



AUGUST 2019 - Volume 17 Number 08

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

SEPTEMBER 2019  
Calendar

## Birthdays

**Swami  
Abhedananda**  
Monday, 23 September

**Swami  
Akhandananda**  
Saturday, 28 September

## Zushi Events

1st (Sun) 14:00~16:00  
**Half-day Retreat**  
Please Contact:  
benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

10th (Tue) 14:00~16:30  
**Gospel Class at Zushi**  
Please Contact:  
benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

23rd (MONDAY)  
10:30~16:30  
**SPECIAL SEPTEMBER  
Zushi Retreat**  
Visiting Guest Speaker:  
Swami Divyanandaji  
from Belur Math  
AM Session  
Lunch Prasad  
PM Session  
All are welcome!

Every Saturday  
**Yoga Asana Class**  
Zushi Annexe (10:15~11:45)

**More Detailed Schedule  
on page 2.**



## ✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"Karma is the eternal assertion of human freedom ... Our thoughts, our words, and our deeds are the threads of the net which we throw around ourselves."*

- Swami Vivekananda

*"Freedom from desire, freedom from hatred, and freedom from illusion, these things, my friends, are the root of the good."*

- Lord Buddha

Shariko at Zentsū-ji

## The Vedanta Society Outdoor Summer Retreat 2019

### "Hindus and the Teachings of Lord Buddha"

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

[On 14 July 2019, Swami Medhasanandaji (Maharaj) presented a 舍利講 'Shariko' (Buddha Study) in the Miedo, the hall where the celebrated Buddhist monk, Kobo Daishi, was born, in Zentsū-ji (Temple) of Kagawa Prefecture on the island of Shikoku. Maharaj's talk was a scheduled event of the Vedanta Society's Summer Retreat in collaboration with the Zentsū-ji Temple.]

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## CALENDAR

### September 2019

1st (Sun) 14:00~16:00

#### **Half-day Retreat at Zushi**

Please bring your copy of  
"Bhagavad Gita" and "Patanjali Yoga"  
Please Contact: benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

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

#### **Gospel Class at Zushi**

Please Contact: benkyo.nvk@gmail.com

23rd (MONDAY) 10:30~16:30

#### **SPECIAL SCHEDULE CHANGE**

#### **September Zushi Monthly Retreat**

Guest Speaker: Swami Divyanandaji  
Visiting from the Ramakrishna Math and Mission Headquarters at Belur Math

AM Session

Lunch Prasad

PM Session

All are welcome to attend!

28th (Fri)

#### **Nara Narayan - Service to Homeless**

Food Distribution

Contact: Yoko Sato

urara5599(at mark) gmail(dot)com

28th & 29th

#### **Namaste India**

#### **Yoyogi Park, Tokyo**

Visit the Japan Vedanta Society's "Ganga CD Shop"  
Books, CDs and many other items will be exhibited at special prices  
Reference: <<http://www.indofestival.com/index.html>>

Every Saturday

#### **Yoga Asana Class**

NOTE: Trial lessons are also available!

Zushi Annexe (10:30~12:00)

Contact: 080-6702-2308 (Hiroto Arai)

Email : ochanomizuyoga@gmail.com

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

**MC:** “Let me introduce Swami Medhasanandaji Maharaj, president of Vedanta Society of Japan as today’s speaker. People from the Vedanta Society of Japan are now participating in a Yoga and meditation camp here and studying Indian philosophy and Universality of Truth. The society belongs to Hinduism, but it respects many religions, such as Buddhism, and preaches the harmony of all religions.

Swami Medhasanandaji Maharaj lives in Zushi city in Kanagawa Prefecture. He has been in Japan for 26 years and spends his time giving discourses energetically all over Japan.

Shariko has been held continuously in Zentsū-ji since the Edo era, but it must be the first time to have the opportunity to hear a speech by Indian monk. So, I think you are lucky to come here at the right time. So please begin, Maharaj.”

**Maharaj:** “Good morning, everyone. First of all, I will chant mantras in Sanskrit which is a holy language. Sanskrit is used not only in Hindu scriptures, but also in Buddhist scriptures. Many Chinese, and later, Japanese monks and devotees had come to India to study Sanskrit. An Indian Buddhist monk also went to China to teach Sanskrit to Chinese and Japanese monks.

I will now offer mantras in Sanskrit, so please let’s chant together.

