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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



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"The sun can give heat and light to the whole world, but he cannot do so when the clouds shut out his rays. Similarly as long as egotism veils the heart, God cannot shine upon it."
... Sri Ramakrishna

"Speak or act with an pure mind and happiness will follow you as your shadow, unshakable."
... Lord Buddha

Zushi Retreat April 2011 Spiritual Practice According to the Christian Tradition

Special Quest Speaker
Professor Fr. Cyril Veliath of Sophia University Tokyo

Today, Swami Medhasananda requested me to speak to you all about Christian Spirituality. What do we mean by the word 'spirituality'? People, I am sure, will define the word in different ways, but for me personally, this is what it means: 'It is the path by which we can experience God, or the road that takes us to God. All of you I am sure are familiar with the statements of Swami Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Well, this is what Ramakrishna Paramahansa had to say about religions. He said that all religions were like the branches of the same tree, or rivers flowing into the same ocean. A human being is free to choose any road he likes in order to experience God. The road taken by Christianity is called Christian spirituality.

Now before I proceed, I would like to tell you all something about my own background. I was born in the south of India, of a Hindu mother and a Catholic father. My mother's family members were extremely orthodox Hindus, and the highest in the Indian caste system, and my father's family members were equally orthodox Catholics. Since Christians were
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Birthdays

Shankaracharya
Sunday, May 8

Lord Buddha
Tuesday, May 17

Kyokai Events

• May Zushi Retreat •

*"Is Selfishness or Unselfishness
More Painful?"*
Sunday 15 May 11 a.m.
All are Welcome!

• Annual Public Celebration • Swami Vivekananda: 149th Birth Anniversary

Sunday, 22 May 2011
2 p.m. - 4 p.m.
Indian Embassy Auditorium
Chiyoda-ku Tokyo

See page 11 for details!



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Christian Tradition [from page 1]

outside the caste system of my Mother's family, to marry a Christian was something unthinkable, and my father's family felt exactly the same way about marrying a Hindu. In any case, my parents got married, and there was one point that both of them insisted upon very much, and that was to respect other religions. Even if you don't believe in another religion, you should show it due respect. Just as your own religion is precious to you, another person's religion is precious to him. So, to criticize another religion, to insult another religion, or to mock another religion, would be totally against the spirituality of Christianity. I personally believe that every religion that is based on love is a good religion.

The world today is filled with problems linked to religion. In most cases the problems lie not with any religion in itself, but with the persons who follow that religion. Unfortunately as you know, in every society there are good people and bad people. Similarly, in every religion, too, there are good and bad people. Just recently we had a very tragic incident in the USA. An American protestant pastor named Terry Jones, publicly burned the Quran as a sign of defiance. I really do not know what did the man hope to gain by burning it, but I do know that he grievously hurt the feelings of millions of Muslims people all over the world. I personally am a Christian and a Catholic priest, but I believe that the Quran has to be respected just as much as we respect the Bible. Just as the Bible is sacred to me, the Quran is sacred to the Muslim people. For me personally, insulting the Quran would be the same as insulting the Bible, and if I ever did such a thing, I think I would be committing a terrible sin. Before we blame others we should look at ourselves and see if we ourselves are perfect. If we ourselves are sinners, then we have no right to put down another or to blame another person.

There is a beautiful incident in the Bible that brings out this point very well. There was a woman in Jerusalem, who was caught in the act of adultery. According to Jewish law, a person who does a thing like that has to be stoned to death. So a large number of Jews dragged the woman before Christ, and asked him what should be done in this matter.

John 8: 1-11

¹ but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the

people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

¹¹ "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

One of the most beautiful chapters in the Bible is called the Sermon on the Mount. This was a chapter that Mahatma Gandhi was very fond of, and he quoted it frequently. Here, Jesus Christ repeats the same thing, but he does it much more directly. That is to say, before you blame another person, you need to look at yourself and see how you are.

