



# the VEDANTA Kyokai

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

## Monthly Calendar

### • Birthdays •

Swami Premananda  
Friday - December 9

Sri Sri Sarada Devi  
Friday - December 23

Swami Shivananda  
Tuesday - December 27

### • Kyokai Events •

**December Retreat at Zushi**  
Sunday, December 18  
Subject: Love as a Path of  
Realization  
All, with family and friends  
are welcome

**Christmas Eve at Zushi**  
24 December 7 p.m.  
A programme of worship, Bible  
reading, talk on Christ and  
Christmas carols is planned.  
All, with family and friends,  
are welcome.

**New Year's Day Kalpataru**  
12 noon - January 1st at Zushi  
A brief programme followed by  
lunch and annual walk to  
Kamakura Daibutsu.

## ✠ Thus Spake ✠

*"Be not a traitor in your thoughts. Be sincere; act according to your thoughts; and you shall surely succeed. Pray with a sincere and simple heart, and your prayers will be heard." ... Sri Ramakrishna*

*"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they shall be filled." ... Jesus the Christ*

## KIYOSATO DISCOURSE - DAY ONE "Tension Free Life; the Hindu Perspective"

*[This report is from the opening day of the Outdoor Retreat held in early September 2005. This subject was covered by Swami Medhasananda over the course of the 3-day retreat and the Vedanta Kyokai will follow-up with reports from days two and three in subsequent issues.]*

One may argue why such a secular topic at a spiritual retreat. The reason is this: however much we talk of abstract philosophy, as we say in India, we listen through one ear and it passes out the other. It does not enter into us. Usually after a talk, if we ask people if they remember the talk, a substantial number of people will say no because the topic is not connected to their daily lives. So we should take up a subject which is relevant to life. At least people will listen. And whether this has any connection with spirituality, we will find out.

The question is - what is stress? Sometimes we use words as we listen to them, without really understanding them. An example of such a word is God. Not only children, even adults use this word without understanding it. So, what is stress? Without borrowing words or thinking other people's thoughts, let us think what we mean by that word. (cont page 2)

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## KIYOSATO DISCOURSE - DAY ONE

*(from page 1)*

Tension is a mental state in which we feel pressure and, consequently, we become restless. There are two types of stress: (a) occasional and (b) habitual or chronic.

Some examples of occasional stress are: (a) before appearing for an examination, not knowing which questions will be asked; (b) then the period before the examination results are published; (c) then which college to seek admission to?. In some people, such cases of occasional stress becomes very acute and the body and mind are affected, while others just accept them. Either way, these types of stress are not long term affairs.

Some examples of chronic stress are: (a) a protracted illness and possible recurrence; (b) strained relationships with the boss or coworkers. Sometimes tension is expressed and sometimes it is repressed. It is expressed, say, through anger. When it is suppressed, it is more dangerous, as it sometimes gives birth to serious diseases.

Tensions become evident in us when: we are quick to anger; we often misunderstand others; we make mistakes in our works; we forget many things; we cannot concentrate in talking with others; we change the topic often; we do not have control over our speech; we cannot sit quietly without moving some part of our body - legs, hands, fingers, eyes, neck.

All these are symptoms of tension and the consequent restlessness of mind.

Now let us consider how people release tension. There are some positive ways: playing sports; listening to music; reading books. All these give temporary relief, as through these activities, our stresses are removed for some time. As long as you play or listen to music or read, you forget about the stress and actually feel good; but the stress returns. Also, how long can you indulge in these activities? After some time you will get bored.

Some negative ways of releasing stress include; watching TV, smoking, drinking alcohol and taking drugs. We feel dull and spiritless and we seek stimulation through these activities. So, though one may feel very happy for some time, finally, our nerves are further dulled. Consequently one needs to consume more and more, and addictions are created. These addictions have a devastating effect on our body, mind, relationships and finances.

Let us now discuss in detail the results of stress.

### RELATIONSHIPS

These are strained if there is stress in our mind. There is loss of harmony between family members. How? The husband returns from the office and tells the wife, 'I feel so stressed.' hoping for sympathy. The wife will tell the children not to go to their father as he is tired. So the children will have a feeling of fear and distances grow between father and children and between husband and wife. So stress has led to less harmony in family life. Sometimes the father will become angry because he is stressed. This also effects the family. It is very difficult for a person who is always stressed to have a friend.

### MENTAL

A person who is stressed-out loses his balance of mind. He cannot make correct decisions.

