

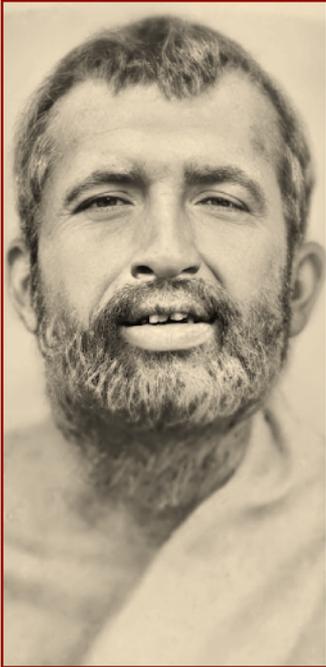


SEPTEMBER 2020 - Volume 18 Number 09

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

October 2020 Calendar



Birthdays

There are no birthdays of note in October of 2020 according to the Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac

Zushi Events

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

Details on page 02!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"The man who works for others, without any selfish motive, really does good to himself."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"The illusion of self originates and manifests itself in a cleaving to things. The desire to live for the enjoyment of self entangles us in the net of sorrow."

- Lord Buddha

Zushi Monthly Retreat August 2020
Sri Krishna Birth Celebration

'A Few Incidents from Sri Krishna's Divine Play' A talk by Swami Divyanathananda

Today we all have gathered here to celebrate the birth of Sri Krishna. We began the day with chanting of hymns, singing of devotional songs and recitations from *The Bhagavad Gita*. Now let us talk and contemplate on His life and teachings.

Supreme Brahman, who is without any form or attributes, from time to time incarnates in human form with divine attributes for the good of the world, although He is beyond both birth and death. He des-
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Vedanta Society of Japan Calendar of Programmes OCTOBER 2020

The Vedanta Society of Japan had discontinued 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 any risks of contamination in view of the corona virus pandemic.

Since travel restrictions around Tokyo have been lifted, we are glad to announce that we have re-opened our monthly programmes for participation to all from July. In addition to our LIVE-STREAMING we now offer some classes on ZOOM as well, to better facilitate Q&A.

Contact us about Zoom at: zoom.nvk@gmail.com

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

- 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 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 OCTOBER 2020 •

- **October 3rd (Sat) 2 pm–4 pm (Live Streaming and Zoom)**

Discourse on the Bhagavad Gita (in Japanese Only)

With Swami Medhasanandaji

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

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

- **October 11th (Sun) 2pm–4pm (Live Streaming and Zoom)**

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

(in Japanese Only) <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

- **October 18th (Sun) 2 pm–4:30 pm (Live Steaming - No Zoom)**

Monthly Retreat

Topic: 'Assimilation in Spiritual Life' - Part 3 of 3

(in both English & Japanese)

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

- **October 25th (Sun) 2pm–4pm (Live Steaming - No Zoom)**

Half Day Retreat at Zushi Centre

Text: 'Meditation in Spiritual Life' (in Japanese only)

Q&A available by email only - <benkyo.nvk@gmail.com>

cends to the earth in order to destroy evil from the world and to establish righteousness. The main purpose of His incarnation is to turn our mind Godward, for it will be easier to think of Him and meditate on His human aspects, if we develop a loving relationship with Him. The scriptures prescribe meditation on His form, on His attributes, and on His divine play as sure ways of developing love for Him.

• **Thought of the Month** •

"The best way to find yourself
is to lose yourself
in the service of others."

- Mohandas K. Gandhi

Sri Krishna's Birth

There once was a powerful and tyrannical King, called Kansa, living in Mathura, who arranged for his sister, Devaki, to marry Vasudeva, himself a Yadava prince. After the marriage of Vasudeva to Devaki, while Kansa was driving the newlywed's carriage, he heard a voice. The voice said that the eighth son of Devaki, whom he was escorting, shall be his killer. Terrified, Kansa was about to kill Devaki when Vasudeva intervened, saying Devaki was no danger to him, and promised to hand-over each and every child born to Devaki to Kansa. With this agreement Kansa spared Devaki's life.

