



January 2020 - Volume 18 Number 01

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

February 2020
Calendar

Birthdays

**Swami
Adbhutananda**

Wednesday, 09 February



**Sri Sri Ramakrishna
Deva**

Tuesday, 25 February

Zushi Events

9th (Sun) 14:00~16:30
Half Day Retreat at Zushi
Chanting, Readings on
Spiritual Life
Discussion, Meditation,
Tea and snacks
Contact: benkyo.nvk(at)
mark@gmail(dot)com

16th (Sun) 10:30~16:30
**Swami Vivekananda
Birth Celebration**
06:30 Mangala Arati
11:00 Puja, Arati,
Pushpanjali
12:45 Prasad
14:45 Reading,
Discourse, Music program
with a Special Guest Flutist
16:30 Tea
18:00 Arati
All are welcome!

More info on page 2



✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"Spiritual practice means to keep the mind steady at His lotus feet
and to be absorbed in His thoughts."*

- The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

*"If a meditative man constantly worships Me through the
path of devotion, all the desires of his heart are destroyed, for I
reside in his heart."*

- Sri Krishna

December Zushi Retreat 2019
AM Session Discourse

'Ramakrishna Consciousness'
by Swami Medhasananda

Today's topic is not entitled 'Ramakrishna's Consciousness' because, naturally, such a topic would be a discussion on the consciousness that Sri Ramakrishna possessed. Quite deliberately, our title is about our own consciousness of Sri Ramakrishna. The reason being is that our Society is related to Sri Ramakrishna and His Mission, and our attendees are generally devotees of Ramakrishna. If primarily addressing devotees of Sri Krishna, such a topic would be titled 'Krishna Consciousness.' In fact, whenever we talk on Ramakrishna Consciousness, the devotees of Krishna should consider that we are indeed addressing Krishna Consciousness as well. The
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THE VEDANTA SOCIETY of JAPAN
CALENDAR of EVENTS

FEBRUARY 2020

1st (Sat) 10:00~12:00

Discourse on Bhagavad Gita - At the Embassy of India in Tokyo

(in Japanese only) Bring photo ID.

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

9th (Sun) 14:00~16:30

Half Day Retreat at Zushi

Chanting, Readings on Spiritual Life

Discussion, Meditation, Tea and snacks

Please bring your Japanese copy of: 'Meditation And Spiritual Life' by Swami
Yatiswarananda

Contact: [benkyo.nvk\(at mark\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:benkyo.nvk(at mark)gmail(dot)com)

11th (Tue) 14:00~16:30

Gospel Class at the Zushi Centre

Contact: [benkyo.nvk\(at mark\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:benkyo.nvk(at mark)gmail(dot)com)

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

Swami Vivekananda Birthday Celebration

Zushi Centre Annexe

06:30 Mangala Arati

11:00 Puja, Arati, Pushpanjali (offering of flowers)

12:45 Prasad

14:45 Reading, Discourse, Music program with a Special Guest Flutist

16:30 Tea

18:00 Arati

All are welcome!

28 (Fri) 16:00

Nara Narayan: Service to Homeless

Food Distribution in Yokohama

Contact: Yoko Sato

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

February 1st, 8th, 22nd, 29th Saturday

Yoga Asana Class

* Trial lessons are also available.

Zushi Annexe (10:30~12:00)

Contact: 080-6702-2308 (Hiroto Arai)

Email : [ochanomizuyoga\(at mark\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:ochanomizuyoga(at mark)gmail(dot)com)

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

Ramakrishna Consciousness (from page 1)

same is true for the devotees of Christ or of Buddha, and one should think of Christ Consciousness or Buddha Consciousness, accordingly. The point is, the names may be different, but the content remains the same. The term Krishna Consciousness has been widely used for some decades now, but because our Mission is devoted to Sri Ramakrishna, we use the term 'Ramakrishna Consciousness'. However, whatever names we give to that 'consciousness' after all, all the names of God, incarnations of God, and realised souls or great sages, are but manifestations of the same divinity.

