



November 2011 - Volume 09 Number 11

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 Premananda
Saturday, 3 December

Sri Sri Sarada Devi
Saturday, 17 December

Swami Shivananda
Wednesday, 21 December

Christmas Eve

Swami Saradananda
Friday, 30 December

Kyokai Events

• December Zushi Retreat •

Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother Birth Celebration

Sunday, 18 December

6am: Mangalarity, Chanting, Bhajans

11am: Puja, Food Offering, Flower Offering, Reading

Talk by Swami Medhasananda

Prasad Lunch

14:30pm: Afternoon Session, Reading, Chants, Devotional Songs

• Christmas Eve •

Annual Christmas Programme
Worship, Bible readings, carols and talk.
Starting at 7p.m. All are welcome!

• New Year Kalpataru • New Years Day 2011

Zushi Centre - 12 Noon
Annual programme includes a talk, lunch, and a walk to the Kamakura Daibutsu and more! All are welcome!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Creeds and sects matter nothing. Let every one perform with faith the devotions and practices of his creed. Faith is the only clue to get to God."

... Sri Ramakrishna

"Make a boat of the sacred Name then, with the oars of faith, cross the ocean of illusion."

... Guru Nanak

August Zushi Retreat 2011
Birthday Celebration of Sri Krishna
"Avadhuta's Twenty-four Gurus"
A talk by Swami Medhasananda

According to one Indian calendar the 26th of November is Sri Krishna's birthday in 2011, which we celebrate it today.

Many sages, realised souls and incarnations of God were born in India. Who of them is the most known? In Japan, that would be Buddha. In India, he is of course respected too, but the most popular is Sri Krishna.

The Spiritual Guide

Sri Krishna has different aspects and His devotees revere Him in different aspects. Some worship Him as a child, some as a Father and some as a Master. Some also as a lover.

Sri Krishna provides us spiritual guidance. He is the most known guide for spiritual journeys. He has a lot of teachings, which are compiled in Bhagavad Gita, as you know, and Bhagavatam. As Hindu scriptures there are Veda and Upanishad, which have commentaries. Then there are Samkhya, Yoga and Vedanta as Hindu [con't page 2]

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Avadhuta's Twenty-four Gurus (from page 1)

philosophy, and the Ramayana and Mahabharata as epic poetry. The Bhagavatam also tells of Krishna's life, plays, teachings, etc. It is a massive book as a whole, the main parts of which were translated into English by the late Swami Prabhavanandaji of our Hollywood Centre. The Kyokai published the Japanese version based on his English translation.

Today our topic is "Avadhuta's Twenty-four Gurus". There was a holy man called Uddhava, one of Sri Krishna's beloved devotees. As he respected Krishna very much, Krishna gave him a lot of advice for guidance and told him spiritual stories. One of these stories is "Avadhuta's Twenty-four Gurus". Usually, we have only one guru, so why twenty-four? I will explain a little later.

Learn by Observation

What is the essence of the story? Learning is important and Avadhuta learnt a lot from different things. People do not usually study any more after finishing school. The real purpose of study, however, is not passing exam, but to develop oneself. If you do not learn, then you will not develop yourself, which is as good as death itself. Life is learning. You live to learn. Life is a big university. The greatest teacher is experience, for which you work hard. It is lifelong learning. In this case self-development represents moral and spiritual growth, which starts after we finish ordinary study. We definitely need to understand and hold the concept in the beginning.

It is not good to be too proud with an ego that thinks, "I know everything". Let us be just humble. I learn even from students, disciples and devotees. Books and the Internet are not the only source for learning, which we can see from "Avadhuta Had Twenty-four Gurus". It is easy to learn from teachers, but what do we need to learn from others and nature? Trees are silent, but have messages. Nature does not talk, but actually teaches. So do human beings and animals. The key to understanding such messages is deep observation. Sri Ramakrishna occasionally gave advice, while Holy Mother did not very often talk or exercise spiritual

practice. However, her life itself was her message. How can we know the message? By observation. It is very important. Observation does not mean just having a look, but watching something and thinking.

