



Issue 49

July 2019

# Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

Kimberleys

Andrew Tischler

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

## SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

### Sri Ramakrishna: Different Religions and Opinions are the will of God

It is by the will of God that different religions and opinions have come into existence. God gives to different people what they can digest. The mother does not give fish pilau to all her children. All cannot digest it; so she prepares simple fish soup for some. Everyone cherishes his own special ideal and follows his own nature.

Source: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Volume II*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, page 540.

### Swami Vivekananda on Vedanta and the concept of the divine

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

Source: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Volume I, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta*; page 388.

### Judaism

Busy yourself as much as possible with the study of divine things, not to know them merely, but to do them; and when you close the book, look round you, look within you, to see if your hand can translate into deed something you have learned. ~Moses of Evreux, Torah/Bible/Tanach

Source: <https://www.jewishquotations.com/education/>

Apology and Correction of the Previous Issue: Caption on p.12 should have been Abd'ul-Baha, son of Baha'u'llah.

## IN THIS ISSUE

### 1. News from Australian Centres

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

### 2. Feature Articles

- A. *Judaism: A Universal Religion.*
- B. *Direct Disciples: The Way to the Realization of a Universal Religion* – Swami Vivekananda

**W**e 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 2019 TO 10 JULY 2019

### ADELAIDE

506 Glynburn Road, Burnside, SA 5066

Email: [vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com](mailto: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 2019. A dedicated group of devotees attended his talks. These talks were also recorded.
- Swami Vireshananda visited the Centre in March and May for informal discussions/interactions with the devotees.
- 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.

#### Other Activities

- An informal reception to meet and pray for Swamis Dhanyananda and Manyananda, who were recently initiated into sannyasa, was held from 11:00am-12:00pm on Saturday, 27 April 2019. Many devotees and friends were present to interact with them and convey their best wishes for their future monastic life. Swami Dhyanyogananda from the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Trabuco, also happened to visit on that occasion.



A Group Photo from the reception to Swamis  
Dhanyananda and Manyananda

### BRISBANE

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

Email: [info@vedantabrisbane.org](mailto:info@vedantabrisbane.org)

Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

URL: <http://vedantabrisbane.org>

#### Daily Activities

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

#### Regular Activities

- Sunday mornings:- a) Yoga class (8:30 am—9:45 am). b) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* Class (10:00 am—11:00 am). (c) Bala Sangha or children's classes (10:00 am—11:00 am during school term).
- A yoga class was conducted on 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).
- A Vedic Chanting class is held on Wednesdays from 8:30 to 9:30 am.
- Religious classes for children conducted by volunteers were held every Wednesday at West End Primary School (3:00 pm – 4:00 pm).
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* (7:00 pm – 8:00 pm at 134 Fleming Rd, Chapel Hill, Qld) 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.
- On the third Saturday of every month, a *satsang* was held at the Helensvale Community Centre in Gold Coast wherein chanting, bhajans and study of *Bhagavad Gita* was undertaken.
- Yoga, meditation and bushwalking were held on the third weekend of every month at Vedanta Precinct, Vedanta Drive, Springfield Lakes.

### Other Activities

- A multifaith programme was conducted on 16 March 2019 on the occasion of the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. After formal worship, Dr. Ashim Majumdar, Senior Vice President of the Brisbane chapter welcomed the audience and introduced the various religious leaders. Children of the Bala Sangha chanted the invocatory prayer. The following representatives of various religions spoke on the topic: 'The Rele-

vance of Religious Pluralism in Modern Society'. Buddhism was represented by Venerable Lozang Lhagsam; Bahai by Fu'ad Paul Forghani; Christianity by Reverend Canon Richard Tutin ; Sikhism by Suba Satnam Singh; Islam by Princess Lakshman; Judaism by David Paratz, and Sufism by Dr Arsalan Mozaffari Falarti. A choir of the Maria Catholic Community Church, Ipswich, rendered devotional music. Soulful Sufi music was also rendered by Mithun Chakravarty and his companions. The event was attended by a large number of devotees.



*Multifaith Programme on 16 March 2019*

- Nriya Bharati school of Kathak dance dedicated their Annual Concert to the Vedanta Centre. The programme was conducted on 6 April 2019 at the Acacia Ridge State school auditorium, Queensland. Funds raised through this concert was donated to the Centre.
- On 13 April 2019, a day-long retreat was held for children of the Bala Sangha. Ten children participated in the event. Yoga, chanting of hymns, singing of devotional songs, discussion on spiritual topics and play-acting were some of the components of the retreat.
- Easter spiritual retreat with the theme: 'Life—a Spiritual Journey towards the Divine' was held from 19 to 21 April 2019 at Mt. Glorious retreat cottages. Swami Sridharanandaji inaugurated the retreat and gave a talk on the occasion. Swami Atmeshananda and other monastics conducted the retreat. Twenty spiritual seekers attended the retreat.



*Spiritual Retreat from 19 to 21 April 2019 at Mt. Glorious retreat cottages*

- Swami Atmeshananda attended the Greater Springfield All Faiths Breakfast programme on 29 April 2019 organized by Cityhope Church. Federal Members of Parliament Blair Shayne Neumann and Milton Dick, and the State MP for Jordon, Charis Mullen, participated in the event held at the Brookwater Golf Club.

### Celebrations

- Sri Ramanavami was celebrated on 14 April 2019. After formal worship to Sri Rama, devotees sang from the Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam. Food offerings were made and devotees partook of the prasada.



*The Shrine on Ramanavami*

- On the occasion of Sri Shankaracharya's birthday, a talk and worship was organised on 5 May 2019.
- Buddha Jayanti was celebrated on 19 May 2019. Worship, devotional music and a talk on the life and teachings of Buddha were the highlights of the celebration.

### Forthcoming Programmes

- The Annual programme of the Centre will be held on 22 June 2019 at the Indooroopilly State High School.
- Sri Guru Purnima will be celebrated on 16 July 2019.

### CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: [vedacanberra@gmail.com](mailto:vedacanberra@gmail.com)

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 6258 7612 / 0433 593 860

### Regular Activities

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

### MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

Email: [vedanta.melb@gmail.com](mailto:vedanta.melb@gmail.com)

Contact: Swami Sunishthananda 03 8684 9594

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

### Regular Activities

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

Swami Sunishthananda conducts:

- A class on Sundays from 10:00 am to 11:30 am on the *Katha Upanishad* followed by an interactive session and guided meditation.
- Chanting, *bhajans* and guided meditation followed by a class on *Narada Bhakti Sutras* on Wednesdays from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm.

- Guided meditation followed by a class on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* on Fridays from 7:30 pm to 8:45 pm.
- A *satsang* on the second Saturday of every month from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm at 4 Bernard Street, Cheltenham.

