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Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

Kimberleys

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SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna: God is One, but He is made to Suit Different Temperaments

A mother loves all her children equally, but she so arranges the food for them that everyone gets what agrees with him. Similarly, the Lord has provided different forms of worship to suit different men with different capacities and in different stages of spiritual development.

Source: Swami Brahmananda, *Words of the Master: Selected Precepts of Sri Ramakrishna* (Kolkata: Udbodhan) 2001, p. 72

Swami Vivekananda on Religion

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 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.

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama), p. 237

Baha'u'llah and the Bahá'í Faith on Oneness

O CHILDREN OF MEN! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest.

Source: <https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/essential-relationships/one-human-family/quotations>

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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 DECEMBER 2018 TO 10 MARCH 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 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 February 2019. 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.

Celebrations

- Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary was celebrated on Sunday, 27 January 2019, by the singing of *bhajans*, reading the *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* and *aratrikam*.

Other Activities

- The Vedanta Centre of Adelaide held a prayer meeting on Saturday, 16 February 2019, after the sad passing away of a long-time local devotee Mrs Nirmala Puvan. She passed away on Tuesday, 15 January, 2019. Many friends and family were present to express their grief and condolences to the members of the bereaved family. The prayer meeting included invocation, *bhajans*, sharing of memories by a

few selected friends intimately known to Mrs Puvan, a tribute by Swami Sridharananda, a two minute silent prayer and *aratrikam*.



Mrs Nirmala Puvan's Prayer Meeting

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:

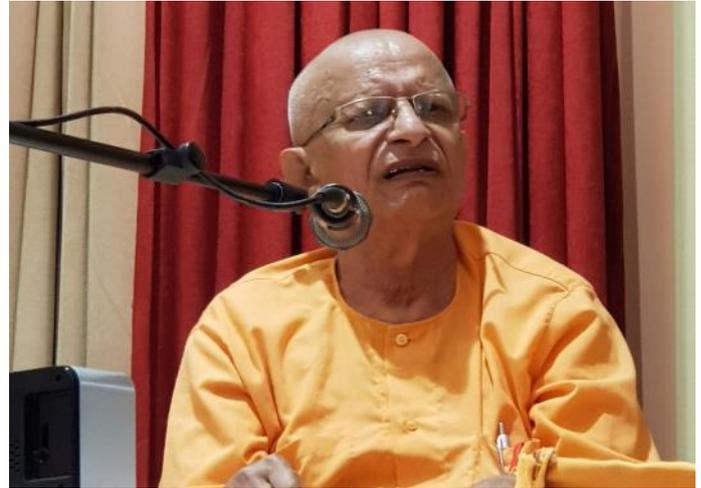
- Sunday mornings:- a) Yoga class (8:30 am – 9:45 am). b) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* Class (10:00 am – 11:00 am). (c) Bala Sangha or children's clas-

ses (10:00 am—11:00 am during school term).

- A yoga class is conducted on Thursday evenings from 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm.
- A discussion group met on the first Monday of the month at Sunnybank Hills (7:00 pm — 8:30 pm).
- 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) and the *Ramayana* (7:15 pm — 8:15 pm) at 12 Greenwood St, Springfield Lakes, 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.
- A class on the *Ashtavakra Gita* is conducted at 101 Sharpless Drive, Springfield Lakes, on a fixed day of the month.
- Yoga, Meditation and Bushwalk were held on the third weekend of every month at Vedanta Precinct, Vedanta Drive, Springfield Lakes.

Other Activities:

- Swami Adibhavananda from India visited Brisbane from the 16 to 24 December 2018 and again from 31 December 2018 to 5 January 2019. The Swami delivered a talk on 22 December at the Centre.
- Swami Atmeshananda officiated as the guest of honour on the occasion of a music concert by Ustad Shahid Pervez Khan on 22 February 2019 at the BEMAC auditorium
- Swami Atmeshananda participated in multi-faith peace prayer meetings on 16 February and 27 February 2019 at Brisbane City in memory of people killed in terrorist attacks.



Swami Adibhavananda in Brisbane



Multi-faith Peace Prayer



Yoga Retreat

- A Yoga retreat was organised by the Centre on 9 and 10 March 2019 at the Centre in collaboration with Vasudevakriya Yoga Centre of Melbourne. Around 20 participants attended the retreat. Talks about yoga, meditation and spiritual life, bushwalk and other activities were part of the retreat.



Christmas Eve in Brisbane



A child offering abhishekam on Shivaratri



Kalpataru Day in Brisbane



Homa on Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary



Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary

- On 28 December 2018, the Birth Anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Saradadevi was celebrated with worship, *homa*, *pushpanjali* and *prasad* distribution.
- Kalpataru day was celebrated on 1 January 2019. Worship, talks by devotees on the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother and *prasad* distribution were the different aspects of the celebration.
- Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary was celebrated on 27 January 2019. Worship, *homa*, devotional singing, *pushpanjali*, a talk on the 'Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda' and *prasad* distribution constituted the programme.
- Sri Mahashivaratri puja was performed on 4 March 2019. Devotees offered worship, sang bhajans and received *prasad* in the evening.
- Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary was celebrated on 8 March 2019 with worship, *homa*, devotional singing, *pushpanjali* and distribution of *prasad*.

Celebrations

- Christmas Eve was celebrated on 24 December 2018. Christmas Carols were sung, there was Reading from the *Sermon on the Mount* and offerings to Christ were made on the occasion.

Forthcoming Programmes

- A fundraising dance programme is being organised by the Nritya Bharati school of dance on 6 April 2019 at the Acacia Ridge State school, Queensland.
- The Annual programme of the Centre is scheduled for 18 May 2019. Details of the venue etc are yet to be finalised.

CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 6258 7612 / 0433 593 860

Regular Activities:

- The last Gita lecture for 2018 was delivered by Swami Vireshananda on 9 December 2018. On 10 March 2019 Swami Vireshananda delivered a lecture on Sri Ramakrishna. The regular monthly Gita classes for 2019 will be conducted by Swami Sridharananda in the near future. The lectures in Canberra are held at Quakers Friends Meeting House, Corner of Bent and Condamine Street, Turner, ACT 2612.



Swami Vireshananda in 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 *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* is conducted on the second Saturday of every month from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm at 4 Milroy Court, Wheelers Hill.



