

Hinduism – the Sanatana Dharma

Based on the paper presented by

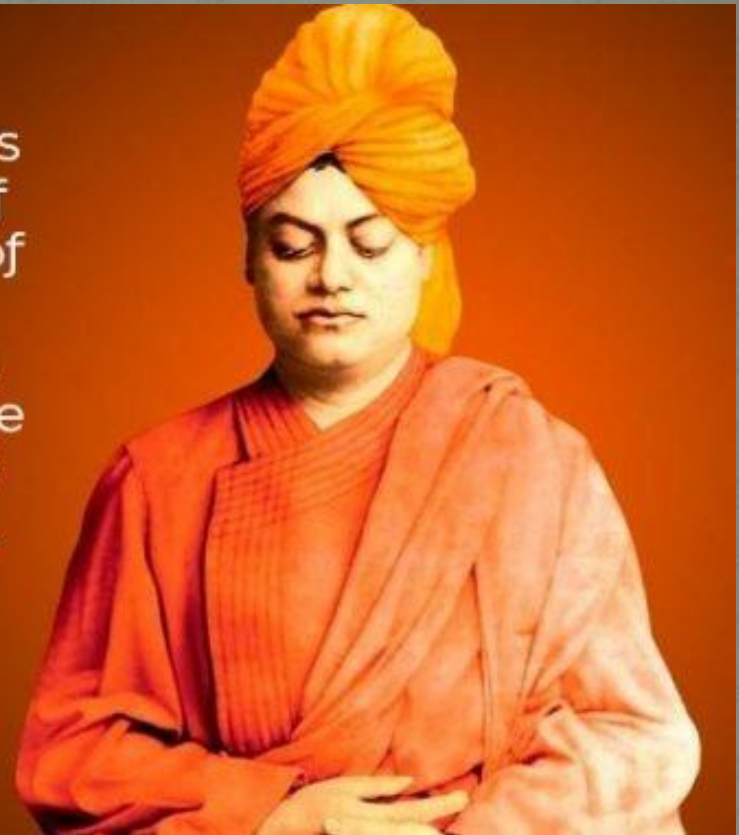
Swami Vivekananda

in

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“From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.”



The Background....

- From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.
- Where then, the question arises, where is the common centre to which all these widely diverging radii converge? Where is the common basis upon which all these seemingly hopeless contradictions rest?

Vedas – the Sacred Text

1. The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end.
2. By the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times.
3. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual world.
4. The moral, ethical, and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits, were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them.

The Rishis - Founders of the System

- The discoverers of these laws are called Rishis, and we honour them as perfected beings.
- Some of the very greatest of them were women.
- The Vedas teach us that creation is without beginning or end. Science is said to have proved that the sum total of cosmic energy is always the same.
- Then, if there was a time when nothing existed, where was all this manifested energy? Some say it was in a potential form in God.



The Supreme Teachings of the Veda

- The idea of a body. Am I, then, nothing but a combination of material substances? The Vedas declare, 'No.' I am a spirit living in a body. I am not the body. The body will die, but I shall not die.
- Here I am in this body; it will fall, but I shall go on living. I had also a past. The soul was not created, for creation means a combination which means a certain future dissolution. If then the soul was created, it must die.
- A Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce — him the fire cannot burn — him the water cannot melt — him the air cannot dry. The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is located in the body, and that death means the change of this centre from body to body.
- Nor is the soul bound by the conditions of matter. In its very essence, it is free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect. But somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter, and thinks of itself as matter.



