



Issue 47

January 2019

Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

Kimberleys

Andrew Tischler

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

SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna: God is One, but His Names are Many

You may say that there are many errors and superstitions in another religion. I should reply, suppose there are? Every religion has errors. Everyone thinks that his watch alone gives the correct time. It is enough to have yearning for God. It is enough to love Him and feel attracted to Him. Don't you know that God is the Inner Guide? He sees the longing of our heart and the yearning of our soul. Suppose a man has several sons. The older boys address him distinctly as 'Bābā' or Pāpā, but the babies can at best call him 'Bā' or Pā'. Now, will the father be angry with those who address him in this indistinct way? The father knows that they too are calling him; only they cannot pronounce his name well. All children are the same to the father. Likewise, the devotees call on God alone, though by different names. They call on one Person only. God is one, but His names are many.

Source: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by Mahendranath Gupta, Translation by Swami Nikhilananda, (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math), Vol. 1, pp. 111-12

Swami Vivekananda on Religion

We have no quarrel with any religion in the world, whether it teaches men to worship Christ, Buddha, or Mohammed, or any other prophet. "Welcome, my brother," the Hindu says, "I am going to help you; but you must allow me to follow my way too. That is my *Ishta*. Your way is very good, no doubt; but it may be dangerous for me.

Source: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama), Volume III, pp. 132.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) on Jihad

The greatest *jihad* (struggle/striving) is to battle your own soul, to fight the evil within yourself.

Source: <https://awakenthegreatnesswithin.com/35-inspirational-prophet-muhammad>

IN THIS ISSUE

1. News from Australian Centres

- ♦ Adelaide
- ♦ Brisbane
- ♦ Canberra
- ♦ Melbourne
- ♦ Perth
- ♦ Sydney

2. Feature Articles

A. *The Prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632) (PBOH) and Islam*

B. *Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and the Islamic Faith*

We welcome you all to the Vedanta Movement in Australia, as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and invite you to involve yourselves and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal Message of Vedanta.

1. NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN CENTRES 11 SEPTEMBER 2018 TO 10 DECEMBER 2018

ADELAIDE

506 Glynburn Road, Burnside, SA 5066

Email: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com

Contact: Dr Raman Sharma on (08) 8431 9775

Mrs Pathma Iswaran on (08) 8379 5336

URL: <http://vedantaadelaide.org>

Daily Activities:

- The Centre is open every evening from 6:45pm for *aratrikam* starting at 7:00pm which is undertaken by the local devotees.

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda visited the Centre and delivered discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* for three days in October 2018 and November 2018. A dedicated group of devotees attended his talks. These talks were also recorded.
- Reading of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, including discussion on relevant points, was held on the first and third Sunday of the month.
- Some devotees have been providing community-based support on a weekly basis at the Centre for meeting the educational needs of children from under-privileged backgrounds.

Other Activities

- Swami Vireshananda, accompanied Br Ishwarachaitanya, presented talks on 22 and 23 November 2018. Swami Vireshananda also conducted the annual spiritual retreat on 24 November 2018 giving two talks along with a Question and Answer session.



Swami Vireshananda, Br. Ishwarachaitanya and
the participants in the spiritual retreat on
23 November 2018

BRISBANE

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

Email: info@vedantabrisbane.org

Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

URL: <http://vedantabrisbane.org>

Daily Activities:

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

Regular Activities:

- Sunday mornings:- a) Yoga class (8:30 am – 9:45 am). b) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* Class (10:00 am – 11:00 am). (c) *Bala Sangha* or children's classes (10:00 am – 11:00 am during school term).

- A yoga class is conducted on Monday evenings from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm.
- On Thursdays, another yoga class is conducted from 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm.
- A discussion group met on the first Monday of the month at Sunnybank Hills (7:00 pm — 8:30 pm).
- Religious classes for children conducted by volunteers were held every Wednesday at West End Primary School (3:00 pm — 4:00 pm).
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* (7:00 pm — 8:00 pm at 134 Fleming Rd, Chapel Hill, Qld 4069) and the *Ramayana* (7:15 pm — 8:15 pm) at 12 Greenwood Street, Springfield Lakes, were held on alternate Fridays.
- Chanting of the *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days (7:30 pm — 8:15 pm).
- Prayer meeting (*satsangs*) were held on the first Saturday of every month.
- Devotees took turns in decorating and worshipping Sri Ramakrishna's image every week at the Sri Selva Vinayakar temple, South Maclean, Qld.
- Swami Atmeshananda conducted *Vivekachudamani* classes at Toowoomba on the first Thursday of every month.
- A class on the *Ashtavakra Gita* is conducted at 101 Sharpless Drive, Springfield Lakes, on a fixed day of the month.
- Yoga, Meditation and Bushwalk were held on the third weekend of every month at Vedanta Precinct, Vedanta Drive, Springfield Lakes.

Other Activities:

- On Saturday, 15 September 2018, a breakfast programme was organized in aid of Farmers' Drought relief fund. Charis Mullen, MP for Jordon, Milton Dick, Federal MP and Swami Sridharananda were present. A sum of \$8000 was raised and donated to the Premier of Queensland's drought relief fund. After the breakfast programme, a formal worship was performed. Swami Sridharananda addressed the audience and thanked all the volunteers who had worked hard during the inauguration of the Centre in June 2018. The Annual General



(Front) Swami Sridharananda and Charis Mullen, MP for Jordon, and others

Meeting of the Centre was also held on this day.

- Swami Atmeshananda was invited to give a talk at the Ganesh Puja celebrations at Griffith University's Multifaith Centre on 15 September 2018. The event was conducted by the Kan-nada Sangha, Brisbane.
- The Centre set up a stall at the Diwali fair organized at the Brisbane Square. A book stall was set up and some cold drinks were also sold at the stall.
- Swami Atmeshananda participated in the Durga puja celebrations conducted by the Bengali Society, Queensland, on 13 October 2018 and gave a talk on the significance of Mother worship.
- The Bangladeshi puja and Cultural Society invited Swami Atmeshananda to give a talk during their Durga puja celebrations on 21 October 2018.
- The Swaminarayan Mandir (BAPS) invited Swami Atmeshananda to participate in their 'Annakut festival' held at the Queensland parliament house on the 30 October 2018.
- A half-day spiritual retreat was held on 3 November 2018 at 39, Tiverton Place, Bridgeman Downs, Qld. Swami Sridharanandaji gave two talks on the subject 'Assurances of the Lord to Devotees'.
- The Premier of Queensland, Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk and Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe, Minister for Multicultural Affairs invited Swami Atmeshananda and members of the manage-



The Honorary Consul General of India, Ms. Archana Singh (5th from Right) and others.

ment committee of the Brisbane centre to a reception of leaders from the Indian community, on 12 November 2018, held at the Parliament Annexe, Queensland Parliament.



