



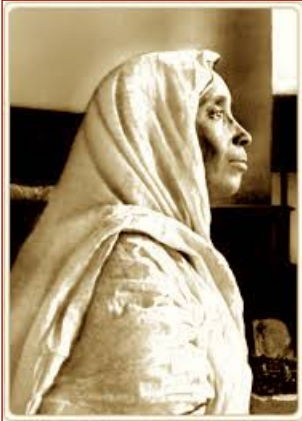
DECEMBER 2020 -VOLUME 18 NUMBER 12

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

JANUARY 2021 Calendar



Birthdays

**Sri Sri Ma
Sarada Devi**

Tuesday, 5 January

Swami Shivananda

Saturday, 9 January

Swami Saradananda

Tuesday, 19 January

Swami Turiyananda

Wednesday, 27
January

Zushi Events

We are pleased to invite you to participate in a few monthly Zushi programmes again. Some classes both Streaming and Zoom!

Details on page 02!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind, in Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"All things, whatsoever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

- Jesus Christ

December Zushi Monthly Retreat 2020 **'Assimilation in Spiritual Life' - Part 4 of 4** by Swami Medhasananda

At the end of our last session we shared one story of Hafez whose faithful practice was to light candles and pray at the gravesite of a Sufi saint nightly without exception. As a result of this dedicated single practice without a break, he was prevented from an intimate liaison with a woman of ill repute, and instead, he was blessed to meet angels and drank of the nectar of God's love. Moreover, by his devout practice the immoral woman was also saved. This was but one example of the success resulting from faithful practice, the main point of which being that concentrating on one practice alone can bring about the highest success.

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Vedanta Society of Japan
Calendar of Programmes
JANUARY 2021

We are pleased to remind one and all that we have re-opened our monthly programmes for participation to all. In addition to our LIVE-STREAMING of many events:

1. If you plan to attend scheduled events, please contact us at: <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>
2. Wear masks at all times in the Centre
3. Use the hand sanitiser 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

• **ZUSHI CENTRE PROGRAMMES for JANUARY 2021** •

New Weekly Upanishads Class * No Live Streaming *

From 13 January 2021 every Wednesday morning from 8:30 a 45 minute "Weekly Upanishads Class" will begin. Anyone can participate, but the Japanese text published by the society, "Upanishads" is required. More details to follow.

• **January 1st (Fri)**

New Year's Kalpataru

14:00 Departure from Zushi Centre - Pilgrimage to Great Buddha of Kamakura, Yukinoshita Catholic Church and Tsurugaoka Hachimangu

• **January 3rd (Sun)**

Nara Narayana Service to the Homeless — New Year's Soup Service

Inquiries to Sato-san [urara5599(at mark)gmail.com]

• **January 10th (Sun) 14:00pm–16:00pm (Live Streaming and Zoom)**

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

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

• **January 13th (Wed) 08:30 to 09:15**

Weekly Upanishads Class * No Live Streaming *

• **January 17th (Sun)**

Monthly Zushi Retreat

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi Birth Celebration

11:00 to 16:30- Livestreaming of bi-lingual discourse only

If you plan to attend please reserve, especially for lunch, by the 11th Jan.

• **January 20th (Wed) 08:30 to 09:15**

Weekly Upanishads Class * No Live Streaming *

• **January 23rd (Sat) 14:00 to 16:00**

Baghavad Gita Study Class * No Live Streaming *

Please Note: The Bhagavad Gita class at the Indian Embassy, Tokyo, is resumed with restricted attendance as per COVID-19 protocols. <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com> Please bring photo ID. Also, if you cannot attend, video of the class will be uploaded on the Society's website later .

