



JUNE 2020 - Volume 18 Number 05

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

JULY 2020
Calendar

Birthdays



Guru Purnima
Sunday, 5 July

**Swami
Ramakrishnananda**
Saturday, 18 July

Zushi Events

Because the situation has improved considerably in Japan, the Government has withdrawn the state of emergency and allowed travelling throughout the country, including in and around the Tokyo and Yokohama regions of the Kanto area.

We are glad to announce that we have decided to re-open our monthly programmes for participation to all from July.

Details on page 02!



✠ Thus Spake ✠

"Many are the names of God and infinite the forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form you worship Him, through that you will realise Him."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. I and my Father are one."

- Jesus, the Christ

Vedanta Society Monthly Discourse
Live-Streamed from the Zushi Centre 17 May 2020

'Lead Us from Darkness to Light'
Swami Divyanathananda

A very good afternoon to you all. In Vedanta society of Japan, we have a monthly retreat and at each monthly retreat we start with the prayer:

*asato ma sadgamaya
tamaso ma jyotirgamaya
mrtyorma amrtam gamaya
om shanti shanti shanti*

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Vedanta Society of Japan Calendar of Programmes July 2020

The Society had stopped general participation of its programmes since March of this year because of the state of emergency declared by the Government of Japan, and also to avoid risks of contamination in view of the corona virus pandemic.

Because the situation has improved considerably in Japan, the Government has withdrawn the state of emergency and allowed travelling throughout the country, including in and around the Tokyo and Yokohama regions of the Kanto area. We are glad to announce that we have decided to re-open our monthly programmes for participation to all from July.

However, whether attendees arrive by public transportation or private vehicle, the following precautionary measures need to be followed strictly by attendees:

1. *If you plan to attend scheduled events, please contact: <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>*
2. *Wear masks at all times in the Centre*
3. *Use the hand sanitizer provided at the entrance upon arrival*
4. *Carefully wash hands with soap and water and gargle with tap water (washrooms)*

*Swami Medhasananda
President
Vedanta Society of Japan*

• PROGRAMMES JULY 2020 •

- July 4th (Sat) 2 pm–4 pm - LIVE STREAMING ONLY

Discourse on the Bhagavad Gita (in Japanese Only)

With Swami Medhasanandaji

Live-Streaming <<https://www.vedantajp.com>> and follow the links

Please Note: The Bhagavad Gita study class at the Indian Embassy, Tokyo, suspended since March of this year, will be resumed through livestreaming from the Society until further notice. Also, please have a copy of the Gita at hand to follow the Live Stream.

- July 12th (Sun) 2pm–4pm

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class (in Japanese Only)

If you plan to attend, please contact: <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

- July 21st (Sun) 2 pm–4 pm

Monthly Retreat Talk

Speaker to be announced

(both in English & Japanese)

If you plan to attend, please contact: <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

- July 26th (Sun) 2pm–4pm

Half Day Retreat at Zushi

Topical Discourse (in Japanese only)

If you plan to attend, please contact: <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

Lead Us from Darkness to Light (from page 1)

One translation reads:

Lead us from ephemeral truth to eternal truth

Lead us from darkness to light

Lead us from death to immortality

When we say, lead us from darkness to light, what is the actual meaning of this darkness? Why does darkness occur on this earth? The reason for this phenomenon is- The earth rotates, and that part of the earth facing the sun enjoys daylight, while the other side of the earth has night and is in darkness. At night when there is darkness, it does not mean that the sun is not there at all. The same thing happens when it is cloudy, as well. The sun is there, but we are unable to see it. In the very same way, our real nature is self-luminous, but there is a thick covering of ignorance over our real Self. And hence, the Atman cannot be perceived. So when we pray, 'Lead us from darkness to light ...' we are actually praying for removing this covering of ignorance from mind. When this ignorance is removed the Atman will shine on its own.

