



FEBRUARY 2019 - Volume 17 Number 02

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

MARCH 2019
Calendar

Birthdays

**Sri Sri
Ramakrishna Deva**
Friday, 8 Mar

**Sri Gauranga
Mahaprabhu**
Thursday, 21 Mar

**Swami
Yoganandaji**
Sunday, 24 Mar

✧ Thus Spake ✧

"My Master found that the one idea in all religions is, 'not me, but Thou', and he who says, 'not me', the Lord fills his heart. The less of this little 'I' the more of God there is in him.."

- Swami Vivekananda

"Think of the feet of the Master in your heart. By constant remembrance of Him, you will cross the ocean of illusory matter."

- The Guru Nanak

Zushi Events

3rd (Sun) 14:00~16:00
Half Day

Retreat at Zushi

Chanting, Readings on
Spiritual Life,
Discussion, Meditation,
Tea and Snacks
Please Contact:
Zushi Centre
—

17th (Sun) 10:30~16:30

Sri Sri Ramakrishna 183rd Birth Anniversary

06:30 Mangala Arati
11:30 Puja, Arati,
Pushpanjali, Homa
12:30 Prasad
14:45 Discourse
15:45 Music Programme
16:30 Tea
18:00 Evening Arati

See Page 2 for details of
these and other events!

January Zushi Retreat 2019

Public Celebration

Holy Mother Sri Sri Sarada Devi 166th Birth Anniversary

On Sunday, 20 January the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat celebrated the 166th 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 volunteer devotees, who had started preparations and spent the night at nearby Holy Mother's House or the Ashram.

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VEDANTA SOCIETY of JAPAN SCHEDULE of EVENTS

March 2019

2nd (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/>

3rd (Sun)

Half Day Retreat at Zushi 14:00~16:00

Chanting
Chanting, Readings on Spiritual Life,
Discussion, Meditation, Tea and Snacks
Please Contact: [benkyo\(dot\)nvk\(at-mark\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:benkyo(dot)nvk(at-mark)gmail(dot)com)

9th (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/>

12th (Tue)

Zushi Gospel Class

At Zushi Centre (from 14:00~15:30)

17th (Sun)

Sri Sri Ramakrishna 183rd Birthday Celebration

At the Zushi Annexe (from 10:30-16:30)
06:30 Mangala Arati
11:30 Puja, Arati, Pushpanjali (flower offering), Homa
12:30 Prasad
14:45 Discourse
15:45 Special Music Programme
16:30 Tea
18:00 Evening Arati

22nd (Fri)

Nara Narayan: Service to Homeless Narayan

Contact Sato: [urara5599\(at mark\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:urara5599(at mark)gmail(dot)com)

23rd (Sat)

Discourses in Osaka

Swami Medhasananda gives monthly talks on Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita.
Details: <<http://vedanta.main.jp>>

Every Saturday

Annexe Yoga Asana Class

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

Holy Mother Public Celebration (from page 1)

Breakfast is served early in the Main Ashrama so that volunteers can attend to the many final preparations for the celebration, such as food dishes, bouquets and garlands for the altar. Flower buds and leaves for pushpanjali are selected and sorted. Over at the Annexe Building the platform is assembled and covered. Puja vessels and utensils are polished. Rows of seating are prepared for the set up for the congregation. The audio crew sets up, checks and rechecks the audio/video equipment.

Thought of the Month

"The more powerful and original a mind, the more it will incline towards the religion of solitude."

- Aldous Huxley

As 10:30am approaches guests begin arriving at the Annexe. At the altar Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) puts his finishing touches to the food and sweet offerings and completes placements and selections of floral offerings and adornments of the photos of Sri Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Maharaj then takes up his position on the elevated platform and prepares for the puja (worship). Lighting the ghee candle and offering incense and a few minutes of proscribed silent prayer Maharaj conducts the ritual worship.

About 55 minutes later Maharaj continues the puja with arati, offering Mother prescribed prayers and the symbolic offerings of the five elements to the continued tolling of conch shells and bells. A harmonium (Indian pump organ) is placed near the foot of the altar and Maharaj plays and leads the congregation in singing Sarva-Mangala-Māṅgalye from the Narayani Stuti of the Chandi.