The Honourable Premier of Queensland, Annastacia Palaszczuk (fourth from left and) and Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe, Minister for Multicultural Affairs (Second from right back).

- Swami Atmeshananda officiated as guest of honour at the Bala Sanskar Kendra's annual concert programme held at the Acacia Ridge State High School's auditorium on Sunday, 20 November 2018.
- A patio was installed at the Centre outside the existing lower ground floor hall. The patio will provide extra space for activities including serving food to the devotees and visitors.



Some of the Indian Representatives at the Premier's Function.

Celebrations

- On the occasion of *navaratri*, Sri Durga Sap-tashati (Chandi) was recited from 8 to 16 October at the Centre from 5:30 am. to 8:00 am. The Mahishasuramardini stotram was sung in the evening during *navaratri* after vesper prayers.
- Durga *ashtami* worship was performed on Wednesday, 17 October, at the Centre.

Forthcoming Programmes

- On 1 January 2019, *kalpataru* day will be observed at the Centre with *puja*, *bhajans*, readings from *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, from 7:00 am to 9:00 am.
- Swami Vivekananda's birthday will be celebrated on 27 January 2019 at the Centre with worship, *bhajans*, a talk and distribution of *prasad*.
- *Mahashivaratri* will be observed on 4 March 2019. Worship will be conducted at the Centre in the evening on the occasion.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birthday will be celebrated on 8 March 2019.

CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 6258 7612 / 0433 593 860

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda conducted regular monthly classes on the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gita* at the Quakers Friends Meeting House, corner of Bent and Condamine Streets, Turner, ACT 2612.



Prayer meeting on Sunday, 23 September 2018, to convey prayers for the departed Mr Santosh Pal

MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

Email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

Contact: Swami Sunishthananda 03 8684 9594

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

Regular Activities:

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

Swami Sunishthananda conducts:

- A class on Sundays from 10:00 am to 11:30 am on the *Katha Upanishad* followed by an interactive session and guided meditation.
- Chanting, *bhajans* and guided meditation followed by a class on *Narada Bhakti Sutras* on Wednesdays from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm.
- Guided meditation followed by a class on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* on Fridays from 7:30 pm to 8:45 pm.
- A *satsang* is conducted on the first Saturday of every month from 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm at 4 Bernard Street, Cheltenham. It began in May 2018.

Other Activities:

- A prayer meeting was held on Sunday, 23 September 2018, to convey prayers for the departed Mr Santosh Pal. He and his wife Mrs Aruna Pal, were lifelong patrons of the Centre at Melbourne. Swami Sridharananda presided over the prayer meeting.
- Mr. Suresh Ravinutala, Secretary of the Vedanta Centre of Melbourne, was invited by Mr. Robin Scott, Minister of Multicultural Affairs, for a conversation at Cranbourne Golf Club on Tuesday, 23 October 2018.
- New photos of the Holy Trio were installed in the shrine altar on the occasion of *jagaddhatru puja* on Saturday, 17 November 2018. The programme included special worship, offerings, *bhajans*, *aratrikam* and *pushpanjali* and sharing of *prasadam*. Swami Sridharananda delivered a talk in the evening after the vesper service to commemorate the occasion.
- A spiritual retreat was held on Sunday, 18 November, at the centre. Swami Sridharananda presided over the spiritual retreat.
- Swami Sunishthananda and Mr. Govindan Aiyer, Treasurer, were invited by the Interfaith Centre of Melbourne for a Celebration Dinner to commemorate it winning the first prize of the 2018 World Interfaith Harmony Week. The Celebration Dinner was held on Wednesday, 21 November 2018, at Melbourne Town Hall.



*Installation of the New Shrine photos on
17 November 2018*

- Swami Vireshananda visited the Centre from Saturday, 1 December 2018, to Thursday, 6 December 2018. He met the devotees and delivered talks on Sunday, 2 December 2018, at 11:00 am and on Wednesday, 5 December 2018, at 11:00 am.

Celebrations:



Swami Vireshananda in Melbourne

- *Sri Sri Durga ashtami* was celebrated on Wednesday, 17 October 2018. The programme included special worship, *homa*, offerings, *bhajans*, *aratrikam* and *pushpanjali* and sharing of *prasadam*.
- Kali Puja was celebrated on 6 November 2018 after the evening vesper service. The programme included special worship, offerings, *bhajans*, *aratrikam* and *pushpanjali* and sharing of *prasadam*.



The Shrine During Durga Puja

Forthcoming Programmes

- *Kalpataru* day on 1 January 2018.
- A Children's holiday programme will be organized from 23 January 2019 to 25 January 2019.
- Swami Vivekananda's Birthday will be celebrated on Sunday, 27 January 2019.
- *Sri Sri Saraswati puja* will be celebrated on Sunday, 10 February 2019.
- *Sri Sri Shiva ratri* will be celebrated on Monday, 4 March 2019.
- Sri Ramakrishna Deva's Birthday will be celebrated on Sunday, 10 March 2019.

PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yokine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact: Sumita Chetty 0438928136

Parthiv Parekh 0430 511 699

Daily Activities:

- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm.

Regular Activities:

- *Satsangas* were conducted on the first Sunday of every month. The programme included chanting, *Gita dhyanam*, *bhajans*, readings and *prasad* distribution.
- Swami Sridharananda continued to deliver monthly discourses on the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gitā*. This time he visited with Br. Swatmachaitanya from 28 November 2018 to 1 December 2018 and gave talks on the 6th Chapter.



Swami Vireshananda in Perth

tober 2018 to 29 October 2018. The devotees had discussions with him on Vedanta.



Swami Sridharananda delivering his Gita Discourse



Devotees from Perth

Other Activities:

- A working bee session was held once every month.
- The Vedanta Multipurpose hall is used about 5 days a week by the organization called Prana Yoga, which is led by an acclaimed yoga teacher who is a member of Yoga Australia.
- Swami Vireshananda visited Perth from 25 Oc-

SYDNEY

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115

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

Email: vedasydney@vedantasydney.org

Contact: 02 8197 7351

URL: www.vedantaaustralia.org

Daily Activities:

- The shrine was open from 6:30 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:30 pm seven days a week.
- Meditation from 6:30 am to 7:20 am and chanting from 7:20 am to 7:45 am.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The times change on special occasions.

