



Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna on the Buddha

Do you know what 'Buddha' means? It is to become one with Bodha, Pure Intelligence, by meditating on That which is of the nature of Pure Intelligence; it is to become Pure Intelligence itself.

Source: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Volume II* by Mahendranath Gupta, Translation by Swami Nikhilananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, page 947.

Swami Vivekananda on Buddha

He [Buddha] did not discuss the existence or non-existence of God. But he showed compassion for others all his life.

Source: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Volume II* by Mahendranath Gupta, Translation by Swami Nikhilananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, page 948.

Buddha on Forgiveness, Living in the Present and Saving Ourselves

Forgive others. Not because they deserve forgiveness, but because you deserve peace.

Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment.

No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path.

Source: <https://ideapod.com/50-quotes-buddha-will-change-spend-life/>

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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 MARCH 2018 TO 10 JUNE 2018

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 is open every evening from 6:45pm for *aratrikam* starting at 7:00pm which is undertaken by the local devotees.

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda visited the Centre and delivered discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* for three days in April 2018 and May 2018. A dedicated group of devotees attended his talks. These talks were also recorded.
- Reading of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, including discussion on relevant points, was held on the first and third Sunday of the month.
- Some devotees have been providing community-based support on a weekly basis at the Centre for meeting the educational needs of children from under-privileged backgrounds.

Celebrations

- The Annual Celebration of the Adelaide Chapter was held on Saturday, 24 March 2018, from 8:30 am-1:00 pm, at the Centre. A group of devotees sang *bhajans* while Br. Swatmachaitanya (Harshal) performed the traditional worship. Swami Sridharananda spoke on the *Life, Teachings and Message of the Divine Trinity*. Many devotees attended the programme, offered *pushpanjali* and later enjoyed the *prasadam*. A number of devotees also attended the evening *aratrikam* and offered *pushpanjali*.



Devotees at the Annual Day Celebrations

BRISBANE

12 Greenwood Street, 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 discussion group met on the first Monday of the month at Sunnybank Hills (7:00 pm — 8:30 pm).
- Sanskrit classes were held every Tuesday (6:00 pm — 7:00 pm).

- Religious classes were held every Wednesday at West End Primary School for children (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 4069) and the *Ramayana* (7:15 pm – 8:15 pm) were held 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.
- Yoga, Meditation and Bushwalk was held on the third weekend of every month at Vedanta Precinct, Vedanta Drive, Springfield lakes.

Other Activities:

- A fundraising dance programme in aid of the Centre's building fund was held at the St. John's College Performing Arts Centre by the Nadananjali school of dance on 31 March 2018.
- Cr. Andrew Antoniolli, the Mayor of Ipswich, visited the Vedanta Precinct on 9 April 2018. He saw the ongoing construction of the Ashram building and had a meeting with Swami Atmeshananda and other members.



Group Photo with Cr. Andrew Antoniolli (Centre)

- Swami Atmeshananda participated in a book launch on Mahatma Gandhi at the Griffith University Multifaith Centre, Brisbane on 9 April 2018.



At the Griffith University Multifaith Centre

- The Federation of Indian Communities, Queensland (FICQ) invited Swami Atmeshananda to participate in a reception to the athletes participating in the Commonwealth games on 12 April 2018, on the Gold Coast.
- On 19 April, members of the Centre, along with Swami Atmeshananda participated in a Networking meeting organised by Wesley Mission to discuss suicide prevention strategies.
- The Vishnu Maya Mandir in North Maclean invited Swami Atmeshananda for a prayer meeting on 22 April 2018.
- Swami Atmeshananda was invited by the Global Persons of Indian Origin (GOPIO) to participate in the Girit Diwas (day of arrival of people of Indian origin in Fiji) on 14 May 2018.
- The Nadananjali School of Dance invited Swami Atmeshananda to participate in their 25th Annual Programme on 19 April 2018.
- The Centre organised an Ayurveda and naturopathy workshop by Dr. Madhavi Kathiria on Sunday, 3 June 2018, at the Centre.

Celebrations

- *Sri Ramanavami* was celebrated on 25 March 2018 with puja, singing of *Ramanama Sankirtan* and distribution of *prasad*.
- Sri Sankaracharya's birthday (*jayanti*) was held at the Centre on 22 April 2018 with worship and a talk on the life and teachings of Sri Sankaracharya.

- Buddha's birthday was celebrated on 29 April 2018 at the Centre with a talk on the life and teachings of Bhagavan Buddha.
- The Vedanta Centre has constructed a multi-purpose building housing the monastery, a prayer hall, a multipurpose hall, library, office, a commercial kitchen and amenities at [96, Vedanta Drive](#) (corner Grindelia Drive and Tea Trees Avenue), Springfield Lakes, Qld. The inauguration of this centre will be held from 28 to 30 June 2018. Traditional *pujas* will be held on the 28th and 29th and a multi-faith prayer session and an evening of cultural programmes are planned for 30 June at the Robelle Domain, Springfield. All the members are hereby invited to participate in these events.

Forthcoming Programmes

- *Guru purnima* will be celebrated on Friday, 27 July 2018.
- *Krishna janmastami* will be celebrated on 2 September 2018.

CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 6258 7612 / 0433 593 860

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda conducted monthly classes on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gitā* at the Belconnen Community Centre, 2 Chandler Street, Belconnen, Canberra.

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 *Isavasya 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* is conducted on the first Saturday of every month from 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm at 4 Bernard Street, Cheltenham. It began in May 2018.

Other Activities:

- As announced in the last issue of *Reach*, Swami Sunishthananda participated in the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week observed by The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne at Deakin Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne, Australia on Saturday, February 24, 2018. This event was subsequently awarded the First Prize in the 6th Annual UN World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize Giving Ceremony held at Jordan on Wednesday, 25 April 2018. His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan awarded the Interfaith Centre of Melbourne a Gold Medal and US \$25,000. Reverend Helen Summers, Founder and Director, and Dr. Nicholas Coleman, Deputy Director were invited to Jordan to collect the award on behalf of The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne.
- Swami Kripamayananda, President, Vedanta Society of Toronto, accompanied by six devotees from Toronto, visited the Centre from 30 April 2018 to 2 May 2018.

