

# CHICAGO

# CALLING



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The Bhagavad Gita is the teaching of Bhagavan Sri Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra more than 5,000 years ago. The majority of Hindus believe that Krishna is the human form of the Supreme Brahman. Hindus believe in 'Avatara-Vada'. In order to help people to follow the path of righteousness, the Supreme Being comes to earth in human form and behaves like a human. The Avatar is the embodiment of the ideal person, the wise teacher, and the divine guide.

The Gita contains 700 verses from chapters 25-42 of the Mahabharata. The Bhagavad Gita is considered to be one of the most important scriptures in Hinduism. According to Indian tradition, the Gita is one of the Prasthanatrai, which form the bedrock of Vedanta philosophy. The other two books are the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras. They are a must read for anyone in quest of the truth. Any philosopher seeking to preach a new doctrine must show that it is supported by these three scriptures.

Hindu philosophy tries to answer three questions:



1. Who is the Creator?
2. What is the Creation?
3. What is the relation between Jiva (Living Being), Jagat (Universe), and Brahman (Consciousness)?

Different thinkers have proposed different theories. Some of them are: Advaita-Vada, Maya-Vada, Vivartha-Vada, Parinama-Vada, Vishistha-Advaita-Vada, Dvaita-Vada, Dvaita-Advaita-Vada.

Every philosopher should discuss tatwa (the goal of the philosophy) and sadhana (the method or spiritual practices by which it can be attained). Below is a chart of the major theories.

Propounder	Date (AD)	Philosophy	Practice	Goal
Shankara	788-820	Advaita Vedanta	Knowledge	Mukti
Ramanuja	1017-1137	Vishishta-Advaita(Qualified Monism)	Devotion to Vasudeva	Salvation
Nimbarka	1100-1162	Veda-Aveda	Devotion to Radha & Krishna	Salvation
Madhavacharya	1199-1276	Shudha Dvaita (Pure Dualism)	Devotion	Salvation
Ballabhacharya	1478-1530	Pushti-Vada	Devotion to Radha Krishna	God's Grace
Sri Chaitanya	1486-1534	Achinta-Vada-Avheda-Vada	Devotion	Salvation
Sri Ramakrishna	1836-1886	Unification Theory	Four Yogas propounded in Gita by Krishna	Brahma Jnana

The goal of the Gita is the realization of Brahman. In the Gita we find Sri Krishna using words like Mad-Bhavan (Mad-Bhavam Upadhyate) to describe liberation. What is the Bhava of Sri Krishna—the real Nature of God?

In the Brahma-Samhita it is described as "Ishwara-Parama-Krishna Satchidananda Bigraha". Krishna, the Supreme God is the embodiment of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, or Brahman Itself, in human form. 'Bhava' or the real nature of Sri Krishna is 'Brahman'

Brahman, or the all-pervading Consciousness, takes form through Its inscrutable power, known as 'Maya'. That Brahman, which is described as Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute), functions through three powers. These powers are Sandhini (Sat), Samvit (Chit), and Hladini (Ananda).

**Sandhini**—The feeling of Existence (Sat)

From the activities of creation flow the actions of the world. The power by which creation happens is known as Sandhini. Sandhini can be called "The Principle of Creative Life".

**Samvit**—The feeling of Knowledge or Consciousness (Chit). It is known as "The Principle of Knowledge".

**Hladini**—The feeling of joy (Ananda)

Using this power God Himself remains in Bliss and makes the whole world joyful. It is known as "The Principle of Delight".

These three Bhavas, associated with the three Shaktis of Brahman, are known as 'God'.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna specifically said, 'God Realization is the Goal for every human'.

The Gita very clearly stated that 'Atman', the 'self', is all pervading, residing in every being. An individual, termed as Jiva, is potentially Brahman. To manifest the Jiva's divinity four spiritual practices have been formulated. They are Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Dhyana Yoga.

In the Bhagavad Gita all these paths to Realization of the Supreme have been elaborately explained. That is why the Gita is known as a

Yoga-shastra. A 'yoga' scripture describes the union of the individual soul with the universal soul and also the means to such union. Hence, yoga is the goal and the basis of all religious practices.

In the life of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna we find the application of all these four spiritual practices. Swami Vivekananda, the illustrious disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, after closely observing this, expressed in a Stotra his guru's uniqueness.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was embodiment of different paths –

अद्वयतत्त्वसमाहितचित्तं  
प्रोज्ज्वलभक्तिपटावृतवृत्तम्।  
कर्मकलेवरमद्भुतचेष्टं

*advaya-tattva-samāhita-cittam  
projjoala-bhakti-paṭāvṛta-vṛttam  
karma-kalevaram-adbhuta-ceṣṭam.*

Inwardly he was pure Advaitin.

Outwardly, he was a devout Devotee.

He was the embodiment of selfless work.

Sri Ramakrishna is peerless.

A few thousand years earlier, Sri Krishna had propagated the yogas, the spiritual paths that lead to the Godhead, and in this modern age Sri Ramakrishna practiced them in his life and propagated them through his disciples, particularly through Ma Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda used to love two books very much; one of them was the Bhagavad Gita. From his biography, we come to know that while travelling Swamiji always carried the Gita.

The spirit of Swami Vivekananda's main teachings is 'Self-Confidence'. We find him appreciating again and again those words of Sri Krishna addressing Arjuna –

*Do not yield to unmanliness, O son of Pritha. It does not become you. Shake off this base faint-heartedness and arise. O scorcher of enemies!*

# VISHISHTA-ADVAITA VEDANTA: BASICS

SWAMI YOGATMANANDA  
Vedanta Society of Providence

This article is based on the talk delivered during September  
2018 spiritual retreat in Ganges.



ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।  
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय । ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

*Lead us from the unreal to the real*

*from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge  
and from this limited existence to immortal unlimited  
existence.*

*OM Peace, Peace, Peace!*

My beloved brother monks and all the devotees sitting here with their devoted hearts ! I was listening very carefully to dear Tyaganandaji's talk. His views bring at least 10 seconds of enlightenment. He carries a lot of conviction with the way he speaks, and it is an uplifting delight to listen to his talks. When he said, "Well, how in the first place did all this mess began?", I remembered a humorous story. There were four professionals discussing "who was first in the society?". One of them was a doctor, one was a lawyer, another was an architect, and the fourth was a communist. The doctor proclaimed, "Well, human beings fall sick; there has to be in human society some rudimentary ways of treating diseases, so the doctors were the first." The lawyer said, "Well, without some laws, some regulations, some mode of organizing, how can human society exist? So, the lawyers were the first. Doctors, you don't have a case. You may deal with other types of cases, but legally speaking you don't have a case here." The Architect said, "Oh my dear friends! don't you see that God himself had to be an architect in order to create this cosmos from the universal chaos." Then the communist said, "But who created chaos in the first place?". So, the question is, "Who created chaos in the first place?". It is very difficult to

answer this question: "Who created the chaos?"

We always seek answers to our multifarious questions, which keep on shifting and changing, and look for guidance from the enlightened souls who have gone beyond these problems. They see in what way we can receive the message according to our state of mind, and they tell us different things, and those become the paths for us. Like, for those like me who are coming from the east coast, their advice would be: "Move towards the west, and you will land in Michigan". Those who are coming from California, for example, would be told to move towards the east. So, different paths have been suggested according to one's own state of mind. It is not that one path is correct and another is not correct. But once we get convinced about a certain path that is the path we should follow. Swami Tyagananda made a very good point. In the beginning keep on doubting, keep on presenting your doubts, but once you are convinced then act on your convictions. An excellent idea, but the convictions get unsettled from time to time. For example, I feel very convinced of certain truths in the morning, so I say "Yes, the world is unreal", etc., but when my stomach starts hurting I say, "Well, other things may be unreal but this stomach ache is real". So our convictions keep on shifting and changing and that is why our understanding becomes confused. It may appear to be a good solution to just brush everything aside as a dream. Well, when you wake up from the dream, then you do not have to brush it aside even, it happens automatically. But, while I am dreaming, am I able to brush it aside as dream? This is not easy!

We have this difficulty of correctly understanding one and many. There is the philosophy of qualified non-dualism. Well, according to many great authorities, including Swami Tapasyanandaji, qualified monism or qualified non-dualism is not the correct translation of Vishishtadvaita. Although the terms are commonly used, they are not correct. I will come to that later, but before that let me tell you another story about our confusion about one and many. There is always a confusion about whether to call something as one or many. It is because things can appear as one or many depending on how you look at them. For example, if I am looking at a camera, that is one, but if I think of its parts then they are many.