Sources of Darkness

Why are we in darkness? We will try to explain this phenomenon from various angles. To begin with, every man, without exception, wants three things. First, everyone wants to live eternally, although everyone knows he must die, yet no one wants to die. The second thing is that we all want happiness—no one says, 'I want misery' or 'I want to be in sorrow' Finally, we have a thirst for knowledge. In our day to day life we find people reading newspapers, or they watch television for news of current affairs, sports, politics, stock markets, films, etc. We always have an interest in knowing what is happening around us. So we are imbued with these three things, we want to live eternally, we want happiness, and we want knowledge. These three are common in every human being.

Why is this so? Because our scriptures declare that our real nature is Sat-Chit- Ananda, or Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. We know, our real nature is Atman, and the Atman is never born, so it never dies, it is immortal. The Atman is Existence Absolute. It is the body that dies, this is the reason that we do not want to die. Every man wants to return to his real nature. We are Knowledge Absolute, but we are seeking knowledge in the external. Again, we are Bliss Absolute, but we are looking for happiness in external things. So, what is actually happening? The infinite is searching into finite things for knowledge, bliss and eternal existence which never comes. This is why it creates endless desires, puts us into bondage, and the Soul is engulfed into darkness.

Now let us look it from another angle—It is said in our scriptures that it is because of Maya that we are bound to this world of dualities. Maya has two powers. In Sanskrit they are called *Avarani-Shakti* and *Vikshepa-Shakti*. *Avarana* means covering—Maya covers the Truth by hiding it. *Vikshepa* means that we mistakenly see one thing for another.

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Lead Us from Darkness to Light (from page 3)

One example of *Avarani-Shakti* is found in 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' where Sri Ramakrishna gives an example from the Ramayana concerning Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. The three were walking, with *Rama* at the front, followed by *Sita* and then *Lakshmana* along a forest path. *Lakshmana* was unable to see *Rama*, because *Sita* was between them. In this example *Sita* represents *Maya*, because *Sita* blocked *Lakshmana's* view of *Sri Rama*, the Lord. In the world, whatever we see before our eyes living and non-living things—men, women, children, young, old, rich, poor, literate, illiterate, trees, mountains, rivers, buildings, all these are actually filled with God. It is because of this *Avarani-Shakti*, this power of *Maya*, that we cannot perceive God behind all these changing entities, and only see the variations.

Next is *Vikshepa-Shakti*, the power of *Maya* that makes us see one thing for another. To illustrate this, an analogy is commonly used in our scriptures. Suppose you step out of your house at night and suddenly you see a snake-like thing lying near your porch. You become frightened and turn on a light to discover that it is not a snake, but actually a rope. When you became frightened it was only a rope, and not a snake. This is what is meant by *Vikshepa-Shakti*, mistaking one thing for another.

Another reason for the covering of our *Atman* is the existence of three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. This concept appears in several chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* and it is explained that these *gunas* bind the soul. *Tamas* binds us by putting us in darkness and delusion. *Rajas* binds by putting us into activity and creates desires and restlessness. *Sattva* binds us as well with knowledge and higher happiness, even though it gives us the desire for liberation.

Sri Ramakrishna explained this phenomenon through an analogy. A rich man was passing through a forest. It was a very dense forest and suddenly he was confronted by three dacoits (robbers). After robbing the man, one dacoit said, "We have robbed him of his wealth, let us kill him." The second dacoit said it would be better to bind the man to tree, the others agreed, and they bound him to a nearby tree and left. After some time, one of these dacoits returned and untied the man and showed him the road leading to his house. The wealthy man appreciated the help of this third dacoit and invited him to visit his house for dinner. He refused, saying the police would certainly be waiting and arrest them all. These three thieves symbolise the three *gunas*; *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The first dacoit who wanted to kill the man represents *tamas*. The second dacoit, who convinced the others to bind the man to a tree represents *rajas*. The third dacoit who returned to release the man and showed him the path home represents *sattva*. *Sattva* shows the path to liberation, and creates virtues like purity and compassion, which lead the way to the Supreme Spirit, but cannot by itself give us liberation. For liberation we must go beyond the three *gunas*. So because of the play of the *gunas*, the soul which is essentially pure, illuminous and free, is bound by ignorance, which is darkness.