Celebrations:

- *Rama navami* was celebrated on 25 March 2018 after the evening vesper service. The programme included offerings and singing of *Ramanama sankirtanam* and *bhajans*.



Swami Kripamayanda with Swami Sunishthananda and others.

- A spiritual retreat was conducted on 31 March 2018. The retreat with 48 attendees was presided over by Swami Sridharananda.
- *Sri Sankaracharya's jayanti* was celebrated on 20 April 2018 after the evening vesper service. The programme included offerings, singing and chanting followed by a talk on the topic, 'The Role of Sankaracharya in revitalizing Hinduism'.



The Programme on Sankaracharya Jayanti

- The Annual Day Celebration was organised on 28 April 2018 at Chandler Community Centre, Keysborough. Honourable Michael Sukkar, Federal Member for Deakin and the Assistant Minister to the Treasurer was the Chief Guest. Mr Vasan Srinivasan, member of the Australian Multicultural Council and the Vice-Chairperson of Mental Health Foundation Australia and Mr. Chidambaram Srinivasan, the Commissioner of Victorian Multicultural Commission were the Guests-of-Honour.
- Buddha Jayanti was celebrated on 29 April 2018 after the evening vesper service. The pro-



Children of the Bala Sangha on the Annual Day



Honourable Michael Sukkar, Federal Member for Deakin and the Assistant Minister to the Treasurer was the Chief Guest at the Annual Day

gramme included offerings, singing and chanting followed by a talk on the topic, "Buddha: The Tathagata".

Forthcoming Programmes

- *Guru purnima* will be celebrated on 29 July 2018.
- *Krishna Janma ashtami* will be celebrated on 2 September 2018.

PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yokine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact: Sumita Chetty 0438928136

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 the first Sunday of every month. The programme included chanting, *Gita dhyanam*, *bhajans*, readings and *prasad* distribution.
- Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gitā*.



Swami Sridharananda delivering his talk at the Vedanta Church

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.
- An Annual General Meeting was held on 13 April 2018

Celebrations:

- *Buddha purnima* was observed at the Vedanta Centre on 29 April 2018. Devotees sang *bhajans* and read an article on Lord Buddha by Swami Dayatmanandji Maharaj.

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 7:30 am and chanting from 7:30 am to 8:00 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 conducts 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 conducts a class on the *Evolution of the Spiritual Ideas in India* 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.
- Parlour talks were conducted by Swami Sridharananda at 1/98 Condamine Street, Balgowlah, NSW 2093, near Manly Beach on Tuesdays between 7:30 pm and 8:30 pm once a month.
- *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:

- *Rama navami* was held at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 25 March 2018. The evening worship was followed by the singing of the *Ramanama sankirtan* and *bhajans* by the devotees. The programme ended with the distribution of prasada. Around 95 to 100 people attended the function.



Ramanavami being Celebrated at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney

- The *Buddha purnima* was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 30 April 2018. The programme included the chanting of *stotras* and a talk on the life and teachings of the Buddha which was delivered by Swami Mahabodhananda. Around 75 people attended this function.

Other Activities

- Swami Vedamritananda, from the Vedanta Society of Southern California visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney from March 10 to 2 June 2018.
- Sri Nagaraj Hedge, a Hindustani flutist, performed at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on Friday, 16 March 2018. He was accompanied on tabla by Sri Bharavi Deraje. The performance consisted of classical items including an item in the Durga rag, which ended with a popular *bhajan*.



Swami Vedamritananda



Sri Nagaraj Hedge and Sri Bharavi Deraje with Swami Sridharananda

- Swami Kripamayananda Minister and Head of the Vedanta Centre of Toronto visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney between 24 April 2018



Swami Kripamayananda at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney

and 28 April 2018. On 25 April 2018 he delivered a talk on Holy Mother entitled 'Simple Mother'.

- The Vedanta Centre of Sydney celebrated its Annual Day on 28 April 2018. The cultural variety programme include Bharatanatyam dances by the Rasika Dance Academy, choreographed by Mrs. Manjula Venkat; Kathak Dance by Ruchi School of Dance, choreographed Ruchi Sanghi; a drama on Mahishasura Mardhini by the students of Vedanta Centre of Sydney Bala Sangha, organized by Mrs Ambika Prasad; Bansuri (Flute) Recital by Nitya Bernard Parker accompanied by Abhijit Dan; Rajasthani Folk Dance by Nartan Institute of Performing Arts led by Dr Kanan Shah; Chenda Vadhyam (Kerala Drums) by Indo-

who has shown keen interest in our activities; Cr. Dr Patricia Prociv, City of Parramatta Council; Cr. Benjamin Barrak, City of Parramatta Council. He represents the Dundas ward in which the Vedanta Centre of Sydney is located in Ermington. There were over 450 tickets sold for the programme.

- On 6 May 2018, a welcome was accorded to Swami Vireshananda. Swami Vireshananda is visiting Australia for one year in which time he will visit the different chapters of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney. He arrived on 19 April 2018. On the 6th he interacted informally with the devotees after his welcome. Prasad was also served.



Members of the audience on the Annual Day



Swami Vireshananda



Mahishasura Mardhini by the students of Vedanta Centre of Sydney Bala Sangha

- Dr. Geoff Lee, NSW State MP for Parramatta, Lord Mayor Andrew Wilson, City of Parramatta Council and Cr Benjamin Barrack, City of Parramatta Council, visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney to hear a special lecture by Swami Sridharananda on the 'Spirit of Vedanta' on Sunday, 27 May 2018.

rhythms. The dignitaries who attended were the Honourable Dr. Geoff Lee, Member for Parramatta, State Government of NSW; Mr. Andrew Wilson, Lord Mayor of Parramatta



(L to R) Cr. Benjamin Barrack, Lord Mayor Andrew Wilson Parramatta Council and Dr. Geoff Lee



L to R) Cr. Benjamin Barrack, Swami Sridharananda Lord Mayor Andrew Wilson Parramatta Council and Dr. Geoff Lee

ON THE SEA'S BOSOM

In blue sky floats a multitude of clouds-
 White, black, of many shades and thicknesses;
 An orange sun, about to say farewell,
 Touches the massed cloud-shapes
 with streaks of red.
 The wind blows as it lists, a hurricane
 Now carving shapes, now breaking them apart:
 Fancies, colours, forms, inert creations-
 A myriad scene, though real, yet fantastic.
 There light clouds spread,
 heaping up spun cotton:
 See next a huge snake, then a strong lion;
 Again, behold a couple locked in love.
 All vanish, at last, in the vapoury sky.
 Below, the sea sings a varied music,
 But not grand, O India, nor ennobling:
 Thy waters, widely praised, murmur serene
 In soothing cadence, without a harsh roar.

