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日本ヴェダント協会ニュースレター

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

Monthly Calendar



Birthdays

Swami Abehdananda
Thursday, 22 September

Swami Akhandananda
Tuesday, 27 September

Kyokai Events

• September Zushi Retreat •

Sunday, 18 September
"Peace and Meditation"
Swami Medhasananda
Prasad Lunch
Afternoon Q&A
All are welcome to attend.

• **Swami to Visit India** •
September 28 to October 23

• **Kali Puja at Zushi** •
October 26 19:00-21:30
Puja, Arati, Pushpanjali,
Homa, Prasad
All are welcome to attend.



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"God is one's very own. It is an eternal relationship."

... The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

"I am not the doer; how can there be either bondage or release for me?"

... Guru Nanak

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

We conclude our coverage of the talks given at the annual Public Celebration of Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary, held in Tokyo on May 22, 2011 at the Indian Embassy Auditorium, with the address by Dr. Tsuyoshi Nara, Professor Emeritus, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, on the theme 'A Positive Approach to Living in Present-day Society and the Role of Spirituality':

The Case for Japanese Society

Respected Swami Medhasanandaji Maharaj, President of the Vedanta Society of Japan, Your Excellency Shri Sanjay Panda, DCM of the Indian Embassy in Japan, my co-speaker Mrs. Rie Ueno, Owner of the Company 'Compass', ladies and gentlemen: Before discussing today's theme, let me ask each of you the following question: "What is the most important thing for you in this world?"

Your answers may vary one from another like this – my own life, family, lover, wealth, social status, honor, etc., etc. Logically speaking, life should come first because no one can enjoy any of the other items if

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Dr. Nara (from page 1)

one loses one's own life. There is a Japanese proverb saying '*Inochi atteno mono-dane*' which means 'With the life force, seeds become things'. In other words, 'Nothing comes out of any seed if it lacks its life energy'. An equivalent English expression might be, 'Life is the first consideration' or 'where there is life, there is hope.'

However, in the history of Japan, there was a common ethical code among the *samurai* or warrior class that one's honor was much more important than one's own life. For instance, if a *samurai* felt insulted by somebody, he would challenge the insulter to a duel. If the former won the fight and killed the opponent, he should be applauded by all his comrades, and particularly by his feudal master for defending his honor.

On the contrary, if the insulted *samurai* lost the fight and was killed by his opponent, his bereaved family faced two different situations. If the *samurai* was killed from the back, he was thought to have run away from his opponent due to cowardice. In that case his whole family was not only defamed, but also deprived of social position and all properties. In the other case, if he fought brilliantly but was unfortunately killed, his properties were secured with one condition: His other family members, usually a son or daughter, had to take revenge on the enemy who killed their father.

Such fights used to take place not only between individual *samurais* but also feudal lords. That is why so many battles or wars were fought among competitive feudal lords, and many *samurais* lost their precious lives and properties in Japan's medieval age. If a feudal lord lost a war and all his territory, all his *samurai* became '*ronin*' (meaning 'a man who flows here and there like seawater' or 'a *samurai* without a master or lord'). If a *ronin* was lucky, some other feudal lord could employ him. Otherwise he had to change his status from *samurai* to peasant/ artisan / salesman, laborer, etc.

A very popular story is called the '*47 ronin*'. During the *Edo* period some *samurai* lost their status and were compelled to become *ronin* because of their master, Lord Asano's, mishaps. In fact, Lord Asano was ordered by the *Tokugawa* Feudal Government to commit '*seppuku* or *harakiri*' (suicide by disembowelment), and the government took away all his family's properties and territory. His subjects thought that their master's opponent (another feudal lord) should also get some sort of punishment from the government. However, contrary to their expectation, no punishment was given to their master's opponent.

Dissatisfied with the government's biased judgment and favoritism, the *47 ronin* made a secret vow to avenge their Lord Asano and demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the government's unfair judgment. After many years of hardship, these *47 ronins* succeeded ultimately in killing Lord Kira. Then, the *ronins* killed themselves with fullest satisfaction, thinking they had consoled their master's soul by demonstrating justice before the whole of society of that period.



