



Issue 50

October 2019

Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

Kimberleys

Andrew Tischler

<https://www.truenorth.com.au/spirit-kimberley-andrew-tischler/>

SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna: Patience and Endurance

Look at the anvil of a blacksmith – how it is hammered and beaten; yet it moves not from its place. Let men learn patience and endurance from it.

Source: *Great sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta; page 4.

Sri Sarada Devi: Many Ways to Realize Truth

Prophets and Incarnations are born to show benighted humanity their way. They give different instructions to suit different temperaments. There are many ways to realise truth. So all these instructions have their relative value. For insistence, many birds are perched on the branches of a tree. They are of different colours: white, black, red, yellow, and so on. Their sounds, too, are different. But when they sing we say that the birds make the sounds. We do not designate one particular sound only as the sound of the birds, and refuse to acknowledge the other sounds as such.

Source: *Great sayings: Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother*, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Math, Mylapore; page 104-5.

Jainism: Mahavira: Infliction of Pain on Others

Can you hold a red-hot iron rod in your hand merely because some one wants you to do so? Then, will it be right on your part to ask others to do the same thing just to satisfy your desires? If you cannot tolerate infliction of pain on your body or mind by others' words and actions, what right have you to do the same to others through your words and deeds?

Source: <http://jaincosmos.blogspot.com/2012/11/lord-mahavira-quotes-mahavir-vaani.html>

IN THIS ISSUE

1. News from Australian Centres

- ◆ Adelaide
- ◆ Brisbane
- ◆ Canberra
- ◆ Melbourne
- ◆ Perth
- ◆ Sydney

2. Contributions from Devotees and Friends

3. Feature Articles

A. Jainism

B. Paper on Hinduism by Swami Vivekananda

We welcome you all to the Vedanta Movement in Australia, as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and invite you to involve yourselves and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal Message of Vedanta.

1. NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN CENTRES 11 JUNE 2019 TO 10 SEPTEMBER 2019

ADELAIDE

506 Glynburn Road, Burnside, SA 5066

Email: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com

Contact: Dr Raman Sharma on (08) 8431 9775

Mrs Pathma Iswaran on (08) 8379 5336

URL: <http://vedantaadelaide.org>

Daily Activities

- The Centre functions from 6.30am-12.30pm and 4.00-8.00pm every day. The evening vesper service to Sri Ramakrishna is performed between 7.00-7.35pm followed by *bhajans*, devotional reading and meditation everyday.

Regular Activities

- Swami Sridharananda visited the Centre and delivered discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* for three days in June 2019. A dedicated group of devotees attended his talks. These talks were also recorded.
- On Sundays Swami Vireshananda has been informally interacting with the devotees and speaking on topics such as 'The Importance of Faith and Devotion for Effective Meditation', 'Integration of Personality and Mental Strength for Effective Meditation', 'The Science of Prayer and Repetition of God's Name (Japa) - Effective Aids to Meditation', 'How to Prepare Mind for Meditation', and 'The Importance of Meditation in Daily Life'.
- On Tuesdays, Swami Vireshananda has been informally interacting with the devotees and discoursing on the *Bhagavatam – The Book on Love of God*.
- On Thursdays Swami Vireshananda has been informally interacting with the devotees and discoursing on *Vedanta for All* by Swami Satprakashananda.
- Reading of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, including discussion on relevant points, was held on alternative Saturdays before the daily Vesper Service.
- Some devotees have been providing communi-

ty-based support on a weekly basis at the Centre for meeting the educational needs of under privileged children .

Celebrations

- The Annual Celebration was held on Saturday, 15 June 2019 from 8:30am to 12:30pm. A group of devotees sang *bhajans* while Swami Manyananda performed the traditional worship. Swami Vireshananda spoke on the 'Vedanta Movement: Its Values and Goals.' Many devotees attended the programme, offered *pushpanjali* and later enjoyed the lunch *prasadam*. Swami Sridharananda and Swami Dhanyananda were also present.



The group of devotees from the Annual Celebration

- *Guru Purnima*, was celebrated from 7:00pm on Tuesday, 16 July 2019. The program included chanting *Vishnu Sahasranama*, evening vesper service to Sri Ramakrishna, devotional singing (*bhajans*) by devotees, a talk on the 'Importance of Guru Purnima' and *prasad* distribution.
- *Krishna Janmashtami* was celebrated from 10:00am on Sunday, 25 August 2019. The program included the puja of Sri Krishna, chanting from *Narayaneeyam* (the sections on Krishna's birth) by devotees, reading and explanation from *Bhagavatam* on the divine birth of Sri Krishna, Krishna bhajans by Priya Ghosal with Pravesh Sewrathan on tabla, *aratrikam* of Sri Krishna and *prasad* distribution.



Swami Vireshananda performing aratrikam during
Krishna Janmashtami

- *Vinayaka Chaturthi*, annual festival dedicated to Lord Ganesha, was celebrated from 7:30 pm on Monday, 2 September 2019. The program included singing of *bhajans* dedicated to Lord Ganesha by Smt Raji Krishnamurthy and her student Anshu with Sri Saras on harmonium and Sri Pravesh on tabla.

Other Activities

- The 14th AGM of the Vedanta Centre of Adelaide was held on Sunday, 18 August 2019 from 11:45 am.

BRISBANE

96 Vedanta Drive, (next to 2 Poppy Crescent),
Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300

Email: info@vedantabrisbane.org

Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

URL: <http://vedantabrisbane.org>

Daily Activities

- Meditation and the chanting of hymns were conducted between 6:15 am and 7:15 am on all days except Sundays when it is held from 8 am to 8:30 am.
- *Vesper service (aratrikam)*, *bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were held between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.
- Members were encouraged to visit the Centre

and discuss topics concerning spiritual life.

Regular Activities

- Sunday mornings:- a) Yoga class (8:30 am—9:45 am). b) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* Class (10:00 am—11:00 am). (c) Bala Sangha or children's classes (10:00 am—11:00 am during school term).
- A yoga class was conducted on Tuesday evenings from 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm.
- A discussion group met on the first Monday of the month at Sunnybank Hills (7:30 pm — 8:45 pm).
- A Vedic Chanting class is held on Wednesdays from 8:30 to 9:30 am.
- Religious classes for children conducted by volunteers were held every Wednesday at West End Primary School (3:00 pm — 4:00 pm).
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* (7:00 pm — 8:00 pm at 134 Fleming Rd, Chapel Hill, Qld) on alternate Fridays.
- Chanting of the *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days (7:30 pm — 8:15 pm).
- Prayer meeting (*satsangs*) were held on the first Saturday of every month.
- Devotees took turns in decorating and worshipping Sri Ramakrishna's image every week at the Sri Selva Vinayakar temple, South Maclean, Qld.
- Swami Atmeshananda conducted *Vivekachudamani* classes at Toowoomba on the first Thursday of every month.
- A class on the *Ashtavakra Gita* is conducted at 101 Sharpless Drive, Springfield Lakes, on a fixed day of the month.
- On the third Saturday of every month, a *satsang* was held at the Helensvale Community Centre in Gold Coast wherein chanting, *bhajans* and study of *Bhagavad Gita* were undertaken.
- Yoga, meditation and bushwalking were held on the third weekend of every month at Vedanta Precinct, Vedanta Drive, Springfield Lakes.
- The Centre started a seniors' *satsang* programme to be held on the 1st Sunday of every

month for about two hours (4.30 to 6.30 p.m) beginning from 1st September 2019. Seniors in the community are encouraged to meet, pray, learn simple physical exercises, read from scriptural texts and spend time in communicating with each other during this session. The frequency of this activity will be increased in due course.

