



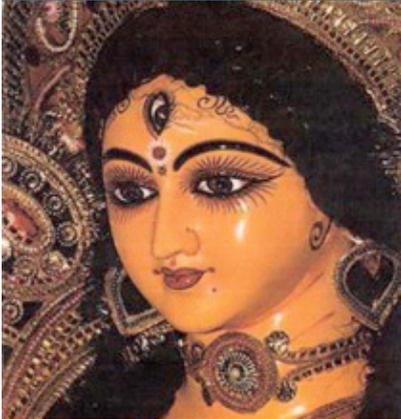
October 2010 - Volume 08 Number 09

日本ヴェーダーンタ協会ニュースレター

The Vedanta Kyokai

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

Monthly Calendar



Sri Durga Puja - Tokyo 2010

Otabunkanomori Hall
October 16, 2010

Birthdays

Swami Abhedananda
Saturday, Oct 2
Swami Akhandananda
Thursday, Oct 7

Kyokai Events

• September Zushi Retreat •

Sunday, October 17th

All, with family and friends,
are welcome to attend!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

“The secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice. To be good and do good - that is the whole of religion.”

... Swami Vivekananda

“Sing the songs of joy to the Lord, serve the Name of the Lord, and become the servant of His servants.”

... Guru Nanak

August Zushi Retreat

The Divine Touch of Sri Ramakrishna

Conclusion of a two-part talk by Swami Medhasananda

Massage - Its Implication

We shall now see an example of a devotee touching Sri Ramakrishna on an entirely different occasion. This happened during one of the first visits to Sri Ramakrishna by Rakhai Chandra Ghosh (later Swami Brahmananda). Rakhai was the proud son of a very rich man and was used to having things done for him by his servants at home. When Sri Ramakrishna asked him to please massage his feet, Rakhai refused saying that this was a servant's duty. He complained that he had come to hear the Master speak of God, not to do servants' chores. But Sri Ramakrishna persisted and finally Rakhai gave in. The moment he began massaging he saw Mother Kali suddenly appear and after circling the Master a while She merged into the body of Sri Ramakrishna. Rakhai was stunned speechless and Sri Ramakrishna teased him: “Rakhai, do you now understand the effect of massaging the feet of a holy man?”

There are many instances in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna where he requests a massage from someone and one may well ask what is the significance of these requests.

[cont page 2]

In This Issue:

- Monthly Calendar ... page 1
- Thus Spake ... page 1
- The Touch of Sri Ramakrishna
The conclusion of a two-part talk

by Swami Medhasananda ... page 1

- September Zushi Retreat
Krishna Birth Celebration - Guest
Speaker Madhu Mangala Das,
President, ISKON, Tokyo ... page 4
- Story to Remember ... page 5
- Namaste India 2010 ... page 5

• Vedanta Society of the Philippines
Participates in Manila Book Fair
... page 5

• Golden Jubilee Closing Ceremony
Address by Prof Yasuji Yamaguchi,
Faculty of Literature, Meiji
University ... page 8

• Thought of the Month ... page 10

Touch [from page 1]

On the face of it one reason is obviously that he is simply tired, but behind this was his desire to shower grace on the devotee or bestow an awakening. Swami Adbhutanandaji (formerly known as Latu) never attended school and was illiterate. He worked as a servant and would become a saint. He spent some years serving the Master and among his duties was massaging the Master upon request. On one such occasion Sri Ramakrishna asked, "Latu, do you know what your Ramji (Latu's chosen deity) is doing now?" Thinking Rama is God, how is it possible know what He is doing, Latu would answer, "No, I do not." To this Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Your Ramji is now passing a camel through the eye of a needle." Later Adbhutanandaji explained the significance of this remark by saying, "My level of spirituality was very low, but Sri Ramakrishna transmitted a lot of spiritual power to me through a touch." This is what was meant by the seemingly impossible task of passing a camel through the eye of a needle.

The Wrestling Challenge

Swami Vijnanananda, a pre-monastic architect and engineer by trade, designed the Ramakrishna Temple at Belur Math at the bidding of Swami Vivekananda who gave him the idea. He had visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar as a young man. On one such visit Sri Ramakrishna was talking with a group of devotees and visitors and gradually as they departed Vijnananandaji, then Hari Prasanna Chatterjee, found that he had been left alone with the Master. Suddenly, Sri Ramakrishna asked, "Do you know wrestling?" Of course this question surprised young Hari coming from a holy man, but in fact he had some wrestling experience and answered affirmatively. "OK, let us wrestle then," came the reply. At this time Ramakrishna was in a rather weakened and emaciated condition and Vijnananandaji was in his prime, but the young man thought that if this man was intent on challenging him, he would oblige. As his hands pushed the Master towards the wall he felt the Master's hand firmly on his shoulder and that his strength was leaving him. At the same moment an intense feeling of joy began to swell and overwhelm him. At this Sri Ramakrishna laughed, "So, I am defeated. You have won." Later on in recalling this incident Swami Vijnananandaji would say that it was not he that had defeated Sri Ramakrishna, but rather Sri Ramakrishna who had defeated him as he had to accept Sri Ramakrishna as his mentor.