An Adopted Phrase

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, was a Vaishnava monk who went to the West to preach in 1964. Later, he formed the religious movement, ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), successfully initiating many young devotees in America. They now have many branches around the world and centres in the US and India with many Indian and Western devotees. One of ISKCON's main practices is to sing the Hare Krishna mantra. Many of you, I'm sure, have heard it:

*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare
Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*

The devotees chant this mantra before gatherings and events, and while dancing or walking in groups. Some wear the gerua or ochre robes of a renunciate monk like our monks, and on visits to the West I have been asked a few times if I am a 'Hare Krishna'. I say that, no, I am a follower of Ramakrishna. However, I personally like the phrase 'Krishna Consciousness' and have adopted and altered it for the purpose of our discussion today as 'Ramakrishna Consciousness'.

Simple Awareness Binds Us

The simplest definition of Ramakrishna Consciousness is continuous uninterrupted awareness of Ramakrishna. In this modern age what are we continuously aware of in our daily life? What is the content of our awareness? Reflect for a moment and ask yourself what you are continuously aware of or thinking of.

We think about family members and friends; the employee thinks about his job; we dwell on the past or the future; yes, our awareness concerns many such things, but our most consistent awareness focuses on our body, our body-mind complex. This is our number one daily, consistent concern. Isn't it true? We think about our own family or friends, because they are related to our body-mind, but we rarely think about other families or the neighbours' families. We think about work, because work provides us money; we need money to live, without money we cannot eat, we have no dwelling. All these concerns are related to the our physical self, not the Atman.

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Ramakrishna Consciousness (from page 3)

Likewise, when we think about the past or the future, such thoughts are not related to the Atman, either. Does the Atman have a past or a future? No, only the body-mind complex does. Additionally, where does this thinking lead? It leads to the growth of attachments, worries, fears, bondages, etc., and not to lasting peace and happiness.

What is the characteristic of this kind of consciousness? It is focused on transient and limited things that have a beginning and an end; they can go through changes and suddenly disappear; or such things can simply come to an end. As a consequence we can never reach a stable and eternal happiness through this consciousness. Scriptures advise us to change the object of our awareness to that of the Atman, to the Eternal. To do this we need to change our daily awareness from the transient to the Eternal; from that which is bound, to that which is free; from that which is ignorance, to that which is wisdom.

Why is it that we always think of transitory things from morning to night, from birth to death? What is the cause of this? According to Hindu philosophy, we've been born many times and in each of these lifetimes we have identified ourselves with the body and the mind. This happens naturally from birth, and the more we think of ourselves as the body and the mind, the stronger our attachment to this idea becomes. By only hearing that we are not the body but the Atman, are we convinced of it? Even upon repeatedly hearing and studying of this spiritual truth, some awareness of Atman may remain with us briefly, but will soon disappear and revert to its old habits. This is the real challenge, and it is what makes it difficult to change our wrong perception about our real nature.

A Deeper Awareness

Our scriptures instruct us to discriminate to realise our real nature thus: I am not the body; I am not the mind; I am not intelligence; I am the soul, pure consciousness, the Atman; infinite and eternal. Practice in this way and fix your awareness on the Atman or soul consciousness. Chapter 12 Verse 5 of the Bhagavad Gita points out our difficulty with such practice saying:

*kleśho 'dhikataras teṣhām avyaktāsakta-chetasām
avyaktā hi gatir duḥkhaṁ dehavadbhir avāpyate*

Meditating on the impersonal aspect of the Supreme is extremely difficult for the embodied, because the embodied soul is always conscious of manifestations.

In 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' we find this statement in the Gita confirmed. Sri Ramakrishna states that in the Modern Age, body-consciousness is very strong, also that we are surrounded by too many pleasurable worldly objects, and it is very difficult to do such practice known as Jnana Yoga under such conditions. Since this is the case, what is the means or methodology we can employ to achieve the same result? Can the mind easily focus on the impersonal, or does it need something personal and with form to be free from worries, fears, and attachments, and achieve enlightenment?

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Ramakrishna Consciousness (from page 4)

Our scriptures say that there is such a way. They teach us to focus on one's chosen ideal, a deity, or an enlightened soul, and by practicing this for a substantial time, we get the same results as the Jnana yogi (practitioner). In this regard, we may choose a deity such as Shiva or Durga, or a saint, or an avatara such as Sri Krishna, Lord Buddha or Jesus Christ, whomever appeals to us, but we have to select one and focus oneself on thoughts of that deity or chosen ideal. With one of these as our object of continuous awareness or consciousness, we can finally get that stable, unending happiness of God Realisation.

