

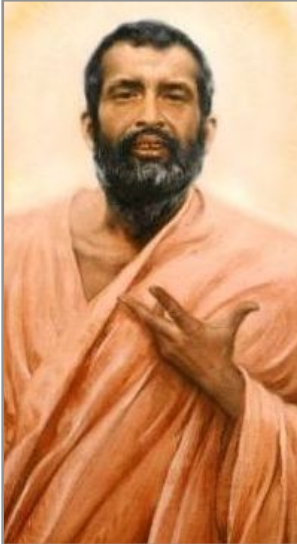


FEBRUARY 2021 -VOLUME 19 NUMBER 02

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

MARCH 2021 Calendar



Birthdays

**Sri Sri
Ramakrishna Deva**
Monday, 15 March



**Zushi March Monthly
Retreat Talk**
Sunday, 21 March

**Sri Gauranga
Mahaprabhu**
Sunday, 28 March

Zushi Events

We regret that our weekly programmes and classes need to be live-streamed again, due to reimposed COVID19 restrictions.

Details on page 02!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

“What power is higher than the power of purity?”

- Swami Vivekananda

“Such persons whose mouths and tongues are clean and pure, make many others clean and pure.”

- Guru Nanak

February Zushi Retreat 2021
Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary

The Power of Vivekananda's Uncompromising Truth

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) is a topic that one may start, but is difficult to stop. We, however, are conditioned by time and space, therefore our talk must stop at a certain time. Herein lies the difference between us and Swamiji, he was not conditioned by time and space.

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**Vedanta Society of Japan
Calendar of Programmes
for MARCH 2021**

The Japanese government has announced that as the number of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases continues to rise, everyone should more seriously adopt masking and social distancing measures, and stay at home in order to prevent an explosion of infections and hospitalisations. Under these circumstances, all our programmes will be live-streamed so you can watch them at home on the computer or on your mobile phone.

Swami Medhasananda, President
Vedanta Society of Japan

3rd (Wed) ★ Zoom

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~9:15 (in Japanese only)

•

6th (Sat) ★ Video uploaded later

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

10:30 ~12:00 (In Japanese only)

•

10th (Wed) ★ Zoom

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~9:15 (in Japanese only)

•

14th (Sun) ★ Live-streaming & Zoom

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

14:00 ~16:00 (in Japanese only)

*Contact about Zoom: zoom.nvk@gmail.com

•

17th (Wed) ★ Zoom

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

8:30 ~9:15 (in Japanese only)

•

21st (Sun) ★ Live-streaming

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva Birth Celebration

PM Session Talk (Bi-lingual)

Check homepage for more attendance details

•

28th (Sun) ★ Live-streaming & Zoom

Half-day Retreat

(Meditation and Spiritual Life)

14:00 ~16:00 (In Japanese only)

Uncompromising Truth (from page 1)

When some of our Indian devotees are late in arriving at the scheduled time, the Japanese devotees like to tease us in saying, "Oh, they are on Indian time." Of course, among the Japanese the same quip is being on 'Okinawa time'. And as our translator, Mr. Alvarez, can confirm, in South America, 'Venezuelan time' is commonly heard, too, meaning that many Venezuelans can be two to three hours late.

During Swamiji's visits to the West, he would never hurry or run. When approaching a train station and at the risk of missing the departure, the devotees accompanying Swamiji would urge him, "Hurry! Quickly, we shall miss the train!" Swamiji would refuse saying, "No, this is my pace. I will not run. If we miss the train, we can take the next train." The devotees there, too, would tease that Indians have no sense of time. Swamiji's retort to this taunt was, "It's because we live in eternity. All time belongs to us."

I am pointing out here that we are indeed completely conditioned by time and space, but that Swamiji absolutely belonged to a different realm, a different sphere. His answer about living in eternity may be repeated by others, but such a remark would not be authentic or even appropriate. In Swamiji's case it was 100% appropriate, as he was not conditioned by time and space. Swamiji's brother disciple, Swami Brahmanandaji once said of Vivekananda that he was a man who was established in the state of awareness of the Supreme Reality.

