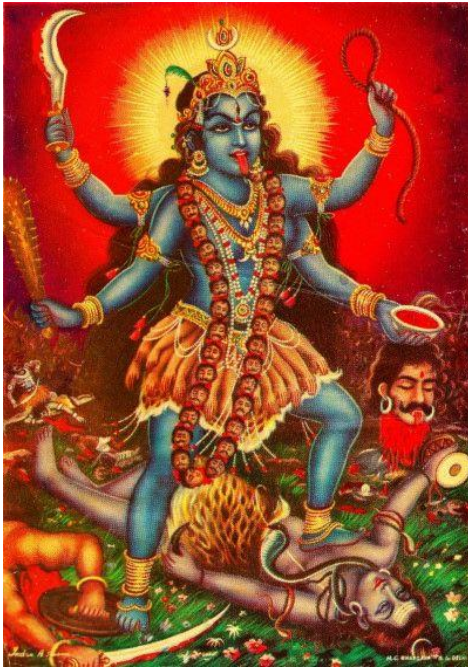




NOVEMBER 2023 -VOLUME 21 NUMBER 11

# The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



## Thus Spake

Spirituality automatically leads to humility. When a flower develops into a fruit, the petals drop off on their own. When one becomes spiritual, the ego vanishes gradually on its own. A tree laden with fruits always bends low. Humility is a sign of greatness.

- Sri Ramakrishna

The highest purpose is served by the simple performance of our duties. That is Dharma. This is no easy matter. The duties cannot be recognized and performed properly unless there is a keen intelligence. Then it is necessary to have a strong mind in order to meditate without wavering upon God. In order to acquire a strong mind, there must be moral discipline. Therefore, all three are necessary: duty, discipline, and devotion.

- Shivapuri Baba

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# Monthly Program Schedule

for

## DECEMBER 2023

2nd (Sat)

### **Bhagavad Gita Study Class in Osaka**

10:30 ~ 12:00

(Japanese Only) Video Uploaded Later

6th (Wed)

### **Weekly Upanishad Study Class**

8:30 ~ 9:30

(Japanese Only) Zoom

12th (Tue)

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

14:00 ~ 16:00

(Japanese Only) Livestream and Zoom

17th (Sun)

### **Monthly Retreat at Zushi**

10:30 ~ 16:30

(Bilingual) Livestreaming

Speaker: Swami Medhasananda

Theme: How can Meditation become Deeper?

20th (Wed)

### **Weekly Upanishad Study Class**

8:30 ~ 9:30

(Japanese Only) Zoom

24th (Sun)

### **Christmas Eve Worship**

19:00 ~ 21:00

(Bilingual) Livestreaming

Prior reservation necessary until 20<sup>th</sup> December

# Report of Summer Retreat at Izu

8<sup>th</sup>~10 September, 2023

By Leonardo Alvarez

The summer retreat of the Vedanta Kyokai was spent in the mountains of the Izu peninsula, at a retreat house called “Zen no Yu” (The hot spring of Zen), a small hotel with hot spring baths, next to a Buddhist temple and run by the daughter of a Buddhist priest.

For two days Maharaj talked on the importance of knowing the purpose of practicing meditation, that is, to get peace, happiness and liberation; to know that only God is real and eternal, that everything else is transitory, and that He alone is our eternal companion and friend.

The gist of the talks consisted in the different types of meditation and spiritual practices to achieve that. There is mantra repetition (Japam), discrimination between the real and unreal (viveka), seeing your Ishta Devata in all, and observing the mind like a witness. All of these help in different situations. Above all, practicing discrimination (viveka) between the eternal and ephemeral in real life situations, in the face of temptations and the world-bewitching magic of Maya, is of utmost help, the real test of our spiritual evolution.

One of the reasons why some people do not make progress for many years is because they do not practice discrimination in real world situations. Another reason is their reluctance to give up desires, attachments and bad habits. What we think and imagine day after day builds up as small waves that suddenly erupt combined as a violent and devastating tsunami that washes away all discrimination, meditation and austerity (Tapasya). To stop the tsunami wave once it has risen is too late. To avoid that, we must eradicate these worldly waves when they are still small ripples, by the above techniques of discrimination, Japam and meditation, combined with relentless daily practice.

