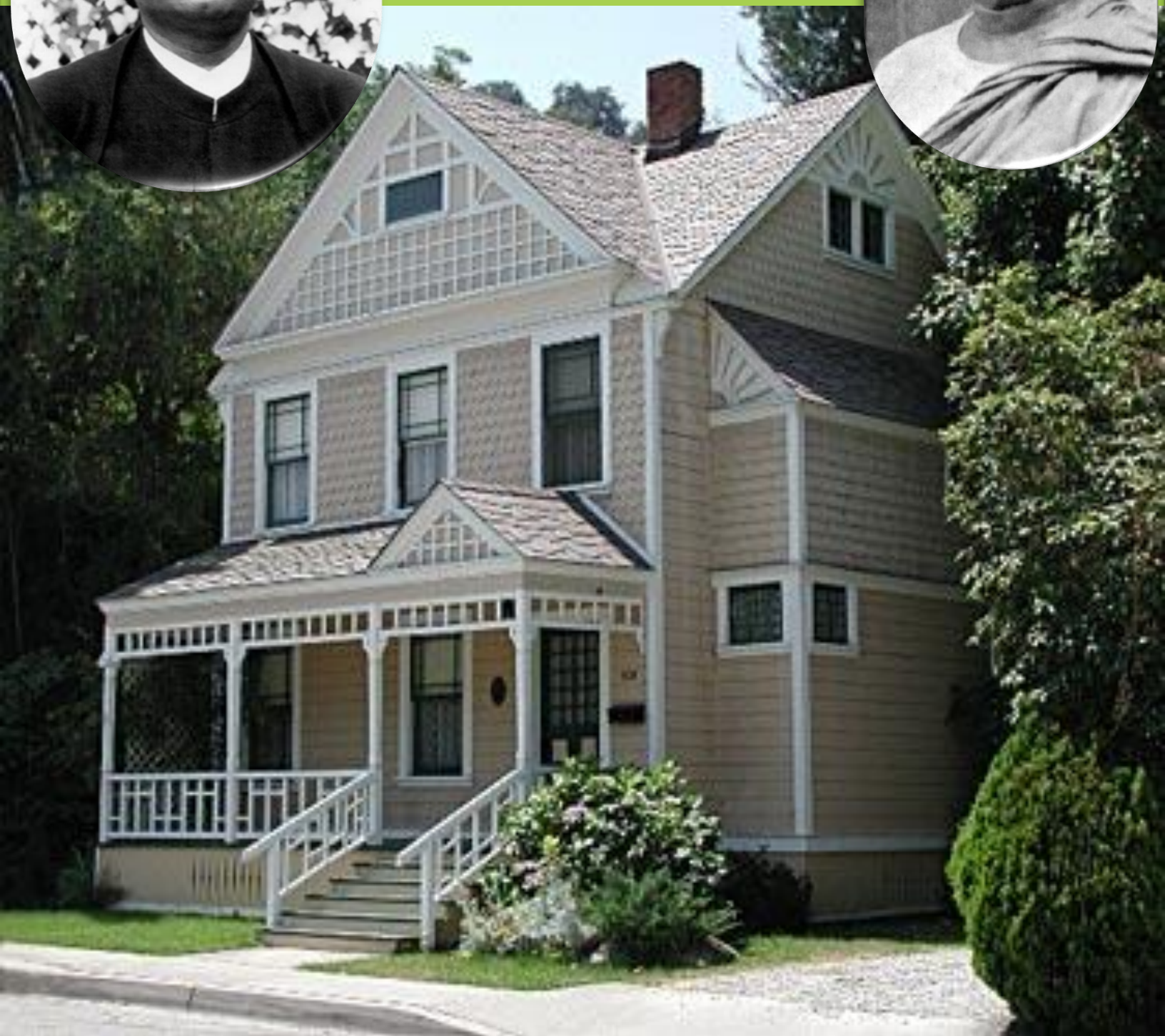


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Solve Problems in the Vivekananda-Way



As I journeyed through the grand cities of Europe, witnessing comforts and education accessible even to the poor, my heart could not help but grieve for our own people back in India. What accounts for this stark difference? The answer, as Swamiji has proclaimed, is clear: Education. “Education, Education, Education is the panacea of all evils,” he called out. For humanity, education is not only empowerment—it is liberation, the force that elevates entire civilizations.

The Power of Education: Nature endows animals with bodily strength; humans, however, are blessed with intellect—the capacity to think, to learn, to transform. Knowledge is power for us.

But what constitutes genuine education?

Drawing from our ancient heritage, I see education as a dynamic process, a combination of five key actions: observation, discrimination, utilization, preservation, and transmission. Our forebears observed the world, discovered the utility of fire, safeguarded this knowledge, and ultimately conveyed it to succeeding generations.

Bharat, from the very dawn of civilization, placed profound emphasis on education. Inspired groups of seekers devoted themselves to research—not for ephemeral gain, but in pursuit of eternal happiness.

The Quest for Lasting Joy: Our sages examined the outer world and found transience. They explored their own being and discerned the fleeting nature of both body and mind—ultimately discovering the Atman, the eternal Self. Thus arose the dual pursuit of Science (Apara Vidya) and Spirituality (Para Vidya)—which when combined constitute the Veda, the boundless expanse of Knowledge.

Sanatana Dharma, known as Hindu Dharma, stands upon the foundation of Veda and Jnana. Consider our sacred worship of Mother Durga—the power of Lord Shiva. Myth tells us how the tyrant Durgama halted education, plunging society into weakness and ignorance. Mother Durga restored nourishment, prosperity, and, above all, knowledge.

Worldly Prosperity and Spiritual Ascent: Hinduism teaches that religion means the harmonious development of both abhudaya (worldly prosperity)

and nishreyasa (spiritual progress). Swami Vivekananda’s proclamation, “Education is the panacea of all evils,” embraces this twofold path.

True education, he asserted, must empower the masses—fostering self-reliance, strength of character, a philanthropic spirit, and the indomitable courage of a lion.

Blueprint for Educational Excellence: Real education enables every person to stand on their own feet, regardless of background.

Mass education up to 10th grade for all, higher learning (11th & 12th) for many, College education for the good and specialized University education for the best. Very effective trade training for class 10-12 graduates, office work for the college educated, and advanced study in medicine, engineering, and research for the best. Income structure should be made almost equal. Swami Vivekananda emphasized on the idea – “Each is great in his own place.”

Our mission is to build character, the bedrock of faith and gratitude—faith in oneself, in teachers, in scriptures; gratitude for the collective contributions that nurture each child.

To cultivate these virtues, the traditional Brahmacharya system guides children from ages six to sixteen, away from the world’s distractions and into the stewardship of dedicated teachers. Every child, rich or poor must go to Guru-Griha – teacher’s house or Ashrama. Simple living and high thinking—this is our credo.

Let us remember even Sri Rama and Sri Krishna underwent Guru-Griha education. Swami Vivekananda passionately advocated for excellence and declared, “Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.” Only a person who has realized the Self can become truly perfect. Hence, the realization of Self—Atma-jnana—is the highest goal, the crowning achievement of our educational tradition.

In Conclusion ...

As leaders and torch bearers of great organizations, let us reaffirm Swamiji’s sacred vision: education as the force that uplifts both the individual and the nation. In serving the highest ideals, we serve all humanity.



Can the Doctrines of Ahimsa and Karma Define Injury and Liability in Cyberspace?

Dr. Syagnik Banerjee

Professor of Marketing, University of Michigan-Flint

This article is prepared based on the lecture that was delivered on April 19, 2025 at Home of Harmony

Why This Subject?

Let me begin with the concept of governance. Most of us are familiar with public governance, which refers to "hard law"—formal governance involving the state, institutions, and citizens. However, there is also private governance, which can be considered a form of "soft law" based on informal norms and shared values adopted voluntarily by a group.

For example, although the meat industry is legally permitted, some groups may choose to follow a meat-free diet due to religious or ethical reasons. As long as there is freedom of religion, such decisions constitute a form of private governance adopted by that community.

Public Governance: Scriptures, Ethics, and the Law

Are any of you familiar with these images? I hadn't seen all of them myself, but the Constitution of India features 22 paintings by Nandalal Bose, and these six are among them.

Each image corresponds to a chapter of the Constitution. For instance, the chapter on Fundamental Rights is illustrated with Ram, Sita, and Lakshman. The Directive Principles of State Policy are accompanied by an image of Sri Krishna and Arjuna. Other images feature Gautama Buddha, Mahavira, Emperor Ashoka, and Vikramaditya.

