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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



Sri Gouranga Chaitanya

Birthdays

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva
Sunday, Mar 06

Gouranga Mahaprabhu
Sri Krishna Chaitanya
Saturday, Mar 19

Swami Yogananda
Wednesday, Mar 23

Kyokai Events

• March Zushi Retreat •

Sri Sri Ramakrishna
176th Birth Anniversary
Celebration
Sunday, Mar 20
Puja, Food Offering, Flower
Offering, (Pushpanjali) Homa Fire
Prasad Lunch
Afternoon Session Cancelled
All are welcome to attend!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"You see, my son, it is not a fact that you will never face danger. Difficulties always come, but they do not last forever. You will see that they pass away like water under a bridge." – The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

"Strive constantly to serve the welfare of the world; by devotion to selfless work one attains the supreme goal of life. Do your work with the welfare of others always in mind." – Sri Krishna, Bhagavad Gita

February 2011 Zushi Retreat
Celebrating Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary

"The Power of the Message of Swami Vivekananda"
A talk by Swami Medhasananda

The theme of today's discourse is "The Power of the Message of Swami Vivekananda", or we can call it "How Swami Vivekananda's Message Can Make Us Powerful" which is, I believe, relevant and important for our life.

Words vs Message

What is the difference between "words" and "message"? We speak a lot of words—many scholars write a lot of books and many speakers give illuminating speeches. Most of these are mere words, not messages. So what then is a message?

A message is the outcome of realization which must be in complete

[con't page 2]

In This Issue:

• Monthly Calendar ... page 1
• Thus Spake ... page 1
• February 2011 Zushi Retreat
The Power of the Message of Swami
Vivekananda - Swami Medhasananda
... page 1

• Thought of the Month ... page 4
• Swami Addresses Society of Hara
Sankei Studies in Yokohama on
Vivekananda, Tagore and Sankei
... page 6
• Visit to Ryukoji Temple ... page 7
• A Story to Remember ... page 8

Vivekananda [from page 1]

unison and in accordance with the life of the person who delivers it. That message must also have some eternal, universal value, and must have the power to impact others and even to transform persons who are receptive. All this should not only refer to the time of delivery of the message, but should keep its value in later years and throughout the generations. These are the features of a real message.

It is in this sense that we talk about the messages of Krishna, Buddha, Muhammad, Jesus, Ramakrishna, and Vivekananda. It means that their messages came from their realizations, and do not contradict the lives they lived. They have universal and eternal value and carry such a great impact that some persons can even be transformed. These messages are valid both in the time and country where they were delivered as well as in other countries and times. Personalities such as Krishna, Jesus and Buddha lived a very long time ago, but even now their messages continue to impact millions of people, despite the changes in historical and social conditions. People are still drawing inspiration from these messages.

Understanding the Message

Though some profound scholars and speakers may expound on themes of wisdom and listeners may find their words interesting, they soon forget about these speakers since their words do not come from deep realization. Romain Rolland was a famous French scholar, writer, thinker, humanist and also a great music authority; he was the first to convey the messages of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda to Japan through Japanese translations of his biographies on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in 1930. In his biography



of Swami Vivekananda Rolland writes, "His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses. I cannot touch these sayings of his...without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock." These are remarks he made some 30 years after the passing of Swami Vivekananda.

Please remember that Romain Rolland did not speak English, so Swami Vivekananda's original words in English were translated for him by his sister into French. Based on these translated words of Vivekananda, Rolland wrote a beautiful and powerful biography from these words in French that gave him "shocks"; imagine what he may have written had he been able to hear and understand the original English words of Swami Vivekananda! Hence we hear him say further, "And what shocks ... must have been produced when in burning words they issued from the lips of the hero!"

Swamiji's message has inspired many people not only in India but also in the West. Among them there are great philosophers, writers, scientists, social leaders, patriots, humanists and of course devotees and ordinary people as well. The book "Western Admirers of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Holy Mother and other Disciples" gives information about how Western people were influenced by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and others. Many pages of this book are devoted to Swami Vivekananda, compiled by Gopal Stavig the Hollywood Vedanta Society, after a lot of research.