In course of time, children were born to Devaki and Vasudeva, and one after another Kansa would soon arrive to dispatch them. The parents would plead and weep, but remained helpless as captives of the powerful King Kansa. Before the birth of the eighth son, Kansa threw them into prison, where a miracle happened. The Lord, who was going to be born as the son of Devaki and Vasudeva, assured them not to grieve. He gave instructions to His parents that after His birth, His father should carry Him to the house of Nanda, at Gokula near Mathura. There, Yashoda had given birth to a daughter, and that Vasudeva should exchange Him for Yashoda's the newly born daughter.

Thus was Krishna born at the prison of Mathura, as the child of Vasudeva and Devaki. Vasudeva, following the Lord's instructions, held the newborn close, as by divine intervention the prison gates opened, the shackles which tied him loosened, and he started for Gokula. Without any hindrance they crossed the Yamuna River, and reaching Nanda's house, he placed Krishna near Yashoda, and exchanged Him for her newly born daughter. Yashoda was in deep sleep and was unaware of the incident.

The Naughty Child of Yashoda and Nanda

Saved from Kansa, Krishna grew up as a child of Yashoda and Nanda. Just like other children, Krishna too was very naughty. He was particularly fond of milk, butter and cheese. Not only would he partake of these at his own house, but he would go to the neighbouring houses of the other milkmen and often stole from their stores. Despite making such mischief, everyone found there was something very special and attractive about the child. The neighbours would not mind his mischief, rather they would be happy to see Krishna come to their homes and they were drawn to him like iron to a magnet.

The Move to Vrindavan

The life of the cowherds of Gokula were disturbed by demons, who would appear from time to time, so Nanda decided to move the family to Vrindavan. In Vrindavan, too, some significant incidents occurred. A poisonous serpent, called Kaliya, lived in the Yamuna River and it had contaminated the river and many cowherd boys had died from poisoning. Learning of this, Krishna punished Kaliya, but spared his life, and the snake vowed to leave Vrindavan and the Yamuna River.

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Sri Krishna (from page 3)

In the life of Sri Krishna there are several anecdotes which describe and reflect upon His divine nature, how much love the people of Vrindavan developed towards Him, and how their lives were changed from ordinary to divine.

The Rasalila

In the Bhagavatam, we find mention of *Rasalila*, meaning dance displaying divine love. One evening, as Krishna was playing the flute the melodic sound enchanted the gopis, cowherd girls, so profoundly that they left their houses following the luring refrain to reach the place where Krishna was playing the flute. There all the gopis started dancing to Krishna's flute when, by His divine power, Krishna multiplied himself and danced with each gopis throughout the night. This event is called *Rasalila*.



Swami Divyanathanandaji

Kansa is Slain

In the meanwhile, Kansa, who had come to know that the divine child, Krishna, lived, had devised many plans to kill him, but had failed. Finally, he made a plot and arranged for a wrestling bout to be held in Kansa's Mathura City, and invited young Krishna and His brother Balarama to participate. Krishna understood everything, however, and He went to participate in the wrestling match anyway. Kansa's plan was to have the other wrestlers kill Krishna, but Krishna defeated them all. After this, Krishna rose to the dais where Kansa had been watching the fights, and pulling him by the hair, brought him to the ground and killed him. After the death of Kansa, Krishna immediately went to the prison and freed his parents, Vasudeva and Devaki.