A primary school child was studying grammar, and the teacher asked, "Tell me is 'pants' singular or plural?". The brilliant child answered, "On the upper half it is singular, on the lower half it is plural". Friends, we do laugh at it, but it is the same with everything. There is always a confusion about whether things are to be called one or many. Because of this the sages came up with the idea that all is one and the many things that you see is the glory of that one, but the glory is not to be brushed aside. That is how the path of Vishishtadvaita, as founded by Ramanujacharya, sees things. Although this view is not limited to Ramanujacharya, it is certain Ramanujacharya is the most important philosopher propagating this school where you see that many and one are together. Variety and unity are one, but the many are subservant to the one.

Variety is the changing aspect, which gives rise to time and space. This idea is very beautifully discussed in Ramanuja's philosophy. We think that we are in time and space, but that is putting things in a reverse way. Actually our perception of multiplicity gives rise to this idea of space and time. It was a stunning revelation to me when I was studying Swami Vivekananda's Jnana Yoga, "Oh my goodness!, we are not in time and space,

we are the creators of time and space". How do we get the idea of space? It is the distance between objects that is called space. Where there is no object, there is no space.

In the physical sciences, this was clarified by Einstein who said that there is no absolute thing like space. It is the perceiver that creates this idea of the space because of the perception of multiplicity. And what about time? This multiplicity that we perceive is not static, it is changing. It is shifting and changing all the time. This changing gives rise to the idea of time—what was, what is, and what will be. Not only does separation give rise to the idea of space, but it also keeps on shifting, changing, and that gives rise to the idea of time. So, these ideas of time and space are the ways that our brain functions and our mind functions. It is a program that is loaded into our systems. This hardware comes loaded with that program of multiplicity and, consequently, time and space.

So, even the idea that there is one becomes multiple, and, therefore, the multiplicity cannot really be brushed aside from our awareness. This is one approach for making you see that there is the one that connects all; it is seeing the connectivity. We always say, "Let us all find unity in diversity." Now, the nondual approach to finding the unity in diversity is by considering the diversity as dream or ignorance. The Vishishtadvaita says, "No, no it is not like that. It is the one that is connected to all this many, and the many is also real. It is not unreal. It is true that it is dependent on the one, but it is real too." This thought is also there, and it is not easy to brush aside. As Swami Vivekananda says, the commentators on the scriptures have interpreted their verses for consistency according to their particular schools because it was the norm that you should present your philosophy in a consistent way, showing that it is always correct. But, the approach that Sri Ramakrishna suggests is that, "No, this is correct and that is correct, too."

That is also correct. It is dependent on the various different minds. These are paths for practice. As Tyaganandaji was saying, the more we practice, the better we become at it. One of our friends, a volunteer, was fixing a window in Providence, and he was taking a long time—it took him about 3 days. I said, "Oh, you spent 3 days to fix this window", and he said, "Swami, you will see that the next time I will do it in 3 hours, because now I know how to do it." So as we practice we become perfect.

The Vishishta Advaita idea is that there is duality, but that duality is not really separate from the unity. It is connected to the unity; thus it governs the unity. This Vishishta Advaita, according to Ramanuja, cannot really be translated as qualified nonduality. Tapasyanandaji mentions in his book that it would then be what is called Karmadharaya Samasa in Sanskrit. But, it is not really a Karmadharaya. Karmadharaya means that you qualify something from whatever its actions and such things are. According to those you qualify it, and, thus, it seems that nonduality has been qualified. But Vishishta Advaita is not a modification of nonduality. Advaita is not being qualified there. Vishishta means, he says, that it is the nonduality of the qualified whole. That is called bahuvrihi samaasa. Thus, the qualified whole and the nonduality of it is Vishishta Advaita.

Those who study the practices of this can see that the translation that it is "qualified nondualism" gives the idea that it is a variety of nondualism. Actually, it is a variety of dualism. For all practical purposes, it is dualism. Yesterday, I was trying to explain that all these different systems of Vedanta are really nondualistic systems. They are not dualistic like the Sankhyas are; they ultimately accept one reality. So here we see there are some very important spiritual ideas. We see that God and we are connected and when you connect, it becomes one. You have the chair that you are sitting on. As a chair, it is one, but look at all the parts: there are the legs, there is the seat,

there is the back. From that viewpoint the chair is now many multiple things connected together into one big chair. Now, do you say that the back is unreal, the seat is unreal, the legs are unreal? No, they are not! Otherwise, the chair also will become unreal. So, this is the idea—multiplicity is not unreal; it is to be connected to that one presence—the divine presence. Thus, we have this system. Take our own example, if you look at the body then it is one. But, when you look at the number of cells then they become trillion. So am I a trillion or am I one? You get the same answer that the child gave, the pants is many if you look at down, if you look at up it is one. So what do you look at? It is one and many all interlocked as it were. Why is this multiplicity considered subservient to the one? This is a very important issue. Look, it comes then to "changing and unchanging". Whatever changes you know to be multiplicity. When you have the sense of unchanging then you are seeing the unity—that which does not change. This idea is common! Whether it is non-dualism or qualified non-dualism, that which changes has multiplicity in it. When you are thinking of the unchanging, then you are looking at the aspect of governorship, the Lord that doesn't change. We are all lords in that sense, when we are thinking of ourselves as unchanging.

We are unchanging! You might have decided long back that, "Yes, I am going to attend this retreat" I might have booked the retreat. How many months ago? Maybe one month or two months ago, I have decided that I will attend this retreat. Now, in that one month, so many things have changed in the body, a lot of things have gone in, a lot of things have gone out, the mind has also changed. You see, everything changes, and yet there is something that does not change, because of which I would say that I decided one month ago that I will attend the retreat and that same I has come here now. If somebody tells me, "No no, the one who decided is different and the one who came here is different", then I am not going to accept it—"No no, it is the same I".

So, there is this perception of the unchanging, and there is a connected perception of the changing. That changing is multiple and the unchanging is where you see no multiplicity there. This is born out in various verses in the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. For example, in Mundaka Upanishad you see how this universe comes up—beautiful examples. Now, it needed a bit of text twisting for Sankaracharya to make it sound completely non-dualistic.

यथोर्णनाभिः सृजतेगृह्णतेच  
यथा पृथिव्यामोषधयः सम्भवन्ति ।  
यथा सतः पुरुषात् केशलोमानि  
तथाऽक्षरात् सम्भवतीह विश्वम् ॥  
*yathorṇanābhiḥ sṛjate grhṇate ca*  
*yathā pṛthivyāmoṣadhayaḥ sambhavanti,*  
*yathā sataḥ puruṣāt keśalomāni*  
*tathā'kṣarāt sambhavatīha viśvam.*

The universe is created just like a spider bringing out the web from itself. Now, the spider is real and is the unit, the one, and then it brings out the web. So, the universe also comes from God without any other material cause. Just as the spider brings out the web, so also the one divine manifests as this whole universe. It is not said to be unreal or a dream, it is there. The web is real. An insect will not get caught in an unreal web. The web is real! If the spider has to eat, then the web also has to be real. The web and the spider both are real, although the web is connected but dependent on the spider. Sparks come out from the fire. The fire is the source, it is the one that is the primary unit and main source, but from it comes the sparks, and a spark falling on some dry wood will make that also a big fire. Many fires in California have been caused by a spark from something. So, they are also real, you cannot brush them aside, saying, "No, no they are the products of ignorance!" Well, that is not easy to do! How can I say it is unreal when I am seeing it? As Sri Ramakrishna says, "Well, when you are not in that state, you may read it, and you may think that the thorn is not real, but when you are feeling the

thorn you will say it is real at that time". The Bhagavad Gita has so many verses like this. In the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter that we were listening to this morning in the chapel the Lord says

मय्येव मन आधत्स्व मयि बुद्धिं निवेशय ।  
निवसिष्यसि मय्येव अत ऊर्ध्वं न संशयः ॥ ८ ॥  
*mayy eva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhiṃ niveśaya*  
*nivasiṣyasi mayy eva ata ūrdhvaṃ na saṃśayaḥ. 8*

This philosophy of Vishishta Advaita gives a lot of scope for practicing Bhakti, such as "Let me get connected to God, may I devote all my mind to God and be connected to God, let me connect all my mind and intellect, let me invest niveshaya, let me put it in God and so forth". It is getting connected to the divine.

Yesterday the example was given of the light bulb and electricity. The electricity is primary because it does not depend on the light bulb, as such. Whether it is plugged in, whether it is switched on or not switched on, the electricity is there. But, to get the light you have to connect the electricity to the bulb, you need both. For electricity to be of any functional use you need both electricity, the source, and the appliances. Both have to be real. The process also has been described by a beautiful analogy in Shvetashvatara as well as Mundaka Upanishad.