• **January 27th (Wed) 08:30 to 09:15**

Weekly Upanishads Class * No Live Streaming *

• **January 31st (Sun) 14:00 to 16:00**

Half-day Retreat (Live Streaming)

Zushi Centre (Japanese only) <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

How to Assimilate Spiritual Truths

Today we will discuss various methods for assimilating spirit truths. From these we may choose one or two, or a few more practices that suit us, because assimilation of spiritual truths is most important for our progress and without practice there can be no such assimilation leading to the realisation of the Truth of God. In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* Sri Ramakrishna tells us that God Himself has provided different forms of worship:

“The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children. Suppose she has five children. If there is a fish to cook, she prepares various dishes from it — pilau, pickled fish, fried fish, and so on — to suit their different tastes and powers of digestion.”

Again, if we intend to practice one or more of these methods, Patanjali advises to practice such methods continuously and to practice for years. We have also discussed the ideas of practicing ‘asupte’ and ‘amrite’ in Sanskrit, meaning one should practice from the time one wakes up till one sleeps and until death (Part 3- In the November Issue).

There are four points to bear in mind while practicing one or more of the methods we are about to discuss:

- First, we have to control our senses and our mind.
- The second is contentment—to remain content.
- The third is determination. There is a saying in English, ‘do or die’.

Swami Trigunatitananda was the third direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna to lead and nurture the Vedanta Society in San Francisco. He was known to hang English phrases on the ashram wall to inspire his Western devotees. On one such wall hanging was the saying ‘Do or Die’ to which he had penned ‘But you will Not die!’ (laughter) So don’t worry.

In the Gita, too, Sri Krishna encourages Arjuna that on the battlefield one kills or will be killed. If he dies in battle he will go to heaven, if he is victorious he will enjoy the kingdom. Krishna stresses there is no loss here, because in a positive sense if he is killed, he will ascend to Heaven.

With all our efforts along the spiritual path, no effort is ever wasted and all will be counted. However, not all our efforts to achieve worldly gain, name, fame, riches, will be successful, and we are more likely to lose much.

- The fourth point to bear in mind is from Swami Vivekananda who urged us to: “Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.”

Various Methods for Assimilating Spiritual Truths

Practicing Jnana Yoga

1) First is the practice of Jnana Yoga or the yoga of negation; I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am not the Buddhi, I am the Atman. I am Sat Chit Ananda; pure existence, pure consciousness and pure bliss. I am eternal and infinite.

Here again we must apply, asupte and amrite, always, time and time again, and never give up. Why? Because our body consciousness is so strong, we have been practicing body consciousness daily since our very birth. The instant we stop our spiritual practice our body or mind consciousness returns to the fore. So our practice must be repeated and repeated until we become established in that state of consciousness.

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Practicing Meditation

2) Second is the practice of Meditation. We can practice according to the methods found in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras explaining the topic of meditation, the preparation for meditation, the objectives of meditation, the obstacles to meditation, and the results of meditation. Understanding these five components we should then practice. Regarding the length of time one meditates, there are two ways to practice. We can begin with long periods or a few much shorter periods. Many people cannot sit for long periods, especially when they are new to meditation, but to meditate for shorter periods during the day and a little longer periods in the mornings and evenings. We may recall here that no matter how busy they are, devout Muslims say their prayers five times a day. Eventually, with practice, one will naturally want to sit for longer meditations. We have discussed meditation techniques at length in other discussions, and as I've just mentioned, one can study Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms to learn more.

Practicing the Repetition of God's Holy Name

3) Third is the practice of repeating a mantra of the holy name of God with the idea that the name of God and God are one and the same, they are identical. By repeating continuously the name of God or the mantra given to us by our Guru or a spiritual teacher, we achieve connectedness with God.

It is written in *The Eternal Companion* that Swami Brahmanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, would often repeat, "japa, japa, japa," or japam, meaning repetition of the Lord's name. Compared to the four traditional yogas, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga, he termed the continuous repetition of the Lord's name, japam, resulting in maintaining a connectedness to God, as Sahaja Yoga, or easy yoga. For some the path of discrimination and unselfish work or ritualistic worship is not easy to follow, but Sahaja Yoga requires no special preparation, no special place, nor any special time. One can practice japam anywhere, at any time, whether the place is neat or messy, whether at work or at rest.

