



The Vedanta Kyokai

News, Updates and Miscellany from the Vedanta Society of Japan

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Thus Spake...

"Men shed streams of tears because sons are not born to them, others wear away their hearts in sorrow because they cannot get riches. But alas! How many are there who sorrow and weep for not having seen God? Very few indeed! Verily, he who seeks Him, who weeps for Him, attains Him."

... Sri Ramakrishna

"Adore God as you would if you saw Him; for, if you see Him not, He sees you."

... Prophet Muhammad

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KyoKai Celebrates Christmas Eve 2003

It was nearly dusk when I arrived at Zushi Station. Contrasting the darkening sky, the Kyokai Center at the top of the hill was aglow. Cheerful Christmas displays in the foyer shone through the glass doors illuminating the front entrance. Upstairs the meeting room had been transformed. The picture of Jesus Christ, which usually resides in the main shrine room, was now upon an altar with offerings of flower garlands, bouquets, fruits, cakes and candies and, below this, a smaller picture of the Madonna and Child (a replica of the one noted in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna).

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The Vedanta Kyokai: February 2004

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Monthly Calendar

• BIRTHDAYS •

Swami Adbhutanandaji

06 Feb

Shiva Ratri

18 Feb

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva

22 Feb

(Kyokai Celebration - 21 Mar)

• KYOKAI EVENTS •

Sunday Retreat

15 Feb 11AM

All Invited to Attend

***Afternoon Session 3PM**

General Body Meeting

Members Requested to Attend

Christmas Eve...(con't from page 1)

At 7 o'clock the Christmas Eve service began with an Arati worship, the singing of carols including "Joy to the World" and "Come All Ye Faithful" and a reading from Mathew 13 from the New Testament in English and Japanese. Swami Medhasananda began his talk by pointing out that Christmas Eve is observed by Vedanta Societies of the Ramakrishna Order the world over. Sri Ramakrishna, the great prophet of Modern India, also practiced Christianity culminating in the vision of Christ. Coincidentally, the Ramakrishna Order was founded after the Master's passing in 1886 with his disciples taking their final vows of sannyasa on Christmas Eve.

"The teachings of Jesus Christ are just as relevant today," urged the Swami. He said that so long as there is humanity with a heart, soul and mind, there will be the necessity for peace. So long as there are souls, there must be spiritual realization. "Again and again the prophets come" declared the Swami. "Their lives and teachings are the wealth of humanity. There is no monopoly on universal truth. Everyone and every religion can claim these teachings. The prophets belong to all. No one can have exclusive claim on them. They are the property of the whole of humanity." He said that Swami Vivekananda had observed that while the West had laid claim to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, love and compassion; the 19th and 20th centuries witnessed new levels of violence, hatred and jealousy, leading to world war. He had urged audiences in the West to go back to Christ; to study the New Testament and to follow the teachings of Jesus.

"How often we find lessons of love and compassion taught in parables in the Bible," he said. "Just see the similarity in the method of preaching

between Jesus, the Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna. The problem lies in the ability of people to understand these teachings." The Swami said the same problem is noted in the Upanishads when it is written that many people have no chance to hear the message; others hear and do not follow; while some try to follow but with little or no success. Jesus chose those disciples fit to understand his teachings and taught the masses through parables. The Swami said the lessons of such parables can be understood at many levels and one may return to them again and again for fresh insights. It is through purity of mind rather than the intellect itself that such understanding grows.

"Jesus said that if you want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven you must be reborn," he continued. "This means a spiritual rebirth, a transformation that occurs when one purifies the mind and body. When one controls the senses, devotion to God can grow. The world needs more and more of this unity through the growth of spirit; not the ideal of 'an eye for an eye' or revenge mentality, but the ideal of forgiveness, love and compassion should be practised. We are of one humanity; we can either survive or perish together. We must recognize our individual responsibility. If we really want to live in peace and harmony, we must follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna not only in words, but in our daily lives."

Reported by Lonnie Hirsch

●Thought of the Month●

When one door of happiness closes,
another opens: but often we look so long
at the closed door that we do not see
the one which has opened for us.

