



March 2012 - Volume 10 Number 03

日本ヴェダ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

April Calendar



Birthdays

Ramnavami
The Birth of Sri Rama
Sunday, 1 April

Kyokai Events

- **Yoga-Asana •**
April 7 from 11am
Contact the Zushi Center
- **Bhagavad Gita Discourse •**
April 7 from 2pm
Indian Embassy Tokyo
- **April Zushi Retreat •**
April 15 from 11am
Talk by Swami Medhasananda
All are welcome to attend!

- **Nara Narayan •**
April 27 Yokohama
Service to Homeless Narayan
Contact Ms. Yoko Sato
090-6544-9304
- **Akhanda Japan •**
29 April - 05:00-20:00
Zushi Center
Japam and Meditation
Contact Zushi Center to Join



Thus Spake

"The mind is everything. It is in the mind alone that one feels pure and impure. A man, first of all, must make his own mind guilty, and then alone can he see another man's guilt."

- Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

"All righteous words and all righteous deeds spring from knowledge and wisdom."

- Zarathushtra

Zushi Retreat February 2012

"Love and Attachment"
A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Let me begin our discussion with a story:

Once there was a king. He was also a devotee who really wanted to realize God, but could not. One night while sleeping he heard a loud noise coming from the roof of the palace. Curious, the king made his way up and found a person pacing quickly back and forth along the roof tiles.

"What are you doing up here?" demanded the king.

"I am searching for a camel!" the man replied.

The king became even angrier. "You are searching for a camel on the roof of my palace!" he bellowed. "Is it not a strange and impossible pursuit?"

"Oh, Great King," replied the man, "You think my quest is strange and impossible, yet you expect to realize God with such strong desire and attachment in your heart?"

(con't page 2)

In this Issue:

- Thus Spake ... page 1
- Monthly Calendar ... page 1
- February Zushi Retreat "Love and Attachment" by Swami Medhasananda ... page 1
- Thought of the Month ... page 6
- Mitake-san Retreat Talk Part III of III - Conclusion "Positive Way of Living" ... page 6
- Society Members Attend Kailas Yoga Center Celebration of Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary ... page 8
- Story to Remember ... page 9

Love and Attachment (from page 1)

After we attain a certain age, we all seek peace of mind. When the course of our life has been more or less decided or set, we really understand the value of peace, and we seriously want it. There is no exception to this for people in countries around the world.

Once a lady devotee from Japan went to visit the then President Maharaj, Swami Bhuteshanandaji, at Belur Math and asked with a yearning heart, "Maharaj, how can I get peace?" He answered, "You have to get rid of your desire and attachment." She said that this solution was impossible and Swami Bhuteshanandaji answered, "Then it will also be impossible for you to get peace."

Finding Peace of Mind

However, finding peace is not impossible, though it may difficult. Otherwise there would be no purpose or use for spiritual discourses and the study of scripture. At the same time, it is true that to the extent that we get rid of our mental desires and attachments, we do get peace.

In the Mundaka Upanishad there is an often quoted verse, "There are two birds perched on the same tree. They look similar. They both have beautiful plumes. One of them eats sweet fruit. The other looks on without eating anything."

What is the intention of this verse? The one bird most often eats, and always expects to eat, the sweet fruits of the tree. This expectation is not always fulfilled as every one of pursues pleasure and happiness, but in this pursuit, not everyone enjoys peace and joy. In the same way, the bird always wants to eat only the sweet fruit, but the bird will get its share of sour fruit too. What is the effect? Naturally, when enjoying sweet fruit the bird is happy, and when it eats bitter fruit it is sad. Our experience is like this: sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes happy and sometimes sad. Sometimes we really enjoy, but sometimes we really suffer. Yes, sometimes we definitely get peace, but the whole trouble is that these moments of peace do not continue, they are not steady. This bird symbolizes ordinary people like ourselves. The other bird is our true self which is free from desire and sees everything as a witness. Because this bird has no desire and no attachment, it is always peaceful.

