



The Vedanta Kyokai

News, Updates and Miscellany from the Vedanta Society of Japan

May 2003

Volume 1 Number 2

Thus Spake...

"Knowledge leads to unity; ignorance to diversity."
...**Sri Ramakrishna**

*"He who recognizes the existence of suffering, its cause, its remedy, and its cessation, has fathomed the Four Noble Truths. He will walk in the right path."...***Lord Buddha**

April Retreat Held

On Sunday, April 20, the Vedanta Society of Japan held its monthly retreat at the Zushi Centre.

As many of you may know, weekly Sunday Services are not yet practical for the Society in Japan as the Zushi Centre is located some distance from most of its membership base in Tokyo and surrounding areas. Instead, regular monthly talks are held at convenient locations in Tokyo such as Shimbashi and the Indian Embassy in Kudanshita. Sunday Services at Vedanta Societies of the West usually mean a lecture at 11:00 and off to lunch with friends by noon; much like the custom of other church services in the West. By contrast, our monthly services in Zushi are, in fact, an all day affair, a programmed retreat where devotees, friends and guests can escape the routine of daily life and spend the day in a spiritual way, enjoying each other's company and also that of the resident monk.

At our newly remodeled library, books can be checked out and CDs and cassettes can be listened to before purchase decisions are made.

All are cordially invited to meditate, pray, chant, read, sing and break bread together from 5:30 in morning until supper at 8:15 in the evening. So come as early as you can and stay as late as you can.

This month the beautiful sakura (cherry blossom) season was just in its final throes when some inclement weather hit the region

Monthly Calendar

HOLY DAYS

Tuesday the 6th
Sri Shankaracharya - Birth

Friday the 16th
Lord Buddha - Birth
(see coming events)

Coming Events...

The Zushi Centre celebrates the birth of **Lord Buddha** on Sunday, May 18, with a special talk entitled "Gautama Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna" by a most distinguished speaker, Chancellor Yasuaki Nara of Komazawa University. Also a Buddhist priest and biographer of Sri Ramakrishna in Japanese, this will be Chancellor Nara's first visit to our Centre and we look forward to his presentation. All are cordially invited to attend.

Akhanda Japam

A special programme of japam and meditation, Akhanda Japam, was held on Tuesday, April 29, at the Zushi Centre. As Tuesday was a national holiday, many members participated at scheduled, hourly intervals providing constant japam and meditation in the main shrine from 5:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. Silence was observed, as much as practicable, throughout the campus and during meals.

April Retreat (cont from page 1)...

bringing winds, rains and plummeting temperatures. Around 11:00 a.m. the entry was quite full of shoes; indicating the day's activities would be well attended despite the weather.

This month's programme, too, began with meditation at 5:30; then chanting and reading at 6:20; breakfast at 7:40; meditation at 10:30; chanting, reading and discourse at 11:00; lunch prasad at 12:30; chanting, reading, Q&A, meditation and music from 3:00; tea at 4:30; aratrik bhajans (vespers), reading and meditation from 6:15; and supper at 8:15. As you can see, there is a lot to do and the break periods between lunch and the afternoon session and tea and vesper services allow for visiting, reading and other activities, such as short walks and nature hikes (weather permitting).

The discourse was entitled 'Our Basic Urges and their Fulfillment in the Vedantic Way' with translation

• A Story to Remember • He Sings for the Lord

The great emperor Akbar was very fond of music, and his court musician Tansen used to entertain him with his songs. One day Akbar asked him whether there was anyone in the world who could sing better than he. Tansen immediately replied that his teacher was incomparably a better singer than he was. The emperor expressed a desire to see Tansen's teacher who lived a simple life in a hut at Brindaban on the bank of the Jumna. Akbar forthwith made arrangements to go there and reached Brindaban with Tansen.