Each of these figures represents ideals that are reflected in the Indian Constitution. The stories surrounding them contain moral and ethical lessons, which directly or indirectly influence the law and order of society. Thus, theology continues

to inspire governance.

Private Governance: Theology, Economics, and Faith-Aligned Investing

An example of private governance can be seen in the work of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, a think tank based in the Vatican. They issued a document titled *Mensuram Bonum*, meaning "a good measure," which outlines guidelines for faith-aligned investing based on Catholic values.

Most of us are familiar with investing for financial gain. However, faith communities often seek to invest in ways that help build a better world. What constitutes a "better world" varies across religions and communities.

To cite a brief statistic: the total value of the faith-aligned investing industry is estimated at \$5 trillion. Of this, approximately \$4 trillion comes from Islamic finance, \$260 billion from Christian investors, and around \$300 billion from Dharmic traditions such as Vaishnavism and Jainism.

These figures do not reflect population sizes or the total volume of business controlled by each faith community. Rather, they illustrate the extent to which business and investment practices are aligned with religious values. A larger population of Christian or Hindu business owners may exist, but they may prioritize commercial profit over faith-based principles.

Faith Endorsements of Environmental Societal Governance (ESG) Principles

You may be familiar with the term ESG, which stands for Environmental and Social Governance. This concept was coined by a North American firm

and is used to evaluate companies based on sustainability—how environmentally and socially responsible they are.

Investors today consider not only financial returns but also how environmentally friendly and socially inclusive a company's practices are. ESG ratings help quantify this.

This intersects directly with religious teachings, as most faiths outline principles for human interaction with the environment. For instance, the Pontifical Academy issued commentaries analyzing how ESG principles align—or do not align—with Catholic values.

Islamic finance has had similar discussions, particularly in the UK. These conversations explore how government policies and corporate practices may support—or contradict—religious ethics and doctrines.

How is Theology Connected to Policy and Governance?

This leads us to a broader question: Why is theology relevant to governance?

In reviewing our scriptures, I see three overarching themes. While this is a simplified framework, it is useful for our discussion:

1. A scientific paradigm describing the interconnectedness of matter and energy.
2. A concept of the self and its purpose.
3. A framework for societal norms and order.

The idea of interconnectedness may be rooted in a divine act of creation or seen as a natural order. Either way, it is intended to help the self realize its purpose, and from that realization emerge societal norms and laws.

Whenever the social order seems disconnected from this framework—or when individuals struggle to realize their spiritual purpose—we return to the scriptures to reinterpret their meaning. Historical examples include:

- The emergence of heterodox sects (e.g., Jainism and Buddhism),
- The development of Advaita Vedanta's quantum metaphysics,
- The Bhakti movement, and

- The Indian freedom movement.

Each of these was a significant societal shift inspired by reinterpretations of scriptural wisdom.

Today, we are witnessing another such moment: the technological transformation of society. This transformation is reshaping everything, especially our understanding of injury in the digital age.

Adaptation and Evolution of Our Scriptures

This artwork, which I created, was inspired by a booklet by Purusatraya Swami on the Four Vaishnava Sampradayas. I call this piece The Story of Three Flowers, and it depicts how our understanding of the relationship between the Creator and creation has evolved over time.

- In the bottom left, you see Shankaracharya's Advaita Vedanta, symbolized by a flower with closed petals and pollen contained within. This represents complete oneness.

- Next is Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita, where the petals remain closed but the concept of qualified oneness is introduced—body and soul are distinct, yet still unified.

- The third flower, with open petals, symbolizes Madhvacharya's Dvaita Vedanta, which emerged in the 16th century. Here, the soul, body, and divinity are entirely separate—this is dualism and complete realism (tattvavada).

Why did this philosophical evolution occur?

When Shankaracharya was active, in the 8th century, India was experiencing a golden age under the Gupta Empire. At such a time, abstract philosophical speculation and the notion of oneness with divinity seemed appropriate and resonant.

However, by the 16th century, the country had experienced multiple invasions, widespread destruction, and social disruption. People likely began to question earlier metaphysical models and shifted toward a more realistic and differentiated view of the divine and the soul.

This led to movements like Achintya Bheda Abheda (used in ISKCON) and others such as Nimbarka's philosophy. These represent further synthesis.

The broader takeaway is this: when profound changes occur in the environment, societies revisit their scriptures—reinterpreting or redefining their meanings and scopes—to reflect new realities.

Are Connecting Technologies the Harbinger of Another Significant Change?

The question arises: are connecting technologies the harbinger of another significant change? In this context, I refer to a paper from the Journal of Consumer Research. The author conducted a series of five studies revealing that individuals riding in autonomous, self-driven cars were more likely to feel less discomfort when a pedestrian was struck by the vehicle. This diminished discomfort stemmed from their perception that they were not in control of the car—the machine was doing the driving.

If we reflect on the concept of "ahimsa" and the notion of responsibility, these typically rest with the individual. How, then, do we account for such acts of harm? One might respond by saying, "The person wasn't driving, so they are not responsible." That seems like a valid argument. However, one could also argue that without the person being inside the car, the vehicle would not have had a purpose, destination, or trajectory—meaning the incident wouldn't have occurred in the first place. Clearly, there is something deeper at play here. These algorithms are now being embedded into everyday products, and often we remain unaware of their existence.

The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences Investment Guidelines Thinks So

The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences has already acknowledged the issue. It has identified computer-assisted games that dehumanize us—either by undermining human dignity or by causing harm. These games are among 24 categories the academy recommends avoiding in investment portfolios. This suggests that Christianity already recognizes the relevance of this domain and believes it needs to enter theological discourse.

Digital Transformation of Economy and

Violence

The digital transformation of the economy is widely appreciated, especially due to the prosperity it has brought. For example, a 10% increase in internet connectivity has historically been linked to a 1.38% increase in GDP growth. This figure is outdated, and today's impact is likely even greater.

However, the darker side is becoming evident. Studies have shown that greater social media penetration has been associated with an increase in hate crimes. Over the last 15 years, the world has become less peaceful: the average score on the Global Peace Index has declined by 5%, affecting between 60 to 80 countries. This is not a trivial sample.

In light of this, a pressing question emerges: Should dharmic schools or religious institutions publish guidelines or commentaries addressing the non-commission of injury via digital tools?

Fatalities from Fake News – Singularity

Let's consider the emerging threat known as the "fake news singularity." This occurs when we cannot determine whether a piece of news is real or fake due to a lack of alternate sources or tools. In countries like the U.S. or Canada, the average person has access to around 13 connected devices. So, if someone receives questionable news on WhatsApp, they can cross-check it using CNN, television, desktops, or radio.

But in many parts of Asia or Africa, the average is closer to 1.5 to 2.5 connected devices per person. In rural areas, the mobile phone may be the only device available. Imagine a situation where someone receives a fake video claiming that violent crimes are being committed by certain strangers. With no way to verify the video's authenticity, panic ensues. People form lynch mobs and attack perceived outsiders. Indeed, we have seen a rise in such communal violence in direct correlation with the spread of WhatsApp in these regions.

Social Media Triggered Genocide

Another tragic example is the role of social media

in the Rohingya crisis. The forced exodus of 700,000 Rohingya refugees was significantly fueled by Facebook's platform, which later rebranded as Meta. This was not an isolated incident—Facebook was also embroiled in the Cambridge Analytica scandal. These events led many to ask: Can social media companies be considered complicit in inciting genocide?

Technology Enabled Crimes

Technology has also enabled a new category of crimes. Chatbots, for instance, have been found to persuade vulnerable individuals—especially those with mental or emotional difficulties—to engage in self-harm or even commit suicide. Such manipulations are increasingly reported.

The Future of Coordinated IoT Device Cyberattacks

Consider the case of the Mirai botnet. According to a letter from a commissioner of the FCC, this was a real and significant threat. The Mirai botnet coordinated 600,000 vulnerable devices to carry out cyberattacks. These devices included common items like smartphones, electric cars, or any internet-connected gadgets with inadequate security. Hackers could extract data or exploit device functions to coordinate attacks on a massive scale.

Digital Transformation of Violence

One of the most disturbing cases in this domain is *Eichenwald v. Rivello*. A critic of the then-sitting president was identified via social media by some of the president's supporters. They discovered he was epileptic because he followed the Epilepsy Foundation online. In response, they created and sent him a GIF image with strobing lights known to trigger seizures. Upon viewing the image, he did indeed suffer a seizure. Thankfully, he survived.

