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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

## OCTOBER Calendar

### Birthdays

**Swami**

**Akhandananda**

Friday, 4 October



### Puja

#### DURGA PUJA

**Bengali Association  
of Tokyo Japan**

Puja: 11:30AM

Anjali: 12:30 Noon

Lunch Prasad:

13:00 ~ 15:00

Cultural Programme:

15:00 ~ 17:00

**Kawasaki Shimin**

**Plaza Hall**

Takatsu-Ku, Kawasaki

**Saturday October 12**

see page 2 for info

(Fees apply)

### Kyokai Events

#### • October Zushi Retreat •

NO RETREAT IN  
OCTOBER 2013



## ✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"One who makes a habit of prayer will easily overcome all difficulties."*

*... The Holy Mother - Sri Sarada Devi*

*"All wrong-doing arises because of mind. If mind is transformed, can wrong-doing remain?"*

*... Gautama Buddha*

### Monthly Zushi Retreat

#### "How to Live Long and Well"

A talk by Swami Medhasananda in November 2012

We have discussed how to live a positive life in the past; let us discuss today how to live long and well. I have chosen this topic this time, as here in Japan and elsewhere we now experience substantial changes and challenges we have never encountered in the past. In days long past we lived in houses without air conditioners or heaters and life was tougher. We now live a more comfortable life under higher standards of living. For example, we can enjoy foods from across the world, as well as our traditional foods, during any season. Not only that, plenty of the things of enjoyment readily available, and we can also afford to have them.

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Bengali Association of Tokyo Japan (**BATJ**) 24<sup>th</sup> Annual  
**Durga Puja**

Saturday, October 12th, 2013. This is actual Astami Puja day!

This year's Puja will be held in a new hall. It is "Kawasaki Shimin Plaza Hall" in Takatsu-ku, Kawasaki City. 1-19-1 Shinsaku, Takatsu-ku, Kawasaki-shi 213-0014 (Tel. 044-888-3131)

The hall is accessible by bus no. 23 from Mizonokuchi station on Denen Toshi line or from Musashi Mizonokuchi station JR Nambu line. Also, it is accessible by bus no. 23 from Kajigaya station on Denen Toshi line. By car, you can reach via 246 and take turn at Kajigaya crossing as shown in map. Parking is available in the hall.

**Schedule:**

Puja	11:30 AM
Anjali	12:30 PM
Prasad Lunch	1:00 PM
Cultural Programme	3:00 PM
Puja & Arati	5:00 PM

**Entrance Fees:**

Bengali family*	¥12,000
(*One spouse only also in this category)	
Bengali single	¥6,000
Others	¥1,500 per person

Check hall website for detailed information: <http://www.kawasaki-shiminplaza.jp/>

## **How to Live Long and Well** (from page 1)

Our life styles have changed too. People did not use to have physical examinations very often and, hence, would suddenly die from cardiac and other diseases and conditions of which they had been unaware. In contrast, we now have CT scans and blood tests, various kinds of medication and supplements, as well as traditional drugs, and yoga exercise to keep us in good health. As a result, we can enjoy a longer life. It is also important, however, in addition to living a long and healthy life, to live one's life well.

## **Meaningful Retirement**

In generations past, grandparents, parents, sons and daughters, in-laws and grandchildren all lived under one roof. Not only did retirees help look after grandchildren, they also taught them the difference between right and wrong, moral principles and spiritual things. Above all, they had faith in God and an altar in their house, where they prayed, chanted and made daily offerings. They also used to visit the temples and shrines of their locality. Living this way, they enjoyed life without being stressed out. Some died early, but others, living long lives, spent their time peacefully even after retirement.

About three years ago, while walking in our locality, I met an elderly lady. I asked her, "Where are you going?" She replied, "I'm on my way to my part-time job." I was curious and asked her age. She replied, "I am 93!" She still looked so healthy and could hold a job on a part-time basis at such an advanced age. Most retirees watch TV for long hours, go to sleep when tired, then eat and read newspapers or magazines each day. Newspapers. TV. Sleep. Food. Almost every day they repeat the same routine. Isn't it a waste of time to live such a life for twenty-five to thirty years after retirement?

TV programmes are mostly topics of

negative subject matter. Entertainment programmes are just secular. That might be OK for the youth, but does it make sense for the elderly? They avidly watch these programmes though. Channels broadcasting stories of scandal and violence are not wanting. I sometimes hear elderly people chatting and complaining about their families. The elderly often tend to be negative, saying although things were better when they were young, the society as a whole is now not good. Such conversation does not help anyone. That negativity will be burden for themselves, their families and the society. They spend their day in the same way day after day. Is there any meaning in living such a negative life?