Tansen introduced the emperor to his master and told him the object of their visit. He was then asked to sing a few songs which he did to the great delight of the emperor. Akbar found that the singing of the master was incomparably superior to Tansen's. He complimented him on his superb music and returned to his capital city. On his way he asked Tansen how it

expertly handled by our dear friend, Mr. Yoshiro Ito. The Swami began by asking those in attendance what they thought these basic human urges were. After eliminating the necessities of food and shelter and such, these basic urges were identified as the urges to exist, to love, to work, to enjoy, to obtain knowledge and to obtain freedom. For most seekers these urges are pursued wrongly at base levels, due to partial understanding and reliance on the input of the senses. As one example; the urge to continue to exist leads most to seek progeny and/or the pursuit of fame, while the highest pursuit to this urge would be to truly exist eternally through the realization of the Self. The conclusion was that the ultimate pursuit of these basic urges can be found through the practice of bhakti-yoga, karma-yoga, jnana-yoga or raja-yoga and that any of these paths, or preferably a harmony thereof, will lead one to the same Reality and the complete satiation and cessation of these urges.

Lunch was served to some 38 guests, many of whom stayed for the afternoon session.

was possible for an old man, who lived a life of austerity in a hut bereft of all comforts, to sing so divinely. Tansen replied, " Sir, I sing for you, an earthly emperor, while my master sings for the Lord of the Universe, and that is why his singing is so superior to mine."

[From Vedanta Through Stories by Swami Sambuddhananda]

Editorial Comments...

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those readers for their words of encouragement upon the launch of this newsletter...

We have noted that some have had difficulties in opening and/or retrieving certain files and formats...

We also wish to point out that this newsletter is also produced in the Japanese language...

Embassy Talk

Our monthly talk on the Yoga Aphorisms of Pantajali was held at the Indian Embassy on 26 April.

Following previous talks on the effects of practising yama (restraint) and niyama (observation) the Swami continued with Pantanjali's descriptions and advice regarding asanas (postures) for connecting body and mind to enhance concentration and eliminate distracting bodily discomforts.

This was followed by the very misunderstood topic of pranayama. Most approach this subject as the simple controlling of breathing, but the Swami pointed out that it is more the harnessing of the most apparent physical manifestation of an individual's vital force or energy (prana) through breathing techniques. This prana was again, broken out into five parts and their corresponding micro and macro aspects, pointing out that by controlling prana at the micro level (as manifested in oneself), one had, by definition, controlled these forces in the universe or macro level. The various energies that move along the spine, and the awakening and rise of the kundalini through various points, or chakras, was also discussed. After a short refreshment break, the Q&A session focused more on definitions of these micro and macro aspects of prana, and the chakras of the kundalini.

The next session will discuss techniques of pranayama and should be very interesting to those curious about this popular topic. All are encouraged to attend.

Refreshments included a delicious treat called 'idli' (a coarsely ground rice dumpling) served with a homemade tomato chutney and a sweet little dish called 'coconut parfait'. These were prepared and served by our friends Ashish Gupta and his wife Sharika. We thank them for this labour of love.

●Thought of the Month●

Just for Today

Just for today I will try to adjust myself to what is, and not try to adjust everything to my own desire. I will take my family, my business, and my luck as they come and fit myself to them.

Just for today I will take care of my body. I will exercise it, care for it, nourish it, not abuse it nor neglect it, so that it will be a perfect machine for my bidding.

Just for today I will try to strengthen my mind. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer, I will read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.

Just for today I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress as becomingly as possible, talk low, act courteously, be liberal with praise, criticize not at all, nor find fault with anything and not try to regulate nor improve anyone.

Just for today I will try to live through this day only, not to tackle my whole life problem at once. I can do things for twelve hours that would appall me if I had to keep them up for a lifetime.

Just for today I will have a programme. I will write down what I expect to do every hour. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it. I will eliminate two pests: hurry and indecision.

Just for today I will have a quiet half hour all by myself and relax. In this half hour sometimes I will think of God, so as to get a little more perspective into my life.

Sybil F. Partridge
(Sister Mary Xavier)
1877

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