Messages that Inspire and Endure

Swami Vivekananda messages, both what he wrote and what he spoke, have spread all over the world. Two books are of great importance.

[con't page 3]





In fact there was hardly an Indian leader of any eminence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century India who was not influenced by Swami Vivekananda last century. Being inspired by the message of Vivekananda, many young men sacrificed their lives to free India from British rule. Even now millions and millions of people, especially young boys and girls, get inspiration from him. They are inspired even to sacrifice their lives for the service of humanity and for the sake of God.

In the book “Talks with Swami Vivekananda”, the book of conversations just mentioned there is this comment by the recorder of the conversation: “Swamiji, when I hear from you I

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter - March 2011 Vol. 09 No. 03

Characteristics of Swamiji's Message

We are not taught by our parents, schools or social leaders, that life involves troubles, failures and disappointments, that the going will be rough and that we should be prepared for that. Consequently we have become mostly negative; often seeing the negative side of a person or of a situation. We have become superficial, just floating on the surface and far too secular. Regarding Japan, her present day social and psychological problems started with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. While its modernization definitely involves many positive aspects, there were negative aspects too, especially when blind imitations of Western civilization were adopted. As a result, Japan lost some of its wonderful

Page 3 of 9



Vivekananda [from page 3]

traditions such as Bushido.

In the process of modernizing the country, Shintoism was highlighted and Buddhism was purposely weakened. With the decline of Buddhist spiritual traditions, Japanese society became increasingly secular and lost its foundation. After the Second World War Japan slowly recovered from total disaster to become a giant economical power, but at the same time a lot of cheaper aspects of American culture took root in this country. And that is the reason why there is so much secularism and why many spiritual traditions have almost been lost.

Now let us see how the powerful, positive, deep, spiritual message of Swami Vivekananda can help the people of this country in this situation. Let us first of all look into the goal of life and how we achieve that goal. Today one of the biggest problems is the lack of direction. What is our goal in life? Swami Vivekananda clearly says that the goal of life is to manifest the divinity within us. How to do that? We have to control our internal and external nature, because it is only by doing that that we can become eternally peaceful, joyful, wise and free.

Another problem is that though we may know about this goal, our motivation is not strong. Swami Vivekananda tries to motivate us in many ways. Remember his famous statement: "Arise and awake, stop not till the goal is reached."

Confronting Weaknesses

Lastly, our present mind is weak and neurotic, and this condition is worsened by brooding about our weaknesses. It is a case of self-created problems. A monkey may have but a small wound, yet it scratches and picks at it until a serious infection

develops and it dies. Brooding over problems and our mistakes only makes them worse.

Swami Vivekananda's advice is, "My friend, why are you weeping? There is infinite strength and power inside you. Manifest it." Then he says, "Strength is life, weakness is death." He continues, "The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength." This is a wonderful, practical message. "Faith in ourselves," he says, "faith in God—this is the secret of greatness."

We are so worried about our failures and mistakes, our so called 'sins', and are afraid of the bad Karma deriving from them. That can sometimes make us fatalistic and pessimistic. Swamiji said, "You are the children of God, you are not sinners, you are perfect, you are holy, you are pure. It is a sin to call a man sinner. "

No doubt people are confronted by various problems related to work, family, environment, etc. Often they do not try to face the problems and solve them, they just try to escape from them. This is called escapism and its greatest danger is that the problem one tries to escape from becomes a thousand fold bigger later on.

In this connection we may recall a famous incident in the life of Swami Vivekananda. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji was leading the life of wandering monk. At that time he was in Benares, where there is a temple dedicated to Mother Durga. There are very many monkeys in and around that temple, and more monkeys are in a nearby temple dedicated to Hanuman. Once, when Swamiji was passing through that area some monkeys started chasing him. He became terribly afraid and started running away, which is a normal reaction for anybody in such a situation. A very old monk saw this incident and shouted to Swami Vivekananda not to run away, but to face the monkeys. Swamiji was struck by this instruction from the old monk and immediately turned and faced the pursuing

[con't page 5]

• Thought of the Month •

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

– Anne Frank



Vivekananda [from page 4]

monkeys in an angry posture. That frightened the monkeys and it was their turn to run away.

