



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



The Vedanta Society of Japan joins with all of Japan and the world in mourning the horrendous loss of life and devastation affecting so many survivors of the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

Birthdays

Ramnavani Tuesday, Apr 12



Kyokai Events

• April Zushi Retreat • Sunday, April 17

Guest Speaker: Prof. Fr. Cyril Veliath of Sophia University

Theme:

Spiritual Practice According to the Christian Tradition

All, are welcome to attend!

. في في في

** Thus Spake **

"That man has reached immortality who is disturbed by nothing material."

... Swami Vivekananda

"When the mass of desires for things other than oneself obscuring the contrary desire for one's real self are eliminated by constant self-remembrance, then it discloses itself of its own accord."

... Adi Shankaracharya

March 2011 Zushi Retreat Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva Birth Anniversary Celebration

On Sunday, March 20, the Vedanta Society of Japan held events marking the 176th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna as its monthly Zushi Retreat programme.

The morning began at 6 a.m. with mangalarati, Vedic mantras, hymns and meditation with attendees taking breakfast thereafter. Chores listed on the duty roster were then completed as devotees and friends began to arrive at 10:30. Swami Medhasananda was assisted by Mr. Sudeb Chatterjee in conducting a formal puja, offering and arati. The devotees all participated by reciting mantras and offering flowers at the altar. As the devotees were offering flowers (pushpanjali) preparations were made for homa fire that ended with mantras recited by all and the swami dabbing the holy ash on each forehead.

After a prasad lunch, the congregation reconvened upstairs. Here Swami discussed his thoughts on the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, and suggested a charity drive to donate directly to local officials there. The meeting closed with prayers and meditation for the victims (see page 7 for details). •

In this issue:

- Monthly Calendar ... page I
- Thus Spake ... page I
- March Zushi Reteat Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration ...page I
- Society Group Celebrates SRK Birth at Kailas Yoga School ... page 2
- Swami Visits Manila Center ... page 3
- Meditation: Why and How
 A talk by Swami Medhasananda at the
 Philippine Vedanta Society ... page 4
- Thought of the Month ... page 6
- Society Launches Quake and Tsunami
 Disaster Relief Drive
 page 7
- Yokohama Students Visit Zushi Center ... page 8
- A Story to Remember ... page 9

Yokohama Kailas Yoga School Celebrates Sri Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary

Contributed by Kaori 'Shanti' Izumida

Hearing that a Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration would be held at the Yokohama branch of Kailas Yoga School, Swami Medhasananda and six devotees of the Japan Vedanta Society joined in this group's celebration for the first time on March 6, the actual birthday of Sri Ramakrishna according to the Indian calendar. The organiser of the celebration, Mr Keisho Matsukawa, started Kailas Yoga School in 2003, after he had illumination while meditating in the Dakshineswar Temple. Since that time he has been celebrating Ramakrishna's birth at his school and this time invited Swami Medhasananda and devotees from the Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai) to participate.

The Yokohama branch of Kailas is on the 15th floor of a skyscraper, and looking out it literally felt like we were atop Mount Kailash, except that we were in the vicinity of the Port of Yokohama, where Swami Vivekananda boarded ship for America to address the first World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. The way the rooms were decorated and the foods and printed materials prepared by the members gave a feeling of warmth from the heart and I felt love everywhere. The pictures of the Holy Trinity on the altar were the same as those in our Zushi Centre, beautifully decorated with flowers and offerings.

With those of us from the Kyokai, about 60 people joined in the celebration including those at the Yokohama branch and 16 more at the Osaka branch where the celebration was broadcast live via the Internet. So many young people with bright happy faces! For this birth celebration, they printed beautiful programme handouts with a picture of Sri Ramakrishna on the cover and numerous lines and devotional songs from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna inside.

The programme began at noon with chanting 'Aum' three times, followed by Mr. Matsukawa's talk on Sri Ramakrishna and the singing of two familiar devotional songs including Ramakrishna Sharanam. Then we read lines from the Gospel and sung three of Kailas's original devotional songs accompanied by brilliant piano playing. I offered one devotional song to Ramakrishna on behalf of the Vedanta Society. I observed everyone sang loudly with great feeling, sometimes with tears in their eyes. After enjoying the

soulful songs of the Kailas group, all of us from the Society, as well as Swami, felt that we should sing with such emotion at our Centre in Zushi.