A shallow thinker only looks, but a deep thinker looks and observes things. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda had a great ability to do so. Sri Ramakrishna, when asked a question by a devotee, took a careful look at him from head to toe to understand his background then gave an answer. Since good spiritual teachers see things in a focused manner and think deeply, they gain insight. Establishing good relationships should be preceded by thought.

The 24 Gurus



Sri Krishna told this story: Once there was a king called Yadu. He always had many guests. One day, a young monk, or sannyasin, called Avadhuta came. He was healthy and strong, but did not work or worry about food. He was quite handsome, but did not marry or worry about who would look after him in his old age. He had no one to support him when in trouble, no friends or a wife. He was clever, but did not talk to others. He had no house to live in, was not proud of himself, and had no bondage. He was just full of inner peace and joy. Yadu was surprised to see the way he lived and asked him, "How could you be so wise when you are still so very young? You do not have a job, money, a wife or a house, and

are not worried about anything. We all worry about money, food, our houses and wives." Avadhuta was actually not an ordinary monk, but a realised soul. So he explained to Yadu how he could attain that state.

There are three types of gurus. The first type is shiksha gurus, who teach ordinary, academic subjects. The second one is mantra gurus or diksha gurus, who provide mantra. You can only have one diksha guru for yourself. The last one is jnana gurus, who give knowledge. The twenty-four teachers refer to these jnana gurus. Avadhuta's jnana gurus are: the earth (nature), air, akasha (ether or space), the sky, water, fire, the moon, the sun, the pigeon, the python, the ocean, the

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Avadhuta's Twenty-four Gurus (from page 2)

moth, the honeybee, the elephant, the deer, the fish, the courtesan, Pingala, the kurara bird (osprey), the child, the young girl, the arrow-maker, the serpent, the spider and the wasp.

The Earth

First, is the earth. It does not protest when we dig holes in the ground to build houses. The earth and nature remain silent even if human beings harm them. So Avadhuta learnt patience and perseverance from the earth. Holy Mother was also patient, while she had many problems and was sometimes criticised by others. Patience is necessary to live. Having a positive life and establishing good relationships require patience. Trees grow from the earth and bear fruits. By felling them we can build houses. Flowers, rivers and everything are born from the earth and we receive them. When we give someone something, we expect reward or gratitude. In contrast, nature expects nothing in return. Trees make fruits and timber not for themselves, but for others, and do not even expect thanks from us in return.

Human beings are the most selfish. When one gets attached, one gets narrow-minded and bound. Pain, sorrow and disappointment are all caused by selfishness. We only think about ourselves and our families. Moreover, trees do not move by themselves, but do not complain if they are suddenly moved elsewhere.

The Air

Next, from air we learn non-attachment. Air smells nice when there is a good smell of flowers in the wind, and smells rotten when there is decay or something dirty. But air is only affected temporarily and its true nature does not change. It gets affected for the time being but not attached, and does not choose a good or bad smell itself. There is the master of a house who does not say whether or not you can come to his house, he just welcomes all the guests who come, and does not hold them up when they want to leave. He

always has the same state of mind. Avadhuta learnt this from air.

What is the state of mind like when one is not attached to his body? Whether it is hot or cold, painful or fun, or whether one succeeds or fails, one's state of mind is the same all the time. It does not get affected, like air. As Bhagavad Gita says, we should neither feel happiness when complimented, nor pain when criticised. Nothing should disturb our mind.

Akasha/Ether

Akasha here is not vacuity, but philosophic akasha. The element of akasha is very subtle and omnipresent. Akasha is in me, the room and the glass looks all different but actually is the same.

Akasha is the same one existence in and around everything. It is like Atman. Atman in different persons appears different from one another because of ignorance. Your Atman is the same as mine. That is what he learnt from akasha.

