



JUNE 2022 -VOLUME 20 NUMBER 06

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

JULY 2022 Calendar



Guru Purnima
Wednesday, 13 July

Birthdays

Swami
Ramakrishnananda
Tuesday, 26 July

Zushi Events

JULY Calendar Page

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



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"If you are in right earnest to learn the mysteries of God, He will send you the Sadguru, the right teacher. You need not trouble yourself about finding a Guru."

- Sri Ramakrishna

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

- Jesus Christ

Swami Vivekananda: 159th Birth Anniversary Celebration
Vivekananda Cultural Centre, Embassy of India,
Sunday, 12th June, 2022

Event Summary

Leonardo Alvarez offers a summary of the celebration and the guest speaker presentations.

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Vedanta Society of Japan

Message Regarding Monthly Programmes for July 2022

Although COVID restrictions imposed by the Japanese government with the recent wave of the Omicron variant have been partially lifted, many precautions will remain in place.

The Vedanta Society of Japan continues to observe social distancing, mask wearing, and avoiding crowding in programme areas. Space is limited so please contact us if you wish to attend these programmes.

*Swami Medhasananda, President
Vedanta Society of Japan*

JULY 2022

Calendar of Programmes (SCHEDULE OF EVENTS)

2nd (Sat) July

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

* Video uploaded later

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

6th (Wed) July-> **CANCELLED**

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

8th (Fri)~10th (Sun) July

*** Summer Retreat in Kyoto ***

*Contact: <vedantaharmony@gmail.com>

20th (Wed) July (Zoom)

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

27th (Wed) July (Zoom)

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

31st (Sun) July

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

Live-streaming and Zoom

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

Public Celebration Summary (from page 1)

The programme was well attended with a nearly-full auditorium. After a year of planning, on the morning of June 12th, a throng of volunteers reached the Indian Embassy in Tokyo around 9AM and all the event preparations started on site. Tables were set with displays of Vedantic books, music CD's, meditation mats and other goods, as well as pamphlets for distribution.

Rehearsals were conducted throughout the morning till just after 13:00. The venue opened its doors at 13:30 and the programme started as scheduled at 14:00. Our Masters of Ceremony, Mrs. Kathy Matsui (English) and Ms. Satsuki Yokota (Japanese) greeted the audience. This was followed by Vedic mantra chanting, headed by Swamis Medhasananda and Divyanathananda, and a group of Japanese devotees. Following that was a short flower offering ceremony to Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji), and a special issue of our "Fumetsu no Kotoba" (Universal Gospel) magazine was released by H.E. Mr. Sanjay Kumar Verma, Ambassador of India to Japan.

Next, an inaugural speech was given by Ambassador Verma (*presented in this issue of The Vedanta Kyokai*). The second speaker was Dr. Tomohiko Taniguchi, Professor of Keio University, who delivered a passionate and eloquent speech on Swami Vivekananda's concept of an ideal society, and how to build it. He discussed this in the context of the modern world, especially Indian-Japanese societies. Professor Taniguchi also commented on the impact Swamiji had upon himself. (*This speech will be presented in its entirety in our July issue*) The last speech was a succinct, but all the more mystically themed talk by Father Cyril Veliath, S.J., professor emeritus of Sophia University, who stressed the importance of the experience of Swamiji's nirvikalpa samadhi, brought about by the fascinating connection and relationship he had with his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna (*presented in this issue*). This experience transformed Swamiji's life and propelled him into a mission of epic proportions for the welfare of mankind. Moreover, Fr. Veliath emphasized that Swamiji represented the ideal human being, and that we would all ultimately have to traverse the same path and experiences as his, thus making him a role model for all of humanity.

A short recess followed, in which the attendees were offered chai (tea) and a set of one samosa with two jilipis (a sugary and juicy deep fried sweet which Sri Ramakrishna liked taking), courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Jagmohan Chandrani, both leaders of the Indian community in Tokyo, and owners of several authentic and high-quality Indian restaurants.