Understanding Sri Ramakrishna

We chose today's topic, 'Ramakrishna Consciousness', because most of the attendees of our Society's Monthly Retreats are devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, and by focusing on Sri Ramakrishna we will get the results we have just discussed. Our next questions are who is Sri Ramakrishna, and what is his nature? In answering these questions we are not so concerned with his place of birth, his parentage, his personality, or other profile and bio data. Rather, we want to know of his true nature, his essence.

In this regard, one day a young monk at Belur Math asked Swami Brahmanandaji, a direct monastic disciple and 'Spiritual Son' of Sri Ramakrishna, "Maharaj, you spent several years with the Master (Sri Ramakrishna) and we would like to hear from you more about your personal experiences with Him." Of course, the Order was founded on Sri Ramakrishna's message, and He was their chosen ideal, so such reminiscences from the direct disciples were always enjoyed. Brahmanandaji, however, offered no reminiscence, and replied by instructing the monk to ask Sri Ramakrishna himself to reveal his true essence. Swami Vivekanandaji (Swamiji), the foremost of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, also said that he had struggled all his life to understand who Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) was, and had yet to comprehend a single portion of His true essence. So you see how difficult it is for us to define and discuss Sri Ramakrishna's true nature!

Nevertheless, it is important for us to understand, even intellectually, who Sri Ramakrishna was, and through practice and through His grace, we may be allowed to understand a little portion of who He was, which we should consider sufficient for us. In regards to our understanding of Ramakrishna, I would say there are three important aspects of the spiritual personality of Sri Ramakrishna which we should first understand intellectually, and then through practice, comprehend through realisation:

- Satchitananda Ramakrishna
- Bhagavan Ramakrishna
- Avatara Ramakrishna

Satchitananda Ramakrishna is the cosmic principle; Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Absolute. Satchitananda Ramakrishna is the Absolute Truth. Satchitananda Ramakrishna is beyond attributes (nirguna) and without form. He is equated with Brahman - without form or attributes as elucidated in the Upanishads.

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Ramakrishna Consciousness (from page 5)

To understand Bhagavan Ramakrishna we need to understand the relationship between Brahman and Maya. With the help of Maya, Brahman manifests as Ishwara or Bhagavan, that is, God. Though Bhagavan has no particular form, He has qualities or attributes, or 'saguna' in Sanskrit. These qualities are omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence, and He also possesses the powers of creation, preservation and destruction. So as Bhagavan, Sri Ramakrishna is the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer of this universe. He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. He bestows the effects of karma. He can also eliminate the effects of evil or bad karma with His power to bestow grace.

• Thought of the Month •

Catch then, O catch the transient hour;
improve each moment as it flies!"

- St. Jerome

The meaning of Avatara Ramakrishna is when this saguna Ishvara assumes a human form in order to lead people on the path of peace and happiness, and guide them in the path of righteousness and spirituality. Although on the outside He appears to have a human form, He is always aware of His real nature as the Ishvara, as Brahman. Another difference between an Avatara and a normal embodied human being is that the Avatara is not bound or born because of any karma. The Avatara is born and gives up the body of His own free will and is beyond the laws of karma.

At the Cossipore Garden House where Sri Ramakrishna had been moved for treatments of his throat cancer, he was surrounded by his disciples, but at times he could only speak in a very feeble voice. Instead, he would make some signs to explain certain points to his disciples. Once with his fingers he pointed all around the room in a swinging motion then to his own chest. Later, he quietly asked Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) if he had understood the earlier gesture. Naren answered that he understood the gesture to mean that everything manifest in the universe had originated from Sri Ramakrishna. It pleased Sri Ramakrishna greatly that Naren had understood the deeper meaning of his gesture. Sri Ramakrishna had thus revealed His true nature as Bhagavan or Ishwara.

Putting the Idea into Practice

The next question we would like to discuss is how we can practice 'Ramakrishna Consciousness'. In discussing the many basic and special practices, we must remember the purpose of all these practices is to grow more love for Sri Ramakrishna. The more we practice; the more we grow our awareness; the more our awareness grows, the more our love for Ramakrishna grows. Likewise, the easier our love for Ramakrishna grows; the easier Ramakrishna Consciousness becomes; and the more Ramakrishna Consciousness we have, the easier it is to practice. This is the objective of practice, so we should keep this in mind when we practice. We should regard Sri Ramakrishna as the 'all in all' of our life, as the Gita puts it in Chapter 9 Verse 18: 'He is the goal, the support, the Lord, the consciousness witnessing everything, the abode, the refuge, and the friend of all, their origin, their dissolution, their ground, their treasure-house and their seed imperishable.'

