

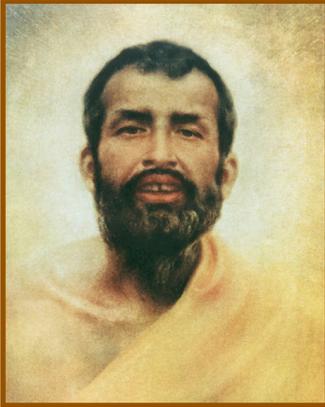


February 2013 - Volume 11 Number 02

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



March Calendar

Birthdays / Pujas

Shiva-Ratri

Sunday, 10 Mar

Sri Ramakrishna Deva

Wednesday, 13 Mar

Gouranga Mahaprabhu

(Sri Chaitanya)

Wednesday, 27 Mar

Swami Yogananda

Saturday, 30 Mar

Kyokai Events

• March Zushi Retreat •

Sri Sri Ramakrishna 176th Birth Anniversary Celebration

(New Annex Building)

Sunday, 17 March 10:30AM
Puja, Food Offering, Flower Offering, (Pushpanjali)
Homa Fire
Prasad Lunch
Afternoon Session Talk and Cultural Programme

All, are welcome to attend!!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"Live in the world like an ant. The world contains a mixture of truth and untruth, sugar and sand. Be an ant and take the sugar."

- Sri Ramakrishna

"Be more humble than a blade of grass, more tolerant than a tree, always offering respect onto others and never expecting any in return"

- Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

Vedanta Society of Japan Celebrates

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 160th Birthday

On Sunday, January 20, 2013, the Vedanta Society of Japan celebrated the 160th birthday of Sri Sarada Devi for their monthly day-long Zushi Retreat programme.

The programme began at 06:00 with mangalariti, chanting, bhajans and meditation, followed by breakfast at 07:45. After breakfast the volunteers in attendance went about attending to the various chores in preparation and set-up of the temporary alter, worship platform, flowers and other articles used worship, and seating in the annex building.

By 11:00 the alter had been prepared with food offerings and flower garlands and bouquets. Swami then conducted the puja and arati worship, ending with fresh flower buds being passed out to the entire congregation, who, with these in hand, were led in prayers of offering (pushpanjali). (con't page 2)

In this Issue:

- Thus Spake ... page 1
- Holy Mother as Supreme Goddess Talk by Swami Medhasananda ... page 3
- Monthly Calendar ... page 1
- Thought of the Month ... page 5
- Vedanta Society of Japan Celebrates Holy Mother's 160th Birth Anniversary ... page 1
- A Story to Remember ... page 6



Holy Mother Celebration (from page 1)

Swami then invited Indian Ambassador to Japan, Her Excellency Shrimati Deepa Gopalan Wadhawa to say a few words. With Swami offering a Japanese translation, Ambassador Wadhawa addressed the congregation in English saying:

'I am very grateful to Swami Medhasanandaji for calling on me and my colleagues to be here today on this very holy occasion, when we celebrate the 160th birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. As you know Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, as well as the Holy Mother, have played a very important role in the religious litany of Modern India.'

'This year India will also be celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. He has a special connection with Japan because he had travelled here, as many of you may know. He recognized the bonds between India and Japan and after the famous Chicago Conference where he brought the message of Hinduism and other Eastern religions of the world, he went back to India where he told Indians that it was important to learn from Japan.'

'As we celebrate the Holy Mother today, I think we should remember the one of the very important aspects of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission and Order, which is humanitarianism and the need for love and peace, so that we all can live together on this earth in the time we are allowed to be



here. As this is the beginning of 2013, I wish all of you here happiness, peace, and prosperity in the year to come.'

'I again thank Swamiji for inviting me to this wonderful place. It is extremely beautiful and well endowed by nature and I hope that Swamiji will certainly see that this is not my last trip.'

Swami then requested all to recess to the main building of the ashrama where a lunch prasad buffet was to be served and seating had been prepared to accommodate the attendees in both in the dining area and the upstairs meeting room.

