



APRIL 2019 - Volume 17 Number 04

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

MAY 2019
Calendar



Birthdays

Sri Rama Navami
Sunday, 14 Apr

Zushi Events

24th (Fri)

Nara Narayan

Service to Homeless
Contact: Yoko Sato
090-6544-9304

Every Saturday

Yoga Asana Class

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

26th (Sun) 1:30 PM

Public Celebration

Swami Vivekananda
156th Birthday
Mahatma Gandhi
150th Birthday
Minami Otsuka Hall

**See Page 2 for
complete details**



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"While performing Japa take the name of God with the utmost love, sincerity and self-surrender. Before commencing your meditation daily, first think of your utter helplessness in this world and then slowly begin the practice of Sadhana as directed by your Guru."

- Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

"There are good souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who, having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others to also cross the same, without any motive whatsoever."

- Sri Shankara

March Zushi Retreat 2019

Celebrates Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva's Birth Anniversary

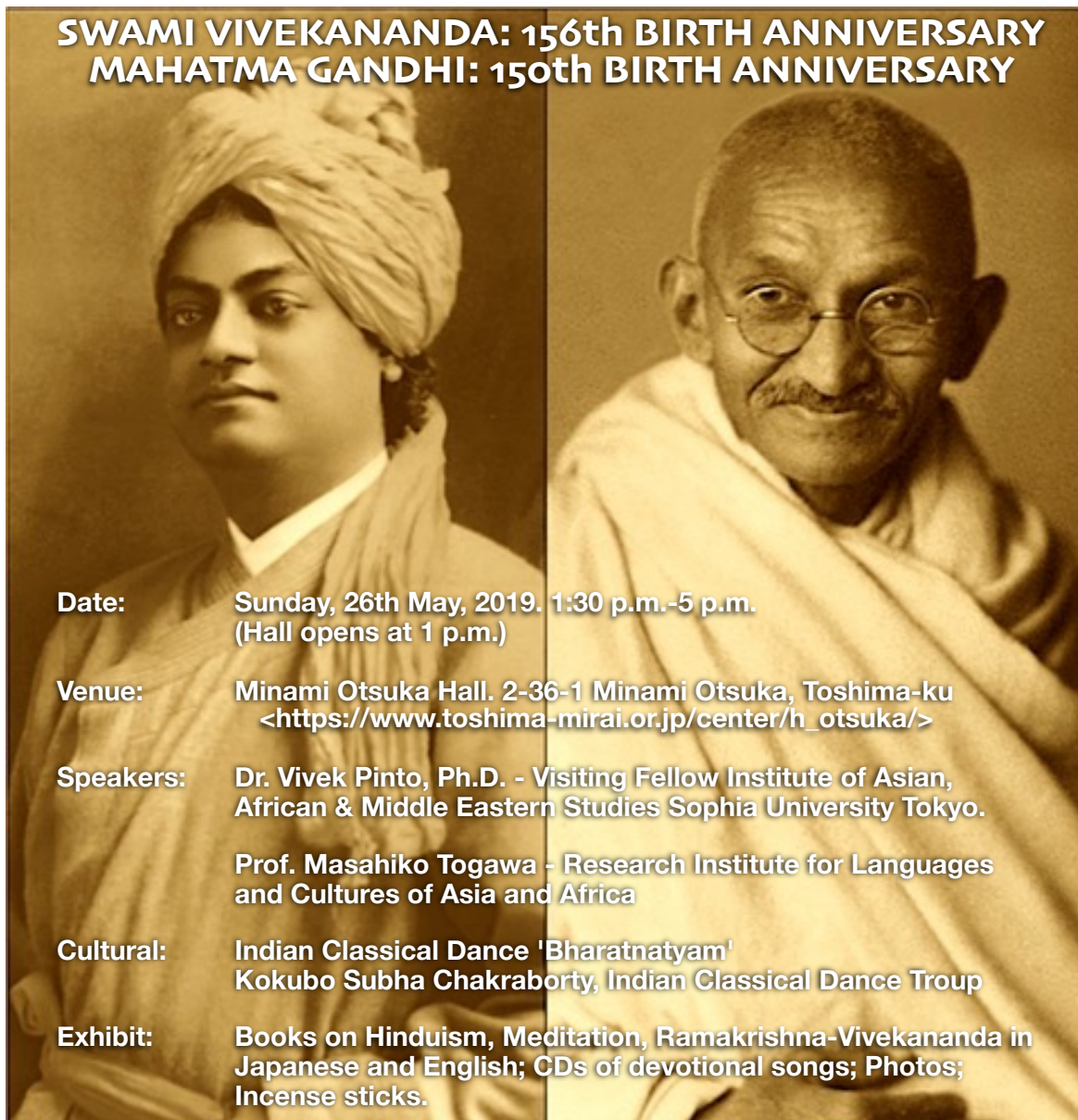
On Sunday, March 17, the Vedanta Society of Japan's monthly Zushi Retreat was a daylong programme in celebration of the 184rd birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. Although Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was on February 25th this year according to the Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac, our monthly retreat falls on the third Sunday of each month so we celebrated on the following (warmer) month this year.

