



Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

IN THIS ISSUE

1. News from Australian Centres

- ◆ Adelaide
- ◆ Brisbane
- ◆ Canberra
- ◆ Melbourne
- ◆ Perth
- ◆ Sydney

2. (a) Feature Article: Bhakti by Swami Vivekananda

(b) Australian Aboriginal Spirituality

Sri Ramakrishna on Perseverance

There are pearls in the deep sea, but you must hazard all perils to get them. If you fail to get them by a single dive, do not conclude that the sea is without them. Dive again and again, and you are sure to be rewarded in the end. So also in the quest for the Lord, if your first attempt to see Him proves fruitless, do not lose heart. Persevere in the attempt, and you are sure to realise him at last.

Source: *Sri Ramakrishna Life and Teachings* by Swami Tapasyananda; Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa; page 140.

Sri Sarada Devi on Love and Compassion

One must live carefully. Every action produces its results. It is not good to use harsh words towards others or be responsible for their suffering.

Source: *Great sayings: Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother*, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Math, Mylapore; page 100.

Swami Vivekananda on Education

Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-building, assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the great sages in the world and encyclopaedias the Rishis.

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* by Swami Mumukshananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; page 53.

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

1. NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN CENTRES 11 DECEMBER 2020 TO 10 MARCH 2021

ADELAIDE

16 East Terrace, Kensington Gardens, SA 5068

Email: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com

Contact: Dr Raman Sharma on (08) 8431 9775

Mrs Pathma Iswaran on (08) 8379 5336

URL: <http://vedantaadelaide.org>

Daily Activities

- The Centre functions from 7.30am-12.30pm and 4.00-8.00pm. The evening vesper service to Sri Ramakrishna is performed from 7.00-7.30 pm followed by *bhajans*, devotional reading and meditation.

Regular Activities

- Swami Manyananda conducted classes and discussions on the *Vedanta Sara* - 'Fundamentals of Vedanta' every Wednesday from 11:00 am to 12:00 noon.
- Swami Manyananda is also conducting classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* on Sundays from 11:00 am.
- Every alternative Saturday, Swami Manyananda has been conducting a reading and discussion on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* before the evening *aratrikam*.

Celebrations

- The Christmas Eve program started with the vesper service to Sri Ramakrishna followed by singing of Carols by devotees, reading from the *New Testament* (Birth of Jesus Christ and Sermon on the Mount), *aratrikam* and *prasad* distribution.
- Holy Mother's *tithi puja* (birth anniversary) was celebrated on 5 January, 2021. The morning program included Vedic chanting and *bhajans*, *special puja*, *pushpanjali* (offering of flowers to the Holy Mother) and lunch *prasad*. The evening program started with *aratrikam* (vesper service) followed by a talk on 'Sri Sarada Devi - The Universal Mother' by Swami



Christmas Eve in Adelaide



Holy Mother's Birth Anniversary in Adelaide

Manyananda, *bhajans*, *pushpanjali* (offering of flowers to the Holy Mother) and *dinner prasad*.

- Swami Vivekananda's *tithi puja* (birth anniversary) was celebrated on Thursday, 4 February, 2021. The morning program started with Vedic chanting, *bhajans*, followed by *special puja*, *pushpanjali* and boxed lunch *prasad*. The evening program started with *aratrikam* (vesper service), a talk on *the Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* by Swami Manyananda, *bhajans*, *pushpanjali* and boxed dinner *prasad*.

Other Activities

- Swami Sridharananda visited Adelaide from



Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary at Adelaide

Sunday, 28 February, to Monday, 8 March 2021. He interacted with the devotees on three occasions: *Bhagavad-Gita* revision talk on Wednesday, 3 March, *Mundaka Upanishad* talk on Friday, 5 March, and 'Origin and Growth of the Ramakrishna Mission in Australia' on Sunday, 7 March 2021, followed by interaction with the devotees over light refreshments.

BRISBANE

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

Email: info@vedantabrisbane.org

Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

URL: <http://vedantabrisbane.org>

Daily Activities

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

Regular Activities

- Sunday mornings:- (a) Guided meditation

from 7:00 am to 7:40 am. (b) Yoga class from 7:45 am to 9:00 am. (c) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* Class (10:00 am—11:00 am). (d) *Bala Sangha* or children's classes and *Yuva Sangha* (10:00 am—11:00 am during school term).

- A class on the *Brahma Sutras* was conducted on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 12 noon.
- A Vedic Chanting class was held on Wednesdays from 8:30 am to 9:30 am online.
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* from 7:30 pm — 8:30 pm at 134 Fleming Rd, Chapel Hill, Qld) on alternate Fridays.
- A reading from the direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna is conducted on their birthdates after the evening aratrikam.
- Chanting of the *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days (7:30 pm — 8:00 pm).
- Devotees took turns in decorating and worshipping Sri Ramakrishna's image every week at the Sri Selva Vinayakar temple, South Maclean, Qld.
- Swami Atmeshananda conducted *Vivekachudamani* classes for the Vedanta Group at Toowoomba on the first Wednesday of every month.
- A class on the *Ashtavakra Gita* was conducted at 101 Sharpless Drive, Springfield Lakes, on a fixed day of the month.
- On the third Saturday of every month, the *Bhagavad Gita* was studied online by the Vedanta group at the Gold Coast from 5.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.
- On alternate Fridays, the Centre's volunteers cooked food at its soup kitchen for the benefit of the needy. An average of 100 meals per week are cooked by volunteers, packed into containers and frozen. They are distributed free of cost through the Westside Community Centre, Goodna Street Life shop, Queensland Youth and Families Support Services and the Base Youth Support Services.
- Every Friday the Centre's Food bank distributed groceries to the needy. An average of 12 grocery hampers along with cooked food and free bread was distributed to the needy.
- The Maa Sarada's kitchen prepares and sells food at a reasonable cost to people. On an average, about 100 persons avail themselves of this service. The kitchen is efficiently managed by

