



Issue 51

November 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 on Prayer

Be not a traitor to your thoughts. Be sincere; act according to your thoughts; and you shall surely succeed. Pray with a sincere and simple heart, and your prayers will be heard.

Source: *Great Sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta; page 3.

Sri Sarada Devi on Intense Aspiration

One realizes God in proportion to the intensity of one's feeling for Him. He who is really eager to cross the ocean of the world will somehow break his bonds. No one can entangle him. The Master (Sri Ramakrishna) is the embodiment of all deities and of all mantras. . . . Really and truly, one can worship through him all gods and goddesses.

Source: *Great Sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta; page 21.

Swami Vivekananda on being True to one's own Religion

The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.

Source: *Great Sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta; page 35.

IN THIS ISSUE

Sri Ramakrishna–Vedanta and the Bahá'í Faith:

Personal Reflections of Mai Musta

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.

Sri Ramakrishna–Vedanta and the Bahá’i Faith:

Personal Reflections of Mai Musta

The late 1800s saw the emergence of two significant movements of Faith: the one - disclosure of a new revelation, and the other - confirmation of the truth and continued relevance of ancient scripture. Sri Ramakrishna was contemporary with Bahá’u’lláh, the founder of the Bahá’i Faith. Where Bahá’u’lláh (1817 – 1892) revealed new Teachings, Sri Ramakrishna (1836 – 1886) re-established the lost value and credibility of India’s ancient Upanishadic (Vedantic) wisdom. Surprisingly, the Bahá’i Faith and ‘Practical Vedanta’ as taught by Swami Vivekananda (foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) have principal teachings in common; both advocate the Oneness of humanity, the harmony of religions, harmony of science and religion, equality of men and women, unity in diversity, and the promotion of work as worship.

In British-ruled India, Hinduism was passing through a historic crisis in the 1800s. Considering Hinduism a religion of superstitions and idolatry, ‘. . . the architect of the then Indian education, Lord Macauley, wrote in 1836: “Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully. If our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolator (Hindu) among the respected classes in thirty years hence.”

This he wrote in the very year which also saw the birth of Sri Ramakrishna. Within sixty years came the mighty flood of Hindu renaissance through the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna.¹ At a time when people’s faith in their traditional religion had been considerably reduced by forces of materialism and foreign missionary propaganda, Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated and taught the truth and depth of India’s spiritual heritage.

Narendranath Datta (later to become Swami Vivekananda) was a young skeptic attracted to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna yet hugely doubtful about the truths of Advaita (*Non-dual*) Vedanta as taught by Ramakrishna. According to Vedantic tradition, one must reach an understanding of the philosophy with the help of experience (*anubhava*) as well as reason (*yukti*) and knowledge of scripture (*sruti*). As time passed and Vivekananda gained various kinds of experience, his rebellious attitude, argumentative nature, and intellectual skepticism were gradually transformed into self-surrender, faith, and devotion. He ultimately came to be the foremost exponent of his Master’s teach-

ings to both India and the West. Nevertheless, ‘Talking of the immeasurably rich inheritance of India, he (*Swami Vivekananda*) could not but truthfully also talk of the wretchedness of many Hindu customs and practices that had grown. He did both with his characteristic passion. Pointing to Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna had once said, “He seems to be walking with an unsheathed sword in his hand.”² “From 1881 to 1886, a close relationship developed between Ramakrishna and Narendra. Narendra’s doubts and skepticism were gradually dispelled by Ramakrishna’s spiritual power and the realizations that Ramakrishna shared with him. Ramakrishna’s love and concern made Narendra his own forever. He trained Narendra in a number of spiritual disciplines and initiated him into the teachings of non-dualistic Vedanta. From the Master Narendra also learned Practical Vedanta and how to serve human beings as God.”³

Swami Vivekananda

While most of the followers of Sri Ramakrishna thought of him in relation to their own personal lives, Vivekananda thought of the Master

in relation to India and the rest of the world - what was Sri Ramakrishna's message to the modern world and to India in particular? After receiving the blessings of Sri Sarada Devi, the divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna, known to the world as Holy Mother, that question prompted Swamiji to embark alone in the middle of 1890 on a long journey of exploration and discovery of India.

During his travels all over India (1890 – 1893), Swami Vivekananda was deeply moved to see the appalling poverty and backwardness of the masses. Owing to centuries of oppression, the downtrodden masses had lost faith in their capacity to improve their lot. It was first of all necessary to infuse into their minds faith in themselves. For this they needed a life-giving, inspiring message. Swamiji found this message in the principle of Atman, the doctrine of the potential divinity of the soul, taught in Vedanta, the ancient system of religious philosophy of India. He saw that, in spite of poverty, the masses clung to religion, but they had never been taught the life-giving, ennobling principles of Vedanta and how to apply them in practical life. The masses needed two kinds of knowledge: secular knowledge to improve their economic condition, and spiritual knowledge to infuse in them faith in themselves and strengthen their moral sense.

It was when these ideas were taking shape in his mind in the course of his wanderings that Swami Vivekananda heard about the World's Parliament of

Religions to be held in Chicago in 1893. His friends and admirers in India wanted him to attend the Parliament. He too felt that the Parliament would provide the right forum to present his Master's message to the world, and so he decided to go to America. Another reason which prompted Swamiji to go to America was to seek financial help for his project of uplifting the Indian masses. His speeches at the World's Parliament of Religions held in September 1893 made him famous as an 'orator by divine right' and as a 'messenger of Indian wisdom to the Western world'. After the Parliament, Swamiji spent nearly three and a half years spreading Vedanta as lived and taught by Sri Ramakrishna, mostly in the eastern parts of USA and also in London.

He returned to India in January 1897. In response to the enthusiastic welcome that he received everywhere, he delivered a series of lectures in different parts of India, which created a great stir all over the country. Through these inspiring and profoundly significant lectures Swamiji attempted to do the following:

- to rouse the religious consciousness of the people and create in them pride in their cultural heritage;
- to bring about unification of Hinduism by pointing out the common bases of its sects;
- to focus the attention of educated people on the plight of the downtrodden masses, and

- to expound his plan for their uplift by the application of the principles of Practical Vedanta.

Soon after his return to Calcutta (Kolkata), Swami Vivekananda accomplished another important task of his mission on earth. He founded on 1 May 1897 a unique type of organization known as Ramakrishna Mission, in which monks and lay people would jointly undertake propagation of Practical Vedanta and various forms of social service, such as running hospitals, schools, colleges, hostels, rural development centres etc, and conducting massive relief and rehabilitation work for victims of earthquakes, cyclones and other calamities, in different parts of India and other countries.