Mathew 7: 1-4

¹ "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³ "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

About 20 years ago, I was speaking to a Dutch scholar, who was an Islamic expert and a professor at Gregorian University in Rome, and I remember asking him, what exactly was inter-religious dialogue. He replied, that inter-religious dialogue did not mean that you have to accept everything that the other person said, or that the

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other person had to accept everything that you said. It meant only meant this: "I take this position, and you take that position. So what do we do about it? Do we fight and kill each other? Or are we going to live in peace?" But my personal opinion is that it does not mean merely living together in peace. It means much more than that. It means respecting one another, and learning from one another. There are many things we can learn from people of other religions, and there are many things that people of other religions can learn from us.

Now, what is the most important thing in Christian spirituality? The answer to that question is LOVE. That is, to love God, and to love our neighbor. Christ expresses this beautifully in one of his most famous parables, namely the parable of the Good Samaritan. Now you might ask, who are the Samaritans? I have to explain this a little. Samaritans were a set of Jews who lived 2000 years ago, and who through no fault of their own suffered a great deal of prejudice from other Jews. They would be like the Burakumin of Japan, the Untouchables of India, or the blacks of America. They were people who were not respected like other Jews. Around the sixth and seventh century BC, the Jewish people were defeated in their battles with the Assyrians who ruled Babylon, and many were taken away to Babylon as slaves.

This happened three times. They were defeated three times in battle, and each time many were taken away to Babylon. However, in 538 BC, the Persians conquered Babylon, and the famous Persian Emperor, Cyrus the Great, freed the Jews and permitted them either to return to the country or to remain in Babylon. Several Jews decided to return, but when they came back to their country they found the Samaritans living there. They resented the Samaritans very much because they had not shared their exile in Babylon. The Jews later built a temple for themselves, but the Samaritans had to build their own temple, because they were not permitted to

enter the temple of the other Jews. When we read the parables of Jesus Christ, we see that he always showed a deep sympathy for the Samaritans. The parable I am now going to read is called the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Luke 10: 23-37

²³ Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. ²⁴ For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"



²⁷ He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

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Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

There may be times when we are faced with problems, which we do not know how to solve. To solve those problems, there are at times various possibilities, but we do not know what possibility to choose. In a case like this, according to Christian teaching, we have to study the matter, reflect over it, and choose the possibility that follows most closely the law of love, that is, the love of God and the love of our fellowman. In a case like this, we are not at all sure if the choice we made is correct, but we have to trust in God, ask for his guidance, and do what we have to do.

I am sure all of you have heard of mother Teresa. Many people in India and the world consider her to be a great saint, but surprisingly there are also many who are very critical of her. The reason why they criticize her is because she received financial help from many who are considered to be bad people, as for example President Baby Doc Duvalier of Haiti. She received money from people who were considered to be murderers and thieves. The critics say that such money is tainted money, and we should never use tainted money in order to do good deeds. But Mother Teresa's answer is this: "They may be bad people, their money may be tainted, but now, they are trying to do something good, and so we must help them. However much money may be tainted, when it comes to saving a person's life, we must definitely accept it." The same thing happened with a Japanese lady who received money from a Foundation which is reported to be linked to gangsters, but she too gave the same answer to the people who criticized her. She said, "Money is money. Regardless of where it comes from, when it comes to saving the life of another, we must definitely accept it." What I wish to say here is that those two people were trying in their own way to follow the path of love. We may not agree with them, but we must respect their freedom.

There is a beautiful incident in the life of Swami Vivekananda that is similar to this. One day when he was traveling in India, he happened to stay at a palace. After supper, a dancing girl came out to entertain the guests. Since most dancing girls of that time were prostitutes, Swami Vivekananda had a very bad feeling, and so he got up and left the room. As he was going out the girl started her song, and the words of the song were as follows: 'O Lord look not upon my evil qualities! You are known for your same-sightedness. One piece of iron goes to make an image of God in the temple,

and another a knife in the hands of a butcher. Yet, when they both touch the philosopher's stone, they both turn into gold.' A famous Hindu saint named Sant Surdas composed this song. When Swami Vivekananda heard these words, he was deeply touched. He went over to the woman and thanked her for having opened his eyes. What the song tried to say was this. Outwardly I may be different from you, but the same God created the two of us, and so we are both equally holy in his eyes. So do not judge a person merely by the outward appearance. No human being can read the heart of another.