volunteers.

- On Fridays, a Justice of the Peace (JP) renders service at the Centre from 10 am to 11 a.m. People needing the service access this free service.

Other Activities

- The Centre organized children's vacation programmes during the school holidays on 14 to 17 December, 11 to 14 January and 18 to 21 January 2021. The programmes included meditation, yoga, story telling, painting, positive affirmation, gardening, creative writing and the like. There were 25 children who participated in the programme.



Holiday Programme in Brisbane

- The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Centre was held on 13 December 2020.
- Federal Senator Paul Scarr visited the Centre on 18 January 2021 to see the ongoing activities and discuss the future plans.
- A bore well was drilled on the Centre's property with funds from the Ipswich Council on 4 February 2021. At 70 meters saline water was found which needed treatment.

Celebrations

- Christmas Eve was celebrated with worship, singing of carols and talks and readings.
- *Kalpataru day* was celebrated on 1 January 2021 with worship, readings from the life of Sri Ramakrishna, *bhajans* and distribution of *prasad*.
- Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's *tithi puja* was



Kalpataru Day in Brisbane



Visit of Senator Paul Scarr to Brisbane

conducted on 5 January 2021. The public celebration was not observed because of the lockdown.

- Swami Vivekananda's birthday was celebrated on 4 January. A public celebration of the birthday was held on 7 January with worship, *bhajans*, talks on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda by children of *Bala Sangha*, and *prasad* distribution.

Forthcoming Programmes

- *Sri Ramanavami* will be celebrated on the 21st April 2021.
- During school holidays in April, a children's retreat would be conducted (dates to be decided).

CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 6258 7612/0433 593 860

Regular Activities

- On account of the Covid 19 pandemic the Gita classes have been suspended temporarily. Friends and devotees are accessing the classes online. When the classes recommence they will be held at the Belconnen Community Meeting Room, 12 Chandler St, Belconnen, ACT. Monthly lectures are advertised by e-mail once scheduled.

MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

Email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

Contact: Swami Sunishthananda (03) 8684 9594

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

Regular Activities

- The shrine was open from 7:00 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm seven days a week.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation were conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm daily.
- *Rama Nama Sankirtanam* on *Ekadasi* Days.
- A scriptural class on Sundays from 10:00 am to 11:00 am on *A Study of Swami Vivekananda's Karma Yoga* by Swami Sunishthananda which was conducted online from 5 April 2020 due to the restrictions brought on by Covid 19.
- Guided meditation followed by a class on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* on Thursdays from 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm. This class was conducted online from 5 April 2020 due to the restrictions brought on by Covid 19.

Celebrations

- On the evening of Thursday, 24 December 2020, Christmas Eve was celebrated online.



Christmas Eve in Melbourne

The programme included vesper service, carols and a talk on the 'Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ'.

- On the evening of Thursday, 1 January 2021, *kalpataru day* was celebrated online. The programme included vesper service, *bhajans* and a talk on 'The Significance of *kalpataru day*'.
- On the morning of Sunday, 10 January 2021, Holy Mother's *tithi puja* (birth anniversary) was celebrated online. The programme included *puja*, offerings, chanting and *bhajans*, a talk on 'The Life and Teachings of Holy Mother' and *pushpanjali*.
- On the morning of Sunday, 7 February 2021, Swami Vivekananda's *tithi puja* (birth anniversary) was celebrated online. The programme included *puja*, offerings, chanting and *bhajans*, a talk on 'The Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda' and *pushpanjali*.



Holy Mother's tithi Puja in Melbourne

- On the morning of Tuesday, 16 February 2021, Saraswati puja was celebrated online. The programme included puja, offerings, chanting, *bhajans* and *pushpanjali*.

Other Activities

- Swami Sunishthananda participated as the Guest Speaker on Sunday, 20 December 2020, in an online Seminar organised by The Hindu Council of Australia. The theme of the seminar was 'Significance of Hindu Religious Practices & COVID-19 Pandemic'.
- An online Spiritual Retreat was conducted on Sunday, 24 January 2021, which was attended by 30 participants.
- Our Centre participated in an online inter-faith musical concert on Sunday, 28 February 2021, organized by the Interfaith Centre of Melbourne to observe the World Interfaith Harmony Week.
- Swami Sunishthananda participated in various online programmes with different institutions in India.

PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yorkine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact: Sumita Chetty (04) 3892 8136

Parthiv Parekh 0430 511 699

Regular Activities:

- *Aratrikam* was conducted each night by a person or family taking the responsibility for it.

Regular Activities

- A busy bee was organized on 13 December 2020 and another on 7 March 2021.

Celebrations

- *Kalpataru day* was celebrated on New Year's Day.



The Devotees in Perth

There was a relatively large gathering which offered prayers, conducted *bhajans* and distributed *prasad*.

- Sri Sarada Devi's *tithi puja* (birth anniversary) was held on Sunday, 10 January 2021. The devotees sang and conducted the *aratrikam*. A devotee from India, Mr. Satyanaraya Bhowmick read the *Chandi*. The programme ended with the distribution of *prasad*.
- Swami Vivekananda's *tithi puja* (birth anniversary) was celebrated at the Universal Church on 14 February 2021. A similar programme to past events was conducted on this occasion.

SYDNEY

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115

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

Email: vedasydney@vedantasydney.org

Contact: (02) 8197 7351

URL: www.vedantaaustralia.org

Daily Activities

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

Regular Activities

- Swami Sridharananda conducted his study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* on Sundays between 9:30 am and 10:30 am. Due to the current restrictions owing to Covid 19, the talks were pre-recorded and uploaded to the Centre's website and Youtube Channel.
- Swami Sridharananda conducted a class on the *Mundaka Upanishad* on Saturdays from 11:00am to 12:00 noon. Due to the current restrictions owing to Covid 19, the talks were pre-recorded and uploaded to the Centre's website and Youtube Channel.
- *Sri Rāmanāma Sankirtanam* was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.

Celebrations

- Christmas Eve was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 24 December 2020. Because of the Covid 19 restrictions invitations were not sent out to devotees. Nonetheless, the programme included *aratrikam*, carols, and reading from the Bible of Jesus' nativity.
- *Kalpataru day* was observed on 1 January 2021 according to Government restrictions because of Covid 19. The programme included *aratrikam*, *bhajans*, and reading from the *Lilaprasanga* or *Sri Ramakrishna and his Divine Play* of Sri Ramakrishna's self revelation to devotees on 1 January 1886.
- Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi's tithi puja (birth

anniversary) was observed on 5 January 2021. Because of the Covid 19 restrictions it was not open to the public. But members of the organization were able to attend and pay their respects in 20 minute time slots through out the day in compliance with Government restrictions.

- Swami Vivekananda's tithi puja (birth anniversary) was observed on 4 February 2021. Because of the Covid 19 restrictions it was not open to the public. But members of the organization were invited to attend and pay their respects in 20 minute time slots through out the day in compliance with Government restrictions. About 135 people attended.



Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary in Sydney



Holy Mother's Anniversary in Sydney

2. FEATURE ARTICLE

B. Bhakti by Swami Vivekananda (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. 3, pp. 357-65*)

One of Swami Vivekananda's important contributions is dividing the gamut of spiritual practices into four—Jnana, Karma, Bhakti and Raja Yogas. Even though these demarcations are there in the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, these were lost sight of by the people at large. Swami Vivekananda brought these out into the open through his lectures in America, Europe and the Indian subcontinent. In fact Jnana, Karma, Bhakti and Raja Yoga cater to the different dimensions of our personality. Jnana caters to the rational dimension of our personalities. Karma caters to the active dimension, bhakti to the emotional dimension and Raja Yoga to the psychic or mystical dimension of our personality. It was Swami Vivekananda's idea that the ideal is to harmonize and develop our whole personality through all the four yogas. In this lecture, which is a part of the *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, Swami Vivekananda deals with Bhakti or the development of the emotional dimension.

The various religions that exist in the world, although they differ in the form of worship they take, are really one. In some places the people build temples and worship in them, in some they worship fire, in others they prostrate themselves before idols, while there are many who do not believe at all in God. All are true, for, if you look to the real spirit, the real religion, and the truths in each of them, they are all alike. In some religions God is not worshipped, nay, His existence is not believed in, but good and worthy men are worshipped as if they were Gods. The example worthy of citation in this case is Buddhism. Bhakti is everywhere, whether directed to God or to noble persons. Upasana in the form of Bhakti is everywhere supreme, and Bhakti is more easily attained than Jnana. The latter requires favourable circumstances and strenuous practice. Yoga cannot be properly practised unless a man is physically very healthy and free from all worldly attachments. But Bhakti can be more easily practised by persons in every condition of life. Shandilya Rishi, who wrote about Bhakti, says

that extreme love for God is Bhakti. Prahlada speaks to the same effect. If a man does not get food one day, he is troubled; if his son dies, how agonising it is to him! The true Bhakta feels the same pangs in his heart when he yearns after God. The great quality of Bhakti is that it cleanses the mind, and the firmly established Bhakti for the Supreme Lord is alone sufficient to purify the mind. "O God, Thy names are innumerable, but in every name Thy power is manifest, and every name is pregnant with deep and mighty significance." We should think of God always and not consider time and place for doing so.

