



MARCH 2021 -VOLUME 19 NUMBER 03

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

APRIL 2021
Calendar



Birthdays

Swami Yogananda

Thursday, 01 April

Zushi Events

Although COVID restrictions have been eased by the Japanese government, precautions are still in place and our monthly programmes and classes will continue with precautions observed.

Details on page 02!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"I tell you the truth: there is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind toward God; otherwise you will not succeed. Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasures be, there will your heart be also."

- Jesus Christ

March Zushi Monthly Retreat 2021

"Inspiring Reminiscences"

A talk by Swami Divyanathananda

In a letter to Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) once wrote: Neither money pays, nor name, nor fame, nor learning; it is character that can cleave through adamant walls of difficulties. Bear this in mind.

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Vedanta Society of Japan Events for APRIL 2021

On March 21, 2021, the Japanese government ended the state of emergency covering Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, and Chiba. The Government of Japan continues to urge residents to take all possible precautions against the spread of COVID-19, including social distancing, mask wearing, and avoiding crowded areas.

As such, the Vedanta Society of Japan will continue to require mask wearing, hand sanitising, and limit the size of congregational gatherings, while providing live-stream, video, and Zoom participation as noted below.

Swami Medhasananda, President
Vedanta Society of Japan

Calendar of Programmes

* Contact about Zoom programming <zoom.nvk(at)gmail(dot)com>

3rd (Wed) April ★ Video uploaded later

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

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

4th (Sun) April ★ Live-Streams 10:30 and 15:00

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration

* Admission Restricted

7th (Wed) April ★ Zoom only - Video uploaded later

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

11th (Sun) April ★ Live-streaming & Zoom

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

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

* For Zoom contact: zoom.nvk@gmail.com

14th (Wed) April ★ Zoom

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

21st (Wed) April ★ Zoom

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

29th (Thu) April

Akhanda Japam

05:00 through 20:00

★ Contact: vedanta.karmayoga@gmail.com

Reminiscences (from page 1)

Since the founding of the Baranagar Math under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda, several promising young men, inspired by the lofty ideals of renunciation as taught by Sri Ramakrishna, have embraced monastic life and have dedicated themselves to Self-realisation and the service of mankind. Many of them have led exemplary lives and have paved the way for others to follow. They have demonstrated that pinnacle of character and the truth of Swami Vivekananda's words as quoted above. In this session, we shall discuss inspiring reminiscences from some of these stalwart monks.

• Thought of the Month •

Start by doing what's necessary;
then do what's possible; and suddenly
you are doing the impossible.

- St. Francis of Assisi

Swami Vireshwaranandaji

Swami Vireshwaranandaji, more commonly called Prabhu Maharaj (his pre-monastic name was Prabhu), was the tenth President of the Ramakrishna Order. He was a disciple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and had the fortune to interact with several direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He became the Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission at the age of 37 and since that time stayed at Belur Math where he attended to administrative work. Although outwardly he looked stern and reserved, a mother's heart dwelled inside him. The Holy Mother would say, "Learn to make the whole world your own, nobody is a stranger, my child, the whole world is your own."

Let us narrate one incident to demonstrate Vireshwaranandaji's brotherly love. One afternoon, a novice from Narendrapur, a branch centre of Belur Math, situated in the outskirts of Kolkata, came to Prabhu Maharaj in order to deliver an important letter. It was a hot summer day, and the brahmachari was perspiring naturally. Maharaj made him sit in a chair, and took some cold water from a mitsafe (cabinet) placed in the corner of the room and started preparing sherbet, a juice drink usually taken in summer. Meanwhile, he asked an office boy to procure a little ice from Belur Market. The brahmachari thought that Maharaj was preparing the juice for himself to drink later. After the attendant came back with the ice, Maharaj rinsed it with tap water and mixing the ice with the juice, he handed it over to the brahmachari to drink. The brahmachari was taken by complete surprise, he was only a novice, yet Prabhu Maharaj, was the Assistant Secretary and several years his senior. Naturally, this was beyond his expectation. Maharaj could have asked the same assistant to do the job, but setting aside his office work, he himself prepared and served the drink to the brahmachari, which was unthinkable. Actually, this incident reflects his consideration for a monastic brother, who had come a long the way on a hot summer day. Holy Mother used to say, that it is love alone, which has bound the members of the Ramakrishna Order together.

