



The Vedanta Kyokai

News, Updates and Miscellany from the Vedanta Society of Japan

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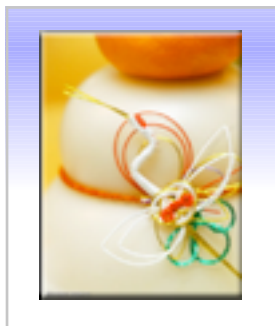
Thus Spake...

"Look upon every man, woman and everyone as God. You cannot help anyone; you can only serve; serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord himself, if you have the privilege. If the Lord grants that you can serve any one of His children, blessed you are; do not think too much of yourselves. Blessed you are that the privilege was given to you when others had it not. Do it only as a worship. The poor and the miserable are for our salvation, so that we may serve the Lord coming in the shape of the diseased, coming in the shape of the lunatic, the leper and the sinner."

... Swami Vivekananda

"O my ignorant mind, always call on Him, by whose grace all your works are accomplished; yea, keep His presence ever before your mind, by whose grace you find the truth; attune yourself to Him."

... Guru Nanak



*Wishing One and All a
Happy and Spiritual
2004*

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Monthly Calendar

• BIRTHDAYS •

Swami Turiyanandaji

6 Jan

Swami Vivekananda

14 Jan

• Kyokai Celebration •

**Swami Vivekananda
Birth Anniversary**

Sunday - 18 Jan

All are invited to attend.

Sri Sri Sarada Devi Birth Celebration

Although Sri Sri Sarada Devi's birthday of record is on the 16 of December, the Zushi Centre (Kyokai) held it's celebrations on Sunday the 21st for the convenience of the devotees. Duties had been assigned some days earlier and final preparations were just being completed as the hour neared for the start of services to commemorate and celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of one of mankind's most remarkable personalities, Sri Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother.

A particularly warm and sunny day for December in Zushi, it seemed that Mother Nature herself offered warmest blessings for the day. (cont. page 2)

Sri Sarada Devi...(con't from page 1)

The atmosphere of the Kyokai was festive and all were beaming with a holiday spirit. One foreign devotee who had just arrived from Narita Airport commented that it felt "just like a homecoming" as he neared the wide-opened double-doors and was welcomed by old friends congregating in the first floor foyer and hall.

This festive atmosphere could also be attributed to the sense of anticipation for the spiritual depth and variety of activities scheduled for the day. In addition to the always appreciated offering ritual and an inspired talk on the Holy Mother by Swami Medhasananda during the morning session, the afternoon session on Shintoism by Professor Tsuyoshi Nara would prove to be both fascinating and informative. (See 'Professor Nara Talks on Shintoism' page 3.)

As our usual interpreter, Ito-san, was on a visit to India, the Swami's talk was expertly translated by Prof. Nara. The Swami pointed out that it was actually the Holy Mother's 151st birthday and that, consequently, it was Her 150th birth anniversary. As such, yearlong celebrations had begun all over the world on December 16, with the main celebrations being held in Jayrambati, Bengal. The Swami noted that the Kyokai, too, will try to commemorate this special year in various ways including the release of a special volume on the Holy Mother as part of our annual Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary Celebrations held in Ikebukuro, Tokyo in June.

The Swami urged the congregation to bear in mind that the Holy Mother was none other than the Divine Mother Herself. Her spiritual greatness was such that it could not be explained as a result of mere spiritual practises or even as a consequence of having Sri Ramakrishna as Her spiritual mentor. He went on to say that besides Sri

Ramakrishna only two other people could fathom Her spiritual greatness; these being Swami Vivekananda and Nag Mahashaya (a renowned householder disciple), and that slowly, others became conscious of Her true nature.

The topic of the talk was "Conversations with Sri Sarada Devi". The Swami pointed out that there are clear differences between the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and the Gospel of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. These being that Sri Ramakrishna would continually raise spiritual talk; either being asked a spiritual question by a devotee or by initiating spiritual conversation Himself. Another point was that Sri Ramakrishna was constantly in deep spiritual moods clearly visible to all.