The second half of the event consisted of a cultural program, which commenced with a dynamic Indian dance by the group "Dwhani" headed by Mrs. Neena and included performances such as one set to Shankaracharya's eulogy for the power of Shakti, the Aigiri Nandini stotram.

Next, Japanese devotees sang two songs, namely, Murta Maheshwara praising the sterling qualities, such as the power of renunciation, energy, leonine courage and compassion of Swami Vivekananda, and "Aozora wo Mite", or "Gazing at the Azure Sky", a Japanese song celebrating God's creation, declaring that all is but His image and manifestation, and that His love is always guiding us through our journey to Him.

This was followed by a few songs from a Bengali community group, which were sung with full enthusiasm and melodious harmony. The song programme earned a standing ovation from members of the public, including Ambassador Verma.

Next, the Dwhani group returned to perform another set of dances, tuned to more modern melodies, but nonetheless a very energetic and enthralling performance.

Finally, a vote of thanks was given in Japanese by Mr. Atsushi Suzuki, Secretary of the Vedanta Society of Japan, and in English by Mr. Jagmohan Chandrani, member of the Swami Vivekananda Celebration Committee. •

Swami Vivekananda: 159th Birth Anniversary Celebration
Vivekananda Cultural Centre, Embassy of India, Sunday, 12th June, 2022
Theme : Ideals of Swami Vivekananda

Inaugural Remarks:

by H.E. Mr. Sanjay Kumar Verma, Ambassador of India to Japan

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Namaskar and Konnichiwa,

I am truly delighted to be amongst you today as we jointly celebrate the 159th Birth Anniversary Celebration of Swami Vivekanandaji. This year assumes added importance due to 75th anniversary of India's independence, celebrated as Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and 70th year of establishment of India Japan diplomatic relations since 1952.

Swami Vivekananda, who advocated positive thinking and service to mankind as the way to spirituality, has always been meaningful for the societal existence of all of us. He was not only a thinker, a philosopher, a humanist and a deeply spiritual leader, but also a true liberal and modernist leader. A spiritual genius commanding intellect and authority, his achievements during a short life of 39 years, are monumental. He always preached to be courageous in the face of troubles, to be persistent to achieve goals; to believe in oneself, to not shy away from struggling to grow, to seek real happiness from being selfless, and to be the best version of oneself. He taught the importance of self-introspection, that honesty is the best policy, that all creations of God are born equal, and the importance of empathy towards fellow beings. All of these are as valid today as they were in yesteryears and will certainly remain relevant for future years as well.

His writings and speeches, especially his celebrated speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, have a universal appeal and he received a standing ovation, when he said "Sisters and brothers of America ...". His speeches at the World's Parliament of Religions made him famous as an 'orator by divine right' and as 'a messenger of Indian wisdom to the Western world'.

Swami Vivekananda, of all the spiritual giants of India, was the first to present the essence of Indian spirituality to the modern West. His teachings lay emphasis on tolerance, harmony and mutual accommodation; they provide pragmatic guidance to all of us, to reconnect with the inner-self and serve the people around us. His ideas 'that a universal truth lies behind all faiths and that everyone possesses a divine spark that can be cultivated through meditation and study', appealed to many religious liberals, like those who had organized the parliament, and are perpetuated today in the movement that he founded, the Vedanta Societies.

Another embodiment of Swami Vivekananda's vision is his unstinting belief in the power of human spirit - the power to choose one's own destiny. "All power is within you; you can do anything and everything", urged the 'karmayogi' (or the man of positive action) in Swamiji.

During his recent visit to Japan, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi referred to Swami Vivekananda's special connection with Japan. Japan left a deep impression on his mind and on his heart. Patriotism, confidence, discipline and cleanliness of the people of Japan found praise in Vivekananda's writings and speeches. Influenced by Japan, Swami Vivekananda once said that we Indian youth must visit Japan at least once in our life.

