

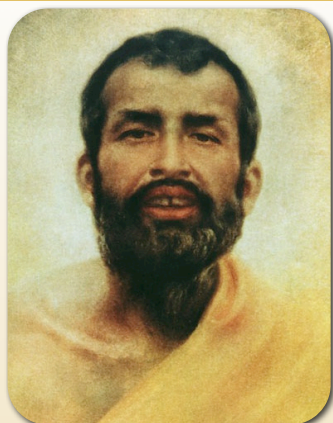


February 2011 - Volume 09 Number 02

日本ヴェーダーンタ協会ニュースレター *The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter*

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

Monthly Calendar



Birthdays

Swami Brahmananda
Saturday, Feb 05
Swami Trigunatitananda
Monday, Feb 07
Swami Adbhutananda
Friday, Feb 11
Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva
Sunday, Mar 06
Zushi Retreat Celebration
Sunday, 20 Mar

Kyokai Events

• January Zushi Retreat •

Swami Vivekananda
Sunday, Feb 20
Mangalariti, Chanting, Bhajan 6 AM
Puja, Food Offering, Flower
Offering, Reading from 11 AM

**‘The Power of the Teachings
of Swami Vivekananda’**
Talk by Swami Medhasananda

Lunch / Afternoon Session
All, are welcome to attend!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"God is in all men, but all men are not in God; that is why we suffer."

... Sri Ramakrishna

"You are the Self, the infinite Being, the pure, unchanging Consciousness, which pervades everything. Your nature is bliss and your glory is without stain. Because you identify yourself with the ego, you are tied to birth and death. Your bondage has no other cause."

... Shankaracharya

January 2011 Zushi Retreat

The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi's Birth Anniversary Celebration

On January 16, the Vedanta Society of Japan celebrated the birth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother at its monthly Zushi Retreat. The day-long schedule began at 6AM with mangalaraty, chanting and bhajans with a meditation from 6:30 to 7:30, followed by a breakfast attended mainly by volunteer devotees that had stayed either at the Ashram/Center or at Holy Mother House accommodations for females and children. Flowers, fruits, baked goods and other articles for worship and offering were then prepared.

At 11AM Swami Medhasananda conducted arati worship with the entire congregation then offering flowers (pushpanjali). Once all were seated again the swami led Vedic peace chants. This was followed by selected readings of Holy Mother's spiritual message in both English and Japanese. Swami then gave a brief talk entitled "Holy Mother's Method of Teaching" in English with translation by Ms. Yoko Sasaki before

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Holy Mother Celebration [from page 1]

before breaking for a prasad lunch.

The afternoon session continued with more readings from Holy Mother's message. Swami Medhasananda then shared some lesser-known stories exemplifying Holy Mother's unique nature and approach as a spiritual leader and teacher. Swami then invited Mr. Samudra Datta Gupta to sing a devotional song in his rich baritone voice and Lonnie then offered a few original devotional compositions in English including "Lord, Lord, Lord" from the Hollywood Men's Choir of the 70s written by Rabindra Danks.

This was followed by tea at 4:30 PM with invitation to participate in evening vespers beginning at 6:15 PM. •



Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's Method of Teaching

Morning and Afternoon Session Commentary by Swami Medhasananda

Why 'Holy' Mother?

Welcome to Holy Mother's birthday celebration. One may wonder why we call her Holy Mother, or sometimes Divine Mother, and not simply Sarada Devi, or Mother Sarada Devi? Is this just a way to show respect to her or there is some other justification?

The very name Sarada means "one who gives the essential things of our life". In India it is a tradition to call an elderly lady "Mother". Do we then call Sarada Devi mother simply because she was the wife of Sri Ramakrishna? Believing that she had no particular uniqueness, some casual observers would think that she possessed no special spiritual height of her own. They simply thought that since she was the wife of Sri Ramakrishna, devotees addressed her like that out of respect. Well, no, she was a great woman saint by her own right, and by her own right she should receive our respect.

Holiness means purity, and a holy person is a person who is free from lustful acts or thoughts. That is of course true, but there is also a deeper meaning. Purity also means one free from greed, pride, jealousy, delusion, and all these vices. The Holy Mother was free from all these vices from her very birth.

Generally speaking, a holy man acquires his holiness after a great deal of struggle and spiritual practice. But Holy Mother was not like that; she was not only pure, she could impart purity to others. She was the very embodiment of purity. We all know how pure and spiritual Swami Vivekananda was, but when he would go to meet and pay his respects to Holy Mother he would drink Ganga water again and again.