When we think of the spirituality of Christianity, there are two names that come to our mind besides that of Jesus Christ. Both of them were eminent men, and both of them today are considered to be pillars of Christianity, and so I would like to speak a little about them.

The first person is St. Paul. Paul was one of the most vicious enemies of Christ, but later he underwent a complete transformation and became one of Jesus' most faithful followers. When we see the life of Paul we are simply stunned, because he was unique in so many ways. He was a brilliant scholar, and a very devout Jew. He was also a citizen of Rome, which was something very unusual, because in those days such citizenship was very rarely given to non-Romans. Paul was also a devout Pharisee. The Pharisees were a powerful political and religious group in ancient Israel, and they believed that every single law of Judaism had to be kept. So, if we kept all his laws, then God would save us and take us to heaven. So their relationship to God was something like a business contract. 'I do my part, and you do yours.' The Pharisees were a very influential group in ancient Israel, and they were among the biggest enemies of Jesus Christ. When Jesus was alive Paul had never met him personally, but after the death of Jesus, he violently persecuted his followers. On one occasion, a group of Jews caught a follower of Jesus named Stephan, and began to beat him to death with stones. Paul was also in the group. We are not sure if he personally threw stones at Stephan, but he was certainly there, encouraging the others to stone Stephan.

However, one day, while traveling at night from Jerusalem to Damascus, he had a powerful mystical experience. As a result of this experience he became blind, and for three days he neither ate nor drank. Later, after meeting the people whom

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he had gone to persecute his sight returned, and from that time onwards, he became one of the most devout followers of Jesus Christ. Paul as I mentioned earlier was a brilliant scholar who wrote many letters. Today his letters are some of the most sacred scriptures of Christianity. They are read very often in the Church, and a great deal of research has been done on them during these past 2000 years. One of the most beautiful passages written by Paul is contained in a letter that he wrote to the people of the city of Corinth. It is a letter in which he speaks of love, and many scholars believe that it is the greatest paragraph on love that has ever been written. I shall now read out that passage for you.

1 Corinthians 13:

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Paul traveled a great deal, wrote many letters, and underwent tremendous suffering. What happened to him finally is not known, but tradition tells us that he died by beheading. He could not be crucified because he was a Roman citizen. Mahatma Gandhi was not very happy with St. Paul. Gandhi insists that Jesus Christ was an Asian, exactly like the Buddha and the prophet Mohammed. He believes that the religion preached by Jesus Christ was a simple religion,

similar to Buddhism and Hinduism, but after Paul came into the picture it went to Europe and became the religion of Europe and the religion of kings and emperors. For that reason Mahatma Gandhi does not like St. Paul very much. However that is Gandhi's opinion, and he has a right to keep it. For us Christians, St. Paul is one of the pillars of our religion, and a man who deeply loved Jesus Christ. There is another passage in the Bible, where St. Paul describes a mystical experience that he had. I shall read out the passage now:

2 Corinthians 12:2-3

² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. ³ And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—⁴ was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.

Here, almost all scholars are convinced that St. Paul is speaking about himself. However, because of his humility, he speaks as though it happened to another person.

The second great person in Christian spirituality is St. Augustine. Many scholars say that he is a pillar not just of Christianity but of the entire European civilization as well. He lived in the 4th century in North Africa, and later went to Rome and became a professor of Rhetoric. As a young man he lived a very sinful and dissipated life, and he himself said that he was shocked at how low he had fallen. Later he joined a religion named Manichaeism, a religion that was created by a man named Mani or Manes in the 3rd century AD. This was a mixture of Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity, and it was a very popular religion in Asia and parts of Europe and Africa for a very long time. This religion teaches that there are two forces in the world, a force of light and a force of darkness, and they constantly fight each other. These forces are also fighting within the human body. As I said earlier, we should respect a religion even if we do not agree with its teachings.