Guru Sandipani Muni

Although Sri Krishna, being the Supreme Brahman, was the very embodiment of all knowledge, He incarnated Himself to teach us the duties of various stages of life, and set an example before us, i.e., how to acquire knowledge and reach perfection by accepting someone as a teacher. Accordingly, He, along with his brother Balaram, went to study the Vedas and Upanishads under Sandipani Muni. The two studied the scriptures and various forms of art as well, under the guidance of Sandipani Muni. They remained devoted disciples and observed meticulously all the disciplines of a learner. During those days, there was a custom that when a student had completed studies under a teacher, the disciple would offer a gift to the guru called *gurudakshina*. It so happened that Sandipani Muni and his wife had lost their only child, and being aware of the omnipotency of Sri Krishna, they asked Him to bring back the life of their dead son. In order to please His teacher and his wife, and also by way of Krishna's *gurudakshina* to his preceptor, their dead son was brought back to life by His supernatural power.

The Kurukshetra War

After their training under Sandipani Muni, Krishna and Balarama headed towards Panchala. In those days, there was a custom where a princess would choose her husband from among the princes of the adjoining kingdoms, who would be invited to the King's Royal Assembly Hall. The princess would walk from suitor to suitor, and finally place a garland around the neck of the one she had chosen to be her husband. This ceremony was called *swayamvara*, and it was at the *swayamvara* of Draupadi in Panchala that Krishna met the five sons of Kunti, known as the

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Pandavas - Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. The Pandavas became very dear friends of Sri Krishna and incidents related to the Pandavas are recorded in the Mahabharata in great detail.

Near the end of the Mahabharata, the dharma-yuddha, or war of righteousness, was fought on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Sri Krishna tried his best to avert a war, and even went as a peace messenger to Duryodhana, but Duryodhana was adamant in his resolve, and the war became inevitable. Sri Krishna decided not to take up arms, but rather serve as *sarathi*, or charioteer, for Arjuna. It was on the battlefield of Kurukshetra that He gave his precious sermon to Arjuna, which was later to be known as *The Bhagavad Gita*.

As the armies faced each other, Arjuna asked Sri Krishna to place the chariot between the two armies so that he could more clearly see the faces of his opponents. When the chariot faced them, Arjuna was bewildered to see before him, his close relatives, cousins, senior members of his family, all of whom he adored, even his teacher, Droṇāchārya, from whom he had learned the art of fighting. His heart broke at the thought of fighting them. It is at this point that Sri Krishna gave Arjuna the discourse, reminding his duty as a Kshatriya, from which *The Bhagavad Gita* begins. As a result, Arjuna did fight and all one hundred Kaurava brothers, the sons of King Dhritarashtra, were slain. With the war ended, Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava brother, was made king.

Preparing to return to his own abode

After the end of the war, Sri Krishna went to meet Gandhari to receive her blessings before leaving the kingdom of the Kurus. But instead of blessing she cursed Him, for she felt He could have prevented the war and her sons could have been saved. So, she cursed Sri Krishna that the Yadu Dynasty, to which Sri Krishna belonged, would soon end and that Sri Krishna, Himself, would be killed as well. He explained to her, that He had tried His best to avert the war, but Duryodhana wanted it. However, He accepted the curse graciously and left the place. He felt His life's mission had been completed, and His divine play, His lila, was over anyway. So very slowly Sri Krishna was to disappear from this earth at the age of one-hundred twenty-five.

I have presented so far a very brief account of Sri Krishna's life, but in the *Bhagavatam* details of His life are documented, and abridged volumes are also available at our Vedanta society in English as well as in Japanese. You will enjoy reading these very much, I am sure.

Here, I am going to present a few more interesting anecdotes culled from his divine play:

The Fruit Seller

In Gokula an elderly woman used to sell fruit from door to door. As she approached the house of Nanda, the young Krishna, who was playing nearby, came running towards the fruit seller. On his way He grabbed a handful of paddy which were lying in the courtyard of the house. Krishna came to her and expressed his desire to have some fruit. The woman was a bit amused at this little boy's demand and asked him, whether he was prepared to pay the price for the fruit.

