



AUGUST 2023 -VOLUME 21 NUMBER 08

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Thus Spake

Imagine a limitless expanse of water: above and below, before and behind, right and left, everywhere there is water. In that water is placed a jar filled with water. There is water inside the jar and water outside, but the jar is still there. The "I" is the jar.

- Sri Ramakrishna

There is no treasure equal to contentment and no virtue equal to fortitude.

- Sri Sarada Devi

Buddha is the only prophet who said, I do not care to know your various theories about God. What is the use of discussing all the subtle doctrines about the soul? Do good and be good.

- Swami Vivekananda

In this Issue:

- Thus Spake page 01
- Monthly Program Schedule page 02
- Unselfishness is God (Part 1) by Swami Medhasananda page 03
- The Concept of Jnana Yoga by Professor Takahiro Kato page 06
- Karma Yoga by Professor by Kathy Matsui page 10
- Some Photographs from the Monthly Retreat page 14
- Story to Remember page 15

Monthly Program Schedule

for

SEPTEMBER 2023

2nd (Sat)

Bhagavad Gita Study Class at the Indian Embassy

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

Video uploaded later

6th (Wed)

Weekly Upanishad Study Class

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

8th (Fri) ~ 10th (Sun)

Annual Summer Retreat at Izu

19th (Tue)

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Study Class

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

22nd Sep ~ 7th Nov

Swami Medhasananda visits India

If you have any urgent matter, please contact the Vedanta Society of Japan

Unselfishness is God (Part 1)

By Swami Medhasnanada on 16th July 2023

We know what the scriptures define about God. God is omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent. But it was very unusual for Swamiji to define God as 'Unselfishness is God'. We know about unselfishness and many of us have some idea about God, but how do we connect these two? So, for many persons it will be a little confusing. In Japanese, unselfishness is denoted by the word 'Mushi', which means 'Not me'. So, the Japanese translation of Unselfishness is God is "Mushi wa Kami desu". Let me start this topic today by narrating the story of Sage Dadhichi, from the Puranas. Many of you might have already heard the name of Dadhichi. He is an example of extreme self-sacrifice. The story is as follows.

There were occasional fights between the demons and Gods. Sometimes the Gods would win, sometimes the demons. Once, the demons defeated the Gods and became the rulers of Heaven and the name of the king of the demons was Vritrasura. When the Gods were ousted from heaven, they sought the help of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara and from them they came to know that if a weapon is made from the skeleton of a great sage, then with that weapon, it will be possible to kill Vrittasura. The Gods started looking for such a sage who would sacrifice his life for the said purpose. But no one agreed. Finally, a sage called Dadhichi agreed to donate his bones for the great cause. He gave up his body through samadhi, and with his bones, a weapon was made called 'Vajra' or thunder and finally, with that, Vrittasura was killed and the demons were defeated and the gods regained heaven. This is one story from the Puranas to exemplify the extreme form of unselfishness.

Now let us first try to understand, what is selfishness, what are its symptoms. Centre of Selfishness is 'Myself' and 'My family'. This 'self' does not indicate The Atman, but the self with a small 's' indicating the body and mind. The symptoms of selfishness are: when one's whole time, energy and money are used for one's little self and for his own family, then the person can be called selfish. A selfish person's primary concern will be how he and his family will live well. He does not have any concern for the welfare of other people. These persons expect help from others, but they are not willing to help others. Even if they possess a lot of wealth and other assets, they are unwilling to share with others. They will not mind wasting food, however they will not feed the hungry. Clothes may accumulate in their house till they become old and unusable, but, they won't think of donating to the needy. Their whole focus is on accumulating as much as possible for their selfish ends.

Unfortunately, among all the beings, average human beings are the most selfish. Please think about this – how many fish, how many chicken, how many cows, how many pigs etc. are sacrificing their lives everyday to be consumed by human beings. It is a hard fact. Now suppose, if a tiger comes to us, and asks us to sacrifice our life, so that they can fill in their stomach with our flesh, will we agree? Then think of the trees, fruits, flowers and vegetables. Do the trees consume their own products? Will a mango tree eat its own mango when it wakes up hungry, at the dead end of night?