When the case went to court, the judge ruled that the claim of "no physical contact" did not hold. The judgment emphasized that light travels in rays or waves composed of photons. These photons strike the retina and are converted into electrical signals. In people with epilepsy, such

signals from flashing images can trigger seizures. This ruling set a groundbreaking legal precedent: even showing someone an image could constitute physical assault.

Seizure-Inducing Attack on Epilepsy Foundation

Unfortunately, this wasn't an isolated case. A series of similar seizure-inducing attacks targeted followers of the Epilepsy Foundation's Twitter account. The attackers used flashing images to cause harm. The motivation is baffling—what could possibly be gained from such cruelty? Yet, the more that covert, invisible violence is permitted, the more people seem willing to explore how far they can go with it.

Digital Transformation of Violence – Ransomware

Another chilling example involves ransomware attacks on hospitals. While patients are not directly targeted, the systems responsible for delivering care are compromised. When hospital systems are locked out, care is delayed. According to hospital administrators, mortality rates rose in 53% of such cases due to the delays caused by these cyberattacks.

Device Addiction

We are all familiar with the growing problem of device addiction. For instance, texting while driving has become rampant—this data comes from New York State. In more severe cases, teenagers have even harmed their own parents when their devices were confiscated. These youths become so detached from reality that they harm the very caregivers who have their best interests at heart.

Future of Violence

The future of violence is evolving—it is increasingly indirect, covert, networked, and premeditated. While we may see impulsive attacks on the surface, behind the scenes, there is often some form of deliberate instigation.

Three Questions

This leads us to three critical questions:

1. Does injury necessarily require physical contact?

2. Who is responsible when harm is caused—especially when multiple actors are involved?
3. How do different philosophical or theological traditions respond to these questions?

Deconstructing Ahimsa: Agency, Process, and Outcome of Commission of Injury

If we break down the term "non-commission of injury," we can analyze it in three ways: injury as an outcome, injury as a process, and commission through karma or agency. I interpret "commission" primarily as agency, and I will defend that interpretation in what follows.

Pujyapada's Sarvarthasiddhi (Jainism) – Definition of Himsa as an Outcome

In Sarvarthasiddhi, a key Jain text, injury (himsa) is defined as the severance of vitalities. Each living organism may possess up to ten pranas or vitalities: taste, speech, smell, sight, hearing, touch, cognition, emotion, energy, respiration, and life-duration. However, not all organisms possess all ten.

Classification of Living Beings (8.4 Million Species)

One fascinating feature of Jain philosophy is its classification of 8.4 million species of living beings, ranging from those with one sense to those with six. This includes a progression from plants (one-sensed beings), to insects, ants, lice (with a sense of smell), scorpions, crickets, spiders (with sight), and eventually animals and humans. One might assume that harming beings with more senses would constitute a greater injury than harming those with fewer, but Jainism adopts a radically egalitarian approach: all living beings deserve equal dignity. Initially, I did not understand this rationale. But later, I found that Buddhism's theory of dependent origination offers a compelling explanation for this egalitarianism.

Jain Processes and Motives: Ahimsanu – Vratas

Jainism also identifies types of injury based on process and motive. This is a broad overview—Jain traditions are diverse. In general, Arambhaja Himsa refers to incidental or unintentional harm,

whereas Samkalpaja Himsa refers to deliberate, premeditated harm. The intention behind the act plays a significant role in moral evaluation.

Buddhism (Dhammapada)

Buddhism, too, introduces a nuanced perspective on injury. It emphasizes empathy: "regard others as oneself—kill not, nor cause to kill." According to Dhammapada, Chapter 10, Verse 129, injury can occur not only through direct execution but also through instigation. One can be morally culpable for initiating harm, even without physically executing it.

Vaishnavism (Bhagavad Gita)

In Vaishnavism, similar principles are echoed in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 18, Verse 25. This verse notes that not only deliberate, passionate actions but also actions carried out in ignorance or delusion—when individuals fail to consider their capacity or the consequences—are considered forms of injury. Such actions are not excused simply because they are unintentional.

Himsa as Process

One of the most controversial and interesting interpretations of injury as process comes from Shaktism. In the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam, translated by a Swami of the Vedanta Society, Janaka tells Shuka that killing animals in a sacrificial context does not constitute himsa (violence); instead, it is ahimsak (non-violent). The rationale is that the act is performed as a duty, without malice or selfish intention. If an animal were killed outside of such a sacrificial context, that would indeed be considered himsa.

This idea challenges our modern intuitions. It suggests that absence of malice, or the presence of duty, can render an act non-violent. One might compare this to the case of a state executioner—someone who carries out an execution as part of their job. Can they be held personally responsible for the violence? The ethical dilemma becomes apparent when we consider Adolf Eichmann's letter to the Israeli president, in which he denied personal involvement in the Holocaust, claiming he was merely following orders.

Swami Vivekananda offers a helpful perspective here. He argues that dispassionate harm is not necessarily non-violent. If one acts without clear purpose or with indifference, that is a sign of injury. For example, in the context of war, there is a moral difference between fighting another soldier and harming civilians. Intent and purpose are crucial.

Himsa as Process: According to Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism

When we synthesize these views, we find remarkable parallels with modern legal frameworks. Consider California law on murder: it distinguishes first-degree (premeditated), second-degree (voluntary, passionate), and third-degree (non-deliberate) murder. Buddhism adds yet another layer: the distinction between instigation and execution. The scriptures offer a rich moral architecture that mirrors our contemporary laws.

The Struggle Between Predators, Herbivores, and Plants

There are different ways to implement the principle of ahimsa. One is through the lens of dependent origination. A striking example is presented in the video *How Wolves Change the Shape of Rivers*. When wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park, they began to prey on deer. This prevented overgrazing, allowing trees and shrubs to regenerate. Birds, insects, beavers, and bears returned. The vegetation stabilized the riverbanks, reduced erosion, deepened the rivers, and revitalized aquatic life. All of this came from a chain of events triggered by predatory violence. This leads us to ask: should we judge violence by isolated acts between two beings, or consider the broader chain of consequences?

Variations in Implementation of Ahimsa

Another variation concerns the definition of *ahar* (intake or food). A verse from the Chandogya Upanishad states: “*Ahar shuddhau sattva shuddhih*”—when food is pure, the mind is pure; when the mind is pure, memory becomes steady. Ramanuja interprets *ahar* as biological food,

aligning it with modern understanding that gut health influences mental well-being. Shankaracharya, however, interprets *ahar* more broadly, to include everything we take in—sensory impressions, thoughts, emotions. I would say that the “kitchen of the mind” is located within the Internet, and that is where much of our mental “food”, thought or emotion, is processed. This interpretation significantly broadens the scope of *ahimsa*.

Does Injury of the Mind Constitute Violence? Does Violence Transcend Physical Contact?

This raises an important question: does injury to the mind constitute violence? Does violence transcend physical contact? In traditions like Vishishtadvaita, which emphasize physical reality, the answer may be no. But in Advaita Vedanta, Jainism, and even in legal rulings—such as one by the Chief U.S. District Judge in Maryland—the answer may be yes. Injury is not limited to the body; it includes the mind.

An Interpretation of Karma: Commission, Agency, or Volition

Having explored various definitions of injury, we now turn to the concept of karma. One line from the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 4, Verse 13) offers a subtle formula for karma: “The four varnas were created by Me according to distinctions of *guna* and *karma*.” This implies that *varna* (character) is a combination of one's qualities (*guna*) and volition or agency (*karma*). Qualities may be inherited or shaped by past lives, but volition belongs to the here and now. Without present volition, one cannot be held morally accountable.

So when I drop a bottle of water, who is the real agent? Is it fate, a creator, karma from a past life, or my present volition? Different philosophical schools offer different answers. To understand agency, we must first understand the structure of the self. Those familiar with behavioral sciences or psychology will find this structure familiar and relevant.

Different Models of the Self

The first model is from Advaita Vedanta. In this system, Brahman is the ultimate reality, and what we usually consider as "ahamkara" (ego) is merely extrinsic. It is shallow and lies only on the surface of our being.

Samkhya has the concepts of purusha and antahkarana. The antahkarana—or the internal instrument—occupies a space somewhere between the surface ego and the deeper aspects of the self.

In the case of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, there is Brahman, ahamkara, and ahamartha. Here, aham artha refers to a deep-seated, intrinsic ego that remains awake even in deep sleep. This school confers a very high degree of internal agency to the individual.

