



the VEDANTA *Kyokai*

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Monthly Calendar

• Kyokai Events •

April Retreat
Zushi Centre

Sunday, April 16th,
10:30 a.m.
All, with family and friends
are welcome.



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"An almanac may forecast rain, but one cannot get a drop by squeezing its pages. In this Kali Yuga one attains to God if one simply sticks to truth. The Master used to say, 'He who speaks nothing but truth is lying on the lap of God.'"

... Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother

"The truth is noble and sweet; the truth can deliver you from evil. There is no savior in the world except the truth."

... The Buddha

MARCH RETREAT:

Sri Sri Ramakrishna 171st Birth Anniversary Celebration

The Vedanta Society of Japan celebrated the 171st birth anniversary of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva at its monthly retreat at the Zushi Centre on 19 March.

The retreat programme began at 6 a.m. with mangalarati, Vedic mantras, hymns and meditation. After breakfast, participants busied

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themselves with the remaining chores in preparation for the large crowd expected to attend this most popular of retreats. At 10:30 Swami Medhasananda began conducting a puja and arati in the shrine and video monitors set up throughout offered close-up views detailing the worship. At the conclusion, all the guests were then encouraged to offer flowers and prayers to the Master.

Puja and Arati Symbolism

The Centre seemed filled to capacity as the focus shifted from the shrine room to meeting room where, with Mr. Yoshiro Ito translating, Swami welcomed one and all, acknowledging some long-time members and noting several new faces in attendance. Swami pointed out that we had just witnessed puja and arati and that for some this type of ritualistic Hindu worship must be a new experience, but noted that, in fact, most Japanese Buddhist rituals find their origins in such Hindu worship. "They are full of deep symbolism, and not meaningless gestures," he said. "Simply put, the philosophy behind Hindu worship is to think of yourself as being pure, deified, and then offer worship to God.

"Another idea is that God is not living out there somewhere, but resides in the very heart of the devotee. So the worshipper superimposes or invokes that divinity, which is within us, upon the image or photograph of worship. This is a wonderful idea. Generally speaking, after the worship, the image of wood or clay temporarily set up for worship, remains simply wood or clay, and that spirit invoked returns to the heart of the worshipper."

"You then witnessed the arati. According to Hindu philosophy the universe is comprised of five elements. Each of the articles of worship represents both the gross and - that which we do not see - the subtle elements of earth; flowers and their fragrance, water; the conch shell holding water, fire; the offered flames, air; the waving of the tail of a special breed of cow, and finally, Akasha, which can be best translated as ether, or that which penetrates all; a piece of cloth with its interwoven threads."

Recharge at the Retreat

Swami then summed up the remainder of day's programme schedule of Vedic chanting from prepared texts, readings from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna in Japanese and English, release of a special CD on songs from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna produced for a Japanese audience, a talk entitled Sri Ramakrishna, the Prophet of Harmony, to be followed by a prasad lunch. He then encouraged one and all to stay for the cultural and music programme later in the afternoon, saying that he was pleased that there would be many singers and musicians among our devotees and friends performing for Sri Ramakrishna and that a large audience is always an additional incentive to the performers.

"Don't just leave after lunch," he said, "but stay for this special programme. Besides, the longer you stay in this holy atmosphere, the more you will benefit from the happiness, peace and joy you find here, and I hope that you can carry this special feeling back with you as you return to your daily lives. This is the place to recharge your batteries, to get strength for the battles of day to day life."

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A STORY TO REMEMBER

As Mothers Do

A single mother I admire told me how she struggled for years to raise her four children alone, with little money and no free time. It seemed she was doing all she could do. Then quite un-selfconsciously the energy of the great mother of compassion filled her when her youngest daughter, at fourteen, was paralyzed as a result of an accident. Her daughter couldn't speak or move. The doctors at the hospital said they didn't think there was a chance for her to ever move again. Yet her mother knew that her daughter was still conscious inside.

As mother do, she felt deep in her being that her daughter could be rehabilitated. The mother moved into the hospital room and began working with the girl. She spent a year in the hospital and two years after that at home almost every day her daughter, just picking up the girl's hand, putting it down, picking it up and putting it down, moving something in front of her eyes, back and forth, day after day, until her daughter's hands and eyes began to move.