Disatisfaction a Blessing

Sri Ramakrishna also said that this world is God's play, and that God wants some fun and does not want us all to attain *mukti* (liberation). He explained through this example: Just as the mother of a household gives her child various toys to keep it occupied, otherwise she can't attend

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Lead Us from Darkness to Light (from page 4)

to her household duties. The child enjoys the play for some time, but a time comes when the child is fully satiated with toys, becomes disinterested, and starts crying for its mother. The mother then comes and takes the child in her lap. In the same way, God gives us various toys too, the ephemeral things—relatives, earthly comforts, riches, etc., and as long as we are quite happy and satisfied with these transient things, we don't feel the thirst for anything beyond. In our case as well, once we become satiated and no longer want all the toys of this world and cry sincerely, the Divine Mother will come and take us in Her arms.

For some fortunate souls, this dissatisfaction comes. They look for something beyond the senses, they don't hanker after comforts, money, relationships, etc. They start looking for eternal happiness. Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) in Jnana Yoga says, 'Religion comes with a tremendous disgust for the present state of things.'

In the Mahabharata there is mention of a King Yayati who, because of a curse, suddenly lost his youth and became very old. One of the king's sons agreed to let him borrow his youth, and thereafter the king enjoyed life for hundreds of years. At the end of his years, however, he realised that none of the things of the world can give one eternal satisfaction.

Tulsidas, the great saint and poet, had a beautiful wife called Ratnavali. He was so infatuated with his wife that he could not live a day without her. One day, as it happened, his wife had returned to her maternal home to visit her parents. The young Tulsidas, finding extremely difficult to live without her, finally made a journey through heavy rains to his in-law's house. Upon his arrival his wife was not very happy to see him and was displeased with his obsession for her. She reprimanded him, saying, if he had this much love for God, he would have realised Him. With this reprimanding, Tulsidas came to his senses and renounced the world, including his wife, devoting himself to spiritual practices and to Ramachandra (Lord Rama). We see here that for a few souls deep dissatisfaction and disgust with the world comes and they devote themselves to spiritual practice.

Removing Darkness

So far we have been talking of the darkness and our topic today is 'Lead Us from Darkness to Light', so let us discuss ways to the light beginning with removing the Atman's covering. In Chapter 7 Verse 14 of the Bhagavad Gita we read:

*daivī hyeṣhā guṇa-mayī mama māyā duratyayā
mām eva ye prapadyante māyām etāṁ taranti te*

*My divine energy Maya, consisting of the three modes of nature, is very difficult to overcome.
But those who surrender unto me cross over it easily.*

• Thought of the Month •

Be still
and the earth
will speak to you.

- Navajo proverb

Lead Us from Darkness to Light (from page 5)

The spiritual practices that we undertake are meant to remove this darkness from the soul. In the centres of Ramakrishna Mission around the world, we sing a devotional song composed by Swami Vivekananda, starting with 'Khandana Bhava ...' during evening vespers (arati), and there comes the line, '*jyotira jyoti ujala-hṛdikandara tumi tamo-bhañjana har*. Actually, this is a prayer to Sri Ramakrishna meaning: *O light of lights, answer our earnest prayer to manifest and shine forth in the cave of our heart. Destroy the darkness of ignorance there, O Lord, destroy the darkness of ignorance.*

In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, we find, a devotee asks Sri Ramakrishna, 'How can we develop devotion to God?' As the doctor prescribes medicine to his patients, Sri Ramakrishna prescribed the following practices:

- Repeat the name of God
- Go into solitude to think of Him and pray to Him
- Discriminate between the real and the unreal
- From time to time seek holy company.

If we follow the Master's prescription faithfully, we will attain devotion to the Lord.