Regular Activities:

- Swami Sridharananda conducted his chapter-wise study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* on Sundays between 9:30 am and 10:30 am.
- Swami Sridharananda conducts a class on the *Mundaka Upanishad* on Mondays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.
- A class for mothers was held every Monday between 11:00 am and 12:30 pm. Swami Mahabodhananda initiated discussion on *Meditation and Spiritual Life*.
- Swami Mahabodhananda conducts a class on the *Evolution of the Spiritual Ideas in India* on Fridays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.
- *Bala sangha* classes which include moral and spiritual lessons, drama and movement were conducted for children every Saturday between 4:45 pm and 6:45 pm during the school term.
- Parlour talks were conducted by Swami Sridharananda at 1/98 Condamine Street, Balgowlah, NSW 2093, near Manly Beach on Tuesdays between 7:30 pm and 8:30 pm once a month.
- *Sri Rāmanāma Sankirtanam* was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.
- 'Yoga for Everybody' was conducted by quali-

fied Yoga Teachers on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Other Activities

- On the *saptami* day of the *navaratri* Rita Chowdury sang some Bengali songs in praise of the Divine Mother of the Universe after the evening *aratrikam*.



Rita Chowdury performing at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on the *saptami* day of the Durga Puja

Celebrations:

- The *ashtami* day of *navaratri* or Durga Puja was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 17 October 2018 in the morning and evening. The function included *puja*, *homa*, *pushpangali*, *aratrikam*, singing of *bhajans* by Rita Chowdury in the morning and in the evening by Sonali Roy, Kum Kum Ganguly, Parth Upadhyaya and others. The function ended with Prasad distribution in the morning and evening. In the morning 1000 people attended, while in the evening 550 people attended.

Forthcoming Programmes:

- *Kalpataru* day will be celebrated on Tuesday, 1 January 2019.
- Swami Vivekananda's birthday will be celebrated on Sunday, 27 January 2019.
- *Sri Sri Shiva-ratri* will be observed on Monday, 4 March 2019.
- Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary will be observed on Friday, 8 March 2019.

Obituary:

We regret to inform you that Mrs. Joy Bourton and Mr. Sharat Arora passed away on 19 September 2018 and 3 October 2018 respectively. Both of them were long standing devotees and benefactors of the Centre.



Puja being done by Br. Ishwarachaitanya and Br. Swatmachaitanya with Raghu Raman chanting the Chandi in the background



Children of the Bala Sangha performing in the evening after aratrikam



Sonali Roy and party performing after aratrikam



Audience during the Ashtami Puja



Paramita Ganguli and others performing after the evening aratrikam



Reverend Sridharananda and Br. Zach

1. FEATURE ARTICLES

A. The Prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632) (PBOH) and Islam

The origin of Islam is placed around 610 CE when Muhammad, a highly spiritual and religious man who spent months in praying and self-contemplation in a secluded cave near the town of Mecca, is thought to have received divine messages. The story is that one morning Muhammad heard the voice of the angel Gabriel and, through him, Allah spoke words of wisdom. The words were first recited by Muhammad, later his disciples, and then recorded as text which came to be known as the Holy Qur'an. Thus followers of Islam consider the Qur'an not the work of Muhammad but direct revelations from Allah.

Thus, Muhammad is believed to be the "seal of the prophets" through whom God has sent down the final, perfect revelation. Though admired for his wisdom and virtue, it is emphasized that Muhammad was only a human, not a supernatural being. The rise of Islam is intrinsically linked with the Prophet Muhammad, believed by Muslims to be the last in a long line of prophets that includes Moses and Jesus. Because Muhammad was the chosen recipient and messenger of the word of God through the divine revelations, Muslims from all walks of life strive to follow his example. After the holy Qur'an, the sayings of the Prophet (hadith) and descriptions of his way of life (sunna) are the most important Muslim texts.

The Life of Muhammad

Muhammad was born around 570, AD in Mecca (now in Saudi Arabia). His father died before he was born and he was raised by his mother, grandfather and then his uncle. He belonged to a poor but respectable family of the Quraysh tribe. The family was active in Meccan politics and trade.

Many of the tribes living in the Arabian Peninsula at the time were nomadic, trading goods as they crisscrossed the desert. Most tribes were polytheistic, worshipping their own set of gods. The town of Mecca was an important trading and religious centre, home to many temples and worship sites where the devoted prayed to the idols of these gods. The most famous site was the Kaaba (meaning cube in Arabic). It is believed to have been built by Abraham (Ibrahim to Muslims) and his son Ismail. Gradually the people of Mecca turned to polytheism and idolatry. Of all the gods

worshipped, it is believed that Allah was considered the greatest and the only one without an idol.

In his early teens, Muhammad worked in a camel caravan, following in the footsteps of many people his age, born of meager wealth. Working for his uncle, he gained experience in commercial trade travelling to Syria and eventually from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean. In time, Muhammad earned a reputation as honest and sincere, acquiring the nickname "al-Amin" meaning faithful or trustworthy.

In his early 20s, Muhammad began working for a wealthy merchant woman named Khadijah, 15 years his senior. She soon became attracted to this young, accomplished man and proposed marriage. He accepted and over the years the happy union brought several children. Not all lived to childhood, but one, Fatima, would marry Muhammad's cousin, Ali ibn Abi

Talib, whom Shi'ite Muslims regard as Muhammad's successor.

Muhammad was also very religious, occasionally taking journeys of devotion to sacred sites near Mecca. On one of his pilgrimages in 610, he was meditating in a cave on Mount Jabal al-Nour. The Angel Gabriel appeared and relayed the word of God: "Recite in the name of your Lord who creates, creates man from a clot! Recite for your lord is most generous...." These words became the opening verses of sūrah (chapter) 96 of the Qur'an. Most Islamic historians believe Muhammad was initially disturbed by the revelations and that he didn't reveal them publicly for several years. However, Shi'a tradition states he welcomed the message from the Angel Gabriel and was deeply inspired to share his experience with other potential believers.

Islamic tradition holds that the first persons to believe were his wife, Khadija and his close

friend Abu Bakr (regarded as the successor to Muhammad by Sunni Muslims). Soon, Muhammad began to gather a small following, initially encountering no opposition. Most people in Mecca either ignored him or mocked him as just another prophet. However, when his message condemned idol worship and polytheism, many of Mecca's tribal leaders began to see Muhammad and his message as a threat. Besides going against long standing beliefs, the condemnation of idol worship had economic consequences for merchants who catered to the thousands of pilgrims who came to Mecca every year. This was especially true for members of Muhammad's own tribe, the Quraysh, who were the guardians of the Kaaba. Sensing a threat, Mecca's merchants and leaders offered Muhammad incentives to abandon his preaching, but he refused.