Someone once asked Swamiji why he was drinking Ganga water and he answered that he would not dare to face Holy Mother if there was any impurity in him, so he drank Ganga water to completely purify himself.

Why 'Divine' Mother?

While this demonstrates her holiness, why is she sometimes called the Divine Mother? Some considerations are now needed. Do you think that God, who has created the universe and is worshipped by millions and millions of devotees, has done all this for egotistic reasons or pride?

Do you think that the millions and millions of devotees worshipping Jesus through the ages make him egotistic? Obviously not, and that is why God is God and Jesus is a God-man. Holy Mother was always the same serene, calm, quiet being, even though devotees literally worshipped her. This moment she would receive the worship of devotees, the next

moment she would rush to the kitchen and cook for them, and after they had been fed she would then wash their dishes.

One devotee observed that the greatest proof of Holy Mother's divinity is that she is completely free from ego even though hundreds upon hundreds of devotees literally worship her. These were not always ordinary people, as some were famous scholars, or those in high government posts or simply renowned for their success or wealth. We call her 'Divine Mother' because of this egolessness.

Additionally, can ordinary holy personages transform people? And can such holy people take on the sufferings of others? The answers

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Mother's Method [from page 3]

are no and no. Yet we see in Holy Mother's life how many devotees she transformed, while assuming their sufferings. Spiritual giants like Brahmanandaji and Premanandaji would say that those people they could not spiritually entertain due to the depth of their impure or negative samskaras, Mother would accept and transform them. What better proof of the divine power of Holy Mother than this? Who can love all and love all equally; whether man, woman or animal? No ordinary sage can do that. Only God or a God-man can do that. No humanist and no member of a common cause or rights group can love all equally. Again we see throughout Holy Mother's life how she loved all and loved all equally.

Another consideration is that we can neither scale the height nor fathom the depth of her spirituality. Only a diamond dealer can appreciate the true value of a diamond. Only a great sage can recognize the spirituality of another sage, and from the statements of great sages such as Vivekanandaji, Brahmanandaji, Turiyanandaji and Saradanandaji we can understand Holy Mother's greatness.

Swami Turiyanandaji once made a comment about Sarada Devi's spiritual heights by using the analogy of the chakras. As envisioned by the Tantra, the seven chakras of the body are muladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddha, ajna and sahasrara. The fifth chakra at the throat is vishuddha, with the seventh being sahasrara, or the seat of the Supreme Reality. It takes tremendous struggle and power of mind to reach even the chest or anahata chakra. Turiyanandaji said that they, the monks, put tremendous effort to reach vishuddha, yet Holy Mother brings her mind down from sahasrara to ajna and then to vishuddha so that she may talk to and serve the devotees. So the struggle of the sages is to raise the mind, while the Holy Mother's struggle was to bring the mind down, otherwise she would remain in sahasrara united with the Supreme Reality. This is something only

the most spiritually advanced could recognize. In fact, some of these great swamis, being fully aware of the divinity of the Mother would tremble or become ecstatic when approaching her, very unlike their behavior when meeting an ordinary person. From this we can understand why she is called The Divine Mother.

Finally, after giving up the body, ordinary sages cannot reappear to teach devotees. Yet we see such reappearances in the lives of Jesus and Krishna who are called God-men. This same phenomenon we see in Holy Mother's life and many attest to the fact that she would appear in answer to earnest prayer or in times of unusual trouble. She in fact declared, "My child if you have any trouble, remember always that you have Mother, and I will be with you and I will take

care of your problems." What great assurance for humanity!

God as Mother

When we combine her holiness, her egolessness, her power to transform others, her love for all equally, her great spiritual height and her reappearances to give spiritual guidance, we can understand why Sri Sarada Devi is called, not only The Holy

Mother, but The Divine Mother.

Power and Popularity

It appears that Holy Mother has become more powerful than Sri Ramakrishna around the world in recent years. Swami Vivekananda once jokingly commented, "My Father has to always

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• Thought of the Month •

*Everything that irritates us about others
can lead us to an understanding about
ourselves.*

- Carl Jung

Mother's Method [from page 4]

obeys my Mother.” Sri Ramakrishna said that it is through the power of the Holy Mother that he would teach humanity. One reason for Mother's popularity in the West is feminists asking why God is only looked upon as the father. This is absolutely true; why not mother?