Japa

Repeating the name of God (japa/japam) is a common practice of nearly all religions of the world. Devotees repeat the name of God, and meditate on His attributes and His form. Sri Sarada Devi (Holy Mother) said that as the wind removes the clouds, the name of God removes the clouds of worldliness from our mind. Holy Mother emphasized in Her teachings the importance of japa. Among the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna we find Swamis Brahmanandaji, Shivanandaji, Turiyanandaji, Adbhutanandaji, and several others, too, stressed the importance of japa in their teachings.

Holy Mother said that even if you have no attraction to repeating the name of the Lord, you will gain benefits. How? She said that one becomes wet whether one jumps into the river or one is pushed into the river. So if we repeat the name of the Lord we will derive the benefits.

If we repeat the name of the Lord, our mind will be coloured with the thought of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna gave an analogy of this saying that a white cloth dipped into dye takes on the colour of that dye. In a similar way, in whatever company the mind is kept, the mind will take on the colour of that. The average person's mind is full of worldliness, and as such, he does not much care to think of God. Such a person's mind is filled with mundane thoughts, thoughts pertaining to everyday life, various worries and anxieties, loss and gain, past and future, etc. So Sri Ramakrishna is talking about this average mind, but He says that if one sincerely repeats the name of God, gradually the attributes of God will come to one's consciousness. Faith in God develops, along with such attributes as love, purity, knowledge, etc. Slowly one imbibes all these attributes. So we see that these practices are very helpful in removing the darkness from our heart.

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Prayer

Sri Ramakrishna prescribes another practice with a lot of emphasis. It is prayer. This word appears more than forty times in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. He states that sincere prayer to God is very helpful to lift our mind from its mundane thoughts, and the way to attain devotion. He says to pray to God with yearning and assures us that if our prayers are sincere, He is bound to listen.

We have to learn how to pray from these incarnations and realised souls and all of these teachers stress that our prayer must be sincere. Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples taught us how to pray. They all say our prayers must be accompanied with a feeling of helplessness. Only when we are helpless can we pray sincerely. When we are sure we will get everything by our own efforts, we will not feel the urge to pray. Also as we develop the faith that God is real, kind and compassionate, and that He listens to our prayer—when we develop this kind of faith then our prayer becomes sincere.

A disciple once asked Swami Adbhutanandaji, also known as Lata Maharaj, 'We do not know God, how do we pray to Him? And what is the guarantee that He will listen to our prayers?' Adbhutanandaji then gives a very fitting reply saying that when one applies for a job, one addresses an application to the person in charge and sends it. One does not know that person in charge, but having written and posted a proper application, it is received. In the same way, we may not know God, but if we pray to Him, send it to the correct address, He is bound to listen to it. Thus, surely, He listens to our prayers.

Sri Ramakrishna teaches us how to pray. In the Gospel Sri Ramakrishna addressing the Divine Mother prays, '*O Mother, I throw myself on Thy mercy; I take shelter at Thy hallowed feet. I do not want bodily comforts; I do not crave name and fame; I do not seek the eight occult powers. Be gracious and grant that I may have pure love for Thee, a love unsmitten by desire, untainted by any selfish ends—a love craved by the devotee for the sake of love alone. And grant me the favour, O Mother, that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching maya, that I may never be attached to the world, to 'woman and gold', conjured up by Thy inscrutable maya! O Mother, I do not know how to worship; I am without austerity; I have neither devotion nor knowledge. Be gracious, Mother, and out of Thy infinite mercy grant me love for Thy lotus feet.'*

Again, during our evening vespers we sing a hymn starting with Sarva-mangala-mangalye.... a hymn to the Divine Mother. In this hymn to the Divine Mother is the line, *śaraṇāgata dīnārta paritrāṇa parāyaṇe*. Here *śaraṇāgata* means 'I have taken shelter at thy lotus feet' and in order to practice self-surrender one needs to be *dīna* and *ārta*, which together expresses the state of helplessness & distress. So only when one feels helpless in this world of maya, can one surrender, knowing that God alone can lift us from this ocean. With this bent of mind, with this attitude, we are supposed to pray and to repeat the name of God. Only then will our prayers and our repeating of the name of God be sincere and coming from our heart. As we said earlier, when the child cries the mother comes. Prayer, is also the cry of the soul to the Divine Mother, the soul of our souls to lift us up from this ocean of darkness.

