



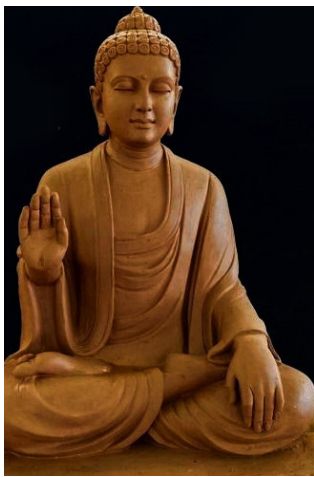
APRIL 2020 - Volume 18 Number 04

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

MAY 2020  
Calendar

## Birthdays



**Sri Buddhadeva**  
Thursday, 07 May

## Zushi Events

We continue social-distancing practices in May and 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 ✧

*"Open your grief-stricken heart to the Lord. Weep and sincerely pray, 'O Lord, draw me towards You; give me peace of mind.' By doing so constantly you will gradually attain peace of mind."*

- Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother

*"Surrender the grasping disposition of your selfishness, and you will attain that sinless calm state of mind which conveys perfect peace, goodness and wisdom."*

- Lord Buddha

Vedanta Society of Japan

## Special Live Stream from the Zushi Centre

Sunday, 05 April 2020

### 'Facing Life's Serious Crises in a Positive Way in the Background of the COVID-19 Pandemic'

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

*Swami Medhasananda (Maharaj) launched into this special Live Stream by chanting 'Om Sahana Vavatu', a Vedic mantra for peace, recited at the beginning of classes:*

(con't page 3)

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## Vedanta Society of Japan

### May 2020 Calendar of Events

As the number of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases continues to rise in Japan, the government has strongly advised that everyone continue social distancing measures and stay at home in order to prevent an explosion of new cases.

For the Month of May the Vedanta Society will continue to provide mental and spiritual support to devotees even when they must stay at home. The new May 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 continue our prayers that the present crisis ends soon by the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, and let our prayers include the good health and wellbeing of everyone during this trying pandemic.

Swami Medhasananda  
President  
Vedanta Society of Japan

#### Link for Live-Streaming of talks

<<https://www.vedantajp.com/映像映像ギャラリー/livestreaming/>>

or visit <<https://www.vedantajp.com>> and follow the links  
Live-streaming starts at 14:00 Japan Standard Time

#### • MAY 2020 Live-Stream Schedule •

- May 3rd (Sun) 2pm–4pm

#### Half Day Retreat at Zushi

Topical Discourse  
(in Japanese only)

- May 10th (Sun) 2pm–4pm

#### The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

(in Japanese Only)

- May 17th (Sun) 2 pm–4 pm

#### Monthly Distance-Retreat Talk

Talk: "Please lead us from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge."

Speaker: Swami Divyanathanandaji

(both in English & Japanese)

- May 24th (Sun) 2 pm–4 pm

#### Discourse on the Bhagavad Gita (in Japanese Only)

Speaker: Swami Medhasanandaji

Please Note: This discourse is NOT at the Embassy of India, Tokyo.

Please have a copy of the Gita at hand to follow the Live Stream.

Again: Link for Live Streaming of talks:

<<https://www.vedantajp.com/映像映像ギャラリー/livestreaming/>>

## 5 April Stream (from page 1)

*Om sahana vavatu - My God protect both teacher and student  
Saha nau bhunaktu - May He nourish us together  
Saha viiryam karavaavahai - May we work together with great energy  
Tejasvi nau-adhiitam-astu - May our studying be effective  
Maa vidvissaavahai - May there be no hate among us  
Om shanti, shanti, shanti - Om peace, peace, peace  
Hari Om Tat Sut*

*Next followed chanting of the Universal Prayer composed in Sanskrit and a most relevant prayer in the context of today's discourse:*