Water

What are the characteristics of water? It cleans dirty things. When you bathe, you feel better. Holy people have the same feature. They cleanse the minds of others. Through holy company we become holy. Water cleans other things and holy people make disciples and devotees holy. When you are with a holy person, you should stop talking about secular topics and hear him/

her talk about God and observe his/her spiritual practice. Otherwise you cannot get anything from holy company. "M", who wrote The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, said to his disciples that they should go to Belur Math when monks are meditating and get inspired by seeing them doing so, as that is what is truly referred to as 'holy company'.

Fire

Fire is light and brightness. Holy people are bright too. They are sacred and hence, give off holy light. Look at the picture of Sri Krishna. You can see a halo emanat-

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Avadhuta's Twenty-four Gurus (from page 3)

ing from behind. It is not an electric light, but a bright spiritual halo, aura or vibration. Behind God a jyoti or aura emanates. Each of us has an aura even though we may not be aware of it. Secular people have a secular vibration and holy people, a holy vibration. Spiritual knowledge sparkles. As darkness is gone with ordinary light, so the darkness of ignorance is gone when we have the light of a holy person. With the light of his/her knowledge, the darkness of ignorance of the people around disappears.

Also, fire may even have something dirty in it, but it is not affected by that and stays pure. So do holy people. They are not affected by any bad people or 'sinners' around and always remain pure. When people cleanse themselves in the Ganges, the holy river does not change and stays pure. It never loses its holiness and purifies us.

Fire sometimes hides itself in something else. When there is a fire in the forest, the fire is fuelled from inside the trees. Fire present and visible is the same as fire hidden and invisible. Likewise, God is hidden while you are not praying or meditating and appears when you start to pray and meditate. He does not come out if you do not meditate, but is actually around even when invisible.

In the ritual of homa, many things are offered to the god of fire, among which there are sometimes dirty things. But fire takes whatever is offered. If you want pure gold, you just put gold into fire to rid it of impurities, resulting in pure gold. God also takes everything and cleanses the dirt of the devotee's heart.

Regardless of the size of flame, fire is always fire. Likewise, God reveals Himself a bit when a devotee meditates a bit, and more when s/he does more, and a lot when s/he does a lot. Moreover, the colour and size of flames change depending on what burns. Fire gets big, small, red or blue depending on what it is consuming. Likewise, God is present in everything and takes the form of all things, but God is God, and does not

change.

The Moon

The moon changes its state from a full to new moon, but does not change in nature. People change from being infant to young and old, while the inner-self or Atman does not change. Avadhuta learnt that from the moon.

The Sun

The scripture reads that the sun takes moisture out of everything and returns it later. Moisture makes clouds, from which it rains, then the sun dries the rain. Likewise, holy people eat and listen to music, but do not get attached or keep anything. On the other hand ordinary people want to keep good things, money and many possessions.

There is the only one sun here, but ponds, lakes and pools reflect it. We each have Atman in ourselves, but it is just a reflection. There is only one Atman. Also, the sun does not get affected and is the same and pure all the time, whether it is reflected in clean or dirty water.

The Pigeon

There is a story about pigeons. A male pigeon fell in love with a female one. They got married and had baby pigeons. While the parent pigeons were out for food, a hunter came and put up a net and captured the squabs. The mother was so sad to see the condition her little ones when she came back that she rushed to them without much thought and was herself caught in the net. After a while the father came back, and when he saw his family caught in the net he also rushed to them and got tangled in the net. This story demonstrates that if we do not think, discriminate or control our feelings and are just subject to emotions, we will have big problems. We should avoid getting emotional and try to discriminate even when we are in pain or sorrow. Otherwise, not only is the problem unsolved, but it gets bigger.

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The Python

The python is a big snake. Ordinary snakes go around hunting, but the python stays still at one place and eats passing prey without thinking whether or not it is tasty. In India, monks in ashrams have cooks who serve food for them, while those living independently walk around alone begging for food. Also there are some monks who stay where they are, just waiting until someone comes to give food. They are happy, however, whether or not they can have food. They actually do not beg for themselves, but depend entirely on God. Avadhuta learnt this from the python.