द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते ।  
*dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhāyā samānam vṛkṣam*  
*pariśasvajāte.*

Sri Ramakrishna liked this analogy so much he drew this picture on the wall in Dakshineswar. It was there. I heard that the picture was there on the wall for a long time. Then it got plastered over, and we do not have it now. Changing and unchanging, they are kind of connected. The changing is suffering and wants to get united and wants to feel that unity with the upper self.

So, what is happening? "Aneeshaya sochathe muhyamanaha". There are two birds "samane vṛkṣhe". The lower bird is on the lower branches and is eating the fruits on this tree and thus

suffering, and there is one on the top of the tree that is not doing anything — just sitting. The lower bird suffers and looks up and sees how majestic, without any problem, this upper bird is and wants to go there. I am making this long story short. Actually, one can meditate for a long time on this illuminating uplifting idea. Thus, we come gradually to be connected more and more with that unchanging reality which is our own nature.

The Upanishad does not say it is your own nature, it says “sayudha sakhayaha”. The non-dual interpreters and then Sankaracharya had to do a lot of exegesis to say that, “no, no it was the higher bird alone that was there.” The Upanishad does not say this. The Upanishad concludes that it is “Anyam taya pashyati Tasya mahimnam iti veeta shokaha.” When that *mahim*, the greatness of that upper bird, is perceived, this lower bird becomes free of all suffering. It is not said that it vanishes; it becomes free from suffering. This idea is also expressed in the Bhagavad Gita:

द्वाविमौ पुरुषौ लोके क्षरश्चाक्षर एव च ।

क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि कूटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते ॥१५- १६॥

*dvāvīmau puruṣau loke kṣaraścākṣara eva ca ।*

*kṣaraḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni kūṭastho'kṣara ucyate ॥ 15-16 ॥*

There are these two *kshara* and *akshara*: the field and the knower of the field. As living beings we see these two realities in us. I gave the example Satyavratha changing and Satyavaratha not changing. We feel within us the changing "I" and the unchanging "I". But, there is an overlord of all these — “*Uttama Purashtoanyaha*”. This is a very great way of putting Vishishta Advaita. Ramanujacharya also tells that it is “*Tattvamasi*”, a famous statement in Vedanta, which is interpreted by non-dualists as you are that. “Thou art That” means this Thou is an illusionary appearance, in ignorance this is thought of as Thou. In the famous example of the snake and the rope, there is a rope, but in ignorance you see it as a snake, and when the light comes the snake is gone. Not that this snake was there and then when the light was

thrown on it, it quickly went into some hole, that didn't happen. It (the snake) really never was there, only the rope was always there. This is the non-dualistic explanation of this.

But Ramanujacharya says that, when there is a direct explanation, why do you need to get into this exegesis and come up with some other meaning. It is you are that in your unchanging aspect, you are that in your changing aspect, and what you see you are. He says that the non-dual vedanta takes the symbolic/lakshana meaning. This means you just make a sign by this symbol to that which is real. Ramanuja says no, this is to be interpreted as what is called Samanaadhikaranya. It means putting things on the same platform like we do all the time. We are, say, the same as members of the Vedanta Society, but we are also different individuals. I am different from Swami Tyaganandaji. Swami T says no to this and then Swami Y responds saying, “See, just now I said we are different and you said no. So we are different.” So, we are same from what point of view? Ramanuja's contention is that we are all different, but as people attending this retreat we are same. So, we have been put on the same footing. Hence Thou and That are put on the same footing.

I will conclude by just pointing out that Vasishtha Advaita is not just Ramanujacharya, because Ramanujacharya calls this one unchanging Vishnu or Narayana and that kind of limits it. What about devotees who want to see it as Shiva? Ramanujacharya does not accept that, but that is equally valid. The qualified non-dualists or vishishta advaitins can be shaivite vishishta advaitins, shakta vishishta advaitins, and also vaishnava vishishta advaitins or any. So that is how Ramanuja's philosophical part is very good, but when it comes to particularization that becomes the difficult part to accept, because one can be vishishta advaitin, yet instead of worshipping Vishnu, can be worshipping Shiva. So with that I conclude my talk, thank you very much friends.

*“Of the Swami’s address before the Parliament of Religions, it may be said that when he began to speak it was of “the religious ideas of the Hindus”, but when he ended, Hinduism had been created.” Wrote Sister Nivedita in the introduction of the complete works of Swami Vivekananda. During the Fall Banquet of 2018, the year-long celebration of the “125th Year of the Chicago Addresses” was inaugurated. Four Vedanta teachers painted an integrated picture of the Eternal Religion, from different timeline. Following are the transcription of their lectures.*

## **Hinduism During the Philosophical Era** Swami Kripamayananda, Vedanta Society of Toronto

This is such a wonderful gathering in honor of Swami Vivekananda’s speech at the Parliament of Religions 125 years ago! This year the Parliament of Religions will be held in the city that I live in, Toronto, Canada, from Nov 1 – Nov 7.

So, what is the philosophical need for human beings to find religion? In the beginning, people tried to gain peace and happiness in the world by believing in a greater supernatural power, like the natural powers of wind, sun, earth, air, and water. All those forces were propitiated by offerings, in and through the fire, to relieve the human beings who were in awe and were frightened on seeing this huge universe in front of them and wondering how to survive. All that was done in the ritualistic part of our Vedas when the religion started. Then slowly people thought, who am I, if this life alone is true, then what is after death? Do we live after death or does everything end with the death of the body? Where do I go after the death of the body? Such questions started coming to the minds of the thinkers, and philosophy arose in Hinduism as in other religions.

There are two types of Hindu philosophies. One is based on the Vedas and the other is independent of the Vedas. One type of philosophy considers the Vedas as the authority and the other doesn’t consider the Vedas as the authority. Those that follow the Vedas as authority are known as śaḍdarśana. There are six philosophies, six ways to realize the truth, to gain the knowledge. One of the six darshanas is called the Sankhya philosophy. It was formulated and developed by Kapila, the sage, and this is a pretty ancient philosophy and

the present-day Vedanta draws a lot from this philosophy. This is based on an atheistic philosophy in which there is a distinction between consciousness and matter. Two entities are proposed, one is consciousness, our true self, and the other matter, and the interaction between consciousness and matter makes the evolution of this world possible.

Another one of these six philosophies of Hinduism is called Yoga. It was formulated by Patanjali and he wrote the aphorisms called Yoga Sutras. This is a school emphasizing meditation and contemplation, which will lead to the liberation of the soul. Meditation is controlling the mind and senses. When we have perfect meditation, we are able to make our mind still like a candle flame that is burning in a windless place. In the Gita Sri Krishna says that when our mind goes deeper by calmness, the truth is revealed, and we understand that we are separate from this Universe, from this material world, and we realize we are really consciousness, and that is Kaivalya.

In the 6th century BC, another philosophy evolved called Nyaya. Its founder was Gautama. This Nyaya philosophy lays emphasis on seeking knowledge and explores the sources of knowledge. It says there are four sources of knowledge. They are direct perception, inference, comparison and testimony. All these lead to knowledge, and that knowledge helps us to realize the truth of our own Self. Another one of the six darshanas, Vaiseshika, was founded by Kaṇāda in 2 BC. In the Vaiseshika philosophy each element is considered unique.

The Vaiseshhika is called the school of atomism. Each small particle is known as Kanaa, and all these particles combine together to make the universe.

Later came the Mimamsa, which is dependent on the ritualistic portion of the Vedas. If you perform action and chant the mantras perfectly, you will gain the result of your worship. It is a very anti-ascetic and anti-mystical school of orthodoxy. At one time that philosophy was prevalent.

But now the modern philosophy of Hinduism, which is very prevalent and dominant, is called Vedanta. It is based on the Vedas and the Upanishads, which are the end portion of the Vedas. Knowledge is its basis and this philosophy is the culmination of all knowledge. In this philosophy of Vedanta, there are again 3 branches—Dvaita, Visishta Advaita and Advaita. Advaita is the monistic philosophy which believes in only one reality, and that one reality appears as the whole Universe. Matter and the soul are all the appearance of that one pure consciousness.

Visishta Advaita and Dvaita believe in God and soul, which are eternally different.

But, when he came to Chicago, Swami Vivekananda preached the Advaita Vedanta philosophy and showed how it unites the whole universe into one. Finding that unity of the Self and the whole universe will lead us to emancipation. We will reach liberation when we realize that all the variety is my own Self. My own true Self appears as God, appears as this Universe, appears as myself. There is only one reality; that system is called Monism. This is a brief description of the six philosophies that started in India.

During Buddha's time, other philosophies started—Buddhism, Jainism, Charvakas, Ajivikas — that were not dependent on the Vedas. They were called Nastika philosophies and they also developed in India. Those philosophies denied the authority of the Vedas, but they all tried to find the purpose of life. They are also a worldview. This is how different philosophies developed in India, even as Hinduism evolved.