Maharaj led a very simple and austere life and was reluctant to take more privileges than others, even while holding a senior position in the Ramakrishna Mission. Another incident will

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Reminiscences (from page 3)

demonstrate this trait. One day, he asked a brahmachari to buy a small cup for him from the market. Maharaj had instructed the brahmachari of the size of cup he desired. And although the brahmachari searched, he could not find a cup of the exact size, so he came back with a little bigger cup than Prabhu Maharaj had wanted. Reluctantly Maharaj accepted the cup since the exact size was unavailable in the market. Actually, as he was the assistant secretary, naturally the kitchen attendant would be sure to pour him a full cup of milk, and that is why he wanted the smaller cup. He felt that in receiving more milk, other monastic members may be deprived of their share. Such was his keen observation and even small acts he sacrificed his needs for the sake of others. So, through this incident, on one side, his feeling for others is reflected, and on the other, we catch a glimpse of his spirit of self-effacement.

I shall narrate another incident which shows his spirit of renunciation. One day, he approached a monk from the nearby Saradapith centre and asked him, "I have heard you show 16mm films on a projector, is this true?" When the swami answered in the affirmative, Maharaj handed over a film which he had brought and asked him to show the film. As it was being shown, he asked if certain portions from the film could be cut. Actually, when the new Sarada Math was inaugurated by Swami Shankaranandaji, many senior monks had attended the ceremony, and Prabhu Maharaj was also one of the monks who had attended. This inauguration ceremony was filmed in 16mm, and it was this film which Maharaj had brought and asked to be shown. The reason being was that he wanted to delete those clips in which he appeared.

This incident shows that he did not want to come into the limelight, because to him service to Sri Ramakrishna was important and he preferred to remain a silent worker. Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly said that when this unripe I has been effaced, the ripe I will emerge. Also, through these acts the spirit of 'not I, but Thou' can be practiced.

Swami Bhuteshanandaji

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Reminiscences (from page 4)

Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj was the twelfth president of the Ramakrishna Mission. As you all know, he was very much loved by the devotees of Japan and he had visited Japan on some ten occasions. Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj was very much loved by all because of his simplicity, motherly love, and his un-assuming nature. He joined as a novice at Belur Math and started rendering services there under the guidance of senior monks. Along with that, he took lessons in scripture very sincerely from adept monks. He was very much loved by the senior monks for his diligence in rendering service and for his sincerity in studies. After receiving sannyasa vows, he developed an intense desire for going into solitude for the purpose of spending time solely in meditation. Taking permission and blessings from Swami Shivanandaji, he went to Uttarkashi, a place situated at the bed of the Himalayas. During that period, he tried to forget all other thoughts and devote himself solely to think and meditate on God with one pointed devotion.

The burning desire to realise God was intense in him. For food, he would procure a few chapattis and spread them with ghee (clarified butter) by begging to satisfy his hunger. Once a known devotee sent him some money so that Maharaj could procure some milk, but he returned the money. As he would narrate later, one day, he found the mind had wandered from "I" consciousness and was freely and spontaneously thinking of God. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, our mind is like cloth dipped in dye. It takes on the colour in which it is dipped in. So by continuous practice of meditation his mind was fully coloured in the thought of God. Sri Ramakrishna used to advise his devotees to go into solitude once in a while to pray and meditate on God, setting aside all worldly thoughts. Then if they stayed in the world, then they wouldn't get attached to the world.