Forthcoming Programmes:

- *Guru purnima* will be celebrated on 27 July 2018.
- *Krishna Janma ashtami* will be celebrated on 2 September 2018.

Swami Vivekananda's Poem 'On the Sea's Bosom'

Swami Vivekananda composed the following poem in Bengali during his return from his second trip to the West. At the time of writing it, he was probably crossing the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

1. FEATURE ARTICLES

On Buddha

Based on the Festival Calendar for Belur Math, the auspicious occasion of Vaishakha Purnima for Sri Buddhadeva was observed on Monday, 30 April 2018. Swami Vivekananda, in some of his discourses, extolled the spirit of renunciation exuded by Buddha as well as his compassion for all beings. Sri Ramakrishna, in speaking to devotees, defined the actual name 'Buddha' as being 'Pure Intelligence' itself. The ensuing discussion would firstly give an account of Buddha's life. It would then draw on specific talks and discussions on Buddha by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Buddha's Birth

The Buddha is the founder of the Buddhist religion. Shakyamuni "Shakya" is the name of the royal family into which he was born, and "Muni" means "Able One." Buddha Shakyamuni was born as a royal prince in 624 BC in a place called Lumbini, in what is now Nepal. His mother's name was Queen Mayadevi and his father's name was King Shuddhodana.

The Queen's Dream

One night, Queen Mayadevi dreamt that a white elephant descended from heaven and entered her womb. The white elephant entering her womb indicated that on that very night she had conceived a child who was a pure and powerful being. The elephant's descending from heaven indicated that her child came from *Tushita* heaven, the Pure Land of Buddha Maitreya. Later, when she gave birth to the child, instead of experiencing pain, the queen experienced a special, pure vision in which she stood holding the branch of a tree with her right hand while the gods Brahma and Indra took the child painlessly from her side. They then proceeded to honour the infant by offering

him ritual ablutions.

The King's Delight

When the king saw the child he felt as if all his wishes had been fulfilled and he named the young prince "Siddhartha." He invited a Brahmin seer to make predictions about the prince's future. The seer examined the child with his clairvoyance and told the king, "There are signs that the boy could become either a chakravatin king, a ruler of the entire world, or a fully enlightened Buddha. However, since the time for chakravatin kings is now past it is certain that he will become a Buddha, and that his beneficial influence will pervade the thousand million worlds like the rays of the sun."

Although born a prince, Buddha realized that conditioned experiences could not provide lasting happiness or protection from suffering. After a long spiritual search he went into deep meditation, where he realized the nature of mind. He achieved the state of unconditional and lasting happiness: the state of enlightenment, of buddhahood. This state of mind is free from disturbing emotions



<https://www.pinterest.com.au/>

and expresses itself through fearlessness, joy and active compassion. For the rest of his life, the Buddha taught anyone who asked how they could reach the same state.

Buddha's Early Life

India at the time of the Buddha was very spiritually open. Every major philosophical view was present in society, and people expected spirituality to influence their daily lives in positive ways.

At this time of great potential,

Siddhartha Gautama, the future Buddha, was born into a royal family in what is now Nepal, close to the border with India. Growing up, the Buddha was exceptionally intelligent and compassionate. Tall, strong, and handsome, the Buddha belonged to the Warrior caste. It was predicted that he would become either a great king or spiritual leader. Since his parents wanted a powerful ruler for their kingdom, they tried to prevent Siddhartha from seeing the unsatisfactory nature of the world. They surrounded him with every kind of pleasure. He was given five hundred attractive ladies and every opportunity for sports and excitement. He completely mastered the important combat training, even winning his wife, Yasodhara, in an archery contest.

Suddenly, at the age of 29, he was confronted with impermanence and suffering. On a rare outing from his luxurious palace, he saw someone desperately sick. The next day, he saw a decrepit old man, and finally a dead person. He was very upset to realize that old age, sickness and death would come to everyone he loved. Siddhartha had no refuge to offer them.

The next morning the prince walked past someone who was meditating, who sat in deep absorption. When their eyes met and their minds linked, Siddhartha stopped, mesmerized. In a flash, he realized that the perfection he had been seeking outside must be within mind itself. Meeting that man gave the future Buddha a first and enticing taste of mind, a true and lasting refuge, which he knew he had to

experience himself for the good of all.

Buddha's Enlightenment

Siddhartha Gautama is said to have attained enlightenment and become the Buddha under a Bodhi tree.

The Buddha decided he had to leave his royal responsibilities and his family in order to realize full enlightenment. He left the palace secretly, and set off alone into the forest. Over the next six years, he met many talented meditation teachers and mastered their techniques. Always he found that they showed him **mind's potential but not mind** itself. Finally, at a place called Bodhagaya, the future Buddha decided to remain in meditation **until he knew mind's true nature** and could benefit all beings. After spending six days and nights cutting through **mind's most subtle obstacles**, he reached enlightenment on the full moon morning of May, a week before he turned thirty-five.

At the moment of full realization, all veils of mixed feelings and stiff ideas dissolved and Buddha experienced the all-encompassing here and now. All separation in time and space disappeared. Past, present, and future, near and far, melted into one radiant state of intuitive bliss. He became timeless, all-pervading awareness. Through every cell in his body he knew and was everything. He became *Buddha*, the Awakened One.