We then each offered flowers, incense and meditated a few minutes on Sri Ramakrishna. Swami then talked on 'Ramakrishna's Impact' starting in a very quiet tone. "One of Sri Ramakrishna's characteristics is that He was always full of happiness," Swami said, "because one of God's characteristics is absolute bliss. His teachings are very holy, universal, harmonious and modern. When He discussed spiritual topics, however, He made them so easy-to-understand, interesting and full of fun. He would even make gestures launching the devotees into peals of laughter. And the next moment, He would withdraw His mind and enter into samadhi. If you want to learn more about Him please read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master. If you practice His teachings you can derive great results.

The swami continued, "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is called 'Kathamrita' in Bengali, its original language, means 'words like nectar,' and if we partake of that nectar, i.e., imbibe His teachings, we can be eternal. Sri Ramakrishna is omnipresent. He is everywhere. So He is also present here and I believe He is very pleased to hear you sing to Him, talk of Him and meditate on Him, because these all are offerings to Him."

We were listening to Swami's speech imagining that Sri Ramakrishna would have talked like that; making his devotees laugh a lot. Finally, Mr. Matsukawa gave a speech, followed by us singing devotional songs on Sri Ramakrishna and a shanti mantra song. The celebration was held in a peaceful and spiritual atmosphere. We then offered foods at the altar and partook of prasad together. We enjoyed homemade dishes by Michiko-san and Sophia-san, and various sweets and fruits and chatting. I especially liked the dishes prepared by Michiko-san with lots of love.

It was such a blessed day to hear Swami Medhasananda talk, laugh, sing and share delights with us. We all shared a really wonderful time and everyone was blessed with the feeling, some with tears in their eyes, that Sri Ramakrishna was present there with us all the time. My thanks to Sri Ramakrishna for blessing us so much.•

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter - April 2011 Vol. 09 No. 04

Swami Medhasananda Visits Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines

Report by Enrico Colombo in Manila

Swami Medhasananda first visited the Philippines in 2002 and has come to Manila at least once each year since then. In 2010, the year when the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines formally dedicated its new home campus building, he visited the Manila Center three times. This was Swami's first visit in 2011 and the Filipino Society is always most pleased when Swami Medhasananda, its Spiritual Advisor, can make time in his busy schedule to share some time with us.

During these visits over the years Swami has become familiar with many devotees and friends, both Filipinos and Indians, and for most of us his visits represent a welcome opportunity to see him again and listen to his talks. For others it is a rare opportunity to receive personal counseling on spiritual matters. Swami's visit to

Manila only lasted a few days, but these days were crammed with activities, both scheduled and unexpected.

Every morning the daily programme started at 06:30 with chanting, reading from the Bhagavad Gita followed by explanations, and a short meditation session. Breakfast was then served to all the attendees who

did not have to rush off to their jobs. During the day Swami Medhasananda received visitors who had requested private appointments with him.

Public programmes then resumed at 19:00 in the evening with Arati Bhajan, reading from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna with commentary and explanations, and a short meditation session. Dinner followed and reading from the Gospel of Holy Mother brought the day's programmes to an end.

Every breakfast, lunch and dinner served during Swami's stay in Manila, was prepared with loving care by kind volunteer ladies who did not miss an opportunity to offer their prized food preparations and delicacies to Maharaj and the other attendees.

On Friday, 11 March, the news of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan reached Swami. His immediate *The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter - April 2011 Vol. 09 No. 04*

reaction was to interrupt his Manila visit and return to Japan right away in order to be close to the devotees and all those who were suffering due the tragic event. However an immediate return did not prove possible due to flight cancellations and/or overbooking. All Swami could do under the circumstances was to continue his Manila schedule and wait for his scheduled flight back to Tokyo on Monday, 14 March.