Karma: Agency of Committing Himsa

This section includes insights from around fifteen prominent philosophical schools, both orthodox and heterodox, including Vedantic perspectives. The question posed is: What are the exogenous influences behind our choices?

Different schools offer different explanations—some say a creator influences us, others point to karmic residues or fate. These influences shape our choices through various mechanisms, including our inherent nature, unconscious inclinations, and external circumstances.

When examining cases of crimes (as discussed earlier), we can categorize them based on certain criteria: whether the act was deliberate, whether the harm was direct or indirect, and whether it was committed by a single individual or by multiple actors. These factors help classify the nature of the harm.

Four Types of Cybercrimes

I have identified four types of cybercrimes:

1. Covert Virtual Instigation of Violence

These crimes are committed by remote actors who covertly instigate violence without directly participating in it. Their actions are probabilistic—they are certain to affect someone, but it's unclear whom. This makes legal attribution of motive difficult. An example will be discussed later.

2. Remote Assaults on Access to Vital Resources

These crimes target essential infrastructure and resources, not people directly. However, the malicious intent is unmistakable. Unlike the first category where intention is ambiguous, here it is clearly evident.

3. Facilitation and Enabling of Injury

This includes entities like corporations that may facilitate harm through profit-seeking ventures—such as marketing campaigns or manufacturing risky products. They may not intend the harm directly but become beneficiaries of it.

4. Systemic or Algorithmic Violence

This is akin to Aramajata Himsa in Jainism—where harm is incidental and a byproduct of systemic choices. For instance, if a self-driving car is programmed to prioritize some pedestrian profiles over others, the company may not have consciously intended harm, but systemic bias can still produce unjust outcomes.

Case: Mass Shooting, Social Media Contagions and Cascades

Here is a case that falls under the first category: covert instigation of violence. Mass shootings are unfortunately familiar to us all. But how do they happen in today's hyper-connected world?

Between 1982 and 2020, the frequency of mass shootings increased significantly, particularly after the rise of social media. This is often explained through a theory known as the contagion effect. Similar to the “Werther Effect”—named after Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*—where readers imitated the fictional character’s suicide, media exposure to self-harm and violence can glamorize these acts, especially for emotionally vulnerable individuals.

The sequence often unfolds like this:

- A mass shooting occurs.
- Social media amplifies the news.
- Public commentary floods in, boosting search rankings and algorithmic visibility.
- Discussions about gun control surface, prompting existing gun owners to buy more firearms in fear of future restrictions.

- Gun companies profit, stocks rise, and new promotional offers emerge.
- First-time gun buyers, seeing the news, begin to question the reliability of law enforcement and decide to arm themselves.
- Eventually, a mentally unwell person who had been contemplating violence might see this as an opportunity to act out against perceived enemies.

This entire cycle cannot be easily prosecuted in a court of law. It is too fuzzy and probabilistic, which is why it remains outside formal accountability, though its patterns are clearly discernible.

Section 230 vs (Purva) Mimamsa Sutras – I

This brings us to a critical comparison: Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act vs. Purva Mimamsa Sutras.

Section 230 states: "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider."

In effect, unless a platform creates the content, it cannot be held liable for its consequences. Historically, newspapers bore journalistic responsibility for what they published. Today, digital platforms do not carry that ethical burden due to this legal shield.

Even though these platforms use algorithms that present content to users—potentially triggering harmful consequences—they are not considered liable. However, both the Purva Mimamsa Sutras and Buddhist scriptures would argue that the initiator of an action bears moral responsibility, whether or not they execute it. From that ethical standpoint, Section 230 is deeply problematic.

Section 230 of the CDA: Similar to Jayadrath Vadha

This scenario reminds me of the episode of Jayadrath Vadh from the Mahabharata. In that story, Sri Krishna uses his chakra to block the sun. Believing it is night, Jayadrath emerges from hiding and is killed.

Similarly, companies today can manipulate digital "realities." Through algorithms, they can

obscure the truth or present an altered version of it—essentially "blocking the sun"—and users act based on these manipulated perceptions. This raises profound ethical concerns about agency and responsibility.

Case: Targeting of Communities via Social Media

There are documented cases of social media being used to target specific communities. One reliable source is a report from Rutgers University, sponsored by the Network Contagion Research Institute. For instance, in 2022, both Leicester and Birmingham saw outbreaks of violence. These did not happen spontaneously. Researchers found that inflammatory tweets and online propaganda had been circulating long before the actual incidents. When a trigger finally occurred, the community—already conditioned—reacted violently.

The Rutgers report analyzed over one million tweets and found that Iranian trolls had propagated anti-Hindu stereotypes, claiming Hindus were committing genocide against minorities in India. This was part of a covert influence campaign designed to deepen social divisions. This is not speculation—it is grounded in rigorous academic research.

Action Options

There are several potential action pathways available to us, including:

- Crisis Detection
- Coordination
- Advocacy

One key takeaway from all of this is that āhāra (what we consume) matters. Everything we absorb—especially online—affects our inner world. The ethical principles found in our scriptures can and should be applied to the digital sphere to assess harm and assign responsibility.

Therefore, I believe religious institutions and philosophical schools—just like the faith-based think tanks at the Vatican—should develop guidelines for families and communities. These guidelines should draw from scriptural wisdom to clearly articulate the dos and don'ts in the digital age.

Travelogue, 2025: Sydney

Hrishikesh Saigaonkar

January 21st – 27th

We left the picturesque archipelago of Fiji on January 21st for our next destination. Sydney, a harbor city located on the southeastern coastline of Australia in the province of New South Wales, was our arrival point. The flight to Sydney took about four and a half hours. While in Sydney, our home was the Vedanta Center of Sydney in Ermington – a bustling suburb about 30 minutes by car from the airport. Devotee Mr. Sajal Halder, received us at the airport and made excellent arrangements to show us the local attractions.

January 21st, 2025, coincided with Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, and the Vedanta Center was full of activity celebrating this joyous occasion. Swami Ishatmanandaji Maharaj delivered an inspiring talk on "Vivekananda and His Message" after the evening Arati. The Sydney ashrama has a large campus with parking in the basement of the building. It houses a shrine-cum-auditorium, monks' quarters, a bookstore, guesthouse, and ground-level houses in the neighborhood, which are often used by guests and devotees. The center was established in 1984 through the dedicated efforts of local devotees who would host Swamis from Fiji and India every year. As a culmination of their efforts, Revered Swami Sridharanandaji Maharaj took charge in 2000. We had the opportunity to receive Maharaj's darshan and blessings the next day.

Since Captain Cook's arrival in 1770, Sydney has

transformed from an Aboriginal homeland and British penal colony into Australia's largest and most multicultural city. Key milestones—such as the gold rush, iconic infrastructure, postwar immigration, and global events like the 2000 Olympics—have shaped its economic and cultural growth. Today, Sydney stands as a vibrant global metropolis, balancing modern challenges with a rich Indigenous heritage and dynamic diversity.

Our itinerary for the next few days was packed with iconic Sydney sights. We visited Bondi Beach, La Perouse, Captain Cook's landing point, and Botany Bay—each location offering its own unique charm and historical significance.

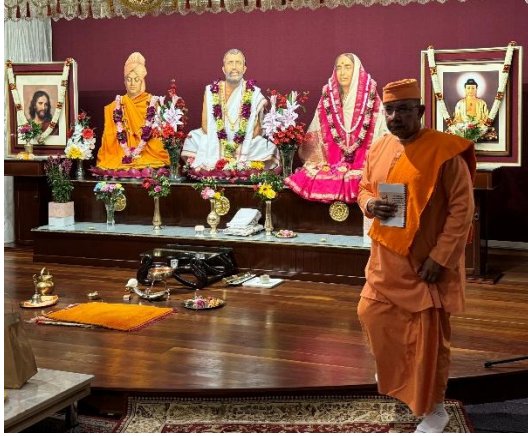
On one of the days, we drove into the city, crossing the famous Sydney Harbour Bridge, then embarked on a scenic boat cruise starting at the iconic Sydney Harbour, taking in stunning views of the city skyline and the Opera House from the water.

In the evening, Swami Ishatmanandaji Maharaj delivered a religious discourse at a devotee's house, sharing profound spiritual insights and connecting with the local community.

Our final day in Sydney included a morning visit to Featherdale Wildlife Park in Doonside, where we encountered native Australian wildlife, including kangaroos. In the afternoon, we traveled to the Blue Mountains to see the majestic Three Sisters rock formation, ending our trip amidst breathtaking natural beauty.