Uncompromising Truth

Swamiji preached Vedanta, initiated disciples, trained his brother disciples, and established Ramakrishna Order. Yet, despite all of this, a greater part of his mind was always established in that state beyond time and space. His first visit to the West lasted about four years and his second visit about a year. During these sojourns he preached the highest Truth. His preaching to Western audiences was absolutely uncompromising. Whatever he regarded as Truth he would explain to his audience without concern as to whether his words would be palatable or acceptable to them or not.

Swamiji's mission was not to please the people, his mission was to preach the Truth. He wanted to bring his Western audiences from darkness to light—from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. He did not seek to convert these audiences to Hinduism or to any particular religion, but he wanted to convert their hearts. When he preached of the Supreme Truth, naturally there were those in these audiences that were taken aback and surprised at ideas that were so new and revolutionary to them, that such concepts were hard for some to accept. Because of this there were many who offered stiff resistance to him, antagonised him, and even sought to assassinate his character with false allegations. Not only that, there were also attempts to eliminate him from this world.

• Thought of the Month •

"Where there is purpose,
there is happiness as well."

- Swami Abhedanandaji

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Uncompromising Truth (from page 3)

One such example that disturbed some was when Swamiji declared, *"Ye, divinities on earth-- sinners! To call a man so is a standing libel on human nature."* In other words, it is a sin to call a man a sinner. This utterance was so revolutionary and so opposed to church teachings that declare and emphasise we are all sinners and destined to an eternity in Hell unless we take refuge in the church and in Jesus Christ. However, Swamiji's message is that our true nature is purity.

Swamiji's pronouncement continues, *"Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirit free, blest and eternal."* We must remember that most of Swamiji's Western audiences were church-going Christians and these ideas were opposed to the teachings they had always heard in their churches. This obviously angered many Christian priests and clerics.

Christian missionaries had come to India to convert Indians—to lift them from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. Many missionary organisations in the West were regularly appealing for donations to continue their efforts in India at the time of Swamiji's efforts in America. Many Americans donated quite generously to these missions to preach and convert Indians to Christianity. Missionaries would often ridicule Indians as worshippers of stones and all manner of odd images, categorising the entire nation as an uncivilised and ignorant people full of superstitions.

Hearing such critiques from their pulpits, the image of a poor and lowly India was easy for American church congregations to believe. Of course, never having been to India to verify the missionary portraits of India, when people saw and heard Vivekananda talk they realised that a civilisation that could produce a man such as Vivekananda could not be the uncivilised nation portrayed to them by their missionaries. How could such a depraved Hindu civilisation produce such a great man, such a great soul, as Vivekananda, if the nation were not itself profound and great. Many Christians among Swamiji's audiences came to this conclusion and realised that most missionary claims about India were prejudicial falsehoods crafted to raise money from their congregations.

From Darkness to Light

Of course Swami Vivekananda was himself a Hindu missionary who had come from the East, while Western Christian missionaries had gone to the East. What was the difference between these two? Christian missionaries wanted to bring Indians from darkness to light, and Swamiji, too, wanted to bring Westerners from darkness to light. However, this image of darkness and light was different from each point of view. From the Christian point of view, to bring one from darkness to light is to convert one to Christianity. Swamiji's 'darkness to light' was bring people from untruth to Truth— not to Hinduism—but from 'the unreal to the Real' and not from one religion to another religion. This is the huge difference between these two missionary objectives.

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Uncompromising Truth (from page 4)

Materialists were quite popular as thinkers in the West, and Swamiji's message was quite different from the ideas that materialists propounded. Materialist philosophies, from Darwinism's materialism and from physical evidence based science had become widely accepted, and most no longer believed in the spirit, the soul, or the Self. Their perception is that everything has emanated from observable and measurable matter. Swamiji's idea was the exact opposite—that all of creation emanates from spirit and not matter. The last part of Swamiji's declaration we quoted earlier is: *"ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you servant of matter."* We are not of matter, we are of spirit. If we constantly think we are matter, matter, matter, then only matter we become in thought and deed. If we think spirit, spirit, spirit, then spirit we become. We are not the stuff of Milton's Paradise Lost, our real state is that of paradise.

Prior to Swami Niranjananandaji becoming monk in the Ramakrishna Order, as a young hobbyist he had been somewhat of a successful spiritual medium. Learning of this Sri Ramakrishna said to Niranjan, *"if you think of ghosts and spooks, ghosts and spooks you will become, if you think of God, divine will be your life."* Of course, Niranjan did not want to become a ghost, he wanted to realise God.