After his enlightenment, Buddha travelled on foot throughout northern India. He taught constantly for forty-five years.

People of all castes and professions, from kings to courtesans, were drawn to him. He answered their questions, always pointing towards that which is ultimately real.

Throughout his life, Buddha encouraged his students to question his teachings and confirm them through their own experience. This non-dogmatic attitude characterizes Buddhism even today.

"I can die happily. I have not kept a single teaching hidden in a closed hand. Everything that is useful for you, I have already given. *Atmadipo Bhava* (Be your own guiding light)."— *The Buddha, while leaving his body at the age of eighty.*



Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886)

The Master [Sri Ramakrishna] and Buddha

Friday, April 9, 1886

It was five o' clock in the afternoon. Narendra, Kali, Niranjan, and M. [Mahendranath Gupta] were downstairs in the Cossi-

pore garden house.

Niranjan (to M.): “Is it true that Vidyāsāgar is going to open a new school? Why don’t you try and secure employment there for Naren?”

Narendra: “I have read enough of services under Vidyāsāgar.”

Narendra had just returned from a visit to Bodha-Gayā, where he had gone with Kali and Tarak. In that sacred place he had been absorbed in deep meditation before the image of Buddha. He had paid his respects to the Bodhi-tree, which is an offshoot of the original tree under which Buddha attained Nirvāna.

Kali said, “One day at Gayā, at Umesh Babu’s house, Narendra sang many classical songs to the accompaniment of the mridanga.”

Sri Ramakrishna sat on his bed in the big hall upstairs. It was evening. M. was alone in the room, fanning the Master. Latu came in a little later.

Master (to M.): “Please bring a chāddar for me and a pair of slippers.”

M: “Yes, sir.”

Master (to Latu): The chāddar will cost ten ānnās, and then the slippers – what will be the total cost?”

Latu: “One rupee and ten ānnās.”

Sri Ramakrishna asked M., by a signed note, to note the price.

Narendra entered the room and

took a seat. Sashi, Rakhal, and one or two other devotees came in. The Master asked Narendra to stroke his feet. He also asked him whether he had taken his meal.

Master (smiling to M.): “He went there [referring to Bodh-Gayā].”

M [to Narendra]: “What are the doctrines of Buddha?”

Narendra: “He could not express in words what he had realised by his tapasyā. So people say he was an atheist.”

Master (by signs): “Why atheist? He was not an atheist. He simply could not express his inner experiences in words. Do you know what ‘Buddha’ means? It is to become one with Bodha, Pure Intelligence, by meditating on That which is of the nature of Pure Intelligence; it is to become Pure Intelligence itself.”

Narendra: “Yes, sir. There are three classes of Buddhas: Buddha, Athat, and Bodhisattva.”

Master: “This too is a sport of God Himself, a new līlā of God.”

“Why would Buddha be called an atheist? When one realises Svarupa, the true nature of one’s Self, one attains a state that is something between *asti*, *is*, and *nāsti*, *is not*.”

Narendra (to M.): “It is a state in which contradiction meets. A combination of hydrogen and oxygen produces cool water; and the same hydrogen and oxygen are used in the oxygen-hydrogen blowpipe.”

“In that state both activity and non-activity are possible; that is to say, one then performs unself-

fish actions.”

“Worldly people, who are engrossed in sense-objects, say that everything exists-*asti*. But the *māyāvādis*, the illusionists, say that nothing exists-*nāsti*. The experience of Buddha is beyond both ‘existence’ and ‘non-existence’.”

Master: “This ‘existence’ and ‘non-existence’ are attributes of Prakriti. The Reality is beyond both.”

The devotees remained silent a few moments.

Master (to Narendra): “What did Buddha preach?”

Narendra: “He did not discuss the existence or non-existence of God. But he showed compassion for others all his life.”

“A hawk pounced upon a bird and was about to devour it. In order to save the bird, Buddha gave the hawk his own flesh.”

Sri Ramakrishna remained silent. Narendra became more and more enthusiastic about Buddha.

Narendra: “How great his renunciation was! Born a prince, he renounced everything! If a man has nothing, no wealth at all, what does his renunciation amount to? After attaining Buddhahood and experiencing Nirvāna, Buddha once visited his home and exhorted his wife, his son, and many others of the royal household to embrace the life of renunciation. How intense his renunciation was! But look at Vyāsa’s conduct! He forbade his son Sukadeva to give

up the world, saying, 'My son, practise religion as a householder.' "

Sri Ramakrishna was silent. As yet he had not uttered a word.

Narendra: "Buddha did not care for Sakti or any such thing. He sought only Nirvāna. Ah, how intense his dispassion was! When he sat down under the Bodhi-tree to meditate, he took this vow: 'Let my body wither away here if I do not attain Nirvāna.' Such a firm resolve!

"This body, indeed, is the great enemy. Can anything be achieved without chastising it?"

Sashi: "But it is you who say that one develops sattva by eating meat. You insist that one should eat meat."

Narendra: "I eat meat, no doubt, but I can also live on rice, mere rice, even without salt."

After a few minutes Sri Ramakrishna broke his silence. He asked Narendra, by a sign, whether he had seen a tuft of hair on Buddha's head.

Narendra: "No, sir. He seems to have a sort of crown; his head seems to be covered by strings of rudrāksha beads placed on top of one another."

Master: "And his eyes?"

Narendra: "They show that he is in samādhi."

Sri Ramakrishna again became silent. Narendra and the other devotees looked at him intently. Suddenly a smile lighted his face and he began to talk to Narendra. M. was fanning him.

Master (to Narendra): "Well, here you find everything-even ordi-

nary red lentils and tamarind. Isn't that so?"

Narendra: "After experiencing all those states, you are now dwelling on a lower plane."

M. (to himself): "Yes, after realising all those ideals, he is now living as a bhakta, a devotee of God."

Master: "Someone seems to be holding me to a lower plane."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna took the fan from M.'s hand and said, "As I see this fan, directly before me, in exactly the same manner have I seen God. And I have seen"

With these words he placed his hand on his heart and asked Narendra, by a sign, "Can you tell me what I said?"