But, there are examples of people who were extremely unselfish. For example, in Bengal, there was an eminent person called Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Vidyasagar means ocean of learning. He was also known as Dayar Sagar, meaning- the ocean of compassion. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, we find

the interesting and profound conversation of Sri Ramakrishna with Vidyasagar. But such people are rare.

Now, what are the consequences of becoming selfish? They become very narrow in their outlook and are very much attached to their own self and their family. Moreover, attachment gives rise to frustration at the end. Because in spite of their best efforts to please their family members, they find it is almost impossible. Not only that, they suffer from the fear of separation, fear of loss of family members these cause stress in them which then affects mental as well as physical health. So, the consequences of being selfish is quite gloomy.

No one naturally wants such consequences. So, what is the remedy?

First, we should be aware, what is the level of our selfishness. How much of our time, energy and money do we spend for ourselves and how much for others? This we should introspect and find answer for ourselves.

The second point is, to practice unselfishness. In our discourses here, we have always stressed on this: Practice.

One pertinent question is: Why is there a general trend towards becoming selfish? What is the basic reason? The answer is, it is a law of nature for self-preservation. In one way, we are serving the purpose of God, who wants his creation to continue. If we don't work to serve our own selves as well our family, God's creation, simply won't continue! But at the same time, it is also true, that the creation will continue if we take and also give. On the contrary, if we only take and don't give at all, then also the world will cease to continue.

When we buy a particular commodity from the market, we pay the price and take it. But have we ever pondered, how many people and tools are involved in preparing the commodity, ready for our use? Clothes, house, furniture, food, etc. for preparing these, so many people have contributed their time and energy behind that.

There is a famous quotation by Albert Einstein which is relevant in this context: Hundreds of times, I remind myself that my inner and outer life depends on thousands and thousands of other men, living and non-living, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and still receiving. If we ponder on this statement, it will remind us the necessity of giving back, so that the balance of life is maintained.

Now let us consider the law of nature from the spiritual aspect. The devotee feels that his chosen deity is in everything around- animate and inanimate.

यत्र जीव तत्र शिव जले कृष्ण सथले कृष्ण, कृष्ण पर्वतमस्तके

Yatra jiva tatra Shiva jale Krishna sthale Krishna, Krishna parvatmastake

God is all-pervading; he is omnipresent. God is present in the distressed, the sick, the troubled ones.

That is why, as devotees we have to serve them. Swamiji brought this idea: शिव ज्ञाने जीब सेवा *Shiv gyane Jiva Seva*. Swamiji also coined these words: दरिद्र नारायण, मूर्ख नारायण *Daridra Narayan, Murkh Narayan*. That is, the poor and illiterate people should be looked upon as God. Thus, from a devotee's point of view, one needs to serve the people around, without expecting any return. In the picture or image of God, we have to imagine the presence of the deity. But God's presence is palpable in human beings who are प्रत्यक्ष देवता *Pratyaksha Devta*

Now what about the outlook of a spiritual aspirant who is practising Jnana Yoga? He will try to think all people as the Atman which pervades everywhere. The Atman which is in me, is in others too. So when we serve others, we serve ourselves. In the Bhagavad Gita, there is a verse:

atmaupamyena sarvatra samam pasyati yo rjuna |
sukham va yadi va dukham sa yogi paramo matah || 6.32 ||

O Arjuna , that yogi is considered the best who judges what is happiness and sorrow in all beings by the same standard as one would apply to oneself .

It means when a Yogi looks upon others' happiness and unhappiness as his own that Yogi is said to have achieved the highest state. That is why a Jnani has great compassion for others as he sees the same Atman in every being. The Yogi, who can see the same Atman in every being, transforms this feeling by serving others. Otherwise, it is not enough just to feel the suffering of others and not trying to alleviate their suffering. Therefore, it is said that realised souls have no desire except the desire of serving others, guiding others with a compassionate heart. The greatest example of this is Gautam Buddha.

In lectures of Karma Yoga, Swami Vivekananda said, 'Unselfishness is more paying, only we don't have the patience to practice it.' Why did Swamiji say so? Because, the result of unselfishness takes time to fructify. Suddenly we cannot get it. For that, we need patience. What are the results of practicing unselfishness? They are: Peace of mind, inner joy and tranquillity, freedom from stress and anxiety and so on.