## Hinduism During the Time of the Upanishads

Swami Ishtananda, Vedanta Center of St. Petersburg, Florida

The Upanishads are the essential part of the holy Vedas. The Hindus are called Hindus, but they should be called VEDI (followers of the Veda) or Vedantins according to Swami Vivekananda. The word Veda comes from the Sanskrit root word, "Vid", which means "knowledge". Veda is the accumulated knowledge of thousands of years.

As such, the Hindu mind considers this knowledge very holy because all knowledge, all wisdom, comes from God, the One who is the source of all knowledge. Knowledge, therefore, has no secular or spiritual division in the eyes of the Vedas. This Vedic knowledge is considered to be the wisdom revealed to great geniuses thousands of years ago. Some of that wisdom related to the material world, some to the spiritual

world. It was the ultimate truth about God, about ourselves, about the purpose of our life here, and how we are connected with everything else.

This Veda is divided into two parts — one is called *Mantra*, the other *Brahmana*. In the olden days the worship of God, the ultimate, who is beyond the reach of all our senses and our speech, was through fire or Agni. That ultimate revealed or manifested Itself in many ways, including many different natural forces.

There were presiding deities, and all those presiding deities, both male and female, gods and goddesses, were worshipped. The method of worship was to offer them oblations along with prayers and chants in their praise.

This mode of worship was a communication between the individual worshipper and the different forms or faces of the Divine. The gods had many different names in those days, such as Indra, Varuna, Agni, Yama etc. Many of them were presiding deities over natural forces.

These deities received the offerings or oblations given into the holy fire, Agni. Agni itself was considered as one of the presiding deities. Agni was the instrument to carry our worship, our offerings, to different deities. This was during the time of Vedas. The portion of the Veda that is associated with the chanting of prayers is called *Mantra*, and the explanations regarding all those mantras and systems of worship is called *Brahmana*. So, Mantra and Brahmana together are considered as the Vedas.

Again, this Veda and another essential part, which came later on, called the Upanishad, are together considered as the holiest of the holy of scriptures among the Hindus from that very ancient time. They are known as *Sruti*. There was another set of scriptures or books, known as *Smriti*, which were about running this civilized human society. They included the Dharma Shastra like Manu Smriti, Itihasas like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as eighteen Puranas like the Bhagavatam and others.

All of them are considered holy. Together they form the scriptures. So there are *Shruti* and *Smriti*. Within the *Shruti*, the Vedas are the holiest of the holy. The Vedas again had differences within. Many of you have heard of Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, etc. Rig Veda is a collection of mantras that were chanted during the time of worship and many other occasions. These Rig Mantras when sung in a particular tone, melodiously with proper meters, were called *Saamas*, and the Veda that provided details about the worship system was called Yajur. Many other areas were covered by Atharva Veda.

We find that during the Vedic or Upanishadic period, it was believed that God was one. From a

very ancient time in the Vedas, from the most ancient part of the Rig Veda, it has been stated very clearly that from the One many had been created or the One had become many. This wisdom, which came from a very ancient period of time in India, has been repeated time and again. We find it repeated during the time of the Bhagavad Gita, and in modern times, we find that it has been again repeated again in Sri Ramakrishna's teaching that there is One who is beyond all human conceptions and understanding. That One is called by many different names, and it is possible to reach Him or worship Him through many different ways.

Hindus during those days, even during the Vedic period, developed the Varnashrama Dharma. As I mentioned, the other part of the scriptures that included the Itihasas and Puranas, included the Dharma Shastra, and this Dharma Shastra defined how people lived their life, what is right and what is wrong — the dos and don'ts. The Varnashrama Dharma in the Dharma Shastras developed in a very particular way. Varna means caste, which is now so very hated, but the caste system was reversible in the original system. The caste system was created to make each and every profession more efficient and to reduce the competition in society that could create a chaotic situation. There was a system of who was supposed to be doing what kind of profession. So, the caste system was made to reduce competition within the profession and make it more efficient.

Then there was the ashrama dharma — Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa. We cannot go into this in detail now. But, according to the particular stage in life and particular place where one was located, they were told clearly what the do's and don'ts of society were.

We find that in that particular society of Hindus they already believed, as I mentioned, that God is One. They had accepted the divinity of godhood but also the divinity of the soul.

They had accepted already the doctrine of rebirth of the soul and the law of karma or cause and effect.

One thing we find in the Hindu society of those days was that men and women were treated equally. That was clearly seen during the Vedic period, when we see that the great personalities were not just men but also women. From the Upanishads it is evident that the seers of the revealed truth, known as *Rishis*, were not just men, they were also women. Both boys and girls in the ancient Hindu society during the time of the Upanishads and Vedas were treated equally, were given equal education, had equal status in marriage and in family life, and were treated honorably in the society. This kind of social structure and this kind of belief system existed during the Vedic period, which included the Upanishads.

The Upanishads are found in the latter part of the Vedas, known as Aranyaka, which meant "forest dwellers"—people who mostly opted for solitude to do more spiritual practices and to meditate. In the end portion of the Aranyaka we find the Upanishads.

In this environment, which was very spiritually oriented, highly civilized, and which took care of everyone in society, India was a very prosperous and highly cultured country. It did an excellent job in producing great thinkers. There was intellectual power, spirituality that uplifted and enlightened men and women, and great prosperity in the country.

So, Hinduism started during the Vedic and Upanishadic period, and, while people are still figuring out how many thousands of years back it was, it was a wonderful, well-developed civilization.



Interfaith Meeting:  
Fall Banquet ,  
Chicago, 2018

## Hinduism before Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Ishatmananda, Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

Hinduism before Sri Ramakrishna! But from where will we start! People cannot say when Hinduism started. It is eternal—Sanatana Dharma. But let us start from the Chandragupta Maurya period. Chandragupta Maurya was the first monarch of India who ruled almost the whole subcontinent. This was around 312 BC. He was a great supporter of the Hindu way of life. His son, Ashoka ( 264 BC), was also a staunch Hindu, a great worshipper of Lord Shiva. He used to feed 60,000 brahmanas daily. But, in 261 BC Ashoka accepted Buddhism. From then on Hinduism lost

the support of the monarchs. Ashoka constructed 84,000 Buddhist chapels. After Ashoka we know that the Maurya dynasty became very weak, and the vast empire was broken into smaller states. Taking this opportunity, the Greeks conquered a big part of India, but some of them accepted Hinduism. In the Puranas we find mention of eight Hindu jabaan (foreigners). "India, a land of many rivers and many towns" attracted foreigners. In 714 AD an Arab King named Asim, attacked Mayer, Rajputana, in the heartland of India, and the Muslim invasions began.

Political instability changed the social, cultural, and spiritual life of India. To save the society from the extreme external influences, the Hindu society imposed strict caste rules. You have heard Swami Ishtanandaji mention the caste system, and in the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna stated "*Chaturvarnam maya srishtam, guna...*", "according to the qualities, I have created four castes." But, it became very rigid from this period onwards. Not only that, they started restricting the freedom of the women. Again, I refer to Swami Ishtanandaji's talk where he mentioned how free the women were! In education, and in all other respects they were equal, but during this period that started breaking down. The brave and broad-minded Hindus slowly became timid and deceitful to save themselves from the tyranny of the rulers. From 11<sup>th</sup> century through the 18<sup>th</sup>, there was a long 700 years that changed many things in Hindu customs, Hindu religion, and other Hindu systems. The terrible effect of these years forced the same-sighted, knowledge loving, friendly Hindus to commit social crimes in the name of religion, like neglecting the masses. Swami Vivekananda at one point of time, when he was travelling all over India, cried out, "Lo! The descendants of the Rishis have become next door neighbor to brutes, neglecting the women, and believing and practicing devilish systems in the name of religion."

Losing faith in the true God and quarrelling and separating on philosophical points like is God is with form or without form and whether the best path is knowledge or devotion. Untouchability and so many other faults that we find in the Hindu society started then. It is not religion. Religion is completely different. So, it was necessary now for an incarnation.

In 1835 Lord Macaulay surveyed India and gave a report that was published by Dr. Abdul Kalam, the former President of India. In it Macaulay said, if we want to rule India permanently, we have to break their morals, and through education we can do that. And they

started the Macaulay system of education! Indians started hating anything and everything that was Indian. Anytime you mentioned our supreme Gods and Goddesses, the Indian system and people, the educated Hindus began disparaging it. They themselves started writing against our long-held beliefs. That was the confusion! And in the name of religion so many negative things started.

So, God had to keep his promise once again. As Sri Krishna promised in the Bhagavad Gita, "*Yada yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavathy Bharata, abyuthaanam adharmasya thadatmanam srijamy Aham.*" "Whenever and wherever there is a decline of Righteousness, and a predominance of Unrighteousness, O descendant of Bharata, at that time I descend."