Other Activities

- The Annual programme of the Centre was held on Saturday, 22 June 2019 at the Indooroopilly State High School Auditorium. Ms. Charis Mullen, MP for Jordon (Qld), represented the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Queensland Government, as the guest of honour. There were talks by the guest of honour and Ms. Raynuha Sinnathamby, and various cultural programmes:- The Yerongpan Dancers presented their Aboriginal music and Welcome to Country programme, Dr. Baishali Sengupta and Mrs. Namita Deb Roy presented Kathak dances, Dr. Ashwin Sathyamoorthi sang bhajans in his melodious voice, the Sino Sound group presented Chinese dance, Classical Bharatanatyam dance was presented by Nadananjali School of Dance, Easwaralaya Kalaikoodam Academy presented semi-classical dance and East-West Music group presented Sufi-Western fusion music. Children of the Centre's Bala Sangha rendered prayers on the occasion. The programme concluded with dinner. About 400 people participated in this event.
- Nadananjali School of Dance staged a classical

dance programme "Narthana Mala" on 31 August 2019 at the St. John's School of Performing Arts, Forest Lakes, Qld. The event was organised to raised funds for the Brisbane Chapter of Vedanta Centre of Sydney. Over \$9000 was donated by the school to the Centre from this event.



Nadananjali School of Dance

Celebrations

- *Guru Purnima* was celebrated on 16 July 2019 at the Centre. After formal worship, devotees sang *bhajans* and Swami Atmeshananda gave a talk on 'The Significance of the Guru in Spiritual Life'. Food offerings were made and devotees partook of the prasada.



Guru Purnima

- *Sri Krishna Janmashtami* was celebrated on 24 August 2019. Children from the Bala Sangha presented a programme consisting of reading from the events in the life of Sri Krishna, chanting and singing of bhajans. Devotees sang hymns and devotional songs. Swami Atmeshananda performed the worship to Sri Krishna and gave a talk on 'The Significance of Celebrating the Birth of Sri Krishna'. Prasad



Ms. Charis Mullen, MP for Jordon (Qld), representing the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Queensland Government, with Swami Atmeshananda and others.

was distributed after the programme. About 200 devotees participated in the event.



Prasad Distribution on Krishna Janmashtami

Forthcoming Programmes

- *Ashtami puja* of the Divine Mother Durga will be conducted on Sunday, 6 October 2019, at the Centre. The *Sri Sri Chandī (Durga Saptashati)* will be chanted on all the three days of the Durga Puja from 4 to 7 October 2019.

CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 6258 7612 / 0433 593 860

Regular Activities

- The regular monthly Gita classes for 2019 were conducted by Swami Sridharananda. The lectures in Canberra are held at Quakers Friends Meeting House, Corner of Bent and Condamine Streets, Turner, ACT 2612.

Other Activities

- Swami Sunishthananda visited Canberra on Friday, 14 June 2019, and delivered a talk on 'Embracing Yoga in Everyday Life' at the Indian High Commission. A number of talks were presented at the forum by various Yoga instructors as a part of a run-up event to mark

the 5th International Day of Yoga.



Swami Sunishthananda at the Indian High Commission

- The Annual General Meeting for the Chapter was held on the 18th of August 2019.

MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

Email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

Contact: Swami Sunishthananda (03) 8684 9594

URL <http://www.vedantamelbourne.org>

Regular Activities

- The shrine was open from 6:30 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm seven days a week.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation were conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm daily.
- A children's class was held on Sundays from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm.

Swami Sunishthananda conducts:

- A class on Sundays from 10:00 am to 11:30 am on the *Katha Upanishad* followed by an interactive session and guided meditation.
- Chanting, *bhajans* and guided meditation followed by a class on *Narada Bhakti Sutras* on Wednesdays from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm.
- Guided meditation followed by a class on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* on Fridays from 7:30 pm to 8:45 pm.
- A *satsang* on the second Saturday of every

month from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm at 4 Bernard Street, Cheltenham.

Celebrations

- On the evening of Tuesday, 16 July 2019, *Guru Purnima* was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre. The programme included puja, offerings, and *bhajans*. Swami Sunishthananda delivered a talk on 'The Significance of Guru Purnima'.
- On the evening of Saturday, 24 August 2019, *Sri Krishna Janmashtami* was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre. The programme included puja, offerings, and *bhajans*.

Other Activities

- Swami Sunishthananda was invited to represent the Hindu Faith in a Faith Leaders' Seminar organized by Leo Baeck Centre for Progressive Judaism, 31 Harp Road, East Kew, on Monday, 17 June 2019.



Swami Sunishthananda at a Faith Leaders' Seminar organized by Leo Baeck Centre for Progressive Judaism

- Swami Sunishthananda was invited to represent the Hindu Faith at the Interfaith Panel Discussion organized by Karuna Centre (Arnold Janssen Spirituality Centre, Boronia), on Wednesday, 26 June 2019.
- Mr. Govindan Aiyer, Treasurer, received a grant for purchasing a laptop on behalf of the Vedanta Centre of Melbourne from the Maroondah Council at the Grant Recognition Event at the Karralyka Centre, Mines Rd, Ringwood, on Wednesday 17 July 2019.
- A Prayer Meeting was held on Sunday, 11 Au-



Mr. Govindan Aiyer, Treasurer, received a grant for purchasing a laptop on behalf of the Vedanta Centre of Melbourne from the Maroondah Council

gust 2019 at 11.00 am in memory of Mr. Debu Chowdhury, a longstanding devotee of Vedanta Centre of Melbourne who passed away peacefully on Friday, 7 June 2019, at his residence after a short illness.

- Swami Sunishthananda, was invited to represent the Hindu Faith at the inaugural Interfaith Ceremony at the Victorian Parliament in Queen's Hall, on Tuesday, 27 August 2019, on behalf of the Hindu Council of Australia.



