



# the VEDANTA *Kyokai*

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN



Swami Vagishananda in Zushi

## Monthly Calendar

• Birthdays •

Swami Ramakrishnananda  
Friday, Aug 2

Swami Niranjanananda  
Friday, Aug 19

Swami Advaitananda  
Friday, Sep 2

Swami Abhedananda  
Monday, 26 Sep

Swami Akhandananda  
Monday, 3 Oct

• Kyokai Events •

OCTOBER RETREAT

Sunday, October 15, 11 a.m.

All are cordially invited.

*Om*

## ✧ Thus Spake ✧

*"Even the injunctions of destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God. Destiny strikes off with her own hands what she has written about such a person." ... Sri Sarada Devi - The Holy Mother*

*"If even a very wicked man worships Me with single-minded devotion, he should be regarded as good, for he has made the right resolution." ... Sri Krishna*

### AUGUST RETREAT

## The Message of Sri Krishna

A talk by Swami Vagishananda,  
President, Ramakrishna Math, Mumbai

The Vedanta Society of Japan was honored to receive Revered Swami Vagishanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Math, Mumbai, as special guest and speaker for the August Zushi Retreat was held on Sunday, August 20. The topic of the swami's talk was The Message of Sri Krishna, to commemorate the birth of Sri Krishna, celebrated annually as Janmashtami in India on 15 August of this year.

After being introduced by the Society's Secretary, Mr. Osonoi, Swami Vagishananda thanked all who had assembled on the hot August day and also offered the greetings and good wishes of all the devotees and monks of the the Ramakrishna Math at Mumbai. He also thanked Mr. Ito for translating the talk.

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## Swami Vagishananda and Japanese Devotees Visit Zushi Beach, Marina and Kamakura

### The Message of Sri Krishna - Talk by Swami Vagishananda [from page 1]

"I am also very grateful to Swami Medhasananda for calling on me to visit Japan," he continued. "I would have really missed something in my life had I not visited this very beautiful country." The swami went on to explain that from his childhood he had heard much about Japan; a progressive country, a very disciplined country, where all were literate. Having heard those things, as a student in 1945 he then heard about the "tragic incidents" of Nagasaki and Hiroshima as well. Then in college from 1947- 49 his fellow students had also learned that those devastated areas were already indistinguishable as new cities and a whole nation had arisen from the ashes. "I come to pay my respects to you this morning, and to discuss the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Krishna," he said.



Swami then launched into his talk with stanzas from the Bhagavad Gita in both Sanskrit and English: "Whenever there is a decline of Dharma and an ascendance of Adharma, then, O scion of Bharata, I manifest Myself in a body. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of Dharma, I am born from age to age."

"This is why Sri Krishna had to be born. When the people become wicked, when adharma prevails, meaning injustice and unrighteousness, and common people suffer, God descends in a human form and reestablishes Dharma. We forget our religion, we forget our own traditions. When we stray too far from Dharma, we are too materialistic, our minds are too engrossed in gross matter, and we forget our true nature. For this reason we become a materialistic person, a selfish person. We become so selfish, we destroy each other. So God comes to show us the righteous path."



Reciting from the booklet, Thus Spake Sri Krishna, the swami continued, "O You, God Supreme, I bow down to You. You are the highest of the highest. Who can see Your infinite glory? You are the innermost ruler of every heart. Your paths are mysterious. Your ways are blessed. You wipe away tears of Your devotees. You destroy the wickedness of the wicked. What sweetness is in remembering you. You are the Lord Supreme. You are indeed the Vedas. You are the Truth. You are the goal of all disciplines. Your lovers meditate on Your blissful form and become lost in the joy thereof. Shower Your grace upon me, O Lord, in Your mercy look upon me."

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**Sri Krishna - Swami Vagishananda** [from page 2]

The swami then read the brief life story of Sri Krishna outlined in the same booklet. "As I mentioned before, when God takes a human body, He comes with a mission, a purpose. That purpose is to make us know, to realize, who we are. We, the human being, have forgotten our own nature, our own identity, We are all God. Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) gave a wonderful definition of our Self: 'We are all God. The Divinity is already within us. We have to manifest it either by karma yoga, or by bhakti yoga, or by raja yoga, or by jnana yoga, whichever method I like or suits me. Each soul is potentially divine. Whether I am a sinner or a saint, it doesn't matter. These are all outer coatings. Within me there is immortal bliss, peace; this thing we have forgotten of our own nature.' Swamiji is urging us to find our own identity."

