



March 2014 - Volume 12 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

Sri Rama Navami
Tuesday, 8 April

Kyokai Events

• Bhagavad Gita Talk •

14:00~16:00 April 5
Indian Embassy, Tokyo

• Kumamoto Event •

Swami Vivekananda
150th Birth Celebration
Saturday April 12
Doors Open - 13:00

• Zushi Retreat •

Sunday April 20,
from 10:30am

Talk-Sw.Medhasananda
All are welcome to attend!

• Akhanda Japam •

Tuesday, April 29
05:00 ~ 20:00
Hourly Scheduled
Participation: Contact
Mr. Mitamura
dd94dd94@nifty.com

Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya

✧ Thus Spake ✧

“Through spiritual disciplines the ties of past karma are cut asunder. But the realisation of God cannot be achieved without ecstatic love for him.”

- The Holy Mother-Sri Sarada Devi

“What neither mother, nor father, nor other relative could do, a well-directed mind does, and thereby elevates one.”

- The Buddha

February Zushi Retreat 2014

Celebrating Swami Vivekananda's 152nd Birth Anniversary

While the Vedanta Society of Japan is still participating in a year-long calendar of events to commemorate Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary launched in coordination with Ramakrishna Mission Centres worldwide, Swamiji's actual 152nd birth anniversary was on Tuesday, January 23, according to the Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac/Calendar.

The Zushi Monthly Retreat was held on Sunday, February 16, at the Zushi Centre's main Ashrama starting at 06:00 with Swami Medhasananda conducting mangalarati, reading, chanting and bhajans. Breakfast was later served and volunteers set about attending to the many chores necessary to ensure a successful Retreat. The regular morning session began at 11am with a puja and worship with the congregation receiving a dab of incense paste on their foreheads before enjoying a prasad lunch.

(con't page 2)

In this Issue:

- Thus Spake ... page 1
- Monthly Calendar ... page 1
- February Zushi Retreat Celebrating Vivekananda's 152nd Birth Anniversary ... page 1

- 150th Birth Anniversary Special Service to the Homeless Nara-Narayan

.. page 3

- January Zushi Retreat Discourse 'Holy Mother's Motherhood' ... page 4
- Thought of the Month ... page 5
- A Story to Remember ... page 9

February Retreat (from page1)



The afternoon session began at 2:45pm with Swami Medhasananda giving a talk on Swami Vivekananda. [This talk will be published in a future issue of The Vedanta Kyokai.] The congregation then joined in singing devotional songs before taking a tea break around 4pm.

The remaining devotees then joined as the swami conducted the evening arati and bhajans. •



Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Celebration Special Nara-Narayan Service to the Homeless

In connection with the Vedanta Society of Japan's year-long calendar of activities and events commemorating the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, a special Nara-Narayan service to the homeless project, which was dear to Swamiji's heart, was conducted on February 21, in Kotobukicho Park, Yokohama, Japan. Although the Society organises monthly distribution of food at this location, on this occasion 350 sets of socks and undergarments were also passed out in addition to the regular monthly distribution of fruits.

As Swami Medhasananda has noted in the past, "There are two kinds of worship; creating an altar in a temple to worship God, or by worshipping a living God by seeing Him in the poor, sick and needy, and providing food if He is hungry, clothes if He does not have them, and medical treatment if He is sick. People are basically selfish, yet when we serve others we have our hearts purified and become selfless. Swami Vivekananda said, 'Selflessness is God.' In the Ramakrishna Order, we watch over the sick in our hospitals each day with the idea of worshipping God in them."

As Swami Vivekananda instructed:

"It is only by doing good to others that one attains to one's own good. It is only work that is done as a free-will offering to humanity and to nature that does not bring with it any binding attachment.

"Let each one of us pray day and night for the downtrodden millions, who are held fast by poverty, priestcraft and tyranny. Pray day and night for them. I care more to preach religion to them than to the high and the rich. I am no metaphysician, no philosopher, nay, no saint. But I am poor and I love the poor."

