



JULY 2022 -VOLUME 20 NUMBER 07

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Birthdays

Swami Niranjanananda
Friday, 12 August

Sri Krishna
Thursday, 18 August

Swami Advaitananda
Friday, 26 August

✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Being steadfast in yoga, O Arjuna, perform actions, abandoning attachment, remaining unconcerned as regards success and failure. This evenness of mind is known as Yoga."

— Sri Krishna

"The older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness. This is my new gospel."

— Swami Vivekananda

Important Announcement

As planned by the Vedanta Kyokai, its Newsletter has been created and edited by our long term devotee Mr. Lonnie Hirsch. For more than 20 years, every month, he has devoted time to lovingly design and prepare this Newsletter to keep our devotees and well-wishers up to date with the ongoings of the Kyokai. For this long, dedicated and expert service of Mr. Lonnie Hirsch the Vedanta Society and the innumerable readers of the Newsletter are immensely grateful to him. Unfortunately, on health grounds, it will be difficult for Lonnie san to continue with this service. Let us pray to Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi for the wellbeing and good health of our dear Lonnie-san. From this month onwards, another long time devotee of our Kyokai, Mr. Ashish Gupta will continue this work.

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Vedanta Society of Japan

Message Regarding Monthly Programmes for August 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.

Vedanta Society of Japan continues to observe social distancing, mask wearing, and avoid crowding in programme areas. Attendance to the Zushi Monthly Retreat and participation in other programs remains space limited, so please contact us if you wish to attend either of these programmes.

Swami Medhasananda, President
Vedanta Society of Japan

AUGUST 2022 Calendar of Programmes

3rd (Wed) August

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

6th (Sat) August

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

* Video uploaded later

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

14th (Sun) August

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

Live Streaming [Click here](#) and Zoom

17th (Wed) August

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

21st (Sun) August

Monthly Zushi Retreat

Sri Krishna Celebration

Bi-Lingual Live Streaming [Click here](#) to go to YouTube.

27th (Sun) August

Osaka Bhagavad Gita Class

14:30 ~ 16:30 (in Japanese only)

Ideals of Swami Vivekananda

By TANIGUCHI, Tomohiko, Dr, Professor, Keio University Graduate School of Systems Design and Management: Address given to "Swami Vivekananda: 159th Birth Anniversary Celebration," Sunday, 12th June, 2022, Vivekananda Cultural Centre, Embassy of India

I made a pledge some time ago that I should be doing whatever I could do in my capacity for the betterment of the Indo-Japanese bilateral relationship. As Prime Minister ABE Shinzo mentioned several times, the sky is the only limit for the relationship. Along with him, I have seen through my eyes the development of the bilateral ties, and emergence of the new geostrategic framework of the Indo-Pacific, as well as of the Quadrilateral Defence Cooperation, or QUAD. I was, to quote Dean Acheson, present at the creation, together with the great prime minister, which partially explains my fondness of working on behalf of our two countries.



Once one finds oneself intrigued by the richness of India's culture, tradition, religion, and spirituality, one is destined to encounter the greatest man of the great among the country's leaders, namely, Swami Vivekananda.

In such a way I also did come to learn of the great man while I was hastily putting together good episodes and narratives with which I could perhaps write a speech for Prime Minister Abe, in the run up to his scheduled visit to Delhi, India, addressing the Joint House of Indian Parliament in 2007.

Prime Minister Abe began his speech by referencing the spiritual leader thus, and I quote, "'The different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea.' It gives me tremendous pleasure to be able to begin my address today with the words of Swami Vivekananda, the great spiritual leader that India gave to the world," unquote.

I have just told you how I came to learn only a bit of Swami Vivekananda, and that brief encounter would later draw attention from Swami Medhasananda, who, eventually urged me to speak on Swami Vivekananda, which was about a year ago, at the occasion of the 158th birth anniversary celebration of the great teacher, which I duly accepted and delivered a speech.

That's it. Nothing more. I do not exhibit humility here as many in Japan do in these cases. I only reveal truth that I have no credentials with which I could make any substantive argument of your greatest of the greatest, for, the two experiences mentioned above mean nothing. It is like zero times zero. It is still zero.

