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日本ヴェダント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

Sri Ramakrishna Deva
Monday, 3 March

Gouranga Mahaprabhu
Sunday, 16 March

Swami Yogananda
Thursday, 20 March

Kyokai Events

March

• Zushi Retreat •

**Sri Ramakrishna Deva
Birth Celebration**
Sunday, 16 March

New Zushi Annexe

06:00 Mangala Arati
10:30 Puja
Pushpanjali
(flower offering)
Homa
12:30 Lunch Prasad
14:45 Discourse
15:45 Music program
16:30 Tea
18:00 Arati

All are welcome to attend!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

“When the goal of spiritual life is reached, there remains only compassion in the heart.”

- Sri Ramakrishna

“Verily, God is Compassionate and is fond of compassion, and He gives to the compassionate what He does not give to the harsh.”

- Prophet Muhammad

Vedanta Society of Chicago Hosts “Calling Chicago”
Celebrating Swami Vivekananda’s 150th Birth Anniversary
Guest Discourse Hilton Hotel on November 10, 2014

The Concept of a Perfect Man According to Swami Vivekananda

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Once Swami Vivekananda had remarked to his brother disciples, ‘First you understand me, then you will understand Sri Ramakrishna.’ Swami Turiyananda, himself a realised soul, a scholar of scriptures, as well as a brother monk of Swamiji, was asked what this remark implied. Turiyanandaji answered that since Swamiji was a perfect man, his brother monk should first understand him before trying to understand Sri Ramakrishna, who was the embodiment of divinity.

(Story on page 2)

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Perfect Man (from page1)

Now what is this concept of a perfect man of whom, according to Turiyanandaji, Swamiji was himself a role model?

In one sense a perfect man is a myth, especially as long as one considers oneself a body-mind complex and governed by the three qualities (gunas) of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. These gunas are made of matter and matter has its limitations. Perfection can be attained by transcending these gunas and realising the spirit, which is pure consciousness, free from all imperfections and all blemishes. Thus, realised souls who transcend these Gunas are equated with perfect souls.

Interestingly, those great souls who realise Truth, follow mostly a single path of devotion or knowledge or meditation. When these souls start teaching, they give emphasis only on the path they themselves have trod. Thus, as Swamiji observed, 'There are many teachers in this world, but you find that most of them are one-sided, that is, highlighting only devotion, or only knowledge, or only meditation.'

Pluralistic Perfectionism

Then Swamiji put forward his suggestion in the form of a question: 'Why not have the giant who is equally active, equally knowing and equally being? Is it impossible? Certainly not! This is the man of the future, of whom there are (only a) few at present.' We can surmise that Swamiji and all his brother disciples were among them.

Now who was the man who set a new trend of pluralistic perfectionism in this age by himself practicing different paths of realisation of the Truth, harmonising them, and by training his disciples to mould their lives by embodying the best of yoga, devotion, knowledge and work? It was Sri Ramakrishna, the great mystic of the age. He in his inimitable, simple, yet profound way, would often say to his disciples, 'Don't be monotonous. That is not my way.'

One who wants to become a perfect man should integrate his personality at the level of body, mind and speech, and develop himself physically, mentally, morally, intellectually, and above all spiritually. Nevertheless, such spirituality should not be one-sided, but combine different streams of spirituality. Otherwise he cannot fully manifest the potentiality of perfection which he has within. Both to Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda a perfect soul should be holistic and pluralistic.

Let me narrate here a personal experience. When I travel I occasionally encounter people at the airport, on the aeroplane or elsewhere, who having seen my saffron coloured robes, ask me. "Are you 'Hare Krishna'?" Inferring that I belong to the Hare Krishna Movement or ISKCON (Int'l Society for Krishna Consciousness). I reply, "No, I am 'Ramakrishna'!" This answer usually confuses them and then they ask further, "What's the difference between Hare Krishna and Ramakrishna?" "The difference is between 'only' and 'also'," I reply and explain, "Hare Krishna or ISKCON devotees worship 'only' Sri Krishna, but we, devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, worship other incarnations and 'also' Krishna." Friends, thus while 'only' stands for exclusiveness, 'also' stands for inclusiveness. Exclusiveness gives birth to intolerance, hatred and disharmony, while inclusiveness gives birth to acceptance, love and harmony. Hence a perfect man should be inclusive and pluralistic.

