



July 2011 - Volume 09 Number 07

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

• Disaster Relief •

CURRY LUNCH

Sunday July 10 - Meet 9:30 a.m.
Saitama Prefectural Kisai High
School in Kazo City, Saitama
Volunteers Contact Shanti-san
shanti.k@r3.dion.ne.jp

Birthdays

Guru Purnima
Friday, 15 July

Swami Ramakrishnananda
Thursday, 28 July

Kyokai Events

• July Zushi Retreat •

“Limitless Joy”

Guest Speaker:
Prof. Tsuyoshi Nara
Professor Emeritus
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Sunday July 17
Talk begins at 11 a.m.
All are Welcome!

• Outdoor Summer • Retreat

Venue: Mitake-san
Dates: 29 July-31 July

Special Guest Speaker:
Rev. Alubomulle Sumanasara

Reservations Please!
Contact Shanti-san
shanti.k@r3.dion.ne.jp



✧ Thus Spake ✧

“You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach you, none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your own soul.”

... Swami Vivekananda

“Among the contributory factors of liberation, devotion stands supreme, and it is the search for one's own true nature that is meant by devotion.”

... Sri Shankaracharya

May 2011 Zushi Retreat Is Selfishness or Unselfishness More Paying? A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Today we ask, 'Is Selfishness or Unselfishness More Paying?' In other words, from which can we get more in return? The human mind is always calculating and often thinks in terms of: 'If I do this, what shall I get in return?' So it is natural to ask the question, 'Is there more to gain by selfishness or unselfishness? The most important thing is to decide upon is what we mean by 'return' or 'gain', as a return may be measured in different ways. So let us start with that.

Securing our wants and needs can be seen as gains or returns. Things like food, clothing, entertainment, a house for me and for my family will make me happy; it will make my family happy. If I can provide good food and clothing for me and my family, I shall be happy. So finally, 'happiness' is a return in terms of material things. This is the common pursuit of a calculating mind.

Selfishness and Unselfishness

What is selfishness and unselfishness? Selfishness means that whatever
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Selfishness or Unselfishness (from page 1)

I do is directed at serving the interest of myself and my family. Unselfishness means that, although it is necessary to serve the interests of me and my family, it should not be the 'be all and end all'. I should also serve others not related to me either by birth or by marriage. The highest idea of unselfishness consists of not thinking of me and my family at all, but in thinking of and serving others.

By 'happiness' common men mean a comfortable material life and under that criterion what is more to 'gain', and what is the best return? Selfishness is best by this calculation, since that motivates us to work for a better material life. What is the root of this selfishness? How does this idea of selfishness come? On what is it centered?

We see the word 'selfishness' is derived from word 'self'. In the English language a letter can be written in either capital or small (a.k.a. uppercase and lowercase) script and that distinction makes a huge difference in meaning. The 'self' with a small 's' has a meaning and 'Self' with capital 'S' means something else.

The small lettered or lowercase 'self' is centered on our body and mind. Sri Ramakrishna called that the small, unripe, deluded and ignorant 'I'. To satisfy this small self means satisfying the demands of my own body, senses and mind, as well as those of my family with good food, dress, interesting company and other such things. Why do we think in such terms; in terms of this body, mind and senses? Is it natural that we should think in that way? Is there any philosophical explanation for this behavior?

Selfishness and Self-Preservation

The answer is that Maya does not want to give us the greater joy of Atman, so it deludes us to seek out the lower joys of body, mind and senses. Under Maya's influence we are naturally focused on this lower I, or self, or body, mind and senses. Although our divine nature is inclined to be immersed in the ecstasy of samadhi, Maya's play stops us and prevents us from doing that.

It is said in Hindu scripture that the great creator first created four sages, full of sattva. Immediately after their birth they were immersed in meditation and samadhi. But in this way the creation would not continue, so the creator decided to create people with only little sattva and more rajas and tamas. Because of the predominance of rajas

and tamas these creatures were more focused on body, mind and senses and in satisfying them.

Also, life is not possible unless there is a natural urge for self-preservation. So creatures develop this inclination about preserving their body: at the root of selfishness there is a natural urge for self-preservation. This is how selfishness starts. The next step after self-preservation is a search for material comfort and happiness. So people end up working day and night for that.