Everyone wants peace. Not everyone may be seeking God, but there is no doubt that everyone wants peace. But if we want to attain eternal peace, then this is the same as attaining God or realizing the Truth as in both cases we must get rid of our secular desires and all attachment. If one says, "No, I enjoy this tension and stress." This advise is not for him. It is not relevant for the person who says he wants to float in the current of the river of life, being rushed along in this direction and that direction. But if you want steady, sustainable peace then as all scripture tells us, we have no choice other than giving up attachment to transitory things and focus on the eternal.

For example, the rich man's attachment to his riches. In the Bible we find in Matthew 19:23-24, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." In the Quran, in Buddhist and Hindu scripture, especially in the Bhagavad Gita, there are lots of discussions on desire. In the Gita we find many references to the words 'sanga' and 'asakti' both denoting attachment. When it is referred to as 'asanga' or 'anasakti' it means non-attachment. The Lord Krishna advised Arjuna, "Always do your work, being free from attachment." Only the person who is free from attachment can achieve the free state of liberation.

Attachment

What is attachment? First, we encounter a thing or a person. Then we find this person or thing attractive and imagine this person or thing will bring me happiness and joy. Then mind wants to brood on this person or thing again and again. The process of attachment starts at the mental level and progresses to both mental and physical levels. The attachment becoming deeper, takes the form of so-called love.

What are the symptoms of attachment? We want to be near the object of our attachment both physically and mentally. We want to communicate at all times and if contact is not possible we become sad. If there is a separation from the object of love we feel sad. We want to control the person to whom we have become attached, and if it is not possible we again become sad.

We also want this attachment to be reciprocal
(con't page 3)

Love and Attachment (from page 2)

cated; we expect that if I am attached to someone, then that someone should be attached to me in return. If not, we also become sad and may become angry, too.

Our power of judgement becomes impaired owing to attachment, which prevents us from thinking, acting and behaving rightly. Finally we are robbed of peace and wisdom. Our freedom is also lost, since the person to whom I am attached also loses their freedom along with me.

This is the great contradiction of our lives. On one hand we want freedom. We do not want to be controlled, yet we want to control others. So in our quest for freedom, we do that which will rob us of our freedom. Thus, it not only degrades me, it also degrades the person to whom I am attached.

Types of Attachment

All of our senses have their objects of attachment. Our eyes may be attached to a beautiful scene or location; our ears may be attached to beautiful songs; our tongue to delicious dishes, in this way every sense has objects to which it may be attached.

Then we may be attached to different persons and things. Not only people, but we become attached to things. In fact, one may not feel so much attachment to family, yet be very attached to his car. There may even be attachment to such an insignificant thing as a fountain pen or wristwatch. As an example of this, Swami Trigunatitanandaji's rich father had given him a golden wristwatch as a young student. He became very attached to this watch. He was a very good student, yet just before his final examination, he lost the watch. He became so sad and disturbed that he could not concentrate on the exams and performed poorly.

There may also be attachment to one's organization, club or religion. We read in Bhakti Yoga by Swami Vivekananda just this morning, that a person becomes orthodox and superstitious when he becomes too attached to his religion alone. It is attachment that makes him orthodox and motivates him to denounce other religions; to criticize other religions; even to attack the devotees of other religions.

Then there is attachment to one's own country. We see so many examples of attachment



to one's own country to the detriment of others in war. Love of country and patriotism is fine, but chauvinism demands the supremacy of one's country at the cost of others. Hitler's love of Germany is such an example of chauvinism and Mussolini's love of Italy was another.

This problem of attachment is not for householders alone. Even a monk's attachment to his own ashrama can be a real hazard. Holy Mother once noted that some monks become so attached to their ashram that they refuse to move to another when asked.

Even a person who has no position in society or any possessions at all may still be steeped in attachment to the body. Swami Turiyanandaji said that the greatest obstacle to spiritual life is attachment to the body.