The Ataman is free from
the cycle of birth & death



The Doctrine of Karma

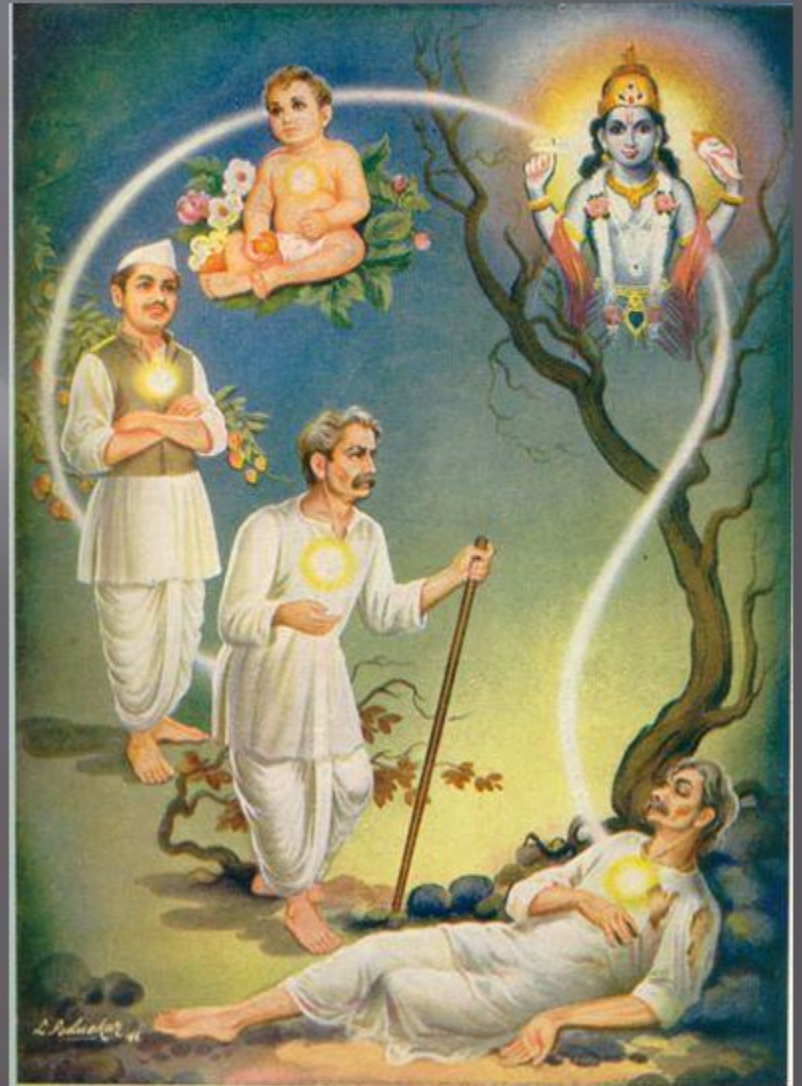
- The human soul is eternal and immortal, perfect and infinite, and death means only a change of centre from one body to another.
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- The present is determined by our past actions, and the future by the present (Doctrine of Karma)
- The soul will go on evolving up or reverting back from birth to birth and death to death.

REINCARNATION

Hindus believe that the soul does not die along with the body but enters another body to carry on its existence.

This endless cycle of rebirth, or reincarnation, is called *samsara*.

In Hindu thought, the physical world is temporary, ever-changing and artificial.



Samsara

- Belief in reincarnation
- Continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth
- Goal in life is achieve *moksha* and be released from samsara
- People make pilgrimages and unite with Brahman to escape the cycle



Karma and Reincarnation

- We continue to be reborn as human beings until we find God, merge into God. This is called **moksha**.
- **Moksha** literally means 'release' or 'liberation' - this is the fourth goal of Hinduism.



MOKSHA

- The ultimate goal of man is to realize the Brahman and attain unity with Him – the Mokasha. Such realizations result in the creation of higher knowledge either in the form of intuition or revelation. Without observing the Dharma nobody could attain Moksha. However, each man is free to choose his own path of Moksha. The Brahman is the One and the Sole and Absolute. But each human being realizes and attains Him in his own unique way which varies from person to person. The Vedas and the Upanishads and the Puranas and the Ithihasas, though originated later, prescribe or explain the different means for attaining these goals and objectives.

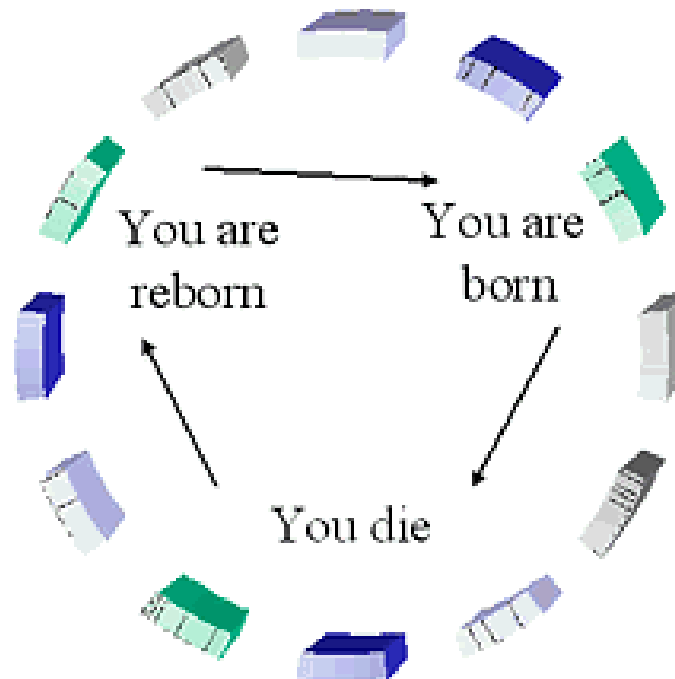
Freedom...

