Monthly Calendar

• **Kyokai Events** •

NO JULY RETREAT

• **Birthdays** •

Swami Ramakrishnananda

Sunday, 23 July

⁂

⌘ Thus Spake ⌘

"Be not a traitor to your thoughts. Be sincere: act according to your thoughts; and you shall surely succeed. Pray with a sincere and simple heart, and your prayers will be heard."

... Sri Ramakrishna

"Amen, Amen. I say unto you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, He will give it to you. Hitherto, you have not asked anything in my name. Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full."

... The Christ

∗ SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT ∗

SRI KRISHNA BIRTH CELEBRATION

Sunday, August 20 - Zushi Centre - 11:00 a.m.
Special Guest Speaker:
Swami Vagishananda, President, Ramakrishna Math
Mumbai

In This Issue

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA 144TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

Invocation: Vedic Prayer

Sri S. K. Mandal, Deputy Chief of the Mission, Indian Embassy:

Offering of bouquet to Swami Vivekananda

Release of The Universal Gospel (Special Issue)

Release of CD (Vol. 2) Songs from The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

Speech on Vivekananda

Swami Medhasananda: *Guided Meditation*

Professor Toru Nishigaki, Interfaculty Initiative in Information Studies, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies, the University of Tokyo:

Information Technology and Spiritual Wisdom

Thanksgiving Address: Mr. A. P. S. Mani, Secretary, Celebration Committee

Recess and Refreshments

Cultural Programme

1. Devotional Songs

Japanese devotees:

Kaori Izumida, Keiko Suzuki, Toshimi Ito, Yasuo Matsuoka

Indian devotees:

Anjalika Sen, Paromita Roy Tyagi, Samudra Dutta Gupta, Viswa Ghosh, Devashis Das, Bhaswati Ghosh, Rita Kar, Sandip Sen, Debalina Mukhopadhyay, Meeta Chanda

2. Tabla performance - Dinesh Ch. Dyoundi

3. Sitar performance - Kenji Inoue with Dinesh Ch. Dyoundi (tabla)

VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN CELEBRATES
Swami Vivekananda 144th Birth Anniversary in Tokyo

The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai) held it's annual public celebration of Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary in Tokyo's Ikebukuro City in Toshima Ward on 11 June. This year's event, marking Swami Vivekananda's 144th Birth Anniversary, was again held at the Toshima Kokaido, a large public hall with theatre seating, a production-sized stage, sub-level dressing rooms and a roomy foyer, conveniently located near Ikebukuro Station.

Vivekananda Celebration (from page 1)

Planning for this biggest of the Society's yearly events takes place throughout the year by a 22-member Celebration Committee, an association of the Vedanta Society of Japan and the Nichi-In Bunka Kyokai (Japan-Indo Cultural Association). Transforming the Toshima Kokaido requires a veritable legion of specialized and organized volunteers working long hours, and as visitors begin to arrive these volunteers have already been fed a home cooked lunch and are busy completing the last minute details of their respective tasks. In addition to all the pre-event preparation there is also a sound, video and stage crew, a flower arrangement team and a bookstore and sales staff.

At the entrance foyer visitors are met by tables of cheerful greeters, who ask attendees to register and pass out a published programme and event questionnaire. No fees are requested. To the right a display of an ever growing number of publications in Japanese along with CDs, cassettes, photographs and incense, and to the left English publications.

Entering though the theatre doors, one's attention is immediately drawn to center stage and the commanding photo-portrait of Swami Vivekananda, looking much as he may have in addressing the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 in the turban and coat fashioned to exemplify his Indian heritage and the trousers and shoes of western sensitivities. Above this portrait hangs a banner in English and Japanese bearing the title of the day's function, to the right and forward the panelist table and on the left the speaker's podium. Dominating the centre of the large seating area, at the midway point, is the audio and visual command center.

An audience of two hundred twenty-five had gathered by 2 p.m. as the panelists took their seats and Ms. Hirano, the emcee, announced the commencement of the event in both Japanese and English. The first order of business was the offering of Vedic peace prayers led by Swami Medhasananda, along with Mr. Chiba and Mr. Kanai from the Vedanta Society of Japan. As these chants were recited the hall took on a peaceful, somber, and for some first-time attendees, perhaps curious atmosphere.