Our Interdependence

But the important objection to such a way of life would be, 'Is life possible by just being selfish?' For our lives we depend on the contributions of so many other people and species, and on contributions of nature as well. Take food for example: do I produce food? No, the farmer does that. Clothing: do I make my clothes? Do I construct my house? No: others do that. Thinking in these terms we may ask, 'How many millions of fish, fowl, sheep, cows and pigs, sacrifice their life for our food?'

How about nature: could we live without air, water and light? We did not create air, water and light. Einstein once remarked, 'How many times in a day do I recall that my life depends on the contributions of hundreds of other persons? So I should also think on how I can give something in return to others. So both things; selfishness and unselfishness are there. Life would be simply impossible with selfishness alone.

So from the point of propriety one should arrive at the following conclusion: Since I receive, I should also give something in return. This is a must; there is no option, if I have at least some sense of values. This is a first motivation of why one should be unselfish. Besides, do I get real happiness by satisfying just the material needs of myself and my family? By satisfying the body, mind and senses of myself and of my family? One should look at this question both in the immediate short-term as well as in the long-term. Surely, we all experience that this type of secular, material happiness gives us immediate and short term joy; the problem is that such joy does not persist.

Seeking Returns

Secular, material joy is short-termed and ends in attachment, which in its turn brings disappointment, frustration, suffering and bondage. And of course, we all are naturally looking for continu-

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Selfishness or Unselfishness (from page 2)

ous peace and joy, but that is impossible with secular and material happiness borne in selfishness. As we have already observed selfishness is centered on the following, 'What do I get in return?' The husband is asking this question; the wife is asking this question; the children are each asking this question; the boss is asking this question; the employees are all asking this same question. And as most of the time our expectations are not fulfilled, disappointment and frustration follow, and finally this selfishness affects our relationships with others.

However, this asking, 'What do I get in return?' is sometimes open and sometimes dormant. In a family where each member is demanding 'What do I get in return?' or 'What's in it for me?', relationships are strained and vulnerable.

Becoming Unselfish

The opposite attitude consists of thinking, 'I give, but I do not expect anything in return'. If there is no expectation of return, there is no disappointment or frustration either. Disappointments come when we want something, but do not get it. But if we sincerely have no expectation of something in return we may avoid disappointment, frustration and the consequent suffering. That is why there is more to gain in unselfishness, since if there is no suffering there is more room for joy. Not only that, by serving without any selfish motive we get a kind of joy which is qualitatively high and abiding. If our goal is continuous happiness, this will help us to become unselfish and not desiring of anything in return for service.

There is another consideration about wanting divine, spiritual happiness. Secular happiness is mostly short-termed and it also becomes a source of suffering, whereas spiritual happiness is permanent. Unselfishness will help us to achieve spiritual illumination and steady joy and peace.

Then how do we become unselfish from the spiritual point of view? As the center of selfishness is the body and the mind, we should transcend that idea of selfishness by transcending the idea that we are the body-mind complex through focusing on the Self, that is, pure Atman. We should try to see the same Atman in others and serve others. By realizing Atman we become full of bliss, as the very nature of Atman is infinite bliss.

See All as God's Children

In other words, what is the greatest obstacle between God and us? What prevents us from realizing our real nature? It is our small ego. How do we eliminate our small ego? By thinking and by serving others, by identifying ourselves with others, by looking at their joy and suffering, as our joy and suffering. In that way we can transcend the boundaries of our small ego and make our ego universal. By serving others our selfishness will disappear and our mind will become purified so that we can realize God, who is in us. One of the best paths to spiritual illumination is to become unselfish by serving others, which is similar to the teachings of Karma Yoga.

To practice this kind of unselfishness one needs patience and faith. Hence Swami Vivekananda famously said, 'Unselfishness is more paying, only people have not the patience to practice it.' All religions teach that we should become unselfish and compassionate. It is not enough for a devotee to worship, meditate, and call the name of God; it is very important to serve others as children of God.

God will become pleased if we serve His children and that will help us in God-realization. But there is even a higher idea which consists of loving and serving others without consideration of the impact this has on our spiritual progress, without even the slightest consideration of the 'return' we can get by that.

The Great Sage Dadhichi

In Hindu scripture there is a reference to the great sage called Dadhichi. In a great battle between the gods and the demons, the demons were victorious. The king of the demons, named Vritra, drove all gods and goddesses from heaven and then enjoyed ruling heaven. The gods were forced to take shelter on the Earth and they prayed to the Supreme Lord Vishnu about how they could regain their position in heaven.