It is said that among animals, the monkey has the greatest attachment to its offspring. If the baby monkey should die, the mother will carry the corpse around discarding it only when her life is in danger. Our greatest final obstacle is this attachment to the body. Even the discriminating mind is sometimes impelled toward attachment to something.

In the Mahabharata, here is the story of King Bharata who, renouncing his kingdom, retired to a forest for spiritual practice. He then became attached to an orphaned deer and took great care of it. In the evenings, if the deer hadn't returned, he would worry about its safety with tigers in the forest. During meditation his mind would return to the deer. He forgot his spiritual practices, as his mind dwelt more upon the deer. Even as he was passing away, his mind was on the deer. As a result, in his next life he was born as a deer. So we see that even the discriminating mind of a seeker can fall prey to attachment.

(con't page 4)

Love and Attachment (from page 3)

The Lure of Senses

In the Bhagavatam there is the story of Avadhuta's Twenty-Four Gurus (see Nov 2011 issue). In this story too, it says we have five senses of knowledge and each of these has an object. If we are attached to an object of even one sense, we may fall. This story give us several examples. There is the male elephant's tremendous love for the touch of a female elephant, and knowing this, hunters keep trained elephants as bait to lure male elephants into traps. As a result, the wild elephant's attachment to the sense of touch causes it to lose its freedom. There is another example of attachment to the object of the sense of sight, the eye. Lured by the brightness and color of fire, insects rush in to be devoured by the flames. Attachment to the sense of sound, the ear, is exemplified by a deer's attachment to sweet, beautiful sounds. Knowing this, hunters play melodious tunes on flutes and lure the unsuspecting animals into traps to die.

In this way we see how our downfall can be brought about by attachment to a single sense object. So we can well understand the condition of someone with a variety of deep-seated attachments. And in fact, even if we do spiritual practice, our progress is limited until we rid ourselves of our attachments.

Once Swami Turiyanandaji visited Nag Mahasaya, a householder disciple of Sri RamaKrishna. Though a householder, Nag Mahasaya was himself considered a sage. Turiyanandaji saw that Nag's father was there sitting in the veranda doing japam for a long time. Later, Nag asked Turiyanandaji to bless his father that he may become free from attachment and the swami asked to whom the father was attached. Nag answered, "To me!" To this Turiyanandaji said there is nothing wrong in his attachment to a son and sage such as himself. "Please don't say that!" replied Nag, "because even if my father commits himself to spiritual practice, this attachment to me will be like rowing a boat at anchor."

How is the Atman Attached?

How is it then, that the Atman, who is always pure, becomes attached? It is under the influence of Prakriti or Maya. This Prakriti is made of the three gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas, which binds our ever-free soul. Sattvic at-

tachment is like a golden chain; rajasic attachment is like a silver chain, while tamasic attachment is like chains of iron.

What is Sattvic attachment? It is the feeling that, "I am joyful" or "I am peaceful" or "I have Wisdom". But this sense of peace and joy and wisdom is borne of "I-ness", and though sattvic, is still an attachment. Rajasic attachment is attachment to one's work; name, fame and money. And what is tamasic attachment? Sleep and indolence.

How does this attachment begin? If we analyze beyond Prakriti and the gunas, we see it is this sense of I-ness and My-ness. What does this I-ness and My-ness constitute? Our body and mind, which is finite and temporary. And this is the starting point of ignorance and attachment.

Our personality has two aspects. One is infinite and eternal, free and wise. This is our Atman. Then there is the other aspect of body/mind, which includes vital energy, the senses and intelligence. This aspect is finite and non-eternal. It is not free, but bound in ignorance.

If our actions and thoughts flow from this finite and non-eternal "I" then all our sufferings and troubles start. This is our present condition, because our present thoughts, activities and relationships, everything, emanates or originates from that idea of I-ness and my-ness which is focused on body/mind.