In early 1898 Swami Vivekananda acquired a big plot of land on the western bank of the Ganga at a place called Belur to have a permanent abode for the monastery and monastic Order originally started at Baranagar, and had it registered as Ramakrishna Math after a couple of years. Here Swamiji established a new, universal pattern of monastic life which adapts ancient monastic ideals to the conditions of modern life, which gives equal importance to personal illumination and social service, and which is open to all men without any distinction of religion, race or caste.

In this new monastic ideal, followed in the Ramakrishna Order, the ancient principles of renunciation and God realization are combined with service to God in man (*Shiva*

jnane jiva seva). Vivekananda elevated social service to the status of divine service.

‘Vivekananda learned from his Master the synthesis of knowledge and devotion, the harmony of religions, the true purport of the scriptures, and the worship of God in man. When Sri Ramakrishna was on his deathbed at the Cossipore garden house, Vivekananda (then Narendra) requested a boon from him that he could remain immersed in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the culmination of Vedantic experience, for three or four days at a time. In that state, knower, knowledge, and knowable become one. But Sri Ramakrishna reprimanded him: “Shame on you! You are asking for such an insignificant thing. I thought that you would be like a big banyan tree and that thousands of people would rest in your shade. But now I see that you are seeking your own liberation”. Sri Ramakrishna knew the future mission of Vivekananda, which was to serve humanity, so he guided him in that direction.’⁴

Sri Ramakrishna

We are fortunate to have a biography of Sri Ramakrishna written by one of his direct disciples, thoroughly researched during the lifetimes of many who had known Ramakrishna and personally witnessed events in his life. A recently published new translation of that biography, on its back cover, gives a reference from His Holiness the Dalai Lama: ‘Sri Ramakrishna

was one of the greatest of India’s spiritual adepts of recent times, actively embodying India’s profound tradition of plurality. By assimilating the *sadhanas* (*spiritual disciplines*), customs, and practices of different faiths into his own personal practice, he presented a powerful example of respect for other traditions even while maintaining a deep fidelity to his own. His transparently pure and well-documented life remains a guide and inspiration to millions on their spiritual path. I am sure many readers will be grateful to Swami Chetanananda for his English translation of Swami Saradananda’s authoritative biography of Sri Ramakrishna from the original Bengali.’

There is also a detailed record of Sri Ramakrishna’s conversations and interaction with spiritual seekers in the teaching years of his life, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, recorded by a learned devotee present at those gatherings.

The future Sri Ramakrishna was already an exceptional child, whose birth was preceded by parental visions and who, on several known occasions, experienced spiritual ecstasy even in childhood. Then in early manhood Sri Ramakrishna spontaneously undertook rigorous spiritual disciplines driven by his unquenchable thirst to commune with God. After some time, teachers adept in the multiple traditions of

Hindu spiritual practice were attracted to his company and he accepted their guidance. He rapidly achieved the promised end of each discipline. That later enabled him to speak with authority to followers of each of those traditions. And his teachers, through their association with him, found completion in what had been still imperfect in their spiritual attainment. His final teacher of a Hindu tradition was a sannyasi (monk) by the name of Tota Puri who was an adept of *Advaita* (Non-dual) *Vedanta*. ‘. . . Tota had little regard for a Personal God. He accepted only the Impersonal Absolute, the Brahman of Vedanta, and considered the idea of a Personal God – a Divine Person, who is the creator, preserver etc. of the universe and the bestower of grace on devotees – as a figment of imagination like the world of duality itself. This extreme and unbalanced form of Advaitic conviction got corrected in the Master’s company. It happened in this way. . . . At this point a new revelation came to the astonished mind of Tota. His conviction till now was that the Ultimate Reality is Pure Being, but now he realized through a new revelation, that It was Pure Will also. It is this Cosmic Will, the Power of Brahman, that Sri Ramakrishna knew as the Divine Mother and Tota denied thus far.’⁵

After Sri Ramakrishna’s *sadhana* period ended, ‘. . . what was before an all-consuming aspiration for the Divine, now gets converted into an equally powerful urge to share his realization with other lovers of God. In place of avoiding company,

he now begins to long and pant for the company of devotees and truth-seekers.’⁶ Sri Ramakrishna was not a scholar or pundit – he taught Vedantic truth from the depths of his own personal experience - not only to householder devotees at the level of their competence but also to a group of young well-educated youths who later initiated a monastic order in his name. It is through their efforts and the pioneering work of his disciple Swami Vivekananda that we have access to these teachings.

Early History of the Bahá’i Faith

The origins of the Bahá’i Faith go back to a religious movement founded in 1844 by a young Iranian, Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad Shírází, who took the title of the Báb (the Gate).

At that time in Islam there was an expectation of the coming of a messianic figure called the Mahdi. Among the Shí’í Muslims who predominated in Iran, it was believed that the Mahdi would be the twelfth of a series of religious leaders, called Imams, who lived in the seventh to ninth centuries AD. The twelfth Imam is thought to have gone into hiding (occultation) in the ninth century and Shí’í Muslims are awaiting his return as the Mahdi. Initially, many people thought that the Báb was claiming to be gateway to the hidden Imam Mahdi. Those who were religious scholars, however, soon realized from his writings that the Báb was in fact claiming a far higher station. He was claiming to be in receipt of a divine revelation that would put him on a par with Muhammad, the founder of Islam. The

Báb was proclaiming the start of a new religious cycle.

Traditionalist Islam upholds the finality of the Islamic Revelation - that after the Prophet Muhammad, there would be no further revelation and no change in religious law. It is assumed that the Word of God is not only eternally valid but unchanging. Traditions are perceived to be absolute and unalterable because they represent the eternal, unalterable Will of God. Thus the Teachings of the Báb immediately met with great opposition from Muslim clergy and the established government. ‘They inflamed and incited the populace against the Bábís (*followers of the Báb*). . . . More than 20,000 Bábís were killed, many by terrible, gruesome methods, as the Islamic clergy waged war against the Bábís.’⁷ Finally the new Shah and his prime minister decided that the only way of stopping this new religious movement would be by executing its founder. By their order, in 1850 the Báb was martyred by a firing squad in the public square of Tabriz.

Fierce oppression of the Bábís continued over the next few years. Eventually, in the summer of 1852, a small group of Bábís decided to exact revenge on the Shah. Their plans, however, were poorly made and their plot was a failure. Although most Bábís had not been involved in the plot, that event was used as an excuse to begin further persecution, resulting in the execution of almost all of the remaining leading Bábís.