In this case too, from the outside this appears to be the simple act of fun, a wrestling challenge, when in actuality Sri Ramakrishna intended to bestow grace through the act of wrestling. This is why the thoughts and deeds of God-men such as Sri Ramakrishna are so difficult to comprehend. Unless He, Himself, explains or the intelligent devotee realizes the meaning or intent, it is nearly impossible for the common man to comprehend the actions of a Sri Ramakrishna. Here again, had Swami Vijnananandaji not explained the matter an outsider could not understand the deeper meaning of such encounters.

Swami Saradanandaji, as the first General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and later the author of *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, took many burdens and

responsibilities upon himself in the early days of the Order. On one occasion Sri Ramakrishna suddenly sat on the lap of the young Sarat remarking that he was just testing how much weight, how much of a load, the future monk could carry. One may wonder whether the Master was not only testing Saranandaji's strength, but transmitting power for the tasks ahead.

Once Sri Ramakrishna was visiting a devotee's house on the occasion of a religious festival. At the house spiritual discussions were going on and devotees were speaking of God and God's grace and the like and there was a scholar of scripture present who was a proclaimed atheist. Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna touched the scholar and asked how after all his study could he not believe in God. In Sri Ramakrishna's grasp the man immediately recanted and protested that he did indeed believe in God. Here the touch changed an atheist into a believer. Ramakrishna would say that it was the size of the ego that kept many from believing in God and that the ego was the greatest obstacle in the path of belief in God. At those times when Sri Ramakrishna chose to touch such people, their egos would immediately deflate and they would then believe in God. This is one more reason we can find instances of touching in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

Transmitting by Mere Thought

Earlier, we cited a few examples of how Sri Ramakrishna gave spiritual experiences through touch. Then the alcoholic Kalipada's very nature was changed by a touch. Another example involves Yogin-Ma, who was a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and would later live with and serve Holy Mother. Sometimes Sri Ramakrishna would visit Yogin-Ma at her house, but for some reason her brother did not like these visits. In that neighborhood lived Manmatha, a ruffian that some would engage as an enforcer to settle local disputes, and on one occasion Manmatha was hired by Yogin's brother Hiralal to threaten Sri Ramakrishna. However after hearing a few words from the Master, this Manmatha fell at Sri Ramakrishna's feet begging forgiveness and to be saved. The Master told him to visit Dakshineswar and later the young Swami Akhandanandaji, Manmatha's friend, brought him there and reintroduced him to Sri Ramakrishna. As Manmatha stood before him Sri Ramakrishna touched a finger to his muscled arm noting how strong he was. With this touch the Master began showering his grace on Manmatha who would become a very saintly person.

In addition to these examples, Sri Ramakrishna could also transmit spiritual power by a mere wish or by being in someone's presence. One day Tarak, a young devotee who later became Swami Shivanandaji, was deeply immersed in meditation in the Panchavati, a grove of trees at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna practiced spiritual disciplines, when the Master came and stood and looked at him. Unaware that Sri Ramakrishna was there and looking at him at the time, Shivanandaji later said that he felt a tremendous spiritual power stirring deep within his being and the awakening of his 'kundalini' (latent spiritual

[cont page 3]

Touch [from page 2]

power). Shivanandaji also proclaimed that Sri Ramakrishna could awaken one's 'kundalini' by a mere wish.

Vivekananda's brother, Mahendranath Datta, wrote a beautiful book titled, *Sri Ramakrishner Anudhyan* (Sacred Memories of Sri Ramakrishna). In this work Mahendranath claims that if he wanted to, Sri Ramakrishna would radiate a spiritual power all around him while he was in the state of samadi, creating a spiritual zone. Moreover, if one who had any measure of belief in God, entered into this zone, he would feel a spiritual uplifting. So here again a physical touch is not necessary to transmit spirituality.

Touching to Reverse the Effect

Sri Ramakrishna could also stop the flow of spirituality with a touch. For example, at gatherings for spiritual discussion and kirtan (singing of religious songs) occasionally someone's kundalini would become so spiritually supercharged that they would appear to lose consciousness. If he felt it necessary, the Master would stop the rising kundalini with a touch, turning it downward and returning the devotee to normal consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna would also touch someone on the chest and tell them to go to meditation. Their meditation would be so deep and continuous, that he would also touch them to stop the effect so that they could return home. Sri Ramakrishna would decide when and how and who he awakened, because if the devotee is not sufficiently prepared and the kundalini is awakened, many problems may result. The body and mind of such a candidate should be purified by spiritual practice.