These ideas of service expounded by Swamiji were put into practice especially on this special occasion.



January Zushi Retreat 2014
Celebrating Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's Birth Anniversary
'Characteristics of Holy Mother's Motherhood'
A talk by Swami Medhasananda

Sri Ramakrishna said about Holy Mother, 'I am accomplishing the task of giving liberation to the people through the power of Sri Sarada Devi.' By this remark we may begin to understand the greatness of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. In fact, no one recognised Sarada Devi, except for Sri Ramakrishna. All the householder and monastic disciples have said that they had no idea about the Mother's greatness, and only after Ramakrishna told them of her greatness could they begin to get an idea about it. He used to say that there was no difference between the Divine Mother living in the Dakshineswar Kali Temple and Sarada Devi living in small room on the ground floor of the temple complex Nahabat (music tower).

In fact it is very difficult for us to understand great souls such as Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Vivekananda. God is infinity and by realising infinity, they have become infinity. While we are living on the plane of the finite, how can we understand infinity? That is why it is very hard for others to understand realised souls. Not only that; a lot of misunderstandings occur. For example, they would say that Sri Ramakrishna was a strange man; a 'mad man' some said. Then some would observe and say that Holy Mother has many attachments, such as her niece Radhu and other relatives, whom she took care of. To this Holy Mother would say, 'Yes, I myself am Maya.'

These great ones eat, drink, sleep, and sometime express anger just like ordinary men, yet they are so different. When we try to give a talk on the Holy Mother or others it only comes from our limited understanding that has, in fact, been given to us by them. This is like offering worship to the Ganga (Ganges) with the water of the Ganga. So whatever little understanding of Holy Mother we have has been given to us by her. In fact, if we make some mistake in speaking of her, it is her responsibility.

Given this understanding we would like to discuss "Holy Mother's Uniqueness as Mother" or we may call it the "Characteristics of Her Motherhood."

Elements of Motherly Love

It is said that of all the loves in this world, a mother's love is greatest, and I have no doubt about it. There are many examples of love; father's love, brother's love, wife's love, friend's love. But of all these examples of worldly love, a mother's love is greatest. Just look at a mother's sacrifice to raise a child. This child is the product of her own body. The time, the labour, the training, the care, just consider how much is sacrificed by the mother to raise this child. Then consider how much emotion and aspirations are associated with the child. Even when the child is still in the womb the mother has invested aspirations and imaginings for the child. Then how much is invested into the welfare of the child throughout its life even to the last of its days. Even after I became a monk, I would look into my mother's eyes and be humbled by the depth of affection for me I saw there. She would not say the words 'I love you,' but by the very sight of her I could know how much love for me she had.

If one objectively analyses this mother's love, which we can recognise as the greatest example of worldly love – if we critically observe this love we can understand that there must be an even higher form of a mother's love. Unless we have some terms of reference to distinguish that higher form of mother's love from ordinary mother's love, our perceptions suffer lacunas.

First of all, a mother's love is centred on her own child and not directed towards others. She is ready to sacrifice anything, but only for her own child. This attraction is strong because the child was produced within the mother's own body. Generally speaking,

(con't page 5)

Mother's Motherhood (from page 4)

there is much attachment in this love. One symptom or idea of this attachment is the desire to control whom we love. Then again, should the person we love do something wrong, we may ignore it. This attachment can obstruct our right thinking and right action as well.

For example, the mother wants to control the child. Here we may have some differences between Western and Eastern culture. In Western culture it may be more common to drive young ones out of the nest when they are of age to make a life of their own. In Asia there is more of a tendency to live together longer, but with mothers still seeking to control their offspring and household even after children marry. This can become a source of trouble for sons – Whom shall he please, wife or mother? We find this in India and Japan as well. The mother doesn't want freedom from these responsibilities.

