



the VEDANTA *Kyokai*

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Monthly Calendar

• Birthdays •

Swami Saradananda
Thursday - January 5

Swami Turiyananda
Friday - January 13

Swami Vivekananda
Saturday - January 21

Swami Brahmananda
Tuesday - January 31

• Kyokai Events •

January Retreat at Zushi

The Holy Mother - Sri Sri
Sarada Devi Birth Celebration

Sunday, Jan 15th, 10:30 a.m.
All are welcome.

✧ Thus Spake ✧

“Spiritual practice means to keep the mind steady at His lotus feet and to be absorbed in His thoughts.” ... Sri Sri Sarada Devi - The Holy Mother

“Riches are not from abundance of worldly goods, but from a contented mind.” ... Prophet Muhammad

CHRISTMAS EVE 2005

The Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual Christmas Eve

service at the Zushi Centre on the evening of December 24, 2005.

Festive lights had been put up across the front the building and visitors stepping in from the cold

were greeted by decorative holly, a large, illuminated wreath, and the warmth and reverence of the environs and the occasion.

Upstairs in the meeting room, the familiar portrayal of a meditating

Jesus Christ had been brought from the main shrine room and was seated high on a wooden throne.

Centered just below was a framed depiction of Madonna and Child upon a tiered backdrop of red

cloth that stretched a few meters out into the room. Both were adorned with hand-strung



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Christmas Eve 2006 (from page 1)

flower garlands and basked in the warm glow of candlelight from dozens of flickering sources, along with a colorful assortment of bouquets and blossoms and an array of cakes, candies and fruit offerings. The setting was completed by the articles of worship at the foot of the altar.

Microphones, speakers and keyboard sound-checked and video camera tested, the congregation settled as Swami Medhasananda began the worship at 7 p.m. Afterward the swami welcomed all and Shanti-san and Lonnie led the congregation in verses of Come All Ye Faithful in English and Japanese.

Then there were English and Japanese readings from Matthew in the New Testament, the swami reading first Jesus' Use of Parables and then Jesus Explains the Parable of the Weeds, The Parable of the Hidden Treasure, The Parable of the Pearl, The Parable of the Net and New Truth and Old. The same texts were then read in Japanese, followed by singing of The First Noel and Joy to the World with English and Japanese verses.

Swami noted that while for many around the world Christmas is just a festival, for devout Christians it is a very holy event and Christmas Eve is celebrated with great devotion. He added that for devotees of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda it is also a very holy occasion. "Sri Ramakrishna taught the harmony of religions and practiced various paths of God-realization, including Christianity," he said. "He had the vision of Christ."

Christmas Eve also has special significance for the Ramakrishna Order because at the insistence of Narendranath, Swami Vivekananda, the first young monastic disciples had taken their vows of renunciation on Christmas Eve, rejoicing at realizing this fact later. "We not only get inspiration from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, but we celebrate Christmas Eve with a beautiful ceremony at Belur Math headquarters and every branch of the Mission as well," he continued.

The subject of the evening's service was Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ, Swami and chose to read from Matthew in The New Testament and offer some commentary.

After reading 'The Birth of Jesus Christ' the swami

noted that most births of great spiritual leaders and incarnations of God like Lord Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ are supernatural. He then read from 'The Baptism of Jesus'.

Before continuing with 'The Temptation of Jesus' the swami pointed out that here again in the life of Lord Buddha and the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find they were also tested by a 'devil' or other such power for their spiritual depth. And that according to some, this temptation was not from an outside source, but from inside. "In fact, the source of temptation is deep inside us," he said. "One view holds that there are deep samskaras of enjoyment inside us and in the course of spiritual discipline these appear to us as temptation." Then he read the description of the confrontation between Jesus and the devil.

