



March 2020 - Volume 18 Number 03

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

APRIL 2020
Calendar

Birthdays



Sri Ramnavami
Thursday, 02 April

Zushi Events

We are sorry to announce that all lectures, classes and events at our Zushi Centre will be suspended until further notice as a precaution against the **CORONAVIRUS**. However, classes will be **LIVE-STREAMED**, so click the live stream link on page 02! ...

✧ Thus Spake ✧

When you are engaged in devotional practices, keep aloof of those who scoff at them, and also from those who ridicule piety and the pious.

- Sri Ramakrishna

Tell not the mysteries of Love and Ecstasy to a sceptic, for he is so engrossed in the worship of his own self that he prefers to die in ignorance of the existence of such qualities.

- Prophet Zarathushtra

February Zushi Retreat 2020

Swami Vivekananda's 158th Birth Anniversary Celebration

On Sunday the 16th of February the Vedanta Society of Japan's held a daylong programme in for its Monthly Retreat to celebrate the 158th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji).

As volunteers performed various preparations, devotees began arriving at the Annexe Building from as early as 10am. With final preparations concluding and the altar decorated with flowers and food offerings, as settled over the congregation as assistant minister Swami Divyanathanandaji (Anirvan Maharaj) joined Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) on the podium and prepared to begin the worship (puja) at 11am.

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Vedanta Society Monthly Calendar of Events REVISED April 2020 Schedule

Link for the Live-Streaming of talks → [Please click](#)

Recently the Japanese government has announced that as the number of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases continues to rise in Japan, everyone should adopt social distancing measures and stay at home in order to prevent an explosion of new cases.

Due to this situation, we have updated the April schedule on our website to continue to provide mental and spiritual support to devotees even if they must stay at home. The new April schedule is shown below, and all the programmes listed will be 'live-streamed' so that one can watch them on a computer or mobile phone.

Let us sincerely pray that by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna the present crisis ends soon. Let us also pray for everyone's good health and wellbeing.

Swami Medhasananda
President
Vedanta Society of Japan

April Live-Stream Schedule

Link for Live Streaming of talks → [Please click](#)

5th (Sun) 2pm–4pm

Half Day Retreat at Zushi

Discourse topic: 'How to Face the Present COVID-19 Crisis'
(In both English & Japanese)

12th (Sun) 2pm–4pm

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

(in Japanese Only)

19th Sun) 2 pm–4 pm

Monthly Retreat Talk

(Topic to be announced later)
(In both English & Japanese)

26th (Sun) 2 pm–4 pm

Discourse on the Bhagavad Gita.

(In Japanese Only)

Please note: This is **NOT** a continuation of the monthly programme of discourses given at the Embassy of India, Tokyo.

29th (Sun)

Akhanda Japam → Cancelled

With incense sticks burning and placed in a holder the swamis began to conduct the arati service with a meditation. Anirvan Maharaj performed the prescribed steps as Maharaj recited the mantra and mudra from the ritual document. About 45 minutes later, with a ringing of the bell and blast from a conch, Maharaj placed sanctified flowers on Swamiji's photo and returned to the platform to continue with offerings, mantras, bells and conch the worship continued and more flowers and pranam were offered to Swamiji. More mudra and mantra concluded this element of the worship.

Ms Shanti Izumida then asked the congregation to sing Khandana Bhava Bandhana as Anirvan Maharaj proceeded with the Arati offerings of the five elements to Swamiji as the conch shell bellowed and the synthesizer led the congregation:

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 |
prāṇarpaṇa jagata-tāraṇa kṛntana-kaliḍor ||
vañcana-kāmakāñcana atinindita-indriyarāg |
tyāgīśvara he naravara dehapade anurāg ||
nirbhaya gatasamśaya dṛṛhaniścaya-mānasavān |
niṣkāraṇa-bhakata-saraṇa tyaji jāti-kula-mānall
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 ||
dhe dhe dhe laṅga raṅga bhaṅga bāje aṅga saṅga mṛdaṅga
gāhiche chanda bhakatavṛnda ārati tomār ||
jaya jaya ārati tomār hara hara ārati tomār
śiva śiva ārati tomār ||
khaṇḍana bhava bandhana jaga vandana vandi tomāy |
jay śrī gurumāhārājī ki jay ||

When the arati came to an end, Maharaj asked Ms. Shanti to lead the congregation in singing Sarvamangala Mangalye*

Om sarvamangala mangalye shive sarvarthasadhike,
Sharanye tryambake Gauri Narayani namo'stu te.
Srishti sthiti vinashanam shaktibhute sanatani,
Gunashraye Gunamaye Narayani namo'stu te.