A young monk once approached Swami Shivanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and complained that his mind was not stable, that he was suffering from stress, and that he was, therefore, unhappy. Shivanandaji said he would teach the young monk a 'secret yoga', saying that the monk must work with his body and his hands, but that he should continuously repeat the name of God with his mind. He advised that if the monk followed this advice, he would become happy and even if faced with great trouble, his mind would be at peace and without fear.

While this is the 'easy' method, the challenge is to keep the mind on the mantra and on God. We may set out fully intent on the practice of japam, but the mind begins to wander to things of the past or to future imaginings, or to work issues and other unrelated things. Soon the mind becomes restless and japam repetition loses its continuity for a few minutes or several minutes, and we lose track. This happens unconsciously. We know we intend to think of God, but the mind has been immersed in worldly concerns so often and for so long, that it just runs off. The mind has functioned regarding worldly matters for so long it is difficult to counteract this impulse of the mind.

For those of you here who want to know more about the practice of japam, please read *The Eternal Companion*, a book on Swami Brahmanandaji and his teachings we offer in Japanese. Some have been so impressed by this book that they began to visit our Vedanta Society after reading it.

• Thought of the Month •

"A journey of a thousand miles
begins with one step."

- Lao Tsu

The Practicing of Truthfulness

4) The next practice is to always be truthful. Keep one's word and always abide by the truth. Sri Ramakrishna said that truthfulness is the special spiritual discipline of the Kali Yuga, when falsehood is rampant. In doing so, one's body, mind, speech and action become one, our inner self and our outer self become one.



One criteria by which to measure our truthfulness, or to say our spiritual progress, is by how many secrets we have comparing our past to our present. The more we practice truth the fewer secrets we'll have. Secret keeping is a contradiction to the practice of truth. The devotee who practices truth has no need of secrets, because by controlling his mind and senses he eliminates the source of secrets and to have no need of them. The devotee's action, mind and speech are on par, which helps them to become truthful. Hence, let us never have need of secrets like the Jekyll & Hyde character; a helpful practicing physician, Dr. Jekyll, by day, but the evil monster Hyde by night. Let's have no Hyding or hiding.

Another important aspect of this practice of truth is that we must keep every promise we make! If the words come from us we must do as we said. Sri Ramakrishna's life exemplified this very well. When visiting the homes of devotees meals or refreshments were often prepared and served. If Sri Ramakrishna was not hungry at that time, he would say that he would not eat. Some time later, if he felt hungry, because he had said he would not eat, he would remain hungry because he had said he would not eat. To one devotee, who lived nearby the Dakshineswar Temple, he had promised to visit that day. He had completely forgotten this promise, only remembering around midnight. He woke another devotee staying with Him at Dakshineswar, explained the situation, and together with a lamp they walked to the devotee's house. Upon arrival the household was dark and it appeared all were asleep, so Sri Ramakrishna set his foot inside the entry of the house, and quietly announced he had arrived before returning to Dakshineswar.

Truth Alone Triumphs

I would like to share a story I often remember hearing from one of the monastic teachers at our Brahmachari training centre at Belur Math, where novices train for two years. The theme of this story is 'the practice of truth and the sacrifices one has to be prepared to make to practice it.'

A king once announced he would hold a bazaar held near the palace. He invited all, including artisans, shopkeepers and the general public to take part in buying and selling, saying that whatever remained unsold he would purchase himself. Many people arrived selling goods from vegetables to sweets, and artisans and craftsmen making all sorts of items, including figurines of gods and goddesses. There were statuettes of Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva, Parvati, etc. Now, while Lakshmi is the goddess of fortune and wealth, there is also her opposite, Alakshmi, the goddess of misfortune and poverty, and one artisan had fashioned a statue of Alakshmi and brought it to the bazaar to sale, too.

