



The Vedanta Kyokai

News, Updates and Miscellany from the Vedanta Society of Japan

MAY 2005

Volume 3 Number 5

Thus Spake ...

"If I do not find bliss in the life of the spirit, shall I seek satisfaction in the life of the senses? If I cannot get nectar, shall I fall back upon ditch water?"

... Swami Vivekananda

"He who fills the lamp with water will not dispel the darkness, and he who tries to light the fire with rotten wood will fail."

... The Buddha

April Retreat - Who Am I?

The April Zushi Retreat fell on the 17th of the month this year. When I arrived on the 16th, the famed, all-to-brief glory of the cherry blossom season had already past its zenith here in the warmer coastal climate. Brisk breezes are fairly common on the hilltop where our Centre is located, but this weekend the stronger gusts urged great swirls of the delicate pink and white petals, or sakura fubuki, to dislodge themselves from the branches and make way for the young leaves to follow.

New faces greeted me at the door of the Centre as well, with guests visiting from India and other parts of Japan, along with most of the familiar faces of those who avail themselves to complete the many tasks in preparation for each monthly Retreat. At lunch we all became better acquainted and enjoyed each other's company as Swami Medhasananda gave introductions or made inquiries in good humour and fun. Afterward, we went to our assigned tasks or were left to read or study in the library for the remainder of the afternoon. At 6 p.m. the conch shell summoned all to arati, or evening

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Monthly Calendar

• May Kyokai Events •

• May Retreat •

Subject:

Don't Search for God. But See God

SUNDAY - May 15

at Zushi Centre 11:00 a.m.

All are welcome to attend.

• June SPECIAL Event •

**Annual Public Birth
Celebration and Symposium
Swami Vivekananda**

in Ikebukuro, Tokyo

SUNDAY JUNE 5 from 2-5:00 p.m.

See page 6 for details



**SRIMAT SWAMI
RANGANATHANANDAJI
MAHARAJ**

13TH PRESIDENT

**RAMAKRISHNA MATH
AND
RAMAKRISHNA MISSION**

1908 - 2005

With deepest sorrow we announce the passing away of Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, on April 25, at 3:51 p.m. at Woodlands Medical Centre, Kolkata. He was 96.

In India the sad news was broadcast over radio and television on the night of the 25th and published in newspapers the following morning. The body of Revered Maharaj was brought to Belur Math from Woodlands Medical Centre, on the 25th at 7:00 p.m. and was kept in the Cultural Hall near his residence. Our monastic members from branch centres, and thousands of disciples, devotees, friends and sympathizers, with floral offerings, poured in all through the night and paid their last respects. On the morning of the 26th at 10:15 a.m. the body of Revered Maharaj was taken in a procession to the courtyard in front of the Math Office and placed on a high platform in a decorated pandal where it remained till 12:10 p.m. The last rites of cremation started at 12:40 pm and were over by 3:15 p.m. An estimated 60,000 people came to pay their last homage to Revered Maharaj.

Sri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal, paid his respects on the morning of the 26th. Condolence messages were received from Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, President of India; Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India; Smt Sonia Gandhi, Congress President; Sri SM Krishna, Governor of Maharashtra; Sri TN Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka. Messages are also pouring in from several other dignitaries, officials, organizations, and persons from different walks of life in India and abroad.

A Special Puja, Bhandara and Memorial meeting will be held on the thirteenth day, Saturday, 7th May 2005, at Belur Math.

Born in the village of Trikkur, Kerala State, on 15 December 1908, Swami Ranganathanandaji joined the Ramakrishna Order at its centre in Mysore in 1926, barely at the age of 18. An initiated disciple of Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and second President of the Ramakrishna Monastic Order, the Swami was formally initiated into Sannyasa by him in 1933. After spending the first twelve years in the Order's branches in

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Swami Ranganathanandaji (cont from page 2)

Mysore and Bangalore, he worked as Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Society at Rangoon (now Yangon in Myanmar) from 1939 to 1942, and thereafter as President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Karachi (now in Pakistan), from 1942 to 1948. From 1949 to 1962 he served as Secretary of the Order's branch in New Delhi, and from 1962 to 1967, as Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. From 1973 to 1993 (January) he was President of Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad. He was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1961. He became a Vice-President of the Order on 1 April 1989 and the President of the Order on 7 September 1998.