### Celebrations

- On the evening of Sunday, 14 April 2019, *Rama Navami* was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre. The programme included puja, offerings, Rama Nama Sankirtanam and Bhajans.
- On the evening of Thursday, 9 May 2019, Shankaracharya Jayanti was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre. Swami Atmeshananda from Brisbane delivered a talk on the 'Life and Teachings of Shankaracharya'.
- On the evening of Saturday, 11 May 2019, as a part of Annual Day Celebration, the play, "The Making of Nivedita" was staged at Kel Watson Theatre, Forest Hill, Victoria. Swami Sri-dharananda, delivered the Inaugural Speech. Hon'ble Michael Sukkar, now Federal Assistant Treasurer and Minister of Housing was the Chief Guest and Hon'ble Matt Fregon, Member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly for Glen Waverly and Dr. Sundaram Sivamalai, Commissioner, Victorian Multicultural



*A Scene from 'The Making of Nivedita'*

Commission were the Guests-of-Honour. Commander Amanda Kates (Australian Federal Police), State Manager Victoria and Tasmania, attended the event as a dignitary.

- On the evening of Saturday, 18 May 2019, Buddha Jayanti was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre. The programme included puja, offerings, chanting and a discourse by Swami Sunishthananda on the topic 'The Compassionate Buddha'.

### Other Activities

- Vedanta Centre of Melbourne organized an Interfaith Meeting on Saturday, 6 April 2019 at Mount Street Neighbourhood House. Swami Vireshananda, from Sydney was invited to de-



*Hon'ble Michael Sukkar, now Federal Assistant Treasurer Minister of Housing and Hon'ble Matt Fregon, Member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly for Glen Waverly with others.*



*Interfaith Meeting on 6 April 2019*

liver the Inaugural Address. Representatives of various faiths deliberated on the topic “How to Lose our Ego and find Compassion.” Reverend Helen Summers, Director. The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne was the moderator for the Panel Discussion Session.

- Swami Sunishthananda attended the Interfaith Dialogue organized by Kriya Yoga on 25 April 2019 at Abbotsford Convent as a speaker on the topic “Modern Mysticism.”
- Swami Sunishthananda represented the Hindu Faith in the Interfaith Prayer Ceremony for Peace, Understanding and Gratitude on 19 May 2019 at Federation Square, Melbourne, organized as a part of 2019 Buddha’s Day and Multicultural Festival.



*Swami Sunishthananda with Rev. Helen Summers and others at the Interfaith Meeting at Federation Square*

### Visiting Monks

The following monks visited Vedanta Centre of Melbourne on the occasion of its Annual Day Celebrations

- Revered Swami Sridharananda, Swami Mahabodhananda, Swami Dhyanananda, Swami Manyananda and Brahmachari Andrew from Vedanta Centre of Sydney.
- Swami Atmeshananda from Vedanta Centre, Brisbane.
- Swami Vedamritananda from Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood.

### Forthcoming Programmes

- Guru Purnima, Tuesday, 16 July 2019.
- Sri Krishna Janmashtami, Saturday, 24 August 2019.

## PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yokine, WA 6060

Email: [vedantaperth@gmail.com](mailto: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* on 11 and 12 April, and 30 May and 1 June 2019.

### Other Activities

- Swami Sridharananda visited Perth along with the newly initiated sannyasis, Swami Dhyanananda and Swami Manyananda from 11 to 13 April 2019. A special puja was performed by Swami Dhyanananda and it was followed by a reception and prasadam (lunch) for the new-



*Reception to Swamis Dhyanananda and Manyananda with Swami Sridharananda and others*

ly initiated sannyasis.

- Swami Vedamritananda from the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, USA accompanied Swami Sridharananda and Swami Dhanyananda to Perth between 29 May to 1 June 2019.
- 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.
- The hall at the Vedanta Centre was hired by the Australian Election Commission to be used as a polling booth for the Federal Elections on 18 May 2019.

### Celebrations

- The devotees celebrated Buddha Purnima on 19 May 2019.

## SYDNEY

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115

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

Email: [vedasydney@vedantasydney.org](mailto:vedasydney@vedantasydney.org)

Contact: 02 8197 7351

URL: [www.vedantaaustralia.org](http://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 conducted a class on the *Mundaka Upanishad* on Mondays from 7:30 pm to

8:30 pm.

- A class for mothers was held every Monday between 11:00 am and 12.30 pm. Swami Mahabodhananda initiated discussion on *Meditation and Spiritual Life*.
- Swami Mahabodhananda conducted a class on 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

- A reception was organized for Swami Dhanyananda (Harshal) and Swami Manyananda (Shivaram) on Sunday, 31 March 2019, after they were recently initiated into *sannyasa*. Devotees had the privilege after the *Bhagavad-Gita* class to convey their



Reception to Swamis Dhanyananda (Harshal) and Manyananda (Shivaram)

congratulations to the two newly ordained *sannyasins*. There were 120 people who had prasada at the VCS.

- Swami Vedamritananda from the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney between 16 March 2019 and 8 June 2019. During this period he visited Brisbane and other places.
- Swami Dhyanayogananda from the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Trabuco, visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney from 18 April 2019 to 2 May 2019. During this period he visited Adelaide and saw some places of interest in Sydney.



*Subrata Dey at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 26 May 2019*



*Swamis Vedamritananda (R) and Dhyanayogananda (L) from the Vedanta Society of Southern California*

- Swami Vireshananda and Swami Mahabodhananda represented the Vedanta Centre of Sydney at the Acharya Kainkarya Sabha at their Adi Shankara Jayanthi at the Ermington Community Hall on 5 May 2019.
- Swami Vireshananda and Swami Mahabodhananda represented the Vedanta Centre of Sydney at the Kriya Yoga foundation day at its Lisarow Ashram on 7 May 2019. The meeting was attended by Paramahansa Prajnananda, the spiritual head of the Kriya Yoga International Organizations.
- Subrata Dey, a visiting sitar artiste from Delhi, India, presented a sitar recital at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on Sunday, 26 May 2019 after the evening aratrikam. He was accompanied on tabla by Abhjit Dan.

### Celebrations

- *Ramanavami* was observed on 14 April 2019. The programme after the evening aratrikam included chanting of the *Rama nama Sankirtana*, bhajans, a tableau presentation by the children of the Bala Sangha followed by prasada distribution. There were 150 people who had prasada.
- Buddha Purnima was celebrated on 18 May 2019. The programme included chanting and a talk on Buddha's Life and Teachings by Swami Mahabodhananda. The celebrations were followed by the distribution of prasada. There was a total of 50 people who partook of prasada.