*Om Asato Maa Sad-Gamaya - O God lead us from the unreal to the real  
Tamaso Maa Jyotir-Gamaya - Lead us from darkness to light  
Mrtyor-Maa Amritam Gamaya - Lead us from death to immortality  
Rudra Yatte Dakshinam Mukham Tena Mam Pahi Nityam -  
O God protect us with thy benign face  
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti - Peace, Peace, Peace*

*Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah - May Everyone Be Happy  
Sarve Santu Niraamayaah - Let Everyone Be Healthy  
Sarve Bhadraanni Pashyantu - Let Everyone See What is Good  
Maa Kashcid-Duhkha-Bhaag-Bhavet - Let None Suffer  
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti - Peace, Peace, Peace*

*Om Sarveshaam Svastir-Bhavatu - Let Everyone Be Happy  
Sarvesham Shaantir-Bhavatu - Let Everyone Be Peaceful  
Sarvesham Purnnam-Bhavatu - Let Everyone Be Perfect  
Sarvesham Mangalam-Bhavatu - Let Auspiciousness Befall Everyone  
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti- Peace, Peace, Peace  
Hari Om Tat Sat*

*After Maharaj led the prayers line by line, he asked all to close their eyes for a few minutes of silence - ending with "Om shanti, shanti, shanti - Hari Om" and began his discourse.*

"Dear devotees and friends, our topic today is how we all, but especially devotees, can face the serious crises in life in a positive way. This we shall discuss in the background of the current Corona virus, COVID-19 pandemic, and its sequel. Let us share our thoughts on this topic so that you may give serious thought to it and do the needful.

Let us begin by acknowledging that this virus emerged in China and has rapidly spread becoming a pandemic throughout the world. As such it has disrupted life in many ways and caused a very serious situation in many countries including Japan. The mechanisms of this disease and its ability to so rapidly spread is not clearly known. Prevention and remedies are also not clearly known. No vaccine is yet available, as this is a time consuming matter. Specific treatments to cure this disease are not sure. In this backdrop of confusion and the absence of specific preventative measures, panic has become universal.

## Our Vulnerability Revealed

(con't page 4)

## 5 April Stream (from page 3)

This sense of panic increases with our constant attention to news reports on this problem. Consequently, the constant watching such news broadcasts will make the mind negative. Situations in different countries differ as well. For instance, some countries enforce mandatory confinement, while others do not. Again, in some countries confinement or restrictions in various areas are only voluntary. Confinement has caused mental problems in some and created other problems regarding daily life, for example daily wage earners of those countries where confinement has been made mandatory have been especially hard hit, because they can not go out to work and earn money.

Our discussion will focus mainly on two points: how we should look upon the COVID-19 crisis as a devotee, and secondly, what we should do and think during this crisis. Not only devotees, but common men, leaders in various fields, intellectuals, heads of state, should also ponder this crisis and introspect.

The first thing is this: The present crisis reveals how vulnerable our lives are. At times we feel how helpless we become as neither relatives, money, power, scholarship, nor advanced technologies can be of any help to us. Superpowers know how to intercept missiles from an enemy, but they miserably fail to intercept a tiny virus originating from a foreign country. So we must consider how much we depend on these material things, and ask ourselves whether there is something else to which we can better turn during such a period of utter helplessness.

However, let us thoroughly believe 'This too shall pass,' as have many previous crises in our individual, national, and international lives. For example, earthquakes, tidal waves, wars and outbreaks of diseases like plagues and influenzas have also passed and normalcy has been restored sooner or later. So as devotees let us turn to God and pray to Him for courage and wisdom to face this situation boldly and successfully. Let us also pray for peace and total health of not only ourselves, but of the whole of humanity. We do believe that collectively our sincere and piteous prayers to God will definitely help to address this crisis by His grace. Most of all, we must remember that God is always with us, whether we are well or unwell.