According to Manichaeism, when a person commits sin, he or she is not responsible. This is because it is not the person that had committed the sin, but the evil force that was within his body. So, even if we commit grievous sins, we are not to be blamed. Other religious groups would not accept this teaching, and so the Manicheans were not accepted anywhere. Augustine remained with

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this group for a very long time, and he was deeply influenced by them. Later however he left this group, because he felt that he had to take personal responsibility for everything that he did. One of Augustine's greatest statements is this: "Our hearts O god are meant for you, and they will not rest until they rest in you." What he meant to say was that if we desire true happiness, we will never find it in honors, wealth, or power, but in God.

I would like to end this talk by quoting the prayer for peace by the famous Italian, Saint Francis of Assisi. This prayer brings out the spirituality of Christianity very clearly.

The Peace Prayer of Saint Francis

"O Lord, make me an instrument of Thy Peace!
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is discord, harmony.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sorrow, joy.

Oh Divine Master, grant that I may not
so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life."

Ramakrishna Vedanta Center of the Philippines

Sunday, March 13, 2011

Meditation: Why and How

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda

Part Two of Two

Focus

Focusing is essential in meditation. We can easily focus on a thing we love. For example, we love music and we put on a CD, immediately we can focus on it. But focusing on God, on our true nature, doesn't happen in that way. The mind is not inclined to do that. Why? Because the mind always runs to the external. But focusing in meditation means we have to withdraw the mind from the outside to the inside. This is what makes it so difficult. When we try to withdraw the mind, it becomes rebellious, turbulent and resistant! It refuses to comply. Resistance to meditation is not from the outside, it is from the inside, and that is the mind. So focusing on our real nature, on God, on something higher, on something spiritual and sublime is not easy.

Because it is not easy, it takes time and needs preparation. Initially it will seem impossible, but once we are able to, just five minutes of focused meditation brings peace and happiness to us. Anything we learn; music, dance, driving, yoga, requires time and patience to learn. If we hope to derive some benefit from something, we need to spend the time and energy on it. An output requires an input. If we want profit there must be some investment. The irony here is that we want the output, the profit, without putting in the investment.

Are we not becoming irrational by expecting mental peace without striving for it? Yesterday we were discussing the subject "Meditation: How to Start" at the auditorium of the Theosophical Society of the Philippines. I asked the audience a basic question: Why do you want to know about meditation in the Vedantic tradition? Most answered that they wanted peace. In course of the discourse, however, I challenged this notion by illustrating that what people really want is peace-less-ness, stress and tension and not peace. Why so?

There are some fishes that live very deep in the sea under tremendous pressure. If we are to bring up to the surface they expand and explode! Our modern lives are like that; it may sound strange but the fact is we have become comfortable with stress and tension. We complain that our work makes us stressful, but can we imagine ourselves without our Blackberry, our cell phones, TVs or newspapers? Let us look at ourselves and imagine how would we live under such conditions!

Some persons criticize our monks with remarks about how easy our lives are and how happily we live. Some believe we don't do any work and say that people work for us and donate money to us, so we can live happily with none of the tensions of the need to earn money. But if it is such an easy life, if it is so peaceful, we say, "Come and

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stay with us, then.” Few accept the challenge and those that do last only a day or two, with their minds completely focused on their families, searching through the newspaper or missing their mobile or TV. Though we say we want peace, we actually thrive in tension. This is the contradiction; what we do and what we want. This contradiction has to be addressed. If I really want peace, then I have to work for it, I must strive for it.

This is where ninety-nine percent of the people who read about meditation, hear about meditation or talk about meditation fail. Even if they begin to practice, it is done casually and superficially and they are destined to give up and return to their lives of stress and tension. So first we have to be serious about it. Do I really want peace? Am I ready to do what is necessary to attain peace? If I am not, it is better to accept that I do not really want peace. Rather, I want peace-less-ness. Let us be frank about it.

