



the VEDANTA *Kyokai*

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

Monthly Calendar

• Birthdays •

Sri Sri Ma Sarada Devi
Monday, Dec 11

Swami Shivananda
Saturday, Dec 16

Jesus Christ - Christmas Eve
Sunday, Dec 24

• Kyokai Events •

DECEMBER RETREAT

Sri Sarada Devi
Birth Celebration

Sunday, December 17, 11 a.m.
All are cordially invited.

CHRISTMAS EVE
(Worship-Reading-Talk-Carols)

Sunday, Dec 24, 7 p.m.
All are cordially invited.

NEW YEAR'S DAY
KALPATARU
(Talk-Lunch-Kamakura Daibutsu)

Monday, Jan 1, 12 noon
All are cordially invited.



✘ Thus Spake ✘

"Call on God who pervades the entire universe. He will shower His blessings upon you."

... The Holy Mother - Sri Sarada Devi

"All things, whatsoever you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."

... Jesus - The Christ

Special Announcements

As noted on the Calendar, from December 17 to January 1, 2007 the Zushi Centre of Vedanta Society of Japan will be holding special events and all, with family and friends, are most welcome to attend. Additionally, on Saturday, December 2, the discourse on the Bhagavad Gita continues in Shimbashi.

• On Sunday, December 17, at 10:30 a.m. the Zushi Centre will hold its annual birth celebration for The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. Swami Medhasananda will conduct arati and give a talk. This will be followed by lunch and an afternoon session from 3 pm.

• On Sunday, December 24, at 7 p.m. the Zushi Centre will hold its annual Christmas Eve celebration. A programme of worship, Bible Reading, a talk on Christ and Christmas carols is planned.

• On Monday, January 1, at 12 p.m. the Zushi Centre will hold its annual New Year's Day Kalpataru. A brief programme will be followed by lunch and the traditional walk to Kamakura Daibutsu and offering. •

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ZUSHI RETREAT - NOVEMBER 2006

Love: Human and Divine

A talk by Swami Medhasananda

I believe today's subject is both important and very interesting because we have experiences of love of various kinds. We also have many basic urges; to live, not only to live, but to live eternally, to work, to know and to get joy. Then there is that most powerful of urges; to love and to be loved - not only do we want to love, but we want to be loved in return as well. And here lies the difference between the basic urges of animals and those of human beings. Animals don't feel any urge for knowledge, nor do they feel the need to love and be loved in return.

Love versus Attachment

Our topic 'Love: Human and Divine' concerns itself with this urge to love and be loved. There are many types of love, for example love for a place like one's country or home, but the three most common are; love of things, love for one's family and friends and self-love. Among these three, almost everyone would agree that the urge for self-love is strongest. In spiritual discussions we often hear that many kinds of these so-called loves are only forms of attachment that lead to pain and sorrow. We need to have a clear idea of how to distinguish between the two, because once we recognize attachment we can try to avoid or get rid of it.

As noted earlier, to love and be loved is a basic urge, and to satisfy this basic urge we must learn to love one another in our day to day life. So on the one hand it is said we should love, while on the other, we should get rid of attachment. And again it is said that what we generally call love is only attachment, and that we should get rid of attachment and grow more love. So what then is the difference between love and attachment? And how do we grow love without being attached?

A mother will surely love her child. Children love their parents. A wife surely loves her husband, as the husband loves the wife. Friends will love friends. It is all very natural. But if such love is but an attachment, should the parents stop loving the children? Should

wives and husbands stop loving each other? What then is the purpose, the import, of this issue; love and attachment?

In love we witness or experience two things; union and joy. When one seeks love, one seeks to be united with the beloved. This is one important aspect of love, the idea of company. This union or company is on a physical, a mental or a spiritual level. The other is the idea of the joy derived in loving others. Without joy, we wouldn't seek this union. This joy, in turn, also has three aspects; the physical and sensual, the intellectual, and the spiritual.

Recognizing Attachment

Attachment is that which primarily seeks out physical and sensual joy. One feels saddened at physical separation, whether the separation is temporary or permanent. Attachment is the attraction of a physical body for another physical body. As Swami Vivekananda said, "It is only an attraction of one mass of molecules for another mass of molecules." This is what we generally call love.

Also, in attachment there is no freedom. One wants to control the other. One wants to possess the other; possessiveness. And if there is any obstruction to these objectives then there is anger and jealousy. For example, parents want to control the children, but limits must be set. In Hindu scripture there is a beautiful verse which advises how long parents should control children. It says that for the first five years, the children should be nursed by the parents. For the next ten years parents should discipline their children. Then when the child reaches sixteen years of age, parents should regard the child as a friend! But how many parents are willing to treat their children as friends at the age of sixteen?

From my observations in India and now in Japan, I must say most parents would find this transition most

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difficult. We think, 'they are my children' and we want to control them; some even after marriage! Invariably there are also clashes of egos between the mother of the son and the wife of the son. When this possessiveness begins between the mother and the wife the conflicts start. I first thought this problem occurred more in India, but now I see this is also very prevalent in Japan and has been for quite some time. Obstructions create jealousy between the two.