Increasingly, the resistance to Muhammad and his followers grew and they were eventually forced to emigrate from Mecca to Medina, a city 260 miles to the north in 622. This event marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. There Muhammad was instrumental in bringing an end to a civil war raging amongst several of the city's tribes. Muhammad settled in Medina, building his Muslim community and gradually gathering acceptance and more followers.

Between 624 and 628, the Muslims were involved in a series of battles for their survival. In the final major confrontation, the 'Battle of the Trench' and 'Siege of Medina', Muhammad and his

followers prevailed and a treaty was signed. The Meccan allies broke the treaty a year later. By now, Muhammad had plenty of forces and the balance of power had shifted away from the Meccan leaders to him. In 630, the Muslim army marched into Mecca, taking the city with minimum casualties. Muhammad gave amnesty to many of the Meccan leaders who had opposed him and pardoned many others. Most of the Meccan population converted to Islam. Muhammad and his followers then proceeded to destroy all of the statues of pagan gods in and around the Kaaba.

The Night Journey and Ascension of the Prophet

Accounts of the ascension (*mi'raj*) of Muhammad have captured the imaginations of writers and painters for centuries. One night, while the Prophet was sleeping, the Archangel Gabriel came and led him on a journey. Mounted on the heavenly steed Buraq, Muhammad travelled from the Ka'ba in Mecca to the "Farthest Mosque," which Muslims believe to be the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. There he prayed with other prophets such as Moses, Abraham and Jesus, and ascended to the skies, where he was led by Gabriel through Paradise and Hell, and finally came face to face with God. He then returned to earth to continue spreading the message of Islam. According to Islamic belief, Muhammad was the only person to see Heaven and Hell while still alive.

After the Prophet's Death: Emergence of Shi'a and Sunni Sects of Islam

After the conflict with Mecca was finally settled, Muhammad took his first true Islamic pilgrimage to that city and in March, 632, he delivered his last sermon at Mount Arafat. Upon his return to Medina to his wife's home, he fell ill for several days. He died on June 8, 632, at the age of 62, and was buried at al-Masjid an-Nabawi (the Mosque of the Prophet) one of the first mosques built by Muhammad in Medina.

When Muhammad died in 632, he had not named a successor. One faction, the Shi'a, believed that only individuals with direct lineage to the Prophet could guide the Muslim community righteously. They thought that 'Ali, Muhammad's closest surviving blood male relative, should be their next leader (caliph). The other faction, the Sunnis, believed that the Prophet's successor should be determined by consensus and successively elected. Three of his most trusted companions, commonly referred to as the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman) were leaders of the Muslim community. 'Ali succeeded them as the fourth caliph.

Today the Islamic community remains divided into Sunni and Shi'a branches. Sunnis revere all four caliphs, while Shi'as regard 'Ali as the first spiritual leader. The rift between these two factions has resulted in differences

in worship as well as political and religious views. Sunnis are in the majority and occupy most of the Muslim world, while Shi'a populations are concentrated in Iran and Iraq, with sizeable numbers in Bahrain, Lebanon, Kuwait, Turkey, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

The Religion of Islam

There are six main beliefs that underpin Islamic faith, which entail the following:

- Belief in Allah as the one and only God
- Belief in angels
- Belief in the holy books
- Belief in the Prophets. For example Adam, Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Dawud (David), Isa (Jesus). Muhammad is regarded as the final prophet.
- Belief in the Day of Judgement. It is on the day when the life of every human being will be assessed to decide whether they go to Heaven or Hell.
- Belief in Predestination. There is the belief that Allah has the knowledge of all that will happen. Muslims believe that this doesn't stop human beings making free choices.

Allah

Allah is the name Muslims use for the supreme and unique God, who created and rules everything. The heart of faith for all Muslims is obedience to Allah's will. According to Muslims, Allah is *eternal*, *omniscient*, and *omnipotent* hence Allah has always existed and will always exist.

Allah knows everything that can be known. Allah can do anything that can be done. Moreover, Allah has no shape or form hence Allah can't be seen; Allah can't be heard; Allah is neither male nor female. Additionally, Allah is regarded as being just, hence Allah rewards and punishes fairly but Allah is also merciful. Finally, a believer can approach Allah by praying, and by reciting the Qur'an. Muslims worship only Allah because only Allah is worthy of worship.

The One and Only God

All Muslims believe that God is one alone hence there is only one God. God has no children, no parents, and no partners. A being did not create God. There are no equal, superior, or lesser Gods.

Sources and Documents for Beginnings of Islam

The *Qur'an* ("The Recitation") is the sacred scripture of Islam. It is a record of revelations believed to have been revealed directly, word for word in Arabic, to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. Its contents originate entirely from God, having no human component. The text is preserved faithfully and carefully compiled. A traditional view upholds the Qur'an as being compiled very close to the time of the events. It contains little historical or biographical material and is not arranged in chronological order. It is in order of length of chapters and composed in Arabic, in beautiful

rhymed prose. The Qur'an adheres to traditional division into Meccan and Medinan "Surah"s (or chapters), which provides traditional association with events in the Prophet's life. Proper recitation and memorization of the Qur'an are religious duties.

Belief in Earlier Prophets and Scriptures

The *Qur'an* provides an acceptance of prophets of Hebrew Bible, New Testament and Arab tradition (Jesus was a prophet). Moreover, there is mention of Torah, Psalms, Gospels (*Injil*). The *Qur'an* confirms the earlier revelations and completes them.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The five pillars of Islam are Shahada, Salat, Zakat, Sawm and Hajj or pilgrimage.

1) *Shahada*: Testifying to God's Oneness:

This entails the declaration that "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet."

2) *Salat*: Prayer.

The general features of Islamic Prayer stipulate five prayer times each day that includes early morning, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening. Raq'ah refers to bowing and prostration, which represents submission to God.

It entails ablutions, symbolic purification by washing hands, feet, etc. with water (or sand).

Qiblah refers to the direction for prayer towards Mecca.

Du'a describes spontaneous private prayer exists, but is less important than communal worship.

Elements of Public prayer includes the Masjid (or Mosque):

The Minaret is the tower for the Muadhdhin to announce services. The Imam leads prayers. Worshippers stand behind in straight lines. The Imam or other scholar delivers a sermon (khutba) from the pulpit (minbar). Women are not required to attend prayers. When they do, they usually stand behind the men. Friday, Yawm al-Jum'ah (Day of Assembly), is the main day of public prayer.

3) Zakat: Giving charity.

It has been originally a free-will donation (what is now called *Sadaqah*). Now it is largely compulsory at the general rate: 2 1/2% of income annually. Charity is given only to needy Muslims, or for religious purposes, etc.