At 14:30 the swami again called the congregation to order and led them in Vedic peace chants to begin the afternoon session. This was followed by reading from Holy Mother's Gospel in Japanese. Swami then delivered a talk on Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in both English and Japanese. (Please see 'Holy Mother as Supreme Goddess' in this issue. -ed)

This was followed by a brief cultural programme of devotional songs featuring a quartet presenting original songs in Japanese by Ms. Shanti Izumida, songs in English by Mr. Lonnie accompanied by Shantisana, and devotional Indian songs by Mr. Samudra Gupta on harmonium. After a meditation, the remaining attendees went to the main ashram for tea at 16:30. At 18:30 vesper service was conducted at the main shrine bringing the day's programme to a memorable close. •

Holy Mother as the Supreme Goddess (Jagadhartri)

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Giving a talk on Holy Mother is very difficult. Of course talks on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are not easy, but Holy Mother's life was so simple, so peaceful, with so few dramatic moments, that it can be difficult to give a talk about her. What I like most is her motherly aspect; it is so beautiful and so loving. But every year I cannot speak on the same subject, as I run the risk that you may think I am using the same script each year.

So I thought that I should say something addressing another of her aspects. I should mention here that I am in a bit of a predicament in that while I can manage to give a talk in Japanese or in English, giving one in both languages is a little difficult. So if I should miss here or there please bear with me.

There are many gods and goddesses in Shintoism, and there are also gods and goddesses in Hinduism. What is the difference? It is that in Hinduism there is only one God, Brahman. All the other gods and goddesses are but manifestations of the one God who is known as Brahman, or the Supreme Reality in English. Yes, in Hinduism also there are other gods and goddesses, god of nature, god of wind, god of fire, sun god, moon god, so many are there, but all of these are but manifestations of the same Supreme Reality. This is not so in Shintoism, where all the gods are unique and separate entities.

Another interesting feature of Hinduism is that the same God has two aspects. For example the God of preservation is Vishnu

and one aspect of Vishnu is that He is preserving this universe, while another aspect of Vishnu is Brahman, who has no form, no quality. Another is Mother Kali, who we see as the Divine Mother, while in another aspect She is Brahman, again with no form, no quality. Then again, Hinduism believes that God appears as a human being to guide people in the path of spirituality; to show them the path of peace and happiness.



In Hinduism in some incarnations we see both the aspect of Brahman and the Divine Mother in one form, for example in the case of Sri Chaitanya. But in the case of Sri Krishna and Sri Ramakrishna we see two separate manifestations of the Divine Mother and Brahman. For example, Sri Krishna is the incarnation of Brahman and Radha is the Divine Mother or Prakriti. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramakrishna is the incarnation of Brahman, while Holy Mother is the incarnation of Prakriti.

So what are these Brahman and Prakriti? According to Hindu philosophy, it is said that Brahman has no form and no quality, but that from Brahman power is projected. It is this power that creates, sustains and destroys this universe. This power is called Prakriti or Shakti or the Primordial Energy. This divine power, Shakti or Prakriti, has two aspects, vidya and avidya. Avidya Shakti binds human beings; it binds them with pride; binds with ego; binds with greed; binds with what is called maya. Vidya Shakti gives liberation; cuts the bondage. (con't page 4)

)**Holy Mother** (from page 3)

Interestingly, when Prakriti, or Divine Mother, appears or incarnates as a human being, like Holy Mother or Radha, however, She is pure vidya without a trace of avidya. In all such cases the Divine Incarnation comes to liberate not to bind. So Holy Mother was born, not to bind us in maya, but to set us free from maya. In nature there are both aspects, but when the Divine incarnates as a human being, there is but the one aspect. Outwardly Sarada Devi was so simple, so guileless; just an ordinary country village girl. Inwardly, however, she was so uncommon, so special, so spectacular.

Sri Ramakrishna, on the other hand, was noticeably remarkable for all to see. He would often slip into samadi. While taking a meal He would suddenly become still and beam in blissful samadi. While listening to music He would soar into samadi. While talking of God many would witness His



ecstatic mood and sudden ascension into samadi and marvel as His entire being radiated light. For most of us samadi is a very rare state indeed, yet for Sri Ramakrishna the state of samadi was commonplace. A famous doctor was puzzled when he was unable to find a pulse or other signs of life when Sri Ramakrishna was in samadi. In this regard, any layman could understand that Sri Ramakrishna was someone very special. From His appearance; from His movements; from His talks it was so easy to observe. Swami Vivekananda, too, had such striking charisma. Even by seeing his picture alone, we can understand, here is a man so different from others. Holy Mother was not like this at all.

What we can see from Her picture is simple grace. It was Sri Ramakrishna alone who saw and told others about Holy Mother's true nature. He said that She was an incarnation of the Divine Mother. She could even accept the worship of Sri Ramakrishna, the incarnation of God. Is She then an ordinary woman? Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'She is my Shakti.' Yet on very few occasions did She reveal Herself.