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Sharanagata dinarta paritrana parayane,
Sarvasyartihare Devi Narayani namo'stu te.
Jaya Narayani namo'stu te, Jaya Narayani namo'stu te,
Jaya Narayani namo'stu te, Jaya Narayani namo'stu te.

Jai Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishnadev ki jai
Jai! Jai Mahamayi ki jai!
Jai Swamiji Maharaj ji ki jai!
Jai Sri Buddhadev ki jai

As the singing came to an end, Swami Medhasananda asked visiting Indian Embassy's Vivekananda Cultural Centre Director, Prof (Mr,) Siddharth Singh to say a few words:

"Konnichiwa and good afternoon to you all. First of all I am thankful to Swami Medhasanandaji and the Vedanta Society of Japan for inviting me to this very auspicious occasion. I extend my warmest greetings to you for getting together and paying homage to Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. By paying this homage we are trying to understand the true meaning of universal brotherhood enshrined in Paramahansa Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda's message. Their message was not confined to any one caste, creed, religion, culture or country. It was for all and encompasses all these streams of knowledge. Swamiji said the truth is one and can be achieved by many paths, as all paths are true. By inculcating and practicing the messages of these masters, we shall strive to bring peace and harmony to the modern world. It can be done by serving one another, by interacting together, and sharing the universal message of love and brotherhood.

Once again, greetings and congratulations to all of you, and my sincere thanks to Swami Medhasananda for inviting me." (applause)

Next Maharaj spoke:

"I am thankful that Professor Singh could come because we have a very special relationship with the Indian Embassy in Tokyo. As you know we hold the Bhagavad Gita discourses there monthly under the auspices of the Vivekananda Cultural Centre, and for this we are grateful to the Centre. Mr. Singh is from Benares and the Benaras University.

I am also happy he could come with his wife and son, too. You are most welcome and we hope you can visit us again and again in the future during his term here.

OK, thank you very much! (applause)

The food offerings were then whisked to the Main Ashrama kitchen as Maharaj walked among the congregation anointing all with sprinkles of Ganges water. Flower buds and leaves were passed and Maharaj asked all to follow him, phrase by phrase, in repeating a Pushpanjali (flower offering) mantra dedicated to Swami Vivekananda, and a mantra invoking prana (primordial energy) before all made their offerings and a brief prayer at the altar.

Swamiji's 158th (from page 3)

The morning worship was followed by lunch prasada served in the Main Ashrama. About 40 persons attended the programme.

The afternoon session began around 14:30 with the congregation assembling in the Annexe Building again. Swami Medhasananda then asked all to join in chanting:

Chant:	Translation:
Om̐ Saha nāu avatu	Om, May God protect us both (teacher and student),
Saha nau bhunaktu	May God nourish us both,
Saha vīryam karavāvahai	May we work together with energy and vigour,
Tejasvi nāu adhitam astu	May our study be enlightening and not give rise to hostility,
Mā vidviṣāvahai	Om, peace (within), peace (with all), peace (universe)
Om̐ Shāntiḥ, Shāntiḥ, Shāntiḥi	

Chant:	Translation:
Om! Śaṃ no mitraḥ śaṃ varuṇaḥ	Om May Mitra be blissful to us
śaṃ no bhavatvaryamā	May Varuna be blissful to us.
śaṃ na indro brihaspatiḥ	May Aryaman be blissful to us.
śaṃ no viṣṇururukramaḥ	May Indra and Brihaspati be blissful to us.
namo brahmaṇe,	May Vishnu, of long strides, be blissful to us.
namaste vāyo	Salutations to Brahman.
tvameva pratyakṣaṃ bhrahmāsi	Salutation to you, O Vayu.
tvāmeva pratyakṣam brahma vadiṣyāmi	You, indeed, are the immediate Brahma
taṃ vadiṣyāmi	You alone I shall call the direct Brahman.
satyaṃ vadiṣyāmi	I shall call you righteousness. I shall call you truth.
tanmāmavatu	May That protect me;
tadvaktāramavatu	May That protect the speaker.
avatu mām	May He protect me.
avatu vaktāram	Please protect the speaker.
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ	Om Peace Peace Peace.