4) Sawm: Fast

Fast is observed in memory of the revelation of the *Qur'an*. It is observed during month of Ramadan, daylight hours. Those who have medical exemptions etc. should fast at another time. 'Id al-Fitr, Feast of Fast-breaking commences at beginning of the next month.

5) Hajj: Pilgrimage

Every Muslim man and woman (if physically and economically able) should try to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in

their life-time.

It supports an egalitarian atmosphere. The Ihram dons simple white garments. There is a refraining from sex, haircuts, jewelry, arguing, etc. The importance of the Ka'ba is in its associations with Abraham, Hagar Ishmael and Muhammad.

There are symbolic re-enactments of past events. These include the Tawaf, which is circling Ka'ba counter clockwise seven times, emphasizing its centrality. It also entails touching black stone of Ka'bah. Sa'y involves running seven times between hills and drinking from Zamam spring (recalling Hagar's running for water). Further, it includes throwing 49 stones at stone "Satan"s (recalling the resistance to Satan's attempts to prevent Abraham from sacrificing Ishmael). On the eighth day pilgrims move to the desert and live in tents. Rituals performed there include Wuquf, which is standing in prayer at the Plain of Arafat and Mount of Mercy and 'Id al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice) whereby the head or household slaughters animal for feast. Meat is also distributed to the poor. A return to Mecca requires second circling of Ka'bah. Most pilgrims also visit Medinah.

Islam's Universal Values

Islam endorses certain universal values and concepts that the *Qur'an* and the traditions of the Prophet endorse for all human beings, and not particularly for Muslims, regardless of their colour, race, gender and religion. The four values become not only

a system of laws, but a religious, moral, legal, individual and societal obligation.

Dignity of the human being

This value pertains to all human beings regardless of their beliefs, religion, race or origin. "This dignity is manifested by certain capacities foremost among them are reason and free-will. Dignifying humankind requires the respect and protection of the wellbeing and the free choice of the individual." (*Qur'an*, 18:29)

Pluralism and Tolerance

Another universal value of Islam is the equal origin of all humans, regardless of their colour, race or ethnicity...The recognition of diversity goes beyond mere forbearance or resignation, it allows for mutual acceptance, toleration and appreciation of difference.

Justice and Excellence

Like human dignity, it (justice) is universal, irreducible value that applies to everyone. Justice implies diversity of sides, differing views, and thus requires impartiality.

Individual and Public Liberties

"Individual rights include security of life and property, protection of honour and dignity, sanctity and security of private life against state violation, security of personal freedoms, protection of religious sentiments, and equality of all Muslims and non-Muslims before the law. Political rights comprise the right to protest against tyranny, freedom of expression, freedom of associa-

tion, freedom of conscience and conviction, protection from arbitrary imprisonment, and the right to participate in public life. Socio-economic rights entail the right to the basic necessities of life (food, shelter, clothing, education). “

Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) Farewell Sermon

After praising and thanking Allah, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

“O People, lend me an attentive ear, for I know not whether after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and TAKE THESE WORDS TO THOSE WHO COULD NOT BE PRESENT HERE TODAY.

O People, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that He will indeed reckon your deeds. Allah has forbidden you to take usury (interest); therefore all interest obligations shall henceforth be waived. Your capital, however, is yours to keep. You will neither inflict nor suffer any inequity. Allah has judged that there shall be no interest and that all the interest due to Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib (Prophet's uncle) shall henceforth be waived...

Beware of Satan, for the safety of

your religion. He has lost all hope that he will ever be able to lead you astray in big things, so beware of following him in small things.

O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with any one of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste.

O People, listen to me in earnest, worship Allah, perform your five daily prayers (salah), fast during the month of Ramadan, and give your wealth in zakat (almsgiving). Perform Hajj if you can afford it.

All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor does a black have any superiority over a white except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves.

Remember, one day you will ap-

pear before Allah and answer for your deeds. So beware, do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone.

O People, no prophet or apostle will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the QURAN and my example, the SUNNAH and if you follow these you will never go astray.

All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed your message to your people”.

Source

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/>

“Islam with a Heart” by Dr Emad Shahin (emadshahin.com/?p=1415)

<https://www.metmuseum.org/learn/educators/curriculum-resources/art-of-the-islamic-world/unit-one/the-prophet-muhammad-and-the-origins-of-islam>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/learn/educators/curriculum-resources/art-of-the-islamic-world/unit-one/the-prophet-muhammad-and-the-origins-of-islam>

<https://www.biography.com/people/muhammad> Last Updated January 16, 2018

<https://hadithoftheday.com/the-last-sermon/>

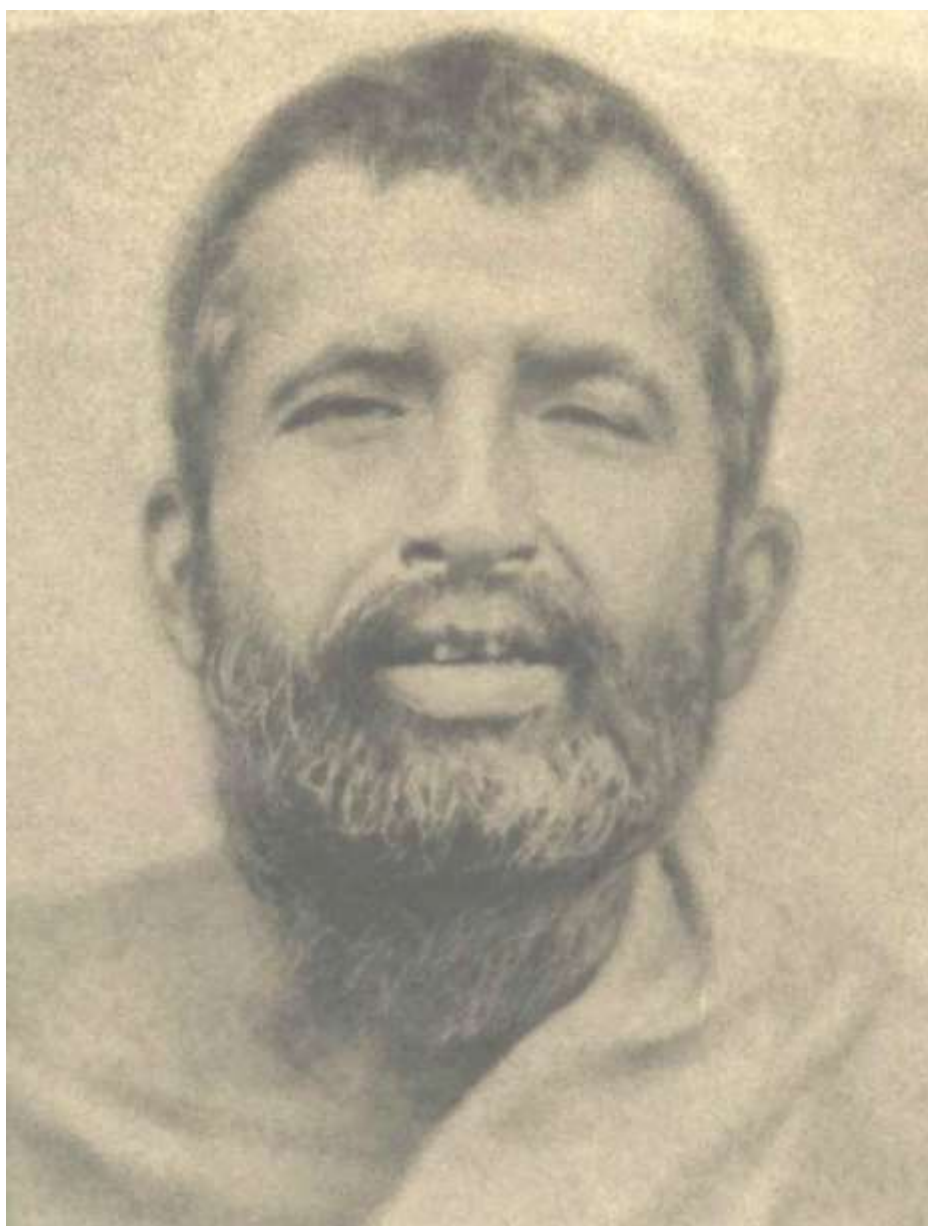
B. Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and the Islamic Faith