The gods were told that they could kill the king of the demons by making a weapon made from Dadhichi's bones. Indra, the king of the gods, did not much like the idea since Dadhichi was a great sage and still very much alive, but as there was no other way to solve the problem, Indra went to Dadhichi anyway and prayed for his help solving this problem.

If a normal person were asked to give up his life and donate his bones for a good cause he would most likely refuse, but Dadhichi, being a great
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Selfishness or Unselfishness (from page 3)

soul, gladly accepted to sacrifice his life as he wanted to help the gods, who look after the whole world and the universe. So the great sage sat himself in meditation and immersed himself in the thought of Brahman and left his mortal body. So this was the sacrifice of Dadhichi in order to help, without any consideration of getting something in return. The story then tells us that a weapon was made with the sage's bones and with that weapon Indra killed Vritta, the king of the demons.

King Rantideva

There is another interesting story in the Bhagavatam about King Rantideva, a devotee of Lord Vishnu, who was always pleased in serving others. He used to share anything that he received with the population of the kingdom. He would always make sure that all around him had eaten before he took his own meal.

Once during a famine the food supply was slowly decreasing. But even in that situation King Rantideva would only take food after everybody else had eaten. Finally no food was left. After a few days of fasting some porridge with ghee and honey was brought to him. When he was about to share that food with his relatives, suddenly a Brahmin guest arrived. So the king gladly offered some of the porridge to the guest, who should be satisfied first. After the Brahmin guest was fed, another guest came. So again the king offered food to the new guest. This continued until a fourth guest came, but no food was left after feeding him.

Even at the point of death by a long starvation the king uttered a prayer to Krishna, a prayer which is now one of the best known prayers in Hindu scripture about pure unselfishness, with no expectation of return, either secular or spiritual.

This prayer is:

*O Lord,
I desire not the greatness which comes by the attainment of the eightfold powers,
Nor do I pray that I may not be born again,
My one prayer is that I may feel the pain of others,
As if I were residing within their bodies,
And I may have the power of relieving them of their pain and of making them happy.*

Everyone prays to God for their own happiness, but this prayer is exactly the opposite. He is say-

ing, 'I seek no happiness for myself, only that I may remove the suffering from others.'

The Example of Ramanujacharya

Madhvacharya is the founder of one of the great schools of Vedanta. There is an interesting anecdote regarding Ramanujacharya when his guru told him, 'My son, I will teach you a mantra by which you will become spiritually illuminated, it is a secret mantra that you should not tell to others.' Ramanuja then asked his guru what would happen if he told the secret mantra to others. The guru answered that those who heard and learned the secret mantra would become liberated, but that Ramanuja himself would go to hell.

Then Ramanuja went to the top of a mound, gathered many people and repeated to them the secret mantra that he had learned from his guru. Once the guru learned what Ramanuja had done he became very angry. But Ramanuja said that he would not mind going to hell, if the secret mantra helped others to attain liberation.

How Can We Practice?

We can enjoy telling and listening to these stories about unselfishness, but when it comes to practicing unselfishness ourselves the trouble begins. So in a practical sense, what sort of unselfishness can we practice in our day to day life?

We can give service to others, without expecting anything in return either in money, name and fame or other form of recognition. There are different types of service: financial, physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual. Any of these types of service we can offer will definitely help us to become unselfish.

Practice the Seven Offerings

In Buddha's teachings the seven types of offerings that follow can be practiced even by those who are not wealthy.

- The first is physical offerings, which is to offer service by one's labor. The highest type of physical offering involves sacrificing one's own life.
- The second is the spiritual offering. This consists of offering a compassionate heart to others.
- The third is the offering of warm eyes to others in order to give them tranquility. Eyes can convey strong messages, but unless one is developed

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Selfishness or Unselfishness (from page 3)

spiritually, it is difficult to convey inner compassion.

- The fourth is the offering of a smile. They say that a smile is divine: do not think that offering a smile is something small, it is great. A smile can relieve stress from other people.

Swami Vivekananda said that one should not go out and show his face to others if one feels sad or angry for some reasons. We always transfer some kind of vibration with our acts and body posture or attitude. A smile can transmit vibrations of love and compassion to others.

- The fifth is oral offering: it is to offer kind and warm words to others.
- The sixth is offering a seat to those who may need it: ladies, the elderly or infirm and so on.
- The seventh is the offering of shelter, hosting people at one's home.

