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日本ヴェダント協会ニュースレター

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES, AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

AUGUST Calendar

Birthdays



**Swami
Ramakrishnananda**

Sunday, 4 August

Swami

Niranjanananda

Wednesday, 21 August

Sri Sri Krishna

Janmashtami

Wednesday, 28 August

Kyokai Events

•August Zushi Retreat •

Talk by
Swami Medhasananda
Sunday 18 August 11am

Lunch Prasad

Afternoon Q&A
All are welcome to attend!



✧ Thus Spake ✧

"'Comfort' is no test of truth; on the contrary, truth is often far from being 'comfortable.' "

- Swami Vivekananda

"No guide is known who can shelter the world from woe, none who knows what moves and works Thy lofty plans."

- The Gathas: the Hymns of Zarathushtra

Swami Vivekananda 150th Birth Anniversary
Opening Celebration June 9, 2013 Indian Embassy, Tokyo
(Continuing Reportage)

Welcome Address
Swami Medhasananda

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Organising Committee and also myself, I heartily welcome you all to the Opening Ceremony of the year-long celebration of Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary. I especially welcome Swami Atmajnananandaji, Monk-in-Charge of the Vedanta Centre, Washington, D.C., for coming all the way to Japan from the USA to this programme and deliver his talk. We are really happy he could take the time from his busy schedule.

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Welcome Address (from page 1)

A hearty welcome also goes to Professor Yasuyuki Nara, a distinguished scholar of Buddhism and former President of Komazawa University, who also has a deep regard for Swami Vivekananda and his mentor, Sri Ramakrishna. Professor Nara is also one of the speakers for today's programme.

We are immensely happy that Her Excellency Smt. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, Ambassador of India to Japan, is present as our Chief Guest. I would like to thank Madam Ambassador and her Embassy staff for always being supportive whenever we organise similar events.

Though we hold a public celebration honoring Swamiji every year, this year's celebration is special in that we are commemorating his 150th Birth Anniversary; a momentous occasion for admirers being celebrated all over the world, including of course India. Swamiji left a deep impact, not only on his countrymen, including great Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, but also on celebrated personalities of other countries like Leo Tolstoy and Roman Rolland. The Indian government has given such importance to this event that the Chairman of the National Celebration Committee is the Prime Minister of India and the President of India inaugurated the celebration in January of this year.

The relevance of Swamiji's life and message even after more than 100 years of his passing has been reiterated by world leaders like Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and President Barack Obama of the USA in speeches.

In his most recent message to us, which will be read in its entirety later in the programme, Prime Minister Abe mentions Vivekananda's special contributions to global peace, harmonious society, and religious harmony.

Celebration of this event in Japan is of special significance. As you may be aware Swamiji had visited this country on his way to attending the first World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, where he made his historic appearance giving a spectacular speech on religious harmony. He had a profound love and appreciation of Japan, its people and culture and wanted his countrymen, especially its youth, to imbibe some of the sterling qualities he had observed of the Japanese.

Okakura Tenshin, the famous art critic and savant of Japan, had gone to India to invite Swamiji to revisit Japan, and stayed with him for a certain period of time. Thus was laid the foundation of a bridge between Japan and India in Modern times, with far-reaching effects, further strengthened by the poet Rabindranath Tagore and other prominent Indians and Japanese. Incidentally, Okakura Tenshin's 150th birth anniversary is being celebrated this year in Japan.

Present day Japan is in urgent need of regaining self-confidence; setting goals to reach for both the individual and the national life; and to start working towards reaching them as Prime Minister Abe observes in his aforementioned message. In this context Swami Vivekananda's inspiring message of self-confidence, peace and harmony and spiritual values can be of tremendous value to the Japanese.

The organising committee, instituted by the Vedanta Society of Japan, a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission founded by Swamiji, has planned to celebrate Swamiji's 150th Birth Anniversary today in Tokyo, in Osaka on November 30th, and in Kumamoto on April 12th of next year. Various projects have been undertaken such as the organising of exhibitions, seminars, and the publication of books on and by Swami Vivekananda for distribution, especially to students.

The main thrust of these activities is to
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bring a greater awareness of Swamiji to the Japanese people and their youth to inspire them to think more deeply and move forward through serious study of Swamiji's messages. His messages are an elixir for the soul and a tonic for a weak and negative mind, famous for their potential to transform an ordinary life into an ideal life.

Obviously the implementation of these projects requires a lot of funding and the

co-operation of many people like those of you who have assembled here in the name of Swamiji. I earnestly appeal to you all to kindly help us in our mission in whatever capacity you can. May Swami Vivekananda shower his blessings on us all and grant us the strength to carry on his unfulfilled mission in this country of Japan for which he had deep love and commitment.