To bring this point home, the first night of the retreat, after the devotees had chanted devotional songs, Maharaj told of the story of Hafiz, the Sufi Saint of Persia. Hafiz had developed the habit of lighting candles for a Sufi saint at his tomb every evening, just before sunset. It happened that he once saw a very beautiful courtesan standing in the balcony of her two storied house. This courtesan was very famous, charged extremely high rates and people of high society were her clients. But he was a poor fellow in rags and could in no way afford some time with her. Still undeterred, he would get her attention somehow. Every morning, very early before dawn, he decided to go to her large and beautiful garden and clean it up, trimming the plants and watering the flowers. This courtesan had no wants of servants who would do this work. To their amazement, all of a sudden, the garden would be very well kept and clean each morning.

After some days, the courtesan said to the servants: “From tomorrow, you wake up very early in the morning and see who is doing this”. They followed her bid, and next morning when Hafiz entered the garden and started his daily gardening work of cleaning, trimming

and watering the plants and flowers, they got hold of him, and took him to the courtesan. After being in the presence of her beloved, she asked Hafiz why he was doing it. He replied that he had fallen in love with her but could never afford time together, so to get her attention he resolved to offer a little bit of service by keeping her garden nice and clean. Moved by his sincerity, she said to him: “This night I will see you free of charge,” and ordered the servants to bathe him and clothe him in the finest garments, after which he was sent away home.

While at home, Hafiz would count the minutes like centuries, impatiently awaiting to see his beloved. Finally, dusk was approaching, his heart was beating fast as he was imagining all the happiness of fulfilling his wish. Suddenly, when he had already started towards the house of the courtesan, he remembered: “Every evening, without fail, I have lighted candles for the Sufi saint”. Now he was in a predicament, should he fulfill his worldly desire? (Preya) or should he be willing to sacrifice it to keep his holy routine? (Shreya). Torn apart between duty and desire, he discriminated and resolved: “I must not fail to light candles to the Sufi saint this evening! We will see what will happen with the courtesan afterwards!”.

Thus determined, he rushed to the tomb of the Saint, where he saw two men drinking from an earthen pot, laughing with roaring laughter and singing in ecstasy. When they saw Hafiz, they told him: “Come brother! You also drink from this!”. Hafiz thought it was wine, which he very much disliked and said: “No, I am a Muslim and do not drink wine”. The two men kept on laughing and singing, and again offered him, to which he refused. After this, they threw the earthen pot to the ground, which broke and were about to leave.

At this moment, Hafiz thought “Ah, I should have better sipped a little bit of it at least, they seemed so happy!”. So, he asked the two men for a drink, but they reproached him saying: “You should have drunk when we offered to you, now the pot is broken, and the drink is spilled.” After some pause, they said in a reconciliatory tone: “But you may still find some drops left in there, so stick your tongue and lick them”. Thus, being encouraged, Hafiz went to broken the pot, and to his good fortune, found some droplets, whereby he licked them. Immediately a rush of insuppressible bliss gushed forth in torrents from the innermost depths of his heart, and in a state of total intoxication, he also started roaring with laughter and singing.

After some time, Hafiz calmed down a little, still trembling with joy, and asked the men, “What kind of wine is this?”, the men, who were really angels, told him “This is no ordinary wine, but the wine of Divine Love”

Meanwhile the courtesan who had been waiting for Hafiz, grew anxious at not seeing him come. Intrigued by what had happened, she went to look out for him. Someone told her that Hafiz used to light candles at the tomb of a Sufi saint every evening, so she rushed to the site. There she found a wondrous sight, for the man was singing and laughing in ecstasy. In awe at this scene, she stood still, but Hafiz approached her and offered a sip of that wine, and much to her surprise, as soon as it touched her lips, in her too sprung forth an irrepressible joy, and thus inebriated in the Love of God Supreme, she also sang and danced.

The moral of this story is that Hafiz would have degraded himself and gone astray if he had followed his base desires (preya), but he chose to keep his good habit of praying and lighting candles at the tomb of the Sufi saint (shreya), and in the process not only saved himself and experienced supreme bliss, but also saved the fallen lady and introduced her into the path of Divine Love.