The different names under which God is worshipped are apparently different. One thinks that his method of worshipping God is the most efficacious, and another thinks that his is the more potent process of attaining salvation. But look at the true basis of all, and it is one. The Shaivas call Shiva the most powerful; the Vaishnavas hold to their all-powerful Vishnu; the worshippers of Devi will not

yield to any in their idea that their Devi is the most omnipotent power in the universe. Leave inimical thoughts aside if you want to have permanent Bhakti. Hatred is a thing which greatly impedes the course of Bhakti, and the man who hates none reaches God. Even then the devotion for one's own ideal is necessary. Hanuman says, "Vishnu and Rama, I know, are one and the same, but after all, the lotus-eyed Rama is my best treasure." The peculiar tendencies with which a person is born must remain with him. That is the chief reason why the world cannot be of one religion--and God forbid that there should be one religion only--for the world would then be a chaos and not a cosmos. A man must follow the tendencies peculiar to himself; and if he gets a teacher to help him to advance along his own lines, he will progress. We should let a person go the way he intends to go, but if we try to force him into another path, he will lose what he has already attained and will become worthless. As the face of one person does not resemble that of another, so the nature of one differs from that of another,

and why should he not be allowed to act accordingly? A river flows in a certain direction; and if you direct the course into a regular channel, the current becomes more rapid and the force is increased, but try to divert it from its proper course, and you will see the result; the volume as well as the force will be lessened. This life is very important, and it, therefore, ought to be guided in the way one's tendency prompts him. In India there was no enmity, and every religion was left unmolested; so religion has lived. It ought to be remembered that quarrels about religion arise from thinking that one alone has the truth and whoever does not believe as one does is a fool; while another thinks that the other is a hypocrite, for if he were not one, he would follow him.

If God wished that people should follow one religion, why have so many religions sprung up? Methods have been vainly tried to force one religion upon everyone. Even when the sword was lifted to make all people follow one religion, history tells us that ten religions sprang up in its place. One religion cannot suit all. Man is the product of two forces, action and reaction, which make him think. If such forces did not exercise a man's mind, he would be incapable of thinking. Man is a creature who thinks; Manushya (man) is a being with Manas (mind); and as soon as his thinking power goes, he becomes no better than an animal. Who would like such a man? God forbid that any such state should come upon the people of India. Variety in unity is necessary to keep man as man. Variety ought to be preserved in every-

thing; for as long as there is variety the world will exist. Of course variety does not merely mean that one is small and the other is great; but if all play their parts equally well in their respective positions in life, the variety is still preserved. In every religion there have been men good and able, thus making the religion to which they belonged worthy of respect; and as there are such people in every religion, there ought to be no hatred for any sect whatsoever.

Then the question may be asked, should we respect that religion which advocates vice? The answer will be certainly in the negative, and such a religion ought to be expelled at once, because it is productive of harm. All religion is to be based upon morality, and personal purity is to be counted superior to Dharma. In this connection it ought to be known that Achara means purity inside and outside. External purity can be attained by cleansing the body with water and other things which are recommended in the Shastras. The internal man is to be purified by not speaking falsehood, by not drinking, by not doing immoral acts, and by doing good to others. If you do not commit any sin, if you do not tell lies, if you do not drink, gamble, or commit theft, it is good. But that is only your duty and you cannot be applauded for it. Some service to others is also to be done. As you do good to yourself, so you must do good to others.

Here I shall say something about food regulations. All the old customs have faded away, and nothing but a vague notion of not eat-



Swami Vivekananda

ing with this man and not eating with that man has been left among our countrymen. Purity by touch is the only relic left of the good rules laid down hundreds of years ago. Three kinds of food are forbidden in the Shastras. First, the food that is by its very nature defective, as garlic or onions. If a man eats too much of them it creates passion, and he may be led to commit immoralities, hateful both to God and man. Secondly, food contaminated by external impurities. We ought to select some place quite neat and clean in which to keep our food. Thirdly, we should avoid eating food touched by a wicked man, because contact with such produces bad ideas in us. Even if one be a son of a Brahmin, but is profligate and immoral in his habits, we should not eat food from his hands.

But the spirit of these observances is gone. What is left is this, that we cannot eat from the hands of any man who is not of the highest caste, even though he be the most wise and holy person. The disregard of those old rules is ever to

be found in the confectioner's shop. If you look there, you will find flies hovering all over the confectionery, and the dust from the road blowing upon the sweetmeats, and the confectioner himself in a dress that is not very clean and neat. Purchasers should declare with one voice that they will not buy sweets unless they are kept in glass-cases in the Halwai's shop. That would have the salutary effect of preventing flies from conveying cholera and other plague germs to the sweets. We ought to improve, but instead of improving we have gone back. Manu says that we should not spit in water, but we throw all sorts of filth into the rivers. Considering all these things we find that the purification of one's outer self is very necessary. The Shastrakaras knew that very well. But now the real spirit of this observance of purity about food is lost and the letter only remains. Thieves, drunkards, and criminals can be our caste-fellows, but if a good and noble man eats food with a person of a lower caste, who is quite as respectable as himself, he will be outcasted and lost for ever. This custom has been the bane of our country. It ought, therefore, to be distinctly understood that sin is incurred by coming in contact with sinners, and nobility in the company of good persons; and keeping aloof from the wicked is the external purification.