Chant:

Om! pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate
om̐ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ

Translation:

Om! That (Brahman) is infinite, and this (universe) is infinite.
The infinite proceeds from the infinite.
(Then) taking the infinitude of the infinite (universe), it remains as the infinite (Brahman) alone.
Om! Peace! Peace! Peace

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Swamiji's 158th (from page 4)

Bringing the chant to a close Maharaj asked Anirvan Maharaj to sing a hymn to Swami Vivekananda. Followed by a reading from *ベカナンダ生涯* (Vivekananda Shōgai -The Life of Vivekananda).

Mr. Leonardo Alvarez joined Maharaj on the platform to act as interpreter and the swami launched into his comments on Swami Vivekananda. (This talk follows) At the conclusion of the talk devotees offered songs and Anirvan Maharaj closed the session with a hymn. The lights were dimmed and the remaining congregation sat in meditation. ●

● Thought of the Month ●

"It is the heart which perceives God and not reason.
That is what faith is:
God perceived by the heart,
not by reason."

- Blaise Pascal

Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary 2020 Photos



Puja



Arati





Altar Offerings



Professor Singh



Pushpanjali



Prasad Lunch



PM Talk



Closing Songs



February Zushi Retreat 2020
Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary
PM Session Talk
'Nararishi'
Swami Medhasananda

Once even before meeting Narendranāth (the future Vivekananda), Sri Ramakrishna had seen him in a vision seated in a high place in heaven as one of seven sages immersed in samadhi. In the heavenly realms there are various saints and sages in various levels, such as the many lesser gods of winds and mountains and the like in the Shinto belief system, and the saints and sages of much higher renunciation dwell at higher planes of spirituality and love of God. One of the seven sages, or Saptarishi in Sanskrit, in Sri Ramakrishna's vision was Nararishi, and Sri Ramakrishna said that Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) was the incarnation of that Nararishi, who, at the Master's request had agreed to take human birth to assist him in his work. Much later when a brother disciple wanted to confirm whether Swamiji actually knew who he was, meaning if he was the incarnation of Nararishi, Swamiji replied, "Yes, I know who I am."

There are two hymns regarding Swamiji; one featuring Swamiji composed by Swami Ramakrishnananda, and another composed by Swami Saradananda about all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, including Swamiji. The last two lines of the first hymn is used by the Ramakrishna Mission as a Pranam Mantra in salutations to Swamiji. In the verses *Nama Sri Yati Rajaya, Vivekananda Suraye, Sat Cit Sukha Swarupaya, Swamine Tapaharine*, 'Sat Cit Sukha' means 'Existence, Consciousness and Bliss Absolute' are the real nature of Swamiji. The second hymn depicts Swamiji as paratattva sadalina, meaning Swamiji is always immersed in the Supreme Truth. Hence, both hymns indicate that Swamiji was immersed in Brahman Consciousness.

If Swamiji was indeed always immersed in samadhi, we would naturally imagine that he would be incapable of performing any works. This, then, is apparently a contradiction. However, after his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, passed away, Swamiji travelled the length and breadth of India; later he travelled to Chicago to attend the world's first Parliament of Religions; he taught and preached Vedanta in the West, including Europe and the USA; and upon returning to India he founded the Ramakrishna Mission. How could he do all this were he 'always immersed in samadhi'? Aren't these contradictory statements?

In this regard, the Yogis declare that the subtle body consists of seven Chakras or energy centres in the body. They are the Muladhara (root), Swadhishtana (sacral), Manipura (solar plexus), Anahata (heart), Vishuddha (throat), Ajna (third eye), and Sahastrara (crown) Chakras. Once Swami Turiyanandaji commented that Holy Mother's mind never came down from higher Ajna Chakra. It is a great mystery to us how she could manage all the works and people she attended to in such a state of mind.