The panelists were then introduced; special guest Sri S. K. Mandal, Deputy Chief of the Mission, Indian Embassy, guest speaker for the event Professor Toru Nishigaki of Tokyo University, Celebration Committee Vice President and Professor Emeritus Tsuyoshi Nara, and President of the Vedanta Society of Japan, Swami Medhasananda. The swami and Sri S. K. Mandal were then requested to offer a bouquet to the portrait of Swami Vivekananda at center stage.

This was followed by Deputy Chief Sri S.K. Mandal formally releasing a special issue of the Vedanta Society's bimonthly magazine, The Universal Gospel, and Volume Two of Songs of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna a new CD published by the Vedanta Society of Japan. Mr. Mandal then gave a short address in reflection of Swami Vivekananda's legacy. All in attendance were then treated to a few selections from the new CD establishing a reflective and reverent atmosphere and Swami Medhasananda immediately afterward led all in a guided meditation in Japanese and English. It was in this atmosphere that Professor Toru Nishigaki was asked to deliver his address entitled Information Technology and Spiritual Wisdom (see full text of this address in this issue of The Vedanta Kyokai).

When Professor Nishigaki concluded his talk, Mr. A.P.S. Mani, Secretary of the Celebration Committee offered thanks to all the participants, planners, advertisers and volunteers.

This was followed by a twenty-minute recess with snacks. The bookstore area became the focus of attention with many visitors, snack-packets in hand, inquiring about the new CD and Japanese-
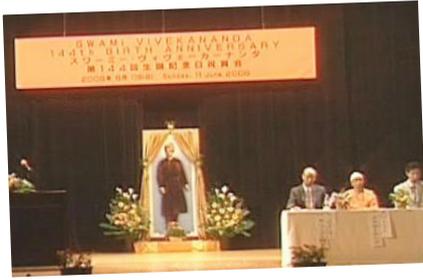
Photos from left to right, top to bottom: the stage is set, Deputy Chief Mandal releasing new CD, Swami Medhasananda leading guided meditation, brisk sales at bookstore,   audio-visual crew and greeters.
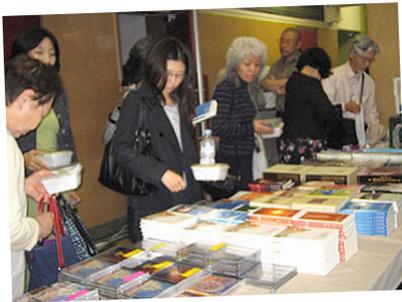
Vivekananda (from page 1)

language publications available. Throughout the Toshima Kokaido the sounds of laughter and chatter and friends greeting friends could be heard, as the many singers and musicians prepared for the nearly two-hour Cultural Programme that concluded the day's

ceremonies. (see the Programme Schedule for names of participants). •

Note: A two-disc DVD of the entire event is available upon request. A four-disc audio CD set is also available. The sound quality of the Cultural Programme is outstanding. Please contact : <info@vedanta.jp> for more information.

CULTURAL PROGRAMME	DEVOTIONAL SONGS Japanese Devotees	DEVOTIONAL SONGS Indian Devotees	TABLA SOLO Dinesh Ch. Dyoundi	SITAR SOLO Kenji Inoue

Photos of: tabla with harmonium performance and sitar with tabla and tanpura performance

Information Technology and Spiritual Wisdom

A Talk by Professor Toru Nishigaki

[Informatics encompasses the study of systems that represent, process, and communicate information, including all computational, cognitive and social aspects. The central notion is the transformation of information — whether by computation or communication, whether by organisms or artifacts. In this sense, informatics can be considered as encompassing computer science, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, information science and related fields, and as extending the scope of computer science to encompass computation in natural, as well as engineered, computational systems. - Wikipedia]

Professor Tsuyoshi Nara, serving as Vice President of the Celebration Committee and as English-language interpreter, gave a brief introduction of Professor Toru Nishigaki before he gave his address at the 144th Birth Anniversary Celebration in Ikebukuro, Tokyo on June 11, 2006.

Some of the background information provided was on Prof. Nishigaki's education, his expertise in mainframe and software research, as a fellow at Stanford Univerisity, and his current position at the Interfaculty Initiative in Information Studies at Tokyo University. Professor Nara pointed out that the list of his published papers in the field of information technology and science was too numerous to quote, but said that the professor holds some unique and interesting views on the subject of informatics, some of which he would share in his talk.