The internal purification is a task much more severe. It consists in speaking the truth, serving the poor, helping the needy, etc. Do we always speak the truth? What happens is often this. People go to the house of a rich person for some business of their own and flatter him by calling him benefactor of

the poor and so forth, even though that man may cut the throat of a poor man coming to his house. What is this? Nothing but falsehood. And it is this that pollutes the mind. It is therefore, truly said that whatever a man says who has purified his inner self for twelve years without entertaining a single vicious idea during that period is sure to come true. This is the power of truth, and one who has cleansed both the inner and the outer self is alone capable of Bhakti. But the beauty is that Bhakti itself cleanses the mind to a great extent. Although the Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians do not set so much importance upon the excessive external purification of the body as the Hindus do, still they have it in some form or other; they find that to a certain extent it is always required. Among the Jews, idol-worship is condemned, but they had a temple in which was kept a chest which they called an ark, in which the Tables of the Law were preserved, and above the chest were two figures of angels with wings outstretched, between which the Divine Presence was supposed to manifest itself as a cloud. That temple has long since been destroyed, but the new temples are made exactly after the old fashion, and in the chest religious books are kept. The Roman Catholics and the Greek Christians have idol-worship in certain forms. The image of Jesus and that of his mother are worshipped. Among

Protestants there is no idol-worship, yet they worship God in a personal form, which may be called idol-worship in another form. Among Parsees and Iranians fire-worship is carried on to a great extent. Among Mohammedans the prophets and great and noble per-

sons are worshipped, and they turn their faces towards the Caaba when they pray. These things show that men at the first stage of religious development have to make use of something external, and when the inner self becomes purified they turn to more abstract conceptions. "When the Jiva is sought to be united with Brahman it is best, when meditation is practised it is mediocre, repetition of names is the lowest form, and external worship is the lowest of the low." But it should be distinctly understood that even in practising the last there is no sin. Everybody ought to do what he is able to do; and if he be dissuaded from that, he will do it in some other way in order to attain his end. So we should not speak ill of a man who worships idols. He is in that stage of growth, and, therefore, must have them; wise men should try to help forward such men and get them to do better. But there is no use in quarrelling about these various sorts of worship.

Some persons worship God for the sake of obtaining wealth, others because they want to have a son, and they think themselves Bhagavatas (devotees). This is no Bhakti, and they are not true Bhagavatas. When a Sadhu comes who professes that he can make gold, they run to him, and they still consider themselves Bhagavatas. It is not Bhakti if we worship God with the desire for a son; it is not Bhakti if we worship with the desire to be rich; it is not Bhakti even if we have a desire for heaven; it is not Bhakti if a man worships with the desire of being saved from the tortures of hell. Bhakti is not the outcome of fear or greediness. He is the true Bhagavata who says, "O God, I do

not want a beautiful wife, I do not want knowledge or salvation. Let me be born and die hundreds of times. What I want is that I should be ever engaged in Thy service." It is at this stage--and when a man sees God in everything, and everything in God--that he attains perfect Bhakti. It is then that he sees Vishnu incarnated in everything from the microbe to Brahma, and it is then that he sees God manifesting Himself in everything, it is then that he feels that there is nothing without God, and it is then and then alone that thinking himself to be the most insignificant of all beings he worships God with the true spirit of a Bhakta. He then leaves Tirthas and external forms of worship far behind him, he sees every man to be the most perfect temple.

Bhakti is described in several ways in the Shastras. We say that God is our Father. In the same way we call Him Mother, and so on. These relationships are conceived in order to strengthen Bhakti in us, and they make us feel nearer and dearer to God. Hence these names are justifiable in one way, and that is that the words are simply words of endearment, the outcome of the fond love which a true Bhagavata feels for God. Take the story of Radha and Krishna in Rasalila. The story simply exemplifies the true spirit of a Bhakta, because no love in the world exceeds that existing between a man and a woman. When there is such intense love, there is no fear, no other attachment save that one which binds that pair in an inseparable and all-absorbing bond. But with regard to parents, love

is accompanied with fear due to the reverence we have for them. Why should we care whether God created anything or not, what have we to do with the fact that He is our preserver? He is only our Beloved, and we should adore Him devoid of all thoughts of fear. A man loves God only when he has no other desire, when he thinks of nothing else and when he is mad after Him. That love which a man has for his beloved can illustrate the love we ought to have for God. Krishna is the God and Radha loves Him; read those books which describe that story, and then you can imagine the way you should love God. But how many understand this? How can people who are vicious to their very core and have no idea of what morality is understand all this? When people drive all sorts of worldly thoughts from their minds and live in a clear moral and spiritual atmosphere, it is then that they understand the abstrusest of thoughts even if they be uneducated. But how few are there of that nature! There is not a single religion which cannot be perverted by man. For example, he may think that the Atman is quite separate from the body, and so, when committing sins with the body his Atman is unaffected. If religions were truly followed, there would not have been a single man, whether Hindu, Mohammedan, or Christian, who would not have been all purity. But men are guided by their own nature, whether good or bad; there is no gainsaying that. But in the world, there are always some who get intoxicated when they hear of God, and shed tears of joy when they read of God. Such men are true Bhaktas.