He undertook extensive lecture tours from 1946 to 1972 covering 50 foreign countries in North and South America, Asia, Africa and Europe, including Russia, Poland and Czechoslovakia. When he visited Japan in 1958 on a lecture tour, he inspired Professor Nikki Kimura and Mr. V. S. Rao to form a society to study and preach the ideas of Vedanta and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. From 1973 to 1986 he visited annually Australia, USA, Holland and Germany spreading the message of Vedanta.

Swami Ranganathanandaji was an internationally acclaimed speaker whose stirring eloquence captivated thousands of people in India and abroad. His lectures have been brought out in several books, notable amongst which are: The Message of the Upanishads; A Pilgrim Looks at the World; Four volumes of Eternal Values for a Changing Society; Vedanta and the Future of Mankind; and Social Responsibilities of Public Administrators. Among his recent publications are his expositions of the Bhagavad Gita (in 3 volumes), and of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. His audio tapes on Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Vedanta are very popular among the public. •

• A STORY TO REMEMBER •

Pious Pride

I remember, being in my childhood pious, rising in the night, addicted to devotion and abstinence. One night I was sitting with my father, remaining awake and holding the beloved Quran in my lap, whilst the people around us were asleep. I said: 'Not one of these persons lifts up his head or makes a genuflection. They are as fast asleep as if they were dead.'

He replied: 'Darling of thy father, would that thou wert also asleep rather than disparaging people.'

The pretender sees no one but himself because he has the veil of conceit in front. If he were endowed with a God-discerning eye, he would see that no one is weaker than himself.

... from 'The Rose Garden' by Sa'di

April Retreat (from page 1)

vespers. Later during dinner the following day's schedule was reconfirmed before the ladies took their leave to stay at Holy Mother's House, and later still the boys tucked in for the night.

At 5:30 a.m. I was struck at how noticeably brighter it was this month than last at same the hour from this 2nd-floor-hilltop vantage point and slipped into the shrine room. At 6:20 morning worship commenced with a Vedic peace prayer and a recital of the Bhagavad Gita in Sanskrit led by Swami followed by a translation read in Japanese, a reading from the Teachings of the Buddha and New Testament in English and Japanese and meditation. After a light breakfast final preparations were made for the day's programme which were to be held this month in the shrine room itself.

At 11 a.m. the morning session began with chanting verses from Vedic peace mantras, readings of passages from the Life of Swami Turiyananda in Japanese and English. The topic of Swami's discussion was 'Who Am I?'. "Now one may wonder if such a question as Who Am I ? is even worth asking... if it is relevant. Well, my name is so and so, I am from this or that country, my height is this - my weight is that, I am a family man... It is all very clear, so what is the point of asking, Who Am I?", the swami asked rhetorically.

"The irony is, the tragedy is that we know so much about others and so little about ourselves. Especially in this so-called 'information age', we are stuffed with so much information about all manner of things except 'us'. This process has to be reversed and the spotlight turned on ourselves as the Hindu scriptures advise, 'Know Thyself'. This is the inquiry, the question, the issue that the whole of

the Upanishads discusses."

"People generally live on different planes of existence. One plane is the gross physical plane... of the body and senses. These people are quite happy with sleeping, eating, drinking and enjoying secular enjoyments," he continued. "Now what difference is there between people who live in the physical and sensual plane and animals?" he asked. "They live exactly the same; on the plane of the body and senses."

