



The Vedanta Kyokai

News, Updates and Miscellany from the Vedanta Society of Japan

June 2004

Volume 2 Number 6

Thus Spake...

"Why should you be frightened? Hold fast to God. What if the world is like a forest of thorns? Put on shoes and walk on the thorns. Whom should you fear?' ... Sri Ramakrishna

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid." ... Jesus Christ

In this issue:

- Thus Spake ... page 1
- Monthly Calendar ...page 1
- May Zushi Retreat Part I - The Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ ...page 1
- Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother Public Celebration Information ...page 2
- Thought of the Month ...page 3
- A Story to Remember...page 4
- Zushi Retreat Part II ...page 5
- Maharaj Lectures in Manila ...page 6
- Special Announcements ...page 6

Monthly Calendar

• KYOKAI EVENTS •

**Annual
Public Birth Celebration
and Symposium
in Ikebukuro, Tokyo**

**Swami Vivekananda
and
The Holy Mother
Sri Sarada Devi**

SUNDAY JUNE 13 from 2~5:30 p.m.
See page 2 for details

May Zushi Retreat Part I

The Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ

On May 16, the Vedanta Society of Japan celebrated the birth of Sri Buddha at it's monthly retreat in Zushi. The Society's long-time friend, Professor Cyril Veliath, S.J., from Sophia University in Tokyo, was kind enough to give a talk on The Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ on this occasion. Father Veliath, a native Indian, teaches courses on Indian Thought and Culture, Indian Mysticism, and Myths and Legends in Indian Artistic History at the university, and is also a member of the Society's Vivekananda Birth Celebration Committee and often a panelist at this yearly event.

(Cont on page 3)



HOLY MOTHER SRI SARADA DEVI
150th BIRTH ANNIVERSARY



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA
142nd BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

All, with family and friends, are cordially invited to attend!

Date: Sunday, June 13, 2004. 2 p.m.- 5:30 p.m.
Venue: Toshima-Kohkaido
1-19-1 Higashi-Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku, Tokyo
Phone: (03) 3981-1009

Welcome address: Swami Medhasananda

Symposium on Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's Life and Teachings

Participants: Ms. Yasuko Yamada, Prof. Kathy Matsui, Ms. Ajanta Gupta
Moderator: Prof. Tsuyoshi Nara

Release of the 'Universal Gospel' (Special Issue), CD on Guided Meditation and speech on Swami Vivekananda by His Excellency Sri Manilal Tripathi , Ambassador of India

Master of Ceremonies: Ms. Kuniko Hirano

The Programme also includes a short guided meditation, devotional songs by Japanese and Indian devotees, and a slide show on Sri Sarada Devi.

Exhibition: Books on Hinduism, Meditation, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in Japanese and English; CDs and Cassettes of devotional songs; Photos; Incense sticks, etc.

Admission Charge: Free - All will be treated to a light refreshment.

Map on Page 3 of this newsletter

Zushi Retreat - Part I (cont from page 1)

The morning session began with Vedic prayer and readings from Buddha's teachings in Japanese and English. Swami Medhasananda then led the congregation in the chant of a Buddhist Sudra starting with "Buddham Saranam Gachchhami".

●Thought of the Month●

A successful person is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks that others throw at him.