Information Technology (from page 5)

Professor Nishigaki, while admitting his unfamiliarity with Hinduism as such, acknowledged that Swami Vivekananda was an extraordinary person who influenced so many the world over in preaching what universal religion should be. He expressed his deep appreciation at being requested to speak on the occasion of such revered personality's birth anniversary celebration.

"I am conducting research on informatics studies, a field dealing with a wider range of information than computer engineering usually does. It is a new research field covering both the humanities and natural sciences, and this discipline called informatics encompasses elements of psychology and sociology. In other words, these studies not only include mechanical information, but also biological and even social information."

"When we hear the term information, most of us think of mechanical information, that which can be processed by computer, transmitted through communication channels and loaded into mechanical memory. Mechanical information is, however, only a small portion of true information. As mechanical information is related by a sign or signal, it cannot contain total or true information. True information is anything important to animate organisms or inanimate artifacts. For animate organisms, examples of true information would include food or gender necessary for survival."

"Modern society is called the information society. Present day society is awash and overflowing with information. Can we really say, however, that this information overload is essential for our lives? Certainly, we can agree that useful data is increasing; such as locating restaurants serving delicious, quality foods of our choice, or which highway routes are jammed and should be avoided, and so forth. On the other hand, our daily lives are becoming busier and busier, and the time we have to think on or ponder those important things of life is becoming harder to find. At first glance then, the information society looks efficient, but on closer examination critics declare it a mean society that robotizes human beings."

"The reason for such criticism derives from the fact that the information society is overwhelmed with mechanical information which is not necessarily essential for our existence. The personal computer and the Internet, or live information technologies, are mere technologies which reproduce and distribute various mechanical information at terrific speeds. Thus, an overflow of mechanical information and a shortage of vital information is certainly one of the most important problems troubling modern society. Without a doubt, not only Japan or India, but the whole world is facing this serious problem in the 21st century."

"I was once a professional computer engineer. I studied in the USA and worked for Hitachi Manufacturing Company Limited to research and develop operating systems. I then joined the University of Tokyo to study informatics for the purpose of thinking seriously on how we could establish a meaningful society; that is, not an efficient society full of mechanical information, but rather, such a society in which people value the really significant information essential to human life."

"You may laugh if I say that man is an information processing robot, but among many scholars such an idea is spreading; the idea that there is no substantial difference between an animate being and a machine. If such a statement were true, then it would be no wonder if an information processing robot or a robotic man were to be manufactured soon."

"Ever since the mid 20th century, when the first computers were in development, many scholars have conceived the mission of a man-like computer giving rise to the field of artificial intelligence. Among many projects related to this subject, one of the most popular in Japan was the Fifth Generation Computer Development Project, which lasted throughout the

Information Technology (from page 6)

decade of the 1980s. Although Japan had become a great economic power during that period, she still lagged behind America and Europe in computer technologies and, with concerted effort, many Japanese specialists set about this national project to create the world's highest standard computer. I, myself, once participated in this project."

"A man-like computer would not necessarily look like a human being outwardly. What we wanted to create was not a computer in a doll, but a computer with a human mind. To be more specific, we wanted to create a computer that could understand human speech and communicate with human beings. Usually, if we want to exchange information with a computer, we must use a special computer language. However, designers in the Fifth Generation Computer Project wanted to make it possible for a man to exchange information with a computer through ordinary human language like English or Japanese. At that time many European scholars and engineers also placed high hopes on the success of this project."

"It would have been convenient if such a computer could have been developed, but in the end this national project was a failure and no such computer yet exists that can understand the Japanese language we use day to day. The national project ended in the beginning of the 1990s resulting in an experimental computer. However, even this experimental computer is hardly put to use at present and the Fifth Generation Computer Project itself is being buried in oblivion."

"Should we not, as the human race, learn an important lesson from this blunder? Those who participated in this project were all excellent engineers and each of them worked very hard, as hard as one could. If they failed in this project despite their desperate efforts, it should be considered that the problem lies in the manner the target itself was set. That is to say, they missed a fundamental point in setting the project's goals."