Of course, in the final sense God is beyond all gender considerations, but when we seek a personal relationship with God, why should we always approach such a relationship as Father? If we compare, we will find we are, in fact, more comfortable with our mother than our father. We take more liberties with our mother than with our father. As with the old Japanese proverb “jishin, kaminari, kaji, oyaji” meaning “earthquakes, thunderbolts, fires, fathers” regarding the four things to be awed. In Christianity, as in all the Semitic traditions, God is looked upon as Father, but this the first time in the West that God is introduced as Mother through Hinduism. This idea is much appreciated in the West, as it is both rational and quite natural and should be so.

Why do I explain all this about the Holy Mother? Because in hearing of Her greatness, you may be drawn to Her. You will study about Her. You will accept Her. Then you will take shelter in Her and every desire in your life will be fulfilled. So now it is up to you.

Method of Teaching

Unlike Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother would never introduce spiritual topics to her devotees. In the Gospel, Sri Ramakrishna himself is introducing topics, giving examples, quoting scripture, explaining, etc. Holy Mother never did the same. It was not necessary either. Her life was her message. Every moment of her life she would impart some teaching, some message to those who could realize it. She would impart spirituality, the most important thing in spiritual life, to the devotees. With a dewdrop the

rosebud blossoms. Silently she would shower spirituality onto the devotees and transform them. When a devotee would come with a particular spiritual problem, she would, of course, would always reply. Such instruction would be brief, simple and profound.

A monk once said, “Mother, sometimes it is so difficult to control our minds. Especially when we become sick, our whole mind rushes to the body. How can we fix our mind upon God.” Holy Mother replied, “My child, divide your mind into two parts. With the sentient, wise part of the mind, control that part which is wicked, naughty and fickle.” This is a very practical teaching.

On another occasion Holy Mother said, “Love all, and love all

equally.” Hearing this a girl asked, “Mother, how can I love all equally?” The answer the Holy Mother gave is not for this child alone, it is for all of us. She said, “My child, never ask anything from others. Never expect anything from others. Then alone can you learn to love all equally.” The moment we ask and receive we will be pleased and feel obliged to that person, but we will feel

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• A Story to Remember •

Happiness

“I am in desperate need of help--or I'll go crazy,” said the villager. “We’re living in a single room--my wife, my children and my in-laws. So our nerves are on edge, we yell and scream at one another. The room is a hell.”

“Do you promise to do whatever I tell you?” said the Master gravely.

“I swear I shall do anything.”

“Very well. How many animals do you have?”

“A cow, a goat and six chickens.” said the man.

“Take them all into the room with you,” instructed the Master. “Then come back after a week.”

The disciple was appalled, but he had promised to obey! So he took all the animals indoors. A week later he came back a pitiable figure, moaning, “I’m a nervous wreck. The dirt! The stench! The noise! We’re all on the verge of madness!”

“Go back now,” said the Master, “and put the animals out.”

The man ran all the way home. And came back the following day, his eyes sparkling with joy. “How sweet life is! The animals are out. The home is a Paradise—so quiet and clean and roomy!”

Fr. Anthony de Mello

Mother's Method [from page 5]

piqued or dissatisfied with the person who refuses our request. Then we cannot love all equally.

Mother's last message was on getting inner peace. She would say, “My daughter, if you want to find peace, don't find fault with others, but find fault with yourself. No one is a stranger. Everyone is your own.” Most important here is finding fault with others. This mind set that says, “I am different. Others are different. I have my own people and those other people are not my people.” To think in terms of difference; to think in terms of selfishness makes us unhappy. “He is not my family. He is from kansai (the western side of Honshu Island) , not from kanto (the

eastern side) like me.” “He is an American, I am a Japanese.” I am an American and he is an Indian.”

Naturally, I have some opportunities to travel abroad. Passing through airport immigration, I sometimes see signs for ‘foreigners’ to go this way or that, while in some countries these signs say ‘visitors’. I really like it when such signs say ‘visitors’. When I stand with others in a line that says ‘foreigners’, immediately I feel I can't identify with the people here or even those standing with me, that they will treat me as a foreigner, an outsider. But when it says ‘visitor’ I feel much more welcomed, although the intent from authorities may be the same. The difference between these two terminologies conjures

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Mother's Method [from page 6]

feelings within. The mind running to these differences is one deep source of our mental peacelessness.

In Japan, for example, I do not look upon the devotees and visitors here as foreigners. I do not think in that way, and would hope to not be looked upon as a foreigner either. God did not create all these barriers. Our minds create these barriers within barriers, becoming so narrow and causing so much peacelessness. This is why we should always remember Mother's wonderful message, "No one is a stranger. Everyone is my own. Everyone is my relative." How simple, yet profound if we really ponder it. That was the beauty of Holy Mother's method of teaching; often it was silent and when it was vocal, it was brief, to the point and profound. - end of AM Session

Afternoon Session Q&A

Q: Are there any particular comments from Holy Mother or Sri Ramakrishna regarding previous incarnations of Sarada Devi?