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Lead Us from Darkness to Light (from page 7)

Swami Shivanandaji (Mahapurush Maharaj), a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the second president of the Ramakrishna Order, emphasised prayer and repeating the name of God again and again in his teachings and in his letters. In one such letter Shivanandaji says:

“Repeat the name of the Master as much as you can. Let your mind be fully occupied with this. Your mind will be so filled with this you will not miss anything whether it is material, moral or spiritual. You miss those things when you lack in love of God or faith in Him. Contentment is a great treasure, contentment is a natural sequel to love of God.

Pray with great fervour, cry like a petulant child, asking for whatever you want and keep repeating His name, His holy name, the name that liberates and on which the Almighty has bestowed all His power. This will remove all your sins and evil tendencies accumulated through numerous lives.

It is precisely to bring this about that the Lord has left His abode, the abode where there are no illusions, and assumed a human form to play the role of a Divine Incarnation. He is now Ramakrishna in name as well as in form. He has this name and form only to help us go beyond all names and forms and attain the world of absolute peace. We become victims of depression when we lose faith in God.

In ‘Om Hrim Ritam’, the arati bhajan (prayer song) I mentioned earlier, we sing the lines:

*tejas taranti tvaritaṁ tvayi tṛpta-tṛṣṇāḥ
rāgaṁ kṛte ṛtapathe tvayi rāmakṛṣṇe*

This ṛtapathe here means that He is the symbol of truth and also the path by which we reach the truth. This means we take the name of God, meditate on His forms and on His noble attributes. We pray to Him and sing His glories. We work to please Him. So actually, what is happening? We are taking His support to attain Him. Then tejas taranti tvaritaṁ tṛpta-tṛṣṇāḥ means that one who develops love for God, for His name and form, can very soon cross this ocean of samsara, this ocean of worldliness.

If we analyse why we are bound to this world, it is due to the concept of ‘I and mine’. Because of our ego we feel, I am a man or woman, I am rich or poor, etc., and then my parents, my house, my family, my profession, my likes, my dislikes, etc. All these stem from the concept of ‘I and mine’ and that is why we are deluded and bound to this world. Spiritual practices help to remove this ‘I and mine’ slowly from our soul, and gradually God takes the possession of our ‘I and mine’. This is what Sri Ramakrishna referred to as the ‘unripe I’ merging into the ‘ripe I’. The ‘unripe I’ says ‘I am so and so, I am educated, I am illiterate, I am rich, I am poor, I am the son or daughter of such and such person’ etc. But the ‘ripe I’ says, I am the child of God. Spiritual practices help us to lift us from the unripe to the ripe I.

Discriminate Between the Unreal and the Real

In addition to prayer and repetition of the name of God, Sri Ramakrishna asks us to

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Lead Us from Darkness to Light (from page 8)

discriminate between the unreal and the real. It is very important for us to analyse and think what is permanent and what is not temporary. If we do not discriminate, we may follow spiritual practices for a few days and when we get caught up again in the attractions of the world, we may discontinue our practices. So for our practices to be sincere these things must go together. In the Bhagavad Gita we find a verse in the thirteenth chapter:

*Indriyarthesu vairagyam anahankaram eva cha
Janma-mrityu-jara-vyadhi dukkha dosha anudarshanam*

In the above verse sri Krishna advises us to look into the defects of birth, death, old age & disease. In Buddhism they have the practice of meditation on impermanence and death. They advise the aspirants to contemplate on impermanence—there is happiness and misery, birth and death, youth and old age. All these changing phenomena are not permanent, and behind all these phenomena there is only one truth. Studying holy books and scriptures is also very helpful to bring thoughts of the impermanence of all things and the permanence of God to our mind again and again.