The Jealousy of Clerics

Swamiji's message and popularity created jealousies as well. When Vivekananda spoke, he would attract large audiences comprised of all sectors of society, some of whom would become his staunch supporters and devotees. This created jealousy among some preachers and drove some to acts of character assassination against Swamiji, some even wanting to eliminate him from this world.

(con't page 6)

Uncompromising Truth (from page 5)

Concerned about this, some of Swamiji's followers tried to caution him, warning that his life may be in danger and that he should be more careful in giving his messages. Swamiji's answer to their concerns was significant stating, "I am one who has experienced nirvikalpa samadhi, while those who threaten me are but babies. I know my real nature, I am immortal, have I any fear of them or of death?" Swamiji had experienced nirvikalpa samadhi and his spiritual heights were that of Himalayan stature, so why should he fear clerics whose spiritual attainment was that of toddlers on the spiritual path?

One interesting thing is that Swamiji was not only always aware of his sat-chit-ananda (existence, knowledge, bliss absolute) or his Brahman nature, he could also raise others to that level. That was his uniqueness as a teacher of Truth. I'll offer now some examples of how he lifted the minds of individuals, groups, and even large audiences en masse.

Swamiji's Power to Uplift Others

Ordinary teachers give talks and some points they offer may impress us and stay with us for a while, or we may soon forget them. In either case, our reaction is based on an intellectual understanding, but as far as one's spirit is concerned, it remains untouched—the soul remains untouched. However, Swamiji's audiences were affected more profoundly than a simple intellectual understanding, his messages went deeper, bringing a change in the level of their spirit. He could elevate people spiritually. Romain Rolland once said that Swamiji's talks could raise the dead, but when ordinary religious teachers speak, some in the audience may even be found dozing.

Most religious teachers can touch us intellectually, but the effect of Swamiji's approach was quite different. He could touch the spirit that would transform them. Words were just the medium by which Swamiji would impart spirituality. It was as if I have an apple in the palm of my hand and I pass that apple to you and you now hold it in your hand - Swamiji could pass spirituality on to another just as clearly.

A Householder Devotee's Experience

I will now narrate an incident that occurred in Swamiji's room at Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order that illustrates this. One day Swamiji said to a householder disciple, Manmatha Nath Ganguli, that if he had any question of him, to go ahead and ask it. The disciple replied, "*I have seen your lectures on Maya. It has appealed to me, but I have not understood it. Please let me know what is Maya.*"

Swamiji remained silent for a while then said, "*If you have anything else you'd like to know, you can ask me.*" Knowing that it would be difficult for him to understand, it would be better if he would ask something else.

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Uncompromising Truth (from page 6)

"Sir, I have nothing more to ask. If a knower of Brahman, like you, cannot enlighten me, then it will remain a closed book to me during this life. At this Swamiji began a discourse on Maya. He was speaking fast and I followed his words and the logic. By and by, my mind lost the contact of the sense-organs. I experienced a subtle world around me, which was much finer, than the gross world. I could see with my open eyes the Belur Math, the trees, and everything before me vibrating. If you look above a large fire you can see a vibration. The objects were oscillating and vibrating before my eyes just like that. I was conscious of my uncommon experience and asked myself: 'What is this that I see?'

"I looked around me and saw there was vibration everywhere. Slowly even Swamiji vanished from my eyes. Even then I could hear his voice, but I did not follow its meaning. Then suddenly I was aware of a vibration within my brain and there was only the void.

"Again I could see and hear the Swami and then followed the meaning as well. But my mind was conscious of my ego, and it no more exerted as it did before as I thought that I knew the meaning of Maya.

"I considered myself a bubble in the ocean of Maya, in which the Swamiji was also another. The difference was lost to me for the moment. It was nothing but an undivided Chit — the Cosmic Consciousness."

This is but one example of how Swamiji could raise someone's spiritual awareness just by talking about it.

Sister Christine

In another instance, there was a small group of disciples at Thousand Island Park in Northern New York that Swamiji was teaching very closely and very deeply. Sister Christine, an American, went there to meet Swamiji, where she stayed and attended several lectures. These talks were later presented in the text 'Inspired Talks'.

