



the VEDANTA Kyokai

NEWS, UPDATES AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

Happy New Year

Monthly Calendar

• Birthdays •

Swami Turijananda
Tuesday, Jan 02

Sri Sri Swamiji
Wednesday, Jan 10

Swami Brahmananda
Saturday, Jan 20

Swami Trigunatitananda
Monday, Jan 22

• Kyokai Events •

NEW YEAR'S DAY
KALPATARU

(Talk-Lunch-Kamakura Daibutsu)

Monday, Jan 1, 12 noon
All are cordially invited.

JANUARY RETREAT
Swami Vivekananda
Birth Celebration

Sunday, January 21, 11 a.m.
All are cordially invited.



✘ Thus Spake ✘

"One may gain political and social independence, but if he is a slave to his passions and desires he cannot feel the pure joy of freedom"

... Swami Vivekananda

"Give up the curse of lust and wrath. Give up delusion and greed. Remember who you really are. Fools are they that are blind to the self."

... Sri Sankara

DECEMBER RETREAT

ZUSHI CENTRE CELEBRATES 154TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SRI SRI SARADA DEVI - THE HOLY MOTHER

The December Retreat of the Vedanta Society of Japan was dedicated to celebrating the 154th birth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. The day started at 6 a.m. with a morning service; mangalarati, chanting, bhajan and meditation. Later, breakfast was served and volunteers went about their duties in preparation for the day's event. At 10:30 a.m. Swami Medhasananda conducted a worship in the shrine followed by arati.

The focus then shifted to the meeting room where Swami led the congregation in Vedic chanting followed by readings from Holy Mother's life in English and Japanese. Swami then gave a talk on Holy Mother's Method of Management (see full report in this issue). Lunch prasada was served afterward and at 3 p.m. the afternoon session began with devotional songs performed by Brahmachari Sumit Maharaj, Ms. Shanti Izumida and Mr. Samudra Dutta Gupta. A question and answer session was followed by meditation. Tea was served from 4:30 p.m. and at 6 p.m. vespers began with arati, bhajan, reading and meditation. Supper was served at 8 p.m. for all still in attendance. •

In This Issue

- | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| • Thus Spake | ... page 1 | - A talk by Swami Medhasananda | ... page 2 |
| • Monthly Calendar | ... page 1 | • A Story to Remember | ... page 5 |
| • December Retreat - Sri Sarada Devi
154th Birth Celebration | ... page 1 | • Thought of the Month | ... page 5 |
| • Holy Mother's Method of Management | | • Christmas Eve Celebration | ... page 6 |

Holy Mother's Method of Management

A Talk by Swami Medhasananda

Many aspects of Holy Mother's life are of great interest, but today's topic is particularly relevant to our personal lives as we too, are managers in some way or other. We manage our homes, our personal and financial affairs, and if in positions of responsibility at work or run enterprises, here too, we act as managers. We practice management at both micro and macro levels. The irony is that while we can be successful at managing affairs at the macro level, we sometimes fail miserably at the micro level.

So many books have been published on management skills and so many institutes have been established to teach business management at the macro level, yet so many broken homes and families show that while we focus our attention at the macro level we pay little attention to how we manage our homes and personal affairs. But charity begins at home. If we are not successful on the home-front; if we cannot find peace in our hearts; if there is frustration in our lives; what is finally achieved by corporate or business success? So we have to also pay close attention to the home and family, while we give the corporate world the attention it needs.

Household Work

Today we will discuss how the Holy Mother managed her household. This may help us with better management of our personal lives. Even in her childhood days in Jayrambati, young Sarada had to take care of her brothers. She had to help her mother. They were extremely poor; so to maintain the family and a livelihood, they had to work hard. This continued long after her marriage to Sri Ramakrishna.

Later on when she joined Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar she continued to work very hard; cooking, serving, cleaning, while looking after her husband, his mother and even devotees. Some devotees would stay with the Master while others visited. Again, among these devotees were both females and males requiring particular attention. Later still, when Sri Ramakrishna required treatment at Shyampukur and Cossipore, Holy Mother followed and endured all manner of inconvenience just to serve Sri Ramakrishna.