Narendra: "I have understood."

Master: "Tell me."

Narendra: "I didn't hear you well."

Sri Ramakrishna said again, by a sign, "I have seen that He and the one who dwells in my heart are one and the same Person."

Narendra: "Yes, yes! *Soham*-I am He."

Master: "But only a line divides the two-that I may enjoy divine bliss."

Narendra, (to M.): "Great souls, even after their own liberation, retain the ego and experience the pleasure and pain of the body that they may help others to attain liberation."

Swami Vivekananda delivered the following talk in Detroit on Lord Buddha

Self - devotion of Lord Buddha

In every religion we find one type of self-devotion particularly developed. The type of working without a motive is most highly developed in Buddhism. Do not mistake Buddhism and Brāhminism. Buddhism is one of our sects. It was founded by a great man called Gautama, who became disgusted at the eternal metaphysical discussions of his day, and the cumbrous rituals, and more especially with the caste system. Some people say that we are born to a certain state, and therefore we are superior to others who are not thus born. He was also against the tremendous priestcraft. He preached a religion in which there was no motive power, and was perfectly agnostic about metaphysics or theories about God. He was often asked if there was a God, and he answered, he did not know. When asked about right conduct, he would reply, "Do good and be good." There came five Brāhmins, who asked him to settle their discussion. One said, "Sir, my book says that God is such and such, and that this is the way to come to God." Another said, "That is wrong, for my book says such and such, and this is the way to come to God"; and so the others. He listened calmly to all of them, and then asked them one by one, "Does any one of your books say that God becomes angry, that he ever injures anyone, that he is impure?" "No, sir, they all teach that God is pure and good." "Then, my friends, why do you not become pure and good first, that you may know what God is?"

Bereft of Motive Power

Of course I do not endorse all his philosophy. I want a good deal of metaphysics, for myself. I entirely differ in many respects, but, because I differ, is that any reason why I should not see the beauty of the man? He was the only man who was bereft of all motive power. There were other great men who all said they were the Incarnations of God Himself, and that those who would believe in them would go to heaven. But what did Buddha say with his dying breath? **"None can help you; help yourself; work out your own salvation." He said about himself, "Buddha is the name of infinite knowledge, infinite as the sky: I, Gautama, have reached that state; you will all reach that too if you struggle for it." Bereft of all motive power.** He did not want to go to heaven, did not want money; he gave up his throne and everything else and went about begging his bread through the streets of India, preaching for the good of men and animals with a heart as wide as the ocean.

He was the only man who was ever ready to give up his life for animals to stop a sacrifice. He once said to a king, **"If the sacrifice of a lamb helps you to go to heaven, sacrificing a man will help you better; so sacrifice me."** The king was astonished. And yet this man was without any motive power. He stands as the perfection of the active type, and the very height to which he attained shows that through the power of work we can also attain to the highest spirituality.

To many the path becomes easier

if they believe in God. But the life of Buddha shows that even a man who does not believe in God, has no metaphysics, belongs to no sects, and does not go to any Church, or temple, and is a confessed materialist, even he can attain to the highest. We have no right to judge him. I wish I had one infinitesimal part of **Buddha's heart. Buddha may or may not have believed in God; that does not matter to me.** He reached the same state of perfection to which others come by Bhakti - love of God - Yoga, or Jnâna. Perfection does not come from belief or faith. Talk does not count for anything. Perfection comes from the disinterested performance of action.

Swami Vivekananda also addressed an audience in Baltimore on the religion of Buddha. This was published in the Morning Herald, October 22, 1894.

Introduction:

An audience that filled the Lyceum Theatre [Baltimore] from pit to dome assembled last night at the second of the series of meetings held by the Vrooman Brothers in the interest of **'Dynamic Religion'**. Fully 3000 persons were present. The speakers of the evening were seated on the stage, the Rev. Vivekananda being an object of particular interest to all. He wore a yellow turban and red robe tied in at the waist with sash of the same colour, which added to the Oriental cast of his features and invested him with a peculiar interest. His address was delivered in an easy, unembarrassed manner, his diction being perfect and his accent

similar to that of a cultured member of the Latin race familiar with the English language. He said in part:

The High Priest Speaks

Buddha began to found the religion of India 600 years before the birth of Christ. He found the religion of India at that time mainly engaged in eternal discussions upon the nature of the human soul. There was no remedy according to the ideas then prevailing for the cure of religious ills but sacrifices of animals, sacrificial altars and similar methods.

In the midst of this system a priest was born who was a member of one of the leading families who was the founder of Buddhism. His was, in the first place, not the founding of a new religion, but a movement of reformation. He believed in the good of all. His religion, as formulated by him, considered of the discovery of **three things: First, 'There is an evil'; second: 'What is the cause of this evil?' This he ascribed to the desires of men to be superior to others, an evil that could be cured by unselfishness. Third, 'This evil is curable by becoming unselfish.'** Force, he concluded, could not cure it; dirt cannot wash dirt; hate cannot cure hate.

This was the basis of his religion. So long a society tries to cure human selfishness by laws and institutions whose aim is to force others to do good to their neighbours, nothing can be done. This remedy is not to place trick against trick and force against force. The only remedy is in mak-

ing unselfish men and women. You may enact laws to cure present evils, but they will be of no avail.

Buddha found in India too much talking about God and His essence and too little work. He always insisted upon this fundamental truth that we are to be pure and holy, and that we are to help others to be holy also. He believed that man must go to work and help others; find his soul in others; find his life in others. He believed that in the conjunction of doing good to others is the only good we do ourselves. He believed that there was always in the world too much theory and too little practice. A dozen Buddhas in India at the present time would do good, and one Buddha in this country would also be beneficial.

When there is too much doctrine, **too much belief in my father's** religion, too much rational superstition, a change is needed. Such doctrine produces evil, and a reformation is necessary.