Swami Sunishthananda, at the Inaugural Interfaith Ceremony at the Victorian Parliament in Queen's Hall

- Swami Sunishthananda was invited to repre-

sent the Hindu Faith at the INTERFAITH FORUM on Freedom of Religion organized by the Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria on Saturday, 31 August 2019, at the Advanced Technology Centre (ATC), Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn. The ceremony marked the 550th Birth Anniversary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the Founder of the Sikh Faith.



Swami Sunishthananda at the Freedom of Religion Conference organized by the Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria

- Swami Sunishthananda was invited by the Hindu Council of Australia to join the Diwali celebration at the Victorian Parliament on Monday, 9 September 2019.

Forthcoming Programmes

- Children's Holiday Programme, 23 – 25 September 2019.
- Sri Sri Durga Puja, Sunday, 6 October 2019.
- Yoga Workshop, Saturday, 12 October 2019.
- Sri Sri Kali Puja, Sunday, 27 October 2019.

PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yokine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact: Sumita Chetty (04) 38928136

Parthiv Parekh 0430 511 699

Daily Activities

- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, reading

from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.

Regular Activities

- *Satsangas* were conducted on a Sunday of every month. The programme included chanting, *Gita dhyanam*, *bhajans*, readings and *prasad* distribution. These were conducted on 21 July 2019 and 18 August 2019. On the 21st a talk by Swami Sunishthananda was played.
- Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gitā* on 27-29 June 2019. He was accompanied by Swami Dhyanananda.

Other Activities

- A working bee session was held once every month.
- The Vedanta Multipurpose hall is used about 5 days a week by the organization called Prana Yoga, which is led by an acclaimed yoga teacher who is a member of Yoga Australia.

Celebrations

- *Guru purnima* was celebrated on 16 July 2019. The devotees listened to a talk given by Swami Sridharananda in Sydney on the 'Significance of Guru Purnima'.
- Krishna Janmashtami was celebrated through a *satsang* on 25 August 2019.



The devotees in Perth

SYDNEY

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115

144A Marsden Road, Ermington, NSW 2115 (Entry)

Email: vedasydney@vedantasydney.org

Contact: (02) 8197 7351

URL: www.vedantaaustralia.org

Daily Activities

- The shrine was open from 6:30 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:30 pm seven days a week.
- Meditation from 6:30 am to 7:00 am and chanting from 7:00 am to 7:30 am.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The times change on special occasions.

Regular Activities

- Swami Sridharananda conducted his chapter-wise study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā*, on Sundays between 9:30 am and 10:30 am.
- Swami Sridharananda conducted a class on the *Mundaka Upanishad* on Mondays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.
- A class for mothers was held every Monday between 11:00 am and 12.30 pm. Swami Mahabodhananda initiated discussion on *Meditation and Spiritual Life*.
- Swami Mahabodhananda conducted a class on *What Religion is in the Words of Swami Vivekananda* on Fridays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.
- *Bala sangha classes*, which include moral and spiritual lessons, drama and movement were conducted for children every Saturday between 4:45 pm and 6:45 pm during the school term.
- *Sri Rāmanāma Sankirtanam* was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.
- 'Yoga for Everybody' was conducted by qualified Yoga Teachers on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Celebrations

- *Guru purnima* was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 16 July 2019. In the morning Vastu puja, Ganesha puja etc were performed at 4 Stewart Street, Ermington. This adjacent property was recently acquired by the Vedanta Centre of Sydney. The evening *Guru purnima* function included *aratrikam*, *bhajans* and a talk on the 'Guru' by Swami Sridharananda. This was followed by the distribution of *prasad*. There were a 180 people who partook of *prasad*.



The Puja at 4 Stewart Street on Guru Purnima

- *Krishna Janmashtami* was celebrated on 24 August 2019. The programme included worship, chanting of the *Vishnu Sahasranama*, singing of the *Shayama Nama Sankritana* and a skit by the children of the Bala Sangha of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on the slaying of the vicious serpent Kaliya. There were nearly 200 people who partook of *prasad*.



Children of the Bala Sangha performing on Krishna Janmashtami

1. CONTRIBUTIONS FROM DEVOTEES AND FRIENDS

By Russel Atkinson

Song and dance

O to hear Sri Ramakrishna sing!
 What supernal joy that would bring,
 To see the radiant face with beaming eyes,
 As 'Hari OM! Hari OM Tat Sat' he cries.
 Devas and apsaras would gather round
 Enraptured by His mantra's sound.

O to see the Master dance,
 In the bliss of samadi's trance,
 Moving in His magic space,
 Flooding all about with grace.

To see the Master sit still as stone,
 Sightless eyes seeing God alone,
 But radiating joy so deep,
 The beauty caused those eyes to weep.
 Blessed are their eyes and ears,
 That make joyful memories for future years.
 Those who saw were thus thrice blessed,
 To be with a man by God possessed.

Now, long after,
 I fancy that I hear their laughter,
 See the kirtan singers come,
 Hear the vina, cymbals, drum,
 Hear them sing 'OM Sri Kali Ma,'
 Calling devotees near and far,
 To sing and dance with the Master,
 Till they could dance no faster,
 And bathed in joy sink to the floor,
 Drunk with the love the Master bore.

But now, in a distant place and time,
 I, wistfully, dream this rhyme.

By Kaitlin Hanson

I saw our Lord Ramakrishna
 sitting on a red lotus flower
 So beautiful, refined, and delicate
 strong
 Enticing you to get closer, closer
 wanting you to touch
 You know if you touch
 your little self will be gone forever?
 Do you want that?
 Yes!

Oh my Lord
 you have shattered all my beliefs
 I have tasted the lightening, fire & honey
 What do I do now?
 Just love!

Oh my lovely Mother Kali
 Today you let me brush your
 beautiful long hair
 I feel so happy!
 Then you turned and looked at me
 Poked your bright red tongue
 at me
 and reduced me to ashes
 I feel so happy!

2. FEATURE ARTICLES

A. Jainism

Jainism, traditionally known as **Jain Dharma**, is a dharmic religion with its origins in the prehistory of India, still practiced today by several million people. Jainism has as its religious ideal the perfection of man's nature. The universe is seen as being eternal—having no beginning and no end—precluding God from being a creator. Perfection of the individual is achieved through the practice of an ascetic life, without any divine assistance. Jain monastics and lay people follow the same fivefold path of nonviolence (*ahinsa*, or *ahimsa*); truth (*satya*); non-stealing (*asteya*); chastity (*brahmacharya*); and non-possession or non-possessiveness (*aparigraha*), but to different degrees.

Origins

Jainism and Buddhism were both originally orders of monks outside of Brahmanism. Jainism is at least as old as Buddhism; the oldest Buddhist works mention the Jains as a rival sect, under their old name, Nigantha, and their leader Nataputta Vardhamana. The Jain canonical books mention the same kings that reigned during Buddha's life as contemporaries of Mahavira.

