



The Vedanta Kyokai

News, Updates and Miscellany from the Vedanta Society of Japan

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Thus Spake ...

"As death is always uncertain, one should carry out pious intentions whenever the opportunity presents itself, without waiting for a particular time. Death does not make any distinction of time."

... The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

"You have obtained from your God a human body, now is the time to attain to your Lord. Of no avail is your other work - join the society of the holy and utter nothing but the Lord's name."

... Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism

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We mourn for all the victims of the catastrophic tsunami across so vast an area of the Indian Ocean on the morning of Sunday, December 26. We pray for all the survivors of this devastation who have lost relatives and friends and neighbors and homes and livelihoods and must struggle on in facing new perils in its aftermath.

Monthly Calendar

• Birthdays •

Sri Sri Ma Sarada Devi
Monday, January 3

Swami Shivananda
Friday, January 7

Swami Saradananda
Saturday, January 15

Swami Turiananda
Monday, January 24

• Kyokai Events •

New Year's Day

Saturday, January 1st
Annual New Year Talk and Walk
12 Noon at Zushi Centre
All are invited to attend.

January Retreat

Sunday, January 16 - 11a.m.
Opening Ceremony
New Holy Mother's House - Zushi
Guest: Swami Gokulanandaji
Delhi Mission
All are invited to attend.



HAPPY NEW YEAR

• NEWS •

FROM HEADQUARTERS

With the New Year we launch this new feature providing news and general announcements from Belur Math Headquarters.

• This month we are pleased to announce that there are now 155 official branches of the Ramakrishna Order with the following two additions:

1. The newly renovated ancestral home of Swami Vivekananda in Kolkata.
(more detailed information follows)
2. Vedanta Gesellschaft at Bindweide 2, 57520, Steinebach/Sieg, Germany.

• The renovation of Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral Home and development of the adjacent Cultural Complex have been completed. Opening ceremonies for the Ancestral Home, or Heritage Building, were attended by the President of the Ramakrishna Order, Revered Swami Raganathanandaji, on 26 October 2004 and the Cultural Complex was opened by the President of India, His Excellency Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, on October 30.

The impressive new complex includes:

1. Heritage Building: Swamiji's home restored with original architectural features, with a small shrine at his actual birthplace, a Meditation Hall on the 1st floor and a Museum occupying the ground floor and some of the 1st floor.

2. Textbook Library and Seminar Hall: providing facilities for college students to read and study books from syllabuses of five local universities. The Seminar Hall is located on the third floor.

3. Vivekananda Research Centre: to conduct research on various aspects of Indian culture and history, spirituality and the messages of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

4. Rural and Slum Development Centre: This centre is to undertake studies and initiate solutions to problems of unemployment, health, sanitation, etc., of Bengal and of living conditions in slums.

Notices of Note:

• Opening celebrations for the new **HOLY MOTHER'S HOUSE** and the **January Retreat** on January 16, 2005 will be held at the new building in Zushi at 11 a.m. The centre is most pleased to announce that Revered Swami Gokulanandaji of the Delhi Mission will be our honoured guest. **ALL ARE ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND.**

• Don't forget, CD-R audio copies of the morning sessions of Retreats will be available upon request for ¥500 each. A great way to take home some Retreat spirit.

Christmas Eve Service

A sparkling multi-colored wreath, candles and other decorations greeted devotees in the broad genkan, or entrance, of the Zushi Centre on the evening of December 24. The occasion, of course, was the Society's annual Christmas Eve Service.

Upstairs, the meeting room adjacent to the main shrine was awash in candlelight and the scent of flowers. The picture of Jesus that hangs in the shrine had been placed on a small wooden seat. Below this, a framed image of the Madonna and Child was placed. Both images were adorned with fresh flower garlands and at either side and stretching out before them were candles and offerings of flower bouquets, fruits and cakes.

In the warm glow of candlelight devotees gathered and Swami Medhasanda conducted a brief formal worship offering prayer, incense and flowers. Following this was a reading from the Bible in English and Japanese of the Parable of the Sower and the four categories of those that hear the word of God. This was followed by the singing of Silent Night in English and Japanese.

"Today is a very special day, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Around the world this special event is being celebrated, not only in churches, but in many homes of devoted Christians. Also in the many branches of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission on this day Christmas Eve is celebrated."