Sri Ramakrishna not only performed spiritual practices according to the variety of Hindu faiths, but also practised Islam and had the experience of Christ. After he had become established as a teacher, Sri Ramakrishna attracted a number of followers from the different Hindu denominations. The fact that he was non sectarian and was able to attract a number of people of diverse backgrounds is testimony of his liberality towards other sects and religions. Swami Vivekananda imbibed this quality from Sri Ramakrishna and his own father and strove to discuss other religions like Christianity and Islam; other incarnations like Christ; and other prophets like Mohammad (PBOH) that have been published in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. This article is a compilation on Islam and the Prophet Mohammad based on the Ramakrishna Vivekananda literature.

Sri Ramakrishna's Experimentation with Islam

An ardent spiritual aspirant named Govinda Ray, who must have been in search of God for a long time, arrived at Dakshineswar. He was perhaps learned in Persian and Arabic. Having studied various religious doctrines and come in contact with different religious communities, he was at last attracted by the liberal doctrine of Islam and was formally initiated into it. Govinda, thirsting for truth, accepted the Islamic faith and engaged ardently in the reading of the Koran and in the religious practices prescribed by that scripture. The method of worshipping God according to the teaching and mental attitude prevalent amongst the Sufis, followers of a sect of Islam, captivated his mind; for he now became engaged day and night in practising devotional moods like the Dervishes, the devotees belonging to that sect.

Govinda came to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar and began to spend his time there with his 'seat' spread under the peaceful shade of the Panchavati, which he thought, was a place favoura-



ble to religious practice. Just like Hindu Sannyasins, Muslim Fakirs were welcome at Rasmani's Kali Temple, and the hospitality of the temple was equally ac-

corded to both of them.

The Master was attracted towards the devout Govinda, and happening to converse with him,

was charmed with Govinda's sincere faith and his love for God. Thus was the master's mind now attracted towards Islamic religion. "This also," he thought, "is a path to the realization of God, the sportive Mother, the source of infinite Lila, has been blessing many people with the attainment of Her lotus feet throughout this path also. I must see how people taking refuge in Her are led along this path to the fulfilment of their spiritual aspirations. I shall be initiated by Govinda and shall engage myself in the practice of that spiritual mood."

Thought was immediately followed by action. The Master expressed his desire to Govinda, and became initiated. He engaged himself in practising Islam according to its prescribed rules. The Master said, "I then repeated the holy syllable 'Allah', with great devotion, wore clothes like the Muslim, recited the Namaz thrice daily, and felt disinclined even to see Hindu deities, not to speak of saluting them, inasmuch as the Hindu mode of thought vanished altogether from my mind. I spent three days in that mood and had the full realisation of the result of the practice according to that faith." At the time of practising Islam, the Master had first had the vision of an effulgent, impressive personage with a long beard; afterwards he attained the knowledge of the all-pervading Brahman with attributes, and then merged finally in the attributeless Brahman, the Absolute.

At the time of practising Islam, the Master wanted to take Muslim type of food. Mathur had a cook brought, under whose instructions a Brahman cook pre-

pared food for the Master in the Muslim style. The Master did not even once enter the inner courtyard of the Kali temple while practising Islam, but remained in the mansion of Mathur situated outside.

Sri Ramakrishna: Respect for other Faiths

Master (to Kedar and the other devotees): "God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can only reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo stairs or by a rope. You can also climb up by a bamboo pole."

Sri Ramakrishna (to the pundit): "You must know that there are different tastes. There are also different powers of digestions. God has made different religions and creeds to suit different aspirants. By no means all are fit for the knowledge of Brahman. The mother brings home a fish for her children. She curries part of the fish, part she fries, and with another part she makes pilau. By no means all can digest the pilau. So she makes fish soup for those who have weak stomachs. Further, some want pickled or fried fish. There are different temperaments. There are differences in the capacity to comprehend."

Swami Vivekananda' speech on 'The Great Teachers of the world' delivered at the Shakespeare Club, Pasadena, California, February 3, 1900

The universe, according to the theory of the Hindus, is moving in cycles of wave - forms. It rises,



reaches its zenith, then falls and remains in the hollow, as it were, for some time, once more to rise, and so on, in wave after wave and fall after fall. The history of nations is like that: they rise and they fall; after the rise comes a fall, again out of the fall comes a rise, with greater power. This motion is always going on. In the religious world the same movement exists. In every nation's spiritual life, there is a fall as well as a rise. The nation goes down and everything goes to pieces. Then again, it gains strength, rises; a huge wave comes, sometimes a tidal wave-and always on the topmost crest of the wave is a shining soul, the Messenger, Creator and created by turns, he is the impetus that makes the wave rise, the nation rise: at the same time, he is created by the same forces which makes the waves, acting and interacting by turns. He puts forth his tremendous power upon society; and society makes him what he is. These are the great world-thinkers. These are the Prophets of the world, the Messengers of life, the Incarnations of God.