### PHYSICAL

Because of stress, we cannot get good sleep. Stress also leads to psychosomatic diseases. There are many such diseases whose origin is a stressed mind. It is one of the main reasons for hypertension, heart disease, ulcers, pain, asthma and, sometimes, for cancer too. These psychosomatic diseases occur without any germs. Organic food, yoga, etc., cannot protect us as long as we do not take care of our minds. We must make our minds healthy.

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## KIYOSATO DISCOURSE - DAY ONE

*(from page 2)*

Why should we discuss this topic with such urgency? Is mental stress very common or not so common?

Now, millions of pills are sold worldwide for getting sleep. People are going in innumerable numbers to psychiatrists. Even in schools and colleges young people, too, need counseling because of stress! It has become universal, irrespective of country or age, but in advanced countries it is more acute. In those countries which have a materialistic outlook, which have no faith, they have more stress. So, it has a relation with our advanced civilization.

Our Vedanta Society published a CD on Meditation two years ago in Japanese. This year an English version was published. I wanted to consult some presently available CDs (in Japanese) before making our CD. A devotee got some such CDs for me, but they were not on meditation, they were only on how to relax by listening to the sound of waves etc. I was a bit disappointed. This is not meditation. When I searched on Google, to my surprise, I found that hundreds and hundreds of CDs were available in English. Yet 99% of these were not really meditation, but on mental relaxation techniques, showing the prevalence of mental stress in the modern age.

Let us now discuss the reasons for stress.

### 1) COMPLEXITIES OF THE MODERN AGE

The modern age is advancing very rapidly, scientifically and technologically. Our amenities have progressed in geometric progression. Our knowledge, too, has progressed in geometric progression. But our wisdom has only progressed in arithmetic progression; or sometimes has stopped progressing altogether. Our brain has advanced so much, but our heart and mind have not. There are huge gaps between our brain and mind and heart. And that makes us confused.

There are so many new technologies. We have to learn about them and to use them to be able to survive. But we do not know how to cope with the changed situations in our day to day life which this technology has created. The computer was supposed to save us time; so that we could use our time and energy for better purposes. But we have become busier!

Mobile phones are used for sending or receiving messages. The purpose of the mobile phone was to make communications easier and cheaper. But devices like this, if not used carefully and judiciously, give birth to negative effects too, such as an increase in restlessness of the mind.

Just like a knife is dangerous in the hands of a child; technology has come to us without proper training on judicious usage. We are not told what to bear in mind while using these tools. Some of the offerings of the modern age, which we were not taught to use judiciously, are: the television, the computer and the mobile phone. So it becomes natural that if we do not use these devices wisely, we will suffer mentally and physically as a consequence.

### 2) LIFE HAS BECOME SO HECTIC AND FAST

There are so many things to do that a 24-hour-day is not enough time. We have to go fast; drive fast, arrive quickly, the only concern is to reach the destination as soon as possible. Not only on paved roads, but on the road of life, so many accidents take place because we are going so fast.

### 3) COMPETITION

Everybody wants to survive, but without consideration for others. The only considerations are profit. In Hinduism there is a concept called 'matsya nyaya' - the ways of the fish - big fish eating the smaller ones. Big corporations eating smaller ones.

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## KIYOSATO DISCOURSE - DAY ONE

(from page 3)

### 4) COMPLICATIONS

We have to do so many types of jobs and readjust so many times, because the world has become so close. For example; Japanese people spend long hours in the office; sometimes as late as 11 p.m. One genuine reason is that sometimes they have to coordinate work with counterparts in the US, etc., and because of the time difference we need to be in the office at unusual hours. When there were no computers, these problems were not there.

### 5) LIFE HAS BECOME MECHANICAL

Works are done, day in and day out - without any feeling, like machines.

### 6) LIFE HAS BECOME ARTIFICIAL

We have been away from nature. There is no touch of nature in our lives. For example, fast food and refrigerators. There is dependence on machines. It saves time, but it makes our lives artificial. The more we become artificial, mechanical and complex, the more tense we become.

### 7) SELFISHNESS

We have become extremely self-centered. Our hearts have become extremely narrow. All our money and time spent on ourselves and our immediate families. We do not even care for our old parents.