Many times later on Swami Vivekananda quoted this incident and invited his devotees to “face the brutes”, to face the problems, without trying to escape from them. Swamiji also said to never mind failures and mistakes, as they are quite natural. “Try one thousand times,” he says, “and if you fail, try once more.” How positive and optimistic! Who knows if that one additional attempt may be successful? “Cows never make mistakes.” He used to say. But cows remain cows whereas human beings, despite their mistakes, may become perfect. Tremendous will, patience and perseverance are needed in order to succeed.

Another problem is that we are too self-centered, which is one of the main reasons for our unhappiness. ‘My body.’ ‘My feelings.’ ‘My family.’ ‘My work’ The whole world has been confined and reduced to ‘me’. Swamiji advised that the surest way to get peace and happiness is to think of others; the more one thinks of others the less one thinks of oneself. But the



present trend is to think more and more about oneself. That makes us attached and bound and increasingly frustrated and unhappy, then full of tension and worries. But those who think of others, of others’ welfare and happiness, such persons definitely will have peace and joy and can also transmit joy, peace and harmony. How wonderfully Swamiji presented this idea when he said, ‘Unselfishness is God’.

Daily Holistic Supplementals

Counseling usually takes place after the problem starts. Why not get counseling before troubles come? And if we are healthy and mentally strong we have no need of any counseling at all. Many believe in the daily supplements they take to keep the body fit. Likewise, if you take what I am about to recommend every now and then, you will not need any counselor or psychiatrist or spiritual healer. This will boost not only your mental health, but also your work performance and relationships.

Just four of Swami Vivekananda’s messages are the great spiritual supplement required for your holistic health. These four should be remembered, deeply pondered and repeated now and then:

First: “I am pure, pure, pure; I am divine, divine, divine; I must manifest this divinity.”

Second: “Strength is life, weakness is death. The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength.”

Third: “I shall struggle, struggle and struggle; I shall not mind failures and mistakes; I shall struggle until I reach the goal.”

Fourth: “Unselfishness is God. The best way to get peace is to think of others and not of ourselves.” •

**“The Connection Between Tagore, Kanpo and Sankei”
Discourses on Rabindranath Tagore’s 150th Birth Anniversary**

Organised by: Society of Hara Sankei Studies

Supported by: Yokohama Museum of Art

Venue: Circular Forum, Yokohama Museum of Art

Date/Time: Saturday 12 February 2012 14:00-16:00

Social Period 16:10 - 17:30

Summary Report

by Tamiko Oba

The Society of Hara Sankei Studies was founded to publish Sankei, a biography of Sankei Hara in 2010 on the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Yokohama Port to commerce, as well as to learn from Hara-san’s life and his philosophy and to communicate this to younger generations. This year is also the 150th birth anniversary of Tagore, and it was fitting to present these talks on connection between Tagore, Kanpo Arai and Tenshin Okakura.

Mr Tsutomu Kawai, grandson of Kanpo Arai, gave the second speech. Professor Takashi Okakura, great-great grandson of Tenshin Okakura, attended the lecturers too, which is very memorable and would have been a pleasure for Tagore, Tenshin and Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Medhasananda talked in very clear Japanese about the connection between Swami Vivekananda and Japan and between Tagore and Japan. This is the first time that I have heard about Swami Vivekananda’s connection to Japan, which was very impressive. I was also deeply impressed when he said, “What really matters when we honour the 150th birth anniversary of Tagore, is that we ask ourselves with introspection: Who are you? Who am I? And what have I and will I live for? And then ponder over these deeper meanings of life which both Tagore and Swamiji wanted us to do.”