Even if there is wrongdoing by her child, the mother may not recognise it. In Sanskrit it says, 'snehandha, meaning blinded by love and attachment. The great example in the Mahabharata is of King Dhritarashtra who could not prevent his wicked son, Durodhana, from doing evil out of attachment for him. Sometimes it is mothers who overlook or ignore the bad deeds of their children out of attachment to them. Sometimes it would be best for the child to travel for education or for work, but the mother will strongly object. Mothers may also have some expectation that the child should look after them in old age.

While mothers want for the wellbeing of their children, sometimes they are not so hopeful for their spiritual wellbeing. Most want their children to have successful lives, marry, have children and earn a lot of money. Rare is the mother who is most concerned for the child's spiritual wellbeing. If the son does not want to marry and wants to become a monk, he faces a lot of resistance. Though mother and father are both devotees they say, "Let other sons become monks. My son should marry!" So the mother's idea of well-

• Thought of the Month •

"Truth comes as conqueror
only to those who have lost the art
of receiving it as friend."

- Rabindranath Tagore

being for the child is mostly material wellbeing, not spiritual wellbeing, nor does the mother's prayer for the wellbeing of her child extend beyond the child's current lifetime.

Just witness how much power a mother has in solving the problems a child faces. Yet, the limits of her power are recognised should the child face problems like diseases and disabilities. She may resort to prayer, but she herself does not have the power. Then again, should the mother of three children have one son who earns a lot of money, she will favour and exhibit a special love for him. Should a mother's son be intelligent or talented in some way, she will always highlight this about the son, and not the qualities of another less-gifted son. So there is discrimination by the mother towards her sons.

Holy Mother's Universal Love

In all these points Holy Mother was different. My first point was a mother's love is generally focused on her children. Holy Mother's love was not like this, it was directed to everyone. You may surmise, 'OK, Holy Mother did not have any children, so she could not become attached.' Well, there are also cases of adoption where these attachments grow. Even in the absence of children there are pet dogs or cats we can become attached to. It is in our nature. If, like most of us, we are prone to attachment, something will come along that we will become attached to. Even if there is nothing there, attachment will seek out something. Is it not true?

Secondly, Holy Mother's love was not limited to her family and inner circle, but was held equally and unconditionally for all. This is very important. In manifesting this motherliness, it does not matter on whether you

(con't page 6)

Mother's Motherhood (from page 5)

marry or not, or have children or not. In every woman this motherliness is there. It has been my experience that when I need help, most of the time it is women who come forward to help, not only within our Society, but outside as well. I recognise the mother that is in every woman, as they immediately sympathise with anyone who is in trouble.

Suppose I am trying to reach a certain destination and I cannot find the correct pathway, I wonder who to ask as I wander down the street. Invariably some woman will notice and ask if she can be of help. Once after I had just arrived in Japan I was waiting at a bus stop nearby when I realised I didn't have any change just a large note. I asked the others in the queue if it was possible for the driver to make change and they said no. Then one lady told me not to worry and offered to pay my fare. I thanked her in Japanese, the extent of my Japanese speaking ability then. When the bus came to a stop at the station, I rushed off to get change to repay her for her kindness. I succeeded in getting change, but the woman then refused to accept it.

If a woman can cultivate this attitude in treating everyone as her own child, then this idea of universal motherhood will manifest. This will elevate her. Holy Mother's life demonstrates this. It elevates both the person you look upon as your child and it elevates yourself as well.

Love Without Discrimination

As I said, Holy Mother's love was universal, but neither was it limited to human beings. Once a devotee asked her, 'Are you also the mother of this ant over here?' 'Yes, I am,' she replied. She is an incarnation of the Di-

vine Mother. The divine incarnates as Mother.

While taking initiation one young man was not sitting quietly, he seemed a little agitated. Holy Mother said to him that Sri Ramakrishna was his chosen ideal, his chosen deity. He protested saying that since she had given him initiation, she was his guru, his chosen ideal. Mother insisted saying that she was only his mother. Again he protested saying that his mother lived in a far away village. Holy Mother said, 'My son, look at me.' At that very moment the boy had the vision of his birth mother sitting before him. He then prostrated before Holy Mother and ceased all his protestations. This same devotee later became a monk as well.