Moreover, the greatest result of practicing unselfishness is, we can get rid of our ego. The centre of selfishness is our ego, which is related to our body and mind. This ego is the greatest obstacle to realisation of God. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, we read his advice again and again, 'Get rid of this ego' This ego is centred in this body and mind, which is conditioned by time and place. We have to replace it by the higher ego, which is Atman. The more we practice unselfishness, our mind will get freed from unripe ego, and the mind will become purified. It is in the purified mind alone, that the Atman gets reflected, just as in the mirror which is clean, the reflection of the sun is clear. But all these can only be achieved by constant practice, over a long period of time. Patience is needed. If we patiently practice the disciplines to make the mind unselfish, it will yield great results.

Now I shall close this session with a question to you. Two types of devotees are seen; One type, is quite sincere in their spiritual practices, visits holy places regularly, but is extremely selfish. Even if he observes someone's suffering, he will not try to serve him. Another type of devotee does not do much practice, but is extremely unselfish. He would go out of his way to serve others without caring how much price he must pay. Our question is which type of devotee would be regarded as superior?

The Concept of Jnana Yoga

By Professor Takahiro Kato on 3rd June 2023

I am Professor Kato from the University of Tokyo, and I am grateful to you all today. I belong to the Department of Indian Philosophy and Buddhism at my university, where I teach Indian philosophy. I specialize in conducting research on Indian philosophy, and especially on Vedantic philosophy.

In Japan, traditional Buddhist studies have been actively undertaken since ancient times, but after the Meiji period, Indian studies was introduced as an academic subject imported from the West. Indian philosophy is important in Japan, as it forms a part of Indian Studies. It is considered one of the most vital areas of research. It has been over 110 years since Indian Philosophy courses began to be taught at the University of Tokyo, making it one of the oldest academic disciplines in the university.

Today, I received a request from Swamiji Medhasananda to say something about the Jñāna yoga of Swami Vivekananda. Since I am not a specialist in the study of Vivekananda I initially tried to refuse, because I thought it would be difficult to talk about the thought of Vivekananda. However I have been told that it has something in common with Vedantic philosophy, which is something I specialize in, and so I would like to talk a little bit about Jñānayoga itself, which is somewhat related to my specialty.

Jñānayoga is the title of a book recording the lectures of Vivekananda in England. These lectures form a series, namely Jñānayoga, Karmayoga, Rājayoga, and Bhaktiyoga. Here the transcripts of Vivekananda's lectures have been collected under the title Jñānayoga. The content is centered on Vedantic philosophy, and especially Advaita Vedantic philosophy, which follows the line of Sankaracharya. We will come back to Vivekananda later, because here I would like to spend a few moments looking at Jñāna yoga.

First of all, Vedanta which I touched upon earlier, is in a narrow sense the tradition of the Brahmasutra, the fundamental scripture that systematically deals with the metaphysical arguments presented in the Upanishads, as indicated by the terms *Veda* and *Anta* (the final part of the Vedas). It refers to the academic field based on the hermeneutics of the Upanishads. In addition, as a central content, he establishes the absolute existence of the Brahman, which appears in the Upanishads as the only real principle of existence, and develops a monistic thought that makes this the subject of investigation. Later, when this developed into a large field called the Vedanta school, they began to take up the three schools (prasthānatraya) as their academic foundation. The three academic foundations are the Upanishadic texts, the Brahmasutra, which is the basic scripture that systematizes the interpretation, and the Bhagavad-Gita, which is the soteriological and theological foundation. In the later Vedanta school it refers to the doctrine developed and expanded by way of commenting on these three schools. Sankaracharya, who you are all familiar with, also commented on these basic texts.

Now, let's get back to Jñānayoga and study the word Jñānayoga a little. It is a well known fact that the word Jñānayoga appears in the Bhagavad-Gita, which I introduced earlier as one of the three scriptures of Vedanta. In the third verse of Chapter 3 the word jñāna yoga appears. I quote:

लोकेऽस्मिन्द्विविधा निष्ठा पुरा प्रोक्ता मयानघ । ज्ञानयोगेन सांस् यानां कर्मयोगेन योगिनाम् ॥ ३.३ ॥

“O innocent man, it was once said by me that there are two positions in this world: that of the Samkhyas (theorists) through the yoga of knowledge, and that of the yogins (practitioners) through the yoga of action.