After three years the girl was well enough to return to school. Now full grown, she has finished law school and is about to be married. Such generosity cannot be forced; it moves through us when we are deeply connected and deeply empty. Such compassion moves through us as a grace, bringing together a tenderness and fearlessness that could never come by any other means.

... Contemporary

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New CD Released

After the chanting and reading, Swami gave some background information behind the release of the new CD, Songs of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, saying that devotional songs have a very special place in spiritual practice. "India has a very rich heritage of devotional music and Sri Ramakrishna not only enjoyed devotional music, but was himself a very good singer. He aroused the devotional spirit of the devotees with his celestial songs. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we find many songs, some sung by the Master and others performed by devotees in His presence. Swami Vivekananda, for example, often sang at the Master's request."

Swami then explained that the Japan Centre will gradually release three CDs based on a series of six professionally recorded cassettes by a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission near Belur Math. By special permission, this Japan Centre produced CD includes a booklet of Japanese translations of the lyrics and phonetic katakana, so that Japanese devotees can sing along. Additionally, the date that the song first appears in the Gospel is listed so one may find reference to the song by date, and also the first few lyric words in English are listed so that English versions of the Gospel can be easily referred to as well.

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In selecting the songs for this first CD from the six separate sources, it was found that the the selections needed to be rebalanced and equalized for presentation on a single CD. For this Mr. Atsushi Suzuki and Ms. Kaori Izumida had the computer programmes and knowhow necessary for the task. "Our devotee in New Delhi, Arunita-san, provided the first katakana version," he said, "this was edited by Mrs. Manjulika Hanari and, finally, Mr. Sakae Machida contributed. The Centre's own Michio Suzuki also provided layout and design for the packaging utilizing a photo of the Temple of



Mother Kali at Dakshineswar, the place of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practice. It was quite a long and complicated process even though the songs had been beautifully recorded in India, and we thank everyone who contributed their efforts and talents."

Swami then requested the Deputy Chief of the Mission of the Indian Embassy in Tokyo, Mr. S. K. Mondal, to assist in making the formal release of the CD and pose for photos. Mr. Mondal received a copy and thanked Swami, noting his great reward for so minimal an effort.

Then to give us an idea of what the CD sounds like, pranam mantras one and two and one of the two songs that Swami Vivekananda had sung upon his first meeting of Sri Ramakrishna were played.

Sri Ramakrishna's Message of Harmony

The topic for discussion was Sri Ramakrishna, the Prophet of Harmony. Swami began by noting the dictionary meaning of harmony as 'living in agreement' and added, "Yes, harmony is living in agreement with others, but I would add, living in a creative way, so that such living together results in joyful, peaceful and productive coexistence.

That harmony nowadays is especially necessary at a personal level in family life and in social life the world over. In personal life it is the harmony of our thoughts, our speech and our deeds. In family life it is living harmoniously with other members of the family. In this class-ridden and caste-ridden society too, there should be harmony. Worldwide we should think of harmony between religious groups. Not only that, but we should also live in harmony with animal beings and plant life."

"Sri Ramakrishna had a wonderful message in establishing harmony on all these planes. Especially regarding religious harmony, he had many wonderful original thoughts. It was this idea of harmony that Swami Vivekananda preached at the Parliament of Religions that made Swamiji famous. Today, with so many religious conflicts in the world, this idea of religious harmony is so important. Because of technological advances the world has become so small that our disharmony has also become very apparent."

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"I would like to point out but one way in which harmony can be established. In fact, it is the central message of Hindu religion and philosophy; the quintessence of the Bhagavad Gita; the quintessence of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. What is that by which we can make the whole world our relative? I believe the most important approach and strategy in establishing this harmony at the personal level, in family life, in society, and around the world, is to see oneself in others and to see others in oneself."

"That Self which dwells in me, dwells in others. The more we can identify with others, the more we really establish harmony. This is the most important idea, and the more we can practice this idea, the more we'll advance harmony. Not by preaching, not quoting from books, not by writing many books, not by organizing many religious discourses on the harmony of religions, but by practicing."