Now I must face up to the challenge, what a challenge, Swami Medhasananda gave me, and that is to address Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on ideal society. How dare I could be this much bold to address such a topic, philosophical one of all issues pertinent to Swami Vivekananda?

The great Hindu priest we are pondering now was born on the 12th of January 1863. To an amazement of many, I believe, about a month later on the 14th of February in that same year, OKAKURA, Tenshin was also born, that man of renaissance who would develop close ties with Sister Nivedita and eventually Swami Vivekananda.

Okakura was a man of great awakening. He was the very first Japanese individual who looked at his home country's heritage of art and culture from the bird's eye's perspective, or I should say, from the earth's satellite orbit's perspective.

The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan, The Awakening of Japan, The Awakening of the East, and lest it be forgotten, *The Book of Tea*, were the books he published in English.

We could all draw an observation simply by giving a glance to the list of Okakura's book titles that in his age, that is to say, in the age of Swami Vivekananda, the impact from the West inevitably led a select few in each country, India and Japan, to seriously contemplate what differentiates their home countries from the West. The ideas they came up with differed. And yet there is one thing in common between the two cases of India and Japan, which is that in order to see the difference between their respective home country and the West, they had to develop a holistic view with which they grappled with the wholeness of their mother country.

That holistic viewpoint was a prerequisite for the intellectuals of their age to construct ideas, ideals, and ideal types of their respective society. It was also to provide the nation with soil to grow patriotic awakenings. After all, unless and until one develops an idea that those from Hokkaido and those from Okinawa are all the same Japanese, there should be no such thing as national awareness.

Little wonder, therefore, that in the 1860s, the decade in which both Swami Vivekananda and OKAKURA, Tenshin were born, also born included such people as follows: Rabindranath Tagore, in 1861; MORI Ōgai, the Japanese great author cum Army doctor, in 1862; Gabriele D'Annunzio, that controversial poet in Italy, in 1863; Max Weber, German sociologist, in 1864; Romain Rolland, who was a great friend of Tagore's, in 1866; Sun Yat-sen, China's revolutionary, in 1866; NATSUME, Sōseki, another great author in Japan, in 1867; and lest we should forget, Mahatma Gandhi, in 1869.

Among them, those worked in art and literature pondered, for the first time, who they are as a collective sum, in other words, as a nation, or as a people. Who are the Japanese? Who are the Indians? Or in the case of D'Annunzio, who are the Italians?

It is only from there those senses of ownership over, responsibility in the running of, and duty of leading the society sprang up. And my understanding is, no one but Swami Vivekananda better epitomised the prevailing zeitgeist.

For the first time in history, society stopped appearing a god given natural being. Previously, society was something that was just there, like the planet earth. Ever present, it was not an object perceived to be constructible, or de-constructible. Any longer, hardly.

One reaches that realisation better, if not only, when one transcends national and cultural borders, for doing so equips one with a much-broadened perspective. Last year, at the same occasion of the birth celebration for Swami Vivekananda, I spoke of the masterpiece authored by Swami Medhasananda, entitled, "The Story of India-Japan Relationship: Swami Vivekananda and Okakura Tenshin, the Modern Era Pioneers," in which the author meticulously chronicled the steps Swami Vivekananda took in Japan, on his way to Chicago.

Common in our knowledge is what he subsequently did in the United States and in Europe. True, he was the first ever Indian leader who taught the largely Christian audiences in the West of the Hindu religion, and Vedanta in particular. Equally important, he turned himself a keen observer of how in each country, Japan, the United States, Britain and so on, society was being run. Intended or not, he developed in his inner self a systems engineer, who first of all looks at the wholeness of the society, second of all perceives it to be alterable, and third of all takes a long-term view when engineering an ideal society.

It is worth noting here that in the late 19th to early 20th century when he traversed across the world absolutely no nation was in any way close to ideal society. No nation, be it America or be it England, had mature democracy. The United States enslaved people of dark skin. Britain achieved prosperity by milking its colonies, India among others. Belgium was just about to embark upon the cruellest colonial rule in the modern-day Democratic Republic of Congo, under King Leopold the Second.