Helen Keller

The Central Message of Swami Vivekananda

On Sunday, January 18, the monthly Zushi Retreat celebrated Swami Vivekananda's 142nd birth anniversary. The pre-lunch talk by Swami Medhasananda was entitled "The Central Message of Swami Vivekananda"; this central message or gospel being the divinity of the soul. The Swami's talk began, "that very God who appears as external we should come to see as internal. God resides within." He went on to say that the soul is infinite, absolute and eternal; it is existence-knowledge-bliss. "Each soul is a star set in the eternal sky and this eternal sky is the Lord." This truth of the divinity of the soul had been confined to a limited circle of spiritual aspirants in forests, caves and ashrams. Swami Vivekananda made it his life's mission to bring this message to all of society; not only in India, but to the world as a whole.

The Swami said that sometimes people want to know the definition of religion and in this regard Swami Vivekananda was not only a great scholar, but a realized soul of the highest order, whose response to this question was, "Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man." And to the question of what form this manifestation of divinity takes, the answer was "in consciousness".

The Swami then pointed out some basic teachings to be found in Buddhist and Christian concepts of the soul. In Buddhism the soul is not eternal; it continues, but not as the same soul, although it may appear the same. The example was given of a lit candle used to light another candle. The one flame used to light the other appears as the same flame, but the new flame is not the same one. The Christian tradition teaches that the soul is born out of sin and that we are, therefore, sinners. and only by taking refuge in Jesus Christ can we ascend to heaven.

He emphasized that these concepts differ from teachings that proclaim the soul is eternal and ever pure. In the Upanishads we find many examples of this like, "O sons of immortality" and "Tat Twam Asi" (Thou Art That). The spiritual equation would be Brahman (God) at the macro level and the individual jiva (soul) at the micro level - the essence of which is of the same nature. Swami Vivekananda challenged us in asking, "Why seek God outside?" and "Why think that we are weak?" When we feel sad we must remember we are the very fountain of joy. When we feel bound we must remember we are ever free. Our ideas of being finite and limited are the result of our identification with the body and the senses. In our ignorance, Maya will convince us we are beggars when we are, in fact, princes; pure, eternal, blissful. It is like the lion that was raised with sheep and bleated and ran from an attacking lion until it was shown its own reflection in a pond; the moment we become aware of our real nature, we will be transformed.

The Swami pointed out that there are three steps necessary for this awareness. These are to hear the message, to intellectually understand it and then to concentrate on it until you become established in its truth. He said the difference between intellectually understanding something and being firmly established in it is like the difference between a child who is told the fire will burn and the child who puts his finger in the flame. The Swami concluded by saying that Swami Vivekananda's message was "the gospel of strength on the basis of the divinity already in the soul" and bid us all to "be ourselves".

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At about 3 p.m. the remaining guests reassembled in the meeting room for a lively Q&A session. A question regarding the three steps mentioned in the morning session led to a discussion of the indications of bhakti-, jnana- and raja-yoga in spiritual practice. The Swami cautioned that there is no set formula or recipe in the quest for God and all depends on one's self-effort and, finally, on the Lord's grace. Another question was raised regarding a Buddhist school of thought that it is nobler to forego ones personal liberation until one has helped all to attain liberation. The Swami pointed out that this is indeed a noble ideal and in seeking and attaining the Lord's grace one may receive such a command, but rare are those souls suited to such a calling. The first step necessary is to seek God.

• A Story to Remember •

The Wisdom of Kings

Lord Krishna wanted to test the wisdom of his kings. One day he summoned a king called Duryodhana. Duryodhana was well known throughout his kingdom for his cruelty and miserliness, and his subjects lived in terror. Lord Krishna said to King Duryodhana, "I want you to go and travel the world over and find for me one truly good man." Duryodhana replied. "Yes, Lord," and obediently began his search. He met and spoke with many people, and after much time had passed he returned to Lord Krishna saying, "Lord, I have done as you have asked and searched the world over for one truly good man. He is not to be found. All of them are selfish and wicked. Nowhere is there to be found this good man you seek!"

Lord Krishna sent him away and called another king named Dharmaraja (Yudhishthira). He was a king well known for his generosity and benevolence and well loved by all his people. Krishna said to him, "King Dharmaraja, I wish for you to travel the world over and bring me one truly wicked man." Dharmaraja also obeyed, and on his travels met and spoke with many people. After much time had passed he returned to Krishna saying, "Lord, I have failed you. There are people who are misguided, people who are misled, people who act in blindness, but nowhere could I find one truly evil man. They are all good at heart, despite their failings!"