The Light of Knowledge

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, we find the Master saying that we have to light the light of knowledge in our heart. What does this mean? Well, In olden times before electricity was discovered, people used candles and lamps for lighting their houses. The poor could not afford many lamps, while the rich could afford several lamps and enjoy more light. But Sri Ramakrishna said it is the lamp of knowledge that must be lit in our heart. There are many people around us who become successful in life in the worldly sense. Many acquire great wealth, some acquire extra-ordinary talent and become celebrities, but according to Sri Ramakrishna, the only aim of life is to realise God and all other efforts are in vain. Sri Ramakrishna stresses this again and again. There are some rare, fortunate souls who, by pursuing spiritual practices sincerely as prescribed by the scriptures, realise the presence of God in their heart and in everybody else, too. When they have His vision, the knots of the heart are then un-tied and they realise that they are essentially pure, Sat-Chi-Ananda. This can happen to us as well, as it can happen to anybody who strives for it, and then alone can we say the light of knowledge has been lit in our heart.

It is a common phenomenon that when a baby is born it cries, and hearing this cry everyone present rejoices, because the cry means it is a normal child. Then in time the child becomes an adult, and with old age the man dies and all around him cry. An average man has many unfulfilled desires and does not want to leave this world. They are very reluctant to leave their body and suffer a lot. However, if we, the devotees can feel our oneness with God and feel separate from this body and mind, then we will laugh at our time of death while those around us weep! So our goal should be to perform practices sincerely and go to that abode where there is no more darkness, no more death, no more coming and going, and attain immortality.

So let us all pray to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda to lead us from darkness to light.

Thank you very much. •



Swami Divyanathananda with translator Leonardo Alvarez



Swami Medhasanandaji introduces Swami Divyanathanandaji on Live-Stream

● A Story to Remember ●

The Parable of the Nobleman's Charity

There was a millionaire in a small town who was famed near and far for the magnanimity of his heart. People would compare him with Karna of the Mahabharata, who never refused anything to anybody.

One day a poor Brahmin approached him for help. The Brahmin narrated to the millionaire all his difficulties and pleaded for help, to which the rich man said: "I will certainly do what I can to help you," and sent the Brahmin away. Soon after, the millionaire sent the Brahmin plenty of gold, rice and other provisions, silk clothes and furniture. The poor Brahmin was beside himself with joy. He never expected so much. He only expected Rs. 5 or so, but what he received was worth over a thousand rupees.

To the rich man, the gifts were nothing. He even felt that the poor Brahmin might not be satisfied with what he gave. So he had more things sent to the Brahmin; and the Brahmin was doubly grateful for this, too. "Without even giving me the trouble of carrying away all this by myself, the noble man has sent them through his own servants," he thought with supreme gratitude. Thereafter, he entered the millionaire's service and served him throughout his life.

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The millionaire here is God; and the poor Brahmin is a pious Sadhaka (spiritual practitioner). Troubled on all sides by innumerable desires and cravings, the Sadhaka resorts to the lotus-feet of the Lord, for relief from them. Through prayer and meditation, he approaches the Lord. He feels His divine Presence within him. He receives the assurance from the Lord that His Grace will descend on him. Lo, behold! The flood of Grace very soon washes out all the Trishnas and Vasanas and fills the Sadhaka's Antahkarana (internal cause) with golden virtues, food-grains of knowledge, clothing of Vairagya (detachment) and the other items of Sadhana-Chatushtaya (paths of salvation), and the furniture (ideal seat) of meditation and Samadhi.

To the Almighty these are nothing, for He can even confer Indrahood and Bramanhood on his devotees. But for the Sadhaka, they mean something invaluable. The Sadhaka is thrilled to feel that the Lord did not even wait till he had departed from this world and gone to His Abode, but had sent His gifts to the Sadhaka's own abode-this world. Filled with supreme devotion, the Sadhaka ever afterwards serves the Lord and dedicates himself to the dissemination of His Glory and His Lilas.

- Parables of Sivananda, Divine Life Society

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