Six hundred years before Christ, the priesthood of India exercised great influence over the minds of the people, and between the upper and nether millstone of intellectuality and learning the people were ground. Buddhism was not founded as an entirely new religion, but rather as a reformation which carried off the corruption of the times. Buddha seems to have been the only prophet who did everything for others and absolutely nothing for himself. He gave up his home and all enjoyments of life to spend his days

in search of the medicine for the terrible disease of human misery. In an age where men and priests were discussing the essence of the deity, he discovered what people had overlooked, that misery existed. The cause of all evil is our desire to be superior to others and our selfishness. We need to teach people to obey the laws rather than to make more laws. Buddhism was the first missionary religion of the world but it was one of the teachings of Buddhism not to antagonise any other religion. Sects weaken their power for good by making war on each other.

Source:

<http://syluba.com/festival-calendar-2018/>

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Swami Vivekananda's Poem 'To My Own Soul'

TO MY OWN SOUL

Hold yet a while, Strong Heart,
Not part a lifelong yoke
Though blighted looks the present,
future gloom.
And age it seems since you and I
began our
March up hill or down. Sailing
smooth o'er
Seas that are so rare-
Thou nearer unto me, than oft-
times I myself-
Proclaiming mental moves before
they were !
Reflector true-Thy pulse so timed
to mine,
Thou perfect note of thoughts,
however fine-
Shall we now part, Recorder,
say ?
In thee is friendship, faith,
For thou didst warn when evil
thoughts were brewing-
And though, alas, thy warning
thrown away,
Went on the same as ever-good
and true.

B. DIRECT DISCIPLES: Soul, God and Religion

—Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda begins this lecture by exploring the comparative study of religions and saying that all religions are essentially one. This is in spite of the challenge of materialism and science at the dawn of the 20th century which threatened the very existence of religions. The same foundational principles found in one's own religion are also found in other religions. The fact that religions have continued through ages and that there are different religions suggest that religions are a constitutional necessity of humankind. Similarly if one religion is true other religions must also be true. There may be differences in non essentials, but with respect to essential they are one. The lecture also deals with various ideas related to the soul like it being distinct from the body, it being perfect, eternal and that it reincarnates. All religions teach the eternity of the soul and that its lustre has been dimmed and that primitive purity is to be regained by the knowledge of God. After discussing the soul, Swamiji goes on to discuss the different conceptions of God. Starting from various tribal ideas of Gods in ancient Judaism, there is a movement towards monotheism where there is an omnipotent and omniscient, but extra cosmic God. This is followed by the idea of God being immanent in nature culminating in the Advaitic experience of 'I and my father in heaven are one.' By knowing God, we find the kingdom of heaven within us. Religion is not what you read or the dogmas you believe in, but what you realise. The end of all religion is realizing God in one's soul. Until religion makes you realise God it is useless.

Introduction

Through the vistas of the past the voice of the centuries is coming to us; the voice of the sages of the Himalayas and the recluses of the forest; the voices that came to the semitic races; the voice that spoke through Buddha and other spiritual giants; the voice that comes from those who live in the light that accompanied man in the beginning of the earth – the light that shines wherever man goes and lives with him forever – is coming to us even now. This voice is like the little rivulets that come from the mountains. Now they disappear, and now they appear again in stronger flow till finally they unite in one mighty majestic flood. The messages that are coming down to us from the prophets and holy men and women of all sects and nations are joining their forces and speaking to us with the trumpet

voice of the past. And the first message it brings us is: Peace be unto you and to all religions. It is not a message of antagonism, but of one united religion.

Let us study this message first. At the beginning of this century it was almost feared that religion was at an end. Under the tremendous sledge-hammer blows of scientific research, old superstitions were crumbling away like masses of porcelain. Those to whom religion meant only a bundle of creeds and meaningless ceremonials were in despair; **they were at their wit's end.** Everything was slipping between their fingers. For a time it seemed inevitable that the surging tide of agnosticism and materialism would sweep all before it. There were those who did not dare utter what they thought. Many thought the case hopeless

and the cause of religion lost once and forever. But the tide has turned and to the rescue has come – what? The study of comparative religions. By the study of different religions we find that in essence they are one.

All Religions are One

When I was a boy [referring to Swami Vivekananda], this scepticism reached me, and it seemed for a time as if I must give up all hope of religion. But fortunately for me I studied the Christian religion, the Mohammedan, the Buddhistic, and others, and what was my surprise to find that the same foundation principles taught by my religion were also taught by all religions. It appealed to me this way. What is the truth? I asked. Is this world true? Yes. Why? Because I see it. Are the beautiful sounds we just

heard (the vocal and instrumental music) true? Yes. Because we heard them. We know that man has a body, eyes, and ears, and he has a spiritual nature, which we cannot see. And with his spiritual faculties he can study these different religions and find that whether a religion is taught in the forests and jungles of India or in a Christian land, in essentials all religions are one. This only shows us that religion is a constitutional necessity of the human mind. The proof of one religion depends on the proof of all the rest. For instance, if I have six fingers, and no one else has, you may well say that this is abnormal. The same reasoning may be applied to the argument that only one religion is true and all others false. One religion only, like one set of six fingers in the world, would be unnatural. We see, therefore, that if one religion is true, all others must be true. There are differences in non-essentials, but in essentials they are all one. If my five fingers are true, they prove that your five fingers are true too. Wherever man is, he must develop a belief, he must develop his religious nature.

And another fact I find in the study of the various religions of the world is that there are three different stages of ideas with regard to the soul and God. In the first place, all religions admit that, apart from the body which perishes, there is a certain part or something which does not change like the body, a part that is immutable, eternal, that never dies; but some of the later religions teach that although there is a part of us that never dies, it had a

beginning. But anything that has a beginning must necessarily have an end. We – the essential part of us – never had a beginning, and will never have an end. And above us all, above this eternal nature, there is another eternal Being, without end - God. People talk about the beginning of the world, the beginning of man. The word *beginning* simply means the beginning of the cycle. It nowhere means the beginning of the whole Cosmos. It is impossible that creation could have a beginning. No one of you can imagine a time of beginning. That which has a beginning must **have an end.** “**Never did I not exist, nor you, nor will nay of us ever hereafter cease to be,**” says the Bhagavad-Gita. Wherever the beginning of creation is mentioned, it means the beginning of a cycle. Your body will meet with death, but your soul, never.