Swami Sunishthananda delivering his address on Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi's Birth Anniversary

Celebrations

- Christmas Eve was celebrated at the Vedanta



Kalpataru Day in Melbourne



Saraswati Puja in Melbourne



Shivaratri Abhishekam

Centre on the evening of Monday, 24 December 2018. The programme included *puja*, offerings, carols and a talk on 'Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ'.

- Holy Mother's Birth Anniversary was celebrat-

ed at the Vedanta Centre on the morning of Sunday, 30 December 2018. The programme included *puja*, offerings, chanting, *bhajans* and a talk on 'Life and Teachings of Holy Mother.'

- *Kalpataru Day* was observed in the Vedanta Centre on Tuesday, 1 January 2019. The programme included *puja*, offerings, *bhajans* and a talk on 'Significance of *Kalpataru Day*'.
- Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre on the morning of Sunday, 27 January 2019. The programme included *puja*, offerings, chanting, *bhajans* and a talk on 'Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda'.
- Saraswati Puja was celebrated in the Vedanta Centre, on the morning of Sunday, 10 February 2019. The programme included *puja*, offerings, chanting, *bhajans* and *Vidyarthi Homa* in which 12 children participated.
- Shivaratri Puja was celebrated in the Vedanta Centre in the evening of Monday, 4 March 2019. The programme included *Rudram* Chanting and *Abhishekam* followed by *bhajans*, *aratrikam* and *pushpanjali*.
- Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre on the morning of Sunday, 10 March 2019. The programme included *puja*, offerings, chanting, *bhajans* and a talk on 'Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.'

Other Activities:

- A Children's Holiday Program was organized at the Vedanta Centre from 21 January 2019 to 23 January 2019. Twenty five children participated in the Program.
- Swami Sridharananda visited the Centre on Wednesday, 30 January 2019 and delivered a talk that evening on the topic 'The Holy Mother: Who is She?'
- Swami Sunishthananda was invited as one of



Children's Summer Holiday Programme

the speakers on World Interfaith Harmony Week Webinar Series hosted by the Parliament of World's Religions on Monday February 11, 2019.

- Br. Iswarachaitanya and Br. Swatmachaitanya from Sydney visited the Melbourne Centre on Sunday, 24 February 2019, on their way to Belur Math for being ordained as monks.

Forthcoming Programmes

- Ramnavami: Sunday, 14 April 2019
- Shankaracharya Jayanti: Thursday, 9 May, 2019
- Play on Life of Sister Nivedita: Saturday, 11 May 2019
- Buddha Purnima: Saturday, 18 May 2019

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*. This time he visited with Kirit Sodha from 28 February 2019 to 2 March 2019 and gave talks on the 6th Chapter.

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.
- Swami Atmeshananda visited Perth from 8 to 10 February 2019. While he was in Perth, he conducted the *aratrikam* with the devotees and lectured on the topics: 'Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj's Impressions on Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings' and 'Five Principles of Buddhism.'



Swami Atmeshananda in Perth from 8 to 10 February 2019

Celebrations

- Kalpataru day was celebrated on 1 January 2019.
- Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary was



Janet Waughray reading from the works of Swami Vivekananda on Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary

celebrated on 27 January 2019. The function included the singing of bhajans, and a talk by Janet Waughray on the 'Teachings of Swami Vivekananda'.

- Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary was observed on 10 March 2019. The programme included the singing of *bhajans*, a talk and the distribution of *prasadam*.

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 7:20 am and chanting from 7:20 am to 7:45 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 once a month. at 1/98 Condamine Street, Balgowlah, NSW 2093, near Manly Beach on Tuesdays between 7:30 pm and 8:30 pm
- *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.

Other Activities

- Swami Adhibhavananda visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney from Ahmedabad from 24 December 2018 to 31 December 2018.
- Br. Swatmachaitanya (Harshal) and Br. Ishwarachaitanya (Sivaram) left Sydney on 24 February 2019 for India via Melbourne to take their final monastic vows on the day after Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Tithi. They were ordained Swami Dhanyananda (Harshal) and Swami Manyananda (Sivaram).

Celebrations:

- Christmas Eve was celebrated on 24 December 2018. The evening programme included *aratrikam*, carols and reading and talk on the nativity of Jesus Christ. There were between 90 to 100 people who shared *prasad*.
- Sri Sarada Devi's Birth Anniversary was observed



(L to R) Br. Ishwarachaitanya, Swami Sridharananda and Br. Swatmachaitanya

on 28 December 2018. The function was held in the morning and evening. The morning function included worship, singing of *bhajans*, chanting, *homa*, *pushpanjali*, and *prasad* distribution. There were 120 people who attended in the morning. The evening programme included *aratrikam*, a short sitar recital by Suchita Rao, a lecture on the Holy Mother by Swami Sridharananda, *pushpanjali* and *prasad* distribution. There were about 170 people who had *prasad* in the evening.



Swami Adhibhavananda and the Christmas Carol Choir

- Kalpataru Day was celebrated on 1 January 2019 at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney. The programme included *aratrikam*, the chanting of 'brahma rupam adi madya' and other *bhajans* and Swami Vireshananda addressed the devotees with a talk on the significance of the

Kalpataru day. There were 170-180 people who partook of *prasad*.

- Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary was celebrated according to the lunar calendar on 27 January 2019. The morning programme included *puja*, *bhajans*, *homa*, *pushpanjali* and *prasad* distribution. The evening programme included *aratrikam*, a talk on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda, *pushpanjali* and *prasad* distribution. There were 180 people who attended in the morning and 130 in the evening.
- Shivaratri was observed on 4 March 2019 at the Vedanta Centre. The function included special worship of Shiva, *bhajans*, *aratrikam*, *abhishekam* by the devotees and *prasad* distribution. There were around 105 people who attended.
- Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary was celebrated on 8 March 2019. The morning programme included *puja*, *bhajans*, chanting, *homa*, *aratrikam* and *pushpanjali*. The evening programme included *aratrikam*, a talk on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami



Swami Vireshananda conducts the worship on Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary

Vireshananda, *pushpanjali*, and *prasad* distribution. There were 110 people who came in the morning and 180 people who came at night.

