



The Vedanta Kyokai

News, Updates and Miscellany from the Vedanta Society of Japan

May 2004

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Thus Spake...

"Everything depends on the mind. Nothing can be achieved without purity of mind. It is said, 'The aspirant may have received the grace of the Guru, the Lord and the Vaishnavas; but he comes to grief without the grace of "one."' That 'one' is the mind. The mind of the aspirant should be gracious to him."

... Sri Sarada Devi - The Holy Mother

"Mind is the precursor of all perceptions; mind is the most subtle of all elements in the phenomenal universe. All objectified consciousness has its origin in the mind. One who speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness abides with him as even his own shadow"

... The Buddha

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April Retreat Talk **The Eternal Now**

In taking up the topic of 'The Eternal Now' on April 18 in Zushi, Swami Medhasananda noted that this subject is very important to our day to day life; for our spiritual life and mental peace. And rather than give a theoretical or intellectual talk, the swami said that he sought to share his thoughts in

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Monthly Calendar

• BIRTHDAYS •

Sri Buddha
04 May

• KYOKAI EVENTS •

**Sri Buddha
Birth Celebration
Sunday 16 May**

- Morning Session 11 a.m.

Father Professor Cyril Veliath

of Sophia University
to speak on

Gautama Buddha

Jesus Christ

Sri Ramakrishna

- Lunch Prasad 12:30
- Afternoon Session 3PM

All are invited to attend!

Akhanda Japam

(Continuous Spiritual Practice)
Sunday 23 May

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Zushi Retreat (con't from page 1)

a practical way, as he himself practices. Practical ideas that once illustrated could be thought upon and put into practice by all. The swami began his comments with two Japanese proverbs:

"Ishi no ue ni mo san nen" or "on a stone even three years" the meaning of which is that through perseverance you will reach the goal.

"Nana korobi ya oki" or 'if you fall seven times get up again' the meaning of which is that even if you fail, try, try again.

"Even if the ideas we discuss today appear to be very lofty or difficult, never mind!" he said. "Just try to practice as much as possible if we want a spiritual life, a peaceful life, a harmonious life."

In defining what he meant by 'the eternal now', Swami quoted a poem by the great Indian poet and dramatist, Kalidasa:

New Day

Look to this day
for it is life,
the very life of life.
In it's brief course lie all
the realities and truths
of existence,
the joy of growth,
the splendor of action,
the glory of power.
For yesterday is but a
memory;
And tomorrow is only a vision.
But today, well lived,
makes every yesterday
a memory of
happiness
and every tomorrow a
vision of hope.
Look well, therefore,
to this day.

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"A day is the sum total of so many seconds" the swami continued. "What you can really hold is this moment. Only this moment is the chain of control we have over time. So how we utilize this very moment, this second, this day has a tremendous connection with our spiritual life; with our harmonious life; and with our peaceful life."

Beginning with spiritual life, Swami took up the topic of meditation saying that those of us who have tried to practice meditation know how difficult it is to concentrate during meditation; know how difficult it is to have a good meditation. Though it is advised that we should concentrate during meditation, our experience tells us that such concentration is very, very difficult. Though we sit for meditation, the whole time is generally spent in a struggle for concentration. "What is the reason for this condition?" he asked.

"The first reason is that we do not really love God as we love the things of the world," he explained. We love our family members, our friends, our works, our many hobbies, more than God. That is why during meditation we think of many things other than God."

"The second reason lies in what we think and do during the day. Other than the half-hour in the morning and evening that we may sit for meditation, most of us remain forgetful about God for the other 23 hours of the day. And unless we think of God throughout the day it is very difficult to concentrate on God during meditation."

"The third reason is that we have not trained our minds to be kept under control. We have not trained our minds to concentrate on what we want it to.

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Zushi Retreat (con't from page 2)

"And though we tell the mind not to think things other than God, it refuses to obey and drags us in it's own way," he said.

"Now let us think about the solutions to these three problems," he continued. "In regard to the loving of other things more than God, we should try to discriminate. What is real? What is permanent? With whom have we an eternal relationship? The natural conclusion is that God alone is real and permanent and the world, with all its phenomenon, is like a passing cloud; and with God we have an eternal relationship."

"Of course we should maintain good relationships with family and friends, but at the same time we should know that all these are temporary relationships. One beautiful example has been given:

As the evening approaches, many birds from many directions come and take shelter together in the branches of the banyan tree. As the day breaks they take flight in all directions never to meet again."

"This example expresses the idea that all worldly relationships are temporary. The only eternal relationship is with God. God is our eternal shelter. We must establish an eternal relationship with God. We must impress this idea on our mind again and again throughout the day. Only then will our love of God grow, and we will yearn to concentrate on God during meditation and remember God at other times during the day."