Finally, I again cordially welcome you all to today's programme and sincerely pray for its success. •

(Continuing Reportage - 150th Birth Anniversary Special Guest Talk)

Swami Vivekananda's Impact on the West: Future Prospects for Individual and Collective Life

by Swami Atmajnanananda

Opening remarks

First, I would like to offer my respectful and loving pranams to Swami Medhasanandaji and also express my gratitude to him for inviting me to participate in this program. I offer my loving greetings to all the respected speakers, and also to all the assembled devotees and friends. I am very happy to be with all of you today on such an auspicious occasion.

Introduction

The topic that was suggested for me by Swami Medhasanandaji, "Swami Vivekananda's Impact on the West" struck me as curious, mainly because we ordinarily think of Japan as belonging fully to Asia and the East. However, that distinction between East and West is slowly disappearing, and Japan was perhaps the first Asian country to begin to bridge the gap. The tremendous advancements in industry, technology, and modernisation that took place in Japan over the past fifty years have also brought along with it, for better or for worse, much of so-called Western culture. So we see many of the ancient Japanese traditions of Buddhism,

Zen, Shintoism, etc., side by side with many of the features of modern Western society. Unfortunately, that often means a trend toward materialism and secularism, and this trend is beginning to show up all throughout all of Asia, especially in present-day India.

The other interesting aspect of this topic is that Swami Vivekananda, through his two visits to the West in the 1890's, himself helped to bridge the gap between East and West. While in the US, Swamiji made the famous statement, "I have a message to the West, as Buddha had a message to the East." And yet that message to the West, given in many lectures, letters, and books, became his message to the world. All of his Four Yogas, Bhakti, Karma, Jnana, and Raja, were either composed or delivered in the US and England, and yet they have come to represent the essence of his message for India as well as the rest

of the world. It is true that Swamiji delivered a whole series of lectures in India while on his return from the West, starting in Colombo in Sri Lanka and continuing on

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to Almora in north India. While his emphasis may have been different, the same principles of Vedanta formed the essence of his teachings throughout his life.

Attitudes toward East and West

Swami Vivekananda's understanding of the Western mind and Western society led him to form certain opinions about the West. Many of these were confirmed after he visited the US, England, and Europe, and some were modified after seeing things firsthand. His understanding contrasted quite a bit with what he perceived as the greatest virtues and needs for his own country, India. To put it very simply, the West was the land of wealth, of materialism, of technology, of organisation. Religion was everywhere to be found, but it seemed to Swamiji's mind to be narrow and often superficial in scope. In India, the situation was practically the reverse. Spirituality formed the very backbone of the nation, but it had failed to put the principle teachings of Vedanta into practice. In addition, the many years of foreign exploitation and lack of social, economic, and political freedom had left the people of India in a state of poverty, disorganisation, and general lethargy, which Swamiji felt was a sign of *tamas* and death. And so, the crying need for India was not religion, but a social and national conscience. While the crying need for the West was a religious outlook that was both broad in its sympathy of other faiths and deep in its ability to transform one's inner life. It was a religious outlook that was more introspective and meditative. To put it very succinctly, his

mission in India was to make the people wake up, while his mission in the West was to make them slow down.

When Swamiji first came to the US, he envisioned a kind of give and take between India and the West: India would provide a more mature spiritual outlook and the West would help India through funds, technology, organisational skills, etc. When we read Swamiji's letters written from the US back to India, particularly to his Madras disciples, such as Alasinga Parumal, and to his own brother disciples, we find Swamiji going back and forth regarding his hope for help from the West.

At times he writes about the generosity of the American people, and then about their failure to do anything in terms of helping the people of India. Of course, much of the problem stemmed from the distorted image of India presented to the American people by the orthodox Christians and missionaries. Nevertheless, Swamiji seems to have rather quickly abandoned the idea that the West would

prove to be a great source of income for India.

Swamiji's opinion of the acceptance of his message in the West also changed quite a bit as he gained more and more experience. The initial reaction to his speeches and the great adulation of the press led to have high hopes that his message of Vedanta would be greatly appreciated by the masses. Later he lost some of his optimism and even wondered that perhaps the enthusiasm would die out completely once he had left the country. But then he

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also understood the immense importance for the Indian work of recognition, not simply by the Western press, but also by the great thinkers of the West, in particular many of the professors from Harvard who could understand the genius and brilliance of his mind. He wrote to Alasinga, "The value of foreign appreciation is in rousing India up (CW 5.48)," and "My little work here [US] makes a big echo in India, do you know? (CW 5.62)." At the same time, he discovered that among the Americans (and British) there was a small but devoted group of devotees in practically all of the cities he stayed in who were sincere to the backbone and willing to follow Swamiji anywhere. Again he wrote to Alasinga, "Every day the people here are appreciating me. And between you and me, I am more of an influence here than you dream of."