### Forthcoming Programmes

- *Guru Purnima*: Tuesday, 16 July 2019
- *Sri Krishna Janmashtami*: Saturday, 24 August 2019

## 1. FEATURE ARTICLES

### A. JUDAISM

**J**udaism is a monotheistic religion developed among the ancient Hebrews. Judaism is characterized by a belief in one transcendent God who revealed himself to Abraham, Moses and the Hebrew prophets and by a religious life in accordance with Scriptures and Rabbinic traditions. Judaism is the complex phenomenon of a total way of life for the Jewish people, comprising theology, law and innumerable cultural traditions.

#### *Historical Context: How did Judaism begin?*

Judaism began about 4000 years ago with the Hebrew people in the Middle East. Abraham, a Hebrew man, is considered the father of the Jewish faith because he promoted the central idea of the Jewish faith: that there is one God. At the time many people in the Middle East worshipped many gods. It is said that Abraham and his wife Sarah, who were old and childless, were told by God that their children would be as plentiful as the stars in the sky and that they would live in a land of their own -- the Promised Land. This gradually came true.

Abraham's son, Isaac had a son, Jacob, also called Israel. In this way the descendants of Abraham came to be known as the Israelites. God promised the Israelites he would care for them as long as they obeyed God's laws. While still travelling, the Hebrews lived in Egypt where they were enslaved. Moses, a Hebrew, was chosen by God to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt. Moses led the Hebrew people out of the Sinai Desert towards the Promised Land. At Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses the Law, which would guide the Israelites to today. The laws

were called the Ten Commandments and form the basis of the Torah, the book of Jewish law.

It took many years for the Israelites to finally get to what they thought was the Promised Land - Canaan. After some fighting the Jews established the Israelite kingdom. After many years, Canaan was conquered by the Assyrians, the Babylonians and then eventually the Romans. The Israelites once again found themselves enslaved, this time by the Babylonians. The Israelites were then taken over by Romans who destroyed much of what had been built in Jerusalem by the Israelites. Most of the Jews were scattered all over the region and eventually moved from place to place to avoid persecution, which continues to this day. The dispersion of the Jews is called the Diaspora.

The worst persecution of the Jews was during World War II by the Nazis who murdered more than six million Jews or a third of the world's Jewish population. This was called the Holocaust. Beginning in the 1880s, Jews began returning to their homeland in growing numbers, this time to avoid persecution where they lived. After World War II, many Jews believed that for the Jewish people

and their culture to survive, Jews needed to live in their own country where all Jews from anywhere in the world would have the right to live and be citizens. In 1948, Palestine was divided up and a Jewish state of Israel was formed in the land that was once called Canaan, surrounded by countries with predominantly Muslim populations. Since Muslims also claimed rights to the land where the Jews were living, there was conflict, which continues to this day in the Middle East.

Today nearly fourteen million Jewish people live all over the world. Approximately half of them live in the United States, one quarter live in Israel, and a quarter are still scattered around the world in countries in Europe, Russia, South America, Africa, Asia and other North American and Middle Eastern countries. Anyone born to a Jewish mother is considered a Jew.

#### *Religious Beliefs*

Judaism has three essential elements: God, Torah, and Israel. Arguably the oldest monotheistic faith, it believes in one universal and eternal God, the creator and sovereign of all that ex-

ists. God has entered into a special relationship, or covenant, with one people, the Jews, or Israel, and given them the task of being a 'light to the nation' (Isaiah 49.6). In return for God's care for Israel, Jews have a responsibility to adhere to the divine teachings, or Torah. This is the plane on which God and Israel meet. It contains the ethical and ritual commandments (mitzvot) through the performance of which one may partake of God's holiness. The term 'Israel' denotes a historic political entity, a people, a nation, a belief system, a social group, and a culture.

Important beliefs for Jews are the belief in one god, God, and the belief in the importance of serving God.

### *God*

An early statement of basic beliefs and doctrines about God emerged in the liturgy of the synagogue some time during the last pre-Christian and first Christian centuries; there is some evidence to suggest that such formulations were not absent from the Temple cult that came to an end in the year 70 BCE. A section of the siddur that focuses on the recitation of a series of Biblical passages (Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Deuteronomy 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41) is named for the first of these, Shema ("Hear"): "Hear, O Israel! the Lord is our God, the Lord alone" (or "...the Lord our God, the Lord is one"). In the Shema—often regarded as the Jewish confession of faith, or

creed—the Biblical material and accompanying benedictions are arranged to provide a statement about God's relationship with the world and Israel (the Jewish people), as well as about Israel's obligations toward and response to God. In this statement, God—the creator of the universe who has chosen Israel in love ("Blessed art thou, O Lord, who has chosen thy people Israel in love") and showed this love by the giving of Torah—is declared to be "one." His love is to be reciprocated by those who lovingly obey Torah and whose obedience is rewarded and rebellion punished. The goal of this obedience is God's "redemption" of Israel, a role foreshadowed by his action in bringing Israel out of Egypt.

Jews believe that God is the one true god. They believe that God:

controls nature and history

is eternal, which means he lives forever

knows everything

is everywhere

has no physical form

loves the Jewish people

provided Scriptures and laws that Jews and non-Jews must obey

sent prophets to earth, such as Moses

will send the Messiah

Jews have many different names for God. These include: Elohim, El Elyon, Jehovah, Adonai, El Shaddai and El Roi.

Jews do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah. They believe the

Messiah will be a descendant of King David and King Solomon. The Messiah will gather all the Jews from all over the earth, bring them to Israel, and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. The time of the Messiah will be a time of world peace, without suffering and disease.

### *Religious Roles*

Two of the ways that a Jew can serve the community in religious life are as a Rabbi or as a cantor.

The word 'Rabbi' means 'my teacher' or 'my master'. Rabbis are usually men but there are some female Rabbis in Conservative and Reform synagogues. Cantors are people who sing prayers solo and lead congregation in singing. Cantors are also men in Orthodox synagogues but can be men or women in Reform or Conservative synagogues.

### *Beliefs underpinning the Jewish faith*

Jewish people believe in the Torah, which was the whole of the laws given to the Israelites at Sinai. They believe they must follow God's laws, which govern daily life. Later legal books, written by Rabbis, determine the law as it applies to life in each new place and time. Jews believe it is important to obey the Torah, particularly the Ten Commandments, and the advice to give regularly to charity.

### *The Ten Commandments*

God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on two stone

tablets as a gift to the Jewish people. This was so they would know how to live a good and meaningful life. Jews are also expected to study the scriptures, attend synagogue services, pray regularly, and say blessings after a meal. They must not harm one another, seek revenge, or judge people unfairly. Jews must pass on their beliefs to their children.