Now regarding pilgrimage, on the second day the group went to a place called “Nanadaru”, literally the seven waterfalls in Japanese. The first one was rushing like Gangotri in the Himalayas. After going through several of these waterfalls, Maharaj spoke with a disciple that one should come to such places alone, spend the whole day in silence and meditation, because only then it would have a beneficial effect. Also, while listening to the murmurs of the water, he recounted how Swamiji, who had been in the Himalayas and had heard the many sounds of the flowing Ganga, said that the sound matched with the different ragas in India that vary depending on the hour of the day. After that the group had tea and snacks and an American devotee called Steve, who is trained in classical music, sang a few songs, such as “We Shall Overcome”, to the joy of all.

On the last day of the retreat, the group departed just before 4 am to the beach, a place called “Shira Hama” or “White Beach” because the sand was more or less white (30 years ago before the onrush of tourists, it used to be pristine white, so they say). There the group sat in a long line along the shoreline and meditated as they saw the sun rise with all its glory, the light breaking through the clouds in the horizon. After about one hour of meditation, the group sat close together, chanted a song for Sri Ramakrishna and another one for Holy Mother guided by Swami Medhasananda, and read from the Bhagavad Gita and heard a short explanation from Maharaj. The group read verses 11 to 26, and then 70 of Chapter 2.

Verses 11 to 26 explain the essence of Vedanta, Maharaj said, while the purport of verse 70 is: “As all the rivers flow into the ocean but the ocean does not overflow, the sage, though many desires may spring in his heart, he observes them without satisfying them, thereby retaining his peace.” This verse Maharaj made the group chant, since he thought appropriate given the fact that the group was literally seeing water flowing from a canal into the majestic ocean, unperturbed by the water entering into it.

After the group returned, Maharaj was shown the temple adjacent to the hotel, where the father of our hostess serves as the main priest. They showed the group the main worship hall (本堂), the funerary tablets with the names of devotees inscribed, as well as some pictures, including one with a Buddhist priest with 3 children on his side, all sitting on a cushion and practicing meditation. There are regular Zazen session held at the temple. Our hostess explained that now to maintain temples, most people have to take full-time jobs, but it was her earnest desire that the temple activities should continue, so she was able to fulfill that by having the hotel next door. Although Japan is said to be almost bereft of religion, there are still zealous devotees who try to uphold the traditions and spiritual practices of yore, even today.

# Summer Retreat Stories

By Swami Divyanathananda

## The teeth and tongue

In a monastery there was a hermit, who was sincere and hardworking, yet he was short-tempered, and would often pick up quarrels with the other inmates. Once in a fit of anger, he became so violent that his whole body was shaking, and blood started oozing out from his mouth. He became alarmed. He went to his teacher for a solution to this problem. The teacher said, 'Look, you should understand that this anger is killing you and you should seriously look for ways to correct yourself.' To explain the matter, the master asked him, 'How many teeth do you have?'

The disciple answered, 'Thirty. I lost two of them when I was small.'

'How many tongues?' asked the master.

'One' came the quick reply.

The Master then said, 'We all have similar number of teeth and one tongue. However, you must have observed that while chewing food, we bite the tongue out of carelessness, and sometimes blood come out. There is an apparent war between the tongue and the teeth, and most of the times the teeth win.'

'However, the teeth decay slowly. Old people are seen with broken and lesser teeth than younger persons. But the tongue remains forever. Till our last day on earth, we live with one tongue, but not all the teeth remain intact. In a similar way, those people who are violent, wear away fast, their energy drains away quickly. However, the gentle ones retain their strength and vigour for a longer time.'

## Good news-bad news

There was a Chinese farmer, who had a nice horse. One day, the Horse came with another horse to his house. One neighbour, seeing this, said 'Good news' The farmer said, 'Good news or bad news, who can say?'

The farmer gave the second horse to his son, who rode it and after some time, fell from the horse-back and broke his feet. The neighbour said, 'Bad news' The farmer replied, 'Bad news or good news, who can say?'

A few days later, the soldier of the local king came to recruit new soldiers for the King's army. When he came to the house of the farmer, finding the son injured, he spared him.

Good news of course!

## Seven types of wives

The time, when Gautam Buddha lived on this earth, there lived a man, called Anathapinda. Sujata was his wife. Sujata was quarrelsome and would often pick up quarrels with other family members. Once Buddha was passing through that area and decided to stay at Anathapinda's house. He was staying there for a few days and during that time, came to know about the quarrelsome nature of Sujata. He called her and said, 'Sujata, do you know, there are seven types of wives?'

