



The Vedanta Kyokai

News, Updates and Miscellany from the Vedanta Society of Japan

JUNE 2005

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Thus Spake ...

“Call on God who pervades the entire universe. He will shower His blessings upon you. Open your grief-stricken heart to God. Weep and sincerely pray, ‘O Lord, draw me towards You, give me peace of mind.’”

... Sri Sarada Devi ~ The Holy Mother

“Come to me; all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

... Jesus the Christ

May Retreat Don't Seek God; but See God!

The Monthly Retreat was held on 15 May. The morning session began with a eulogy for Swami Ranganathanandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Order, who passed away in April. (See May Issue)

Swami Medhasananda noted that the Revered Swami had a very special relationship with the Japan Centre, as it was at his inspiration that the Society was started in 1958. During that year, the swami, while on a lecture tour of Southeast Asia, also visited many places in Japan from Hokkaido to Kyushu giving talks at universities, colleges and Buddhist temples.

While giving a talk in Tokyo, Mr. Rao, a retired military officer, had asked Swami Ranganathanandaji about establishing a society in Japan. This resulted in a meeting of interested parties, both Indian and Japanese, that later established a Vedanta Society of Japan. The swami also helped secure an Indian government grant to help support the Society during its early years.

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Monthly Calendar

• June SPECIAL Event •
THIS SUNDAY!

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

SUNDAY JUNE 5 from 2-5:00 p.m.
See page 6 for details

NOTICE:

Due to the public celebration above
there will be no Monthly Retreat
in the month of June

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**SWAMI
GAHANANANDAJI
MAHARAJ**

ELECTED

**14TH
PRESIDENT**

**OF THE
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER**

Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj was elected President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Math and the Governing Body of the Mission held on 25 May 2005. He is the 14th President of the Order.

Swami Gahananandaji has been one of the Vice-Presidents of the Math and Mission since 14 April 1992, and succeeds Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj who passed away on 25 April 2005.

Born in the village of Paharpur in Sylhet district (now in Bangladesh) in October 1916, he joined the Ramakrishna Order at its centre in Bhubaneswar in January 1939 at the age of 22. He received mantra diksha from Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, the then President of the Order, in 1939 and Sannyasa from him in 1948. He served at Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, from 1942 to 1952 and at Shillong centre from 1953 to 1958.

Keenly interested in service to sick and suffering people, he was posted to the Mission's hospital centre, Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata, in 1958. There he worked during the first 5 years as its Assistant Secretary and then as its head for 22 years. He worked tirelessly to develop the services of Seva Pratishthan to cater to the medical needs of more and more people belonging to poor and low-income sections of the society and converted the original small maternity hospital into a huge 550-bed, modern, well-equipped hospital that it is today.

He was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1965. In 1979, he was appointed an Assistant Secretary of the twin organizations. He became the General Secretary of the Math and Mission in 1989 and continued in that post for 3 years till 1992 when he became a Vice-President of the Order. From that time he was also simultaneously the head of Ramakrishna Math (Yogodyan) at Kankurgachhi, Kolkata.

As a Vice-President of the Math and Mission, Swami Gahananandaji travelled extensively in various parts of the country and visited many branches of the Order. He also visited at different times various places in USA, Canada, England, France, Switzerland, Holland, Russia, Australia, Japan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia and Mauritius. In all these places, he spread the message of Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda•

• THOUGHT OF THE MONTH •

**Learning, the destroyer of arrogance,
begets arrogance in fools,
even as light that illumines the eyes,
makes owls blind.**

Panchatantra

May Retreat (cont from page 1)

After a brief personal history of Swami Ranganathanandaji; from his joining the Order at the age of 18 and early humble duties as a cook at the Math, to his lecture tours, writings and efforts at establishing centres in other countries, Mr. Ohasa then gave some personal reminiscences of the swami. This was followed by few moments of silence in homage to the swami.

Swami Medhasananda then made a few announcements: encouraging all to attend the annual public celebration honouring Swami Vivekananda's 143rd birth anniversary (see page 5); to be sure join in this year's autumn retreat, in a Yamanashi forest this time, from the first Friday through Sunday of September; and stating that he would be going to India from mid-September and to contact him if interested in visiting India.

'Don't Seek God; But See God' was the retreat topic inspired by similar words from Swami Vivekananda. The swami noted that devotees often go to temples or to various holy places to feel the presence of God. This requires time and money and planning. In Japan there is a custom to visit some 88 various temples in Shikoku, "this used to undertaken on foot, but now I understand some people take their cars," he said to laughter. "This fits into what Swami Vivekananda meant when he said, 'Don't seek God; just see God'. It is not necessary to go to particular places to 'see' God. He wrote a beautiful poem in Bengali asking why go here and there seeking God when He is just in front of you in various forms. See that God. Serve that God."