Along with this idea of the soul we find another group of ideas in regard to its perfection. The soul in itself is perfect. The Old Testament of the Hebrews admits man perfect at the beginning. Man made himself impure by his own actions. But he is to regain his old nature, his pure nature. Some speak of these things in allegories, fables, and symbols. But when we begin to analyse these statements, we find that they all teach that the human soul is in its very nature perfect, and that man is to regain that original purity. How? By knowing God. Just as **the Bible says, “No man can see God but through the Son.”** What is meant by it? That seeing God is the aim and goal of all human life. The sonship must come before we become one with the Fa-

ther. Remember that man lost his purity through his own actions. When we suffer, it is because of our own acts; God is not to be blamed for it.

The Doctrine of Reincarnation

Closely connected with these ideas is the doctrine of reincarnation, which has been universal. This idea of reincarnation runs parallel with the other doctrine of the eternity of the human soul. Nothing, which ends at one point, can be without a beginning and nothing that begins at one point can be without an end. We cannot believe in such a monstrous impossibility as the beginning of the human soul. The doctrine of reincarnation asserts the freedom of the soul. Suppose there was an absolute beginning. Then the whole burden of this impurity in man falls upon God. The all-merciful Father responsible for the sins of the world! If sin comes in this way, why should one suffer more than another? Why such partiality, if it comes from an all-merciful God? Why are millions trampled underfoot? Why do people starve who never did anything to cause it? Who is responsible? If they had no hand in it, surely, God would be responsible. Therefore the better explanation is that one is responsible for the miseries one suffers. If I set the wheel in motion, I am responsible for the result. And if I can bring misery, I can also stop it. It necessarily follows that we are free. There is no such thing as fate. There is nothing to compel us. What we have done, that we can undo.

To one argument in connection with this doctrine I will ask your patient attention as it is a little intricate. We gain all our knowledge through experience; that is the only way. What we call experiences are on the plane of consciousness. For illustration: A man plays a tune on a piano, he places each finger on each key consciously. He repeats this process till the movement of the fingers become a habit. He then plays a tune without having to pay special attention to each particular key. Similarly, we find in regard to ourselves that our tendencies are the result of past conscious actions. A child is born with certain tendencies. Whence do they come from? No child is born with a *tabula rasa* - with a clean, blank page - of a mind. The page has been written on previously. The old Greek and Egyptian philosophers taught that no child came with a vacant mind. Each child comes with a hundred tendencies generated by past conscious actions. It did not acquire these in this life, and we are bound to admit that it must have had them in past lives. The rankest materialist had to admit that these tendencies are the result of past actions, only they add that these tendencies come through hereditary. Our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents come down to us through this law of hereditary. Now if hereditary alone explains this, there is no necessity of believing in the soul at all, because body explains everything. We need not go into the different arguments and discussions on materialism and spiritualism. So far the way is clear for those who believe in an individual soul. We

see that to come to a reasonable conclusion we must admit that we have had past lives. This is the belief of the great philosophers and sages of the past and of modern times. Such a doctrine was believed in among the Jews. Jesus Christ believed in it. He **says in the Bible, "Before Abraham was, I am." And in another place it is said, "This is Elias who is said to have come."**

All the different religions, which grew among different nations under varying circumstances and conditions, had their origin in Asia, and the Asiatics understand them well. When they came out from the motherland, they got mixed up with errors. The most profound and noble ideas of Christianity were never understood in Europe, because the ideas and images used by the writers of the Bible were foreign to it. Take for illustration the pictures of the Madonna. Every artist paints his Madonna according to his own pre-conceived ideas. I have been seeing hundreds of pictures of the Last Supper of Jesus Christ, and he is made to sit at a table. Now, Christ never sat at a table; he squatted with others, and they had a bowl in which they dipped bread – not the kind of bread you eat today. It is hard for any nation to understand the unfamiliar customs of other people. How much more difficult was it for Europeans to understand the Jewish customs after centuries of change and accretions from Greek, Roman and other sources. Through all the myths and mythologies by which it is surrounded it is no wonder that the people get very little of the beautiful religion of Jesus.

Concept of God

To come to our point. We find that all religions teach the eternity of the soul, as well as that its lustre has been dimmed, and that its primitive purity is to be regained by knowledge of God. What is the idea of God in these different religions? The primary idea of God was very vague. The most ancient nations had different Deities – sun, earth, fire, water. Among the ancient Jews we find numbers of these Gods ferociously fighting with each other. Then we find Elohim whom the Jews and the Babylonians worshipped. We next find one God standing supreme. But the idea differed according to different tribes. They each asserted that their God was the greatest. And they tried to prove it by fighting. The one that could do the best fighting proved thereby that its God was the greatest. Those races were more or less savage. But gradually better and better ideas took the place of the old ones. All those old ideas are gone or going into the lumber - room. All those religions were the outgrowth of centuries; not one fell from the skies. Each had to be worked out bit by bit. Next come the monotheistic ideas: belief in one god, who is omnipotent and omniscient, the one God of the universe. This one God is extra-cosmic; he lies in the heavens. He is invested with the gross conception of His originators. He has a right side and a left side, and a bird in His hand, and so on and so forth. But one thing we find, that the tribal Gods have disappeared forever, and the one God of the universe has taken their place: the God of Gods. Still He is only an extra-cosmic God. He is

unapproachable; nothing can come near Him. But slowly this idea has changed also, and at the next stage we find a God immanent in nature.

