



# Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

## SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

### Sri Ramakrishna on God

So long as the sound of a bell is audible it exists in the region of form: but when it is no longer heard, it has become formless. Similarly God is both with form and formless.

Source: *The Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, p. 6

### Sri Sarada Devi on Renunciation

The essence of the Master's teaching was the renunciation of a worldly life.

Source: *The Message of Holy Mother*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, p. 40

### Swami Vivekananda on Knowledge and Ignorance

Ignorance is death; knowledge is life.

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, p.80.

### Epictetus: On Stoic Principles

Make the best use of what is in your power, and take the rest as it happens. Some things are up to us and some things are not up to us.

Source: <https://www.njlifehacks.com/what-is-stoicism-overview-definition-10-stoic-principles/>

Correction: In the previous issue on the top of page 2 it was inadvertently written that the period of coverage was 11 June to 10 September 2019. This should have been 11 September to 10 December 2019. The error is regretted.

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**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 DECEMBER 2019 TO 10 MARCH 2020

### ADELAIDE

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#### Daily Activities

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

#### Regular Activities

- On Sundays, Swami Vireshananda has been informally interacting with the devotees and speaking on topics such as 'Humorous Stories for Noble Living - Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna'.
- On Tuesdays, Swami Vireshananda has been informally interacting with the devotees and discoursing on the *Bhagavatam – The Book on Love of God*.
- On Thursday mornings, Swami Vireshananda has been informally interacting with the devotees and discoursing on *Vedanta for All* by Swami Satprakashananda.
- On Monday and Thursday evenings, Swami Vireshananda has been informally interacting with the devotees and discoursing on Sankaracharya's *Vivekachudamani*.
- On Tuesday and Saturday mornings, Swami Vireshananda has been informally interacting with the devotees and conducting a class on elementary Sanskrit and Bhagavad Gita chanting.
- Swami Sridharananda visited Adelaide and gave talks on the *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 17 from Monday to Wednesday 27 to 29 January 2020.
- Some devotees have been providing community-based support on a weekly basis at the Cen-

tre in meeting the educational needs of under-privileged children .

#### Celebrations

- The 167th birth anniversary of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated on Wednesday 18 December 2019. The function in the morning included Vedic chanting, *bhajans*, special *puja*, *pushpanjali* and *prasad*. In the evening the programme included *aratrikam*, a talk on 'Universal Motherhood of Sri Sarada Devi' by Swami Vireshananda, devotional singing by Smt Soumya Ananda and her group, *pushpanjali* and *prasad*.
- A half-day retreat called 'Bliss Divine' to commemorate the Holy Mother's birth anniversary was held on Sunday, 22 December 2019. Swami Swatmaramananda, Swami in-charge of the Vedanta Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa, conducted the retreat. The retreat included *bhajans*, meditation, a talk on 'Holy Mother: Mother of All'. The retreat concluded with *aratrikam* and *prasad* distribution.



Swami Swatmaramananda, Swami Vireshananda and others

- Christmas Eve was celebrated on Tuesday, 24 December 2019. The evening started with ves-



Swami Vireshananda and Swami Manyananda on Christmas Eve

per service to Sri Ramakrishna followed by Carols by devotees, reading from the New Testament and concluded with *prasad* distribution.

- Swami Vivekananda's 158th birth anniversary was celebrated on Friday, 17 January 2020. The morning service included Vedic chanting, *bhajans*, *puja*, *pushpanjali* and *prasad*. The evening service included *aratrikam*, a talk on 'The Universal Message of Swami Vivekananda' by Swami Vireshananda, devotional singing by Sri Jiten Patel, *pushpanjali* and *prasad*.
- Shivaratri was celebrated on Friday, 21 February 2020 with *aratrikam*, *puja*, *bhajans*, worship of a Siva Lingam and *prasad*.



*Shivaratri puja*

- The 185th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated on Tuesday, 25 February 2020. The morning program included Vedic chanting, *bhajans*, *puja*, Sri Ramakrishna *archana* (chanting 108 names of Sri Ramakrishna), *pushpanjali* and *prasad*. The evening program included *Vishnu Sahasranama* chanting, *aratrikam*, a talk on 'What Sri Ramakrishna has taught us?' by Swami Vireshananda, veena recital by Sangeetha Ramkumar, *pushpanjali* and dinner *prasad*.
- Sri Ramakrishna Mananam (Contemplation on Sri Ramakrishna), a half-day retreat on the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary



*Sri Ramakrishna Mananam Spiritual Retreat*

was held on Sunday, 1 March 2020. The retreat included *Nama Sankirtana*, *Sri Ramakrishna archana*, a talk on 'Contemplating on Sri Ramakrishna - The Source of Divine Bliss' by Swami Vireshananda, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, silence and meditation, question and answer/discussion, *aratrikam*, *pushpanjali*, and *prasad*.

## BRISBANE

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

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Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

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### Daily Activities

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

### Regular Activities

- Sunday mornings:- a) Yoga class (8:30 am—9:45 am). b) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* Class (10:00 am—11:00 am). (c) Bala Sangha or children's classes (10:00 am—11:00 am during school term).
- A yoga class was conducted on Tuesday evenings from 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm.
- A discussion group met on the first Monday of the month at Sunnybank Hills (7:30 pm — 8:45 pm).
- A Vedic Chanting class was held on Wednesdays from 8:30 am to 9:30 am.
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* (7:00 pm — 8:00 pm) at 134 Fleming Rd, Chapel Hill, Qld) on alternate Fridays.
- Chanting of the *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days (7:30 pm — 8:15 pm).

## Reach

- 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* was 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 on the Gold Coast wherein chanting, bhajans and study of *Bhagavad Gita* were undertaken.
- Yoga, meditation and bushwalking were held on the third weekend of every month at Vedanta Precinct, Vedanta Drive, Springfield Lakes.

### Other Activities

- Swami Swatmaramananda from the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Johannesburg visited Brisbane from 13 to 15 December 2019. He sang *bhajans* and gave talks on the Gold Coast (on 14 December) and at Springfield Lakes, Vedanta Centre, on 15 December 2019.
- 'Pray for Australia' - an event praying for the welfare of the bushfire victims was conducted by Global Persons of Indian Origin (GPIO) on 11 January 2020 in South Brisbane. Swami Atmeshananda participated in the programme and spoke on the occasion.
- Mr. Unnikrishnan Nair represented the Centre and spoke at the Brisbane Bahai Centre in honour of United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week on Saturday, 1 February 2020. The theme of the event was Social Cohesion: Trustworthiness.
- Swami Atmeshananda participated in a concert programme *Yatra Holi Sandhya* on 22 February 2020 held as part of the BrisAsia 2020 Festival.
- The Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Queensland - Mr. Stirling Hinchliffe, accompanied by the MP for Jordon - Charis Mullen visited the Centre on 3 March 2020 and met the members of the Centre. They appreciated the activities undertaken by the Centre for the bene-

fit of the local community. A cheque for \$5000 as donation towards the bushfire relief fund, was handed over to the Minister by Swami Atmeshananda.



*Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Queensland Mr. Stirling Hinchliffe, MP for Jordon Charis Mullen and others.*

### Celebrations

- The birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was conducted on 18 December 2019, with worship, *bhajans*, readings from the life of Holy Mother and *prasad* distribution. A public celebration was organized on Saturday, 21st December 2019 at which a large number of people attended.
- Christmas eve was celebrated on 24 December 2019. Worship of Christ, singing of Carols and distribution of *prasad* constituted the evening programme.
- *Kalpataru day* was celebrated on 1 January 2020, from 7.30 a.m. to 10 a.m. Chanting of Om, meditation, *puja*, *bhajans*, talks on the significance of



*Audience on Kalpataru Day*

the day and the serving of breakfast were the different aspects of the event.

- Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary was conducted on 17 January 2020 with *puja, bhajans*, meditation and distribution of *prasad*. Again, on 18 January, a public celebration was held.



*Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary*

- Shivaratri was observed on 21 February 2020 from 6.30 p.m to 10 p.m. After formal worship by Swami Atmeshananda, devotees worshiped Shiva while the chanting of hymns continued. *Prasad* was distributed after the worship.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was held on 25 February 2020 with *puja*, meditation and *prasad* distribution.
- The public celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was conducted on 1 March 2020. After worship, a multifaith programme was conducted on the theme 'How can my Religion enhance Cohesiveness'. Speakers from the Bahai, Buddhist, Christian (evangelical and liberal), Islamic, Sikh and Sufi faiths spoke on the subject. Swami Atmeshananda spoke on the subject based on Sri Ramakrishna's personal realizations. Federal Senator for Queensland - Hon. Paul Scarr and the candidate for Ipswich Mayorship - Teresa Harding participated in the event.

### **Forthcoming Programmes**

- The Annual spiritual retreat will be held from 10 to 13 April (Easter weekend) at Mt. Glorious, Qld. Swamis Sridharananda and Sunishthananda will be conducting the retreat.



*Religious Leaders at the Multifaith Programme*

Limited places are available. Contact Swami Atmeshananda for further details.

- Paramahansa Prajnananda from Kriya Yoga International will deliver a lecture at the Centre on 23 April 2020 on the subject 'Life, Spirituality and the search for Happiness'.

## **CANBERRA**

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### **Regular Activities**

- The first Gita lecture for this calendar year was conducted by Swami Sridharananda on 16 February 2020. The lectures in Canberra this year are expected to be held at the Belconnen Community Meeting Room, 12 Chandler St, Belconnen, ACT. Monthly lectures are advertised by e-mail once scheduled.

## MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

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### Regular Activities

- The shrine was open from 7:00 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.
- Rama Nama Sankirtanam on Ekadasi Days.

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 and guided meditation followed by a class on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* on Wednesdays from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm.
- Guided meditation followed by a class on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* on Thursdays from 7:30 pm to 8:45 pm.

### Celebrations

- On the morning of Sunday, 22 December, 2019 Holy Mother's birthday was celebrated in the Vedanta Centre. The programme included *puja*, *homa*, offerings, *bhajans* and sharing of *prasad*. Swami Sunishthananda delivered a talk on the



The Holy Mother's Birth Anniversary

topic 'Relevance of Holy Mother's Life.'

- On the evening of Tuesday, 24 December 2019, Christmas Eve was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre. The programme included *puja*, offerings, Carols and a talk on 'Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ'.
- On the evening of Wednesday, 1 January 2020, Kalpataru Day was observed in the Vedanta Centre. The programme included *puja*, offerings, *bhajans* and a talk on 'The Significance of Kalpataru Day'.



Kalpataru Day in Melbourne

- On the morning of Sunday, 12 January 2020, Swami Vivekananda's birthday was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre. The programme included *puja*, offerings, chanting, *bhajans* and a talk was delivered by Swami Sunishthananda on 'Swami Vivekananda and his Message'.
- On the morning of Saturday, 1 February 2020,



Saraswati Puja in Melbourne

Saraswati Puja was celebrated in the Vedanta Centre. The programme included puja, offerings, chanting, *bhajans* and *Vidyarthi Homa* in which 25 children participated. The event was funded by the Victorian Multicultural Festivals and Events 2019-2020 Round 2 Grants Programme.

- On the evening of Friday, 21 February 2020, *Shivaratri* was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre. The programme included Rudram Chanting and *abhisekam* followed by *bhajans*, *aratrikam* and *pushpanjali*.



*Shivaratri in Melbourne*

- On the morning of Sunday, 1 March 2020, Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre. The programme included *puja*, offerings, *chanting*, *bhajans* and a talk delivered by Swami Sunishthananda on the topic 'Sri Ramakrishna: A Living Commentary on Scriptures'.



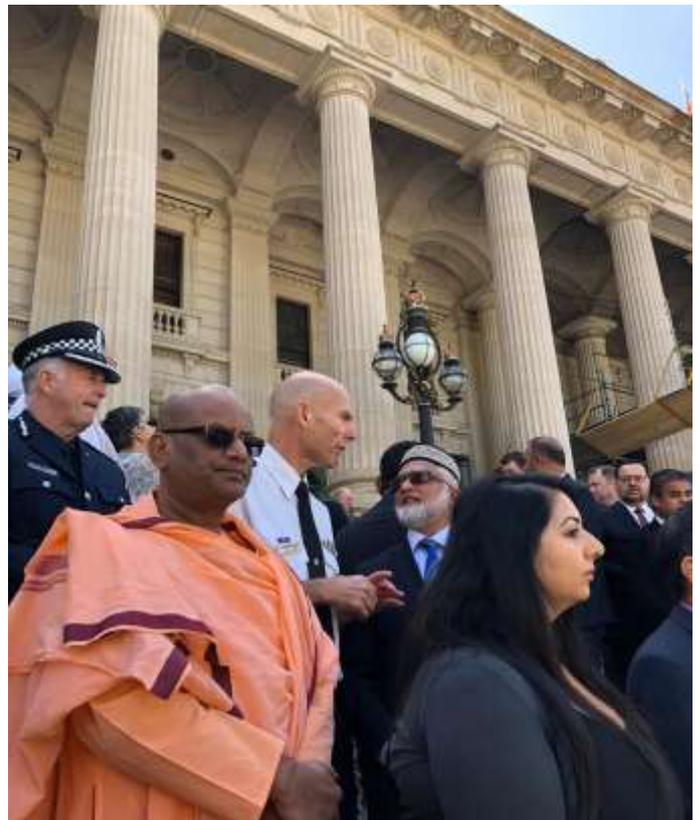
*The Worship of Sri Ramakrishna on his Birth Anniversary*



*Children's Holiday Programme*

### Other Activities

- A Children's holiday programme was organized from Monday, 20 January 2020, to Wednesday 22 January 2020, at the Vedanta Centre. Thirty children of the age group 5 – 13 years were registered to participate.
- Swami Sunishthananda was invited to participate in a Multi-Faith Gathering organised by the Victorian Multicultural Commission in conjunction with the Faith Communities Council of Victoria. The function at the Victorian Parliament was intended to support the recovery efforts for the bushfire victims and firefighters.