At the initial stage of religious development a man thinks of God as his Master and himself as His servant. He feels indebted to Him for providing for his daily wants, and so forth. Put such thoughts aside. There is but one attractive power, and that is God; and it is in obedience to that attractive power that the sun and the moon and everything else move. Everything in this world, whether good or bad, belongs to God. Whatever occurs in our life, whether good or bad, is bringing us to Him. One man kills another because of some selfish purpose. But the motive behind is love, whether for himself or for any one else. Whether we do good or evil, the propeller is love. When a tiger kills a buffalo, it is because he or his cubs are hungry.

God is love personified. He is apparent in everything. Everybody is being drawn to Him whether he knows it or not. When a woman loves her husband, she does not understand that it is the divine in her husband that is the great attractive power. The God of Love is the one thing to be worshipped. So long as we think of Him only as the Creator and Preserver, we can offer Him external worship, but when we get beyond all that and think Him to be Love Incarnate, seeing Him in all things and all things in Him, it is then that supreme Bhakti is attained.

2. FEATURE ARTICLE:

(B) AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL SPIRITUALITY

Australian Aborigines are a very spiritual people. But their beliefs are often very local and as a result it is difficult to identify generic themes. What is central to Aboriginal spirituality is the concept of Dreaming. Dreaming are like creation stories that link the Aboriginal people to the land and the land's flora and fauna. Relationships are established with objects through ancestors on the land. These objects are animated by certain spirits. For this reason, Aboriginal spirituality is a type of animism. Similarly, there are relationships established with certain objects, making these objects act like guardian angels. These guardian angels are what are called totems, with totemism being another characteristic of Aboriginal spirituality.

Introduction

Aboriginal religion is characterised by having spirits who create people and the surrounding environment during a particular creation period at the beginning of time. Aboriginal people are very religious and spiritual, but rather than praying to a single god they cannot see, each group generally believes in a number of different deities or spirits, whose image is often depicted in some tangible, recognisable form. This form may be that of a particular landscape feature, an image in a rock art shelter, or in a plant or animal form. Aboriginal spirituality, Aboriginal writer Mudrooroo says, "is a feeling of oneness, of belonging", a connectedness with "deep innermost feelings". Everything else is secondary. For the Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal people from north-west South Australia the law of Kanyini implies that everybody is responsible for each other. It is a principle of connectedness that underpins Aboriginal life. And because of connection, Kanyini teaches to look away from oneself and towards community: "We practise Kanyini by learning to restrict the 'mine-ness', and to develop a strong

sense of 'ours-ness'," explains Aboriginal Elder Uncle Bob Randall.

Beliefs and practices

Landscape features may be the embodiment of the deity itself, such as a particular rock representing a specific figure, or they may be the result of something the deity did or that happened to the deity in the Creation Period, such as a river having formed when the Rainbow Serpent passed through the area in the Creation Period, or a depression in a rock or in the ground representing the footprint or sitting place of an Ancestral Being.

There is no one deity covering all of Australia. Each tribe has its own deities with an overlap of beliefs, just as there is an overlap of words between language groups. Thus, for example, the *Wandjina* spirits in the northern Kimberley of Western Australia belong to the *Ngarinyin*, *Worora* and *Wunambal* tribes. These *Wandjina* are responsible for bringing the Wet Season rains, as well as laying down many of the laws for the people. As one travels east, this function

is taken over by the *Yagjabula* and *Jabirringgi*, The Lightning Brothers of the *Wardaman* tribe in the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory, then by *Nargorkun*, also known as *Bula*, in the upper Katherine River area, and by *Namarrgun*, the Lightning Man in the Kakadu and western Arnhem Land regions.

Aboriginal deities

Aboriginal deities have many roles and no single description or term can describe all of these. Based on their primary role, they fall into three main categories, and any one deity may belong to one, two, or all three of these categories:

(a) Creation Beings (also: Creation Figure)

Many are involved with the creation of people, the landscape, and aspects of the environment, such as the creation of red, yellow or white pigments. Thus, they can be called *Creation Beings* or *Creation Figures*.

(b) Ancestral Beings

In many examples, these deities are regarded as the direct ancestors of the people living today and so they are "Ancestral Fig-

ures”, “Ancestral Beings”, “Ancestral Heroes”, or “Dreamtime Ancestors”. Here, the one term “Ancestral Being” is used to describe these deities.

Ancestral Beings have taught the first people how to make tools and weapons, hunt animals and collect food. They have laid down the laws that govern society, and taught people the correct way to conduct ceremonies.

Even though regarded as ancestors of the people, such deities may not appear in a human form, but may be plant or animal, for example. In Aboriginal religious belief, a person’s spirit may return in human, animal or plant form after death. So an Ancestral Being may have the appearance of a plant or animal, but have done deeds similar to a human in the past.

(c) Totemic Beings / Totemic ancestors

A Totemic Being represents the original form of an animal, plant or other object (totem), as it was in the Creation Period. The concept of a Totemic Being overlaps with that of a Creation Being and an Ancestral Being because the Totemic Being may create the abundance of species, and people see themselves as being derived from the different Totemic Beings.

