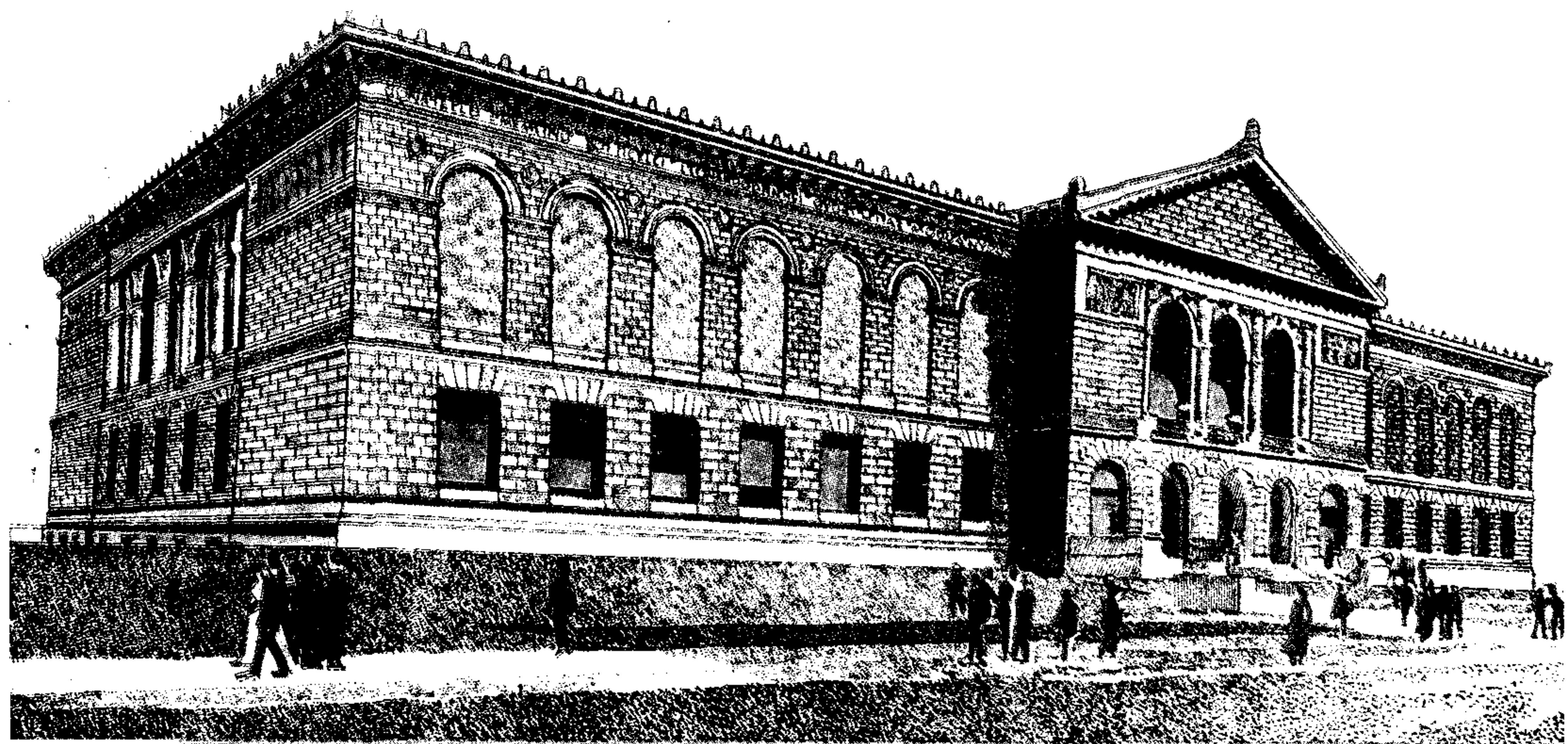




# Prabuddha Bharata

## or Awakened India



*"Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance:  
'Help and not Fight,' 'Assimilation and not Destruction,'  
'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.'"*