Before his second visit to the West, Swami Vivekananda addressed a group of monastics at Belur Math saying: "You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate these fields (Pointing to the meadows of the Math). You must be prepared to explain the difficult intricacies of the Shâstras now, and the next moment to go and sell the produce of the fields in the market. You must be prepared for all menial services, not only here, but elsewhere also."

Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj combined in his life a zeal for austerity and meditation, and great devotion and dedication to service, exactly the way Swamiji had wanted. We shall see that when he plunged into work, there too he had put his heart and soul into it. The authorities of Belur Math had decided to send him to Cherrapunji, which lies in the north-east part of India. Cherrapunji enjoys the highest amount of rainfall in the country and it remains very cold most of the year. Some brother monks tried to dissuade him from going there by explaining to him the hardships he might encounter. Although he was in a dilemma at first, he later accepted it as a challenge and made up his mind to go. In Cherrapunji his cloth was moist almost all the time due to the frequent rainfall. The roof leaked so much that the floor was wet, and often he would wrap

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Reminiscences (from page 5)

himself in a plastic sheet to sleep. Such was the hardship. He kept one piece of dry cloth and would use it for going outside among devotees where he lectured and raised funds for the ashrama.

The above narrative reflects Bhuteshanandaji's undaunted spirit, forbearance and reliance on God. Thus, he stayed there under such conditions for nine years and improved the condition of the ashrama. After returning to Belur Math from Cherrapunji, he was asked to take charge of the Rajkot Ashrama. In Rajkot too, conditions were not at all favourable. The ashrama was facing closure and deep in debt. Even so, Bhuteshanandaji slowly built it up by organising ashrama activities and earning a positive reputation among the local people. Gradually, he cleared all the debts which the ashrama had incurred and he arranged to translate Swamiji's complete works into Gujarati. This shows his remarkable foresightedness. He wanted more and more people in Gujarat to know about the life giving ideas of Swami Vivekananda. Bhuteshanandaji learnt the Gujarati language well and that brought him even closer to the local devotees and to people at large. Thus, he raised the reputation of the ashrama and gave it a solid foundation. He not only improved the financial condition of the ashrama, but also helped its spiritual and intellectual side to flourish as well. Thus, it shows that determination, foresightedness, hard work, and above all, faith and dependence on God works wonders.

As demonstrated above, we can safely say that he had raised himself to the level of 'sthita prajna', a man of steady wisdom who is not effected by pleasure or pain, and maintains equanimity under all situations.

Another incident will show his loyalty to the sangha (monastic community) that happened when Swami Virajanandaji was the President of the Ramakrishna Mission. Once the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna was being observed at Belur Math with the usual pageantry and grandeur of worship, devotional music, discourses, etc., being observed. Several monks from branch centres far and near and a huge number of devotees had also assembled. It was indeed a divine sight. However, one devotee of good reputation among the senior monks had decided to install Sri Ramakrishna in his house and conduct a special puja on this particular day. Accordingly he requested Virajanandaji to send a suitable monk from Belur Math for the purpose. This put Virajanandaji in a fix. He called Bhuteshanandaji and shared his worry, saying how could he ask a monk to leave the festival at Belur Math to visit a devotee's house? Bhuteshanandaji, without the least hesitation, said he was willing to go if Virajanandaji Maharaj agreed. Virajanandaji felt much relieved and happy, and Bhuteshanandaji went to the devotee's house forsaking the joy and bliss of being at Belur Math.

Swami Vivekananda used to say, unselfishness is more paying, only we don't have the patience to practice it. On another occasion he said that purity and unselfishness are the true

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Reminiscences (from page 6)

signs of religion. So through this incident we can gauge, to what extent Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj practiced un-selfishness in his life. Above all, his motherly love and child-like simplicity endeared him to all. Generally, people's achievements in their works and/or scholarship are recognised, and one develops some sort of pride as a result, but Maharaj rose above that. He was easily accessible to all, monks, brahmacharis, devotees, rich, poor, high and low alike. More than his scholarly knowledge, his achievements in his field of work, or in his hard austerities and meditative spirit, it was his motherly love and simple behaviour which brought him close to the people of all strata of society.