"In regard to the second problem, forgetfulness of God, we should try remember God through japam and prayer throughout the day. Chant the name of God that appeals to you. Mentally call on Ramakrishna, Christ, Buddha, Allah, on different occasions
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during the day. When you leave your house for work, remember God. When you return home, remember God. When you eat or drink anything, even a glass of water, a cup of tea, offer it to God. These are the different occasions we can think of God, and in that way we can develop a relationship with God."

"As Sri Ramakrishna would illustrate; try to light the lamp of the thought of God in your heart, and try to turn your mind inward and see if that lamp is burning or not. This is a very interesting and important spiritual practice; wherever you go, whatever you do, withdraw your mind at a moment's notice from your environment and turn it inward to see whether the lamp of the thought of God is burning or not. In this way, if we try to remember God at other

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●Thought of the Month●

The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical.

It is the foundation of all true science.

He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead.

To know that what is inconceivable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom, as the most radiant beauty which our dull facilities can comprehend only in their most primitive form – this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center of true religiousness.

- Albert Einstein

Zushi Retreat (cont from page 3)

times during the day, it will be easier for us to concentrate on God during meditation."

"The third important thing – which is deeply connected with our topic for today, is the problem of the control and concentration of the mind. We must perfectly analyze our state of mind during meditation. As one would examine a drop of water through a microscope to identify bacteria, we need to examine our mind. But in this case, the object of examination and the apparatus or instrument by which we examine are the same; the mind. Therein lies the difficulty; but we must accept the challenge. We must try to observe the activity of the mind during our meditation.

"Generally we will see three common activities of the mind; brooding, planning and fantasizing. Firstly, we find that the mind is brooding on previous events; just moments before, yesterday, last month, last year, or even during childhood. All manner of things past the mind broods upon.

"Secondly, we see that the mind begins planning: Oh, when I rise from this meditation I must check my email. Oh, when I rise from this meditation what shall I prepare for dinner for the family? What shall I do tomorrow, next year, after five years, after retirement; the mind is busy in all sorts of planning."

"Thirdly, we find ourselves in an imaginary revery of all manner of things with no meaning whatsoever. The mind is not brooding or planning, just imagining this and that; fancy and fantasizing."

"What are the themes of these mental activities? Myself, my health, my family, my friends, my work, these are the themes. And not only

when we sit for meditation; these thoughts arise like thousands of bubbles throughout all the activities of our day. Is it possible to count all the blades of grass? Suffice it to say they are countless. In the Mahabharata the Lord of Dharma asks Yudhishtira what is more numerous than blades of grass? And again, he asks him what the fastest thing is? The answers are thoughts and the mind. One moment we can be in the shrine and in the next we can be thousands of miles away. Throughout the day these thoughts are bubbling up countlessly; brooding, planning and fantasizing."

"So if we really try to see what this rascal mind is thinking - what it's doing, we can know the nature of these thoughts. Of course, there may be good and positive thoughts, but most are meaningless and random. For example, many of these thoughts are irrelevant to our lives. When you read the newspaper or watch television and later dwell on these ideas or images, you'll find most are not relevant for our life. Some thoughts of the past appear again and again, they too have no meaning. They are past. They are gone."

"Then again, some thoughts are negative and weakening. One example of weakening thoughts that are faced by many people may be things done in error in the past, this type of recurring thought is weakening. Oh, why did I do that? Why did I say that? Why have I spent my life in such unnecessary things? The reappearance of these mistakes in our thoughts weakens us. This is especially weakening if we revisit acts we consider as serious sins we may have committed, as it disturbs the mind."

"Other thoughts can be very harmful; such as thoughts of violence, lust, jealousy and the like. Some thoughts

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RAMAKRISHNA MATH, BELUR, INDIA

LIST OF CELEBRATIONS for 2004-2005
(According to the Vishuddha Siddhanta Almanac)