"People, whether from a highly developed country, a developing country or a poor country, are all imperfect. What is the meaning of imperfection? We are all led by our own impulses; our eyes, our nose, our ears, our tongue, our hand, they are always causing our mind to drift toward sense objects. We have no control over our mind with which to control the senses. This is called imperfection. This imperfection leads to anger, hatred, jealousy, aversion, and what not. And for this reason, we encroach upon other's territory, or we make atom bombs, and we destroy our whole universe. All this is coming because we have all forgotten that come from the same source. Whether I may be in Japan or India or England or Russia or the USA, it doesn't matter. We have all come from God, we have to go back to God, and that thing we have forgotten. It is for this reason They come, They have to come, in a human form to give this eternal message. That you are all divine, find your divinity by any means."

"How can an imperfect man be ascended to perfection? It is the God-man who comes ages after ages. They come to show us that chastity, purity, truthfulness, fearlessness, childlike simplicity is our

birthright. This is the main thing you find in all great men, all great men who have gone beyond the senses and beyond all our shortcomings and have become our liberators. They have shown us the light.

"In Japan also we find many enlightened souls were born. In Zen Buddhist culture, for example, we find many enlightened souls to show us the righteous path. Because when we have forgotten our own nature, we become slaves to our own senses. So we must recultivate those traits of chastity, purity, truthfulness, fearless and a childlike simplicity as these God-men show us."

Swami Vagishananda then quoted some of Sri Krishna's teachings from Thus Spake Sri Krishna regarding the path of knowledge. He continued, "Knowledge removes the darkness. What is the darkness within me? That I am Mr. or Mrs. So and So, I have got my family, this business, this duty, all these things. And it makes me selfish to think of my own and not of others. But knowledge reveals that we are all one. You must feel oneness with the whole universe. You must feel that myself, with the whole of the Japan community,

with the whole community of the universe, and the Creator of the whole universe are One. This is greatest message found everywhere in the Upanishads and the Gita."

"Though we in Japan and India are separate by many thousand miles; though physically we are all different, within ourselves we all have the same divine spark because God dwells in every heart. Your misery is my misery. Your happiness is my happiness. It is the great motto of all the saints who have preached throughout the centuries. They all tell us this same thing, so try to feel that we are all one."

Swami then quoted selections from the text regarding the path of devotion to realize God and ended his talk with the verse: "Take refuge in Him with all your heart, O Arjuna, by His grace you will attain supreme peace and the eternal abode! •



## *Worship of God as Mother*

Today's subject is three-part; worship, God and Mother. As we have discussed before, God has four aspects; the absolute or transcendental aspect, that is God with no qualities; the second aspect is God with qualities, but no form; the third is God with both qualities and form; and the fourth, when God incarnates as human beings. We shall see that in the worship of God as Mother, all these aspects have been reconciled or harmonized.

We should also remember there are four ways or paths to realize God; the path of Bhakti Yoga or devotion, the path of Jnana Yoga or knowledge, the path of Karma Yoga or selfless work, and the path of Raja Yoga or psychic control and meditation. But here we are mainly concerned with the path of devotion or Bhakti. The devotee directs his emotions to God in worship to realize Him.

In the absolute sense, God has no gender, but the worshipper in the relative plane imagines God with form. As such, we generally chose to imagine a masculine or feminine form with human-like qualities. As Swami Vivekananda once remarked, "If a buffalo were to imagine God with form, the buffalo would imagine a huge buffalo as its image of God." It wouldn't be possible for a buffalo to think of God as a human being, God with human qualities suits a human being's imagination.

In Christianity there are generally two aspects of worship of God; God as the Father and God as His only son, Jesus. But at the same time the Motherhood of God is also practiced in the worship of the Virgin Mother in Catholicism. In many places there are festivals dedicated to the worship of the Mother Mary. There are also rare cases of the attitude of God as sweetheart, such as in Solomon's Songs of love.

In Hindu tradition and scripture there are references to five attitudes toward God. First is looking upon God in a calm and quiet attitude; secondly, the attitude of looking upon God as master and oneself as servant; thirdly, looking upon God as a friend; fourthly, God as a child; and finally, God as one's sweetheart. In addition to these two more attitudes are possible; looking

upon God as father or mother. Looking upon God as mother has become very popular, especially in the Indian states of Kirala, Gujarat, Kashmir and Bengal, and behind the worship of Divine Mother a great philosophy has been developed.

Although the ancient Upanishads are generally discussions on the nature of Brahman, the Supreme Reality, there is reference to the Divine Mother in the Kinau Upanishad. It is mentioned that there are eternal battles between gods and demons, in which the gods sometimes win and sometimes the demons win. On this one occasion the gods were victorious and bragging about their strength and powers. Suddenly a goddess appears and warns them not to think it is by their power that the battle has been won, but by the power of Brahman, the Supreme Reality, working through them.

In the age of epics, the Ramayana and Mahabarata, again we see reference to the Divine Mother. Rama worships the Divine Mother as Durga and by Her grace destroys the demonic King Ravana in the Ramayana. Then in the age of the Puranas, there are some wherein the glory of the Divine Mother has been narrated. As the Bhagavad Gita forms part of the epic Mahabarata, there is also a very popular scripture, especially in Bengal, the Chandi, that is part of the Markandeya Purana. Here wonderful hymns to the Divine Mother are found.