These kinds of offerings, which are examples of practical services, if practised, will help us to become unselfish, making us qualified for leading a higher life.

Let me conclude with an appropriate quotation from Martin Luther King Jr: "Everybody can be great ... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love." •

• Thought of the Month •

**The most powerful moral
influence is example.**

... Huston Smith

2011 Public Celebration Swami Vivekananda 149th Birth Anniversary Embassy of India Tokyo

We launch our coverage of the talks given at the annual Public Celebration of Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary held in Tokyo on May 22, 2011 at the Indian Embassy Auditorium, with the opening address by Shri Sanjay Panda, Deputy Chief of Mission, Indian Embassy Tokyo.

Dear friends, it is a great honour and privilege for us to join you today for the celebrations to mark the 149th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. It is of particular significance that this happens to be our first event at the Embassy of India after the massive disaster wrought by the earthquake and tsunami on 11 March in the Tohoku area. As Japan recovers from such an unprecedented scale of devastation, Swami Vivekananda's clarion call to humanity to discover its inner strength in fending off adversity assumes special relevance. Swamiji's thoughts and positive approach to life resonate in the Japanese ethos of resilience that the entire world has come to admire. In Swami Vivekananda's words, 'Don't look back—forward, infinite energy, infinite enthusiasm, infinite daring, and infinite patience—then alone can great deeds be accomplished'.

As Japan faced nature's wrath on March 11, our thoughts in India were with our Japanese friends
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– our friends who have always been by our side when we needed them, be it during the Bhuj earthquake or the Indian Ocean tsunami. Perhaps it was time for India to reach out to Japan in its own small way. Our contribution may have been symbolic given the scale of disaster, yet this rekindles the feeling of fellowship and universal brotherhood – the ideals that find resonance in the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.

It is an apt occasion today to look back at the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda who advocated positive thinking and service to man as the way to spirituality. Swami Vivekananda denounced the belief in destiny and encouraged all to work for others and mankind. I recall his words of wisdom; 'We are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in

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Opening Address (from page 5)

future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act.' A profound statement indeed by this visionary.

Another embodiment of Swami Vivekananda's vision is his unstinting belief in the power of man; the power to choose one's own destiny. 'All power is within you; you can do anything and everything', urged the karmayogi (or man of positive action) in Swamiji. It is said that once Swami Vivekananda was on a long trek in the Himalayas when he found a tired and exhausted old man standing helplessly at the foot of an upward slope. Staring at the uphill battle that he had on his hands, the old man said to Swamiji in frustration, 'Oh, Sir, how to cross it; I cannot walk any more.' Swamiji listened to the old man patiently and then said, 'Look down at your feet. The road that is under your feet is the road that you have passed over and is the same road that you see before you; it will soon be under your feet.' These words emboldened the old man to resume his onward trek. Swami Vivekananda's unstinting belief in the indomitable spirit of man, and his vision of standing fearlessly and facing adversity has more relevance in today's world than ever before.

Swami Vivekananda was barely 30 years old when he introduced the message of India to the world during his speech at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. His message to the world was loud and clear when he endeared the words, 'India's contribution to the sum total of human knowledge has been spirituality and philosophy', the whole world listened in awe and admiration. He was convinced that while India possessed philosophical and spiritual truths, there was the need for modern scientific ideas and thorough reform. It is a matter of some satisfaction that today India is on the path to realize the vision that Swami Vivekananda had outlined. The journey to revive the glory of India and realize the spirit of the individual has begun. There is recognition of the rightful place of India in the comity of nations for the principles that she stands for, and her en-

deavour and achievements. Yes, we do owe this to Swami Vivekananda, the 'messenger of Indian wisdom'.

Swami Vivekananda visited Japan on his way to the World Congress of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He was greatly impressed by Japan, Japanese etiquette, development, arts and technology of that time. So impressed was he by the advancement of technology in Japan that he advised every young man of India to visit Japan rather than the West for technical education.

The Vedanta Society in Japan has reached out to wide sections of Japanese public through its non-sectarian approach based on the propagation of religious harmony and human values through spiritual and cultural programmes. I take this opportunity to felicitate the Vedanta Society, and Swami Medhasanandaji in particular, for their yeoman service and contribution in providing that special connect between our two countries by enriching our spiritual linkage and social mores.