Friends, this was the condition of Hinduism before the birth of Sri Ramakrishna. You have heard from Swami Kripamayanandaji and before him from Swami Ishtanandaji, what Hinduism was like at the time of the Vedas—what the philosophy of Hinduism was at that time! And the Hinduism that had come later, about which Swami Vivekananda said, "Do you think you have religion? That has gone to the kitchen. What will I eat, when will I eat, how will I eat, who is going to cook, is this religion? What am I'm wearing, what language will I will use, these things are all superstitions, bad habits in the name of religion." So, it was necessary for God, the almighty God, to come once again because he promised in the Bhagawad Gita "*Yada yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavathy Bharata...*" When that *glanir* (unrighteousnes) prevailed, the supreme God came in 1836 in the form of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna. Now, this young boy never went to any school, but he developed knowledge from within. He took birth in a Brahmin family, but what type of Brahmin? Constantly, every moment, living with high moral values. That is a Brahmin, always living in Brahman! And this boy slowly, slowly, as he grew up, became a teacher of the Hindus.

Now, I will give you some points about what Sri Ramakrishna did. The first and foremost thing he did was to bring back faith in the existence of God. God is here! You can talk to God!

How many of us believe that? But it's true! God is here! We can talk to God. He himself did! Then he affirmed that with sincere effort God can be realized through any path. He asked, can you cry for God? Sometimes he said, suppose a small child cannot properly pronounce the word "Father". He is only uttering some sound, but the father knows the child is calling him. This is the way, a very simple way—call on Him. He asked, if you want to see God, if you want to practice spirituality, can you cry? You cry for so many things, can you truly cry for God?

He went to the lowest of the low, the pariah and the sweeper. He was a brahmin, he was a

priest, yet he cleaned their toilet, their bathroom, himself! This is how he showed us the way. Another example he set—he accepted a lady as his guru, and his Chosen Deity was the Goddess Kali and his first disciple was a woman, Ma Saradamani Devi! Sri Ramakrishna used to say that Hindu society needed to give education to women once again — bringing back its ancient glory. Our ladies, sitting here, highly educated and fluent in many things, do you know how it happened? Because of this man! He emphasized that you have to give education to the women and to the downtrodden people, and his disciple, Swami Vivekananda, came and preached, "Education, Education, Education!" Education is the panacea for all evils! This came from Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna and because of who he is, Hinduism is once again taking the purest form that existed in the time of the Vedas.

## Hinduism After Swami Vivekananda

Swami Tyagananda, Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston

Swami Vivekananda began his historic address at the Parliament of Religions 125 years ago with these words, "Sisters and Brothers of America...". These words and similar sentiments have been expressed over the last century from many different platforms and by many different speakers, but the kind of reaction that Swami Vivekananda's words evoked has not been equaled. As many of us who have read his life know, there was a spontaneous ovation from thousands of people—something in those words resonated with their head and heart, something moved them.

It was not just the words, because those words have been uttered by many speakers without producing the same effect. It was not just the speeches of Swami Vivekananda but the power of the truth that his life exemplified that brought about a great renaissance. A great teaching not only to the Hindus around the world but, I believe, to all the seekers of truth, all the seekers of higher

life no matter from which tradition, which part of the world they come from.

And it was this—beyond the words, beyond the books, beyond the superficialities— that created such an impact. If we dive deep down, beyond the layers of diversity that we see, there is a deeper unity underlying the diversity. In Swamiji's time there was already enough diversity. In fact, the gathering that occurred in Chicago was already historic, because never before had religious leaders from the East and the West spoken on the same platform at the same time. In the last more than 125 years the diversity has increased even more, thanks to easy jet travel and globalization. Now, we encounter this diversity in every field no matter to which part of the world we go.

Swami Vivekananda's words and teachings have given us insights into how to deal with this diversity in an intelligent way, in a wise way, and one of the teachings was this — he emphasized to the Hindus and also to people everywhere who

seek truth, that religion was not simply a matter of acknowledging something or believing in something but was a matter of experience. Religion was about transformation of character. It's not enough to be able to describe wisely, intelligently what the religious books of any tradition say. What proves the validity of any tradition is whether it made me a better person, made me a better human being. And more than that, has it somehow helped me transcend my human limitations.

Swami Vivekananda emphasized that every religious tradition has at least two aspects—the experiential aspect and the social aspect. The parts of religion which deal with the unchanging realities of life, that deal with God and the purpose of existence, don't change with time, but the social aspect of religion, of how we apply these timeless principles to society, to life, those will change as societies change. So, if my religious understanding remains limited only to the social aspect of it, and if I remain stuck in it, then I might miss the deeper soul of religion and only those who have touched that deeper soul are able to recognize the unity that underlies the diversity. So, while we can celebrate the diversity amongst us, that celebration will be meaningful, that celebration can be truly joyful, only when we have touched something that unites all of us.

Beyond the material layers of our human personality, there is a deeper truth. We can call that truth by any name. Names and labels don't matter, but the reality is what we need to get in touch with. Similarly, just as we can find something unchanging, something deeper than simply the flesh and bones in our being, we can look out at the world, at this material universe, and can see that there is something deeper, something more. So, the unchanging within me is the real me. The unchanging behind the universe is what is popularly called God.

True religion can be seen as our attempt to discover the relationship between the unchanging

part within me and the unchanging part behind the universe. And the different answers that human beings have arrived at as a result of this reflection, this inquiry, in different parts of the world at different points in history, is what these different religious traditions are. So, the hunger of the human mind is to try to figure out what this is all about, what human life means, what is the purpose of life. We find that hunger is common to all. The love for God is common to all. How that love gets expressed, whether it's in Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or Judaism is different. The expression might be different, but the experience is the same, and that is one of the central teachings that Vivekananda brought before us.

In 1835 Lord Macaulay surveyed India and gave a report that was published by Dr. Abdul Kalam, the former President of India. In it Macaulay said, if we want to rule India permanently, we have to break their morals, and through education we can do that. And they started the Macaulay system of education! Indians started hating anything and everything that was Indian. Anytime you mentioned our supreme Gods and Goddesses, the Indian system and people, the educated Hindus began disparaging it. They themselves started writing against our long-held beliefs. That was the confusion! And in the name of religion so many negative things started.

So, God had to keep his promise once again. As Sri Krishna promised in the Bhagavad Gita, "*Yada yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavathy Bharata, abyuthaanam adharmasya thadatmanam srijamy Aham.*" "Whenever and wherever there is a decline of Righteousness, and a predominance of Unrighteousness, O descendant of Bharata, at that time I descend."

And one other point and I will stop, and it is this. In Swami Vivekananda's teachings we find that he came at a time when the industrial revolution was booming, and science seemed to be

filled with blessings. So, we find in Vivekananda's teachings a lot of emphasis on the fact that many of these ancient principles are in complete harmony with Science. Today we have seen that Science is a great blessing, but it can also be a curse. With two World Wars and the holocaust, and as the rabbi mentioned, terrorism. Plenty of technology is being used for all of these things. So, we know science is a mixed blessing.

Therefore, when we try to figure out the role of religion in life, it is not enough to swear by some of these things that may be popular as buzz words. We need to look deeply, hold on to whatever is positive, whatever is strengthening. If we ever have a doubt if something is the right choice or not, Swami Vivekananda said, and these are his words, "Strength is life, weakness is death." By that he meant if I am ever faced with, "should I do this, or should I not do this; should I think this way, or should I not think this way", one simple test would be if something is going to make me strong either physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, emotionally. Then go for it! If something is going to make me weak then that' is probably not the best thing for me to do. He gave a new understanding, a new definition to the word strength. We all must have strength and that real strength can come through true humility. People who are very macho and try to show how aggressive they are, they are not very strong people. That comes from a deep inner insecurity. People who are strong, people who are wise, are also very humble, are also very calm, and that's the message Swami Vivekananda brought to the Hindus.

And finally, to recognize that these messages that the great ones bring us present us with an ideal, but we also have to see what the reality is. That's the situation religious leaders face in every part of the world.

There is this ideal given in the books and taught by these great reformers that come in every

generation. But then there is the reality on the street, and the challenge is to bring religion as it is practiced in day-to-day life as close as possible to the ideal that it represents. We must begin by first doing that in our own individual lives. Who do I see who is an ideal Hindu? Who is an ideal Christian? Who is an ideal Jewish person? Who is an ideal Muslim? Whatever concept of that ideal we have, we need to compare it with our life as it is now and try to bring one's life as close to that ideal as possible. The more we are able to see it as an individual project, because after all groups and societies and nations are just a collection of individuals, the more we are able to improve our own lives, the better chance we have of improving our neighborhoods, our cities, our nations and the world.