In her love Holy Mother would practice no discrimination. As I have noted, a mother may discriminate in favour of a talented or intelligent child, in Holy Mother's case there was no such discrimination. Saint or sinner, rich or poor, there was no discrimination. Suppose some distinguished guest comes to the house, we make our best effort to accommodate

him. But suppose such a guest could not come and sends his servant with word of his regrets and some food items to offer at the altar. Usually, this servant is not given the same care that his employer would have received. There is always a difference in how the master or the servant is served. But we find in Holy Mother there was no such discrimination, no difference whatsoever.

In India at that time there was a lot of caste distinction and religious prejudices, Hindus could be very critical if a Muslim enters a high-caste Hindu's house and such things, especially as Holy Mother belonged to the Brahmin caste. If a poor Muslim would come to visit Holy Mother at her village home on some occasion for a feast, Mother would

(con't page 7)



Mother's Motherhood (from page 6)

request one of her relatives present to serve this guest. On one such occasion Mother's niece Nalini, complied by taking great care that she would not touch this guest and tossed the food at the guest. Actually, according to social norms of that period, this was not so unusual. Holy Mother showed her displeasure in seeing this by saying, 'If you serve someone in this way, can anyone get some happiness in enjoying the food? If you cannot serve someone properly, just tell me. I will do it.' She then took great care to serve this Muslim guest herself.

This was during British rule and there was a lot of dissension against the British for the exploitation, imprisonments, torture and other offences they committed against Indians. Naturally there was a lot of fighting between nationalists and the British. When this issue was brought to Holy Mother, her attitude was completely different. 'There may be fighting between you and them,' she said, 'but they are still my children!' See how this practically illiterate village woman rose above all prejudices and hatreds and infightings, as she lifted others. She, who was born and brought up in very strict, orthodox social customs. Is it not surprising?

Spiritual Wellbeing of Her Children

As Mother she would not only think about the wellbeing of her children in this secular world, she would always consider their spiritual wellbeing. That was her speciality. She knew that all aspects of material wellbeing always come to an end, but that spiritual wellbeing continues on. That is why, while she would take care of the material wellbeing of devotees as much as practicable, she was always most concerned with the spiritual wellbeing of her children.



In the Puranas there is a story of Queen Madalasa who gave birth to princes one after another. When babies are born, mothers usually rock the cradle and sing songs to their infants. Queen Madalasa, however, would sing, ""Suddha-asi Buddha-asi Niranjana-asi Samsara-maya-parivarjita-asi" ("You become pure, you become wise, you become free of Maya.") That was the song she would sing to her babies. She didn't sing to the child about getting a good education, getting a good job, earning money, having a good standard of living. No, she sang to them get moksha-mukti, be rid of samskaras and Maya and become free! She sang about making her sons sages. That is the idea of motherhood in our scriptures.

Mother's Advice and Protection

When some devotees were not sure and would ask Holy Mother, 'Should I marry?' She would say, 'Don't marry and you can sleep peacefully.' Never mind, this is not my comment, it was Holy Mother's comment. Of course, that means one will have more freedom to develop one's spiritual life. This is not to say

that as a householder one cannot live a spiritual life. Of course to those who wanted to marry she acknowledged that was also a path, her advice to not marry was to encourage the path of renunciation to those who did not want a married life. Such unattached devotees are freer to help others also.

Most mothers are naturally limited in the help they can give their children to a certain extent, but Holy Mother could help with the deepest problems. Here is one interesting example: Near Jayrambati there is a little village where we have a small Mission. Some monks live there and once a famous astrologer from Orissa visited. Some of the monks knew that this was a famous astrolo-

(con't page 8)

Mother's Motherhood (from page 7)

ger and one of the monks brought the horoscope of a brother monk to read. At this the astrologer became very angry, 'Why have you brought the horoscope of a person who is already dead!' 'No, no!' said the monk, 'He is living here now!' They were perplexed at the astrologers reaction.