Message to the West

And what was that message to the West? Surprisingly it was the very highest teachings of Advaita Vedanta, with almost no mention even of the name of Sri Ramakrishna. If this strikes us as curious, it also struck Swamiji's own brother disciples as such. But Swamiji had his own very good reasons for doing what he did. For one thing, he had a theory about the different stages of development in the East and the West. Swamiji felt that India had become nearly comatose in the death-like sleep of *tamas* and needed to be roused from this sleep, taught to enjoy a little of *rajas*. Not only bread for the poor, he felt, but even a little of luxury would help rouse the sleeping people of his country. It was not the time to preach renunciation. They had had enough of that. Now was the time for intense activity. That is why the phrase most often associated with Swamiji, "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached," was uttered almost exclusively in India, and why his emphasis was on worshipping God not in the temple, not even within one's own heart,

but in the form of the poor and downtrodden, the *Dairidra Narayan*s.

If the people of India were suffering from an excess of *tamas*, the people of the West were equally suffering from too much of *rajas*. Swamiji found their minds to be outgoing, given to enjoyment, material improvement, wealth, and luxury. Having had every opportunity to enjoy the world and its riches, they could also see the limits to the happiness that comes from external things. And so, Swamiji felt that many in the West were ripe for the idea of renunciation, which was also one of the prerequisites for an appreciation of the ideas of Advaita Vedanta. He also felt that they were thirsting for a deeper kind of spirituality than a mere church-going religion, and so felt a strong desire to share with them the glory of the Self within, to try to turn their gaze from heaven above to God within. This was the message Christ wanted to give to the world with his two great messages, "The kingdom of God is within," and "I and my father are one." However, either the message was lost or it was never fully understood, and Swamiji wanted to awaken the American people to the truth of that teaching. Swamiji also wanted to stress the universal nature of religion, the oneness of reality, the harmony of science and religion, and so many more of the pearls of wisdom from India. And once he had settled on the real message he wanted to give to the West, and realised that there was a small but sincere segment of the population ready to follow his teachings, he understood the real significance to his mission in the West. It was not merely to raise funds and help for India, though that was also to come to a certain extent. It was not merely to create a sensation in his own homeland, though that also happened. Rather, it was for the benefit of the many people in the US, England, and ultimately the whole of the Western world, that had the open-mindedness, the discrimination, the sensitivity, to benefit from the ancient wisdom

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of Vedanta.

What does the future hold in store for the individual?

Swamiji's main emphasis in his teachings in the West was on the individual. From the standpoint of social and political life, he felt that the US was far more advanced than India and that India had much to learn from the US. He marvelled at the freedom of women, the upward mobility of the poor, the concern of the masses for those less fortunate, even the efforts to rehabilitate those in prisons. Of course, Swamiji also saw the privilege of the wealthy and upper classes in the West, which he understood to be simply another form of caste. Yet, in general, he felt that it was the collective life that had been developed at the expense of the individual—quite the opposite of what he found in India. In one of his letters to his Indian disciples he wrote, "Liberty is the first condition of growth. Your ancestors gave every liberty to the soul, and religion grew. They put the body under every bondage, and society did not grow. The opposite is the case in the West—every liberty to society, none to religion. Now are falling off the shackles from the feet of Eastern society as from those of Western religion."

From an individual point of view, Swami Vivekananda's contribution was unparalleled and unprecedented. Perhaps never before had so many people in the West been so deeply affected by a spiritual teacher from a foreign country representing a non-Christian religion. It is true that a generation earlier, Emerson and Thoreau presented many typically Vedantic ideas

to the world through their philosophy of Transcendentalism. Christian Science also borrowed from Eastern thought in its own way, and the Theosophists even more so. And yet, each one of these movements was propounded by Westerners after changing and adapting Eastern ideas for a Western audience. Swami Vivekananda was the first authentic spiritual teacher from India to present a genuine, undiluted form of Vedanta to the Western public at large. It is true that he tried to make it appealing to the Western mind, avoiding esoteric doctrines, long quotations from Sanskrit texts, and undue references to cults and personalities. But there was absolutely no compromise in his message, and that, perhaps, is the secret as to why it was so appealing to the people at large. No doubt, even the average person could sense that there was something of royalty, of spiritual greatness, of perfect purity and unselfishness in Swamiji, which also formed a great part of the appeal of his words. But whatever the reason, from the day Swamiji first spoke at the parliament of Religions in Chicago, there has been a real appreciation for the wisdom of the East. In a sense, he opened the flood gates, so that within a short period of time other spiritual teachers from India began to come, so that today many of the basic tenets of Vedanta are commonly accepted by the masses, without their ever knowing the initial source of them. Consequently, it is an increasingly common phenomenon for people to reject the conservative, dogmatic religion of their church or faith, and yet feel themselves to be firmly established in a spiritual path, striving for inner development, transformation, and peace, and accepting the idea that there is an ultimate realisation awaiting them at the end of their journey. This is a trend that only seems to be getting stronger year by year, and it is a very welcome sign for those sincere souls who look upon religious life in this vein.