"God is omnipresent. As the first verse of the Isha Upanishad states, 'God, the ruling force, dwells in all of this; in every beat of it.' In everything that is changing and moving, the lord is also there. The Baghavad Gita also states that 'the Lord's feet are everywhere; the Lord's face is everywhere; the Lord covers this whole universe.' So you see He is in everything, everywhere; in every person. Jesus said, 'Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Pick up a stone, and you will find me there.' And the Great Prophet Muhammad also said, 'The spirit of Allah is all-pervasive.' You see, the sages only use different words to describe that same all-pervasive Divine Spirit. The Upanishads also state that only One exists; though sages call Him by various names."

The swami explained that ordinary devotees
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declare this is spirit; that is not spirit, but only matter. This is sacred, that is not sacred. This is holy, that is not holy. But such attitudes evidence a partial or limited knowledge of God; an incomplete concept of God. A complete and perfect concept of God is that everything we can perceive through the senses is God. And more than idea that God is in these things, but that God is all these things. "God is in him. And God is him," said Swami. "These are not the same. There is an important distinction or difference between these two ideas."

"The perfect concept is not only that God is in everything, that God is in everyone; but that God is everything; God is everyone. God is not only inside the image. God is not only inside the temple or church or in heaven. God is not only inside me or you. Not only that. He is God. She is God. You are God. It is only in the manifestation of that divinity that degrees are measured."

"What is the definition of death? This is very confusing since the actual experience contradicts the medical definition or symptoms which say that the heart stops, the brain activity ceases, these indicate death has occurred, the time of death is pronounced. From the spiritual point of view; when the body cannot manifest divinity or consciousness, it is dead."

"To give you a more concrete example; when doctors would examine Sri Ramakrishna in samadi, they could find no signs of life in Him. Heartbeat was stopped, breathing ceased, the medical signs of a dead man. In time, however, Sri Ramakrishna would come down from that state of samadi and be, again, the same man."

"So what is the difference between the dead body and the living body? It is very important to note this: That since Brahman is all-pervasive, it also pervades that dead body. The dead body cannot manifest that consciousness, while a living man does manifest that. This is the difference between a dead body and a living body."

"Then again, God has two aspects, with name and form being temporary and impermanent, but behind this, that underlying consciousness, that is eternal. So there are two, the temporary aspect and the eternal aspect."

"Sri Ramakrishna once said in discussing this particular matter that if he didn't have a good meditation by closing his eyes, it mattered not, since he also saw God all around Him with His

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May Retreat (cont from page 3)

eyes wide open and there was no difference."

"Another time Sri Ramakrishna was explaining this Vedantic truth - that everything is the supreme reality - but Narendranath, even though the highest of spiritual aspirants, found it hard to accept the idea that everything is God; that God is indeed Sat Chit Ananda; knowledge, bliss absolute. Naren did not object directly to this, but when he went out onto the veranda of the Master's room he joked with, Hazra, a devotee there, 'This pot is Brahman, this dish is Brahman. Is it possible that everything is God?' Hearing the joking, Sri Ramakrishna came out and asked what the discussion was about while giving Naren a touch."

"What happened next to Narendra proves that this is not just a concept, a utopian idea; it's not the imaginings of the sages of the Vedanta. It's a reality. It's an experience which one can have.

"Narendra himself narrated his experience, that touch from the Master. He said that after His touch he felt that everything was made of consciousness; that nothing was concrete. People were not made of flesh and bone, but all were made of consciousness. The concrete world disappeared before him and the world of consciousness appeared before him. It's an entirely different experience on a different level."

"As the Upanishads say, there are four states of consciousness; the waking state, the dreaming state, the dreamless sleep state and the highest state of pure consciousness, or turiya."

"Narendra stated that when taking food he would actually see, experience that food is Brahman; his hand is Brahman; his mother serving him was Brahman; all these distinctions, food, hand, were gone, with only pure consciousness remaining."

"Still in this state, Narendra would not be afraid of carts and horse carriages when crossing the street seeing them all as the same consciousness. At a park near his house he would hit his head against an iron fence to confirm whether it was solid matter as he remembered or consciousness as he was now experiencing."

"This continued for some days and when Narendra came down to normal consciousness

he understood that what the Upanishads and Vedas say are true, not imaginings, but a reality that can be experienced. So we can see that when Swamiji said, 'Don't seek God; just see God', he spoke the highest truth based on his own experience, not just repeating words from scripture."