Well, in fact, some years earlier Holy Mother had summoned this monk to Jayrambati and told him to go to Belur Math immediately for initiation into Sannyasin. It had become customary that only on special occasions, such as Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, these initiations would take place.

When this monk arrived with the message from Holy Mother the senior monks told him that while that was not the occasion for initiations, Holy Mother's word was final and arrangements were made accordingly. Holy Mother had not included a reason with her instructions

and all the monks were to remain curious as to why she had uncharacteristically ordered this initiation.

Now years later it was understood that the aforementioned horoscope had noted the death of that same monk around the day of his initiation into sannyasi. Only Holy Mother had seen this eventuality. So, knowing that a monk's karma can be mitigated in taking sannyasin initiation, Mother sent him immediately for his final vows. Now, of course, Holy Mother never saw the horoscope in question, she just silently protected her child.

Not only that, she still protects now. When Holy Mother said, 'My child, whenever you are in trouble, know there is a mother protecting you.' These are not just words of

assurance—not just a shallow promise. She is fully aware that she can do it and she does it. There are many instances to show that when help was needed, help came. In this way Holy Mother's motherhood is very special.

Mother's Message

What can Holy Mother's life teach us all; what message is there for ordinary women and mothers? Firstly, that a woman can be motherly irrespective of whether she is married or childless or not. Secondly, for mothers is practicing extended motherhood, that is, not restricting motherhood to her own children and extending that motherhood toward others.

Thirdly, Holy Mother teaches us to love but without attachment. Fourthly, let mothers who have children also understand that while material well-being is good, it is still far better to pray for and nurture the spiritual side of their children.



Now while motherhood is in the nature of every woman, they still possess some element of fatherhood. In the same way, in every man there is also some element of motherhood also. So for men it is better to cultivate some aspects of motherhood. What I mean is that it is good for us to combine both attitudes of fatherhood and motherhood in us. Gents can take better care of others if they have cultivated this sense of motherhood in themselves. We see this in Sri Ramakrishna. Often devotees would be of the view that Sri Ramakrishna was also their mother. So this cultivation of motherhood is not only for the women, but men too should cultivate a little bit of this motherhood. Then their human relationships will be much better and they can serve society in a better way. •

• A Story to Remember •

Anansi Tries To Steal All The Wisdom In The World

A long time ago, Anansi the spider, had all the wisdom in the world stored in a huge pot. Nyame, the sky god, had given it to him and Anansi had been instructed to share it with everyone.

Every day, Anansi looked in the pot, and learned different things. The pot was full of wonderful ideas and skills. Anansi greedily thought, "I will not share the treasure of knowledge with everyone. I will keep all the wisdom for myself."

So, Anansi decided to hide the wisdom up in the top of a tall tree. He took some vines and made some strong string and tied it firmly around the pot, leaving one end free. He then tied the loose end around his waist so that the pot hung in front of him. He then started to climb the tree. But he struggled as he climbed because the pot of wisdom kept swinging and getting in his way, bumping against his tummy.

Anansi's son watched in fascination as his father struggled up the tree. Finally, Anansi's son told him "If you tie the pot to your back, it will be easier to cling to the tree and climb." Anansi tied the pot to his back instead, and continued to climb the tree, with much more ease than before. When Anansi got to the top of the tree, he became angry. "A young one with some common sense knows more than I, and I have the pot of wisdom!"

In anger, Anansi threw down the pot of wisdom. The pot broke, and pieces of wisdom flew in every direction. People found the bits scattered everywhere, and if they wanted to, they could take some home to their families and friends. That is why to this day, no one person has ALL the world's wisdom. People everywhere share small pieces of it whenever they exchange ideas.

- Ashanti Folktale

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