There is this one final Sanskrit Verse "*ayaṃ nijah paro veti gaṇanā laghucetasām, udāracaritānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam.*" It simply means this: "This is mine, that's a foreigner, that's an alien. The moment we create these walls separating us, the verse says "iti gaṇanā" this is the kind of thinking of "laghucetasām," small-minded people. But for those whose hearts have opened "udāracaritānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam" —"the entire world becomes one family. So, if we want to be true to ourselves, if we want to learn anything from the wisdom that has come to us from these different traditions, this may be the one important thing to see. Am I able to dive deep within me and then see that same depth in the person in front of me? Just as I love my own mother, my father, my children, when I look out there, no one is a stranger. I may not know a person, but that person is still a father or a mother to someone. The person in front of me may not be my child, but that person is a son or daughter of someone. So, to be able to see that One reflected in others, that is what true spirituality is all about, and I believe that's one of the many important insights that comes to us from the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda.

## Introduction to the Cover Page **Déjà vu: Those Inspiring Golden Days in 1893**

*Br. Panchatapa*

This issue of the eZine is going to be published on 27<sup>th</sup> September, the date on which the first Parliament of World's Religions had its closing ceremony 125 years ago. This cover page is a tribute to those golden days in 1893.

This interreligious conclave that is also known as 'the morning star of the twentieth century began on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1893. More than 7,000 people attended its closing session on the seventeenth day. Several Christian hymns were sung before Mr. Charles Bonney and Rev. John Barrows delivered their concluding addresses. Along with them, some representatives also spoke to express their thanks and impressions. The "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's Messiah was then sung. About this, Barrows commented, "To the Christians who were present, and all seemed imbued with a Christian spirit, [the chorus] appeared as if the Kingdom of God was descending visibly before their eyes and many thought of the Redeemer's promise – "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The Parliament was officially closed with the Lord's Prayer led by Emil Hirsch, a rabbi from Chicago.

Presbyterian minister Barrows, the 'architect' of the program, was the event's chairman. There were ten objectives set by the General Committee planning the Parliament. Derek Michaud, the editor of *the Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia Of Western Theology* listed those all.

1. *To bring together in conference, for the first time in history, the leading representatives of the great historic religions of the world.*
2. *To show to men, in the most impressive way, what and how many important truths the various religions hold and teach in common.*
3. *To promote and deepen the spirit of human brotherhood among religious men of diverse faiths, through friendly conference and mutual good*

*understanding, while not seeking to foster the temper of indifferentism, and not striving to achieve any formal and outward unity.*

4. *To set forth, by those most competent to speak, what are deemed the important distinctive truths held and taught by each Religion, and by the various chief branches of Christendom.*

5. *To indicate the impregnable foundations of Theism, and the reasons for man's faith in Immortality, and thus to unite and strengthen the forces which are adverse to a materialistic philosophy of the universe.*

6. *To secure from leading scholars, representing the Brahman, Buddhist, Confucian, Parsee, Mohammedan, Jewish and other Faiths, and from representatives of the various Churches of Christendom, full and accurate statements of the spiritual and other effects of the Religions which they hold upon the Literature, Art, Commerce, Government, Domestic and Social life of the peoples among whom these Faiths have prevailed.*

7. *To inquire what light each Religion has afforded, or may afford, to the other religions of the world.*

8. *To set forth, for permanent record to be published to the world, an accurate and authoritative account of the present condition and outlook of Religion among the leading nations of the earth.*

9. *To discover, from competent men, what light Religion has to throw on the great problems of the present age, especially the important questions connected with Temperance, Labor, Education, Wealth and Poverty.*

10. *To bring the nations of the earth into a more friendly fellowship, in the hope of securing permanent international peace.*

The 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, was held on the shore of Lake Michigan, Chicago. From the very beginning, the Parliament was expected to be "the most important, commanding, and influential, as surely it will be the most phenomenal fact of the Columbian Exposition."

In June 1891, more than three thousand copies of the Preliminary Address were sent out to the world, informing the plan of the 1893 Parliament and inviting religious leaders from all over the world to attend it.

Sri Ramakrishna left His body in 1886 and before leaving the mortal plane He instructed Swami Vivekananda to keep his brother disciples organized. Therefore, for next two years Swamiji tried to set up some Math for the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

From 1888 Swamiji started wandering all over India. During his travel he came to know about this announcement. He decided to participate. People of India, whoever came in contact with Swamiji, in the meantime, were convinced by Swamiji's command over Hinduism and raised funds for his trip to America in 1893.

On this other side of the world, responses started arriving. Enthusiastic responses came from those like Max Müller, a great scholar in the field of comparative studies of religion. Swami Vivekananda once said Sayan-acharya, the great ancient commentator of the Vedas, is reborn as Max Müller in this age. Although Professor Müller deeply regretted failing to attend the Parliament, he expressed his hope that the Parliament would increase interest in the studies of religions and he hoped that the Parliament "stands unique, stands unprecedented in the whole history of the world."

There were also those who disapproved. For instance, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the home church of Barrows, itself passed a resolution against convention. Yet, the fact that this resolution was passed hurriedly in the closing hours of the General Assembly in 1892 did not produce a unified voice among the Presbyterians; indeed, their opinion was divided. Further opposition came from the Archbishop of Canterbury, saying in his letter that his disapproval rested on "the fact that the Christian religion is the one religion." Along with these two, the sultan of Turkey, the European Roman Catholic

hierarchy, and many North American Evangelical leaders also opposed this convention. But a professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville was more optimistic: "Let an honest effort be made to get at the facts of religious experience, and the truth of God will take care of itself."

The glory of the Parliament was most obvious in the opening ceremony, on September 11, 1893. As the World Fair of 1893 was organized to celebrate four hundred years of Columbus's discovery of America, the hall in the Art Institute of Chicago, where more than four thousand people had gathered for the Parliament was named after him. At ten o'clock a dozen representatives from different faiths marched into the hall hand in hand. At the same time, the replica Columbian Liberty bell tolled ten times, honoring ten great world religions – Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The inaugural ceremony began with "an act of common worship to Almighty God," Cardinal Gibbons led the crowd in the Lord's Prayer.

*At the opening session the Rev. Barrows proclaimed, "We are met together today as men, children of one God. We are not here as Baptists and Buddhists, Catholics and Confucians, Parsees and Presbyterians, Methodists and Moslems; we are here as members of a Parliament of Religions, over which flies no sectarian flag."*

Statistically speaking, the Parliament was dominated by English-speaking Christian representatives, who delivered 152 of 194 papers. Within the limited opportunity other representatives contributed significantly -- Buddhism (12), Judaism (11), Hinduism (8), Islam (2), Parsis (2), Shintoism (2), Confucianism (1) Taoism (1), and Jainism (1).

This Parliament was first in many ways.

Bahá'í World, Vol. 2, p. 169 says: "*The First Public Mention of the Bahá'í Faith in America was made. A paper written by the Rev. Henry Jessup was read by a Rev. Ford.*"

*At the end of Jessup's paper he 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. ... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind."*

It was the first significant public appearance of Unitarians and Universalists. "Lake Chalice" is a ministry of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Gainesville. According to their webpage: *"The Unitarian minister Jenkin Lloyd-Jones was one of the 16 on the planning committee that toiled for two years to make the event happen. At the Parliament, Unitarian and Universalist speakers brought, and embodied, new ideas about gender equality in religion. 1893 came during a chapter of Unitarian history known as "The Iowa Sisterhood" – a period in which many Unitarian women ministers thrived in pulpits dotting the Midwest frontier – pulpits which male ministers had refused or abandoned. A number of these Unitarian women ministers spoke at the World Parliament of Religions, including Rev. Marion Murdoch, and Rev. Ida Hultin. Unitarian lay activists and scholars Julia Ward Howe and Eliza Sunderland also gave prominent and acclaimed addresses at the Parliament. Universalist minister Augusta Jane Chapin chaired the Parliament's Woman's Committee, addressed the opening and closing sessions and was the only woman to preside over a session."*

It was the first time when many Americans had ever heard Hindus or Buddhists speak in their own voices on behalf of their own faith. Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu, confirmed from the other side of the world the vision of universal convergence that had captured the imagination of the planners. His three speeches undoubtedly drew most attention from the American public. One journalist wrote of him: *"Vivekananda's address before the parliament was broad as the heavens above us, embracing the best in all religions, as the ultimate universal religion—charity to all mankind, good works for the love of God, not for fear of punishment or hope of*

*reward."*

And, it was the first time when the language of the universal was wielded eloquently by the Christian participants as well. Christians claimed universality for Christianity, and listening with earnestness to the witness of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus uplifted them to a larger and more expansive Christianity.