I should like to be enlightened as to whether Swami Vivekananda left any reflections on the disunity, disharmony, and inequality of the Western society in detail. Suffice it to say that for someone like him who believed that God is omnipresent and that all are equal and same as all of them share divinity, societies he witnessed in the West must have given him a good example of what not to do.

When he began his monumental speech in Chicago by addressing the audience "Sisters and brothers of America," he became the human's first ever proponent of, say, gender equality, accidental may he have been.

To quote Hiltrud Rüstau of Humboldt University, "[I]t expressed his firm conviction of the equality of man, no matter what his nationality, faith, sex, colour, etc., and it also expressed the self-confidence of a man who, coming from a colonial country, proudly announced to the public that his country, poor, downtrodden, and starving as it was, had something valuable to offer the world. I unquote and tell you that blessed are the Indians who had such a giant.

In order here is also to quote what Sister Nivedita said of Swami Vivekananda, which I actually learned in a paper written by Subhadip Mukherjee of Jatindra Rajendra Mahavidyalaya, and I quote:

'That society is the greatest, where the highest truths became practical,' he observed. 'In an ideal society, there is no sphere left for privilege of force, wealth, intelligence. Any kind of privilege for any individual or group on the basis of spiritual power or birth is negation of an ideal society. Vivekananda was very critical of the privilege groups of the society who oppressed the most of the society. In his opinion this was the worst tyranny in the world.

And I unquote.

Gaur Chandra Ghosh and Ram Krishna Biswas argued in their paper entitled "The Concept of Democracy and the Relevance of Swami Vivekananda in the Indian perspective" and I quote, "Vivekananda says that the true nature of the soul of Vedanta will be to establish the unity among human beings along with the equality of right of the people. There is God in everybody. The society demands that kind of system where nobody will be allowed to enjoy special right, and everybody should have equal right and opportunity to enjoy. Everybody will have the opportunity to improve his or her ability and there will be incentives for work. It will ultimately weed out differences in the exercise of rights. In this way the weaker, depressed and expropriated sections of the society will be able to take up power which is essential for democracy," unquote.

By now we can argue that his belief in the oneness of human beings, the omnipresence of God in all creatures, still resonates greatly among the Japanese, who believe that their deceased parents, sisters, brothers, uncles, and aunts are present under the sod, or in the shadow of grass leaves. One finds yet again the spiritual commonality between the Indians and the Japanese.

It is an apt moment now to pay more heed to what Swami Vivekananda said of an ideal society by largely relying upon the depictions Hiltrud Rüstau gave in her paper, entitled "Swami Vivekananda's Ideal Society."

For Swami Vivekananda, an ideal society is one in which unselfishness and renunciation of privileges can be realised. The ideal society has to guarantee liberty of thought and action, which is the precondition of life. "Where it does not exist, the man, the race, the nation must go down," he said. Liberty means the natural right of man to use his body, mind and property according to his own will, without doing any harm to other people. All members shall have the same opportunities to get education, to acquire wealth etc. This natural right of man Vivekananda considered to be unrealised in modern society where the luxury of the wealthy people is ensured by the suffering of millions of poor people condemned to misery and ignorance.

The German scholar of India's philosophy, Hiltrud Rüstau, went on to point out the following. And I quote again: "Vivekananda's social thoughts were always centred on the the life of the common man, but especially at the end of his life he stressed the fact that the labouring masses were the 'backbone of the country,' who by their labour are producing food -- these poor people, the sweepers and labourers, who if they stop work for one day will create a panic in the town," unquote.

As is the case with a leader so towering as could be found only in the formative years of the nation, his was a big heart. So big, that it heard the vox populi, raged at the people's suffering, and felt acute the pain of the people.

To improve the Indian society, or for that matter any society, for the achievement of social equity, is an effort worth not only a generation but generations. That much, I believe, is what he knew to the fullest as none among his contemporaries observed politics, economy and religious undertakings in the West as deeply as he did. To reiterate what was mentioned before, neither England, France, nor America exemplified anything akin to egalitarian society he wished for in his own country. Then the question to be posed is this. What would be the first and the most important step that the nation's leaders should take, and continue to commit themselves to?

Swami Vivekananda as a religious leader, a philosopher, and a systems engineer, had an answer that applies to our age as well: education. Though against the backdrop utterly different from what Swami Vivekananda viewed in India, Japan could not grow any longer without spending substantially more on education, from the elementary level to one that is to help shift careers for the working adults. For it is people that generate growth, which holds even more truths in this age of technological advancement.

