



FEBRUARY 2022 -VOLUME 20 NUMBER 02

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

MARCH 2022 Calendar



Birthdays

Sri Sri Ramakrishna
Friday, 4 March

**Sri Sri Gauranga
Mahaprabhu**
Friday, 18 March

Swami Yogananda
Monday, 21 March

Zushi Events

While COVID restrictions had been lifted somewhat by the Japanese government, new Omicron variants require we continue to observe stringent precautions.

**See page 02 for more
event details!**



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"The whole secret of existence is to have no fear. Never fear what will become of you. Depend on no one. Only the moment you reject all help are you free."

- Swami Vivekananda

"Let a man read some portion of the Bhagavad Gita or drink of the Ganges but a drop, or worship the Lord but once, he will set at rest forever all his fear of the King of Death."

- Sri Shankaracharya

20 February 2022
Zushi Monthly Retreat
Celebrating Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary

PM Session Talk
'Swami Vivekananda's Passion for the Truth'
Swami Medhasananda

Sri Krishna, Lord Buddha, Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna are regarded as incarnations of God. In the case of Sri Krishna, there are numerous unique incidents regarding His birth and childhood. The

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Vedanta Society of Japan

Message Regarding Monthly Programmes for MARCH 2022

The Vedanta Society of Japan continues to observe social distancing, mask wearing, and avoiding the crowding of programme areas. As attendance to programmes remains space-limited, please contact us if you wish to attend any of the programmes.

Swami Medhasananda, President
Vedanta Society of Japan

MARCH 2022 Calendar of Programmes

2nd (Wed) March - Zoom
Weekly Upanishad Study Class
8:30 ~9:30 (in Japanese only)

5th (Sat) March
Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy
* Video uploaded later
10:30 ~12:00 (In Japanese only)

9th (Wed) March - Zoom
Weekly Upanishad Study Class
8:30 ~9:30 (in Japanese only)

13th (Sun) March
Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class
Live Streaming and Zoom
14:00 ~16:00 (in Japanese only)
* For Zoom contact: zoom.nvk@gmail.com

16th (Wed) March - Zoom
Weekly Upanishad Study Class
8:30 ~9:30 (in Japanese only)

20th (Sun) March
Monthly Zushi Retreat
Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva Birthday Celebration
Live Steaming and Zoom 11:00~16:30
AM and PM Sessions
* RESERVATIONS REQUIRED TO ATTEND *
Contact prior 11th February - 046-873-0428

< Live Streaming >

[Click here](#) to go to YouTube.

< Online Study Class on Zoom >

[Click here](#) to go to the Japanese page 'Zoom'.



Swami Vivekananda (from page 1)

births and childhoods of Lord Buddha, Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna are not so much like that. One wonders, if Lord Buddha, Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna are incarnations of God, Himself, why was there not much evidence of their divinity during their childhoods like ordinary children born in similar circumstances with few exceptions. Hence, while there are some differences from that of ordinary children, they are not so recognisable as incarnations of God. Only after they matured did it become revealed how extremely different their lives were from those of ordinary people.

Regarding Swami Vivekananda, he is regarded as one of the great seven sages (sapta-rishis) of the celestial sphere, meaning a sage of greater spiritual heights than an ordinary knower of Brahman, even greater than ordinary gods and goddesses. The seven sages belong to a very special category of spiritual personality. Swami Vivekananda was an incarnation of one of these seven great sages, so how is it that at one time young Vivekananda was not convinced if there really was a God or not?

The Laws of Prakriti

Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) was, of course, brilliant in many respects such as athletics, singing, cooking, languages, etc. Whether any of the seven great sages proficient in cooking or sports we do not know, as their speciality was in spirituality, but my question is as one of the seven great sages, why would he need to go to ordinary religious leaders to ask of the existence of God? When Sri Ramakrishna said that, yes, God was real and that He saw God clearly, and He can even show God to him, Vivekananda was inclined to believe it. However, when Sri Ramakrishna declared that He was an incarnation of God, Vivekananda would not accept this idea. In the divine kingdom a baby embraced the sage around the neck and asked him to descend to earth with Him—
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this is the vision Sri Ramakrishna narrated. How is it possible for this incarnation, one of the seven greatest of sages to remain still unconvinced about the incarnation ideal of Sri Ramakrishna? It appears that after birth he recalled nothing of his spiritual heights prior to his birth at all. How is this possible? There are also many examples of child prodigies of music and maths, but what is the reason the great sage retained nothing of his spiritual heights upon his birth?