Bahá’u’lláh (*The Glory of God*) is the title taken by Mírzá Husayn ‘Alí Núrí, founder of the

Bahá’i Faith. In 1844, the first year of the Báb’s mission, Bahá’u’lláh became an enthusiastic supporter of the new teachings. ‘His home in Tehran became an important headquarters of the movement. When the Bábís began to be persecuted, Bahá’u’lláh also suffered, and was arrested several times and beaten. Although he had been in no way involved in the attempted assassination of the Shah in 1852, Bahá’u’lláh was arrested and thrown into an underground pit called the Siyáh Chál. It was while he was in this pit that a visionary experience occurred to him which he has described in some of his writings and which he pinpoints as the start of his mission. . . .’⁸ ‘‘‘One night in a dream,’’ He Himself, calling to mind, in the evening of His life, the first stirrings of God’s Revelation within His soul, has written, ‘‘these exalted words were heard on every side:’’ Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Ere long will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him.’’ In another passage He describes, briefly and graphically, the impact of the on-rushing force of the Divine Summons upon His entire being. . . . ‘During the days I lay in the prison of Tíhrán’, are His own memorable words, ‘though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My

*breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.*⁹

Although most of the Bábí prisoners in the Siyáh Chál were executed, Bahá'u'lláh's life was spared because of his high social position and the intervention of the Russian minister in Tehran (Bahá'u'lláh's sister was married to an official of the Russian legation), Bahá'u'lláh was released from imprisonment on the condition that he go into exile. Although the Russian minister offered him the choice of proceeding to Russian territory, Bahá'u'lláh preferred to go to Baghdad.

In Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh proceeded to revitalize the Bábí community. The Bábí's had become demoralized and degraded as a result of the persecutions that had decimated their ranks. Then for two years, 1854-6, he withdrew to the mountains of Kurdistan. For part of this time he lived alone; the rest of the time he was a guest in a Sufí retreat in the town of Sulaymaniyya. Here he expounded on mystical themes and attracted many people to himself. When he returned to Baghdad at the end of this time, he kept his contact with some of these Sufís. His two main mystical works, the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, were written to two Sufí leaders. While in Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh wrote several other important works. These included the Hidden Words, a series of aphorisms on spiritual and ethical themes, and the Book of Certitude (Kitáb-i-Íqán), which deals with the na-

ture of religion and explains the fulfillment in the present day of the prophecies of the Holy Books of the past.

The Iranian authorities made representations to the Ottoman government about the presence and increasing influence of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad, close to the Iranian border. Orders eventually came that Bahá'u'lláh was to go to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman empire.

In many places in his writings, the Báb had written of a messianic figure whom he called 'Him Whom God shall make manifest', whose Teachings should take precedence over his own. Just before his departure from Baghdad in April 1863, Bahá'u'lláh announced to a group of his Bábí companions, his claim to be the one promised by the Báb (this event is commemorated by Bahá'ís each year in the holy days of Ridván). Bahá'u'lláh remained in Istanbul for only three months before being sent on to Edirne (Adrianople) in European Turkey. Here Bahá'u'lláh openly announced his claim to be the one foretold by the Báb and the inaugurator of a new religious dispensation. He sent his emissaries to Iran to publicize his claim among the Bábí's, almost all of whom now became Bahá'ís.

'In 1867, orders came that Bahá'u'lláh and his companions were to leave Edirne. Without knowing where they were going, they were forced to sell their possessions and leave. They were taken to Gallapoli and put aboard a ship. Eventually they arrived in the prison-city of Akka in Palestine. . . . In Akka, Bahá'u'lláh was at first imprisoned in the citadel for two years.

When that building was required for other purposes, he was placed in a succession of houses in the city under house arrest. Soldiers guarded the city gate with strict instructions not to let Bahá'u'lláh or his companions out or to let any of his followers who came to meet him, into the city. It was in these circumstances that Bahá'u'lláh wrote his most important book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (the Most Holy Book), in which he outlined his main religious laws. This was followed in the next two decades by a series of writings (tablets as they are called by Bahá'ís) in which he gave the distinctive teachings of his religious dispensation. The personality of Bahá'u'lláh and the character of his companions eventually overcame the hostility of the (*local*) authorities. In 1877, Bahá'u'lláh was allowed to move outside the city walls. In 1879 he took up residence in the mansion of Bahji just outside Akka. The last years of Bahá'u'lláh's life were spent in writing and dictating numerous works, receiving the pilgrims that came in increasing numbers, and directing the affairs of his religion. The religion itself was now gradually spreading into Egypt, Anatolia, the Caucasus, Central Asia and India. Even in Iran, despite episodes of persecution from time to time, the religion was spreading among all classes and in all parts of the country. . . . Bahá'u'lláh passed away on 29 May 1892 in the mansion of Bahji. . . .¹⁰

Bahá'u'lláh, in His Will and Testament, had appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest son, to be leader of the Bahá'í community (the 'Centre off the Covenant' as this is known in the Bahá'í writings) and sole authorized

interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's writings after His death. Already 'during the period of the Baghdad exile, when he (*Abdu'l-Bahá*) was in his teens, he began to assist his father, and in Edirne and Akká took responsibility for the practical management of the large household of Bahá'u'lláh's family and disciples. He also acted as one of his father's secretaries. . . . After his father moved out of Akká in 1877, 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued to live in the city, increasingly gaining acceptance as a local notable despite living under the government's order of banishment.'¹¹

'The second phase of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry began in 1908, when the dangers that had faced him in Akka ended following the Young Turk revolution of that year and the freeing of Ottoman political prisoners. . . . Taking advantage of his new freedom of movement, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, now in his late sixties and in poor health, travelled to Egypt in 1910, and then determined to visit the new Bahá'is of the West, embarking on the first of his Western journeys (to London, Bristol, and Paris) in 1911. Resting for the winter in Egypt, he made a longer second journey from March 1912 to June 1913, and during fourteen months of extensive travelling visited thirty-eight American and Canadian cities before proceeding to Europe, where he visited Britain, France, Germany and Austria-Hungary. His public addresses during these journeys represent an important addition to Bahá'í literature.'¹²

'Abdu'l-Bahá guided the development and expansion of the Bahá'í Faith from 1892 till his own death in 1921. In his own Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá

appointed his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, to be leader of the Bahá'í community after him as 'Guardian of the Faith' and authorized interpreter of Bahá'í scripture. When Shoghi Effendi died suddenly in 1957, a small group of prominent Bahá'is who had been appointed 'Hands of the Cause of God' administered the Bahá'í world until the establishment in 1963 of the Universal House of Justice, as envisioned in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. That elected body is now the highest authority of the Bahá'í world.

A Special Place

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844 – 1921) was a contemporary of Swami Vivekananda (1863 – 1902) yet they never met. But one special place – Green Acre on the Piscataqua – is associated with both persons and their respective visits to America. It played a role in introducing both Vedanta and the Bahá'í Faith to the West.