"As Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Is God only in my heart, so that I may see Him only by closing my eyes? No, even if I open my eyes, I see Him.' And not only in human beings, in animals as well. As part of his duties as Dashineswar temple priest he would offer food to Mother Kali, and if a cat would stray in he would offer that food to the cat as well. Why? Because, as Sri Ramakrishna himself said, he saw Mother in that cat too. Other people would misunderstand him saying, 'Oh, now that priest is giving food prepared for the Divine Mother to a cat!' Ordinary temple officials would complain that Sri Ramakrishna was doing such sacrilegious acts. But here is an example of Sri Ramakrishna seeing the Divine even in an animal. "

Swami closed here, suggesting that we take up the topic again in August so that we may discuss how ordinary devotees can practice this truth, and the benefits of such practice•

NOTE:

VHS Video/ DVD and CD audio of the Zushi Retreat morning sessions are now available.

Please contact the Centre via phone or email to order copies of sessions you may have been unable to attend.

NEW CD RELEASE

*HINDU GUIDED MEDITATIONS
FOR PEACE AND ENLIGHTENMENT*



by Swami Medhasananda

English Language Version

Available June 5 in Ikebukuro!
(see page 6 for details)

• A STORY TO REMEMBER •

Two Sculptors

Once a king was looking for the best sculptor in his kingdom. Two excellent sculptors presented themselves to him and he needed to give them a test to decide who was best.

He asked them to carve an image on two opposite walls of his palace. A curtain was hung between the walls so that they could not see each other's work. After many months, both sculptors reported that they had finished the work and the king could view it.

Both the works were covered with curtains. First, one curtain was raised that revealed a beautiful image and everyone clapped in appreciation.

Then the opposite curtain was raised, here there was no image on the wall - instead the wall had been polished so finely that it gave a perfect reflection of the opposite image. In fact, it looked sharper than the original, as so much effort had been made in polishing the wall.

The second sculptor won the contest.

The story illustrates an interesting Vedantic tenet:

Really, we do not have to conjure up an image of 'God' in our minds. All we have to do is polish the mind - just remove the blemishes. Purify it. That is our task. God already exists. It is just that he is reflected more clearly in a pure mind.

Cyberspace

Maharaj's Brief and Hectic Visit to Manila

By Enrico Colombo

Swami Medhasananda reached Manila late in the evening of Saturday, May 7. Earlier on that day he had delivered his regular talk at Shimbashi and from there he had rushed to Narita airport on time to catch the JAL evening flight to Manila. This was his fourth visit to the Philippines in as many years* and a very busy schedule was lined up for him the following day, Sunday, May 8.

Some ten Filipino ladies and gentlemen, most of whom had attended his talks in previous years, had requested an opportunity to meet Maharaj individually or in small groups in order to ask him advice on spiritual matters. Maharaj received the visitors on Sunday morning in the living room of an apartment made available by a devotee. These interviews proved to be quite a success and went on well beyond the allocated time.

This was followed by a lunch in a nearby Filipino restaurant attended in a festive mood by most of the persons who had met Maharaj in the morning (some had to excuse themselves as they were busy making arrangements for his public lecture later that afternoon). Filipino preparations of vegetables or fish met with general appreciation, not much so for the rather loud pop music blasting from the restaurant's audio system. (A somewhat noisy background is not an unusual feature in Filipino restaurants and is generally appreciated by the local diners.)

After a short rest Maharaj engaged in a public discourse entitled "Total Health". This was held at the same venue as last year, a fairly large room, mostly used for courses in dancing

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The Vedanta Society of Japan's Annual Public Celebration
Swami Vivekananda 143rd Birth Anniversary

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

Date: Sunday, June 5, 2005. 2 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Venue: Toshima-Kohkaido, 1-19-1 Higashi-Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku, Tokyo
 Phone: (03) 3981-1009

Speech: **Dr. Yamamori Tetsuo, Former Director,
 International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto**

Subject: **Religion to be Believed and Religion to be Felt**

Master of Ceremonies: Ms. Kuniko Hirano

**Release of the 'Universal Gospel' (Special Issue) and a Speech on
 Swami Vivekananda by His Excellency Sri Manilal Tripathi,
 Ambassador of India**

The programme includes a short guided meditation, Ainu music, shamisen and songs by Japanese and Indian devotees.

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

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

Maharaj Visits Manila (from page 5)

and physical yoga, and was attended by about forty persons, all of them Filipinos with the exception of two Italian devotees. Again, the talk, given in English, which is commonly understood in the Philippines, lasted well beyond schedule and was followed with close attention by the audience.

