



the VEDANTA *Kyokai*

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Monthly Calendar

• Birthdays •

Swami Trigunatitananda
Wednesday - February 1

Swami Adbhutananda
Monday - February 13

• Kyokai Events •

February Retreat at Zushi

Swami Vivekananda
Birth Celebration

Sunday, Jan 19th, 10:30 a.m.
All are welcome.



✧ Thus Spake ✧

“Love never fails my son; today or tomorrow or ages after, truth will conquer! Love shall win the victory. Do you love your fellowmen?”

... Swami Vivekananda

“Truth is noble and sweet; truth can deliver you from evil. There is no savior in the world except truth.”

... The Buddha

January Retreat: *The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, the Shakti of Sri Ramakrishna*

The swami began by explaining that Shakti means energy or power, and therefore the day's topic literally means the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, the energy, the power, of Sri Ramakrishna. Before discussing this power or energy, the Swami then included himself in stating that first we must admit for people of very limited intelligence and spiritual understanding such as us, it is very difficult, if not impossible to understand personalities such as Sri Rama-

krishna and Sri Sarada Devi and their relationship. “It is like a lame man trying to cross a mountain say the scriptures,” Swami said. “Swami Vivekananda himself declared that he had failed to fully understand Sri Ramakrishna even after a lifelong struggle adding, 'but to the extent that one tries, he will be elevated.' And this is the motive for selecting this topic for today's Retreat, a topic of particular importance for devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi.” (cont page 2)

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January Retreat (from page 1)

"In reading the reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi one comes across many instances wherein Sri Ramakrishna states that Sarada Devi was his shakti. Once while addressing devotees, 'Do you think my wife is an ordinary woman? No, she is verily my power!' She is Sarada, one of the names of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning: sara, meaning spiritual essence in Sanskrit, and da, meaning giver, the giver of spiritual essence to mankind. Sri Ramakrishna said that she had incarnated to give spiritual instruction to humanity."

"In the last days of Sri Ramakrishna's life, Sarada Devi was at the Cossipore Garden House, along with the Master's young disciples, nursing and attending to him. This was also a rare opportunity for these young disciples to come into close contact with her. When these boys would report to the Master that they had never witnessed such a great and compassionate heart, pleased he would smile and say that she was not just an ordinary woman, but his Prakriti or Shakti."



"Then there was the case of Hriday, the Master's nephew, who no doubt served the Master devotedly at Dakshineswar for some years, but who would, from time to time, be very disrespectful to the Master. After Sri Sarada Devi began living at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna once took Hriday aside and cautioned him gravely that although he may be spared should he show disrespect to him, if his 'auntie' should become offended by his displays of disrespect there would be no one in the universe to whom he could seek protection."

"There were also occasions when Sri Ramakrishna would openly declare that Sarada Devi was greater than himself. One such episode involved a lady devotee named Gaurdasi (also known as Gauri Ma or Gauri the mother). When parents test a child, asking whether they love the mother or father best, they anticipate the child will answer both, indicating a clever offspring. But when this question was lightheartedly put to Gaurdasi, she, not concerned with offending, answered by singing, 'O Krishna, when the devotees are in trouble they pray to You. They remember You. They take shelter in You. But when You are in difficulty, You take shelter in Radha.' From this we can understand Gaurdasi's

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A STORY TO REMEMBER

TWINS

Once upon a time, twin boys were conceived.

Weeks passed and the twins developed. As their awareness grew, they laughed for joy: "Isn't it great that we were conceived? Isn't it great to be alive? "

Together the twins explored their worlds. When they found their mother's cord that gave them life, they sang for joy! "How great our mother's love is, that she shares her own life with us!"

As weeks stretched into months, the twins noticed how much each was changing.

"What does it mean?" one asked.

"It means our stay in this world is drawing to an end." said the other.

"But I don't want to go," said one. "I want to stay here always."

"We have no choice," said the other. "But maybe there is life after birth."

"But how can there be?" responded one. "We will shed our life cord and how can life be possible without it? Besides, we have seen evidence that others were here before us, and none of them has returned to tell us there is life after birth. No, this is the end. Maybe there is no mother after all."

"But there has to be," protested the other. "How else did we get here? How do we remain alive?"