Forthcoming Programmes:

- Ramnavami: Sunday, 14 April 2019
- Buddha Purnima: Saturday, 18 May 2019

1. FEATURE ARTICLES

A. The Bahá'í Faith and Baha'u'llah (the Founder of the Bahá'í religion)

The Bahá'í Faith originated in the 19th century in Iran. It is a Faith in its own right which broke away from Islam, just as Christianity grew out of Judaism and Buddhism out of Hinduism. The central idea of the Bahá'í Faith is the Oneness of Humankind. This Oneness and recognition of the different Faiths of the world, not just monotheistic Faiths, is attained through reason. Reason is one of the important methods through which knowledge is acquired and the Bahá'í Faith is not antagonistic to science. The first community of this Faith included those from Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrian Religion, and Judaism. The concept of God of the Bahá'í Faith is a monotheistic God. Some idea of God can be gained from names and attributes, but God is essentially unknowable. The various other conceptions of God that people have are a product of the imagination of people. The individual comprises of the physical dimension and the spiritual dimension. The social outcome of the Baha'u'llah's teaching is to unite the various religions and peoples of the world in order to bring about world peace and harmony.

Bahá'í Faith: A religion of modern times

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions. From its obscure beginnings in Iran during the mid-nineteenth century it has now spread to virtually every part of the world, has established its administrative institutions in well over two hundred independent states and major territories, and has embraced believers from virtually every cultural, racial, social, and religious background.

Religious context

Iran was mainly a Muslim country, but there were also communities of Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews, all of whom made up the first adherents of the Bahá'í Faith.

The majority of Muslims in Persia at this time were Shi'a Muslims (as opposed to those of the Sunni tradition).

Shi'a Muslims believe that it was the Prophet Muhammad's

intention that his descendants inherit the spiritual and temporal leadership of the Muslim Faith and that these leaders be called *Imams* (or leaders). They were believed to be infallible.

In the words of Arnold Toynbee, "Bahá'í sm is an independent religion on par with Islam, Christianity, and the other recognised world religions. Bahá'í sm is not a sect of some other religion; it is a separate religion, and it has the same status as the other recognised religions."

The pivotal concept of the Bahá'í Faith is the oneness of humankind. Bahá'u'llah's central message is that the day has come for the unification of humanity into one global family. He asserts that God has set in motion historical forces that are to bring about worldwide recognition that the entire human race is a unified, distinct species. The historical process in which, Bahá'í s believe, their Faith has a central role to play,

will involve the emergence of a global civilization.

The history of the Bábí and Baha'i Faiths

To assert that a religion is independent of other Faiths is not to argue that it began in a religious vacuum. Buddhism emerged from a traditional Hindu background, and only after it had crossed the Himalayas did it assume its full character as a separate Faith destined to become a major cultural force in China, Japan, and the lands of Southeast Asia. Similarly, Jesus Christ and his immediate followers began their mission within the context of Judaism, and for some two centuries, neighbouring peoples regarded the movement as a reformed branch of the parent religion. Christianity did not appear as a separate religion with its own scriptures, laws, and institutional and ritual forms until it had begun to attract large numbers of adherents from the many non

-Semitic races in the Mediterranean world.

The religious matrix of the Bahá'í Faith was Islam. Much as Christianity was born out of the Messianic expectations of Judaism, the religion that was to become the Bahá'í Faith arose from the eschatological tensions within Islam. In the same way, however, the Bahá'í Faith is entirely independent of its parent religion. The new Faith first appeared in Persia, a predominantly Muslim country. It then spread to neighbouring Muslim lands in the Ottoman and Russian Empires and to northern India. Though some early followers were of Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian background, the vast majority had been followers of Islam. Their religious ideas were drawn from the Qur'án, and they were primarily interested in those aspects of their new belief system that represented the fulfilment of Islamic prophecies and the interpretation of Muslim teachings. Similarly, the Islamic clergy initially saw those who followed the new Faith as Muslim heretics.

Because of the Bahá'í Faith's Islamic background, it is important to begin with a consideration of the Islamic matrix out of which the Bahá'í Faith arose. Such an examination is important for a second reason as well: Islam fits into a concept of both religious history and the relationship between religions, which is central to Bahá'í teachings. The Bahá'í Faith is perhaps unique in that it unreservedly accepts the validity of the other great Faiths. Bahá'í s be-

lieve that Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, the Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad, are all equally authentic messengers of one God. The teachings of these divine messengers are seen as paths to salvation which contribute to the 'carrying forward of an ever-advancing civilization.' But Bahá'í s believe that this series of interventions by God in human history has been progressive, each revelation from God more complete than those which preceded it, and each preparing the way for the next. In this view, Islam, as the most recent of the prior religions, constituted the immediate historical preparation for the Bahá'í Faith. Like Muslims, Bahá'í s believe that God is One and utterly transcendent in his essence. He 'manifests' his will to humanity through the series of messengers whom Bahá'í s call 'Manifestations of God.' The purpose of the Manifestations is to provide perfect guidance not only for the spiritual progress of the individual believer, but also to mould society as a whole. An important difference between the two Faiths in this respect is that while, among the existing religions, the Quran designates only Judaism, Christianity, and Islam itself as divinely inspired, Bahá'í s believe that all religions are integral parts of one divine plan:

There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying re-

quirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them, except a few which are the outcomes of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose

There is yet another aspect of Islam which influenced the development of the new religion and which dictated Muslim reaction to it. Like Christianity before it, Islam gradually divided into a number of major sects. One of the most significant of these is the Shi'a sect, which believes that it was Muhammad's intention that his descendants inherit the spiritual and temporal leadership of the faithful. These chosen ones, called 'Imams, or 'leaders', were believed to be endowed with unqualified infallibility in the discharge of their related responsibilities. However, the great majority of Muslims rejected such claims, believing that the *sunna* – the 'way' or mode of conduct attributed by tradition to the Prophet Muhammad – was a sufficient guide. Those who subscribed to this latter belief became known as Sunni. Although Sunni Muslims vastly outnumber the Shi'a today, and are usually referred to by Western scholars as 'orthodox' as opposed to the 'heterodoxy' of the Shi'a, Shi'a Islam has a long and respected tradition.