*Closing Address by Swami Vivekananda,  
Chicago Parliament of Religions, September 1893.*





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उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत



# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

**ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED.**

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## DIVINE WISDOM

स एव मायापरिमोहितात्मा  
शरीरमास्थाय करोति सर्वम्।  
स्त्रियन्नपानादिविचित्रभोगैः  
स एव जाग्रत्परितृप्तिमेति॥

With his self thus deluded by *Māyā* or ignorance, it is he (the *jīva*) who identifies himself with the body and does all sorts of things. In the waking state it is he who attains satisfaction through the varied objects of enjoyments, such as women, food, drink, etc.

स्वप्ने स जीवः सुखदुःखभोक्ता  
स्वमायया कल्पितजीवलोके।  
सुषुप्तिकाले सकले विलीने  
तमोऽभिभूतः सुखरूपमेति॥

In the dream-state that *jīva* feels pleasure and pain in a sphere of existence created by his own *Māyā* or ignorance. During the state of profound sleep, when everything is dissolved (into their causal

state), he is overpowered by *Tamas* or non-manifestation and comes to exist in his form of Bliss.

पुनश्च जन्मान्तरकर्मयोगात्  
स एव जीवः स्वपिति प्रबुद्धः  
पुरत्रये क्रीडति यश्च जीव—  
स्ततस्तु जातं सकलं विचित्रम्॥  
आधारमानन्दमखण्डबोधं  
यस्मिँल्लयं याति पुरत्रयं च॥

Again, through his connection with deeds done in previous births, that very *jīva* returns to the dream state, or the waking state. The being who sports in the three cities (viz. the states of wakefulness, dream and profound sleep)—from Him has sprung up all diversity. He is the substratum, the bliss, the indivisible Consciousness, in whom the three cities dissolve themselves.\*

*from the Kaivalyopaniṣad*

\* No distinction is made here between the *jīva* and *Brahman*, which are eternally one, the difference between them being only apparent, due to ignorance.



## Renunciation and Service

Renouncing one's own personal interests for the good of others, and performing actions for others in a spirit of friendship and service, is not only a personal ideal of a few individual men and women, but is a basic and essential value of society as a whole. When any nation aims for peace and the well-being of its people, it must in some measure practise these virtues. If we can make Renunciation and Service our conscious ideals so much the better. But there is a psychological difficulty—the word 'Service', or *Seva*, is not that frightening to most people, whereas 'Renunciation', or *Tyāga*, is. The moment a person hears about renouncing, he gets the idea of forcibly giving up something; he gets edgy and feels trapped. He tries to wriggle off the hook, as it were, and wants to avoid some kind of unpleasant personal sacrifice that he imagines. Many people however are engaged in various types of social service or welfare activities. Though such good works are difficult for them, they don't mind. They perform their services without any thought of renunciation. The same persons may become apprehensive if they are reminded of renouncement, however. It is as though thinking about renouncing draws into their mind the picture of painful asceticism or austere and lonely life. A recluse or monk, who has withdrawn from the world has renounced his hearth and home and given up worldly pleasures. So this premeditated idea of giving up personal pleasures and family life alarms most people. They fail to grasp that renunciation does not mean running away from the world; on the contrary, it is living in the world, practising unselfishness as far as possible, and deriving happiness from that.

When people engage in social welfare

activities, for the good of the poor and needy, certainly they renounce something. They give up money, some of their time and labour, and endure certain hardships. This is *tyāga*, true renunciation. Without *tyāga* there cannot be *seva* or service. Any kind of doing good to others will always entail some kind of renouncing. Parents give up many of their desires and comforts and sacrifice a lot for their children. Children too reciprocate. If parents become selfish and look out for their own pleasures only, and children imitate their bad example, then there is neither harmony nor peace in that family. It is rather a selfish group and not a family. In a family each gives up some of his selfish desires for the sake of others. This ensures family harmony and happiness. The same ideal holds for all collective and social life. The twin ideals of *tyāga* and *seva* are not mutually exclusive, but are interdependent.