The Ten Commandments, as written in the Torah, are:

1. Worship no other God but me.
2. Do not make images to worship.
3. Do not misuse the name of God.
4. Observe the Sabbath Day (Saturday). Keep it Holy.
5. Honor and respect your father and mother.
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not accuse anyone falsely. Do not tell lies about other people.
10. Do not envy other's possessions

### *Scriptures*

The monotheistic religion of the Jews has its spiritual and ethical principles embodied chiefly in the Torah and in the Talmud. Jews believe the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Tanach, are a gift from God to give them instruction in life. There are also books written to help interpret the Tanach. The Tanach is the ancient collection of writings that are

sacred to the Jews. They were written over almost a thousand years ago from 1000 to 100 BCE. The word Tanach comes from the three first letters of the three books included in this text: the Torah, plus the Nev'im (prophets) and the Ketuvim (writings, which include histories, prophecies, poems, hymns and sayings).

The Torah is written on scrolls and kept in a special cabinet called the aron hakodish, the Holy Ark, in synagogues. The Torah is read with a pointer called a yad (hand) to keep it from being spoiled. Each week, one section is read until the entire Torah is completed and the reading begins again.

The Talmud is also an important collection of Jewish writings. Written about 2000 years ago, it is a recording of the Rabbi's discussion of the way to follow the Torah at that time. Later texts, the Mishnah Torah and the Shulhan Aruch, are recordings of Rabbinic discussions from later periods.

### *The Tanach*

'Tanach' is a made-up word, taken from the first letter of the three parts of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Tanach consists of five books of the Torah (the Law), eight books of the Nvi'im (the Prophets) and eleven books of the Ketuvim (the Writings).

The five books of the Torah were given to Moses on Mount Sinai and are known as the 'laws of the Jews.' The Torah is kept in a special cabinet called the Ark, which is the focus of

the synagogue. When the Torah is taken out of the Ark it is carried around the synagogue. A portion of the Torah is read each morning and afternoon of the Sabbath, and on Monday and Thursday mornings.

The Nvi'im is the longest section of the Tanach. It is a combination of historical events, religious teachings, and prophecies of the future.

The Ketuvim is also called the 'Wisdom literature'. It consists of poetry, history and discussions about why bad things happen to people, faith, reward, and punishment. Writers of the Ketuvim include King David, author of the Psalms, and King Solomon, who wrote the Proverbs.

There are three basic groups of Jewish people who have a different understanding of the interpretation of the Torah.

**Orthodox Jews** believe that all of the practices in the Torah, which it is practical to obey, must be obeyed without question.

**Conservative and Reform Jews** believe that the ancient laws and practices have to be interpreted for modern life with inclusion of contemporary sources and with more concern with community practices than with ritual practices.

**Reform Jews** also allow everyone to sit together, men and women, and both Hebrew and the local language are spoken in services.

*The traditional pattern of individual and familial practices*

The traditional pattern of an individual's life can be discerned by examining a passage from the Babylonian Talmud (tractate *Berakhot* 60b). In this passage, the blessings accompanying one's waking and returning to the routines of life are prescribed. There is a brief thanksgiving on awakening for being restored to conscious life; then a benediction is offered over the cock's crowing; following this, each ordinary act—opening one's eyes, stretching and sitting up, dressing, standing up, walking, tying one's shoes, fastening one's belt, covering one's head, washing one's hands and face—has its accompanying blessing, reminding one that the world and the life to which he has returned exist in the presence of God. These are followed by a supplication in which the petitioner asks that his life during the day may be worthy in all of its relationships. Then, as the first order of daily business, Torah, both written (Bible) and oral (Mishna), is briefly studied, introduced by doxologies to God as Giver of Torah. Finally, there is a prayer for the establishment of the kingdom of God, for each day contains within itself the possibility of ultimate fulfillment. As indicated, this was originally not a part of public worship but rather was personal preparation for a life to be lived in the presence of God (even today it is not, strictly speaking, part of the synagogue service, though it is frequently recited there).

Such individual responsibility

marks much of Jewish observance, so that the synagogue—far from being the focus of observance—shares with the home and the workaday world the opportunities for divine-human encounter. The table blessings, Kiddush (the "sanctification" of the Sabbath and festivals), the erection of the booth (*sukka*) for Sukkoth (the Feast of Tabernacles), the seder (the festive Passover meal) with its symbols and narration of the Exodus, and the lighting of the lamps during the eight days of Hanukkah (the Feast of Dedication) are all the obligation of the individual and the family and have their place in the home. It is here too where the woman's role is defined and where, as contrasted with the synagogue, she functions centrally. Given the traditional dietary regimen of the Jewish community—the exclusion of swine, carrion eaters, shellfish, and certain other creatures, the separation of meat and dairy products, the ritual slaughtering of animals, the required separation and burning of a small portion of dough (*ḥalla*) when baking, the supervision of the Passover food requirements, and many other stipulations—there exists a large and meticulously governed area in the home that is the sphere of woman's religion. There seems not to have been a hierarchy of values in which the home-centred—as contrasted with the synagogue-oriented—practices were given an inferior status. In modern times, however—particularly in Western societies, where the pervasiveness of religious obligation has been replaced by ecclesiastical institutionalism on the prevailing

Christian model—this whole crucial area has lost much of its meaning as a place of divine-human meeting. Thus, for many it is only the synagogue that provides such an opportunity, and the individual act has been reduced on the scale of values. With this downgrading, woman's religion has lost much of its significance. However attenuated personal religious responsibility may have become, the intention of the Halakhic structure, the hallowing of the individual's total existence, remains a potent force within the Jewish community.

*The traditional pattern of synagogue practices*

At the heart of synagogal worship is the public reading of Scriptures. This takes place at the morning service on Sabbaths, holy days and festivals, on Monday and Thursday mornings, and on Sabbath afternoons. The readings from the Pentateuch are currently arranged in an annual cycle so that, beginning with Genesis 1:1 on the Sabbath following the autumnal festivals, the entire five books are read through the rest of the year. The texts for festivals, holy days and fasts reflect the particular significance of those occasions. In addition, a second portion from the prophetic writings (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, as well as the three major and 12 minor Prophets, but not Daniel) is read on many of these occasions. The readings take place within the structure of public worship and are incorporated into ceremonies in which the Seder Torah ("Book of the Torah"), the pentateuchal scroll, is removed from the ark (cabinet) at

the front of the synagogue and carried in procession to the reading desk; from it, the reader chants the pertinent text.

The text for the service is divided into subsections varying from seven on the Sabbath to three at the weekday morning service, and individuals are called forward to recite the blessings eulogizing God as Giver of Torah before and after each of these. The order of worship is composed of the preparatory blessings and prayers, to which are added passages recalling the Temple sacrificial cult (thus relating the present form of worship to the past); the recitation of a number of Psalms and Biblical prayers; the Shema and its accompanying benedictions, introduced by a call to worship that marks the beginning of formal public worship; the prayer (*tefilla*) in the strict sense of petition; confession and supplication (*taʿanun*) on weekdays; the reading of Scripture; and concluding acts of worship. This general structure of the morning service varies somewhat, with additions and subtractions for the afternoon and evening services and for Sabbath, holy days and festivals.

