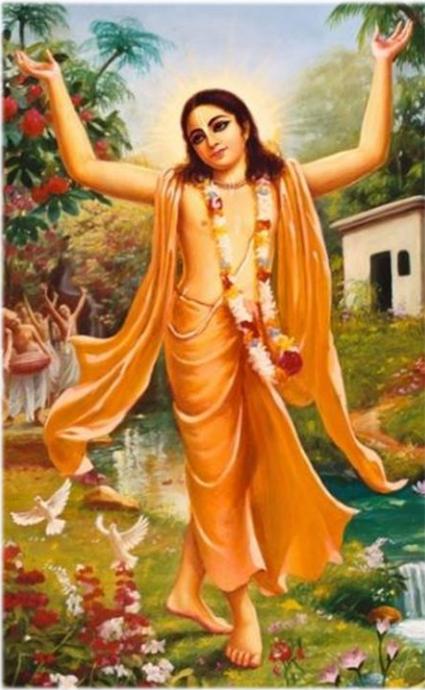




JULY 2023 -VOLUME 21 NUMBER 07

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Thus Spake

Devotion to God increases in the same proportion as attachment to the objects of the senses decreases.

- Sri Ramakrishna

As you smell the fragrance of a flower by handing it or the smell of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, so you obtain spiritual awakening by constantly thinking of God.

- Sri Sarada Devi

According to the Advaita Vedantist, the soul is struggling to reveal itself. After long struggle, it finds that the subject must always remain the subject; and then begins non-attachment, and it becomes free.

- Swami Vivekananda

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Monthly Program Schedule

for

AUGUST 2023

5th (Sat)

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

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

Video uploaded later

9th (Wed)

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

15th (Tue)

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

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

20th (Sun)

Monthly Retreat at Zushi

10:30 ~ 16:30

Bilingual Live Streaming

Speaker: Swami Medhasananda

23rd (Wed)

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

Importance of Love: from Human love to Divine Love

by Swami Divyanathananda on 18th June 2023

Love is a mighty force.

Where there is love, there is no fear.

Love dispels all kinds of fear, said Christ. Pure, selfless love is a divine force.

“Of the three- virtues, faith, hope and love, love is the greatest” said St. Paul.

Love is a very common concept in our everyday life. Parents love their children, the husband loves his wife, scholars love their subject, the farmer loves his crop, the lawyer loves his profession- in other words love manifests in so many different forms. Love nurtures the family, binds the society. When love expands from family to nation, it becomes much deeper and broader. In India, during the freedom struggle from the British, so many young men gave up their lives for the cause of freedom of their country. All these were rooted in love for country. About the patriotism of Japanese people Swami Vivekananda said, “The faith of the Japanese in themselves, and the love for their country... The Japanese are ready to sacrifice everything for their country and they have become a great people.” Love is an important ingredient which keeps our life moving. Yet, it is not easy to love, and real love is rare.



The word ‘Love’ is so commonly used in our daily life, however, all are not fortunate enough to receive parental love from their childhood. For want of love many children turn into criminals when they grow up. Again, by showing love, sympathy, and compassion, one can change others. Let me narrate a story.

A professor of psychology sent a team of researchers to a certain slum area in Baltimore, America and made a survey about the young people therein. They interviewed some 200 children and came out with horrific reports. According to that report, most of the children would invariably turn into criminals when they grow up. Exactly twenty years later, the same professor sent another team to the same place and they could identify 180 of those 200 children, again interviewed them and found to their astonishment that the predictions of the earlier research have proved to be wrong. Most of the adults who were children during that time, and about whom the prediction was made, have turned up into responsible citizens. Then they went to find out, what was the cause. They found that a teacher, called Sheela O’Rourke had taken care of all these 200 young children. She took personal care of each of them, listened to their problems, found out the strengths of each and helped to give a shape to their life. Her method of teaching was by love. But if necessary, she used the cane too, to punish any unruly child. Slowly, all those children came under the orbit of her love, which moulded their life. Had they not received her love, they would have turned into criminals.

Love binds a family and for want of love, families often get disintegrated. Here is an example of two families. There is one family, comprising of the husband and wife, with their two children. They are quite rich and affluent, living in a palatial building in a cosmopolitan city. The husband gets up early, then tries to wake up his wife for a cup of tea, but she continues to sleep. The man makes the tea for

himself, cursing his fate. He tries to wake up the children, but in vain. They grumble for having deprived of their sleep. They start for school, which they don't like. They blame the monotonous routine every day. They blame their mother for the bland breakfast, while their mother blames her husband for not giving attention to the household. The father actually runs a big business, is very nice to his customers, but rude to his wife and children. The children on the other hand cannot open up themselves to their parents. So, in one way, everybody in the house is unhappy with something or the other. Outwardly, they have all the amenities of life, but the one most important ingredient, LOVE is missing from their life.

