



FEBRUARY 2023 -VOLUME 21 NUMBER 02

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



## Birthdays

**Sri Gauranga**  
Tuesday, 7 March

**Swami Yogananda**  
Saturday, 11 March

**Sri Ramnavami**  
Thursday, 30 March

## Thus Spake

One must live carefully. Every action produces its results. It is not good to use harsh words towards others or be responsible for their suffering.

- Sarada Devi

We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far.

- Swami Vivekananda

Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Ma Sarada Devi were one in essence, though appearing in separate forms. Is it not said in the scriptures: "Lord, thou art man, thou art woman"? The Master told me many times that there was no difference between him and the Mother.

- Swami Yogananda

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# Vedanta Society of Japan

## Message Regarding Monthly Programmes for March 2023

*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*

## MARCH 2023 Calendar of Programmes

4th (Sat) March

### **Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy**

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

Video uploaded later

15th (Wed) March

### **Weekly Upanishad Study Class**

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

19th (Sun) March

### **Sri Ramakrishna Birthday Celebration**

10:30 ~ 17:30

Bilingual Live Streaming

Prior reservation required: [ramakrishna.yoyaku@gmail.com](mailto:ramakrishna.yoyaku@gmail.com)

21st (Tue) March

### **Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class**

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

29th (Wed) March

### **Weekly Upanishad Study Class**

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

# Swami Vivekananda - The Embodiment of Bliss

Discourse by Swami Medhasananda on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2023

The theme of our discussion today is ‘Swami Vivekananda, the embodiment of bliss’. I want to show you a photograph of Swamiji, which I believe, if you see, you will have an idea of Swamiji as an embodiment of bliss. He is full of joy and is lively. When he was in the west, one day, Swamiji was spending some time with some of his devotees in a forest. He was lying down and chatting with the devotees, when one devotee approached him and requested for a photo, Swamiji at first declined but when the devotees kept requesting, Swamiji stood up casually and then the photo was taken. There wasn't any preparation, like standing in a particular posture, etc. It was taken as it is. That is why this photo was so natural.



In the Upanishad, there is a saying that the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman.

ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति

*Brahmaved brahmaiva bhavati*

It is a very profound statement. The nature of Brahman is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Why is it Absolute? Because there are also other existences, there are also other types of knowledge, there are also other kinds of joy; but these are relative, small, decaying. On the other hand, the Supreme Brahman - *Sacchidananda* - is eternal, absolute and highest. When we say the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman, it actually means he imbibes the nature of Brahman, i.e., Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

Now, what is the general image of priests, or monks? Generally, the image about monks in the West is, that they are calm, quiet, serious, somber, reserved. They smile, but do not laugh. They talk, but do not gossip. These are the general ideas which people have of monks. So, when the Western world saw Swami Vivekananda, they were somewhat shocked, because they saw a monk, who was very joyful, who not only smiled, but laughed heartily, who made jokes, who loved fun. Sometimes, they would ask, ‘Swamiji, are you never serious at all?’ Swamiji would feign seriousness, and say, ‘Yes, I too become serious sometimes. Do you know, when? When there is a pain in my stomach’.

Now I shall give many illustrations to show how Swamiji loved fun. Christ also said, as long as you are with the bridegroom, you should enjoy. In the life of Sri Ramakrishna also, we find, how much he was in joy! how much he enjoyed fun! How much he also made the

disciples laugh. All these incidents are recorded in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. That is why reading of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna never becomes monotonous. Holy Mother made a comment about Sri Ramakrishna. After He had left his mortal body, many devotees came who had not the chance to see Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother commented about Him, 'I never saw Him without joy, and that too with all – with children, with young people, elderly, with ladies, with gentlemen. He was always full of joy. This was one of His characteristic features'.

Aswini Kumar Dutta was a famous educationist and social reformer. He would visit Sri Ramakrishna sometimes. He talked about a monk called Achalananda with Sri Ramakrishna. Achalananda was a great scholar. One day, Sri Ramakrishna asked Aswini, 'Who do you think is greater - myself or Achalananda?' Like a child He asked. Aswini Dutta was an upright person. He said, Achalananda is a great scholar. How can you be equal to him? You are almost an illiterate person. When Sri Ramakrishna heard this, he became a bit sad. Then Aswini Kumar made a significant comment. 'But, you are full of fun!' When Sri Ramakrishna heard this, he felt very happy, and replied, 'Yes, I am full of fun!'