"If there is the least desire for secular enjoyment, there cannot be spiritual realization," Swami stated bluntly. "And that is the test." He then read 'Jesus Calls Four Fishermen'. "Apparently these four disciples came from a very low strata of society, but for spiritual realization social position is not important. Money is not important. What is important is purity of heart. Great spiritual leaders, like Jesus Christ, have a spiritual insight and can see who is pure of heart. So when Jesus asked these fishermen to follow him, they immediately obeyed him. Purity of heart is of importance."

"In this connection we can recall an incident in the life of The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi," he continued. "While she standing at a railroad station platform in India a porter suddenly came up and addressed Her as the Divine Mother. 'O Mother,' said the man, 'I have been waiting for you for a long time. Where have you been?' And right there, Holy Mother gave him initiation."

He then read 'Jesus Teaches, Preaches and Heals'. "Here we see something special in Jesus Christ's life; though preaching and teaching are quite common in other spiritual teachers lives, we don't see healing of the sick as a legacy in the lives of Lord Buddha or Sri Ramakrishna," Swami said. "Here, the purpose was not to bring any name and fame to himself by healing the diseased, but out of deep sympathy and compassion. He also wanted to show that the power to heal was God's power - not to glorify Jesus, but to glorify God. With this objective, this purpose, and

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out of deep compassion, Jesus healed diseased people."

Before reading 'The Sermon on the Mount', Swami said that this represented one of most important parts of the New Testament; that it contains moral and spiritual values. "It has deep significance," he said, "in that Jesus explains how spiritual ways and secular ways are different. The criteria of judging by a secular person and the criteria of judging by a spiritual person are different. Persons of secular values will see many things as strange, peculiar or impossible in Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. But from the point of spirituality the apparently strange, apparently peculiar, and apparently impossible advise are of deep significance.

"There is no doubt that it is very hard to practice the moral and spiritual values contained in the Sermon on the Mount. But even in considering this difficulty, Jesus did not compromise or dilute these values. What people, especially secular people, would think or accept, or the difficulty of practice, Jesus did not consider these things, but He clearly laid out and explained that which He knew to be correct and right."

"Another point is, as we go through His teachings in the New Testament, at times it appears very enigmatic, the meaning unclear. The disciples themselves would submit that they couldn't grasp the deeper meaning of the parables and Jesus would explain. So unless we deeply meditate on what Jesus said; unless we become pure of heart, we'll not really understand the inner meaning of His teachings. The same can be said of the teachings of Lord Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna."

"We must also remember the great teachers would give the same teachings to all. We must remember that the Sermon on the Mount was delivered to His chosen disciples. A given instruction may be intended for people of a particular background or ability to understand and this can sometimes cause confusion. The instruction, the idea, of total renunciation that we see in the Sermon on the Mount is not meant for all, but for His chosen disciples. There are also many other instructions that can and should be followed by common devotees, but keep this in mind as we read

from The Sermon on the Mount: 'Jesus saw the crowds and went up a hill, where he sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them.' "

"True Happiness: 'Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!'" he read. "What does it mean, happy are those who are spiritually poor? It means really that those who have the egotistic idea that they are spiritually rich are not really happy and cannot realize God. Surely humility and egoless-ness will help one to realize God."

"Number 5: 'Happy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised them.' As we just discussed, humility and ego-less-ness."

"Number 7: 'Happy are those who are merciful to others; God will be merciful to them.' This means that God should not only be worshipped in a temple or church or an image. One should love the devotees of God. One should be merciful to others. In the Bhagavad Gita it says that God loves the devotee who has love for all. How can one be merciful to others? If one has no love for others, one cannot be merciful to others. One of the most important teachings of Jesus is: Love thy neighbor as thyself. Love God and love thy neighbor. The whole of Christianity, the quintessence of Christianity can be found in these two teachings of Jesus Christ."

"In fact, this is the essence of all religions; love God and love all of humanity. There is so much fighting over religion and religious teachings. The main reason for this is that we do not practice these religious teachings, we don't implement, we don't translate into our own actions these spiritual teachings. This the reason for all the fighting and struggle and violence regarding religion.

'Happy are the pure at heart; they will see God. Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them His children.' "So here again, purity of heart is important for the realization of God. Not money or position or anything else."