Aboriginal society throughout Australia is divided into groups. When there are two main groups, they are termed *moieties*. When there are four divisions, they are termed *sections*, and when there are eight or more divisions, they are termed *sub-sections*.

Every person belongs to one of these groups, generally signified by an emblem or *totem*. People may refer to their section or subsection totem as their *skin name*. The emblematic leader of each division is termed a *Totemic Being* or *Ancestral Being*, and these help define a person’s origins and connections with their land, with their world, and their relationships with the past, present and future.

For example, a person connected with a yam (native potato) totem might believe that he was a yam in a previous life, that some yams are his relatives, and that a particularly prominent rock feature in his clan estate represents the embodiment of his yam ancestor. This, or another area nearby, might also be an “increase centre” where rituals are performed to ensure the maintenance of this food supply. Each clan will have several totems, so this person will have a close human relative living on the same clan estate who is not of the yam totem. That person might belong to the kangaroo totem and similarly be related to kangaroos and have another feature of the landscape representing their kangaroo totem.

(d) Significance of totemic belief

Through systems of totemic belief, individuals and groups are linked in many different ways to both the things of nature and the all-powerful beings of the spiritual realm. Totemic beliefs are more highly elaborated among Aboriginal people than among any other people. Totemism has been defined as a representation of the universe seen as

a moral and social order, a worldview that regards humanity and nature as one corporate whole, or a set of symbols forming a conventional expression of the value system of a society. Such symbols provided intermediate links, both personal and social, between humans and the mythic beings. Many of the mythic beings in Australia are totemic in the sense of exemplifying in their own persons, or outward forms, the common life force pervading particular species. Others, originating in human or near-human form, at the end of their wanderings entered some physiographic feature, were metamorphosed as hills or rocks, or turned into various creatures or plants.

Totemism’s importance lies in providing individuals and groups with direct and life-sustaining links back to the very beginnings of society itself, the Dreaming, and to the enormous powers emanating from the spiritual realm. Conception totemism connects individuals to particular places and events and provides them with a unique account of their coming into being. It thus underpins individual identity while at the same time linking a person to many others who share similar associations. The plants, animals, or minerals that are selected as totems are not in themselves of religious significance, though in the case of foods a person may choose not to eat his or her totem, considering it to be of the same flesh. What is important is the connections symbolized by totems—the ties that bind people simultaneously to one another, to sites in the physical

world, and to the omnipotent spiritual powers on which all worldly life depends.

Ancestral Beings

In order to keep the terminology manageable, the term “Ancestral Being” is used here to describe all Aboriginal deities, rather than including the terms “Creation Being” and “Totemic Being”. There are hundreds of Ancestral Beings throughout Australia, recorded by Aborigines in their stories, songs, body paintings and art. This includes recordings in the rock paintings and petroglyphs (rock carvings) dating back thousands of years.

Ancestral Beings are an intrinsic part of Aboriginal belief and everyday thought. As one moves through the day, walking past a particular rock or creek, spearing a particular animal, catching a goanna (large lizard), or collecting other bush foods, the Ancestral Beings who created these places and things come to mind. Even making tools and weapons will bring to mind the myths and legends of the Ancestral Beings who taught the Aborigines these skills.

Each Ancestral Being has its own creation story, has performed specific activities in the Creation Period, and has played a specific role in relation to laying down the laws for people to follow or in creating the landscape. This information is contained in the body of songs, dances, stories and paintings for each clan or tribe and is revered during certain ceremonies.

The Creation Period – The Dreamtime

Similar to other religions, there was a time in Aboriginal belief when things were created. This “Creation Period” was the time when the Ancestral Beings created landforms, such as certain animals digging, creating lagoons or pushing up mountain ranges, or the first animals or plants being made. The Aboriginal word for this Creation Period varies throughout Australia and each linguistic region has its own beliefs pertaining to that particular area.

Aboriginal people often interpret dreams as being the memory of things that happened during this Creation Period. Dreams are also important because they can be a time when we are transformed back into that ancestral time. This linking of dreams to the Creation Period has led people to adopt the general term “The Dreamtime” in order to describe the time of creation in their religion. The term “Dreamtime” in Aboriginal mythology is not really about a person having a dream, but rather, a reference to this Creation Period.

All aspects of Aboriginal culture are full of legends and beings associated with this Creation Period, or Dreamtime. Each tribe has many stories, often with a lesson to be learned or a moral tale, about the Creation Period deities, animals, plants, and other beings. These stories are told to children, discussed around campfires, and are sung and acted out in plays and dances during the times of ceremony. When an adolescent progresses through their phases

of initiation, they learn the more important, senior and secret parts of these stories, and this knowledge is reinforced by the acting-out of more secret-sacred rituals, songs and dances.

Images relating to the Creation Period are a feature in art forms on weapons, utensils, body painting, ground designs, bark paintings, and rock art. The stories of The Dreamtime form the basis of Aboriginal religion, behaviour, law and order in society.