By A.D. 661, only twenty-nine years after Muhammad's death, power in the Muslim world fell into the hands of the first of a series of dynastic rulers, theoretically elected by the faithful, but in fact representing the domi-

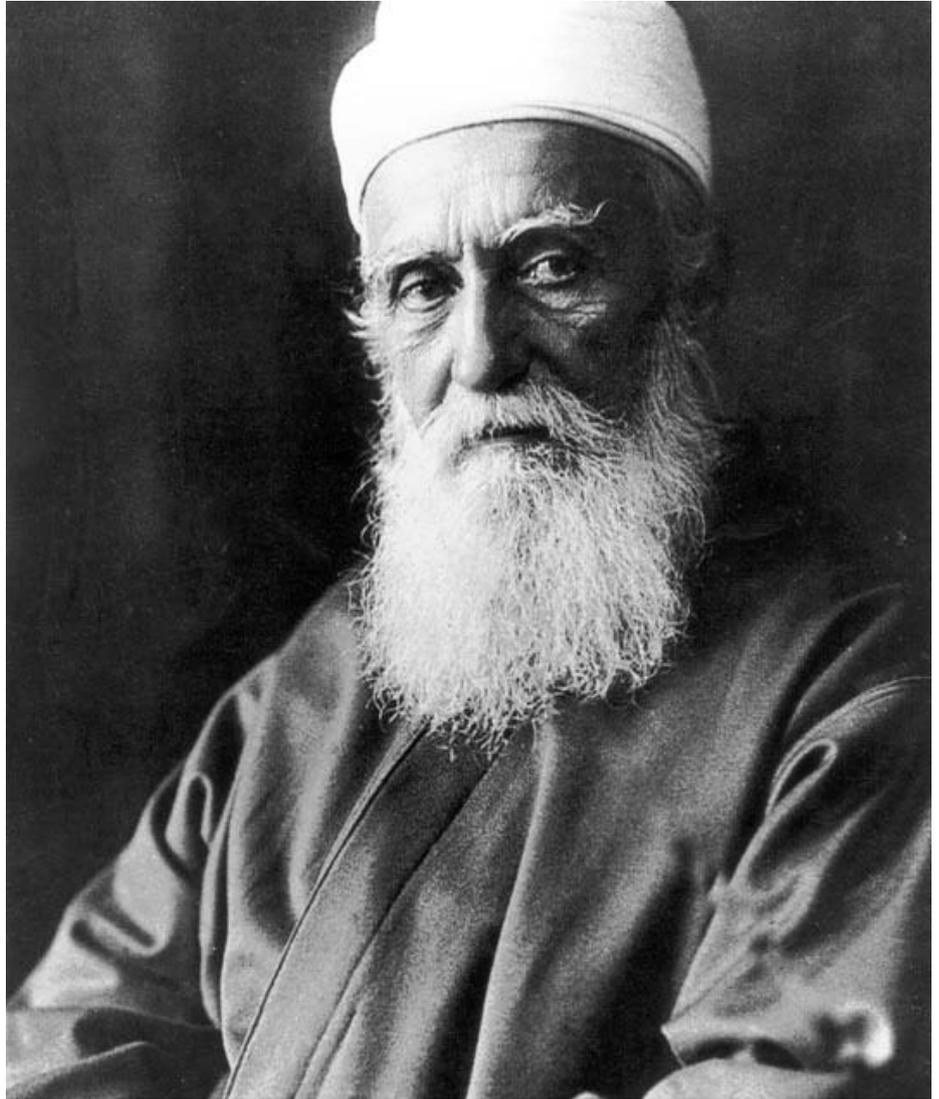
nance of various powerful families. The first two of these Sunni dynasties, the Umayyads and the Abbasids, saw the Imams as a challenge to their own legitimacy. Consequently, according to Shi'a accounts, one Imam after another was put to death, beginning with Hasan and Husayn, grandsons of Muhammad. These Imams, or descendants of the prophet, came in time to be regarded by Shi'a Islam as saints and martyrs.

Although Shi'a Islam began among Arabs, it reached its greatest influence in Persia. From the beginning, the Persian converts to Islam were attracted by the idea of the Imam as a divinely appointed leader. Unlike the Arabs, the Persians possessed a long heritage of government by a divinely appointed monarch, and the devotion that gathered around this figure in time came to focus on the person of the Prophet's descendants and appointed successors. After centuries of oppression by Sunni caliphs, the tradition of the Imamate eventually triumphed in Persia through the rise in the sixteenth century of a strongly Shi'a dynasty, the Safavids.

By this time, however, the line of Imams had ended. One of the features of Iranian Shi'a tradition is that, in the year 873, the twelfth and last appointed Imam—only a child at the time—withdrawed into 'concealment' in order to escape the fate of his predecessors. For a period of sixty-nine years following his disappearance, the twelfth or Hidden Imam was said to have

communicated with his followers through a series of deputies. These intermediaries took the title *báb* (gate), because they were the only way to the Hidden Imam. There had been four *bábs* up to the year 941, when

Mahdi, or *Qá'im*, and who would again provide a direct channel for the Divine Will to human affairs. It was out of this tradition that the Bahá'í religion and its forerunner, the Bábí Faith, appeared.



Baha'u'llah: Founder of the Bahá'í religion

the fourth one died without naming a successor.

The refusal of either the Imam or the final *báb* to name a successor implied that the matter was to be left by the faithful entirely in the hands of God. In time, a messenger or messengers of God would appear, one of whom would be the Imam

Baha'u'llah: Founder of the Bahá'í religion

Baha'u'llah was a nobleman with the names *Mírzá Husayn 'Alí*. His family, from among Persia's oldest landed gentry, held extensive estates in the area of *Núr* in the province of *Mázin-darán*. *Mírzá Husayn 'Alí* was

one of the first of those to declare his Faith in the *báb*, in 1844. Upon becoming a follower of the *Báb* at the age of twenty-seven, *Mírzá Husayn 'Alí* threw himself energetically into the affairs of the young Faith, which was beginning to experience the first tremors of the persecutions that were to follow. He travelled widely, was responsible for the conversions of a significant number of people of ability, including some of his own relatives, and provided financial support for much of the *Babi* teaching activity in various parts of the country.

There is considerable evidence that the *báb* had, from the beginning, regarded *Baha'u'llah* as the one for whom he himself had come to prepare the way. He had strongly intimated this to a few of his closest disciples, and stated in a remarkable passage in the *Bayán*:

“Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the order of *Baha'u'llah* and rendereth thanks unto his Lord! For he will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the *Bayán*.”

Bahá'í history refers to *Baha'u'llah's* experience in the *Síyah-Chál* as the dawning of his revelation. The event is today celebrated around the world as the chief festival of the *Bahá'í* Faith.