This Parliament addressed issues from all alienation perspectives such as religion, country, race and gender. Let's quote an excerpt from the "Pluralism Project" write up: *"There were many voices at the Parliament that stressed not the universals, but the real differences between and within religions. Their voices made clear the difficult tasks that lay ahead and forecast the complex challenges that religious diversity would pose for the twentieth century. The Buddhist reformer Anagarika Dharmapala asked the audience in a large lecture hall, "How many of you have read the life of the Buddha?" When only five raised a hand, he scolded, "Five only! Four hundred and seventy-five millions of people accept our religion of love and hope. You call yourselves a nation — a great nation — and yet you do not know the history of this great teacher. How dare you judge us!" One of the Buddhists from Japan was equally challenging, pointing to the anti-Japanese feeling he had met in America and deploring the signs that read "No Japanese is allowed to enter here." "If such be the Christian ethics," he said, "We are perfectly satisfied to be heathen."*

*Of the major speakers only two were African-Americans. Frederick Douglass called the "White City" created for the event a "whitened sepulcher" for blacks. Fannie Barrier Williams declared, "It is a monstrous thing that nearly one-half of the so-called evangelical churches of this country repudiate and haughtily deny fellowship to every Christian lady and gentleman happening to be of African descent." She challenged Christians to take seriously their own religion.*

*Among the women who spoke was the first ordained as a minister in America, Antoinette Blackwell, who declared, "Women are needed in the pulpit as imperatively and for the same reason they are needed in the world — because they are women."*

*And, Elizabeth Stanton, who had been working on the Women's Bible, called for a religion that would preach the dignity of all human beings. A new world, she said, would have to build its house with the cellar first, and that meant justice for the poorest."*

Interestingly there were no Native Americans present except in the curiosities display of American Indians on the fair's midway. For many visitors, these Indians were as exotic as Vivekananda. But no native elder or chief was invited to speak at the Parliament. Native American life-ways were not yet seen as a spiritual perspective. In 1890 native Indian Chief Sitting Bull had been arrested and killed, the Ghost Dance had been suppressed, and on December 29 near Wounded Knee Creek on the Lakota Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota 350 Sioux had been massacred.

However, as the Parliament concluded, many felt that the universalist vision should be sustained. One of the Unitarian conveners suggested that the representatives of the world's traditions convene again in 1900 "on the banks of the Ganges in the ancient city of Benares." This was not to be, but there was a meeting in Boston in 1900 of a new group: the International Council of Unitarian and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers. It came to include a few Muslims, Jews, Catholics, and reformist Hindus. Its agenda of international congresses addressed the question of justice for women and the expansion of narrow patriotism to a wider human loyalty. From this seed grew the International Association for Religious Freedom.

Derek Michaud listed the *Significant Legacies* of the Parliament.

*1. It is important to highlight that the Parliament created the field of the study of comparative religion in America, especially in the academic life. Moreover, the flood of immigrants entering the USA during those times has made "religious plurality" and "multiculturalism" two characteristics of the twentieth century America.*

*2. The Parliament is usually considered the cradle of*

*interfaith movement, although no specific organization emerged in this event. The formation process of some interfaith bodies ran slowly (though recently quite rapidly) and seemed to be sporadic.*

*3. The Christian ecumenical movement.. Thereafter, the ecumenical movement has always been dealing with the issues of religious plurality in connection with Christian unity and mission.*

*4. the Parliament has also influenced Christian missionaries who work abroad in the ways they approach and appreciate people from other religious traditions. They become more sensitive to local cultures and religions. Yet, what is fascinating is that the Parliament has opened the gate widely for the leaders from other religions to do their own missions to the West, especially to America. Among the missionaries from the East several important figures can be mentioned: Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, Swami Vivekananda, Anagarika Dharmapala, and Soyen Shaku.*

After the Parliament the religious situation in America has been changed forever. It became a cosmopolitan nation and had come out having to live up to the claim. There was no going back.

Swamiji was not only the witness of all these wonderful changes that happened, but also became an integrated form of this golden shift.

A relationship was built between Swamiji and the Unitarian Universalist churches all over the country. He accepted a reception at the home of Unitarian Minister and Mrs. Young. During the Parliament itself, being invited by Unitarian minister Rev. Blake on 24<sup>th</sup> September he delivered a lecture at Third Unitarian Church, Chicago on *The Love Of God*. He met Unitarian minister Jenkin Jones of Chicago also. This relation with the Unitarian Universalist churches led him to give talk at other churches as well. For example, on 30<sup>th</sup> September we find him giving an: evening lecture at 1<sup>st</sup> Congregational Church on *Hindu Altruism*. Here he lectured with Sweden's Dr. Carl von Bergen, who was the Unitarian delegate from Sweden to Parliament

Through these lectures other religious practices were getting benefitted to come out of sectarianism and bigotry. On February 18, 1894 Swamiji attended the church service of Rev. Reed Stuart where Rev. Stuart himself lectured on "The Gate Opening Towards The East" and Rabbi Grossman spoke on "What Vivekananda Has Taught Us".

As we just now read another important aspect of the Parliament was: *voice of women*. Not only in the religious sector, they were working in important areas like health and education and were struggling for gender equality.

Swami Vivekananda gave a series of lectures at the Masonic Temple of Chicago a month after the Parliament of Religions. It is not known who first arranged these talks. Swamiji's 3<sup>rd</sup> November talk was introduced by Dr. Sarah Stevenson. Dr. Stevenson was president of the Women's Club. Perhaps the Club sponsored this series of talks.

When Swamiji lectured at the Masonic Temple building it was brand new and a fashionable place to meet. It had been designed by the distinguished firm of Burnham and Root and completed in 1892. This 22 stories tall building was the second tallest building in the city, a veritable skyscraper.

Swamiji's lectures at the Masonic Temple were scheduled for 3 p.m., a time convenient for women to meet. Apparently one o'clock was a fashionable hour to take a buffet luncheon in the 19th century. This buffet used to advertise itself as the "finest buffet in America," according to an advertisement in the *Chicago Eagle*, 24 March 1894.

Anyhow, the probable convener of these lectures, Dr. Stevenson, was the first of many also. The first woman member of the American Medical Association (AMA), the first woman appointed on the State Board of Health, and the first woman to be on staff at the Cook County Hospital. She was a strong advocate for the emancipation of women. Dr. Stevenson opted to resign from her position at the Woman's Medical College because she believed the segregation of sexes in medical school was no longer needed. She took up a professorship at the Women's Hospital Medical College and in 1876,

attending the AMA convention as a delegate of the Illinois State Medical Society, she was accepted without controversy as the AMA's first female member. In 1880 she co-founded the Illinois Training School for Nurses. In 1893, Stevenson proposed to the Chicago Woman's Club to create a safe home for women and children without funds and in of shelter. Her proposal was accepted by many and was followed by donations from various individuals and other clubs; the Woman's Model Lodging House was then opened to the public as a result of Stevenson's plea to help those in need. There was a charge of fifteen cents per night, and those who were unable pay were given work to pay for their lodging. She retired in 1903.

The people of Chicago started to take initiatives for the needy of the other part of the world also. After the Parliament of Religions, the Indian delegates were in high demand as guest speakers for a host of charities. Bertha Potter and Ellen Henrotin were the two most powerful women in Chicago. Their support was essential for charitable endeavors.

On 25 Oct 1893, *Chicago Tribune* announced: *There will be a meeting in the Art Institute in which a number of prominent Hindoos will take part. The object of the meeting is to begin a movement towards the organization of High Caste Hospitals for Women of India. During the evening addresses on the subject will be delivered by Dr. Jeanne Sarabji, Messrs Virchand Gandhi, Swami Vevakanda, and Narasema Cheri. Tickets for the lecture are \$1 each and may be purchased of Mrs. Potter Palmer, Mrs. Charles Henrotin, or C.C. Bonney.* Lack of further information on this event suggests it was cancelled.

But soon after that on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 1893 Edition of *Chicago Tribune* we find that Swamiji is giving lecture to raise fund in Damascus. How Swamiji got involved with this project? A couple of suggestions from the "Swami Vivekananda Abroad" blog writer.

The writer collected a sketch that was published in *Chicago Inter Ocean* 20 on September 1893.

At the Parliament of Religions Swamiji had been sketched — unnamed — by a newspaper artist as part of "A Group on the Platform." Swamiji on the far left. The other man in a turban on the right is Narasimhacharya. They wrapped their turbans differently. The bearded man sitting next to Swamiji was Christophore Jibara, Archimandrite of the Orthodox Church of Damascus. Jibara distributed a pamphlet titled, "Unity in Faith and Harmony in Religion." According to Barrows's History of the Parliament: "It is an honest, scholarly, labored attempt to discover the fundamental basis that underlies the great monotheistic religions of the world,—Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism—and to find in the Old Testament and the New Testament and the Koran a certain fundamental revelation which being recognized, would meet largely the hunger of the human heart."