Back to Swami Vivekananda's thoughts, what did he say of education, and the value therein? According to him, and I rely here on a paper written by Mohan Lal, entitled "Reflections of Swami Vivekananda's Ideas on Education," education is a process in which the young minds will receive strength, energy and vigorous character. All knowledge and all powers are within. All knowledge comes from the human soul. Education is a man-making and nation-making process. It is the process which awakens the sleeping soul to self-conscious activity.

Also in his own words, "we want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet. What our country now wants are muscles of lion and a nerve of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist."

I am aware that I am just putting together only fragments of his thoughts. Still, it is evident that his are the views one could also find among the great founding fathers of Japan's modernisation, such as FUKUZAWA, Yukichi. Or for that matter similarity of thoughts could be found among enlightenment philosophers elsewhere in the world.

Fast forward to the present day, the life, the wandering, the thoughts and the burning passion for his religious beliefs, still stand as a beacon that awakens not only people in India, but also those in Japan.

That in India you had Swami Vivekananda, of whose broad mind shared people's pain and suffering, of whose shining eyes still gaze upon us, and of whose ideas long remain a source of enlightenment, continues to earn admiration from across the world.

Japan under Prime Minister Abe chose to bring her ever closer to India. It was an act of investment into the country's richness in future growth potentials, sustained primarily by its education, which the great spiritual leader held so much dear, as well as an act of putting faith onto the country's future trajectory, for after all, you had Swami Vivekananda, whom you still greatly admire. And I conclude my speech by adding that I also admire him so very much.



Chion-in Retreat in Kyoto

Report by Leonardo Alvarez

This year the retreat was held at the headquarters of one of the largest Buddhist sects in Japan, Pure Land Buddhism, or Jōdo-shū (浄土宗) in Japanese, founded by Hōnen (法然) and located in North-East Kyoto. It was here at Chion-in (知恩院) that Hōnen taught chanting the name of Amida (Sanskrit: Amitabha Buddha) to attain Enlightenment, and it is also the place where he left his mortal coil.

Medhasanandaji (henceforth Maharaj) and Divyanatanandaji departed early morning of July 8th from the Ashrama in Zushi and reached Kyoto by Shinkansen shortly before lunch, where they were greeted by some devotees. After taking lunch together, while a few attendees along with Maharaj visited the Gion Gallery where they saw the festival car “Yamahoko,” and then paid a visit to the Yasaka Shinto Shrine nearby on the way to the venue of the Retreat, others headed to the hotel accommodations at Chion-in, called “Wajun Kaikan” (和順会館:

“The Hall of Peaceful Obedience”, in Japanese). This hotel is 5-storey high, located on a slope, with a white façade, noted for its spacious areas with glass windows on the first floor, overlooking the temple compound. Many receptionists are Buddhist novices and calls for morning ritualistic prayers are given every morning at 4:50 am. Once the group reached the hotel, they prayed for a successful and smooth retreat.



Then from 14:40, under the guidance of a Buddhist priest from Chion-in, a group of devotees visited the main temple compound, which boasts numerous halls and temples. They entered through the Sanmon (三門) , a gate 25 meters high

and 50 meters long, the biggest of its kind in Japan, and proceeded to the Mieidō (御影堂) , a national treasure of Japan, showcasing the statue of Hōnen, decorated by exquisite gold ornaments dangling from the roof, statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and interspaced with wooden carvings featuring motifs of trees and animals. They also saw the Hall dedicated to Amitabha Buddha, the largest bell in Japan, among others, and were lastly treated with a cup of Japanese green tea and Japanese delicacies.



After returning to their rooms and resting for some time, Arati began at 18:00 before a neatly set up small altar at the assembly hall, where the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and the celebrated founder of the Jodo-shu named Honen were placed. Devotional songs in Bengali and Sanskrit filled the hall accompanied by the harmonium played by Divyanathanandaji, and the Japanese devotees also sang worship songs in Japanese. This was followed by a reading from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Maharaj then explained about the importance and details regarding meditation and conducted a guided meditation for the devotees. Dinner was served at 19:30 and the evening meeting began at 20:30, where all attendees present at the moment sat together to read about the Scriptures and introduce themselves. At this time, Maharaj explained the necessity and significance of spiritual retreats, such as the present summer retreat, and again, Divyanathanandaji delighted devotees with songs. It was a lively atmosphere making all feel at home.