"Salt and Light" 'You are like salt for all mankind. But if salt loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again. I has become worthless, so it is thrown out and people trample on it.

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'You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.'

'No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead he puts it on the lamp-stand, where it gives light for everyone in the house.'

'In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.'

"The important idea of the salt is that if a monk does not lead a life of renunciation and the devotee does not live a life of devotion, how can they be called a monk or a devotee? How can parents be called parents if they don't raise, don't look after, don't do their duty to their children? How can a teacher be called a teacher if he or she does not really teach? So the purpose this teaching is that one should be careful about one's station in life and the responsibilities involved.

After reading from 'Teaching about the Law' he said, "That is another important aspect of the great spiritual teachers; they don't come to destroy or break, but they come to fulfill. They try to follow the traditions, but only in the right spirit, not blindly. Even if they want to reform something, they follow the path of least resistance. Their solution is a very positive solution; not a negative one."

He then read from 'Teaching about Anger' and said, "Here brother does not only mean one's brother, but means anyone to whom we are related. Now why did Jesus give the specific instance about leaving your gift at the altar and making peace with one's brother? Because it really happens so. If we nurse anger against someone, then during our period of prayer or meditation the anger comes to mind, and as long as we have anger in our mind, our mind is disturbed. The mind becomes restless; and with such a restless mind, deep prayer and meditation is not possible. So Jesus tells us to settle the matter, so that we can pray and meditate. So love, sympathy and forgiveness must be practiced in spiritual life."

Commenting on 'Teaching about Vows' Swami asked, "What is the deeper meaning in this teaching about vows? He means that when we take a vow, we have inner faith that we have some power over our actions and the outcome. But Jesus warns that we do

not have any power and says that we cannot make a single hair black or white. Only God has power and mistakenly we think we have some power. So when we make vows we should just say 'Yes' or 'No' and we may add; if God wills, or if God gives me the power, then I can do so and so. It is a mistaken idea that we have any power over outcomes and it is egotistic, so Jesus says that it is not the right approach. Just say 'yes' or 'no'. Who is that evil one? 'The ego.'"

With this the talk came to a close with more Christmas carols in English and Japanese and a lovely bhajan from Ms. Latna, a visitor from southern India in Japan on temporary assignment as assistant professor at Tokyo University. After Swami thanked one and all for attending the service, a prasad supper of delightful curries and sweets was served in the dining room. Here too, amidst the conversation and laughter all enjoyed the spirit of community and a shared spirit of Christmas. •



• Thought of the Month •

"A book is the only place in which you can examine a fragile thought without breaking it, or explore an explosive idea without fear it will go off in your face. It is one of the few havens remaining where a man's mind can get both provocation and privacy."

- Edward P. Morgan

December Retreat

Love as a Path of Realization

Love as a path of realization of God, or the Self, is also known as Bhakti Yoga. To better understand this path, first let us try to understand what God is, what the Self is, and what the relation between God and the Self is."

God, according to Hinduism, has various aspects. In one aspect God is pure consciousness. He has no form and no quality. Then, in another aspect He has no form, but has qualities; He creates, sustains and destroys this universe. He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. Then in a third aspect, God has both form and qualities; examples of which are Shiva, Durga, Vishnu, etc. Then in another aspect God is born as a human being and is known as an Incarnation of God for guiding people in the path of spirituality. What we call God or the Supreme Reality at the macro level, we call Self at the individual or micro level. Basically their nature is the same, their essence is the same, that is, pure consciousness. It is real existence, real knowledge and real joy."

Now let us discuss what realization is? It is the realisation of the essential nature of God. What is the difference between intellectual understanding and realisation? The effect of intellectual understanding is very superficial and temporary, whereas, the effect of realisation is deep and eternal. The realisation of God produces eternal joy, fearlessness, and wisdom. Simple intellectual understanding God doesn't produce these effects. Only our brain is

necessary to understand concepts God, but for realisation, not only one should understand mentally, but one should also feel and love God in his whole being. Then again, understanding God does not mean one is connected to God, but realisation of God means that one is eternally connected with God. This is the big difference.