The Sea

Next is the sea. Many rivers flow into the sea, which never floods but stays the same. Human beings should keep their mind quiet while having good or bad experiences. If you do not react when desires pop up in your mind or try to meet them, you can keep calm. When you seek to meet desires, the mind loses balance. This he learnt from the sea.

The Moth

The moth likes the brightness and colour of fire and rushes to embrace it, only to burn to death in the flames. If we do not control our sense of sight with regard to all pretty and attractive things, like scenic views, consumer goods and beautiful people, we get attached. He learnt this from the moth.

The Elephant

Male elephants like touching female ones. When a male finds a female in the distance he runs towards her, without discriminating or thinking, in order to get closer. However, there are two problems. One is, since another male wants to touch her too, the two males have to fight. The other is, hunters use a female elephant as bait to entrap him. He rushes for the touch of the female without knowing it and falls into a pit. There are people who try to lure others secretly, but wise people carefully control their senses and are not

deceived. He learnt this from the elephant.

The Deer

Deer like the melodious sound of flutes. Hunters know that and lure it with the sound of a flute. When a deer hears it, it comes nearer to the source of the sound and falls into the trap. When we listen to secular songs and music and sing karaoke, we have secular thoughts. He learnt this from the deer.

The Fish

When fish find bait on the hook of fishing line, they do not discriminate but bite and get caught. Problems occur to us when we do not control our tongue. Many people die not because they have no food, but because they only eat what they like. He learnt this from the fish.

The Honeybee

Honeybees collect nectar from different flowers. Likewise, monks work on different scriptures, think and learn what is good in them. However, there is something we have to be careful about. Lotus flowers smell so nice and their nectar tastes so good that bees keep drinking it all day long. If they linger inside the flower until it closes in the evening however, they are trapped inside

and die. Likewise, if we do not think at all but get attached, the same thing happens with us. Wise bees fly away after they drink a bit of nectar and get happy. He learnt two things from the bee: only find good things in scriptures and see good things in people without criticising. Attachment leads us to death.

The Honey Gather

Honeybees collect flower nectar and make hives to keep honeycombs of honey. The honeybee does not even enjoy its stock of honey which other honey gatherers take, leaving nothing behind. On the other hand, bumble bees do not make and keep honey, so they do not have to worry. If we do not keep things for the future, we have nothing to worry about.

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Pingala

The Pingala was a fine looking courtesan who waited for customers. She wanted rich people to come, but no one visited her even by midnight. Tired and disappointed, she started to introspect. "I am very unhappy and despised. I have desires, but never have them met. I depend on others for money and pleasures which is not real happiness." Until then Pingala had not realised that one can only get real happiness by thinking of God. In real pain and sorrow she understood for the first time that one cannot be happy with secular pleasures. She thought, "From now, I only depend on God for happiness and not on others or money." As she could introspect and discriminate, she decided to stop living like before and hence called on God. Then she gained knowledge and felt inner peace. By renouncing all her desires, she got real happiness instead. Desires cause enormous pain and sorrow, while we can have real inner peace without desires. That is a great message learnt by Avadhuta from observing Pingala.

The Child

Children are not affected by Trigunas of sattva, rajas and tamas. Tamasic means being lazy, dull, dark and low. Rajasic is being active, but working too much. Sattvic is a balanced state. Children become tamasic, rajasic and sattvic at times, but they do not stay at one state for a long time. They are only affected by one such state for a short time. He learnt that one could not obtain eternal bliss without transcending all of these gunas.

The Maiden

A maiden lived with her family in a house. One day, when her parents were out and she was alone at home, some guests visited. Since they wanted lunch, she went to prepare something but found no white rice was there. So she had to thresh some rice. While she was doing so, her bracelets made a big noise. Not wanting the guest to know she was out of rice, she took off her bracelets one by one. At last when she was only wearing one on each wrist it became quiet. By observing that, Avadhuta learnt that living with others may disturb spiritual practice, even two people living together may waste time chatting, but living alone meant tranquillity. He learnt that if one wanted a serious spiritual practice, one had to live alone.