Maharaj started his discourse by quoting the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of health as a state of well-being, free from illness. Although we commonly tend to think of health in its physical aspect, there is a strong interconnection between the health of the body and that of the mind. He also mentioned that the prevailing western system of medical treatment (called 'allopathic') is aimed at just treating the disease. Another western system (called 'homeopathic') considers both the disease and the patient.

In India, however, for several thousand of years another system of medical treatment (called 'ayurvedic') has had a more comprehensive approach by taking into consideration all the aspects of our existence (soul, vital energy, mind and body). Significantly, among gravely ill patients, those who believe and pray to God have a better chance of recovery. The same principle applies to the doctors treating such patients.

Although modern civilization tends to focus only on the health of the body, Maharaj underlined the importance of paying attention to both the physical and the mental aspects, as well as the spiritual. He then continued by giving some simple and practical suggestions on how to take care of the body and the mind.

For the health of the body he suggested that:

- We should consume good food and apply our own judgment about choosing it without being influenced by current trends or fashions
- We should exercise regularly (suggestions; Yoga, brisk walking).
- We should work with a free mind, avoiding excessive stress
- We should have a wholesome and balanced lifestyle (suggestion: avoid enjoyments that trouble our mind and cause remorse and sadness)
- We should have a good and regular rest

For a strong and healthy mind, Maharaj recommended that:

- We should be morally strong and stay away from the six main weaknesses of the mind: lust, anger, greed, delusion, vanity and jealousy
- We should use discrimination and analyze the harm caused by the above weaknesses to our mind
- We should love others and see God in them

We should try to improve our emotional balance by:

- Developing the power of reason
- Controlling our emotions through logic
- Avoid being overwhelmed by other people's praise or criticism (specifically: Try to improve ourselves when criticism is founded, ignore it otherwise)
- Being inflexible about principles, but trying to adjust to situations and people (like steel, which is strong but flexible, and not like iron, which is strong but rigid and breakable)

We should free ourselves from stress by:

- Thinking deeply about our problems with the aim to find right solutions
- Consulting knowledgeable persons whom we trust
- Making an effort to implement resolutions
- Praying to God and being happy with whatever God provides (avoid dictating to God in our prayers, always pray that God may grant the object of our prayers only in cases that are good for us, in God's judgment)

We should free ourselves from fear, especially fear of death. That can be achieved by having deep faith in God and by thinking of Him as our eternal companion who looks after us in

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Maharaj Visits Manila (from page 8)

this life and hereafter.

We should avoid brooding about the past and planning about the future. We should 'live in the now' by fully concentrating on whatever we are doing at one particular time.

We should mentally repeat the name of God (regardless of our religion or chosen ideal), as this will generate positive thoughts, purify us and be beneficial for our spiritual life.

We should mentally offer our food and drinks to God. That is another way to purify ourselves and to keep in contact with God.

We should practice meditation at least once a day, at regular times.

Maharaj concluded his talk by underlining the need to maintain good mental health and lead a moral life as a condition for physical health. The health of the body is interconnected with the health of the mind and the spirit and these three aspects must be harmonically developed, if we want to achieve total health and enjoy life.

After a short tea break a lively question and answer session began and was followed by a guided meditation, which was attended with great attention by the participants. The program, by then running for well over three hours, was closed by the Universal Prayer, led by Maharaj and repeated by all participants, and by a few devotional songs from the local Christian tradition performed by a small group of young boys and girls in English and Tagalog.

The day ended in a happy mood with supper at an Indian restaurant. Maharaj was asked to select the preparations to be served to the over twenty participants, most of whom were not familiar with Indian food. It had been a long day and afterward the diners lined up to bid Maharaj goodbye. He was soon able to retire and get some well-deserved rest.

The flight back to Japan was scheduled in the early afternoon of the following day, Monday, May 9. This left only a little time on Monday morning for Maharaj to go through the questionnaires collected after the lecture and to discuss future activities with some of the organizers •

** Editors Note: As with previous visits to Manila, this trip was planned, arranged and sponsored by two brothers and devotees, Carlo and Enrico Colombo.*

Notices of Note:

- There will be no Zushi Retreat in June due to our public celebration of Swami Vivekananda's 143rd Birth Anniversary. Monthly Retreats will return to the 3rd Sunday of each month from July.
- This year's Autumn Outdoor Retreat will be in a forest in Yamanashi Prefecture from Friday September 2 to Sunday September 4. Please make plans to join us and contact the Centre for more information.
- Swami Medhasananda is returning to India from 22 September for about 5 weeks.

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