### 8) ELABORATE ASSORTMENT OF ENJOYMENTS

In one sense this is good because people's tastes are different, this is also good for industry. But the negatives associated with this are: it makes us greedy and increases our desires. Sometimes we go to the departmental store only to see things - this, too, gives us joy! This is a subtle (and not gross) enjoyment. With increased desires, tension grows, because desires make our mind restless. See the contradiction? On the one hand, we

want to have a tension free, calm and quiet life. And on the other, we do so many things daily to make our minds restless. Medicines, exercise and food cannot help. We have to solve the problem on a mental level.

### 9) MATERIALISTIC OUTLOOK

Earn money and enjoy; but enjoyment will not be satisfied and dissatisfaction increases. Enjoyment is just of the senses and the body. There is no development of the mind. We are not manifesting our Self/Atman. The more we enjoy, the more tense our mind and senses become. If we don't have a higher purpose of life, a spiritual purpose, we are bound to suffer.

### 10) NO FAITH IN GOD

We have no anchor in life. So the boat of life is drifting here and there. When we have problems, to whom shall we go for shelter? Those who believe in God have an anchor, a refuge. During the typhoon of life, that will hold them. Else they would drift or be blown away.

We have to solve these mentally and by changing our life style. These are the two main approaches to becoming tension free. •

- Ashish Gupta / Notes from the Lecture by Swami Medhasananda / 2005 Sep 3.

## Thought of the Month

*Faith is a bird  
That feels dawn breaking  
And sings  
While it is still dark.*

*-Rabindranath Tagore*



## Swami Gives Third Talk in Sapporo

Swami Medhasananda delivered an inspiring lecture on the theme, **Mantra and Meditation**, in Sapporo on the 23rd of November.

During his talk, Swami kept emphasizing the importance of focusing the mind on one object and that repeating a mantra (japam) is one of

the most effective ways of doing this.

In a detailed explanation of Aum meditation, the swami explained that, symbolically speaking, one could think of "aum" as the bow, the Atman as the arrow, and Brahman as the target. We learned that we should practice repeating the Aum

Mantra so that the arrow (Atman), is eventually able to pierce the target (Brahman). Furthermore, japam helps us to purify our minds, while erasing negative emotions.

The lecture room was filled with approximately forty people who were eager to listen to Swami's talk. Since it was his third

lecture here in Sapporo, many of the faces in the audience were familiar. Naturally, everyone is looking forward to Swami Medhasananda's visit again next year.

**- Takako D'Amors, Sapporo**

## AKHANDA JAPAM AT ZUSHI

From 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. some 20 people, including two from India and one from the USA, participated in Akhanda Japam at the Zushi Center on Sunday, November 27.

Akhanda Japam means continuous spiritual practice and participants take one hour shifts offering japam, meditation

and prayer in the shrine room, making sure incense is offered and the single ghee-fueled flame continues to burn. Silence is also maintained, as much is practical, throughout the Centre.

Participants can volunteer for one or more shifts throughout the day and breakfast and lunch are

served, with meals served later for those in the shrine during mealtimes. After regular breakfast and lunch periods, participants read in turns from "Towards the Goal Supreme" by Swami Virajananda. Those not in the shrine enjoyed free time by silent reading from the extensive library or by talking short walks.

Akhanda Japam is scheduled at the Zushi Centre twice a year, in April and November. I find this kind of meditation with others very fruitful. I hope many more people take advantage of these opportunities to participate in this unique experience.

**- Haruki Kanai (Hari)**

# November Retreat

## INTROSPECTION, DISCRIMINATION AND SELF-ANALYSIS

In his opening remarks on the subject, Introspection, Discrimination and Self-Analysis, Swami noted that for any civilized man the important thing is freedom from the senses, not freedom of the senses; that self-restraint, not indiscriminate enjoyment, marks the difference between a civilized and an uncivilized man; that civilization is not possible without self-restraint of sense enjoyments by individuals of a society. He noted that the downfalls of many great civilizations were largely preceded by moral and physical weakness, as these societies engaged in indiscriminate pursuit of sensual enjoyment.

Swami said the higher purpose of life is getting knowledge, wisdom, peace and joy; finally, attaining truth and true freedom. The three things necessary to channel the energy and to practice the restraint necessary to fulfill this higher purpose are introspection, discrimination and self-analysis. These three can be applied to various aspects of our personalities and existence; our physical, intellectual, mental, moral and spiritual lives.

As examples of how we consciously or unconsciously practice introspection, discrimination and self-analysis in daily life, he said we practice: Introspection, when personal tragedy strikes and we wonder of the purpose of life; Discrimination, at the marketplace, balancing what we would like with what we can afford; and Self-analysis, when we decide to control our temper.