"We still wonder at the divine phenomenon that appeared as Jesus Christ on this earth," he said noting Jesus Christ, Gautama Buddha and Sri Krishna as some examples of the few whose impact on humanity is tremendous; whose impact grows in course of time. "We see that although Jesus Christ was born some 2000 years ago, so many people worship Him. So many people accept Him as the ideal of life. So many people accept Jesus Christ as their eternal shelter. More than 2000 years ago Jesus called those who are tired, who are worried, come to me, I shall give you peace. And they get peace."

Swami asked if such a thing could be possible without some divine power acting

behind such personalities; that this surely wasn't possible by human power alone. "Jesus himself declared, 'I am the son of God'. In one sense every man and woman is a child of God, but when Jesus said he was the son of God, it was meant in a very special sense. When Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'I am the child of Mother Kali', he would say it in a very special sense." Swami pointed out that when Mother Mary had conceived, both she and Joseph were concerned, but an angel appeared before Mary and in a dream to Joseph assuring them both with the message that the Holy Host was to be born to them as the son of God. The reason for their concern was that the child had not been conceived through normal relations between husband and wife. They were thus assured that this birth was the will of God. "So this angel, too, announced that Jesus was not an ordinary child, that he was the son of God."

"So in what sense was Jesus the son of God?" he asked. "Once Sri Ramakrishna said, 'As the son inherits the property of the father, similarly a devotee of God inherits the property of God.' Sri Ramakrishna explained that these properties are not worldly properties, worldly wealth, but devotion, wisdom, compassion, love and spiritual realization. In the case of Jesus Christ we see these things in a much deeper, more intense sense. "

In another approach at conveying this special sense, Swami continued, "As is believed by Hindus, God incarnates Himself as a human being to show the way to all humanity, this is why such personalities as Jesus Christ, Gautama Buddha and Krishna appear on earth. They come to reveal the spiritual path to devotees. We can combine these two ideas; Jesus the son and God the father, as Jesus declared; the human relationship between God and the devotee; between God and Jesus Christ; and also the Hindu idea of the incarnation of God, to understand Jesus Christ better."

"Again, Jesus had very little formal education but he learned well from personal experience. He was devoted to spiritual practice for some 18 years - a period of his life that very little is known, but is believed he went to India and Tibet to practice. This is

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Christmas Eve (from page 3)

not accepted by all, but what is important is that during this period he experienced the highest of realizations."

"There are three types of spiritual realization in terms of relationship with God," he continued. "There is one in which the aspirant realizes that God is the father and he is the son; that God is the master and he is the servant. Then there is another type in which the aspirant realizes that he is part of God. Still there is another type in which the aspirant realizes he is one with God. If we study the Bible we

understand that Jesus had all three types of realization. He often said he was the son of God. On another occasion Jesus said, 'God is the vine and I am the branch.' Still he remarked, 'I and my father are one.' In Hindu philosophy these are the three realizations

mentioned as dualism (dvaita), qualified non-dualism (visishtadvaita) and non-dualism (advaita). These show what great spiritual realization he had.

"His methods of teaching were different between disciples, to whom he offered direct teachings, and people in general, to whom he offered parables. The parables, taken from practical life, were given so that people could understand, appreciate and remember his messages. In our Bible reading this evening, we see that he taught the core of spiritual principles to his disciples and he said that when he taught the people, he took the help of parables.

We can see there are differences between an ordinary teacher, a realized soul and Jesus Christ in the matter of teaching spirituality. While a teacher can explain religious ideas well, it is beyond their power to impart spirituality. Even realized souls cannot necessarily impart spirituality to

others, and even if they do, they do so in a limited way. But Jesus Christ could not only teach spirituality, he could impart spirituality to others. By a touch, a mere wish or a prayer he could change the course of a person's life. He could make a sinner a saint. That is why Jesus Christ is so very special."

"Then also think of the other qualities of his character. What infinite compassion he had. What tremendous love he had. Think of his forgiveness, as well. The very persons responsible for his death - he was praying that God forgive them. He was the living example of what he taught."



"And think of his egolessness. On many occasions he would heal sick individuals and possessed souls always declare that it was only by the power of God that he could have done so. And the real reason he performed these miracles was that most people would not believe in God without witnessing some miracle. Just so that people would have faith in

God he would perform miracles. Not just for the sake of miracles, but to firstly cure the afflicted and, secondly, so that they would understand the glory of God through them."

"Then, finally, three days after his crucifixion, there was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even a realized soul cannot have this type of power, the power of the resurrection. It shows that Jesus could not be killed by any physical means. He was crucified because he allowed himself to be. With that resurrection an earnest devotee may have the vision of Jesus Christ, even today."