A few trip photos



In the shrine after delivering an address on Vivekananda birthday celebration.



Meet and greet with devotees at the Vedanta Center



Swami Ishatmananda at the Bondi Beach



A spectacular view from the 23rd floor of Siebel Hotel - Downtown Sydney. The iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge is visible on the left, with the Sydney Opera House prominently on the right in the background



Sat-sang at a devotee's house



Watching a Kangaroo at the Featherdale wildlife park

BHAGAVATA (28): BRAHMAN IS THE MOTHER OF ALL

Swami Ishatmananda

To describe Brahman, the Mundaka Upanishad (verse 1.1.9) says: यः सर्वज्ञः सर्वविद् यस्य ज्ञानमयं तपः

Meaning: That one who is omniscient in general and all-knowing in detail, whose austerity is knowledge.

तस्मादेतद्ब्रह्म नाम रूपं च जायते, From That (the Supreme), arise this Brahma (Hiranyagarbha), names, forms, and food.

Supporting this view, the Taittiriya Upanishad (verse 3.1) states:

यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते । येन जातानि जीवन्ति ।

यत्प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्ति । तद्विजिज्ञासस्व तद्ब्रह्मेति ॥

From which all these beings take birth, by which they live, towards which they move, and into which they merge: That is Brahman.

Thus, Brahman is seen as the ultimate cause and sustainer of the cosmos, transcending time, space, and causality. When the Rishis, the realized seers, attempt to describe Brahman, they offer glimpses through special descriptors—known as Lakshana—special means by which the targeted reality can be indicated or intuited.

‘Lakshana’ separates things from the ‘targeted object’. It is of two principal types in Vedanta:

1. Svarupa—Intrinsic or essential indication.
2. Tatastha—Incidental or external indication.

Svarupa Lakshana points to the inherent characteristics that are unique to Brahman and none other. For example, as the Taittiriya Upanishad declares: सत्यं ज्ञानं अनन्तं ब्रह्म, Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma. This concise statement implies: Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, and Infinity. Here, the very nature of Brahman is revealed.

Tatastha Lakshana, on the other hand, indirectly identifies Brahman by distinguishing the target from other entities. For instance, “From whom this universe and these beings are born.” Not everything can be the cause of all; that which truly creates and encompasses everything is recognized as Brahman.

With Svarupa Lakshana, Nirguna Brahman—that is, Brahman without any attributes or qualities—is identified. With Tatastha Lakshana, Saguna Brahman—Brahman ascribed with attributes and qualities—is indicated. This twofold division matches with the major schools of Indian

philosophy, especially Advaita Vedanta. Interestingly, Veda Vyasa did not explicitly mention these two Lakshanas in the Brahma Sutras.

If Brahman is not the “cause” of creation, then Brahman stands as the all-pervading consciousness—Satyam (Truth), Jnanam (Knowledge), Anantam (Infinite), Anandam (Bliss). No philosophical dilemma arises.

But if Brahman is the source of creation, then Brahman must possess or give rise to Shakti (Power), which, when united with knowledge, enables action in the universe. Thus emerges the ancient triad:

- Jnana (Knowledge),
- Shakti (Power),
- Kriya (Action).

Where, Jnana + Shakti = Kriya.

Across millennia, India’s deepest thinkers have debated three perennial realities:

Jiva (the individual soul), Jagat (the universe), and Brahman (the cosmic consciousness).

Over time, numerous doctrines and schools arose, each providing a unique view:

Advaita-vada (Non-dualism), Maya-vada (Doctrine of Illusion), Vivartavada (Doctrine of Appearance), Parinama-vada (Doctrine of Transformation), Vishishtadvaita-vada (Qualified Non-dualism), Dvaita-vada (Dualism), Bhedabheda-vada (Doctrine of Difference and Non-difference), Achintya Bhedabheda-vada (“Inconceivable” dual-nondualism), Pushti-vada (Doctrine of Grace), and Samanyaya-vada (General doctrine). Each vada (doctrine) addresses two central objectives:

1. Tattva Nirdesha—Fixation of the ultimate Goal (the True Nature or Tattva).
2. Sadhana Nirdesha—Prescription for spiritual practices.

To systematize, we may summarize Brahman’s core aspects as follows:

Attribute	Sanskrit Term	Explanation Ultimate Reality
Existence	Sat (सत्)	Existence
Knowledge	Cit (चित्)	Pure Consciousness
Bliss	Ananda (आनन्द)	Inherent Fulfillment, Bliss

Introduction to the Cover Page: A Two-storied History

Pravrajika Matriprana

Sarada Convent

Vedanta Society of Southern California

“I HAVE COME TO STAY WITH YOU,” announced Swami Vivekananda, standing in front of a two-story frame house located at 309 Monterey Road. One morning in the third week of January 1900, Vivekananda drove up in a horse carriage to this two-story residence, photographed on the cover of this e-Zine. Old photos show that a Gold of Ophir climbing rose grew on the side of the front porch. The house is presumed to have been built in the 1870s or 1880s by John Early, one of South Pasadena’s first land developers, and it was rented by the Mead family at the time. In the 1900 Pasadena city directory, the Mead house did not have a street number; it was listed as the “second house east of Pasadena Avenue”. Swamiji climbed down from the carriage and was promptly greeted by the Mead sisters.

Ms. Carrie Wyckoff was the head of the household according to the 1900 census. She was a widow with her seventeen-year-old son, Ralph. Her father, Jesse Mead, age 83, was also a widower. His wife Emily, the matriarch of the family, had died in 1896. The oldest sister, Mrs. Ida Mary Herman, was apparently not much involved with the family when Swamiji came, but the older brother, William, was an Assemblyman in Los Angeles. He owned the insurance business where Helen Mead, the youngest sister, worked as a bookkeeper. Alice Hansbrough, the middle sister, was estranged from her husband, Snowden, who would die in 1928. Their daughter, Dorothy, had been born in 1894. William probably took care of the whole family. The two main narrators of Swamiji’s story during this period are Swami Ashokananda, who learned from Alice, and later Marie Louise Burke, who interviewed Dorothy.

Weeks before coming to the Mead residence,

Swamiji arrived in Los Angeles from New York via Chicago by train. On the third day of travel, he wrote to Sister Nivedita describing the scene he was passing as “a big desert, bleak hills, scanty, thorny shrubs, very little water.” It was winter, so he continued, “The little streams are frozen, but during the middle of the day it is hot.” The California Limited arrived in Pasadena in the afternoon. He was met at the station by Josephine MacLeod and probably some of her friends. A new chapter in the history of the Vedanta movement had begun.

The website of the City of South Pasadena states: “Few cities in California are better recognized for the quality of its small-town atmosphere and rich legacy of intact late 19th and early 20th century neighborhoods and residences. South Pasadena also has a strong claim to having the oldest and most historic sites in the San Gabriel Valley. For many centuries, its adjacency to a natural fording place along the Arroyo Seco had served as a gateway to travel and commerce for aboriginal peoples here and along the coast. It was here that Hahamognas greeted Portola and the missionaries who later established the San Gabriel Mission a few miles to the west. ... The first of these adobe structures became headquarters for General Flores and his staff in 1847 where they agreed to surrender to American forces, ending Mexican Colonial rule in California.”

Until 1874, the area that is now South Pasadena was part of the San Gabriel–Orange Grove Association. In 1875, Pasadena emerged as a separate town, and just three years later, residents living in the southern portion of Pasadena considered themselves South Pasadenans. In 1888, South Pasadena officially began to be recognized as a separate city with a population of slightly over 500.

It became the sixth municipality in Los Angeles

County. With the completion of the Pacific Electric Short Line, which put the entire city within easy walking distance of the “red car” stations, South Pasadena also became one of the first suburbs of Los Angeles.

On December 3, 1899, Swamiji’s train arrived in Pasadena. Why did he come here? The story is as follows. Vivekananda returned to the United States on August 28, 1899. This time Swami Turiyananda accompanied him. They stayed at Ridgeley Manor in New York State, where Josephine MacLeod was also residing at the time. On October 9, she received a letter from an unknown lady named Roxie Blodgett. The letter made it clear that Taylor, Josephine’s older brother, was lying seriously ill with tuberculosis at the home of Mrs. Blodgett in Los Angeles. When Jo left the Manor, Vivekananda blessed her, and as she got into the carriage, he called out, “Get up some classes and I will come.” Jo journeyed to Los Angeles and found her dying brother lying in bed. Much to her surprise, above the bed hung a large colored poster of Vivekananda dressed in a robe and turban.

