



April 2003

The Vedanta Kyokai

News, Updates and Miscellany from the Vedanta Society of Japan

Volume 1 Number 1

THUS SPAKE...

"You will gain everything if you but take refuge in the Master. Renunciation alone was His splendour. We take His name and eat and enjoy because He renounced all" - Sri Sarada Devi - The Holy Mother

"The truth is best as it is. No one can alter it; neither can anyone improve it. Have faith in the truth and live it." - The Buddha

NEWSLETTER LAUNCHED

In response to requests for email-type updates on the activities of Nippon Vedanta Kyokai (The Vedanta Society of Japan) from some members who have left Japan and others, we are pleased to present the first issue of The Vedanta Kyokai.

Our intention is to bring you brief descriptions of various Society activities, provide some food for thought and to keep you updated. While we hope to keep these editions to within a couple of pages each, our scope may broaden over time based on your response and requests and our resources. We are thankful to Lonnie, a Kyokai devotee, for his assistance in this publication.

Comments and suggestions sent to info@vedanta.jp will be appreciated.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA 168th Birthday Puja Held

On Sunday March 16 celebrations were held to commemorate the birth of Sri Ramakrishna at the Kyokai in Zushi. The event was a great success by all accounts, by the grace of the Lord and with the unstinting help of many.

The Centre was a buzz of activity from early Saturday afternoon of the 15th with several volunteers making preparations for the many guests expected to attend Sunday's programme. The kitchen was simmering with conversation as various tasks were assigned and implemented toward completing a gourmet Indian menu under the direction of Mrs. Papiya Banerjee and Mrs. Sophia Hazra, two of our highly motivated devotees expert in cooking. Upstairs in the meeting room others were carefully arranging vases or stringing flowers into the beautiful garlands that adorned the many images in the shrine room and elsewhere. Still others were tackling the more mundane and necessary tasks of cleaning and scrubbing the premises. Medhasanandaji, the resident swami, too, was enlisted to make a last minute purchase of potatoes. Accompanied by a devotee, the Swami set out late in the afternoon only to find that most local stores had closed for the weekend. Finally, the determined buyers were assisted by a most helpful clerk at a convenience store located on the fringes of the neighborhood who contacted their supplier. Within minutes the two delighted companions were trekking back up the hill, with the required quota of potatoes in hand. It was late evening before Mr. Tushar Basu (an alumnus of the same college attended by the Swami and currently posted in Nagoya) had finished pre-frying this cache and quiet settled upon the Centre.



The Shrine - Specially Decorated

Daybreak began with a special morning worship to Sri Ramakrishna conducted by Swami Medhasananda in the main shrine. There were also songs and hymns devoted to the Master. Several devotees had spent the night either at Holy Mother House or the main Centre and were in attendance at this early hour. After a light breakfast final preparations continued.

The weather was exceptional and from 10:30am devotees and guests - Indian, Bangladeshi, American, European and, of course, many Japanese from various parts of the country - began arriving and making their way to the shrine in ever greater numbers. By 11am there was hardly space for another pair of shoes in our rather spacious main entry, or "genkan" as it's called in Japan.

The service began shortly after 11am with a puja conducted by the Swami. Afterward flowers were distributed so that devotees could make their offerings. This was followed by a short talk on "The Place of Faith in Spiritual Life in the Light of Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings" by the Swami in English, deftly translated by our friend Ananda Hanari-sensei of the Tokyo Yoga Centre. Devotees read brief selections from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna from both English- and Japanese-language versions of this text. We then broke for lunch and after considerable logistics and much shuffling, tables were set up and a sumptuous lunch prasada was served both in the main dining and upstairs meeting areas accommodating some 76 diners.

Many of these stayed for the cultural or second part of the day's programme which included some surprises. In collaboration with Ito-san, Shanti-san (Ms. Kaori Izumida) had prepared lyric sheets and presented a new Japanese-language version of the favorite bhajan standard "Sam gachhadhdam" and many of the Japanese in attendance sang along following her lead. She then sang two more of her much loved original compositions also in Japanese.

We were then treated to the rich and luxuriant voice of Mr. Samudra Datta Gupta who can also be heard on one of the recent Nippon Vedanta Kyokai-produced CDs. This reporter was also asked to sing some western devotional songs, and although he received much encouragement from the crowd, kept his part short. Perhaps the biggest surprise of the programme was Sitarist Inoue-san, whom we only recently discovered lives right near Zushi. Accompanied by Mr. Suresh Sarkar on the tabla, Mr. Inoue's performance wowed the audience with his technique and mastery of the instrument. After these performances there was a final prayer and short meditation, followed by tea. Later that evening there was a vesper service which was again followed by readings, bhajans and meditation.