In contrast, the Holy Mother would keep her spiritual moods veiled, as it were. Again, most of Her conversations seem to be secular in nature; familiar and homely, like owns own mother. At the same time, when asked a specific spiritual question, Her answer would be full of spiritual wisdom. In fact, Sri Sarada Devi was the "Supreme Court" to which controversial matters within the Ramakrishna Order were referred to; and that Her solutions were always spontaneous, simple and agreeable to all.

Finally, the Swami exhorted and reassured one and all that even if we should forget other teachings of the Holy Mother, it would be enough to remember the Holy Mother gave us this assurance, "My child, whenever you face any difficulty, any problem, just remember Me. And know for certain that I'll be with you. I will save you. I will protect you. (con't)

Sri Sarada Devi ...con't from page 2

I will give you shelter."

The morning session came to an end and all broke for lunch-prasad. As is usually the case on such special occasions, the main dining and adjacent room could not accommodate all the devotees and additional tables had to be set-up in the upstairs meeting room. This simple and increasingly routine procedure was soon concluded and all sat down to a "sumptuous gourmet Indian and Japanese dishes" and "the greatest company one could hope to enjoy" as one connoisseur/devotee put it.

- *Compiled from a report by Ashish Gupta and an interview with Enrico Colombo.*

●Thought of the Month●

Misfortune Indeed

A mind that is free from passion is a very citadel; man has no stronger fortress in which to seek shelter and defy every assault.

Failure to perceive this is ignorance; but to perceive it, and still not to seek its refuge, is misfortune indeed.

– Marcus Aurelius

Professor Nara Talks on Hinduism and Shintoism

The afternoon session of the Zushi Monthly Retreat on December 21st was a talk on Hinduism and Shintoism by Mr. Tsuyoshi Nara, Professor Emeritus, Seisen University. This talk introduced some basic ideas and practises of Shintoism. The Professor gave the talk in both English and Japanese. He started off by saying that as Swami Medhasanandaji had mentioned earlier in his comments that the Holy Mother manifested Herself through various mothers, he felt that the delicious lunch prasadam was prepared by the Holy Mother Herself through Her children.

Professor Nara pointed out that Shintoism was not founded by any one person or group and that nobody really knew how far back the belief system dated. He said that many Japanese practise it unconsciously in daily life. He explained that the word Shinto means Divine Path or the Way to God, and that there were no actual defining scriptures. He said that fundamental Shinto rituals were related to the worship of nature and of ancestors and that while a Shinto shrine does not have images per se, a stone is kept in each shrine and the Universal Spirit is invoked in this stone. He pointed out that a Shinto shrine is secluded by trees and that the area inside the shrine is considered pure. Interestingly, scientists have taken readings which point to the fact that vibrations within the Shinto shrines were different.

Professor Nara stated that to be able to communicate with the Universal Spirit, truthfulness, sincerity, purity are all important, and that, in fact, there were some mystical practises which were known only to the Emperor in earlier times and possibly even to this day, since the Emperor is considered to be the spiritual head of Shintoism. In contrast to Hinduism, he noted that in Shintoism there was no concept of reincarnation or rebirth of souls and that after death, all would finally merge in the Divine Spirit through graded steps. While on the other hand, there is a Shinto concept akin to the Jivanmukta of Hinduism, and such people are called Mikoto.

After the talk, there was a brief question and answer session followed by Bhajans by Shanti-san and Samudra Gupta-san. After Bhajans, there was a guided meditation. After tea and snacks, devotees started taking leave of the Centre with hearts full of joy and the satisfaction which comes from a day well spent.

(Reported by Ashish Gupta)

• A Story to Remember •

You Have to Walk the Path Yourself

In the City of Sravasti in northern India, the Buddha had a large center where people would come to meditate and listen to his Dharma talks. Every evening one young man used to come to hear his discourses. For years he came to listen to the Buddha but never put any of the teaching into practice.

After a few years, one evening this man came a little early and found the Buddha alone. He approached him and said, "Sir, I have a question that keeps arising in my mind, raising doubts."

"Oh? There should not be any doubts on the path of Dharma; have them clarified. What is your question?"

"Sir, for many years now I have been coming to your meditation center, and I have noticed that there are a large number of recluses around you, monks and nuns, and a still larger number of lay people, both men and women. For years some of them have been coming to you. Some of them, I can see, have certainly reached the final stage; quite obviously they are fully liberated. I can also see that others have experienced some change in their lives. They are partially liberated. But sir, I also notice that a large number of people, including myself, are as they were, or sometimes they are even worse. They have not changed at all, or have not changed for the better.