It turned out that Mrs. Blodgett had attended Swamiji’s lecture at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in 1893 in Chicago and had been very much impressed. So he actually entered Los Angeles through his poster—long before he came in person. Swamiji’s visit had been arranged by Josephine MacLeod, who sometimes referred to California as Kali-formia.

In Los Angeles, Swami Vivekananda gave lectures on diverse topics such as the history, customs, and religion of India; religious legends and great teachers; the ideal of a universal religion; Vedantic cosmology; his mission; reincarnation; and practical spirituality.

The Capital, a Los Angeles weekly, described Swamiji as A Prince From India: “He is in very truth, an Indian Prince—Prince in intellect, in knowledge and in that strange realm we vaguely call spiritual. Swami Vivekananda has awakened the interest of a number of the most prominent society people—men and women of culture in Los Angeles....

Those who saw him at the World’s Fair in 1893, speak of him as a young man, thirty or thereabouts, a born orator, who seemed charged with the Philosophy of the Vedanta.”

Vivekananda’s first public lecture in Los Angeles was on December 8 and was attended by six hundred people. Present were the three sisters: Mrs. Carrie (later Sister Lalita, 1859–1949), Mrs. Alice Mead Hansbrough (later Shanti, 1864–1955), and Miss Helen Mead (1866–1907). These three sisters remained his enthusiastic supporters and helpers for the rest of their lives. Among other dignitaries, Swamiji was also introduced by Bernhard Baumgardt, who scheduled some of his engagements. Baumgardt was a graduate of Strengnäs College in Sweden and was then secretary—and later president—of the Southern California Academy of Sciences.

Soon after arriving in Los Angeles, on December 10, the Swami moved to Mrs. Blodgett’s cottage and remained there until about January 3, 1900. After Swamiji’s mahasamadhi in July 1902, she wrote to MacLeod: “*I am ever recalling those swift, bright days in that never to be forgotten winter, lived in simple freedom and kindness. ... I could but see in a hundred ways the child side of Swamiji’s character which was a constant appeal to the Mother quality in all good women.... Ah, those pleasant “tea party” days, as you used to call them. How we used to laugh!*”

A thousand people attended Vivekananda’s December 12 lecture at the Unity Church, including members of the Southern California Academy of Sciences. According to the Los Angeles Times, “The audience was large and appreciative.” In the February 1900 issue of Unity magazine, Mr. Bransby wrote: “*There is combined in the Swami Vivekananda the learning of a university president, the dignity of an archbishop, with the grace and winsomeness of a free, natural child. ... We had a lecture on Christmas day from the Swami entitled, ‘Christ’s Mission to the World,’ and a better one on the subject I never heard. No Christian minister could have presented Jesus as a character worthy of the greatest reverence more eloquently or more powerfully than did*

this learned Hindoo, who told us that in this country on account of his dark skin he has been refused admission to hotels, and even barbers have sometimes objected to shave him."

Roxie Blodgett's modest rented house was not grand or spacious, but it was a congenial meeting place. Jo MacLeod called it a "tea-party house." On December 13 she arranged for Swamiji to meet the Mead sisters—Alice, Helen, and Carrie—from Pasadena. Swamiji came to Pasadena to share Sunday dinner with the Mead family on Christmas Eve.

On December 21 Josephine MacLeod wrote to Sister Nivedita: *"Happy New Year—I called out to Swamiji this morning and his face broke into a smile as he said, 'Happy New Year to you and to me.' I then made him greet the sun and gave him a gold coin! as emblematic of the new year's gifts to him."* She wrote to Mrs. Bull: *"Swamiji and I greeted each other, dear S.S., this morning with a 'Happy New Year,' after which we greeted the Sun, while he recited the Gayatri!"*

On the morning of December 23 a reception was held for Vivekananda by Mrs. Caroline Severance. She had previously attended Swamiji's lectures in Massachusetts and was known as the "Mother of Women's Clubs," which she had created to promote women's suffrage, women's rights, social reform, and other causes.

Ms. MacLeod wrote that Swamiji's lecture on "Jesus of Nazareth"—either the one delivered on December 25 at the Home of Truth ("Christ's Mission to the World") or the one at Payne's Hall on January 7, 1900 ("Christ, the Messenger")—was "perhaps the most outstanding lecture I ever heard." She added: "He seemed to radiate a white light from head to foot, so lost was he in the wonder and the power of Christ."

While he was in Los Angeles, Swami Vivekananda welcomed the new century on the first day of January 1900. His activities that day are not known. He had been teaching a class at the Home of Truth from December 25 through December 30, and he would teach another series beginning on January 2. Probably he had a short

time to relax on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. The arrival of a new century made the eleventh annual parade in Pasadena a special event. The LA Times described the raucous welcome people gave the new twentieth century—sounds that Swamiji could not have escaped even in his quiet neighborhood: *"The coming in of New Year's day was serenaded with the screeching of whistles, the ringing of all the bells in the city and some others, the blowing of horns and all the fire-crackery explosions of a Fourth of July. Almost everybody in the city limits was woke up and made to know that the New Year had arrived with a bang, on schedule time."*

On January 14, 1900, the LA Times reported: *"Swami Vivekananda leaves shortly for San Francisco. He is without doubt one of the greatest oriental scholars to ever visit these shores and has aroused the enthusiasm of the cultured people of the city."* The report added that his mission included arousing interest in the establishment of industrial schools for the uplift of the masses of India, modeled after the Pratt Institute of New York.

On January 21, the Los Angeles Times reported that Vivekananda's lecture had the largest attendance of the year and was "exceedingly interesting," followed by a reception for the Swami. It was probably decided not to advertise his classes to the public, so no more public lectures were advertised after January 27.

Mrs. Emeline Bowler, President of the Shakespeare Club of Pasadena, arranged Swamiji's thirteen or more classes at Stickney Hall. A core of supporters of the Vedanta philosophy evidently grew out of this series. Mrs. Hansbrough later recollected that a Pasadena Vedanta Society had been formed in the rooms of the Shakespeare Club, but Swamiji had remarked, *"It won't last."* Nevertheless, a core of Vedanta and Vivekananda supporters had formed.

Mrs. Bowler was a boarder at the home of Miss Stickney, the wealthy daughter of Rufus Stickney, partner of Stickney & Poor's spice merchants. Miss Stickney was a wealthy woman, and Swamiji was her guest for several days. For some reasons,

Swamiji did not feel entirely comfortable at the home of Mrs. Bowler and Miss Stickney, and during the third week of January he came to stay with the Mead family.

Alice Hansbrough had already read Swamiji's books *Raja Yoga* and *Karma Yoga*. From 1897 to 1899 she lived in Alaska, where she spent many hours engrossed in these two books. She later recalled: *"I used to read for a while and the thought would come to me, 'What marvelous thoughts these are!' I would shut my eyes and think, 'What a wonderful man he must be who wrote the words!' ... I never expected to see him."* Alice returned from Alaska to Los Angeles on November 23, 1899, and on December 8 she learned from her sister Helen that Vivekananda was in Los Angeles. That same evening she and her two sisters attended his first lecture in the city.

Carrie later expressed the feeling that the Swami's magnificent presence made them feel *"as if Christ himself were in their midst."* Years later, when devotees asked her how it had been to live with him, she replied: *"You know, he was just like a brother. He raised our consciousness up so we didn't feel while we were with him anything but love and joy. And he was so much fun!"*

Helen Mead recorded a number of Swamiji's lectures. He stayed in Southern California until February 20, 1900. His visit served as the inspiration that led to future Vedanta organizations in Los Angeles. Of course, his followers did not want him to leave the city, but he had to contact as many devotees as possible, so he departed from Los Angeles for Oakland on February 21. The faithful Alice Hansbrough became his personal attendant, secretary, and housekeeper in Northern California. The Vedanta Society of Southern California acquired the residence in 1956 and named it *"Vivekananda House."*

Alice gave many details of his daily routine at their house on Monterey Road. She remembered how during the time of casual conversation like after meal at the dining table or so Swamiji *"would*

talk on many subjects: philosophy, science, our national development—'Swamiji said that our civilization would fall within fifty years if we did not spiritualize it.'"