There is, on the other hand, another family, which is quite poor. They have to work very hard for maintaining their living. They have a simple house, but they keep it clean. All wake up early in the morning. While the wife cooks food for the family, her husband also lends a helping hand to her. The children prepare their lessons and clean the courtyard of the house. They are sincere in their studies and hard-working. In the evening they all sit together and share what happened during the day. In this family, a strong love is binding each of them and that is why, the family runs so smoothly. Thus, love is the life-blood of family life.

In the beginning, Love is confined to our body, our house and family, our profession and the small circle of near and dear ones around us. But it is possible to extend this love further and further. The greatest manifestation of love is seen in Holy Men, who have expanded their heart to include the entire humanity. Their love doesn't have boundaries of race, language and country. In the modern times, we have seen the extraordinary life of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. We shall give a few illustrations from their lives.

Somebody asked Swami Vijnananandaji, what attracted him towards Sri Ramakrishna. Sw. Vijnananandaji immediately replied, at that time he had no idea about Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual greatness, renunciation, absorption in God, etc. What drew him towards the Master was his unalloyed love. His love was so deep that even he didn't get that much love from his parents, brothers, or friends. Many other disciples of the Master were of the same opinion. Swami Vivekananda used to say about Sri Ramakrishna- He was L O V E personified.

Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi during her childhood would lend her helping hands to her parents in the household chores. When the great famine in Bengal broke out, her father, though a poor brahmin decided to distribute cooked food to the poor persons of the locality. As the cooked food was being served in the plates, the young Sarada, with her tiny hands would fan it, so that the warm food cools a little and the person can partake of it. As a wife she took care of her ailing husband and looked after the devotees who would come from far and near. In her parental home, when she lived there with her brothers, she would day and night serve the family. Sometimes devotee families would arrive suddenly without prior information, however, without showing slightest sign of annoyance, she would accept them lovingly, make room for their lodging, cook food and serve them with her own hands. They also very easily would feel at home.

Some devotee would come to her with great eagerness for initiation, she would gladly initiate them, even during sickness. She had the power to take sins of others and gladly suffer for others' sake. Those who would complain, saying they were unable to undertake japa every day, she would say, 'I shall take your responsibility, You need not do anything'. Actually, she was seen making japa for others, knowing

that many of her disciples after taking initiation were careless about daily meditation. During extreme hot season in Kolkata, she would cover her body with a cloth and accept *pranams* from the devotees for hours together. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was the very embodiment of Love. To Her, the whole world was her own. No one was a stranger. Her love was truly universal. Devotee, non-devotee, good children as well as fallen ones, persons of low caste, poor, uneducated and birds and animals received Her unbounded love. Her love was not only confined to the welfare of Her children in this life alone, but to the other world also. Swami Abhedanandaji, in his famous hymn to Sarada Devi wrote:

स्नेहेन बध्नासि मनोऽस्मदीयं
दोषानशेषान् सगुणीकरोषि ।
अहेतुना नो दयसे सदोषान्
स्वाङ्के गृहीत्वा यदिदं विचित्रम् ॥९॥

You tie our minds with the tenderness of maternal love, and orient our lives which are filled with endless faults into good qualities. Without any motive you take pity on us who are filled with various faults. And, accepting us as we are, take us on your lap, this indeed is surprising.

Swami Vivekananda, although he was an all-renouncing monk, yet he had the heart of a loving mother. The day when he made his world-shaking speech at the Parliament of religions at Chicago, was he feeling himself at the top of the world, looking back at his success? No, on the contrary he was so much worrying for his poor motherland that he couldn't sleep the whole night. The degraded condition of his countrymen couldn't make him sleep in the luxury of the hotel room, instead he was weeping, thinking of their deplorable condition, many of whom couldn't afford a square meal a day. When Bengal was hit by plague, he was ready to sell the lands of Belur Math. In those days, it was unthinkable to get large donations to meet the cost of relief work.

Another incident is worth narrating. At that time Swamiji was staying at Belur Math and Swami Vijnananandaji, although most of the time he would stay at Allahabad, he also happened to be there. One night, Vijnananandaji woke up in the middle of the night and as he stepped outside his room, he saw Swamiji pacing up and down in the Veranda. Vijnananandaji asked him, why he was still awake, Swamiji replied, 'I was asleep, suddenly I woke up, as if shaken by something and felt, someplace might have been hit by a calamity and several people were crying in pain.' Vijnananandaji couldn't understand what Swamiji meant. However, the next morning the newspapers reported of a huge fire in a nearby island of Fiji and several persons had lost their lives.