No man can remain utterly selfish. His selfishness will be knocked down by nature and by his own living in a group. During personal crises he needs succour and help; during sickness he requires care and kindness. An isolated and self-centred life is an arid desert. It is bereft of beauty and love. Even animals are social and love and care for each other. That society is degenerate where human behaviour is solely dictated by selfish and material interests.

Our present human society does not present a scene of pure health and harmony. Motivated by greed for money, man's activity seems to be for personal gain, luxury and enjoyment. 'Each man for himself and the devil take the hindmost' is the prevailing mood. That is why people commonly feel quite at ease amongst a

surfeit of material things, but uncomfortable in simple surroundings with only human companionship. In a neighbourhood it is sometimes seen that people live as strangers to each other. Each country is desperately seeking economic prosperity. The irony is, what means it adopts to achieve this goal does not matter. People never raise any voice against it. Having lived in developed or economically affluent societies, they are not ready to lower their high or luxurious standards of living, let alone share their wealth with poor and starving millions elsewhere. People are driven by one insatiable motive: to acquire more and more. Whatever they want to throw away as useless goes in the name of charity to poor countries. There are a few wealthy countries which destroy their surplus agricultural produce when those products cannot fetch adequate profits in the world market. A few countries patronize drug-trafficking. Money and profit have become the driving forces behind human activities. Some countries harp upon the need for global peace, yet manufacture and sell the weapons of mass destruction. They don't care as long as they get money, who purchases these deadly arms or for what purpose. It is a very lucrative business and no wealthy country is about to let it go. Our depleting natural resources are not used for the welfare of mankind, but are employed for its slow destruction. Human greed is unquenchable. Modern man laughs at the virtues of renunciation and service. But without the practice of these virtues to some extent the face of the earth and life on it may not change.

Human beings live depending on each other. This requires a bit of sacrifice from each member of society. This giving up, in most cases, is not voluntary but enforced from outside authority. Religion and laws of the land either use persuasion or enact

laws to force citizens or members to give up some part of their wealth and time. The noble purpose behind all these enforcements is to teach man a little of renunciation. In Hindu tradition certain days in a year are earmarked as auspicious or holy. The Hindus are advised to be generous on these days and give liberally to poor people. By doing so they hope to accumulate merit in this life. Religions lay stress on charity. Charity is renouncement. The law demands, whereas religions persuade. The legal measures are impersonal and take away by taxes the surplus wealth of citizens. Voluntary renunciation brings more joy, whereas forced giving-up often induces suffering and hatred.

*Tyāga* does not mean only giving money in charity. It's scope is much wider than this. It includes transmission of knowledge, giving one's time and labour, feeding hungry mouths, sharing and trying to alleviate others' sufferings, doing one's work whole-heartedly and not escaping from responsibility. Appreciating good works and good qualities in others, encouraging people, and using kind words also involve a certain kind of *tyāga*. We usually do not admire goodness in others. We are so encapsulated in our own little personal world of covetousness and problems that we rarely notice the sacrifice of others. A little *tyāga* is necessary to look beyond one's personal concerns. Of course, we help our neighbours sometimes, but that help is based on the calculation of getting some return. And our hope is that during our troubles they would pay it back. Whatever little service we do for others, we go on advertising about it. We expect and like gratitude from others. Very few persons like to remain anonymous. So renunciation and service instead of broadening our hearts and engendering sympathy, make us still small and petty.