Swamiji found the atmosphere in Los Angeles *"very India-like"* and remarked that it was *"restful."* Pasadena's climate was advertised as *"like the Mediterranean but without the mosquitoes."*

While staying with the Meads he went on some picnics in the nearby hills. These were not merely picnics but were probably meetings of the nascent Vedanta Society of Pasadena. By 1900 handheld cameras were fairly common, and were used to make the snapshots of Swamiji and friends.

Besides lecturing, during his stay he took a brief excursion on January 13 with Mr. and Mrs. Baumgardt, Betty Leggett, and Jo MacLeod to Mt. Lowe in the San Gabriel Mountains north of Pasadena. Mr. Baumgardt arranged the trip. Swamiji gave a brief talk on the morning of the 14th after spending the night on the mountain. From the hotel the party took a trolley to Alpine Tavern and then stargazed at the Mt. Lowe Observatory; the observatory still stands, though modernized. Swamiji observed the night sky. January 15 was a full-moon night.

He also visited Throop Polytechnic on February 6. This institution, founded as a preparatory and vocational school by Amos Throop in 1891, is now known as the California Institute of Technology. Swamiji hoped to establish similar industrial schools in India. While he was in California, Sister Nivedita was in the Midwest raising funds for her proposed girls' school in India. The schools that Swamiji intended to set up were eventually established.

In 1900, after returning to New York from California a month later, Swami Vivekananda made a prophetic statement to Swami Abhedananda: *"California is the place where Vedanta will grow."* A San Francisco newspaper reporter confirmed this in an article that appeared in the *Prabuddha Bharata*: *"He [Swamiji] himself regards California as a country particularly well suited to the*

development of Oriental philosophies, its climatic conditions especially kind, its strange intermixture of races a fruitful soil wherein to plant the new-old thought, its youth a promise and potency of growth."

As mentioned earlier, Swamiji's brother-disciple Turiyananda accompanied him on his journey from Calcutta to New York. The two Swamis landed in New York City on August 28 and quickly proceeded to Ridgely Manor. From October 27, 1899 to early July 1900, Turiyananda assisted Abhedananda in the New York City area. Following Vivekananda's instruction, on July 8, 1900, the Turiyananda arrived in the small town of Alhambra near Los Angeles. He was heading north to establish a Vedanta Ashrama on land donated by Miss Minnie Boock. Before that he enjoyed a two-week sojourn in Southern California. Turiyananda mailed an introductory letter to Alice from Vivekananda dated July 3, which stated: *"The best thing would be to help him [Turiyananda] to start a Center [Shanti Ashrama] for quiet and rest and meditation in the land near San Jose."* She responded by sending her nephew Ralph Wyckoff to see him.

Within a short time, the Swami was living with the three Mead sisters and their father, Jesse Mead, in South Pasadena. Turiyananda probably stayed in the same room that Swami Vivekananda had lived in five months earlier, and he came to know Swamiji's friends. During his stay in Southern California, devotees took him to see the surrounding towns, the orange groves, and the Pacific Ocean.

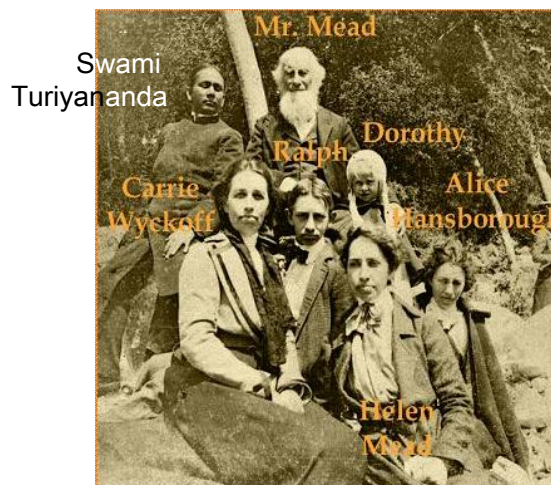
Swami Vivekananda wrote to Turiyananda on July 25, 1900: *"I received a letter from Mrs. Hansbrough telling me of your visit to her. They liked you immensely, and I am sure you have found in them genuine, pure, and absolutely unselfish friends. ... Revive the clubs [Pasadena and/or Los Angeles Vedanta Club] a bit, and ask Mrs. Hansbrough to collect the dues as they fall and send them to India."*

The local devotees wanted Turiyananda to stay in Los Angeles, but he had to leave for San Francisco. He traveled by from July 24 to 26, 1900. The

following year, on March 24, 1901, he traveled south by ship to Los Angeles. On April 4, the LA Times reported an interesting conversation. *Swami Turiyananda, a Hindu monk, together with a dozen or more of the faithful, a little girl, and a neighbor, climbed the hill at Lincoln Park, South Pasadena, for a meeting of open-air meditation on Tuesday, April 2. One woman confessed, "If happiness be our birthright, I have been robbed." The Swami replied that she had robbed herself and advised her not to think of "I" as the body or the mind but "I" as the soul, saying, "You are lost, but when once you find yourself you will see that your birthright is within you."*

Turiyananda held free classes on Wednesday and Friday mornings and on Thursday evenings, and continued to deliver lectures in and around the city. He probably stayed with the Mead family. At that time, Carrie and her sister Helen became disciples of Turiyananda at their home in South Pasadena, and Carrie was blessed with the name Lalita—later known as Sister Lalita. Turiyananda made the prophetic statement to Miss Wyckoff: *"You have work to do, but it will be quiet work."*

According to the classified ads in the LA Times between October 5 and 26, 1901, the Vedanta Society (no longer a club) met every Saturday. Swami Turiyananda met all the members of the Los Angeles Vedanta Society, as well as those of the Pasadena branch of the Society, and although he remained but two weeks, he made an impression upon the lives of some, which will never leave them, and all felt the spiritual power of the great soul. Turiyananda left for India in 1902.



Swami Trigunatitananda came primarily to take charge of the Vedanta Society in San Francisco. From there he traveled alone by train to Los Angeles. He lived at the home of the affluent Mrs. Kelly for three weeks, beginning May 1 and ending July 12, 1903. During his stay in Los Angeles, he delivered public lectures to audiences of 250–300 people. Within a week after his arrival, with the assistance of Alice Hansbrough, a twelve-page circular was printed listing the titles of his Sunday addresses in Los Angeles for May, June, and July: the basic doctrines of Vedanta; a brief history of the Los Angeles Vedanta Society; the purpose of the Society and its methods of work; the duties and privileges of membership; and the organization of the Society and its current officers. The Swami also granted private interviews to sincere devotees.

According to the LA Times of May 4, 1903, he acknowledged in his lectures the love of freedom of Americans “whose nation stands for liberty.” He then explained that “true liberty means more than political or social liberty. The highest is spiritual liberty, which means freedom from the bondage of nature’s laws.” To Ida Ansell in San Francisco he wrote on May 6, 1903: “My lectures here are very successful. ... All is Mother’s will and act.”

With Alice Hansbrough’s help, the Swami worked hard to strengthen the Los Angeles Vedanta Society. He wrote to Turiyananda on May 22: “I have started a meditation class under the oak tree in Pasadena where Swamiji and you used to sit for meditation. There I conduct reading from Gita, meditation, and lecture.... Besides, I make them practice meditation at home four times a day. Everyone is exceedingly satisfied.” He also lived for a time in the Mead house in South Pasadena.

Later, Trigunatita resided in a rented house paid for by Mrs. Kelly, and then on June 22 he moved to the residence of Dr. and Mrs. John Schmitz. Dr. Schmitz was then president of the Vedanta Society of Los Angeles. Both Mrs. Kelly and Dr. Schmitz had known Swami Vivekananda. The Swami gave classes on Indian philosophy at the Schmitz residence. On July 25, after nearly three rewarding

months in Los Angeles, he returned to San Francisco. Mr. Brown, a longtime devotee in Northern California, later eulogized Swami Trigunatita, saying he “firmly believed that America was destined to be a great spiritual land, second only to India.”

In the spring of 1904, Swami Trigunatita returned to Los Angeles to visit the Vedanta Society he had established. According to Gertrude Topham, he lived at least part of the time in a small bungalow with Alice Hansbrough and her sister, Carrie Wyckoff. For about two months (April 3 to May 29), he addressed audiences on Fridays and Sundays. Devotees took him to dinner at the top of Mt. Lowe and to the resort on Catalina Island.