In 1890 a small group of investors, headed by a lady, Sarah Farmer, opened a resort hotel by that name in Eliot, Maine. Then 'In June 1892 Sarah had a vision of Green Acre as a place where various philosophies and religions could find expression. In reference to that significant experience she recounts:

"Green Acre was an original conception. The vision flashed upon me. . . in Boston. I was listening to a lecture by W. J. Colville on 'The Abundant Life' through the forming of the Christ within. The day was hot, and through the open window came a noise of traffic

which almost drowned the speaker's voice. The people were so eager for knowledge of themselves that they sat patiently, two hours at a time, three times a day. I looked at them and thought of the spot which Whittier (*U.S. poet & writer*) loved and found so restful – Green Acre on the Piscataqua – and I saw them seated in a large tent on the green bank of this beautiful river, the cool breeze from the water fanning their cheeks, and I realized how much more receptive the mind and heart would be if the body were in such a cool and healthy environment . . . one's mind and soul could be refreshed by helpful thoughts, under spreading pines, in green pastures, beside still waters. The details of the work came quickly before my mind, and when we left the audience room I had it all. . . ."

In March 1893 Moses Farmer (*her father*) died while he and Sarah were preparing for an exhibit of some of his inventions at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Sarah, deep in grief, decided to travel to Norway with Mrs. Sara Bull, widow of the Norwegian violinist Ole Bull. . . . Sarah returned to Chicago after the closing of the Parliament of Religions at the Columbian Exposition. There she met with its organizer, Charles Bonney, and eventually invited Vivekananda . . . to speak at Green Acre on a universal platform for the comparative study of religious systems.'¹³ She and Sara Bull worked closely together to organize that first summer session at Green Acre. 'In 1894, under a tent banked by fragrant pines, Sarah dedicated Green Acre to the ideals of peace and religious unity. . . . Sarah in-

vited speakers of various persuasions to Green Acre and encouraged her guests to listen to all of the lectures without bias.¹⁴

Wishing to disseminate his Master's teachings on Vedantic Hinduism and to subsequently raise funds for his planned work of helping the poor and downtrodden in British India, Swami Vivekananda had travelled to America as delegate to the 1893 Parliament of World Religions. In his speech at the opening session of the Parliament, Vivekananda addressed the audience with the words 'Sisters and brothers of America' which met with a deafening applause of two minutes, after which he proceeded with his short talk that day. All of his talks at the Parliament were recorded. In time, the American press spoke of Vivekananda as 'undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him, we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.'¹⁵ The newspapers of America gave Vivekananda much publicity, and he became widely known. 'He started lecturing all over the Midwest as well as on the East Coast and in some of the southern states of the U.S.A. He founded the Vedanta Society in New York and trained some sincere students at Thousand Island Park. Both through lectures and personal contacts, Vivekananda unveiled the spiritual treasures of Vedanta to the Western world. . . .'¹⁶

Swami Vivekananda stayed and taught at Green Acre for two weeks in the summer of 1894. To this day, the pine tree under which he taught, now

known as the 'Prophet's Seat', remains a revered place for North American devotees of Sri Ramakrishna-Vedanta. In later years, Swamiji sent brother disciples to also teach at summer sessions there – Swami Saradananda in 1896 and 1897 and Swami Abhedananda in 1898, 1899, and 1900. In addition, Swami Paramananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, gave classes at Green Acre in 1909, 1910 and 1911.

Swami Vivekananda had first introduced the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna to America at the 1893 Parliament of Religions. At that same event, came first mention of Bahá'u'lláh in America. A paper, written by Rev. Henry Jessup of the Presbyterian mission in Syria and read at the Parliament by a Rev. Ford, at its end, quoted these words of Bahá'u'lláh:

'That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religions should cease and differences of race be annulled. What harm is there in this?'¹⁷

Perhaps Sarah Farmer first heard of the Bahá'i Faith through Phoebe Hearst of the California newspaper family who visited Green Acre in 1897 and became Sarah's close friend – the 1899 Green Acre program included a quotation from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Subsequently Sarah visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Akka in 1900. A powerful bond was formed there that influenced Sarah's future and

that of Green Acre. 'In 1901, upon Sarah's return to America, the cover of the summer program read: "Tis Daybreak Everywhere. Good Tidings to You! Awake! Awake!", 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent Mirzá Abu'l-Fadl (*a learned Bahá'i teacher*) to lecture (there), and Sarah offered personal classes by appointment on "The Persian Revelation"¹⁸ During his tour of America in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spent a week at Green Acre. "His week-long stay underlined the significance of the property and the importance of Sarah's vision for its future, as well as providing a place for many to hear His talks and meet with Him."¹⁹ Sarah Farmer died in 1916. Today Green Acre is owned by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States and is run as a Bahá'i school.

Sarah had written of Swami Vivekananda: 'To know Vivekananda was a renewed consecration; to have him under one's roof was to feel empowered to go forth to the children of men and to help them all to a realization of their birthright as Sons of God. What Green Acre owes to him cannot be put into words. . . . This great soul came into our midst and did more than any other to give the work its true tone, for he lived every day the truths which his lips proclaimed. When the news of the transition of this beloved servant of God reached us, we assembled in the grove consecrated by him and his brothers, and under "the Prophet's Pine," gave thanks to God for what he had been to us, for what he is now and ever will be.'²⁰

Later she wrote of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 'My joy in the Persian Revelation is not that it reveals one of the streams flowing to the great Ocean of Life, Light and Love, but that it is a perfect mirror of that Ocean. What in Green Acre was a vision and a hope becomes, through it, a blessed reality now. It has illuminated for me every other expression of Truth which I had hitherto known and placed my feet on a Rock from which they cannot be moved. And it is the Manifestation of the Fatherhood - Behá'u'lláh (*Ed. - as it was spelled in those days*) - who had taught me to look away from even the Greatest and find within the One "Powerful, Mighty, and Supreme" who is to be the Redeemer of my life. It is a Revelation of Unity such as I had never before found. By means of its Light, as shown in the life of the Master Abbas Abdul Beha, I have entered into a joy greater than any I have hitherto known. Green Acre was established as a means to that end and in proportion as we lay aside all spirit of criticism of others and seek only to live the Unity we find, shall we be able to help others to the same divine realization."²¹

Absolute Reality

Vedanta defines as 'Real', that which is unchanging in all three periods of time - past, present, and future. Whatever is changeable is termed 'apparent' or 'illusory' - the relative (empirical) reality experienced by our mind and senses. The *Rishis* of ancient India enquired into such matters and came up with radical insights. Those were enshrined as

the Upanishads (Vedanta) in the Vedas.

These days many people find it difficult to believe that an unchanging Absolute Reality does exist to support this ever-changing empirical world we experience - much less that it can be 'known' by man. We identify ourselves with our ever-changing body, mind and intellect, and do not reflect on that unchanging awareness - 'I am' - that witnesses the changes in bodily form from childhood to youth, maturity, and old-age, that is unchanging and unchanging through all fluctuations of emotion, thought and understanding. That unchanging awareness is also witness to the daily changes in our states of consciousness from waking to dream and deep sleep, and then back to waking. What is its nature? Is awareness a 'product' of the interaction of matter and energy as long thought, or is it one aspect of fundamental Reality?