Since the shocking news of Abe Shinzō’s (former Prime Minister of Japan) assassination had reached by then and given his close association with India and even his

support of Swamiji's Birthday Celebration in Japan, the group held a short silent prayer for the well-being of his departed soul by standing up.



The following morning of July 9th, most of the devotees assembled before 4:00 in the lobby and departed on time for an outdoor meditation session on the picturesque walking area cum Japanese garden located near the hotel, facing the small mountain where the temple complex is located. Dawn was at hand, and all was in peaceful silence around. The group sat in front of a small pond, over which stretched a small concrete Japanese-style bridge bedecked with stone lanterns, whose end, though not far away, seemed to flow into infinity. After we spread our meditation mats and assumed the position to meditate, Maharaj gave us instructions: *"First, keep your eyes open and enjoy the scenery around you. Also imagine that the mountain in front of you is as if the Himalayas."* After some time, he instructed us to close our eyes, and this was followed by a reverberating intonation of "Om" in a low voice. Meditation continued uninterrupted for more than one hour in deep silence occasionally broken by the splashing sound of water due to sporadic jumps of Japanese carps joyfully swimming in the pond in front of us.



After that we returned to the hotel hall around 6:50, when we began chanting Vedic mantras, then read the Bhagavad Gita both in Sanskrit and Japanese translation, after which, Maharaj gave an explanation on the verses we read, namely Chapter 6, verses 5 to 26. *The gist of the talk was that our mind, uncontrolled, is our worst enemy, but when it is controlled, is our best friend. The two options of Sreya and Preya always appear before us, that is, one is what is pleasant but ruinous in the long run, and the other is what is difficult in the beginning but takes us on to the path of self-mastery and growth. It is always our choice to take one or the other. We must also still the mind, like the steady flame undisturbed by wind, protected by a glass. Only then we will gain control over it.* After the explanation, singing of 'Murtamaheshvara', a Sanskrit hymn on Swamiji, was led by Divyanathananda-ji and joined by all.

From 07:00 about a dozen of devotees gathered to practice Yoga nearby our morning meditation spot, while the rest took the time for themselves. Breakfast was from 08:15, and either Japanese or Western-style items were served. The first series of lectures given by Maharaj, entitled *"How to Face the Various Disasters in Life and How to Obtain Peace and Lead a Spiritual Life from the Perspective of Indian Philosophy"* began at 09:45 until midday. The talk on this day started by treating the topic of different types of intelligence, such as I.Q. (Intelligence Quotient), W.Q. (Wisdom Quotient), E.Q. (Emotional Quotient), M.Q. (Morality Quotient) and S.Q. (Spiritual Quotient), stressing the fact that we need to develop in these five aspects to have an all-round, ideal personality. The next point was that we should welcome troubles and trials in life, since no one can become great without facing them. Great



personages of history such as Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln, all had boldly faced and overcome many vicissitudes that made them who they were. Moreover, Swamiji stressed that infinite power lies dormant in us, but we have to awaken it and use it. This is done not by escaping from the troubles but by facing them boldly. We cry for help to God, but God does not help because He has already given us the power to help ourselves. He will only help when we exhaust all the power He has given us. Another issue with us is that in spite of being in the spiritual path for many years and practicing meditation, still we do not change much. Why is it so? Maharaj placed this most pertinent question before all. Then Maharaj observed: Is it not that most of the time, we do not really want to change us, and hence, no change takes place in us.



At midday, offering of sweets to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Deva, Swami Vivekananda and Hōnen was performed, and the prasada was taken with lunch at 12:15. Subsequently a group photograph was taken and sales of Vedantic books, CDs and religious paraphernalia was carried out with great enthusiasm, by a group of devotees including Mr. Tajima and Mr. and Mrs. Masuda.

