based spirituality, by preaching the ideal of Karma Yoga; regenerating Buddhism; motivating the local people and, finally, promoting the India-Japan relationship. Here we shall take up only two of those areas and briefly discuss them:

The Ideal of Karma Yoga

The dedication of the Japanese to work and their striving for perfection is proverbial, making matchless products and capturing world markets. However, a close observation of a people focused on work reveals that tremendous stress and strain due to relentless work pressures tells upon their physical and mental health, as well as personal relationships.

Hence, everyone wants to know how, while performing all those duties that one cannot just give up, one can become free from stress and enjoy good health and mental peace, and if so inclined, even become spiritually elevated. In this Swami Vivekananda's ideas on Karma Yoga can be of substantial help.

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Motivational

In a recent US survey, student graduates and new company employees were asked if they had received any education or training at home or at school on how to face the crises of life encountered such as failures, frustration, loss, and consequent stresses and fears. Most of these young people replied that they had either received absolutely no such training or very little of it.

This is also true in Japan. We feel disturbed when young boys and girls, or even adults, suffer so tremendously and feel utterly helpless in the face of serious troubles in life—especially when there is a lack of interest in God or prophets and they run here and there for support, mostly unsuccessfully, and finally think of ending their lives. Should the parents and leaders of society helplessly watch this condition and not think of especially equipping the young to boldly face life's adversities by providing them positive ideas and inspiring messages beforehand?

I am aware that there are quite a few books on 'inspiration' in Japanese, but I do not know the extent to which these books are utilised. However, in addition to those messages, memorising and following some of the inspirational messages of Vivekananda would be of tremendous help. Vivekananda's messages are like elixirs to the soul and energy tonics to the negative and weak mind. We may recall here that one of the chief reasons prompting the Indian Government to proclaim Swamiji's birthday as 'Youth Day' in India, is that the government felt Swamiji's message has the tremendous power to inspire all, especially the young, to lead an ideal life. Here we provide a few of Swamiji's quotes to give you a better idea of them:

- All power is within you; manifest it!
- Strength is life, weakness is death.
- The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength.
- Unselfishness is God.

Conclusion

It would be the height of folly to discard Vivekananda, as some are unfortunately prone to do, because he is a man of religion and therefore irrelevant. Swamiji had profound messages both for individuals and for nations. This is not only true with respect to Indians, but for people of other countries as well, including Japan. This is substantiated by a report that America's famous Smithsonian Institute had organised an exhibit highlighting thirty-one non-Americans who had greatly contributed to the culture and growth of America and Swami Vivekananda was among them.

A special character trait of the Japanese is that if they realise that a certain idea is good and beneficial for them, no matter where it comes from, they will no longer simply discuss or dream about it, they will adopt and adapt it. Now when once convinced that Swamiji's ideas will be greatly beneficial for the Japanese individual and nation, the next thought will be its implementation, which requires greater awareness of these ideas.

Likewise, by imbibing some laudable Japanese character traits, Indians, on the other

Vivekananda and Japan (from page 9)

hand, will fare better in their commitment to duty, discipline, unity and social ethics, as already suggested. Through this and by cooperation with each other in all sectors, we the people of two countries can fulfil the cherished dreams of not only Swami Vivekananda, but also of Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin, in creating a better bond between our two countries. That would also be a most fitting tribute to the hallowed memories of these three great men, the three great pioneers of the Japan-India relationship on the august occasions of Swamiji's 155th birth anniversary, and especially, the 125th anniversary of his visit to Japan celebrations.

Thank you for listening so patiently. •

Special Guest Speaker
Swami Vivekananda Public Celebration in Tokyo 19 May 2018

The India-Japan Relationship Dr. Fukunaga Masaaki, Ph.D.

Honorable Mr. Raj Kumar Srivastava, Deputy Chief of Mission, Swamiji Medhasananda of the Vedantic Society of Japan, my many Friends from India and Japan, Ladies and Gentlemen, today happens to be the 155th anniversary of the birth of Swami Vivekananda, as well as the 125th anniversary of his visit to Japan. On this occasion I must confess I am deeply honored to be called upon to speak to you all on the topic of relations between India and Japan, and accordingly, I express my sincere gratitude to the organizers of this event for their kind invitation.