"Have you ever seen our mother?" said one. "Maybe she only lives in our minds. Maybe we made her up because the idea made us feel good."

So the last days in the womb were filled with deep questioning and fear.

Finally, the moment of birth arrived. When the twins had passed from their world, they opened their eyes and cried for joy - for what they saw exceeded their imaginings.

That is birth ... and that is death.

... Author Unknown

• ANNOUNCEMENT •

New Japanese Version of Bhagavad Gita to be Released

On February 19, as part of our scheduled February Retreat celebrating Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai will release a new publication of the Bhagavad Gita. This publication offers these holy Sanskrit verses translated into the Japanese language with transliterations into both Roman and Katakana scripts.

This is the perfect companion text for the many Japanese students who are now studying the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai's audio CD of Swami Medhasananda reciting the Bhagavad Gita in Sanskrit.

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answer, and Sarada Devi, being shy by nature was surprised, reached out and placed her hand over Goldashi's mouth. Sri Ramakrishna appeared to enjoy this answer and response, smiling and leaving the room."

"Sri Ramakrishna not only spoke highly of Sarada Devi, he always showed her the greatest respect in both words and behavior. Many such instances can be read in their biographies. One classical example is when after having practiced the many spiritual paths of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and having reached perfection in each, Sri Ramakrishna worshiped Sarada Devi as the Holy Mother, offering the fruits of all of these disciplines at her lotus feet. We can understand how great her spiritual power was, that she could accept the worship of a God-man like Sri Ramakrishna; that she could accept the results, the fruits, of his intense spiritual practices without being perturbed at all."

"Let us define shakti in more detail. As we said, shakti is energy or power, but there are other similar words in Sanskrit meaning shakti, such as prakriti, which is nature, and maya, illusion or delusion. So shakti, prakriti and maya, or power, nature and illusion or delusion. But, according to scripture, when shakti is referred to as adya shakti or the primordial energy, or prakriti, parama prakriti, primordial nature or maya, mahamaya, the great illusion, they are of much greater connotation and significance."

"What does She do? What are the features of these phenomena? The primordial energy, adya shakti, creates this universe, she preserves it and she destroys it. She also creates bondage and releases or frees one from bondage. She binds and she liberates. She is the patient, she is the doctor and she is the medicine. She sends trouble and at the same time she removes the trouble. It is like a play. In the scripture, Sri Sri Chandi, there is a verse that reads; The Divine Mother even deludes a discriminating person,

who then becomes a victim of ignorance. When She is pleased, She grants liberation to human beings. She is eternal, She binds us in maya, and again, She cuts the bonds and gives us liberation."

"She has two aspects - avidya and vidya. avidya causes bondage, vidya grants liberation. In one aspect She kills, deludes and destroys. In another aspect She is gracious, compassionate, She gives whatever the devotees want from Her. You can get a perfect representation of this idea in the image of Mother Kali. She has four hands. Two hands represent the aspect of destruction; in one hand She holds a sword and in another the severed head of a man. One of the other hands is in the posture, or mudra, of giving boons and another the mudra of offering protection. She give us whatever we want. If we want money, pleasures, or liberation."

"In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna it is said that however you may try – of course self-effort is important – don't have the self-delusion that by your effort alone you'll have the vision of God. For that you have to please Mother by prayer, by your submission, and only if Mother is pleased with you and opens the gate of liberation, can you be liberated. Otherwise not. Everything happens by Her desire at Her will. Sri Ramakrishna suggests that like a kitten cries for its mother, we should chant Mother, Mother, Mother and submit to Her."

"Once Swami Vivekananda had gone to an old temple of the Divine Mother, Kshirbhavani, in Kashmir. Once a grand temple, it had been demolished by the Muslims. Standing before the broken edifice, Swami Vivekananda felt very sad, and thought that had he been there at the time of this attack, he would have given his life in resistance. Immediately he heard Mother's divine voice saying, "When you think that way, do I protect you or do you protect me? If I wished, right now, could I not construct a seven-story temple made of gold? Do not have

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such an ego." This event had a tremendous impact on Swami Vivekananda's life and from that moment forward he would say, 'Not I, not I, but Thou.' He could often be heard chanting, 'Mother, Mother, Mother.'"