Sarva-Mangala-Māṅgalye: Litany to the Divine Mother

ॐ सर्वमङ्गलमाङ्गल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थसाधिके।
शरण्ये त्र्यम्बके गौरि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते॥
सृष्टिस्थितिविनाशानां शक्तिभूते सनातनि।
गुणाश्रये गुणमये नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते॥
शरणागतदीनार्तपरित्राणपरायणे।
सर्वस्यार्तिहरे देवि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते॥
जय नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते जय नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते।
जय नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते जय नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते॥

om sarvamaṅgalamāṅgalye śive sarvārthasādhike |
śaraṇye tryambake gauri nārāyaṇi namo'stu te ||
sṛṣṭiṣṭhitivināśānāṃ śaktibhūte sanātani |
guṇāśraye guṇamaye nārāyaṇi namo'stu te ||
śaraṇāgatadīnārtaparitrāṇaparāyaṇe |
sarvasyārtihare devi nārāyaṇi namo'stu te ||
jaya nārāyaṇi namo'stu te jaya nārāyaṇi namo'stu te |
jaya nārāyaṇi namo'stu te jaya nārāyaṇi namo'stu te ||

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Holy Mother Public Celebration (from page 3)

Auspiciousness of all things auspicious!
O consort of Shiva, fulfiller of all our goals!
Our only refuge! O three-eyed Gauri!
O Narayani! Our salutations to you.
The power beyond all creation, preservation,
and destruction! O eternal one!
O ground of the gunas and embodiment of the gunas!
O Narayani! Our salutations to you.
Ever devoted to the salvation of the lowly and suffering who seek shelter with you!
O destroyer of all misery! O Divine Mother!
O Narayani! Our salutations to you.
All victory to you, O Narayani. Our salutations to you.
Victory and salutations to you again and again, O Narayani!

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 Sarva-Mangala-Mangalye.

Summoning all to rise as space was cleared and flowers and leaves were passed out for the pushpanjali (flower offering) everyone got a splash of Ganges water from Maharaj. Sanskrit pushpanjali and pranam mantras to the Holy Mother were repeated phrase by phrase or word by word before each offered their prayers and flowers at the altar. 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 (see 'Desire and Liberation' in this issue of The Vedanta Kyokai). Japanese devotees then offered songs to the Mother, followed by a short meditation. Tea was then served in the Main Ashrama. About 35 people had attended the celebration. ●

Afternoon Session Talk Holy Mother Birth Celebration 2019

'Desire and Liberation' by Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj)

“ It is very hard to provide a true picture of Holy Mother, as one can only speak authentically about something one has experienced for oneself. Last year, for example, we selected some teachings of Holy Mother and discussed them, so in the same way this year let us examine some of Her teachings. Before that, let me ask you about the character traits of Holy Mother. Please think about and prepare your answer to this question for couple of minutes, so that everyone will not spontaneously arrive at the same first answer. (laughter) OK, then let me hear some of your thoughts:

Attendee A: “A mother can easily care for good children, but Holy Mother showed that She was the mother of all.”

Attendee B: “Although Holy Mother was so advanced spiritually, she would appear to
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Desire and Liberation (from page 4)

many as a just simple village woman. Her spirituality was hidden and only recognised by monks who themselves had attained to a high spiritual state."

Attendee C: " She was very compassionate and considerate to others regardless of the situation. Once upon seeing food being rudely served to a guest, Holy Mother herself served the guest with love and affection."

Medhasananda: "Yes, in this instance, the guest being served was a Muslim, whom at that time Brahmins would not touch. This resulted in plates being briskly pushed at the guest to avoid any contact. Holy Mother's point was that this attitude was incorrect and an inappropriate way to treat any guest."

Attendee D: "I was reminded of Her quietness. My impression is that Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna are one."

Attendee E: "Holy Mother was pure to the core. Her greatness was incomprehensible. She also showed her grace abundantly"

Mother's Play

Medhasananda: "Once a monastic attendant of Holy Mother failed to stick to the path of monasticism, married and led an ordinary life. On day Swami Saradanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who later took care of Holy Mother and finally became General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, visited its Benares Branch. Here one monk who knew Holy Mother had loved Her former attendant asked Saradanandaji how Holy Mother had actually helped him if in the end he had left the Order. At this Saradanandaji appeared somewhat annoyed, but soon answered in song:

Seeing the play of the fun loving Mother
I am so surprised
For so many years I am so near Her
Often here and there I follow Her
Yet I cannot understand Her Mystery
This world is Her play
This moment She creates,
The next moment She destroys.
Like a child, so unique is Her play
This much I can comprehend
I am so surprised
Seeing the play of the fun loving Mother.

