

New Translation of Swami Vivekananda's "*Hindudharma ki?*" (1901) ("What is Hindu Dharma?") by Swami Medhananda

(Original Bengali essay in *Bāṇi o Racanā*, vol. 6, p. 3; English translation under the title "Hinduism and Sri Ramakrishna," in *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 6, pp. 181–82)

[1] The word "*śāstra*" means the beginningless and endless Veda. This Veda alone is capable of providing religious instruction and guidance.

[2] The Purāṇas and other scriptural texts are denoted by the word "*smṛti*"; and their authority extends only so far as they follow *śruti*, and no further.

[3] Truth is of two kinds: first, that which is cognizable by the five ordinary senses of man, and by inferential reasoning based thereon; second, that which is cognizable by the subtle, supersensuous power born of Yoga.

[4] Knowledge acquired by the first means is called "science" (*vijñāna*); and knowledge acquired by the second is called "Veda."

[5] The whole body of supersensuous knowledge (*jñānarāśi*), having no beginning or end, and called by the name of "Veda," is ever-existent, and the Creator Himself is creating, preserving, and destroying the universe with the help of this knowledge.

[6] The person in whom this supersensuous power (*atīndriya śakti*) is manifested is called a "Rishi," and the supersensuous truths (*alaukik satya*) which he realises by this power are called "Veda."

[7] The attainment of this Rishihood and this supersensuous perception of Veda is the true experiential verification of religion (*ei ṛṣitva o vedadraṣṭṛtva lābh karāi yathārta dharmānubhūti*). And as long as this does not develop, so long does religion remain a mere empty word, and it is to be understood that the first step into the realm of religion has not yet been taken.

[8] The authority of Veda extends to all countries, time periods, and persons; that is to say, its authority is not confined to any particular country, time period, or person.

[9] Veda alone expounds the Universal Religion (*sārvajanīn dharma*).

[10] Although the supersensuous knowledge of truths is present, to some extent, in our country's Itihāsas and Purāṇas and in all the religious scriptures of other countries, yet as the first, most complete, and most undistorted collection of the whole body of supersensuous knowledge, the body of words known among the Aryan race as the "Vedas," and which is divided into four books, deserves to occupy the highest place in all respects, is worthy of being worshipped by the whole world, and is the ultimate proof (*pramāṇa-bhūmi*) of all religious scriptures, Aryan or foreign.

[11] With regard to the body of words known as the "Vedas," discovered by the Aryans, it must be understood that those portions alone form the Vedas in the true sense which do not

refer to empirical or secular matters, which do not extol and encourage the performance of Vedic rituals, and which do not merely record history or tradition.

[12] This mass of words known as the Vedas is divided into two portions: the knowledge portion (*jñāna-kāṇḍa*) and the ritualistic portion (*karma-kāṇḍa*). Since the rituals and their results taught in the ritualistic portion fall within the world of *māyā*, they have changed and evolved, are still evolving, and will continue to evolve in accordance with the law of change with respect to place, time, person, and so on. Since social customs and duties are also based on the ritualistic portion of the Vedas, they also change from time to time and will continue to change. Likewise, all popular customs and manners are to be accepted, so long as they are not contrary to the true scriptures and the conduct of holy people. One of the main causes of the downfall of the Aryan race is their subjection to popular customs and manners that are contrary to the true scripture and to the conduct of holy people.

[13] It is the knowledge portion of the Vedas, otherwise known as Vedānta, that is the only teacher of the universal religion—a religion that is meant for all peoples, all countries and all times—since Vedānta alone is not at all affected by time, place, or person and is eternally taking people across the ocean of *māyā* to the other shore of liberation by means of selfless works, yoga, bhakti, and jñāna.

[14] The laws of Manu and other sages, on the basis of the *karma-kāṇḍa*, have mainly taught actions that are beneficial to society, according to the exigencies of time, place, and person. The Purāṇas and other texts have uncovered the truths hidden in Vedānta and explained them in detail through descriptions of the great lives and deeds of avatāras and other great souls, and they have emphasized one or another aspect (*bhāva*) of the Lord of infinite aspects (*anantabhāvamaya prabhu bhagavān*), teaching only that particular aspect.

[15] However, in the course of time, the descendants of the Aryans—who had deviated from right conduct, were devoid of dispassion, feeble in intellect, and devoted only to the prevailing popular customs—were not able to understand the deeper import of the Purāṇas and other scriptures, which seemed to contradict one another due to the fact that they taught different aspects (*bhāva*) of God and preached the subtle truths of Vedānta in gross and multifarious language for those of little intelligence. Consequently, when they turned India, the Land of Religion, almost into a hell by splitting into numerous divisions the indivisible Eternal Religion, which encompasses infinite spiritual attitudes (*anantabhāvasamaṣṭi akhaṇḍa sanātana dharma*), thereby kindling the fire of sectarian jealousy and anger and attempting constantly to throw each other into that fire—

[16] Then it was that Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna incarnated Himself in order to show what the true religion of the Aryans was and where, amidst all its innumerable sects and denominations that had cropped up throughout the country over a vast period of time, lay the true unity of the Hindu Dharma, which had been devastated by continuous sectarian quarrels, which appeared to be divided in various ways, and the various sects of which were constantly quarrelling with one another and abounding in customs divergent in every way. And above all, He incarnated to hold up before people—for their lasting welfare—his own life as a living embodiment of the universal, timeless, and global essence of the Sanātana Dharma, so long cast into oblivion by the process of time.

[17] The Śāstra, which is eternally existent and the instrument of the Divine Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe, reveals itself spontaneously in the hearts of rishis purified of

past impressions. In order to demonstrate this, and because such verification of the Śāstra will help in the revival, reestablishment, and spread of religion, God—who is the very embodiment of the Veda—has in this new incarnation almost completely neglected external forms of learning.

[18] It is well established in the Smṛtis, etc. that God incarnates again and again in human form in order to protect the Veda, or true religion, and brahminhood—that is, the ability to teach true religion.

[19] The waters of a river falling down a precipice acquire greater velocity. The rising wave after a hollow swells higher. So, after every period of decline, the Āryan society—under the compassionate guidance of the Divine—has risen the more glorious and powerful. Such is the testimony of history.

[20] Rising again after each fall, our revived society expresses more of the eternal perfection hidden within; and likewise, the Lord, the Inner Controller of all beings, manifests Himself more and more in each successive Incarnation.