Why is such realisation necessary? Because only by realisation of God we can get real peace and joy and wisdom; we can become free from delusion and ignorance. Because these are our problems - our fears, our tensions, our stress, lack of joy, lack of peace. Sometimes may get peace and joy in our day-to-day life, but they are very short lived. Only by realizing God we can get genuine and permanent joy and peace, and become fearless and wise. Many paths have been tried to get eternal joy and peace and wisdom since the dawn of civilization, but there is not a single way other than God realization.

What are the paths of God realisation? Each path of God realisation is known as a Yoga. The Bhagavad Gita has been divided into eighteen chapters and each of these is known as a Yoga - a spiritual path. So in the Bhagavad Gita alone there are eighteen paths of God realization, and then there are Kundalini Yoga and Abhyasa Yoga. All these spiritual paths consist of elements of the four paths; Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Raja Yoga. Jnana Yoga is the path of discrimination between the real and the unreal. Raja Yoga is the path of control of the senses, the mind and meditation. Karma Yoga is the path of unselfish work. And finally, the path of love for God, known as Bhakti Yoga, our topic today.

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Island Hopping with the Swami December 2005

Date: Location: Coordinator: Theme:

27 Nov	Osaka	Yutaka Oasa	Swami Vivekananda Life and Message
28 Nov	Kashiwara (Nara)	Ms. Ichiyama Yoga Group	Self-Analysis & Introspection
4 Dec	Okinawa	Chieko Morita	Karma Yoga (Japanese Session)
5 Dec	"	"	(Indian Session) Bhakti Yoga
11 Dec	Kumamoto	Ms. Inaba	Holistic Health
12 Dec	Fukuoka	Kishi Aiko	Holistic Health (Yoga Nikikan branch)

• A Story to Remember •

Socrates' Three Tests

In ancient Greece, the renowned philosopher Socrates was reputed to hold truth and knowledge in the highest esteem. One day an acquaintance met the philosopher and said, "I just heard something about one of your friends. Would you care to hear about it?"

"Just a moment, friend," Socrates replied. "Before you tell me what you have heard about my friend. Let's put this news to three simple tests."

"A test?" asked the man.

"Yes," Socrates enthused, "before you inform me about what you heard regarding my friend, it might be a good idea to take a moment and consider what you're going to say."

"All right, then," said the man, "let's put it to the test."

"The first part of the test is truth," said Socrates. "Are you sure that what you are about to share with me is true?"

"No," the man said, "actually, I just heard it a moment ago and wanted to pass it along to you."

"All right," said Socrates. "So you don't really know if it's true or not. Let's try the test of goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend something good for him or me?"

"No, on the contrary, it is not very good," he replied.

"So," Socrates continued, "you want to tell me something bad about him, but you're not certain it's true. Regardless, it may still pass the test of usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about my friend going to be useful to me or him?"

"No, I cannot say that it is very useful to anyone," answered man.

"Well," concluded Socrates, "if what you want to tell me is not true, good or useful to anyone, why repeat it at all?"

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Now, what is love? First, let us try to define what love is and then we shall try to understand what love for God is. It is basically a flow of tender feelings; then to qualify further; an unceasing flow of warmth and tenderness towards a person, seeking closeness and perceiving joy in that. If we didn't perceive joy in love, then there would be no love. Summed up it is a feeling or emotion. Hatred is also an emotion, but here it is warm. Then it must be a continuous flow, because we may feel for some person for a moment, an hour, but that is not love. Love is an unceasing flow. We also seek closeness. We seek the company of the person we love, and we perceive joy in that.

How does this love originate? There are different origins. Sometimes it starts from appreciation. The next steps are liking and then love. Then appreciation of what? Sometimes just the appearance of a person, or sometimes the qualities or virtues of a person. Sometimes there is no appreciation at the root of love, just sympathy. Then also, due to some situation that places persons together because of birth, profession, marriage, and even the situation of trouble. The father and mother love their child because of birth.