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Assimilation - Part 4 (from page 5)

The bazaar was a success, but upon closing it was found that the one statue of Alakshmi had not been sold. This the king purchased as promised and took to his palace. Taking a walk very early one morning few days later the king happened upon a most beautiful and radiant woman adorned in the finest materials and jewels leaving the palace. When the king asked who she was and where she was going, she introduced herself as 'Lakshmi' and said she had come to say goodbye to the king. The king became dismayed and asked her why she must leave the palace. She answered that she and Alakshmi cannot dwell in the same house and left. The king thought to himself this cannot be helped and took it in stride.

A couple of days later again on his morning walk the king was visited by the luminous form of Saraswati the goddess of knowledge, music, art, wisdom and learning, dressed in white. As she was leaving the palace he asked who she was. Informed that she was Saraswati, she too told the king that she had to leave the palace because she and Lakshmi were twin and they live together, and since Lakshmi had already left the palace, she must leave too. Without Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth in the palace, the king had already become poor. Now, without the wisdom of Saraswati in the palace the king's court of scholars would soon leave too, but the king took her departure in stride too.

Some mornings later the king saw another radiant figure with an elephant's head. This was Ganesha, the god of wisdom, success and good luck, who informed the king he must leave the palace. When the king asked why he was leaving, he replied that if Lakshmi cannot stay and Saraswati cannot stay, then he too must go. Ganesha is the god of success, and without Ganesha, the king was sure to face hardship. So be it, thought the king.

Again after a few mornings he witnessed a large, powerful, yet radiant man leaving the palace. 'Who are you?' asked the king. The god explained that he was the deity Karthika, the general of the army of gods and the bestower of power and courage. He said that since Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Ganesha had departed he too must leave the palace. This, too, cannot be helped thought the king.

Not long after this the king noticed a bright, elderly figure quietly sneaking slowly away from the palace. The king approached and asked who he was. "Dharma" said the figure. Dharma is the god of duty, virtue, morality and all such virtues. The king again asked why he too was leaving and he replied since Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesha and Karthika were gone, he too must leave. This time the king intervened and commanded. "I forbid you to leave!"

"Why should I stay?"

"Because I have sacrificed everything for you! I have lost wealth, learning, success, and the protection of the army of god's, all just for keeping my promise!"

The god Dharma had to acquiesce to the king's just claim and slowly returned to the palace. Consequently, one by one the other gods and goddesses who had left the palace returned as well, because the god Dharma is supreme among them all.

The moral of the story is that one must be ready to sacrifice much in keeping one's word; however, it is Truth that triumphs in the end. There is a mantra in Sanskrit "satyameva jayate nānṛtaṃ" which means " - Truth alone triumphs; not falsehood. We may go through many trials and tribulations to get there, but in the end truth will prevail.

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Purifying the Body, Mind and Senses

5) To become pure is very important for spiritual life, and that is dependent on our ability to control our mind and senses. Controlling one's senses is not only controlling one's sexuality and the practice of celibacy, but in a more comprehensive way, controlling our pride, controlling our anger, controlling our jealousy, etc. So this controlling of the senses is more of a comprehensive effort than that which is usually first considered.

In the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 16, Verse 21) we read:

*tri-vidhaṁ narakasyedaṁ dvāraṁ nāśhanam ātmanaḥ
kāmaḥ krodhas tathā lobhas tasmād etat trayam tyajet*

Sri Krishna here says there are three gates that lead to hell; one is lust, one is anger, and one is greed. Unless we try to abandon these three, it will be difficult for us to assimilate spiritual truths.

In the Bible (Matthew 5:8) we read:

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"

This shows that the practice of purity is also emphasised in other religions. In fact, purity is the basis of spiritual life. If we are to practice purity, we must also practice sticking to truth, as these two are intertwined, one to the other. There is a Hindi quote that says, 'if one practices one thing thoroughly everything is achieved, but if one pursues everything, nothing is achieved.'