'Consciousness Studies' is now an active field of scientific research. The very ancient teaching of Vedanta that the fundamental Reality of this universe is of the nature of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda) is gaining ground.

Sri Ramakrishna, in his life, demonstrated the validity, significance, and value of the teachings recorded in the Vedas. He inspired his followers to practice spiritual disciplines and seek the ultimate end-goal of human life - the experience of our true Self.

'... the Veda has two sections - karma kanda (ritualistic section) and jnana kanda

(philosophic or knowledge section). The latter is the crown of the Vedas. What the ritualists say (*that "the real nature of the Veda is of the nature of commandments to actions of a ritualistic nature"*) is true of only the karma kanda and not of the Veda as a whole. The jnana kanda, consisting of the Upanishads (also known as Vedanta), reveal the real or ultimate meaning of the Veda, and the karma kanda portions are merely preparatory to this. Therefore to extend the philosophy of ritualism to the understanding of the Upanishads is a great blasphemy. The statements of the Upanishads are not commandments for any action but revelations of the nature of the Ultimate Reality and man's relation to it. They are an end in themselves and not aids to the performance of any ritual. The understanding conveyed by them releases man from the false sense of duality and establishes him in the experience of the Unity of all existence (advaitam: non-duality)...²²

Though Vedanta agrees that Absolute Reality is unknowable by the mind and intellect, it clarifies: there are two kinds of 'knowing'. One is indirect (*paroksha*), mediated by sense perception and concepts based on sense perception, having three components - a subject (the 'knower'), an object (the 'known') and the relationship between those two (the 'knowing'), as for example in our seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking etc. However a second, direct (*aparoksha*), knowing also exists; it is better

described as ‘experiencing’ and involves only the ‘knower’: ‘I am’, ‘I exist’. This ‘knowing’ is not mediated by any of our senses. The intuitional experience ‘I am’ cannot be defined or described but it is EXPERIENCED. The Mundaka Upanishad asserts ‘Those who have attained the knowledge of Brahman (*Absolute Reality*) say that there are two kinds of knowledge – one kind relating to Brahman, the Absolute, and another kind relating to the phenomenal world, the relative.’ ‘As regards the two categories of knowledge, secular (*apara*) and spiritual (*para*), the former comprises the Rg Veda, Yayur Veda, Sama Veda, Artharva Veda, phonetics, rituals, grammar, etymology, metre, and astronomy; the latter (*para*) is that by which one knows Brahman, which is ever the same and never decays.’²³

‘. . . the *rishis* advised: “There are two forces – the forces of nature external to you and the forces of nature internal to you. The forces of nature working within you, when managed, help lead you to that faculty which is not yet evident in you – the faculty with which you will experience what is your true, original Nature.”’²⁴

While Vedanta adopts the language of metaphysics and talks of Reality unconditioned by time, space or causation, the writings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh adopt the language of devotion.

In *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb*, its author writes: ‘True reality, or the noumenal world, is manifested by the totality of the revelation that is manifested in each age. However, the perspectives through which human beings perceive and understand the revelation are limited by the individuals’ own existential stations. . . . According to the Báb, this difference in existential stations, corresponding to the dominance of a particular divine Word, or verse, in the heart of the individual, is the objective basis of the difference of interpretation and the contention about the meaning of the Holy Scriptures that occur within a Dispensation. He (*the Báb*) continues:

“Thus these two would dispute: This one sayeth, Thou art an extremist (*gháli*) and the other one sayeth, Thou art intolerant (*qáli*). This one adduceth evidence from a word of God, and that one reasoneth by another word of God. But I affirm unto them: Ye both are true and right. . . . As to thee who art in the lower station, thou verily art created by this verse, and thus thou wouldst not comprehend above it. As to thee who art in the higher station, thou art fashioned by that verse and thou canst understand the station beneath thine existence. . . . Thus, wert thou to acquire wisdom, thou wouldst not reject anyone because of his

limitations, but must foster the growth of all in the palm of thy mercy. Shouldst thou succeed in elevating him to the realm of glory, great would be his blessings from thee; and shouldst he fail to ascend to thy height, thou shouldst train him within his own rank of existence. For verily he too is a creation of thy Lord; God loveth him and he loveth God”’^{25, 26}

Bahá’u’lláh, in His mystical work *The Seven Valleys*, describes our soul potential in terms of ‘Valleys’ - that ‘of Search’, ‘of Love’, ‘of Knowledge’, ‘of Unity’, ‘of Contentment’, ‘of Wonderment’, and finally that ‘of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness’. The following excerpts are from the section entitled ‘The Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness’ (*as translated from the original Persian*):

‘This station is the dying from self and the living in God, the being poor in self and rich in the Desired One. Poverty, as here referred to, signifieth being poor in the things of the created world, rich in the things of God’s world. For when the true lover and devoted friend reacheth to the presence of the Beloved, the sparkling beauty of the Loved One and the fire of the lover’s heart will kindle a blaze and burn away all veils and wrappings. Yea, all he hath, from heart to skin, will be set aflame, so that nothing will remain save the Friend.

. . . This is the plane whereon the vestiges of all things are de-

stroyed in the traveller, and on the horizon of eternity the Divine Face riseth out of the darkness, and the meaning of "All on the earth shall pass away, but the face of thy Lord...." is made manifest. . . . make thou an effort, that haply in this dustheap of the mortal world thou mayest catch a fragrance from the everlasting garden, and live forever in the shadow of the peoples of this city. And when thou hast attained this highest station and come to this mightiest plane, then shalt thou gaze on the Beloved, and forget all else.

. . . In this Valley, the wayfarer leaveth behind him the stages of the 'oneness of Being and Manifestation' and reacheth a oneness that is sanctified above these two stations. Ecstasy alone can encompass this theme, not utterance nor argument; and whosoever hath dwelt at this stage of the journey, or caught a breath from this garden land, knoweth whereof We speak.

. . . They who soar in the heaven of singleness and reach to the sea of the Absolute, reckon this city—which is the station of life in God—as the furthestmost state of mystic knowers, and the farthest homeland of the lovers. But to this evanescent One of the mystic ocean, this station is the first gate of the heart's citadel, that is, man's first entrance to the city of the heart; and the heart is endowed with four stages, which

would be recounted should a kindred soul be found.