*Victorian Multicultural Commission Programme*

### Forthcoming Programmes

- Rama Navami: Thursday, 2 April 2020
- Sri Shankaracharya Jayanti: Tuesday, 28 April 2020
- Buddha Jayanti: Thursday, 30 April 2020
- Annual Day Celebration: Saturday, 9 May 2020

### PERTH

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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* are usually conducted on a Sunday of every month. The programmes include chanting, *Gita dhyanam*, *bhajans*, readings and *prasad* distribution. A *satsang* to celebrate Thakur's birth anniversary was held on Sunday 1 March 2020.

### Other Activities

- A working bee is usually held once every month. A working bee to tidy up the centre was held on Sunday, 16 February 2020.
- The Vedanta Multipurpose hall is used about 5 days a week by the organization called Prana Yoga, which is led by an acclaimed yoga teacher who is a member of Yoga Australia.

### Celebrations

- Holy Mother's birth anniversary was celebrated on 18 December 2019.
- Christmas Eve was celebrated on 24 December 2019.
- Kalpataru Day was observed on 1 January 2020.

- Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary was celebrated on 19 January 2020.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was celebrated during the evening with *aratrikam* by the devotees on 25 February 2020.



Group Photo of the devotees from Perth

### SYDNEY

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### Daily Activities

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

### Regular Activities

- Swami Sridharananda conducted his chapter-wise study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā*, on Sundays between 9:30 am and 10:30 am.
- Swami Sridharananda conducted a class on the

*Mundaka Upanishad* on Mondays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.

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

### Celebrations

- Sri Sarada Devi's 167th birth anniversary was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 18 December 2019. The morning function included *puja, bhajans, homa*, while the evening function included *aratrikam*, a talk by Swami Mahabodhananda on 'The Life and Teachings of the Holy Mother', offerings, chanting by the children of the Bala Sangha and *prasad* distribution. There were 280 devotees who attended in the morning and evening.
- Christmas Eve was observed on 24 December 2019. After *aratrikam* there were Carols by the devotees, reading from the Bible by Swami Mahabodhananda, and the distribution of *prasad*. There were 75 people who attended.
- *Kalpataru Day* was observed on 1 January 2020. The evening programme included *bhajans*, a talk on the 'Significance of the Kalpataru Day' by Swami Sridharananda, distribution of *prasad*. There were about 200 people who attended.
- Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary was celebrated on 17 January 2020. The morning programme included *puja, chanting, homa, pushpanjali* and *prasad* distribution. The evening programme included *aratrikam*, a sarod recital by Sandipan Ganguli and a talk by Swami Mahabodhananda. There were in total about 210 people who partook of *prasad* in the morning and evening.



Children of the Bala Sangha on Holy Mother's Birth Anniversary



Sarod recital by Sandipan Ganguli

- *Shivaratri* was observed at the Vedanta Centre on Friday, 21 February 2020. The function included *aratrikam*, chanting of the *Rudraprasna, bhajans, puja, abhishekam* by the devotees and *prasad* distribution. There were 120 people who attended the *puja*.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was celebrated on Tuesday, 25 February 2020. The programme in the morning included *puja, chanting, bhajans, homa, aratrikam, pushpanjali* and *prasad* distribution. The evening programme included *aratrikam, bhajans*, a talk by Swami Mahabodhananda, a children's programme, *pushpanjali* and *prasad* distribution. There were 220 people who received *prasad* in the morning and evening.

### Other Activities

- Swami Atmajnanananda from the Vedanta Centre of Greater Washington DC visited the Vedanta Centre of Sydney between 2 March 2020 to 13 March 2020. He addressed the devotees of the VCS on Sunday, 8 March and on Monday, 9 March on topics related to spiritual life.

## 2. FEATURE ARTICLES

### A. Stoicism

#### Introduction

**S**toicism was one of the new philosophical movements of the Hellenistic period. The name derives from the porch (*stoa poikilê*) in the Agora at Athens decorated with mural paintings, where the members of the school congregated, and their lectures were held. Unlike 'epicurean,' the sense of the English adjective 'stoical' is not utterly misleading with regard to its philosophical origins. The Stoics did, in fact, hold that emotions like fear or envy (or impassioned sexual attachments, or passionate love of anything whatsoever) either were, or arose from, false judgements and that the sage – a person who had attained moral and intellectual perfection – would not undergo them.

The later Stoics emphasise the doctrines (already central to the early Stoics' teachings) that the sage is utterly immune to misfortune and that virtue is sufficient for happiness. Our phrase 'stoic calm' perhaps encapsulates the general drift of these claims. Stoic ethics achieves a certain plausibility within the context of their physical theory and psychology, and within the framework of Greek ethical theory as that was handed down to them from Plato and Aristotle. It seems that they were well aware of the mutually interdependent nature of their philosophical views, likening philosophy itself

to a living animal in which logic is bones and sinews; ethics and physics, the flesh and the soul respectively (another version reverses this assignment, making ethics the soul). Their views in logic and physics are no less distinctive and interesting than those in ethics itself.

#### Historical Context

The Stoic School was started in the final decade of the fourth century before the Christian era, by a certain Zeno: not the earlier Eleatic paradox-monger, but a native of the Cypriot city of Citium, and thus usually distinguished as 'Zeno of Citium'. His date of birth is unknown – probably around the 330s BCE – but his death can be dated with fair confidence to 262 BCE, when the school that he had founded came under the leadership of his student and successor, Cleanthes of Assos. Cleanthes was succeeded thirty years later by the greatest of the Stoic line, Chrysippus of Soli.

Although none of these three were Athenians by birth, they all studied and worked in Athens, and were deeply influenced by the schools of Athens that preceded them: Plato's Academy, first and foremost, but Aristotle's Lyceum as well, and even, in an adversarial way, the roughly contemporary and rival school of Epicurus. They also absorbed the writings of Xenophon, who had been a student of Socrates alongside Plato and wrote his own Socratic dia-

logues, although he left no school behind. Many facets of Stoic theory show the influence of the Socratic legacy – their theology as much as their ethics – and the Socrates that they imitated was just as often Xenophon's as Plato's.