- The Vedas teach that the soul is divine, only held in the bondage of matter; perfection will be reached when this bond will burst, and the word they use for it is therefore, Mukti — freedom, freedom from the bonds of imperfection, freedom from death and misery.
- And this bondage can only fall off through the mercy of God, and this mercy comes on the pure. So purity is the condition of His mercy.
- How does that mercy act? He reveals Himself to the pure heart; the pure and the stainless see God, yea, even in this life; then and then only all the crookedness of the heart is made straight. Then all doubt ceases

The Law Of Samsara - Reincarnation

KARMA

The amount of good works/ actions, following your DHARMA (duty) that you perform. The more good Karma you build up in your ATMAN (Soul) during your life, the better your rebirth.



If your atman has better Karma than the previous life then you will be reborn into a higher life form. **EVENTUALLY** your Atman will not be reborn into another body. You will achieve

MOKSHA

– release from Samsara and be at one with Brahman.

A continual cycle of birth-death-rebirth

How do Hindus achieve Moksha

- There are four different paths to achieve Moksha which a Hindu can take.

The Hindu can choose one or all four of the paths they are:

- **1 The path of knowledge** - Jnana-Yoga

Spiritual knowledge -leading to the knowledge of the relationship between the soul (atman) and God (Brahman)

- **2 The path of meditation** - Dhyana-yoga

The idea is to concentrate so you can reach the real self within you and become one with Brahman

- **3 The Path of Devotion** - Bhakti-yoga

Choosing a particular god or goddess and worshipping them throughout your life in actions, words and deeds.

- **4 The path of good works** - Karma-yoga

This involves doing all your duties correctly throughout your life.



The Next Question..

- How can the perfect soul be deluded into the belief that it is imperfect?
- A Hindu is brave enough to face the question in a manly fashion; and his answer is: 'I do not know. I do not know how the perfect being, the soul, came to think of itself as imperfect, as joined to and conditioned by matter.'
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- But the fact is a fact for all that. It is a fact in everybody's consciousness that one thinks of oneself as the body.
- The Hindu does not attempt to explain why one thinks one is the body. The answer that it is the will of God is no explanation. This is nothing more than what the Hindu says, 'I do not know.'
- Vedanta proclaims, this is absolutely because of IGNORANCE (Ajanana or Maya) – not being able to understand of our TRUE NATURE

Attaining Perfection is the Goal

- Thus the whole object of their system is by constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God, and see God, and this reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect, constitutes the religion of the Hindus.
- And what becomes of a man when he attains perfection? He lives a life of bliss infinite. He enjoys infinite and perfect bliss, having obtained the only thing in which man ought to have pleasure, namely God, and enjoys the bliss with God.
- So far all the Hindus are agreed. This is the common religion of all the sects of India; but, then, perfection is absolute, and the absolute cannot be two or three. It cannot have any qualities. It cannot be an individual.
- And so when a soul becomes perfect and absolute, it must become one with Brahman, and it would only realize the Lord as the perfection, the reality, of its own nature and existence, the existence absolute, knowledge absolute, and bliss absolute. We have often and often read this called the losing of individuality and becoming a stock or a stone.

The True Nature of Us

- Upanishad says, 'Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! Even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again.'
- 'Children of immortal bliss' — what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name — heirs of immortal bliss — yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners.
- Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth — sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature.
- Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.