"Saradanandaji then addressed the question saying that one may think that the former monk had failed somehow, but no one can know how Holy Mother teaches disciples. 'Really, no one knows!' he said emphatically. 'He may make faster progress than any of us, no one can know Her way'

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Desire and Liberation (from page 5)

“As one comment pointed out, She was on a spiritual level so high that few would recognise Her greatness. Actually, this was good, or She would have been unable to move about as freely as She did. Being unaware of Her true nature, scores of people could approach Her very easily. On the other hand, Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples, even spiritual giants like Vivekanandaji, Brahmanandaji, Premanandaji and others who could recognise her greatness found it difficult to approach and speak with Her so easily.

Reading from a collection of the teachings of Sri Sarada Devi - The Holy Mother, Maharaj read from teaching number twelve:

'12. From desire this body comes into being. When there is no desire at all, the body falls away. With complete cessation of desire there comes the final end.

13. As long as a man has desires there will be no end to his transmigration. It is the desire alone that makes him take one body after another. Rebirth is inevitable so long as one has desires.

Seeds of Desire

"Now let me discuss these teachings:

"Holy Mother also once remarked that if we can be completely free from all our desires (of both the conscious and the sub-conscious mind) we can become liberated this moment! If we introspect on this point we soon understand how difficult it is to get rid of all our desires.

“We have Karma we have created in previous lives by desires that must be experienced or exhausted in this life or in a next life. This is the reason for our rebirths. Let me point out here, that if you want to be born again and again, then is discussion has no relevance for you. However, if you would not prefer rebirth you may find this information important. So please decide now which group you belong to! (laughter) There are those who both do not want to reduce their desires and do not want rebirth. I know of nothing that can be done such people. That is like having some stomach ailment and you want to cure it, yet you do not want to change your unhealthy eating habits!

"Even from the smallest seed a big tree grows. Desires are like such seeds. There is nothing to be done to prevent it other than burning even the smallest seed of desire! The struggle is great, as the seeds are always cropping up. We must be aware every moment and fight, fight, fight! The root systems of vegetables are small and easily plucked from the soil, but think of the roots of a big tree, like a banyan tree. How deep and far they spread. We cannot imagine how the roots spread looking down from above, but if we must remove such a tree, we see how far and wide and deep these roots have taken hold. Now one's desires are rooted like such a big tree.

"Is it impossible to uproot such deep set desires? No, it is not! Discrimination is very important to uproot such desires. We hardly realise how desires occupy and take root in our consciousness by the act of wishing, dreaming and imagining. First we need awareness of our present state. Why is it I do not want to be born again? Why am I seeking freedom from endless rebirths. We must be very clear on this point, or we cannot engage in this struggle. Awareness starts here.

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Desire and Liberation (from page 6)

"However, I want to hear from you in attendance today about this. First, are you in Group A (no rebirth) or Group B (yes, rebirth):

Attendee: "Is there a Group C? (laughter)

Maharaj: "Group C? Please explain Group C"

Attendee: "I said Group C because I am old now and at my death I will, of course, leave everything to God. I have desired realisation during my lifetime and if God says I must be reborn to complete this desire I welcome that, too. I think this way because in my 80+ years nearly 99% of this life has been hardship and struggle with very few moments or glimpses of sweetness or joy. I hope God has consumed my Karma with such hardships, but I cannot know, and now I only want peace. That is why I seek realisation."

Why Liberation?

Maharaj: "Most devotees have affirmed their desire for liberation. First let us examine, 'Why do I want liberation?' There is little joy and mostly suffering in this world, as Buddhism declares, everything is full of suffering and the same experiences are repeated in every rebirth. Hence, some people want to get rid of such a life of sufferings and this forms their motivation for liberation. There is still another group of people who want joy—always and infinite. But when they realise after repeated births that their goal of absolute joy is not possible and only through liberation can such joy be experienced, they aspire for liberation.