"Are these phenomena, the supreme reality, Brahman, and Shakti, the primordial energy, two phenomena or are they two aspects of the same phenomenon? In more concrete terms; are Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi different, or are they two aspects of the same phenomenon? According to Sāmkhya philosophy there are two eternal infinite phenomena; Purusha, the supreme reality, and the Prakriti, the primordial energy. But according to Vedanta philosophy, and here is the big difference between the two systems of philosophy, Vedanta says, no, there are no two eternal entities, infinity is one. That infinity is the Supreme Reality, and Primordial Energy is not something separate, the two cannot be separated. Sri Ramakrishna gave a practical, easy to understand illustration to this difficult philosophical problem, using fire and its power to give light and its power to burn. These two aspects of fire cannot be separated, they are two aspects of the same phenomenon."

"When that same phenomenon is in the state of non-action, it is known as Brahman, when it is involved in action, it is known as Shakti. Another example given by Sri Ramakrishna are a calm ocean and waves. They look different, but they are not separate, they are of the same stuff. Swami Saradanandaji, who had taken great care of Holy Mother for many years, composed a beautiful hymn in Sanskrit which reads: I bow down to Holy Mother Sarada, who is inseparable from Sri Ramakrishna, as the power of burning is inseparable from fire."

"In fact, Sri Ramakrishna, an incarnation of the Supreme Being, carried out his mission on Earth, with the help of the divine power of Mother Sarada. This universe is the domain of

Shakti even when the Supreme Reality incarnates, so the help, support and power of the primordial energy is necessary. John Yale, an American writer and devotee, visited India before later becoming Swami Vidyatmananda. Most probably speaking to a monk on that visit about Shakti and the compassionate and the destroyer aspects, he asked a very interesting and pertinent question: "Is Holy Mother the incarnation of both these aspects?" The answer, fortunately for us all, of course, is that she is the incarnation of compassion, grace, love and kindness."

"Though we bind ourselves, She liberates us. She is the compassionate aspect of the Divine Mother. She would always say, 'My son, when you are in trouble, remember, you have a Mother who is always looking after you. I am equally the mother of the saint and the sinner alike.' She would say, 'Does the mother forsake the child because it is soiled, or does she clean and take it upon her lap?'"

"With his last days approaching, once Sri Ramakrishna was staring at Sarada Devi for quite a while. She asked why he was looking at her in that way and said that if he had something to say, he should just say it. In answer Sri Ramakrishna asked, 'Must I do everything by myself, will you not do anything?' Do, in this case, means giving spiritual help, granting liberation. Sarada Devi answered, 'I am just a woman, what can I do?' To this Sri Ramakrishna said, 'No, no, you will have to do much more than I have done. These people of Calcutta [often used to symbolize people of the modern age] are immersed in worldliness, you have to look after them. You have to save them.' And we see that after his death, Sarada Devi did, indeed, do this."

"We also see one fundamental difference between Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna – Sri Ramakrishna would only attend to the spiritual problems of devotees. He never con-

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• Thought of the Month •

“When the oak is felled the forest echoes with its fall,
but a hundred acorns are sown silently by an unnoticed breeze.”

... Thomas Carlyle

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concerned himself with secular matters, such as praying for curing diseases of devotees and the like. On the other hand, Sarada Devi would attend to all the problems of her children, irrespective of whether the problem was secular or spiritual. Problems of money, health, even relationships between husband and wife were brought to Holy Mother. Once Swami Vivekananda wittily confided, "When I'm fine I feel that I am Brahman, pure consciousness, but when my stomach aches, immediately I call on Mother."

"Referring to the continuous assault of problems one encounters in daily life, one practical devotee of Sri Ramakrishna once amusingly noted that if he remembers Sri Ramakrishna a few times a day, he remembers Holy Mother a few hundred times. This world and our daily lives are full of problems and it is the Holy Mother who is ever ready to help us. And I wonder, though it may be that today many devotees (and why only the householder devotees, monks too) follow the same example of this devotee, it should always be remembered that they are the same; two aspects of the same reality. So let us pray on this holy occasion that Sri Sarada Devi protects us and gives us shelter here and in the hereafter." •



January Retreat - Afternoon Session: Music by Mr. Samudra Gupta and Miss Kaori (Shanti) Izumida

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