The prayer (*tefilla*) is often called the *shemone ʿesre*, the “Eighteen Benedictions”—though it actually has 19—or the *ʿamida*, “standing,” because it is recited in that position. It is made up of three introductory benedictions (praise of the God of the Fathers, of God the Redeemer who resurrects the dead, and of God the Holy One who fills the earth with His glory) and three concluding acts (a prayer for the acceptance of the service, a thanksgiving, and a prayer for peace). Between

the introductory and concluding sections there is a series of intermediate petitions for knowledge, well-being, acceptance of repentance, forgiveness of sin, and others. On the Sabbath and on festivals the petitions are replaced by benedictions that mention the specific occasion but are not petitionary; it is considered inappropriate to attend to workaday concerns at these times.

The general outline of this order of service is found throughout the entire Jewish world, but the details have varied in different periods and geographic and cultural areas. The public service, requiring the presence of at least 10 males, the *minyan* (“quorum”), is generally led by a synagogal official, the *ʿazzan*, or cantor, but any Jewish male with the requisite knowledge may act in this capacity, since there is no clerical class in the community to whom such leadership is limited.

The synagogue room itself has a very simple basic form, though it may be embellished considerably. The only requirements are a container for the Torah scroll(s), called the *aron ha-qodesh* (“the holy ark”), a chest against the east wall or a recessed closet with doors and a curtain; a prayer desk (*ʿamud*) facing the ark, at which the reader stands when reciting the service; and the pulpit (*bima*)—in or close to the centre of the room, according to some requirements—from which the Torah is read. In the Spanish-Portuguese tradition, only one desk (called *teva*) is used. The ark contains one or more scrolls, on which are written the Five Books of Moses. These are variously ornamented, depending upon the cultural region: European com-

munities deck them in coverings of cloth, and Eastern communities (North African and Near Eastern) place them in wooden or metal containers. In addition, silver ornaments (*rimonim*) in the form of towers or crowns are often set on the tops of two rods on which the scroll is wound, and a breastplate (*hoshen*) and a pointer (*yad*) are suspended from them.

### *Holy places: the land of Israel and Jerusalem*

The land of Israel, as is evident from the Biblical narratives, played a significant role in the life and thought of the Israelites. It was the promised home, for the sake of which Abraham left his birthplace; the haven toward which those escaping from Egyptian servitude moved; and the hope of the exiles in Babylon. In the long centuries following the destruction of the Judean state by the Romans, it was a central part of messianic and eschatological expectations.

### *Conclusion*

In nearly 4,000 years of historical development, the Jewish people and their religion have displayed a remarkable adaptability and continuity. In their encounter with the great civilizations, from ancient Babylonia and Egypt to Western Christendom and modern secular culture, they have assimilated foreign elements and integrated them into their own social and religious systems, thus maintaining an unbroken religious and cultural tradition. Furthermore, each period of Jewish history has left behind it a spe-

cific element of a Judaic heritage that continued to influence subsequent developments, so that the total Jewish heritage at any given time is a combination of all these successive elements along with whatever adjustments and accretions have occurred in each new age.

Jewish monotheism has had both universalistic and particularistic features. Along universal lines, it has affirmed a God who created and rules the entire world and who at the end of history will redeem all Israel (the classical name for the Jewish people), all humankind, and indeed the whole world. The ultimate goal of all nature and history is an unending reign of cosmic intimacy with God, entailing universal justice and peace. Between creation and redemption lies the particularistic designation of the Jewish people as the locus of God's activity in

the world, as the people chosen by God to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). This arrangement is designated a covenant and is structured by an elaborate and intricate law. Thus, the Jewish people are both entitled to special privileges and burdened with special responsibilities from God. As the prophet Amos (8th century BCE) expressed it: "You alone have I intimately known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). The universal goal of the Jewish people has frequently expressed itself in messianism—the idea of a universal, political realm of justice and peace. In one form or another, messianism has permeated Jewish thinking and action throughout the ages, and it has strongly influenced the outlook of many secular-minded Jews (*see also* eschatology).

**Sources**

<https://www.refseek.com/search?q=judaism>  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Judaism>  
[https://books.google.com.au/books?id=0t7GMrqazNQC&printsec=frontcover&dq=judaism&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwji-sueidLhAh-VCeH0KHQ\\_PAPYQ6AEIRjAF#v=onepage&q=judaism&f=false](https://books.google.com.au/books?id=0t7GMrqazNQC&printsec=frontcover&dq=judaism&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwji-sueidLhAh-VCeH0KHQ_PAPYQ6AEIRjAF#v=onepage&q=judaism&f=false)  
<https://books.google.com.au/books?isbn=1435856228>: *Judaism* by Carl S. Ehrlich  
<https://www.jewishquotations.com/education/>

**B. The Way to the Realization of a Universal Religion**  
 —*Swami Vivekananda* (Delivered in the Universalist Church, Pasadena, California, 28th January 1900)

**T**his lecture by Swami Vivekananda traces the great religions of the world to have originated between the Ganges and the Euphrates and all of them having experienced growth, excepting the Zoroastrian religion. Even though there is a lot of positive dimensions to religions, religions have also been misused to create havoc in society. Among the issues discussed in this lecture are the merits of having many sects to cater to the different temperaments of adherents so that each person in the world is benefited. The article concludes with the requirements for a truly universal religion, which are philosophy, ritual, poetry etc somewhat reflecting the four yogas in Vedanta.

No search has been dearer to the human heart than that which brings to us light from God. No study has taken so much of human energy, whether in times past or present, as the study of the soul, of God, and of human destiny. However immersed we are in our daily occupations, in our ambitions, in our work, in the midst of the greatest of our struggles, sometimes

there will come a pause; the mind stops and wants to know something beyond this world. Sometimes it catches glimpses of a realm beyond the senses, and a struggle to get at it is the result. Thus it has been throughout the ages, in all countries. Man has wanted to look beyond, wanted to expand himself; and all that we call progress, evolution, has been always measured by

that one search, the search for human destiny, the search for God.