## **Seeking Happiness**

How can one live a positive, meaningful life until one dies? Life counts. God created all living things, plants, fish, birds, animals and human beings. What is at the highest level of them all? Human beings are, as they are able to think, discriminate and aspire. As human beings, we understand our environs and know how we can make life better. Moreover, we have conscience, which animals do not have. A conscience helps us to distinguish between right or wrong. Moreover, if we want, we can help each other. The use of languages and other means of communication for animals are very limited, while human beings have and use lots of words. We can express our thoughts, ideas and feelings with words.

All living things, including human beings want happiness, which is one characteristic. Animals only seek physical happiness such as eating, sleeping and reproduction. Human beings have other sorts of happiness at the level of the senses. For example, listening to music, seeing paintings and watching cinema.

The next difference is the intellect. By

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## **How to Live Long and Well** (from page 3)

reading, writing, teaching and finding something, human beings feel happiness. That is what we alone can do. Another kind of happiness is one at a moralistic level. We feel happy to help others. And at a spiritual level we feel happiness to think about, meditate on, sing for and read about God. The highest happiness here is spiritual realisation. After attaining it, we have a great happiness, which will last forever.

### **Real Happiness**

What are the criteria for high levels of happiness? How can we know that the sensory level of happiness is higher than the physical level? We can tell by how long that happiness lasts. Physical happiness is gone quickly. For instance, the happiness from food only exists while it is in our mouth. Negative reactions can occur too and if we eat too much too fast we may suffer abdominal discomfort. Sensory happiness lasts a bit longer than physical ones., and we can be happy again when we remember it. It helps change our personality too.

Moralistic happiness is different from the others in that it helps purify us and makes a lot of changes in our personality.

Spiritual happiness is completely different. It lasts forever. While other kinds of happiness last only a short time, spiritual happiness is about the eternal, about purifying oneself and helping one attain realisation. This human beings alone can obtain. We can attain different types happiness both at the lowest and the highest levels. Other living creatures only have limited and temporary happiness based upon limited things such as food and reproduction from birth till death. Taking that into account, the most important aspect of being human is our awareness of being born as a human being. Life as a human being is very special and should not be wasted, but

lived well. Most people, however, waste 25 or 30 years of life of which they are not even aware.

### **Using God's Greatest Gift**

The greatest and highest gift from God to us is being born as a human being, in consideration of which we need to figure out how to live well. We may not have much time when we work, but once we retire or finish raising children, we have more time. Then at the beginning of this period of freer time, we have to be aware and careful about making and maintaining our schedule. Let us plan each day; how we spend our free time from physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual points of view. Otherwise, if we just spend time watching TV, reading newspapers and magazines, eating and sleeping without thinking. Our life seems to be wasted.

Firstly, from a physical perspective we need to maintain good physical health, for example, by doing yoga. Those groups that come to our spiritual discourses across Japan are often members of yoga groups. Many of the participants are over 45 years old up to around 70, and regularly do yoga exercises which is really good. Other good exercises are walking fast for an hour in the morning or evening or gardening. Growing flowers and vegetables gives one physical exercise as well as experiencing the joy of being in touch with nature and cultivation. This is good for the health of both the body and mind.

Alzheimer's disease, a degenerative dementia, often affects the elderly, but even unaffected people often seem forget things in old age. Here is a funny story. An elderly man was visited by an elderly friend. The guest was impressed to hear him call his wife "honey" and asked him if he still loved her so tenderly in his old age. He laughed and answered that he actually just forgot her name and so addressed her that way. One of the major reasons for

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## **How to Live Long and Well** (from page 3)

forgetting things is one does not use one's brain very much. Even habits like reading newspapers doesn't help very much. Thinking deeply is necessary for exercising one's brain for which some serious reading or writing is really good.

It is fine to read newspapers and watch TV for a certain periods of time, but it is a better use of your free time to do some volunteer work. If you are not physically strong enough to do so, you can pray not only for yourself and your family, but also for the peace, happiness and well-being of all people. To chant 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina' By doing so, you can ignite feelings of happiness within, finding that your life is becoming more meaningful.