The first type is like a murderer. She has an impure mind, doesn't honour the husband and consequently turns her mind to another man.

The second type is like a thief. She spends the hard-earned money of her husband for her physical comforts and if required, doesn't hesitate to steal money from her husband.

The third type is like a master. She rules over the entire household and takes upper hand over her husband and other family matters.

The fourth type is like a friend. She assists her husband in all matters and if necessary, gives helpful advice in times of crisis.

The fifth type is like a sister, who is also like the former and serves her husband heart and soul and assists him in all matters. She is loving and caring and takes care of her husband like a sister.

Then there is a wife who is like a mother. She takes care of her husband like her own son.

Finally, there is a wife who is like a maidservant. She also serves her husband, but silently, without grumbling and she has no expectations.

Then Buddha, addressing Sujata asked, 'To which category do you belong?' Then Sujata realised her mistake and started thinking seriously, how to correct herself.

### **The mistress and her maid**

Once there was a rich lady, who was kind, well-mannered and modest. She had a large household consisting of several maidservants. There was one maid, who was wise and clever. She doubted, whether the good behaviour of her mistress was genuine, or she was nice because of the favourable surroundings. She decided to find out.

One day, knowingly she remained confined to her room and did not report for work on time. When the mistress enquired, she said, if one day I am a bit late, you shouldn't be impatient. This made the mistress angry. The next day, she repeated the same thing. The mistress came to her room and hit her with a stick. The news of this incident spread among other maids also and the nature of the mistress was revealed to all.

### **The magical begging-bowl**

A beggar appeared before a king one morning, when he had come out for his morning walk.

'What do you want?' asked the King.

'Think twice' came the reply from the beggar. The King was surprised, for he was not prepared for such a reply.

'Go ahead, ask whatever you want, and it will be brought before you' assured the King.

The beggar took out a small bowl from his bag and said, 'What you give me, it doesn't matter, only this begging bowl should be full.' To this the King ordered his servants to bring some diamonds from his treasury and pour them in the begging bowl.

But, to his surprise, the moment those diamonds were put in that bowl, they vanished. They couldn't believe their eyes. The King ordered more diamonds and jewellery to be brought and poured in that bowl, but every time the same thing happened. The news spread like a bonfire throughout the Kingdom.

Then the King, addressing the beggar said, 'I beg your pardon, but please tell me the secret'.

The beggar said, 'This is a human skull, but I have polished it to look like a bowl.

Whatever you put inside, it disappears'.

There is a hidden meaning in this story. Our desires cannot be fulfilled. After one desire is fulfilled, another comes. We always want more and more. Physical comforts, power, prestige, name, fame, everything we get, but they soon disappear, and our desires are not satiated. Our begging bowl is always empty. Out of millions of people, there are however a few, who don't seek things from outside. They shun all the desires and at the end find fulfilment from within.

## **Crooks of Gold**

Once, a person living near a grave heard a voice from inside the grave. He became frightened and hesitated to go near the grave and so reported the matter to one of his friends. The friend was not so timid, so he decided to investigate the matter. He stayed the next night near the grave and in the middle of night heard the same voice. He dug the grave and heard a voice telling him 'I am a treasure of Gold. I wanted to offer myself to your friend, but he was too timid to come near me. If you want, you can take me' But how shall you come to me?' replied this man. 'Tomorrow bathe yourself, keep your room clean. We shall come in the garb of monks. Please keep a separate room for us, we shall go inside the room and turn into crooks of gold.'

The man did as directed. He bathed himself, cleaned his room. At the appointed hour eight monks came, took some refreshments and as soon as they went inside the next room, they turned themselves into crooks of gold.

In the same village, another man, who heard of this incident, felt greedy for the treasure, and so he invited eight monks to his house. The monks came but became rough and violent and reported the matter to the police. Now, the man, who had heard this voice from the grave first time, came to the house of his friend and demanded the treasure, for he felt, because of him alone the treasure has been discovered. But as he went inside the room to take the gold away, he found lot of poisonous snakes who crawled towards him to attack. The man ran away.

The moral of the story is, there are some persons who are desirous to get the results, but they are not willing to work for it. They are too timid to chase their dream till the last. They are frightened by failures which are inevitable in the beginning. Only those, who are courageous, hardworking, and have perseverance get their cherished goals fulfilled.