See God at All Times and in All Beings

6) During our Gospel Class we have discussed in detail how to see God within and without, and seeing God in all things and in all beings. See God in nature. See God in every situation we observe or find ourselves in, whether we are in a nice, comfortable situation or a most troublesome situation, see God in both. Spiritualise everything! Spiritualise our everyday life. Know that everything happens by the will of God in order to train us, and if we remain aware of this, we will not grumble or despair about it.

There is a story to illustrate this point about a king and his minister:

In this abbreviated version of the story there is a king and his minister. This minister would always say to the king that everything happens by the will of God, and that it happens for our good. Once they went hunting into the forest and the king cut his finger and as the minister tended to the king's wound, he repeated that this incident, too, was by the will of God and that it happened for some good. This statement infuriated the king who pushed the minister into a nearby well. The king left the minister there and continued on his way.

Along the way the king was captured by a tribe of thieves who decided they would offer this king in sacrifice to the image of a goddess in hopes she would grant and fulfil their desires, evil though they were. They proceeded with the king to their encampment and prepared him for sacrifice, when they realised that one condition of such a sacrifice is that the body must not reveal even a minor defect. Detecting the bandaged cut on the king's finger, they sent the king away unharmed. At that moment the king realised the words of the minister, "Everything happens by the will of God, and that's for our good," was indeed true.

Assimilation Part - 4 (from page 7)

Filled with remorse for pushing his minister into the well in anger, he went back and rescued him. The king apologised to the minister saying that he finally understood that everything happens by the will of God, but asked what was good about the minister being pushed into the well? The minister replied that had he been captured too, he would surely have been sacrificed since he had no wounds.

This story illustrates how both the comfortable and the distressing situations we experience have all been arranged by God for our training. So see God at all times; in all beings, and in all situations we may find ourselves in.

We Are All Instruments of God

7) The next method to help us assimilate spiritual teachings is to know that we are instruments of God. Whatever talents, powers and assets we have are all gifts of God to us. We have to use them to do the Lord's work as His instruments. We have to depend on God for the results of those works, and finally, we have to offer those results to God. We have to repeat always, as Sri Ramakrishna advised, 'O Lord, not I but Thou.' Thy will be done.

This idea is beautifully illustrated in a Bengali song Sri Ramakrishna loved to sing, which conveys the idea that we are the machines and the Lord is the operator; we are the chariot and the Lord is the charioteer; we are the house and the Lord is the indweller. By putting this idea into practice, one can successfully perform Karma Yoga. Details of this Karma Yoga has been explained both in the *Bhagavad Gita* and Swami Vivekananda's gospel work entitled *Karma Yoga*.

This Too Shall Also Pass

8) Another truth to remember and practice is 'This too shall also pass.' Our very being, our wealth, our relatives, our friends, everything will pass. If we are in the cold of winter, or the heat of summer, or enjoying spring or autumn, these too will pass. Both pleasant and unpleasant situations will pass. The only thing which does not pass or change is God. If we constantly remember this, no matter what situation we find ourselves in, we can remain equipoise with stability of mind. Not only that, it will help us to become free from worldly desires and attachments and get us established in renunciation.

Contentment

9) Another practice is contentment. Accept what comes or doesn't come, and be content with that. There is a saying that the most valuable treasure is contentment, not riches. Let us recollect the Japanese catchphrase: 'Happy with, happy without, and happy as if it never was or is to be'. A man whose wants are minimal is really rich; on the other hand, even a rich man whose wants are plenty is actually poor. It becomes easier for the contented mind to assimilate spiritual truths.

Fault-Finding

10) Most of us know of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's last message given to a devotee which we now quote:

"Let me tell you one thing, my child. If you want peace, do not look into anybody's faults. Rather look into your own faults. Learn to make the world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own."