Let us often recall how Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, the Divine Consort of Sri Ramakrishna, and Herself the Divine Embodiment of the Primordial Energy (Shakti) would assure the devotees by saying, "My child, don't be afraid at all. Why should you fear? If none else, I am always with you. I am your eternal Mother." Let me repeat what the Holy Mother said:

'My child, don't be afraid at all. Why should you fear? If none else, I am always with you. I am your Eternal Mother.'

Now let us consider that though the present crisis is indeed of great magnitude adversely affecting normal life in an unprecedented ways, there must be some positive consequence, as well, as has always been the case in the past, and of which we are absolutely unable to imagine at present. One such effect which has already become apparent is that water and air pollution levels have fallen drastically in several areas.

(con't page 5)

## **Spiritualising the Pandemic**

As devotees let us also try to spiritualise the present situation, that is, to connect whatever is happening in or around us to God. We should try to see God, not only in beautiful and wonderful things, but also in the most terrible and dreadful things. As you know, in Chapter XI of the Bhagavad Gita there is a description of the Lord showing His Cosmic Form to Arjuna, and also revealing Himself as Kaala, or time, the devourer of everything. The well known poem of Swami Vivekananda, Kali the Mother, conveys the same Idea, meaning that Mother Kali represents not only the Gracious aspect of God, She represents His Terrible aspect as well. On the one hand She creates this universe and protects it, and on the other, She also destroys. However, there is no destruction in the real sense, there is only the transformation from the gross form of the universe to its subtle form. In the scriptures this process is called 'pralaya,' that is, dissolution from the gross form to the subtle form, and in other words involution of the universe.

All of us should also try to realise the presence of God in existence, including human beings, good or bad, animal beings, and even germs, amoebas, plants, trees, everything. However, while trying to visualise God thus, we need to remember Sri Ramakrishna's practical advise. He said that although God is in evil persons and ferocious animals like tigers, this does not mean we should go near and hug them, rather we need to take precautions to keep ourselves at a safe distance from them.

To spiritualise everything in these ways has a tremendously positive effect. First of all, as a devotee we should try to integrate what we have studied in scripture, for example God is Omnipresent, with our thoughts and actions. If there is anything which we cannot spiritualise or spiritually integrate, we will cause disintegration in our speech, thoughts and actions bringing about a disturbance causing a lack of calmness and peace of mind. On the other hand, if we are successful, even to a small extent in our efforts at spiritualising everything, we will become fearless and peaceful.

## **Mitigate the Dangers**

The most important thing to understand is that becoming panicky creates a negative mental state, and such a state will not abate, but rather aggravate, if we allow it to grow, unless we relentlessly try to stop it by exercising our force of will and divert our mind to positive things. The effects of this state of panic include damage to our physical health, for example, by reducing our immune system, and to our mental health by our loss of peace. Our spiritual health is also impaired by diverting our mind from God and spiritual practices, and focusing only on fear and physical things. So what can we do to mitigate this possible damage?

The first and most important thing is to be aware of the danger, but without becoming panicky. Let me repeat: Be aware of the danger, but without becoming panicky. Secondly, take various precautionary steps to prevent contamination by the disease, some of which you may already be aware of:

## 5 April Stream (from page 4)

- Of these precautionary steps, the first is to stay at home, avoiding close contact with others and congregations of people in necessary outings such as shopping, etc., which should also be minimal

- Wear a mask, carry disease disinfecting alcohol, and wash your hands occasionally even

when out of the house. Upon returning home, disinfect your hands before entering, and after entering wash you hands well with soap and water. Wash you mouth and gargle several times with warm water.

- Take a warm drink every two or three hours thereafter. Also we can practice deep and rhythmic breathing, inhaling and exhaling, a few times in the morning and evening. This will help our respiratory system.

- Some physical exercise is also necessary everyday, free hand or yoga twice a day for some minutes each. This is tremendously helpful to not only enhance the immune system, but helps our digestion, especially while we are not going out and confined at home.

- However, if possible, and we are allowed to, we can also go for a short walk.