This story was dramatized and enacted in *Kabuki* theatres. Even now it is played from time to time in theatres or on television. Such self-sacrificing loyalty demonstrated by the *samurai* class, the willingness to commit *hara-kiri* suicide, has been inherited even by contemporary

Japanese society. For instance, when an influential statesman is arrested by the Special Investigation Division under suspicion of some official corruption, his chief political secretary often killed himself by taking poison or by hanging, for the dual purposes of destroying evidence and apologizing to the public on behalf of his master.

In 1868 when the *Tokugawa Shogunate* and rule by the *samurai* class was abolished, the Imperial Government was established. In line with national policy to make Japan as economically and militarily strong as the more advanced Western nations, the *Meiji* government started educating the whole Japanese population to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their national goal.

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Dr. Nara (from page 2)

Under the spell of such patriotic education, the Japanese people were brainwashed to believe that the purpose of their life was to sacrifice everything to glorify their mother country and their supreme spiritual master, that is, the Emperor.

As a result of such brainwashing education, professional soldiers and even young voluntary soldiers, who were mostly middle-school students, were made to believe that the value of their individual lives was as light as a piece of paper, while the value of sacrificing their lives for the sake of national interest was the highest possible honor for his whole family.

In fact, with this artificially instilled belief, many young voluntary soldiers joined the so-called *kamikaze* corps or suicide air corps to fly into American warships.

However, after our defeat in the Second World War, Japanese values or ethics changed drastically. People's loyalty shifted from the nation or Emperor to one's own family or company or organization. Then, the majority of Japanese people started running after the American lifestyle. This was their new model or ideal.

By virtue of Japanese industriousness and basic education, the majority of Japanese people succeeded in catching up to the American standard of life, even surpassing it in some aspects of their daily lives. Among all the nations in the world, the Japanese people have been enjoying so far:

- (1) the highest personal monetary savings
- (2) the highest daily consumption of industrial products
- (3) the longest average span of life – 84.5 years.

Strange to say, however, though envied by many in developing nations who regard Japan as their model, the Japanese people themselves are not happy. Rather, they feel insecure and fearful about the future. Especially those Japanese children who were born after the Second World War and who were brought up indulgently by their overprotective parents, lack the internal fortitude or power to stand up against any sort of hardship they may confront in their daily lives.

According to a statistical survey conducted by WHO during the last decade, the top ten national

suicide rates are as follows:

Country	Suicides /per 100,000 people
1. Belarus	35.1 / 100,000
2. Lithuania	30.4 / 100,000
3. Russia	30.1 / 100,000
4. Kazakhstan	26.9 / 100,000
5. Hungary	24.7 / 100,000
6. Japan	24.0 / 100,000
7. Guyana	22.9 / 100,000
8. Ukraine	22.6 / 100,000
9. Korea	21.9 / 100,000
10. Sri Lanka	21.6 / 100,000
.....	
47. India	10.5 / 100,000
.....	
Egypt, Haiti, Honduras, Jordan / none	

Although Japan ranked 7th worldwide, we occupy the top position among the so-called advanced countries. As the present Japanese population is a little over 120 million, the total number of suicides is 31,690 persons. This figure is 6.5 times more than the number of victims of fatal traffic accidents of 4,863 persons. This gloomy figure has been increasing consistently for the last 8 years, which has made Japan notorious as 'a major suicide nation'.

Every day nearly 100 people commit suicide in Japan, and particularly in Tokyo, almost daily one or two middle-aged persons jump in front of a moving train. In fact, we have discovered that the majority of Japanese suicides are middle-aged people ranging from 45 to 64 years of age, and the most direct cause of their suicidal impulse is the mental disease known as 'depressive psychosis' or 'melancholia'. The root cause of this mental disease can be attributed to 'anxiety about an uncertain future' and 'lack of confidence in overcoming misfortune, which may not have even happened at all'.

Time being short, let me stop discussing this gloomy phenomenon for the moment and express my personal view regarding how to curb this awful trend in Japanese society.

Any pious Christian knows very well that suicide is prohibited. It is a sinful act that dooms the sinner to hell after his or her death. This religious belief can and certainly does help many Christian followers to avoid the suicidal temptation in a mental crisis.

A devout Buddhist may accept any challenging
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Dr. Nara (from page 3)

circumstances as a manifestation of his or her own karma, and resolve to create new good karma from now on. Such clear philosophical insight or one's own Buddha wisdom can and certainly does help many Buddhist followers in overcoming any crisis of daily life.