Now, to offer you all a brief self-introduction, I am currently a Visiting Fellow of the Institute of Asian, African, and Middle Eastern Studies at Sophia University, as well as Assistant Director and Visiting Professor at the Center for South Asian Studies at Gifu Women's University. My first visit to India was in 1977, at the time of the proclamation of the emergency by India's former Prime Minister, the late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and her subsequent defeat in the elections. At that time, I happened to be a second-year university undergraduate. From 1981, for a period of three years, I studied as a foreign graduate student at Benares Hindu University, and obtained a Ph.D. in Sociology.

As a researcher, the subject of my specialty concerns India's society and people. I spent approximately a year in a small farming village located in the eastern part of the State of Uttar Pradesh, and conducted participatory observational research as field work. This research earned for me a doctorate, and my doctoral thesis was subsequently published in both Delhi and London. Since then around 40 years have elapsed, yet I continue to visit the village and maintain my links with the villagers, by pursuing my study under the overall theme of 'transformations that have occurred in the farming village and in the lives of the people.'

Well, the subject of today's talk concerns the relationship between India and Japan. This being the case, I shall hereafter briefly present before you my analyses and proposals, with regard to the development of relations between our two nations.

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India-Japan Relationship (from page 11)

[1]: Swami Vivekananda set foot in Japan 125 years ago. He arrived in Japan in 1893, namely the 26th year of the Meiji era. He spent some time in the South Indian city of Chennai (which at that time was referred to as Madras), and here he discussed the future of India and Hinduism with some young people. The youngsters who heard him were deeply impressed. They bade him participate as the representative of Hinduism in the World Parliament of Religions that was slated to be held in the city of Chicago in America, and Swami Vivekananda too, complying with their request, decided to sail for America.

Swami Vivekananda at that time was 30 years of age. On May 31st he set sail from Mumbai (which at that time was called Bombay), and the ship on which he sailed, namely the Peninsula, eventually reached Nagasaki after docking at Singapore, Hongkong, and other ports. From Nagasaki, journeying by land he spent some time in Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo, before eventually heading for Yokohama, from where he set sail for America.

As regards the lectures and talks he delivered while in Japan, we have no detailed information. However, since the Tokaido Line was opened in July 1889, I am of the view that his initial glimpses of Japan were acquired through the windows of trains. From Yokohama he sailed aboard a ship named the 'Empress of India,' and around the middle of July he arrived into the port of Vancouver in Canada. His visit to Japan was brief and he journeyed mostly by road, and yet, during this short space of time, he succeeded in acquiring a profound insight into the unique facets of Japanese society.

For example, during an interview that he gave for a Chennai newspaper in February 1897, he declared:

- * Japanese have a great sense of loyalty and love for their nation, even to the extent of sacrificing everything for it.
- * Their Art is authentic.
- * The Buddhism they follow, namely the Mahayana school of Buddhism, differs from the Theravada Buddhism of Ceylon (the former name of Sri Lanka). It is a theistic and positive Buddhism, similar to Vedanta.



* Japan seeks to absorb deeply the wisdom of the West, while at the same time sustaining its own spirituality.

* Japanese eat optimal amounts of cooked rice and miso soup.

* It would be better for young Indians to pursue their studies in Japan rather than in England.

(con't page 13)

India-Japan Relationship (from page 12)

As witnessed from the above statements Swami Vivekananda rated Japan highly, though sad to say his health eventually deteriorated to such an extent, that his second visit to Japan was not realized. I shall hereafter conduct a scrutiny of Japan's society of that time, and study the links it bears to the society of today.

[2]: I shall henceforth diverge a little from the subject of Swami Vivekananda's Japan visit, and speak instead about the relationship between India and Japan. When speaking of this relationship, invariably our thoughts turn to the fact of India being the 'Land of Buddhism,' as the birthplace of Shakyamuni Buddha, or the 'land that created curry rice,' and so on and so forth.