Om asato ma sad gamaya	Lead me from the unreal to the real
Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya	Lead me from darkness to light
Mrityorma amritam gamaya	Lead me from death to immortality.

I will chant another universal prayer for everyone’s health and happiness. Please repeat after me:

Sarve bhavantu sukhinah	May all be happy
Sarve santu niramayah	May all be free from illness
Sarve bhadraṇi paśyantu	May all see what is auspicious
Maa kashcid duḥka bhaag bhavet	May no one suffer

The next prayer is also in Sanskrit. The devotees of the Buddha and Buddhist monks also chant it. We Hindus also like this mantra, and we chant it at the Vedanta Society of Japan. Let me chant it and please repeat after me:

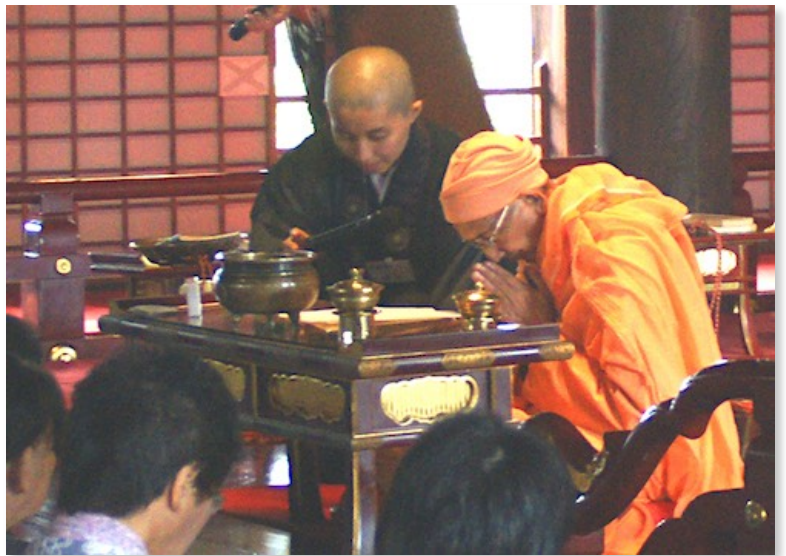
Buddham saranam gacchami	May Buddha be our refuge.
Dharman saranam gacchami	May Buddha’s teachings be our refuge.
Sangham saranam gacchami	May Buddha’s sangha (company) be our refuge.

I would like to express my gratitude, and my heartfelt thanks for the Summer Retreat collaboration with Zentsū-ji and the Vedanta Society of Japan through the efforts of Zentsū-ji monastics. Shikoku is a holy place in Japan, because Kobo Daishi was born here, and in Shikoku, Zentsū-ji is the holiest of places, because it is the very birth spot of Kobo Daishi.

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The content of my speech will reflect the impressions Hindus have regarding the teachings of the Lord Buddha (Oshakasama). First, I will share with you some characteristics of Hinduism.

One of the characteristics of Hinduism is that only one God exists above all. You may find numerous gods and goddess in Hinduism, but all those many gods and goddess are just multi-faceted appearances of the one God.



Another characteristic of Hinduism is that we call God, the Supreme Reality. That Supreme Reality also occasionally manifests as a human being to guide the people in the path of peace and to the path of Truth. For example, Krishna of India is one human form of that Supreme Reality. The Buddha is also a special appearance of that same Supreme Reality. Hinduism says an incarnation of God is the special appearance of God, the Supreme Reality, in human form.

I suppose there is no concept of the incarnation of God in Japan, but Gautama Buddha assumed the form of a human being for the purpose of guiding people on the path of true peace, to Truth. Jesus Christ is also an incarnation of God. Another characteristic of Hinduism is that we think "As many faiths, so many paths." There are a lot of religions, but to tell the truth, in reality, there is only one religion. For example, Indians call the sun, 'suriya', Japanese call the sun, 'taiyo', and Americans call the sun, 'sun', but there is only one sun and, likewise, there is just one religion. Every religion refers to purity, to universal love, and to mercy, there is no exception. So we Hindus respect Buddhism and Christianity, too.

There is a special relationship between Lord Buddha and Hinduism. The Buddha was born in India (now Nepal), and he practiced, reached realisation (nirvana), preached his message, and passed away in India, too. So the Buddha had a deep relationship with India. The Buddha was a scholar of the highest level, who studied the various scriptures of Hinduism. After his enlightenment, he created his own teachings, and these teachings are quite similar to the teachings of Hinduism.