[Swami Medhasananda requested opinions from the congregation.] One explanation offered was that Vivekananda remembered nothing so that he could identify himself with us on our level and grow and teach as he matured. Another suggested that upon birth all memory is reset like that of a new disk drive on a computer.]

My answer is that as one of the seven great sages, he was beyond Prakriti (or Maya), and as such Prakriti could not control him—rather he could control prakriti. When he took a human body, he came under the control of Prakriti and Prakriti made him forget everything, and he had to start from scratch though his deep spiritual samskaras were lying dormant. As Sri Ramakrishna said, “The incarnation of God is only possible with the help of Prakriti.” With pure Brahman there is no Prakriti, but when Brahman takes a human form, the help of Prakriti is necessary. Also that human form becomes subject to the laws of Prakriti. So three things are constituted here. First, the help of Prakriti is necessary. Second, upon birth one becomes subject to the laws of Prakriti. Third, it is Prakriti that makes one forget his pre-birth spiritual height.

For example, at birth one cannot suddenly be mature like a fifty-year-old man. There must be a natural cycle of physical, mental and spiritual development in accordance with the laws of nature. Everyone has a period of gradual development and then maturity. Memory of our former lives are erased from memory by Prakriti though samskaras remain. So when spiritual entities assume a human form, the same rules must be followed.

Propagation of Sri Ramakrishna’s Message

If Swamiji realised who he was and the realm from which he came early on, he would have returned there without hesitation and the whole mission of Sri Ramakrishna’s incarnation to remove the sufferings of the world and show mankind the path of peace, joy, wisdom and liberation would have been a failure. Why? Because Sri Ramakrishna chose Swamiji as his chief instrument to preach His message. Sri Ramakrishna’s body was too fragile from long and hard spiritual practices and could never have travelled to the West or give talks in English. He required a palanquin to visit even nearby locations. Sri Ramakrishna needed Swami Vivekananda to propagate His message. If Swamiji had realised his true nature as a young boy, and considered the quagmire of this realm of maya, he would have immediately given up his body and returned!

As Jesus had said, “And I say also unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.” So Ramakrishna nurtured the same idea with Swamiji. He could not remember his true identity because he had mission in life which he had to fulfil—a mission that when completed he would return to his abode. It was as if the door to the memory of his true identity as one of the seven great sages had been locked, and the key was held

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Swami Vivekananda (from page 4)

by Sri Ramakrishna. Shortly before end of his life a devotee asked Swami Vivekananda if he remembered who he was. He answered, “Yes!” but did not elaborate. And in fact, Swamiji passed away not to long afterward—meaning that he had indeed remembered.

• Thought of the Month •

“Don’t cry because it’s over.
Smile because it Happened.”

– Dr. Seuss

As we mentioned earlier, as a young man Vivekananda had doubts about the existence of God and would ask all the religious leaders he met if they had, in fact, seen God and his doubts were eventually resolved with spiritual practices. In this way we can relate to Swamiji because it is natural to have doubts about God, and if we want to resolve our doubts, we must also engage in spiritual practices.

Swamiji as an Aspirant

Let us forget about the incarnation and their true natures for a moment and look upon them as spiritual aspirants. Sri Ramakrishna too inquired about God. He listened to the stories of the gods and goddesses. And while He believed in God and became priest of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, He sought to authenticate this belief Himself whether God was just a matter of belief, just an image, just imagination, or does God really exist. He pursued the question and the answer as a scientific inquirer would. He had three questions; is there any God, if so, what is His nature; and finally, are the Gods of other religions the same? These are the three doubts Sri Ramakrishna wanted to clear. In this pursuit He engaged in rigorous and demanding spiritual practices for twelve years, finally getting the answer.