Practicing Non-Attachment

How do we get free from attachment? The more we focus on the eternal aspect, the wisdom aspect, the freedom aspect, the Atman, the Self, more we become free from attachment. This is the most important thing to know about freeing oneself from attachments. Whatever religion or spiritual practice we follow, this is what we must remember. We may follow the paths of bhakti, or of knowledge, or of selfless action, or of meditation; we may become a Christian, a Buddhist or a Hindu, but this is the central point. The more we focus on our eternal and infinite aspect, the Atman, automatically we will focus less and less on the non-eternal or finite things such as body/bind. And the whole purpose, the whole goal of our spiritual practice is to focus more and more on the eternal and infinite aspect of our personality.

There is also a difference between household-
(con't page 5)

Love and Attachment (from page 4)

ers and monks in the practice of non-attachment. In what way? If we want to focus on the eternal aspect, then one must constantly discriminate: what is eternal—what is non-eternal; what is finite—what is infinite; what is freedom—what is bondage; what is ignorance—what is knowledge. The next step is to keep away from the objects of attachment, and herein is the difference between the monk and the householder. The householder must be out in the world surrounded by objects of enjoyment. Monks, naturally, try to stay away from such objects as one of their spiritual practices.

So how can a householder practice non-attachment? Here the question of outer-detachment and inner-detachment becomes the important point. There is nothing wrong in leading a householder's life. There is nothing wrong in having a family, husband, wife, children. There is nothing wrong in becoming a company employee. There is no need to renounce, to give up, all these things. The solution is inner-detachment. Everything may be at hand, but there will be no attachments. As an example of this, Sri Ramakrishna gave the example of a boat on the water is fine, just see that no water enters the boat. There is nothing wrong being in a family, but see that the family is not in you. It is a question of attitude, and if we can practice this attitude with all sincerity, then it is definitely possible in the long run. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we find many examples of those living a householder's life, yet being non-attached.

Sri Ramakrishna also provides us with another strategy for success, and that is to turn our attachments for worldly things into attachment to God. He gave three examples: the attachment of a chaste wife for her husband; the attachment of a mother to the child; and the attachment of a rich-man to his riches. If these attachments can be directed to God, then one can become free from the world and realize God. Turiyanandaji said while attachment to worldly things creates bondage, attachment to God and holy personages, frees one from the bondages of attachment. And in the story where young Swami Trigunatitanandaji lost his wristwatch, he was studying in a school whose headmaster was "M", the recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. It was M who introduced Trigunatitanandaji, sad with the loss of his watch, to Sri Ramakrishna under whose influence and guidance his at-



tachment to worldly things was turned to attachment to God and he became a sage.

Swami Turiyanandaji said that all the trouble is caused by directing all our love toward a single, specific person or object, stemming from I-ness and my-ness which turns to attachment. A very interesting example is given: when one dives deep into the Ganges, one is not burdened in the least by the tons of water overhead, but on shore one struggles beneath the weight of a single water-pot carried on the head.

The question then is, if there is no attachment, what is the motivation to work and support one's family? This is a source of much confusion among householders when they are advised to give up attachments or to redirect their attachments to God. They say that they work so hard because they have such love for their families. They don't even mind working ten-hour days for them, even though it is so hard and stressful. They declare that it is through their love of family, or namely, attachment, that they can do it, and without that love where is the motivation?

Transcending Attachment

What is the answer? Can there be any work or support for one's family without attachment? We see organizations like the Catholic Church with nicely managed schools and hospitals by monks and nuns around the world. They have no families. The Ramakrishna Mission schools and hospitals of India, too, are run by monks efficiently. They have no families either, so where does the motivation to work so hard come from? Definitely, they are not working for families or name and fame.

So what is the motivation? It is love for the ideal. The ideal may be different between or

(con't page 6)

• Thought of the Month •

Act well at the moment,
and you have performed a good action
for all eternity.

- Michael Korda

Love and Attachment (from page 5)

ganizations, as the ideal in the Catholic Mission is Christ. They want to do everything for Christ. They see Christ in the patients and they want to serve Christ by nursing patients or teaching students, whereas the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission they want to see Sri Ramakrishna in patients and students and serve Sri Ramakrishna in them.

For the Red Cross and Red Crescent the ideal is to serve society. When we love our family exclusively, it is attachment and not devotion to any idealism. When we disperse or spread our love, then we cannot call it attachment. You may call it 'universal love', or you may call

it 'divine love', or whatever, but from this type of love, love for idealism, one can also create tremendous motivation. This is the practice of motivation at the macro level.

What is at the micro level? Seeing and serving God in members of our family. Don't only think in terms of 'my husband', 'my wife', 'my son', connected through marriage or blood, but connect the family with God. In that way we can transcend attachment and reach pure love, divine love. Ordinary love flows from attachment, but this leads to our frustration, pain, suffering, bondage and ignorance. But when we transcend that attachment, it will lead us to pure love. And from this pure, divine love we can get peace, joy, freedom and knowledge.

In conclusion, we can transcend attachment and that will create the motivation for performing our works and duties, while at the same time allow us to truly live a life of peace and joy. We must transcend that small 'i' of the ego centered on body and mind, and focus on that eternal, infinite "I"; the wisdom and knowledge "I" that is the Atman, that is God. •

Mitakesan Outdoor Summer Retreat

Ms. Miwako Tanabe contributes her notes on

"Positive Way of Living"

Part III and Final Installment of a Discourse by Swami Medhasananda

Meaning of Life's Pains and Sorrows

In our daily lives we experience many dualities, like good and bad, hot and cold, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow. In other words, there is joy because there is sorrow. The path to success is not smooth or easy in the world. Without failure, sometimes one cannot always succeed. Without pain, one cannot have pleasure. In short, everything in creation is composed of the three gunas or qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas to some degree. So the same single thing can have both good and bad aspects, or positive and negative sides due to these qualities of nature, we call the three gunas.

Now let's look at our lives. Is it better for us, if we can live a smooth life without any problems? Does such a life have any meaning? Is it any different from being in a tomb? If one has no problems in life, one is

the same as being dead. Without problems, we could not develop ourselves. In fact, we are stronger when we have problems that awakens the sleeping strength within us. With strength we can develop ourselves. If we have no trouble, we will not need strength, which means we will not grow as human beings.

If you want self-development, therefore, you should think that problems in life are necessary for you. You should not say "no" to trouble and run away, but instead ask God to give you trouble when days are passing too smoothly over a long period of time. The purpose of life is the gaining of knowledge, which is the only thing we can take with us when our life is ended. Life is a university and experience is the teacher.

What we learn from this university of life
(con't page 7)



Positive Way of Living (from page 6)

is how to overcome the problems, pains and sorrows we face. By gaining more experience, we can develop ourselves. From this point of view, pain is a positive thing and a step towards liberation which is our final goal. When we have some hard experience let us say to ourselves, "God gave me this experience as new knowledge. It was not an accident, but something He arranged for me." If one can achieve such a deep understanding, one does not despair at the duality of things any more, but transcends it. This is how we finally achieve liberation.

Good Stress and Bad Stress

We cannot live without having stress or pressure. There are two kinds of stress, good and bad. Something that pushes us to react positively at work and in life is an example of good stress.. Bad stress puts us under the control of our worries and fears, our delusions gets bigger and we lose strength. We despair. How then can we change bad stress to good stress?

1. First of all, do not delay in solving problems. Try hard to work out how to deal with them and take action. Postponing problems makes you worry more and you become physically and mentally weaker.

2. Pray to God when you are in trouble, anxious or scared. He protects us. By praying to Him, we can mitigate negative thoughts and worries. We can calm down and prepare ourselves to take the next ac-

tion. Just try it.

3. Be aware that 90 percent of the things we fear never actually occur. Most of what we fear is created by our own imagination. Knowing this is important.

4. Do not give up until you reach the goal. "The key to success is to keep going until you succeed" (from Konosuke Matsushita, as mentioned above).

5. Do not be too sad about the mistakes you have committed. Swami Vivekananda said this: "I am glad that I did lots of good things. I am glad that I made lots of mistakes. From those mistakes I have learned and have become what I am now." Do not be afraid to make a mistake, but be aware of, reflect on it and examine it. By doing so, you can live in a manner that you make the most of it.

6. "Focus on this moment." "Live well today." People who think negatively tend to regret the past and worry about the future. It is true that one cannot control the future. However, by directing our attention to the present, by focusing on the "now" our future automatically improves. The mind cannot picture both the present and future at the same time. So it is important to accept things happening at this very moment as they are, and do what we can do. Dedicate ourselves to what we are working on instead of doing things in a half-minded way, and worries will automatically disappear.

(con't page 8)



Positive Way of Living (from page 7)

Swami Medhasananda advised us to focus on the moment and to keep ourselves busy at every moment from morning till night - to schedule our days with work, study and meditation, and keep working. He told us not be lazy, because if we are lazy and doing nothing, we may become delusional.

Conclusion:

Four Steps to a Positive Life

The first step to take is to have hope. If we lose hope, we lose strength too and cannot do anything. "Hope is life." With hope we can push ourselves forward with even with a little strength.

The second step is to develop patience. Seek and find an eternal refuge, which is God. God is the nearest and dearest refuge to take and the best support we can get. Moreover, if we pray to Him, He gives us strength too, since He is the source of all strength.

Next, pray deeply to God. Have faith in yourself and God. That is the key to all success and all strength. All power is inside us, just manifest it. However hard a time we are having, we have strength inside which will help us face it. By meditating on

our Self we can bring it out. If we know and realise that our real nature is the same as God's, we can gain tremendous strength.

Finally, contemplation. Once we calm down by prayer and meditation, we can contemplate on solving the problem. Then we will find a new approach. Because if we try to work out solutions with a stressed and scared mind, we cannot find the perfect answer. We need a calm mind to think deeply. Otherwise, we cannot contemplate or find a new way.

Transcending Positive Living

As discussed in Bhagavad Gita, sattva is pure nature, yet it binds us in chains just as rajas and tamas do. The Gita says that "Sattva is chains of gold" (Chapter 14 Sections 6-8). Finally, we have to cut off those sattvic chains too and become free. Thus we have to overcome negative living by leading a positive life, then transcend positive living and attaining to liberation, which is that state of abiding peace, joy and wisdom. •

This is the 3rd and final installment of the talk given during the Outdoor Summer Retreat 2011 - Parts I and II can be found in the January and February issues of The Vedanta Kyokai. - editor

Vedanta Group Attends Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration Held at Kailas Yoga Center, Yokohama

On Sunday February 26, Swami Medhasananda and six devotees from the Vedanta Society joined in the Sri Ramakrishna Birth Celebration held at Kailas Yoga School in Yokohama.

Swami performed puja and gave a short discourse on Sri Ramakrishna's holy touch. The attendees then sang Indian and Japanese devotional songs together, it was impressive how these members of Kailas sang from the heart in full voice.

At lunch prasad, we enjoyed delicious Indian foods made by Kailas members and Society devotees, as well as dal cooked by Swami Medhasananda himself.

Thirty-five people attended the event. •



Kailas Yoga Center
Yokohama



Sri Ramakrishna
Birth Celebration



• Story to Remember •

Benevolence

A grocer came to the Master in great distress to say that across the way from his shop they had opened a large chain store that would drive him out of business. His family had owned his shop for a century - and to lose it now would be his undoing, for there was nothing else he was skilled at.

Said the Master, "If you fear the owner of the chain store, you will hate him. And hatred will be your undoing".

"What shall I do"? said the distraught grocer.

"Each morning walk out of your shop onto the sidewalk and bless your shop, wishing it prosperity. Then turn to face the chain store and bless it too".

"What? Bless my competitor and destroyer?"

"Any blessing you give him will rebound to your good. Any evil you wish him will destroy you".

After six months the grocer returned to report that he had had to close down his shop as he had feared, but he was now in charge of the chain store and his affairs were in better shape than ever before.

by Fr. Anthony de Mello

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