"I appeal to you and pray that here on this day, let us try to really think about this particular point. Let us see how much we can identify, not with just our own body and mind, but with others; members of our family, members of society, the whole world, including plant life and animal life. Because the more we can really identify ourselves with the world around us, the more genuine peace and genuine harmony will be established in the universe. This is real spirituality. This is real realization."

Lunch and Free Time



The morning session had run a little long and at the close of Swami's brief talk, the meeting room and hallway began its rapid transformation into an annex dining hall. Even the bookstore and library were recruited to help accommodate over 100 diners. But with the organization skills of seasoned volunteers and the cooperation of everyone, a delicious prasadam lunch of curries, fruits and sweets, hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Syamal Kar, was served and people were seated. Swami, himself, led grace upstairs before retiring to the main dining area downstairs where the others were waiting.



Immediately after lunch, clean-up began and the meeting room began yet another transformation into a performance hall complete with a stage. As instruments, microphones and video cameras were being readied and tested, many took advantage of the fine weather to enjoy the outdoors and local environs. The playful squeals of children were everywhere. The bookstore, library, and every open space was abuzz with activity. Some sought out areas to read, sit or rest with measured success and the muffled sounds of musicians warming up their instruments and voices emanated through the halls.

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Thought of the Month

A foolish man seeks happiness in the distance, the wise grows it under his feet.

... James Oppenheim

March Retreat (from page 5)



Mrs. Rita Kar - Mr. Ashish Trivedi - Mrs. Debarati Bose - Mr. Subhas Mukhopadhyay

Music and Cultural Programme

At 2:45 Swami again welcomed everyone to the afternoon session and was pleased that so many had stayed on for the music program. He reminded all that devotional music plays an important role in spiritual practice and that this was the fourth consecutive year that a music programme was presented as part of the Centre's annual Sri Ramakrishna birth celebration. The performers represented Japan, India, Bangladesh, Canada, and the United States and the languages included Bengali, Hindi, Japanese and English.



Ms. Kaori (Shanti) Izumida - Some of the Crowd - Lonnie

Mrs Rita Kar was first to take the stage, accompanying herself on harmonium as she sang a song devoted to Mother Kali in Bengali. Next up was Mr. Ashish Trivedi, also on harmonium with Mr. Dinesh Dyoundi on tabla, offering a Ramachandra bhajan in Hindi. Then Mrs. Debarati Bose also sang two beautiful Hindi bhajans and a piece by Rabindranath Tagore accompanied only by Dinesh on tabla. Next up was Mr. Subhas Mukhopadhyay, on a visit from his home in Canada,

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accompanying himself on harmonium as he performed devotional songs on Sri Ramakrishna and Mother Kali. Ms. Kaori (Shanti) Izumida then explained the lyrics of an original devotional song to Sri Ramakrishna in both English and Japanese. The song itself was presented with prerecorded backtracks, Dinesh on tabla and Shanti-san on vocals, shamisen and keyboards. Shanti-san followed with another original song devoted to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda requesting all to join in singing the chorus, the backtrack instrumentation for this song also included tanpura. Mr. Jerome Gomes, originally from Bangladesh, sang three lively numbers in Bengali and Hindi accompanying himself on harmonium with Dinesh continuing tabla duties. At Swami's request he also played a popular, traditional Bengali folk song. Lonnie then offered two original songs, On This Ocean and I Take Your Name, accompanied by backtracks and Dinesh on tabla.

A short five-minute break was then called as the stage was set for the 'headline' performance, a spectacular sitar recital featuring Mr. Kenji Inoue, with Dinesh on tabla and Ms. Aiko Ikeda on tanpura. The audience was enthusiastic throughout the afternoon programme and offered all the performers very warm applause, but the atmosphere created by the sitar recital was especially infectious and most appreciated by all in attendance. •



Island Hopping with the Swami

- On March 25, paid a visit to Miyazaki and gave his first talk to a group of 20 on the topic, Peace. Swami notes that the Q & A session was especially lively and that the participants showed a lot of interest in the new CD release on songs from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and the new Japanese Bhagavad Gita.
- On March 26, Swami gave a talk in Beppu on karma yoga organized by the Shinriki family. The talk was attended by local residents as well as interested parties from Kumamoto, Nagasaki and Oita. Swami reports that Professor D. N. Sinha of Asia Pacific University took very good care of him during his stay there.

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