There is another incident wherein Sri Ramakrishna's nephew Hriday would practice meditation and other disciplines long and hard for realization. At this the Master would say that Hriday's service to him would be enough and that he needn't practice so strongly, but Hriday would not listen to his advice. As it happened, Hriday did have a spiritual experience and began shouting that Sri Ramakrishna was the Lord Incarnate and he himself was his divine attendant. And why was He wasting His time confined in Dakshineswar and that the two of them should roam the world preaching and proclaiming this advent. Sri Ramakrishna begged him to be quiet, but Hriday continued ranting so much so that an embarrassed Sri Ramakrishna touched him saying, "Mother, make him inert!" Immediately, Hriday returned to his normal state. "Oh Uncle," cried Hriday, "what have you done to me? I was in such a high spiritual state and now you have made me dull!" Sri Ramakrishna answered, "You rascal, I asked you to be quiet. I have had many deep spiritual experiences, but I don't shout about them. Now with such a minor awakening you are creating such noise. I told you that your service to me is enough for you, but you pay me no heed!"

The Painful Touch

In India we have a tradition of taking the dust from the feet of a holy person as a show of respect and to receive blessings. As we know from the Gospel and other sources, when a pure person touched the feet of Sri Ramakrishna or

Holy Mother they would not be negatively affected, but if the person was very secular in thought and deed, they would suffer pain at that touch. The difference between Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi being that Sri Ramakrishna would not contain or restrict his spiritual experiences and would express them, even if painful ones brought embarrassment to some. Sri Sarada Devi on the other hand, as a manifestation of Mahamaya, could hide and subdue both spiritual ecstasy and those discomforts suffered at the hands of others.

Once a older maid-servant, who had led an immoral life in her youth, was visiting the Kali Temple and touched Sri Ramakrishna's feet causing a burning sensation requiring many washings of Ganga water. Then again, after watching one of Girish Chandra Ghosh's spiritual dramas, when actresses who in their private lives were rather immoral saluted him by touching his feet, he had no negative reaction to this touch at all. Why he had such different reactions to the touch of the impure is hard to fathom. But perhaps the fact that these actresses had just been immersed in playing the roles of devotees and goddesses minutes earlier and were inwardly pure, and that they had sincerely sought his blessings, had played a part. Maybe watching the play had prepared him for their touch, while he had been in a different state and unprepared for the touch of the old maid. It is only conjecture on our part, but it does bring to mind that famous incident in the life of Jesus where he touched and transformed Mary Magdalene, a woman of ill-repute, as a similar example.

Relevance and Benefit Today

What is the value of this 'touching by the Master' that took place so long ago to us now? We are not about to meet Sri Ramakrishna or Holy Mother, so what is the relevance in our lives of explaining these stories to us? Most of us have a photo of Sri Ramakrishna or Holy Mother or a picture or statuette of Buddha at home. Holy Mother said that if we deeply believe, worship and meditate on that image or photograph as God, that a special manifestation occurs in that particular photo or image. It is no longer just a piece of paper or clay or wood, God resides there. Mother Kali's image at Dakshineswar was made of stone, but due to Sri Ramakrishna's intense belief, love and worship, Mother Kali actually manifested Herself in that image. If our faith becomes strong enough, then Sri Ramakrishna will reside in his photo kept by us. If we then touch that photo with faith, some benefit will come.

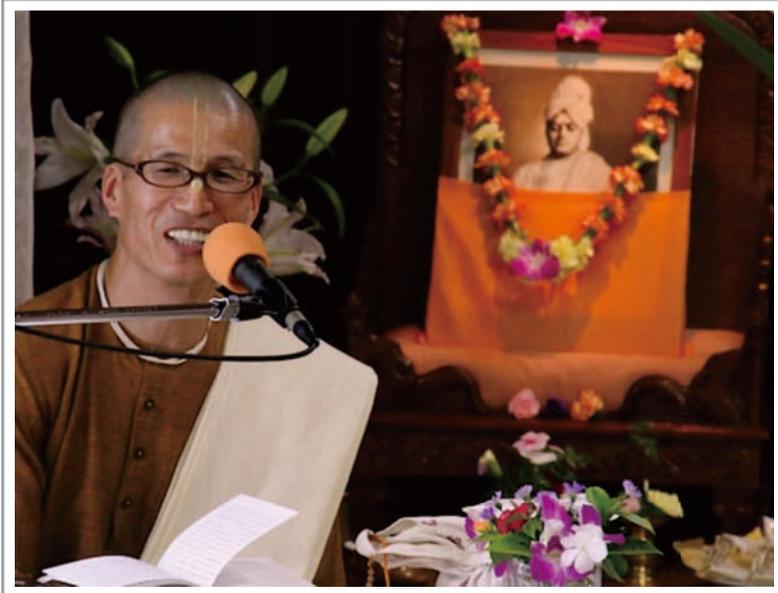
In India we have many images and celebrations offering to Mother Durga and Mother Kali and others. At the end of these elaborate ceremonies the image is immersed in a river, but before this the devotees touch the feet of the the image with great reverence and faith. They do not consider the statue as being clay or stone, but as that actual manifestation of God. Why? To receive grace and purification or some other spiritual benefit from this touch. This is the relevance of our talk and how we may benefit from such a divine touch. •