Archaeological studies currently show that Aboriginal people have been in Australia at least 50,000 years. In the 1970s that figure was thought to be 40,000 years, which is the limit of how far back carbon dating can go. This latter figure was widely publicised at the time and many Australian people, including Aborigines, know the 40,000 year figure. So, if you ask an Aboriginal person today, they will tell you the Creation Period / Dreamtime goes back before 40,000 years. But what was their concept before this knowledge? This question was put to people in the past, and the answer was about five or six generations of people previous to the existing time. In other words, a person would have a knowledge of their father, grandfather, great grandfather, and great-great grandfather, but the next generation or a few more before that was when their relatives lived in the Creation Period and were kangaroo people, plant people, or took on some other form.

Religious activity

Throughout the year, religious activity was often taking place or being planned or discussed, particularly by initiated men. However, the high points were large gatherings, made possible periodically by the local superabundance of a major food resource. These occasions enabled Aboriginal people to conduct their religious life in an atmosphere of heightened excitement and tension. The main ritual roles in most major religious sequences were reserved for initiated men, and much secret-sacred activity excluded all others, but women had important roles in many religious activities. Children also took part in many rituals. In some areas, such as the Great Sandy Desert, women had their own secret-sacred rites and objects. New rituals were always being composed or exchanged with other groups, and this diffusion added a vital dynamic element to religious life.

Aspects of Aboriginal spirituality

(a) Everything is connected

All elements of the Earth are interconnected: the people, the plants and animals, land forms and celestial bodies. Everything is related to each other.

(b) Everything is animated

A second important aspect of Aboriginal spirituality is that everything is life, as Professor Jakelin Troy, a Ngarigu woman from the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales, explains. "All elements of the natural world are animated.

Every rock, mountain, river, plant and animal all are sentient [able to perceive or feel], having individual personalities and a life force." It's an aspect common to many indigenous philosophies which has some scientific support, at least as far as plants are concerned.

(C) Sacred stories

These relations and the knowledge of how they are interconnected are expressed in sacred stories. These creation stories describe how the activities of powerful creator ancestors shaped and developed the world as people know and experience it.

Those sacred Aboriginal stories (also known as Dreamtime, Dreaming stories, song-lines, or Aboriginal oral literature) find expression in performances within each of the language groups across Australia.

The land is part of being, family Aboriginal spiritual beliefs are intimately associated with the land Aboriginal people live on. It is 'geosophical' (earth-centred) and not 'theosophical' (God-centred). The earth, their country, is "impregnated with the power of the Ancestor Spirits" which Aboriginal people draw upon. They experience a connection to their land, with the entirety of nature that is associated with it, that is unknown to white people. A key feature of Aboriginal spirituality is to look after the land, an obligation which has been passed down as law for thousands of years. Land joins the commonly cited trilogy of being: "To recover our wellbeing, we have to pay attention to all four dimensions

of our being, mind, body, spirit and land," explains Uncle Bob Randall. Land is seen as a family member.

(d) Sacred texts

Aboriginal spirituality doesn't have any sacred texts or writings, they do however have important stories which have been passed down throughout their history. A major story from the Aboriginal people is the story of how the world was created. They believe it was created by the Dreaming spirit known as the Rainbow Serpent. The Rainbow Serpent is known of by many different Aboriginal groups.

(e) Rituals

The Aboriginals have many kinds of rituals and each of these rituals follow a set pattern of celebration. Some of these rituals include:

Initiation: This is the ritual when children move into adulthood. When Girls come into adulthood it is more of a personal and family matter, whereas boys have rituals that are long and painful.

Mortuary Rites: These are also known as death rituals. They usually go over months or even years, until that person's passage into their next life is complete and the Aboriginals left on earth have finished grieving.

Cultic Rituals: These rituals relate to Aboriginal spirits. This might include celebrating the actions of the creator spirits of a clan or group of clans.

Rituals of Reconciliation: These rituals are made and performed to reduce tensions and conflicts

Conclusion

Aboriginal's religious experiences revolve around the earth and their country, as they believe it is "impregnated with the power of the Ancestor Spirits". They experience a connection to their land and feel they have to look after the land, an obligation which has been passed down as law for thousands of years. Aboriginal spirituality implies that not only do animals and plants have souls, but even rocks have a soul. An Aboriginal person's soul or spirit is believed to continue on after death. After the death of an Aboriginal person they believe their spirit returns to the Dreamtime from where it will return through birth as a human, an animal, a plant or even a rock. This entire concept is very important and they often feel a massive spiritual experience in connection to this.

Aboriginal spirituality is heavily linked to land, they say "it's like picking up a piece of dirt and saying this is where I started and this is where I'll go. The land is our food, our culture, our spirit and identity." They also believe in Dreamtime and Dreaming, however Dreamtime and Dreaming are not the same thing. Dreaming is the environment the Aboriginal people lived in and it still exists today "all around us". They believe that "All objects are living and share the same soul or spirit that Aboriginals share" Their whole religion is revolves around the earth as they believe the earth to be the mother of all

things. A person's soul is believed to continue on after their physical form has moved on through death. Aboriginals believe that after the death of a person, their spirit returns to the Dreamtime form, where they are reborn as a person, an animal, a plant or a rock. The Dreamtime is the core of Aboriginal spiritual belief, they say it has no beginning and no end.

Source:

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