Mission Work

After Sri Ramakrishna's passing, Sarada Devi lived for some years at her husband's ancestral home in Kamarpukur. These were days of extreme poverty, sometimes going without even salt to spice her rice and vegetables. She wore threadbare cloth, yet she never complained. Being invited by the devotees, she returned to Calcutta (Kolkata) where gradually an increasingly steady stream of devotees would visit seeking spiritual advice or initiation. She soon found it difficult to get proper rest.

At times Holy Mother would return to her ancestral home in Jayrambati. Here, in spite of all the inconveniences due to poor rural communications, many devotees would flock to

meet the Holy Mother because of its more relaxed atmosphere. While she stayed in Calcutta it was a little more difficult for common devotees, especially male devotees, to have private audiences with her; as the many attendants there were protective and maintained strict formalities and schedules.

On the other hand, Holy Mother's relatives were in Jayrambati and they were always troublesome. Her brothers were often petty, quarrelsome and pestered her for money, while their wives displayed jealous and superstitious behaviors. Then there was her youngest brother's daughter, Radhu, whom the Holy Mother raised as her own. This girl was willful and childish and even tormented the Holy Mother on many occasions. Radhu's mother, Surabala, was known as the 'Mad Aunt' and she, too, continually caused trouble for Holy Mother. Additionally, Mother cared for her old uncle who was living a retired life.

In this rural setting there were also attendant monks, servants, domestic animals and pets to be cared for. One can imagine how busy everyday life was in Jayrambati; cooking for the devotees; making arrangements for their stays - often days at a time; giving spiritual instruction and initiation; the daily worship and offerings to Sri Ramakrishna; neighbors and visitors from neighboring villages; all would come to Holy Mother. She would attend to them all without discrimination; without discrimination of cast - high or low; without discrimination of religion - both Hindus and Muslims came; without discrimination of social status - both rich and poor came; all were welcomed by the Holy Mother.

Calm, Quiet Joy and Sincerity

[cont on page 3]

December Retreat [from page 2]

As we can see, the Holy Mother's life was full of problems and troubles in Jayrambati. But what was her management style, how did she cope with all this? Firstly, while we often express our dissatisfaction with doing monotonous, insignificant work, Holy Mother would do the same, at times tedious tasks, day in and day out maintaining a spirit of sincerity and joy. Rather than seeking out ways to break the monotony as we will, she found pleasure in everyday work. Secondly, Holy Mother also had the ability to complete tasks to perfection in a short time. Thirdly, if we had to deal with a fraction of the distractions and troubles that were present in Holy Mother's household, we would probably be continually upset. The Holy Mother always remained calm and quiet during these storms.

Though she suffered from dire poverty and ill treatment by others, she never complained and remained in peace and joy. Her simplicity, orderliness and cleanliness were always evident in her household. In Dakshineswar she lived in a very small room with many supplies and it was always in perfect order. There was also perfect restraint of conduct though monks and many relatives and devotees, male and female, were all living together in Jayrambati. Holy Mother was very particular about the modesty of the women and would often say that modesty is the true ornament of a woman.

Loving All Equally

God centered-ness was always a chief characteristic of her household, whether in Calcutta or Jayrambati there was always an aura of holiness. There was daily ritualistic worship, meditation and japam. Holy Mother would impart holiness to others through initiations, blessings and occasional spiritual instruction. The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, would do her duties to everyone with love and respect. She would not discriminate in her love. Indiscriminate and spontaneous love and affection were cornerstones of her method of management.

On occasion a troublesome young girl would visit Holy Mother in Calcutta with her mother. This child always demanded attention from others, especially at home, and would create trouble if she failed to get it. Holy Mother would always give her a lot of prasada. Before departing for Jayrambati once, Holy Mother asked

this child, "Do you love me?" "Yes, I do," was the reply. Then Holy Mother asked her, "How much?" The child stretched out both arms and said, "This much!" "Good. I am leaving for Jayrambati," said Holy Mother, "will you continue to love me?" "Yes," was the answer. "How shall I know that you will continue to love me?" Holy Mother asked. "What proof do you want?" asked the child. "O.K., if you love your father, mother, brothers and sisters all equally, then I will know that you love me." The girl naturally asked how to love all equally without favoritism (discrimination). Holy Mother answered that she should not ask anything of anyone, because by asking and receiving she might then prefer one over another. Only then would she be able to love all equally. This piece of advice so impressed the child that from that day on she changed the course of her life.