In illustrating these concepts for better understanding, the swami noted that introspection is more than mere observation, since analysis of thoughts, feelings and motives regarding one's body, mind, existence, family, friends, work and environment are necessary. Our thoughts are at conscious, sub-conscious and supra-conscious levels of the mind; with our conscious thoughts just the tip of the iceberg. We must become aware of the depth of the mind and our thoughts; some beautiful, some hideous, through introspection.

Ordinary purposes for introspection are; to become aware of the present condition of our minds; to become aware of the mind's strengths and weaknesses; its dark and light sides. This awareness is necessary to cleanse our thoughts, feelings and motives for peace and joy. Another ordinary purpose of introspection is to establish harmony between body, mind, speech and action. In establishing this harmony we find disharmony at various levels of existence; mind, body, family, work, etc., and a higher type of introspection is needed. And what is this higher type of introspection?

"First of all, who am I? To enquire as to the serious questions related to our life. Very important questions relevant for our own existence. Who am I? Am I just this body and mind? What is my real nature? How can I realize my real nature? What was my state before my birth? And what will happen to me after death? Is there is a Self? Does it continue to exist even after death? What is rebirth? Who is reborn? What is freedom? I mean spiritual freedom. What is the purpose of this life? Is it just to

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## **November Retreat** *(from page 6)*

earn money? To lead a comfortable life with family and friends? How am I connected with my friends and family? What is the basis of our relationship? Is there anything permanent in these relationships? What purpose is fulfilled by these relationships? What is this universe? What is the basis of this universe? What is God? How am I connected with God? How can I get eternal peace and joy and strength and knowledge?"

"The purpose of this higher type of introspection is to solve the problems of life and death; of pain and suffering; of finding Eternal Life" said the swami. "Higher discrimination is understanding the difference between Self and non-self, the real and the unreal, of truth and falsehood; the difference between Brahman and maya."

"First, I said to understand the difference," he continued. "Then to understand that all goodness, holiness, joy, peace, wisdom and freedom flow from the Self. And suffering, peacelessness, ignorance, bondage flow from the non-Self. Now in our present condition the Self and the non-self have been mixed up within us. Subject and object, God and maya are mixed up. An example of this is when it is said, that the hot water burnt his hand. When we make this statement, actually what burnt the hand? Has the water burnt it or the heat which is in that water? We have Self and non-self mixed up in our existence. In us, the Self, the real thing, is our soul; and the non-self are the other things - body, mind, intelligence, senses. Now the Self and non-self, coexist in our being."

"Naturally to practise this higher type of discrimination, we have to understand the difference between the Self and non-self, eternal and non-eternal, temporary and permanent, Brahman and maya. We must try to understand and practise it accordingly. Once Sri Ramakrishna was visiting Calcutta with his nephew Hriday in a horse carriage. Then it was British India and Hriday drew Sri Ramakrishna's attention of to a magnificent palace where the British Governor General live. 'Oh, uncle see what a magnificent palace this is.' When Sri Ramakrishna looked at it, he told Hriday that building was just bricks upon bricks, nothing more than that. So at the back of every beautiful edifice or garment, either there is steel or there are bricks or there is cotton."

"Sri Ramakrishna taught discrimination about money by saying that one should not hanker too much after earning money. Because after all, one should know the purpose of earning money. What does money do? Well, it helps you to get the basic necessities of life for yourself and your family, but money cannot give peace. You cannot purchase peace and you cannot realize God with the help of money. Money cannot help you in realizing God, in realizing the Self. So you should know the limitations of money."

"Then how temporary and fragile is name and fame. The same person who praises me today, will criticise me tomorrow. I am always amused to read reports in newspapers about the performance of a player. Suppose a player plays very well; soccer or cricket or baseball; the newspaper reporter is full of praise for that player. But the next day if the player plays badly, then that same newspaper is full of criticism. So you see, the same newspaper and the same sports journalist. So fragile and short lived is this type of name and fame."