Once a young monk wanted to visit Mother Kali's temple in Kalighat in Calcutta and asked Swami Premanandaji for permission. Premanandaji suggested he first visit the living Mother Kali, make

pranams to Her and then go on to Kalighat. The young monk obeyed and upon offering his pranams to Holy Mother, he repeated what the swami had said to him. Holy Mother quietly replied, 'Yes, what Baburam (Swami Premananda) has said is right.'

At Holy Mother House in Kolkata there was an employee and devotee named Chandra-babu. He was a great devotee with profound respect for Holy Mother. In return, Holy Mother had great love for him. Once while Chandra-babu was accompanying Holy Mother on the trip back to Her birthplace at Jairambati, they stopped at a rest area in a village. Chandra then seized this opportunity to make a special request. 'Mother,' he said, 'I have heard that you are Divine, that you are the Goddess, I want to see that aspect.' As we know, generally that a devotee need to perform a lot of spiritual practice to being blessed with a vision of the Divine. Here, however,

(con't page 5)

• Thought of the Month •

When all your desires are distilled;
You will cast just two votes:
To love more,
And be happy.

Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi

Holy Mother (from page)

Chandra requests Holy Mother to reveal Her Divine aspect and form before him, which was obviously an odd request.

At first Holy Mother protested that She possessed no such form and that She was but an ordinary woman. Chandra could not be dissuaded by Her denials and persisted that She reveal Herself. Just like a boy pestering his mother for something, he continued on. Finally, Holy Mother conceded saying She would reveal Herself as long as he would never share this knowledge with others while She lived. She then gave him the vision of Jagadhartri, the Supreme Goddess, the Sustainer of this universe. This vision was so full of light (jyoti) that he could barely endure it and nearly fell unconscious. So although Holy Mother was always aware of Her divine nature, She would hide it from others and behave as an ordinary woman.

Holy Mother would also say to some devotees, 'This is your last birth.' Who can see the future of any person with such certainty? Holy Mother could see our past, present, and future. So she could say so.



Not only that, but by Her spiritual power She could cut one's bonds then and there and make such a declaration. Furthermore, She would give assurance. 'My son,' she would say, 'remember, there is a Mother (meaning herself) who is protecting you always. Believe it. I am your Mother who is always protecting you.'

I can tell you, too, that in my own experience, how true is Mother's assurance. So on this day let us all believe in Mother's words as well. There is no limit to our problems and dangers from morning to night, so what a great assurance. Without such an assurance, it is difficult to live. Our capacity to believe is so shallow that we cannot find faith in it. If we can have the faith that Holy Mother is protecting us, it will greatly benefit us. Sometimes it is very helpful to carry a picture of Holy Mother. Many people do it. Whenever you have a problem, look at this picture, feel the living presence of Mother in it and pray with all your heart. Help is sure to come sooner or later. •



• A Story to Remember •

The Art of Making Fire

After many years of labour an inventor discovered the art of making fire. He took his tools to the snow-clad northern regions and initiated a tribe into the art-and the advantages-of making fire. The people became so absorbed in this novelty that it did not occur to them to thank the inventor who one day quietly slipped away.

Being one of those rare human beings endowed with greatness, he had no desire to be remembered or revered; all he sought was the satisfaction of knowing that someone had benefited from his discovery.

The next tribe he went to was just as eager to learn as the first. But the local priests, jealous of the stranger's hold on the people, had him assassinated. To allay any suspicion of the crime, they had a portrait of the Great Inventor enthroned upon the main altar of the temple; and a liturgy designed so that his name would be revered and his memory kept alive. The greatest care was taken that not a single rubric of the liturgy was altered or omitted. The tools for making fire were enshrined within a casket and were said to bring healing to all who laid their hands on them with faith.

The High Priest himself undertook the task of compiling a Life of the Inventor. This became the Holy book in which his loving kindness was offered as an example for all to emulate, his glorious deeds were eulogized, his superhuman nature made an article of faith. The priests saw to it that the Book was handed down to future generations, while they authoritatively interpreted the meaning of his words and the significance of his holy life and death. And they ruthlessly punished with death or excommunication anyone who deviated from their doctrine.

Caught up as they were in these religious tasks, the people completely forgot the art of making fire.

As From the Lives of the Desert Fathers:

Abbot Lot came to Abbot Joseph and said, 'Father, according to my capacity I keep my little rule and my little fast, my prayer, my meditation, my contemplative silence; and according as I am able, I cleanse my heart of evil thoughts. Now what more should I do?'

The elder stood up in reply. He stretched out his hand to heaven and his fingers became ten lamps of fire. He said: 'This: become totally changed into fire.'

S. J. Anthony de Mello (The Prayer of the Frog)

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