We like Lord Buddha very much, because his mercy and universal love are incredible. There have been a lot of saints all over the world, but rare indeed do we find a saint who's mercy and universal love are such that he would sacrifice his own body to serve the devotees. We respect the Buddha because his mercy is a special mercy of the heart.

Not only to we respect him, but we also go on pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha obtained enlightenment, and we regard Bodh Gaya as a place of pilgrimage. There is an old

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temple there and people from all over the world (Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Japan, and so on) go there on pilgrimage. Myself and devotees of the Vedanta Society of Japan have been there to express our respects.

The Vedanta Society belongs to Hinduism, but our headquarters in India and our branches in many countries around the world celebrate the birth of Lord Buddha. Can you imagine the birth ceremony of the Buddha in a Christian church? I can't imagine the birth ceremony of Sri Krishna in a Buddhist temple either, but we believe in the harmony of God and his religions, so we celebrate the birth ceremony of Lord Buddha, and we also celebrate Christmas Eve every year. We also have a study class on Sundays at our Vedanta Society Centre ashrama in Zushi, that includes readings from the teachings of Lord Buddha. So, we have a deep relationship with the Buddha.



Let me share with you something that you may not be aware of. The headquarters of the Vedanta Society, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, had been established in 1897 in Kolkata, India. About five years later, Tenshin Okakura visited India, and he came to our headquarters to express his respects to Swami Vivekananda. One young son of a Shingon-shū monk had accompanied Tenshin Okakura from Japan. That young man stayed for about six months in our headquarters and monastery and studied Sanskrit, English and Buddhism. His name was Shitoku Hori. I think it is exceptional that the son of a Shingon-shū monk stayed our headquarters not so long ago.

Hindus have a deep relationship with Buddhism, since Buddhism was influenced by Hinduism, and Hinduism has been influenced and enriched by Buddhism. Hindus observe this kind of deep relationship in the Buddha, but, unfortunately, few Buddhists appear to share the same sentiment. We believe Buddhist monks and devotees should study Hinduism a little more. If you study Hindu scriptures, you will find how many important ideas these great teachings share. Hindus get a lot of inspiration from the teachings of the Buddha. Likewise, if Buddhist monks and devotees were to study the scriptures of Hinduism, they would get inspiration from them, too. Is this not good for all?

I offer, as my personal advice, to please study at least two Hindu scriptures. One of these is the 'Bhagavad Gita', the most famous and popular of Hindu scriptures. It was written at least 3000 years ago, but we can feel its messages still apply to the modern age. Another scripture I prefer is 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'. Sri Ramakrishna is the most famous saint of the Modern Age, and the contents of the 'Gospel' are His documented words and teachings, and are, therefore, scripture. If you study these scriptures, you will be able to find many solutions for help in your moral and your spiritual life.

(con't page 6)

As I said before, Hindus study Buddhism and understand the Buddha well. But if Buddhists don't know about Hinduism, we cannot have real religious harmony. If there is no religious harmony, we cannot have world harmony, or even person to person harmony, because the primary basis for person to person harmony and country to country harmony, is the harmony from religion to religion.

To that point, I believe this is a historical moment in Japan, that a Hindu monk from India was given the opportunity to give a speech on the altar of a Buddhist temple in Japan, as the consequence of a collaboration between the Buddhist Zentsū-ji and the Hindu Vedanta Society. It is not an ordinary event. I think this moment will be written in the history of Zentsū-ji as a most special event, one brought to fruition through the efforts of the abbott and monks, and our friend, Jyokei-san, of Zentsū-ji.

Thank you very much."



The Vedanta Society's Outdoor Summer Retreat 2019

**"Some Zentsū-ji Retreat Reminiscences"**

by Leonardo Alvarez

The temple where the retreat was held is called "Zentsū-ji" (善通寺). It is located on Japan's Shikoku island. The location of the temple is the actual birthplace of Kobo Daishi, the founder of the Shingon-shū 真言宗 sect. It is Esoteric Buddhism, specifically Vajrayana Buddhism ("Vajra" meaning "Diamond" in Sanskrit), and is keen in teaching enlightenment in this very life and body. Kobo Daishi went to the city of Chang'An (長安), then capital of the Tang Dynasty, then the ruling dynasty of China. He learned Sanskrit from two Buddhist monks, and Buddhism from his Master Huiguo (惠果). After 2 years of staying there, he returned to Japan and spread Esoteric Buddhism in Japan.