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General practices include listening or reading about Sri Ramakrishna's divine life and personality, chanting His name, and meditating on His true nature. We should do our work with the talents, intelligence, and power given to us by Sri Ramakrishna, depending upon Him for results, and finally, we are to offer the fruits of our work to Sri Ramakrishna. The Gita contains a relevant verse which says: '... whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give as charity, whatever austerity you perform - do as an offering unto the Lord.' By doing so, we will not be subject to the Laws of Karma and become free from bondages. These are the practices which most of us are familiar with, as we often talk about them. However, when we meditate on Sri Ramakrishna, we should meditate on all three of the aspects of Sri Ramakrishna cited above, although doing so may be practiced during separate sessions.

Seeing Sri Ramakrishna in All

Now what are the special ways of practice? That is, seeing Sri Ramakrishna in all beings, or in other words, to visualise that Sri Ramakrishna lives in all beings - not only those we care about, but those we may dislike as well. Regardless of this, we are to think and visualise Sri Ramakrishna residing in all beings; the good or the bad, the pious or the criminal, our countrymen or foreigners, followers of our religion, or the followers of other religions, since history shows repeatedly that while most of the followers of a religion are generous and kind to those of the same religion, they do exhibit animosity toward members of different religions.

One may argue as to why we should try to imagine the figure of Sri Ramakrishna in all when we do not actually see Him in others. However, is it not a fact that most of the time our mind is engaged in various imaginings? Again, the objects of such imaginings are mostly unreal, that is, such objects either cease to exist or never existed at all. The type of imaginings we are suggesting in visualising Sri Ramakrishna are imaginings of the Real, which at the outset may also seem unreal, or do not exist, will finally lead to the Real, which exists eternally. One may also recall a well-known episode from Swami Vivekananda's (Swamiji) life in this context. When Sri Ramakrishna once remarked that God pervades everything of this universe, Swamiji (then Narendranath) would not believe it, rather he mocked the suggestion saying, 'Then this pot is God, this plate is God?' Overhearing Swamiji's comment, Sri Ramakrishna in an ecstatic mood touched Swamiji with his hand. As a consequence Swamiji actually visualised not only the animate, but the inanimate as well, such as carriages, food, plates, the railings in a park, were all made of pure consciousness, that God indeed pervaded everything.

Let us illustrate this point further. Suppose we go to Tokyo for a certain purpose. What do we generally do? We go to our local station, take a train to arrive at another station near our destination, then we walk along a street to reach our destination. In the stations, on the trains, and along the streets, we encounter many people, we see many shops, buildings, cars, etc., and we see the people as people, the shops as shops, buildings as buildings, and cars as cars. Now we have to change this way of looking about and instead visualise Sri Ramakrishna in the people, shops, buildings and cars. Along with this, the repetition of the mantra, or even just the name of Ramakrishna, mentally becomes more effective.

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Ramakrishna Consciousness (from page 7)

This practice helps us in three ways. First of all it helps us to restrain the mind and senses from running after various objects, and secondly we get connected with Sri Ramakrishna even amidst a secular atmosphere, thus maintaining the calmness of mind. Over the long run, such practices lead us to experiencing greater Ramakrishna Consciousness.

Not only human beings, but we need to see that Sri Ramakrishna resides in animals, birds, trees, plants and inanimate things, like a house and it's furnishings as well. In all of nature too, the sun, the moon, the stars, the sky, the oceans, the rivers, the lands, even the air we breathe, all are Sri Ramakrishna.

When Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was in Jayrambati many cats would gather at her cottage and she would feed them. Cats, of course, like fish and milk very much. Some monks were assigned to care for and to serve the Holy Mother and one of these was called Jnan Maharaj, a vegetarian. Once, before returning to Calcutta, Holy Mother instructed Jnan that he was to tend to the cats in her absence. Now, in addition to being a vegetarian, the swami did not like cats, but when Holy Mother asked him to take care of the cats he offered no objection. Holy Mother understood his feelings anyway, however, and told him to remember that when he was serving the cats, he was serving her as well, as Holy Mother also resides in cats. Henceforth, with Mother's instruction, Jnan Maharaj the vegetarian, busied himself with obtaining and preparing fish for the cats.