Suppose a person is sick with some serious illness and people who know him come to see him. What kind of atmosphere would you expect to find there? It is natural to find an atmosphere of anxiety, sorrow, and sadness. But think of the last few months of Sri Ramakrishna's life. He was being looked after by devotees at the Cossipore Garden house. He was critically ill, and sometimes would vomit blood too. But see the situation there. It is amazing! There was no sign of sorrow or sadness prevailing there. Sri Ramakrishna being full of joy, he kept others too filled with joy. Outwardly, though he was sick, but inwardly, there was a continuous, steady flow of joy. That actually changed the atmosphere around Him.

But please do not have a wrong image about this situation. Often when we see a person who makes fun most of the time, we know that person to be a light-hearted person. But in case of Sri Ramakrishna it was different. This moment, he is immersed in Samadhi, immersed in God consciousness, the next moment, coming down to the ordinary level, he is full of joy. So, in his case these two extremes had met.

And same is the case with Swamiji also. When he was in the west, single-handedly he had to face the materialists and even the Christian missionaries, who opposed him because of their narrow mindedness. He often had to travel long distances for giving lectures. It was very very cold in America, sometimes even with snowfall. Moreover, he did not have any certainty of residence or food. But even then, in these kinds of adverse situations, inwardly Swamiji was full of joy.

During that phase, he had written a letter to a devotee, and he wrote, 'Last night, there was such an overflow of joy in my heart, as if I could not contain it and I could not sleep at all'. Just imagine. There are people who are unable to get sleep out of worry and anxiety, and here is a person who is unable to sleep due to overflowing of joy!

As I mentioned, he was full of fun, would make jokes, especially, during question-answer sessions after his class talks. There are quite a few examples which show that he retorted to some of the questions of the audience by making jokes. You should remember, during that period, there were many Christian missionaries, who would visit India to preach Christianity. And for supporting this work, they needed money which was collected via donations, mainly from America. For collecting donations, they created an image of India which was very very negative.

So after a discourse given by Swami Vivekananda, there was a question-answer session, in which someone asked, 'Swami, we have heard, in India, children are thrown into the river, later to be gulped by crocodiles – child sacrifice. Is it true?' Swamiji said, 'Yes, I was also thrown into the Ganga when I was an infant. But you know, I was so fatty, that any crocodile could not eat me and that is why I survived'.

Then somebody else asked a similar question. 'Aren't baby girls thrown into the Ganges, because people prefer a male child over a female child?' Swamiji said, 'Yes, it is true, that is why now-a-days in India male people are now giving birth to the children.'

Another example. One person asked, 'Swami, what is the difference between a monk and a monkey?' Swamiji said, 'Not much, it is the same as the difference between a Sot and a Scot'. Sot means, who drink too much and Scot means those who are from Scotland. Swamiji knew that that person who had asked the question was from Scotland, and also that he used to drink a lot.

Swamiji often had to cook his own food and he had a small kitchen. He would ask his devotees and friends in India to send spices to him so that he could cook spicy food. He had various small bottles where he would keep the spices. There was an elderly person would often enter the kitchen and would ask Swamiji about the contents of these bottles and sometimes would take some spices from the bottles and taste them too. This was a bit irritating for Swamiji, but out of courtsey he could not say anything to that person. Now one of the bottles contained red chilli. One day he asked, pointing to the bottle containing red chilli, 'Swami, what is in that?' Swamiji said, 'It is Indian plum', and immediately left the kitchen. Upon hearing this, the elderly gentleman took some from that bottle and started tasting. Immediately, he felt a burning sensation in his stomach, and since then he never entered the kitchen of Swamiji.

There was another gentleman, who used to attend to the lectures of Swamiji, and the concept of Brahman would be mentioned off and on during Swamiji's lectures, especially on Vedanta. That Gentleman was bald. Often after the lectures, rubbing his hands over his bald head, he would say, 'Swamiji, so the conclusion is this: We all are Brahman.' So, whenever that person would come, Swamiji would say, 'Mr. Brahman is coming'.

After Swamiji came back from the West, he was staying at Belur Math with his brother disciples. He felt that he should train the monastic brothers so that they could give lectures. Accordingly, it was arranged that there would be a gathering of the monastic inmates and the

monks would give lectures in turns. Once Swamiji asked Khoka Maharaj – Swami Subodhananda – to give a talk. Subodhananda was reluctant, for he was feeling shy as he had never given a talk before an audience. But Swamiji would not listen. So, quite reluctantly, as he stood up and was about to talk, all of a sudden a strong earthquake started, violently shaking everything. Naturally, everybody started running for safety. Slowly the situation became normal. However, the talk of Subodhananda was not held and he was relieved. Later Swamiji used to make fun about the incident and would say, ‘Khoka gave an earth shaking speech!’