...unknown

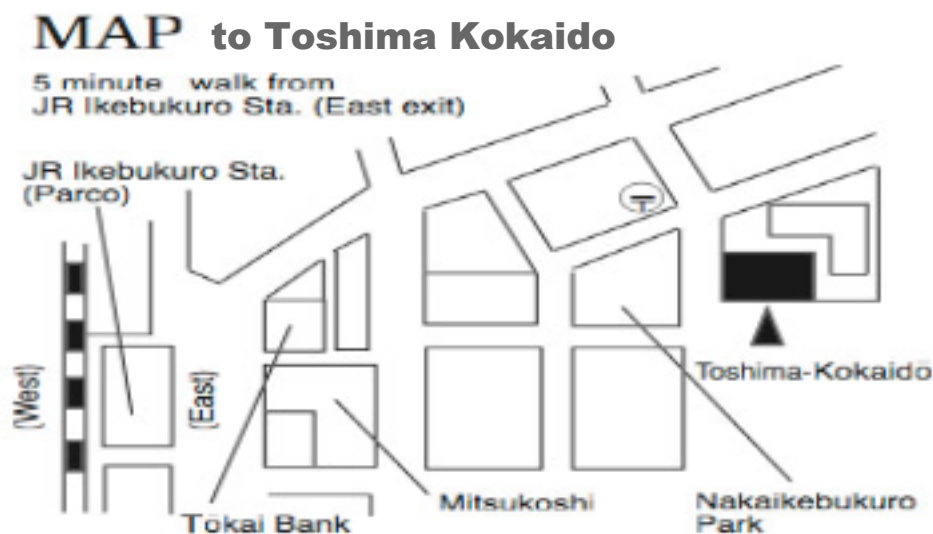
After a brief introduction by the Swami, Professor Veliath gave his talk in Japanese in order to cover his prepared material in time for the lunch break. He began his remarks by saying that the 6th century BC was a truly remarkable period in world history. "In different parts of the world a number of eminent people were born. Some were great philosophers, some were thinkers, and some were founders of great religions."

"In Greece we had Parmenides, Empedocles, Pythagoras and others; in Israel we had the prophet Isaiah; in Persia we had Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism; in China we had Confucius, the founder Confucianism, and Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism; in India we had Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, and finally, Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, also known as The Buddha."

The professor then explored the variety of names attributed to the Buddha in Buddhist scriptures and discussed various points of interest about his life, his enlightenment and his message, before turning to some comparisons of the three eminent subjects of his talk.

"When we compare the Buddha with Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ," he continued, "we notice that all three have certain things in common and certain things that are different. All three of them based their teachings on love, and all three used parables and stories when they communicated the people. These stories were told in a very similar manner and some have become world famous. We have, for instance, Ramakrishna's tale of the blind men and elephant; Jesus Christ's story of the prodigal son; and the Jataka stories of Buddhism, all of which give us an idea of the nature of God."

(cont page 4)



Zushi Retreat - Part I (cont from page 3)

"All three of them had friends among the very rich and the very poor. Among the fervent disciples of Jesus Christ was the prostitute Mary Magdalene, and among the great disciples of the Buddha was the prostitute Amrapali. Both of these were wealthy women who donated all they had to their respective Masters. Similarly, among the disciples of Ramakrishna there were many who had been rejected by society."

"All three had many eminent disciples. Among the disciples of Jesus, St. Paul became a great scholar and one of the founders of Christianity. Among the disciples of Ramakrishna we have Vivekananda, whose relationship to Ramakrishna was similar to that of St. Paul to Jesus Christ." The professor then discussed these relationships and the far-reaching accomplishments and worldwide impact of these two prominent disciples in spreading their Masters' messages.

He concluded his remarks with, "Another important point to notice is that Buddha, Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ were all Asians. Christianity for various historical reasons became a religion of western nations, but Jesus Christ himself was an Asian. Concerning this, Mahatma Gandhi remarked that it was Jesus' disciple, St. Paul, who carried Christianity to the West. And once it reached the West, it became the religion of kings and emperors. Had it not gone so early to the West, Christianity would probably have been no different from Buddhism, or even some schools of Hinduism."

• A Story to Remember •

A Farmer's Request

A farmer requested a Tendai priest to recite sutras for his wife, who had died. After the recitation was over the farmer asked, "Do you think my wife will gain merit from this?"

"Not only your wife, but all sentient beings will benefit from the recitation of sutras," answered the priest.

"If you say all sentient beings will benefit," said the farmer, "my wife may be very weak and others will take advantage of her, getting the benefit she should have. So please recite sutras just for her."

The priest explained that it was the desire of a Buddhist to offer blessings and wish merit for every living being.

"That is a fine teaching," concluded the farmer, "but please make one exception. I have a neighbor who is rough and mean to me. Just exclude him from all those sentient beings."

... Buddhist Tradition

May Zushi Retreat - Part II
The Afternoon Session

After a delicious lunch of both Indian curries and Japanese dishes and some rest, reading, and socializing time, the remaining friends and guests began to congregate in the main shrine room for the afternoon session at 3 p.m. Although Professor Valiath had already taken his leave, Swami began the session by again offering his thanks and gratitude to him for the interesting and informative presentation of the morning session.