Sister Christine was later to come to Calcutta to assist Sister Nivedita with her school for girls. At Belur one monk addressed the Sister Christine saying, *"Sister, we know that to study Vedanta, a lot of preparation is required. The reading scripture, study, meditation, etc., yet you had no such preparation, so how did you come to understand Swamiji's teachings on Vedanta?"*

Sister Christine retorted, *"Why are you talking like an ignorant person? First you should remember who it was that taught us, a person of the spiritual stature of Vivekananda. Even before his talks he would prepare us and elevate our minds to such a level that we could understand his teaching of Vedanta."*

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Sister Devamata

Another American devotee, known as Sister Devamata, narrated her experience of listening to Swamiji talk in the USA. Swamiji had arrived and walked up to the speakers' platform and started his talk. She said that soon she felt that some wave had been created, and that wave washed away her memory, time, space, and all the people around her were washed away by this wave. She said that suddenly she felt there was a void around her and she only heard Swamiji's voice faintly ringing and echoing, just as the previous devotee at Belur Math had described his experience. She said that it was as if a closed gate had suddenly swung open, and through that gate lay a great road that led to infinity.

Under the Mango Tree

This is another description of an individual being spiritually uplifted, but Swamiji could also uplift the minds of an entire group en masse. From these descriptions we can understand what a spiritual giant Swamiji was to have such an impact on the minds of his audiences. In an instant he could make one aware of their infinite nature.

One day Swamiji was sitting on a cot under a mango tree at Belur Math and other people had gathered around him. At that moment Swami Premanandaji was descending the stairs of the former second floor Sri Ramakrishna Temple after his morning worship. He was carrying a tray of flowers intended for the worship of Mother Ganga. The written account on this is not clear as to why, but suddenly Swamiji began pointing to individuals around him saying, "You are Brahman" and again "You are Brahman". He also pointed to Swami Premanandaji as he approached and declared, "He is Brahman."

A tremendous change had come over all as Swamiji had proclaimed, "You are Brahman" one after another. The monks and devotees around him had become motionless and silent, then as if on cue everyone collectively lost consciousness of the outer world and witnessed the infinite and eternal nature of their Self. This state continued for a couple of minutes until Swamiji said, "OK! OK! Come back, now! Alright, Baburam (Premanandaji), you may also go." Everyone's mind then returned to the normal plane and they became themselves again.

If We Strive Hard

These stories all attest to the fact that Swamiji himself was not only always established in awareness of his true nature as the Supreme Reality, but he could also give the same experience to others, if but only for short periods. Nevertheless, by the grace of Swamiji such an experience would definitely inspire these most of these fortunate ones to regain that experience for themselves by their own efforts of spiritual practices.

Another important point we can understand from these episodes is that this type of experience as described in scripture is not the stuff of imagination, nor are such experiences the monopoly of great souls such as Swami Vivekanandaji or Swami Brahmanandaji. We, as ordinary devotees, can certainly have this experience if we dedicate ourselves and strive hard. •

● A Story to Remember ●

God Exists

A man went to a barbershop to have his hair and beard cut and trimmed as usual. He started to have a good conversation with the barber who attended him. They talked about so many things on various subjects. Suddenly, they touched the subject of God. The barber said, 'Look man, I don't believe that God exists.'

"Why do you say that?"

"Well," said the barber, "it's so easy. You just have to go out in the street to realise that God does not exist. If God really existed, would there be so many sick people? Would there be abandoned children? No, if a loving God existed, there would be neither suffering nor pain."

The man stopped, thinking it was better not to respond so as to prevent an argument. The barber finished his job and the silence continued as the man paid and left the barbershop. Just out the door he saw a man in the street with very long hair and an untidy beard. Seeing this, an idea came to the man as he returned to the barbershop and said to the barber, "I believe barbers do not exist."

"What do you mean they don't exist?" said the barber. "Certainly, I am a barber!"

"No!" insisted the man. "They don't exist, because if they did exist, no one would need a haircut or his beard trimmed like that man across the street!"

"Ah, barbers certainly exist, but some people choose not to come to us."

"Exactly!" said the man, "That's the point."

Of course God exists, but few people seek Him or go to Him and that is why there is so much pain and suffering in the world.

- From English for Students

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