Everyone has experienced love. Though it is difficult to express, we know what love is. That love which we all know, which we all have experienced, when it is turned to God, then it becomes itself a path of realisation of God. So it is not something which you lack and you acquire. You already have that thing, only it has to be directed to God. In this way, the path of love is a very natural path. To give you an example, there is a very famous story, of a saint and poet called Tulasidas. He wrote a wonderful epic called Rama-charit-manas in Hindi. It is an epic on Rama, the incarnation of God. Tulasidas was married to a girl whom he loved very dearly and he could not live a single day being separated from her. Then one day his wife had gone alone to her parents' village to

see them. In the evening when Tulasidas returned home, he did not find her there and immediately started for his father-in-law's house. When he reached the house, his wife, being tremendously embarrassed, scolded him, saying that had he given the love to God that he had given to her temporary and short lived body, maybe he would have realised God. This gave a rude shock to Tulasidas and he understood the deeper meaning of what she had said. He immediately left his father-in-law's house, left his wife, left his home, and then led the life of a recluse, a renunciate, praying and meditating on God.

Here is an example of how that love for another human being, directed towards God, finally helps one to realize God. Of course it is not suggested that everyone should renounce one's wife and family and become a renunciate, but what is suggested is that one should not just be satisfied with loving one's family and friends, but love should initially also be directed to God and, finally, that love for God will become all inclusive. It will also include love for other things and other persons.

The next point we should discuss is, why should we love God? Or we may put it in another way, why should we not love God? Try to understand that it is God who has created us and the light, air, water and food, so that we can survive. Though apparently it looks as if nature has created all this, finally, nature herself has been created by the Creator, so we should be eternally grateful to God. God is also protecting us. When we are in trouble, we pray to God and on many occasions, as we understand, God protects us from trouble. Then, God's love for us is unconditional. He doesn't want anything from us in return for his love. He just gives and does not expect anything in return. What a great difference there is between human love and God's love. If you serve a person you love on ninety nine occasions, but do something to displease him

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once, there is a possibility that he will forget the ninety nine occasions of service and remember just that single occasion of disservice or displeasure. But God's love is just the opposite. This is an example given by Sri Ramakrishna. He explains God's love saying that even if you do ninety nine things to displease God, He does not remember, provided you do just one thing to please Him. He forgives all those ninety nine cases of displeasing Him.

I don't say there is only the negative side of human love, there are some positive sides too, but at the same time if you compare human love with the love of God, then there is a very big difference. There is no doubt about this. The main difference is this - while human love causes bondage and ignorance, the love for God liberates us and removes our ignorance. We are eternally connected with God. We may know or we may not know, but actually through our Self, through our atman, we are eternally connected with God. So in a very natural way God attracts us. Because of some impurities in our mind we don't feel this attraction. When the impurities of our mind are washed away, we immediately will feel the greatest attraction for God, as a piece of iron feels the attraction of a magnet. That is why I said it is better to say why should we not love God, instead of saying why should we love God; because that is natural.

Now the question arises, how to believe in and love God whom I have not seen? How can I be sure that God is? This is the confusion of a modern mind. In earlier times, people had tremendous faith and whatever saints or the scriptures would say, people would believe. But now more and more people want reasoning. They love reasoning. So they ask, 'We have not seen God so how can we believe in his existence? This is the first question which should be answered.

Firstly, we can understand that God exists through reasoning. As I said, nature is also

created; it must have a creator. Nature itself is matter which must be controlled and guided by spirit. Great scientists such as Einstein also believed in the existence of such an intelligence behind this universe.