How to Meditate

If I decide that I want peace, the process demands that I make time for practice in my daily schedule. Without a commitment to practice, any discussion on the techniques of meditation is meaningless and fruitless. Let us discuss the meditation process.

Patanjali, the great exponent of meditation, says to sit in such a way that you can sit for quite a while without moving the body. Sit on a cushion set apart for this purpose. Be careful that the neck head spine and chest are aligned, but not stiff. Straight but not stiff so that the energy can flow from the bottom of the spine upward without obstruction. If sitting on the floor cross-legged in the lotus position is uncomfortable, then sit in a chair. Don't lean against the backrest, but sit straight. Be careful of dozing in a chair, as there is a greater risk of an accident than while sitting on the floor! But never sit on your bed for meditation.

When we try to concentrate the mind, its first reaction is movement of the body. The body doesn't require this movement, it is the restless mind moving the legs, the hands. Just bear with it, the reactionary mind subsides with practice. Start sitting comfortably for just a few minutes, gradually increasing the time to 20-30 minutes. Morning is the best time for meditation practice

and the time and duration for this practice should be fixed.

I have read the remarks of some senior corporate people who say they schedule 20-30 minutes for meditation and prayer each morning because it definitely helps in their work throughout the day. So this investment, as we have called it, helps me in my work, in my personal life and in my relationships. We have to look upon it in that way, and we can find time to invest in longer meditations at the weekends.

Pranayama

At the discussion yesterday with the Theosophical Society, the question arose whether or not a guru, a teacher, is necessary. As long as we practice simple meditation, we may not need so much guidance. But if we wish to practice complicated pranayama techniques while meditating we must have an instructor, otherwise it is risky. Breathing is vital to our system, so any long and arduous practice of pranayama can adversely affect our mental and physical health for a long time.

While Patanjali discusses pranayama, he does not place that much importance on it. Later on, other practitioners gave a lot of importance to it. But general practitioners place no importance on it at all. Simple rhythmic pranayama, inhaling and exhaling, without holding the breath, on the other hand, is absolutely safe.

I am speaking of inhaling for five or six seconds and exhaling for five or six seconds, without holding the breath. And when you inhale think of purity, compassion and love. Think that divinity is entering you. When you exhale think that all impurities are being expelled. Instead of consciously thinking these particular thoughts, we can also just chant the Lord's name. Regardless, simple rhythmic breathing definitely helps calm and quiet.

Prayer

The next thing we should do is pray for the welfare of all. One of the root causes of our restlessness is that our whole life is focused on me, my family and my work. The heart has become narrow, and this narrow world causes attachment followed by, bondage, frustration and disappointment. One of the best ways to transcend this narrowness is to pray for all. Our hearts will widen. Another benefit is that this

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Meditation [from page 8]

goodwill will finally return to you. We cannot pray for others in the expectation that it will return to us, however, because this, again, is selfishness.

Pray with a real heart for others:

Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinh
Sarve santu Niramaya
Sarve Bhadrani Pashyantu
Ma Kaschin Dukh Bhag Bhavet”

May all be happy. May all be free from disabilities.
May all see auspicious things. May none suffer sorrows.

How beautiful these prayers are:

Asato maa sadgamaya
Tamaso maa jyotirgamaya
Mrityor maa amṛitan gamaya
Om shanti shanti shanti

Lead us from the unreal to the real
Lead us from darkness to light.
Lead us from death to immortality.
Om, peace, peace, peace

These are not only prayers for Hindus or Indians. These are universal prayers. In fact we should not limit our prayers exclusively to our prophets, but we should pray to the prophets of other religions as well. Buddha. Jesus. Krishna. Pray to them all and seek their blessings. This is an important spiritual practice that will help us as we strive for mental peace.

The Meditation Process

The meditation process has two parts; first is awareness of the mind. Do we want to focus and control our minds? Well, first we must be aware of the mind's present condition, its present state. And how do we become aware of the state of our mind? By watching it. See that you are different from the mind. Just watch what this naughty, monkey mind is doing! Again, we apply the witness aspect. So the first part of meditation is we should be aware of how the mind is working. If it is calm and quiet, fine, but usually we find it is very active. Active in what sense? It is focusing on so many things, which makes us restless.