In the “Bhagavad Gita” Jñānayoga appears once more, in the first verse of Chapter 16. I quote:

अभयं सत्त्वसंशुद्धिर्ज्ञानयोगव्यवस्थितिः । दानं दमश्च यज्ञश्च स्वाध्यायस्तप आर्जवम् ॥ १६.१

“Fearlessness, purity of mind, devotion to the yoga of knowledge, charity, self-control, rituals, study of the Vedas, penance, sincerity.”

The context continues here, and the commentary continues saying that these qualities are the attributes of those born with divine qualities.

भवन्ति सम्पदं दैवीमभिजातस्य भारत ॥ १६.

In the Bhagavad Gita, as indicated in Chapter 3, verse 3, the position of Jñānayoga and the position of Karmayoga are presented. Traditionally, they are joined by another position, Bhaktiyoga. These are gradually presented as the three means to attain liberation (mokṣa). That is, Jñānamārga (the path of knowledge), Karmamārga (the path of devotion), and Bhaktimārga (the path of devotion). It is like this. These three paths shown in the Gita can reach the same goal of liberation by people from different social backgrounds, by adopting the means best suited to them. It is believed that this opened the way for salvation.

In this way, the concept of Jñānayoga appears in the Gita, but it is actually difficult to interpret this Jñānayoga. If you look up this word Jñānayoga in dictionaries, for example the Sanskrit-English dictionary of Monier Williams, it is described as, “the yoga based on the acquisition of truthful knowledge.” Böhtlingk’s Sanskrit-German dictionary describes it as “theoretical.” There is an explanation about all “Yogas,” referring to Chapter 3, Verse 3, of the Gita. This suggests that the ideas underlying Jñānayoga existed even before the Gita, but as far as our current knowledge goes, the earliest known occurrence of the word Jñānayoga is in the Gita. I think this is okay. I don’t quite understand the “theoretical yoga” mentioned in Böhtlingk’s explanation. Monier Williams’ “Yoga based on the Acquisition of True Knowledge” provides a more detailed explanation, but you probably won’t understand it just by looking at it. In the first place, I don’t really know what true knowledge is.

When we are in troubled situations like this, we researchers look up what is called ‘annotated’ literature. As I introduced in the beginning, the Gita is one of the most vital scriptures in the academic tradition known as the Vedantic school, and so many commentaries have been written. Let’s take a look at some of the oldest and most referenced commentaries of Sankaracharya. This is a passage from the Sankara commentary on the Gita, Chapter 3, Verse 3: “Through Jñāna yoga, that is, yoga, which is knowledge itself.” On the other hand, in Chapter 16, verse 1, which appears in another place, a slightly

different explanation is given. I quote: “Devotion to Jñāna yoga, is devotion to two things: knowledge and yoga.”

Earlier, in Chapter 3, Verse 3, the commentary was given in the form of knowledge, that is, yoga, but here it is explained in the form of knowledge and yoga. The relationship between knowledge and yoga is interpreted here in two different ways, which is a bit confusing. So let us look a little more closely at the commentary of Sankaracharya. The annotation continues like this. “Yoga is the subjecting of one’s experience to the knowledge thus acquired, through concentration, such as through the control of the sense organs.”

If you read this commentary carefully, you will understand that what is referred to as yoga, is what is learned from scriptures and teachers as knowledge, and the making of that knowledge one’s own. I know a little about Jñāna yoga. Now, I would like to go a bit further and consider what the ‘jñāna’ in jñānayoga could be. Jñāna is translated as knowledge, and I feel as though I have a vague understanding of it, but in fact, I cannot understand the essentials simply by replacing the words. For example, in the explanation contained in the dictionary I mentioned earlier, there was an explanation of true knowledge. I think it means “true knowledge,” but this alone will not help us to understand it. In the birthplace of Shankaracharya in Kerala, a seated statue of Sankaracharya welcomes you at the entrance of the temple. If you take a look at the plaque, you see that in it is engraved the words, Jñānād eva kaivalyam, “With knowledge alone there is liberation.” This is the core teaching of Sankaracharya, and in the Gita the three paths of salvation are indicated: the path of knowledge, the path of action, and the path of devotion. It is said liberation can be attained only through the path of Shankaracharya. It is safe to assume that the Jñāna mentioned here refers to the same Jñāna that appears in the Gita.