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### **November Retreat** *(from page 7)*

"Sri Ramakrishna said in the Gospel again and again; try to discriminate that only the magician is real, and not his magic. His magic is unreal. So don't be charmed by the magic of the magician. Don't be overwhelmed, moved; don't be cheated by the magic of the magician. He gives as one example: a magician appeared before a king and wanted to perform. The king agreed. The next moment, everyone saw, including the king, that a person in the dress of a soldier with weapons appeared on horseback. Of course this was just magic. Now, that king belonged to a class of Jnani, a follower of the path of Jnana, or knowledge. So he started discriminating. After all what is the truth in it. What is the real thing in this performance. Is this horse true? No. Are these weapons true? No. Is the dress of the soldier true? No. And when he started discriminating in this way, finally he saw only the magician standing there, and all else had vanished. All his magic vanished. So Sri Ramakrishna remarked that only Brahman is true, Brahman is the magician. All these manifestation of God as the universe, these are all his magic. All this splendour, the universe with all its attractions is but the magic of the magician. And these are all short lived, temporary, non eternal and non permanent. So don't be moved, don't be cheated, don't be overwhelmed, don't be misguided by these manifestations, by this magic of that greatest magician, God. This is how to discriminate, as Sri Ramakrishna taught."

"Then there is another type of discrimination; regarding our agency. The discrimination that - O God, you are the doer. I do and you make me do. You are the doer, I am the agent. You are the operator, I am the machine. You are the indweller, I am the house. You are the charioteer, I am the chariot. Then who is the real doer? It is God who is the real doer. I am just the instrument. This is another very very important aspect of discrimination."

"You see one of the most important problems of spiritual life is the ego, our vanity. Now how to eliminate that ego? You see by thinking that we are really the agent, and God is really the doer, we can eliminate our ego. And the elimination of ego is very important for the building of our moral and spiritual life. So, this type of discrimination is also very, very important."

Swami discussed the practice of introspection, discrimination and self-analysis. Introspection as often as possible, but discrimination and self-analysis must be practiced everyday. "For example," said Swami, "Am I following the ideal of my life? Have I hurt anyone? Have I told a lie? Have I become greedy? Have I passed my time in an idle way? Have I followed my daily routine sincerely? This is how we should do our self analysis every day. And for that you should devote some time. The best thing is this, either in the morning or in the evening, we should sit at a fixed time and then we should make this sort of self-analysis."

The swami said that this practice requires the help of our intelligence and our conscience. We can help our secular intelligence become a higher intelligence by listening to spiritual talks, praying sincerely and intensely, the company of the holy, visiting holy places and being selective in our study of spiritual books, such as the Bible, Vedas or Upanishads; books written by realized souls, like Swami Vivekananda.

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### **November Retreat** *(from page 8)*

Again, the swami pointed out that there are no instruments to measure self-analysis and discrimination and we should measure other because it may be more interesting. We shouldn't fall to temptations and provocations and then justify them, but see them as failings or deviations and struggle to rectify them.

"By struggling and by devotion to God, we will be established in discrimination. As, again, Swami Vivekananda gave the example of a cow that does not commit any mistake, but a cow remains a cow. We commit mistakes, but we also become realized souls.

"Finally, my last point is that we should combine both our head and our heart. While all these things; introspection, discrimination and self-analysis we do by our head, so to say, at the same time we have to manifest our heart. We should take the help of our heart. That is devotion to God and love for others. We have to combine our head and heart. We have to combine our power of reasoning and at the same time our devotion to God and love for others. This is the royal road of realization of God, realization of Self. The royal road for attaining the highest truth." •

*Reported by Ashish Gupta*

## **A Story to Remember**

### **ST FRANCIS AND THE NOVICE**

Once a novice asked St. Francis for a copy of a book of psalms. He stated his desire to recite the psalms in prayer and meditate on them as opportunities allowed him to during each day. St. Francis thoughtfully considered this request, but refused saying. "Once you have your own book of psalms, the desire will arise for a breviary (book of daily prayers) as well. Then pride will grow as your ability to recite these prayers and psalms increases. And finally, you will sit in your chair, like a great prelate (senior dignitary of the church), and request your brother to bring you your breviary."

When the novice stated that he couldn't see how such knowledge could be harmful to his spiritual life St. Francis replied, "My dear brother, in the past we had great heroes and warriors of purpose and honour; men of great personal sacrifice, who endured terrible trials and faced bitter hardships. Nowadays, there are wandering bards who earn money and attempt to bring honour upon themselves, not by doing what these great men have done, but by singing about them. This temptation may be your downfall as well; for once you start reading these books, you may begin to take pride in reciting them for others, and you will put your confidence in the words of knowledge and not the knowledge that grows of virtuous thoughts and deeds. - Anonymous

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