Of course, since recent times India's Information Technology (IT), its huge consumer market that is sustained by a substantial population, and even more, its reputation as a land of prodigies capable of the efficient use of 4-digit arithmetic and so on, have given rise to fresh images of the nation, so much so that India is now being considered even with reference to security issues.

Nonetheless however, present-day Indian society and its people are issues that are almost wholly unknown to the average Japanese. This perhaps is due to the fact that in 21st century India, poverty and economic growth are intermingled, and this in turn has given rise to an excessively complex form of society. It is possible too that the nation's robust religious faith, which exceeds the vision of the average Japanese, or the fact of a society wherein a multiplicity of religions co-exist, are matters that the Japanese people find hard to fathom.

India is a country that has never ceased to intrigue sizeable numbers of the world's residents, and people from nations all over the globe have visited India. They have resonated with the figures that pervade the nation's vast history, they have experienced feelings of wonder at the nation's religious etiquette that has been conveyed from the past, or, in an ambience of profound emotion, they have felt themselves drawn into the nation's all-encompassing space-time.

On the assumption that Buddhism, which originated in India, entered Japan in the 6th century, the Japanese people referred to India as 'Tenjiku,' and it was looked upon as a nation that one yearned for.

Also, the South Indian Buddhist monk Bodhisena arrived in Japan from 'Tenjiku' in the 8th century after journeying through China, and he performed the eye-opening ceremony for the giant bronze statue of Buddha Mahavairocana in the Tōdaiji Temple, located in the city of Nara. In the Kamakura Period, the senior monk Myōe Shonin, who also went by the name Kōben, and who restored the Kōzanji Temple (located in Umegahata Toganōchō in Kyoto), was keen on visiting Tenjiku. He has left us an unaffected record of his travels, despite the fact that his journey to Tenjiku was not realized.

This yearning that people had for Tenjiku, the birthplace of Buddhism, was fostered by hymns that extolled it as the most ideal place on earth. Furthermore, it underscored the fact these three nations, namely Tenjiku, China, (which had created an outstanding culture), and Japan, were specially linked to one another, and hence this longing for Tenjiku even pervaded the ranks of the common man.

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Among the Japanese, India for lengthy periods continued to be viewed as a far-away land of human yearning, possessing links that led to the sacred sites of Buddhism. Needless to say, in accordance with this belief, since the people of India too lived in areas that were sacred to Buddhism, they too were offered the type of treatment one would grant to sacred Buddhist objects. One might also add that the Japanese of those days did not restrict this way of thinking to people who lived only in their own times, but rather, included people of other times as well.

What is clear to us is that as regards Tenjiku or India, from the remote past to modern times, the thoughts of the Japanese were focused not so much upon the hardships that pervaded the society and livelihood of the Indians. Rather, they were focused more upon this feeling of yearning for India, something that was far removed from the reality that pervaded the place.

In the middle of the 19th century, during the Meiji Restoration that followed the re-opening of Japan to the world, many young Japanese sailed to Europe, and in the course of their voyage some stopped by in India. This was not merely due to their interest in India as a land sacred to Buddhism. Rather, for them who were sailing to Europe with high expectations of acquiring knowledge from the West, India projected an image that was quaint and curious. That is to say, for academics and young intellectuals of Japan, a nation that had just begun to embark upon the path to modernism, India appeared to be a nation writhing under the torment of colonialism, a pitiful nation mired in poverty and gasping under oppression. It was thus that Tenjiku, which for long had served as an object of yearning for vast numbers of Japanese, now came to be viewed as a victim of Western colonialism, a nation undergoing the agonies of penury and destitution.

In fact, after the Meiji Restoration there arose a change in Japan's outlook, as conveyed by the words, "we should not become like India." Additionally, such changes also gave rise to the reaction that Japan should endure as a nation of Asia, that was strong enough to resist the Western colonial powers. It was precisely at that time that Swami Vivekananda chose to visit to Japan, and his visit turned out into becoming an event of critical value for both nations.