A man with such reductive methodology analyzing religion probably have had some conversation with Swamiji and perhaps as a result of this friendship Swamiji came forward to help his country.

In the same edition of the Chicago Tribune that announced his "Damascus" talk, a story of a school for poor Jewish girls in Safed, Palestine (now in northern Israel) was published. Therefore, the other guess is Swamiji spoke on behalf Flora Bliden who was working as a Jewish missionary to help these poor girls with education.

Through the patronage of the Rothschilds, Flora and her husband had established a manual training school for boys and she intended to do the similar for girls of that community. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this area was devastated by plague, earthquake and looting by armed rebels.

Bliden's English was described by the Chicago Inter-Ocean as "broken" but in her own outspoken way, she was able to convey the pathos of the life of the destitute children she wished to help. She sound exactly like the sort of person that Swamiji might have been sympathetic toward.

Around this time he revived his Freemasonic

## TO ESTABLISH SCHOOLS IN DAMASCUS.

### Hindoo Monk Lectures on the Characteristics of the Human Soul.

Swami Vivekananda, the Hindoo monk, gave his fourth lecture at the Masonic Temple yesterday for the purpose of raising funds with which to establish schools among the poor of Damascus. His subject was the characteristics of the human soul as viewed through Indian philosophy. There never was a time, he said, when the creation did not exist. The soul of a human being always existed. If a new soul were created the equilibrium of nature would be thrown out of balance and annihilation would result. Human souls are simply inhabiting certain bodies for the time being. God could not be partial by the creation of some souls to be eternally happy and others to be eternally miserable. The present is only the line of demarkation between the past and the future.



A GROUP ON THE PLATFORM

brotherhood also. A report in the Chicago Inter Ocean on 4th November 1893 : "Swami Vivekananda, the Hindoo monk who attracted so much attention at the Parliament of Religions, gave a parlor lecture Friday afternoons in Hall 309, Masonic Temple. His subject was "The Divinity of Man." The lecture was a brilliant one and elicited repeated applause from the select and cultured audience. Subject for Tuesday, "Hindoo Philosophy, Embracing Monism and Reincarnation"; for Friday, "Love from the Abstract to the Concrete."

A news from Chicago Tribune on 8 November 1893:

*“Swami Vivekanandei (sic), the Hindoo monk who made such a favorable impression in the recent Religious Congress, lectured before an audience of good size, composed chiefly of women, yesterday afternoon at Masonic Temple on the subject of “Hindoo Philosophy”. He discussed the various religious beliefs and superstitions, giving many illustrations of their causes and effects. But the principle of all religions, he declared, is the same and means that the state of the soul is unconditional and independent. It doesn’t require any external force for its existence. “We are all aiming for the same thing, all traveling in the same direction, all going to the same place.”*

His lectures created deep impact on the Freemasons. In his book *Western Admirers of Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, Gopal Stavig quoted a letter of introduction written by the Freemason, Past Grand Master George Cooper Connor, whom Swamiji met, to Gilbert Barnard of Masonic Temple in Chicago on January 22, 1894, wrote a letter of introduction : *“My dear Brother: -- I take a very great pleasure in introducing to you personally, and as a Freemason, our East India Brother Swami Vivekananda, whom I examined in the English Work, in which he was made a Master Mason [in 1884], in Anchor and Hope, 236 E.C. He was educated in India, and is a Monk of the oldest, and most humane of the Religions of the world, -- and because of my own family relations to the city of Calcutta I am anxious that this amiable representative of that wonderful land receive as cordial consideration in my country as I received in his”.*

Those days had a great influence on the making of Vivekananda the embodiment of all religions as also a practical Vedantin. It was probably during this time that he learned how to build hospitals for the needy. Not just to support the cause externally with money but directly to run hospitals as service. Later we see this has become a great service of Ramakrishna Mission to humanity.

We talked about Dr. Stevenson, who left an impression on him. Another two women to leave impression in this field were from the two families

who first hosted him in Chicago. Both were involved in hospitals, though in the 1890s, traditionally a household duty, nursing was emerging as a profession for young women.

Meeting with his first host: On September 9-10, 1893 he returned from Boston to Chicago and upon his return, he got lost. How did this happen?

Swamiji himself retold the heart of this story, neglecting petty historic details, such as which railroad line he travelled. But some guess can be made according to the biography by Swami Virajananda (1914). Swamiji had made the acquaintance of a fellow passenger on the train, who had promised to give him directions, but when they reached Chicago the fellow rushed off and Swamiji realized that he had lost the paper containing his destination address.. The writer of *“Vivekananda Aboard”* suggests: *Most likely this precious address belonged to Dr. Barrows, the Chairman of the Parliament of Religions. Probably he partially recalled that Dr. Barrows lived on a street named Indiana. If he was still in the depot when he discovered his predicament, he would have asked someone how to get to Indiana Street — not realizing that Dr. Barrows lived on Indiana Avenue. Indiana Street is now called Grand Avenue and he was walking in the opposite direction of Indiana Avenue.*

Probably he spent a fruitless evening inquiring after Dr. Barrows and as night fell, there was no hotel that he could recognize and his pocket change was exhausted. Therefore, dark, empty boxcar (a compartment of goods-train) was the most expedient option.

The next morning he resumed his search. He was walking by Lake Michigan. There was a large German community in Chicago to the northern part of the lake. His difficulties were compounded because the people he met seemed to speak only German. Even now, there are street names such as Goethe, Beethoven and Schiller. He arrived at 541 (now 1415) North Dearborn Avenue, footsore and weary and finally sat down on a curb.. The curb of the Episcopal church of St. John Chrysostom was built in 1892 and dedicated in February 1893.

Its appearance was considerably altered after a fire in February 1914.

The Hale family residence was standing before him and Mrs. Ellen Hale observed the forlorn, turbaned man sitting across the street and she approached asked, like a fresh breeze off Lake Michigan, "Sir, are you a delegate to the Parliament of Religions?" The Hales were the first family to host Swamiji in Chicago.

The distance between the Hales' house and Barrows' house (2958 South Indiana Avenue) was approximately five miles. Dunbar Park replaced that part of Indiana Avenue in the 1960s. The Hale family was also associated with projects to help build hospitals. A year and half later we find a report in: Inter Ocean 10 February 1895 that Mr. Hale reported that that from a concert, attended by 5000 people, which Mr. Hale had organized, \$5,614.75 had been raised for a Presbyterian Hospital. The evening was a great success. Though on that evening Swamiji was in New York giving a lecture at Emma Thursby's apartment.

Swamiji's second host in Chicago were John and Emily Lyon at 262 Michigan Avenue. The Lyons were members of the First Presbyterian Church. Rev Barrows was their pastor. Mrs. Lyon, like many in her congregation, had volunteered to host a delegate to that religious congress. She had no idea who their out-of-town guest would be but her husband declared that he had better not be a bigot. Very late on the night before the Parliament opened, a church member brought around their mystery delegate. The next day 7000 people would give Vivekananda a standing ovation .

According to Cornelia Conger, a granddaughter of Emily Lyon: Swamiji "seemed to feel especially close to my grandmother, who reminded him of his own mother. She was short and very erect, with quiet dignity and assurance, excellent common sense, and a dry humor that he enjoyed." He addressed her as: "Dear Mrs. Lyon, you dear American mother of mine."

Cornelia recalled: "My grandmother and my mother attended most of the meetings of the

Congress of Religions and heard Swamiji speak there and later at lectures he gave."

Like many women of her era, Emily Lyon had experience as a nurse. Her husband was a member of the exclusive Chicago Club, which had a famously restrictive entrance sign: "No Dogs, Democrats, Women or Reporters." By the 1890s some Democrats had joined the Club, and conservative members would have sooner relaxed the rules for dogs than for women. The only woman who was actually allowed to stay — secretly — for three days — in the Chicago Club throughout its century of barring women, was Emily Lyon. She, too, came via the backdoor to nurse a member, who was suffering a crisis of typhoid fever.

Many years later on a visit to India in the 1950s, Cornelia shared: "My grandmother was president of the Women's Hospital at home [Chicago], and he visited it with lively interest and asked for all the figures in infant mortality etc. So again it showed how much he was learning in our country to be used in helping his own people, because I was told that a maternity hospital was also founded later. How very happy that would have made my grandmother!"

There are many, many such stories that show how Swamiji influenced the days after September 1893. To commemorate the 125<sup>th</sup> year of the 'Chicago Addresses', here we have remembered only few touches of Swami Vivekananda that made the year 1893 golden forever in the history of humankind.

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