[See the September Issue for Part I of *The Divine Touch of Sri Ramakrishna*.]

September Zushi Retreat Sri Krishna Birth Celebration

Since Krishna Janmashtami fell on September 1, 2010 according to the Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac, the Vedanta Society of Japan held its Krishna Birth Celebration on the 3rd Sunday of September at its monthly retreat in Zushi City. This year the Society was most pleased that Reverend Madhu Mangala Das, President, ISKON, Tokyo graciously accepted an invitation to speak to the congregation on the topic: 'The Practice of the Teachings of Sri Krishna as Contained in the Bhagavatam to Attain Abiding Peace and Joy'.

At 11AM the ceremony began with a Vedic Mantra followed by readings from the Bhagavad Gita. Guests of Reverend Das led a kirtan and the reverend's talk followed as summarized below:



“Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at this Sri Krishna birth anniversary celebration. My name is Madhu Mangala Das. It is a bit too long so just call me Madhu. I was initiated in 1992 and named after one of Krishna’s friends, who was funny, as I used to be a comedian.

“We all just chanted Section 12 of the Bhagavad Gita together, where Krishna says you can start to practice bhakti yoga at any stage. How kind and generous of Him. He first says you always have to think of Him and put your intelligence toward Him. That is very difficult, however. He then recommends spiritual practice so that we can do so. He next suggests working for Him, if you cannot continue or carry out such practice. He then advises that if you do not even want to work for Him, you can work for something good; and that if you do not even like that, then you can start to learn spiritual knowledge.”

“There is a scripture called the Srimad Bhagavatam. If you were to label the Gita as high school, then the Bhagavatam would be university. It consists of 18,000 verses in 12 volumes. It has lots of examples of how different types and levels of devotees offered bhakti to Krishna and accomplished themselves. As an example, there is a story of Dhruva. He was the son of a king but his mother was downgraded from a queen to a servant for some reasons. He decided to perform spiritual exercises at five, when he got furious with insulting words from the second wife to his father, the new queen. He finally achieved liberation, when Vishnu appeared saying He came to fulfill his desire. Dhruva, however, regretted his initial intention to have a bigger kingdom than his king father for vengeance as he was fascinated by the beauty of Vishnu; and realizing that his original wish was not worth seeking, only wanted to respect and meditate on Him. Vishnu nevertheless insisted on making his wish come true and gave him a planet as a reward of his strict spiritual practice, this ‘planet’ is the Pole Star.”

“From Dhruva’s example you can learn a lot of spiritual things. In particular, I would like to highlight the importance of being honest to yourself and your guru. When he was walking to the woods for spiritual exercise, he met Narada, who kindly advised him, “Be glad when you meet someone at a spiritually higher level than yours; be friendly to someone at the same level; and be kind and helpful to someone at a lower level. Respect everyone from your heart and you will achieve liberation at the end of this life.” Dhruva, however, did not agree and said, “I understand what you said and appreciate it. But it is for someone with sattva guna and doesn’t suit me as I belong to Kshatriya.” So Narada changed his instructions to those more suitable for Dhruva, who followed them and successfully liberated himself as shortly as six months thereafter.”

“As you see here, it is very important for the guru-disciple relationship to know where you are and how you feel and honestly tell that to your guru. Then the guru can provide the best instructions for you. If you get lost and phone someone for help they can not give you directions, if you do not know where you are. For instance, Srimad Bhagavatam, a spiritual encyclopedia, discusses the material world in Volume 1, as readers must know about the world from where they are, or their starting point.” •

• A Story to Remember •

Communion

When it was certain that the Master was going to die, his disciples wished to give him a worthy funeral. The Master heard of this and said, "With the sky and the earth for my coffin; the sun and moon and stars for my burial regalia; and all creation to escort me to the grave -- could I desire anything more ceremonious and impressive"?