When Swamiji visited Sri Ramakrishna for the first time, Sri Ramakrishna touched Swamiji and he lost all outer consciousness, recalled and became aware of his own true nature. Outwardly, Swamiji was still not aware of his identity as a Saptarishi, but with the spiritual touch of Ramakrishna, he could recognise his real nature in a trance state. This is the significant difference between Swamiji and common people, that with the powerful spiritual touch of the Master he could recall his true nature.

Is it not a great mystery how Brahman, the unlimited and Infinite, can become manifest as a

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finite human being like Sri Ramakrishna, for example? How is it possible that the infinite can become finite? It defies all logic. Yet we know from the testimony of Sri Ramakrishna, the Godman of the Modern Age, that Sat Chit Ananda Brahman had assumed a human body as He, who taught humanity the path of absolute peace, joy, knowledge and truth. It means that although Swamiji was always immersed in Absolute Truth, he could fulfil his mission on earth as a prophet, a fact at the time which cannot be denied.

Swamiji's normal state of being was his constant awareness of his true nature, while for us, body-consciousness is our normal state of being. We cannot even imagine what this 'soul consciousness' state of mind is like, because of our ever present body-consciousness. But in the case of Swamiji, while his mind was immersed in the state of God Consciousness, with a very small fraction of his mind he was aware of the world and could accomplish so many works for the happiness and wellbeing of humanity.

Girish Chandra Ghosh, the famous dramatist, actor, and one of the close householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, once made a significant remark about the ropes of delusion of Mahamaya, with which she binds embodied souls. He said there were but two persons that Mahamaya, Herself, had been unable to bind with Her rope. One of these was Swamiji and the other was Nag Mahasaya (another householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna). What is rope of Mahamaya? It represents our desires, our attachments, our deceits and our samskaras (psychological imprints).

Regarding Swamiji, Girish explained that Mahamaya, as the primordial energy, indeed had almost an infinitely long rope, but each time She tried to bind Swamiji, he grew bigger and bigger until he merged with the infinite, hence Mahamaya could not bind him. Girish's reference to Nag Mahasaya was that the latter became so humble he could slip through the knots Mahamaya tied to bind him with.

There is one instance that occurred in the life of Swamiji in the USA that I would like to share with you. It involves a Miss Sara Ellen Waldo, a spiritual aspirant, who had been looking for a special kind of teacher to guide her; a teacher who had no imperfections. In her searches she would find a teacher and seriously study under that teacher until she became dissatisfied with some failing or other, and end the relationship. This was her experience with several teachers and she had become a bit dispirited.

She got word about Swamiji and began to attend his talks and even became a follower. In the bottom of her heart, however, she still worried that although she had not yet found any imperfections in Swamiji, she thought that in due course she might discover some defect. One day in New York City she was with Swamiji and other devotees on the first floor of a building that featured a long narrow drawing-room, with high folding-doors at one end, two large windows at the other, and between these a large mirror reaching from floor to ceiling. This mirror seemed to fascinate Swamiji, who was exceptionally handsome, as he would pace to and fro deep in thought and pause before the mirror again and again, gazing at himself intently. Observing this Waldo thought her fears had come true and thought to herself, 'He takes pride in his good looks.'

At that very moment, Swamiji turned to her and said, "Ellen, you see, it is the strangest thing, I cannot remember how I look. I look again and again at myself in the glass, but the moment I turn away I forget completely what I look like." She realised that this was the opposite

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of body-consciousness, as Swamiji was sadalina, that is, established in Brahman Consciousness. For us it is exactly the opposite, seeing our reflection just once, we remember what we look like for a long time.

Upon returning to India after his many efforts in the USA, Swamiji suffered from various ailments including asthma and diabetes, and occasionally experienced acute shortness of breath. Once Swamiji revealed that during his spells gasping for air, he would hear from inside the "Shivoham! Shivoham!" (I am Shiva) mantra as he laboured for each breath. People who suffer from asthma know how difficult it is to breathe during asthma attacks, and how the mind becomes solely focused on the suffering of the body. This incident in the life of Swamiji, however, clearly reveals that he could split his consciousness between the body and the soul, and focus on the soul even during acute physical adversity.