"There is another group whose motivation for liberation is freedom. Let me explain it. Our life is full of bondage even though we may have external freedoms, like economic, political, religious and social freedoms. They are not absolute. Moreover, we are slaves to the body and its needs. We are all slaves of our senses. We are slaves to our mind—of our deep samskaras. All the great religions speak of our bondage, our chains. One can think of a bird in a small ornate birdcage or even a huge birdcage with other birds with a tree and fresh fruits, birdseed and water. Our bird has never been in its natural environment, it has never been flying in the vast skies outside the cage and realises not that it is even in a cage.

"We can equate the many iron bars of this grand birdcage to the samskaras (karmic impressions or impacts) of our lives, the desires and attachments and results of our actions. It matters not whether these bars are of iron, steel, silver or gold—they are bars of our cage. When we are in the cage, in bondage, we have little idea we are bound. Should the bird happen to see the sky above, it feels it belongs there and desires to fly away, but the bars of samskaras, desires

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Desire and Liberation (from page 7)

and attachments. deny its departure from the cage. There are so many samskaras in one's sub-conscious. This is why Holy Mother said that the very moment you are free of desire you are liberated.

And we can only answer this by understanding what 'liberation' is. There are three types of liberation; Bhakta, Jnani and Vijnani. The minimum requirement is that we do not want to be reborn in a body and we want to live in the company of God for evermore. There is no desire at all for a seat in some heaven or place with enjoyments and fun at all. No, only the desire to be in the company of our chosen ideal, for example in the company of Sri Ramakrishna, Buddha, Jesus Christ, etc. to taste sugar forever.

“This is the primary level of desire for liberation. This is the way of Bhakta. Next is the way of Jnani, the desire to merge, to become one with God, Brahman; to become one with the Absolute Truth like that of a river merging with the ocean. What, then, is the Vijnani's desire and liberation? First realise Truth, then come down to enjoy the bliss of God. So the Bhakta wants to taste sugar; the Jnani wants to be sugar; and the Vijnani wants both to become sugar and afterward to taste the sugar. Which of these is your motivation?

Conclusion

"It does not matter what our motivation for liberation is. Be it to get rid of all suffering, or to get absolute joy, or to get absolute freedom, such motivations must be sufficiently strong—not casual or superficial—so that we are ready to walk according to our own path to reach the goal of liberation. •

Holy Mother Sri Sri Sarada Devi Puja





Arati



Arati Sarva-Mangala-Mangalye



Pushpanjali



Lunch Prasad



PM Session Contributors

• **A Story to Remember** •

My Master and the Pariah

Now, there was a family of Pariahs living near the place. The Pariahs number several millions in the whole of India and are a sect of people so low that some of our books say that if a Brahmin coming out from his house sees the face of a Pariah, he has to fast that day and recite certain prayers before he becomes holy again. In some Hindu cities when a Pariah enters, he has to put a crow's feather on his head as a sign that he is a Pariah, and he has to cry aloud, "Save yourselves, the Pariah is passing through the street", and you will find people flying off from him as if by magic, because if they touch him by chance, they will have to change their clothes, bathe, and do other things.

And the Pariah for thousands of years has believed that it is perfectly right; that his touch will make everybody unholy. Now my Master would go to a Pariah and ask to be allowed to clean his house. The business of the Pariah is to clean the streets of the cities and to keep houses clean. He cannot enter the house by the front door; by the back door he enters; and as soon as he has gone, the whole place over which he has passed is sprinkled with and made holy by a little Ganga water. By birth the Brahmin stands for holiness, and the Pariah for the very reverse. And this Brahmin asked to be allowed to do the menial services in the house of the Pariah. The Pariah of course could not allow that, for they all think that if they allow a Brahmin to do such menial work it will be an awful sin, and they will become extinct.

The Pariah would not permit it; so in the dead of night, when all were sleeping, Ramakrishna would enter the house. He had long hair, and with his hair he would wipe the place, saying, "Oh, my Mother, make me the servant of the Pariah, make me feel that I am even lower than the Pariah."

"They worship Me best who worship My worshippers. These are all My children and your privilege is to serve them" — is the teaching of Hindu scriptures.

- An excerpt from 'My Master' by Swami Vivekananda

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