Sri Ramakrishna trained Swamiji and His other monastic disciples and made them perfect and entrusted in them, especially Swamiji, a mission to make a new type of man, caste in His own mould. That is why Swamiji proclaimed, 'Man-making is my mission.' and he spent his life in fulfilling this mission of his Guru.

Swamiji not only conceptualised the perfect man, he symbolised this concept in originating an emblem, and actualised it by introducing a method within the mon-

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Perfect Man (from page 2)

astery he founded. The emblem of the Ramakrishna Order, as you know, consists of the Sun, symbolising Jnana Yoga, the lotus for Bhakti Yoga, the wave for Karma Yoga, the serpent for Raja Yoga, and also the swan, symbolising Paramatman, the Supreme Reality, which will be realised by the combined practice of all the four yogas. The practice of all four of these yogas harmoniously is made possible by following a practical method of daily routine at the monastery. If you observe our ashrama's daily schedule, you will find that the monastics practice Raja Yoga during meditation; Bhakti Yoga when they go to the temple and pay their respects to Sri Ramakrishna, attend evening vesper services and sing devotional songs; they practice Karma Yoga when they perform various types of selfless service; and they practice Jnana Yoga when they study scriptures and practice discrimination and focus on the Supreme Reality.

Once Swami Premeshanandaji, a highly venerable monk of our Order who had inspired many to lead a spiritual life, commented to a young monk, 'If you follow our ashrama's daily routine everyday with awareness and sincerity, not only will you not need to go to a secluded place like mountains or forests for spiritual practice, but you will become a perfect monk by living in the ashrama.' In fact we were so fortunate to see such monks in our Order – monks who by living in the monastery and following its routine and doing spiri-

tual practices and selfless works. While some of them are well known, for example, swamis like Madhavanandaji and Vireswaranandaji, there are also lesser known monks like Swami Muktananda, popularly known as Bonbaba or Bonbihari Maharaj of Benares, who mostly lived at our Varanasi Home of Service, followed the ashrama routine, and did the same job of dressing wounds at the hospital, however foul the smells they would emit, day in and day out for 60-odd years with a cheerful heart and the utmost dedication and, thus, perfected himself.

If we really believe that Swamiji is the prophet of this age, we should also believe that the emblem he designed for the Ramakrishna Order as its ideal, and the method of practicing all the four yogas in everyday life he had introduced in the Ramakrishna Order of monasteries, was not only meant for the monks and devotees of that Order, but also for all the aspirants of the world to emulate and make themselves perfect.

Transcend the Gunas

While preaching the Gospel of Man-making Swamiji mainly emphasised Ashtāngika Mārga, an eight-fold path of ideas. First and foremost of these ideas is the dehypnotisation of the soul. Once when Swamiji was giving talks on Atman, someone from the audience charged up saying, 'Swami, are you not trying to hypnotise us by convincing us to believe that we are the Atman?' Swamiji assured her, 'No Madam, you are already hypnotised. I am trying to dehypnotise you!'

Swamiji would often stress upon one's thinking that he is not the body, not mind, not ego, but that he is Atman. He would say that the greatest superstition that we have, and that we should get rid of, is 'I am body', or sometimes he would say 'our mind is maya' from which we should become free. The root cause of all our sufferings, of all our fears and our selfishness, is

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Perfect Man (from page 3)

our mistaken understanding that we are body, that we are mind, when we are actually Atman – and this is the state of hypnotism – the greatest obstacle to our becoming perfect.

There are seven more important ideas reiterated by Swamiji, which help us to become perfect. We need not elucidate each as they are self-explanatory and include:

1. Cultivate Sraddha, that is, faith in God and faith in yourself and believe that all power is within you and manifest that power.
2. Be kind, benevolent and serve others by seeing God in them.
3. Be pure and practice self-abnegation which is the center of morality.
4. Hold fast to your faith but respect others' faith also.
5. Combine intense activity with eternal calmness.
6. Practice both attachment and detachment.
7. Cultivate learning.