The Jains are followers of Vardhamana Mahavira (599–527 B.C.E.) who systematized the doctrine of the three *tirthankaras*: Rsabha, Ajitanatha, and Aristanemi. Mahavira was not the founder of Jainism, but a monk who espoused the Jaina creed and became a seer and the last prophet (Tirthankara) of Jainism. His predecessor, Parsva, the second-to-last Tirthankara, is said to have died 250 years before Mahavira. According to *Uttaradhyayan sutra*, a disciple of Parsva met a disciple of Mahavira, and brought about a union of the old Jainism with that of Mahavira.

Basic Beliefs

Belief for Jains is a normal part

of life – it is not something reserved for the time of prayer or the visit to the temple. It is rarely expressed or experienced as miracles, but it is the giver of inner strength and the triumph of hope over adversity. Belief is seen as the line which continues from past lives to the current life and helps us move beyond death to future lives or liberation. It is the thread that weaves the soul in its journey through the Universe.

Much of Jain belief is based on respect for enlightened souls, wherever they may live. The most sacred Jain prayer, the Navkar Mantra is a salutation to all such souls of whatever faith they may belong. It is a universal prayer. Belief fills everyday life with a sense of purpose and helps us to be contented and thankful. Belief helps us put the material world in its place and prevents it from overwhelming our lives. A distinctive belief of Jainism is that the whole of nature is included in the cycle of liberation – men, gods, animals, insects, plants and all living beings. Consequently, life and its direction are ruled by karma – deeds, and these decide the condition of the next life. Liberation

arises when all karmas are destroyed and the soul becomes pure and free. Ethical conduct is an expression of belief – with values like service, respect, simplicity, selflessness and forgiveness its guiding lights. The word Jain derives from the root Jina, which means conqueror of the inner vices. A true Jain is one who has reached the inner purity of the soul and is not tainted by greed, violence or vices of any kind.

Authoritative Scriptures

The primary sources of authority are the Agamas or scriptures. There is no one bible or main scripture but a whole series of scriptures numbering at least forty-five and some have been lost over the years. These cover a wide range of topics, from the life and times of the Tirthankaras, to the code of conduct for monks and nuns, the values and science of living (Acharanga Sutra), the psychology of non-violence, the science of existence (Tattvartha Sutra).

The Tirthankaras or ford-makers are the primary source of authority for the wisdom of the tradition. The latest Tirthan-

kara, Mahavira was born in 599 BCE. The scriptures are partly based on what he said whilst he was alive, and have partly evolved over later centuries and written by scholar monks and agreed upon by monk congregations. The role of scriptures is important and they have evolved over the years – however the scriptures are not absolute nor are they treated as the last word. They are presented for study and reflection rather than as a precise prescription of right livelihood. They are open to analysis and interpretation. There is a vast artistic, poetical and literary tradition which expands upon the core values and practices. The agamas were passed on orally for many centuries and probably fixed about the 5th century CE.

Authoritative Leadership

There is an order of monks and nuns who observe the highest values of purity, non-possessiveness, non-violence, chastity and non-stealing. They walk barefoot and do not carry any possessions nor are they allowed to travel by car or aeroplane. Their existence is nomadic and they depend on the lay community for their basic food and shelter. They translate the tradition to the lay community through lectures and by example and dialogue. They are present at auspicious events such as festivals and poojas and participate in some temple and other rituals. In practice, spiritual leadership in the community is provided by monks and nuns living in India. Lay people listen to their sermons and consult them on difficult concepts and

for spiritual guidance. Some lay people even adopt certain monks or nuns as their 'gurus' or primary mentors. The Acharya is the highest rank among monks and nuns, and is appointed by the peer group of existing Acharyas. He would be the leader of a group of monks and nuns. Lay Jains are supposed to live an ethical life endowed with these principles and ideals. They observe daily rituals such as Samayik and Pratikraman (meditations and prayers) and visit temples and community centres regularly. There are no middlemen in the act of worship – each soul has to make its own personal efforts to liberation and there is no hierarchy of bishops and priests. There are many festivals, the most important being Paryushan or Daslakshan where there is intense fasting, prayer and listening to lectures.

Founders and Exemplars of Faith

The Jain tradition is believed to be at least three thousand years old. Mahavira was the 24th in the line of Tirthankaras (Prophets / Ford Makers) and he was born in north-east India in 599 BCE. There is scientific and historical evidence of his existence and that of Parshva, the 23rd Tirthankara who was born 250 years before Mahavira. Mahavira was born into the Hindu Kshatriya caste in the Indian town of Vaisali, near the Ganges River. His father was a local prince and according to legend, his mother had dreams and portents that foretold the birth of a prophet son. Mahavira was brought up as a Jain and fol-

lowed ascetic practices. At the age of 30, Mahavira himself became an ascetic, left his home and family and became a wandering teacher, begging for his food. He lived on gifts for twelve years spending most of the time in meditation. Then at the age of forty three, he became enlightened and a jina, or conqueror of life and death. For the next thirty years of his life, Mahavira taught his ideas, gathered disciples who were willing to renounce all possessions, and ordained them as monks and nuns. He attained liberation (nirvana) at Pavapuri near Patna in 527 BCE – Jains celebrate this liberation during the festival of Diwali every year.

A Jina is a victor over the inner vices and weaknesses, one who not only carves his own path to enlightenment, but also leaves a torchlight of wisdom for others to follow in this journey. They were great teachers and wise and enlightened souls, and stories of their lives and accomplishments abound in the scriptures, with much more known about the life of Mahavira than any other Tirthankara. The lives of the Jinas were simple, their sacrifices immense and their compassion boundless. Their lifetime was dedicated to the pursuit of truth in all its manifestations and encouraging others to follow truthful living through a minimization of harm to other living beings. Many were often born in royal households and had access to all material comforts, but chose to give these up to pursue spiritual enlightenment. They were truly courageous and victorious, not

in the sense of victory or power over others, but in the sense of providing genuine and democratic leadership and vision. They espoused the values they preached and there was no hypocrisy and significant humility. Mahatma Gandhi, one of the most venerated leaders of the twentieth century, was strongly inspired by the Jain faith in his movement of non-violent resistance. His mentor, Shrimad Rajchandra, was a distinguished businessman, poet and philosopher who was able to translate the practical dimensions of the faith with great lucidity and insight. Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara is the most celebrated of heroes, but there have also been several monk heroes such as Hemchandraacharya who was a great scholar and poet around the 11th century and Pandit Sukhlalji, one of the greatest Jain scholars of the twentieth century. All the heroes lived simply and humbly, but had very strong aesthetic and intellectual wisdom. They provided vital leadership in many dimensions of life and were able to influence individuals, leaders and whole societies toward positive transformation. Pandit Sukhlalji was blind, but this disability did not in any way get in the way of his scholarship – he had opened his third eye to seek and translate ancient wisdom. Their very life was their message, showing people how to live with integrity, non-violence, simplicity, respect and selflessness. These are the lasting values of sustainable living.