In the interim he tried to establish contact with the Zushi Centre in Japan and different devotees by telephone and through e-mail. This proved difficult due to the disruption of both landline and cellphone service and electricity outages occurring as a result of the quake. Interestingly enough, email contact proved to be the most reliable means of communication during the

first few days.

Despite the concern for the sad developments in Japan, Swami Medhasananda delivered two important public discourses during the week-end. On Saturday, 12 March, at 17:00, after a short visit to a local Buddhist organization, he spoke to a large audience at the auditorium of the Theosophical Society of the Philippines. The subject was

"Meditation: How to Start" and was followed by a lively question and answer session. The President of the Theosophical Society of the Philippines and some of its main Officers then treated Swami to dinner.

Then on Sunday at 17:00, Swami delivered a public discourse at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines on the theme: "Meditation, How and Why?" After a break for refreshments a question and answer followed and the program ended sometime after 8pm with some religious songs. An audience of about forty persons attended the talk, including three Christian nuns.

After some more telephone and e-mail exchanges with the Zushi Centre and different devotees, Swami returned to Japan by a Japan Airlines flight from Manila to Narita on Monday afternoon, 14 March.



Ramakrishna Vedanta Center of the Philippines

Sunday, March 13, 2011

Meditation: Why and How

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda



Part One of Two

On one occasion Swami Nikhilanandaji, the famous translator of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of modern India, from Bengali into English, and head of the New York Vedanta Center, met Albert Einstein. During their discussion Einstein said that meditation is very important. Nikhilanandaji responded by saying that we should also work. To this Einstein replied that it was in our very nature to work and we will do so whether we are asked to or not, but that unless motivated, people would not meditate.

Our topic is "Meditation; Why and How?" This would be a fruitless discussion unless it applies to the individual, because idle curiosity does not motivate us to action. Most people who want to know the why of the question do so because they want to know how to get mental peace in a peace-less environment. But there is another spiritual element and purpose in meditation; enlightenment, to know the truth, to realize God, to realize the Self, to realize the Supreme Reality.

Peace

Mental peace is not purchasable commodity. Were they so, no one would spend the time to come and listen to this topic. You cannot purchase peace. You may be very rich, but your money cannot purchase it. Many methods have

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter - April 2011 Vol. 09 No. 04

been tried to get peace; some entertainment, some music, some hobbies, travel, relationships, name, fame. Yet with all these things we don't get peace. Finally, it comes back to meditation.

Meditation is a technique, a method, which can really, effectively, help us in getting peace by controlling our mind. So more and more people all over the world living under tremendous stress want to know how to control the mind; how to make the mind strong; how to make the mind positive; how to make the mind steady and pure. And if we can accomplish this there is a corollary; as a consequence we get peace as well.

This is why people in greater numbers, irrespective of nationality, now want to learn about meditation and hundreds of meditation CDs, books, teachers and groups have now emerged to cater to this need. The basic understanding that is required is that if one cannot control the mind, one cannot find peace either. It is a close relationship, because peace is relative to the mind, not to the body. Control of mind and peace of mind are almost the same thing. Without some control the mind cannot be peaceful. We cannot have peace with a monkey mind and meditation offers the best method of controlling the mind. But before discussing the techniques of meditation let us first prepare the [con't page 5]

.

Page 4 of 10

Meditation [from page 4]

ground by taking up some issues related to peace vis-a-vis our mind and attitude.

Problems

Peace-less-ness abounds at the macro level, but our discussion is concerned with how to get peace at the individual level. There are many causes of our peace-less-ness, causes related to one's self; our body, our mind, our present, future, ambitions and aspirations. These are self-oriented problems.

Then there are problems which are relationship oriented. These problems are not for householders alone. I believe the same problems are found in a monastic organization or spiritual community of brotherhood and sisterhood. When so many live together, it is only natural that relationship problems are confronted at least occasionally.

The third source is work oriented problems, where one is constantly buffeted with currents and cross-currents of both simple and critical situations.

These are the three sources of our peace-less-ness, and on top of this modern life is very hectic and focused on an abundance of secular

enjoyments. Random use of various electronic gadgets makes the situation worse. Our many pursuits or diversions cannot solve these problems. Consequently, mental problems have become rampant.