Stoicism had intelligent and interesting proponents to its name for the next four hundred years; the school made an easy passage to Rome when Rome eclipsed Greece in the second century BCE, and it even found adherents among the early Christians.

#### *Stoicism: Key principles and beliefs*

##### **1 Live in Agreement with Nature – The Stoic Goal of Life**

The ultimate goal of life was agreed by all ancient schools of philosophy to be *Eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* should be thought of as the supreme happiness or fulfilment attainable by human beings. The Good Life – a flourishing, lofty, and smoothly flowing life. The Stoics came up with many practical strategies to progress to the Good Life. Stoics summed up their goal of life as 'Living in agreement with nature.'

To clarify this, one of the principal leaders, Epictetus stated:

*"For what is Man? A rational animal, subject to death. At once we ask, from what does the rational element distinguish us? From wild beasts. And from what else? From sheep and the like. Look to it then*

*that you do nothing like a wild beast, else you destroy the Man in you and fail to fulfil his promise. See that you do not act like a sheep, or else again the Man in you perishes.*

*You ask how we act like sheep? When we consult the belly, or our passions, when our actions are random or dirty or inconsiderate, are we not falling away to the state of sheep? What do we destroy? The faculty of reason. When our actions are combative, mischievous, angry, and rude, do we not fall away and become wild beasts?"*

The human being is a *rational* animal. That's what separates us from sheep and beasts. We are different from all other species on the planet Earth, both for better and worse. The point of interest is not that we have smaller teeth, different skin, or weaker bones, but our social and mental abilities – the very abilities that let me write this article you care to read.

What distinguishes humans from all other species is our capacity for rationality. We should *not* behave like sheep or beasts because doing so negates our humanity, the most precious and natural thing we have.

'Living in agreement with nature' is about behaving rationally like a human instead of randomly (and out of passion) like a beast. In other words, we should always apply our natural ability 'reason' in all of our actions. If we apply reason we live in agreement with nature, because we act like humans are meant to act.

## 2 Live by Virtue – It Is the Highest of All Goods

What the Stoics meant with 'virtue' was excelling or flourishing in terms of our rational human nature. The Stoics classified these different forms of virtue under four broad headings, the four cardinal virtues:

- **Wisdom or Prudence:** Includes excellent deliberation, good judgment, perspective, good sense.
- **Justice or Fairness:** Includes good-heartedness, benevolence, public service, fair dealing.
- **Courage or Fortitude:** Includes bravery, perseverance, authenticity (honesty), confidence.
- **Self-Discipline or Temperance:** Includes orderliness, self-control, forgiveness, humility.

Now, when you act according to these virtues, you progress towards the Good Life, or Eudaimonia, the ultimate goal of life. So the key to living the Good Life, then, is the perfection of reason and living according to virtue, or being 'virtuous'.

In the Stoic sense, you can only be virtuous if you practice all the virtues. For example, if you act courageously throughout the day and then get wasted at night, you are not truly virtuous (because you break the virtue of self-discipline with all the binge drinking). Virtue is an all-or-nothing package.

To the Stoics it was clear that virtue must be its own reward. You do something because it is the right thing to do. You act in agreement with nature, with reason, and according to the car-

dinal virtues for its own sake. It does not matter what you get out of it, since acting according to virtue is rewarding in itself as you are progressing towards the Good Life.

Doing the right thing is enough, it's your nature and it's your job.

Again, the term 'virtue' really refers to excelling at one's own character and applying reason in a manner that's healthy and praiseworthy.

## 3 Focus on What You Can Control, Accept What You Can't

"Make the best use of what is in your power, and take the rest as it happens. Some things are up to us and some things are not up to us." – Epictetus

This passage is found right at the beginning of Epictetus' *Enchiridion*, because it is fundamental to the teachings of Epictetus and to Stoic Philosophy. This so called 'Stoic dichotomy of control' is actually the most characteristic principle of Stoicism.

We must carefully distinguish between what is 'up to us', or within our own power, and what is not. Up to us are our voluntary choices, namely our actions and judgements, while everything else is not under our control.

## 4 Distinguish Between Good, Bad, and ('Preferred') Indifferent Things

The Stoics differentiated between 'good', 'bad', and 'indifferent' things.

The good things include the cardinal virtues wisdom, justice, courage, and self-discipline. The bad things include the opposites

of these virtues, namely the four vices folly, injustice, cowardice, and indulgence.

Indifferent things include all the rest, but mainly life and death, fame and bad reputation, pleasure and pain, wealth and poverty, and health and sickness. Indifferent things can be summed up as health, wealth, and reputation.

### **5 Take Action – The True Philosopher Is a Warrior of the Mind**

Even though the Stoics looked at external things as indifferent, they were not at all indifferent to their own actions.

Since the Stoics wanted to live in accord with virtue to get to the eudaimonic life, they had to try to 'do the right thing'. Always. Stoics were doers. For the Stoics it's not enough to think about how to live one's own life, but to actually go out in the world and practice its ideas. You must earn the Good Life by taking the right actions.

### **6 Practice Misfortune – Ask "What Could Go Wrong?"**

Vaccines prepare your body to fight off disease before the disease actually befalls your body. The Stoics used a similar tool for their minds. In a sense, they vaccinated themselves for misfortune. They prepared mentally for bad stuff to happen. This was a main reason for studying the Stoic philosophy, to prepare oneself for future events in order to stay calm in the face of adversity.

### **7 Add a Reserve Clause to Your Planned Actions**

Seneca defines the reserve

clause with the formula, "I want to do such and such, as long as nothing happens which may present an obstacle to my decision." Elsewhere he gives the example, "I will sail across the ocean, if nothing prevents me."

### **8 Amor Fati – Love Everything that Happens**

"Seek not for events to happen as you wish but rather wish for events to happen as they do and your life will go smoothly." – Epictetus

The Stoics used a wonderful metaphor, the dog leashed to a cart:

Imagine a dog leashed to a moving cart. The leash is long enough that the dog has two options: (1) either he can smoothly follow the direction of the cart, over which he has no control, and at the same time enjoy the ride and explore the surroundings, (2) or he can stubbornly resist the cart with all his force and end up being dragged for the rest of the trip anyway.

We are that dog. Either we make the best of the trip or we fight against every little decision the cart driver makes. One way is effortless and joyful, the other is exhausting and miserable. You choose. The cart always keeps moving. Change is inevitable. To be clear, accepting the direction and speed of the cart, accepting whatever happens, has nothing to do with giving up. It takes toughness, humility, and will to accept them for what they actually are. It takes a real man or woman to face necessity."