Any sincere Shinto believer takes any happening or phenomenon as a manifestation of God or the Universal Spirit. Needless to say, human life absolutely depends upon or is sustained by the natural elements, namely 'air, solar heat, water, earth, etc. The container or supplying source of all these essential natural elements is none other than our Mother Earth. Thus, this Mother Earth herself is controlled and sustained by the whole solar system, including the sun, moon, Venus, Mercury, Mars Saturn etc., all of which are again sustained by our Milky Way galaxy and other nebulae.

In short, the whole universe containing roughly 6 trillion stars and planets sustains our individual human lives. At the same time, our individual human lives are also sustained by our biological organs, including our head, eyes, nose, ears, mouth, lung, stomach, bowels, hands, legs, hands, etc. and the total number of cells contained in any human body is also roughly 6 trillion. Therefore, each Shinto believer feels grateful to all these elements existing inside and outside his or her own self.

My point here is that if money or other material things are unable to ensure peace of mind or a sense of security in a neurotic patient, the only

alternative left to them is 'a spiritual orientation of thought or mind' imparted through a new type of education befitting the needs of contemporary society in Japan.

To tell you the truth, I have been receiving medical treatment in a hospital for the last 10 days. Today, I got special permission from my doctor to come to this venue to deliver this talk, thanks to Thakur's grace.

When we are healthy or in normal physical condition, we tend to take health for granted. We feel it quite natural, so we do not feel anything special about it. But when we fall ill and have to lie down on a bed for medical treatment, we suddenly realize the importance and true value of our normal healthy condition. We also realize what a costly affair it is for a person to undergo various kinds of medical treatment. Similarly we are not usually conscious of our dependence upon the blessings of Great Nature. We usually take any natural phenomena as a matter of course -nothing special-. But when a natural disaster like an earthquake or tsunami or typhoon visits us, we suddenly realize how we have been protected or blessed by all kinds of natural phenomena for which we should be profoundly grateful.

So let me close my talk here by quoting a few Japanese traditional sayings that contain spiritual significance beneficial for people living in contemporary Japan:

- (1) You will be visited with divine punishment if you wish for more than your due.
- (2) If you eat in moderation, no doctor is required.
- (3) Live in the spirit of mottainai (receive everything with gratitude, and never take more than you really need).

Thank you. •

• Thought of the Month •

While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart.

... Saint Francis of Assisi

News in Brief

for July and August 2011

Translated from Japanese for "The Vedanta Kyokai" by Ms. Satsuki Yokota

This summer we experienced the pressure of saving electrical power as well as abnormal heat, then in September loss of life and devastating floods due to very slow moving typhoon number 12, or "Talas". Then the very large and strong typhoon number 15, or "Roke", hit Kyushu shortly afterward and followed the southern coast of Honshu causing evacuations in low-lying areas near Nagoya and later in Tokyo, before moving on to northeast. Pray you are all keeping safe and well.

July Zushi Retreat

On Sunday July 17, the monthly retreat was held at Zushi Centre. Starting at 10.30 with meditation, chanting mantra and reading from the scripture, Prof Tsuyoshi Nara, emeritus professor of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, gave a discourse on "Limitless Joy", followed by lunch prasad at 12.30. Approximately 30 people attended. •

Homeless Narayana Osewa Programme

On Friday July 22, six people from the Vedanta Society went to Kotobukicho, Yokohama on the Society's regular programme to serve the homeless. We provided 400 bananas, as usual, and a 5 kg bag of rice. Recipients seemed please to receive fruit, which they cannot enjoy very often. A lot of student volunteers were seen there as well, as it was during their summer holiday. •

Summer Outdoor Retreat (at Mitakesan)



Our regular Outdoor Summer Retreat was held at Mitakesan, Tokyo from July 29 to 31. According to the daily schedule of the retreat, our days started at 5:20 with meditation followed by prayers, chanting and reading from scripture. Then an hour yoga lesson by Mr Arai, instructor of Tokyo Yoga Centre, before breakfast. After a break a discourse was given in the morning, then after lunch a different discourse was presented. In the afternoon everyone was invited to go on a walk, returning to vespers and supper in the evening. Participants were encouraged to maintain silence as much as possible throughout the day. There was a get-together after dinner

The theme of Swami Medhasananda's discourse this year was "The Positive Way of Life" and for special lectures in the afternoons, Reverend Smanasara of the Japan Theravada Buddhist Association, was invited to talk about "Vipassanâ Meditation". After the discourse all the participants, including the two monks, took walks in the natural surroundings of the Mitake-san area enjoying the mystic atmosphere. Thirty-three people participated in the retreat. •



Discourse

Summer Outdoor Retreat

Bhajans

India Embassy Gita Studies

On Saturday, August 6, thirty-five people attended a monthly retreat at the Embassy of India in Tokyo at 2 p.m. to study Bhagavad Gita. Swami Medhasananda gave a discourse on "Transcending Trigunas".