"What price?" said Krishna, "I visit so many neighbours asking for milk and cheese and they just give it to me. Sometimes I even steal what I want. They have never asked me for a price."

Saying this, little Krishna offered the woman the few grains of rice in His hand. Seeing the face and hearing the voice of this child, the innate motherhood blossomed in the heart of this fruit-seller. She became so charmed that she forgot she had come to sell fruit and continued talking to

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Sri Krishna (from page 5)

Him. However, she she told Him, instead of those grains as price for fruit, if he would but sit on her lap and call her 'Mother' just once, he could have as many fruits as he wanted. Young Krishna thought to himself that this was not very difficult, so he looked left and right, then sat on her lap and called her Mother. With her heart filled with inexpressible joy, she gave some fruit to Krishna. Taking these, Krishna walked away. Suddenly, something strange



happened and the world of name and form disappeared from the eyes of the fruit seller and she became full of the ecstatic joy of Krishna Consciousness. As she lifted her basket to leave, she found it was laden with ornaments and jewels. She thought that since she was poor, merciful Sri Krishna had bestowed upon her all this wealth. But this wealth now held little value to her, since she had already received the grace of Sri Krishna. Leaving her basket behind she left Gokula, never to be seen there again.

Gopal's mother

In this context, we are reminded of an incident which happened in the life of Gopal's mother, Aghormani Devi, a female disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. We know that before she had met Sri Ramakrishna, she would worship an image of the child Krishna, called *Gopala*, in her room for many years. There she would cook early in the morning and offer this to *Gopala* every day and finally was blessed with the vision of the child Krishna now and then.

In course of time, she came in touch with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, and she would often visit him and would look upon Him as the embodiment of Krishna. Sri Ramakrishna would request her to prepare various dishes for Him, sometimes to the point she would feel a bit displeased. Sri Ramakrishna then told her that in a previous birth she had often fed Him. He also told her that she was actually none other than the fruit seller mentioned in the above anecdote. Sri Ramakrishna also loved to feed her.

There are various approaches by which we can contemplate on God and develop love for Him. One such approach is to think of God as one's own child; this is known as 'vātsalya bhava'. In the fruit-seller incident, the woman earned the grace of the Lord not by any austerities, not through meditation, not by reading scripture or by controlling the mind, etc. She received the Lord's grace just by the love of a mother for her son. Through that approach alone she earned the grace of Sri Krishna.

Lord Brahma's Play

There is another remarkable and an interesting anecdote in the life of Sri Krishna. The cowherd boys of Gokula would take their cows into open fields to graze, and Sri Krishna would often join them. They would play games, take food together, probably in the shade of a tree, thus spending the whole day in merriment and returning home before the setting of the sun. One day as they had gathered to eat, they noticed that the grazing cows could not be seen. The cowherds became a bit worried, but Sri Krishna asked them not to worry, to eat first, and then He would Himself search for the cows. So as promised, after partaking of food, Krishna searched all the

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possible places, but the cows were not to be found anywhere. Upon His return, to his amazement, He found that the cowherd boys were nowhere to be found as well.

Actually, it was a prank by Lord Brahma, who had rendered the boys, along with their cows, unconscious through His divine power and had imprisoned them in a mountain cave. He wanted to test the power of Sri Krishna, who was believed to be the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. So Krishna, unable to find either the cows or the cowherd boys, naturally became quite worried. Born as a human, He felt despair as any other normal person would, but by divine insight He soon realised that all the cows and boys had been hidden by Lord Brahma to verify who Krishna actually was. Sri Krishna then created out of Himself all the missing cowherd boys and their cows, and returned home with them. After their return, something strange happened. The mothers of those cowherd boys felt more attraction for them than before. They themselves were quite amazed at the transformation of their feelings towards their sons. They soon realised that their affection for their own sons had increased many-fold, and was, in fact, the same affection they felt for Sri Krishna.