## **Rama's will**

In a certain village, there lived a weaver, who made his living by sewing clothes and selling them in the village market. He was extremely honest. If anybody would ask him the price of the cloth, he would answer, 'by Rama's will, the cost of the fabric is 4 annas, sewing charges are 2 annas, my profit is 1 anna, so the price of the cloth is 7 annas'. Everybody would believe him and would buy cloth from him.

One night he was sitting in the village Temple, singing the names of God. In the meantime, some dacoits had raided the house of a rich man in the village, and they were taking the loot. They needed a porter to carry the big bundle. Seeing the weaver, they caught hold of him and forced him to carry the bundle. However, after proceeding a small distance, they saw the police coming. The dacoits ran away. The weaver was caught by the police with the bundle and was thrown in the lock-up. Next morning, he was produced in front of the village judge. When the judge asked him to explain what happened last night, he answered, 'By Rama's will, I was singing the names of God in the village temple. By Rama's will the dacoits caught hold of me and put their lot in my head. By Rama's will after some time, police came, the dacoits ran away and by Rama's will I was put inside lock-up'.

The Judge, understanding the situation and seeing his sincerity set him free.

Then the weaver said, 'By Rama's will I am free again.'



## Photos from Trip to India



Arrival at Delhi Airport



Swami Suhitananda, Vice President



Belur Math



Sarada Ma did Panchatapa here



Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral Home





Sister Nivedita Museum



M's House



Kamarpukur



Barasat Ashram



Barasat Ashram

• Thought of the Month •

This is the true joy in life, to be used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, to be a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and that as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live, I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me; it is a sort of splendid torch which I've got a hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

- GB Shaw

• Story to Remember •

## The Parable of the Millionaire's Son

There was once a multimillionaire with unlimited wealth. He had an only child, a little baby son. The millionaire left all his wealth to the little boy who became the sole possessor of the entire huge fortune. So even at the little age of a year or so this tiny boy was a great multimillionaire. He was the possessor of a vast fortune. He had no need of anything at all. He himself was the owner of all the wealth. This was his real status.

But then what was his actual condition for all practical purposes? Let us see. Though it was true that the little boy was a multimillionaire yet all the same the boy was not able to enjoy the fact of his multimillionaire-ship in practical effect because of several things. Firstly, as he was only a minor in age, he could not utilize his status due to certain prevailing laws of inheritance. He had to attain the age of a major and then alone into active, effective, and de facto ownership of his vast wealth and the status this wealth would give him. He was therefore subject to the operation of the law and was under the control of his guardian who was in charge until the boy attained the proper age of majority. Thus, this multimillionaire had to obey the guardian and try to please him if he wished any of his special desires to be fulfilled. Secondly, the father had laid down certain specific conditions to be fulfilled by the boy if he was to get the fortune when he reached the age of majority, i.e., 18 years or 21 years as the law of the land required it. If he failed to fulfil these conditions then he was not eligible to the fortune.

Let us take for example that the father laid down in his will that the son would receive the fortune when he attained majority only on condition that he never smoked, drank wine, gambled or did anything that was disgraceful to the fair name of the family, etc. , etc. Now we see that even though it is a fact that the boy is a multimillionaire and no one can deny this fact nor no one can alter it yet all the same at the particular juncture until the boy has fulfilled all the conditions required by the Law as well as the father's will the mere fact of his being a multimillionaire (however true and real that it may be) does not in any way free him from his present limitations nor place him above from all wants. If he wants to experience that state when he is not at all in need of any thing whatsoever then he must patiently wait till he grows up and also take care to fulfil the several conditions laid down by his father in his will. Then alone he will ultimately realize the full state of plenty and power and independence.

But before he has actually done this if he tries to act on the strength of his status, he will find that will not succeed. If he orders for a motor car for 10,000 dollars the dealer will only smile but nothing will come out of it. But the guardian can make a purchase on the heir's behalf. The heir cannot do it though he is himself the real owner of the wealth. Is this not a very peculiar situation really?

Similarly, even though you are in reality Satchidananda, Absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, you have to realize to fulfil all the conditions (viz., cultivation of virtues and eradication of vices) and undergo all the preparatory exercises like concentration, meditation, etc.

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