Swamiji too, had faith in God, but as he studied Western religion and philosophy, his doubts about the existence of God arose. Besides whether God existed or not, he also wondered that if God did indeed exist, whether He was knowable or not? These are the two basic questions Swamiji confronted and sought answers to. Though he studied religions and philosophies, he wanted confirmation from someone who had had the direct experience of God. This is why he asked a few religious leaders who were known for their spiritual practice and knowledge these questions. Swamiji was not satisfied with any of the responses he was to receive, and not one of them said, “Yes, I have seen God and, yes, God is knowable.” Finally, it was Sri Ramakrishna alone who told him in clear and direct words, “Yes, God is! I have seen him and I can show you God!”

Here let me tell you a story:

Once a king put three questions to a sage: “First, is there a God? Second, if there is a God, what is the proof of His existence? Third, how can one see God?”

The sage answered, “Can you please ask someone to bring me a cup of milk?” A cup of milk was brought to the sage who asked, “Oh, king, do you see butter in this milk?”

To which the king said, “No!”

The sage continued, “Then do you say there is no butter in this milk?”

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The replied, “No, butter is there.”

“Why cannot you see the butter then?” pressed the sage.

The king replied, “To get the butter, the milk must be warmed a little and cooled a little. Some yoghurt must be added and let to set for a time. Finally, the curds must be churned from the whey to get butter.”

To this the sage said, “Though God is everywhere we cannot see Him because we did not follow the necessary procedure. If we want to see God, there is a procedure we must follow. This procedure is spiritual practice. This procedure consists of three parts; first is the practice of concentration on God, second is to give up attachment to the world, and third is the control of mind and senses. These are the three practices, if one does these, then one will see God.”

Yearning and Determination are Required

So when Sri Ramakrishna had said yes, he had seen God and could show Swamiji God, it did not end there—Sri Ramakrishna also said that a procedure must be followed. When we read of Swamiji getting this instruction from Sri Ramakrishna in ‘The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna’ what then is the difference between us as spiritual seekers and Swami Vivekananda as a spiritual seeker? Let me repeat this question; Sri Ramakrishna gave three instructions to Swamiji which he practiced and then realised God. We also know the same answers from our readings of ‘The Gospel’ and from our discourses. So why don’t we realise God? What is the difference between Swami Vivekananda and us as spiritual seekers?

[A devotee suggests, “He was special.”]

Yes, Vivekananda stands out as a unique personality, and yes, our spiritual heights may differ, but think of all the other disciples, monastic and householder alike. Why did only Swami Vivekananda realise God?

[A devotee suggests, “He had received Ramakrishna’s blessings”]

Yes, I understand we can present Swami Vivekananda as someone spiritually blessed, but so were the others like Latu Maharaj. Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda both said that they can do everything for their disciples except give them the vision of God, that one must earn by one’s practice alone. That is why Sri Ramakrishna would wake the young devotees who had stayed the night at Dakshineshwar in the dead of night saying, “Wake up! Have you come here to sleep? Go to the Panchavati and meditate!” We see that spiritual disciplines are necessary for all. Remember that in the Panchavati there was no air conditioning or heating, full of mosquitos and no insect repellent. Explain this to me. Sri Ramakrishna loved these disciples very much, why did He insist on putting them through the ordeal of spiritual disciplines if His blessing would suffice?

Sri Ramakrishna, who certainly had the power to impart spirituality, woke the boys

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Swami Vivekananda (from page 6)

up in the dead of night and sent them to the Panchavati for spiritual practice so that they may be established in the consciousness of God. A short story which I quote from 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' may explain our position regarding spiritual practices, e.g. renunciation:

A wife said to her husband, "You see! That person is practicing renunciation!"

The husband answers, "How so?"

"He has sixteen wives!" she replied. "And he is giving them up one by one."

The husband answered, "No, he cannot really renounce."