Just as love is so powerful, the opposite of love, which are hatred and jealousy are forces which make us weak. Love binds; jealousy separates. Love lifts a man from darkness; hatred degrades us into the depths of hell. Most of the violence that we see in our society is borne out of hatred and jealousy. Out of the six enemies of men, hatred and jealousy are considered as one's enemy. They are inter-related to each other. Hatred burns the person himself as well as the other. A man who is hateful of others always feels irritated and bitter. He will not spare any opportunity to cause harm to the person whom he hates. We shall cite two illustrations:

A teacher in a certain school earned lot of love and respect from his students because of his loving nature. He also showed his due respects to the headmaster. However, the headmaster couldn't digest the

popularity that the teacher earned from his students and so, felt irritated in his presence. For years together the headmaster never talked to him with love and respect. The more his popularity increased, the more he felt jealous of the teacher. After some years the headmaster was able to transfer the teacher to another school. Because of hatred and jealousy, he failed to see the good virtues in the schoolteacher.

A middle-aged woman, suffering from sleeplessness, anxiety, and extreme fatigue consulted a doctor for treatment. She also confessed to the Doctor that at times she was contemplating of suicide. The doctor, who at first couldn't identify the cause behind her problems. However, by repeated visits and questioning, the doctor found that actually she was feeling extremely jealous with her own sister because of some personal family issue.

During this time a holy man, who happened to visit the house of the lady offered her a remedy. He said, you surrender to God and pray to Him sincerely to relieve you of this aversion to your sister. The lady followed the advice of the Holy man and by sincere prayer could get out of the darkness which was killing her from inside. In other words, there is remedy for getting over these two enemies. If we practice unselfishness in our daily acts, along with prayer and meditation, it is possible to lift our mind from feelings of hatred and jealousy.

The highest manifestation of love is love for God, or divine love. It is possible to expand this love which we have for ourselves and the small circle around us further and further. If we practice bhakti, then this love will expand. Since God resides in all beings, so by loving God, we actually will be able to love all beings equally. The Bhakti schools have laid down nine modes of approaching God, called Navadha Bhakti. We can approach God as our Father, or Mother or friend, or as spouse or even as a child. So, if we are able to develop a personal relationship with God, it will be easy to connect to Him.

We find this in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. He received the vision of the blissful divine Mother only by yearning. The shepherd boys of Vrindaban approached Sri Krishna as their friend and so did Arjuna. Yashoda looked upon him as her own child. The Gopis loved him as their beloved. In today's age, Aghormani Devi, one of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, called as Gopal's mother has shown the great transformation that took place in her life by serving her chosen deity as a small child. She led a very austere life and spent long hours in japa and meditation. Her chosen deity was baby Gopala. There was no room for anything else in her life but serving Gopala in heart and spirit. Then one day the baby Gopala actually became a living being in her life. She could see him, running here and there, taking food offerings, sleeping by her bed-side. Her love for her chosen deity was so intense that The Lord couldn't contain himself, but actually come into Her life and blessed her.

When a spiritual aspirant develops intense love for God, then God cannot contain himself. He answers the call of the devotee and bestows the vision of his divine, blissful form. At that point a great transformation takes place in the devotee. He loses all sense of 'I' and 'Mine'. The 'unripe I' merges into the 'Ripe I'. Love finds fulfilment in divine love. When the devotee reaches that state, he will be able to love all equally without any prejudice. That is real love. However, there are certain parameters to judge, whether the love is real or not. Swami Vivekananda has explained the conditions of real love in the following way:

There are three angles in a triangle. In the triangle of love, the first angle represents that true lover doesn't bargain. A true lover loves for its own sake. Wherever there is any bargaining real love cannot

be there. Swami Vivekananda gave an illustration. A king once visited a sage in a jungle and was very much impressed by his renunciation, knowledge and devotion and so requested the sage to visit his palace for he wanted to give gifts to the sage. The sage at first refused, saying the resources of the forest were enough to meet his requirements. However, after much persuasion, the sage agreed, and accordingly after many days he visited the royal palace of the king. But as he entered the palace, he could hear the king praying to God, 'Oh Lord, give me more children, give me more wealth!' As he heard these, he started leaving the palace. At that time, the king saw him and cried out, 'Maharaj, please wait, let me finish my prayers and then I shall attend to you.' The sage replied, I cannot receive gifts from a beggar. You yourself are a beggar, begging of worldly things from God.' So saying, the sage left the king's palace.