At the Ramakrishna Mission we chant the following before meals:

*brahmarpanam brahma havir
brahmagnau brahmana hutam
brahmaiva tena gantavyam
brahma-karma-samadhina*

The meaning of this mantra is that Brahman (God) is the food, Brahman is the utensils, Brahman consumes the food, Brahman is the power of digestion (fire), and the results of this digestion go to Brahman as well. However, Brahman is hard for us to visualise while chanting this prayer. On the other hand, if we see Sri Ramakrishna as the omnipresent in the offering, the food, utensils, and digestive power, isn't this a more practical approach? Similarly, when we enter the bathroom to bathe (ofuro), we should try to imagine that the bathtub and the hot water are all Ramakrishna and that it is Ramakrishna in us who is taking the ofuro. Thus, we can spiritualise or Ramakrishna-ise our everyday life

All our conditions are created by Sri Ramakrishna's will. Our health is Sri Ramakrishna, our illness is Sri Ramakrishna, the patient is Sri Ramakrishna, the doctor and the medications as well are Sri Ramakrishna. Whether or not the patient is cured is also Sri Ramakrishna's will. This point is illustrated well in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, in the story of 'The Weaver and Lord Rama's Will' as told by Sri Ramakrishna. There was a pious weaver who firmly believed everything happened by the will of Rama. One day some robbers forced him to carry their heavy bundle of stolen goods, and he was later arrested with the bundle. But the weaver held fast to his belief during it all, and while chanting Lord Rama's name he explained to the Magistrate that everything that had happened to him, had happened by the will of Rama, the Lord. Upon hearing this the Magistrate found him innocent of the theft and released him. Upon

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Ramakrishna Consciousness (from page 8)

returning home he commented to his friends that his release was also possible by the will of Rama.

Moreover, when we offer service to others, we should visualise those we are serving as Sri Ramakrishna. So our visualisations and our actions must not contradict each other. We must see everyone as Ramakrishna regardless of our likes and dislikes. This does not mean we have to befriend or associate with evil people in our effort to see Ramakrishna in them, we can still see Ramakrishna in such people, yet remain aloof and keep our distance from them.

The Greatest Challenge

One of the greatest challenges is changing our body-mind consciousness into Ramakrishna Consciousness. Even for monastics, who do not have a family or a job to go to earn money, body consciousness can become strong. The mind can become upset at the slightest health problem for example. To address this issue we must think that every single cell of body is Sri Ramakrishna; our vital energy (prana) is Sri Ramakrishna; all our senses are Sri Ramakrishna, our eyes are Sri Ramakrishna, our ears are Sri Ramakrishna, our tongue is Sri Ramakrishna - focus on all the senses individually and visualise Sri Ramakrishna behind each.

Not only that, but see that the objects of the senses are also Sri Ramakrishna. Our eyes are Sri Ramakrishna and the others whom our eyes see are Sri Ramakrishna too. At all the seven chakras (subtle body points) of our body Sri Ramakrishna dwells, too. The mind, the subconscious, and the supra-conscious, are Sri Ramakrishna. The intelligence (bodhi) is Sri Ramakrishna. The memory is Sri Ramakrishna. The ego is Sri Ramakrishna. The Atman, our innermost essence and soul, is also Sri Ramakrishna. This is the practice of spiritualising every aspect of our being. Such practice done with sincerity over a long period can transform our deep and strong body-mind complex consciousness into Ramakrishna Consciousness.

Ramakrishna Advaita

All the practices noted above will lead us to attain to Ramakrishna Consciousness, in other words for the practice of Ramakrishna Advaita, or non-dualism in Bhakti Yoga. In Jnana Yoga the yogi seeks to be united with Brahman, that is Advaita Vedanta. There is an Advaita Ashrama in the Himalayas established by Swamiji where no photographs of Ramakrishna or any deity is installed and where the attribute-less Brahman is meditated upon.

But our practice is Ramakrishna Advaita. Swami Shivanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, established the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama in Varanasi. Shivanandaji explained that the intention of establishing the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama was to promote the practice of visualising the omnipresence of Sri Ramakrishna, in other words, putting Ramakrishna Consciousness into practice.