Here I wish to refer once more to Sankaracharya’s commentary on Jñāna. The description of Sankaracharya is as follows: “Knowledge is the understanding of the semantic objects of words such as Atman, learned from scriptures and teachers.” We have the words, “learned from scriptures and teachers.” In the scriptures and in Sanskrit, the word “shastra” is used. There are many things to consider about the meaning of this word shastra, but here we will follow for the time being the traditional theory of Vedanta. I wish to introduce this.

Here we have critical passages of the Upanishads, which are called the great texts of the Vedanta school. These verses, which are particularly crucial in the Upanishads, are traditionally called mahāvākyas in the Vedanta school, and they have come down as expressions of the basic teachings of the Upanishads. Here are 4 great sayings. This is what Ramakrishna, the translator of the text Panchadasi, a non-dualist manual written around the 14th century, introduces as mahāvākyas: Prajñānaṃ brahma (Aitareya), “Brahman is wisdom”; Upanishad (Chāndogya), “You are it,” ayam ātmā brahma; “Mandukya Upanishad” (Māṇḍūkya), “This is Atman. Brahman.” According to Ramakrishna, each of these 4 great texts is a selection from the Vedas. Aitareya belongs to the Rig Veda, Brhadāraṇyaka belongs to the Yajur Veda, and Chāndogya belongs to the Sama Veda. The Mandukya Upanishads are from the Atharva Vedas. In other words, these four mahāvākyas not only convey the essence of the 4 Upanishads, but also represent the essence of the 4 Vedas.

Here I wish to focus on two verses. In the Chandogya Upanishad: “You are it,” and in the Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad: “I am Brahman.” Let us go back to the explanation of Jñāna yoga. “Knowledge is to understand the semantic objects of words such as Atman, which are learned from scriptures and

teachers. It is to be the object of the experience of the great sentences. I have given here first of all the Jñāna part that the teacher (in this case, the scene where a father named Uddalaka talks to his son) tells him, “You are that”, and the Jñāna that is obtained in this way. The part of yoga is presented in the form, “I am Brahman.” In other words, I think knowledge is to take in what you have learned and understood from scriptures and teachers, and made your own.

Here I wish to focus on two verses. In the Chandogya Upanishad: “You are it,” and in the Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad: “I am Brahman.” Let us go back to the explanation of Jñāna yoga. “Knowledge is to understand the semantic objects of words such as Atman, which are learned from scriptures and teachers. It is to be the object of the experience of the great sentences. I have given here first of all the Jñāna part that the teacher (in this case, the scene where a father named Uddalaka talks to his son) tells him, “You are that”, and the Jñāna that is obtained in this way. The part of yoga is presented in the form, “I am Brahman.” In other words, I think knowledge is to take in what you have learned and understood from scriptures and teachers, and made your own.

I would like to wrap up today’s talk. As a summary, here is a passage from the Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad. “Maitreyi, it is this Atman that one should see, one should hear, one should consider this Atman, one should pay attention to this Atman.” The vital message here is that the final destination of liberation is waiting for us, after our undergoing the process of acquiring knowledge and internalizing it. Another way of saying this would be as a discipline. By the way, in Buddhism, this monastic process is presented in the form of listening, thinking, and practicing. So far, I have considered Jñānayoga while looking at related literature. I learned that in the tradition of Vedanta, this was not simply considered as “knowledge,” but as the whole process of coming into contact with, understanding, and mastering traditional knowledge, since the time of the Vedas.

As I am sure you all know, Swami Vivekananda quoted the following passage from the Gita in his talk at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, USA in 1893. “If people take refuge in Me in any way, I love them just as much. O Partha, all people follow My ways.” It is a famous passage that made the message of the Gita known to the Western world, the fact that all people can be saved. As an aside, in the world situation at that time, Western countries tried to show a spirit of tolerance to representatives of each religion in the world, but on the contrary, Swami Vivekananda, who came from India, explained while quoting ancient Indian words the possibility of a universal religion and the spirit of compassion. This surprised people in Europe and the United States, and of course, caused a great sensation.