Secondly, we should have faith in the words of a person who has realized God. Jesus, Muhammad, Rama, Krishna and Ramakrishna were such persons. As you know Vivekananda asked this question to Sri Ramakrishna, 'Have you seen God?' Sri Ramakrishna answered very clearly, 'Yes, I have seen God; not only that, I can show God to you.' Don't think that Vivekananda was just convinced by this statement from Sri Ramakrishna. Vivekananda studied and observed the life of Sri Ramakrishna very closely and only then became convinced that Sri Ramakrishna was a person who could be believed.

Thirdly, we can pray to God and see the result. If God really exists then our prayers will be answered. An atheist, who did not believe in God, once visited Sri Ramakrishna. When Sri Ramakrishna advised him to pray to God, he confessed that he did not believe in God, so how could he pray to God. Then Sri Ramakrishna taught a prayer to him. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'I believe you will have no objection if you pray in this way - O, if there is anyone called God, then this is my sincere prayer to you, please respond to me.' The person was convinced and he prayed and he got a result. Later, he naturally became a firm believer in God.

Let us now discuss the role of image worship in the path of love for God. You see if there is an image, then we can visualise God and think about Him in concrete terms. Otherwise, for the beginner it is very difficult to imagine God in the abstract. Remember that the image itself is not worshipped as God, but the presence of God is visualized, is imagined, in that image and then He is worshipped.

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What is the role of an incarnation in this path of love for God? You see, God incarnates as a human being so that the devotees can love Him in a natural and comfortable way. It is much easier to love Jesus Christ and to do spiritual practice rather than to love God in heaven. So that is why Sri Ramakrishna said that God incarnates as human beings so that the devotees can love Him intensely. And by loving the incarnation of God, one loves God. As Jesus would say, one who has seen the Son has seen the Father. Because the Son is, in a way, a replica of the Father.

Let us try to establish a loving relationship with God. In Hinduism there are five relationships with God; the relationship between a devotee and God, the master and servant, friendship with God, to look upon God as the child and to look up on oneself as the father or the mother, and the relationship of the lover and the beloved, or the husband the the wife. In addition to these, God is also looked upon as Father or Mother. Jesus established the relationship of Father with God. And Sri Ramakrishna looked upon God as his Divine Mother. So don't think of God as someone unrelated, but establish a close, personal relationship. That will help to call on God with greater feelings of love.

Next, as Sri Ramakrishna taught us, force your demands on God. Say God, you have created us, so you must look after us. I may make some mistakes, I may commit sin, but finally you have to wash my sin, you have to purify me and save me. You are bound to do that, because it is you who have created me. Not only a prayer - generally, devotees pray with humility - but here it is not just a prayer, it is a demand. You must do this, you must save me, you must purify me, you must look after me, you must protect me, you must show me the right way, you must liberate me. So this is a demand. Sri Ramakrishna termed this, Tamasika Bhakti.

How to practice love of God? To adore God with body, mind and words. Let's take the body first; to serve God and worship Him with our hands; to go to holy places with one's feet; to hear chanting of the name and glories of God with one's ears; to behold the Divine Image with one's eyes. Next, to adore God with the mind; to contemplate and meditate on God constantly; to remember and think of his Divine Sport and to pray. Then with words; sing hymns to Him and chant His name and glories. These are practical hints on how one can practice the love of God.

We can also think and act as the agent of God. Work to please God; to work by God's power; to surrender results of works to God. Think, I am the machine, God is the operator. The main thing is to get connected and remain with God always; all twenty-four hours. So get connected with God in various ways; whatever you eat, before eating, remember God - this is one occasion. Another is dependence on God.

Now let us consider ordinary love of God and a higher type of love of God. The ordinary type of love for God is to love through an image or in a temple when there is expectation from God - O God, I want this, please satisfy this, please fulfill my prayer. But a higher love for God is when one love's God by seeing Him in everything and everyone. God is not only in an image, not only in temple, God lives everywhere; God is not only in friends and relatives, God is also in my enemies; God is not only in human beings, God is also in animal beings and plants. To see and love God in that way is the higher type of love for God. As a natural consequence, there arises the idea of service. Love is not only an abstract, it has expression too, and that is service. That is why in the Bhagavad Gita, in the Bible, in Buddha's teachings, there is a great emphasis on the idea of service. As in Bible we see, Jesus says, 'love thy neighbour as thyself.' You should not only love your friends, you should also love your

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January 1st

KALPATARU

On Sunday, January 1, 2006, about 20 devotees gathered at the Zushi Centre for our traditional New Year's Day Kalpataru.