Ways of Living

Belief and Religious Practice

Belief, for Jains, is a very important part of life, in fact the core of life. However, it is not a form of fundamentalist belief or a belief in one truth and one God or the set written scriptures of God. Instead it is a faith in oneself and one's own powers and potential to live truthfully and ethically and overcome hardships and suffering. Prayer and worship is aimed at building this inner strength as opposed to seeking salvation and emancipation from an external being. Belief drives everyday action and provides strength at times of despair and pain. Gods or Tirthankaras are role models and teachers of ethical living. They have lived a life which has helped them attain liberation and left a light of wisdom for all to follow. This wisdom is the Jain philosophy and its virtues. It is believed that right knowledge is the best gift one could have as it shows the path to eternal happiness and enlightenment. The benefits of right belief on individuals and communities are significant, especially in a time of unprecedented global change and transformation. They provide inner strength and stability and a framework for negotiating and adapting to worldly living. For Jains living outside India, belief is critical to their adaption and assimilation. Community is seen as a natural extension of the individual and one of the most important acts is to build a temple and community centre where faith is sustained and nourished through collective action and worship. It is re-

markable how active the Jains are in this sphere even though they are so far away from their homeland.

Worship and the Scriptures

Texts and scriptures have an importance in religious worship, but different Jain sects give different emphasis to these. For example, The Kalpasutra, is a sacred text used by the Shvetambaras during the Paryushan festival and is recited and celebrated during this time. It contains the stories of the lives of the 24 Tirthankaras or prophets of Jainism and rules of code of conduct of monks and nuns. The Digambaras place a strong emphasis on scriptures and their study and encourage discussion and dialogue about them. There is a strong emphasis on this. Even Sthanakvasi Jains attach importance to scriptural study and reflection. They are written in Prakrit and Ardha Maghdi, ancient languages of India which have links to Sanskrit. Ardha Maghdi was the language of common people during the time of Lord Mahavir whilst Sanskrit was the language of the educated elite Brahmins. Thus not only the faith, but even the language of the scriptures was democratic and non-discriminatory. The scriptures were written almost a thousand years after the death of Lord Mahavira. Oral recitation and memorization was given significant importance and is critical even in this day and age. Many religious rituals are conducted in these ancient languages which have been preserved over all these years and even young people in Britain

can recite prayers and rituals which were originally written in these words. The interpretation of these texts changes over time and different emphasis is given by different spiritual leaders and saints. Even lay people are allowed to interpret them and write articles and books based on their interpretations. Many have done so, and there are scholars who are not brought up in the Jain tradition, but are highly respected have done so and there are scholars who are not brought up in the Jain tradition but are highly respected.

Holy Days and Celebrations

There are many festivals in the Jain calendar. The most important of these are Mahavir Jyanti (birth of Lord Mahavir), Diwali (Enlightenment of Lord Mahavir) and Paryushan or Daslakshan (festival of forgiveness). The dates follow the lunar calendar and not the Christian calendar so they vary from year to year. The festivals are celebrated at temples and community centres wherever Jains live or if such facilities are not available then local community halls are hired for this purpose. They are always celebrated collectively and Jains make a point of coming together during these special days. For example, during the eight day Shvetambara festival of Paryushan, there is a lot of fasting. It is a time to apply a hand-brake on life and focus on personal salvation and liberation. The ideal fast is for the full eight days without any food whatsoever – it is not compulsory but many endeavour to do this at least once in their lives. There is a daily communal prayer and lec-

tures and readings from the sacred scriptures. The eighth day is the day of forgiveness. On the ninth day, there is large and colourful fastbreaking ceremony where people come to 'spoon-feed' those who have fasted for the eight days. The distinctive feature of these celebrations is the way in which they spiritually recharge individuals and the community. Faces light up and spirits are lifted and rejuvenated. They play a key role in the renewal of commitment to faith and the uniting of the community. None of these events are exclusive.

Symbols of Faith

Symbolism is important in the Jain tradition. It is manifested in temple designs, paintings and illustrations, printed matter such as wedding invitations and Diwali cards, and in rituals and worship. There is a broad range and there is no one core symbol or central emblem for all Jains. The swastika, however, is often seen as a key Jain symbol and there is a Jain Om which incorporates the Universe and symbols representing the three jewels of Jainism - right faith, right knowledge, right conduct. This is a very ancient symbol which is many thousands of years old and was possibly originally a representation of the shape of the Universe according to the Jains. Symbols have meaning and remind the seer about the core values of the faith - such as the three jewels of right conduct, right knowledge and right faith as the key to liberation. This is expressed sometimes during the temple 'puja' ceremony using rice to draw the symbol. Symbols are

used as an expression of belief and as a reminder of core wisdoms.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is given a very high importance in life and well-being and regarded as the key to spiritual elevation. Most sacred pilgrimage sites are in different parts of India and penance and hardship in the act of pilgrimage is encouraged to help focus the mind on the ultimate goal of liberation and salvation. Shatrunjaya in Gujarat, Sammet Shikhar in Jharkhand and Bahubali in Shravana Belgola (Karnataka State) are regarded as some of the most auspicious pilgrimage destinations.

Meaning, Purpose and Truth

Jains have no theory of creation (the Universe always existed) but an extensive theory of liberation. All living beings possess a soul which is capable of liberation - moksha. For Jains, the universe is peopled by countless souls which are imprisoned by material actions. Only through the freeing of the soul from matter can salvation be achieved. After many rebirths the soul may be liberated. The aim of life is to free the soul from the bondage caused by karma and attain liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth: reincarnation. Ahimsa or non-violence in thought, word and deed is the central pillar of the Jain tradition. Each living being has a zest for life and this must be respected in our thoughts and actions. Suffering can be overcome through perseverance and right living. Faced with problems, one should not seek to blame others but look

for positive solutions and means to overcome the hurdles and develop inner strength and belief. Hardships are a fact of life and accepting them and living ethically is the key to destroying accumulated karma and unlocking the purity and the divinity of the soul.

Rules and Ethical Guidelines

The Tirthankaras (Prophets) laid down the path of liberation for future generations and it was based on core values, right living and conduct and right knowledge and faith.