The wife then teased, "But he is better than you, you cannot live a single moment away from me."

"No," the apparently henpecked husband retorted. "He cannot renounce, but I can. I go now." He then walked out the door with only the cloth on his shoulder he had prepared for his bath, leaving hearth and home never to return.

So what is required is strong determination and an uncompromising attitude regarding spiritual practices. Once we realise something is detrimental to our spiritual life, or that an attachment is an obstacle to our spiritual life, then we should be ready to immediately give it up. This is difference between ordinary spiritual aspirants like us, and spiritual aspirants like the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Unless we have a strong urge and determination to realise God, we cannot do so even if we know how to realise God. This yearning and determination are necessary. What we lack are this yearning and determination. Though we know the way, what we lack is this.



Let us think of Swamiji: He gave up everything, his family, his prospects as a lawyer, comforts, attachments and so forth. He would have definitely shined in his life as a householder, but he gave up all. His only purposes in life became the realisation of God so that he may teach the message of Sri Ramakrishna to the world. The thing to remember is this; unless we are prepared to give up our very comfortable lifestyle, some of our relationships, some of our attachments, likings and habits—unless we are ready to sacrifice and change all this, then it is very difficult to reach the goal of spirituality.

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Observing Truth

Our topic today is ‘Swami Vivekananda’s Passion for the Truth’. On another point, Swamiji was not a vegetarian, he took meat and fish. In India many are vegetarians and they think that the consuming of non-vegetarian foods is detrimental to spiritual life. Many could not imagine that especially a monk could eat non-vegetarian food. So when Swamiji was leading the life of a wandering monk across India from north to south and east to west, many would ask about his food habit, and he would never hide the truth and tell them that he would eat whatever was given to him. People could criticise this, but Swamiji would never hide this truth. He would not concern himself with any consequence and tell the truth.

Among these vegetarians were admirers who, though they themselves were very strict vegetarians, did not care what sort of food Swamiji took. For them Swamiji’s spirituality was the most important thing, and they admired, respected and loved Swamiji despite his dietary habits. But there was another type of vegetarian admirer, one of whom clearly said that he liked everything about Swamiji except for his taking of non-vegetarian food. This was the one and only thing he did not like about Swamiji. So we have two types of admirers of Swamiji, but Swamiji spoke the truth and did not worry about their feelings on the subject.

Teaching the Universal Truth

Swamiji had gone to the West to speak the truth. He did not go there to preach Hinduism, but to teach the universal truth. This was the great difference between him and other religious leaders of the West. For example Swamiji would say that there are different religions, but that all religions lead to the same goal, the same God. Western religious leaders, on the other hand, would proclaim, first, that Christianity is the only ‘true’ religion, second, that only by accepting Jesus as one’s saviour, can one go to heaven, and if not, then one is bound to go to hell. But Swamiji said, no, every religion has produced great sages, not only Christianity or Hinduism has produced them, but every religion has. Third, is that Christians must just accept and cannot argue the dogma of their religion, but Swamiji said, no, while there is a place for rationalism in religion, at one point religion must transcend logic, but not contradict logic. The fourth difference is that the Western leaders would say we are all sinners, but Swamiji would say, no, ‘It’s a sin to call a man a sinner! Man’s true nature is pure.’ These are the main points of contradiction between Swamiji’s teachings and those of the local Christian leadership.

When Swamiji preached these ideas, this angered many clerics and church leaders in the West, as well as many members of their congregations. Swamiji’s new Western admirers worried that he should not engage with such people, as they may be a danger to his life. Some radicals may believe that silencing Swamiji may be God’s work, but Swamiji was unperturbed claiming, ‘I am not afraid of death, I have touched the feet of God.’ ‘What can they kill,’ Swamiji continued, ‘only the body, and I am the Atman. The Atman cannot be killed.’ This was Swamiji’s stand on the matter. Truth cannot be compromised—Truth first, and it is Truth which finally triumphs.