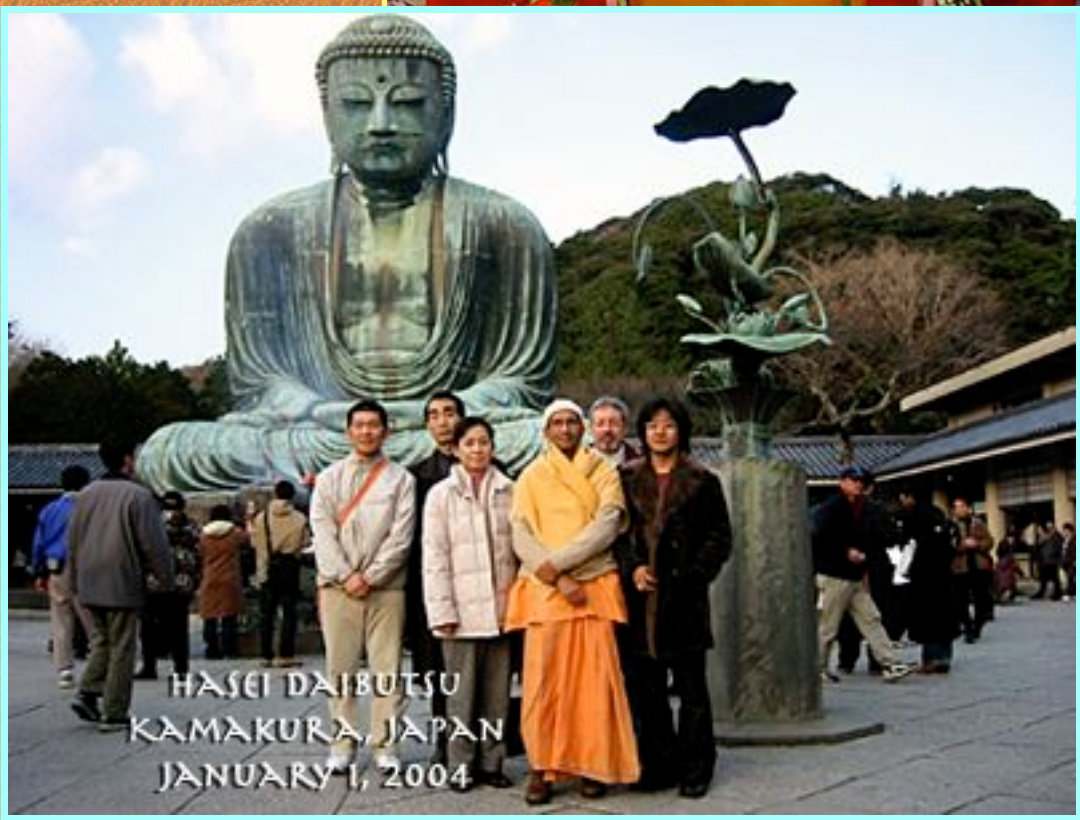
Early Hindu Tradition (*Soul Food*, ed., J. Kornfield and C. Feldman)

Kalpataru and New Year's Day

On Thursday, January 1, the Zushi Center held it's annual Kalpataru and New Year's Day observance. At 11:50 devotees, family members and friends assembled in the Shrine room for a brief introduction and Vedic Mantra by Swami Medhasananda. This was followed by readings in Japanese and English from The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, teachings of Sri Sarada Devi - The Holy Mother, Lord Buddha Sutras and The Bible, and a silent prayer.

Lunch Prasad was served from 12:30, during which all enjoyed a casual conversation with the Swami sharing anecdotal stories regarding the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. At 2 PM a small party made the traditional pilgrimage to Daibutsu (Buddha Statue) in nearby Kamakura. Later the Swami led a smaller group on a visit to Yukinoshita Catholic Church and even fewer continued on to Hachimangu Shrine where thousands continued coming to offer traditional New Year's prayers.

Christmas Eve
&
Kalputaru
New Year's Day



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