Man has an idea that there can be only one religion, that there can be only one Prophet, and that there can be only one Incarna-

tion; but that idea is not true. By studying the lives of all these great Messengers, we find that each, as it were, was destined to play a part, and a part only; that the harmony consists in the sum total, and not in one note. Each race has a part to play in the divine harmony of nations. Each race has its mission to perform, its duty to fulfil. The sum total is the great harmony.

Let us, therefore, find God, not only in Jesus of Nazareth, but in all the great Ones that have preceded him, and all that are yet to come. Our worship is unbounded and free. They are all manifestations of the same Infinite God. They are all pure and unselfish; they struggled and gave up their lives for us, poor human beings. They each and all suffer vicarious atonement for every one of us, and also for all that are to come hereafter.

In a sense you are all Prophets; every one of you is a Prophet, bearing the burden of the world on your own shoulders. Have you ever seen a man, have you ever seen a woman, who is not quietly, patiently, bearing his or her little burden of life? The great Prophets were giants – they bore a gigantic world on their shoulders. Compared with them we are pygmies, no doubt, yet we are doing the same task; in our little circuses, in our little homes, we are bearing our little crosses. There is no one so evil, no one so worthless, but he has to bear his own cross. But with all our mistakes, with all our evil thoughts and evil deeds, there is a bright spot somewhere, there is still somewhere the golden thread through which we are always in touch with the Divine. For, know

for certain, the moment the touch of the Divine is lost there would be annihilation. And because none can be annihilated, there is always somewhere in our hearts, however low or degraded we may be, a little circle of light which is in constant touch with the divine.

Our salutations go to all the past prophets whose teachings and lives we have inherited, whatever might have been their race, clime or creed! Our salutations go to all those Godlike men and women who are working to help humanity, whatever be their births, colour or race! Our salutations to those who are coming in the future – living Gods – to work unselfishly for our descendants.

And then comes Mohammed, the Messenger of equality. You ask, "What good can there be in his religion?" If there were no good, how could it live? The good alone lives, that alone survives; because the good alone is strong, therefore it survives. How long is the life of an impure man, even in this life? Is not the life of the pure man much longer? Without doubt, for purity is strength, goodness is strength. How could Mohammedanism have lived, had there been nothing good in its teaching? There is much good. Mohammed was the Prophet of equality, of the brotherhood of man, the brotherhood of all Mussalmans.

So we see that each Prophet, each Messenger, has a particular message. When you first listen to that message, and then look at his life, you will see his whole life stands explained, radiant.

Now, ignorant fools start twenty thousand theories, and put for-

ward, according to their own mental development, explanations to suit their own ideas, and ascribe them to these great Teachers. They take their teachings and put their misconstruction upon them. With every great Prophet his life is the only commentary. Look at his life: what he did will bear out the texts. Read the Gita, and you will find that is exactly borne out by the life of the Teacher.

Mohammed by his life showed that amongst Mohammedans there should be perfect equality and brotherhood. There was no question of race, caste, creed, colour or sex. The Sultan of Turkey may buy a Negro from the mart of Africa, and bring him in chains to Turkey; but should he become a Mohammedan and have sufficient merit and abilities, he might even marry the daughter of the Sultan. Compare this with the way in which the Negroes and the American Indians are treated in this country! And what do Hindus do? If one of your missionaries chance to touch the food of an orthodox person, he would throw it away. Notwithstanding our grand philosophy, you note our weakness in practice; but there you see the greatness of the Mohammedan beyond other races, showing itself in equality, perfect equality regardless of race or colour.

Will other and greater Prophets come? Certainly they will come in this world. But do not look forward to that. I should better like that each one of you became a Prophet of this real New Testament, which is made up of all the Old Testaments. Take all the old messages, supplement them with your own realisations, and become a Prophet unto others. Each one of these Teachers has been

great; each has left something for us; they have been our Gods. We salute them, we are their servants; and, all the same, we salute ourselves; for if they have been Prophets and children of God, we also are the same. They reached their perfection, and we are going to attain ours now. Remember the words of Jesus: "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" This very moment let every one of us make a staunch resolution: "I will become a Prophet, I will become a messenger of Light, I will become a child of God, nay, I will become a God!"

Swami Vivekananda's Speech on 'Mohammed', delivered in the San Francisco Bay area on March 25, 1900,

The ancient message of Krishna is one harmonising three--Buddha's, Christ's, and Mohammed's. Each of the three started an idea and carried it to its extreme. Krishna antedates all the other prophets. [Yet, we might say,] Krishna takes the old ideas and synthesises them, [although] his is the most ancient message. His message was for the time being submerged by the advance wave of Buddhism. Today it is the message peculiar to India. If you will have it so, this afternoon I will take Mohammed and bring out the particular work of the great Arabian prophet. ...

Mohammed [as] a young man...did not [seem to] care much for religion. He was inclined to make money. He was considered a nice young man and very handsome. There was a rich widow. She fell in love with this young man, and they married. When

Mohammed had become emperor over the larger part of the world, the Roman and Persian empires were all under his feet, and he had a number of wives. When one day he was asked which wife he liked best, he pointed to his first wife: "Because she believed [in] me first." Women have faith. ...Gain independence, gain everything, but do not lose that characteristic of women! ...

Mohammed's heart was sick at the sin, idolatry and mock worship, superstitions and human sacrifices, and so on. The Jews were degraded by the Christians. On the other hand, the Christians were worse degraded than his own countrymen.

We are always in the hurry. [But] if any great work is to be done, there must be great preparation. ...After much praying, day and night, Mohammed began to have dreams and visions. Gabriel appeared to him in a dream and told him that he was the messenger of truth. He told him that the message of Jesus, of Moses, and all the prophets would be lost and asked him to go and preach. Seeing the Christians preaching politics in the name of Jesus, seeing the Persians preaching dualism, Mohammed said: "Our God is one God. He is the Lord of all that exists. There is no comparison between Him and any other."

God is God. There is no philosophy, no complicated code of ethics. "Our God is one without a second, and Mohammed is the Prophet." ...Mohammed began to preach it in the streets of Mecca. ...They began to persecute him, and he fled into the city of [Medina]. He began to fight, and the whole race became united.

[Mohammedanism] deluged the world in the name of the Lord. The tremendous conquering power! ...

You...people {Americans} have very hard ideas and are so superstitious and prejudiced! These messengers must have come from God, else how could they have been so great? You look at every defect. Each one of us has his defects. Who hasn't? I can point out many defects in the Jews. The wicked are always looking for defects. ...Flies come and seek for the [ulcer], and bees come only for the honey in the flower. Do not follow the way of the fly but that of the bee. ...