A: On some special occasions Holy Mother made some statements, mostly unconsciously and not very clearly, that in previous incarnations she had been Sita, the wife of Rama, and Durga, the daughter of the King of the Himalayas.

Q: I am reading now that Sri Ramakrishna considered her his spiritual consort, his Shakti.

A: Yes, in that way Kali is Holy Mother and Shiva is Sri Ramakrishna. Mahamaya creates this universe, sustains this universe and destroys this universe; Mahamaya makes people bound and also she liberates people: these are all functions, qualities and characteristics of Mahamaya. In that way we can see Sri Ramakrishna as Brahman and Holy Mother is Mahamaya, Prakriti or Shakti, or primordial energy.

Q: What was the purpose of Holy Mother's marriage?

A: It has several meanings. The first meaning is that although Sri Ramakrishna was a monk, as he had practiced Vedanta and formally became a monk; he outwardly remained a householder. Householders have to keep some routines and traditions and one of them is marriage, so Sri Ramakrishna also married and took Sarada Devi as his wife. The second meaning is that it shows that is possible to lead a spiritual life even while leading a householder's life. This marriage took place in order to show that example.

Householders may say that as a monk or a nun, living alone, it is very easy to talk of renunciation; never having experienced

the troubles and problems of a householder's life. Householders experience how hard it is to face their many problems and at the same time to call on God. Holy Mother set an example that even leading a householder's life with all the problems, troubles, responsibilities, works and duties from morning till night, it is possible to call on God.



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Mother's Method [from page 7]

Sometimes I speak to householders devotees and they complain that it is very difficult for them to take care of their family and children, to attend to their work: there is no time, no energy and no motivation to pray to God and to do Japam. This is indeed a very common problem. Look at Holy Mother's life, with all the troubles that her relatives created for her! But in spite of all that she would always maintain her mental peace, equanimity and calmness of the mind. She would call on God, pray to God and do Japam. Swami Saradanandaji took care of Holy Mother for many years and was also the reputed biographer of Sri Ramakrishna. He used to say that sometimes monks, even those having led the life of a monk for decades, get irritated and become angry if something happens not up to their liking. But look at how calm, quite, serene and peaceful Holy Mother was in the midst of the environment she lived in. She would not complain about some of her relatives who were so troublesome. She would love and serve them, even persons like her niece Radhu who was so often unmanageable and exacting. She would declare that she was able to break her "attachment" to Radhu any time she wanted and that is the difference between her and common people who cannot detach themselves from the objects of their attachment. She would say that this is the ideal, "Outward attachment and absolute inner detachment."

Holy mother set this example for the householders and that is why her marriage was necessary. The householders could see Holy Mother coping with so many problems and still keeping calm, serene and peaceful: they could then refer to her example to face their own problems and feel then that they also have hope for themselves by studying Holy Mother's life.

Q: I find many troubles in my householder life resulting from trying to lead a spiritual life at the same time. Is this common?

A: There is no contradiction between spiritual life and householder's secular life. Definitely these two can be adjusted and harmonized. If some problems occur regarding combining and harmonizing them, then some mistake definitely must have been made in the way spiritual practice is performed. So it is necessary to discover such mistakes, performing deep self-introspection, or consult some experienced spiritual teacher to find out and correct what went wrong.

In order to harmoniously combine work and spiritual practice, it is important to do that with some

pragmatism. It is not advisable, for instance, to combine a full day's work with long night hours of Japam and meditation in order to accelerate the achievement of one's spiritual goal. In that way one only jeopardizes one's health without achieving one's goal. One should always remember the limitations of one's body and

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Mother's Method [from page 8]

power, if one wants to avoid the possibility of physical or mental problems while trying to perform hard spiritual practice.

Stories about The Holy Mother

There are many stories about Holy Mother. Some of these real-life stories show how Holy Mother was able to read other people's mind (in Sanskrit this is called Antaryamitra). This is not simply thought or mind reading: it goes beyond that and is a characteristic of great spiritual leaders. They access others' minds with no purpose of acquiring name or fame or money. Their purpose is only to help others.