These core values are:

Ahimsa - non-violence in thought, word and deed

Anekant - respect for different viewpoints and beliefs

Aparigraha - non-materialism and simplicity of living

Asteya - non-stealing and abidance of the law

Satya - Truthful living with sincerity and integrity

Brahmacharya - Restraint in sensual indulgence

The source of these values is the scriptures, which have been derived from the wisdom of the founding prophets or Tirthankaras. Violence, Greed, Possessiveness, Ignorance, Lies and Deceit, Sensual Indulgence are considered to be wrong. Greed is seen as a type of violence and an exploitation of others right to live and be happy. Peaceful living and thinking, modest eating and simple living without greed or malice, honesty and sincerity in thought and action, tolerance and

respect for different peoples and faiths are considered right. Vegetarianism is a central tenet of the faith and diet and exercise are considered very important to spiritual progress. Jains have been strict vegetarians for thousands of years and have developed a vast and varied cuisine which is healthy, nourishing and balanced. Monks even wear a cloth over their mouths and brush the road before them when they walk in order not to harm any living thing, including insects. Jains have animal sanctuaries called panjrapoors and the principle of ahimsa, or non-violence, has inspired many great people in modern times, including Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther-King Jr. Sexual indulgence is discouraged, euthanasia is also seen as an escape from life and discouraged, abortion is also a form of violence and capital punishment is seen as harsh and unjust. War is to be avoided as far as possible, but defence is allowed. Wherever possible, problems should be solved through dialogue, tolerance and diplomacy. Interdependence is the key wisdom of the Universe - parasparopagraho jivanam. Happiness cannot be built at the expense of pain on others. Nature is not separate but a core fabric of life and its protection is synonymous with the protection of human life. Truthful living with honesty and integrity is a vital principle. People should look at the mirror not to admire their own beauty but to see their own imperfections and rise beyond them. Lying, deceit or deception is to be avoided at any cost. Consciences should be clean and should not bear any scars or fears - people should love all, including their enemies.

Non-violence

The philosophy of non-violence influenced Mahatma Gandhi who used to free a whole society from colonialism and later came to influence people like Martin Luther King Jr. Jains have a beautiful psychoanalysis of the methods of ethical living with a pure mind and they believe this is much needed in the world today. Jains avoid professions which involve harm to other living beings such as butchery, leather trade, even military and go for medicine, accountancy, education, dentistry and are widely recognized as highly skilled traders and business.

Conclusion

Jainism Today

At a few million adherents, Jainism is among the smallest of the major world religions. Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat are likely to have the largest Jain population among Indian states. Another state of India with a relatively large Jain population among its residents is Karnataka. Outside of India, East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) has significant communities. Many Jains migrated from East Africa to the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States.

Source:

1. <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jainism>
2. <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralsm/affiliates/jainism/jainedu/mahavir.htm>

2. FEATURE ARTICLES

B. Paper on Hinduism by Swami Vivekananda

Read at the World's Parliament of Religions on 19th September, 1893

The Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission has been observing the 125th Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's historic address at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 over 2018-19. Given this celebration, it is timely to have another look at Swami Vivekananda's Paper on Hinduism. In this paper Swami Vivekananda deals with the salient ideas of Hinduism or Vedanta like the karma theory, our true nature as the Self or Atman which is different from the body, and the rationale of image worship in Hinduism. Image worship is held to be important in Hinduism in order to conceptualize the Divine with our minds. Abrahamic religions like Christianity, Judaism and Islam do not recognize image worship, even though Catholicism employs it in its churches. Here the rationale for image worship is discussed.

Three religions now stand in the world which have come down to us from time prehistoric—Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. They have all received tremendous shocks and all of them prove by their survival their internal strength. But while Judaism failed to absorb Christianity and was driven out of its place of birth by its all-conquering daughter, and a handful of Parsees is all that remains to tell the tale of their grand religion, sect after sect arose in India and seemed to shake the religion of the Vedas to its very foundations, but like the waters of the seashore in a tremendous earthquake it receded only for a while, only to return in an all-absorbing flood, a thousand times more vigorous, and when the tumult of the rush was over, these sects were all sucked in, absorbed, and assimilated into the immense body of the mother faith.

From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the

Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.

Where then, the question arises, where is the common centre to which all these widely diverging radii converge? Where is the common basis upon which all these seemingly hopeless contradictions rest? And this is the question I shall attempt to answer.

The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to this audience, how a book can be without beginning or end. But by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual world. The moral, ethical, and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits, were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them.

The discoverers of these laws are called Rishis, and we honour them as perfected beings. I am glad to tell this audience that some of the very greatest of them were women. Here it may be said that these laws as laws may be without end, but they must have had a beginning. The Vedas teach us that creation is without beginning or end. Science is said to have proved that the sum total of cosmic energy is always the same. Then, if there was a time when nothing existed, where was all this manifested energy? Some say it was in a potential form in God. In that case God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic, which would make Him mutable. Everything mutable is a compound, and everything compound must undergo that change which is called destruction. So God would die, which is absurd. Therefore there never was a time when there was no creation.

If I may be allowed to use a simile, creation and creator are two lines, without beginning and without end, running parallel to each other. God is the ever active providence, by whose power systems after systems are being evolved out of cha-

os, made to run for a time and again destroyed. This is what the Brahmin boy repeats every day: "*The sun and the moon, the Lord created like the suns and moons of previous cycles.*" And this agrees with modern science.

Here I stand and if I shut my eyes, and try to conceive my existence, "I", "I", "I", what is the idea before me? The idea of a body. Am I, then, nothing but a combination of material substances? The Vedas declare, "No". I am a spirit living in a body. I am not the body. The body will die, but I shall not die. Here am I in this body; it will fall, but I shall go on living. I had also a past. The soul was not created, for creation means a combination which means a certain future dissolution. If then the soul was created, it must die. Some are born happy, enjoy perfect health, with beautiful body, mental vigour and all wants supplied. Others are born miserable, some are without hands or feet, others again are idiots and only drag on a wretched existence. Why, if they are all created, why does a just and merciful God create one happy and another unhappy, why is He so partial? Nor would it mend matters in the least to hold that those who are miserable in this life will be happy in a future one. Why should a man be miserable even here in the reign of a just and merciful God?

In the second place, the idea of a creator God does not explain the anomaly, but simply expresses the cruel fate of an all-powerful being. There must have been causes, then, before his birth, to make a man miserable or happy and those were his past actions.

Are not all the tendencies of the mind and the body accounted for

by inherited aptitude? Here are two parallel lines of existence--one of the mind, the other of matter. If matter and its transformations answer for all that we have, there is no necessity for supposing the existence of a soul. But it cannot be proved that thought has been evolved out of matter, and if a philosophical monism is inevitable, spiritual monism is certainly logical and no less desirable than a materialistic monism; but neither of these is necessary here.

We cannot deny that bodies acquire certain tendencies from heredity, but those tendencies only mean the physical configuration, through which a peculiar mind alone can act in a peculiar way. There are other tendencies peculiar to a soul caused by its past actions. And a soul with a certain tendency would by the laws of affinity take birth in a body which is the fittest instrument for the display of that tendency. This is in accord with science, for science wants to explain everything by habit, and habit is got through repetitions. So repetitions are necessary to explain the natural habits of a new-born soul. And since they were not obtained in this present life, they must have come down from past lives.