### **9 Turn Obstacles into Opportunities – Perception Is Key**

What we already learned from the Stoics, is, that they see external events not as good or bad but as indifferent. So it's not these events, because they are ultimately indifferent, but your own judgment of these events that matters.

"If you are pained by any external thing, it is not this thing that disturbs you, but your own judgment about it. And it is in your power to wipe out this judgment now." – Marcus Aurelius

This makes you responsible for your life. You don't control external events, but you control how you choose to look at them and then respond to them. And, in the end, that's all that matters.

We are disturbed or delighted not by events, but by our judgment about those events.

For example, it's a rainy day (an external event).

- Luke gets upset because he wanted to go to the beach.
- Farmer Ben is happy because he thinks it's good for his crop.

Auntie Charlize is furious because she hung up the laundry in her garden.

"Remind yourself that misfortunes can only be predicted for your body or your property but your mind is always available to turn it into good fortune by responding with virtue." – Epictetus. You can always respond with virtue. You can see everything as an opportunity to respond with virtue. The Stoics

had this idea that you can turn every obstacle into an opportunity. Marcus Aurelius described it like this:

“The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.” The key to recognize these opportunities lies in your perception. How you see things is way more important than the things themselves. You can find good in everything. Stoicism teaches us to regard everything as an opportunity for growth. This enables us to turn everything, obstacles and gifts alike, into causes for opportunity.

### **10 Be Mindful – Stoic Mindfulness Is Where it All Begins**

If you want to live according to any philosophy, you need to be mindful of your actions. According to Stoicism, if you want to live according to virtue, you know, applying reason (wisdom), courage, justice, and temperance, then you necessarily need to be mindful of what you’re doing. How else can you be present enough to choose the required rational actions? So, in a sense, all the Stoic ideas inevitably lead to greater mindfulness. Mindfulness is a prerequisite to practice Stoicism, but it also gets further developed by practicing. It works both ways. Again, being mindful is about being aware enough to take a step back from your own thoughts, and then being able to choose the best action rather than running on autopilot.

“When the light has been removed and my wife has fallen silent, aware of this habit that’s now mine, I examine my entire day and go back over what I’ve done and said, hiding nothing from myself, passing nothing by.

For why should I fear any consequence from my mistakes, when I’m able to say, ‘See that you don’t do it again, but now I forgive you.’” – Seneca

### ***The Stoic Love for Mankind***

“The Stoics believed that we are essentially social creatures, with a ‘natural affection’ and ‘affinity’ for all people. This forms the basis of Stoic ‘philanthropy’, the rational love of our brothers and fellow citizens in the universe. A good person ‘displays love for all his fellow human beings, as well as goodness, justice, kindness and concern for his neighbour’, and for the welfare of his home city. Stoics are able to live the eudaimonic life without a friend but they prefer *not* to go without one. Why? Because of their natural affection for mankind and because they can practice the virtues much better when around others (think about justice and courage).

“We ought to do good to others as simply as a horse runs, or a bee makes honey, or a vine bears grapes season after season without thinking of the grapes it has borne.”  
– Marcus Aurelius.

It’s our human nature to do good to others and we should not care whether they care or not. Marcus goes so far as to say that all our actions should be good ‘for the common welfare.’ This is our nature, it’s our job.

### ***True Beauty Lies in Character***

The only way to recognize a true Stoic is by character.

The door to develop one’s character stands open to everybody. It doesn’t matter whether you are rich or poor, healthy or sick, tall

or small, thin or chubby, you can always try to live a moral life and thus live the Good Life.

“To a Stoic, it ultimately does not matter if we think the Logos is God or Nature, as long as we recognize that a decent human life is about the cultivation of one’s character and concern for other people (and even for Nature itself) and is best enjoyed by way of a proper – but not fanatical – detachment from mere worldly goods.” – Massimo Pigliucci.

The cultivation of one’s character is the highest good. Therefore, to the Stoics, true beauty lies in the excellence of our mind and character and not in our physical appearance. Epictetus says we should aim to “beautify that which is our true nature – the reason, its judgements, its activities.”

The true value of a person lies in their core, their character or personality, and it does not matter if it’s a banker or baker.

### ***Conclusion***

The ordinary Greek in the street may have had little idea of the views of Plato or Aristotle. The founder of the Stoic school, however, had a statue raised to him in Athens at public expense, the inscription on which read, in part:

*Whereas Zeno of Citium, son of Mnaseas, has for many years been devoted to philosophy in the city and has continued to be a man of worth in all other respects, exhorting to virtue and temperance those of the youth who came to him to be taught, directing them to what is best, affording to all in his own conduct a pattern for imitation in perfect consistency with his teaching ... (Diog.*

Laert. 7.10–11, tr. Hicks)

Of course the citizens of Athens couldn't have honoured Zeno for a life lived in consistency with his philosophical principles unless the content of those principles was known to the general public. Since the Stoics gathered, discussed and taught philosophy in a public place, the general import of their philosophy was widely known. Stoicism became a "popular philosophy" in a way that neither Platonism nor Aristotelianism ever did. In part this is because Stoicism addressed the questions that most people are concerned with in very direct and practical ways. It tells you

how you should regard death, suffering, great wealth, poverty, power over others and slavery. In the political and social context of the Hellenistic period (where a person could move between these extremes in very short order) Stoicism provided a psychological fortress against bad fortune.

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## 2. FEATURE ARTICLES

### B. The Methods and Purpose of Religion by Swami Vivekananda

*To Strive for Liberty of the Body and Soul*

In studying the religion of the world we generally find two methods of procedures. The one is from God to man. That is to say, we have the Semitic group of religions in which the idea of God comes almost from the very first, and, strangely enough, without any idea of soul. It was very remarkable amongst the ancient Hebrews that, until very recent periods in their history, they never evolved any idea of a human soul. Man was composed of certain mind and material particles, and that was all. With death everything ended. But, on the other hand, there was a most wonderful idea of God evolved by the same race. This is one of the methods of procedure. The other is through man to God. The sec-

ond is peculiarly Aryan, and the first is peculiarly Semitic.

The Aryan first began with the soul. His ideas of God were hazy, indistinguishable, not very clear; but, as his idea of the human soul began to be clearer in the same proportion. So the inquiry in the Vedas was always through the soul; and, as such, the peculiar stamp that has been left upon their whole cycle of philosophy is that introspective search after divinity. The Aryan man was always seeking divinity inside his own self. It became, in course of time, a natural, characteristic. It is remarkable in their art and in their commonest dealings. Even at the present time, if we take a European picture of a man in a religious attitude, the painter always makes his subject point his eyes upwards, looking outside of nature for God, looking up into the

skies. In India, on the other hand, the religious attitude is always presented by making the subject close his eyes. His is, as it were, looking inward.