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In Closing

I will finish my talk with a simple anecdote. When Swami Vivekananda was in the West giving talks here and there at the invitation of interested parties, he of course had no fixed residence and occasionally accommodations had to be hastily prepared for him.

On one such occasion the resourceful superintendent of a school for girls had invited Swamiji to give a talk in the school auditorium, and space was found for Swamiji to stay at a dormitory. There was much excitement among the students when they learned of the visitor, as they would also attend this unusual event. The superintendent had great interest in religious philosophy and had arranged for local scholars and Christian clerics to attend, and as the evening progressed the conversation turned to Christianity and its faith and practice.

The clerics in attendance then asserted that the Christian faith was the only true faith, quoting various scholarly works and the Bible. Swamiji, however, said that while Christianity was surely true, it was not the only true religion, and that each religion led to the same God. The conversation proceeded back and forth with Swami and the clerics citing from scholarly works and the Bible, but with Swamiji finally defeating all the protestations with his determined clarification of Universal Truth.

Some time later, one of the girls in attendance wrote of her reminiscence of that day, saying that as a Christian she recognised that all the clerics' arguments had been defeated by Swamiji. She, however, remembered feeling happy as the hour passed during the experience. It was a period of free thinking and the atmosphere of the auditorium had an impact on everyone, many recognising that Truth is not sectarian, but that Truth is universal. •



**Swami Vivekananda Birthday Celebration
Japan Vedanta Society Zushi Centre**

Date: Sunday, 20 February 2022

Venue: Main Building

Schedule

06:00 Mangalarity, Chanting and Bhajan

06:30 Meditation

07:45 Breakfast

11:00 Puja, Food offering, Arati, Flower offering

12:30 Lunch Prasad (Main Building)

14:45 Chanting

Hymn: Swami Divyanathanandaji

Reading from 'The Story of Vivekananda' (Japanese)

Talk: 'Swami Vivekananda's Passion for the Truth'

Speaker: Swami Medhasanandaji

Interpreter: Sr. Leonardo Arvarez

Devotional Song

Meditation

16:30 Tea (Main Building)

18:00 Arati, Bhajan, Reading

Meditation

20:00 Supper





Puja





Bhajans



• Story to Remember •

Swami Yoganandaji

Swami Yogananda (Jogin Maharaj) was the first to organise a public celebration of the birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna on a large scale. It was performed at Dakshineswar. The success of this celebration, against tremendous odds, was due to the great influence Swami Yogananda had over men—specially of the younger generation. The organising ability of Swami Yogananda was evidenced also when a grand reception was given to Swami Vivekananda in 1897 upon his return from America. Swami Yogananda was the moving spirit behind that as well.

After his return to India, when Swami Vivekananda made his proposal of starting an organisation to his brother-disciples, Swami Yogananda was the person to raise protest. His contention was that Sri Ramakrishna wanted all to devote their time and energy exclusively to spiritual practices, but that Vivekananda, deviating from the Master's teachings, was starting an organisation on his own initiative. This provoked Vivekananda who feelingly said that he (meaning himself) was too insignificant to improve upon the teachings of that spiritual giant—Sri Ramakrishna, that if Sri Ramakrishna liked he could create hundreds of Vivekanandas from a handful of dust, but that He had made Swami Vivekananda simply a tool for carrying out His mission, and Swami Vivekananda had no will but that of Sri Ramakrishna. Such astounding faith of Swami Vivekananda in Sri Ramakrishna stunned all that were present there, and had the effect of winning over Swami Yogananda immediately.

When the Ramakrishna Mission Society was actually started, Swami Yogananda was made one of its office-bearers. This was not the only occasion when Swami Yogananda showed the power of individual judgment and of a great critical faculty by challenging the very leader— Swami Vivekananda, though his love for the latter was very, very deep. Indeed, one who dared examine the conduct of his Guru with a critical eye before fully submitting to him, could not spare his Gurubhai. So whenever Swami Yogananda differed from Swami Vivekananda, he was bold enough to say it straightforwardly.

From <<https://www.sriramakrishna.in/2018/02/01/swami-yogananda/>>

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