What is the benefit of this awareness of the mind? This practice helps us to identify with our

higher nature, our higher ego, our Self, with God, and disassociate or dis-identity with the other lower ego, the lower nature.

Swami Vivekananda said that mind is thought and thought is mind. There cannot be any thought if there is no mind; and there is no existence of mind without any thought. They are synonymous. Our peace-less-ness stems from our thoughts being random, negative and repetitive.

Watching the Mind

Swamiji also said we should just watch the mind. It presents a thought and we should acknowledge it and ask the mind for the next show. The next thought springs and we say, 'OK, mind, what is your next item.' If we consciously speak to the mind in this way, it becomes very self-conscious that someone is watching it. But the third thought sneaks in anyway and we forget that we are witnessing. We have identified with this thought and suddenly we don't know where the last five minutes vanished to.

We were swept away again. It is fun to watch the mind. It is quite a show and also quite a challenge. When we again emerge from thought and try to take command, making greater effort to remain aware, we dare the mind to show its menu of distractions. But no menu comes, it remains blank. No thought. But the moment we become less aware, the mind starts up again. Swamiji said that if we watch as the witness, the first day will exhibit 200 thoughts in ten minutes; the next day perhaps 100 thoughts; by the fourth or fifth day 50 thoughts; but if we persist there will be no thought until we allow it to think again. Try it.

We may also visualize that we are like the blue, infinite sky and that thoughts are like passing clouds - we watch them appear and disappear, but we remain the same calm, quiet, blue sky. These types of imagery help us practice our witness attitude.

Obsessed with Thoughts

We are obsessed with thoughts. This thought. That thought. Family thought. Future. Past. Present. Schedule. Company. So many thoughts. It's an obsession we seemingly cannot escape.

My eyes are open, so the things I see influence my thinking. Suppose I see something, like this
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Meditation [from page 8]

curtain, well the mind makes its associations with the curtain. When I close my eyes, however, what is influencing thoughts? Mind is associated with memory and the thoughts flood in through the storehouse of association. Disconnect it. When you can concentrate your mind on your forehead, known as the seat of mind; when you reach that point where very few thoughts arise, tell the mind, 'OK, just stay here.'

There are some meditation groups instructing practice in this way which brings them some peace, no doubt. But we cannot really get an abiding peace with this technique, because there are many thoughts inside us that need to be resolved. These are the conflicting thoughts, contradictory thoughts and negative thoughts. And for this we need to focus on sublime.

So the steps to real meditation are witnessing the mind, eliminating thoughts and directing the mind to focus on particular aspect of the sublime. Then real meditation starts. We need all this preparation for real meditation, because if we suddenly jump to it we'll find ourselves asleep or dwelling on our schedule and the mind will be more restless and finally, we lose interest in meditation. For deep concentration, deep focusing and deep meditation all this preparation is necessary.

With Form or Pure Consciousness

While meditating we can focus on some spiritual form or symbol or simply on pure consciousness. Symbols or images must have some spiritual association like a lotus or light. Visualization is important in spiritual life. Try to see that this lotus is not just a material lotus and that the light is spiritual light. Then there are images of Christ or Buddha or Krishna. Don't see them as flesh and bone or it becomes a secular imagining. Think of the deity as made of spirit. Imagine there is a lotus within your heart and your chosen deity is seated upon it. His body is light, His face is benign, smiling and compassionate. Behind the image of Christ there is pure consciousness. Behind the image of Buddha there is pure consciousness. Try to focus that.

The mind is like white linen, as Sri Ramakrishna put it. If we dye it with indigo, it will be blue. If we dye it red, it will be red. If we dye our minds on secular things, the mind will be secular. If we dye it in the spiritual, our mind will be spiritual. We have to dye it with the symbols, the embodiment

of divinity; that embodiment of purity and love. The more we focus on Jesus, the more we focus on Sri Ramakrishna, the more we focus on love and purity and divinity and become pure, divine and full of love. That is the benefit of meditation on form.