In Swami Vivekananda's concept of a perfect man, such a person will not only harbour lofty thoughts and ideas, but must also have the power to translate them into action. This is not possible unless he has a strong body and will power. So Swamiji would often reiterate: Make your nerves strong. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel.

There is neither any long jump nor high jump in the journey to perfection. So Swamiji, while charting the path of perfection, advised aspirants to transform themselves gradually, but not hastily and abruptly. In transforming aspirants thus, he used the concept of Triguna, unique to Indian philosophy, and advised that depending upon one's state, one should transform oneself from a Tamasic state to

a Rajasic state, and then from the Rajasic to Sattvic, and finally transcending the Sattvic as well. Thus, while in the West he advocated to mostly Rajasic people that they should transform themselves into a Sattvic state, and in India where people were steeped in Tamas in the name of Sattva at that time. Swamiji advised a transformation to Rajasic and then on to Sattvic. But in both cases the goal was to transcend all three gunas and become free and perfect.

Patience and Vigilance

It is not that Swamiji alone discussed the theme of perfection, this theme also forms parts of various scriptures and thoughts of religious teachers and philosophers of the world. For example, the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavatam, Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, Buddha's Eightfold Path and the Sermon on the Mount of the New Testament, all discuss this same theme in their own ways. There is also Frederick Nietzsche's philosophical Superman and Bernard Shaw's dramatisation of Superman. But what sets Swamiji's concept of a perfect man apart is that it is well defined, holistic, universal, practicable and also best suited to the present age. Moreover, his presentation of such concepts is so forceful, so penetrating, that even though they come to us now in black and white print they pierce into our heart, give us shock therapy and induce us to become different. Thus, even after 150 years since Swamiji's birth many people, who have a natural love of idealism resort to Vivekananda and accept him as their friend, philosopher and guide. This is especially true of Indian youth.

The journey to perfection, often compared to walking on a razor's edge, is not an easy or comfortable journey, and eternal vigilance and infinite patience are needed to reach the goal. Without these there is every chance of a fall and deviation from the path, which may induce the aspirant to feel dejected and even give up the journey.

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Perfect Man (from page 4)

Swamiji was fully aware of this problem and would encourage such aspirants by saying: 'Never mind failures, they are quite natural, they are the beauty of life – these failures. Never mind struggles, the mistakes – hold to the ideal a thousand times, and if you fail a thousand times, make the attempt once more.'

Another piece of advice Swamiji would often offer travellers on the path to perfection, was that while one is undertaking this path, aspirants should also help their co-travellers to reach the goal. 'Be and Make' thus became another of his famous mottos.

The Social Dimension

Now, does this concept of a Perfect Man and its actualisation have any social dimension? Yes, it has. The greatest breadth, the highest catholicity, the utmost integrity, the intellect of Shankara and the heart of Buddha can be combined in this Perfect Man. Swamiji believed that a perfect society could be constituted by these perfected men, since society is nothing but an aggregate of individuals.

But to establish such an ideal society, every individual must try to change himself to become ideal. Herein lies the real problem. Like the popular adages of Murphy's Law, there are four laws concerning changing society. These are:

1st Law – Everyone wants to change the society and make it perfect



• Thought of the Month •

"...man is a bundle of relations,
a knot of roots, whose flower
and fruitage is the world..."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

2nd Law – No one wants to change himself

3rd Law – Everyone wants others to change

4th Law – Finally, no one changes and society remains the same.

So without expecting others to change or without trying to change others, let each of us start the process by trying to change ourselves first.

Let me close by recounting a story – a story of Mulla Nasiruddin, the legendary Sufi wise-man. Once Nasiruddin was found sitting near the plaza in a pensive mood. People, being curious, asked him, 'Mulla sahib, salutations, share with us what you are pondering.'

Nasiruddin replied, 'I want to change this damn society, so I am thinking how to achieve it.'