Our educational institutions, government offices and hospitals and so on present a pathetic sight. The very spirit of *seva* is absent everywhere. Apathy towards work, absence of fellow-feeling, and morbid self-concern are the common phenomena. Each member of society is loaded with complaints and grievances. A lazy teacher, who is not devoted to his work, complains about poor medical service in the hospitals. An unsympathetic bureaucrat blames educational institutions for the poor quality of life and discipline. An unscrupulous doctor excuses himself by pointing to the dishonesty of other people. We only complain against each other and never for a moment think to do our work with some dedication. Therefore people are simmering with dissatisfaction, irritation and the habit of blaming. Everyone wishes, if others conscientiously do their work, things will be better. When each one of us does our work with some measure of dedication, interest, and love, only then things would change. One cannot exclude himself from others. It is waste of time and energy to find fault with the world. Any improvement begins within oneself and not with the world, is an inexorable law.

Environment does not change by hurling abuses at it. It changes dramatically when the majority of human beings start changing their outlook and attitudes. That attitudinal change comes with renouncing. If we want to attain a happy and healthy human society, there could be no greater help than for all to imbibe the attitude of renouncing our excessive selfishness and serving other people who are in need. One may say, there is no other alternative to improve our society. This *tyāga* and *seva*, renunciation and service, are not utopian ideals, but are within the reach of us all. One can start with oneself. By keeping aside consideration for one's personal gains and losses, one can share the troubles and

difficulties of others for short periods and help in whatever way possible. We have to get rid of the old habit of thought, and go out and treat people with kindness and sympathy. To acknowledge without reserve, and praise others for whatever little they do for ourselves is also a selfless service. It helps bring out positive qualities in others, too. Bhartṛhari says in his *Nītiśataka*: "Do good to others and be silent about it, but proclaim among people the benefits received from others."<sup>1</sup>

The general tendency on our part is to expect sweet behaviour, prompt response and kind treatment. Why not reverse this negative process and say: "I shall be kind, considerate and sympathetic to other people and will not ill-treat others. Let others behave the way they like, but I will not deviate from my path and unduly get disturbed." Yes, such determination demands great self-control, ignoring the colossal ego. Peace and ego cannot co-exist. Where ego is, its concomitants are pain and disquiet. We cannot insulate the ego from disturbance, hurts and insults. Disturbance and unhappiness are the other names for it. Unless we renounce this pseudo-entity little by little, freedom is *not*. Without freedom there can be no pure joy of life. As one has his ego, other people too have theirs. In the Mahabharata, the sage Brhaspati tells Yudhiṣṭhira, "When you hurt another, he turns and hurts you; when you love another, he turns and loves you." A Sanskrit verse puts it beautifully: "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."<sup>2</sup> The question is, how to practise it in everyday life? A Christian mystic answered it: "You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working; and just so,

1. *Priyam kṛtvā maunam sadasi kathanam cāpi upakṛteḥ*.—Bhartṛhari *Nītiśataka*.

2. *Ātmavat pratikūlāni na pareśām samācāret*.

you learn to love God and man by loving." The 'how' lies in the doing.

Many of us have read about the famous expression, "Birkenhead drill." A crew of any ship is familiar with this proverbial expression. In times of terrible dangers at sea they remember the story of the brave crew of the troopship *Birkenhead* and it steadies them. The extraordinary discipline and sacrifice of this ship's crew are legendary. In 1852, the British troopship was carrying soldiers and their families to South Africa. In the dead of night, about forty miles from Cape Town, the ship struck a hidden rock. She split in two. The forward half sank, but everyone managed to reach the stern, the rear end of the ship. Of the 630 people aboard, 170 were women and children. The soldiers were new recruits and their young officers inexperienced. The ship was sinking fast. There were only three lifeboats, and only sixty people could be put in each of them. Colonel Sydney Seton ordered the soldiers to be lined up on deck. The women and children were put into the lifeboats and rowed away from the sinking ship. The ship's crew and soldiers stood like statues without murmur or panic till the ship went down and water closed over their heads. A few of them struggled to the surface and were able to hang onto pieces of floating wreckage. They were hours later picked up by a rescue ship. But 436 men sank before help came. In England monuments were erected to these brave soldiers who calmly embraced death to save others. The sacrifice of these men did not go in vain. The ship's disaster has left behind a noble tradition. Before that when a ship went down it was usually the strongest who got to the lifeboats first and hapless women and children were left behind. Since 1852, before abandoning a ship all men have stood still, no matter what the danger, while women and children were put into the lifeboats.