"In fact, developers of the Fifth Generation Computer Project accepted that the human mind is something that thinks logically. Here, logical thinking means mechanical inference. As a computer is excellent at logical processing, perhaps the developers thought a computer could be excellent at logical thinking. But it

is obvious that the human mind not only thinks logically, it thinks illogically as well. Mans emotions often contain illogical contradictions. In addition, man's communicative signs contain various semantic content or meanings depending on situation or context. Therefore, a computer cannot easily understand human language."

"In spite of this failure, however, designers have not extinguished their fire of ambition. Some are still trying to create artificial creatures. As human language is too complicated, here again, these developers have to ask themselves what the fundamental differences are between creature and machine."

"Molecular biology and its applied technology, genetic engineering, developed in the late 20th century can be responsible for promoting the idea of considering animate beings as a kind of information processing machine. It is becoming common knowledge in present society that each and every living thing exists under a genetic information system. Just as epoch-making medical technology can be expected to be developed through gene analysis, various controversial developments such as human cloning have also emerged. Due to the knowledge gained by rapidly developing computer and genetic engineering, more ideas relating to some merging of animate beings and information processing machines will more commonly spread in the 21st Century."

"I believe there is a line of demarcation between bio-information and mechanical information that cannot be crossed no matter how far computer engineering and genetic engineering may advance. I think it is also possible to point out that there is something invaluable existing in every living thing, particularly in the human mind. Deliberation on this issue is one of the purposes of informatics."

"What is the fundamental difference between a living being and a machine? Earlier there were some scholars who thought that in the body of livings things there existed some spacial matter that non-living things lacked. This theory was later denied. What modern science teaches is that our body consists of ordinary proteins and contains nothing mysterious from either a physical or chemical point of view. If a machine were made from proteins, there would be no dissimilarity

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between it and living things as far as material composition is concerned. Therefore, the vital point does not lie in the material, but in construction or assembly. I am convinced that the construction of a living thing differs from that of a machine."

"How do they differ? Let me state my conclusion by omitting technically detailed discussions. Living beings are self-created beings; a being that reproduces itself on the basis of its own genetic information, facilitated by generative activities. Therefore, living things are an autopoietic system, reproducing themselves by their own energy. On the other hand, machines are unpoietic systems, produced by other things or human beings. Here is the fundamental difference between living things and machines."

"Machines are so designed that their input produces their corresponding output. In the case of information processing machines, its input information provides the same output contents. If it doesn't work this way, then something is wrong with the machine. On the contrary, a living thing cannot insure its input information corresponds with its output information. In the case of human beings, each of us understands the same word or phrase differently. This is the manner of a living thing's information processing. Living things are of a historical existence, as they have been reproducing themselves. This history not only contains its individual experience, but also its long history of genetically inherited evolution."

"Since each animate being takes its own individual historical course, whatever we may try, our semantic interpretation of an individual being's information is bound to vary. Therefore, even if one tries hard to make a machine of an animate being, he can never succeed in this venture since such machines would produce infinitely varying outputs, against one and the same input."

"A little while ago I described mechanical information as a mere sign or signal without any semantic content. To say it more correctly, it means that the content of mechanical information is always invaluable and latent. As an information machine always gives the same output against a certain corresponding input, the machine takes input information as mere meaningless signs and seems to process it in a mechanical or stereotyped way. On the other hand, the fact that bio-information contains a semantic content essential for living beings is relevant to a certain degree of freedom and variety of semantic interpretation."

"Theoretically, each and every time a living being judges on the basis on its own history, whether certain input information is really necessary for its existence or not, it then produces an output accordingly. That is why living-being-information processing cannot be done mechanically or in a stereotyped way. In a sense, therefore, a living thing can be said to be of an egocentric existence. It interprets everything and recognizes the whole world according to its own past experiences. As a living thing, the human being also sees the world from a particular point of view, which varies individually in a stricter sense. If we consider things this way, don't you think there is something wrong with contemporary man behaving exactly like an information processing robot, being engulfed with a profusion of mechanical information? Should we not regain the freedom proper to living beings and pursue a course to choose vital information activities?"

"We may not be able to find any solution even if we only observe the egocentricity and individuality of living things, including human beings. In fact, from the informatic point of view, there is one more important point to be considered. Namely, from the viewpoint of ecological systems. Each and every living thing is playing a certain set role, like an information processing machine does. Genetic information is unexchangeable and a food chain is observable in an ecological system where an individual living being performs a certain function; just as individual computer parts. Owing to such functions, an ecological system is maintained and individual living things can exist. In the case of the human being, he plays a certain role, not only in the ecological system, but also in human society. For instance, as a teacher I give lessons in my university class just as an information processing machine. As we human beings perform our respective functions individually in a society, that same society can continue to exist and human beings can also survive."