After a short break, Abbot Maeda Shōshin gave a speech entitled “The Teachings of Hōnen and How to Put Them into Practice in Our Daily Lives.” Next, followed a short discourse by Maharaj. It dealt with the fact that in spite of us being devotees, we still had to face numerous trials and tribulations. He cited the example of Bhavatarini, affectionately called ‘Bhavi’ by Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swamiji, among others. Though she was nurtured by them from a very young age, and very devoted to God, even her husband, Upendra Babu, formerly a very poor person, received Sri Ramakrishna’s grace and became rich, after some years, first her husband, then her only son, and lastly, her only grandson, all passed away. Not being able to bear with the tremendous shock and bereavement, she left home unnoticed and was found in a place of pilgrimage. Later she lived in Benares, being looked after by the monastics of the local Ramakrishna Mission, practicing hard austerities (tapasya) and always remembering Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sarada Devi. The ultimate test of devotion by God is that, even after everyone and everything has left a devotee, would such a devotee still say: “O Lord! Thou art my only Refuge, Thou, my only Companion?”



At around 17:15, it had stopped raining, so the devotees, together with Maharaj, went out for a stroll on the park area, where they had meditated the previous day in the morning. Along the way, one devotee asked questions about Tantra and meditation to Maharaj. Maharaj was also found caressing a serene cat that was resting beside a tree. After one lap around the area, they came back to the pond, where they fed the multicoloured carps with crackers, who came in throngs to relish the offerings. Also, a group of Nepalese students majoring in IT at Kyoto were present, and they briefly exchanged greetings



with Maharaj.

The evening worship began at 18:00, following the usual Arati songs and reading from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, and meditation. Dinner was served at 19:30, which was as usual, a sumptuous assortment of Japanese dishes.

From 20:30 to 21:30, the second evening gathering was held, and mainly consisted of songs. First Mr. Leonardo Alvarez sang a Jewish song about Jerusalem. Then followed a dramatic description by one of the organisers, Atsushi Suzuki-san, recounting how as planned by Maharaj and meticulously executed by him, he had disguised himself back in December last year, when a group of devotees were heading to Osaka by bullet-train, where Maharaj was visiting for the first time after 3 years to give a discourse before a group of devotees. Atsushi-san had boarded the same bullet-train, camouflaging his identity with a nit-hat, thick glasses and covering his face most of the time with a magazine. Unbeknownst to all except Maharaj, he had sat only next to the group of devotees. Although some had noted the strange behaviour of the fellow passenger, no one could discover his identity, and it was a great surprise, almost in utter disbelief, to find him entering the discourse hall, after reaching Osaka and knowing that he had been next to us all along! His description kept listeners enthralled, while pearls of laughter filled the room.

Next a Japanese folk song “故郷 (Furusato) or ‘Hometown’”, extolling the beauty and purity of a typical Japanese village in the countryside was sung in chorus in a mellowed voice by the Japanese attendees.

Then Maharaj and Divyanathananda Maharaj on harmonium sang in a melodious and full throated voice mixed with emotion a song composed and set to tune following a Bengali folk song by Poet Rabindranath Tagore, “Amar Sonar Bangla” (My exquisite Bengal) which later became the national anthem of Bangladesh.

The last day of the retreat, Sunday 10th, began at 5:00 with meditation at the assembly hall. As on the previous day, after Vedic chanting and reading from the Gita, Maharaj expounded the verses we had read, this time, from Chapter 2. Four main points were elucidated: (1) *Body, mind, intelligence and ego are all material, or part of Prakriti, hence inert, like dead matter. Only Consciousness is alive.* (2) *The Atman cannot be pierced by the sword, drowned by water, burnt by fire; it is immortal.* (3) *We suffer because we establish our relationships with others based on our body consciousness, which leads to attachment, and finally suffering.* (4) *We should always identify ourselves with the Atman, whose essence is Sat-Chit-Ananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute, to become truly happy and establish a relationship with others founded on spirituality.*



A Yoga class was held again at 7:00 for those who wanted to participate, and breakfast followed. Then the second half of the discourse began at 9:45. The previous day Maharaj had explained about several types of intelligence as well as problems we have to face in our daily lives, of which he gave 9 main examples, including work, human relationships, fear, attachment, desires, negative thinking, thinking of temporary things, worrying about the future and brooding about the past, and not wanting to change. Today he gave the criteria of true intelligence, with 5 questions. First, who is the most beautiful person? Answer: One whose nature is most beautiful? Who is the richest person? Answer: One who has no wants. Who is the strongest person? Answer: One who has gained control over his senses and mind. What is the fastest thing in the world? Answer: Mind. And finally, what is the most numerous in the world? Answer: Thoughts.