Swamiji was convinced that while India possessed philosophical and spiritual truths, there

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Inaugural Remarks (from page 4)

was the need to practice modern scientific ideas and bring reforms.

The Vedanta Society in Japan has reached out to wide sections of the Japanese public through its non-sectarian approach, based on the propagation of religious harmony and human values through spiritual and cultural programmes. I take this opportunity to felicitate the Vedanta Society and Swami Medhasanandaji in particular, for their yeoman service and contribution in providing that special connection between our two countries by enriching our spiritual linkage and social mores.



Let us use this occasion to tirelessly work together and play our part in realising Swami Vivekananda's dreams.

Thank you!
Arigato Goziamasu!

Swami Vivekananda: 159th Birth Anniversary Celebration
Vivekananda Cultural Centre, Embassy of India, Sunday, 12th June, 2022

Swami Vivekananda's Concept of an Ideal Human Being by Father Cyril Veliath, SJ

My friends, as you know, the subject of today's talk is Swami Vivekananda's concept of an ideal human being. What sort of a person would Swami Vivekananda have viewed as an ideal human being? When we observe his writings we notice that he has clear views as to how human beings should be, and these are some statements he made about them.

According to him human beings are the greatest of all created objects, and a perfect human being sees nothing but God. Every human being is perfect by nature. Some people can manifest this perfection, and so when we look at them we can see this perfection in them. Others may not reveal this perfection, but the potential to become perfect is present within each one of us. Every human being is divine, every human being is God by his very nature. Human beings have infinite power, and they can feel this power. They know clearly that they themselves are the One Infinite God. These are some famous comments made by Swami Vivekananda about human beings.

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Ideal Human Being (from page 5)

Recently I happened to see a book on Swami Vivekananda edited by Verinder Grover, and there I came across the following words that Swamiji himself had uttered. Here, he speaks of what he calls the “Great Messengers,” that is, holy and outstanding men and women of different religious traditions of the past, who have appeared in this world. This is what he has to say about them:

• Thought of the Month •

Faith is the bird that feels the light
when the dawn is still dark.

- Rabindranath Tagore

“People have the impression that there can be only one religion, only one prophet, and only one incarnation. That is not true. When we study the lives of these Great Messengers, we see that each person is destined to play a role in life. Harmony lies not just in the role played by one person, but in the roles played by all. No human race is born to enjoy the world alone. Each race has a role to play in this Divine Harmony. Each race has a mission to perform. Each race has a duty to fulfil.”

The Great Messengers that Swami Vivekananda speaks of here are obviously the great religious leaders of the past, those eminent men and women belonging to a diversity of races, traditions, creeds, and historical milieus. They were motivated by a single message, namely the message of love. For them, all that mattered was to love God, and to love their fellowmen. When I read this, I realized at once that these were the ideal human beings that Swamiji speaks of. These eminent men and women of the past, spent their entire lives in loving and serving God, and their fellowmen. These are the people he would like us all to emulate.

These Great Messengers are what we call ‘Mystics’ or ‘Saints.’ These Mystics or Saints are people who are always full of the love of God, but sometimes the love of God grips them so powerfully that they enter into a supernatural state, a state of unimaginable joy. This is what we refer to as “the state of ecstasy.” When I read the life of Swami Vivekananda for the first time, I learned that he also experienced this state of ecstasy. He experienced it when he went to meet his Guru, Shri Ramakrishna, at a time when he was depressed over his many problems. Ecstasy is a state of joy, but scholars of mysticism say that sometimes the joy is so intense, that it can even become painful. The person suffers greatly, but it is a suffering caused not by pain but by love and joy. Vivekananda described his mystical experience, in the following words:

“He (Ramakrishna) came walking up to me, but before I could stop him, he had placed his right foot on my body. The contact was so terrible. With my eyes open I saw the walls and everything in the room whirling and vanishing into nothingness. The whole Universe and my individuality were at the same time lost in a nameless void, which swallowed up everything I saw. I was terrified. I believed that I was face to face with death. I could not stop myself from crying out: What are you doing? I have my parents at home! And the great Sage removed his touch from my body. I was then amazed to see that the extraordinary experience of mine had vanished as quickly as it had come, when he touched me in that manner and said those words. I came to my normal state and saw everything inside and outside the room, standing still as before.”