On the other hand there is meditation on the formless. As we discussed, through illumination we understand our real nature is Atman. That is eternal. That is infinite. The substratum of my personality is my Atman. Behind my personality is Atman, Pure Consciousness. It is Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute. Why absolute? Because in comparison to other existences; in comparison to other knowledge; in comparison to other bliss, it is infinite. Our existence is conditioned by time and space, and we can very easily understand this. But the Atman, the soul, at the micro level and Brahman, the Supreme Reality, or God at the macro level, have the same nature, only the level is different.

To concentrate on that Atman we must train the mind to discriminate that I am not body, I am not mind, I am not intelligence nor the ego. It is a process of elimination, of negation and analysis wherein we finally arrive at the point, 'I am Atman'. Then focus on this, your real nature. This is one way of meditation on consciousness at the micro level.

At the macro level we can concentrate in the same way. See all around us, the people, buildings and houses and nature as shadows, as the substratum of the Supreme Reality which is infinite, eternal. It is existence, knowledge and bliss absolute. Again, it's just a matter of level, the micro level or the macro level. The nature of both is the same.

What is the benefit of this? The more we focus on these qualities, the more and more we imbibe them. We begin to feel, 'I am eternal, I am joy Absolute, I am bliss Absolute.' This is the benefit of meditation on pure consciousness. We will be free from attachment. There will be love, but there will be no attachment. There will be freedom and no bondage. There will be joy and no sorrow.

For a practitioner, both techniques are necessary. Why? Because right at the beginning we cannot concentrate on pure consciousness, it is too abstract an idea. We need some elementary accession and we are advised to first focus on form. Choose whatever form you like,

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Meditation [from page 9]

and after you become used to meditating in that way, then you can focus on consciousness. This will help eliminate attachments. This will help us be free from fear and anxiety. This will help us identify more with our real nature.

Challenges and Results

No doubt challenges will arise as we practice meditation. The initial challenge is that when we first try to meditate so many unrelated thoughts come up. We have to drive them out. The second is we must have patience. It is not simply like by eating our stomach is full—there are certain results we have to wait for. When we invest in business, do we get the profit immediately? When we plant the tree, do we get the mango the next day? After meditating a few days or weeks we say, 'Oh, my mind was not fixed!' or 'Oh, I have not realized the truth!' or 'I haven't achieved peace of mind.' No, we must give it time. We must have patience and faith. If you do it sincerely for 30 days, for 20 to 30 minutes, and Saturday and Sunday a little longer, I am sure the first result you will get is mental peace.

This is not only important for your work, it is important for your health too. For high blood pressure, heart problems and even diabetes most doctors recommend meditation. It is not for spiritual purposes only. If your mind is peaceful, you are in a better position to make proper

decisions. If my mind is irritated and distracted, can I make good decisions? Impossible! To make good decisions our minds must be calm and quiet. And we must make decision in our community and personal lives.

Work is Worship

And once we understand that the same God that is in me is also in others, our relationships will be better. I want to serve God who is in others. If I meditate, I will grow more love for God and this idea of connectedness with God during my workday may continue. How? I shall work with the energy God has given me. I will do the work God has given me. I shall please God with the work He has given me. And finally, whatever successes I have, I will surrender the results to God. In that way we remember God and love God more. It is practicing the presence of God in everyday life. This is spiritualizing one's life. This is how meditation, and meditation through work, helps us to elevate us and bring abiding peace and joy. •

• Thought of the Month •

“One kind word can warm
three winter months.”