THE FORM & FORMLESS ASPECTS OF GOD

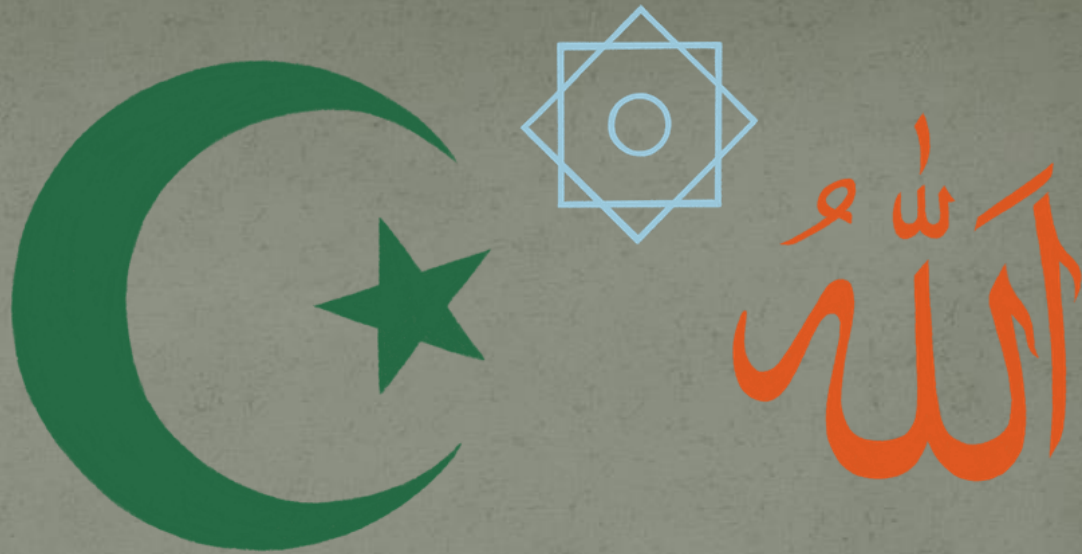
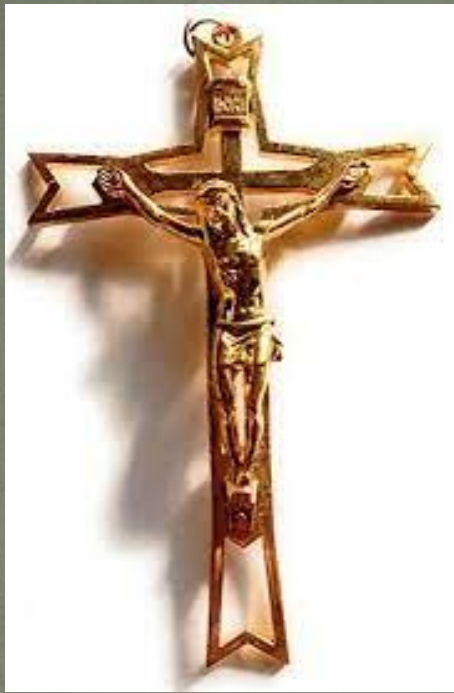
- A. He is everywhere, the pure and formless One, the Almighty and the All-merciful. 'Thou art our father, Thou art our mother, Thou art our beloved friend. Thou art the source of all strength; give us strength. Thou art He that beareth the burdens of the universe; help me bear the little burden of this life.' Thus sang the Rishis of the Veda.
- B. And how to worship Him? Through love. 'He is to be worshipped as the one beloved, dearer than everything in this and the next life.'
- C. This is the doctrine of love declared in the Vedas, and let us see how it is fully developed and taught by Krishna, whom the Hindus believe to have been God incarnate on earth.
- D. He taught that a man ought to live in this world like a lotus leaf, which grows in water but is never moistened by water; so a man ought to live in the world-his heart to God and his hands to work.

Hinds are idolaters

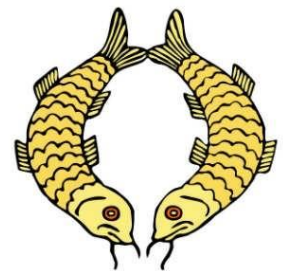
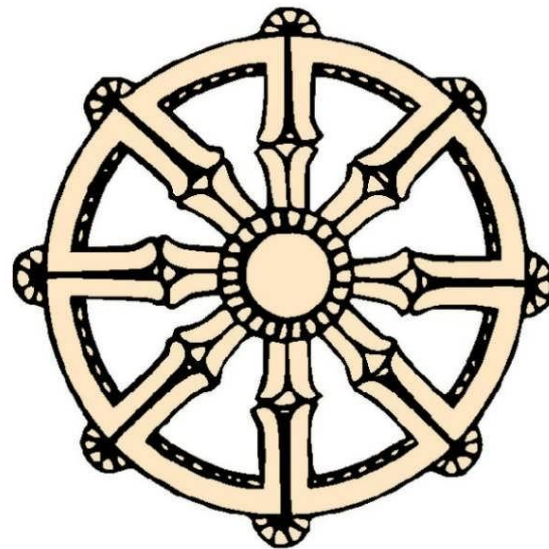