BIRTHDAYS

| | | Kyokai Celebrations |
|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Sri Shankaracharya | 24 Apr 2004 Saturday | ヴェーダーンタ協会行事 |
| Sri Buddha | 04 May 2004 Tuesday | 16 May 2004 Sunday |
| Guru Purnima | 02 Jul 2004 Friday | |
| Swami Ramakrishnananda | 15 Jul 2004 Tuesday | |
| Swami Niranjanananda | 30 Aug 2004 Monday | |
| Janmashtami | 06 Sep 2004 Monday | 19 Sep 2004 Sunday |
| Swami Advaitananda | 13 Sep 2004 Monday | |
| Swami Abhedananda | 07 Oct 2004 Tuesday | |
| Swami Akhandananda | 14 Oct 2004 Tuesday | |
| Swami Subodhananda | 23 Nov 2004 Tuesday | |
| Swami Vijnanananda | 25 Nov 2004 Thursday | |
| Swami Premananda | 20 Dec 2004 Monday | |
| Christmas Eve | 24 Dec 2004 Friday | 24 Dec 2004 Friday |
| Sri Sri Ma Sarada Devi | 03 Jan 2005 Monday | 16 Jan 2005 Sunday |
| Swami Shivananda | 07 Jan 2005 Friday | |
| Swami Saradananda | 15 Jan 2005 Saturday | |
| Swami Turiyananda | 24 Jan 2005 Monday | |
| Sri Sri Swamiji | 01 Feb 2005 Tuesday | 20 Feb 2005 Sunday |
| Swami Brahmananda | 10 Feb 2005 Thursday | |
| Swami Trigunatitananda | 12 Feb 2005 Saturday | |
| Swami Adbhutananda | 24 Feb 2005 Thursday | |
| Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva | 12 Mar 2005 Saturday | 20 Mar 2005 Sunday |
| Public Celebration | 20 Mar 2005 Sunday | |
| Sri Gouranga Mahaprabhu | 25 Mar 2005 Friday | |
| Swami Yogananda | 29 Mar 2005 Thursday | |

PUJA CELEBRATIONS

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Phalaharini Kali Puja | 18 May 2004 Tuesday |
| Snana Yatra | 03 Jun 2004 Thursday |
| Sri Sri Durga Puja | 20 Oct 2004 Wednesday |
| Sri Sri Kali Puja | 11 Nov 2004 Thursday |
| Sri Sri Saraswati Puja | 13 Feb 2005 Sunday |
| Shiva-Ratri | 08 Mar 2005 Thursday |

EKADASHI DAYS (Rama-Nama Sankirtanam)

| | | | | |
|------|-----------------|-------------|------|--------------|
| 2004 | Apr 01, 15* | Aug 11, 26* | 2005 | Jan. 07, 20* |
| | May 01, 14, 30* | Sep 10, 24* | | Feb 05, 19* |
| | Jun 13, 29* | Oct 10, 24* | | Mar 06, 21* |
| | Jul 13, 28* | Nov 08, 22* | | Apr 05 |
| | Dec.08, 22* | | | |

N.B. Rama-Nama Sankirtanam will be sung only on the Ekadashi days with asterisk *.

注意:ラームナム・サンキルトンは月1回、※印のついた日におこないます。

Special Programmes

Akhanda Japam (Continuous Spiritual Practice: 5 am to 8 pm) 23 May 04 , 28 Nov 04

アカンダ・ジャパム(霊性の連なる修業、朝5時より夜8時まで)

Swami Vivekananda Birthday: Public Celebration in Tokyo, Sunday, 13 Jun 04

スワミ・ヴィヴェーカーナンダ生誕:東京での公開祝賀会

Outdoor Spiritual Retreat in Mitake San -06 (Fri) - 09 (Mon) Aug 04

御岳山での戸外霊性修養会

Zushi Retreat (cont from page 4)

are just randomly repeated. Things we have already decided. Tomorrow I'll do such and such; repeated again and again in our mind."

"Again, the mind brings up many pictures, a mental phantasmagoria. When do these types of thoughts occur? Generally, when we do work that requires much attention, when we read books, or even watch a movie, the mind is very occupied in those activities. But when we are engaged in routine work and duties that do not require so much concentration, such as cooking, cleaning, during traveling, during leisure time, these are the times when the mind is not so concentrated. Oh, and I should add, in meditation." (Laughter)

"So what shall we do to solve this problem? First of all we must try to understand the bad effect of such uncontrolled thoughts. Firstly, such thoughts create a conflict in us. How is this conflict created? Our consciousness says don't think of jealousy, ego, pride; I don't want to think of unnecessary events; but the mind doesn't obey. Intellectually I may know it is not good to think these thoughts; but I can't help it. Thus, the conflict within us is created; a contradiction arises. We think something, but our action betrays that. We say something and yet our action betrays that."

"You see, real harmony is created when our thought, speech and action are united. When our mind thinks one thing, but our actions or speech are different, there is conflict. We can talk of very noble ideals, but if our mind dwells on lower thoughts, a contradiction arises and we cannot find peace. So one effect is that if we cannot control our thoughts, we cannot find peace. And so long as there are so many uncontrolled

thoughts, spiritual life is not possible. Good meditation is not possible, and without good meditation, real spiritual life is not possible."

"So for a harmonious personality, for a peaceful life, and for spiritual life we must control our thoughts."