He asked to be left unburied, but the disciples wouldn't hear of it, protesting that he would be eaten by the animals and birds.

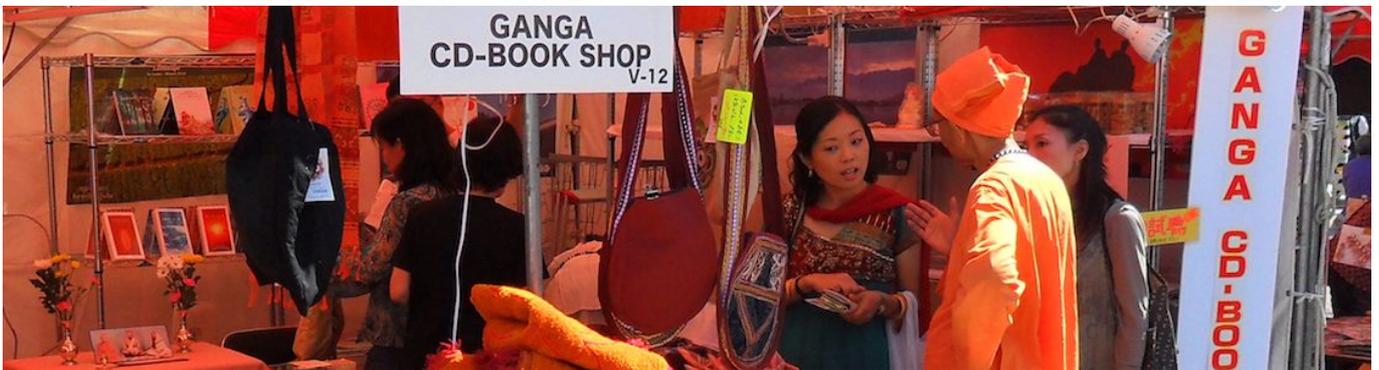
"Then make sure you place my staff near me that I might drive them away", said the Master with a smile.

"How would you manage that? You will be unconscious".

"In which case it will not matter, will it, that I be devoured by the birds and beasts".

... Short Wisdom Stories by Anthony de Mello

Vedanta Society's Ganga Book Shop at a Very Successful Namaste India 2010



The Vedanta Society of Japan participated in "Namaste India 2010" festival on the 25th and 26th, the last week-end of September. This was the fourth participation by the Society to such event, which every year attracts thousands and thousands of visitors to the Yoyogi Park Event Grounds in Tokyo.

During the days preceding the event preparations had been going on at the Zushi Center with books, incense sticks, pictures, mats, bags and a variety of other items being prepared and packed, including several display cabinets and shelves. All these materials filled a rented van which was loaded in the evening before the opening of the

festival. Then early the next morning on Saturday, September 25, a small group of volunteers, led by Swami Medhasananda, left Zushi bound for Yoyogi Park, where many more volunteers were already waiting.

Festival officials had already arranged the many canvas covered booths and electricity supply cables during a very stormy night and very early morning hours and fears were that the storm would dampen the festival at least until noon. But there was little time to worry about the weather and the task at hand was to assemble the shelves and display all the different items to their best advantage in the

[cont page 6]



Namaste India 2010 [from page 5]

booth reserved for the Vedanta Society of Japan.

The job was almost completed, including a small Shrine with pictures of the Vedanta Society trinity of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda, by 10:00 AM, when the first visitors started pouring into the festival compound. To everyone's relief bright sunshine surprisingly appeared shortly afterwards, welcomed by exhibitors and visitors alike.

From that moment to 8:00 in the evening and then again for the whole of the following day, Sunday, a continuous flow of visitors kept crowding the Namaste India compound and many stopped at the stand of the Vedanta Society of Japan and purchased different items. Hundreds of copies of a brochure describing the activities of the Society were distributed to these visitors, together with a catalogue listing the articles from India and Japan available from the Society.

A number of volunteers helped handling the crowd and the buyers and a computerized system recorded sales in a speedy and efficient way. Volunteers were organized in shifts so that each could get some time off to rest for a while and enjoy some tasty Indian food available in many

stands run by Indian Restaurants in Tokyo in a section of the compound reserved for sales of food and drink with large seating areas that remained crushed to overflowing with visitors throughout. For the duration of the festival a cultural program took place at the outdoor theater located inside the Namaste India compound. The program included Indian music, Indian classical dance and even contemporary "Bollywood" style dancing. All the performances were followed with great interest by audiences so large that it was often impossible to find an available seat and people had to stand at the back of the theater just to get a glimpse.