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PUBLIC CELEBRATION in TOKYO



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: 156th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY
MAHATMA GANDHI: 150th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Date: Sunday, 26th May, 2019. 1:30 p.m.-5 p.m.
(Hall opens at 1 p.m.)

Venue: Minami Otsuka Hall. 2-36-1 Minami Otsuka, Toshima-ku
<https://www.toshima-mirai.or.jp/center/h_otsuka/>

Speakers: Dr. Vivek Pinto, Ph.D. - Visiting Fellow Institute of Asian, African & Middle Eastern Studies Sophia University Tokyo.
Prof. Masahiko Togawa - Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa

Cultural: Indian Classical Dance 'Bharatnatyam'
Kokubo Subha Chakraborty, Indian Classical Dance Troup

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

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.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was an Indian activist who led India to independence from British colonial rule by organizing a nonviolent civil disobedience movement. Beloved the world over, his work continues to inspire nonviolent freedom and civil rights movements in many countries across our violent world.

About the Program:

The purpose of the present program is to pay tribute to Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi by highlighting and deliberating on their messages and works that can help us in solving various problems in present day world and elevate us to a higher state of consciousness.

All will be treated to a light refreshment.

Sri Ramakrishna (from page 1)

As has become the yearly tradition, 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 in the Annexe Building, while the raised platform, audio/visual gear and seating were set up.

Thought of the Month

"Your daily life is your temple and your religion. When you enter into it, take with you your all."

- Khalil Gibran

Puja

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. 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. Leaving the podium to offer flowers to Sri Ramakrishna. He then continued with ritual offerings and mantras,

Arati

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 Maharaj concluded these offerings 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-īśvara jagadīśvara yogasahāy |
nirodhana samāhitamana nirakhi tava kṛpāy ||

bhañjana-duḥkhagañjana karuṇāghana karma-kaṭhor |
prāñarpaṇa 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 ||

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Sri Ramakrishna (from page 3)

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

jaya jaya āraṭi tomār hara hara āraṭi tomār
śiva śiva āraṭi tomār ||

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

Afterward Ms. Shanti continued leading the congregation 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 |||

Flower Offering

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

So many people had assembled that flowers were passed out in a second round and the mantras repeated for those who had not been able to participate in the first flower offering.

Homa-Fire

Soon the platform was arranged for the homa-fire and Maharaj took his seat and made the necessary final arrangements of flowers, leaves, fruit, ghee and other items for offering. 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 douse 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.

As the vibhuti was being prepared, Maharaj then introduced a special guest in attendance, Ambassador Sanjay Kumar Verma of the Embassy of India, to applause and asked him to address the congregation on this occasion:

"Just one very small message," said Ambassador Verma. "In a world of violence and terrorism, may Sri Ramakrishna Deva give us enough patience, courage and tolerance to go through the process of peace and tolerance. Thank you."

"Arigato gozaimasu" said Maharaj as the congregation again applauded. Maharaj then placed vibhuti upon the photos of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. Then everyone queued up to receive their vibhuti and offer prayer to Sri Ramakrishna and pranams to

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Sri Ramakrishna (from page 4)

Maharaj, who encouraged all to stay for lunch prasad served in the Main Ashrama before returning to the Annexe for the Afternoon Session.

Afternoon Session

After lunch, at about 2:45pm as various mic and instrument settings were checked, Maharaj took his seat on the podium and asked Ms. Yoko Sasaki to join him as translator. Then he led the congregation in a Vedic chant:

Chant:

Om Saha nāu avatu
Saha nau bhunaktu
Saha vīryam karavāvahai
Tejasvi nāu adhītam astu
Mā vidviṣāvahai
Om Shāntiḥ, Shāntiḥ, Shāntiḥ

Translation:

Om, May God protect us both (teacher and student),
May God nourish us both,
May we work together with energy and vigour,
May our study be enlightening and not give rise to hostility,
Om, peace (within), peace (with all), peace (universe)

"Dear devotees and friends," Maharaj continued, "we are celebrating Sri Ramakrishna's birthday today. The morning session was our ritualistic session wherein we offered puja, arati, flower offering (worships) and homa (fire offering). This was followed by a lunch prasad. Now our afternoon session begins. First will be a short talk, as a matter of routine, and then there are many singers and performers waiting to entertain you! So let me give a brief talk, so that we may continue with our cultural programme without delay." Maharaj then gave a talk on Sri Ramakrishna's profound message of the greatest value to householders. (See 'Advice to Householders' in this issue)

At the conclusion of Maharaj's talk, Ms. Satsuki Yokota acted as bilingual emcee in announcing the participants for the cultural programme. First the young Ms. Ashumita Pal played a piece on piano. Then Mrs. Mita Chanda, an Indian devotee, sang a Hindi song a cappella to God meaning, 'You are the father and the mother, You are everything.' This was followed by a cappella songs from Indians Mrs. Sayantani Dasgupta, Mrs. Kalati Rai and Mrs. Samskrita Battachariya.