In 1954 the 'Birkenhead discipline' saved hundreds of lives from a ship *Empire Windrush*. The ship was moving through the Mediterranean waters near the coast of Africa. One day in the early morning there was an explosion in the boiler room and soon the ship was engulfed in flames. When the captain realized that the blaze was beyond control he ordered to abandon the ship. There were more passengers on the ship than the lifeboats could handle. The men remembered the Birkenhead discipline and the crew remained at their posts. Other men lined up on deck and stood still. The women, children and invalids were put into the lifeboats. The fire spread to the deck. But nobody selfishly rushed for the boats. The men jumped into the sea from the burning ship. The swimmers after many hours were picked up by rescue ships.

The almost uncontrollable instinct for one in time of danger is to save one's life at any cost. But there are people who bravely face death to save others. There are men and women who without a single thought about themselves, risk their lives to save not only human beings but even endangered forests and animal species in different parts of the world. These few teach us a worthy lesson—the preciousness of human life as well as all lives.

To help others one need not be a wealthy or powerful person. It is usually those who have less that are ready to share. Those who have more are reluctant to give. Gentleness, sympathy, altruism and affection are lying potentially in ample measure in every human heart. These resources are waiting to be tapped. Money and power have nothing to do with these natural gifts. Money and machinery are rather comparatively powerless. Wealthy people suffer from loneliness, despair and depression. Money cannot fill up the chronic vacuum and incompleteness in the human heart, or



by itself bring peace and love into the world. There is always something to be fulfilled in human life and people often feel that more enrichment with material things can fill the gap. They try to silence the cry of the heart with accumulating wealth, power and other things of this world. But in spite of it all, that feeling of incompleteness surfaces again and again. None can get over it. Everyone suffers from this mysterious sense of subjective unfulfilment, an unnameable want of something. People are unable to put a finger at it and understand what really it is. It is separation. Each one is trying to alienate and fortify himself from others. Life is forcing us towards Unity and Oneness. Life is One. The incessant struggle to keep oneself away from total *Life* is the cause of the feeling of insufficiency and emptiness. Any attempt at differentiation is vain, but adds misery. The only way to total contentment and fullness is to break down the separation and move towards Unity. Renunciation and Service are not mere ethical ideals, but are practical measures to live by in daily life. Ethical norms are rooted in an ethics of giving, sharing and Unity. Observes Eric Fromm: "The problem of psychic health and neurosis is inseparably linked up with that of ethics. It may be said that every neurosis represents a moral problem."<sup>3</sup>

Whatever we do to others and think about them come back to us. By causing misery to others we suffer, by insulting others we hurt ourselves. Because Life is one. The same principle works, when we do some good to others, when we think of their welfare, the good effects of those thoughts and actions come back to us.

"In doing evil," says Vivekananda, "we

injure ourselves and others also. In doing good, we do good to ourselves and others as well. . . . According to Karma Yoga, the action one has done cannot be destroyed until it has borne its fruit; no power in nature can stop it from yielding its results. If I do an evil action, I must suffer for it; there is no power in the universe to stop it or stay it. Similarly, if I do good action, there is no power in the universe which can stop its bearing good results."<sup>4</sup>

The basic premise on which the constitution of UNESCO rests echoes the Vedantic truth:

"...that a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world and that the peace must, therefore, be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind."

The flowering of limited human personality into divinity is possible only when human life is based on sound moral foundation.