'That's great!' quipped the folk and left him.

One year later Nasiruddin was found on the same spot in the same mood, and the people asked again, 'Mulla sahib, last year you were pondering how to change society. Have you not found the solution?'

Nasiruddin answered, 'Brethren, I realised it was too difficult to change society. So now I am thinking how to change my family, which, too, has so many of its own drawbacks.'

The people remarked, 'That is also very impressive!' But after another year had passed Nasiruddin was found back in the same place and in the same thoughtful

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Perfect Man (from page 5)

mood. The people could not resist themselves and one asked aloud, 'Mulla sahib, what makes you still so thoughtful?'

Nasiruddin confided, 'Brother, I have realised that it is difficult not only to change society, but to change my own family. So I am pondering how to change myself!'

So friends! Let us now ponder like Nasiruddin and also start acting to change ourselves so that we may become perfect as Swamiji wanted each of us to be, and as a consequence society will also become perfect.

Thank you. Arigatougozaimashita.

Memorial Service

It is with a heavy heart that we announce the passing away of our dear friend, Professor Tsuyoshi Nara, in the evening of January 20, after a brief illness. Professor Nara had a long association with the Ramakrishna Mission dating back to when he stayed at one Mission branch near Kolkata for about five years while earning his Ph.D. from the University of Calcutta in the 1950s. He was Vice President of both the Swami Vivekananda 150th Birth Celebration Committee and the Managing Committee of the Vedanta Society of Japan, a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, and offered his invaluable services in promoting the Vedanta Movement in Japan. Thus his loss to both admirers and followers of Vedanta is irreparable.

Our earnest prayer is that his soul may rest in peace!

The Indian Embassy in Tokyo has organised a memorial service to pay homage to the departed soul of Professor Tsuyoshi Nara on Monday, February 3, from 4pm to 5-15pm according to the following programme. Everyone is welcome to attend.

1600 – 1615 – Invocation of Prayer by Swami Medhasananda

1615– 1617 – Two Minutes of Silence

1617 – 1620 – Condolence Speech by the Ambassador

1620 – 1630 – Word of Remembrance by Mrs. Akiko Nara

1630 – 1635 – Speech by Mr. Kanokogi

1635 – 1650 – Invocation of Prayers by Bengali Association in Japan

1650 – 1715 – Photo Slide Show of Mr. Nara with Sarangi Music Background

1715 – Closing



Professor Tsuyoshi Nara

January Zushi Retreat 2014
Celebrating Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 162nd Birth Anniversary



Preparing the Altar



Brief Meditation

The Vedanta Society of Japan commemorated Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 162nd Birthday with a celebration held for its Monthly Zushi Retreat on Sunday, January 19, in the Centre's Annexe Building.

The programme began at 6 a.m. in the main ashrama building with mangalarati, readings, chanting and bhajans. This was followed by meditation until 7:30. Breakfast was served at about 7:45 to a few of the celebration volunteers who had stayed overnight at either Holy Mother House for lady devotees and guests or the Main Ashram for gentlemen. After breakfast volunteers attended to various preparations of food, flowers, chairs, audio equipment and a temporary elevated platform for the puja .

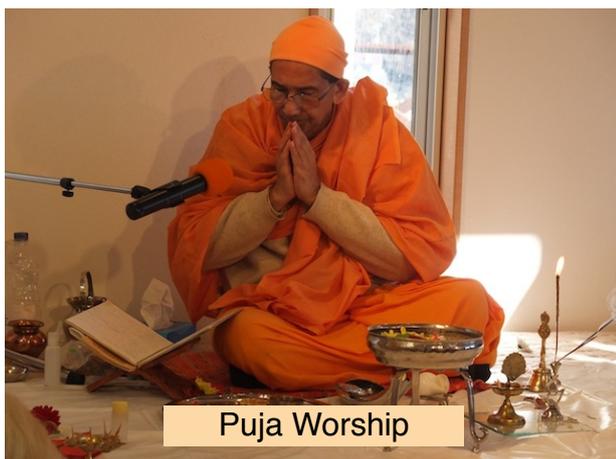
At 11 a.m. with about 50 people in attendance, Swami Medhasananda saw to final

details of the altar with food offerings, leis and flower blossoms and bouquets and began the puja. This was followed by brief meditation before beginning the arati. The swami led the congregation in Vedic chants prior to pushpanji, where all offered flower-blossoms, salutations and prayers to Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.