"We have discussed the problems, now how do we solve them? The most important way to solve the problem of an uncontrolled mind; to stop that imagination; those unnecessary thoughts; is to take care of the present moment. First ask the mind to stop those thoughts. Our experience says the mind won't listen, so what steps can we take? We must educate the mind again and again, autosuggestion. Impress upon the mind the bad effects of uncontrolled thoughts. Impress upon the mind the good effects of controlled thoughts. We become the guardians, the parents, of our mind in this way."

"The next step is to be aware of what the mind is doing. Be aware of its thoughts this moment. We check our watches, our schedules and so many things constantly. We should also check our mind. What is it thinking right now? Is it positive or is it negative? If it is positive, then OK. If it is negative, you must discipline it. Tell it to stop. There is no one else who can do this for you. You must do it."

"Thirdly, let us try to live this moment well. Let us perform the task at hand with full concentration. Let us do what we are doing well; without thinking of other things; without thinking of the past; without thinking of the future; without thinking of family. So let us harmonize our thought and action completely."

"In this regard, I would like to share

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a story with you. A Zen master was asked, 'How do you conduct your spiritual practices?' 'Nothing very special,' he replied. 'During teatime, I just take tea. During study time, I just study. During work time, I just work. During meditation, I just meditate.' Well, this is a great master, yet it seems we do just the same. (More laughter) How is this different? What is the meaning of his reply? It means that when he is engaged in any activity, his full mind is involved in that activity alone. When I read this anecdote I was so impressed. What a profound teaching! You see, if we can really practice in this way, no other special spiritual practice is necessary; not twenty hours of meditation, not fifteen hours of japam. Just let us do what we do with full concentration. That in itself becomes a spiritual practice."

"Swami Vivekananda gave the example of a great yogi, Paohari Baba, who would often fast, and became known as the 'air-eating swami'. He had a water pot made of brass and the yogi would clean this pot with such concentration that it would shine like gold. This is essence of karma yoga as taught by Swami Vivekananda; do whatever you do with full concentration, full thought and full faith as a way of spiritual practice. In that way we can utilize every moment and the harmonizing of our thoughts with our deeds is established."

"The fourth step is 'pratipaksha bhavana' or exchanging one thought or feeling for another. Patanjali said that if you have hate, if you have jealousy, conquer that by love. Grow more love to conquer hate, jealousy and violence. Produce counter-thoughts. So when the mind brings its counter-productive imaginings, we

should be prepared with positive thoughts to counteract any negative thoughts and images. When we sit for meditation, we should have some good imaginings at the ready. For example, we can use the many wonderful and inspiring conversations and scenes from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. This can be of great help during meditation. We must do it consciously. Be prepared. Because we can tell the mind to stop bringing negative images and thoughts, but it rarely listens. We must be proactive in our approach."

"Finally, japam helps. It keeps the mind busy in a constructive way. We cannot stop the mind from thinking. The mind will surely think and unless we give it some positive thoughts to think, the mind will produce its own negative and unnecessary thoughts. Japam occupies the mind and prevents harmful thoughts, and at the same time, it purifies the mind. It will help us grow spiritually and, thus, has a doubly positive effect."

"In conclusion, teaching our mind of the positive and negative effects of thoughts; awareness of the moment - checking the activities of the mind; uniting thought and deed and doing it with our whole mind; being prepared with good counter-thoughts; and, finally, taking the Lord's name or japam; these are the five steps we can take.

"The more we can be successful in this practice, the more we can get peace of mind. The more we can establish harmony in ourselves, we can establish harmony in our family, friends and community. And the more we can be successful in leading a spiritual life. By living in the now, this moment, this day, successfully, we can ensure a glorious future. By living accordingly we can surely elevate ourselves to a higher level and, finally, become perfect."

- End -

• A Story to Remember •

And There Was Light!

A villager came to the big city for the first time. He was amazed at the many wonders he saw there. He wanted to buy something to show to his friends back home. Most of the items needed electricity, which his village didn't have. He was delighted when he found a flashlight. He bought it and was fascinated every time he pressed the switch and a bright light came on.

As he continued on his way, he saw people waiting in line and learnt that they were waiting to enter a theatre to see a movie. He had no idea what a movie was, but decided to wait in line too. He paid for a ticket and was ushered into a dark room.

After a little while, a picture started playing. He was fascinated to see the beautiful scenery and all the action on the screen. Then he remembered the flashlight in his pocket: 'I will shine the light on the screen, but to his amazement the picture became faded. From all sides people started shouting that he should turn off the light!

'But I only wanted to get a better view of the picture,' he said to the one sitting next to him. 'Don't you know? Here, we see only in the dark!' replied his neighbour.

It's the same with the theatre of this world. Many of the pleasures and values people pursue have value only because they find themselves in spiritual darkness. When they bring spiritual light into their lives, these values and pleasures fade, for they are only imaginary and temporary.

– From cyberspace

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