With regard to the similarities of the Buddha, Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna noted in the earlier session, the Swami sought to point out one more distinct similarity of these three preeminent religious figures; that being the profoundness of their renunciation.

Then in response to a question addressing the point that God is never actually mentioned in Buddhist philosophy the Swami said, "This is a common mistake of interpretation made by many scholars and philosophers. Buddha was never an atheist, and he realized the highest spiritual truth. Buddha decried and discouraged all debates and philosophical speculations; such are the pastimes of scholars. Buddha was interested not in theory, but in the practice of spirituality." In this connection Swami quoted a renowned composition from Shankaracharya that says,

*Worship Govinda (the Lord), worship Govinda, worship Govinda
Oh foolish man! Your scholastic pursuits will not save you when death comes!*

"Suppose an arrow is launched; does it make such distinctions as to cast, philosophical view, man or woman before it pierces the target. The Buddha's religion showed a practical way to solve the real physical, mental and spiritual problems of life. He communicated his ideas in a new way, but there are many commonalities and identical teachings of Buddha to be found in other religions, especially in Hinduism, into which he was born and raised. "

"Does devotion have a place in Buddhism?" the Swami asked rhetorically. "Without devotion, no progress can be made in spiritual life. Faith and love are interconnected. Just look at the tremendous devotion of the disciples of the Buddha, Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna."

"The fact is that devotion has four aspects; first is faith and confidence in oneself; second is faith in and devotion to the teacher; the third is faith in the scriptures; and the result is faith and devotion to God. After his death devotees began to offer prayers and devotion to the Buddha, and generations later likenesses were crafted with devotion and devotees worshipped the Buddha as God Himself. This is how prayer and devotion found natural expression in Buddhism."

"The Buddha was also a symbol of compassion; not only to humans, but to animals as well. Animal sacrifice in the name of religion had become rampant in Hinduism. The Buddha was critical of this, declaring that it was not necessary for religious experience. As a result of the Buddha's influence, the popularity of animal sacrifice diminished substantially."

The session ended with the Swami leading a guided meditation in Japanese.

Maharaj Delivers Lecture in Manila

(Contributed by Enrico Colombo from Manila)

Swami Medhasanandaji paid his third visit to Manila on invitation by some devotees. It was a very short and hectic stay: Maharaj reached Manila by a JAL flight at about 9.45PM on Friday May 7, 2004 and stayed there less than 48 hours, leaving on a JAL flight back to Tokyo on Sunday May 9 at about 2.30PM.

On Saturday May 8 in the afternoon Maharaj delivered a lecture about the theme: "The mind and its control" attended by some forty persons, mostly Filipinos, but including also three Indian and three Italian citizens living in Manila. About half of the audience had attended the two previous talks delivered by Swami Medhasananda in year 2002 and 2003, the remaining persons were newcomers who had heard about the talk from various sources, including an article and an announcement published by the "Manila Bulletin", the main daily newspaper of the Philippines. This year the talk was held in a spacious room normally used for various courses, such as dance and physical yoga. The room seemed more adequate than the hotel function rooms used for the talks held in the past two years.

Maharaj spoke for about one hour and fifteen minutes catching the attention of audience also by using illuminating examples and interesting stories. The talk was

followed by a short tea break and right after that by a lively session of questions and answers.

The program carried on with a guided meditation. This lasted about 45 minutes and received the full attention of the participants, most of which followed Maharaj's example sitting on the floor. The program was concluded by the chanting of the Universal Prayer (Maharaj intoned it in its original Sanskrit version and the audience followed with the English translation). The event was no doubt a success with the highest attendance registered so far by Maharaj's talks in Manila.

The lecture lasted some three and a half hours altogether. He joined however a group of about twenty persons for a dinner at an Indian restaurant nearby. The Indian food preparations were met with widespread approval and Maharaj expressed his special appreciation when he learned that the cook was not an Indian but a Filipino.

The small but growing group of Manila devotees are very thankful to Maharaj for his third visit and lecture here and hope to see him soon again in the Philippines.

• Special Announcements •

All regularly scheduled programmes will be suspended in June due to the Annual Birth Celebration and Symposium in Tokyo on June 13.

A new CD in Japanese on Guided Meditation According to Hindu Spiritual Traditions will be released during the Celebration noted above.

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