Shortly after closing time, scheduled for 8:00 PM of Sunday, September 26, the rain started again, but many exhibitors did not mind as the weather had been quite enjoyable during the event and had encouraged throngs of visitors to enjoy the festival, which surely had been very successful for all. The operations of dismantling the shelves and stands and packing up the unsold items took place in a happy mood despite the rain.

Group pictures of Swami Medhasananda surrounded by the volunteers were then taken just before the event came to an end, followed by Vedic chanting of Purnamadah Purmanidam.

Contributed by Enrico Colombo





Vedanta Society of the Philippines Participates in Manila International Book Fair 2010

For the fourth consecutive year the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines participated in the Manila International Book Fair held from September 15 to September 19. This year the Book Fair took place in the huge exhibition facility called “SMX” which is located next to the Mall of Asia in Manila, facing Manila Bay.

Every year this fair is visited by many thousands of people, including numerous school groups. Books of all kinds can be found at the fair; among religious and philosophical books one can find titles exhibited by several Christian organizations of various denominations, two Buddhist exhibitors, one Muslim exhibitor, one booth by the Theosophical Society of the Philippines and, of course, the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines, which presented some 140 titles for a total of 645 books.

The English language is very common in the Philippines so the majority of the books displayed at the fair were in English, although there was also a

significant portion of books in Tagalog. Nearly all the books exhibited by The Ramakrishna Vedanta Society were English titles, imported from India, but we also presented our first book published in Tagalog, the Filipino version of A Short Life of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother translated by Professor Flordeliza S. Flancia.

For the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Philippines the fair was more of an occasion to make itself known to the general Filipino public, rather than to make a profit from book sales. In fact, we did sell about 150 books and many people were made aware of the existence of the Manila Center and were invited to visit and participate in our activities. All visitors who showed interest in the Society’s books received a leaflet about the Society and a small gift consisting of a bookmark containing contact information about the Society nicely packaged together with a few incense sticks. •

Contributed by Enrico Colombo



The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter - October 2010 Vol. 08 No. 09



Vedanta Society's Golden Jubilee Closing Ceremony Address 30 May 2010
The Influence of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda on Sri Aurobindo
By Professor Yasuji Yamaguchi, Faculty of Literature, Meiji University

Before I begin I would like to express my sincere good wishes to the Vedanta Society of Japan on this occasion of the Golden Jubilee of their founding, and I convey my gratitude to them for kindly inviting me to this function.

I have specialized in Western Philosophy, and ever since the days of my youth I have struggled greatly to acquire a total grasp of the essence of man from diverse perspectives, and from a wide-ranging philosophical and human standpoint. Yet, I was unable to produce any fruit, and I only ended up with a feeling of frustration at myself.

Despite this I was drawn towards Indian Philosophy, and last year I was finally able to publish a translation of that work of Sri Aurobindo's that has been lauded as a monument of modern Indian thought, namely, *The Life Divine—A Philosophy of Spiritual Evolution*. Perhaps the reason why I was invited here today has something to do with that issue.

Why is it that a person like me who has specialized in Western Philosophy, felt drawn towards Indian Thought? I would like to explain this matter a little.

Western Benchmarks of Truth

As we know, in Western Science, with regard to any learning, it is analytical reasoning and sense confirmation that constitute the highest tribunals the truth. In other words, an object we cannot visualize with the mind or ascertain with the body is considered to be the same as something non-existent. However, philosophy is a study that is expected to confront such enigmatic questions as, 'Who am I, Where have I come from and where am I going, What is it that lies beyond this world, Where would I reach if I were to urge my consciousness into the utmost depths, Where would I arrive if I were to direct my consciousness to the maximum height,' and so on.

In situations like this, if we try to grasp human beings as a totality, if we try to seek a verdict on this issue within the limits of this spectrum, we would have no choice but to wholly discard factors like our innermost thoughts, the yearnings of our souls, the radiance of life, the charm of simplicity, and so on. Notwithstanding this, I began the study of Existential Philosophy and Psychopathology, and later from the Science of Art I tried my hand at Ethology, Evolutionary Biology, and other such disciplines, all with the desire to acquire an intellectual grasp of the totality of mankind. Yet, all I experienced was a feeling of incapacity at my inability to advance even a single step, a feeling that was reminiscent of the service of the soul mentioned by Socrates.