"Now others live on the plane of the mind. They are imaginative and emotional, mainly in the plane of mind. Mark that word 'mainly', as I don't say 'exclusively'. Then there are people, intellectuals, who live in the plane of the intellect. All of these planes; body, mind and intellect are non-self planes. The grosser plane is surely lower than the intellect. So even in these non-self planes, those who live in the plane of intellect are surely higher beings. It is much better to live in the plane of intellect than in the body and senses. "

Swami said that advise given to monks is to inculcate the habit of reading to nurture the intellect, because while it is often difficult for beginners to constantly dwell in the spiritual plane - in meditation, prayer and japam, at least the mind is kept busy and prevented from slipping down to the lower planes. This is not only true for monks, but this practice is important for devotees as well. "I am sorry to say, I rather wonder whether quite a few devotees really understand the importance of study in spiritual life," he said. "But it is very, very important. It is not only important in nurturing spiritual life, but it helps prevent the mind from going down to the lower planes."

"Those who live a serious spiritual life - I don't say a casual or shallow

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April Retreat (from page 4)

spiritual life - but those who live a serious spiritual life always dwell in the plane of spirit. For those who live in the realms of body and senses, they identify themselves as the body and senses, their idea of self is just that, body and senses. Those who live in the realm of mind, their idea of themselves and their consciousness is centered in feelings and emotions. Those who live in the plane of intellect, their consciousness is centered on the intellect. And those who live in the plane of spirit, their consciousness is centered in spirit. So if you ask someone who dwells in the non-self planes to answer the question 'who am I?' you will get the answers discussed earlier. I am so and so, etc., all the physical details, as their idea about themselves is all physical. In some cases the response may reflect the mental plane and in others the intellectual.

"But one who dwells in the realm of spirit will answer, 'I am spirit. I am Atman. I am Self.' And this is not just an answer, it is a real answer that comes from realization." Swami said. To better illustrate this difference in understanding between realized and non-realized souls, Swami offered a short story told of Swami Vivekananda while he was in New York City. It seems that he was walking along a shop-filled street with some devotees when he passed a storefront with a life-sized mirror in the window and stopped. He looked at his reflection briefly and stepped away; then stepped back and looked

again; stepped away; and repeated the move again. Seeing this behavior the thought came to the mind of one of the lady devotees, 'Yes, Swami Vivekananda is indeed a great realized soul, no doubt, but because he is very handsome he perhaps wanted to see his own image in the mirror.'"

"Then as Swamiji continued walking he explained on his own, 'You know, just now as I stood before the mirror, I remembered how I look. But the moment I turned away I forgot how I looked, so I returned again. I looked, remembered, and I forgot again.' So you see, he is established in spirit, this body idea doesn't last in his mind at all. This is one wonderful example of what it means to be established in the realm of spirit." Before the session broke for lunch, Swami offered many encouraging points of advice from scripture and Sri Ramakrishna, along with practical methods by which to monitor and redirect one's mind to higher realms.

The quests enjoyed Swami's company and an interesting mix of Indian and Japanese dishes, while getting to know each other better as well. After lunch most of those remaining for the afternoon Q&A session volunteered for some 'karma yoga' in assisting Mr. Kanai with light gardening. As I was making my farewells, the wild spring growth of the gardens was being groomed and transformed by dozens of devotees working in harmony. •

-the editor

• THOUGHT OF THE MONTH •

WE DON'T SEE THINGS AS THEY ARE,
WE SEE THINGS AS WE ARE.

... ANAIS NIN



The Vedanta Society of Japan's Annual Public Celebration

Swami Vivekananda 143rd Birth Anniversary

All, with family and friends, are cordially invited to attend!

Date: Sunday, June 5, 2005. 2 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Venue: Toshima-Kohkaido, 1-19-1 Higashi-Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku, Tokyo
 Phone: (03) 3981-1009

Speech: **Dr. Yamamori Tetsuo, Director,**
International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto

Subject: **Religion to be Believed and Religion to be Felt**

Master of Ceremonies: Ms. Kuniko Hirano

**Release of the 'Universal Gospel' (Special Issue) and a Speech on
 Swami Vivekananda by His Excellency Sri Manilal Tripathi,
 Ambassador of India**

The programme includes a short guided meditation, Ainu music, shamisen and songs by Japanese and Indian devotees.

Exhibition: Books on Hinduism, Meditation, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in Japanese and English; CDs and Cassettes on meditation and devotional songs, Photos and Incense .