The second angle represents love doesn't know any fear. Many pray to God from fear of punishment. They are called 'God fearing devotees' However, that is not real devotion. Swami Vivekananda gave an illustration. Imagine, a mother walking on the street and a few dogs barking and chasing after her. She will try to find some corner where she will hide herself. But the same woman, carrying her child on her lap, and suddenly confronted by a lion. In that position, she will not hesitate to go into the mouth of the lion to protect her little one. Fear has gone for love for the child. Thus, real love doesn't know any fear.

The third angle represents love does not know any rival. Everybody has his own ideal of love. While someone loves the highest thing, other may love the vilest of the things. It is in the eye of the lover that the ideal of love finds importance. To quote Swami Vivekananda, 'Everyone admits the truth of the saying that the lover sees Helen's beauty on an Ethiop's brow. The man who is standing aside as a looker-on sees that love is here misplaced, but the lover sees his Helen all the same, and so does not see the Ethiop at all. Helen or Ethiop, the objects of our love are really the centres round which our ideals become crystalised.....that ideal which men and women commonly worship is what is in themselves; every person projects his or her own ideal on the outside world and kneels before it.

• Thought of the Month •

If you wish to be free, shun the poison of the senses.

Seek the nectar of truth, of love and forgiveness, simplicity and happiness.

Earth, fire and water, the wind and the sky - you are none of these.

If you wish to be free, know you are the Self, the witness of all these, the heart of awareness.

- Ashtavakra Gita

Swami Vivekananda's Public Birthday Celebration – Event Summary

The theme of this year's program was Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Yogas. The programme started as scheduled at 2 pm. Our Masters of Ceremony, Mr. Ranjan Gupta (English) and Ms. Satsuki Yokota (Japanese), greeted the audience.

This was followed by Vedic Peace Prayer chanting by Swami Medhasananda, Swami Divyanathananda, Leonardo Alvarez, and Shanti Izumida. Next, Swami Medhasananda led a special prayer, during which the audience was requested to stand up and repeat. After this, there were a few minutes for silent prayers.

Then, His Excellency Mr. Sibi George, Ambassador of India to Japan, offered a bouquet to Swami Vivekananda. Subsequently, the Ambassador released a special issue of the Universal Gospel ("Fumetsu no Kotoba"), a bimonthly magazine of the Vedanta Society of Japan.

Following that, an inaugural speech was given by Ambassador George (*this speech and the others that followed will be published in the next issue of The Vedanta Kyokai*).

The second speaker was Professor Takahiro Kato, an Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, Department of Indian Philosophy and Buddhist Studies in the University of Tokyo. His speech focused on Swami Vivekananda's concept of Jnana Yoga.

Next, Professor Kathy Matsui elaborated on Swamiji's concept of Karma Yoga. She is a professor of the Department of Global Citizenship Studies, Seisen University (Tokyo, Japan), and teaches courses on conflict resolution and peace-related subjects. She is also a long-standing member of Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary Celebration committee.

Following her talk, Sister Jyoukei Sato, Nun of Zentsuji School of Shingon Buddhism, spoke on Swami Vivekananda's concept of Bhakti Yoga.

This was succeeded by Mr. Leonardo Alvarez, who spoke on Swami Vivekananda's concept of Raja Yoga. Mr. Leonardo Alvarez is a PhD candidate at Sophia University, conducting research on "The relationship between Mindfulness, Triguna, and Psychological Well-Being."

These speeches were then followed by some comments by Swami Medhasananda, who presented a synthesis of all these four yogas.

A short recess ensued, during which the attendees were offered light refreshments.

The second half of the event consisted of a cultural program, which commenced with a devotional song sung by a few Japanese devotees, led by Ms. Shanti Izumida. Subsequently, a devotional song was sung by Indian devotees, led by Swami Divyanathananda.

These devotional songs were followed by some wonderful dance performances by various dance groups who had come from India. First to perform was a group from the Art of Soul Dance School. It was a folk dance of Bengal based on the lives of fishermen.

Next was a Garba Performance. Garba is a dance form from the northwestern Indian state of Gujarat. The dance form originated in the villages of Gujarat, where it was (and continues to be) performed in communal gathering spaces in the center of the village with the entire community participating.