These are the two subjects of study for man, external and internal nature; and though at first these seem to be contradictory, yet external nature must, to the ordinary man, be entirely composed of internal nature, the world of thought. The majority of philosophers in every country, especially in the West, have started with the assumption that these two, matter and mind, are contradictory existences; but in the long run we shall find that they converge towards each other and in the end unite and form an infinite whole. So it is not by this analysis I mean a higher or lower standpoint with regard to the subject. I do not mean that those who went to search af-

ter truth through external nature are wrong, nor that those who want to search after truth through internal nature are higher. These are the two modes of procedure. Both of them must live; both of them must be studied; and in the end we shall find that they meet. We shall see that neither is the body antagonistic to the mind, nor the mind to the body, although we find, many persons who think that this body is nothing. In old times, every country was full of people who thought this body was only a disease, a sin, or something of that kind. Later on, however, we see how, as it was taught in the Vedas, this body melts into the mind, and the mind into the body.

### *The Quest for Unity Based on the Vedas*

You must remember the one theme that runs through all the Vedas. "Just as by the knowledge of one lump of clay we know all the clay that is in the universe, so what is that, knowing which we know everything else?" This, expressed more or less clearly, is the theme of all human knowledge. It is the finding of a unity towards which we are all going. Every action of our lives – the most material, the grossest as well as the finest, the highest, the most spiritual – is alike tending towards this one ideal, the finding of unity. A man is single. He marries. Apparently it may be a selfish act, but at the same time, the impulsion, the motive power, is to find that unity. He has children, he has friends, he loves his country, he loves the world, and ends by loving the whole universe. Irresistibly we are impelled towards the perfection

which consists in finding the unity, killing this little self and making ourselves broader and broader. This is the goal, the end towards which the universe is rushing. Every atom is trying to go and join itself to the next atom. Atoms after atoms combine, making huge balls, the earths, the suns, the moons, the stars, the planets. They, in their turn, are trying to rush towards each other, and, at last, we know that the whole universe, mental and material, will be fused into one.

### *The Foundation of all Morality, the Quintessence of Ethics: "Be thou Unselfish"*

The process that is going on in the cosmos on a large scale, is the same as that going on in the microcosm on a smaller scale. Just as this universe has its existence in separation, in distinction, and all the while is rushing towards unity, non-separation, so in our little worlds, each soul is born, as it were, cut off from the rest of the world. The more ignorant, the more unenlightened the soul, the more it thinks that it is separate from the rest of the universe. The more ignorant the person, the more he thinks, he will die or will be born, and so forth – ideas that are an expression of this separateness. But we find that, as knowledge comes, man grows, morality is evolved, and the idea of non-separateness begins. Whether men understand it or not, they are impelled by that power behind to become unselfish. This is the foundation of all morality. It is the quintessence of all ethics, preached in any language, or in any religion, or by any prophet in the world. "Be

thou unselfish", "Not 'I'", but 'thou'" – that is the background of all ethical codes. And what is meant by this is the recognition of non-individuality – that you are a part of me, and I of you; the recognition that in hurting you I hurt myself, and in helping you I help myself; the recognition that there cannot possibly be death for me when you live. When one worm lives in this universe, how can I die? For my life is in the life of that worm. At the same time it will teach us that we cannot leave one of our fellow-beings without helping him that in his good consists any good.

### *The Philosophy, the Essence, the Principles of every Religion*

This is the theme that runs through the whole of Vedanta, and which runs through every other religion. For, you must remember, religions divide themselves generally into three parts. There is the first part, consisting of the philosophy, the essence, the principles of every religion. These principles find expression in mythology – lives of saints or heroes, demi-gods, or gods, or divine beings; and the whole idea of this mythology is that of power. And in the lower class of mythologies – the primitive – the expressions of this power is in the muscles; their heroes are strong, gigantic. One hero conquers the whole world. As man advances, he must find expression in something higher. The higher mythologies have heroes who are gigantic moral men. Their strength is manifested in becoming moral and pure. They can stand alone, they can beat back the surging tide of selfishness and immorality. The third

portion of all religions is symbolism, which you call ceremonials and forms. Even the expression through mythology, the lives of heroes, is not sufficient for all. There are minds still lower. Like children they must have their kindergarten of religion, and these symbolologies are evolved – concrete examples which they can handle and grasp and understand, which they can see and feel as material somethings.

So in every religion you find there are the three stages: philosophy, mythology and ceremonial. There is one advantage which can be pleaded for the Vedanta, that in India, fortunately, these three stages have been sharply defined. In other religions the principles are so interwoven with the mythology that it is very hard to distinguish one from the other. The mythology stands supreme, swallowing up the principles; and in the course of centuries the principles are lost sight of. The explanation, the illustration of the principle, swallows up the principle, and the people see only the explanation, the prophet, the preacher, while the principles have gone out of existence almost – so much so that even today, if a man dares to preach the principles of Christianity apart from Christ, they will try and attack him and think he is wrong and dealing blows at Christianity. In the same way, if a man wants to preach the principles of Mohammedanism, Mohammedans will think the same; because concrete ideas, the lives of great men and prophets, have entirely overshadowed the principles.

In Vedanta the chief advantage is that it was not the work of one

single man; and therefore, naturally, unlike Buddhism, or Christianity, or Mohammedanism, the prophet or teacher did not entirely swallow up or overshadow the principles. The principles live, and the prophets, as it were, form a secondary group, unknown to Vedanta. The Upanishads speak of no particular prophet, but they speak of various prophets and prophetesses. The old Hebrews had something of that idea; yet we find Moses occupying most of the space of the Hebrew literature. Of course I do not mean that it is bad that these prophets should take religious hold of a nation; but it certainly is very injurious if the whole field of principles is lost sight of. We can very much agree as to principles, but not very much as to persons. The persons appeal to our emotions; and the principles, to something higher, to our calm judgement. Principles must conquer in the long run, for that is the manhood of man. Emotions many times drag us to the level of animals. Emotions have more connection with the senses than with the faculty of reason; and, therefore, when principles are entirely lost sight of and emotions prevail, religions degenerate into fanaticism and sectarianism. They are no better than party politics and such things. The most horribly ignorant notions will be taken up, and for these ideas thousands will be ready to cut the throats of their brethren. This is the reason that, though these great personalities and prophets are tremendous motive powers for good, at the same time their lives are altogether dangerous when they lead to the disregard

of the principles they represent. That has always led to fanaticism, and has deluged the world in blood. Vedanta can avoid this difficulty, because it has not one special prophet. It has many Seers, who are called Rishis or sages. Seers – that is the literal translation – those who see these truths, the Mantras.