As our social struggles are represented amongst different nations by different social organisations, so is man's spiritual struggle represented by various religions; and as different social organisations are constantly quarrelling, are constantly at war with one another, so

these spiritual organisations have been constantly at war with one another, constantly quarrelling. Men belonging to a particular social organisation claim that the right to live only belongs to them; and so long as they can, they want to exercise that right at the cost of the weak. We know that just now there is a fierce struggle of that sort going on in South Africa. Similarly, each religious sect has claimed the exclusive right to live. And thus we find that though there is nothing that has brought to man more blessings than religion, yet at the same time, there is nothing that has brought more horror than religion. Nothing has made more for peace and love than religion; nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than religion. Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more tangible than religion; nothing has bred more bitter enmity between man and man than religion. Nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men, and even for animals, than religion; nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion. We know, at the same time, that there has always been an undercurrent of thought; there have been always parties of men, philosophers, students of comparative religion who have tried and are still trying to bring about harmony in the midst of all these jarring and discordant sects. As regards certain countries, these attempts have succeeded, but as regards the whole world, they have failed.

There are some religions which have come down to us from the remotest antiquity, which are imbued with the idea that all sects should be allowed to live, that every sect has a meaning, a great

idea, imbedded within itself, and, therefore it is necessary for the good of the world and ought to be helped. In modern times the same idea is prevailing and attempts are made from time to time to reduce it to practice. These attempts do not always come up to our expectations, up to the required efficiency. Nay, to our great disappointment, we sometimes find that we are quarrelling all the more.

Now, leaving aside dogmatic study, and taking a common-sense view of the thing, we find at the start that there is a tremendous life-power in all the great religions of the world. Some may say that they are ignorant of this, but ignorance is no excuse. If a man says, "I do not know what is going on in the external world, therefore things that are going on in the external world do not exist", that man is inexcusable. Now those of you that watch the movement of religious thought all over the world are perfectly aware that not one of the great religions of the world has died; not only so, each one of them is progressive. Christians are multiplying, Mohammedans are multiplying, the Hindus are gaining ground, and the Jews also are increasing, and by their spreading all over the world and increasing rapidly, the fold of Judaism is constantly expanding.

Only one religion of the world—an ancient, great religion—has dwindled away, and that is the religion of Zoroastrianism, the religion of the ancient Persians. Under the Mohammedan conquest of Persia about a hundred thousand of these people came and took shelter in India and some remained in ancient Persia. Those that were in Persia, under

the constant persecution of the Mohammedans, dwindled down till there are at most only ten thousand; in India there are about eighty thousand of them, but they do not increase. Of course, there is an initial difficulty; they do not convert others to their religion. And then, this handful of persons living in India, with the pernicious custom of cousin marriage, do not multiply. With this single exception, all the great religions are living, spreading, and increasing. We must remember that all the great religions of the world are very ancient, not one has been formed at the present time, and that every religion of the world owes its origin to the country between the Ganga and the Euphrates; not one great religion has arisen in Europe, not one in America, not one; every religion is of Asiatic origin and belongs to that part of the world. If what the modern scientists say is true, that the survival of the fittest is the test, these religions prove by their still living that they are yet fit for some people. There is a reason why they should live, they bring good to many. Look at the Mohammedans, how they are spreading in some places in Southern Asia, and spreading like fire in Africa. The Buddhists are spreading all over Central Asia, all the time. The Hindus, like the Jews, do not convert others; still gradually, other races are coming within Hinduism and adopting the manners and customs of the Hindus and falling into line with them. Christianity, you all know, is spreading --though I am not sure that the results are equal to the energy put forth. The Christians' attempt at propaganda has one tremendous defect--and that is the defect of all

Western institutions: the machine consumes ninety per cent of the energy, there is too much machinery. Preaching has always been the business of the Asiatics. The Western people are grand in organisation, social institutions, armies, governments, etc.; but when it comes to preaching religion, they cannot come near the Asiatic, whose business it has been all the time, and he knows it, and he does not use too much machinery.

This then is a fact in the present history of the human race, that all these great religions exist and are spreading and multiplying. Now, there is a meaning, certainly, to this; and had it been the will of an All-wise and All-merciful Creator that one of these religions should exist and the rest should die, it would have become a fact long, long ago. If it were a fact that only one of these religions is true and all the rest are false, by this time it would have covered the whole ground. But this is not so; not one has gained all the ground. All religions sometimes advance--sometimes decline. Now, just think of this: in your own country there are more than sixty millions of people, and only twenty-one millions professing religions of all sorts. So it is not always progress. In every country, probably, if the statistics are taken, you would find that religions are sometimes progressing and sometimes going back. Sects are multiplying all the time. If the claims of a religion that it has all the truth and God has given it all this truth in a certain book were true, why are there so many sects? Fifty years do not pass before there are twenty sects founded upon the same book. If God has put all the truth in certain books, He does not give us those

books in order that we may quarrel over texts. That seems to be the fact. Why is it? Even if a book were given by God which contained all the truth about religion, it would not serve the purpose because nobody could understand the book. Take the Bible, for instance, and all the sects that exist amongst Christians; each one puts its own interpretation upon the same text, and each says that it alone understands that text and all the rest are wrong. So with every religion. There are many sects among the Mohammedans and among the Buddhists, and hundreds among the Hindus. Now, I bring these facts before you in order to show you that any attempt to bring all humanity to one method of thinking in spiritual things has been a failure and always will be a failure. Every man that starts a theory, even at the present day, finds that if he goes twenty miles away from his followers, they will make twenty sects. You see that happening all the time. You cannot make all conform to the same ideas: that is a fact, and I thank God that it is so. I am not against any sect. I am glad that sects exist, and I only wish they may go on multiplying more and more. Why? Simply because of this: If you and I and all who are present here were to think exactly the same thoughts, there would be no thoughts for us to think. We know that two or more forces must come into collision in order to produce motion. It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakes thought. Now, if we all thought alike, we would be like Egyptian mummies in a museum looking vacantly at one another's faces--no more than that! Whirls and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. There

are no whirlpools in stagnant, dead water. When religions are dead, there will be no more sects; it will be the perfect peace and harmony of the grave. But so long as mankind thinks, there will be sects. Variation is the sign of life, and it must be there. I pray that they may multiply so that at last there will be as many sects as human beings, and each one will have his own method, his individual method of thought in religion.

But this thing exists already. Each one of us is thinking in his own way, but his natural course has been obstructed all the time and is still being obstructed. If the sword is not used directly, other means will be used. Just hear what one of the best preachers in New York says: he preaches that the Filipinos should be conquered because that is the only way to teach Christianity to them! They are already Catholics; but he wants to make them Presbyterians, and for this, he is ready to lay all this terrible sin of bloodshed upon his race. How terrible! And this man is one of the greatest preachers of this country, one of the best informed men. Think of the state of the world when a man like that is not ashamed to stand up and utter such arrant nonsense; and think of the state of the world when an audience cheers him! Is this civilisation? It is the old blood-thirstiness of the tiger, the cannibal, the savage, coming out once more under new names, new circumstances. What else can it be? If the state of things is such now, think of the horrors through which the world passed in olden times, when every sect was trying by every means in its power to tear to pieces the other sects. History shows that. The tiger in us is only asleep; it is not

dead. When opportunities come, it jumps up and, as of old, uses its claws and fangs. Apart from the sword, apart from material weapons, there are weapons still more terrible--contempt, social hatred, and social ostracism. Now, these are the most terrible of all inflictions that are hurled against persons who do not think exactly in the same way as we do.