Service without Expectations

A lady who once lived with the Holy Mother would sweep and then carelessly toss the broom aside. Observing this, Holy Mother asked why she threw the broomstick in such a manner. "This broomstick is also part of the household," she said, "and it has a role to play, too. It has its own dignity and you should show it that respect." We see here that even seemingly insignificant items should be considered as deserving of respect.

Another characteristic of Holy Mother was that although she never sought anything for whatever service she gave to others, she would always remember even the most trifling present or offering made to her. She would say that anyone who does not appreciate or is not grateful for even the smallest service rendered is more beast than human being.

Selfless Humility

Then, too, Sister Nivedita remarked that Holy Mother would simply present herself as another devotee of Sri Ramakrishna to others, even though as his wife she rightfully held special claim to the Master. No one from outside would know by her words, bearing or attitude that she held such a special relationship. This self-effacement, even as center of her household and matriarch of Sri Ramakrishna's legacy, was yet another characteristic.

[cont on page 4]

December Retreat [from page 2]

One lady devotee remarked that the proof of the divinity of Holy Mother is not that she dispenses miracles, it is that she is worshipped by the devotees as a living deity and shows no egoism in that regard whatsoever. One moment she was literally being worshipped as a living Goddess, and the next she'd run to the kitchen to prepare a meal or wash the dishes for the devotees. With ordinary people, if a subordinate doesn't show us some measure of respect we feel hurt or even offended. On the other hand, when a subordinate compliments us our egos become somewhat inflated.

Principled Firmness

Although Holy Mother was always very modest, humble, gentle and loving, in matters of principle she would not budge. In those days India was governed by the British and a few revolutionaries changed their points of view and joined the Ramakrishna Order as monks. Naturally, the British government became suspicious of the Mission and even thought that some monks would carry on their revolutionary activities disguised as monks. This, of course, never happened. When some devotees learned of the government's suspicions they became concerned for the welfare of the Mission and suggested that these monks not be allowed to continue in the Order. When this matter was referred to the Holy Mother, she declared that either the monks in question stayed or there would be no monks at all in the Ramakrishna Order. She said that fear of possible government action should not be cause to drive out the former revolutionaries.

Holy Mother would not bow to any pressure either. From time to time, two spiritually advanced women, Yogin Ma and Golap Ma, would stay and assist Holy Mother. And as we mentioned one or two monks would attend to Holy Mother as well. It happened that once Yogin Ma became very angry with one of the monk attendants, Rashbehari Maharaj, saying, "Either he stays or I stay." Holy Mother asked her to be calm and answered that if Yogin Ma should choose not to stay it would be her own decision, but under no circumstance would she ask the dedicated monk to leave.

On another occasion a young girl of questionable character would visit Holy Mother. Other female devotees, in-

cluding the wife of Balam Bose, a long-respected devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, held a meeting amongst themselves and decided that if Holy Mother didn't forbid the girl from visiting, that they could no longer visit either. When this decision was communicated to Holy Mother, she said that she would not stop that young girl from visiting and if on that account others ceased to visit - it could not be helped. She restated that she was the Mother of the pure as well as the wicked, and if one of her sons or daughters had become dirty she would wash them and take them on her lap. Hearing the Mother's decision, the female devotees realized their error and the matter was resolved with a dinner at Balam's home with the girl invited to attend.

Learning from Holy Mother's Ideal

It is true that the life of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, was unique, in the sense that she was an embodiment of the primordial energy, Parama Prakriti. Her attachment to Radhu, her niece, was self-imposed so that she could continue to help Sri Ramakrishna's mission on this earth after his passing away. She could have severed that attachment at any moment. Swami Saradananda once remarked that he had never seen such attachment and detachment as he witnessed in Holy Mother: In our case, however, attachment has become our very nature. It is a hard and prolonged struggle for us to get rid of attachment. But it is also true that we can become ideal householders by following the ideal that Holy Mother set before us.

Karma yoga is the primary Indian ethos of life management as explained in the Bhagavad Gita and Swami Vivekananda's writings on Karma Yoga. To begin with, we must understand the difference between an efficient worker and a noble worker; an efficient manager and a noble manager. The Indian ethos of management discusses not only the methods to becoming an efficient worker, but how to become a noble worker - how to become a karma yogi. Production or output is not the only motivation, we should at the same time bring joy and peace in employees and managers. It does not discriminate between important or significant work and seemingly insignificant work, it give emphasis on the method and motivation; the ideal. Mahanirvana Tantra says the purpose of the life of the householder is to realize truth; is to realize God, through day to day work.