The Jñāna yoga we have seen today is one such means, and there are other paths to liberation. Karman, in those days, was the execution of Vedic rituals, but today, the way is open for us to attain liberation by concentrating on work, or to be saved by Bhakti, which is simply believing in God. Whichever path we take, I think it will be vital for us to repeat these practices every day, and turn our attention to knowledge, actions, and faith, as our own. In other words, Yoga. Recently Yoga has been attracting attention. We do not speak of the type of yoga that adjusts the so-called body functions, but Yoga in the sense of concentrating one’s consciousness on one thing, and carefully directing one’s mind. I think I was able to learn about these things today.

Karma Yoga

By Professor Kathy Matsui on 3rd June 2023

Swami Medhasananda, distinguished guests, kindred spirits (like minded people) in this hall today, I am honored and grateful to be given this opportunity to discuss the valuable Karma Yoga through the lecture of Swami Vivekananda given in December of 1895 in New York. I was greatly impressed as I read the transcription and found many of his words resonated with thoughts I have as a peace educator. I was encouraged that my actions, work and mission are shaping my character toward the goal I have been committed to attain.

There is so much depth and wisdom in Karma Yoga that I struggled to find how I can organize this presentation and keep it within 15 minutes. After much thought I thought I should cite some parts of Swami Vivekananda's lecture and respond to his wisdom with my thoughts and work I do. I want to share with you what I have learned from Swami Vivekananda through his lecture on Karma Yoga and connect that learning to the story of my journey as a peace educator, my vision for my continued work as a peacebuilder and my hope for the future.

First of all, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Kathy Ramos Matsui. The name Ramos is part of my heritage, a Philippina American born and raised in Yokohama Japan. I am especially sensitive to war and peace because of my father's profession as a seaman, a US Navy civilian. His job was to transport ammunition and necessities to the war zone. He went to Korean War and Vietnam War. I heard many gruesome war stories from my father. I also visited US military hospitals as part of my Catholic High School tradition, to sing Christmas carols to the wounded US soldiers who fought for their country in Vietnam. I still recall the sight of these soldiers all taped up from head to toe and the smell of pus and blood even in a sanitary hospital. So that was my indirect experience of war.

I am a Catholic and I was also brought up in a Buddhist environment. My maternal Japanese grandmother and my mother were members of a Buddhist lay association, called Rissho Koseikai. This organization was one of the founders of Religions for Peace, an organization that is committed to leading effective multi-religious responses to the world's pressing issues. This organization believes that ambitious goals and complex problems can best be tackled when different faith communities work together. (From Religions for Peace website) And this belief is also practiced by the Vedanta Society. I had a wonderful spiritual experience with Dr. Tsuyoshi Nara, the very person who invited me to join this Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary Celebration Committee about two decades ago.

And now, I would like to discuss this topic on the meaning, theory and practice of Karma Yoga. Let me begin with the quote from Chapter 1.

“The word Karma is derived from the Sanskrit Kri, to do; all action is Karma. Technically, this word also means the effects of actions. Karma as meaning work. The goal of mankind is knowledge. ...Now this knowledge, again, is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside...be what he 'discovers' or 'unveils'; what a man 'learns' is really what he 'discovers', by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge...In many cases it is not discovered, but remains

covered, and when the covering is being slowly taken off, we say, 'We are learning,' advance of knowledge is made by the advance of this process of uncovering."

(Chapter 1)

I felt this is so true as the word "education" means to retrieve the knowledge within each individual. Swami Vivekananda further mentions "all work is simply to bring out the power of the mind which is already there, to wake up the soul." This is what we can say a learning moment for the learner and a teachable moment for the educator. These words also remind me of an "Aha moment", an eye-opening experience I had at my first Peace Education Conference, International Institute on Peace Education (IIPE from hereon) held at the University of Hawaii about 40 years ago. This was the first time I met my mentor Dr. Betty Reardon, the mother of peace education and founder of IIPE. All the activities I participated touched my heart and I thought immediately, can't we do this in Japan?

This learning process is mentioned in Chapter 5.