### *Prophets as Discoverers in the realm of Spirituality*

The word Mantra means “thought out”, cogitated by the mind; and the Rishi is the seer of these thoughts. They are neither the property of particular persons, nor the exclusive property of any man or woman, however great he or she may be; nor even the exclusive property of the greatest spirits – the Buddhas or Christs – whom the world has produced. They are as much the property of the lowest of the ‘low’, as they are the property of a Buddha, and as much the property of the smallest worm that crawls as of the Christ, because they are universal principles. They were never created. These principles have existed throughout time; and they will exist. They are non-created – uncreated by any laws which science teaches us today. They remain covered and become discovered, but are existing through all eternity in nature. If Newton had not been born, the law of gravitation would have remained all the same and would have worked all the same. It was Newton’s genius which formulated it, discovered it, brought it into consciousness, and made it a conscious thing to the human race. So are these religious laws, the grand truths of

spirituality. They are working all the time. If all the Vedas and the Bibles and the Korans did not exist at all, if seers and prophets had never been born, yet these laws would exist. They are only held in abeyance, and slowly but surely would work to raise the human race, to raise human nature. But they are the prophets who see them, discover them, and such prophets are discoverers in the field of spirituality. As Newton and Galileo were prophets of physical science, so are they prophets of spirituality. They can claim no exclusive right to any of these laws; they are the common property of all nature.

### *The Infinite Ocean of Spiritual Truth*

The Vedas, as the Hindus say, are eternal. We now understand what they mean by their being eternal, that is, that the laws have neither beginning nor end, just as nature has neither beginning nor end. Earth after earth, system after system, will evolve, run for a certain time, and then dissolve back again into chaos; but the universe remains the same. Millions and millions of systems are being born, while millions are being destroyed. The universe remains the same. The beginning and the end of time can be held as regards a certain planet; but as regards the universe, time has no meaning at all. So are the laws of nature, the physical laws, the mental laws, the spiritual laws. Without beginning and without end are they; and it is within a few years, comparatively speaking, a few thousand years at best, that man has tried to reveal them. The infinite mass remains before

us. Therefore the one great lesson that we learn from the Vedas, at the start, is that religion has just begun. The infinite ocean of spiritual truth lies before us to be worked on, to be discovered, to be brought into our lives. The world has seen thousands of prophets, and the world has yet to see millions.

There were times in olden days when prophets were many in every society. The time is to come when prophets will walk through every street in every city in the world. In olden times, particular, peculiar persons were, so to speak, selected by the operations of the laws of society to become prophets. The time is coming when we shall understand that to become religious means to become a prophet that none can become religious until he or she becomes a prophet. We shall come to understand that the secret of religion is not being able to think and say all these thoughts; but, as the Vedas teach, to realise them, to realise newer and higher ones than have ever been realised, to discover them, bring them to society; and the study of religion should be the training to make prophets. The schools and colleges should be training ground for prophets. The whole universe must become prophets; and until a man becomes a prophet, religion is a mockery and a byword unto him. We must see religion, feel it, realise it in a thousand times more intense a sense than that in which we see the wall.

### *The Grand Principle of Attaining Perfect Unity*

But there is one principle which underlies all these various mani-

festations of religions and which has been already mapped out for us. Every science must end where it finds a unity, because we cannot go any further. When a perfect unity is reached, that science has nothing more of principles to tell us. All the work that religions have to do is to work out the details. Take any science, chemistry, for example. Suppose we can find one element out of which we can manufacture all the other elements. Then chemistry, as a science, will have become perfect. What will remain for us is to discover every day new combinations of that one material and the application of those combinations for all the purposes of life. So with religion. The gigantic principles, the scope, the plan of religion were already discovered ages ago when man found the last words, as they are called, of the Vedas – “I am He” – that there is that One in whom this whole universe of matter and mind finds its unity, whom they call God, or Brahman, or Allah, or Jehovah, or any other name. We cannot go beyond that. The grand principle has been already mapped out for us. Our work lies in filling it in, working it out, and applying it to every part of our lives. We have to work now so that everyone will become a prophet. There is great work before us. In old times, many did not understand what a prophet meant. They thought it was something by chance, that just by a fiat of will or some superior intelligence, a man gained superior knowledge. In modern times, we are prepared to demonstrate that this knowledge is the birthright of every living being, whosoever and wheresoever he be, and that

there is no chance in this universe. Every man who, we think, gets something by chance, has been working for it slowly and surely through ages. And the whole question devolves upon us: "Do we want to be prophets?" If we want, we shall be.

### *The Need and Training of Prophets*

This, the training of prophets, is the great work that lies before us; and, consciously or unconsciously, all the great systems of religion are working towards this one great goal, only with this difference, that in many religions you will find they declare that this direct perception of spirituality is not to be had in this life, that man must die, and after his death there will come a time in another world, when he will have visions of spirituality, when he will realise things which now he must believe. But Vedanta will ask all people who make such assertions, "Then how do you know that spirituality exists?" And they will have to answer that there must have been always certain particular people who, even in this life, have got a glimpse of things which are unknown and unknowable.

Even this makes a difficulty. If there were peculiar people, having this power simply by chance, we have no right to believe in them. It would be a sin to believe in anything that is by chance, because we cannot know it. What is meant by knowledge? Destruction of peculiarity. Suppose a boy goes into a street or a menagerie, and sees a peculiarly shaped ani-

mal. He does not know what it is. Then he goes to a country where there are hundreds like that one, and he is satisfied, he knows what the species is. Our knowledge is knowing the principle. Our non-knowledge is finding the particular without reference to principle. When we find one case or a few cases separate from the principle, without any reference to the principle, we are in darkness and do not know. Now, if these prophets, as they say, were peculiar persons who alone had the right to catch a glimpse of that which is beyond and no one else has the right, we should not believe in these prophets, because they are peculiar cases without any reference to a principle. We can only believe in them if we ourselves become prophets.

### *Reason and Emotion*

You, all of you, hear about the various jokes that get into the newspapers about the sea-serpent; and why should it be so? Because a few persons, at long intervals, came and told their stories about the sea-serpent, and others never see it. They have no particular principle to which to refer, and therefore the world does not believe. If a man comes to me and says a prophet disappeared into the air and went through it, I have the right to see that. I ask him, "Did your father or grandfather see it?" "Oh, no," he replies, "but five thousand years ago such a thing happened." And if I do not believe it, I have to be barbequed through eternity.