## **The First Day**

This program was special in that it was made in full collaboration between Zentsū-ji and the Vedanta Society of Japan. Hence we were not there as mere guests, but there was participation from monks and nuns of the temple, including the head of the temple, who graced us with two talks and his presence in several occasions.

The program started on Saturday July 13th . At around 3 p.m., Sato Jyokei-san, a Shingon-shū Buddhist nun who helped in the preparations for the retreat, guided the 60 plus participants (the first day there were about 60, but by the second day, 83 participants had arrived), along the inner grounds of the vast temple, explaining the history of each shrine, and the a high pagoda inside the complex.

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## Retreat Reminiscences (from page 6)

We then went to a museum, which also held 88 statues representing the 88 temples in Shikoku, as well as some sand from each of the 88 temple sites, spread beneath each corresponding statue. We all lined up as instructed and bought 100 five-yen coins, depositing one coin at each statue—most proceeding clock-wise one-by-one, others in counter-clockwise fashion. We were told that worshipping with faith all the 88 statues there would be equivalent to worshipping at each of the actual 88 temples scattered throughout the island of Shikoku. Finally, upon returning to the temple lodgings, we stood in front of a 1200 year old hollowed pine tree trunk, on which it is said that Kobo Daishi used to climb on as a child.

Each night there was a scheduled group gathering, where people were seated according to the prefecture in which they currently lived. The largest groups came from Ehime Prefecture and the Tokyo area, followed by the Osaka area, and Kanagawa Prefecture (Zushi City). Before retiring for the evening we all sang a few songs together, including "Tsubasa wo Kudasai" (Give Me Wings).

### The Second Day

The next morning, Sunday the 14th, most participants gathered at 4:30 a.m. for a morning meditation. We went to meditate along the roofed outer circumference of one of the main temples. After the meditation, around 5:30 am, we went to see a fire offering ceremony called "Homa" in Sanskrit (護摩 "Goma" in Japanese). The previous night people had written their prayers and desires on slender wooden tablets, and these were offered to the flames in the ceremony. The officiating monk explained that Homa was given to propitiate the wrathful protector god known as "Fudō Myōō" (不動明王), in order to fulfil people's desires. However, he explained those desires can only be fulfilled if (1) the desire is intense, (2) Fudō Myōō agrees to it, and (3) one's mental and inner energy are connected to the Fudō Myōō.

He then commenced with the goma ceremony, performing mudras (ritual hand gestures), very similar to those Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) employs during the Kali Puja at the Vedanta Society in Zushi. Similarly, the monk recited pseudo-Sanskrit mantras—in that they are indeed of Sanskrit origin, but the pronunciation has been localised and is not standard. We also had to recite many times one mantra to propitiate the deity "*Namah samanta-vajranam chanda maharosana shphotaya hum trat ham mam*". While all this was going on -except during the mantra chanting- the Buddhist nun Jyokei-San was explaining the similarities between Esoteric Buddhism and Vedanta.

Later that morning, after breakfast, we all went to the main worship hall of the temple compound. There, for the first time in this temple's history, and perhaps in all of Japan, a Hindu monk (Medhasanandaji), addressed the Buddhist devotees. First Maharaj chanted in Sanskrit:

"Buddham Sharanam Gacchami,  
Sangham Sharanam Gacchami  
Dharmam Sharanam Gacchami"

(con't page 8)

He then addressed the audience saying it had been Kobo Daishi who had first encountered Indian monks in China, from whom he learned Sanskrit and Buddhism, but it was the first time a Hindu monk spoke at a Buddhist temple in Japan, thus, making it a historical event. The head of the Buddhist temple also mentioned that ever since the foundation of the temple in the Edo Period, it was the first time a Hindu monk spoke on their premises.

After lunch, there was a group photo session. Then from 2 pm Maharaj gave a talk based on the recently published book of "Patanjali Yoga Sutras", a talk I missed as I was feeling poorly. That day was also raining, so there was no evening walk outside.

At night there was another evening meeting with all the participants. Here traditional Japanese songs were sung by an Ehime group and then songs by an Osaka group. At the end Maharaj thanked everyone for coming, and explained how it had almost been a miracle that the retreat had been able to take place, having been cancelled once due to his health.