We have discussed our fault-finding nature before a few times and determined that we

(con't page 9)

Assimilation Part - 4 (from page 8)

should not be like the common house-fly, but we should be like the honeybee. Flies are fond of filth, but honeybees are only attracted to the sweet nectar of flowers. Likewise we should only see the positive aspects of people, the negative aspects are fodder for flies. The danger of our chronic fault-finding is that by constantly dwelling on the faults of others, we may imbibe those very faults ourselves. Moreover, our finding of faults ensues from our feeling of superiority to others, which



results in enhancing our ego. Not only that, seeing the faults of others does not help us, while seeing the good in others enriches us. In order to be like the honeybee we need to have universal love for everyone. This universal love requires us to be unselfish, and without this universal love, we cannot practice Holy Mother's last message on fault-finding and find peace. If we practice seeing God at all times and in all beings, the practice of universal love becomes easier.

Helping Others

11) Finally, we should try to help others as much as possible and practicable. Our ideal should be to offer what help we can without expecting any return. Be like the cow or the tree. Why? Most everything they give us, they do not enjoy themselves. The simple tree gives us shade and oxygen. Fruit trees give us flowers and the fruits they bear feed us and other creatures. They offer shelter and rest for the birds at night. We have never witnessed a mango tree eating its own mangoes. Even after death trees give us fuel for fire to heat and cook. Felled trees give us housing. Cow manure gives us fertiliser, disinfectants and fuel. Cows give their calves milk, and give us milk, butter and cheese. Even after death their hides have long provided leather for clothing and footwear. Even their horns are used as ornaments.

There are also examples of human beings who were not only munificent while they lived, they expressly will that their cadavers be used for specific humanitarian purposes including scientific research. We should ponder how much our day to day life depends on the service and sacrifice of innumerable people, plants and trees, animals, birds and fishes. So how can we afford to live selfishly thinking only about accepting from others and not giving anything back in return. Let us recall here this famous statement by Albert Einstein:

"A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depends on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the measure as I have received and am still receiving."

A self-centric life makes us narrow, attached and peace-less, but an altruistic life makes us large-hearted, detached and peaceful, which is conducive to the assimilation of spiritual truths.

In closing

The criteria to determine whether or not we are truly assimilating spiritual teachings are that our body and mind are becoming ever purer. We are focusing on God ever more. Our daily practice and discipline is 'charity to all, malice to none,' and our love for all is steadily increasing. •

● A Story to Remember ●

A King And His Hawk

A king had trained a hawk for purposes of hunt and reconnoitre. He used to take the hawk with him whenever he went out. As the king and his huntsmen were riding home through a dry valley the king felt very thirsty. As he rode along the valley he found, to his great joy, water seeping down the edge of a rocky ridge. He at once dismounted and held out his silver goblet to collect some water. Meanwhile, his pet hawk flew off and began to circle high above the ridge.

After some time, when the cup was full, the king raised it to drink the crystal clear water with great eagerness. But before he could do so, the hawk suddenly swooped down from above and flapped its wing against the cup, so that all the water was spilled.

The king looked up and saw his pet hawk alight upon the top of the ridge from where the water trickled down. He picked up the cup and held it again to collect the trickling drops. He had to wait a long time until the cup was full, and then when he was about to drink the water, the hawk dived down as before and knocked out the cup from the king's hand.

The king grew very angry at this, but collected the water again with great patience, and for the third time the hawk did not allow the king to drink it.

The king was furious by now and drew out his sword and shouted at the hawk: "This is the last time. If you prevent me from drinking the water, you will pay with your life." Again he collected the water patiently, and this time with his sword in hand as he raised the cup to drink the water. This time as well the hawk swooped down and knocked the cup out of the king's hand, but as it did so, the king slew the hawk with a quick slash of his sword.

"Now you had your lesson!" he shouted. And as he looked for his cup, he saw that it had fallen inside a crevice where he could not reach it. So he began to climb up the rockface to drink from the water's source. When he reached the top he found a pool of water and floating inside a dead poisonous snake. The king was stupefied. He no longer remembered his thirst, but only thought of his hasty action which resulted in the killing of the hawk which had saved his life. The king then resolved, "I have learnt a bitter lesson today – to never do anything in haste."

Haste is the mother of grief. Develop discriminative power. Think well, and then act. Look before you leap.

Selected from Divine Life Society

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