Mohammed married quite a number of wives afterwards. Great men may marry two hundred wives each. "Giants" like you, I would not allow to marry one wife. The characters of the great souls are mysterious, their methods past our finding out. We must not judge them. Christ may judge Mohammed. Who are you and I? Little babies. What do we understand of these great souls? ...

[Mohammedanism] came as a message for the masses. ...The first message was equality. ...There is one religion--love. No more question of race, colour, [or] anything else. Join it! That practical quality carried the day. ...The great message was perfectly simple. Believe in one God, the creator of heaven and earth. All was created out of nothing by Him. Ask no questions. ...

Their temples are like Protestant churches, ...no music, no paintings, no pictures. A pulpit in the corner; on that lies the Koran. The people all stand in line. No priest, no person{parson?}, no bishop.

...The man who prays must stand at the side of the audience. Some parts are beautiful. ...

These old people were all messengers of God. I fall down and worship them; I take the dust of their feet. But they are dead! ...And we are alive. We must go ahead! ...Religion is not an imitation of Jesus or Mohammed. Even if an imitation is good, it is never genuine. Be not an imitation of Jesus, but be Jesus. You are quite as great as Jesus, Buddha, or anybody else. If we are not...we must struggle and be. I would not be exactly like Jesus. It is unnecessary that I should be born a Jew. ...

The greatest religion is to be true to your own nature. Have faith in yourselves! If you do not exist, how can God exist, or anybody else? Wherever you are, it is this mind that perceives even the Infinite. I see God, therefore He exists. If I cannot think of God, He does not exist [for me]. This is the grand march of our human progress.

These [great souls] are signposts on the way. That is all they are. They say, "Onward, brothers!" We cling to them; we never want to move. We do not want to think; we want others to think for us. The messengers fulfil their mission. They ask to be up and doing. A hundred years later we cling to the message and go to sleep.

Talking about faith and belief and doctrine is easy, but it is so difficult to build character and to stem the tide of the senses. We succumb. We become hypocrites. ...

[Religion] is not a doctrine, [not] a rule. It is a process. That is all. [Doctrines and rules] are all for exercise. By that exercise we get

strong and at last break the bonds and become free. Doctrine is of no use except for gymnastics. ...Through exercise the soul becomes perfect. That exercise is stopped when you say, "I believe." ...

"Whenever virtue subsides and immorality abounds, I take human form. In every age I come for the salvation of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, for the establishment of spirituality." ...

[Such] are the great messengers of light. They are our great teachers, our elder brothers. But we must go our own way!

Bhakti or Devotion

From time to time, there have been reformers in every religion who have stood against all symbols and rituals. But vain has been their opposition, for so long as man will remain as he is, the vast majority will always want something concrete to hold on to, something around which, as it were, to place their ideas, something which will be the centre of all the thought-forms in their minds. The great attempts of the Mohammedans and of the Protestants have been directed to this one end, of doing away with all rituals, and yet we find that even with them, rituals have crept in. They cannot be kept out; after long struggle, the masses simply change one symbol for another. The Mohammedan, who thinks that every ritual, every form, image, or ceremony, used by a non-Mohammedan is sinful, does not think so when he comes to his own shrine, the Caaba. Every religious Mohammedan wherever he prays, must

imagine that he is standing before the Caaba. When he makes a pilgrimage there, he must kiss the black stone in the wall of the shrine. All the kisses that have been imprinted on that stone, by millions and millions of pilgrims, will stand up as witnesses for the benefit of the faithful on the last day of judgment. Then, there is the well of Zimzim. Mohammedans believe that whoever draws a little water out of that well will have his sins pardoned, and he will, after the day of resurrection, have a fresh body, and live for ever. In others, we find that the symbology comes in the form of buildings. Protestants hold that churches are more sacred than other places. The church, as it is, stands for a symbol. Or there is the Book. The idea of the Book, to them, is much holier than any other symbol.

It is vain to preach against the use of symbols, and why should we preach against them? There is no reason why man should not use symbols. They have them in order to represent the ideas signified behind them. This universe is a symbol, in and through which we are trying to grasp the thing signified, which is beyond and behind. The spirit is the goal, and not matter. Forms, images, bells, candles, books, churches, temples, and all holy symbols are very good, very helpful to the growing plant of spirituality, but thus far and no farther. In the vast majority of cases, we find that the plant does not grow. It is very good to be born in a church, but it is very bad to die in a church. It is very good to be born within the limits of certain forms that help the little plant of spirituality, but if a man

dies within the bounds of these forms, it shows that he has not grown, that there has been no development of the soul.

The Way to the Realization of a Universal Religion

The fact that all these old religions are living today proves that they must have kept that mission intact; in spite of all their mistakes, in spite of all difficulties, in spite of all quarrels, in spite of all the incrustation of forms and figures, the heart of every one of them is sound—it is a throbbing, beating, living heart. They have not lost, any one of them, the great mission they came for. And it is splendid to study that mission. Take Mohammedanism, for instance. Christian people hate no religion in the world so much as Mohammedanism. They think it is the very worst form of religion that ever existed. As soon as a man becomes a Mohammedan, the whole of Islam receives him as a brother with open arms, without making any distinction, which no other religion does. If one of your American Indians becomes a Mohammedan, the Sultan of Turkey would have no objection to dine with him. If he has brains, no position is barred to him. In this country, I have never yet seen a church where the white man and the negro can kneel side by side to pray. Just think of that: Islam makes its followers all equal—so, that, you see, is the peculiar excellence of Mohammedanism. In many places in the Koran you find very sensual ideas of life. Never mind. What Mohammedanism comes to preach to the world is this practical brotherhood of all belonging to

their faith. That is the essential part of the Mohammedan religion; and all the other ideas about heaven and of life etc. are not Mohammedanism. They are accretions.

Our watchword, then, will be acceptance, and not exclusion. Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy, and I do not believe in it. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not a blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one. Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutation

to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future!

Inspired Talks

There are sixty-five million Mohammedans in India, some of them Sufis. Sufis identify man with God, and through them this idea came into Europe. They say, "I am that Truth"; but they have an *esoteric* as well as an *exoteric* doctrine, although Mohammed himself did not hold it.

Sources

Sri Ramakrishna: A Biography in Pictures, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, pp. 38.

Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, pp. 298-299.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Volume I, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, pp. 111; 486.

The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda Volume 4, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, pp. 120-5, 153, 497.

The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda Volume 1, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, pp. 467-471.

The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda Volume 2, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, pp. 38-39, 370-371.

The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda Volume 7, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, pp. 40.