In the New Testament it is taught, **“Our Father who art in Heaven”** – God living in the heavens separated from men. We are living on earth and He is living in heaven. Further on we find the teaching that He is a God immanent in nature; He is not only God in heaven, but on earth too. He is the God in us. In the Hindu philosophy we find a stage of the same proximity of God to us. But we do not stop there. There is the non-dualistic stage, in which man realises that the God he has been worshipping is not only the Father in heaven, and on earth, **but that “I and my Father are one.” He realises in his soul that he is God Himself, only a lower expression of Him. All that is real in me is He; all that is real in Him is I. The gulf between God and man is thus bridged. Thus we find how, by knowing God, we find the kingdom of heaven within us.**

In the first or dualistic stage, man knows he is a little personal soul, John, James or Tom; and he says, **“I will be John, James or Tom to all eternity, and never anything else.” As well might the murderer come along and say, “I will remain a murderer forever.”** But as time goes on, Tom vanishes and goes back to the original pure Adam.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Can we see

God? Of course not. Can we know God? Of course not. If God can be known, He will be God no longer. Knowledge is limitation. But I and my Father are one: I find the reality in my soul. These ideas are expressed in some religions, and in others only hinted. In some they are expatriated. **Christ’s teachings are now very little understood in this country. If you will excuse me, I will say that they have never been very well understood.**

The different stages of growth are absolutely necessary to the attainment of purity and perfection. The varying systems of religion are at bottom founded on the same ideas. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is within **you. Again he says, “Our Father who art in heaven.”** How do you reconcile the two sayings? In this way: He was talking to the uneducated masses when he said the latter, the masses who were uneducated in religion. It was necessary to speak to them in their own language. The masses want concrete ideas, something the senses can grasp. A man may be the greatest philosopher in the world, but a child in religion. When a man has developed a high state of spirituality he can understand that the kingdom of heaven is within him. That is the real kingdom of the mind. Thus we see that the apparent contradictions and perplexities in every religion mark but different stages of growth. And as such we have no right to blame anyone for his religion. There are stages of growth in which forms and symbols are necessary; they are the language that the souls in that stage can understand.

Doctrines and Dogmas

The next idea that I want to bring to you is that religion does not consist in doctrines or dogmas. It is not what you read, nor what dogmas you believe that is of importance, but what you realise. **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall realise God,”** yea, in this life. And that is salvation. There are those who teach that this can be gained by the mumbling of words. But no great Master ever taught that external forms were necessary for salvation. The power of attaining it is within ourselves. We live and move in God. Creeds and sects have their part to play, but they are for children, they last but temporarily. Books never make religions, but religions make books. We must not forget that. No book ever created God, but God inspired all the great books. And no book ever created a soul. We must never forget that. The end of all religions is the realising of God in the soul. That is the one universal religion. If there is one universal truth in all religions, I place it here - in realising God. Ideals and methods may differ, but that is the central point. There may be a thousand different radii, but they all converge to the one centre, and that is the realisation of God: something behind this world of sense, this world of eternal eating and drinking and talking nonsense, this world of false shadows and selfishness. There is that beyond all books, beyond all creeds, beyond the vanities of this world, and it is the realisation of God within yourself. A man may believe in all the churches in the world, he may carry in his head all the sacred books ever written,

he may baptise himself in all the rivers of the earth, still, if he has no perception of God, I would class him with the rankest atheist. And a man may have never entered a church or a mosque, nor performed any ceremony, but if he feels God within himself and is thereby lifted above the vanities of the world, that man is a holy man, a saint, call him what you will. As soon as a man stands up and says he is right or his church is right, and all others are wrong, he is himself all wrong. He does not know that upon the proof of all the others depends the proof of his won. Love and charity for the whole human race, that is the test of true religiousness. I do not mean the sentimental statement that all men are brothers, but that one must feel the oneness of human life. So far as they are not exclusive, I see that the sects and creeds are all mine; they are all grand. They are all helping men towards the real religion. I will add, it is good to be born in a church, but it is bad to die there. It is good to be born a child, but bad to remain a child. Churches, ceremonies, and symbols are good for children, but when the child is grown, he must burst the church or himself. We must not remain children forever. It is like trying to fit one coat to all sizes and growths. I do not deprecate the existence of sects in the world. Would to God there were twenty millions more, for the more there are, there will be a greater field for selection. What I do object to is trying to fit one religion to every case. Though all religions are essentially the same, they must have the varieties of forms produced by dissimilar

circumstances among different nations. We must each have our own individual religion, individual as far as the externals of it go.

Many years ago I visited a great sage of our own country, a very holy man. We talked of our revealed books, the Vedas, of the Bible, of the Koran, and of revealed books in general. At the close of our talk, this good man asked me to go the table and take up a book; it was a book which, among other things, contained forecast of the rainfall during the year. **The sage said, "Read that."** And I read out the quantity of rain that was to fall. He said, **"Now take the book and squeeze it."** I did so and he said, **"Why, my boy, not a drop of water comes out. Until the water comes out, it is all book, book. So until your religion makes you realise God, it is useless. He who only studies books for religion reminds one of the fable of the ass which carried a heavy load of sugar on its back, but did not know the sweetness of it."**

Man's Divine Nature, not a Sinner

Shall we advise men to kneel down and cry, **"O miserable sinners that we are!"** No, rather let us remind them of their divine nature. I will tell you a story. A lioness in search of prey came upon a flock of sheep, and as she jumped at one of them, she gave birth to a cub and died on the spot. The young lion was brought up in the flock, ate grass, and bleated like a sheep, and it never knew that it was a lion. One day a lion came across the

flock and was astonished to see in it a huge lion eating grass and bleating like a sheep. At his sight the flock fled and the lion-sheep with them. But the lion watched his opportunity and one day found the lion-sheep asleep. He **woke him up and said, "You are a lion."** **The other said, "No,"** and began to bleat like a sheep. But the stranger lion took him to a lake and asked him to look in the water at his own image and see if it did not resemble him, the stranger lion. He looked and acknowledged that it did. Then the stranger lion began to roar and asked him to do the same. The lion-sheep tried his voice and was soon roaring as grandly as the other. And he was a sheep no longer.

My friends, I would like to tell you all that you are mighty as lions.

If the room is dark, do you go about beating your chest and crying, **"It is dark, dark, dark!"** No, the only way to get the light is to strike a light, and then the darkness goes. The only way to realise the light above you is to strike the spiritual light within you, and the darkness of sin and impurity will flee away. Think of your higher self, not of your lower.

Source:

Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati Memorial Edition, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, Vol. 1, pp. 317-332, Vol. 6 p. 180