The Real Idea behind Idol Worship

- A. I remember, as a boy, hearing a Christian missionary preach to a crowd in India. Among other sweet things he was telling them was that if he gave a blow to their idol with his stick, what could it do? One of his hearers sharply answered, 'If I abuse your God, what can He do?' 'You would be punished,' said the preacher, 'when you die.' 'So my idol will punish you when you die,' retorted the Hindu.
- B. The tree is known by its fruits. When I have seen amongst them that are called idolaters, men, the like of whom, in morality and spirituality and love I have never seen anywhere, I stop and ask myself, 'Can sin beget holiness?'
- C. Superstition is a great enemy of man, but bigotry is worse. Why does a Christian go to church? Why is the cross holy? Why is the face turned toward the sky in prayer? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church? Why are there so many images in the minds of Protestants when they pray? My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a mental image than we can live without breathing.
- D. By the law of association the material image calls up the mental idea and vice versa. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. He will tell you, it helps to keep his mind fixed on the Being to whom he prays. He knows as well as you do that the image is not God, is not omnipresent.
- E. After all, how much does omnipresence mean to almost the whole world? It stands merely as a word, a symbol. Has God superficial area? If not, when we repeat that word 'omnipresent', we think of the extended sky or of space, that is all.



The Holy Symbols in Religious Systems



The Real Idea behind Idol Worship

- As we find that somehow or other, by the laws of our mental constitution, we have to associate our ideas of infinity with the image of the blue sky, or of the sea, so we naturally connect our idea of holiness with the image of a church, a mosque, or a cross.
- The Hindus have associated the ideas of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence, and such other ideas with different images and forms. But with this difference that while some people devote their whole lives to their idol of a church and never rise higher, because with them religion means an intellectual assent to certain doctrines and doing good to their fellows, the whole religion of the Hindu is centred in realization.
- Man is to become divine by realizing the divine. Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual childhood; but on and on he must progress.
- He must not stop anywhere. 'External worship, material worship,' say the scriptures, 'is the lowest stage; struggling to rise high, mental prayer is the next stage, but the highest stage is when the Lord has been realized.' Mark, the same earnest man who is kneeling before the idol tells you, 'Him the sun cannot express, nor the moon, nor the stars, the lightning cannot express Him, nor what we speak of as fire; through Him they shine.' But he does not abuse any one's idol or call its worship sin. He recognizes in it a necessary stage of life. 'The child is father of the man.' Would it be right for an old man to say that childhood is a sin or youth a sin?

Invoking Infinite “in finite”



The Real Idea behind Idol Worship

- If a man can realize his divine nature with the help of an image, would it be right to call that a sin? Nor, even when he has passed that stage, should he call it an error.
- To the Hindu, man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth.
- To him all the religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the Infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of these marks a stage of progress; and every soul is a young eagle soaring higher and higher, gathering more and more strength, till it reaches the Glorious Sun.
- Unity in variety is the plan of nature, and the Hindu has recognized it. Every other religion lays down certain fixed dogmas, and tries to force society to adopt them. It places before society only one coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. If it does not fit John or Henry, he must go without a coat to cover his body.
- The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realized, or thought of, or stated, through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols-so many pegs to hang spiritual ideas on. It is not that this help is necessary for everyone, but those that do not need it have no right to say that it is wrong. Nor is it compulsory in Hinduism.

After realizing the TRUE Nature....



There should not be any contradiction....

- To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal.
- Every religion is only evolving a God out of the material man, and the same God is the inspirer of all of them. Why, then, are there so many contradictions? They are only apparent, says the Hindu. The contradictions come from the same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures.
- It is the same light coming through glasses of different colours. And these little variations are necessary for purposes of adaptation. But in the heart of everything the same truth reigns.
- The Lord has declared to the Hindu in His incarnation as Krishna: 'I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there.' And what has been the result?
- I challenge the world to find, throughout the whole system of Sanskrit philosophy, any such expression as that the Hindu alone will be saved and not others. Says Vyasa, 'We find perfect men even beyond the pale of our caste and creed.' One thing more. How, then, can the Hindu, whose whole fabric of thought centres in God, believe in Buddhism which is agnostic, or in Jainism which is atheistic?

**A RELIGION WHICH WILL HAVE NO PLACE FOR PERSECUTION OR
INTOLERANCE IN ITS POLITY.....**

- This, brethren, is a short sketch of the religious ideas of the Hindus. The Hindu may have failed to carry out all his plans, but if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being, from the lowest grovelling savage not far removed from the brute, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature.
- It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centred in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature.

As many faiths so many paths...



Marching at the vanguard of civilization with the flag of harmony.....

- Offer such a religion, and all the nations will follow you. Ashoka's council was a council of the Buddhist faith. Akbar's, though more to the purpose, was only a parlour meeting. It was reserved for America to proclaim to all quarters of the globe that the Lord is in every religion.
- May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea! The star arose in the East; it travelled steadily towards the West, sometimes dimmed and sometimes effulgent, till it made a circuit of the world; and now it is again rising on the very horizon of the East, the borders of the Sampo, a thousandfold more effulgent than it ever was before.

The strength lies here in INDIA