Baha'u'llah's basic teachings

One of the teachings of its founder, *Bahá'u'lláh*, is that God's greatest gift to humankind is reason. *Bahá'í*s accept that reason must be applied to all phenomena of existence, including those

which are spiritual, and the instrument to be used in this effort is the scientific method. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of *Bahá'u'lláh* and the appointed interpreter of his writings, asserted that, 'Any religion that contradicts science or that is opposed to it is only ignorance – for ignorance is the opposite of knowledge.'

Central to *Baha'u'llah's* rise as preeminent *babi* leader were his writings. Living in Iraq in a bilingual environment, he wrote very naturally in both Persian and a somewhat Persianized Arabic. Perhaps the most important theme in *Baha'u'llah's* writings at this time was his own sense of the divine presence. Of the substantive themes in *Baha'u'llah's* writing at this time, three were particularly prominent: the spiritual-mystical path, the ethical demands of belief and certain doctrinal concerns. Referring to the mystical path, whereon the religious seeker journeyed towards God, *Baha'u'llah* explicitly addressed the Sufi tradition of Islamic mysticism.

Doctrines and Beliefs

1. *Bahá'í texts*. Authoritative *Bahá'í* teachings are derived from the original writings of the successive leaders of the Faith, and in the case of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, approved transcripts of his public talks. There are now over forty volumes of the *Bahá'í* writings in English, and it is relatively easy for all *Bahá'í*s to identify 'official' *Bahá'í* teachings. There is no *Bahá'í* sacred or liturgical language. Arabic, Persian and English have a special status as

the languages of the original writings of the *Bahá'í* leaders, but access to and understanding of the texts is what is regarded as of primary importance, with the result that extensive translation programmes of *Bahá'í* scriptures and other literature have long been an important part of *Bahá'í* endeavour.

2. *Theology and metaphysics*. The *Bahá'í* Faith is strictly monotheistic. Some understanding of God can be gained from 'his' names and attributes (He is Almighty; All-Loving; the Help in Peril, and so on). However, God in essence is unknowable, so that all human conceptions of God are mere imaginations, which some individuals mistake for reality. Therefore, knowledge of God is primarily to be achieved by way of his messengers: the 'Manifestations of God'.

For *Bahá'í*s, the development of the *Bahá'í* Faith forms part of a single overarching history of religion on this planet (symbolically starting with Adam, seen as the first known Manifestation of God). The major world's religions recognized by the *Bahá'í*s (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam in the west; Hinduism and Buddhism in the east) are incorporated into this schema and their founders honoured as divine Manifestations with a fundamental unity of mission.

The unity of these religions is seen as both recurrent and progressive. Thus, on the one hand, each of the divine religions expresses eternal moral and spiritual truths, which are proclaimed and renewed by their founders. At the same time, each religion

represents an evolutionary stage in a single and eternal religion of God, progressively revealed to humankind (a process which Bahá'í s term 'progressive revelation'). This schema also accounted for differences between the religions, in that each of the Manifestations of God brought divine teachings appropriate to the spiritual capacity, intellectual frameworks and social needs of the people of their own particular time and place.

3. *Being human.* For Bahá'í s, human beings possess both a physical body and a non-material rational soul. The soul is the essential inner reality of each human being. It comes into existence at the time of conception, and enters a new existence after death.

4. *Social teachings and the vision of a new world order.* For Bahá'í s, Baha'u'llah came to unite all the peoples of the world; bring together the followers of the world's religions; and establish the future millennial age, which has been prophesied in all religions. The main elements of the Bahá'í millennial and social vision include:

(i) *The achievement of world peace in a united world* in which all peoples are seen as the citizens of one country.

(ii) *The establishment of social order and justice.*

(iii) *The advancement of women.*

(iv) *Education.* Bahá'í s emphasize the importance of both religious and 'secular' education for the individual and for society as a whole.

(v) *The role of religion.* Bahá'í s emphasize the importance of combining 'spiritual' and

'material' solutions to the world's problems.

Conclusion: Issues and challenges

The Bahá'í Faith is now a worldwide movement and the challenges, which face Bahá'í communities in one part of the world may be quite different from those in another. For the Bahá'í s in the Middle East the key issue is religious freedom. In Iran, the Bahá'í s have faced an ongoing campaign of persecution ever since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Despite being the largest religious minority in the country, they have faced waves of arrests of their leaders and many of their most active members – around 200 of whom have been murdered and executed; the banning of all their activities; and the attempt to totally exclude them from all aspects of civic life (including education and the burial of their dead). Considerable difficulties have also been encountered by the Egyptian Bahá'í s, who have also been denied many civil rights.

By contrast, whilst the Bahá'í s in the West have often been able to gain considerable public attention and sympathy, their numbers have generally remained small, leading to anxieties in some circles about the failure to achieve a greater impact. Small but very vocal groups of Western Bahá'í s have also expressed discontent over Bahá'í practices, which they deem illiberal, notably the restriction of membership of the Universal House of Justice to men and the prohibition on homosexual activity (including marriage). Intellectual tensions

have also surfaced about 'academic' interpretations of the Faith.

It is very difficult to make any generalizations about the very diverse Bahá'í communities of the 'Third World'. In a number there are certainly practical challenges in consolidating a national Bahá'í community with limited resources and in dealing with harsh social realities – including the displacement of refugees, poverty and crime.

Source:

The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion by William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin [https://books.google.com.au/books?](https://books.google.com.au/books?hl=en&lr=&id=IZmkG1ASirgC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=bahai+faith&ots=kRM516GMWI&sig=zfomaRPI1Weq_hYDU-AnKR2B-ow&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=bahai%20faith&f=false)

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2. An introduction to the Baha'I Faith by Peter Smith [https://books.google.com.au/books?](https://books.google.com.au/books?hl=en&lr=&id=z7zdDFTzNr0C&oi=fnd&pg=PA3&dq=bahai+faith&ots=ToXb5kQnSo&sig=UlqTyHoZkTMaLDbPu8o9LqCU5VY&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=bahai%20faith&f=false)

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3. A Short Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith by Peter Smith 2013 http://bahai-library.com/smith_short_introduction_2013

4. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/bahai/beliefs/god.shtml>

B. Ramakrishna, Sarada and Vivekananda on Vedanta in Theory and Practice

This is a collection culled from the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature which shows that there are many similarities between it and the Ba'hai Faith. Swami Vivekananda distils the essentials of the Vedanta Philosophy as the divinity of man, oneness of existence and the harmony of Religions. In the passage from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramakrishna shows the practicalities of dealing with the idea that God dwells in all beings and not taking the scriptures at face value with respect to his parable about the brahmachari and the snake. The passage from the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi is also a lesson in practicality in having to deal with people of various temperaments.

