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# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



## Thus Spake

This maya, that is to say, the ego, is like a cloud. The sun cannot be seen on account of a thin patch of cloud; when that disappears, one sees the sun. If by the grace of the guru one's ego vanishes, then one sees God.

- Sri Ramakrishna

One who makes a habit of prayer will easily overcome all difficulties and remain calm and unruffled in the midst of the trials of life.

- Sri Sarada Devi

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## Monthly Program Schedule for MAY 2023

3rd (Wed) May

**Weekly Upanishad Study Class**

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

6th (Sat) May

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

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

Video uploaded later

9th (Tue) May  
**Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class**  
14:00 ~ 16:00 (in Japanese only), Zoom

14th (Sun) May  
**Monthly Retreat at Zushi – Buddha Celebration**  
10:30 ~ 16:30  
Bilingual Live Streaming  
Speaker: Swami Medhasnananda

17th (Wed) May  
**Weekly Upanishad Study Class**  
8:30 ~ 9:30 (in Japanese only), Zoom

## **Sri Ramakrishna – the Teacher of Teachers**

Swami Medhasnananda

Today the theme of our talk is Sri Ramakrishna- the Teacher of Teachers. As you know, both householders and monks sometimes give discourses on spiritual subjects. But I think that monks are better than householders in this matter. Monks give up their hearth and home for the sake of God. They try to focus their whole mind on God. For a householder, since he has a family, religious preaching is a bit difficult. But, the saints who have realised God are far greater than ordinary monks as religious teachers. The greatest teachers of course are incarnations of God, or Avatars.

This concept is not commonly understood in Japan, but in the West and in India, people are well aware of this. In India, an incarnation of God is known as an Avatar, whereas in the west, an incarnation of God is called the 'Son of God'. To explain, who is an Avatar, we can say, God descends as a human being to lead us towards peace, joy, freedom, and the realisation of Truth. Or in other words, in an incarnation, we find the greatest manifestation of divinity. Some examples of divine incarnations are Sri Krishna, Buddha, Jesus Christ.

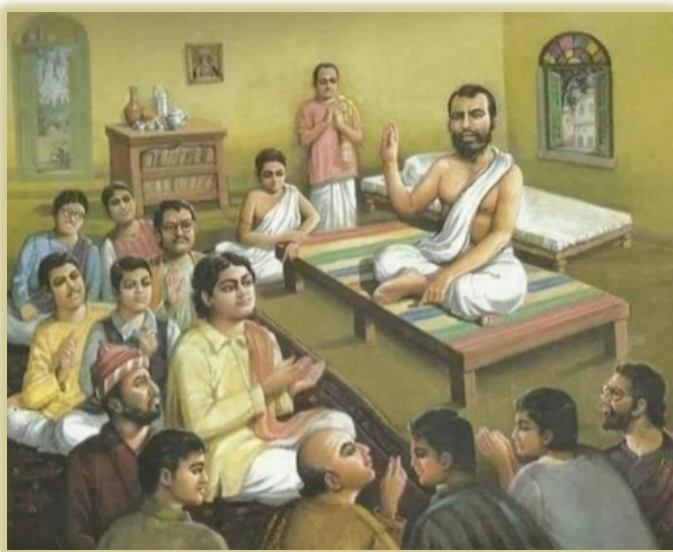
In the present age, millions of people regard Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation. Every age has problems which are unique in contrast to the problems in other ages. An incarnation comes to solve the problems of that age. Swami Saradanandaji composed a hymn where we come across these two lines:

सर्वधर्म स्थापकस्त्वं सर्वधर्म स्वरूपकः  
आचार्याणां महाचार्यो रामकृष्णाय ते नमः

*Sarva dharma sthapakastwam sarva dharma swarupakah  
Acharyanam mahacharya Ramakrishnaya te namah*

Here he refers to Sri Ramakrishna as Acharyanam mahacharya- teacher among teachers. Now, what are the special features of Sri Ramakrishna, as a spiritual teacher? His greatest quality as a spiritual teacher, is to show the devotees the path of peace, joy, freedom, and the realisation of Truth. His spirituality was not adulterated spirituality. It was pure and genuine. There was no sign of occult powers.