And why should everybody think just as we do? I do not see any reason. If I am a rational man, I should be glad they do not think just as I do. I do not want to live in a grave-like land; I want to be a man in a world of men. Thinking beings must differ; difference is the first sign of thought. If I am a thoughtful man, certainly I ought to like to live amongst thoughtful persons where there are differences of opinion.

Then arises the question: How can all these varieties be true? If one thing is true, its negation is false. How can contradictory opinions be true at the same time? This is the question which I intend to answer. But I will first ask you: Are all the religions of the world really contradictory? I do not mean the external forms in which great thoughts are clad. I do not mean the different buildings, languages, rituals, books, etc. employed in various religions, but I mean the internal soul of every religion. Every religion has a soul behind it, and that soul may differ from the soul of another religion; but are they contradictory? Do they contradict or supplement each other?--that is the question. I took up the question when I was quite a boy, and have been studying it all my life. Thinking that my conclusion may be of some help to you, I place it before you. I believe that

they are not contradictory; they are supplementary. Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth, and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, addition, not exclusion. That is the idea. System after system arises, each one embodying a great idea, and ideals must be added to ideals. And this is the march of humanity. Man never progresses from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lesser truth to higher truth--but it is never from error to truth. The child may develop more than the father, but was the father insane? The child is the father plus something else. If your present state of knowledge is much greater than it was when you were a child, would you look down upon that stage now? Will you look back and call it insanity? Why, your present stage is the knowledge of the child plus something more.

Then, again, we also know that there may be almost contradictory points of view of the same thing, but they will all indicate the same thing. Suppose a man is journeying towards the sun, and as he advances he takes a photograph of the sun at every stage. When he comes back, he has many photographs of the sun, which he places before us. We see that not two are alike, and yet, who will deny that all these are photographs of the same sun, from different standpoints? Take four photographs of this church from different corners: how different they would look, and yet they would all represent this church. In the same way, we are all looking at truth from different standpoints, which vary according to our birth, education, surroundings, and so on. We are

viewing truth, getting as much of it as these circumstances will permit, colouring the truth with our own heart, understanding it with our own intellect, and grasping it with our own mind. We can only know as much of truth as is related to us, as much of it as we are able to receive. This makes the difference between man and man, and occasions sometimes even contradictory ideas; yet we all belong to the same great universal truth.

My idea, therefore, is that all these religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind; and that not one can become dead, not one can be killed. Just as you cannot kill any force in nature, so you cannot kill any one of these spiritual forces. You have seen that each religion is living. From time to time it may retrograde or go forward. At one time, it may be shorn of a good many of its trappings; at another time it may be covered with all sorts of trappings; but all the same, the soul is ever there, it can never be lost. The ideal which every religion represents is never lost, and so every religion is intelligently on the march.

And that universal religion about which philosophers and others have dreamed in every country already exists. It is here. As the universal brotherhood of man is already existing, so also is universal religion. Which of you, that have travelled far and wide, have not found brothers and sisters in every nation? I have found them all over the world. Brotherhood already exists; only there are numbers of persons who fail to see this and only upset it by crying for new brotherhoods. Universal religion, too, is already existing. If the

priests and other people that have taken upon themselves the task of preaching different religions simply cease preaching for a few moments, we shall see it is there. They are disturbing it all the time, because it is to their interest. You see that priests in every country are very conservative. Why is it so? There are very few priests who lead the people; most of them are led by the people and are their slaves and servants. If you say it is dry, they say it is so; if you say it is black, they say it is black. If the people advance, the priests must advance. They cannot lag behind. So, before blaming the priests--it is the fashion to blame the priest--you ought to blame yourselves. You only get what you deserve. What would be the fate of a priest who wants to give you new and advanced ideas and lead you forward? His children would probably starve, and he would be clad in rags. He is governed by the same worldly law as you are. "If you go on," he says, "let us march." Of course, there are exceptional souls, not cowed down by public opinion. They see the truth and truth alone they value. Truth has got hold of them, has got possession of them, as it were, and they cannot but march ahead. They never look backward, and for them there are no people. God alone exists for them, He is the Light before them, and they are following that Light.

I met a Mormon gentleman in this country, who tried to persuade me to his faith. I said, "I have great respect for your opinions, but in certain points we do not agree--I belong to a monastic order, and you believe in marrying many wives. But why don't you go to India to preach?" Then he was

astonished. he said, "Why, you don't believe in any marriage at all, and we believe in polygamy, and yet you ask me to go to your country!" I said, "Yes; my countrymen will hear every religious thought wherever it may come from. I wish you would go to India, first, because I am a great believer in sects. Secondly, there are many men in India who are not at all satisfied with any of the existing sects, and on account of this dissatisfaction, they will not have anything to do with religion, and possibly, you might get some of them." The greater the number of sects, the more chance of people getting religion. In the hotel, where there are all sorts of food, everyone has a chance to get his appetite satisfied. So I want sects to multiply in every country, that more people may have a chance to be spiritual. Do not think that people do not like religion. I do not believe that. The preachers cannot give them what they need. The same man that may have been branded as an atheist, as a materialist, or what not, may meet a man who gives him the truth needed by him, and he may turn out the most spiritual man in the community. We can eat only in our own way. For instance, we Hindus eat with our fingers. Our fingers are suppler than yours, you cannot use your fingers the same way. Not only the food should be supplied, but it should be taken in your own particular way. Not only must you have the spiritual ideas, but they must come to you according to your own method. They must speak your own language, the language of your soul, and then alone they will satisfy you. When the man comes who speaks my language and gives

truth in my language, I at once understand it and receive it for ever. This is a great fact.

Now from this we see that there are various grades and types of human minds and what a task religions take upon them! A man brings forth two or three doctrines and claims that his religion ought to satisfy all humanity. He goes out into the world, God's menagerie, with a little cage in hand, and says, "God and the elephant and everybody has to go into this. Even if we have to cut the elephant into pieces, he must go in." Again, there may be a sect with a few good ideas. Its followers say, "All men must come in!" "But there is no room for them." "Never mind! Cut them to pieces; get them in anyhow; if they don't get in, why, they will be damned." No preacher, no sect, have I ever met that pauses and asks, "Why is it that people do not listen to us?" Instead, they curse the people and say, "The people are wicked." They never ask, "How is it that people do not listen to my words? Why cannot I make them see the truth? Why cannot I speak in their language? Why cannot I open their eyes?" Surely, they ought to know better, and when they find people do not listen to them, if they curse anybody, it should be themselves. But it is always the people's fault! They never try to make their sect large enough to embrace every one.