## **Preparing for Death**

After retirement, we need to get ready for death which inevitably comes. We have deep attachments to our family and to our life. Although we know we have to die, we do not want to, due to such attachments. We should prepare ourselves by shifting our focus onto that entity which is eternal, or in other words, God, from all the temporary and mundane things of the world. Otherwise, it will be too awesome when death suddenly appears, due to our fear of death and lots of attachments.

In one story the God of Death came to an old man and said, "Come with me now your time is up!"

But the man retorted, "You gave me no prior knowledge of your arrival, nor of insistence that I go with you! That is not proper".

Then the Grim Reaper said "I have been in touch with you and giving you notice for years now. You have been losing your teeth one by one. Again, I alerted you as your eyesight and hearing steadily deteriorated. It is not my fault that you did not

realise the import of these notifications, so it was your fault. So no, you have to come with me right now."

We do not listen to these warnings from God and want to cling to life and live as well as possible. We have to prepare ourselves for death, by thinking more of God, by praying more to God, and by depending more upon God.

## **Eternal Support**

While we are alive He protects us, He takes care of us also after death. Death is fearful to us, as we think we have no idea of what happens to us after death. If we can really believe God takes care of us even after death, our fear and worries about death will disappear and we can face and accept death calmly and peacefully.

Another thing is, we feel lonely more often after retirement. We have fewer friends and a shallower relationships with our spouses than when we were younger. If we live by ourselves, we feel lonelier. Just try to think of God at all times. Even if we have no one else around us, we have Him, who is our eternal friend.

Think about this also. If we become blind or shortsighted in old age we cannot watch TV or read newspapers or books or the Internet. If you become deaf you cannot listen to music. However, even if we lost all of our senses, we can think of God in our mind. When we get old, we become ill more often and hence, tend to be more physically conscious and focus more on physical functions. If we have been trying to think of Him since we were young, we can do so even when we are ill. More specifically, pray to Him, meditate on Him, repeat His name and think of Him. He provides us with eternal support. Also practise thinking, "I am not body and mind, I am Atman, pure consciousness. Even if this body dies, I do not die. I am deathless

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## **How to Live Long and Well** (from page 4)

and eternal. These teachings in the Bhagavad Gita, the well-known scripture of Hinduism, tell us so, and though a bit difficult, regular practice may help us tremendously to get rid of the fear of death and accept it with dignity.

We cannot be able to focus on God immediately, so we should start to prepare ourselves right after retirement, if not even earlier. We cannot do so easily if we wait to start such practice after retirement, but

we should start to practice now, by reading about Him and thinking of Him. If we can learn to take this attitude, we can live well and meaningfully as long as we are alive. •

### • Thought of the Month •

“He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own.”

... Confucius

## NEWS BRIEFS

### **Summer Outdoor Spiritual Retreat**

The annual summer spiritual retreat took place at Daikanso in Yugawara, Kanagawa between Friday 26 July and Sunday 28 July. It had been held in the mountains in most years, but this year the venue chosen was close to the beach according to Maharaj's suggestion. It was planned as a two nights stay as a whole, but participants had the options to stay overnight or just spend a day. A total of thirty-one people joined, twelve out of whom had attended for the first time. The outline of the events was as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> day: vespers, devotional songs, readings, and guided meditation. After dinner, satsanga.  
2<sup>nd</sup> day: got up at 4:45 am. Meditation, chanting, devotional songs, readings, mangala arati and yoga exercise. After breakfast, Maharaj gave discourse on Divine Qualities - What Is Being a Better Person Like? Offering and Meditation.

After lunch the discourse continued. In the evening we all walked to a nearby waterfall, where we meditated and had tea and snacks. Returning to the inn, vespers and a guided meditation. After dinner a satsanga with Swami.

3<sup>rd</sup> day: We got up at 3:40 am and moved in cars to nearby beach. Meditation, chanting, devotional songs and yoga exercise on the beach. Back at inn, breakfast, then discourse continued. Offering and meditation. After lunch, questions and answers, and comments from all participants. Retreat ended.

Some came from far afield, with three from Kansai area, one from Nagano Prefecture, plus a Venezuelan student living and studying in Tokyo. We were supposed to spend most of the time silently during the retreat, while during satsanga after dinner there was time to get to know each other and have fun. We introduced ourselves one by one, laughing at humorous comments and singing the Japanese song Furusato together with Maharaj.