Swami Vivekananda on 'The Spirit and influence of Vedanta'

(Delivered at the Twentieth Century Club, Boston)

Before going into the subject of this afternoon, will you allow me to say a few words of thanks, now that I have the opportunity? I have lived three years amongst you. I have travelled nearly the whole of America, and as I am going back from here to my own country, it is that I should take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude in this Athens of America. When I first came to this country, after a few days I thought I would be able to write a book on the nation. But after three years' stay here, I find I am not able to write even a page. On the other hand, I find in travelling in various countries, that beneath the surface, differences that we find in dress and food and little details of manners, man is man all the world over; the same wonderful human nature is everywhere represented. Yet there are certain characteristics, and in a few words I would like to sum up all my experiences here. In this land of America, no question is asked about a man's peculiarities. If a man is a man, that is enough, and they take him into their hearts, and that is one

thing I have never seen in any other country in the world.

I came here to represent a philosophy of India, which is called the Vedanta philosophy. This philosophy is very, very ancient; it is the outcome of that mass of ancient Aryan literature known by the name of the Vedas. It is, as it were, the very flower of all the speculations and experiences and analyses, embodied in that mass of literature – collected and culled through centuries. This Vedanta philosophy has certain peculiarities. In the first place, it is perfectly impersonal; it does not owe its origin to any person or prophet; it does not build itself around one man as a centre. Yet it has nothing to say against philosophies, which do build themselves around certain persons. In later days in India, other philosophies and systems arose, built around certain persons – such as Buddhism, or many of our recent sects. They each have a certain leader to whom they owe allegiance, just as the Christians and Mohammedans have. But the Vedanta philosophy stands at the background of all these various sects, and there is no fight and no antagonism between the Vedanta and any other

system in the world.

One principle it lays down – and that, the Vedanta claims, is to be found in every religion in the world – that man is divine, that all this which we see around us is the outcome of that consciousness of the divine. Everything that is strong, and good, and powerful in human nature is the outcome of that divinity, and though potential in many, there is no difference between man and man essentially, all being alike, divine. There is, at it were, an infinite ocean behind, and you and I are so many waves, coming out of that infinite ocean; and each one of us is trying his best to manifest that infinite outside. So, potentially, each one of us has that infinite ocean of Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss as our birth right, our real nature; and the difference between us is caused by the greater or lesser power to manifest that divine. Therefore the Vedanta lays down that each man should be treated not as what he manifests, but as what he stands for. Each human being stands for the divine, and, therefore, every teacher should be helpful, not by condemning man, but by helping him to call forth the divinity that is within

him.

It also teaches that all the vast mass of energy that we see displayed in society and in every plane of action is really from inside out; and, therefore, what is called inspiration by other sects, the Vedantist begs the liberty to call the expiration of man. At the same time it does not quarrel with other sects; the Vedanta has no quarrel with those who do not understand this divinity of man. Consciously or unconsciously, every man is trying to unfold that divinity.

Man is like an infinite spring, coiled up in a small box, and that spring is trying to unfold itself; and all the social phenomena that we see is the result of this trying to unfold. All the competitions and struggles and evils that we see around us are neither the causes of these unfoldments, nor the effects. As one of our great philosophers says – in the case of the irrigation of a field, the tank is somewhere upon a higher level, and the water is trying to rush into the field, and is barred by a gate. But as soon as the gate is opened, the water rushes in by its own nature; and if there is dust and dirt in the way, the water rolls over them. But dust and dirt are neither the result nor the cause of this unfolding of the divine nature of man. They are co-existent circumstances, and therefore, can be remedied.

Now, this idea, claims the Vedanta, is to be found in all religions, whether in India or outside of it; only, in some of them,

the idea is expressed through mythology, and in others, through symbology. The Vedanta claims that there has not been one religious inspiration, one manifestation of the divine man, however great, but it has been the expression of that infinite oneness in human nature; and all that we call ethics and morality and doing good to others is also but the manifestation of this oneness. There are moments when every man feels that he is one with the universe, and he rushes forth to express it, whether he knows it or not. This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality. This is summed up in the Vedanta philosophy by the celebrated aphorism *Tat Tvam Asi*, "Thou art That".

To every man, this is taught: Thou art one with this Universal Being, and, as such, every soul that exists is your soul; and every body that exists is your body; and in hurting anyone, you hurt yourself, in loving anyone, you love yourself. As soon as a current of hatred is thrown outside, whomsoever else it hurts, it also hurts yourself, and if love comes out from you, it is bound to come back to you. For I am the universe; this universe is my body. I am the Infinite, only I am not conscious of it now; but I am struggling to get this consciousness of the Infinite, and perfection will be reached when full consciousness of this Infinite comes.

Another peculiar idea of the Vedanta is that we must allow this

infinite variation in religious thought, and not try to bring everybody to the same opinion, because the goal is the same. As the Vedantist says in his poetical language, "As so many rivers, having their source in different mountains, roll down, crooked or straight, and at last come into the ocean – so, all these various creeds and religions, taking their start from different standpoints and running through crooked and straight courses, at last come unto Thee."

As a manifestation of that, we find that this most ancient philosophy has, through its influence, directly inspired Buddhism, the first missionary religion of the world, and indirectly, it has also influenced Christianity, through the Alexandrians, the Gnostics, and the European philosophers of the middle ages. And later, influencing German thought, it has produced almost a revolution in the region of philosophy and psychology. Yet all this mass of influence has been given to the world almost unperceived. As the gentle falling of the dew at night brings support to all vegetable life, so, slowly and imperceptibly, this divine philosophy has been spread through the world for the good of mankind. No march of armies has been used to preach this religion. In Buddhism, one of the most missionary religions of the world, we find inscriptions remaining of the great Emperor Asoka – recording how missionaries were sent to Alexandria, to Antioch, to Persia, to China, and to various other countries of the then civilized world. Three hundred years before Christ, instruc-

tions were given them not to revile other religions: "The basis of all religions is the same, wherever they are; try to help them all you can, teach them all you can, but do not try to injure them."