When the pen set to picturing this station, It broke in pieces and the page was torn... '27

'Shattered was the pen at once,
Rent and torn in twain the page,
When the pen did reach the point
Of depicting such a stage.'²⁸

Spiritual Evolution

Advaita Vedanta asserts that the achievable end-goal of human life is realization of our true Nature as Spirit (Atman). It teaches that the body-mind complex is empirically real – not ABSOLUTELY real - that our challenge is to self-identify ourselves with Spirit, not 'matter' - applying ourselves, even in this life, to our spiritual evolution. If we believe that we have only one lifetime available for the achievement of such a high goal as Self-realization, we may feel such attempt to be not worthwhile. On the other hand, if we are convinced that there is purpose to human life and that purpose is to be achieved through the slow evolution of our soul over many 'lives', we may give it a try!

In 1911, while in Paris, 'Abdu'l-Bahá advised: 'God, in His Bounty, has given us a foretaste here, has given us certain proofs, of the difference that exists between body, soul and spir-

it. . . . It is quite apparent to the seeing mind that a man's spirit is something very different from his physical body. The spirit is changeless, indestructible. . . .

The progress and development of the soul, the joy and sorrow of the soul, are independent of the physical body. If we are caused joy or pain by a friend, if a love proves true or false, it is the soul that is affected. If our dear ones are far from us—it is the soul that grieves, and the grief or trouble of the soul may react on the body. When we find truth, constancy, fidelity, and love, we are happy; but if we meet with lying, faithlessness, and deceit, we are miserable. These are all things pertaining to the soul, and are not bodily ills. Thus, it is apparent that the soul, even as the body, has its own individuality. But if the body undergoes a change, the spirit need not be touched. When you break a glass on which the sun shines, the glass is broken, but the sun still shines! If a cage containing a bird is destroyed, the bird is unharmed! If a lamp is broken, the flame can still burn bright!

The same thing applies to the spirit of man. Though death destroys his body, it has no power over his spirit—this is eternal, everlasting, both birth-less and death-less. As to the soul of man after death, it remains in the degree of purity to which it has evolved during life in the physical body, and after it is freed from the body it remains plunged in the ocean of God's Mercy. From the moment the soul leaves the body and arrives

in the Heavenly World, its evolution is spiritual, and that evolution is: The approaching unto God. The soul does not evolve from degree to degree as a law – it only evolves nearer to God, by the Mercy and Bounty of God.²⁹

Vedanta teaches that Atman is our true Self. In the limited self, Atman is veiled by delusion (ignorance) as sunlight is blocked by clouds or reflection in a mirror is blocked by dust! In reference to the individual self, the term 'Atman' is synonymous with 'Spirit' in Bahá'í terminology; in reference to the universe, 'Brahman' is synonymous with 'Spirit'. One of the *Mahavakya*-s (the four 'Great Sayings' of the Upanishads) in the Vedas confirms '*Ayam Atma Brahma*' (This Self – Atman – is Brahman). Sri Ramakrishna advised: 'A man should reach *Nitya*, the Absolute, by following the trail of the *Lila*, the Relative. It is like reaching the roof by the stairs. After realizing the Absolute, he should climb down to the Relative and live on that plane in the company of devotees, charging his mind with the love of God. This is my final and most mature opinion.'³⁰

Vedanta also teaches that the limited self (*jivatman*) is sequentially reborn into this apparently 'material' world in a slow learning curve to its spiritual maturity.

The Bhagavad Gita is an important and highly revered scripture of Hinduism. In it the mortal Arjuna asks Sri Krishna, as manifestation of the Supreme Lord: 'What, O Krishna, is the

fate of a man who, though endowed with firm faith, is not steadfast in his practices owing to distractions, and therefore fails to reach spiritual perfection?' 'Bewildered in the path of Brahman, support-less, does he not perish like a rain-cloud rent asunder?' 'O Krishna! My doubt in this respect has yet to be cleared completely. Indeed I find none better than Thee to be that doubt-dispeller.'³¹

Sri Krishna replies: 'O son of Pritha! He does not meet with downfall either here in this world or in the hereafter. Know for certain, O dear one, that one who treads the path of virtue never goes to ruin.' 'The fallen Yogi goes (after death) to the spheres of the righteous, and after having lived there for unnumbered years, is reborn in this world in a pure and prosperous family.' 'Or he is reborn in a family of men full of wisdom and spirituality. Re-birth under such conditions is passing hard to get in this world.' 'There, O scion of the clan of Kurus! he will regain the spiritual discernment of his previous birth, and then he will strive harder than ever for perfection.' 'Even as helpless, he will be driven towards the path of Yoga by the force of his previous striving. For even a beginner in the path of Yoga goes above the stage requiring the aid of Vedic ritualism.' 'As for the Yogi striving diligently, he is cleansed of all his sins and gains spiritual perfection after passing through several embodiments. Finally he reaches the highest state (which consists in release from the bondage of the body).'³²

'The *Bhagavad Gita* is said to contain the essence of all the Upanishads, Self-knowledge being the main theme of both these scriptures. But the *Gita* is unique and has universal appeal because it guides us in the fundamental problem of humankind – that of right choice. We have to know our identity and our goal – what do we want to achieve in life? In choosing wisely between options we need to have a clear vision of life. Thus clear understanding is the firm basis for right thinking. And correct thinking leads to right action. This is what Lord Krishna taught Arjuna in the *Gita* and through that dialogue it remains a lesson for all humanity. He began the teaching with the absolute standpoint of highest Truth and then taught Arjuna to also understand the relative perspective of right conduct in society – the standpoint of *dharma*. . . . We do not have a choice of whether or not to act. But we do have a choice of selecting which actions to perform and with what attitude. . . . It is only when we have a vision of the totality of life that we can make right choices in the complex problems that confront us in life.'³³

Intellectual appreciation of metaphysical theory is not evolution of the soul. 'Three types of our relationship with Truth have been beautifully described in *Ramayana* when Hanuman, the greatest devotee of Sri Ramachandra, explains his relationship with Sri Ramachandra. Hanuman says, "O Lord, at moments when I am steeped in my body consciousness, I am *Thy slave*; when I identify myself with

the mind and intellect, i.e. *as a Jiva, I am part of Thee; and when I am in my Svarupa (Self), that is as the Spirit, I am Thyself.*" Thus our relationship with the Absolute can be explained in three different ways according to our state of self-consciousness. . . . It is only in those rare moments of bliss and peace in *Samadhi*, when he has completely retired from the false outer coverings, that he recognizes and cries forth "*Śivoham*" "*Śivoham*", "I am That". . . . It must also be clear to you that all the three schools of thought in Hindu Philosophy are not competing and contradicting theories, but each explains a necessary stage we must pass through in our slow pilgrimage to the Peak of Perfection."³⁴

Swami Vivekananda advised: 'The Advaitist (*non-dualist*) or the Qualified Advaitist does not say that Dualism is wrong; it is a right view but a lower one. It is on the way to truth; therefore let everybody work out his own vision of this universe according to his own ideas. Injure none, deny the position of none. Take a man where he stands and, if you can, lend him a helping hand and put him on a higher platform, but do not injure and do not destroy. All will come to truth in the long run.'³⁵

Is this a New Age?