Our True Nature

Family life, community life, and even world community life, are all affected by these problems. The United Nations Charter states " ... wars begin in the minds of men ..." Similarly, peace must also begin in the minds of men. If we can take care of this at the micro level, it will definitely have an effect at the macro level.

If I am convinced that I am not mind; I am not body; I am not this small ego or unripe ego (as Sri Ramakrishna put it); I am the ripe ego; I am Self, I am not finite, I am infinite; I am not something temporary, I am eternal, then fear and anxiety relative to my mind and body will be no more. All our fears and anxieties; fear of disease, fear of old age, fear of death, our rank selfishness and our attachments are centered upon this particular idea: 'I am body.' If I am convinced that I am not the body, but I am 'Atman', and others are also 'Atman', then most of our problems vanish and get the taste of peace. This idea is beautifully expressed in the Bhagavad Gita

Once Arthur Schopenhauer, the celebrated German philosopher, said that he was not even afraid to live in a house where there were poisonous snakes. Why? He said that even should he be bitten, what would die? "The body will die, but I am not body, I am Atman."



The Ego

If we analyze the problems that arise in relationships between husband and wife, brother to brother, and friend to friend, we may find the real source of a troubled relationship is ego. The husband thinks the son should study so and so for his career. But the wife thinks differently.

claiming that she knows her son better, and arguments ensue. You see what happens here. It's about what "I" feel. It is about what "I" believe. No one considers what the child may think; neither the father nor the mother.

At the monastery monks often have to meet and decide upon things. Of course every monk is concerned with how the Lord's work can be best done, but every monk has his own way of thinking. One says he believes so and so is the best way, another say no, no, he believes another way is better.

Here again it is the problem of ego. I see only my [con't page 6]

Meditation [from page 4]

point of view. I am so focused on my view, my ego, I cannot even hear the other point of view even should something of benefit for all be in it. I don't want to consider another's point of view. We have all attended meetings like that, where no one wants to deflect from his particular point of view, and there is difficulty in reaching decisions. The work itself is not as important as what I say.

This ego is centered on what? It is centered on this limited body, mind and intelligence. So if we can transcend that; if we know we are not that ego, but the Super Ego; if we can recognize that the same God that dwells in me, dwells in the person I am dealing with; if we can see God in others, we ripen the unripe ego. We transcend the unripe ego by emphasizing the divinity of others, by emphasizing the Super Ego. This is how we eliminate the problem of ego in relationships, which will help to foster better relationships and understanding with others.

The Witness

As we noted earlier, the problems with work are the constant crosscurrents of situations that make us so stressful and strained. We need to cultivate a witness attitude. The witness does not involve himself with the things about him, he just watches as if he were a third party. If we can cultivate this witness attitude, then with one part of our mind do the work we must and with the other part of the mind observes what is happening. See the fun. Watch how the other part of the mind interacts. Cultivation of the witness mind really helps the mind become calm and quiet.

From my experience I can tell you that before coming to Japan I was leading a very busy life as the head of a college. After a good meditation I could maintain my calmness of mind. I experienced that with one part of my mind I remained calm and with the other I was engaged in many duties. If we completely identify ourself with work, this witness attitude is lost. This witness attitude is not impossible to achieve. As you know, there is always a witness inside of us. Sometimes we may be aware of it and sometimes we may not, but later on we can recall what we said or did because of this 'witness'. What I am suggesting, however, is

consciously cultivating and developing a witness attitude.

Cultivation of the Witness Attitude

How do we cultivate this witness attitude, this right attitude, to myself, to others and to work? By reading books we cannot cultivate this right attitude; by listening to CDs we cannot; by listening to discourses we cannot. No, we must focus our mind on doing this. In order to focus our mind, we must understand it intellectually first. We must be logically and rationally convinced that this is the true and correct attitude. This is known as 'dhāranā', the initial step of concentrative meditation.

According to Vedanta there are three steps; 'shravana', 'manana' and 'nididhyasana'. First is hearing or reading about it or shravana; then we must deeply cogitate and ponder over the truth of it or manana. Next we have to focus on that. You may read a book and understand what is written, but this is not focusing and cultivating right attitudes. Meditation is what will help you; teach you; train you in cultivating this attitude and focusing.

The general understanding of meditation is to just close our eyes, sit straight and focus on something spiritual Finished! This is a superficial understanding of meditation. And what do we do in the name of meditation? We either doze or sleep or we think of our schedule, that is, we focus on some secular thing, but meditation is focusing on a higher thing, not on our work schedule. Focusing on our real nature; focusing on God, something abstract, something elevating. Essentially, meditation is focusing on something sublime and spiritual. This is meditation.

[Part Two to follow it the May issue]

• Thought of the Month •

I deal with modern life by meditating and by understanding I've been put on the planet to serve humanity. I have to remind myself to live simply and not to overindulge, which is a constant battle in a material world.

- Sandra Cisneros

Japan Natural Disaster Report and Relief Fund

Preamble

Upon Swami Medhasananda's return to Tokyo from Manila after Japan's earthquake and tsunami natural disasters, the desperate conditions that existed for survivors became increasingly evident. Resources were mobilized to deliver some supplies through the Vedanta Society's local Zushi City office, as they were accepting packaged goods for shipment and delivery to authorities in the devastated areas. Two such deliveries were made by the Society, the details of which are posted on our website at <www.vedanta.jp>.

During this time the Society received a continuous flow of emails and phone calls from Ramakrishna Mission Centers and concerned friends around the world. These people wanted to know how they could help and where they could send money to support relief efforts. This prompted setting up a relief fund and issuance of the following report focused on providing information to Mission Headquarters, other centers worldwide and concerned devotees and friends.

Dear All, Monday, March 28, 2011

As you have already been made aware, a massive 8.9-magnitude earthquake struck the northeastern coast of Japan on March 11, creating an extremely destructive tsunami (tidal wave) that rushed ashore within minutes afterward. The devastation along the northeast coast is described best by video news reports as they become available. The loss of life and property and shelter caused by this two-fold natural disaster continues to heap tremendous suffering to innumerable survivors. Some of the most severely hit areas have been rendered inaccessible and the severely damaged area extends from Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture in the north to Kita Ibaraki City in Ibaraki Prefecture in the south. The seriousness of this situation has been worsened by the damaged nuclear reactors between these two at Fukushima Prefecture and the ongoing efforts toward preventing meltdowns and limiting extremely dangerous radiation leakages affecting the atmosphere, drinking water, vegetables etc. in varying degrees.

As of this writing the situation remains very fluid and daily life in the major population centres of Tokyo and Yokohama have been disrupted as well. Public train and subway transportation move millions of urban Japanese to and from work each day and has continued to function after a 24-hr shutdown that stranded thousands in town. With the ongoing severe quakes and aftershocks and uncertainty about electricity supplies, many out of town dwellers cannot reach their offices. Gasoline service stations have dried up for all but lifeline services, and available supplies are headed north where they are desperately needed. Tokyo store shelves are noticeably devoid of dairy and bread and rice stocks and residents are also experiencing rolling blackouts in the areas immediately surrounding Tokyo and Yokohama to ease electricity demand. Although Japan experiences earthquakes and tsunami fairly regularly, the scale and magnitude of the concurrent disasters are unprecedented and the entire nation is reeling from the impact.

[It should be noted here that while much has improved in the Tokyo-Yokohama area as of mid-April, Tokyo's train station escalators, street lights and most shop signs are kept off to conserve electricity. Uncertainty and concern about the nuclear reactor threats remain high as the whole of the main island of eastern Honshu continues to get shaken with very large aftershocks and quakes. And while gasoline and food supplies are normalizing, customers are still limited to one bottle of water per person in supermarkets and shops that have supplies. - edited on 16 April 2011]

The Ramakrishna Mission has a long tradition of providing extensive relief to the victims of natural disasters, and as the Japan branch of the Mission, we, the monk and devotees of the Vedanta Society of Japan, are wondering if we can be of some service to the victims during this moment of national crisis. We have been considering various options, including mobilizing some funds collected from our devotees and friends and sympathetic people from within this country and from abroad. In fact, we have been receiving many phone calls and emails from different countries, including India, since this disaster began to unfold. These concerned people not only express their sympathies and prayers for the victims, they also inquire what they may do to directly help the afflicted.

[con't page 8]

Relief Fund [from page 7]

As such, may we request you to donate to our relief fund and if possible to take the initiative to mobilize a fund drive and send whatever is collected to the Japan Branch of the Mission through a bank transfer? We, in turn, intend to give monies to local governments and city offices in as many affected areas as possible to be used as they prioritize. Of course we will keep proper records of these disbursements. We include the following banking information for your kind and generous consideration:

Bank information for the Vedanta Society of Japan:

Our Bank: Mizuho Bank, Ltd

Address: 11-35 Onarimachi, Kamakura, Kanagawa

248-0012 Japan

Bank Telephone: Country Code 81

City Code 467

Local Number 23-1155

Swift Code: mhbkjpjt

Account name: Shukyohoujin Nihon Vedanta Kyokai

Account number: 760-1114571

We believe that any funds raised by you, regardless of amount, will be greatly appreciated by the people of this country as a kind and sympathetic gesture from you and your friends.

Please note that if you send a donation through the Society, please inform us as to the amount of donation and the name of your bank and the date of the bank transfer through e-mail; all correspondence regarding donations should be sent to the following e-mail address only: <jprelief@gmail.com>

With loving namaskar and prayer, Yours in the Lord,

Swami Medhasananda

Swami Medhasananda

High School Students Visit Zushi Centre

On February 7, 2011, a group of eight high school students from Yokohama visited the Society's Zushi Centre with two of their teachers. Some of the students had volunteered as part of class activities to serve the needy escorted by a teacher and met Swami Medhasananda while he was working the Society's monthly Osewa Homeless Narayanas in Kotobukicho, Yokohama. The teacher stuck up a conversation and showed interest in learning about Indian culture from the swami which resulted in the group's visit to the Society.

With the upstairs meeting room arranged like a classroom complete with whiteboard, Swami gave an interesting and easy-to-understand talk on Indian culture and answered many questions regarding Indian culture and the India-Japan relationship, even sharing some of his personal experiences in Japan pertaining to this topic. Later Swami presented them all with copies of the booklet "Swami Vivekananda and Japan" detailing some little known facts of interest to students from Yokohama in particular. Afterwards they all enjoyed some homecooked Indian dishes prepared by neighborhood devotee and volunteer gourmet chef, Ms. Sophia. It would appear that the teacher and all the attendees had a most informative and enjoyable time.



• A Story to Remember •

Nonoko And The Thief

There was an old Zen master called Nonoko who lived alone in a hut at the foot of a mountain. One night while Nonoko was sitting in meditation, a stranger broke into the hut and, brandishing a sword, demanded Nonoko's money.

Nonoko did not interrupt his meditation while he addressed the man:

"All my money is in a bowl on the shelf up there. Take all you need, but leave me five yen. I have to pay my taxes next week."

The stranger emptied the bowl of all the money it held and threw five yen back into it. He also helped himself to a precious vase he found on the shelf.

"Carry that vase with care," said Nonoko. "It will crack easily."

The stranger looked around the small barren room once more and was going to leave.

"You haven't said thank you," said Nonoko.

The man said thank you and left. The next day the whole village was in turmoil. Many people claimed they had been robbed. Someone noticed the vase missing from the shelf in Nonoko's hut and asked if he, too, had been the victim of the burglar.

"Oh, no," said Nonoko. "I gave the vase to a stranger, along with some money. He thanked me and left. He was a pleasant enough sort of fellow, but a bit careless with his sword!"

... Fr. Anthony de Mello

Issued by:
The Vedanta Society of Japan
4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi-shi, Kanagawa-ken 249-0001
Phone: 81-46-873-0428
Fax: 81-46-873-0592

Website: http://www.vedanta.jp Email: vedantajapan@gmail.com



The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter - April 2011 Vol. 09 No. 04

Page 10 of 10