"Why should this be, sir? People come to you, such a great man, fully enlightened, such a powerful, compassionate person. Why don't you use your power and compassion to liberate them all?"

The Buddha smiled and said, "Young man, where do you live? What is your native place?"

"Sir, I live here in Sravasti, this capital city of the state of Kosala."

"Yes, but your facial features show that you are not from this part of the country. Where are you from originally?"

"Sir, I am from the city of Rajagriha, the capital of the state of Magdha. I came and settled here in Sravasti a few years ago."

"And you have severed all connections with Rajagriha?"

"No sir. I still have relatives there. I have friends there. I have business there."

"Then certainly you must go from Sravasti to Rajagriha quite often?"

"Yes sir. Many times each year I visit Rajagriha and return to Sravasti."

"Having traveled and returned so many times on the path from here to Rajagriha, certainly you must know the path very well?"

"Oh yes sir, I know it perfectly. I might almost say that even if I was blindfolded I could find the path to Rajagriha, so many times I have walked it."

"And your friends, those who know you well, certainly they must know that you are from Rajagriha and have settled here? They must know that you often visit Rajagriha and return, and that you know the path from here to Rajagriha perfectly?" con't page 5

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"Oh yes sir. All those who are close to me know that I often go to Rajagriha and that I know the path perfectly."

"Then it must must happen that some of them come to you and ask you to explain the to them the path from here to Rajagriha. Do you hide anything or do you explain the path to them clearly?"

"What is there to hide, sir? I explain it to them as clearly as I can; you start walking toward the east and then head towards Banaras, and continue onward until you reach Gaya and then Rajagriha. I explain it very plainly to them, sir."

"And these people to whom you give such clear explanation, do all of them reach Rajagriha?"

"How can that be, sir? Those who walk the entire path to its end, only they will reach Rajagriha."

"This is what I want to explain to you, young man. People keep coming to me knowing that this is someone who has walked the path from here to Nirvana and so knows it perfectly. They come to me and ask. 'What is the path to Nirvana, to liberation?' And what is there to hide? I explain it to them clearly: 'This is the path.' If somebody just nods his head and says, 'Well said, well said, a very good path, but I won't take a step on it; a wonderful path, but I won't take the trouble to walk over it,' then how can such a person reach the final goal?"

"I do not carry anyone on my shoulders to the final goal. Nobody can carry anyone else on his shoulders to the final goal. At most, with love and compassion one can say, 'Well, this is the path, and this is how I have walked on it. You also work, you also walk, and you will reach the final goal.' But each person has to walk himself, has to take every step on the path himself. He who has taken one step on the path is one step nearer the goal. He who has taken a hundred steps is a hundred steps nearer the goal. He who has taken all the steps on the path has reached the final goal. You have to walk on the path yourself."

Early Buddhist Tradition *Soul Food*, ed., J. Kornfield and C. Feldman

Swami Medhasananda Visits Kumamoto

At the invitation of local devotees, Mrs. Kajihara, Mr. Oshima, Mrs. Inaba, Swami Medhasananda paid his annual visit to Kumamoto on November 29, returning to Zushi on December 1.

The following day a Retreat programme scheduled for most of the day was attended by some 35 people. The theme of the Retreat was "The Way of Absolute Joy" and the audience listened in rapt attention, as evidenced by a most interesting Q&A session following this discourse. The interpreter for the Retreat was Mr. Masaki, a long-time devotee of the Vedanta Society, who once again managed this critical task most capably.

One note of special interest to our readers is that during this Retreat, two young boys and a girl, conducted by Mrs. Inaba, performed a Japanese song on the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi composed and set to tune by Zushi's own Kaori Izumida (Shanti-san). This lovely rendition of 'Watakushi no Okasan' (My Mother) was accompanied by guitar and flute. Additionally, Mrs Masaki sang a beautiful new composition written by her husband.

We believe it's a positive development that devotees are embracing and performing such compositions and it's hoped that this trend will inspire a growing library of Japanese devotional music.

Zushi Centre - 21 Dec 2003

The Holy Mother's 150th Birth Anniversary



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