There is another suggestion. Taking all these for granted, how is it that I do not remember anything of my past life? This can be easily explained. I am now speaking English. It is not my mother tongue, in fact no words of my mother tongue are now present in my consciousness; but let me try to bring them up, and they rush in. That shows that consciousness is only the surface of the mental ocean, and within its depths are stored up all our experiences. Try

and struggle, they would come up and you would be conscious even of your past life.

This is direct and demonstrative evidence. Verification is the perfect proof of a theory, and here is the challenge thrown to the world by the Rishis. We have discovered the secret by which the very depths of the ocean of memory can be stirred up--try it and you would get a complete reminiscence of your past life.

So then the Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce--him the fire cannot burn--him the water cannot melt--him the air cannot dry. The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is located in the body, and that death means the change of this centre from body to body. Nor is the soul bound by the conditions of matter. In its very essence it is free, unbounded, holy, pure and perfect. But somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter, and thinks of itself as matter.

Why should the free, perfect, and pure being be thus under the thralldom of matter, is the next question. How can the perfect soul be deluded into the belief that it is imperfect? We have been told that the Hindus shirk the question and say that no such question can be there. Some thinkers want to answer it by positing one or more quasi-perfect beings, and use big scientific names to fill up the gap. But naming is not explaining. The question remains the same. How can the perfect become the quasi-perfect; how can the pure, the absolute, change even a microscopic particle of its nature? But the Hindu is sincere.

He does not want to take shelter under sophistry. He is brave enough to face the question in a manly fashion; and his answer is: "I do not know. I do not know how the perfect being, the soul, came to think of itself as imperfect, as joined to and conditioned by matter." But the fact is a fact for all that. It is a fact in everybody's consciousness that one thinks of oneself as the body. The Hindu does not attempt to explain why one thinks one is the body. The answer that it is the will of God is no explanation. This is nothing more than what the Hindu says, "I do not know."

Well, then, the human soul is eternal and immortal, perfect and infinite, and death means only a change of centre from one body to another. The present is determined by our past actions, and the future by the present. The soul will go on evolving up or reverting back from birth to birth and death to death. But here is another question: Is man a tiny boat in a tempest, raised one moment on the foamy crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning chasm the next, rolling to and fro at the mercy of good and bad actions--a powerless, helpless wreck in an ever-raging, ever-rushing, uncompromising current of cause and effect; a little moth placed under the wheel of causation which rolls on crushing everything in its way and waits not for the widow's tears or the orphan's cry? The heart sinks at the idea, yet this is the law of Nature. Is there no hope? Is there no escape?--was the cry that went up from the bottom of the heart of despair. It reached the throne of mercy, and words of hope and consolation came down and inspired a Vedic sage, and he

stood up before the world and in trumpet voice proclaimed the glad tidings: "Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! Even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again". "Children of immortal bliss" --what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name--heirs of immortal bliss--yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth--sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.

Thus it is that the Vedas proclaim not a dreadful combination of unforgiving laws, not an endless prison of cause and effect, but that at the head of all these laws, in and through every particle of matter and force, stands One "by whose command the wind blows, the fire burns, the clouds rain, and death stalks upon the earth."

And what is His nature?

He is everywhere, the pure and formless One, the Almighty and the All-merciful. "Thou art our father, Thou art our mother, Thou art our beloved friend, Thou art the source of all strength; give us strength. Thou art He that beareth the burdens of the universe; help me bear the little burden of this life." Thus sang the Rishis of the Vedas. And how to worship Him? Through love. "He is to be wor-

shipped as the one beloved, dearer than everything in this and the next life."

This is the doctrine of love declared in the Vedas, and let us see how it is fully developed and taught by Krishna, whom the Hindus believe to have been God incarnate on earth.

He taught that a man ought to live in this world like a lotus leaf, which grows in water but is never moistened by water; so a man ought to live in the world--his heart to God and his hands to work.

It is good to love God for hope of reward in this or the next world, but it is better to love God for love's sake, and the prayer goes: "Lord, I do not want wealth, nor children, nor learning. If it be Thy will, I shall go from birth to birth, but grant me this, that I may love Thee without the hope of reward--love unselfishly for love's sake." One of the disciples of Krishna, the then Emperor of India, was driven from his kingdom by his enemies and had to take shelter with his queen in a forest in the Himalayas, and there one day the queen asked him how it was that he, the most virtuous of men, should suffer so much misery. Yudhishtira answered, "Behold, my queen, the Himalayas, how grand and beautiful they are; I love them. They do not give me anything, but my nature is to love the grand, the beautiful, therefore I love them. Similarly, I love the Lord. He is the source of all beauty, of all sublimity. He is the only object to be loved; my nature is to love Him, and therefore I love. I do not pray for anything; I do not ask for anything. Let Him place me wherever He likes. I must love

Him for love's sake. I cannot trade love."

The Vedas teach that the soul is divine, only held in the bondage of matter; perfection will be reached when this bond will burst, and the word they use for it is therefore, Mukti—freedom, freedom from the bonds of imperfection, freedom from death and misery.

And this bondage can only fall off through the mercy of God, and this mercy comes on the pure. So purity is the condition of His mercy. How does that mercy act? He reveals Himself to the pure heart; the pure and the stainless see God, yea, even in this life; then and then only all the crookedness of the heart is made straight. Then all doubt ceases. He is no more the freak of a terrible law of causation. This is the very centre, the very vital conception of Hinduism. The Hindu does not want to live upon words and theories. If there are existences beyond the ordinary sensuous existence, he wants to come face to face with them. If there is a soul in him which is not matter, if there is an all-merciful universal Soul, he will go to Him direct. He must see Him, and that alone can destroy all doubts. So the best proof a Hindu sage gives about the soul, about God, is: "I have seen the soul; I have seen God." And that is the only condition of perfection. The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realising—not in believing, but in being and becoming.

Thus the whole object of their system is by constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God, and this

reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect, constitutes the religion of the Hindus.

And what becomes of a man when he attains perfection? He lives a life of bliss infinite. He enjoys infinite and perfect bliss, having obtained the only thing in which man ought to have pleasure, namely God, and enjoys the bliss with God.

So far all the Hindus are agreed. This is the common religion of all the sects of India; but, then, perfection is absolute, and the absolute cannot be two or three. It cannot have any qualities. It cannot be an individual. And so when a soul becomes perfect and absolute, it must become one with Brahman, and it would only realise the Lord as the perfection, the reality, of its own nature and existence, the existence absolute, knowledge absolute, and bliss absolute. We have often and often read this called the losing of individuality and becoming a stock or a stone.

"He jests at scars that never felt a wound."

I tell you it is nothing of the kind. If it is happiness to enjoy the consciousness of this small body, it must be greater happiness to enjoy the consciousness of two bodies, the measure of happiness increasing with the consciousness of an increasing number of bodies, the aim, the ultimate of happiness being reached when it would become a universal consciousness.