Japanese Proverb

Update for April 2011 Vedanta Society Disaster Relief Activities Report



On the 26th of April, 2011, Swami Medhasananda and three devotees, Mr. Ko Mitamura, Mr. Atsushi Suzuki and Ms. Shanti Izumida of the Vedanta Society of Japan loaded the Society's van with 40 kgs of onions, 20 kgs of potatoes, 10 kgs of carrots, 42 head of cabbage, 32 daikon radishes, 20 bunches of



komatsuna or Japanese mustard spinach, 120 burdock roots, 210 oranges and 120 kiwi fruits. We also brought lots of candies, 180 school notebooks, 30 drawing pads, 200 ballpoint pens, 108 coloured pencil sets, 12 pencil sharpeners, 89 erasers and 992 pencils.

The group first arrived at the Nihon Univa, an NPO
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Swami Vivekananda: 149th Birth Anniversary

ANNUAL PUBLIC CELEBRATION

Date:

Sunday, May 22, 2011. 2 p.m.- 4 p.m.

Venue:

Indian Embassy Auditorium
2-2-11 Kudan-minami, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo

Theme:

*'Positive Approach to Living in the Present
Society and the Role of Spirituality'*

Speakers:

- Dr. Tsuyoshi Nara, Professor Emeritus of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
- Ms. Rie Ueno, President of 'Compass'

Release:

"Universal Gospel" (Special Issue)

Speech:

Sri Sanjay Panda, Deputy Chief of the Mission,
Indian Embassy

Master of Ceremonies:

Professor Kathy Matsui



The Programme also includes a short guided meditation and prayer for the victims of the Tohoku natural disaster. All will be treated to light refreshment. *No Admission charge.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Swami Vivekananda was a prophet of Modern India. He was a lover of humanity, a preacher of Universal Religion and a protagonist of internationalism. Both Eastern and Western savants hold Vivekananda in high esteem for his universal outlook, holistic approach and soul-stirring message. He founded the Ramakrishna Mission, an international spiritual organization, in 1897 with the objective of realizing the Self and serving humanity with a spirit of worship.

About the Programme:

The purpose of the present programme is to pay tribute to the great Swami and to highlight the various facets of his personality and deliberate on his message, which not only helps us to solve the problems we face at different levels, but also elevates us to a higher state of consciousness.

For further details, please call:

Swami Medhasananda (046)873-0428 Prof. T. Nara (03)5608-0525 Mr. S. Kar (045)622-6451 Mr. S. Brahma (03)3816-6075

Organized by: The Celebration Committee in collaboration with the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai (A branch of the Ramakrishna Mission) and Nichi-in Bunka Kyokai

Office Address: Nippon Vedanta Kyokai 4-18-1 Hisagi Zushi-shi Kanagawa-ken 249-0001
Phone (046)873-0428 Fax (046)873-0592

See <<http://vedanta.jp>> for more details



Relief [from page 10]

volunteer centre in Iwaki City, Fukushima. This centre establishes contact with various shelters for the disaster victims and sends supplies to them.

In consultation with this centre the Vedanta group first visited a shelter housed in the Ena Elementary School of Ena City. As this shelter was not in serious need of supplies, the group drove on to the Izumi Kominkan shelter in Izumi City, which is about 50 km away from

the damaged nuclear power plants in Fukushima. As this shelter and some residents in the surrounding area were indeed, in need of some supplies, the vegetables and school supplies were offered. Afterward members of the group met with evacuees individually and offered what comfort they could. It was quite obvious that this visit was much appreciated.

The remaining fruits, vegetables and other articles were finally left at the Nihon Univa Volunteer Centre in Iwaki for distribution before the group began the journey back to Zushi.

• A Story to Remember •

Common Sense

"When you speak about Reality," said the Master, "you are attempting to put the Inexpressible into words, so your words are certain to be misunderstood. Thus people who read that expression of Reality called the Scriptures become stupid and cruel, for they follow not their common sense, but what they think their Scriptures say."

He had the perfect parable to show this:

"A village blacksmith found an apprentice willing to work hard at low pay. The smith immediately began his instructions to the lad: 'When I take the metal out of the fire, I'll lay it on the anvil; and when I nod my head you hit it with the hammer.' The apprentice did precisely what he thought he was told. Next day he was the village blacksmith."

... Fr. Anthony de Mello, 'One Minute Nonsense'

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