Reason as Highest Ideal

One may say however that this feeling of helplessness that I had, was the same as that which has been afflicting Modern philosophy in the West, since the 17th century. Philosophy in the 17th and 18th century viewed reason as the highest of man's faculties. It sought to get a grasp of mankind from the angle of Idealism, viewing man as a creature of infinite nobility. However, on entering the industrial society of the 19th century, this Idealism was pathetically transformed. Basing itself once again on material reality, it began to view the surrounding world of the senses as the ultimate tribunal of truth, and it began to urge with even greater vigor, a pragmatic notion of mankind. Yet, after the middle of the 19th century, when the contradictions that afflict modern society began to emerge in a variety of ways, people who were mired in various serious social concerns began to gradually and deeply awaken to the fact that the basic anxiety lying in man's unconscious, was not something that could be solved by mere reason or sensitivity. In course of time, the idea developed that the key to mankind lay hidden in a place that was beyond the reach of both the mind and body. This way of thinking developed into Existential Philosophy, after which, it bore fruit and gave rise to the notion that it was not so much in his consciousness, but rather, in the much more deep-seated unconscious of man, that the key to the problem lay concealed. Such thinking gave rise to Psychopathology and other related fields, and in the 20th century, we might say that in virtually all the Humanities, there arose at the same time and hastily within their relevant disciplines, an urge to investigate the structure of this unconscious world.

Shackles of Western Philosophy

In this situation, Modern Western Philosophy tenaciously probed the notion of Existence or the notion of the Unconscious. Yet, since it refused to accept the fact that the roots of such notions extended towards life, and particularly towards the life of the cosmos, and also since it refused to accept the fact that such notions arose from the Spirit, and that too from the Spirit of God, it could do nothing more than grieve over the impotence of reason and unreliability of sensitivity, and was finally unable to resolve that basic problem of mankind. This impotence was explicated in a refined and splendid manner by a branch of Modern Thought, referred to as Post-modernism. Post-modernism proclaimed the death of Modernism, and it is an exceedingly profound Philosophy that denounced Europeanism and Rationalism. It explicated the diversity of the infinite

[cont page 9]

Arubindo [from page 8]

and relativity of truth when viewed from a human standpoint, and yet, despite the fact that it asserted the law of transience and self-effacement, it was unable to become the type of philosophy we hoped for, owing to the fact that it did not deal with the eternity of the soul, the existence of God, or even of the Eightfold Noble Path of Buddhism.

In this situation, with the desire to overcome both these restrictions in Western Philosophy and my own feeling of incapacity, I, from my youth, was genuinely and at my own pace drawn to the person of the Buddha, who in a tranquil and lucid manner indicated a Way, and to the personality of Christ Jesus, whose words to the oppressed resembled the emission of fire. On one occasion though, from a book which I at intervals used to read, I came across the figure of that spiritual genius drunk with the love of God, namely Ramakrishna, a person sweet like honey and fresh as the morning dew. By my familiarity with eminent figures such as these, I tried at least to subdue my incapacity by seeking comfort in Art, especially the religious music of the East and West. Yet, there was nothing I could do about this academic impotence. So, after my acquaintance with the two great works of Daniel Dennet who probed the mystery of consciousness and the mystery of life from the perspective of Scientific Evolution, I at length turned to the tradition of Indian Vedantic Philosophy and studied the great work of Sri Aurobindo, who dealt with the philosophy of Spiritual Evolution.

Revisiting Aurobindo

In my youth I had started to read Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* along with a friend, namely the researcher Mr. Miyazawa Kenji. However, to a person like me who knew nothing other than Western-type Rationalism, the concepts were so odd, and the use of words so abstruse, that I finally consigned it to my bookshelf. Yet, since I was unable to blot out the fear that unless I actually read and adopted this work my philosophical research would forever remain incomplete, I eventually extricated myself from the spell of Western Philosophy and Reason, and began this study in earnest. This time though, for some reason or other, I realized that every word written in the book was something that I myself had wanted to write, and everything that was said in it, was what I myself had wanted to say. I had the

profound feeling that at long last I had begun to relish the joy of learning.

Incidentally, since Aurobindo is virtually unknown in Japan, I shall now explain a little about him by way of introduction. He was born in 1872 in Calcutta, the son of a doctor who had returned from England. His father was an anglophile. He was eager that his son should by all means succeed in the British Higher Civil Service Examination that was oriented to people of the British-ruled colonies, and hence, when Aurobindo was seven years old, he sent him along with his two elder brothers to England. Thanks to his innate and matchless spirit of enquiry and power of cognition, Aurobindo was happily able to withstand the trials he faced in England. Hence, after concluding his studies at the famous St. Paul's High School he successfully entered Cambridge University, from where he graduated after studying the Classics. However, thinking of the independence struggle that had assumed concrete dimensions by that time, he boldly spurned the Civil Service Examination and returned



to India, where he worked as a political officer in the native Indian state of Baroda, while at the same time making secretive preparations for an insurgent movement. In due course however he moved to Calcutta, which at the time was the Mecca of political activity, and there he earned renown as an extremist leader in the field of political journalism. However, since he was accused of being the architect of a terrorist plot involving an

attempt to assassinate a high-powered individual, he was arrested and forced to undergo a year of imprisonment.