Therefore, to gain this infinite universal individuality, this miserable little prison-individuality must go. Then alone can death cease when I am one with life, then alone can misery cease when I am one with

happiness itself, then alone can all errors cease when I am one with knowledge itself; and this is the necessary scientific conclusion. Science has proved to me that physical individuality is a delusion, that really my body is one little continuously changing body in an unbroken ocean of matter; and Advaita (unity) is the necessary conclusion with my other counterpart, soul.

Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal. Thus Chemistry could not progress farther when it would discover one element out of which all others could be made. Physics would stop when it would be able to fulfil its services in discovering one energy of which all the others are but manifestations, and the science of religion becomes perfect when it would discover Him who is the one life in a universe of death, Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world. One who is the only Soul of which all souls are but delusive manifestations. Thus is it, through multiplicity and duality, that the ultimate unity is reached. Religion can go no farther. This is the goal of all science.

All science is bound to come to this conclusion in the long run. Manifestation, and not creation, is the word of science today, and the Hindu is only glad that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages is going to be taught in more forcible language, and with further light from the latest conclusions of science.

Descend we now from the aspirations of philosophy to the religion

of the ignorant. At the very outset, I may tell you that there is no *polytheism* in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence, to the images. It is not polytheism, nor would the name henotheism explain the situation. "The rose called by any other name would smell as sweet." Names are not explanations.

I remember, as a boy, hearing a Christian missionary preach to a crowd in India. Among other sweet things he was telling them was that if he gave a blow to their idol with his stick, what could it do? One of his hearers sharply answered, "If I abuse your God, what can He do?" "You would be punished," said the preacher, "when you die." "So my idol will punish you when you die," retorted the Hindu.

The tree is known by its fruits. When I have seen amongst them that are called idolaters, men, the like of whom in morality and spirituality and love I have never seen anywhere, I stop and ask myself, "Can sin beget holiness?"

Superstition is a great enemy of man, but bigotry is worse. Why does a Christian go to church? Why is the cross holy? Why is the face turned toward the sky in prayer? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church? Why are there so many images in the minds of Protestants when they pray? My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a mental image than we can live without breathing. By the law of association, the material image calls up the mental idea and *vice versa*. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol

when he worships. He will tell you, it helps to keep his mind fixed on the Being to whom he prays. He knows as well as you do that the image is not God, is not omnipresent. After all, how much does omnipresence mean to almost the whole world? It stands merely as a word, a symbol. Has God superficial area? If not, when we repeat that word "omnipresent", we think of the extended sky or of space, that is all.

As we find that somehow or other, by the laws of our mental constitution, we have to associate our ideas of infinity with the image of the blue sky, or of the sea, so we naturally connect our idea of holiness with the image of a church, a mosque or a cross. The Hindus have associated the idea of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence, and such other ideas with different images and forms. But with this difference that while some people devote their whole lives to their idol of a church and never rise higher, because with them religion means an intellectual assent to certain doctrines and doing good to their fellows, the whole religion of the Hindu is centred in realisation. Man is to become divine by realising the divine. Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual childhood: but on and on he must progress.

He must not stop anywhere. "*External worship, material worship,*" say the scriptures, "*is the lowest stage; struggling to rise high, mental prayer is the next stage, but the highest stage is when the Lord has been realized.*" Mark, the same earnest man who is kneeling before the idol tells you, "*Him the sun cannot express, nor the moon, nor the stars,*

the lightning cannot express Him, nor what we speak of as fire; through Him they shine." But he does not abuse any one's idol or call its worship sin. He recognises in it a necessary stage of life. "*The child is father of the man.*" Would it be right for an old man to say that childhood is a sin or youth a sin?

If a man can realise his divine nature with the help of an image, would it be right to call that a sin? Nor even when he has passed that stage, should he call it an error. To the Hindu, man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth. To him all the religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the Infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of these marks a stage of progress; and every soul is a young eagle soaring higher and higher, gathering more and more strength, till it reaches the Glorious Sun.

Unity in variety is the plan of nature, and the Hindu has recognised it. Every other religion lays down certain fixed dogmas, and tries to force society to adopt them. It places before society only one coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. If it does not fit John or Henry, he must go without a coat to cover his body. The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realised, or thought of, or stated, through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols--so many pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on. It is not that this help is necessary for every one, but those that do not need it have no right to say that it is wrong. Nor is it compulsory in Hinduism.

One thing I must tell you. Idolatry in India does not mean anything horrible. It is not the mother of harlots. On the other hand, it is the attempt of undeveloped minds to grasp high spiritual truths. The Hindus have their faults, they sometimes have their exceptions; but mark this, they are always for punishing their own bodies, and never for cutting the throats of their neighbours. If the Hindu fanatic burns himself on the pyre, he never lights the fire of Inquisition. And even this cannot be laid at the door of his religion any more than the burning of witches can be laid at the door of Christianity.

To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal. Every religion is only evolving a God out of the material man, and the same God is the inspirer of all of them. Why, then, are there so many contradictions? They are only apparent, says the Hindu. The contradictions come from the same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures.

It is the same light coming through glasses of different colours. And these little variations are necessary for purposes of adaptation. But in the heart of everything the same truth reigns. The Lord has declared to the Hindu in His incarnation as Krishna, "*I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there.*" And what has been the result? I challenge the world to find, throughout the whole system of Sanskrit philosophy, any such ex-

pression as that the Hindu alone will be saved and not others. Says Vyasa, "*We find perfect men even beyond the pale of our caste and creed.*" One thing more. How, then, can the Hindu, whose whole fabric of thought centres in God, believe in Buddhism which is agnostic, or in Jainism which is atheistic?

The Buddhists or the Jains do not depend upon God; but the whole force of their religion is directed to the great central truth in every religion, to evolve a God out of man. They have not seen the Father, but they have seen the Son. And he that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father also.

This, brethren, is a short sketch of the religious ideas of the Hindus. The Hindu may have failed to carry out all his plans, but if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being, from the lowest grovelling savage not far removed from the brute, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognise divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force,

will be created in aiding humanity to realise its own true, divine nature.

Offer such a religion, and all the nations will follow you. Asoka's council was a council of the Buddhist faith. Akbar's, though more to the purpose, was only a parlour-meeting. It was reserved for America to proclaim to all quarters of the globe that the Lord is in every religion.

May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea! The star arose in the East; it travelled steadily towards the West, sometimes dimmed and sometimes effulgent, till it made a circuit of the world; and now it is again rising on the very horizon of the East, the borders of the Sanpo, a thousandfold more effulgent than it ever was before.

Hail, Columbia, motherland of liberty! It has been given to thee, who never dipped her hand in her neighbour's blood, who never found out that the shortest way of becoming rich was by robbing one's neighbours, it has been given to thee to march at the vanguard of civilisation with the flag of harmony.

Source:

Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama), Vol. 1., eds.