Attendees then proceeded to the Main Ashrama where a Prasad lunch was served cafeteria style at about 12:30. The menu was Indian vegetarian or fish curries and dishes prepared by the Centre's culinary expert, Sophia-san. Tables were set up in the main dining room and upstairs in the meeting room to accommodate all comfortably.

At 2:30 p.m. the congregation was again called to order in the Annexe. Swami

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Puja Worship



Lunch Served

Holy Mother (from page 7)

again led chants and reading from Holy Mother's Gospel in English and Japanese followed. The topic of Swami Medhasananda's talk on Holy Mother Sarada Devi that followed was "Characteristics of Her Motherhood" which was interpreted by Ms. Yoko Sasaki.

After the talk and a few brief comments by

the Swami the congregation was led in the singing of Japanese devotional songs by a small group of lady devotees. Those that remained afterward enjoyed a light refreshment of tea and snacks.

Evening arati began in the Main Ashram Shrine promptly at 6:15 p.m. with bhajans, readings and meditation. Supper was served to the remaining volunteers from 8 p.m. •



Prasad Lunch



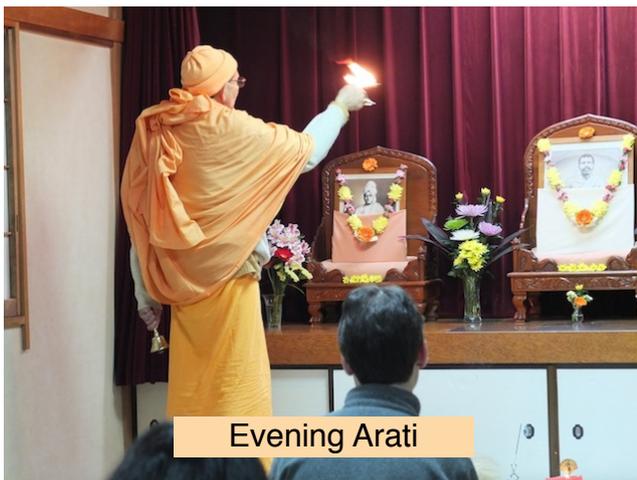
Talk on Mother



Devotional Songs



Congregation Singing



Evening Arati



Evening Arati

• A Story to Remember •

In the Dense Forest of this World

"Once a rich man was passing through a forest, when three robbers surrounded him and robbed him of all his wealth. After snatching all his possessions from him, one of the robbers said: 'What's the good of keeping the man alive? Kill him.' Saying this, he was about to strike their victim with his sword, when the second robber interrupted and said: 'There's no use in killing him. Let us bind him fast and leave him here. Then he won't be able to tell the police.' Accordingly the robbers tied him with a rope, left him, and went away."

"After a while the third robber returned to the rich man and said: 'Ah! You're badly hurt, aren't you? Come, I'm going to release you.' The third robber set the man free and led him out of the forest. When they came near the highway, the robber said, 'Follow this road and you will reach home easily.' 'But you must come with me too', said the man. 'You have done so much for me. We shall all be happy to see you at our home.' 'No,' said the robber, 'it is not possible for me to go there. The police will arrest me.' So saying, he left the rich man after pointing out his way."

"Now, the first robber, who said: 'What's the good of keeping the man alive? Kill him', is *tamas*. It destroys. The second robber is *rajas*, which binds a man to the world and entangles him in a variety of activities. *Rajas* makes him forget God. *Sattva* alone shows the way to God. It produces virtues like compassion, righteousness, and devotion. Again, *sattva* is like the last step of the stairs. Next to it is the roof. The Supreme Brahman is man's own abode. One cannot attain the Knowledge of Brahman unless one transcends the three *gunas*."

- Sri Ramakrishna - Tales and Parables

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