- Regular intake of Vitamin C in various forms, including tablets, has also been recommended to enhance our immune system.

### • Thought of the Month •

"Faith in oneself  
is the best and safest course."

- Michelangelo

## Transformative Introspection

When we are home, what should we avoid to prevent negative and weakening thoughts related to the pandemic? First of all, avoid lengthy and repeated attention to pandemic news broadcasts or paying heed to rumours, because there is no end to these dispatches. Watching these dire news reports will have a negative effect on our mental health, as we have already discussed. Also minimise long discussions with family members or friends on this pandemic, as this too will engender anxiety and fear, making us mentally weak and fearful. Rather, think how we can use this time in a more positive and constructive way.

Let us resolve to utilise this time in positive thoughts and actions so that this forced, mandatory confinement for a shorter or longer periods becomes a blessing in disguise. There are several instances wherein forced confinement, taken in a positive way, has become a turning point in the lives of people. One of the greatest examples of this is in the life of Sri Aurobindo, a great saint and philosopher. As an intellectual in the movement for independence from British rule he was imprisoned as a result of an incident, but he radically changed from politics to spirituality due to his realisations and experiences in jail.

Our confinement too, gives us the scope to introspect deeply about the lives we have been leading hitherto with regard to our work, our relationships and our daily way of life. Such introspection will reveal whether we need to make some vital changes in our lifestyle. Thus we can identify any changes we need and think of the methods by which we can bring a transformation into our lives, and then start implementing these changes in a humble way.

## Frame a Transformative Daily Schedule

(con't page 7)

## **5 April Stream** (from page 6)

So now is the time to start some good and beneficial practices and continue them even after normalcy has been restored. As we are not sure how long this confinement will continue, let us make a daily schedule so that we may spend the time in a planned and fruitful way. In this schedule set apart some time for physical exercise, as we already suggested to help our immune system. Also set some time for the study of some serious and elevating books like classical literature and biographies of great men. We can share with family members what we have studied. We should also study scriptures such as The Bhagavad Gita, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, The Teachings of Lord Buddha, and the Bible which teach eternal truths. We should also listen to spiritual discourses via the Internet including ours which have been uploaded to YouTube and linked to our homepage. Then we should do 'manana' (cogitation), that is to ponder over what we have studied, which has been recommended by Vedanta literature as an aid to the deep impact of scripture on our mind.

We can spend some time in cultivating good and enjoyable hobbies such as flower arranging, gardening—if possible, singing, playing music, or just listening to music, or even preparing new dishes for meals.

### **Meditation and Prayer**

Also we should set some time for prayer and meditation. Some of us who practice meditation know how to do it, but it may happen that we only practice for short periods or have not been able to practice sincerely. Let us utilise this period for longer periods of practice, and not only once, but twice a day, both mornings and evenings. As we know, such prayer and meditation will help us physically, mentally and spiritually as well. We should remember that as devotees, we are in a better position to face such crises than those who have no interest and no faith in God. In one sense this is also the time to test our faith in God. If we are fearful and panicky, it shows our study of scripture is but superficial and we have not grown in faith, faith in God or faith in His power of protection.

So let us utilise this time in strengthening our spiritual life to be of help to us, not only now, but in future as well. This is helpful, not only for oneself and our family as well, by being a source of courage, calmness of mind and wisdom.