Gopal Stavig wrote in his book *Ramakrishna-Vedanta in Southern California: From Swami Vivekananda to the Present*: “On January 12, 1911, the Swami returned to the Southland and intensively reorganized the Vedanta Society in Los Angeles. Swami Trigunatita wanted to provide a stable ground on which to base the Vedanta Society, so he drew up a set of seventy-five ‘Rules and Regulations Governing Vedanta Centers.’ He handpicked a group of eleven Mothers and Fathers to establish small Vedanta groups throughout Southern California. They would act in a subordinate capacity, resembling deaconesses and deacons in some Christian traditions. The Mothers and Fathers were to practice these rules (moral principles) in their own lives before teaching them to others. For example, one rule was: ‘Do all religious works as works of love, just for the sake of God and Truth.’ Another read: ‘If you wish to find fault with anyone, it would be better if you do so with yourself.’ Weekly classes would be held at each local Vedanta Center to interest more people in the teachings. The Mothers and Fathers were to meet monthly to read, meditate, sing, pray, and discuss. On February 19, 1911, the Swami returned to San Francisco.”

“Though the organization eventually died out, some of its members were responsible for bringing Swami Prabhavananda to Los Angeles and offering him support. Swami Trigunatita’s all-star list of ‘Mothers’ included Carrie Wyckoff (Sister Lalita), her sister Alice

Hansbrough (Shanti), Minnie Boock, Miss Gertrude Topham (who gave Prakashananda a thousand dollars to bring a Swami to Los Angeles in 1922), and Dr. Elias H. Grove, who hosted Swami Paramananda in August 1915; Miss Fredericka Greenstidel (possibly related to Sister Christine, whose father's name was Frederick Greenstidel); and Mrs. E. Wilhelm, who may have been the Mrs. Wilhelm who later invited Prabhavananda to Los Angeles in 1928 and rented a hall for him to speak in for three days. Swami Abhedananda mentioned a Mrs. Wilhelm who in 1903 moved from the New York to the Los Angeles Center."

Later in 1911, from August 6 to 12, the Swami returned to Southern California to observe how the Mothers and Fathers were progressing. During that time he was invited to give four addresses on Hinduism at the twenty-two-day World's Spiritual Congress in Long Beach. The Long Beach Daily Telegram (August 10, 1911) described the Swami's lectures as "intense and instructive," and reported that the audience cheered him for several minutes until he was forced to come forward and deliver another brief address. His picture appeared in the program, where he was listed first among the speakers and described as "one of the greatest exponents of the Hindoo philosophy and religion in the Western World."

Vedanta in Los Angeles continued to invite Swamis like Bodhananda, Prabhavananda and the like from other Vedanta Societies time to time.

Due to his success in Los Angeles, Swami Trigunatita wished to establish a permanent Vedanta Society in the city, but it was four hundred miles from San Francisco, and he found it difficult to manage the work there. He therefore requested a Swami from Belur Math, and Sachchidananda II was sent to San Francisco in December 1904. He left for Los Angeles on December 31. The 1906 U.S. Census Bureau reported forty members in the Vedanta Society of Los Angeles.

According to the LA Times and the City Directory, Swami Sachchidananda II presented lectures, meditation classes, and interviews at a rented house. The Society had three distinct parts in three

separate locations: the Vedanta Society Headquarters, the Vedanta School, and the Vedanta Home. In 1906 the Swami offered free Sunday lectures. Seven women and two children lived with him in the boarding house.

During the summer of 1905, Swami Abhedananda and Herschel Parker, then president of the Vedanta Society of New York, made an extended tour from Alaska to Mexico City. On his way south, they stopped in Los Angeles to meet the Society. Sachchidananda II arranged a reception at which Abhedananda delivered a short address to the members. He was impressed with their earnestness and enthusiasm. The three Mead sisters and Alice Hansbrough's daughter Dorothy were active members of the Society.

After five years in charge of the Vedanta Headquarters and Home in Los Angeles (January 1905 to January 1910), Sachchidananda II was asked to return to India, though he continued to remain in Los Angeles as a religious teacher at the Vedanta Home, and announcements of his lectures appeared in the LA Times until February 1912. During this period, his organization operated independently of the Vedanta Society formed by Trigunatita, and when he returned to India in 1912 or 1913, he left the Ramakrishna Order.

In September, 1901, at the invitation of George Howison, Professor of Philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley, Abhedananda came to California to deliver a lecture on "Vedanta Philosophy." After that engagement, he traveled to Los Angeles and was hosted for ten days by the Mead family in South Pasadena. His next visit was four years later.

When Abhedananda came at the end of 1914 to Southern California at the invitation of some of his former students who had moved from New York to Long Beach, he delivered a comprehensive course of nine public lectures and established a Vedanta Library. After the passing of Trigunatita in January 1915, Los Angeles was no longer under the unofficial jurisdiction of the San Francisco Center. So Abhedananda lectured here for at least four

consecutive winters, from 1914–15 to 1917–18, per LA Times. During this period, Alice Hansbrough was an intimate and faithful devotee.

In the latter part of 1916, Abhedananda founded a Vedanta Society in Long Beach and established Vedanta Society Headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. Members of the Los Angeles Vedanta Society wrote to Prabuddha Bharata on February 16, 1917: *"When it was learned that Swami Abhedananda was willing to establish permanent headquarters here, Swami Vivekananda's old students and friends, as well as many new ones, rejoiced in the opportunity for the study and practice of pure Vedanta under a competent guide."*

On February 1, 1917, Abhedananda conducted a birthday service in memory of Vivekananda in Los Angeles. His talk was like a meditation on Vivekananda's character—on his great power of self-sacrifice, always giving himself for the sake of others; on his chastity and purity, which gave him tremendous spiritual strength; and on his great love for humanity, which made people pause and listen to his message. After the closing meditation, the offered fruits and flowers were passed among the audience.

Swami Paramananda, the youngest monastic disciple of Swami Vivekananda, made his first journey to the West Coast in 1915, arriving initially in San Francisco. At the invitation of Vedanta friends in Los Angeles, he planned a short visit to the city. He probably did not have particular association with the Mead sisters or the house in Pasadena. However, local Vedantists urged him to establish a permanent center in Los Angeles. In 1923, as a branch of the Vedanta Centre in Boston, he founded Ananda Ashrama in La Crescenta, about ten miles northwest of Los Angeles. After his death, the Centre came out of the jurisdiction of the Ramakrishna Mission in Belur Math. During the years 1915 to 1921, Abhedananda and Paramananda at times offered talks to separate groups of Vedantists in Los Angeles on the same

day.

In March 1920, a reorganization meeting of the Vedanta Society of Los Angeles was convened at the home of Mrs. Harry Wilhelm, the wife of a farmer living in Long Beach. They intended to raise funds to create an office, meeting place, and library in downtown Los Angeles. Their goal was to establish a permanent organization for Abhedananda, who was then teaching in San Francisco. He responded by relocating to Los Angeles in December of that year. In January he gave a series of public lectures. He stayed for six months. In 1921 departed for India in July forever.

Disciples of Vivekananda and lovers of Vedanta kept the flame of Vedanta movement alive. Swami Prabhavananda came to San Francisco in 1923 as an assistant minister. In 1925 he founded the Vedanta Society of Portland. In 1927 Sister Lalita requested him to found the Vedanta Society of Los Angeles and offered their property in Hollywood for this purpose. The Swami accepted the proposal. He arrived in Hollywood in November 1929, and the Society was founded in 1930.

Sister Lalita and the members of the Mead family were actively present always from the very beginning. One by one, close associates of Vivekananda came with their wisdom and support. Jo MacLeod (Swamiji's Tantine), Ida Ansell (Turiyananda's Ujjvala), and others were important among them. From this simple two-storied building, the story spread in innumerable directions. As Swamiji had announced, he continued to 'stay with' us through the light of Freedom that he brought to Los Angeles in 1899—through his people, his teachings, and his Vedanta."

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2. <http://vivekanandaabroad.blogspot.com/>



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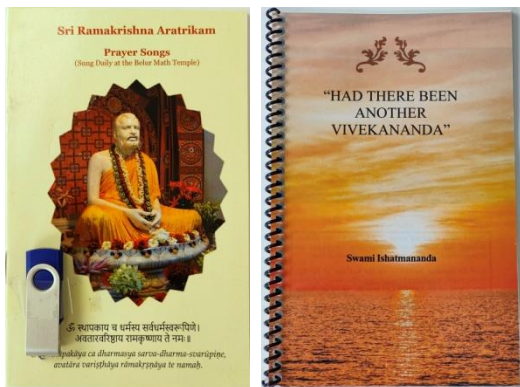
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