Swamiji was a living example of Ramakrishna Consciousness. A direct householder

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Ramakrishna Consciousness (from page 9)

disciple of Swamiji, Sarat Chandra Chakravarti, notes that though Swamiji gave many talks on Advaita Vedanta, in private talks within his close circle, he mostly spoke of Sri Ramakrishna. However, the best example of Ramakrishna Consciousness is found in the life of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, about whom Swami Abhedanandaji composed a beautiful hymn which contains the following verse:

Rāmakṛṣṇa-gata-prāṇām tan-nāma
śravaṇa-priyām
tad-bhāva-rañjit' ākārām praṇamāmi
muhur-muhuḥ

To Her whose life is fused into one with Ramakrishna's,
Whose delight consists in absorption in
thoughts and talks about His glories,
Whose personality is soaked and suffused with His spirit.
To Her our repeated salutations!

Swami Turiyanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, also said his ideal of dualism, non-dualism, and qualified-non-dualism were all but Sri Ramakrishna. Like Hanuman, the great devotee of Lord Rama, Turiyanandaji also perhaps felt that when he regards himself as a body, he considers Sri Ramakrishna as his Master and he as His servant, but when he regards himself as an embodied soul, he looks upon himself as a part of Sri Ramakrishna, and when he regards himself as the pure Self, he sees no difference between him and Sri Ramakrishna - he and Sri Ramakrishna are the same. This is the culmination of the practice of Ramakrishna Consciousness.

In conclusion, the practice of Jnana Yoga, attaining to Brahman Consciousness, and the practice of Bhakti Yoga, leading to Ramakrishna Consciousness, which is easier to practice, both lead one to the same goal of spiritual realisation. Then in light of Chapter 5 Verse 21 of the Bhagavad Gita, it may be postulated that the practitioner of Ramakrishna Consciousness, who is unattached to the contactual experiences of the external world, gains the joy of the Self within and also enjoys unending bliss with the mind absorbed in communion with Sri Ramakrishna, who is Satchitananda Brahman. •

Vedanta Society of Japan Celebrates Christmas Eve 2019

On 24 December 2019, the Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual Christmas Eve celebration this year in the Main Ashrama Building of its Zushi Centre. The altar was set up at the back of the Main Shrine room with the sliding doors (soji) to the Meeting Room removed for seating there. The altar was framed in garlands with coloured lights and hibiscus and featured the print of Jesus Christ in Yoga Posture and on the tier below the Madonna and Child print recounted in 'Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play' by Swami Saradananda in detail on page 356. An array of flowers, bouquets, leis, candles, cookies, candies and a birthday cake were offered extending out to the floor. The items for worship were laid out to the left of the

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Christmas 2019 (from page 11)

altar and offerings. At about 7PM the candles on the altar were lit and Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) sprinkled Ganges water upon the offerings as the programme began. This year Swami Divyanathananda conducted the worship of Jesus Christ and Maharaj assisted.

When the worship came to an end Maharaj asked that 'Joy to the World' be sung. Ms. Shanti Izumida accompanied on keyboard as Leonardo Alvarez sang the first verse in Latin, and the congregation then sang a verse in English and a verse in Japanese. Maharaj then read from the 'Holy Bible' John 4:4-26 'Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well' and called upon an attendee to read the same in Japanese. Maharaj then called on the congregation to sing 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus' Mr. Hirsch first led with an English verse and the entire congregation joining in with Japanese verses.

Maharaj then requested Mr. Alvarez to give a brief talk. Mr. Alvarez first led the the congregation in the 'The Lord's Prayer' in both English and Japanese. He then began his talk with the Latin phrase "Ex Oriente Lux" - meaning 'from the East, light comes.' His talk emphasised the fact that Jesus was from the East and that he taught Eastern teachings. Mr. Alvarez's complete remarks will appear in 'The Vedanta Kyokai' when they become available.

When Mr. Alvarez completed his comments Maharaj called upon Shanti-san to lead the congregation in singing 'The First Noel'. He then asked the congregation to spend a few minutes in silent prayer, as offerings were collected and taken to the kitchen. The celebration programme concluded with the congregation singing English and Japanese verses of 'Silent Night'. A delicious Christmas prasad dinner with many desserts prasad dinner was then offered for those able to remain in Zushi a little longer.