In the 21st century, I think we should connect to each other as world citizens, which Tagore and Vivekananda aimed at. We listened to a poem by Tagore recited in Bengali by the swami, which helped us feel the heart of Tagore and Bengal. The audience listened with rapt attention. I thank Swami Medhasananda from my heart and hope to be learning from him. •

Contributed by Hoken, a Buddhist Monk of the Nichiren Sect



A Visit to Ryukoji Temple in Kamakura



On 25 February, Swami Medhasananda, Yoko



Sato-san, Ko Mitamura-san and me worked our soup kitchen together with a gentleman (a cook for American military base and yoga teacher). The menu was porridge of rice and vegetables as usual and 400 bananas. Professors and students from the Department of Social Welfare, Musashino University, were volunteering too, with whom Maharaj enjoyed talking.

It was so warm, as if spring had arrived and everyone was full of life. This marked the second time this year for Kyokai to participate in the soup kitchen. Expecting a very cold day, the unexpected unseasonably warm weather felt like blessing.

While we were having lunch after our soup kitchen ended, Swami asked, "Hoken-san, can we visit your Ryukoji Temple?" So on the spur of the moment we all decided to follow his suggestion. Maharaj had often said he would like to visit and Yoko-san missed Enoshima as she used to work in the area. And since Mitamura-san knew the traffic and routes around there well, we arrived at the temple soon.

After a bit of walk around the temple grounds, we went up to the bussharito or stupa (which I've

[con't page 8]

Ryukoji [from page 7]

heard is called a shanti stupa in India) on the hilltop, where we took pictures. Swami knew of Nipponzan Myohoji as a religious organization which had built many stupas in India and he paused to offer prayers at the statue of Buddha in the middle of the stupa.

We then visited the five-story wooden pagoda, the only one of its kind in Kanagawa Prefecture, and the hondo or main building, where Maharaj offered holy prayers. He commented that the atmosphere inside was very nice and appeared to be enjoying it. Later, Yoko-san also said that with her eyes closed she had wanted to sit there forever.

I guided them to the side of the building, where Mother Kali is enshrined. The goddess is worshipped as She is called upon as guardian deity for Buddhism (called Kishibojin) in the

Lotus Sutra, the sutra of the Nichiren Sect of Buddhism.

During the Kamakura period (jidai), criminals were executed in the vicinity of the temple and the area is closely connected to Nichiren, who miraculously escaped being beheaded there at the last minute; a bolt of lightening having struck the executioner. As Swami Medhasananda quietly prayed in the main building I felt that his holy prayers were regenerating the site.

After the visitors enjoyed viewing the buildings and daffodils on the temple grounds in the peaceful glow of the sunset. As a Ryukoji monk, I gave them prasada and incense as gifts when they left. I hope they had a good time here at Ryukoji. For me, it was a lovely day, purifying my heart. •

• A Story to Remember •

Parable of the Fish and the Net

Sri Ramakrishna: "This world is like a fishing-net. Men are the fish, and God, whose maya has created this world, is the fisherman. When the fish are entangled in the net, some of them try to tear through its meshes in order to get their liberation. They are like the men striving after liberation. But by no means all of them escape.

Only a few jump out of the net with a loud splash, and then people say, 'Ah! There goes a big one!' In like manner, three or four men attain liberation. Again, some fish are so careful by nature that they are never caught in the net; some beings of the ever perfect class, like Narada, are never entangled in the meshes of worldliness. Most of the fish are trapped; but they are not conscious of the net and of their imminent death.

No sooner are they entangled than they run headlong, net and all, trying to hide themselves in the mud. They don't make the least effort to get free. On the contrary, they go deeper and deeper into the mud. These fish are like the bound men. They are still inside the net, but they think they are quite safe there.

A bound creature is immersed in worldliness, in 'woman and gold', having gone deep into the mire of degradation. But still he believes he is quite happy and secure. The liberated, and the seekers after liberation, look on the world as a deep well. They do not enjoy it. Therefore, after the attainment of Knowledge, the realization of God, some give up their bodies. But such a thing is rare indeed.

... The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

Pictures from January Osaka Satsanga



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