Girish Chandra Ghosh was a great householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, and also a playwright, actor, poet. He was a multi-talented person. He had led a fast life, but finally became a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He strongly believed that Sri Ramakrishna is an incarnation of God. Brahman, or God, who is infinite has incarnated as Sri Ramakrishna. We have read in the biography of Swami Vivekananda, that although the devotees had started believing that Sri Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God, but initially, Swamiji himself wouldn't believe it, although later, he also started believing so.

Once, Swamiji just wanted to tease and also to show before others the depth of the faith of Girish in Sri Ramakrishna. He used to address Girish Chandra as G.C. (abbreviation for Girish Chandra). So one day he opened an argument with Girish in an assembly of devotees, ‘You see, G.C., It is impossible for God to incarnate as Sri Ramakrishna. Because, God is infinite, so how can the infinite manifest himself in a finite human body? It is impossible.’

But Girish Ghosh was a hundred per cent sure that it is possible and Sri Ramakrishna is non other than God incarnated. Then they started an intense discussion. Both were very intelligent and both were proficient in debating. Slowly the argument started to get heated up. While Swamiji was calm, quiet and composed, Girish Chandra was getting emotional and excited. Swamiji intentionally was making him more and more excited. Finally, Girish Chandra could not control himself. He hit the table with his fist saying, ‘I say, you rascal, it is possible, I have seen it’. Immediately, Swamiji hugged Girish Chandra, and addressing the others present in the gathering said, ‘You see, how deep is the faith of Girish’. Actually, Swamiji had started this argument only to test the faith of Girish.

Here is the last illustration I want to share with you. While in the West, once Swamiji was travelling with his disciples and followers. They had to catch a train or steamer and were getting a bit late. Although the others were getting ready quickly there was no sign of any hurry in Swamiji. He was walking and moving at his own pace. One devotee was complaining, ‘Swamiji, if you don't get ready quickly, we might miss the train’. Swamiji calmly said, ‘If we miss it, then we can catch the next train/steamer’. Because of this attitude of Swamiji, a few times they had actually missed the train/steamer. So being a bit disgusted, a devotee one day burst out, saying, ‘You Indians have no sense of time’. Swamiji retorted, saying, ‘Yes, we live in eternity. You are always bound, or conditioned by time, whereas we live in Eternity.’ See the profound answer Swamiji gave. In fact, Swamiji's answer was not insincere or casual. A realized soul actually goes beyond time and space. He is not bound by



them. When he transcends time and place, he lives in eternity. In India, this concept of living in eternity is there.

The purpose of today's talk is, let us ask ourselves, how can we get joy even amidst adverse situations, problems and troubles that we find ourselves in from time to time. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, there are three types of joy: *vishaya-ananda*, *bhajan-ananda* and *brahm-ananda*. *Vishaya-ananda* is the joy from fulfilment of desires, *bhajan-ananda* is joy from contemplation of God, and *brahm-ananda* is joy from realization of God. Most of the people have the experience only of *vishaya-ananda*, which is secular joy, material joy, which is finite, full of various kinds of reactions, and most of the time this kind of joy ends in sufferings. But better than that is *bhajan-ananda*, the joy which comes from spiritual practices, by singing the name of the Lord, by meditating and contemplating on the Lord. But the highest joy is *brahm-ananda*, the joy which can only be experienced after the realization of Brahman, which is the highest bliss. The Bhagavad Gita mentions this:

बाह्यस्पर्शेष्वसक्तात्मा विन्दत्यात्मनि यत्सुखम् ।  
स ब्रह्मयोगयुक्तात्मा सुखमक्षयमश्नुते ॥ 5.21॥

*bāhya-sparśheṣvasaktātmā vindatyātmani yat sukham  
sa brahma-yoga-yuktātmā sukham akṣhayam aśhnute*

With his heart unattached to external objects, he gets the bliss that is in the Self. With his heart absorbed in meditation on Brahman, he acquires undecaying Bliss. That is the highest goal of our life.

## New Year Talk by Swami Medhasananda

Generally, people take this New Year Day as a day of festivities. Lots of fun, food, outings. This is the general image. So, some of our devotees without having such worldly fun, try to come to the Vedanta Society. In India, people generally go for picnics, think about the menu since much before, have various nice varieties of foods, in the afternoon they will have some songs, etc. In the evening, they become tired and from the next day onwards their normal life would start.