Clearing the

### **Clearing the Backlog**

If we have any backlog of uncompleted tasks we have been wanting to get to, but just haven't had the time, utilise this time for clearing this backlog, too. There is a story in one of the epics of India, the Ramayana, wherein King Ravana of the Rakshasas wanted to accomplish two great things in his life. First of all, he wanted to construct a stairway from Earth to Heaven, so that everyone could go to Heaven without performing any hard spiritual practice. Ravana was so powerful he thought he could construct such a staircase so that everyone, saint or sinner, could enter and enjoy Heaven by only climbing that stairway. Secondly, as we know, though the oceans are a huge volumes of water, we are unable to drink it because it tastes very salty. Hence Ravana

(con't page 8)



## **5 April Stream** (from page 7)

wanted to change these salty waters into 'kshira' (a delicious thickened milk), so that everyone, (from page 6)freely and to his heart's content, could consume of it and feel immensely happy and be nourished as well. These two charitable ideas remained pending however, while an unethical act, the kidnapping of another's wife, in the person of Sita, Lord Rama's divine consort, he readily did do. Finally, Ravana could not implement his charitable projects, as in the meantime he had been killed by Lord Rama. Thus, what he should not have done, he did first, and what he should have done, he postponed, finally, never doing that which he should have accomplished first. So this is a good time to start that good and beneficial practice which we have wanted to do for a long time. And whatever good practices we have already started, let us do these regularly with more sincerity.

## **A Lot Depends on Us**

With the above, we have offered some guidelines on living in a positive way during our isolation, but the most important thing is that whatever we want to do, we have to do it in a systematic way. I mean, we should not do things haphazardly, otherwise, we cannot utilise this time forced upon us fruitfully. The second great effect of this is the help it brings to control our mind. By making a schedule and asking the mind to follow it, we can keep a grip on the ever restless mind with its vagaries, which will now help us to accomplish what we want to do. Thus, a lot depends on us; whether this forced or voluntary confinement becomes a blessing or not, and, finally, whether it will help to enrich and elevate us or not.

Om Peace! Peace! Peace! " •



## ● A Story to Remember ●

### The Parable of the King's Dream

A king went to bed in his palace, which was guarded on all sides by sentries. Not even a fly could enter it and disturb the king. The bed-room was equipped with every kind of comfort and there was nothing lacking, which enabled the monarch to enjoy the bliss of deep sleep.

Soon after he lay down he had a dream. A jackal had somehow entered the palace, attacked him and had bitten a toe of his left foot. In the meantime he hears the news that enemies have entered his kingdom and taken possession of all things. He flees in fear; but the toe gives him great pain. He runs to a doctor for medical aid. The doctor refuses to treat him as, though he was a king, he had no money to pay for the doctor's fees on the spot, for he had lost his kingdom. As a mendicant he runs away to the forest. There he finds a Mahatma who heals the wounds. Gratitude to the Mahatma wells up in the heart of the ruler, then he wakes up.

The dream vanishes. The king is still lying on his golden bed in the palace which not even a fly could enter. He finds that there is neither the jackal, nor the wound nor his running away to the forest. But the Mahatma's grace endures in his mind, and he, though it was all a dream and he has realised it, for ever cherishes the memory of the holy man's healing service and derives inspiration from it.

Similarly, the Jiva is truly the Supreme Monarch of the Universe. There is nothing lacking in it and it is in possession of supreme bliss- it is bliss itself. Yet, when the veil of ignorance is thrown over it, it dreams. In that dream the jackal of egoism bites it. The enemies of the senses overpower it. The happiness that it so long enjoyed is gone; it experiences pain and misery. It runs here and there in search of relief from misery and in search of happiness. Everyone in the world is selfish. Unless there is immediate benefit from it, no one is prepared to give it even a cup of water. Disgusted with the ways of the world, it runs to the forest-to the lotus-feet of the Sat-Guru. The Guru heals its wounds and awakens its higher soul-consciousness. The awakened soul perceives everything that happened as nothing but a long dream. Gratitude to the Sat-Guru who healed the Jiva of the dire malady of birth-and-death, alone remains.

The Guru's Upadesa and his Grace alone endure when all else that was part of the dream vanishes. The awakened soul once again feels that it is the Supreme Monarch of the Universe, that nothing ever happened to its majesty, that there was no ignorance and no egoism, and that from eternity to eternity it continues to be the self-same Self-all-blissful, peaceful and immortal.

Parables of Sivananda, Divine Life Society

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