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Ideal Human Being (from page 6)

This was the mystical experience that Swami Vivekananda went through, and historians say that after this experience he became a totally different person. He was never again the same man. This experience opened a new road for him. It was the start of a new life.

Now, how do western scholars look upon such experiences? In England in the 19th century, there was a famous mystical poet named William Blake.

He was not a scholar of religion but he had a love for mystical experiences, and he described them in these beautiful words:

“... to see a world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wild flower, hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour?” In other words, when on looking at a grain of sand we can see the whole universe in it, when on looking at a flower we can see heaven in it, when we realize that we ourselves are infinite and eternal, it means we have had an experience of the Eternal God. This I believe is the ideal human being for Swami Vivekananda. The ideal human being would be a saint who has undergone an experience of God, similar to what Swami Vivekananda himself had undergone.

Let me now give you an idea of the image of God that Swami Vivekananda had. Swami Vivekananda as you know was a reputed scholar who had studied a wide variety of scriptures of diverse religions, including the Holy Bible and famous Christian scriptures like the Imitation of Christ. I am sure every single one of the Scriptures exerted an influence on him. However, I personally believe the greatest impact on him was exerted by two Scriptures of Hinduism, namely the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita. The Upanishads describe God in a variety of ways. He is described as an eternal and transcendental reality, that has no beginning, no end, and who is changeless. Words cannot describe Him. Although he surpasses all being and non-being, yet in a mysterious way he pervades everything, and he is the foundation or basis of everything.

He is the Supreme Spirit, a boundless and infinite ocean of pure consciousness, he is all-knowing, he is blissful and immortal, he is Infinite, he is smaller than the smallest atom, greater than the greatest spaces, he is the Overseer of all activities. The historian and scholar Dasgupta notes that in the Upanishads, the Highest Reality is not an individual separate from us. He is not someone whom we try to please, nor one whose laws and commands we obey. He is not just someone to whose will we submit with reverence and devotion. Rather, he is the ultimate essence of ourselves and the highest principal of the universe. He is what we call the Atman (Eternal Soul), or the Brahman (All-pervading Eternal Reality).



Father Cyril Veliath, S.J.

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Ideal Human Being (from page 7)

In Chapter 11 of the Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna reveals himself to Prince Arjun in his supreme and glorious form as the Lord of all. In that magnificent vision Arjun saw the entire universe within the body of Lord Krishna, a vision that resembled the light of a thousand suns. Arjun was overawed by that vision. He described Krishna as the imperishable, the ultimate resting place of the universe, the undying guardian of the eternal law, and by many other names.

So, for Swami Vivekananda, an ideal human being is a person who has had an experience of the Supreme God, a mystical experience similar to what he himself had when he encountered his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna. An ideal human being is a person who leads a life motivated purely by love. His consciousness of God is so intense, that he does not feel the need of using rituals, rites, or other symbolic means. He is a person who has such an intimacy with God, that he has no choice but to radiate the goodness of God to all people and to everything around him.

For an ideal human being, for a person who has had a mystical experience like that of Swami Vivekananda, the world around will not be different after the mystical experience. The world we see around us will be the same as it was before, but the person will see the world through different eyes. The scholar Anthony De Mello, describes this in the following way, by using the example of Zen Buddhism.

When a certain Zen Master attained enlightenment, he wrote the following words. “What a marvelous thing! I chop wood. I draw water from the well.” Commenting on this passage, De Mello remarks:

“For most people there is nothing special about activities like chopping wood or drawing water from a well. Every villager does it. After enlightenment nothing really changes. Everything remains the same as it was before. The trees around will be the same trees, the people around will be the same people, and we also will be the same. However, there is one major difference. Now we will see all these things through different eyes.”