Religion is a multi-dimensional phenomenon with two of its dimensions - the metaphysical/spiritual and the social/empirical - of great importance. Religion presents a metaphysical vision as revelation of transcendent Absolute Reality and at the

same time it is embodied in particular forms of human belief, behavior, organization, and institutions that are subject to sociological and historical dynamics. Any adequate approach to the study of religion needs to recognize those two dimensions. Each religion, with its specific practices and laws, can be explained as the product of the interaction between the divine Will and a specific set of historical, social, and cultural conditions. Bahá'is believe that the Will of God is not static but is ever-creative, renewing the form in which it manifests Itself in accordance with humanity's stage of development.

Progressive Revelation, as conceived of by the Bahá'is, is the arrival of a fresh Divine Mandate governing the customs and manners of a certain Age - defining *dharma* (righteousness) for that Age, forbidding *adharma* (unrighteousness), and restoring spiritual vigor to society. Bahá'is believe that 'only the authority of a new message from God can dispel all of the disagreements and re-establish the true Dharma. Only God can point the way out of the present difficulties of the world.'³⁶ They believe that Bahá'u'lláh is not just a thinker with another new set of ideas; they consider that his message has the authority of God behind it. Bahá'is believe that Bahá'u'lláh fulfils the promise given by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita: 'Whenever there is a decline of righteousness, O Arjuna, and rise of unrighteousness, then I manifest Myself.' 'For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for

the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every Age.'³⁷

'In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries *Persia* (Iran) had sunk to a condition of deplorable degradation. Her ancient glory seemed irretrievably lost. Her government was corrupt and in desperate financial straits; some of her rulers were feeble, and others monsters of cruelty. Her priests were bigoted and intolerant, her people ignorant and superstitious. Most of them belonged to the *Shí'ih* sect of Muhammadans, but there were also considerable numbers of Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians, of diverse and antagonistic sects. All professed to follow sublime teachers who exhorted them to worship the one God and to live in love and unity, yet they shunned, detested and despised each other, each sect regarding the others as unclean, as dogs or heathens. Cursing and execration were indulged in to a fearful extent. It was dangerous for a Jew or a Zoroastrian to walk in the street on a rainy day, for if his wet garment should touch a Muhammadan, the Muslim was defiled, and the other might have to atone for the offence with his life. If a Muhammadan took money from a Jew, Zoroastrian or Christian he had to wash it before he could put it in his pocket. If a Jew found his child giving a glass of water to a poor Muhammadan beggar he would dash the glass from the child's hand, for curses

rather than kindness should be the portion of infidels! . . . Such was the state of affairs in Persia when the Báb, the Herald of a new era, set all the country in commotion with His message.³⁸

Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings, revealed contemporaneously to those of Bahá'u'lláh, though entirely separate, never-the-less have commonality with some of the teachings of the Baha'i Faith. Hinduism speaks of four 'paths' to spiritual growth – that of *Bhakti Yoga* (the path of Devotion), *Jnana Yoga* (the path of discrimination and knowledge), *Raja Yoga* (the path of concentration and meditation), and *Karma Yoga*. While past teachings on Karma Yoga advised ritualistic discipline and worship as preparatory to the other Yogas, Sri Ramakrishna taught synthesis of those four 'paths' - redefining Karma Yoga in this Age as worship of God through the service of man: a path of unselfish action in which one offers the results of one's actions to the Lord. Thus 'Practical Vedanta' as taught by Swami Vivekananda encompassed all four dimensions - devotion to God, scriptural study, practice of concentration/meditation, and work as worship - thus echoing the summons for this Age expressed by Bahá'u'lláh:

'O Brethren! Let DEEDS, not words, be your adorning!³⁹

'The betterment of the world CAN be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct.'⁴⁰

As 'Abdu'l-Bahá was instrumental in the wider dissemination of his father's teachings and spread of the Bahá'i Faith, Swami Vivekananda was instrumental in bringing Sri Ramakrishna's teachings to the attention of the wider world.

One major significance of Sri Ramakrishna's advent as contemporary to Bahá'u'lláh, was to confirm and demonstrate the depth of India's spiritual heritage and the truths of Advaita Vedanta at a time that the world was entering a new Age. The truths of Advaita Vedanta are attested to by the *Rishis* (Seers, Sages) of the Upanishads, by mystics of many Faith traditions throughout the ages, and, most recently, by Sri Ramakrishna and his senior disciples. Although for millennia Vedanta was a restricted Teaching, open to few, Sri Ramakrishna commissioned his disciples to broadcast it to all spiritual seekers - sharing those ages-old metaphysical insights anew. Those metaphysical Teachings now, in light of scientific advances in secular knowledge, are more easily grasped and conceived than in earlier ages. Possibly they may lift our spiritual strivings to new levels of universality; no matter what Faith community we belong to or which World Teacher inspires us most deeply, we may come to conceive a common high spiritual end-goal for all humanity!

May we all strive to manifest the potential divinity of our

soul! May we discover the inner peace 'that passeth all understanding' and our true Self as Spirit!

What is true 'Dharma' (righteous conduct) for this Age?

The ethical and moral laws that govern our relationships with others are universal and timeless. Such values as honesty, straightforwardness, non-injury, compassion, self-control, patience and forgiveness, are common to all religions. But the social teachings, the specified social duties of an individual, are one aspect of religious life that varies greatly. One reason is that man's society itself is constantly evolving. Changes in the social teachings of religion respond to such evolution.

In our changed social environment is it not true that social mores enunciated many thousands of years ago are no longer adequate? It seems to me that the commonality in some aspects of the spiritual Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Bahá'u'lláh stems from their deep insight into the needs of this new Age. Yet their mandates were quite different – while Sri Ramakrishna strove to demonstrate and clarify the truth and depth of India's spiritual heritage, universally applicable, Bahá'u'lláh's mandate was to demonstrate and teach spiritual truth as the basis for a new world culture bringing unity to mankind and eliminating animosity prevalent in many religious communities toward rival movements.