"Jesus Christ was an incarnation of God. That's why when Jesus said he was the son of God, we should understand it in a greater sense. Let us pray to Jesus Christ to bless us; so that we can grow in devotion to God; so that we can grow in faith to God." •

• Thought of the Month •

Security depends not so much on how much you have as on how much you can do without. -Joseph Wood Krutch

The December Zushi Retreat

The subject of the December Zushi Retreat was total health, or holistic health, according to Hindu Tradition. Swami Medhasananda began his talk by asking, "Now what is health? Generally we understand by health a strong and disease free body. In the Oxford Dictionary I saw that health is also a state of being well and free from illness. So you see this definition has two parts. The state of being well - one should feel that I am well; this is a mental condition. And at the same time the physical condition is - free from illness. So, health is not merely physical, it is also mental. Because we know very well from our experience that if the body is well but the mind is not well and peaceful, then we cannot say that I am enjoying a state of being well."

Swami pointed out that from our own experience not only physical illness, but many mental illnesses such as mental strain, tension, frustration affect health. He noted other examples of mental illness such as, strong emotions of anger, greed and lust. "So health as two aspects - physical aspect and mental aspect," he said. "And there is a very close relationship between these two aspects of health."

He said that though it has become somewhat of a fad to become healthy, eat healthy food, do all sorts of things to improve our health, that fact remained that very few people could really be called healthy. The western idea of health used to give sole emphasis to the body for making the body healthy and curing the diseases. But only recently they tried to understand that just by treating the body, the disease cannot be treated.

"In the process of curing too, the mind has a great role. Again studies show that for cancer patients who have been operated upon and given therapies such as chemotherapy, the effects on different patients are different depending on their mental condition. A cancer

patient who is optimistic, who has a strong mind and who has faith in the treatment, has a much less chance of a relapse of cancer as compared to a patient who is mentally weak and who is afraid of a relapse. Also, from my own experience I know that I feel more comfortable with a doctor who is confident as in 'I am giving you this medicine, you surely will be cured', and a doctor who does not have so much confidence say, 'I am giving this medicine, well, you can try it'. Hearing the latter type of doctor, a patient will also feel shaky and think, maybe I will be cured, maybe not.

"We have to consider how to make our body strong and how to make our mind strong. According to Hindu Tradition, when we try to make our mind strong and healthy, we discover that still another level, dimension, aspect of our personality exists which also needs to be taken care of. That is the spirit, the soul. Even though western medical practitioners and thinkers emphasize the need of mental and physical development for good health, still they cannot appreciate that unless the spirit is taken care of, unless we manifest the source of our personality, that is the soul, there cannot be a sound and strong mind. In fact the method of treatment of psychiatrists is not very dependable and steady. This is because they do not recognize the role of the soul and spirit. They do not recognize that our mind and personality have a deeper connection with the soul. And that the soul is the substratum of our personality."

"It will be easier for you to understand if I put it in this way: the body is the covering of the mind and the mind is the covering of the soul. And what guides us and nourishes us, what protects us, what really gives us our strength is not the body, not the mind but the soul, the spirit the atman. So, if we really want peace and joy through health then we must consider the simultaneous development and manifestation of

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all three aspects of our personality - body, mind and soul.

"And if you really do that then it is really what is called holistic health, perfect health or total health. But without doing that, if you consider only one aspect, take care of only one aspect, you do not get the benefit of total, holistic, perfect health. This is the first thing which we should understand. First is understanding, then acting and then what is necessary is patience. You cannot expect the result overnight. So understanding is necessary, and if you only understand intellectually you cannot get the results unless you act, unless you practice it.

In discussing how to make the physical body strong and disease free, Swami said that the important thing was food. "Our systems are so different that everyone has to observe one's system and choose the food accordingly. What is nectar to one maybe poison to another. Not only that, when you grow older, the effect of a particular food on your health may also change."

Swami gave the example of milk in his own experience. Although he never really enjoyed it, he had been trained to drink it and as an adult accept the nutritional benefits and so continued to drink it. However a few years ago he developed constant stomach and lung discomfort. Doctors were inconclusive and he decided to change his diet starting with the elimination of milk. Within days all symptoms disappeared.

Swami noted that this individual approach includes fresh and healthy foods, rather than tasty and convenient. Exercise and supplements should be considered as well on an individual basis. A regular routine for eating is important too, understanding one's body clock and listening to its alarms. "I once visited a doctor," he said. "He was a very senior doctor and my father's teacher (my father was also a doctor). This doctor said to me, do you know what makes the health of prisoners so good? The quality of the food which they get in prison is not so good. But what makes their body strong is that they take food only at appointed times."