To bring a little sunshine and cheerfulness into the lives of other fellow beings is a blessing. For that, one has to forget one's petty worries, anxieties and excessive narcissistic concerns. What is after all human life in the world?—A bundle of fears, jealousies, worries, tensions, hopes, and despairs. The more we think exclusively about ourselves, the more we are dragged into the mire of troubles. The joyous moments are those when we have stopped or forgotten to think about

(Continued on page 542)

3. Eric Fromm, *Man For Himself* (Greenwich, Connecticut, U.S.A., Fawcett Publications, 1947) page 225.

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. 1, page 82.



# Universal Religion and Swami Vivekananda

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

*In 1893 at the Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda initiated with rare spiritual insight the idea of Universal Religion and emphasized the spirit of acceptance of religious plurality. In this in-depth and scholarly article, the author, who is the spiritual head of the Vedanta Society of New York, casts illumination on the essential features of universal religion.*

Religion is life. "Religious thought is in man's very constitution, so much so, that it is impossible for him to give up religion until he can give up his mind and body, until he can give up thought and life," Swami Vivekananda said.<sup>1</sup> All over the world there is the urge to make religion immensely practical. There is a growing protest against any stale and static religion. We make a great mistake in making it a stone of dogma, instead of the bread of life. In order to gain an insight about the true spirit of religion, we should take an interest in other religions.

It is not proposed, however, that some scriptural knowledge is essential in order to understand the spirit of other religions. Knowledge by itself cannot give real insight which is a gift of genuine spiritual development. "A man may be a very good Christian without Greek and Hebrew, and a very bad Christian with both." The student of comparative religion should devote himself to the task of discovering the unity underlying the different religions.

It should be remembered that comparative religion is not to be considered "competitive religion." This study, taken with an open mind, does not foster any malevolent attitude of competition. In

modern times, when we are mingling with other people, religious isolation is impossible. Also, in this modern age, peaceful coexistence is dependent on the recognition of spiritual solidarity. Swami Vivekananda said,

"No civilization can grow, unless fanaticism, bloodshed, and brutality stop. No civilization can begin to lift its head until we look charitably upon one another, and the first step towards that much-needed charity is to look kindly upon the religious convictions of others. Moreover to understand that, not only should we be charitable, but positively helpful to each other, however different our religious ideas and convictions may be." <sup>2</sup> ... "Religion is the greatest motive power for realizing that infinite energy which is the birthright and nature of every man. In making for everything that is good and great, in bringing peace to others, and peace to one's own self, religion is the highest motive power, and therefore ought to be studied from that standpoint. Religion must be studied on a broader basis than formerly...." <sup>3</sup> Swami Vivekananda continued, "... As the human mind broadens, its spiritual steps broaden too. The time has already come when a man cannot record a thought without its reaching all corners

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. 3, page 1.

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 187-88.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, page 67.



of the earth; by merely physical means we have come into touch with the whole world; so the future religions of the world have to become as universal and as wide. The religious ideals of the future must embrace all that exists in the world and is good and great, and, at the same time, have infinite scope for future development. . .”<sup>4</sup>

“The power of religion, broadened and purified, is going to penetrate every part of human life. So long as religion was in the hands of chosen few, or of a body of priests, it was in temples, churches, books, dogmas, ceremonials, forms, and rituals. But when we come to the real spiritual universal concept, then, and then alone, religion will become real and living; it will come into our very nature, live in our every movement, permeate every pore of our society and be infinitely more a power for good than it has ever been before.”<sup>5</sup>

Religion is value oriented. Religious experience, therefore, involves a kind of subjective attitude towards what we look upon as supremely valuable. Religion worth the name anywhere implies a response to a supremely valuable reality which though divine or supersensuous, is ready to respond back to human supplication. A seeker of truth is expected to develop a genuine sense of rapport with the supreme value or absolute value which is not dependent on any other value, though all other values are absolutely dependent on it. Further, this supreme value, whenever partially experienced, gives us great satisfaction and fulfillment. It is ultimate because it is the final goal of all our actions and pursuits. It fosters a sense of “holiness” around it. This is not necessarily always

approached with consuming love. It may bring fear. While engaged in this sort of comparative study, we ought to approach it in a manner that does not hurt the feelings of other. Hence, a special type of mental equipment is urgently needed. A merely biased attitude and argumentative spirit is insufficient, as “grey cold eyes do not know the value of things.” Sympathy is expected of every student of religion. It is not simply a kind of sympathy, but a kind of empathy which alone can help us in this regard.