Swami Gambhiranandaji

Swami Gambhiranandaji was yet another highly respected monk of the Ramakrishna Mission. He served as the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission for several years before becoming the Vice President. After the passing away of Swami Vireshwaranandaji, he became the eleventh President of the Order. He is particularly known for rendering the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads into English, and for authoring biographies of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda in Bengali, which are considered brilliant in terms of their authenticity and literary standard. During his stay at Advaita Ashrama, while he was editing the book 'Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda', he suffered from a severe stomach ache, but without paying any heed to his difficulty, he kept on working. He tried to alleviate his pain by pressing a pillow against his stomach. When a brahmachari urged him to take rest, Maharaj said, 'Do you feel, just by taking rest the pain will cease?' Such was his love for Swamiji's work, his own hardship or comfort was not important to him. He said that when Swamiji's work comes, he forgets all his suffering. He was able to raise service to that level where service became worship, and when the opportunity to serve came, even bodily discomforts ceased to exist.

Maharaj had the habit of going for a walk in the morning. One day while he was President, after his morning walk at Belur Math, his attendant found him shivering with cold. The doctor was called and some minor injury on his leg was found, and he had to be hospitalised briefly. Nobody came to know what had happened, as he himself was silent about it. Much later, during his visit to Lucknow, he divulged to a senior monk that during his usual morning walk, as he had a poor eye sight he was unable to see the path clearly, and he turned towards the River Ganga in error and slipped on the path. Somehow he found his way back to his quarters, but he had kept quiet about the fall because he was afraid that it might put others into anxiety and cause a sudden disturbance in the usual day to day work of the senior monks, particularly those who were in the administration. So just to avoid all disturbance, he had remained silent. Generally, when some difficulty comes in our life, we Indians talk about it to everybody one meets. We become, so to say, the centre of attraction. But in case of Swami Gambhiranandaji, the opposite was evident.

In the Bhagavad Gita Verse 12:15 we find:

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Reminiscences (from page 7)

yasmān nodvijate loko
lokān nodvijate ca yah
harṣāmarṣa-bhayodvegair
mukto yaḥ sa ca me priyah

‘He for whom no one is put into difficulty and who is not disturbed by anyone, who is equipoised in happiness and distress, fear and anxiety, is very dear to Me.’

Gambhiranandaji Maharaj was also known in the monastic circle for his punctuality. Also he had a daily routine which he strictly and doggedly followed day after day, year after year. Even after becoming Vice President, he would not deviate even slightly from his usual routine. One of his attendants expressed his surprise and casually commented one day, “Is it necessary to follow

the routine scrupulously at such an advanced age, too?” Maharaj immediately said that even after death he would not cease his routine. This teaches us the value of time management. Because he had followed a routine and didn’t waste time, in spite of being busy with his administrative work, he was able to author so many sacred texts. Again, it shows his love for scriptures, too.



Swami Ranganathanandaji

Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, was to succeed Swami Bhuteshanandaji becoming the thirteenth President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He was well known the world over as a powerful speaker and for his vast knowledge of philosophy, world scriptures, and many other modern subjects. He was appointed by the government as a Religious and Cultural Ambassador of India, travelling to several countries where he also spread the message of Vedanta.

Before the Second World War, the Ramakrishna Mission had a branch centre at Rangoon, Burma, and during the outbreak of the war Revered Ranganathananda Maharaj was serving at the Rangoon Ashrama. When Japan attacked Burma, people started fleeing the town, the ashrama had to be closed, and Maharaj was to leave as well. He was offered passage by both ship and aircraft, but he decided to flee with the Burmese people instead who were trying to reach safety on foot, and thus, he reached safety in Dhaka. When he finally arrived at Belur Math, he weighed a mere 35 kgs. Later, he would often say, ‘Are you growing spiritually? Can you love others? Can

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Reminiscences (from page 8)

you feel oneness with others? Have you peace within yourself? And do you radiate it around you? That is called spiritual growth which is stimulated by meditation inwardly, and by work done in a spirit of service outwardly.' Maharaj showed in his life this feeling of oneness with others. The suffering of others had become his own suffering, and he couldn't run away and leave them to seek his own comfort.