Then he loved each of his disciples intensely, without any expectations. Moreover, he had so much concern for them, that each of them felt that Sri Ramakrishna loved him the most. After his passing away, when the monastic disciples were staying at Baranagar, sometimes they would argue amongst themselves. Some one would say, 'Sri Ramakrishna loved me the most' then another would try to correct him, saying 'No, Sri Ramakrishna loved me the most.' See how interesting this is? This is a result of what is called Universal love.



Sri Ramakrishna would keenly observe the nature of each disciple. Each of them was different. He could clearly see the inside of the minds of each one as one can see the objects kept inside a glass-case. Their minds were like an open book for him, and he would give spiritual instructions to them according to their individual nature. To one, he would give the instructions to practice Vedanta, whereas to another, who was not qualified to practice that, he would give the instructions of duality. And to some, he would instruct *jnana-mishra-bhakti* (Knowledge mixed with Devotion).

He was like a mother who would cook and serve different recipes of fish curry to her children, according to their different abilities of digestion. He was not like the ordinary physician whom we consult when we are sick. We explain our problem to him. Sometimes he listens, sometimes he doesn't even care to listen, for he has in the meantime already started writing the prescription. Moreover, an ordinary physician sometimes doesn't even bother to take feedback from the patient - whether the patient is feeling better, whether he is taking the prescribed medicine. Such careless doctors are the worst types of physicians. Another type of physician enquires whether the patient is taking the medicines as prescribed and when he finds that the patient has not been taking his medicines properly, he gently advises, 'It is good to take these medicines'. The third kind - the best type of physician - forces the patient to take medicines, if the patient doesn't willingly take them. He is the best type of physician. Sri Ramakrishna is the third type of physician. He would see whether the disciple is following his instructions as directed by him. If he found that the disciple was not following his advice, a mild rebuke or sometimes even a sharp rebuke would follow. Another significant point is - Sri Ramakrishna would observe and protect and guide the disciple not only during the time when Sri Ramakrishna was in

his physical body, but also after giving up his mortal body and while he was in his subtle body. That is his speciality.

Now let me share some examples of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. He would say – too much softness is not good, too much violent nature is also not good. If he would find a devotee one sided, for example, someone practicing only bhakti, he would say, why are you one-sided? He would advise such a devotee to practice jnana also along with bhakti. Since he was the apostle of harmony, he would advice others to achieve harmony in life. He would say, why should you take only one dish? You should taste different kinds of food. But at the same time he was careful to see the capacity of the disciple, since everybody has different capacities.

There was a disciple who felt that he could realise Brahman by his own efforts alone. Sri Ramakrishna corrected him, saying, no, you cannot realise God by your own efforts alone. The grace of God too is necessary. Both of these two things must be there- self effort as well as divine grace.

One of his famous statements was, ভক্ত হবি, তো বোকা হবি কেন? (Bhakta habi, tō bōkā habi kēna?) If you are a devotee, it doesn't mean you should not be a simpleton, a foolish person. What he expected of from a devotee was, a devotee must be organised and not disorganised. Being organised is not only regarding keeping your furniture organised, but your daily lifestyle must be organised. Those who are not organised are slaves of their emotions and mind. They are impulsive. They live in the plane of emotions.

Next, he wanted the devotees to be alert. As Buddha said, Ananda, be wide awake. So that others cannot do harm to you. Because householders must protect themselves, since many people in society depend on the householders – children, old people, the diseased, poor people as well as the monks. So, the earning of the householders is not meant only for themselves, since so many people depend on them. That is why, they should protect themselves so that others cannot deceive them. Once Sri Ramakrishna asked one of his disciples to purchase a frying pan from the market. The disciple went to the market and told a shopkeeper, 'Please give me a good quality frying pan'. The shopkeeper gave him one, and upon showing it to Sri Ramakrishna, a crack was discovered in that. Then Sri Ramakrishna uttered this particular remark 'If you are a devotee, it doesn't mean you should be a simpleton, a foolish person' This teaching is particularly helpful for those who do shopping.