Regarding issues in our daily lives, he explained the following solutions. **For work**, we should perform it in the spirit of Karma Yoga as an instrument of God and offering our works to God and remembering God, before, during and after the work is done and to depend on God for results and finally, not to be overwhelmed either by success or by failure. **For human relationships**, we must reduce our ego, see God in all people and see their good qualities and overlook their faults.

Again, even the closest human relationship will end sooner or later. **To control the mind**, we must conquer ourselves and gain peace, by long practice, controlling the senses, meditating, discriminating between the ephemeral and the eternal, making and following a schedule of an ideal life, and stop worrying and regretting by living well now. **To reduce attachment and selfishness**, we must spiritualise our relationship with everything around us, think of wellbeing of others and serving them, instead of only caring for ourselves or our limited circle of family and friends.



To control desires, we must not fulfil them, because it would be like adding ghee (clarified butter) to fire, and also we should control our greed and practice contentment. **We should have a positive attitude**, by seeing the good in others, thinking of the Eternal, and remembering God at all times. **We can overcome fears, worries and stress**, by remembering that most of our fears and worries never take place, and by relying more on God.

Last but not least, on how to turn from a worldly (tamasic and rajasic) person to a spiritual (sattvic) person, the easiest way or Sahaja Yoga, as explained by Swami Brahmanandaji, is to repeat God's name mentally. It requires no long preparation as it is in the case of the practice of Jnana Yoga or Raja Yoga, where self-restraint and moral practices are a sine-qua-non, nor does it depend on physical strength and selflessness, as in Karma Yoga, and is not restricted by time or place or



situation. It has 11 benefits: (1) Counters negative thoughts (*Pratipaksha-bhavana*), (2) Prevents negative thoughts from rising; prevention is better than the cure; (3) God's name holy vibrations increase Sattva and reduce Rajas-Tamas; (4) Cleanses deeply rooted, negative samskaras; (5) Nullifies the effect of bad karma from this and other lives; (6) Increases our love for and faith in God; (7) Helps us feel in good company when we are alone; (8) Helps us concentrate during meditation by diminishing the amount of time we think of worldly things, which draws our mind away from God during meditation; (9) Helps performing our work better; (10) Helps us think of God at the moment of death; (11) Helps us become happy by giving us a taste of transcendental bliss.

The talk ended with a session of Q&A, and comments by those who had attended for the first time. A vote of thanks was given to the main organisers, Atsushi Suzuki-san, Shanti Izumida-san, to the volunteers that helped in organizing and conducting the retreat, as well as to the temple authorities and the hotel staff. The retreat closed with the following Vedic Peace Prayer:

*“Om pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ”*

After this, most devotees left. A small group of devotees, in addition to both Swamis, stayed one more night in Kyoto, for sight-seeing. That same evening, they headed to Katsura River, which runs with Mt. Arashi on its background, and meditated on the banks of the river, basking in the twilight sun, with the cooling effect of fresh winds and the sight of fishermen and houseboats across the river. After spending a night in a hotel, the group departed at 8 am on July 11th, and headed to the Golden Pavilion where they strolled on the temple area, and then visited the Heian Shrine (平安神宮), a Shinto Shrine



reconstructed at the end of the 19th Century, fashioned at the style of the old Chinese-style imperial buildings of the Heian Period. It continued by a visit to Kiyomizudera (清水寺), a famous temple noted by its beautiful view of the city of Kyoto from a hillside. Then the group headed to Sanjūsangendō (三十三間堂), a Buddhist temple from the 12th to 13th century, having a long corridor with real-life size sculptures of 1001 Bodhisattvas. In contrast to the scorching heat outside, the hallway was cool, and Maharaj explained to the devotees the connections between the Buddhist statues installed there and different Indian Gods and Goddesses. Then, the congregation meditated for a while before the images. On the way back to the Zushi Ashrama, the group stopped at an authentic Chinese restaurant for lunch, and all along the way, they conversed joyfully and tirelessly.