Then with attachment there is expectation. It is said that the purest expression of love is that between the mother and the child. But even here we often see in the onset of old age, a mother's growing concern for who will look after her. So some sort of expectation is there. Of course, between husband and wife so many expectations are there, and when expectations are not fulfilled there is frustration and disappointment.

So with analysis we see the results of attachment are generally anger, jealousy, frustration, suffering and bondage. The spiritual seeker's goal in life is freedom, emancipation from the repeated cycles of birth and death. Therefore we should try to understand, to recognize and eliminate attachments in our lives.

Behind the Attraction

Philosophically speaking, what is behind this attachment, this powerful attraction for others, this physical love? According to Hindu philosophy, the real reason for this is the attraction of one soul for another soul. As we know, we have different levels of existence; the physical, senses; the mind, intellect and ego; and finally, the level of Self, of spirit and the Atman. So behind this ordinary love there is the attraction of one soul for another. One soul wants to get united with another. One soul wants to merge with another.

In the Brahadaranyaka Upanishad there is a beautiful instruction given by the great sage Yagyavalkya to his wife Maitreyi. In it he tells Maitreyi that the wife loves the husband not for the sake of the husband, but that she sees her soul, Atman, in the husband. Therefore she loves the husband. Again, the husband loves the wife not for the sake of the wife, but because he sees his Self in the Self of the wife. That is why they love each other. But because of the spell of maya, ignorance, this attraction is wrongly directed to the physical and the

unwanted consequences of anger, jealousy, suffering and bondage follow.

What then is spiritual love? Spiritual love is the love of Self for the Self. It seeks union, not on the physical, sensual or mental plane, but on the spiritual plane, the plane of Atman. From this union emanates spiritual joy, bliss. Perhaps the difference between attachment and pure love is better understood when put this way: When one feels attraction for the finite aspect of another, a temporary body, this is attachment, but when one feels attraction for the infinite aspect, the Atman, this is pure love.

Transcending Attachment

There is a story about the great sage and poet Tulsidas, who wrote the Ramacaritamanasa, based on the epic Ramayana. Tulsidas was very attached to his wife, so much so that he forbade her to even visit her parents' home. On one occasion, his wife received word that her father had fallen seriously ill. Tulsidas was not home at the time and being unable to send him word, she set out for her parent's house. When Tulsidas returned that evening to find her gone, he became so sad that he immediately left for his father-in-law's house as well. When Tulsidas finally arrived, his wife was not at all happy. She was embarrassed and ashamed that he could not bear with even a temporary pang of separation and had shown up at her parents' door. She rebuked him saying that had the love he placed in her gross and perishable body been directed toward Rama instead, he would surely have realized God. This statement shook Tulsidas to his senses and he realized the truth of her words. He immediately left her at that house and set out for Benares to begin spiritual practice.

Naturally, we do not suggest that all husbands should give up their wives and go to Benares or Shikouku for spiritual practice. But we do want to discuss how to transcend from attachment to love. The husband's and the wife's love for each other should be sublimated and transcended into pure spiritual love. We do that by trying to develop divine love, love of God.

This divine love has two aspects; to love God and to love the manifestations of God. The million dollar question is how can I love God, that whom I cannot

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see; I cannot meet? It is not a easy thing and there is a difference between loving and liking God. Sri Ramakrishna said that so many people say they love God, but that this love was rather superficial. A great householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna was Balaram Bose, who had practiced regularly and sincerely even before meeting the Master. At their first meeting in Dakshineswar, Balaram asked the Master why, since he called on God, meditated on God, and remained in remembrance of God, could he not see God after so many years. To this Sri Ramakrishna asked, "Do you really love God as much as your own children." After some reflection, Balaram realized that he didn't and he understood the implication of the Master's words.

Faith in God

First we must have faith in the existence of God. For this we need to have faith in the words of the prophets, who vow to the existence of God. They live pure lives. They would not lie, as they have no financial or egotistical self-interest, no hankering for name and fame in whether or not you believe them. Then through reasoning we must see that this is a creation, therefore there must be a creator. And finally, through prayer.

Once an atheist visited Sri Ramakrishna. The man was suffering some mental anguish at the time and he felt a void in his heart. As he did not believe in God, of course, he had never prayed to God. When Sri Ramakrishna advised the man to pray to God, he replied that if he didn't believe in God, how could he pray to Him? Sri Ramakrishna then suggested that the man pray, "If there is a God, please answer my prayer." After some time the man returned to Dakshineswar a changed man, his prayers had, indeed, been answered and he had become convinced of the existence of God. He cried to Sri Ramakrishna, "Sir, you have saved me from the suffering I was going through."