Scholars of different persuasions have reached a consensus of opinion by their discovery of certain fundamental characteristics shared by all religions. These are:

- a. Its practical utility in bringing harmony in life;
- b. it engenders fellowship due to transformed life;
- c. religious experience is a response to a supremely valuable object or principle;
- d. it involves a kind of whole-hearted enthusiasm in its quest;
- e. religion draws all our attention. Every faculty can be pressed for its service;
- f. it awakens our life and compels us to accept certain duties;
- g. religion enables us to transcend our weakness; and,
- h. the divine power is holiness itself.

This sort of study, along with sincere spiritual joy, completes fulfillment. “Many lamps, but one light,” this is what mystics feel in all traditions. This reminds us of one Bengali song: “The cows are of many colours but milk has got only one.” The Ultimate One is the very perfection of existence, the ideal Reality. Swami Vivekananda said,

4. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, page 67.

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, page 68.

“If you go below the surface, you find that unity between man and man,



between races and races, high and low, rich and poor, gods and men, and men and animals. If you go deep enough all will be seen as only variations of the One, and he who has attained to this conception of Oneness has no more delusion. What can delude him? He knows the reality of everything, the secret of everything. Where is there any more misery for him? He has traced the reality of everything to the Lord, the Centre, the Unity of everything, and that is Eternal Existence, Eternal Knowledge, Eternal Bliss.<sup>6</sup>

To unite all mankind in the acceptance of one universal religion, has been cherished desire of many wise men and thinkers in all ages. We shall try to give a brief idea of the views of Swami Vivekananda in this regard.

Due to the phenomenal growth of secularism, people of various races, religious beliefs and cultural standards, have been living together. The wall of isolation is almost broken. Political stability and economic security are not enough for our common peace. We must discover the common ground of human relationships that transcends all superficial distinctions. In Vedantic language, one supreme reality underlies all diversity. Therefore, different religions are varied expressions of the one eternal religion, which is the object of human search through religious practices. We must look upon ourselves as pilgrims to the same temple of Divinity.

In modern times, religion is devalued and, therefore, it has lost its bright image to be adored by the intellectuals. Universal religion seems to be a play of words or an effusion of sentiment. In spite of that, the concept of universal religion has been

growing among the thinkers since the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, who is regarded as an apostle of universalism and harmony of religions. There are three main approaches to the problem of a universal religion:

- a. Universalism through eclecticism and syncretism,
- b. sectarian religion claiming the privilege of being called universal, and,
- c. the true concept of universal religion.

Eclecticism aims at choosing the best out of every religion and combining them into a consistent whole—a sort of “esperanto” religion. It is like a beautiful flower vase in which different varieties of flowers have been placed together. It may be attractive for the time being, but it is lifeless, having no root in the soil. This method was experimented with in the past, but died. Syncretism wants to bring reconciliation and harmony among the divergent religions by giving emphasis on the similarities among them and neglecting the differences. Akbar’s pious attempt to establish a universal religion, *Din-Ilahi*, is a well-known historical example of the syncretic approach. Arnold Toynbee, in modern times seemed to endorse this attitude when he said, “A time may come when the local heritage of the different historic nations, civilizations and religions will have coalesced into a common heritage of the whole human family. The mission of higher religions is not competitive, they are complementary.”<sup>7</sup>

The second approach to this idea of universal religion is the attempt of those religious imperialists who claim their own religion as the best and most fitted to be the universal religion. By this epithet—

6 *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 153-54.

7 *An Historian’s Approach to Religion*, 1956, page 296.