This play continued for one year, and every day Krishna would join the mind-born boys and their herds and go to the grazing fields. The cows would graze and the boys would play their games and they would all eat together and return home, just as they had done before. One day Lord Brahma arrived and knowing that he had kept both the cows and boys away in slumber, he looked in wonder at Sri Krishna's mind-born cows and boys with Sri Krishna and wondered which among them were genuine. Soon He realised that the scene before Him was all the divine play of Sri Krishna. Brahma had created the prank to test Sri Krishna, and he now understood that the power of Sri Krishna was great indeed. Not only this, He saw that all the cowherds and the cows were nothing but Krishna himself, and He felt the entire universe full of Krishna. Even looking upon Himself, He realised that He, too, was a part of Sri Krishna.

Surrender All to the Lord

As I have already mentioned, Sri Krishna gave the discourse to Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, which in course of time came to be known as *The Bhagavad Gita*. Among the seven hundred verses presented in eighteen chapters, I am going to explain only one. It appears in the eighteenth chapter and is considered to be the conclusion of the *Gita*. Adi Shankaracharya wrote an extensive commentary on this:

*sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śharaṇam vraja
ahaṁ tvām sarva-pāpebhyo mokṣhayiṣhyāmi mā śhuchaḥ*

Meaning:

*Having abandoned all duties,
take refuge in Me alone.
I shall liberate you from all sins;
grieve not.*

What He is imparting here is, let us not worry too much about the injunctions of the scriptures. Rather, we should try our best to increase our devotion to the Lord, for when devotion comes, all else becomes easy.

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Swami Medhasanandaji

We find a similar teaching in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna:

'To my Divine Mother I prayed only for pure love. I offered flowers at Her Lotus Feet and prayed to Her: "Mother, here is Thy virtue, here is Thy vice. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy knowledge, here is Thy ignorance, take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy purity, here is Thy impurity. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy dharma, here is Thy adharma. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee.'

May He Fill Our Hearts with Divine Love

From the life of Sri Krishna and His Divine Play we learn that He came to this Earth, and lived among the people to teach love. Those who stayed with Him, earned devotion to His holy feet by developing unalloyed love for Him. His foster parents Yashoda and Nanda brought him up as their own son, though He was actually born to Devaki and Vasudeva. He earned the hearts of the gopis with *madhura bhava*, the devotion of the wife towards the husband or one's love for one's sweetheart. The cowherd boys, too, demonstrated *sakhya bhava*, the love between two friends. The Pandavas also looked upon Him as their very dear friend. They did not care much for His divine powers, that He was the Creator, the Preserver, and the Destroyer of the world. All of them, without long and strenuous practice of austerities, were blessed with the divine grace of refuge at His lotus feet.

So let us all pray to Bhagavan Sri Krishna that He may fill our hearts with divine love so that we may rise above all the trifling problems of life, and that our minds may merge at His lotus feet.

Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya •



● A Story to Remember ●

Savour the Coffee, Not the Cups!

A group of alumni, highly established in their careers, got together to visit their old university professor. Conversation soon turned to complaints about modern-day stresses in work and life.

Offering his guests coffee, the professor went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of coffee and an assortment of cups - porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal, some plain looking, some expensive, some exquisite - telling them to help themselves to the coffee.

When all the students had a cup of coffee in hand, the professor said: "If you noticed, all the nice looking expensive cups have been taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. While it is normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and stress.

Be assured that the cup itself adds no quality to the coffee. In most cases it is just more expensive and in some cases even hides what we drink. What all of you really wanted was coffee, not the cup, but you consciously went for the best cups... And then you began eyeing each other's cups.

Now consider this: Life is the coffee; the jobs, money and position in society are the cups. They are just tools to hold and contain Life, and the type of cup we have does not define, nor change the quality of life we live.

Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the coffee.

Savour the coffee, not the cups!

The happiest people don't have the best of everything.

They just make the best of everything.

- Author Unknown

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