Approximately 30 people attended the programme. •





Ex Oriente Lux



Christmas Carols



Christmas Prasad

Vedanta Society of Japan Observes New Year's Kalpataru

On Wednesday, the 1st of January, the Vedanta Society of Japan observed its annual New Year's Day Kalpataru at its Zushi Centre Ashrama. Devotees gathered in the Main Shrine room from 5AM for meditation and the morning worship.

At 11:30 Swami Medhasanandaji (Maharaj) welcomed one and all with a solemn New Year greeting, adding he was pleased that attendees had chosen to start the New Year in a spiritual way. He then briefly recounted the significance of the Ramakrishna Order's observance of New Year's Kalpataru. Kalpataru is the Wish Fulfilling Tree of Indian lore, and on the 1st of January 1986, Sri Ramakrishna, who was terminally ill, came down from his bed and blessed the householder disciples who had assembled at the Cossipore Garden House saying "be conscious."

Maharaj also welcomed and introduced the Society's new Assistant Minister, Swami Divyanathanandaji (Anirvan Maharaj), mentioning that he was also accomplished at singing. Both swamis then led the gathering in singing bhajans with Anirvan Maharaj playing the harmonium before a lunch prasad was served.

At around 2 o'clock Maharaj led the group on a walk to Kamakura where they worshipped at the Great Buddha Statue (Kotokuin) where a group photo was taken (PDF version) showing 32 attendees, Many then continued on to pay respects at the Catholic Church Yukinoshita. Along the way Anirvan Maharaj was introduced to a 'snowman' (PDF version) in front of a nearby shop. The final Kalpataru visit was paid to the traditionally crowded Tsuruoka Hachimangu Shrine (Shinto). •



Medhasanandaji Welcomes All



Swamis Sing Bhajans



Walk to Kamakura



Anirvan Maharaj Meets Snowman



Medhasanandaji Offers Incence



Devotees Offer Prayers



Devotees & Great Buddha of Kamaura

● A Story to Remember ●

The Lakota Sioux Code of Ethics

1. Rise with the sun to pray. Pray alone. Pray often. The Great Spirit will listen, if you only speak.
2. Be tolerant of those who are lost on their path. Ignorance, conceit, anger, jealousy and greed stem from the lost soul. Pray that they will find guidance.
3. Search for yourself, by yourself. Do not allow others to make your path for you. It is your road, and yours alone. Others may walk it with you, but no one can walk it for you.
4. Treat the guests in your home with much consideration. Serve them the best food, give them the best bed and treat them with respect and honor.
5. Do not take what is not yours whether from a person, a community, the wilderness or from a culture. It was not earned nor given. It is not yours.
6. Respect all things that are placed upon this earth - whether it be people or plant.
7. Honor other people's thoughts, wishes and words. Never interrupt another or mock or rudely mimic them. Allow each person the right to personal expression.
8. Never speak of others in a bad way. The negative energy that you put out into the universe will multiply when it returns to you.
9. All persons make mistakes. And all mistakes can be forgiven.
10. Bad thoughts cause illness of the mind, body and spirit. Practice optimism.
11. Nature is not FOR us, it is a PART of us. They are part of your worldly family.
12. Children are the seeds of our future. Plant love in their hearts and water them with wisdom and life's lessons. When they are grown, give them space to grow.
13. Avoid hurting the hearts of others. The poison of your pain will return to you.
14. Be truthful at all times. Honesty is the test of ones will within this universe.
15. Keep yourself balanced. Your Mental self, Spiritual self, Emotional self, and Physical self - all need to be strong, pure and healthy. Work out the body to strengthen the mind. Grow rich in spirit to cure emotional ails.
16. Make conscious decisions as to who you will be and how you will react. Be responsible for your own actions.
17. Respect the privacy and personal space of others. Do not touch the personal property of others - especially sacred and religious objects. This is forbidden.
18. Be true to yourself first. You cannot nurture and help others if you cannot nurture and help yourself first.
19. Respect others' religious beliefs. Do not force your beliefs on others.
20. Share your good fortune with others.

This is an eminent code of ethics widely attributed to the Lakota Sioux, though unverifiable as such. The Lakota are an Native American tribe also known as the Teton Sioux, one of the three tribes of the Great Sioux Nation.

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