He gave many more detailed practical suggestions for shopping as follows:

- If you want to purchase something, check the price and visit different shops and make the best bargain. But at the same time, make sure the quality is good.
- Don't depend on the seller to give you a good quality product. You have to yourself check the product thoroughly.
- If there is any discount on the product, you should ask about it.
- Sometimes if you purchase many things then the shopkeeper gives something extra, free of cost. In that case, don't forget to procure that.

So, we can see that Sri Ramakrishna, although he could immerse himself in Samadhi at will, but when he came down to ordinary plane, he would be more alert than an average person. He knew and understood in detail about how to carry out our daily life. This alertness is important for a devotee.

Then one should be intelligent and discriminate about what to do and what not to do, with whom he should mix and with whom he should not. Sometimes, we have to maintain a safe distance from some kinds of people. Particularly, those of us, who use smartphones, we should discriminate, how much to use, because in our present life, we cannot fully dispense it out, so we should be careful that it doesn't become counter-productive.

Then there was another advise, which he gave to Holy Mother, but it is equally relevant for all. He said, 'যখন যেমন, তখন তেমন, যেখানে যেমন, সেখানে তেমন, যাকে যেমন, তাকে তেমন।' (Yakhana yēmana, takhana tēmana, yēkhānē yēmana, sēkhānē tēmana, yākē yēmana, tākē tēmana). One should be flexible about one's manner and behaviour according to the person, place and situation. But in matters of principle, one should be rigid. So one should be like steel, it is possible to bend but steel doesn't break. So, this combination of flexibility and rigidity.

One should spend a part of one's income for helping others. যার আছে, মাপো, যার নেই সে জপো (Yāra āchē, māpō, yāra nē'i sē japō). This means, those who have money, they should share it for helping others and those who are poor, should do more spiritual practice, like Japa.

Now I shall give two more examples to show how he taught his disciples even after he left his physical body. During British rule of India, many Christian missionaries had come to India to preach Christianity. There is nothing wrong with preaching Christianity, but most of the time they would vilify Hinduism. Usually they would preach at places where many people gather, for example in front of a temple, and there they would criticise the Hindu Gods and Goddesses. But since these missionaries belonged to the race of the rulers, people would be afraid to protest.

Once, Swami Premanandaji, a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna had gone to Puri and he discovered that a Christian missionary was preaching just in front of the Jagannath Temple. As usual, the missionary was abusing Lord Jagannath. Swami Premanandaji could not bear that. Jagannath is a form of Vishnu. Premanandaji could not stop that missionary, so he loudly started chanting 'Hari Bol! Hari Bol!' Other devotees, most of whom were Hindus, who had gathered there also joined him and loudly started chanting 'Hari Bol! Hari Bol!' The Christian preacher's speech was thus disrupted, and he had to leave the place immediately. Then those who had gathered there, expressed their immense gratitude to Premanandaji for his timely act of stopping the abuse of Lord Jagannath in front of his temple. Premanandaji was also quite satisfied.

That night, Sri Ramakrishna appeared in the dream of Swami Premanandaji and started scolding him and said, the preacher was preaching about me, why did you stop him? Tomorrow, go and find out the preacher and apologize to him. Swami Premanandaji had a

very hard time in finding out the place where the preacher lived, and after finding him out, he apologised to him.

Another example: Sri Ramakrishna would always strongly talk about renouncing lust and gold. And he himself was so much established in renunciation of lust and gold, that it was tested and found several times that his body could not bear even the touch of metals. Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar, the famous physician who would visit Sri Ramakrishna for treatment, once brought a coin and placed in the palm of Sri Ramakrishna, and it was found that his palm bent like that of a person with paralysis. Once Swamiji also tested him similarly. One day, when Sri Ramakrishna was not in his room, Swamiji placed a coin below his mattress and then when Sri Ramakrishna came and was going to sit on the cot, he got a kind of electrical shock, he could not touch the bed. Then it was found out that a coin was placed below the mattress of the cot.