Future for the collective life of the West

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• Thought of the Month •

"I have decided to stick with love.
Hate is too great a burden to bear."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Though there are more and more people who have a liberal and mature understanding of religion in the sense in which Swamiji spoke of it—as a means to the realisation of one's own divine nature—that does not mean that the narrowness, bigotry, and exclusiveness of religion has died out. It seems to be an unfortunate truth, equally valid in science and in religion, that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. And so we find that there has been a backlash of a very severe nature in terms of fundamentalist, orthodox, movements in practically every religion. We see it most tangibly in Islam, but it is there in Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and other religions as well. So, with regard to the collective life of the people of the West, there seems to be a tension between these two conflicting

forces: the one leading to fellow-feeling, universality, oneness, and love, and the other to bigotry, bitterness, hate, and separation. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to believe, or at least hope, that the forces of good, of righteousness, and of love will ultimately prevail. This was the prediction that Swamiji made one hundred and twenty years ago at the Parliament of Religions. It was he who planted the seeds for the forces of love and claimed the death knell had been sounded for intolerance and hatred. Let us all pray that his vision of universal peace and harmony will begin to manifest itself more and more, killing out the tendency toward hatred and violence. Let us pray that the Vedantic ideal of oneness will draw all humanity together into a single family, so that mutual love and respect will grow in all nations of the West and of the world.●

Unpublished Letter of Swami Vivekananda Found

Very recently, a hitherto unpublished letter of Swami Vivekananda has been discovered. To students of Swami Vivekananda's thought, every such discovery is accompanied with a degree of excitement in that it may throw light on some aspect of his life or teachings.

The letter in question was written by Swamiji to a Rev. Hugh Reginald Haweis (1839-1901) and is dated July 17, 1896. A photocopy of the letter follows on page 8.

53 St. George's Road
London SW.

July 17

Dear friend – Many, many thanks for your very instructive book. I have been going through a few pages already and have already learned a few great and beautiful lessons. One specially where you insist that the life of Lord Jesus is the only commentary to His teachings and wherever the teachings as recorded contradict the life we are sure that the record was wrong. That is wonderful insight and keen reason. I am sure to read the book several times over and learn many a lesson. May the Lord speak through you long – for the world needs and never more than now inspired souls like yourself.

Ever yours in the Lord

Vivekananda

53 St George's Road

London S.W.

July 17th

Dear friend - Many many

thanks for your very instructive book.

I have been going through a few
hours slowly and have already
learned a few great & beautiful lessons.

One specially where you insist that
the life of Lord Jesus is the only
commentary to His teachings and whereas
the teachings as recorded contradict -
the life we are sure that the record
was wrong. That is wonderful insight
and keen reason. I am here to read
the book several times over and learn
many a lesson. May the Lord thank
through you long - for the world needs
and needs more than ever inspired souls
like ~~you~~ Jesus in the Lord
Vinefrank

• A Story to Remember •

Bridging Differences

In days gone by, two brothers, Raul and Johan, who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in 35 years of farming side-by-side in central Germany, sharing machinery, and trading labour and goods as needed without a single problem occurring. However, one autumn, the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference, and finally it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence between the two brothers.

One morning there was a knock on Raul's door. He opened it to find a man holding a carpenter's toolbox. 'I'm looking for a few days work,' Angelis said. 'Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there I could help with? Could I help you?'

'Yes,' answered Raul, extremely pleased to see Angelis the carpenter, 'I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbour, in fact, it's my younger brother, Johan's farm. Last week there was a meadow between us and he took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll go him one better. See that pile of lumber by the barn? I want you to build me a fence; an 8-foot-high fence, so I won't need to see Johan's place or his face anymore.'

Angelis the carpenter said thoughtfully, 'I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you.' Before Raul left for the nearby town of Erfurt, he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and then he was off for the day. The carpenter worked hard all that day measuring, sawing, nailing, and hammering. About sunset when Raul returned, the carpenter had just finished his job. The farmer's eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all.

Instead Angelis had built a bridge: a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other. A fine piece of work, handrails and all, and the neighbour, his younger brother Johan, was coming across, his hand outstretched. 'You are quite the brother to build this bridge after all I've said and done,' Johan smiled. The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge, and then they met in the middle, taking each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder.

'No, wait. Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you,' called Raul.

'I'd love to stay on,' Angelis answered sincerely, 'but, I have many more bridges to build.'

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