"The external teacher offers only the suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to work to understand things. Then things will be made clearer to us by our own power of perception and thought, and we shall realise them in our own souls; and that realisation will grow into the intense power of will... First it is feeling, then it becomes willing, and out of that willing comes the tremendous force for work that will go through every vein and nerve and muscle, until the whole mass of your body is changed into an instrument of the unselfish Yoga of work, and the desired result of perfect self-abnegation and utter unselfishness is duly attained." (Chapter 5)

This process of learning resonates with the valuing process of peace education. Knowledge, in other words "touching the mind," is our cognitive skill. We can seek knowledge through history, through what has been practiced in the past

Skills leading to feel means "Touching the heart," our affective skill. We can learn alternative solutions by using our skills to imagine, think, create and practice. We need to feel with our five senses what is happening around us, our community, our country and the world. We are all a part of it. We need to open our ears and hear the moaning cries, feel the pain, and face the same direction toward our mutual future. Skills to take action are also needed. With knowledge we can think and with empathy we can feel, then we are compelled to take action, action to change the world to a better place, a world filled with love and respect for each other, we have the right to live, above all we have the right to peace. We want to live peacefully.

So, three years later in 1996, I organized with my peace educator friends IIPE in Tokyo, at the International Christian University. Since then, my mind and heart were filled with how I can adopt peace education activities and curriculum at Seisen University, a women's university where I presently work as an educator. Then, in 1998, since the 18-year-old population was declining in Japan, Seisen thought about how the university can sustain their educational mission and conducted a survey through Mitsubishi Research Institute of the majors that 18-year-old girls would be interested in. The research results focused on areas of Intercultural Understanding and Communications. Karma Yoga also mentions the importance of intercultural understanding in Chapter 4. "It is necessary in the study of Karma-Yoga to know what duty is...: Do not injure any being; not injuring any being is virtue, injuring any being is sin...Therefore the one point we ought to remember is that we should always try to see the

duty of others through their own eyes, and never judge the customs of other peoples by our own standard.”

This is indeed a theory of intercultural understanding, that is much needed in peacemaking.

In preparing for a new department, the President of Seisen University at that time appointed me and several other professors to form a committee and come up with a proposal to form the curriculum for the new department. I suggested a peace education program, an interdisciplinary program to develop active citizens. I thought of the importance of inquiry, reflection, knowledge, skills to feel, and skills to take action for change.

These actions one after another resonates with the following citation from Chapter 7.

“In addition to meaning work, we have stated that psychologically the word Karma also implies causation. Any work, any action, any thought that produces an effect is called a Karma. Thus, the law of Karma means the law of causation, of inevitable cause and sequence...There may be millions of kinds of happiness, and beings, and laws, and progress, and causation, all acting outside the little universe that we know; and, after all, the whole of this comprises but one section of our infinite nature.”

Many causations of the past serve as dots that connected many other dots that occurred after my eye opening experience at IIPE. Steve Jobs, founder of Apple computers also mentioned the dots in his quote about leadership “ “You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something—your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.” Just as I was inspired twenty somewhat years ago at IIPE I discovered that becoming a peace educator is my mission, my teleology, I have come to this world to be a peace educator. Then I promised myself that my mission is to go out and involve people

So that was the beginning of a new department launched in 2001 called Global Citizenship Studies. The curriculum consists of three pillars: knowledge, interdisciplinary knowledge; skills, communicative and conflict transformation skills; and fieldwork, mainly experiential learning within Japan and to different parts of the world. Besides teaching at the university, I got involved in many other peacebuilding activities such as World Conference of Religions for Peace, Global Partnership for Prevention of Armed Conflict, Global Campaign for Peace Education and of course, the peace activities of Swami Vivekananda’s Birth Anniversary Celebration Events.

In chapter 6, Swami Vivekananda quotes, “When I am doing a good action, my mind is in another state of vibration; and all minds similarly strung have the possibility of being affected by my mind; and this power of mind upon mind is more or less according as the force of the tension is greater or less...Every thought projected from every brain goes on pulsating, as it were, until it meets a fit object that will receive it. Any mind which is open to receive some of these impulses will take them immediately.”