Sad to say though, ideas of nationalism began to be emphasized in Japanese society, and in due course the hand of invasion began to be stretched out towards Asia, including towards India, the land of yearning.

In the early 20th century, Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, visited Japan on five separate occasions. He introduced Indian culture to the scholarly elite of Japan and commenced a fresh cultural exchange between Japan and India, an exchange that was not limited to Buddhism.

Aside from providing a spiritual boost to the independence movement and defying the colossal British Empire, Mahatma Gandhi was an individual who was accepted by the Japanese people with feelings of profound awe. In Japan, a nation that was nursing designs of launching a counter-offensive against Western control and thereby becoming a spokesperson for Asia, Gandhi became a new target of esteem, and his role as an Asian who would defy the West, was highlighted.

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In actual fact Gandhi's notions of non-violence and civil disobedience were promptly translated and conveyed to the Japanese, but on gauging the issue, we may perhaps say that the people associated with the society and press of those days, were unable to acquire a suitable grasp of what those notions implied. That is to say, while promoting the liberation of the Asian People from the hegemony of the West, Japan to the very end, set its sight upon attaining in an expedient manner, both the freedom of the Asian People, and the overthrow of Western Imperialism. It is also clear that once this Western control was toppled, the plan was for Japan itself to occupy their place.

In reality however, Japan, which was proactively endorsing the subjugation of Asia, went on to invade British India, modern India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar (Burma). As regards relations between India and Japan at that time, there is little indication of adverse history. However, that was merely due to the fact that it was an issue that was never raised, as it was considered bad for both nations. Even so however, it is undeniably a portion of history that we should never forget.

In the aftermath of the Second World War India gained independence from Great Britain in 1947, and thereafter, all its policies towards Japan, which was now an occupied country exhausted by defeat, exerted a forceful impression upon the Japanese public. Certain initiatives taken by India, as for example at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, the insistence of Dr. Radha Binod Pal of India that the trial should be declared invalid on the basis of the principle of legality, India's refusal to participate in the San Francisco Peace Conference of 1951 as a sign of protest against the continued presence of foreign troops (the US army) in Japan, the separate peace treaty signed between India and Japan, and other similar moves, all led to a brightening of the prospects of Independent India.

It is obvious that for India, which after gaining independence had promptly acquired the awareness of its being a great nation, all such policies were purely a reaction against the Western powers. Such efforts of India, regardless of whether they stemmed from the colonial India of 1945 or the newly emerging India of 1947, evoked fresh reactions of goodwill among the Japanese, and the exultant welcome Prime minister Nehru received on his first visit to Japan in 1957, was emblematic of this. In Japan, sentiments of intimacy towards the great Indian nation were reinforced, feelings of yearning began to develop towards this new India, and one might even go so far as to say that regarding Indo-Japan relations, the suitable keyword was "yearning."

After 1950, India chose to adopt a pro-soviet stance, and this subsequently led to a distancing of itself from Japan. In actual fact though, until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, relations between India and Japan were lethargic, and economic links remained torpid. The allure the Japanese had for India continued unabated, but now, more than Buddhist worship, they tended to view India as a place where people could travel freely, and where mutual accord was concerned, there seemed to be a dearth.

I personally would describe the relationship between India and Japan as a "mutual misjudgment of goodwill." There is no preconceived malice or ill will on either side, and each has a good impression of the other. For example, in Japan, whenever we recall India, the images that arise within our minds are linked to the growth of IT (Information Technology), people skilled in mathematics, delicious Indian curry, and so on, while in the case of India,

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whenever Indians recall Japan, they promptly visualize images of a society bouncing back from the ravages of the atomic bomb, brand name products of cutting-edge technology, and so on. Problems arise because people have a tendency to rely on these images alone, and not on the reality from which such images originate. The authentic state of society, the livelihood of the people, and other related issues are often ignored and not conveyed to the other party, and this inevitably results in the failure of mutual cooperation, and an inability on our part to find solutions to our problems. More than looking for praise or adulation, what we are called upon to do is to struggle towards the attainment of the type of mutual relationship, that will counteract and offset such drawbacks and hurdles.