We must think about our life. Fun of course is necessary, but work is also necessary. We are also growing slowly in age. The span of our life is limited. Old age will be there, and we definitely need peace of mind. We must ponder, what are we doing to get peace of mind. So, on New Year's Day, we must make a vow: I shall lead my life in such a way that it will help me to enrich myself not only in terms of my work, but also in terms of values, mental peace and spiritual progress.

This is the difference between animals and human beings. Animals live in the physical plane, whereas, human beings live not only in the physical plane, but also in the mental, intellectual

and spiritual planes. Being a human being, if we don't try to develop ourselves in all these planes- physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual, then this precious human life is wasted.

Since you all have come to the Vedanta Society, we want to discuss these facts because the speciality of Vedanta Society is that here we always talk about life as a whole. There are few other places where such talks about our whole life take place.

Now, it is important that we set a reachable goal, which we can achieve. Then after we gain in self-confidence, we can set our goals higher. If we set a very high goal to start with, we may not reach it, and then we shall feel frustrated. But our goals should be in all these areas which we have stated above, otherwise fulfilment in life does not take place.

Does fulfilment in life happen only by earning money? Does it happen by only getting name and fame? Is it possible by just having a good family? No. Fulfilment in life doesn't happen only through these. In this reference, I am reminded of a Bengali movie, called 'Nayak' where the whole cinema is shot in the background of a train. One famous actor was travelling in the train, and a reporter was taking his interview. The movie was in that scenario. The reporter asked the hero of the movie, you are such a famous person, do you have fulfilment in life? The actor replied, no, I have an emptiness in my heart, though I have money, name and fame, etc. Each one of us should ponder. How will my life be fulfilled? By getting big post in a multinational company? By accumulating lots of wealth?

Today, is a special day. Apart from being the New Year, it is called Kalpataru Day amongst the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. On this day, in 1886, Sri Ramakrishna fulfilled the spiritual desires of several devotees. Kalpataru means wish fulfilling tree. If one sits under this tree, all his wishes will be fulfilled. So, I invite all of you to pray to Sri Ramakrishna, for your spiritual fulfilment in life, because He is not just a picture here, but He stays here, his living presence is here. Then, your visit to the Society will be fruitful.

• Thought of the Month •

Those who become mad with an idea, they alone see light. Those that only take a nibble here and a nibble there will never attain anything. They may titillate their nerves for a moment, but there it will end. They will be slaves in the hands of nature, and will never get beyond the senses. Those who really want to be Yogis must give up, once for all, this nibbling at things.

- Swami Vivekananda



## Some Photographs from Swami Vivekananda's Birthday Celebrations







## • Story to Remember •

### Two Tales of the Buddha

Even before Buddha, the Great Renunciation was not new in India. But after Nirvana, look at the poetry!

It is a wet night, and the Buddha comes to a cowherd's hut and gathers in to the wall under the dripping eaves. The rain is pouring down and the wind rising. Within, the cowherd catches a glimpse of a face through the window and thinks, 'Ha, ha! Yellow garb! stay there! It's good enough for you!'

And then he begins to sing. 'My cattle are housed, and the fire burns bright. My wife is safe, and my babes sleep sweet! Therefore ye may rain, if ye will, O clouds, tonight!'

And the Buddha answers from without, "My mind is controlled: my senses are all gathered in; my heart firm. Therefore ye may rain, if ye will, O clouds, tonight!"

Again the cowherd: 'The fields are reaped, and the hay is fast in the barn. The stream is full, and the roads are firm. Therefore ye may rain, if ye will, O clouds, tonight.'

And so it goes on, till at last the cowherd rises, in contrition and wonder, and becomes a disciple.

Or what would be more beautiful than the barber's story? Where the barber is overwhelmed to be able to receive Buddha's grace.

"The Blessed One passed by my house, my house – the Barber's!

"I ran, but He turned and awaited me, Awaited me – the Barber!

"I said, 'May I speak, O Lord, with Thee?' "And He said 'Yes!' 'Yes!' to me – the Barber!

"And I said, 'Is Nirvana for such as I?' "And He said 'Yes!' Even for me – the Barber!

"And I said, 'May I follow after Thee?' "And He said, 'Oh yes!' Even I – the Barber!

"And I said, 'May I stay, O Lord, near Thee?' "And He said, 'Thou mayest!'

Even to me – the poor Barber!"

- Swami Vivekananda

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