Revered Ranganathanandaji practiced the vow of poverty all his life. He visited several countries and seldom kept any money with him, because for every scheduled lecture, somebody was to come and receive him at the airport. Once it happened due to some communication mix-up, the person assigned to pick him up did not arrive. Swami simply begged a coin from a stranger to make a phone call. This was the spirit he maintained.

Ranganathanandaji visited many places to deliver talks, and there were some places with no branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission, so he would be required to stay as guest of some local dignitary. Normally what happens is that a great man is always aware of his greatness. But for Maharaj, whenever he mixed and interacted with people, he became one of them. Whenever he stayed at somebody's home, he would mix freely with all the members of the household, even children, without any reservation. But when he lectured from the dais, or when he was surrounded by people asking him serious questions pertaining to religion or spirituality, he would become a completely different man. He combined in his life, dignity with simplicity. Often at Belur Math, Hyderabad and other ashrams where he stayed, he was found playing volleyball with other monastic inmates.

Another incident reflects his child like nature. Once while crossing the River Narmada on a boat accompanied by some devotees. At one point, the boatman announced that the depth of the river at that spot was 400 feet and the deepest part of the river. All those in the boat peered over the side to witness such a depth, but when they looked up they found that Maharaj was missing. After some anxious moments, he was found swimming in the river nearby. Actually, being from Kerala village, he was an expert swimmer.

His simplicity is also worth observing. He had the ability to set aside his personality and become one with the devotees. Another incident will show this simplicity. Once he was coming out of his room and heading toward the hall where he was supposed to deliver a lecture. The person accompanying him noticed that his shirt was not properly buttoned. When he pointed it out to Maharaj, the latter said it didn't matter, since people were going to listen to what he had to say, and not be concerned with how he was dressed.

We have narrated today some brief stories regarding but a few highly respected senior monks of the Ramakrishna Mission. They were respected not only for their learning, their name or fame, but for their character. Their lives became models for others to emulate. They have demonstrated to what level unselfishness, strength, forbearance, faith in God, and other divine traits can be practiced and achieved. Let us reflect on their lives and try to imbibe such attributes into our own lives. ●

● A Story to Remember ●

The Pastor's Cat

The pastor of a church had a kitten that climbed up a tree in his backyard and then was afraid to come down. The pastor coaxed, offered warm milk, etc. The kitty would not come down. The tree was not sturdy enough to climb, so the pastor decided that if he tied a rope to his car and pulled it until the tree bent down, he could then reach up and get the kitten.

That's what he did, all the while checking his progress in the car. He then figured if he went just a little bit further, the tree would be bent sufficiently for him to reach the kitten. But as he moved the car a little further forward, the rope broke. The tree retracted sharply and the kitten instantly sailed through the air – out of sight.

The pastor felt terrible. He walked all over the neighbourhood asking people if they'd seen a little kitten. No. Nobody had seen a stray kitten. So he prayed, 'Lord, I just commit this kitten to your keeping,' and went on about his business.

A few days later he was at the grocery store, and met one of his church members. He happened to look into her shopping cart and was amazed to see cat food. He knew this woman disliked cats, so he asked her, 'Why are you buying cat food when you dislike cats so much?'

She replied, 'You won't believe this,' and then told him how her little girl had been begging her for a cat, but she had refused. Then a few days ago the child begged for a cat again, so she finally told her little girl, 'Well, if God gives you a cat, I'll let you keep it.'

She told the pastor, 'I watched my child go out in the yard, get on her knees, and ask God for a cat. And really, Pastor, you won't believe this, but I saw it with my own eyes. A kitten suddenly came flying out of the blue sky, with its paws outspread, and landed right in front of her.'

- IndianThoughts.In

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