Satsanga in Nagano

On August 9, Swami Medhasananda was invited by Ms Naoko Ozawa to give a discourse at Komehanaya in Tatsunocho, Nagano. Four people from the Zushi Centre also attended.

Komehanaya is a restaurant at a farm where you are served fresh and healthy food and sweets and can enjoy the panoramic rural scenery. Society members were served home-made curry made by Naoko-san.

• The discourse on "Positive Way of Life" started at



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Nagano (from page 6)

a traditionally built annex at 1.30 p.m. Attendees listened attentively to practical tips and thoughts for positive ways of life.

- At 3 p.m. home-made vegetable rice cakes, water melon and corn were served followed by the Q&A session.
- At four they took a walk along rice paddies and fields to the mountains nearby enjoying clear air in the forest and fresh spring water.
- At six they sang Sri Ramakrishna bhajans at vespers then Maharaj led a guided meditation.
- At seven they had dinner prepared with heart and brought by attendees, who looked tense at first but were relaxed over time enjoying chatting.

The following day, Swami and six other people visited Suwa Taisha guided by Naoko-san and Ms Kyoko Ariga, a member of the staff of Komehanaya. It is known as one of the oldest shrines in Japan and has a Kamisha, or upper shrine, on the south side and a Shimosha, or lower shrine, on the north side of Lake Suwa. On this occasion they visited the Maemiya (old shrine) and Honmiya (main shrine) of the Kamisha (upper shrine) complex. At Honmiya they meditated on the grounds embraced in a holy atmosphere. They then visited the museum of Priest Moriya in Chino and took the 16:00 bus back to the farm.

This was the first such satsanga for this organizer and twenty people attended. Commenting on the occasion after dinner, all seemed very happy with the discourse, guided meditation and the thoughtful hospitality of Naoko-san. Many expressed their hope for another satsanga.



August Zushi Retreat

On Sunday August 21, Sri Krishna's birthday was celebrated at the Zushi Centre. Starting at 10.30 with meditation, Swami Medhasananda led chanting Vedic mantras at 11:00 followed by readings from the Bha-
(cont. page 8)

August Retreat (from page 7)

gavad Gita and singing kirtan. Swami then gave a discourse on “Avadhuta’s Twenty-Four Gurus” with a partial help of Ms Satsuki Yokota as interpreter. After lunch, the afternoon session began with readings, chanting, Q&A session, and meditation followed by a tea and cake break. Twenty-eight people attended.

Swami Gives Talk at Padma Yoga Ashram

On Sunday August 29, Padma Yoga Ashram invited Swami Medhasananda to give a discourse at their 9th workshop in Otsuka, Tokyo from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., where he talked about “Meditation and Peace”. The organisers are Ms Yasuko Yamada and Ms Kuniko Hirano, who yearly invite him to their workshops to give a discourse.

Here is a brief summary of Ms Hirano’s account of the event:

“Swami Medhasananda gave a two-hour discourse on the purpose, meaning and methods of meditation, which was practical, easy to understand and sometimes humorous. After the discourse, we had a Q&A session and then a guided meditation.

Participants commented that they could clearly understand the meanings and purposes of meditation; that it was good to learn practical and specific points one should remember about it; that they were motivated by knowing easy to understand tips on it; and that they would start it again with fresh interest.

On a hot late-summer day with cicadas singing, we had a fruitful time enjoying a discourse and meditation at a quiet, peaceful venue in a lush green park.” •

• A Story to Remember •

Adulthood

To a disciple who was always at his prayers the Master said, “When will you stop leaning on God and stand on your own two feet”?

The disciple was astonished. “But you are the one who taught us to look on God as Father”!

“When will you learn that a father isn’t someone you can lean on, but someone who rids you of your tendency to lean”?

... Fr. Anthony de Mello

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