"universal religion," the adherents mean a religion which is not confined to a particular area but which draws its notions from the whole of humanity. Like war-mongers or crusaders, they are bent on destroying all other religions save the one which they think is universal. History is replete with examples of cruelty meted out to the religious for this purpose. This fanatical zeal is not confined to the common masses. Even the high dignitaries and scholars lend support to this movement. The Gifford lecture of Edward Caird(1893) and John Baille(1961-62) are cases in point.

The third approach, in our opinion, is the only sound approach to the problem of a universal religion. As a true disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda laid the path of Universal Religion at the Parliament of Religions in 1893. He made a great impact on Western thinking, especially in the realm of religion. Marie Louise Burke, the well-known research scholar of Swami Vivekananda's life and literature, says this living Vivekananda "gave American ideals Vedantic roots. . . . In regard to the cultural impact of this teaching . . . it is bomb-like in its effect."<sup>8</sup>

In sharp contrast to other views referred to earlier, Swamiji spelled out at the Parliament of Religions, the very first criterion of the universal religion. He said,

"If one religion is true, then by the same logic all other religions are also true." This is authenticated by the fact that "holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character."<sup>9</sup>

By universality, it is meant that its appeal is not restricted to any particular segment of humanity, to any religious group, nation, race, class, country or age. The individual belonging to any such group is expected to emulate that spirit of universalism in due time.

"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 Brahmanic 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 recognise divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realise its own true divine nature."<sup>10</sup>

Swamiji's spirit of universalism stems from his highest spiritual experience. He saw the divine in the human form and, there, he spent every ounce of his energy in awakening man's spiritual possibilities. Swamiji gave us a universal message of religion and a comprehensive view of life. He experienced spiritual unity as the root of all diversified objectivity. To discover that

8. *Swami Vivekananda, Prophet of the Modern Age*, pp. 13,16.

9. *The Complete Works*, Vol. 1, page 22.

10. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, page 19.

unity which underlies all religious doctrines and experiences is the supreme goal of life. That same unity is getting itself expressed in and through diversity. They are many, but the substance behind diversifications is one and the same. Therefore, Swamiji never approved the idea of theological imperialism. He, on the contrary, pointed out that each traditional religion, when followed properly, will make the seeker broader and more universal. He explained that religion was an effort to go beyond the phenomenon of relativity. He said, "Religion belongs to the super-sensuous and not to the sense plane."<sup>11</sup> This spiritual impulse to transcend the human weakness has been responsible for the discoveries of many pathways to divine excellences. Hence, in the economy of spiritual fulfillment, each traditional religion is valuable to its adherents. Swamiji said,

"The second idea that I learnt from my Master, and which is perhaps the most vital, is the wonderful truth that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are but various phases of one eternal religion. That one eternal religion is applied to different planes of existence, is applied to the opinions of various minds and various races. There never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your national religion; there never existed many religions, there is only the one. One infinite religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways. Therefore we must respect all religions and we must try to accept them all as far as we can. Religions manifest themselves not only according to race and geographical position, but according to individual powers.

In one man religion is manifesting itself as intense activity, as work. In another it is manifesting itself as intense devotion, in yet another, as mysticism, in others as philosophy, and so forth."<sup>12</sup>

This concept of universal religion, which recognizes unity in diversity, is very helpful for our spiritual development because it does not harp on creed or dogma. He was very eloquent about the special mission of each of the traditional religions. He said,

"The fact that all these old religions are living today proves that they must have kept that mission intact; in spite of all their mistakes, in spite of all difficulties, in spite of all quarrels, in spite of all the incrustation of forms and figures, the heart of every one of them is sound—it is a throbbing, beating, living heart. They have not lost, any one of them, the great mission they came for."<sup>13</sup>

Swamiji represented the best spirit of Hinduism and, therefore, to him religion was realization, an experience bringing highest satisfaction. It is not sufficient to record our admiration and recognize their peculiar characteristics in our study of other religions. The practice being the very soul of religion, