

Voice of the Worldwide Vedanta Movement

# GLOBAL VEDANTA

Online Issue #4 September 2023

## ***In This Issue:***

- **Temples, Worship, and the Old Temple in San Francisco**
- **Swami Vivekananda and the Salvation Army**
- **The Seers of Truth**

**and much more...**



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Viveka Press, the publisher of *Global Vedanta*, is the publishing arm of The Vedanta Society of Western Washington, a branch of the Ramakrishna Order of India. The Vedanta Society, a nonprofit corporation founded in 1941, gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and requests to assist its efforts to publicize various aspects of Vedanta with special emphasis on its teaching of the harmony of all religions. All editorial work on *Global Vedanta* is provided on a voluntary basis.

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*Cover: The Old Temple in San Francisco, California, USA.  
Construction commenced in 1905 under the inspiration and  
guidance of Swami Trigunatitananda*

### About Contributing to *Global Vedanta*

*Global Vedanta* will gladly consider articles, poetry, humor, etc., submitted for publication. The subject matter should be religious, cultural, or educational and must appeal to a general and broad-minded readership. Articles should be entertaining, and yet substantial, and be within 2000 words in length. Articles accepted for publication *may* require a release signed by the author.

# EDITORIAL

## THE GROWING NEED FOR YOGA AND MEDITATION

Today's world is marked by a growing sense of universal dissatisfaction—with the world around us primarily, and secondly with ourselves. Sometimes this primacy is reversed. However, we all try to allay and ignore our dissatisfaction by inventing an interminable series of things to keep us distracted and engaged. This, of course, works for a while but then as the gnawing dissatisfaction becomes stronger it leads to fragmentation of personality. This is the reason stress, tension, anxiety, depression, panic, and such other mental and physical health issues beset us and are increasing at an alarming pace. The alarms are loud, but nobody really is addressing these pressing issues. For we really do not have adequate solutions. Religious or self-righteous people blame it on unchecked materialism and unbridled thirst or longings that societies are subject to. We are indulging ourselves without knowing the consequences. These self-righteous folks may be right, but they also could be just trying to validate their religious identity or some other thing. We propose another argument: human intelligence, which is growing, thanks to the rapid spread of education and information.

The sensory and motor systems in us opened a complex world of experiences. We engaged, developed ourselves and also became enamored with the sensory world of rich sounds, sight, taste, smell, and touch. Ordinarily, the world of experience is comprised of the sensory motor systems and mind—the objective and subjective—which form a unit. Yet, a higher aspect of the mind, known as intelligence, has begun dominating both the sensory experiences and the mind with all its workings. Humans are becoming increasingly cognitively developed as well as able to think abstractly. It may be that technology and its spinoffs are behind the development. But a counter argument is that the forces of evolution have not stopped operating after building our bodies and these forces are forcing our intelligence to develop. Technology of course has directly aided the vast storage of information that has taken the burden off from storing individual memories in the brain. The signs of progress are apparent. Humans have found that the world of senses and its experiences are merely representative of what is really out there. Intelligence has begun penetrating the mystery of the world and the mind and thus opening an immense window to knowledge. Today we mold the external world—sentient and insentient—through intelligence. For so long we were the products of evolution, but now we are partners in shaping it by our genetic research and so on which has opened up vast possibilities and marvels concerning ourselves, the world we inhabit, and the universe. Human cognitive ingenuity and skills are taking over everything, including human destiny and human welfare. This is the reason why this age is being called the Anthropocene!

So, why is there dissatisfaction? Our intelligence is giving us undreamt of gifts yet as it solves one problem, ten others arise in its place, like the proverbial multiheaded Hydra. Life has its problems, no doubt, but today's problems have become too painful to bear. The world that is represented to us, and which is not fully known, has invaded our inner being. Our intelligence has internalized its inventions and creations, deified them, and they have imprisoned us, for they are false gods. This is the delusion of our times. We have created an inner world that is becoming oppressive and threatening and there is no place to run or hide. The intellect, the worshipper, has not been able to see itself! If it could, it would see a true sanctum sanctorum of a temple, a sacred space, within itself and worship the true god—consciousness. The *Bhagavad Gita* says, "Where one experiences that absolute bliss which can be intuited by the intellect and which is beyond the senses, and where being established this person surely does not swerve from reality" (6.21). Consciousness is bliss in Vedanta, and Vedanta is based on universal experience.

Yoga and meditation have become current all over the world, at least the words are in many cases. One of the definitions of Yoga is: "One should know that severance of contact (*vi-yoga*) with sorrow to be what is called Yoga. That Yoga has to be practiced with conviction and with a non-despondent heart" (6.23). The method given is, "One should gradually withdraw (the senses and mind) with one's intelligence, which is kept steady through perseverance. Making the mind fixed in the Self (consciousness), one should not think of anything whatsoever" (6.24). Yoga is ninety-nine percent practice and one percent theory. As it looks within, the intellect becomes fine and one-pointed, and catches the subtle consciousness. The more it does, the more the imprisoned intellect becomes free.

The question then arises, can this self-absorption really be useful to our other intellectual activities? Perfectly. As the intellect is free from delusions it becomes a perfect instrument with which to work and think. The fragmented intellect becomes integrated. Memory becomes firm and cognition becomes sharp. Physical and especially mental health becomes better, life looks up, energy flows unimpeded. The list can go on and on.

We will have to incorporate this Yoga and meditation in our daily life, for it has become imperative. We may take any form of help, like temples or other sacred places in order to go within. Inside is a vast world accessible only through Yoga. Deep down our intelligence is mildly intuiting this need and that is why the proliferation of Yoga and Meditation centers everywhere. Another way of putting it is—the science of Yoga and meditation was designed for cognitively superior minds who will take it up, only it had to wait for a few thousand years before a major portion of humanity would appreciate and take it up. It took a prophet to see future humanity's need and put the solutions into place in advance. That prophet is Swami Vivekananda. This great Yogi brought Yoga to the USA and thus to the whole world, in 1893, at the Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago. In order to crystallize his plans, he formed the Ramakrishna Order. The various Vedanta Societies in the USA and in the West are the different branches of the Order, now celebrating its 125 years of dedicated service. It will continue to cater to the needs of the present and future humanity. For humanity is heir to Yoga and meditation.

Swami Satyamayananda  
*Editor-in-chief*



# TEMPLES, WORSHIP, AND THE OLD TEMPLE IN SAN FRANCISCO

SWAMI TATTWAMAYANANDA

**T**emples in India have a long history, and building temples was and is considered to be a spiritually meritorious act that brought sanctity to the place. As a religious institution, temples have always played an important role in the history of religious practices in Hinduism, where traditionally a temple is conceived as a symbol or a combination of various symbols and, much like a human organism, is considered to be the abode of God, the immanent divine spirit.

A temple is also a symbol of the omnipresent, cosmic, and transcendental dimension of God. The *Brihat Samhita* states that a temple is a microcosm of creation! Temples were conceived to be spiritual symbols of human effort and devotion (*Yaavut chandraarkamedini*—"as long as the moon, the sun, and the earth exist"). From the standpoint of the individual spiritual seeker, a temple represents the subtle body with the seven psychic centers mentioned in the Tantric texts. A temple, in essence, is the link between humans and God helping us evolve from the earthly level to the transcendental divine realm. Texts like *Aparajitaprichcha* (a well-known text on traditional Hindu architecture) present the temple structure itself as the form of creation or as the physical body of God. The *Agni Purana*, on the other hand, considers the sanctum sanctorum alone as the body of the presiding deity. All rituals performed in temples symbolize different stages in our spiritual journey to discover the presence of the immanent divine reality as residing in our own heart.

The history of God and religion is the evolution of the human consciousness of the Divine, the history of our ideas and concepts of God. In the history of Hinduism, especially after the Vedic age, temples were centers of religious life. But

conventional temple worship did not have anything to do with religious universalism as understood today. Credit should go to Swami Vivekananda for giving a universal dimension to the concept of temple worship and then to Swami Trigunatitananda who took this idea and built a Temple in San Francisco that has stood out as a picturesque landmark in the urban landscape of San Francisco.

This universal Hindu Temple was built



Roof of the Old Temple in San Francisco representing various religious traditions

as a symbol (*pratika*) of the great Vedantic ideal that the ultimate reality is one and that every religion is a path leading to it. Every religion represents an expression of the same eternal, transcendental truth. This integral view of the ultimate reality and the diverse human attempts to reach that goal, as taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, formed the philosophical and spiritual symbolism of the Hindu Temple of San Francisco.

Swami Trigunatitananda was fired with this idea of a universal temple and immediately after arriving in San Francisco, he set himself to work. He had a clear idea about his mission. He reorganized the Vedanta Society and established it on a secure, traditional spiritual foundation. Every act of his remaining twelve years seemed to have spiritual significance, as evidenced, for instance, by the planning and building of the Hindu Temple in 1905.

## Symbolism in Temple Worship

Symbols represent our efforts to understand the invisible and the abstract through the visible and the concrete. They help us to conceive of a higher and transcendental idea through concrete representations.

Symbolism plays a very important role in Hinduism, especially in the construction of temples and the rituals performed therein. Every act of worship and every form of the deity is raised to a higher level through philosophical and spiritual reinterpretation. The whole idea of temple worship is built on symbolism. Sound symbols, such as OM, the Gayatri-Mantra, *Bija*-Mantras, and the sacred mantras chanted in various ceremonies, as well as the form symbols of different conceptions of deities, diagrammatic symbols like yantras, the *Shiva-linga* and the *Salagrama*, the lotus, the different elements and rituals of formal worship of various deities, especially in the

temple installation ceremony, the *upa-charas* (five, ten, sixteen, sixty-four, or one hundred eight items or articles ceremonially offered with appropriate mantras to the deity invoked in the temple image), and the elaborate celebrations like the Car Festival of Lord Jagannath of the Puri temple—all these have a deep symbolic significance. The symbolism of temples, as well as of all aspects of temple worship, are meant to help us to eventually realize the immanent presence of God in our own heart, because the light in the temple ultimately represents the light of our own soul, the Atman. Thus, symbolism helps spiritual aspirants to transcend external rituals and ceremonies. A devotee experiences that God that is worshiped in the temple, is, in reality, the divine spirit present in one's own heart. Finally, this living presence then manifests in one's everyday life.

## Symbolism in the Features of the Old Temple and Its Architecture

All the distinguishing features of the San Francisco Hindu Temple or the Old Temple, as it is now referred to, are symbolic of a basic concept which Swami Trigunatitananda expressed in these words: "This Temple may be considered as a combination of a Hindu temple, a Christian church, a Mohammedan Mosque, a Hindu Math or monastery, and an American residence."

The large round tower at the northeast corner of the building is fashioned after some of the modern provincial Shiva temples of Bengal, complete with the usual emblems.

The next tower, west of it, is a model of one of the twelve small Shiva temples along the Ganges at Dakshineswar, near Kolkata, where Sri Ramakrishna lived, and Swami Vivekananda and the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna first came under his influence and training. This middle tower is surmounted by a combination of three symbols. First, it has a crescent form at the bottom, which is a Muslim symbol, but this is also the type of symbol used by some Hindu devotional sects, as well, and represents the spiritual path of devotion to God. Second, the middle sign looks like the sun: Without sunlight and heat, we cannot grow, and, therefore, this symbol indicates the path of work or karma. The third symbol, in this group of three, is the trident, which is the scepter of Shiva, who destroys ignorance, and, therefore, it symbolizes the path of knowledge or of spiritual inquiry and philosophy.

The particular order of these three symbols on one staff has an additional meaning: one must have a little faith and love to start some real kind of work. Therefore, the sign for the path of devotion has been put first. Then through love and faith comes a true sense of duty or work. Therefore, the path of karma has been put next. Then when we finish all our karma or work, and, when we become pure, we pierce through the veil of ignorance. Therefore, the sign of the path

of knowledge has been put last.

The next tower to the west, with its cluster of multiple small, pointed domes surrounding a large central dome, is a replica of one of the principal temples of Varanasi, the most ancient center of Hindu learning and spiritual tradition. This tower has also a little similarity with the top of the temple of Mother Kali at Dakshineswar.

The small tower farther west, high above the entrance to the temple, is a miniature, modeled after the Taj Mahal at Agra in North India. On the southeast corner of the building is a crenelated round tower modeled after some of the old castle towers of Europe, which belong to the medieval era of Christianity. The veranda that runs along the third floor on the north and east sides of the building is lined with sculpted arches in Moorish style.

Over the entrance door to the temple is a canopy with further symbolism to illustrate the soul's rise to spiritual insight and illumination. It also contains a mosaic inscription in Sanskrit which reads: "OM Namō Bhagavate Ramakrishnaya, OM, salutation to Bhagavaan Ramakrishna"; OM being a word indicative of divinity in its most universal aspect, Namō or namah refers to salutation. The word Bhagavate or bhagavaan, signifying Lord, implies that the holy personality, Sri Ramakrishna, named in this verse is considered to have a divine, rather than a merely human origin and function.

The metal canopy above the entrance door is decorated around its edge with a fringe of lotus petals, symbolizing the inner mental lotuses of increasing beauty seen by mystics in meditation. The whole is surmounted, as though protected, by an American eagle with wings outspread. The eagle seems to fly beyond this world,



Another view from the roof of the Old Temple in San Francisco

which is the realm of creation, preservation, and destruction—the realm of relativities. The eagle can also be seen as expressive of the Hindu mythological bird, Garuda, the symbol of great strength, spiritual devotion, and of steady and rapid progress.

Swami Trigunatitananda, while answering a question as to whether one had to believe in rebirth or in any such doctrine, in order to reach the highest spiritual goal, said: "There are many faiths and religious sects in the world, which do not believe in nor care to believe in such doctrines; according to Vedantism, they, too, reach the very highest; one should simply go on sincerely, ardently and steadily along one's own faith, with one's own beliefs, with a view to advance to the very highest."

Swami Trigunatitananda wanted to construct a building in San Francisco that would be an architectural representation of the message of religious harmony, a medium for communicating the Vedantic universalism that was the central theme of Sri Ramakrishna's message to the modern world, as so ably expounded by Swami Vivekananda. That partly explains his decision to build a temple so unlike the traditional Hindu temples in India. The message of the Old Temple was the message of religious harmony, based on the fact that spiritual experience knows no barriers of race, nationality, or external practices.

Perhaps, the most remarkable thing about the whole work was the amazing speed of the construction of the temple. The cultural and spiritual landscape of America during this period was undergoing a radical transformation in the field of religion and spirituality. New concepts and movements like Theosophy, Christian Science, and Unitarianism were becoming popular among the social elites in the United States. Higher Hinduism, or Vedanta, had just been introduced to American society by Swami Vivekananda in the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 and, subsequently, through his lectures and classes. Its catholicity, rationality, and especially its open acceptance of other faith-systems was in sharp contrast to the narrow dogmatism. The intellectual challenges of Darwinist, humanist, and atheistic movements, as well as the criticism of the admirers of the latest scientific discoveries, posed a great threat to exclusivist claims of established religions.

From an architectural point of view the San Francisco Hindu Temple is different from both the South Indian or Dravida and Chalukya temples with their characteristic tiered *vimana* shrines, their axial and peripheral *mandapa* adjuncts, and towering *gopura* entrances (gates), as well as from the North Indian temples with their own distinctive features like a square plan and curvilinear towers, representing the *nagara* style. Also, there is no evidence to show that Swami Trigunatitananda fully adhered to the principles of temple construction as laid down in the traditional texts on *Vastu Shastra* like *Brihat Sambhita*.

### A Spiritual Saga of Dedication and Service

Considering the circumstances under which he was deputed by Swami Vivekananda to take up the Vedanta work in San Francisco, Swami Trigunatitananda knew it was to be a heroic task. It needed exceptional organizational skills, spiritual insight, moral strength, ingenuity,

drive, iron determination, and, above all, a blending of the dedicated action of a missionary and the profound spirituality of a sage.

It was remarkable that, even in the midst of Swami Trigunatitananda's active dynamism on display throughout his more than twelve years of spiritual ministration in San Francisco, there were always glimpses of his monastic humility and contemplative nature. About this builder of the Hindu Temple, one may well say what William Arthur Ward stated about an ideal teacher: "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." Swami Trigunatitananda's sense of dedication was an inspiring example for all those who worked with him to build the Temple.

The universal Hindu Temple of San Francisco has a special significance in the present age which is characterized by a widespread urge for anything universal. Unity in variety is the theme for our times. This urge for universality, especially in the field of spirituality, is bound to prompt thinking people everywhere to study the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and his ideal of universal religious harmony symbolized in the universal Hindu Temple of San Francisco.

If Swami Turiyananda had not left San Francisco in 1902 and Swami Trigunatitananda had not arrived in 1903, probably the temple would never have been built. But, when we look back after more than a century, we can see that there was a divine hand and divine plan behind it. Swami Trigunatitananda experienced this as he revealed from time to time. On one such occasion, he said, regarding this first Hindu Temple in the West: "I shall not live to enjoy, others will come later who will enjoy." And "Believe me, believe me, if there is the least tinge of selfishness in building the temple, it will fall, but if it is the Master's work, it will stand." And it has stood, weathering more than a century, including the catastrophic 1906 earthquake and the fire ignited by it, which was fanned by unrelenting winds

to within six blocks of the Temple before suddenly being diverted by a providential reversal of wind direction.

The story of the universal Hindu Temple of San Francisco is not just the story of a temple. It is the saga of a sage—a humbling, inspiring model for all spiritual seekers.

1. Sister Gargi (Marie Louise Burke), *Swami Trigunatita: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Vedanta Society of Northern California, 1997), 198-203.

2. *Ibid.*, 373.

3. *His Western Disciples*, "The Work of Swami Trigunatita in the West," Prabuddha Bharata, March 1928: 132.



*Once I visited the image of Jagannath at Puri at the time of the Car Festival. I wept in sheer joy to see so many people having a view of the image of the deity. "Ah," I said to myself, "it is good. They will be saved." But later on I realized that it was not so. Only one or two who were absolutely free from desires could attain salvation. When I narrated the incident to Yogin-Ma, she corroborated this by saying, "Yes, Mother, only people who are free from desires attain liberation (mukti)."*

—Sri Sarada Devi

# SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND THE SALVATION ARMY

JOSEPH PEIDLE

## Introduction

### September 1882

In Dakshineswar, a village north of Calcutta, the world teacher Sri Ramakrishna's close disciples like Narendra and Rakhal visit him like bees finding a flower in the forest; a religious movement is slowly being formed. On Sundays, an army of householder devotees invade the Master's (Sri Ramakrishna's) room to partake in a mart of spiritual joy.

At the opposite extremity of India in the metropolis of Bombay, a different kind of army invades India—the Salvation Army. In the following decades, this initial platoon of four would grow into a major missionary organization providing social services like education and health care to thousands of Indian citizens.

### March 1896

Narendra, now known as Swami Vivekananda, is seated comfortably in the USA in Boston chatting with a newspaper reporter:

Reporter: “Well, what is your attitude towards our Western religions, then?”

“Briefly, it is one of extreme sympathy,” said the Swami, his fine eyes kindling with the light of benevolence.

“My teaching is antagonistic to no religion. I direct my attention to the individual to make him strong, to teach him that he himself is divine. I call upon men to make themselves conscious of the divinity within. I teach only the Self, hidden in the heart of every individual, common to all. And that is the aim, conscious or unconscious, of all religions.”

In speaking of his work in New York, where he has met with distinguished success and has established the warmest friendships, the Swami said: “I admire the sincerity and devotion of the Sal-

vation Army, for I have known many of them personally and know what consecrated lives they are living. But they have made a great mistake. They have allowed their religion to become a sect, an organization, and just as soon as religion becomes an organization, it becomes in danger. It is bound, then, to fall. And that is why this ‘split,’ as you



call it, has come in the army ranks.”

Reporter: I asked the Swanie (sic) if his words were received gladly by the working men of New York. The Swanie (sic) smiled with pleasure. “Oh, yes,” he said. “Workingmen are my great friends. I know very many of the leaders among laboring men, and they have been my warm allies. I claim that any teaching to be great must be greatly simple. It must be that the common people can see and know and feel. And so, when I teach, I wish always to do as all the greatest philosophers have done, and give the people, in the simplest form, the truth.”<sup>1</sup>

1 “Vive Kananda.” Boston Daily Advertiser, 21 March 1896, p. 12. Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers, Accessed 23 May 2020.

How did Swami Vivekananda become acquainted with the Salvationists, as they preferred to be called? And what was the “split” that the reporter referred to? Let’s take a look at the genesis and early history of this charismatic organization to find out.

## Salvation Army History

The history of the Salvation Army is in large part the story of its founder William Booth and his family. In 1842 William, aged thirteen, went to work for a pawnbroker in his village near Nottingham, England. Daily contact with workingmen pawning valuables to support their families became a first-person experience after William’s father passed away a year later. To make matters even worse, the potato blight struck in 1845 causing famine throughout the British Isles and Europe.

Where could William turn but to religion? He joined the Methodist church and worked for a time as a lay preacher in London. In 1855 he married Catherine Mumford, a temperance activist who later also became a charismatic preacher. In the 1860s the Booths struck out on their own and opened the Christian Revival Society in London’s East End, one of many organizations mixing social service with religion.

All through the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution had left British cities with patchworks of tenements surrounding factories. The residents in these areas had much more access to pubs than to churches, and William decided that the most fruitful preaching would be done in the open air targeting the working class. He developed a forceful preaching style with simple theology accompanied by marches, music, and singing to enhance visibility. Converts were enlisted to make more converts and the organization grew

rapidly with over 50 Corps by 1878 when the name was changed to The Salvation Army. Uniforms, ranks, and a flag added to popular appeal among young adults. Women were empowered to preach and were promoted to high ranks in the Army.

As the Salvationists experienced rapid growth in England, General Booth decided to expand abroad. In the 1880s, his children and their spouses led the charge in Canada, the United States, Australia, South Africa, and India.

The first contingent of Salvationists to land in Bombay was led by Major Frederick Tucker, aged 29, formerly of the Indian Civil Service. Major Tucker carried on the Army's high-visibility activities despite opposition from the British government in India. He quickly realized that the most fertile ground for seeking converts was among villagers of low caste and that the confidence of these people could be gained only by adopting their lifestyle. Accordingly, he and all European officers who followed adopted native dress, took new names, and learned local languages. Reports of successful conversions reached England, and General Booth heartily accepted Major Tucker's tactics as this open letter shows:

**27 August 1886**

My Dear Comrades,

...Here I may remind you, that perhaps in no other country will there be a louder call, and a wider opportunity, for the display of that principle of adaptation which is a fundamental principle with The Army everywhere. In order to conquer you must stoop, becoming with the Apostle all things to all men, in order that you may win them to your Master. This must mean, if anything at all, that to the Indians you must be Indians....

Go, my comrades, and pray and look about you, and thus acquaint yourselves with Indian modes of thought and feeling and action, and then adapt yourselves to them, so far as such adaptation shall be consistent with the doctrines of the Bible and the principles of The Army.

You will succeed! ...Believe me,  
Your affectionate General,  
William Booth<sup>2</sup>

In April 1888, incoming Commissioner Booth-Tucker demonstrated his remarkable commitment to India by showing up for his London wedding to the General's daughter Emma, barefoot and wearing a *dhoti* under his red Salvation Army jacket!

However, the General's principle of adaptation was found impracticable in America. Whereas adapting to local standards in India meant *increasing* austerity, in America it meant *decreasing* it, and this ultimately led to the "split" that Swami Vivekananda referred to while talking to the Boston reporter.

How Did Swami Vivekananda Meet the Salvationists?

In addition to the interview quoted above, Swami Vivekananda made two other recorded remarks about the Salvation Army. These give us hints about where and when he became acquainted with the Salvationists. Consider this letter written to Mrs. G. W. Hale a few days after his first arrival in New York:

10 April 1894

Dear Mother,

I just now received your letter. I have the greatest regard for the Salvationists; in fact, they and the Oxford Mission gentlemen are the only Christian missionaries for whom I have any regard at all. They live with the people, as the people, and for the people of India. Lord bless them.

...Yours obediently,

Vivekananda<sup>3</sup>

We conclude that Swami Vivekananda met or at least observed Salvation Army workers in India before he came to America.

<sup>2</sup> Commissioner F. Booth Tucker, *Muktifauj, or, Forty Years with the Salvation Army in India and Ceylon*, Salvationist Pub. Ltd., London, 1923, xv - xix.

<sup>3</sup> *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 9, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1997, 17.

## India

**November 15, 1882**

Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by Rakhal and several other devotees, came to Calcutta in a carriage and called for M. at the school where he was teaching. Then they all set out for the Maidan. Sri Ramakrishna wanted to see the Wilson Circus.<sup>4</sup>

A few weeks before Sri Ramakrishna saw Wilson's Circus, Major Tucker's platoon arrived in Calcutta. He met Keshab Chandra Sen at this time, and, on January 22, 1883, he led a prayer meeting attended by 3,000 persons in Calcutta—in Wilson's tent!<sup>5</sup>

A major agenda item of the Salvation Army was temperance. Accordingly, during this visit to Calcutta, a grog shop was "attacked," meaning that Army officers took turns walking back and forth outside the shop and reminding customers about the evils of alcohol. Reportedly, the shop owner's income dropped Rs. 10 in a single day.

These facts establish that Swami Vivekananda, then known as Narendra, was in the same locality as the Salvationists from the beginning of their work in India. We imagine that he was aware that a new Christian group had arrived. However, in 1882, the Salvation Army was in its infancy in India. Writing to Mrs. Hale in 1894, Swami Vivekananda made it clear that he knew that Salvationists in India "live with the people." So, he must have also observed the workings of the Salvation Army at a later date.

In the following decade, the Salvation Army in India solidified its modus operandi—creating converts in villages. Large contingents of reinforcements reached Ceylon and India in 1886 and 1888. General Booth visited India from December 1891 to January 1892, and spurred vigorous missionary activity in western India. Swami Vivekananda was

<sup>4</sup> Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1992, 154.

<sup>5</sup> Tucker, op. cit. 115ff.



known to be in Baroda (now Vadodara) in Gujarat in April 1892,<sup>6</sup> and this coincides exactly with a series of boom marches, later referred to as *The Gujarat Revival* in Salvation Army history. The name came from the colloquial meaning of boom: a period of intense activity, as in “the diamond boom in South Africa.” The boom marches were “soul booms in India.” A large group of officers would travel and preach together, and one by one stay with the people who converted to Christianity to mentor and support them. When the last officer had been stationed, the march ended. After Gujarat, the campaign for converts shifted south to Travancore a few months before the Swami’s arrival there. Again, we have located Swami Vivekananda and the Salvationists in the same time and place but have no proof of how they interacted.

### England

Swami Vivekananda spent the majority of his first visit to England in the fall of 1895 with Mr. E. T. Sturdy in Reading, and for a month in rented lodgings on Oakley Street in the West End of London. As we saw above, Salvation Army work in London was concentrated in the East End, so this was not an obvious opportunity for the Swami to interact with Salvationists.

Swami Vivekananda’s second recorded remark about the Salvationists appeared about a year later. Goodwin was with him in London at that time, so verbatim transcripts of his lectures are available. In “Vedic Religious Ideals” he compares the relationship between Buddhism and Vedanta to that between the Salvation Army and mainstream Christianity:

“And even now it is a patent fact how much Hindus have helped to build Christian churches, and how much readiness there is to help them. There never has been bloodshed. Even heterodox religions that have come out of India have been likewise affected; for instance, Buddhism.

Buddhism is a great religion in some respects, but to confuse Buddhism with Vedanta is without meaning; anyone may mark just the difference that exists between Christianity and the Salvation Army. There are great and good points in Buddhism, but these great points fell into hands which were not able to keep them safe.”<sup>7</sup>

In this case, Swami Vivekananda used previous knowledge of the Salvationists to make a point which his British audience would readily understand.

### America

The events that Swami Vivekananda discussed with the reporter in Boston were centered near the Salvation Army headquarters in New York City. The timing and location of the Swami’s work in New York again place him in close proximity to Salvation Army activity.

Swami Vivekananda’s first stay in New York was in the spring of 1894. At that time, he made initial contacts including with Mr. Leon Landsberg who would turn out to be a central (and sometimes difficult) figure in the Swami’s work. Swami Vivekananda returned to New York briefly at the end of June and stayed with Mr. Landsberg at the Hall of Universal Brotherhood (run by the Theosophical Society) at 144 Madison Avenue.

Swami Vivekananda’s next stay in New York was almost continuous from January to June 1895. At the beginning of this stretch, Mr. Landsberg rented rooms for them around the corner from the Theosophical Society at 54 West 33rd St. The neighborhood was nicknamed “Tenderloin” because the New York City Police who patrolled there received so many bribes that they could afford the most expensive steak for dinner every night! This was indeed a locale which the Salvation Army would target.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> CW 1:349.

<sup>8</sup> For a description of how Swami Vivekananda’s classes flourished despite the location: M.L. Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1985, chapter 1.

In that same year the Salvationists occupied a massive new headquarters building at 120 West 14th St., a little over one mile downtown from the Swami’s lodging-cum-classroom. General Booth himself was present in New York in February 1895 at the end of his tour of Canada and the U.S.

From the context given by the Boston reporter, Salvation Army activities were highly visible with outdoor marches, music, open-air meetings, and street-corner preaching. The neighborhood where the Swami lived in 1895 was a plausible area for such activities.

### What Was the “Split” in the Army Ranks?

The Salvation Army had enlisted 30,000 followers in the U.S. in the sixteen years before Swami Vivekananda commented about the “split.” General Booth’s second son, Ballington, and daughter-in-law Maud, had led this rapid growth since 1887 and had recently become American citizens. Adapting the Army to American ways had meant softening of the standards imposed in England, and General Booth wanted to re-Anglicize the movement. After his tour of America and Canada (where his third son Herbert was Commander) in 1894-95, he sent trusted English officers to America. Early in 1896 the General ordered Ballington to relinquish command and return to England with a deadline of March 31, 1896; he refused. His youngest sister Eva was dispatched from London to intervene, with little effect. Commissioner and Mrs. Booth-Tucker were reassigned from India to the U.S. to take charge; Emma arrived in New York just four days before the deadline.

In that turbulent month of March 1896, Ballington formed his own organization now known as the Volunteers of America. A large number of Salvation Army officers and soldiers showed their loyalty by following him to the Volunteers. Separating the two organizations took some legal work as Army funds had

<sup>6</sup> *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 8, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1992, 286.

been used to finance mortgages for the Booths and other officers. The headquarters building on West 14th St. was also deeded in Ballington Booth's name. However, he willingly surrendered the deeds to all properties in his name including his residence in Montclair, NJ.

There were significant differences between the Volunteers and the Army. Primary was the fact that whereas the Salvation Army was itself a religion, members of the Volunteers of America were expected to continue attending their own churches. Thus, social services could be provided with no question of converting the beneficiaries. Officers within the Volunteers were elected, so the kind of nepotism practiced by General Booth never took hold. Basic amenities of middle-class American life like bicycles and carriages were allowed.

The "split" became national news, so Swami Vivekananda could have followed the rapidly unfolding events from Detroit where he spent the two weeks prior to his Boston interview.

### Further Questions

In his brief interview with the reporter from the *Boston Advertiser*, Swami Vivekananda touched on several interesting points beyond the scope of this article. For example, he mentioned "A Sannyasin cannot belong to any religion.... I have

founded no sect." And "just as soon as religion becomes an organization it becomes in danger."

This is consistent with what he had written to Swami Abhayananda in 1895: "We have no organization, nor want to build any. Each one is quite independent to teach, quite free to preach whatever he or she likes."<sup>9</sup>

However, on May 1, 1897, in India he said, "No great cause can succeed without an organisation."<sup>10</sup> Then what kind of organization should a Vedanta Society be? What level of authority did he give his American disciples like Landsberg to teach in their own way? What kind of interchange did he envision between India and Western countries? One hopes that other researchers will take up these topics.

### Conclusion

Both the Salvation Army and the Volunteers of America are still active today. Their brief interactions with our hero Swami Vivekananda gave us an opportunity to learn more about his experiences in India and America as well as highlighting further questions regarding the evolution of his thought about religious organizations.

<sup>9</sup> *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1995, 18.  
<sup>10</sup> CW 6:476.



I don't want to brag, but I finished the puzzle in under a week, but it said 2 to 4 years on the box.

*At dawn, I meditate in my heart on the truth of the radiant inner Self.*

*This true Self is Pure Being, Awareness, and Joy, the transcendent goal of the great sages.*

*The eternal witness of the waking, dream and deep sleep states.*

*I am more than my body, mind and emotions, I am that undivided Spirit.*

*At dawn, I worship the true Self that is beyond the reach of mind and speech,*

*By whose grace, speech is even made possible,*

*This Self is described in the scriptures as "Not this, Not this".*

*It is called the God of the Gods, It is unborn, undying, one with the All.*

*At dawn, I salute the true Self that is beyond all darkness, brilliant as the sun,*

*The infinite, eternal reality, the highest.*

*On whom this whole universe of infinite forms is superimposed.*

*It is like a snake on a rope. The snake seems so real, but when you pick it up, it's just a rope. This world is ever-changing, fleeting, but this eternal Light is real and everlasting.*

—Sri Shankaracharya

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# THE SEERS OF TRUTH

SWAMI APARANANDA

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In order to empower people who are desirous to find out the origin of cosmic life or cosmic intelligence, the living power of the cosmos, many brave souls have attempted to lay bare for the world visions of the Supreme, the secrets of human nature. They have been able to shred the veil that conceals the Real person, because these brave souls know that behind matter, lives the Real Divine Nature of the human being, which no evil can tarnish or spoil, no lust can destroy, no fire can burn, nor water wet, no heat can dry, nor death kill; and to them this true nature of being is the One Reality. This true nature is Bliss Itself, Consciousness Itself, Intelligence Itself and Existence Itself. Before Its splendors, the visible universe of experience melts away. The individual self becomes the Universal Soul which has been existing throughout eternity, the inexpressible One within the depth of the heart!

The enlightened ones claim that this mind has a higher nature—known as Divine nature. There are many hidden truths which an enlightened and intelligent person can perceive and experience, and it is open to all! Anyone at any time can experience it.

Common questions raised are, how can the Infinite one, the effulgent one, express Itself through the body-mind organism having become finite? Is it possible to perceive consciousness in and through the actions and activities of the body-mind organism, or experience consciousness itself? What purpose can the creator fulfill in His own creation?

A provisional answer can be found which runs thus, 'This is the mystery of the universe. This is the secret of creation'.

Most people live within the perimeter of a sense-bound life. They function solely in the reality of the visible universe. All knowledge, all experiences, all feelings, all emotions belong to the internal nature of being! It means that machines never made mankind happy and never

can. Happiness is always in the mind. Modern science in search of truth has discovered that the visible gross reality is undoubtedly founded on the finer aspect of material reality including fine particles and forces. After knowing this truth, how much importance can be given to the material universe?

Only a person who is the lord of one's mind can be happy. Therefore, the study of the internal nature of human beings is an essential part of human life. By following the path of yoga, the human mind can develop restraining power over one's emotions and wrong impulses, and then a human being can dive deep within the depths of the mind and attain the concentrated state of mind. Having attained the concentrated state of mind, the mystery of the universe is revealed and the human mind achieves life's fulfillment, the awareness of God-consciousness is experienced while living within the physical body! It is a wonderful achievement that only a human being can get. The one enlightened in this manner claims that when one experiences the Divine consciousness existing within every living being, in every object – animate and inanimate, only Divine consciousness exists as Reality – the visible universe of experience disappears. The individual self discovers that it has been the same divine conscious being existing all through eternity and thus transcends all dual experiences.

We are not so much concerned about people who are non-believers of God, soul, after life, reincarnation, doctrine of karma, and religious life. What we want is to present before others is the fundamental truths underlying the visible universe of experience, as experienced by the enlightened souls of the world. The ancient seers of truths boldly declared before the world – you are all the children of immortal bliss. By knowing that alone, all darkness and all confusion are removed. The individual self becomes aware of its Divine Nature—awareness of

divine consciousness, and this experience and knowledge is the birthright of every being.

The seers of truth have pointed out that in essence, life force, cosmic intelligence and divine consciousness are the three expressions of the Supreme Being. In normal life, their expressions are coming in the form of knowing, feeling and willpower which are the functions of consciousness in a living being. The Divine consciousness has become individualized through an inscrutable power of the Supreme Being, called Maya. The transcendental consciousness, through a series of Its own changes by Its own power, has become individualized, getting a gross physical body, fine body and causal body and experiencing these wonderful creations in different forms. When the physical body perishes, the individual self will take up another body and so on it will continue until the individual self becomes aware of Divine consciousness. All this belongs to the internal nature of humans. The different mental thoughts, ideas, are known as different mental modes.

There are many hidden truths lying within the depths of the human mind. Through proper culture, those dormant faculties can be roused. Slowly and gradually the mental activities can be controlled by following mental exercises and disciplines. It is a fact that from childhood children are familiar with certain mental and emotional feelings such as love, anger, and fear. As the children grow older, there is an inner transformation of childhood to youth unconsciously. This inner transformation takes place within the internal nature due to some internal laws. Those internal laws function in the mind on different planes of space, beginning with the physical plane of space where gross objects exist. Then there is the mental plane of space where mental thoughts and ideas exist, and finally there is the innermost plane of space, the plane of spiritual space, where spiritual truths exist. Each of

the planes of space has its own grandeur, power and so on.

Just as the experience of a snake is superimposed on a rope and the rope is the basis or support of the experience of the snake, and without the support there is no existence of the snake; exactly in the same way, the entire cosmos is founded upon Divine consciousness. And this is the mystery of creation. These manifested forms of different spaces are not mere imaginations but are revealed Truths experienced by the seers of Truths. Not only have they formulated the ways, the paths to arrive at these Truths, but also discovered the most important truth about a living being that his or her inner self is the eternal one, it is divine, uncreated, and immortal.

“Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature—external and internal.”<sup>1</sup> According to our living conditions, our mind and intelligence may not accept this truth immediately, but this internal nature of a human can be demonstrated. The human mind can be cultivated in such a way that it can grasp this divine truth while living in the physical body.

What is needed in life is an unshakable faith in after-life, loving devotion to the Divine Being, strong determination to pursue the divine truth, and loving

sympathy for others. One should practice meditation on the Divine Being and show respect and reverence to the great souls of the world. The next question that results from the previous discussion is, what about the people with whom I am associating every now and then, my family and communities, above all my obligatory duties and responsibilities of life? In order to pursue the Divine Truth am I to give up everything in my life? Not at all! The power that works in every life, in every moment, is the expression of universal love, the binding force of every life. Working in various ways is nothing but Divine love. In the midst of the tremendous activities of life the outlook should be changed to pursue the Divine Truth and to express the Divine love in and through our relation to the world. And this should be the spiritual practice and discipline to follow.

In the beginning we are to look upon the Divine Being as our ideal of the Lord. This Divine Being is of inexpressible love and joy. Naturally, the more our love towards the Divine Being deepens, the more we will feel the expression of Divine love and joy in our life, and the ordinary world of name and form will be transformed to that of Divine love and oneness. This is the real wonder of all wonders in the cosmos! In it, one can find real heroism, courage and moral strength. This is not a mere theoretical doctrine of love, but an actual realization that the Divinity that has become many is indeed One!



1 From the essay *Morality and Its Foundation on Spiritual Truths* by Swami Aparananda p.15 to 20.

*One must do some work. Through work alone one can remove the bondage of work, not by avoiding work. Total detachment comes later on. One should not be without work even for a moment.*  
—The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

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# TALES WITH NINE LIVES

## WHAT LENDS STORIES THEIR STAYING POWER

### — PART II —

DR. JAYENDRINA SINGHA RAY

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A tale that escapes the confines of time and space is eternal. In Part I of the article *Tales with Nine Lives: What Lends Stories their Staying Power?* I discussed two key elements that determine a tale's staying power: 1. recurrence & lack of resolution; and 2. familiarity & universals. I argued that tales that thrive are ones that capture recurrent themes and motifs. Additionally, I contended that recurrence is closely tied to our inability to find a definitive explanation for existential questions that human civilizations have nursed through eons without finding a conclusive answer to. The second point about familiarity and universals was an extension of the first, with the difference that it discussed a tale's success through the optics of an effective application of familiar archetypes. In Part II of this article, I will be touching upon the other three elements that determine a tale's staying power, namely: provokability, applicability, and advertisement.



#### Provokability

By 'provokability', I refer to the ability of a tale to incite an idea or a new thought in the reader. Etymologically, the word "provoke" comes from the Latin *provocare*—meaning, to "call forth, challenge."<sup>1</sup> A tale that disturbs the status quo/predominant thought processes of a society's socio-political institutions, and provokes people into questioning the mundane and obvious, is powerful enough to live on. Here, by provokability I do not refer to the tropes used by a text/its author to grab the reader's attention, but to a text's ability to challenge the reader into reviewing one's modes of thinking and being. Take for instance the "Hymn of Creation" in the *Rig Veda*. As provocative as the ideas of nonexistence, nondeath and non-duality are, the hymn's ending refuses its listener the finality of an answer by challenging its own assertions. Let's examine a few lines from the Hymn:<sup>2</sup>



*THEN was not non-existent nor existent: there was no realm of air, no sky beyond it...  
Death was not then, nor was there aught immortal: no sign was there, the day's  
and night's divider.  
That One Thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature: apart from it was nothing  
whatsoever.*

The hymn starts by provoking the listener/reader to think—what is "not non-existent nor existent"? For those conditioned to perceive the world through dual modes of thinking (good/bad; male/female; life/death)—how can something be neither existent nor non-existent, but still exist? How can something be deathless yet not immortal *or* without breath yet breathing? These contradictions that challenge dual, socially-conditioned modes of thinking—that irritate the listener by its denial to offer ONE definitive, easy answer is an example of intellectual provocation.<sup>3</sup> Thereby, this idea recurs throughout philosophical, literary and scientific texts. Now, let us look at the other provocative element in this hymn captured best in the following lines:

*He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it,  
Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not.*

While the first few stanzas of the hymn give the reader a sense of the author's authority over the subject of discussion, the last few lines negate both the authority of the author and that of the creator—"he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not." This act of forming and negating authorship (both of the author of the hymn and the author of the universe) is disturbing as it provokes the listener/reader into breaking out of definitive and dual modes of thinking.

Another example of provokability can be found in the text of the *Mahabharata*—composed between the third and fifth millennia BCE. Though I call it a text, the epic is a diverse amalgamation of texts and authorships—and thereby provides ample instances

1 Source: [www.etymonline.com/word/provoke](http://www.etymonline.com/word/provoke)

2 Tr. Griffith, Ralph T.H. *The Hymns of the Rigveda*. 2004, p 633.

3 For purposes of simplicity, in this article, I will be classifying provokability into three distinct types, namely: intellectual, ethical and textual/ideological. Note that there may be instances of overlaps between these types or textual provocations that go beyond these categories.

of Intellectual, ideological, and ethical provocation that have aged well in terms of their relevancy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Gender-alteration, homosexual love, motherhood outside wedlock, surrogacy, property feuds, political ploys, war strategies, existential questions—issues that are relevant to the current times—have been addressed in the *Mahabharata*. But beyond their relevance (archetypes/universals) and applicability (which I shall discuss later in this article), what makes this text unforgettable is its penchant for provocation. In other words, the *Mahabharata* is a good example of a text that provokes the reader/listener into exploring the possibilities of how far people and human emotions can go.



Let's take the story of Ganga as a discussion point. While the qualities of motherhood have surfaced through different characters in different tales embedded in the *Mahabharata*, Ganga's motherhood provokes the listener into accepting a different form of it. Ganga is a river nymph meant to live life on her own terms: she travels, learns, flows despite geological obstacles as it is in her nature to be an unbridled woman. When King Shantanu marries her, and thereupon—through the institution of marriage—domesticates a free-flowing feminine force, Ganga dictates a non-negotiable aspect of her marriage to Shantanu—he shall never stop her from actions she deems necessary.<sup>4</sup> The day he does, Ganga would leave him. Shantanu accepts this term, and they begin a conventional married life. However, Ganga leaves him the day he questions her decisions.<sup>5</sup> In his attempt to save their son Devavrata (later known as Bhishma), Shantanu fails his promise to Ganga thereby leading her to leave him. As fascinating and complicated this story is, it provokes the reader into thinking about marital vows and motherhood. Let's discuss motherhood here briefly as an example of ethical provocation. Ganga both negates and upholds what is socially or instinctually defined as the natural duties of a mother. In her essay "Maternal Thinking," Sara Ruddick notes, "Maternal practice is governed by (at least) three interests... preservation, growth, and acceptability. Preservation is the most invariant and primary of the three." The question then is, can a mother act against this very principle of preservation? Contrast this to Gandhari's desperate attempts at preserving the life of her son Duryodhana despite knowing he could not win against the Pandavas.<sup>6</sup> In fact, we need not refer to Gandhari to show two contrasting facets of motherhood between Gandhari and Ganga—the preserver vs. the destroyer—but Ganga herself. While on the one hand she challenges the preservatory principle of motherhood, on the other her act of nurturing Devavrata/Bhishma<sup>7</sup> until he reaches a mature age reinstates the instinctual/social duty of a mother to nurture and preserve her creation.<sup>8</sup> This is the perfect example of ethical provocation, as the reader is compelled to question what motherhood constitutes.

Based on this etymological characteristic, provokability can be thought of as an irritant—an idea that goes against the grain.

Now that we have discussed intellectual and ethical provocations, let's consider a few examples of ideological and textual provocations. A seminal text of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels was the *Communist Manifesto*. The book makes for an example of ideological provocation and the subsequent dominance of a theory across geographical boundaries. Besides the rhetoric of urgency, kairos, or timing, did play a key role in establishing the text's dominance, for this was a time when Europe

4 "I shall be your obedient queen, O lord of the earth. But if perhaps I do something, whether it pleases or displeases you, O king, I must never be stopped nor harshly spoken to. If you will act thus I shall live with you, sire. But once you stop me or scold me, I shall surely forsake you." (qtd. in Brodbeck, Simon Pearse. *The Mahabharata Patriline Gender, Culture, and the Royal Hereditary*. 2017)

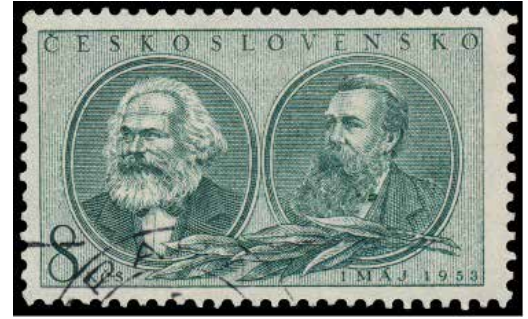
5 "She [Ganga] said, 'I was loving you [Shantanu] and living with you and I gave birth eight times without objecting. You promised me you would never ask me why I was doing anything...' Then she told him about the eight Vasus who had tried to steal Kamdhenu from Vasishta and been cursed by him to incarnate on Earth and her promise to liberate them. She said, 'Seven Vasus were only helpers so their punishment was to be born as human beings and after a few minutes be free again. But this one was the actual culprit who has to live a long life.'" (*The Wisdom Teachings of Harish Johari on the Mahabharata*. Ed. Wil Geraets. 2011)

6 "There came a time when her son Duryodhana was going to Kurukshetra to fight the battle of the Mahabharata against the Pandavas. Gandhari knew that Duryodhana could not conquer his brothers. She decided to do him a favour—to look at her son with her eyes [note here, Gandhari had spent all her life blindfolded owing to a vow]. The belief was that her glance would make Duryodhana's body invincible. She asked Duryodhana to come naked before her. Duryodhana did appear naked though with a loin cloth on his private parts. Gandhari's glance did turn Duryodhana's whole body undefeatable. She, however, lamented the idiocy of her son. He did not like to be seen fully naked. As a result, Duryodhana's body under the waist became his Achilles' heel." (Pathak, Dev Nath. *In Defence of the Ordinary: Everyday Awakenings*. 2021, p. 26.)

7 Ganga: "Now I am taking him with me because no father can take care of a child like the mother can. I promise I will bring him back to you when he has completed his education and can take care of himself... Then the lady stepped into the river and disappeared with the baby." (*The Wisdom Teachings of Harish Johari on the Mahabharata*. Ed. Wil Geraets. 2011)

8 In her essay, "Maternal Thinking," Ruddick notes, "Interest in fostering the physical, emotional, and intellectual growth of her child soon supplements a mother's interest in its preservation. The human child is typically capable of complicated emotional and intellectual development; the human adult is radically different in kind from the child it once was. A woman who mothers may be aided or assaulted by the help and advice of fathers, teachers, doctors, moralists, therapists, and others who have an interest in fostering and shaping the growth of her child. Although rarely given primary credit, a mother typically holds herself, and is held by others, responsible for the malfunction of the growth process from early on. Certainly, by the middle years of childhood, a mother is governed by a third interest: she must shape natural growth in such a way that her child becomes a sort of adult that she can appreciate and others can accept."

was undergoing industrialization—the economy was changing and there was a population boom. A manifesto that grew out of these socio-economic conditions and addressed the masses through its focus on economic imbalances between resource owners (bourgeoisie) and the working classes (proletariat) was both topical and relatable. But an important aspect of the text was its ability to induce people into thinking against/beyond the existing socio-economic power structures and national borders.<sup>9</sup> The text was violent and provocative in its proposal of “the most radical rupture with traditional ideas” and a “forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions” (*CM*)—the displacement of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat,<sup>10</sup> an end to division of labor, and abolition of private property. It was a clarion call for laborers to reimagine a new society where they could enact the role of the power wielder—what Weydemeyer called the “dictatorship of the proletariat.”



Moving on to an example of textual provocation, in 1988 the Indian English author Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* found itself banned in more than 12 countries. In the text, Rushdie provides a portrait of pre-Islamic Arabia that many found blasphemous. Copies of the book were burnt in Britain, several bookstores selling these copies were bombed, and the author had a death sentence issued against him by the Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989. A 2022 article in *The New Yorker*<sup>11</sup> claims that Khomeini did not read Salman Rushdie’s book before issuing a fatwah against the author. However, the reaction to the text was so acute that over 30 years later, in 2022, Rushdie was stabbed multiple times during a public lecture. The *Satanic Verses* is a modern-day example of textual provocation—so much so that reactions to it were not necessarily contingent upon reading the book. While one may argue that literary censorship can hasten the popularity of a text, we need to question what about a book can provoke even non-readers to react violently to not only the book at hand but also its author. Provokability, in addition to the consequent censorship it calls forth, is a powerful element in determining the shelf life of a text.

### Applicability

Books are generous with ideas. However, only some of these ideas are effective enough to ensure the longevity of a book. In this section, I argue that a text’s ability to survive is dependent on how applicable its ideas/concepts are to social realities across time and space—these ideas can be political, scientific, social amongst many others.



*The Art of Rhetoric*, by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE), is a text that informs writing and communication strategies in the West till date. The word “rhetoric” refers to the art of an orator. In ancient Greece, freelance teachers—known as sophists—were hired to teach young men in Athens how to argue/persuade in public in order to enhance the latter’s chances of entering political life. Aristotle’s teacher Plato was highly critical of rhetoric<sup>12</sup> as he considered it an ingenuine/manipulated version of the truth. While Aristotle drew his inspiration from Plato’s discussions on and criticisms of rhetoric, the former rebranded rhetoric or the art of persuasion in his treatise as an effective aspect of public discourse.<sup>13</sup> Aristotle identified a few means of persuasion in the *Art of Rhetoric*, and these are Ethos, Pathos,

and Logos. Ethos refers to credibility, it is in the character of the speaker; pathos is the emotions the speech can arouse in the audience; and logos is the use of logical reasoning to convince the listener.<sup>14</sup> These techniques of persuasion encoded by Aristotle,

9 *Communist Manifesto*: “The workingmen have no country... Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.”

10 *Communist Manifesto*: “The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.”

11 Wright, Robin. 2022. “Ayatollah Khomeini Never Read Salman Rushdie’s Book” <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/ayatollah-khomeini-never-read-salman-rushdies-book>

12 *Gorgias and Phaedrus*

13 “Many historians also argue that Aristotle wrote *Rhetoric* in order to defend the subject from other philosophers’ criticisms. In *The Clouds*, Aristophanes, another fourth-century BCE philosopher and playwright, condemns those who utilize rhetoric; he blames rhetoricians for trying to undermine justice by creating semblances of credibility through pretty language. Plato also scorned rhetoric, believing political speech to be nothing more than flattery crafted to hoodwink unaware listeners... Although Aristotle recognizes rhetoric can be used by people and for causes that lack integrity, he advocates its value as a tool of public discourse through presenting its complexity and potential as a method that engages both reason and emotion. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle asserts and seeks to prove that rhetoric, contrary to his peers’ opinions, is a valid technique.”

14 Aristotle. *The Art of Rhetoric*. [https://www.google.com/books/edition/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Rhetoric/FHaVEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=aristotle%27s+rhetoric&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Art_of_Rhetoric/FHaVEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=aristotle%27s+rhetoric&printsec=frontcover)



along with other Greek concepts like Telos (clearly defined purpose) and Kairos (opportune timing of an argument) are ideas that continue to influence oral and written communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Let's discuss the application of some of these strategies in a 20<sup>th</sup> Century marketing campaign.

The father of public relations, Edward Bernays, made an effective use of Pathos, Ethos and kairos in a campaign for a cigarette brand called Lucky Strikes. In need of expanding their market, the tobacco group approached Bernays to help sell cigarettes to women. This was not particularly an easy task in the America of the 1920s, as there was a stigma attached to women smoking. As noted by "Digital History", "Women were given the option to smoke in private, but, even then it was still tabooed by American society due to its unfeminine nature: indeed, smoking by women in North America and Europe had long been associated with loose morals and dubious sexual behavior. The women that were smoking were perceived as whores or procuresses, or it was a symbol of prostitution and Victorian erotic photography. Only some rebellious women were willing to go against the social stigma in the early twentieth century."<sup>15</sup>



To find female consumers in this social context required an effective strategy. What Bernays did, therefore, was tap into the other predominant sentiment of the times (Kairos)—the growing need for women's emancipation. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment granted women in America the right to vote in 1920.<sup>16</sup> This was a time that also saw female liberation marches, a rising awareness of gender-based discriminations between men and women, the first Miss America pageant (1921), and a swimsuit revolution<sup>17</sup> that allowed women more freedom of choice with swimsuit design otherwise regulated through beach policing. Bernays weaved this larger historical context into the favorable narrative of female smokers by calling the cigarettes "torches of freedom." In 1929, he hired some female socialites to light these "torches of freedom" at an Easter Parade in New York city. Following this, Bernays presented this act to the press as a protest against gender inequality.<sup>18</sup> Though Bernays never characterized this campaign as one informed directly by the principles of Aristotelian rhetoric, we can see the larger application of key persuasion techniques like Pathos (evoking an emotion in the audience); Ethos (choosing educated elegant women to light the torches of freedom); and Kairos (timing the argument/campaign in favor of the times) in this campaign.<sup>19</sup>

A text's applicability, in most cases, may not be overt since ideas travel and metamorphose outside the tangible body of the text. One may argue that rhetoric is a subjective lens through which I have decided to read Bernays' campaign or one may decide to read Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from the Birmingham Jail" or a Superbowl advertisement. However, I'd like to contend that even when applying rhetoric as an optics to read the persuasive techniques of any of these texts, one is consciously/subconsciously informed by ideas drawn from a 4<sup>th</sup> Century Aristotelian text—and those it succeeded—like Plato's criticism of rhetoric. A text that contains critical ideas applicable and relevant to real life situations, across time and geographies, is one that has a longer shelf life.

### Advertisement

Many a time, patrons, sponsors, awards/accolades play a strong role in catapulting a text or idea to fame and longevity. In the history of Western music, German composer Felix Mendelssohn played a key role in reviving Bach, who was otherwise forgotten.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in the world of literature, King James' patronage of Shakespeare and patenting of the King's Men theatrical company helped Shakespearean plays gain popularity. Additionally, as noted by Dr. Paul Edmondson, Head of Research for the Shakespeare

15 <https://biblio.uottawa.ca/omeka2/jmccutcheon/exhibits/show/american-women-in-tobacco-adve/torches-of-freedom-campaign>

16 <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/19th-amendment>

17 Hancock Historical Museum: "Young women in the 1920s embraced the newfound freedom to enjoy swimming and sunbathing on now coed beaches and in a more sensible garment but older generations were not comfortable with these racy new girls and their modern, revealing fashion. To prevent women showing off too much of their physique, many city governments passed ordinances that controlled the length of women's suits, the size of the arm openings, and the deepness of the neckline. Volunteer police forces were created at some beaches, such as the Sheriffettes in Rockaway Beach, New York, to enforce the dress code. Women were subjected to their suits being measured in front of other swimmers to be sure they met the requirements, such as bottoms being no shorter than six inches above the knee." <https://hancockhistoricalmuseum.org/i-love-the-1920s/womens-swimwear-in-the-twenties/>

18 *Biography of an Idea: The Founding Principles of Public Relations*. Edward L. Bernays. [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Biography\\_of\\_an\\_Idea/tFO2BgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Biography_of_an_Idea/tFO2BgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1)

19 In his book *Propaganda*, Bernays discusses the meaning of propaganda—"The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses" in a democratic society through "an organized effort to spread a particular belief or doctrine." While the torches of freedom campaign has been interpreted through the lens of propaganda, we cannot overlook the obvious rhetorical influences on manipulative strategies used by Bernays in the torches of freedom campaign.

20 <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200156436/>



Birthplace Trust (SBT), Shakespeare's global appeal can also be attributed to the British Empire—as it exported Shakespearean plays to its colonies. In SBT's podcast discussing the reasons behind Shakespeare's popularity,<sup>21</sup> Dr. Elizabeth Dollimore traces the Empire's fascination with Shakespeare to the Romantic and Victorian eras when the playwright started being idolized (she calls it “Bardolatry”). As an example, Dollimore brings up the case of the Romantic poet John Keats, who is known to have carried around a small portrait of Shakespeare on holidays. She notes, “that kind of reverence...began with the Romantic poets and continued on into the Victorian era [when]...it got onto the curriculum and has stayed there ever since. Every person who goes through the education system in the UK is exposed to Shakespeare.”

Another example that comes to mind is Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (or *The Modern Prometheus*). While kairos (timing), besides other reasons, had a significant role to play in promoting the novel,<sup>22</sup> two elements of advertising also worked in its favor. First, the novel was published anonymously in 1818—with a preface by P.B. Shelley; second, the genesis story/rhetoric of Shelley's *Frankenstein* held powerful names in its scope—Lord Byron, P.B. Shelley, Polidori—all of who were a part of Mary Shelley's novel when it was first conceived. In fact, the novel begins with a reference to its story of origin: “in the environs of Geneva...in the evenings we crowded around a blazing wood fire...[with] two other friends (a tale from the pen of one of whom would be far more acceptable to the public than anything I can ever hope to produce).”

Negative publicity can also add to the enduring nature of a text. As discussed earlier, Salman Rushdie's novels, despite their literary merit like most of the texts discussed here, have also achieved recognition owing to the reception of and reaction to *Satanic Verses*. The novel's ability to offend people across an entire geographic spectrum, followed by the public condemnation of it led to a negative marketing that ironically sustained its shelf life.

In conclusion, a tale with nine lives is one that has a combination of all these elements, namely—recurrence & lack of resolution; familiarity; provokability; applicability; and advertisement interfusing to establish its relevance across time and space.

21 <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/podcasts/lets-talk-shakespeare/how-did-shakespeare-get-so-popular/>

22 The eighteenth century, also known as the Age of Reason, saw the onset of changing attitudes towards science. To quote Kathryn Harkup, “Science became the fashionable philosophy of the day...Societies were formed, not just in the capitals of Europe but in the provinces as well, where science was discussed and experiments performed. Coffee houses in London buzzed with the talk of recent discoveries in far-flung parts of the world.” (*Making the Monster: The Science Behind Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*). The novel's connection with the times/science is laid out at the very beginning in P.B. Shelley's reference to Erasmus Darwin in the Preface to *Frankenstein* which says, “The event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed by Dr. Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany, as not of impossible occurrence.”



I think I would like a job cleaning mirrors. It's just something I could really see myself doing

*On analyzing the ego, you will find that there is no real entity that you can call 'I'. (This) convinces one that the ultimate substance is God alone. When egotism drops away, Divinity manifests Itself.*

—Sri Ramakrishna

*God is one's very own. It is the eternal relationship. He is everyone's own. One realizes Him in proportion to the intensity of one's feelings for Him.*

—Sri Sarada Devi

*Cut out the word "help" from your mind. You cannot help; it is blasphemy! You worship. When you give a morsel of food to a dog, you worship the dog as God.*

—Swami Vivekananda

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# THE TREE OF LIFE

THERESA LORRAINE SHREFFLER

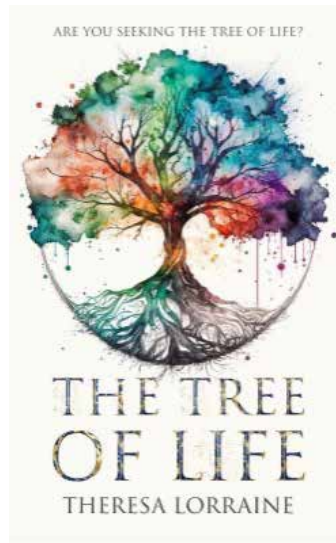
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Swami Vivekananda said, “The great lesson is that unity is behind all. Call it God, Love, Spirit. Allah, Jehovah, whatever you call this One, it is the same unity that animates all life from the lowest animal to the noblest man.”

Unity is behind all. And in Vedanta we believe in the harmony of religions. If unity exists, there is harmony. If harmony exists, there must be unity. And so it is through this observation of the harmony in nature that we glimpse the essential unity in all things. All things harmonize to One. And this is why the universe has order.

A year ago I came to the Vedanta Society in Seattle looking for a spiritual community to set down roots. As a child of the West, I had not heard of Vedanta before, but I already deeply believed in the underlying harmony of religions, which made it difficult for me to choose one. I was raised in an atheist family, and found my spirituality young through personal experience, and so some part of me always wished to remain free and independent of any institution. I was working on a book at the time, a memoir of my life and a research project that sought to connect the teachings of all the major religions. It was during the writing of this book that I came to the Vedanta Society in Seattle. This is where I met Swami Satyamayananda, and he encouraged me to explore *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and the works of Vivekananda, and their inspiration has continued to guide my work.

Two books have arisen from this project over the past year. The first, a memoir of my life entitled *Spiritual*, is a diary I have kept since I was twelve years old. It can be considered a firsthand account and primary source. As mentioned, I was raised in an atheist family, but when I was twelve years old, my mother died and my beliefs changed. I had a profound experience of unity. And so, this first book is a



journey of faith through trial and grief that explores the underlying unity in Life and in Spirit and in God. It is a diary I've kept over the past twenty-one years, from losing my parents as a young adult, to exploring different religions through stages of grief, to this overarching realization that in truth, I am not religious, and I can never be. I am not truly Vedantist, Christian, Buddhist, atheist, or agnostic. I am a human being. And in my heart of hearts, I am Love. And I truly believe that the story of being human is the mastery of the practice of love. And so, this memoir is a deeply human story, because it is about grief, and love, and growth, and *spirituality*. It's not a story about religion. It is the story of an atheist who had an experience that convinced her there is unity in Life. Nothing is separate from anything else. All things are One, and consciousness is not generated in the brain, but exists as a unifying, harmonizing force in nature, and that perfect Divine Consciousness is Love. We are spiritual beings, and spirituality is our birthright. We do not need to justify it.

The culmination of this first book, which has become its own separate work of nonfiction, is entitled *The Tree of Life*, because we've heard many people tell us there is unity in Life. This is the first

and the oldest teaching found in the *Rig Veda*: “Truth is one, sages call it by various names.” So, it's not enough to say all the religions are connected, because at a glance, they seem very different. And if we have a mind that focuses on differences and splitting hairs, it is easy to split a hair a hundred times. We can take One and split it into Infinity, and this is the basis of mathematics. So, there are people who refuse to let go of differences. We cling to them because really, we are all looking for Truth and we think we will learn how the world works by studying all the separate parts. But we miss the forest when we're staring at the trees. We must pull far back to see it. The only Truth to be found in this world is unity. To see Truth, we must see where these great world traditions intersect.

So, we know there is an essential underlying harmony in all religions. But what is that harmony? In *The Tree of Life* book, I build my thesis on three intersecting points:

1) The first point of intersection between world religions is the nature of God. This begins with understanding that God has many names, among them: Brahman, Allah, Jehovah, Tao, Self, Nirvana, Reality, Universe, Father, Mother, Kali, Great Spirit, or Olodumare. Of course, God has a million names, as many as we have traditions.

From this point onward, we can explore nondualism as taught by various traditions. By spiritual practice, we may find God inside, which leads us to the extraordinary experience of entering into the presence of Brahman and discovering the universal nature of Truth: Atman is Brahman. This idea is present in the Bible as well, as Christ tells us, “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you” and “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” In Buddhism, this is the state of nirvana, as the world is like a mirror, and when the Tathagata sees the Truth, he or she

becomes the Truth. This unity with the greater One is present as well in Taoism (by cultivating energy we attain the Tao), and in Kabbalah, Sufism, Yoruba, and Native American traditions. I have explored all of these in *The Tree of Life*.

2) My second point of intersection in *The Tree of Life* is the nature of liberation or *moksha*. As with the names of God, so has liberation been called many things by different teachers: enlightenment, salvation, realization, attaining the Tao, entering the garden of Truth, etc. Through the firsthand accounts of spiritual figures, we can observe and discern that these experiences are the same.

As Ramakrishna tells us, there are two kinds of perfect souls: those who draw water up from the well and attain liberation through hard work and those who are granted liberation by God's grace. And so, by studying the firsthand accounts of major prophets, gurus, saints, and world teachers, we can see how some have attained this realization through "drawing up water from the well," while others have received God's grace.

This was perhaps the most rewarding experience of writing this book, for we know there are many different branches and schools of thought prevalent in every religion. Buddhists don't agree on a single interpretation of enlightenment, and in Christianity as well there are strong disagreements over the nature of salvation. But there are many firsthand accounts written by different illumined figures who have entered into the presence of God and gained *moksha*. There is always the mention of an ocean, of the light or "illumination" of Knowledge, of vast love and bliss, a great sense of spiritual power pervading one's being, and God's presence coming into the heart. In the Upanishads, we know this as the unitive state. If we look beyond the cultural narrative of each religion, and train our eyes upon the individual descriptions of these experiences, and the aftereffects left upon the soul and the psyche, we can see that each experience of enlightenment or salvation is in alignment with one another. The

knowledge is the same. Their transformation is the same. And we know some of these liberated people go on to teach and liberate others. What one religion calls a prophet, another may call a manifestation of God, yet another may call a Buddha. So, in *The Tree of Life* book, I seek to tease out this string of Truth that connects all the beads.

3) Finally, as my third and final point of intersection, there is a symbol that points to this essential harmony underlying all faiths, and I found that symbol in the tree of life.

The tree of life is a universal symbol present in all religions. As a universal symbol, the various teachings linked to the tree of life are vast and sprawling, yet lead to a singular realization of unity. The smaller, individual self begins as a seed and through various world traditions and practices eventually the smaller self grows into the unitive Self, attaining liberation.

I'm sure some people reading this article are familiar with the name Carl Jung. He was one of the founding fathers of modern day psychology. He believed mankind had a collective consciousness and that archetypal symbols exist universally within the human psyche, present in our storytelling and customs, that can be interpreted the same across cultures. In this sense, the tree of life can be designated as a universal symbol for God since it represents the unity of creation and the culmination of the spiritual Self. The tree of life exists in every culture and religion—from atheism to indigenous belief systems as well. It is through the symbol of the tree of life that we know unity in diversity, and see how "the All" becomes "the One."

So where is the tree of life in Vedanta? In Vedanta, we have heard Ramakrishna called the *kalpataru* or the wish-fulfilling tree, because of his ability to bestow liberation upon others, and, as we know, liberation breaks the bonds of karma and grants eternal life. (January 1, 1886, is considered the day of self-revelation by Sri Ramakrishna and the day he granted us freedom from fear). So Ramakrishna

is the tree of life. And through his life, we can see the culmination of the spiritual Self.

The tree of life is also known in the *Bhagavad Gita* as the inverted tree, rooted in the pure light of Brahman, which is a metaphor for creation: physical reality is rooted in Consciousness. The material world is empty; light is the true ground upon which all of creation rests. Through the study of light, the scientific communities are coming to realize the same thing. Now universities are studying quantum biology, how the nature of light impacts physical processes in the body. What we have yet to scientifically confirm, but which we know through the firsthand accounts of these great spiritual teachers, is that light and Consciousness are deeply intertwined. Nature is not just rooted in light but in Consciousness.

Interestingly enough, the great Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi, who is a giant among Muslim philosophers, speaks as well about the tree of life in his iconic work, *The Tree of Being: Ode to the Perfect Man*. In his words, he tells us:

*Now I look upon the universe that surrounds us and think how each and everything came to be and try to solve its coded mysteries, and lo! I see that the whole universe is but a Tree.*

*A tree whose Light of Life came out of a seed shed when Allah said BE!*

*This seed has a single root. That root is the will of the creator, and what it grew into is his power.*

Here we can make a connection between Vedanta and Sufism. We can see in Sufism that Ibn Arabi's "Tree of Being" is rooted in Allah, just as the *Bhagavad Gita*'s cosmic tree is rooted in Brahman, and we know that Allah and Brahman are both names of God. In fact, this symbol of the tree of life is discussed similarly in all major world traditions and is present even in the prophetic visions of Black Elk, who was a Native American shaman living at the turn of the 19th century, during the same time as Ramakrishna.

This *Tree of Life* book is the capstone of the memoir, *Spiritual*, and the culmi-

nation of my own spiritual growth—to begin as an atheist and journey through these different stages of spirituality to arrive at this conclusion of the tree of life. Every religion is like a flower in this beautiful bouquet of faith. What we can understand by exploring these three points of intersection is: no, it will not be one religion which will unite them all. There is no need to create a homogenous teaching or culture. Spirituality is our birthright; it goes hand in hand with being human, and spiritual teachings are already in perfect harmony with each other if we can look at them from the right view. In Vedanta, we know this is true, for as Swami Vivekananda promises us, if Truth exists, then it must be One.



*When the mind becomes purified like a mirror, knowledge is revealed in it. Care should therefore be taken to purify the mind.*

*Do not look at anybody in terms of friend or foe, brother or cousin; do not fritter away your mental energies in thoughts of friendship or enmity. Seeking the Self everywhere, be amiable and equal-minded towards all, treating all alike.*

—Sri Shankaracharya

## A Jiva's Longing

by Nik Warren

*Om  
Siva  
How can I worship You  
To You what can I sing  
Who dances the world into existence  
And swallows again the world in its wholeness back into oblivion  
Who is the very stillness of that power out which the world roars  
You hold in deep meditation That Which Is*

*Om  
You who I worship  
Coming to You  
Reaching up through the roar of snow hurtling down from the cliffs of your abode  
To pray to your name  
To bow to your form  
Again and again  
I pray to you  
I bow to you  
But how can I know You  
Emptied of name and form  
How can I reach you through the roar of snow  
hurtling down from the cliffs of your abode*

*The roar is Mother  
The roar is Shakti  
We who are born We are born of that roar  
The roar is Mother  
The roar is Siva's power  
The roar is Kali's laughter  
The roar is the Ganga river*

*O Mother  
Singing into existence all that is  
All that we worship  
All that we know  
Name and form  
Your names Mother Mother of God Mother of illusion Mother of ignorance  
I will be born in illusion to know illusion  
I will be born in ignorance to know ignorance  
I will be born in God to know God  
I will be born to know I am*

*She who creates us and tramples us  
O Siva  
She Dances on You*

*Painting three lines across my forehead  
I will mark me as yours  
I will come to You  
I will live among the rivers of your braided hair  
I will bow and build a shrine*

*In You I am*

*A grain of sand beneath your feet*

*Sing and hold dear the transparent skies of these dreams*



## FRANCE

The Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna in Gretz-Armainvilliers, France, completed a successful year of programs at the end of June 2023.

There were many seminars on a variety of topics all through the year, with as many as three seminars often occurring simultaneously at the Center, and as many as 40 to 80 people staying overnight.

The Université de l'homme, or the University of Man, continued its various courses in the Spiritual Arts, such as the *Yoga of Singing*, and the Spiritual Sciences such as Yoga, Ayurveda, and Vedanta. Several new seminars were developed for the university, including a three-part series on *The Voyage of Death* for those who have to accompany a dying person in their last days, and a three-part series on the Sacred Science of Vedanta.

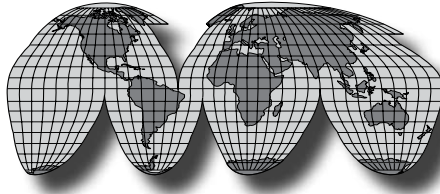
The Institute for Research and Practice of Vedic Yoga, which is a branch of the University, was founded by Swami Veetamohananda to give a spiritual depth



Guided meditation as the Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna celebrates Yoga International Day

to the study of yoga in the West and to bring it back into the tradition of the Upanishads. The students are taught the scriptures, meditation, mantra practice, as well as the postures of yoga as a comprehensive and integrated spiritual course which lasts four years. In July 2022 the Institute gave certificates to the first class of students to finish the four-year course, and this month we are celebrating the second graduating class.

The Centre remains open during July and August for visitors and overnight guests both, and there are some seminars during the summer break as well. But



the regular public programs are stopped, those being the guided meditations on Tuesdays and Saturdays, the philosophy lectures on Saturdays, the Sunday talks on spiritual topics, and the public yoga classes four days a week. They will begin again in September.

### Celebrating Yoga International Day

To close the year, the Center celebrated Yoga International Day on June 18. There were 20 yoga teachers present to give four simultaneous yoga classes in four different halls throughout the day, starting at 5:15a.m. There was also guided



One of the many yoga sessions hosted by The Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna

meditation, and a plenary session in the afternoon with the Swami-in-charge, two officers of the Indian Embassy representing the Ambassador to France, and the Deputy to the Mayor of Gretz-Armainvilliers. One hundred and fifty people attended.

And finally, on the weekend of July 8-9 the Center hosted an Interreligious seminar on the topic of *Transformation of Self, Transformation of the World*. On Saturday morning each representative spoke on Transformation in their tradition. The afternoon was devoted to a roundtable discussion of two related topics: 1) What are the practices for transformation in

your tradition; and 2) Is there a map of transformation in your tradition. Sunday was devoted to practices through which each representative led the attendees. The event was well attended both days, and the discussion was unusually rich in content and inspiration.

The representatives included Rabbi Gabriel Hagai from Israel who is a close friend of the Center, the well-known Father Benoit Billot who for many years was head of the Intermonastic Dialogue (DIM) in France and is a long-time associate of the Center, Adji Drame who



The representatives are (l-r): Br. Isha Chaitanya, Pr. Brahmaprana, Rabbi Gabriel Hagai, Father Benoit Billot (Benedictine), Swami Atmarupananda, Adji Dramé (Sufi Muslim), Lama Guetcheu, and Sister Solange (Benedictine)



Group photo of the representatives with devotees attending an Interreligious seminar

is a Sufi from Africa and a close friend of the Center, Lama Guetcheu who is a French Lama of the Tibetan tradition, and Pravrajika Brahmaprana from the Vedanta Society of Southern California. It was a fitting end to a successful and active year



The Ramakrishna Mission in Mauritius celebrates the 188<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna

## MAURITIUS

One week after the countywide celebration of Maha Shiva Ratri, the Ramakrishna Mission in Mauritius celebrated the 188<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna on 26 February 2023 with a special puja and devotional songs. On that occasion, Swami Krishnarupananda gave an inspiring discourse on the unique personality of Sri Ramakrishna. After the program, all the devotees present were served food prasada.

### Celebration of Guru Purnima

The Guru (spiritual master) holds an important role in the life of a spiritual aspirant. He is the person who propels the seeker of truth to new spiritual heights. Guru Purnima is an occasion where every spiritual seeker pays homage to one's Guru.

The Ramakrishna Mission in Mauritius, as in all centers all over the world, celebrated Guru Purnima on Sunday, 2 July 2023. In the morning, a special puja was performed, after which devotees sang some devotional songs. On that occasion,



The Ramakrishna Mission in Mauritius celebrates Guru Purnima on Sunday, 2 July 2023

Swami Krishnarupananda, head of the Mauritius center, made an inspiring discourse on the importance of the Guru in the life of a devotee, especially those who have taken initiation (*mantra diksha*) from their gurus. After the function, all the 200 devotees present were served food prasada.

## USA

### The Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Seattle

The Vedanta Society of Western Washington, held meditation retreats led by Swami Satyamayananda at their beautiful retreat property, Tapovan, in Arlington, Washington

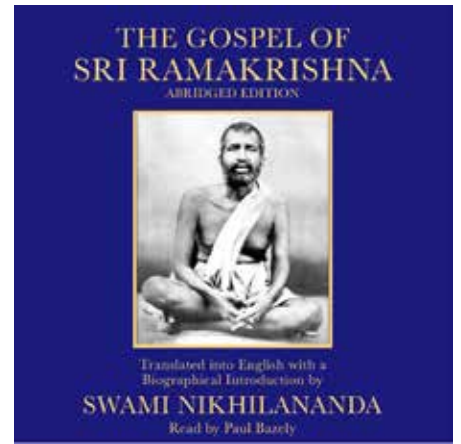


Swami Satyamayananda conducts a meditation retreat at Tapovan

The retreats have been well attended and much appreciated. The program for the retreat is as follows: silent meditation, introductory talk on Yoga and Meditation, guided meditation, tea/coffee break, guided meditation, flower offering, question and answer session, and closing remarks.

### Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, in an effort to make its publications more relevant for future generations, has embarked on a new audiobook project. In 2023 the Center released the first of its audiobooks: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Abridged Edition) 18 hours, 43 minutes, and *Sri Ramakrishna, A Biography*, 4 hours, 7



minutes, both titles by Swami Nikhilananda.

Forthcoming titles will include Swami Nikhilananda's *Vivekananda, A Biography*, *Vivekananda Chicago Addresses*, and *Vivekananda at Thousand Island Park*. The audiobooks are available through all popular distributors such as Amazon-Audible, Spotify, Barnes & Noble, Google Play, Kobo-Walmart, and Apple Books. Beautifully read by distinguished British actor, Paul Bazely, we experience the *Gospel* in an entirely new and spiritually inspiring way.

Originally published in 1942, the *Gospel* was voted one of the **100 Most Important Spiritual Books of the 20th Century** by the American Scholars convened by Harper Collins publishers. In its Book Review of November 2, 1942, *Time Magazine* declared the *Gospel* "One of the world's most extraordinary religious documents." Aldous Huxley, in his foreword to the unabridged *Gospel*, says: "Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute detail. We must be grateful to the translator for his excellent version of a book so precious for what it teaches us of the life of the spirit."

### Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco

This year the Vedanta Society of Northern California was again able to hold an in-person retreat program at its Olema retreat after several years during which this annual celebration had to be



conducted online due to the coronavirus emergency.

On Sunday, May 28, there were two programs, one in the morning and another in the afternoon, featuring presentations by six devotees on the topic: *A Survival Kit for the Spiritual Journey*. A question and answer session followed each program.



Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco holds a Memorial Day weekend retreat program at Olema, May 28-29, 2023

On Monday, May 29, the subject was *The Future of Vedanta in America*. Swami Vedananda welcomed the gathering and Swami Tattwamayanda, Bobby Coleman, and Richard Schimpf participated in the discussions which were followed by questions and answers.

### The Vedanta Society of Portland

On Saturday, Feb. 4, the Vedanta Society of Portland hosted a Creative Workshop for children and teens on **Cultivating the Virtues of Love and Respect**. Suzie Giacomelli, conceived of, supplied the supplies for, and facilitated the two-hour-long event. Shayan, Mahalakshmi and Lokesh helped organize the program. Fourteen youngsters (age 3 to teenage) participated. The programs included a



Creative workshop for children at the Vedanta Society of Portland

Temple tour, lessons and conversations about love and respect, introductions to Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna, as well as the Golden



A Devotee's Meet was organized by the Vedanta Society of Portland on the occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ramakrishna Mission

Rule across the world religions, a mini guided meditation, co-creation of a heart made of flowers for the Holy Mother in the shrine and offering gratitude and prayers with a short writing activity. Swami Devishananda shared a short chant with the English translation, which



Interfaith meeting at the Vedanta Society of Portland's retreat on July 4, 2023

the children repeated. They created valentines from a selection of curated quotes, primarily from Swami Vivekananda. The Swamis interacted with the children. After the program the children enjoyed snacks.

On July 4, 2023 the Vedanta Society of Portland hosted an Interfaith Meeting with Swami Satyamanananda, head of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington as the main guest speaker.

### CANADA

The Vivekananda Vedanta Society of British Columbia celebrated the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's arrival in Vancouver on 15 July 1893, at the Confederation Hall in Burnaby, BC. The program consisted of reading from Swami Vivekananda's works, talks, devotional songs and arati, followed by a vegetarian dinner. About 67 devotees participated.

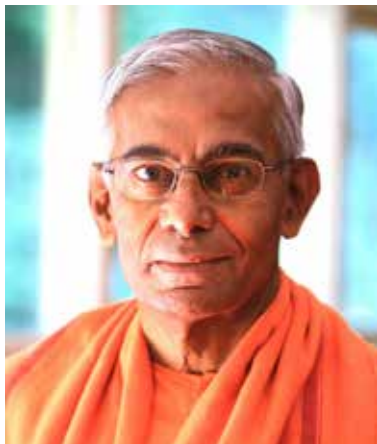


Members of the Vedanta Society of British Columbia celebrating Swami Vivekananda's arrival in Vancouver, British Columbia 130 years ago



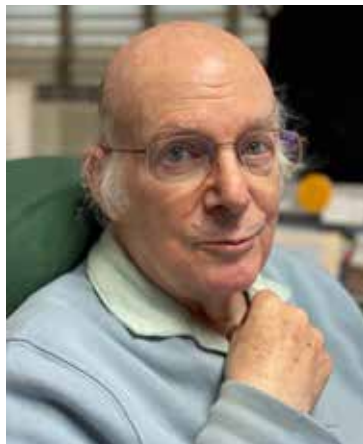
*Good will towards all  
beings is the true religion;  
cherish in your hearts boundless  
good will to all that lives.*

—Lord Buddha



**Swami Brahmarupananda**  
1934 – April 7, 2023

Swami Brahmarupananda was born in 1934 in a small town not far from Mysore. He came to the US in 1971 to pursue a Ph.D. in Library Science at the University of Pittsburgh. It was at this time that he came into contact with Swami Bhashyananda, the head of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago and eventually took initiation from him. After completing his degree and working for several years as a professor in Drexel University, he eventually joined the Vivekananda Vedanta Center of Chicago as a monastic member. Because he was above the age limit for joining the Ramakrishna Order, he was sent by Swami Bhashyananda to the Sri Mangal Ashrama in Khankal to take vows of sannyasa. After that he served the Chicago center until 1993 when he moved to Maryland at the invitation of the local devotees. Once the Vedanta Center of Greater Washington, DC, was established in 1997, he served the center with great devotion and love until the very end. After returning from a trip to India on April 1, 2023, he tested positive for Covid and was put in the hospital. His condition gradually deteriorated and on April 7, he breathed his last with the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji in front of him. His final few days were remarkable for the great feeling of peace he had and the conviction that Holy Mother would come for him at the final moment. He was dearly beloved by all and is greatly missed by his many devotees and friends.



**Allen Roy Freedman**  
August 18, 1940 – May 17, 2023

Allen Freedman passed away peacefully after a long battle with cancer. Allen and his wife, Devra, first came to the Vedanta Society in 1967 and were initiated by Swami Vividishananda. In the years since he unstintingly served the Ashram in a variety of roles. These include, but are by no means limited to, Treasurer of the Board for over four decades, the production of *Global Vedanta*, harmonium player (yes, he led group singing) cook, driver, repairman, assistant for Swami Bhaskarananda, and host to the many, many women guests and their children who stayed in the Freedman house over the years. He rarely spoke of what he held close to his heart, but the integrity and thoroughness with which he worked constantly for 56 years for the Society showed his complete dedication to Thakur and Ma.

From 1978 until 2017, he was a member of the Board of Directors of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of British Columbia, Canada, and was chairman for some of that time. Allen was born in Chicago on August

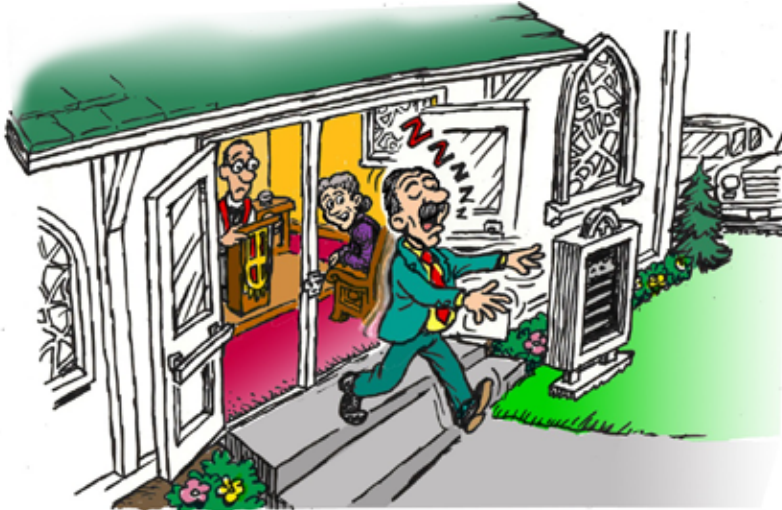
18, 1940, and pursued a career in mathematics, completing his undergraduate work at U.C. Berkeley and getting his Ph.D. from Oregon State University in Corvallis in 1965. He was the first hire, after the Chair, of the fledgling math department at Simon Fraser University, in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, where he spent his entire career and finished as Chair himself. Interestingly, Allen is one of a very small group of mathematicians who have an Erdős number of 1 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erd%C5%91s\\_number](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erd%C5%91s_number)). During these early years he would return to Seattle every weekend and holiday to be at the Society, usually arriving in time on Friday night to lead the group in singing devotional songs. Allen taught himself to play the recorder and set English translations of Indian songs to music.

Allen continued to publish math papers into his 80's; he traveled to Indonesia for several years as part of a Canadian program to provide advanced instruction to Indonesian math teachers; he spent time in India as a visiting professor; he wrote math puzzle books, including a Math book for his granddaughter then three years old, and achieved a level of notoriety as the "Mathemagician" who would give performances featuring mathematical "tricks" to children and adults of all ages, creating many fun puzzles and games. He wrote a book called *Algebraz Puzzles: Algebraic Expression Puzzles*. He was a great cook, and his challahs and blintzes were eagerly devoured. Allen will be remembered, above all, for his integrity, dedication to the Society in all ways, kindness, intelligence, humor, and extraordinarily generous nature by everyone he touched throughout his life.

*The Self is never born, nor does It ever die, nor, having once been, does It again cease to be. Unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval, It is not slain when the body is slain. • Weapons cut It not; fire burns It not; water wets It not; the wind does not wither It. • This Self cannot be cut nor burnt nor wetted nor withered. Eternal, all-pervading, unchanging, immovable, the Self is the same for ever.*

From the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 2, Verses 20, 23, 24.  
Translation by Swami Nikhilananda





"I hope you didn't take it personally, Reverend," an embarrassed woman said after church service, "when my husband walked out during your sermon."  
 "I did find it rather disconcerting," the preacher replied.  
 "It's not a reflection on you, sir," insisted the churchgoer, "Ralph has been walking in his sleep ever since he was a child."

— *World's Greatest Collection of Church Jokes*  
 Compiled and Edited by Paul M Miller, p 25.



Two police officers crash their car into a tree. After a moment of silence, one of them says, "Wow, that's got to be the fastest we ever got to the accident site."

— <https://short-funny.com/hilarious-jokes.php>



**Swami Aparananda** is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Mission who was head of the Vedanta Society of Berkeley from 1985 to 2014.



**Charles Mathias** is a devotee and the Secretary of the board of directors of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Seattle, and a gifted cartoonist and artist. The cartoons contained in this issue of *Global Vedanta* are his contributions.



**Dr. Jayendrina Singha Ray** is a Learning Experience Designer with a background in English literature. She has a PhD in English and has taught Rhetoric and Research Writing at colleges in Washington and New Delhi.



**Joseph Peidle** is a devotee associated with the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Massachusetts in Boston.



**Swami Satyamayananda** is the Minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington and also serves as editor-in-chief of *Global Vedanta*.



**Theresa Lorraine Shreffler** is a devotee associated with the Vedanta Society of Western Washington in Seattle.



**Swami Tattwamayananda** is the head of the Vedanta Society of Northern California in San Francisco.



**Nik Warren** is a longtime devotee of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. A geophysicist, teacher and poet, Nik has dedicated his life to exploring the interface between art, science and spirituality in pursuit of universal wholeness grounded in Advaita (non-dual) philosophy.