Thus in India there never was any religious persecution by the Hindus, but only that wonderful reverence, which they have for all the religions of the world. They sheltered a portion of the Hebrews, when they were driven out of their own country; and the Malabar Jews remain as a result. They received at another time the remnants of the Persians, when they were almost annihilated, and they remain to this day, as a part of us and loved by us, as the modern Parsees of Bombay. There were Christians who claimed to have come with St. Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ; and they were allowed to settle in India and hold their own opinions; and a colony of them is even now in existence in India. And this spirit of tolerance has not died down. It will not and cannot die there.

This is one of the great lessons that the Vedanta has to teach. Knowing that, consciously or unconsciously, we are struggling to reach the same goal, why should we be impatient? If one man is slower than another, we need not be impatient, we need not curse him or revile him. When our eyes are opened and the heart is purified, the work of the same divine influence, the unfolding of the same divinity in every heart, will become manifest; and then alone we shall be in a position to claim the brotherhood of man.

When a man has reached the highest, when he sees neither man nor woman, neither sect nor creed, nor colour, nor birth, nor any of these differentiations, but goes beyond and finds that divinity which is the real man behind every human being – then alone he has reached the universal brotherhood, and that man alone is a Vedantist.

Such are some of the practical historical results of the Vedanta.

Sri Ramakrishna's teaching that 'God dwells in all beings'

M. guessed that the conversation was about worldly men, who had looked down on those who aspire to spiritual things. The Master was talking about the great number of such people in the world, and about how to deal with them.

Master (to *Narendra*): "How do you feel about it? Worldly people say all kinds of things about the spiritually minded. But look here! When an elephant moves along the street, any number of curs and any small animals may bark and cry after it; but the elephant doesn't even look back at them. If people speak ill of you, what will you think of them?"

Narendra: "I shall think the dogs are barking at me."

Master (*smiling*): "Oh, no! You mustn't go that far, my child! (*Laughter*). God dwells in all beings. But you may be intimate only

with good people; you must keep away from the evil minded. God is even in the tiger; but you cannot embrace the tiger on that account. (*Laughter*). You may say, 'Why run away from a tiger, which is also a manifestation of God?' The answer to that is: 'Those who tell you to run away are also manifestations of God – and why shouldn't you listen to them?'

"Let me tell you a story. In a forest there lived a holy man who had many disciples. One day he taught them to see God in all beings and, knowing this, to bow low before them all. A disciple went to the forest to gather wood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he heard an outcry: "Get out of the way! A mad elephant is coming!" All but the disciple of the holy man took to their heels. He reasoned that the elephant was also God in another form. Then why should he run away from it? He stood still, bowed before the animal, and began to sing its praises. The mahut of the elephant was shouting, 'Run away! Run away!' But the disciple didn't move. The animal seized him with its trunk, cast him to one side, and went on its way. Hurt and bruised, the disciple lay unconscious on the ground. Hearing what had happened, his teacher and brother disciples came and carried him to the hermitage. With the help of some medicine he soon regained consciousness. Someone asked him 'You knew the elephant was coming – why didn't you leave the place?' 'But', he said, 'Our teacher has told us that God Himself has taken all these forms, of animals as well as men.

Therefore, thinking it was only the elephant God that was coming, I didn't run away.' At this the teacher said, 'Yes, my child, it is true that the elephant God was coming; but the mahut God forbade you to stay there. Since all are manifestations of God, why didn't you trust the mahut's words? You should have heeded the words of the mahut God.' (*Laughter*).

"It is said in the scriptures that water is a form of God. But some water is fit to be used for worship, some water for washing the face, and some only for washing plates or dirty linen. This last sort cannot be used for drinking or for a holy purpose. In like manner, God undoubtedly dwells in the hearts of all – holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous; but a man should not have dealings with the unholy, the wicked, the impure. He must not be intimate with them. With some of them he may exchange words, but with others he shouldn't go even that far. He should keep aloof from such people."

A devotee: "Sir, if a wicked man is about to do harm, or actually does so, should we keep quiet then?"

Master: "A man living in society should make a show of *tamas* to protect himself from evil-minded people. But he should not harm anybody in anticipation of harm likely to be done to him.

"Listen to a story. Some cowherd boys used to tend their cows in a

meadow where a terrible poisonous snake lived. Everyone was alert for fear of it. One day a brahmachari was going along the meadow. The boys ran to him and said, 'Revered sir, please don't go that way. A venomous snake lives over there.' 'What of it, my good children?' said the brahmachari. 'I am not afraid of the snake. I know some mantras.' So saying, he continued on his way along the meadow. But the cowherd boys, being afraid, did not accompany him. In the meantime the snake moved swiftly towards him with upraised hood. As soon as it came near, he recited a mantra, and the snake lay at his feet like an earthworm. The brahmachari said, 'Look here. Why do you go about doing harm? Come, I will give you a holy word. By repeating it you will learn to love God. Ultimately you will realise Him and so get rid of your violent nature.' Saying this, he taught the snake a holy word and initiated him into spiritual life. The snake bowed before the teacher and said, 'Revered sir, how shall I practise spiritual discipline?' 'Repeat that scared word,' said the teacher, 'and do no harm to anybody.' As he was about to depart, the brahmachari said, 'I shall see you again.'

"Some days passed and the cowherd boys noticed that the snake would not bite. They threw stones at it. Still it showed no anger; it behaved as if it were an earthworm. One day some of the boys came close to it, caught it by the tail, and, whirling it round and round, dashed it again and again on the ground and threw it away. The snake vomited blood

and became unconscious. It was stunned. It could not move. So, thinking it dead, the boys went their way.

"Late at night the snake regained consciousness. Slowly, and with great difficulty it dragged itself into its hole; its bones were broken and it could scarcely move. Many days passed. The snake became a mere skeleton covered with a skin. Now and then, at night, it would come out in search of food. For fear of the boys it would not leave its hole during the day-time. Since receiving the scared word from the teacher, it had given up doing harm to others. It maintained its life on dirt, leaves or the fruits that dropped from the trees.

"About a year later the brahmachari came that way again and asked after the snake. The cowherd boys told him that it was dead. But he couldn't believe them. He knew that the snake would not die before attaining the fruit of the holy word with which it had been initiated. He found his way to the place and, searching here and there, called it by the name he had given it. Hearing the teacher's voice, it came out of its hole and bowed before him with great reverence. 'How are you?' asked the brahmachari. 'I am well, sir,' replied the snake. 'But,' the teacher asked, 'why are you so thin?' The snake replied, 'Revered sir, you ordered me not to harm anybody. So I have been living only on leaves and fruit. Perhaps that had made me thinner.'