Shortly before noon the swami gave a brief welcome and led the invocation of Vedic peace chants. Then there were readings in English and Japanese from Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master, The Gospel of The Holy Mother, Lord Buddha's Message and the Bible.

The swami noted the special significance of January 1st for the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and recounted the events that January afternoon in 1886 when Sri Ramakrishna felt well enough to take a walk in the gardens at Cossipore Garden House where he was convalescing and described the various scenes of spiritual bliss experienced by the 30 or so devotees who had gathered that day and had received the Master's touch and personal blessings. Many refer this event as the day that the Master became the Spiritual Kalpataru, or wish-fulfilling tree, granting one and all assembled that day their innermost spiritual desires.



Before lunch, Swami asked all to assemble in the library where the initial launching of our new bilingual (English-Japanese) website was formally announced, the result of Lonnie and Michio-san's creative minds and hard labor. Although the new Japanese pages and many elements of the English multimedia and publishing pages are still under construction, the previous Japanese website is still available at the Japanese-language link.



At 12:30 lunch prasada was served that included traditional Japanese New Year dishes. After lunch there was much activity in the library and bookstore, and many explored the new web pages on the available computers.

At 2 p.m. everyone bundled up against the cold and the heartiest of the group continued on the annual nearly one-hour walk from the Centre to Kamakura Daibutsu, the famous statue of Lord Buddha in the former capital city of Kamakura, to offer prayers, fruit and flowers, and then on to the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu, a Shinto shrine. •

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enemies. As Holy Mother also said on one occasion, 'If someone does an injustice to you, don't complain against him to God. Don't ask God to punish him. But if possible, pray to God for him.' So that is how the idea of Universal Love is possible - by seeing God in everyone.

In this higher type of love for God, there is no expectation from God - I love God not for any purpose, but because I love to love God, so I love God. The devotee not only wants some temporary closeness, but he wants a union with God; not just a nearness, but a union. There is, however, a difference among devotees practicing this higher type of love. Some seek total union, but others say, I don't want to become sugar, I want to taste sugar. In order to taste, to enjoy the love of God, they want to retain their own identity, they do not want to become totally united with God. Then still there is another type of devotee, who first want to be united with God and then again return to their own identity. The perfect example of this state, known as vijñana, we find in Sri Ramakrishna.

What is the kind of love necessary for seeing God? As Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'When the rich man's love for his wealth, the mother's love for her child, and the chaste wife's love for the husband, when these three loves are combined, one can realise God. Now for us this appears to be a very difficult ideal, but the important thing is this, God has given us the capacity. If according to our maximum capacity we love God, we may be blessed with God's grace.

The other thing which we should remember in this practice of love for God is the purification of the mind. We have many impurities in our mind. While trying to remember and love God, we should at the same time try to purify our mind. And for that introspection, discrimination and self-analysis are very important.

Finally, let us ask a relevant question: What is the greatest obstacle in the path of love? It is the ego. For spiritual practice, specially for the love for God, one must always try to remain free from the ego. As Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'I can solve all your problems; I can rectify; I can help; there is only one case in which I can't help, I am helpless, that is if you have ego.' If there is ego, there cannot be real love because real love is thou, you, not me. Real love and ego contradict each other. So in real love, there is complete egolessness. We should try to remember this most important thing, and try to practice love of God for the realization of God.

- contributed by Ashish Gupta

Issued by: The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)
4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi-shi, Kanagawa-ken 249-0001 JAPAN
Phone: 81-468-73-0428 Fax: 81-468-73-0592
Website: <http://www.vedanta.jp> Email: info@vedanta.jp