Much after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, when the Belur Math was established and when Swamiji was also staying there, an incident happened. For regular worship of Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine, utensils were there and a devotee had gifted some utensils made of silver for the purpose of worship. One night, Sri Ramakrishna appeared in the dream of Swamiji and asked him, why silver utensils were used for worship, as he could not touch gold or silver! And why even though Swamiji was present, such negligence can happen. Immediately, at that dead end of night, Swamiji awoke, accompanied by an attendant, made him open the shrine and when he found those silver utensils, he threw them away.

The above illustrations have been given to show, how Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciples – both monks and householders. And it continued, not only during his life, but also after his passing away. All his teachings were great. That is why, he is called the teacher of teachers.

### • Thought of the Month •

When you go out into the woods, and you look at trees, you see all these different trees. And some of them are bent, and some of them are straight, and some of them are evergreens, and some of them are whatever. And you look at the tree and you allow it. You see why it is the way it is. You sort of understand that it didn't get enough light, and so it turned that way. And you don't get all emotional about it. You just allow it. You appreciate the tree.

The minute you get near humans, you lose all that. And you are constantly saying 'You are too this, or I'm too this.' That judgment mind comes in. And so, I practice turning people into trees. Which means appreciating them just the way they are.

- Ram Dass



## Obituary

Dear All,

With a heavy heart we announce that Mr. Lonnie Hirsch, our dear Lonnie-san, who was one of the closest devotees of the Vedanta Society of Japan over a period of nearly three decades, passed away on Monday, 24th April at 3:04 pm at his residence in Ikebukuro. He was about 74 years old and was critically ill for the last few months when we had visited him a number of times.



Born and brought up in California he used to visit the Vedanta Society of Hollywood in the 1960s and was one of the members of its choir. Later he moved to Japan and lived here until last. He was a multitalented person and especially proficient in editing and music. He was one of the enthusiastic members of the organizing committee of the Public Celebration of the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda in Japan. He was also the editor of the monthly English

newsletter of the Society since its inception and did the job meticulously and devotedly for about two decades; the newsletter was highly appreciated by its readers from Japan and abroad. He also extended his unstinting support to the Kyokai in various other ways.

Lonnie-san, also a proficient musician, published a number of albums of his songs. He used to attend the Christmas Eve Celebration at the Society almost every year and sing carols and also performed during the Vivekananda Celebration in Tokyo and Sri Ramakrishna Celebration at the Society in Zushi and enthralled his audience by his soulful songs.

He was an amicable, jolly, and frank person and endeared himself to everyone who came in contact with him. In his personal life he was a sincere devotee and was well acquainted with the Vedanta and Ramakrishna -Vivekananda traditions since he was quite young and was sincere in his spiritual practices.

In fact, Lonnie-san's passing away is an irreparable loss to the Vedanta Society of Japan.

May Lonnie-san's soul rest eternally with Sri Ramakrishna in peace is our sincere prayer! Let us also pray for the peace and solace of his family members.

Incidentally, his body will be cremated on the 2nd of May which will be a family affair.

- Swami Medhasananda

• Story to Remember •

**The King and the Painting**



A long time ago, there was a king who wanted a painting that depicted peace. He said anyone could submit a painting and that the best piece will be awarded a prize.

All the finest painters in the land brought the king their finest works. But of all the entries, one painting stood out. It was a painting of a calm lake with snow-capped mountains in the background. Above the mountains were clear blue skies — their reflection was perfectly cast on the lake. Everyone admired the painting and knew for certain that the king would declare it the winner.

But to everyone's surprise, the king chose a painting that depicted the exact opposite. He chose a painting that depicted a mountain that was bare and rugged. The sky in the painting was dark and sinister — as if a huge storm was about to take place. But in that painting was a tiny bush with a bird's nest. In the nest was a bird that sat in peace, unfazed by the storm that was to come.

The people who was there to witness the ceremony asked the king why he chose that particular painting. The king replied:

"What does it mean to have peace? Is it the absence of violence or suffering? No. These things will always be present. Having peace means staying calm amidst the chaos that life brings. It is a state of mind. If your mind is at peace, then the state of your surroundings won't matter. The bird in that painting is able to convey that message best."

**Moral of the Story**

Wise men know that peace is a state of mind. Trouble will always find its way to you. But if your mind is at peace, then you'll remain calm no matter what happens.

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