Therefore we at once see why there has been so much narrow-mindedness, the part always claiming to be the whole; the little, finite unit always laying claim to the infinite. Think of little sects, born within a few hundred years out of fallible human brains, making this arrogant claim of

knowledge of the whole of God's infinite truth! Think of the arrogance of it! If it shows anything, it is this, how vain human beings are. And it is no wonder that such claims have always failed, and, by the mercy of the Lord, are always destined to fail. In this line the Mohammedans were the best off; every step forward was made with the sword--the Koran in the one hand and the sword in the other: "Take the Koran, or you must die; there is no alternative!" You know from history how phenomenal was their success; for six hundred years nothing could resist them, and then there came a time when they had to cry halt. So will it be with other religions if they follow the same methods. We are such babes! We always forget human nature. When we begin life, we think that our fate will be something extraordinary, and nothing can make us disbelieve that. But when we grow old, we think differently. So with religions. In their early stages, when they spread a little, they get the idea that they can change the minds of the whole human race in a few years, and go on killing and massacring to make converts by force; then they fail, and begin to understand better. We see that these sects did not succeed in what they started out to do, which was a great blessing. Just think if one of those fanatical sects had succeeded all over the world, where would man be today? Now, the Lord be blessed that they did not succeed! Yet, each one represents a great truth; each religion represents a particular excellence--something which is its soul. There is an old story which comes to my mind: There were some ogresses who used to kill

people and do all sorts of mischief; but they themselves could not be killed, until someone found out that their souls were in certain birds, and so long as the birds were safe nothing could destroy the ogresses. So, each one of us has, as it were, such a bird, where our soul is; has an ideal, a mission to perform in life. Every human being is an embodiment of such an ideal, such a mission. Whatever else you may lose, so long as that ideal is not lost, and that mission is not hurt, nothing can kill you. Wealth may come and go, misfortunes may pile mountains high, but if you have kept the ideal entire, nothing can kill you. You may have grown old, even a hundred years old, but if that mission is fresh and young in your heart, what can kill you? But when that ideal is lost and that mission is hurt, nothing can save you. All the wealth, all the power of the world will not save you. And what are nations but multiplied individuals? So, each nation has a mission of its own to perform in this harmony of races; and so long as that nation keeps to that ideal, that nation nothing can kill; but if that nation gives up its mission in life and goes after something else, its life becomes short, and it vanishes.

And so with religions. The fact that all these old religions are living today proves that they must have kept that mission intact; in spite of all their mistakes, in spite of all difficulties, in spite of all quarrels, in spite of all the incrustation of forms and figures, the heart of every one of them is sound--it is a throbbing, beating, living heart. They have not lost, any one of them, the great mission they came for. And it is splendid

to study that mission. Take Mohammedanism, for instance. Christian people hate no religion in the world so much as Mohammedanism. They think it is the very worst form of religion that ever existed. As soon as a man becomes a Mohammedan, the whole of Islam receives him as a brother with open arms, without making any distinction, which no other religion does. If one of your American Indians becomes a Mohammedan, the Sultan of Turkey would have no objection to dine with him. If he has brains, no position is barred to him. In this country, I have never yet seen a church where the white man and the negro can kneel side by side to pray. Just think of that: Islam makes its followers all equal--so, that, you see, is the peculiar excellence of Mohammedanism. In many places in the Koran you find very sensual ideas of life. Never mind. What Mohammedanism comes to preach to the world is this practical brotherhood of all belonging to their faith. That is the essential part of the Mohammedan religion; and all the other ideas about heaven and of life etc. are not Mohammedanism. They are accretions.

With the Hindus you will find one national idea--spirituality. In no other religion, in no other sacred books of the world, will you find so much energy spent in defining the idea of God. They tried to define the ideal of soul so that no earthly touch might mar it. The spirit must be divine; and spirit understood as spirit must not be made into a man. The same idea of unity, of the realisation of God, the omnipresent, is preached throughout. They think it is all nonsense to say that He lives in heaven, and all that. It is a mere

human, anthropomorphic idea. All the heaven that ever existed is now and here. One moment in infinite time is quite as good as any other moment. If you believe in a God, you can see Him even now. We think religion begins when you have realised something. It is not believing in doctrines, nor giving intellectual assent, nor making declarations. If there is a God, have you seen Him? If you say "no", then what right have you to believe in Him? If you are in doubt whether there is a God, why do you not struggle to see Him? Why do you not renounce the world and spend the whole of your life for this one object? Renunciation and spirituality are the two great ideas of India, and it is because India clings to these ideas that all her mistakes count for so little.

With the Christians, the central idea that has been preached by them is the same: "Watch and pray, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand"--which means, purify your minds and be ready! And that spirit never dies. You recollect that the Christians are, even in the darkest days, even in the most superstitious Christian countries, always trying to prepare themselves for the coming of the Lord, by trying to help others, building hospitals and so on. So long as the Christians keep to that ideal, their religion lives.

Now an ideal presents itself to my mind. It may be only a dream. I do not know whether it will ever be realized in this world, but sometimes it is better to dream a dream, than die on hard facts. Great truths, even in a dream are good, better than bad facts. So, let us dream a dream. You know that there are various grades of mind.

You may be a matter-of-fact, common-sense rationalist: you do not care for forms and ceremonies; you want intellectual, hard, ringing facts, and they alone will satisfy you. Then there are the Puritans, the Mohammedans, who will not allow a picture or a statue in their place of worship. Very well! But there is another man who is more artistic. He wants a great deal of art--beauty of lines and curves, the colours, flowers, forms; he wants candles, lights, and all the insignia and paraphernalia of ritual, that he may see God. His mind takes God in those forms, as yours takes Him through the intellect. Then, there is the devotional man, whose soul is crying for God: he has no other idea but to worship God, and to praise Him. Then again, there is the philosopher, standing outside all these, mocking at them. He thinks, "What nonsense they are! What ideas about God!"

They may laugh at one another, but each one has a place in this world. All these various minds, all these various types are necessary. If there ever is going to be an ideal religion, it must be broad and large enough to supply food for all these minds. It must supply the strength of philosophy to the philosopher, the devotee's heart to the worshipper; to the ritualist, it will give all that the most marvelous symbolism can convey; to the poet, it will give as much of heart as he can take in, and other things besides. To make such a broad religion, we shall have to go back to the time when religions began and take them all in.

Our watchword, then, will be acceptance, and not exclusion. Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy, and I do

not believe in it. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not a blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one.

Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvelous book--these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutation to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future!

### Source

*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama) Vol 2.