Once you believe in the existence of God, the question comes as to how to develop a relationship with God. God is not to be awed or feared, but to be loved. To this end nurture a relationship of love for God. This is a very important concept of Hinduism; do not think of God as always ready to discipline or punish. No, you need a loving relationship with God. Look upon him as your father, your mother, or your loving master. There

is a famous verse in sanskrit that reads, O Lord, you are my mother, my father my friend, my wealth, you are everything to me. This is how a devotee should look upon God. God is everything to the devotee. Treat Him as a member of your family. This is how we develop divine love.

Love of God

How is it possible to get connected to God? While some religions may place more importance on one way or another, Hinduism emphasizes that there are many ways to develop one's connection to God. Through prayer, through meditation, through chanting the name of God, through reading of holy books, through listening to devotional music, and through listening to spiritual talks and discourses. By whatever method best suits you, your purpose is be to become connected with God.

Moreover, love the manifestations of God in human beings, in animal beings, and try to serve as much as possible. In doing so we should try and remember that while God is real, His manifestations are conditioned by time, space and causality.

Swami Turiyananda was a great jnani, a monist. Practitioners of the monistic school of Vedanta always discriminate between the real and the unreal. That is, God alone is real, all the world or creation is unreal. Interestingly, on the eve of Swami Turiyanandaji's passing away he remarked, "Brahman is real and the world is also real." In what sense could this Vedantin have meant that the world is also real? Brahman is real and the substratum of the world is also Brahman, so in this sense the world is also real. This the realization of the vijnani.

Sri Ramakrishna pointed out the difference between a

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Thought of the Month

The superior man thinks always of virtue; the common man thinks of comfort.

... Confucius



A VISIT TO NARA

On Saturday, October 28, Swami Medhasananda paid a visit to Gojoh City in Nara Prefecture. He went at the request of Ms. Yoshika Ichiyama who organized the presentation for her local yoga group. The meeting was attended by 57 members and friends.

Starting at 11 a.m. Swami began with a reading and chanting of Vedic mantras. He then gave a talk on Karma Yoga and all participated in a guided meditation the swami presented in Japanese. This was followed by a Q&A session.

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jnani and a vijnani. A jnani only believes the truth of the reality of Brahman, but the vijnani also realizes that the truth behind this passing phenomenon of the universe is Brahman too. When you want to reach the roof, you must make use of the steps, leaving them behind as you progress ever higher. Once you reach therooftop, however, you realize that the steps used to climb to the roof are made of the same bricks and mortar, the same material, as the roof itself. In this sense Brahman pervades His creation as well. This is the experience, the realization, of the vijnani. It is with this idea that devotees should love the manifestations of God.

Joy in Serving God

The yogi, the devotee, sees himself in everyone and everyone in himself. In other words, he sees God in himself and God in others. It is with this idea, such a devotee will love and serve others. Although the prophets realized that God alone was the reality and that the world was unreal, this realization did not

prevent them from loving and serving humanity. Think of Buddha's love. Think of Christ's love. Think of Sri Ramakrishna's love. Think of their love for saints and sinners, for rich and poor, for all types of people.

Once one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Premananda, also known as Baburam Maharaj, was just sitting to conduct ritualistic worship of the Master in the Belur Math shrine when Swami Vivekananda appeared. "Baburam," Swamiji said, "you have conducted enough worships of the Master, now get up and go to the village. Find poor and needy children and bring them back to the Math and serve them. This will be real worship of Sri Ramakrishna." Obeying the command of the leader of the Order, Premanandaji went out to the village. He first inquired of an elderly woman if she was in need of some assistance. She became indignant and said that as long as she still had power in her limbs, she would not require his help. Gradually he collected some needy children of the area and brought them back to the Math where he bathed and gave them clothing. He was

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A Story to Remember

Every-Minute Zen

Zen students are with their masters at least ten years before they presume to teach others. Nanin was visited by Tenno, who, having passed his apprenticeship, had become a teacher.

The day happened to be rainy, so Tenno wore wooden clogs and carried an umbrella. After greeting him, Nan-in remarked: "I suppose you left your wooden clogs in the vestibule. I want to know if your umbrella is on the right or left side of the clogs."

Tenno, confused, had no instant answer. He realized that he was unable to carry his Zen every minute. He became Nan-in's pupil, and he studied six more years to accomplish this every-minute Zen.

... Soul Food

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feeding them sumptuously when Swami Vivekananda called down from the veranda, "Baburam, how do you feel?" "Oh," Swami Premananda replied, "what an experience! I feel that I am serving Brahman, I am serving Sri Ramakrishna Himself in these children. What joy!"

Thus a devotee should try to see God, not only in family, relatives and friends, but in those who are not related as well. In practice we find, in fact, that it is often more difficult to see God in those family members and friends with which we have daily contact. This in itself forms a spiritual practice in transcending attachment to the finite aspects of love for family into the infinite aspects of spiritual or pure love. By trying to love God, and by trying to see God in our family and friends, we lose attachment and then we can extend our love to others. Thus we attain freedom from bondage, we get wisdom, and we experience divine joy and peace. Then our lives are truly fulfilled. •

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