Then later in the age of Tantra, the worship of God as Mother has been greatly highlighted. Here not only the philosophy of worship of the Divine Mother is discussed, but also the details of ritualistic worship. Here two aspects are necessary; Shiva is referred to as the transcendental aspect of God and Shakti as the human aspect of God. Thus, in Tantra these two aspects of God have been harmonized as Shiva and Shakti.

But there is yet another case in which the Divine Mother, or Kali, represents both the absolute and the relative aspects of God. To Sri Ramakrishna, Mother Kali represented both absolute and relative aspects. In

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## **Worship of God as Mother** [from page 4]

Her relative aspect, Mother Kali creates the universe, sustains it and destroys it. Sri Ramakrishna had a wonderful vision showing these two aspects of Mother Kali. Once while sitting in the Panchavati garden at Dakshineswar he saw a beautiful woman arise from the Ganges. That woman slowly began to show signs of pregnancy, then eventually gave birth to a child, and tenderly nursed it for a time. Then the same woman took on a terrible aspect and devoured that very child.

We may shudder at this vision, but truth is truth. We never want to see the terrible aspect of God, we only want to see the benign aspect, the kind aspect, God as loving and merciful. But isn't God's hand behind the earthquake, the tsunami, the famine? This is reality. God is not only the creator and sustainer, God is also the destroyer. Of course, in Hinduism this destruction is really only a transformation, a change of state or form from subtle to gross and gross to subtle.

In Sanskrit Pralaya is derived from the word laya or dissolution. It is not the absence of something, however, but where the gross becomes the subtle. It is merged into the subtle and manifests again later as the gross. Behind this change of state works the compassion of Mother, as Her final objective with regard to Her children is our attainment of Nirvana.

One of Ramakrishna's disciples asked him to explain the different roles played by Mother Kali, or how She sports within Her lila. He answered that first there is Nitya Kali, the aspect of the transcendental or absolute, wherein Kali and Brahman, the Supreme Reality, are the same. Then there are Shyama Kali and Raksha Kali representing the two aspects of creation and destruction of God. Then there is Smashana Kali or Kali of the cremation ground, the destroyer. So when the critics of Hinduism say that Hindus worship dolls, it is because they don't understand the lofty philosophy behind the worship of Mother Kali.

That is why one devotee taunting Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Oh, you say your Mother Kali is the creator of this universe, how is this possible? She looks so small and the universe is so big. It is impossible, illogical. Sri Ramakrishna replied that the sun in the sky also looked like a small disc, but it is much larger than the earth. The reason for this is that we are very far away from the sun. Likewise, because we are so far from

Her, not by proximity, but in understanding, She appears small. The more you understand, the more you approach Her, you will realize the infinite nature of Mother Kali.

Quoting now from the Chandi we can get some idea of the nature of the Mother: 'O Devi, O Goddess, by Thee always is everything supported. By Thee always is this world created, sustained and, finally, destroyed. At the time of creation You are the act of creation and all created things. You are that which is sustained and the act of sustenance. At the end of the cycle, Thou art the thing destroyed and the act of destruction.' In other words, there is nothing other than the Mother.

As we see in the Upanishads; like the spider that creates his web from himself and dwells within that web, Brahman creates this universe of Himself and then dwells within it. Mother Kali has been described in the same way.

'Thou art the Supreme Knowledge, Maya, intellect, memory, delusion and the great prowess of the gods, as well as the demons. Thou, the Self of everything, of whatever thing existing in whatever place or time, the cause or effect. Thou art the power behind that.'

'O Divine Mother, Your energy pervades the entire universe. You embody the powers of divine, diverse deities. You are the object of worship of all the gods and sages. Please bestow on us what is auspicious. We bow down to You in devotion. When called to mind in a difficult pass, You remove the fear of every person. When called to mind of those in happiness, you bestow a mind still further pious. O dispeller of poverty, remover of pain and fear, who has an ever sympathetic heart for everyone in distress.'

You see, here are two very interesting aspects: Inside the heart, She has sympathy and compassion for everyone, while on the outside, She strikes fear in demons and enemies who are very terrified of Her. This means that even when Mother kills a demon, that demon will be liberated, because Mother Kali has killed it, and everyone is the child of Mother Kali. It is not written that only saints and sages, but evil minded persons too, are children of Mother Kali.

When the child misbehaves, the mother chides, scolds and even spansks the child. The child may cry, but behind this punishment there is the good motive of the mother. So when Mother Kali punishes there is also

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## **Worship of God as Mother** [from page 5]

the compassionate heart of Mother Kali behind it, because the consequence will be something great. This may be difficult to understand. You may say, 'but the person died.' Yes, but death is not the end. Because we believe in the doctrine of reincarnation or emancipation, death is not the end of being, just the passing from one stage to another. If we can't understand this, then surely for us death is not an act of compassion, but if can, we see that death is not an end but just a gateway.