Then Japanese devotees sang original devotional songs led by Ms. Shanti, inviting the congregation to turn to the prayer, chant and lyric booklets on their seats to follow along. This was followed by a large contingent from the Kailas Yoga School of Yokohama performing an original number composed by the groups members. This group was then joined by the former Japanese group to sing 'Ramakrishna Sharanam', a devotional hymn to Sri Ramakrishna.

After this large assemblage returned to their seats the congregation were entertained by Mrs. Ravi Masaki and Mr. Otoh Masaki on a six-string ukulele or mandolin performing two numbers. Then Lonnie offered two "deguised devotional" songs, 'Start Again' and 'My Love is You' from a late November 2018 commercial release 'The Happiness Blues'. Some stage adjustments for microphones and tuning of tabla and sitar for the main attraction of the cultural programme, Kenji Inoue on sitar and Dinesh Dyondi on tabla, took up their places on the podium to perform. Mr. Inoue expressed his thanks and pleasure at being invited to perform and the pair launched into a captivating forty minute performance.

This concluded the scheduled programme attended by some 140 people. •

March Zushi Retreat 2019
Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration
Afternoon Session

Sri Ramakrishna's Advice to Householders
by Swami Medhasananda

In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we find the teachings and messages of Sri Ramakrishna (Master). Most of these teachings are for the benefit of householders, but many of these are equally important for monks as well. I will briefly note some of the key teachings given for householder devotees.

In this regard the Gospel records one visitor to Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple as 'Neighbour' who asks, "Householders, too, will have the vision of God, won't they? To which the Master answered, 'Everybody will surely be liberated.' In another sense this means that everyone will have the vision of God.

[Swami then read in English from Gospel texts written in Bengali. The translator, Ms. Yoko Sasaki, then read the same texts that had been translated into Japanese]

What is knowledge? And what is the nature of this ego? 'God alone is the doer, and none else' — that is knowledge. I am not the doer, I am a mere instrument in His hand. Therefore I say: 'O Mother, Thou art the Operator and I am the machine. Thou art the indweller and I am the house. Thou are the Driver and I am the carriage. I move as Thou movest me. I do as Thou makest me do. I speak as Thou makest me speak. Not I, not I, but Thou, but Thou.' That is His message.

There are also several yogas, such as the yoga of knowledge Jnana yoga; the yoga of devotion, Bhakti yoga; the yoga of meditation, Raja yoga; and the yoga of karma; Karma yoga. There is another yoga, the yoga of surrender, Saranagati yoga. For the householder devotees the most important for them is to combine three; Karma yoga, because they cannot give up their work and it is easier to believe in God in this practice; Bhakti yoga, to develop love for God; and Saranagati, the yoga of surrender.

Though the yoga of knowledge says, 'I am Atman! I am Atman! The meaning here is that I am pure conscienceness and not the body. But as long as we have body-conscienceness, it is better to have belief in God and to take refuge in God. And for this it is important to adopt the attitude, 'Not I, not I, but Thou?' Because it helps us in solving our most difficult problems.

When we practice Karma yoga, we still have some ego as; 'I am working, I am working for my family.' Also, when our work is for the family, some attachments evolve here as well. From these two, the sense of ego and the sense of attachment, many other problems arise. If we can but remove just these two, God will be revealed to us. He is already in our heart, but we cannot see Him because of our ego and our attachments. That is why Sri Ramakrishna's message is so important for the householders.



Ego and attachments—how are these addressed by the practice of 'Not I, not I, but Thou'? All the while we think about having a body, a family, a house and duties. Whatever we do, all the while we first associate what we do with ourselves before we do it. This steadily increases our ego and our attachments. So we must practice this idea, 'Not I, not I, but Thou!'