"In other words, even though living beings, including

• A Story to Remember •

The Fisherman Pretending to be a Holy Man

"One night a fisherman went into a garden and cast his net in order to steal some fish. The owner heard him and surrounded him with his servants. They brought lighted torches and began to search for him. In the mean time the fisherman smeared his body with ashes and sat under a tree, pretending to be a holy man. The owner and his men searched a great deal buy could not find the thief. All they saw was a holy man covered with ashes, meditating under a tree."

"The next day the news spread in the neighborhood that a great sage was staying in the garden. People gathered there and saluted him with offerings of fruit, flowers and sweets. Many also offered silver and copper coins."

" 'How strange!' thought the fisherman, 'I am not a genuine holy man, and still people show such devotion to me. I shall certainly realize God if I become a true sadhu. There is no doubt about it.' "

"If a mere pretense of religious life can bring such spiritual awakening, you can imagine the effect of real sadhana. In that state you will surely realize what is real and what is un-real. God alone is real, and the world is illusory."

Sri Ramakrishna from The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna
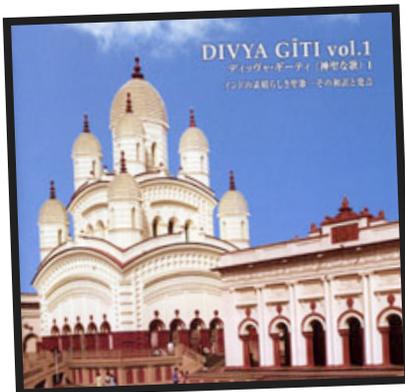
• Thought of the Month •

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." ... Marcel Proust

Information Technology (from page 8)

humans, do not always necessarily produce output against a certain corresponding input, that output is not always necessarily irregular. The semantic interpretation sometimes fluctuates, but maintains considerable recurrence and consistency. It is true that misunderstandings occur frequently in human society. Conversely, it can be said that in other cases certain meanings are understood properly. Therefore, certain information can be said to have the double faces of individuality or discontinuity of an incommunicable nature and, secondly, commonness of a communicable nature."

"To be honest, all of us know intuitively this two-faced nature of information without any difficult discussion on informatics. Taking the former standpoint, one feels alone and that this world will collapse if he or she dies. The person concerned feels as if he or she is the whole world. Contrarily, taking the second standpoint, one feels linked with innumerable beings and that the world will remain safe even if he or she passes away. In this case the person concerned feels as if he or she is but a tiny thing in the vastness of time and space."

"How should we deal with this contradictory two-facedness? I am presently struggling with this problem as an informatics specialist. But perhaps all great religious leaders may have been deliberating on this problem more or less from ancient times. Therefore I could be considered as arrogant if I should try to present an answer-like remark here. But one thing is clear. It is a fact that shameful thought is becoming rampant. This shameful thought grows out of egoism based on competition from the first viewpoint, that which considers human beings as information processing robots from the second viewpoint, and that which tries to combine these two thoughts. If it is realized that human beings are bound to fight an economic battle like fighting robots, it is a hopeless thought. If such thoughts continue to spread not only in Japan or India, but the whole world, we will have to do something about it."

"It is desirable that we express our will and live our lives actively from the first viewpoint; that we show our thankful heart expressed to innumerable other things for their support, as we are being sustained by the whole universe from the second viewpoint; and further, we should combine both of them. But it is indeed difficult for us to actually do so."

"Swami Vivekananda is said to have preached that it is important for human beings to practice four types of yoga in order to lead a better life; these are Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga. By practicing these types of yoga can we really subjugate the egoism rampant now in the present information society or the distorted view of human beings as information processing robots? Perhaps you all know the answer well, but not me. Although I am an irreligious man, I know that my own learning should not be directed only to material interests. I also caution myself that my learning should not be done only for the sake of getting more mere knowledge or for performing academic pursuits. I shall be extremely happy if my learning will result in helping myself as well as other people and many other living beings out of various difficulties."

"I thank you very much for your kind attention." •