

[Dayananda's Arya Samaj](#)

Category : [March/April 2001](#)

Published by Anonymous on Mar. 02, 2001

MOVEMENTS

Dayananda's Arya Samaj

The 19th-century firebrands crusade to revive the

Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj in 1875 as a social/political reform movement within Hinduism. He sought to reestablish the Vedas as the primary scriptural source. Toward this aim, his Arya Samaj opposed idolatry, child marriage, child labor, untouchability, non-Vedic literature such as the Puranas, animal sacrifice, discrimination against women, a caste system based on birth rather than merit, pilgrimage, austerity and complex temple rituals. A compelling leader with brilliant intelligence, Swami Dayananda was adamant and unyielding in his mission.

Swami Dayananda was born in 1825 into a wealthy Saivite family in Gujurat. At the age of eight he was invested with the sacred brahmin thread. Accounts of his life always begin with the same story:

In February of the year 1839 during the long, dark night of Sivaratri (an important all-night Siva festival celebrated once a year) the life of a 14-year-old brahmin boy changed course and set destiny. Young Mushankar, as he was named, was told by his father that if he could repeat "Aum Nama Sivaya" without

falling asleep the whole night through, he would have a vision of Lord Siva. He took his father seriously but was disappointed. Instead of seeing Siva, he saw a small rat climb up on the Siva Lingam to eat the food offerings. He wondered how such a great God could not even keep such a small creature from eating the sacred prasadam. This event, in conjunction with the tragic death of his sister, disillusioned him and set his mind burning with questions concerning the validity of what he was being taught about God, the soul and the purpose of life on Earth. Thus began for the boy Mushankar the quest that would culminate in his initiation as Swami Dayananda and a life dedicated to a spiritual, cultural and social mission destined to gain him an international fame that is still alive today, 161 years later.

Against the wishes of his parents, he took the renunciate vows of sannyasa at the age of 24 from Swami Purnananda Saraswati and for twelve years studied and practiced yoga with great teachers such as Swami Yogananda at Mount Abu and saints in Rishi-

kesht and Haridwar. He also received some training in tantric practices. During his extensive wanderings, he practiced great austerities, but apparently became disillusioned with these methods. The conviction grew within him that his mission in life was to help others. As time went on, he focused progressively more and more on the social and political arena, an inclination greatly motivated by the events of his time.

In the mid-19th century, India's social, economic, political and cultural condition had degenerated tremendously. Hundreds of years of neglect due to indifference and foreign domination

had reduced the country to near ruin in almost every sphere of life. He deplored the complacency of the people. Swami was sure he could bring about a major change, and he threw himself into the task wholeheartedly. He established the Arya Samaj ("Society of Noble People") in Bombay on April 10, 1875, and did some writing. His single most important literary accomplishment was Satyārtha Prakash (Light of Truth), a comprehensive study--most brazenly expressed--focusing on a broad range of subject matter from child-rearing, marriage and the science of government to the Vedic meaning of emancipation to detailed studies of other religions.

Few men toiled, labored and sacrificed as Swami Dayananda did, and this personal zeal earned him great respect. Yet, no one who knew him--even his friends--would deny that he was antagonistic and confrontational. Still, he gained popularity. Debate was his forte. He attended religious fairs and celebrations such as the Kumbha Mela and engaged learned pundits in philosophical discussion. He would openly challenge anyone to deny the central importance of the Vedas, and this audacity earned him vicious ridicule and even physical abuse.

The most frequent criticism leveled against him was for his refusal to compromise. This was especially true with regard to his stance on idol worship. When once asked for leniency in his criticism of idol worship, he adamantly replied: "The things of the world which yield pleasure to you have no charm for me. To me there is pleasure in the contemplation and adoration of God alone and in carrying out his commandments. I shall work with the one, sole objective of disseminating true Vedic knowledge."

Swami's anti-idolatry stance was, at least in part, a concession to the Christian missionaries' contention that idolatry signified undeveloped thinking about religion and God. Because Christian missionaries emphasized idolatry as a weakness within Hinduism, Swami was all the more motivated to annihilate it altogether. It was on the issue of "idolatry" that Swami was most divided from traditional Hindu thought. Eventually however, when pundits provided undeniable proof that the Vedas condone the worship of physical icons, Swami was forced to at least partially recant his unyielding conviction.

He was also convinced that Puranic literature relating the stories of Gods and devas was fiction. Here, he stood on better ground against opposition. His argument was that such unfounded myths, as he regarded them, lead to superstition not conducive to intelligent religious culture. He said, "Just as a grain of poison is sufficient to vitiate several pounds of food-stuff, similarly the poison of mythology has vitiated the whole Puranic literature."

Swami was impressed by the organizational rigidity and unity of the Christian and Islamic churches, and he incorporated some of their principles in his structuring of the Arya Samaj. He also established vegetarianism in the Samaj and prohibited alcohol. He was adamantly against the concept of Avatar (that God takes birth as a man), and he loved democracy. During his life, he was never president of the Arya Samaj. He was only an ordinary member. Even today, Arya Samaj leaders are elected for a fixed term only and have no personal power to override popular Samaj opinion. Democracy, he thought, was the antithesis of the severely flawed caste system which gave birth to so many other problems, such as discrimination

against women, child labor and child marriage. After many failed attempts on his life, Swami Dayananda Saraswati was assassinated by opponents on October 30, 1883.

Today the Arya Samaj has several thousand centers worldwide (www.aryasamaj.com). Its largest following in India is in the west and north, where they run many schools. They have been effective in ministry among Indians of the diaspora, with a significant presence in South Africa, Kenya, Trinidad, Fiji, Mauritius and USA

Ten Principles Of Arya Samaj

Religion without ritual

- 1.** God is the primary source of all true knowledge and all that is known by its means.
- 2.** God is existent, intelligent and blissful. He is formless, omniscient, just, merciful, unborn, endless, unchangeable, beginningless, the support of all, the master of all, omnipresent, immanent, unaging, immortal, fearless, eternal and holy creator of all. He alone is worthy of

being worshiped.

3. The Vedas are the scriptures of true knowledge. It is the first duty of the Aryans to read, teach, recite them and hear them being read.

4. One should always be ready to accept truth and give up untruth.

5. One should do everything according to the dictates of karma after consideration of right and wrong.

6. Doing good to the whole world is the primary objective of this society. It should strive to ameliorate the physical, spiritual and social conditions of all men.

7. All people should be treated with care, justice, righteousness and due regard for merits.

8. Ignorance ought to be dispelled and knowledge disseminated.

9. One should not be content with one's own welfare alone, but should look to the welfare of others.

10. In all matters affecting the well-being

of society, one should subordinate personal interests; in matters that affect him alone, he is to enjoy freedom of action.