The Discourse



Sitar Performance

Visit to Local Elementary School a Treat for All

On Thursday, March 13, Swami Medhasananda was invited to give a talk on Indian Culture at Hisagi Shogakko, a local elementary school.

To make his presentation simple and interesting to the children, the Swami came prepared to provide demonstrations of clothing and music and plenty of samples of a fried bean Indian snack made of Mug-dal. The latter was received with nearly unanimous enthusiasm.

The universal aspects of the works and teachings of some of India's most notable personalities such as, Gautama Buddha, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi were also touched upon.

We would be remiss in failing to report that the Swami addressed the school principal, faculty and some 83 students in the Japanese language, as much as possible, mainly with the assistance of Mrs. Masako Matsuda whose daughter, Kirari, also studies at the school.

GROUP WELCOMES TALK IN BEPPU ON KYUSHU

At the request of devotees, Swami Medhasananda paid his first visit to Beppu on the island of Kyushu on March 9th where he gave a talk on "Peace of Mind" and held a one-day retreat. Presented in a conveniently located hotel conference room, some 30 people attended and requested the Swami to revisit Beppu and give a discourse at least once a year.

Before visiting Beppu, the Swami had visited Miyazaki, meeting with a few devotees and others and discussing various spiritual topics.

INDIAN EMBASSY TALK

Due to a busy schedule of industry seminars being held at the Indian Embassy, the monthly talk by Swami Medhasananda slated for March 22 had to be postponed until March 29. Scheduled talks on Pantanjali's Yoga Sutra will return to the 4th Saturday of each month unless otherwise notified.

As a side note, attendees were pleasantly surprised to find the floor of this rather large meeting room had been fully and beautifully carpeted.

• **Thought for the Month** •

THE YOGA OF INWARD SILENCE

There is another kind of silence to be cultivated, besides that of the tongue as regards others. I mean silence as regards one's self,-restraining the imagination, not permitting it to dwell overmuch on what we have heard or said, not indulging in the phantasmagoria of picture-thoughts, whether of the past or future. Be sure that you have made no small progress in the spiritual life, when you can control your imagination, so as to fix it on the duty and occupation actually existing, to the exclusion of the crowd of thoughts which are perpetually sweeping across the mind. No doubt, you cannot prevent those thoughts from arising, but you can prevent yourself from dwelling on them; you can put them aside, you can check the self-complacency, or irritation, or earthly longings which feed them, and by the practice of such control of your thoughts you will attain that spirit of inward silence which draws the soul into a close intercourse with God.

Jean N. Grou (1731-1803)

• **A Story to Remember** •
BEGGING OF A BEGGAR

A mendicant once went to the palace of Akbar, the emperor of India, who was known for his munificence and gifts. As the emperor was at his prayers, the mendicant waited a short distance away. He, however, heard the emperor finish his prayer by praying to the Almighty for more wealth, property and honour. Having overheard this, the mendicant began to think that the emperor himself was nothing but another beggar and asked himself how one beggar could relieve the needs of another beggar. He, therefore, went out of the palace. The emperor on hearing that the mendicant had gone away, at once sent a servant to bring him back to the palace. When the mendicant was brought before him, the emperor asked him why he had gone away without taking gift from him. The mendicant said, "Sire, I heard you saying your prayers in which you are asking the Almighty for more property, more wealth and more honour, and I found that your wants were a thousand times more than mine. How can you, who are yourself a beggar help me in my need? The emperor then realised his own limitations though he possessed vast powers and immense wealth."

[Adapted from Vedanta Through Stories - Swami Sambuddhananda]

Important upcoming events...

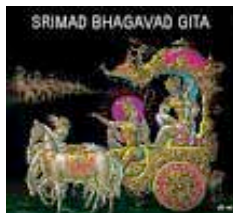
Akhanda japam (continuous successive spiritual practice) will be held from 5am to 8pm in the Kyokai Shrine on April 29th. Persons interested in participating are urged to contact the Kyokai for particulars.

Issued by:

Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)
4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi-shi, Kanagawa-ken 249-0001 JAPAN
Phone: 81-46-873-0428 Fax: 81-46-873-0592
website: <http://www.vedanta.jp> email: info@vedanta.jp

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