That is what happened to Swami Vivekananda. After his mystical experience with Sri Ramakrishna, he returned to the same life that he had before. However, there was this major difference. Now he reacted to the world and to the problems around him in a totally different way.

In our Indian tradition we have the Sanskrit term *Jivanamukta*. This is a term used in Vedantic philosophy, and it signifies a person who has been liberated from the bonds of rebirth and who has attained God, even though he or she is still alive and still has a body. These people live and work among us just like normal people, but they have already had an experience of God. Such people are also referred to as *Atma-jnani* (one who has had an experience of his or her own soul or *Atman*), or *Brahma-jnani* (one who has had an experience of the All-pervading Eternal Spirit or *Brahman*).

Some Vedantic masters did not accept the idea of *Jivanamukta*. For instance, according to scholars, Shankaracharya of the 8th century who taught the philosophy of

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Ideal Human Being (from page 8)

Advaita or non-dualism, and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of the 15th century who preached the doctrine of *Acintya Bheda Abheda* or Incomprehensible Dualistic Non-dualism, both accepted it. Yet, in the case of Ramanujacharya of the 11th century who preached the doctrine of *Vishishtadvaita* or Qualified Non-dualism, scholars are not sure whether he accepted it or not.

Did Swami Vivekananda accept the idea of *Jivanamukta*? My own answer is YES. My personal opinion is, not only did Swami Vivekananda accept the concept of *Jivanamukta*, but he was a *Jivanamukta* himself. And not only that, he also regarded his Guru Sri Ramakrishna, whom he deeply loved and revered, as a *Jivanamukta*. So for Swami Vivekananda, an ideal Human Being is a *Jivanamukta*, a person who resembled his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna. •

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA 159TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY AT THE VIVEKANANDA CULTURAL CENTRE INDIAN EMBASSY TOKYO



Foyer Registration



Peace Prayer



Peace Prayer



Universal Gospel Release



Flower Offering



Foyer Book Display



Swami Medhasananda & Ambassador Verma



Swami Divyanathananda & Japanese Devotees



Dwhani Dance Group



Japanese Devotees



Bengali Devotees



Mr. Chandrani



Applause



Closing Group Photo

• Story to Remember •

An Excerpt from '*Reminiscences of Swami Ramakrishnananda*'
By Sister Devamata

Swami Ramakrishnananda stands as a towering figure in my Indian life. He was an inherent part of it from the moment when he waited on the station platform to greet me as the in-coming train brought me to Madras, until he leaned through the railway carriage window to give a parting word of counsel as the out-going Bombay mail carried me westward. There was always a bigness and a majesty about him that impelled. He had a way of sweeping aside the belittling details of life and leaving large spaces for nobler thought and action

One evening a torrential tropical storm swept over Mylapore after Arati, the Indian Vesper Service. Some Mohammedan students who were passing took shelter in the monastery. Swami Ramakrishnananda gave them cordial welcome, and then with true spiritual courtesy he began talking to them, not of the Vedas and his own form of faith, but of their religion and the Koran. His exposition of the words of Mohammed was so illuminating that the students returned every evening for a week to hear more of it. . .

Swami Ramakrishnananda's devotion was not a surface emotion. It reached down to the deepest roots of his being... He had little patience with a wavering half-faith in the Higher Power. "Now we trust God only partially," he said one day. "We think we can do many things better ourselves. We may say, 'God, please write this letter,' but all the time we believe we can write it a little better than He, so we do not entrust it entirely to Him. When, however, we can give up everything to Him, then we shall see how well He will serve us, for He says, of such devotees He actually becomes the servant."

Shortly before I left Madras, as we were driving back from the city one evening, I expressed regret that I was leaving when he had so few to help him. The answer that came was direct and uncompromising:

"I do not need anyone to help me. I am all full of God. What need have I of anyone else? If He sends people to help me, I am satisfied. If He does not send, I am satisfied. I know that whatever He sends is for my good and is the best thing for me."

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