[cont on page 5]

A STORY TO REMEMBER

I Just Don't Understand

A pious man who tried to live by God's will dwelled in a valley out in the country. One day a great rain came to his valley and the flood waters rose. The man went from the first floor to the second floor as the rains continued. Finally he climbed out onto the roof. A rescue boat came up and offered to row him to safety, but this man sent them away saying, "I have full faith God. I pray and believe and trust He will care for me." So the rowboat left. The storm continued, it rained further, and soon the waters were up to his neck. A second rowboat came to rescue him and again was dismissed in the same way. "I have faith and trust in God. I pray and believe," and they were sent away. It continued to rain and the water got so high that the man could barely breathe through his mouth and nose. A helicopter flew over and let down a ladder to rescue him. "Come up," they said, "we will take you to safety." "No," he cried with the same words as before, "I have faith in God. I pray and believe and I trust and I have followed Him," and he sent the helicopter away. However, it continued to rain, the waters rose, and finally he was drowned.

He went to heaven and after a short period was granted an interview with God. He went in and was seated in front of the Almighty and began to ask, "I had so much faith in You. I believed in You so fully. I prayed and tried to follow Your will. I just don't understand." At this point God scratched His head and said, "I don't understand either! I sent you two rowboats and a helicopter."

... Contemporary Christian

December Retreat [from page 4]

Often when a modern-day housewife is asked about her career, she may be a little diffident in her response saying that she is 'just' a housewife. But one shouldn't feel this way at all because, as we see from the life of Holy Mother, if conducted with the proper spirit and motivation this life choice is most important. Children can rise to greatness when the mother is also great. Think of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and others; How great were their mothers?

This centerpiece of the Indian ethos of management, nishkama karma or karma yoga, teaches us to not seek God, but to see God and to serve that God in everyone. God is not only in the temple or in the teacher; He is everywhere; in everyone around us. Serve, but don't expect anything in return. Love, but don't become at-

tached. Be active, but remain calm and quiet. Strive for the best, but be prepared for the worst. Lead, but don't be egotistic. Enjoy, but practice restraint. Live this life well, but be prepared for death. Be rigid, but at the same time flexible; be like steel, not iron. Be honest, but at the same time be practical.

Holy Mother was the living example of all these principles. If we can strive to imbibe these practices into our own lives, we, too, will surely become successful at managing our personal affairs, our families and our workplaces. •

Thought of the Month

No man was ever wise by chance.

... Seneca



Mr. Samudra Gupta, Ms. Shanti Izumida and Brahmachari Sumit perform devotional songs during the afternoon session of the December Retreat celebrating Holy Mother's 154th birth anniversary.



Christmas Eve Celebration

The Vedanta Society of Japan held its annual Christmas Eve celebration at Zushi at 7 p.m.. For the occasion, the front of the Centre had been decorated with colorful lights and even a glowing fiber-optic tree could be seen atop the porch. Inside the entry hall more festive lights and wreaths and holly were aglow and in the meeting room a special shrine had been arranged. Upon a tiered, red cloth likenesses of a meditating Jesus and of Madonna and Child were adorned with flowers, garlands, bouquets and candles; and at their feet an array of cakes, fruits, candies, more candles, even some representative grape juice and the articles of worship lay spread out before them.

When the devotees had gathered, the many candles were lit and the lights were dimmed. In this reverential, solemn glow, Swami Medhasananda conducted a brief worship. The lights came back up and Lonnie and Shanti-san led the congregation in the first of the evening's Christmas carols. There were readings from the New Testament Bible in both English and Japanese, followed by more caroling. The lights came down again and with the gathering awash in candlelight from the shrine, Swami gave a talk on the miracles of Jesus Christ. This was followed by a period of silent prayer and more carols. At the conclusion of the programme all were invited to share in a prasad supper. •

Issued by: The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)
4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi-shi, Kanagawa-ken 249-0001 JAPAN
Phone: 81-468-73-0428 Fax: 81-468-73-0592
Website: <http://www.vedanta.jp> Email: info@vedanta.jp