*Here is part of the report from Ms Yuko Nitta, one of the participants.*

“This was my first time to participate in the Summer Retreat. I was able to completely relax there though, feeling I was surrounded in tender love. Also, I found it very important to  
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spend days and nights with those whose beings are aimed in the same direction. Thanks to the love and blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji, we could learn and practise together, regardless of whether one had joined for the first time or had participated many times.”

The Retreat full of activities went very smoothly and ended successfully. We cannot thank the volunteer staff enough, who supported Swami Medhasananda all ways from finding the inn to facilitating the programme during the retreat. •

### **Sri Krishna Janmashtami**

The Vedanta Society (Kyokai) celebrated Sri Krishna’s birth anniversary at the monthly Zushi Retreat on Sunday, August 18. Thirty-eight people joined in the celebration. The morning programme consisted of chanting Vedic mantras together and readings from the Bhagavad Gita and Srimad Bhagavatam and we sang devotional songs revering Sri Krishna.

Then Maharaj gave a discourse on The Devine Play of Sri Krishna with the help of a Japanese interpreter, Ms Yoko Sasaki. Some of the most fascinating stories were about why He has blue or black skin in artworks; weighing Him and a tulsi leaf on balance scales; being unable to bind a baby Krishna with rope, as no rope is long enough to go around His body; and seeing the universe in His mouth. The audience nodded and smiled at such witty and imaginative tales.

After lunch prasad, Maharaj continued with his discourse followed by questions and answers and meditation. Then they had tea and snacks, and late in the afternoon he and about a dozen of devotees walked down to the nearby beach, where they meditated for a few minutes. •

### **Krishna Jayanti Bhakti Yoga Festa 2013:**

Swami Medhasananda joined in the Krishna Jayanti Bhakti Yoga Festa 2013, Sri Krishna’s birth anniversary celebration, held by Yoga School Kailas in Yodoyabashi, Osaka on Sunday, August 25. In spite of a heavy rain with thunder and lightning in the morning, more than two hundred people participated in the event.

At 10:30 AM, Swami conducted a puja for Krishna, during which the audience chanted the maha mantra. We also offered flowers one by one putting their palms together and offering prayers (pushpanjali). After the ritual, Swami gave a discourse on Sri Krishna.

Lunch prasad was homemade curry prepared by the event staff from scratch. It was so popular that many enjoyed a refill. By that time it had stopped raining and the sky had cleared up. Actually, Sri Krishna was born on a stormy day and, according to Swami, it usually rains on his birthday.

The afternoon programme included a video produced by Kailas, ‘The Essence of Bhakti Yoga’, a film about the child Krishna, yoga lessons and live performances of classical Indian music.

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NEWS BRIEFS (from page 7)

*Ms Michiko Kadota of Kailas Yoga School said of the event:*

“Swami Medhasananda only gave a short discourse because of time considerations, but the audience all listened attentively. Some respondents to a questionnaire passed out after the event, said Swami’s discourse was one of the best parts in the Festa. I am glad if we were able to get across what Bhakti Yoga is like through this Festa. It is beyond words and cannot hence be conveyed in books. It can only be expressed in action, atmosphere and the flow of God’s blessings. Sri Krishna was born here in this world to convey it and it would be a real joy if I can help to do so at all.”

PHOTOS FROM KRISHNA JAYANTI BHAKTI YOGA FESTA 2013





## • A Story to Remember •

### **Shipwrecked**

There was once a man who was ship-wrecked and stranded on an island. Every day he prayed asking God to send someone to rescue him, but to his disappointment, no one ever came.

Months passed and this man learned how to survive on the island. During this time, he accumulated several items of practical use from around the island and stored them in a hut that he had constructed. One day returning to his hut after fishing, much to his dismay he saw that it was on fire along with everything else he had collected! All of his possessions were going up in smoke! The only thing he had left were the clothes on his back. Initially he was in shock, and then he was consumed with anger and rage!

In his fury he shook a fist at the sky and began cursing God and yelling, "God, how could you let this happen to me? I've been praying everyday for months about being rescued and no one has come, and now everything that I have is on fire! How could you do this to me! Why did you let this happen?"

The man was on his hands and knees weeping heavily when he happened to look up and catch sight of a ship coming in his direction. The man was rescued and as they were heading back to civilization he asked the captain, "How were you able to find me?"

The captain responded, "We were voyaging on course for our port of call when we noticed a column of smoke rising up on the horizon. We decided to go check it out and that's when we found you!"

Author unknown

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](mailto:info@vedanta.jp)