She binds us, and again, it is She that frees us from that bondage. You'll see this concept of the Divine Mother in the many songs of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. She binds us, and being gracious, She releases us too. The realization of the devotee is not possible unless She grants it. The grace of the Divine Mother is something very important for the devotee. She not only protects us in this life, but also in the hereafter.

We see that this concept of looking upon God as Mother is becoming popular even in the West. This is because the relationship between the child and the mother is the sweetest and purest, it is lifelong, and in most cases it is unconditional. So to superimpose the relationship of mother to God is something which appeals to the hearts of the devotees. It is also very interesting that quite a few devotees in the West look upon Mother Kali in Her true aspect, despite cultural differences.

Though there was initial doubt as to whether Hindu rituals would be accepted in the West, we see our Hollywood Center attracting so many Western devotees to celebrations such as Kali Puja. You may be surprised to know that they come to pray and really enjoy and appreciate such events. In Laguna Beach one lady devotee installed an image of Mother Kali in her house which is regularly worshipped. Now open to the public as the Kali Mandir, on the day of Kali Puja, a Hindu priest from the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar comes all the way to Laguna Beach, California to perform the puja.

We have been speaking of worshipping God in the image of Mother. As I mentioned earlier, there is another

aspect in which God incarnates as a human being. For an example of this we have the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, representing this aspect. It becomes more comfortable, easier, when we can look upon God as Mother in the form of a human being. The relationship becomes more natural, more spontaneous, sweeter, because communication is possible here. It may not be that easy to communicate with an image, but it is very natural to communicate with one who has appeared as a human being.

That is why we can communicate with Sarada Devi more readily and spontaneously and She is always ready to respond to our prayer. Sri Ramakrishna stated clearly and emphatically that Sri Sarada Devi represents the Divine Mother. It is not only that He said so, He actually worshiped Sri Sarada Devi as the Divine Mother. As human beings we have our limitations, our drawbacks, our failings; we have our aspirations, our ambitions, all these things we can just present to the Holy Mother and wait for Her grace. As we know Sri Ramakrishna would not entertain any worldly prayer, but to the Holy Mother there is no such restriction.

One very senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order once told me, 'To Sri Ramakrishna you should only pray for devotion and divine knowledge, but you can pray to Holy Mother for anything.' She will not judge as to whether this is a secular or spiritual prayer; whether this will do good for you or bind you. She doesn't discriminate. Whatever you want, She will fulfill.

Of course no one wants something that will bring problems upon oneself, but the thing is this; as ordinary devotees, we have so many things to ask for and She has the power to grant that prayer. In my own experience I have seen that whenever I pray to Holy Mother, today or tomorrow, Mother grants that prayer. She is our protectress here in this world and in the hereafter, so let us pray to Her, let us submit to Her, looking upon Her as the Divine Mother, Herself. •

### **Thought of the Month**

*"There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle, or the mirror that reflects it."*

... Edith Wharton

## • A Story to Remember •

### Narada and Two Aspirants

There was a great god-sage called Narada. Just as there are sages among mankind, great Yogis, so there are great Yogis among the gods. Narada was a good Yogi, and very great.

He travelled everywhere. One day he was passing through a forest, and saw a man who had been meditating until white ants had built a huge mound round his body—so long had he been sitting in that position. He said to Narada, "Where are you going?" Narada replied, "I am going to heaven." "Then ask God when he will be merciful to me; when I shall attain freedom."

Further on Narada saw another man. He was jumping about, singing, dancing, and said, "Oh, Narada, where are you going?" His voice and gestures were wild. Narada said, "I am going to heaven." "Then ask when I shall be free." Narada went on. In course of time he came again by the same road, and there was the man who had been meditating with the ant-hill round him.

He said, "Oh, Narada, did you ask the Lord about me?" "Oh, yes." "What did He say?" "The Lord told me that you would attain freedom in four more births." The man began to weep and wail, and said, "I have meditated until an ant-hill has grown around me, and I have four more births, yet!"

Narada went on to the other man. "Did you ask my question?" "Oh, yes. Do you see that tamarind tree? I have to tell you that as many leaves as there are on that tree, so many times, you shall be born, and then you shall attain freedom." The man began to dance for joy, and said, "I shall have freedom after such a short time!"

A voice came, "My child, you will have freedom this minute." That was the reward for his perseverance. He was ready to work through all those births, nothing discouraged him. But the first man felt that even four births were too long. Only perseverance, like that of the man who was willing to wait eons brings about the highest result.

– Swami Vivekananda

(Complete Works 1:193-194)

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