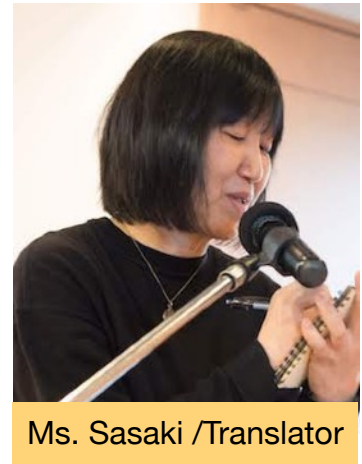
There is a song in Bengali, 'Shokoli Tomari Iccha'. Does anyone here know it? *[The swami was delighted that someone did indeed know the song, and they sang the first verse together.]*

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Advice to Householders (from page 6)

সকলি তোমারি ইচ্ছা,
ইচ্ছাময়ী তারা তুমি
তোমার কর্ম তুমি করো মা,
লোকে বলে করি আমি
সকলি তোমারি ইচ্ছা।

Shokoli Tomari Iccha
Iccha-Moyi Tara Tumi
Tomar Kormo Tumi Koro Maa
Loke Bole Kori Ami
Sokoli Tomari Iccha



Ms. Sasaki /Translator

The essential meaning is Lord it is your wish. I am the machine and You are the Operator. I am the house and You are the Indweller. I am the charriot and You are the Charrioteer. We can extend this idea in so many ways, such as, Lord, it is Your family, it is Your house, it is Your duty.

Is this not very difficult? Because from our innermost being we feel it is my family, my house, my work, my body. How difficult it is to be sincere in thinking this way. Though I am paying (laughter) the taxes for my house; though I am working to support my family; though it is my husband, my wife, these are my children. It becomes a confusion, a contradiction. That is the purpose of this practice, however, to become sincere and speak from the bottom of our heart, 'Lord, it is Your family. It is Your house. It is Your work. This body belongs to You.'

If we can achieve it little by little, however, the two most fundamental problems; the root of all other problems, the ego and attachment, will be eliminated. We need not practice long meditations. We need not practice spiritual discrimination. Just continuously, every moment, day in and day out think, 'Lord, it is not me, it's You. It's You.' This is the most important practice for the householder.

Firstly, we must understand intellectually why one belongs to God. Those who believe in God, believe that this universe was created by Him. It began with God. We need a reverse process to find the parent of the parent. Finally, we have to come to the conclusion that it ends with God.

We take for granted that we are alive. The three most important things to maintain this life are, water, light and air. Have we created these? Have we created sunlight? Have we created water? Have we created the air that we breathe? In this way we can understand that we came from God, and that we live by the will of God. So first we have to intellectually understand why this is true. It is not just a question of faith, it is true. So when we say, 'Not I, not I,' it is not only a matter of faith. It is not only a hypothesis, it is truth. So let us try to stick to the truth.

We are actually full of illusion when we believe it is my family, it is my work. When Jawaharlal Nehru passed away in 1964, people thought there would be no one to take up the leadership of India. It is the same in a family. The master of the family may pass, but the family continues. Everyone belongs to God. Our talent belongs to God. Our energy belongs to God. Our family belongs to God. Our work belongs to God.

Most in attendance today are householders, so this is the message I want to share. Practice in this particular way, 'Not I, not I, but Thou, but Thou.' How many times during our day from morning until we return to bed do we think I, me and mine. So we can understand what a monumental task it is to change our thoughts to not I, not I, but Thou, but Thou. Therefore we have to understand this intellectually and then we have to grow love of God.

So continually practice. Not I, not I, but Thou, but Thou. Not my talent, but Thy talent. Not my family, but Thy family. Not my energy, but Thy energy. Not my work, but Thy work. If this is sincerely practiced, then I think the householder need not engage in any other special practices to have the vision of God.

Thank you. •

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva's Birth Anniversary



Puja



Arati

Pushpanjali



Homa Fire



Ambassador Verma



Vibhuti



Lunch Prasad





Ambassador Verma with Mr. Syamal Kar and Maharaj



PM Session Contributors





• A Story to Remember •

The Sixth Bell

Once upon a time there was an inn called THE SILVER STAR. The innkeeper was unable to make ends meet even though he did his very best to draw customers by making the inn comfortable, the service cordial and the prices reasonable. So in despair he consulted a Sage.

After listening to his tale of woe the Sage said, "It is very simple. You must change the name of your inn."

"Impossible!" said the innkeeper. "It has been THE SILVER STAR for generations and is well known all over the country."

"No," said the Sage firmly, "You must now call it THE FIVE BELLS and have a row of six bells hanging at the entrance."

"Six bells? But that's absurd. What good would that do?"

"Give it a try and see," said the Sage with a smile.

Well, the innkeeper gave it a try. And this is what he saw. Every traveller who passed by the inn walked in to point out the mistake, each one believing that no one else had noticed it. Once inside, they were impressed by the cordiality of the service and stayed on to refresh themselves, thereby providing the innkeeper with the fortune that he had been seeking in vain for so long.

There are few things the ego delights in more than correcting other people's mistakes.

Courtesy: Prayer of the Frog
(This story also appeared in the March 2011 issue of 'The Universal Gospel')

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