For some insight into Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings, we may turn to excerpts from the Kitáb-i-

Aqdas (Most Holy Book) of the Bahá'is:

'The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behooveth everyone who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.'⁴¹

'They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples. He that turneth away from them is accounted among the abject and foolish.'⁴²

'O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures. Thus hath it been sent down from the heaven of the Will of your Lord, the Lord of Revelation. Were any man to taste the sweetness of the words which the lips of the All-Merciful have willed to utter, he would, though the treasures of the earth be in his possession, renounce them one

and all, that he might vindicate the truth of even one of His commandments, shining above the Dayspring of His bountiful care and loving-kindness.'⁴³

'Consort with all religions with amity and concord, that they may inhale from you the sweet fragrance of God. Beware lest amidst men the flame of foolish ignorance overpower you. All things proceed from God and unto Him they return. He is the source of all things and in Him all things are ended.'⁴⁴

'Adorn your heads with the garlands of trustworthiness and fidelity, your hearts with the attire of the fear of God, your tongues with absolute truthfulness, your bodies with the vesture of courtesy. These are in truth seemly adornings unto the temple of man, if ye be of them that reflect. Cling, O ye people of Bahá, to the cord of servitude unto God, the True One, for thereby your stations shall be made manifest, your names written and preserved, your ranks raised and your memory exalted in the Preserved Tablet. Beware lest the dwellers on earth hinder you from this glorious and exalted station. Thus have We exhorted you in most of Our Epistles and now in this, Our Holy Tablet, above which hath beamed the Daystar of the Laws of the Lord, your God, the Powerful, the All-Wise.'⁴⁵

'We have enjoined obligatory prayer upon you'⁴⁶

'Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide.'⁴⁷

'It is inadmissible that man, who hath been endowed with reason, should consume that which stealeth it away. Nay, rather it behooveth him to comport himself in a manner worthy of the human station, and not in accordance with the misdeeds of every heedless and wavering soul.'⁴⁸

'Beware of using any substance that induceth sluggishness and torpor in the human temple and inflicteth harm upon the body. We, verily, desire for you naught save what shall profit you, and to this bear witness all created things, had ye but ears to hear.'⁴⁹

'It is forbidden you to trade in slaves, be they men or women. It is not for him who is himself a servant to buy another of God's servants, and this hath been prohibited in His Holy Tablet. Thus, by His mercy, hath the commandment been recorded by the Pen of justice. Let no man exalt himself above another; all are but bond-slaves before the Lord, and all exemplify the truth that there is none other God but Him. He, verily, is the All-Wise, Whose wisdom encompasseth all things.'⁵⁰

'God hath . . . as a bounty from His presence, abolished the concept of "uncleanness," whereby diverse things and peoples have been held to be impure. He, of a certainty, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous. Verily, all created things were immersed in the sea of purification when, on that first day of Ridvan, We shed upon the whole of creation the splendors of Our most excellent Names and Our most exalted Attributes. This, verily, is a token of My loving providence, which

hath encompassed all the worlds. Consort ye then with the followers of all religions, and proclaim ye the Cause of your Lord, the Most Compassionate; this is the very crown of deeds, if ye be of them who understand.’⁵¹

‘This is the Counsel of God; would that thou mightest heed it! This is the Bounty of God; would that thou mightest receive it! This is the Utterance of God; if only thou wouldst apprehend it! This is the Treasure of God; if only thou couldst understand!’⁵²

‘Be not dismayed, O peoples of the world, when the daystar of My beauty is set, and the heaven of My tabernacle is concealed from your eyes. Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth.’⁵³

End Notes

¹ Swami Jitatmananda, *Swami Vivekananda: Prophet and Pathfinder*, p. 35
² C. Badrinath, *Swami Vivekananda - The Living Vedanta*, p. 103
³ Swami Chetanananda, *How to Live with God*, p. 404
⁴ Swami Chetanananda, Introduction to *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom*, p. 29, 30
⁵ Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Ramakrishna: Life and Teachings*, p. 56
⁶ Ibid, p. 90
⁷ <http://bahaiteaching.org/the-Báb>
⁸ Moojan Momen, *A Short Introduction to the Bahá’i Faith*,
⁹ www.bahai-library.com/books/introduction/intro8.html
www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/god-passes-by/8#689236014

¹⁰ Moojan Momen, *A Short Introduction to the Bahá’i Faith*, www.bahai-library.com/books/introduction/intro8.html

¹¹ Peter Smith, *A Short History of the Bahá’i Faith*, p. 74

¹² Peter Smith, *A Short History of the Bahá’i Faith*, pp. 79, 82

¹³ *Green Acre on the Piscataqua*, Expanded third edition, Bahá’i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, pp. 12, 14

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 14

¹⁵ C. Badrinath, *Swami Vivekananda: The Living Vedanta*, p. 179

¹⁶ Swami Chetanananda, Introduction to *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom*, p. 32

¹⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 256

¹⁸ *Green Acre on the Piscataqua*, Expanded third edition, Bahá’i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, p. 29

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 59

²⁰ Gopal Stavig, *Western Admirers of Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, p. 482

²¹ Leigh Erik Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality*, p. 206

²² T.N. Sethumadhavan, “The Classic Debate Between Manadana Misra and Adi Shankara”, May 2018 Newsletter of the Vedanta Society of Toronto, p. 2

²³ *Mundaka Upanishad*, translation by Swami Lokeswarananda, 1.i. 4-5 (pp. 11,12)

²⁴ Swami Sridharananda, transcribed from his recorded talk: *What is Spirituality?*

²⁵ The Báb, *Panji Sha’n*, pp. 391-92

²⁶ Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb*, p. 175, 176

²⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Seven Valleys And the Four Valleys* (US Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1991 pocket-size edition), pp. 36-41

²⁸ <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/call-divine-beloved/4#289115398>

²⁹ www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/paris-talks/3#158632900

³⁰ Sri Ramakrishna, quoted in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, translated by Swami Nikhilananda, p. 257

³¹ *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, translated by Swami Tapasyananda, Chapter 6, Verses 37-39

³² Ibid, Verses 40-45

³³ Introduction to *Vision of the Bhagavad Gītā*, one of the 2001 Mananam Series publications of CMWest, p. viii

³⁴ Swami Chinmayananda, Introduction to *Kenopanishad* (Chinmaya Book Trust, 1965), p.13

³⁵ Swami Vivekananda, as quoted in *Vedanta, Voice of Freedom*, p. 67

³⁶ Moojan Momen, *Hinduism & the Bahá’i Faith*, p. 39

³⁷ *Bhagavad Gita*, chapter 4, verses 7,8. Translated by Swami Sivananda

³⁸ <https://www.bahai.org/library/other-literature/publications-individual-authors/bahauallah-new-era/4#788255117>

³⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, p.24

⁴⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 24, 25

⁴¹ Bahá’u’lláh, [www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/kitab-i-](http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/kitab-i-aqdas)

[aqdas](http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/kitab-i-aqdas), /5#366312870

⁴² Ibid, /5#366312870

⁴³ Ibid, /5#495703799

⁴⁴ Ibid, /7#575868705

⁴⁵ Ibid, /6#561552502

⁴⁶ <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/kitab-i-aqdas>, /5#303611242

⁴⁷ Ibid, /7#706273075

⁴⁸ Ibid, /6#128748070

⁴⁹ Ibid, /7#329719813

⁵⁰ Ibid, /6#161988045

⁵¹ Ibid, /6#179303986

⁵² Ibid, /7#487734557

⁵³ Ibid, /5#729302844