At a personal level, I must confess that I have had a special association with the Ramakrishna Mission. I take great pride and consider myself privileged that my upbringing since childhood has been greatly influenced by the Ramakrishna Mission and Swami Vivekananda's philosophy and vision. As a four-year-old, my first experience of education was at a Ramakrishna Mission School.

I immensely value these four years of education that I had during my formative years, which has held me in good stead as I move from country to country today on my diplomatic assignments. After all, we do look up to Swami Vivekananda as the eternal Ambassador of India.

Living for a short span of four decades, Swamiji left his footprints on the sands of time. I hope that Swami Vivekananda's thoughts will continue to guide and inspire us. As Swamiji said, 'Our thoughts make things beautiful, our thoughts make things ugly. The whole world is in our own minds. Learn to see things in the proper light ... and keep our thinking positive'.

Thank you.





Swami Medhasananda and Deputy Chief Panda Offer Bouquet



Deputy Chief Panda Releases Special Issue of Universal Gospel



Mrs. Panda Releases Ramakrishna Arati CD

Swami Gives Talk in Mitaka, Tokyo

On Saturday June 18, Swami Medhasananda was invited to give a discourse on Maya and Brahman by Inochino Gakko (The School of Life) organized by Sarasha in Mitaka, Tokyo. Here is a brief edited version of the report Ms. Sakae Machida prepared about the event. Ms. Machida is a translator who contributes reports for our magazine:

“Maharaj’s discourse was, in summary, as follows: Nothing that changes is real, but Brahman is truly real and exists eternally. All that is subject to change is called maya, shakti, prakriti or ajnana, having the ability to hide Reality and project fake figures and shapes. By repeatedly discriminating between what does and does not change, one can understand Reality.

“Approximately thirty people joined, most of whom were interested in yoga. Some heard the path of discrimination for the first time and were deeply fascinated. After the discourse we enjoyed delicious natural foods with Maharaj, having a delightful time.”

Swami Attends Japan Yoga Therapy Society General Meeting in Sapporo

On Saturday June 25, Swami attended the 9th General Meeting of the Japan Yoga Therapy Society in Sapporo and led the Opening and Closing Prayers. He is invited to this meeting every year. One of the guest speakers was Dr. Toru Abo, Professor of the Graduate School of Nigata University, renowned for immunotherapy, who talked about Breathing Methods and Immunity. Also, Reverend Shun Kageyama, a Nichiren Buddhist priest and a lecturer at the Institute of Contemporary Religion, gave a talk on Integrated Medicine for Cancer, Yoga and Spirituality. Around one thousand people joined the meeting.

Swami Invited to Opening Ceremony of Tokyo Centre of the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres

On Sunday June 26, Maharaj was invited for the Opening Ceremony of the Tokyo Centre in Koenji, Suginami Ward, of the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres to speak on the

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Spiritual Path to a Positive Life. Here is the brief summary of the English report about the Ceremony from Ms. Noriko Narayani of the Tokyo Centre:

On June 26, the Tokyo Centre of the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres was formally inaugurated. The Opening Ceremony commenced at 1 p.m. with rites for Ganesha performed by Pandaji, an Indian expert in Hindu ritualism living in Tokyo. Then Swami Mahadevanandaji of the Sivananda Centre and Swami Medhasanandaji, President of the Vedanta Society of Japan, joined in a ribbon cutting. This was followed by four speeches as follows:

Swami Mahadevanandaji talked on the 'Necessity of Yoga in This Japanese Society'; Swami Medhasanandaji talked on the 'Spiritual Path to a Positive Life' discussing what is a truly positive way of life and thinking; Sethna, Paravidya Kendram talked on 'Yoga and Vedanta'; and Kiyoshi Naruse, the Japanese translator of Sivananda Yoga by Swami Venkatesanandaji, presented, 'How I Met Sivananda and His Teachings'.

The Ceremony ended with Mr. Jimmy Miyashita and Ms. Yuko playing Indian classic music on the santoor and tabla respectively.

• A Story to Remember •

DETACHMENT

It intrigued the disciples that the Master who lived so simply would not condemn his wealthy followers. "It is rare, but not impossible, for someone to be rich and holy," he said one day.

"How"?

"When money has the effect on his heart that the shadow of that bamboo has on the courtyard".

The disciples turned to watch the bamboo's shadow sweep the courtyard without stirring a single particle of dust.

MORSEL: The self-controlled soul, who moves amongst sense objects, free from either attachment or repulsion, he wins eternal Peace. -- Bhagavad Gita (c. B.C. 400)

From 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