The whole program and trip were smooth and enjoyable through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother.

2022 Outdoor Retreat Schedule

July 8th (Friday) ~ 11th (Monday)

8th (Friday)

07:40 Departure from Kyokai
08:01 Departure from Zushi Station
09:10 Departure from Shinagawa Station (Shinkansen HIKARI 505)
11:37 Arrival at Kyoto Station
12:00 Lunch at Restaurant
13:40 To the hotel by Kyokai's car
13:50 Check In at Hotel
14:40 Pilgrimage
16:10 Resting and Tea (Assembly Hall)
18:00 Arati, Devotional Songs: Swami Divyanathanandaji
19:30 Supper
20:30 Satsanga
21:30 Retire for the Day

9th (Saturday)

04:50 Start from the Hotel (Meeting at lobby)
05:00 Outdoor Meditation
06:00 Vedic prayer and Gita, Hymn: Swami Divyanathanandaji
07:00 Yoga
08:15 Breakfast
09:45 Discourse: Swami Medhasanandaji
12:00 Offering
12:15 Lunch
14:30 Discourse: Chion-in monk 'MASANOBU MAEDA'
Theme: Honen Shonin's teachings and today's challenges
15:45 Outdoor Walking and tea
18:00 Arati, Devotional Songs: Swami Divyanathanandaji & Shanti, Meditation
19:30 Supper
20:30 Satsanga
21:30 Retire for the Day

10th (Sunday)

04:50 Start from the Hotel (Meeting at lobby)
05:00 Outdoor Meditation
06:00 Vedic prayer and Gita, Hymn: Swami Divyanathanandaji
07:00 Yoga
08:15 Breakfast
09:45 Discourse: Swami Medhasanandaji
12:00 Offering
12:15 Lunch
14:00 Q&A and Comments
15:30 Closure, Clean up
19:30 Supper at the another restaurant
21:00 Closure

11th (Monday)

07:00 Breakfast
08:00 Check out
Sightseeing around Kyoto 'ARASHIYAMA'
12:00 Lunch
13:30 Departure from Kyoto
23:30 Reach Kyokai

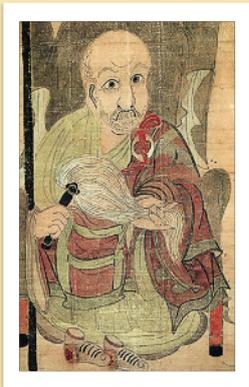
• Thought of the Month •

"Every man I meet is my superior in some way. In that, I learn of him."

– Dale Carnegie

• Story to Remember •

Is That So?



Zen Master Hakuin lived in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He is said to have created the now-famous question: “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” Hakuin believed that the understanding arising out of practice in everyday life was deeper than the understanding that could come from practicing in the monastery, since lay people faced more distractions, held more responsibilities, and experienced more heartbreak than the monks and so needed to practice with great diligence.

Hakuin was greatly respected and had many disciples. At one time in his life, he lived in a village hermitage, close to a food shop run by a couple and their beautiful, young daughter. One day the parents discovered that their daughter was pregnant. Angry and distraught, they demanded to know the name of the father. At first, the girl would not confess but after much harassment, she named Hakuin. The furious parents confronted Hakuin, berating him in front of all of his students. He simply replied, “Is that so?”

When the baby was born, the family gave it to Hakuin. By this time, he had lost his reputation and his disciples. But Hakuin was not disturbed. He took delight in caring for the infant child; he was able to obtain milk and other essentials from the villagers. A year later, the young mother of the child was troubled by great remorse. She confessed the truth to her parents – the real father was not Hakuin but rather a young man who worked at the local fish market. The mortified parents went to Hakuin, apologising, asking his forgiveness for the wrong they did him. They asked Hakuin to return the baby. Although he loved the child as his own, Hakuin was willing to give him up without complaint.

All he said was: “Is that so?”

The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)
4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi-shi, Kanagawa-ken 249-0001 JAPAN
Phone: 81-46-873-0428 Fax: 81-46-873-0592
Website: <http://www.vedanta.jp> Email: info@vedanta.jp