India is a huge nation, with a population increasing to massive proportions. It possesses a large consumer market, a thriving economy, and a youthful society of an average age of 27 years, which seems all set to expand even more. Japan on the other hand is an aging society, with a diminishing number of young people. Since its population is slated to decline in the years to come, the maintenance of its current industries and economic structures, the management of its society and so on, are issues that are likely to prove arduous in the coming decades. In view of this, it is essential these two nations reach out their hands to each other in a spirit of earnestness and discharge their roles as world leaders, especially with regard to the betterment of public welfare and protection of the environment.

[3]: In conclusion, I wish to say that it is vital for both Japan and India to acquire an adequate perception of one another's societies, peoples, and ideologies. The spirit of 'yearning' alone will no longer serve to sustain bonds between them. The two need to learn from each other, exchange views, clarify issues on which they agree and differ, and assist one another for the benefit of both.

Recently there has been much debate concerning the relationship between India and Japan in connection with certain International Political Issues, namely, the relationship with China. Frankly I feel a bit uneasy about this.

What we need right now is for the people of India and Japan to learn from each other how to live as human beings, for this is what is demanded of us. Hence, for us who are members of Japan's society, to learn from a reputed sage of the stature of Swami Vivekananda, is an issue of supreme significance. In addition, I desire that the Indian people persist in their efforts to acquire an insight into the culture of Japan, and I desire also that they look upon these efforts as a means to reflect upon and get to know better, their own culture as well.

The spirit of 'yearning' is a requisite whose cogency endures to this very day, yet it needs to be converted into a form that is applicable to the present age. In other words, it needs to be accompanied by a clear insight into what it implies, and an attitude of mutual respect for one another.

In closing, I wish to express my sincere thankfulness to all of you for your cooperation, and I affirm once again my desire to work for the betterment of ties between our two nations.

Thank you very much. •

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日本ヴェーダ協会会長
日本ヨーガ療法学会スピリチュアルアドバイザー
1974年インド・ラマクリシュナ・ミッションの出家僧となり
同団体のヴィディヤマンディール大学学長を経て、1993年より
日本ヴェーダ協会会長を務める。
著書『スワミー・ヴィヴェーカーナンダと日本』他、読者瞑想
やマントラのCD等各種。毎月インド大使館にて行われる
バガヴァッド・ギター講話の他、日本全国で講話を行う。その
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• A Story to Remember •

The Two Brahmacharis

In olden days, a young woman was living with her 3-year-old son in a house near the banks of a river. In the hot summer season the waters of the river had receded and people would walk across knee-deep waters to cross the river. The woman left her house and went across the river to gather some wood from the countryside. When she came back to the river, to her horror, she saw the river in floods.

Heavy rains in the mountain regions caused the river waters to swell, and the woman was worried about her 3-year-old son. He could wander out to the rapidly flowing waters of the river and could drown. The mother was getting hysterical with fear and worry.

Just then two young and well-built brahmacharis were passing by and heard the mother crying and pleading for help to cross the river. She told them about her 3-year-old son left alone to play by the house. The brahmacharis remembered the strict rules regarding contact with females lest it should arouse desires. That they should not even be in the company of females.

One brahmachari, Harshananda, reminded himself of these rules and said he could not help the young mother. The other brahmachari, Devananda, immediately lifted the mother to his shoulders and started swimming across the strong currents of the river. He safely delivered the mother to the other side of the river and swam back.

The brahmacharis resumed their journey back to the Ashram where they were staying with their Guru. Harshananda, who had refused to help could not believe the breach of the strict regulations and was constantly harping on it, muttering and thinking about it all the way.

When they reached the Ashram, the Guru asked them how their day went. The irritated Harshananda immediately spoke out in strong condemnation about the behaviour of his companion. The Guru then asked the other brahmachari.

Devananda replied saying, "I carried the distraught mother across the river and forgot all about it, but it seems my friend is still carrying the woman in his mind."

The Guru was pleased with Devananda who had used his discrimination and helped the mother, and he spoke about the true meaning of hypocrisy as taught in the Bhagavad Gita.

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