This was followed by the Folk Dance from Maharashtra called Gondhal. The Gondhal is the dramatic narration of mythological stories and folk legends as a part of the ritual dedicated to deities like Renuka and Bhavani. It is said that the Gondhal dance form was created by the warrior-sage Parasuram. The dance is composed of dynamic movements, and the dancers are brightly dressed and ornamented.

Next was a dance called Kalbeliya from the state of Rajasthan. The dance involves women in black skirts in swirling, graceful movements that replicate the movements of a serpent.

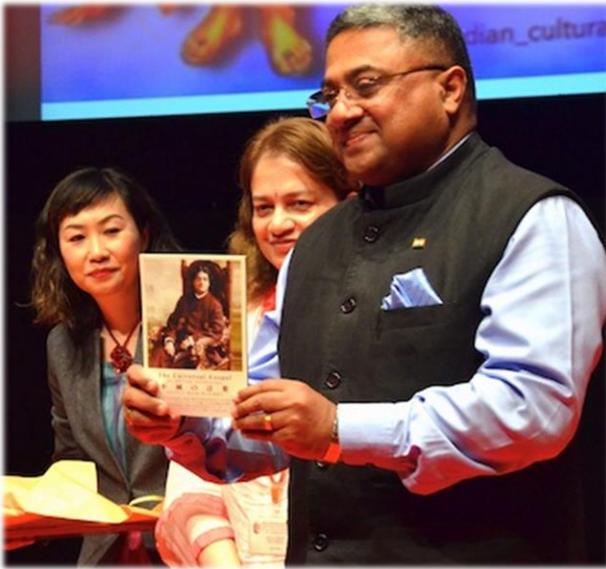
The final dance of the afternoon was the dance from the state of Punjab called Bhangra. An energetic Punjabi dance, Bhangra originated from Punjab farmers as a cultural and communal celebration.

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, a member of the Swami Vivekananda Celebration Committee.

Swami Vivekananda's Public Birthday Celebration – Some Photographs





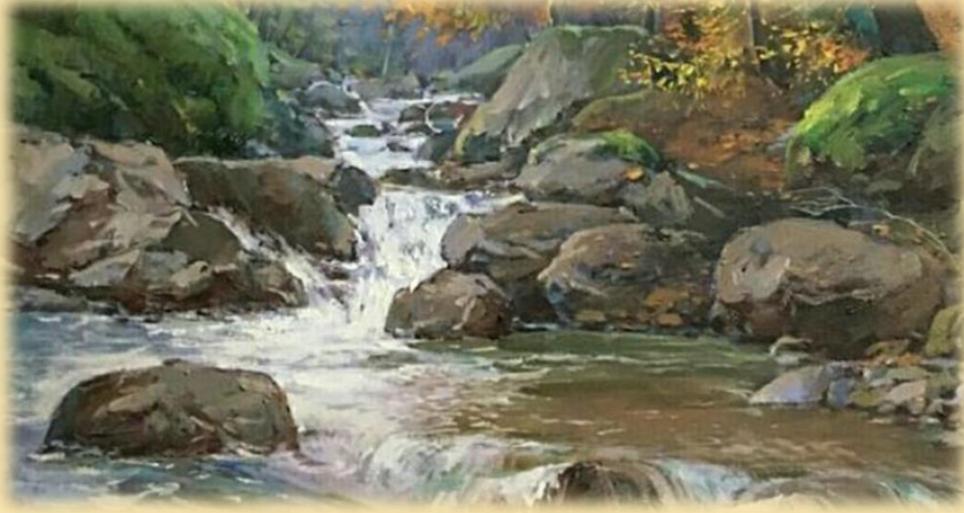




For more photographs of the event, please visit our website.

• Story to Remember •

Flow Like A River



There is the story of a young martial arts student who was under the tutelage of a famous zen master. One day, the master was watching a practice session in the courtyard. He realized that the presence of the other students was interfering with the young man's attempts to perfect his technique. The master could sense the young man's frustration.

He went up to the young man and tapped him on his shoulder.

"What's the problem?" he inquired.

"I don't know", said the youth, with a strained expression.

"No matter how much I try, I am unable to execute the moves properly".

"Before you can master technique, you must understand harmony. Come with me, I will explain", replied the master.

The teacher and student left the building and walked some distance into the woods until they came upon a stream. The master stood silently on the bank for several moments. Then he spoke.

"Look at the stream," he said. "There are rocks in its way. Does it slam into them out of frustration? It simply flows over and around them and moves on! Be like the water and you will know what harmony is."

The young man took the master's advice to heart. Soon, he was barely noticing the other students around him. Nothing could come in his way of executing the most perfect moves.

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