"The snake had developed the

quality of sattva; it could not be angry with anyone. It had totally forgotten that the cowherd boys had almost killed it.

“The bramachari said, ‘It can’t be mere want of food that has reduced you to this state. There must be some other reason. Think a little.’ Then the snake had remembered that the boys had dashed it against the ground. It said, ‘Yes, revered sir, now I remember. The boys one day dashed me violently against the ground. They are ignorant after all. They didn’t realise what a great change had come over my mind. How could they know I wouldn’t bite or harm anyone?’ The bramachari exclaimed, ‘What a shame! You are such a fool. You don’t know how to protect yourself. I asked you not to bite, but I didn’t forbid you to hiss. Why didn’t you scare them by hissing?’

“So you must hiss at wicked people. You must frighten them lest they should do you harm. But never inject your venom into them. One must not injure others.

“In this creation of God there is a variety of things: men, animals, trees, plants. Among the animals some are good, some bad. There are ferocious animals like the tiger. Some trees bear fruit sweet as nectar, and others have fruit that is poisonous. Likewise, among human beings, there are the good and the wicked, the holy and the unholy. There are some who are devoted to God, and others who are attached to the world.

The Mother’s (Sri Sarada Devi) way of teaching

There were many ‘daughters’ of the Mother who visited Jayrambati. Braving the difficulties of long-distance travel, they began to come in such large numbers that the people were dumbfounded with wonder and thought, “How could all these ladies, till now confined within the four walls of their homes, come so far, without any fear or hesitation?” Such was the Mother’s attraction. Just as one or two of her sons would be with her, so also, besides her three nieces, there would always be two or three of these daughters with her. As a result of staying near her, the hearts of all her children would naturally be at a high plane of divine consciousness, even when engaged in the daily routine of work. We often make a hard and fast distinction between our spiritual life and our worldly activities, dividing them into two watertight compartments. The consequence is that we often feel our spiritual practice as something unnatural to us, as something forced into our life, which we identify with our worldly activities. Not to speak of the Holy Mother, even in the life of her disciples living near her, this compartmentalisation of life, and the consequent development of a feeling of dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular, did not arise. Through her love and sweetness there would grow naturally in these disciples traits like proficiency in work, attachment to truth, forbearance, love and affection, eagerness to serve others etc. As regards faith in God and the practice of His worship –

that was one’s very life and was as spontaneous as breathing. The faith that gradually became firm in their hearts was this: “There is one all pervading, all compassionate Lord, who is the Sakti (Power) behind all the functions of the word like creation, preservation and destruction. He is present everywhere, inside and outside. The world is the Lord’s. He created it for His own play. We are mere pawns in His game. Wherever He keeps us, and in whatever way he does so, we have to abide by it contentedly. We suffer as a result of our own actions; it is unfair to blame anybody else for it. We have to surrender ourselves completely to the Lord with faith and devotion, serve others to the best of our capacity, and never be a source of sorrow to anybody.” Teachings like these, the Mother used to impart to her children in a manner that they absorbed them in their hearts unknowingly, without any formal instruction. Through her grace, their ego, based on their bodily identity and their attachment for objects of the senses, gradually got attenuated in her company.

A son of hers might sometimes get anxious to practise austerities, seeing someone else doing so. But the Mother, who knew what was good for him, would pacify him sweetly, advising, “Call on the Master, depending on him entirely. You will then achieve everything.” To some other aspirants of a higher order having greater spiritual stamina, she might give a different instruction. In the case of a rare few, whose spiritual aspiration was very powerful, she bestowed

her grace in a special way. But all her spiritual instruction were conveyed in an informal and natural manner, which helped them to absorb the teachings through example and suggestions rather than lectures and discourses. Whenever the aspirants found life unbearable because of conflict of ideals and contradictions of life's situations, the Mother would, with great love and patience, help them to overcome them and attain harmony. Her instructions were simple. She would say, "Is the Master a 'part' of some 'whole'? No, He is the 'whole', the complete, the full. Brahman is the 'whole', without anything else beside Him. There is nothing existing but He. Everything that appears before us is the manifestation of Brahman, of His power (Sakti). It is His power that is manifested as all Deities and is worshipped through them. Brahman alone is the Purusha, the male supreme, the infinite, and the absolute being; He is also the Prakriti or Sakti, the glorious Female, the source of this universe of multiplicity. The Master only harmonised all the spiritual traditions, never upset them." She helped her disciples to think of the Master alone and centre their lives in him, though she gave them different Mantras and different Ishtams (Chosen deities) according to their nature and competence. A simple-minded and unsophisticated devotee-son of the Mother would often bring home this teaching of the Mother to the raw young men coming newly to the Mother without an understanding of the oneness of the Mother with the Master. Devotees of varying social standing and power

of understanding came to the mother. Some made pranams to her and recited invocations before her as Adya-sakti, the Power of the Lord that creates and sustains the universe. There were others without any such theological understanding but knew her merely as their 'Mother', their protector in this life and hereafter, whose grace freed them from all causes of fear. All of them, the knowing ones and the ignorant, were alike in the Mother's eyes; for she knew that they were all calling on her according to their individual capacity. Some may call the same person 'Ba' and some 'Pa' according to the development of their capacity to speak.

Once a disciple asked the Mother: "Where does this initiative for good and evil originate? You may say from our previous life; but where is the source of it all?"

The Mother replied: "Even a blade of grass cannot stir without the will of God, my son. When a creature falls on good times, his thoughts turn to prayer; when he falls on bad times, all is evil. It is all according to God's will. It is God alone who expresses His will through the actions of men. What powers did Naren (Swami Vivekananda) have by himself? It was because God acted through him that he achieved what he did. The Lord knows what he is about to perform. But should a man surrender himself totally at His feet, He will do everything for him. One must bear with everything, because it is all due to cause and effect, according to one's Karma. And Karma coun-

teracts the effects of one's previous Karma...If you do a good deed, it cancels the effects of your evil deeds. If one prays, takes the name of God and thinks of Him, the effects of evil are cancelled."

Source

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Volume I, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, pp.387-392

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Volume I, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, pp. 84-87

The Mother as I saw her: Reminiscences of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Saradeshananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, pp.103-5

Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, pp. 7-8