What a mass of superstition this is. And its effect is to degrade

man from his divine nature to that of brutes. Why was reason given us if we have to believe? Is it not tremendously blasphemous to believe against reason? What right have we not to use the greatest gift that God has given to us? I am sure God will pardon a man who will use his reason and cannot believe, rather than a man who believes blindly instead of using the faculties, He has given him. He simply degrades his nature and goes down to the level of the beasts – degrades his senses and dies. We must reason; and when reason proves to us the truth of these prophets and great men about whom the ancient books speak in every country, we shall believe in them. We shall believe in them when we see such prophets among ourselves. We shall then find that they were not peculiar men, but only illustrations of certain principles. They worked, and that principle expressed itself naturally, and we shall have to work to express that principle in us. They were prophets, we shall believe, when we become prophets. They were seers of things divine. They could go beyond the bounds of senses and catch a glimpse of that which is beyond. We shall believe that when we are able to do it ourselves and not before.

### *Principle of Vedanta: Religion is to be Realized Now*

That is the one principle of Vedanta. Vedanta declares that religion is here and now, because the question of this life and that life, of life and death, this world and that world, is merely one of superstition and prejudice. There is no break in time beyond what we

make. What difference is there between ten and twelve o'clock, except what we make by certain changes in nature? Time flows on the same. So what is meant by this life or that life? It is only a question of time, and what is lost in time may be made up by speed in work. So, says Vedanta, religion is to be realised now. And for you to become religious means that you will start without any religion, work your way up and realise things, see things for yourself; and when you have done that, then, and then alone, you have religion. Before that you are no better than an atheist, or worse, because the atheist is sincere – he stands up and says, "I do not know about these things" – while those others do not know but go about the world, saying, "We are very religious people." What religion they have no one knows, because they have swallowed some grandmother's story, and priests have asked them to believe these things; if they do not, then let them take care. That is how it is going.

### *The Distinction between Realization and the Scriptures*

Realization of religion is the only way. Each one of us will have to discover. Of what use are these books, then, these Bibles of the world? They are of great use, just as maps are of a country. I have seen maps of England all my life before I came here, and they were great helps to me informing me of some sort of conception of England. Yet, when I arrived in this country, what difference between the maps and the country itself. So is the difference between realization and the scrip-

tures. These books are only the maps, the experiences of past men, as a motive power to us to dare to make the same experiences and discover in the same way, if not better.

This is the first principle of Vedanta, that realization is religion, and he who realizes it is the religious man; and he who does not is no better than the one who says, "I do not know", if not worse, because the other says, "I do not know", and is sincere. In this realization, again, we shall be helped very much by these books, not only as guides, but as giving instructions and exercises; for every science has its own particular method of investigation. You will find many persons in this world who will say, "I wanted to become religious, I wanted to realise these things, but I have not been able to, so I do not believe anything." Even among the educated you will find these. Large numbers of people will tell you, "I have tried to be religious all my life, but there is nothing in it." At the same time you will find this phenomenon: Suppose a man is a chemist, a great scientific man. He comes and tells you this. If you say to him, "I do not believe anything about chemistry, because I have all my life tried to become a chemist and do not find anything in it", he will ask, "When did you try?" "When I went to bed, I repeated, 'O chemistry, come to me', and it never came." That is the very same thing. The chemist laughs at you and says, "Oh, that is not the way. Why did you not go to the laboratory and get all the acids and alkalis and burn your hands from time to time? That

alone would have taught you." Do you take the same trouble with religion? Every science has its own method of learning, and religion is to be learned the same way. It has its own methods, and here is something we can learn, and must learn, from all the ancient prophets of the world, everyone who has found something, who has realized religion. They will give us the methods, the particular methods, through which alone we shall be able to realize the truths of religion. They struggle all their lives, discovered particular methods of mental culture, bringing the mind to a certain state, the finest perception, and through that they perceived the truths of religion. To become religious, to perceive religion, feel it, to become a prophet, we have to take those methods and practise them; and then if we find nothing, we shall have the right to say, "There is nothing in religion, for I have tried and failed."

This is the practical side of all religions. You will find it in every Bible in the world. Not only do they teach principles and doctrines, but in the lives of the saints you find practices; and when it is not expressly laid down as a rule of conduct, you will always find it in the lives of these prophets that even they regulated their eating and drinking sometimes. Their whole living, their practice, their method, everything was different from the masses who surrounded them; and these were the causes that gave them the higher light, the vision of the Divine. And we, if we want to have this vision, must be ready to take up these methods. It is practice, work, that will bring us up to that. The plan

of Vedanta, therefore, is: first, to lay down the principles, map out for us the goal, and then to teach us the method by which to arrive at the goal, to understand and realize religion.

Again, these methods must be various. Seeing that we are so various in our natures, the same method can scarcely be applied to any two of us in the same manner. We have idiosyncrasies in our minds, each one of us; so the method ought to be varied. Some, you will find, are very emotional in their nature; some very philosophical, rational; others cling to all sorts of ritualistic forms – want things which are concrete. You will find that one man does not care for any ceremony or form or anything of the sort; they are like death to him. And another man carries a load of amulets all over his body; he is so fond of these symbols. Another man who is emotional in his nature wants to show acts of charity to everyone; he weeps, he laughs, and so on. And all of these certainly cannot have the same method. If there were only one method to arrive at truth, it would be death for everyone else who is not similarly constituted. Therefore the methods should be various. Vedanta understands that and wants to lay before the world different methods through which we can work. Take up any one you like; and if one does not suit you, another may. From this standpoint we see how glorious it is that there are so many religions in the world, how good it is that there are so many teachers and prophets, instead of there being only one, as many persons would like to have it. The Mohammedans want to have the

whole world Mohammedan; the Christians, Christian; and the Buddhists, Buddhist; but Vedanta says, "Let each person in the world be separate, if you will; the one principle, the unity will be behind. The more prophets there are, the more books, the more seers, the more methods, so much the better for the world." Just as in social life the greater the number of occupations in every society, the better for that society, the more chance is there for everyone of that society to make a living; so in the world of thought and of religion. How much better it is today when we have so many divisions of science – how much more is it possible for everyone to have great mental culture, with this great variety before us. How much better it is, even on the physical plane, to have the opportunity of so many various things spread before us, so that we may choose any one we like, the one which suits us best. So it is with the world of religions. It is a most glorious dispensation of the Lord that there are so many religions in the world; and would to God that these would increase every day, until every man had a religion unto himself.

### *Conclusion*

Vedanta understands that and therefore preaches the one principle and admits various methods. It has nothing to say against anyone – whether you are a Christian, or a Buddhist, or a Jew, or a Hindu, whatever mythology you believe, whether you owe allegiance to the prophet of Nazareth, or of Mecca, or of India, or of anywhere else, whether you

yourself are a prophet – it has nothing to say. It only preaches the principle which is the background of every religion and of which all the prophets and saints and seers are but illustrations and manifestations. Multiply your prophets if you like; it has no objection. It only preaches the principle, and the method it leaves to you. Take any path you like; follow any prophet you like; but have only that method which suits your own nature, so that you will be sure to progress.

### *Source:*

*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 6, pp1-17; 85-86, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta*