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The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES, AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



FEBRUARY Calendar

Birthdays / Pujas

Swami Vivekananda

Sunday, February 03

Swami Brahmananda

Tuesday, February 12

Swami Trigunatitananda

Thursday, February 14

Swami Adbhutananda

Monday, February 25

Kyokai Events

• February Zushi Retreat •

Swami Vivekananda
Birth Celebration

Sunday, February 17
11 AM, Puja, Pushpanjali

Lunch

Afternoon Session
Reading, Discourse,
Devotional Songs

All, are welcome to attend!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"We are the children of the Almighty, we are sparks of the infinite, divine fire. How can we be nothings? We are everything, ready to do everything, we can do everything, and man must do everything. Therefore, my brethren, teach this life-saving, great, ennobling, grand doctrine, to your children, even from their very birth. This marvelous doctrine of the soul, the perfection of the soul, is commonly believed by all sects."

... Swami Vivekananda

"People perform all their actions in and through Brahman, but they are ignorant of this; just as through ignorance, people do not know that jars and other earthenware are nothing but earth."

... Sri Sankara

Sri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India, Speaks At Launch of Ramakrishna Math and Mission's Year-long Vivekananda 150th Birth Celebration

The President of India, Pranab Mukherjee, inaugurated the 150th birth anniversary celebration of Swami Vivekananda at Swamiji's ancestral birthplace in Simla Street in north Kolkata on Friday, 18 January.

After Vedic prayers, welcoming speeches and presentations of the opening ceremony, Sri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India, greeted the Governor of West Bengal, government dignitaries, monks of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, nuns of the Sarada Math, and other assembled guests and delivered the following speech:

"It's indeed a privilege for me to be present at the same place where 150 years ago a great son of India, and perhaps a great visionary of the world, one whom British historian Professor Basham described saying, 'We shall have to wait many centuries to have one like him' was born at this very place.

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Vivekananda (from page 1)

I am deeply grateful to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and their office bearers for inviting me to be present on this holy occasion, today, 6 days after the actual birthday on the 12 January. Because as Mr. Jahar Sarkar has already described to you, a National Committee was formed under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of India, to celebrate the 150th year of two great sons of India, Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda. I had the privilege of being the Chairman of the Implementation Committee along with a couple of other distinguished persons, including the Chief Minister of West Bengal, till I served as the minister in the government of India. Now that job has been entrusted to Sri A. Antony, the Defense Minister.

Now it was decided by the Implementation Committee that on 12th January a function should take place at Delhi, because it is the national celebration, and Tagore's 150th year was celebrated in Delhi on his birthday, 8th May. Therefore, on 12th of this month, Swamiji's actual birthday, there in Delhi too I had the privilege of formally launching the sesquicentenary year in a function attended by distinguished personalities like the Defense Minister, Cultural Minister, Finance Minister, Communication Minister, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, and many others. But I had the desire that if I could be in Calcutta on this occasion, and with the blessing of Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna), and the gracious invitation extended to me by the Mission, I may be able to pay my homage to this great visionary ... great humanist, Swami Vivekananda.

I would now like to add, because the persons who are present here know about Swami Vivekananda much more than me ...

I'm still a learner, not even in the position to pick up the pebbles along the shore of his vast ocean of knowledge. But the more I read, the more I am fascinated that in such a short span of life a man could transform Indian society, which had lost self-confidence completely.

The decade of 1860 was very historic and momentous ... for India. For in 1861 Rabindranath (Tagore) was born. In 1863 Vivekananda was born. In 1869 Mahatma Gandhi was born – all just within a decade.

But what was the state of affairs then? Just 5 years earlier in 1858 the responsibility of administering India was transferred from a mercantile company, East India Company,

to the British sovereign by Queen Victoria's proclamation. A series of legal enactments since that act took place. British colonial powers firmly established their control over the territory of India, which then extended at that time including today's Myanmar, then

Burma, and today's Sri Lanka, then Ceylon. The people of India, particularly what is known in history as young Bengal, completely lost confidence in themselves.

I read somewhere that Radhanath Sikhdar, a pioneer among young Bengalis who had the distinction of measuring the highest mountain in the world, Mt. Everest, was working in the Surveyor General Office of India. When he came to Calcutta on holiday he was surprised that some of his friends were talking amongst themselves in Bengali. His surprise was that this language was being used to exchange views between western educated people.

(con't page 3)



Vivekananda (from page 2)

When somebody suggested to Michael Madhusudan Datt to compose blank verse (amitrakshar chhanda) in the Bengali language, his response was to ask if it was worth trying. He was then reminded that Bengali is the daughter of Sanskrit, but his retort was that this daughter was too weak. However, he experimented in composing blank verse in Bengali and we could get the wonderful epic that Datt composed namely, 'Meghnad Badh Karya'.

The fourth point which I'm trying to drive at, is that indeed an educated people, who were the proud products of the new renaissance, had lost confidence in themselves, yet, with the blessings of Thakur, who quietly blessed this nation from Dakshineswar, and with the inspiration to Swami Vivekananda who could take on this gigantic task, shook us vigorously. He was a great traveller. He travelled all over India and to a large number of countries.



He recognized and could articulate for the first time the problem, 'How can you expect the country to develop, so long as the poor and underprivileged are exploited?' Therefore it was appropriate when India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru observed in a speech, 'Rooted in the past and full of pride in India's prestige, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life's problems, and was a kind of bridge between the past of India and her present.'

He could observe and say that every educated Indian is a sinner because he does not take care of the exploitation of teeming millions at whose cost they have educated themselves. All of the quotations from Swami Vivekananda which are all around us

here speak of the philosophy which brought back confidence in a shaken nation, all over the country.

Therefore, as we said, Jahar Sarkar was one of the architects of this programme that the current Secretary to the Minister of Culture could not otherwise have achieved. I know personally, because in 1995 when I was Foreign Minister, at that point in time I tried to have some memorial installed at the hall in Chicago where Swami Vivekananda addressed the world in September 1893. But at that time I could not achieve success because local law stood in the way and we could not overcome it.

Thereafter when I again had the privilege of being the Foreign Minister of India, and with the initiatives Mr. Jahar Sarkar took, we were able to put up a plaque. With imagination, if one goes and looks very closely, you will see the face of Swami Vivekananda, which was their objection because as they believe, and as per American

law, they don't allow deification of such sites.

Not only that, one of the most prestigious universities of the world, Chicago University, established the 'Indian Ministry of Culture Vivekananda Chair' for the study of the teachings, philosophies and relevance of Swami Vivekananda. He was relevant then, he is relevant now and he will continue to be relevant to human civilization as long as civilization continues.

With these words I pay my respectful homage to this great visionary, and son of, of course I will say, son of Bengal. Thank you ladies and gentlemen. •

Vedanta Society Celebrates

Kali Puja

at Zushi Centre

A photo of the Kali Ma image at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple near Kolkata, Bengal was flanked by those of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi upon the altar in the Zushi Centre Annex, where Kali Puja was observed on November 13, 2012.

The altar held an array of flower and food offerings, as Swami Medhasananda conducted the puja worship on a raised platform to the right of the open space before the altar. Conch shells bellowed and bells tolled at prescribed times as the swami made offering into a vessel. Each of the five elements comprising the earth; ether, air, fire, water and earth were offered to the photos at the altar, represented by flames, an oxtail fan, some woven cloth etc. The congregation then all joined in singing Sarva Mangala Mangalye, a Sanskrit hymn to the Divine Mother.

The swami then went into the crowd of over 100 participants sprinkling all with holy Ganges water, before leading the congregation in mantras that were each repeated three times. Then each offered a flower bud with folded hands (pushpanjali) to Kali Ma.

After some preparations ritual homa fire began wherein the swami again led all in repeating the prescribed sanskrit mantras with each traditional offering to the crackling flames that grew ever higher. Finally, the flames died down and were doused with yogurt and holywater, and some were collected to make holy ash (bhasma) for which all took their turn in receiving a dab of on the forehead. As the hour had grown late, Swami Medhasananda urged everyone to partake in a prepared light meal of prasad, unless it was absolutely necessary to immediately return home. •

• Thought of the Month •

"No pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage-ground of truth."

Francis Bacon



Vedanta Society Celebrates Christmas Eve

The Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual Christmas Eve celebration at the Zushi Centre from 7:30 PM on 24 December 2012, and the Main Building was decorated with Christmas cheer. The altar was set up at the back of the main shrine room facing the adjoining meeting room where devotees could observe the worship conducted by Swami Medhasananda. Accentuated by a variety of LED and wax candles, an array of fruits, candies, cakes, biscuits and even grape juice were laid out and before pictures of Jesus in meditation and a copy of the rendering of Madonna and Child noted in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.



Bible readings from Mathew and a brief talk by the swami were interspersed with Christmas carols in both English and Japanese by Lonnie and Shanti •

Vedanta Society Celebrates New Year's Day

The Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual New Year's Kalpataru assembly at the Zushi Centre from 11am on New Year's Day.

Following an invocation and introduction by the Swami Medhasananda, there were readings from the Life of Sri Ramakrishna, the Gospel of Holy Mother, Lord Buddha's Message and the Bible. A silent prayer was followed by lunch prasad.

At a little after 2pm a party of twelve devotees and the swami then set off on foot for Kamakura to make offerings to the famous Daibutsu (Buddha statue) and to pay respects to the Yukinoshita Catholic Church (Christian) and, the Hachimangu Shrine (Shinto). •



• A Story to Remember •

Saint and Sinner

Anastasius was abbot of a monastery in Egypt. The monastery had a large collection of books, one among them being a rare volume, worth a fortune.

One day a visiting monk chanced upon the book and succumbing to temptation walked away with it. The theft was discovered the same day and it was not hard to guess who the culprit was, but Anastasius refused to send anyone after the monk for fear that he might say he had not taken it and add the sin of perjury to that of theft.

The monk meanwhile was trying to sell the book and eventually found a buyer, a rich man who asked him to leave the book with him for a day so that he could get it evaluated.

When the monk had gone, the man hastened to the monastery and showed the book to Anastasius. The abbot recognized it instantly but did not say anything.

"A monk wants to sell it to me," said his visitor. "He's asking for a gold sovereign. You are knowledgeable about books. Is this book worth that much?"

"It's worth much much more than a sovereign," said the abbot. "It's a valuable book."

The man thanked the abbot and left. The next day when the monk came, he informed him that he would like to buy the book and was prepared to pay the price he had mentioned. The monk was overjoyed.

"Whom did you show it to?" he asked.

"Anastasius, the abbot."

His visitor turned pale. "A-And what did he say?"

"He said the book was worth a sovereign."

"And what else?"

"Nothing."

The monk was both amazed and touched. He realized that the abbot had refused to reclaim his lost treasure so that he, the thief would not get into trouble. Nobody had ever shown him such love; nobody had ever behaved so nobly towards him.

"I've changed my mind, I don't want to sell it," he said and took the book from the man.

"I'll give you two sovereigns," said the customer.

The monk walked away without answering. He went directly to the monastery and handed the book to the abbot, tears brimming in his eyes.

"Keep it," said Anastasius. "When I learnt you had borrowed it I decided to give it to you."

"Please take it back," pleaded the monk, "but let me stay here and learn wisdom from you."

His wish was granted. He spent the rest of his years in the monastery modelling his life after that of the saintly Anastasius.

'Wisdom of the Desert' Thomas Merton (Trappist)

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