Admission: Free of Charge - All will be treated to a light refreshment

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Beppu Satsanga

On April 8th, Swami Medhasananda visited the Tanaka family home near Hyuuga City in Miyazaki-ken. From here the devotees took a 30 to 40-minute walk to a lovely riverbank setting where Swami held a Q&A with the children of the devotees, answering their questions on Indian culture and life. Then all had fun playing leap-frog together.

Swami arrived at Beppu City in Oita-ken on the evening of the 9th. Ms. Tachibori had invited Swami to her home for dinner along with two other devotees. There he had time to conduct an evening bhajan service before dinner. We sang Gospel songs together as well.

On the next day, the 10th, weather information called for rain. Fortunately, it was a fine day that seemed more like early summer, even causing us to perspire a little. The devotees were reading from the Gospel of Ramakrishna together little by little at a place near Beppu Park which was full of cherry (sakura) trees in full bloom. Swami spoke on the subject of putting effort into daily meditation and japam, and said this was a necessary practice if one wanted to remember God at the time of death.

After lunch, from 1:30-4:00, Maharaji spoke on "Meditation and Mantra" in Japanese. His Japanese was excellent and easy to understand, and Ms. Tachibori, who has been our interpreter every year, was only occasionally needed for support. As the session drew to a close, Swami seemed to be very relaxed at the desk as he answered questions from the participants. There were 33 attendees for this talk

and after the Q&A session Swami led a guided meditation.

During the break, Dorina Sinha, wife of Prof. D. N. Sinha, was joined by this reporter in singing a Tagore song in her beautiful voice. Everyone is looking for to Satsanga again next year.

Some of us later enjoyed a second evening bhajan service at the Sinha's home. There Swami sang the traditional Ramakrishna Mission arati songs and Brahma Sangeet, a Bengali folk song. Mrs. Sinha sang again as well.

We spent a very warm and happy time with Swami and at times it was like staying in India. The Dinner menu was great; a mild bengali curry without a hot peppers prepared for Swami, shrimp curry, egg curry, cauliflower curry, sabji (eggplant curry), chutney, Indian deserts, etc.

This is our third Satsanga in Beppu and I felt very solemnly that everyone in attendance participated with one heart. Especially in the bhajans, meditations and Gospel readings. Finally, Swami suggested to us again and again that we should arrange to have Gospel readings on a regular basis. I believe that this is one way we can continue the spirit of Satsanga until Swami's next visit.

Contributed by
Mrs. Michiko Shinriki (Beppu)

NOTE:

VHS Video/ DVD and CD audio of the Zushi Retreat morning sessions are now available.

Please contact the Centre via phone or email to order copies of sessions you may have been unable to attend.



A Wonderful Gathering in Beppu

Mr. and Mrs. Shinriki make all the arrangements and Swami Medhasananda graciously comes and gives a talk in Beppu every year since 2003. I am blessed.

This year Mrs. Shinriki (Mi-chan) had asked the usual attendees about subjects they would like Swami to address on his visit. Like many others, I had hoped for a discussion on mantra and meditation, and when Swami arrived, I was pleasantly surprised when he addressed this very topic - and in Japanese.

Swami explained to us that there are two kinds of mantras, one is called a seed mantra, while others are invoked for particular results or effects. He then detailed the significance and meaning of the Gayatri Mantra and taught us a typical seed mantra. He told us of the various ways to recite a mantra as well. The swami explained that to get maximum from the chanting of mantra and meditation, we should practice both simultaneously.

Swami then asked us rhetorically why we thought the best way to repeat a mantra would be silently from the heart. Yuki Nakao, who was sitting right next to me, answered that it was difficult to think of mundane matters while our hearts were engaged in reciting a mantra. I was deeply impressed. This was "indeed, the correct answer." And as I now recite the Gayatri Mantra, I, too, hope to receive initiation someday, somewhere.

At the end of the session Swami led us in a guided meditation. A friend, who had joined me for the first time to attend a meeting with the swami, said that he meditated very comfortably. I felt the same and I truly appreciate Swami Medhasananda and Mr. and Mrs. Shinriki for making this possible. •

Contributed by Yasu Jinen (Beppu)

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