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The swami also said one should take food with a calm and quiet mind; that anger and other disturbances should be avoided; and that mealtime prayer can be very effective for both the mind and body before enjoying a meal. Modest exercise routines are also better when they are begun before the onset of disease.

"What is mental health? he asked. When you are morally strong, when you are emotionally balanced and when you have a strong will power. If you have these three things then we can say that you have a healthy mind. If a person is morally weak or if he is emotionally disbalanced or if he has no will power then such a person's mind is sick.

He described six defects - kama (lust), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), moha (delusion), mada (vanity), matsarya (jealousy) as being the six impurities that overwhelm a healthy mind. Emotional imbalances too are cured by combining the head and heart. Because without sound mental health, sound physical health is not possible. And without spiritual health, mental health is not really possible. Only by combining all these aspects can we enjoy total holistic health. Then we can enjoy the effect of health which is peace and joy. •

Swami's 2nd Visit to Sapporo

(Contributed by Mrs. Takako D'Amours)

From November 22nd to the 24th, Swami Medhasananda stayed in Sapporo to give his second lecture there.

About forty people, mostly women as usual, filled the meeting room, including about 15 students from Nippon Vivekananda Kendra led by Mr. Keisin Kimura. The theme of the lecture was 'Karma Yoga' and everybody listened to Swami's lecture very eagerly.

The swami gave the lecture almost completely in Japanese. At the end of his talk he conducted a guided meditation which had been requested since last lecture in Sapporo. Some people experienced meditation for the first time and truly appreciated it.

It suddenly became cold and started snowing in Sapporo right after Swami had left and he missed seeing the snowfall here this year again. •

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• A Story to Remember •

The Samurai and the Monk

A big tough samurai once went to see a little monk. "Monk," he said, in a voice accustomed to instant obedience, "teach me about heaven and hell!"

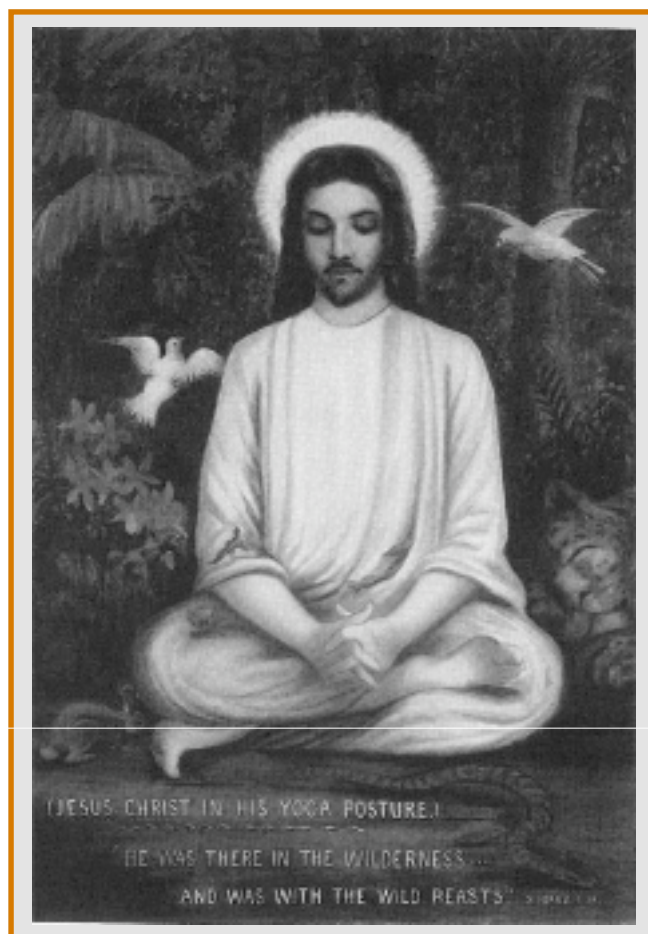
The monk looked up at this mighty warrior and replied with utter disdain, "Teach you about heaven and hell? I couldn't teach you about anything. You're dirty. You smell. Your blade is rusty. You're a disgrace, an embarrassment to the samurai class. Get out of my sight. I can't stand you."

The samurai was furious. He shook, got all red in the face, was speechless with rage. He pulled out his sword and raised it above him, preparing to slay the monk.

"That's hell," said the monk softly.

The samurai was overwhelmed. The compassion and surrender of this little man who had offered his life to give this teaching to show him hell! He slowly put down his sword, filled with gratitude, and suddenly peaceful.

"And that's heaven," said the monk softly.



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