Once a young man came to know about Holy Mother and wanted to see her and receive initiation and spiritual instructions from her. He then went from Calcutta to her native village of Jayrambati despite the fact that in those days such trip was very difficult for lack of efficient communications. He was very much disappointed when he finally saw Holy Mother. He thought that Holy Mother would look elegant and beautiful, but then he saw her dark complexion and unimpressive aging figure. So Holy Mother told him: "My child, I really looked pretty before. But then I performed spiritual practices, including being encircled by fire for three days from morning to dusk: since then my complexion became dark." Hearing this the devotee felt very much ashamed and apologized repeatedly to Holy Mother.

One devotee came from East Bengal, a part of the country where people are used to eating large servings of rice. In West Bengal, on the contrary, rice was usually served in smaller portions. When the devotee received his rice for lunch he thought that he was being served a very small portion, but refrained from asking for more. Just then Holy Mother told the person serving the food to give more rice to the devotee. At that

the devotee realized that Holy Mother was aware of his thoughts.

Holy Mother had the appearance of an ordinary village widow. Once a lady visitor mistook Golap-Ma, who had an impressive, aristocratic bearing, for Holy Mother. Holy Mother made a lot of fun out of that incident, but Golap-Ma reprimanded the visitor for not recognizing the divinity in Holy Mother's face. Like in the quote from the Bible ("He who has eyes to see, let him see, and he who has ears to hear, let him hear.") only some could recognize Holy Mother's unique divine features.

Once some visitors were talking amongst themselves as they made their way to Jayrambati to visit the Holy Mother. They agreed they would be very glad if they were served a certain special Indian cake upon reaching Holy Mother's place, but, of course, they agreed that they should not openly express such a wish to Holy Mother. When they finally reached Jayrambati they were invited to join in lunch. They were amazed to see that the very first item served to them was that very Indian cake that they had been hoping to receive.

On another occasion, some devotees discussed among themselves that they would take initiation from Holy Mother if they were satisfied that she possessed some special powers—there are many types of devotees and some of them have some peculiar ideas. On the way to Jayrambati the idea came to them that it would be nice to offer some lotus flowers to Holy Mother upon their arrival and as they approached the village they came across a quiet pond with lovely lotus blossoms. As they considered how to collect the flowers without soiling their garments in the pond an elderly woman appeared. Upon hearing that the pair were hoping to offer these lotus blossoms to Sarada Devi, she explained that she was a local woman and volunteered to fetch the flowers for them. She refused any compensation from the pleased travelers, who proceeded on

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and were able to meet the Holy Mother and have their wish fulfilled in offering the lotuses. Later, while on a stroll they returned to the same location, but no pond was to be found. Moreover, having thought they'd lost their way, they asked some local villagers who knew nothing of a lotus pond anywhere in the area. At this, they were satisfied that the pond and lotuses had been

provided as proof of the Mother's special powers.

There are many other such instances in the reminiscences of the life of the Holy Mother, but significantly, Sri Sarada Devi never gave any special emphasis to, nor claimed to possess or practice, any such miraculous powers, but while advising devotees would put the emphasis on the cultivation of qualities like purity and devotion to God. •

Swami Talks at Sophia University

Contributed by Fr. Veliath and Sw. Medhasananda

On January 20, 2011 Swami Medhasananda spoke on Indian Culture and Characteristics at Sophia University in Tokyo. The swami had been invited to address Professor Fr. Cyril Veliath's lecture class on Indian Mysticism. He is a Jesuit Priest of Indian heritage who has been involved with inter-religious dialog for the Jesuit Assistancy of East Asia and Oceania for several years.

Fr. Veliath is a close and admired friend of the Vedanta Society of Japan, serving on several of the Society's organizing committees over the years. Due to his exceptional command of the Japanese language, Fr. Veliath is often called upon to assist in translating guest speaker addresses from Japanese to English and/or Japanese to English for events such as Swami Vivekananda's yearly public celebration and last year's 50th Golden Jubilee series of events.

Among the 50-odd students whom Swami Medhasananda addressed there were youngsters of diverse nationalities, as well as religious and

racial backgrounds. In fact, there were Americans, Chinese, Russians, a few Britishers, Koreans, and of course Japanese (some of whom had lived all their lives in Japan and others who had been educated abroad). They all belonged to different religious groups and among them were Jews, Christians, Buddhists, and a few who were not quite sure where exactly they fitted in.

All listened with great attention to every word that the swami had to say, and when the time came for questions, some of the most interesting questions came from an Afro-American girl. What made it very special for the students was the fact that they were listening to a genuine Hindu monk. What the swami told them were very simple things, but everything he said had the ring of truth in it.

Another nice little gesture on swami's part was the fact that he distributed some sweets to the students at the end of his talk, and gave them some literature on Swami Vivekananda. All in all, the program was a roaring success. •

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