The vibrations that I send out reach other minds and those people are the like minded people, or I would prefer to say kindred spirits who work with me in solidarity for a better world.

Swami further states, “According to Karma-Yoga, the action one has done cannot be destroyed until it has borne its fruit; no power in nature can stop it from yielding its results.” This quote is very encouraging for peace educators. When we educate and work for peace, especially for the eventual

abolition of the war system and toward a more just society, some ask: Why do you take on such a pointless project that is incapable of producing any useful results? Are your feet on the ground? Do you really think this dream will ever be achieved? With Swami's encouragement, in response, we can only say: Because it is the right thing to do. The peace journey is not an easy one, but the answer to the many challenges is not hopelessness nor cynicism, but the conviction that peace is possible, if only we would join our minds and hearts, our spirits and will - toward action.

So therefore, I also find that it is my mission to propose peace education curriculum, that is more than visiting Hiroshima and Nagasaki to Ministry of Education in Japan because that this very action is supported and confirmed by the theory and practice of Karma Yoga as mentioned by Swami Vivekananda. I am presently working with Asia Pacific Center of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU), UNESCO of South Korea on a project to disseminate a common peace education curriculum in Northeast Asia. This common curriculum aims to provide peace educators with the common goals, meanings, contents, methods, and learning outcomes of peace education pertinent and responsive to the needs and contexts of Northeast Asia while being faithful to UNESCO's vision. (From Concept Note provided by APCEIU)

In conclusion, I quote from Chapter 7 the following:

"What is Karma-Yoga? The knowledge of the secret of work. We see that the whole universe is working. For what? For salvation, for liberty; from the atom to the highest being, working for the one end, liberty for the mind, for the body, for the spirit.....we learn from Karma-Yoga the secret of work, the method of work, the organising power of work...you learn by it how best to utilise all the workings of this world... Karma-Yoga shows the process, the secret, and the method of doing it to the best advantage.

My upbringing, my religious background and this experience of finding my mission as peace educator are dots that were connected, the dots of knowledge, effects of action, work, unattachment, unselfishness, and path toward freedom (that is yet to be achieved) have been connected to where I am now and my journey will still continue on.

Thanks be to Swami Vivekananda.

• Thought of the Month •

"Every desire is a chosen unhappiness. Desire is a contract you make with yourself to be unhappy until you get what you want."

- Naval Ravikant

Some Photographs from the Monthly Retreat



• Story to Remember •

Forgiveness of Buddha

One day Buddha went to a village with his disciples. Hearing Buddha's visit, many villagers turned out to seek his blessings.

A businessman running a business with his children was furious with Buddha. He thought Buddha was doing something wrong by simply drawing his children and other people in the village to meditate without doing anything. And he felt spending time just seeing Buddha, whose eyes were always closed, was a complete waste of time. Instead, his Children should help his business to make more money.

He said, "Today, I will teach him a lesson."

He went angrily towards Buddha. As soon as he approached Buddha, he felt some difference. But the anger in him did not dissipate. He was speechless and was not able to express his emotions in words. He slaps Buddha's face. Buddha, in return, smiled back at him.

Seeing this, his disciples and the villagers were furious with the businessman. But in Buddha's presence, they controlled their emotions and kept quiet. The businessman noticed that his action had not drawn any reaction from the people around him.

Then he thought, "If I continue staying here, I will explode again." So he walked away from that place. He returned to his home. The image of a smiling Buddha occupied his mind. In his life, for the first time, he met someone who controlled their emotions for a disrespectful action. He went to sleep but could not sleep throughout the night. He was shivering. Businessman felt that something was happening to him and the whole world turned upside down. The next day, he went to Buddha and fell at his feet, "Please forgive me for my action."

Buddha replied, "I cannot forgive you."

Hearing Buddha's reply, his disciples and villagers were shocked. Buddha has been compassionate throughout his life and accepted everyone in his ashram regardless of their past. And now he is saying he could not excuse businessman behavior.

Sensing everyone's shock, he explained, "Why should I excuse you when you have not done anything."

The businessman replied, "It is me yesterday slap on your face."

Buddha said, "That person is not here anymore. If I ever meet the person on whom you slap, I will tell him to excuse you!. Now to the person here in this moment, you are glorious, and you have not done anything wrong."

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