### The Final Day

The final morning of Monday the 16th began with another outdoor meditation at the same temple as the previous day from 4:30 a.m. to 5:30 a.m. Once that was finished, we went to the main temple hall, where there was the morning prayer called "Cho-ka" (朝課), which included Buddhist prayers in Japanese and Sanskrit. The head monk conducted a brief fire ceremony (goma) as the chantings continued. A young monk was also sounding some cymbals, which were reminiscent of the old Chinese style of instruments, probably the same that Kobo Daishi saw in the Chinese capital of Chan'an, 1200 years before. Likewise, during the prayers a "Vajra" (lit. meaning "Thunder" in Sanskrit, a ritualistic club with a ribbed spherical head) apparently brought from China by Kobo Daishi was shown to the public.

Then the head monk gave a talk, a brief summary of the history of Japanese religions, especially based in Buddhism. There he made an important statement at the end, that the lack of religious education had made the Japanese "Religiously illiterate" (宗教音痴) ("音痴" or 'tone deaf' in Japanese), used here as an allegory to mean complete ignorance about the subject at hand, because religion is not taught at all in Japanese schools. Hence, they do not know how to distinguish true religion from sects. Tragically, that is one of the reasons why incidents and sects like Aum Shinrikyo could have happened.

Later on that morning, I gave a talk on "Christianity and the Universal Religion". I talked about how in the beginning Judaism was also polytheist, as many other religions, hence, a first commonality with all religions. Then I proceeded to relate the moral rules laid out by Moses, i.e. the Ten Commandments, and their similarities with the Yama and Niyama of the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, and the Buddhist Precepts. Lastly, in an effort to make the point that the role models exemplified by Jesus Christ, Lord Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna, were essentially the same, I attempted to point out some similarities in their teachings and practices.

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## Retreat Reminiscences (from page 8)

After that, a Buddhist monk called "Miyoshi" (referred to as "Miyoshi Sensei") gave a deep and long talk on Esoteric Buddhism, pointing out the similarities between the doctrines taught by Kobo Daishi through Shingon-shū teachings and the Vedanta, especially on the ideas of an immortal Self and being able to realize that Self, or the state of Enlightenment in this very life. It was very informative and enriching.

The afternoon program began at 1:30 pm with a movie on the life of Gandhiji, followed by a Q&A session from 2 to 3 p.m. Special priority was given to first time participants to ask questions. Some questions were about how to obtain mental peace, the practice of Tantra, and others gave their opinion about the retreat, specially praising it as one of the best they had ever participated in.

Lastly, Maharaj gave a brief talk, in a very emotive tone, thanking everyone for coming, and again saying how it had been a miracle for him to be able to come back from India and for this retreat to take place. He also marked the historic importance of it, because it had been done in full collaboration with the Shingon sect, and he had found a new venue of inter-religious dialogue, not from an academic standpoint, but from the perspective of the practitioners. •

### • Thought of the Month •

Faith is much better than belief.  
Belief is when someone else does  
the thinking.

- R. Buckminster Fuller

## Vedanta Society Outdoor Summer Retreat 2019 善通寺 Zentsū-ji

For dozens of Day by Day Photographs of the Activities of the Zentsū-ji Retreat please visit:  
<<https://www.vedantajp.com/活動/戶外夏季リトリート/2019善通寺/>>







Sister Jyokei Guides Guests



Kobo Daishi's Tree



Evening Satsanga



Sister Jyokei and Maharaj



Supper





Morning Meditation



Breakfast



Goma



Q & A



Evening Satsanga

• A Story to Remember •

### Watch Yourself

There was once a pair of acrobats. The teacher was a poor widower and the student was a young girl by the name of Meda. These acrobats performed each day on the streets in order to earn enough to eat.

Their act consisted of the teacher balancing a tall bamboo pole on his head while the little girl climbed slowly to the top. Once to the top, she remained there while the teacher walked along the ground.

Both performers had to maintain complete focus and balance in order to prevent any injury from occurring and to complete the performance. One day, the teacher said to the pupil:

'Listen Meda, I will watch you and you watch me, so that we can help each other maintain concentration and balance and prevent an accident. Then we'll surely earn enough to eat.'

But the little girl was wise, she answered, 'Dear Master, I think it would be better for each of us to watch ourselves. To look after oneself means to look after both of us. That way I am sure we will avoid any accidents and earn enough to eat.'

**Explanation:** *This story is said to have been told by the Buddha himself. It is meant to illustrate that taking care of yourself is the most important thing you can do to take care of others.*

- Zen Stories

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