Let me share with you one more example from Swamiji's life illustrating his eternal Brahman Consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna would say 'Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva,' meaning 'Serve man seeing God in him', in other words 'service is worship.' Brahman is omnipresent and dwells in all, which was taught to Swamiji by Sri Ramakrishna.

The episode I want to share in this regard was narrated by Swami Bodhanandaji, a monastic disciple of Swamiji who would later take charge of the New York Vedanta Society. As a young novice, Bodhananda and the other monks lived at the newly founded Belur Math (monastery) with Swamiji. One day Swamiji announced, "Today I shall perform the worship of Sri Ramakrishna." Usually the monks would perform the ritualistic worship of Sri Ramakrishna following the established, written mantras and procedures. But it was known that Swamiji was not very fond of ritual worship, so the resident monks were curious to see how Swamiji would conduct this worship of Sri Ramakrishna and went to the shrine observe. As usual, in the shrine the sandalwood paste and flowers were set out and the necessary utensils of worship had already been prepared for the worship.

Swamiji entered the shrine and sat in front of the photo of Sri Ramakrishna and began to meditate, so the others began to meditate, too. A little time had passed when Bodhananda felt that someone was passing in front of him, but only Swamiji was seated at the front so who could this be? He opened his eyes to see that Swamiji was placing flowers with sandal-paste upon the heads of all the meditating monks. In a usual ritual worship the flowers are offered to the deity first, and then those gathered receive the flowers to offer back to the deity.

In this instance Swamiji first offered the flowers not to the deity, but to the monks who has assembled there. The initial impact of an observer would be that Swamiji had disregarded the norms of ritual worship, which in other words was 'sacrilegious' but he was, in fact, exercising the teachings of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, that Brahman or Shiva dwells in the heart of everyone. Swamiji saw the monks sitting behind him as Shiva and Swami Bodhananda later recalled, "It was as if he had invoked the divinity which was latent within us."

So let us also invoke the divinity within us and always be aware of Its presence in us. •

● A Story to Remember ●

The Power of Gratitude

Narada, the great Indian mystic, is going to see God. Playing on his veena, he passes a forest, and comes across a very old sage sitting under a tree.

The old sage says to Narada, "You are going to God — please ask one question from me. I have been making all kinds of efforts for three lives, how much more is needed? How much longer do I have to wait? When is my liberation going to happen? You just ask Him!"

Narada laughed and said, "Okay."

As he progressed along, under another tree, a young man was dancing and singing in ecstatic joy — very young. May have been only thirty. Jokingly, Narada asked the young man, "Would you also like me to ask any question of God for you? — I am going and your neighbor, the old man, has requested me to ask the Lord a question."

The young man did not reply. He continued his dance — as if he had not listened at all, as if he was not there at all.

After a few days, Narada came back. He told the old man, "I asked God. He said three more lives."

The old man had been doing his Japa on his beads, and he threw the beads in a rage. He threw the scriptures that he was keeping with him, and he said, "This is absolutely unjust! Three lives more?!"

Narada moved to the young man who was again dancing, and he said, "Although you had not answered me, and you had not asked, I asked God about you too. But now I am afraid — whether to tell it to you or not? Seeing the rage of the old man, I am hesitating."

The young man still did not say anything and continued his dance. Narada told him; "When I asked, God said, 'Tell the young man that he will have to be born AS many times as there are leaves on the tree under which he is dancing.'"

At this the young man started dancing even more ecstatically, and he lamented, "So soon?! There are only so many trees in the world, each with limited leaves ... only that much? Only this tree's leaves? Only this many more lives? But then again, I have already attained many lives! When you see the Lord next, thank Him for me."

And it is said the man was liberated at that very moment. Yes, the next moment he became liberated! If there is such a test, such totality of trust, more time is not needed. If there is no trust, then even three more lives are not enough. My feeling is that old man must be around somewhere! He cannot have become liberated yet. Even three more lives won't do. Such a mind cannot become liberated. Such a mind creates the strongest of chains. - Osho

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