While in prison, he pursued Indian studies. He studied Vedantic philosophy, the Bhagavad Gita, and the practice of Yoga, all of which he had begun earlier on his return to India, and as a result he attained an incredibly high level of spirituality. His conversion from revolutionary to religionist was sudden. A year later he was acquitted and discharged, but in order to elude the British authorities, who were still intent on giving him the death penalty, he took refuge in the city of Pondicherry in the French-ruled area of India, and there he began life as a sage and religious leader. He spent the rest of his life in Pondicherry, where basing himself on Yoga and especially meditative experience, he brought out a series of massive works on the

[cont page 10]

Arubindo [from page 8]

essence and possibilities of mankind, while at the same time serving as a guide and counselor to his juniors. Till the end of his life he did not lose his interest in politics, but the target of his concern was no more the freedom of India from British rule, but rather, the freedom of mankind from ignorance and the ideal of human unification through Spiritual Evolution.

Vivekananda as Tutor

Before presenting his philosophy I wish to introduce two passages that contain the words of Aurobindo himself, which will serve as decisive keys towards the understanding of his thought and philosophical life:

I. (1912, December 5, *Record of Yoga*, p. 128) “But in the jail I had the Gita and the Upanishads with me, practiced the Yoga of the Gita and meditated with the help of the Upanishads ... I sometimes turned to the Gita for light when there was a question or a difficulty and usually received help or an answer from it, but there were no such happenings in connection with the Gita as are narrated in the book.

It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence ... The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject” (*Sri Aurobindo on Himself*).

II. “18th October, when the third & last message from Sri Ramakrishna was received. The first message was in Baroda, the “Arubindo, mandir karo, mandir karo”, (Aurobindo, build a temple) & the parable of the snake Pravritti devouring herself.

This second was given in Shankar Chetti’s house soon after the arrival in Pondicherry, & the words were lost, but it was a direction to form the higher being in the lower self coupled with a promise to speak once more when the sadhan was nearing its close.

III. This is the third message (18 Oct 1912) “Make complete sannyasa (renunciation) of Karma. Make complete sannyasa of thought. Make complete sannyasa of feeling. This is my last utterance.”

As we see from the above, Ramakrishna was the hidden supervisor of Aurobindo, and Vivekananda was his hidden tutor. According to Aurobindo, the Absolute Brahman, who is Eternal Existence, Eternal Consciousness, and Eternal Bliss, created heaven, earth, and all things by his own free will by activating the process of Involution, and he descends to this earth on his own, by taking the form of a limitless multitude of material realities.

Since the eternal Reality, Consciousness, and Bliss of

the Brahman subsist even in material entities that are almost devoid of consciousness and life, and which are dead, hence when the time arises life will arise from this lifeless material. From this life, consciousness will awaken on its own, and from this hazy consciousness the Spirit will awaken. Everything in heaven and earth that was created by this process of Involution, will through the process of Evolution awaken in sequence to a higher world, and by steadily escaping from this world of limitations they will approach the world of the Absolute Brahman. If this were true, then it follows that mankind who has awakened in the Spirit, will have earlier awakened to the Super-mind and Super-reason, and besides, it is reasonable to assume that he will follow the path of the Super-humans. It may also be that these human beings will turn out into embodiments of wisdom and compassion, as exemplified in the Sages, Angels, and Bodhisattvas of ancient India.

This contention of Aurobindo is symbolized by the words, *True, Omnipresent, and Holy Reality*; the *Cycle of Involution and Evolution*; and *Integration*. If all existence were precisely that holy Reality that contains within itself the life of God, then our bodies and this world too, however much they may be fragmented, were from the beginning not just something to be cut-away and discarded. Rather, since all existence seeks to bring about a casting away of the old in order to enter their original sacred world, they are in a sense our companions, whose presence beside us is essential. Needless to say, however, all assertions such as, ‘the spirit of God is our spirit, the life of God is our life,’ and so on, constitute the very essence of Vedantic philosophy.

Finally, I would like to end my talk by saying that even Aurobindo’s 1100 page magnum opus, namely, *The Life Divine*, is in a sense, an exceptional annotation on a work by his authentic tutor, namely Vivekananda. That is to say, it is a lecture that Vivekananda gave in London entitled the ‘Essence of Man,’ and which has a length of just a few pages. •

• Thought of the Month •

The free man is he who does not fear to go to the end of his thought.

... Leon Blum

Issued by:

The Vedanta Society of Japan
(Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)

4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi-shi, Kanagawa-ken 249-0001 JAPAN

Phone: 81-46-873-0428 Fax: 81-46-873-0592

Website: <http://www.vedanta.jp> Email: info@vedanta.jp