The Arrow-Maker

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• Thought of the Month •

**It is better to light one small candle
than to curse the darkness**

... Confucius

In order to make perfect arrows, one has to be very focused. An arrow-maker was busy concentrating on making his arrows when a marching band passed playing loudly, but he was so focused on the work at hand that he did not hear it. When we are meditating on God we have to be focused on God. Otherwise we cannot have a deep meditation. Avadhuta learnt this from the arrow-maker.

The Snake

Snakes do not dig holes or burrow, but live in those other animals have made. Since they do not have their own house or do anything for themselves, they have no attachment. When you own something, you get attached. Keeping nothing for oneself is real renunciation.

The Spider

Spiders build a web from themselves and can draw it back inside themselves later. God creates the entire universe from within Himself, is in it, yet not of it, and finally draws it back into Himself.

The Brahmara Kita

This insect, the brahmara kita, becomes so scared when attacked that it keeps dwelling on its attacker, a wasp, while being brought to its nest. It focused on the wasp so intently that finally it was transformed into one. If I am so focused on thinking about an object, I will become it. Likewise, if we keep focused on thinking of God, we will become Godlike and holy.

The Osprey

Lastly, the osprey, is a bird like a sea hawk or fish eagle that eats fish. If they successfully steal a fish from a shop or grab one from the sea, they take it elsewhere to eat slowly. But if an osprey sees another one flying with a fish in its mouth, it starts chasing the other bird.

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Avadhuta's Twenty-four Gurus (from page 6)

The pursued tries to fly away, but the other one follows closely. It can neither eat the fish nor relax. Likewise, if we seek secular pleasure, fear, worry and disappointment follow. If we do not, we have no pain.

That is the story of "Avadhuta Had Twenty-four Gurus". Devotees may not find it possible to follow the lessons of all 24 gurus, but if we try to understand and make an effort to follow these teachings as much as possible, we can develop ourselves spiritually and finally attain liberation. •

News in Brief **Events in November 2011**

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

Akanda Japam:

Participants meditate for an hour or more each, alternating continuously in a silent and holy mood. You may join at an hour of your convenience for a one hour interval - but more than one hour participation is most welcome. Beginners are also welcome. Please contact us.

Date: November 23, 2011 (Wednesday-a National holiday), 05:00 to 20:00

Venue: Kyokai Centre Shrine in Zushi

Note: Meals are to be served.

Contact: Please inform us of the time slots we can schedule you for to Mr. Mitamura (090-7194-1274) by November 20.

Satsanga in Hamamatsu

Date: November 3rd, 2011

Please Contact: Sugihara (090-8964-7362)

Satsanga in Kumamoto

Date: November 12th, 2011

Please Contact: Pushpa (090-3073-4063)

Satsanga in Aso

Date: November 13th, 2011

Please Contact: Ravi (080-5266-3399)

Satsanga in Yamagata

Date: November 23rd, 2011

Please Contact: Takahashi 023-645-3282

Satsanga in Osaka

Place: The Osaka Education Center

Date: November 26th, 2011

Time: 13:30~17:00

Please contact: Morioka 0744-22-6658

Programme and Registration Form at:

<http://www.vedantajp.com/スケジュール/特別プログラム/>

Photos from
● **Kali Puja at Zushi** ●

October 26 19:00-21:30

Puja, Arati, Pushpanjali, Homa, Prasad





• A Story to Remember •

The Stairway

A man came upon a tall tower and stepped inside to find it all dark. As he groped around, he came upon a circular staircase. Curious to know where it led to, he began to climb and as he climbed, he sensed a growing uneasiness in his heart.

So he looked behind him and was horrified to see that each time he climbed a step, the previous one fell off and disappeared. Before him the stairs wound upward and he had no idea where they led; while behind him yawned an enormous black emptiness.

... Fr. Anthony de Mello

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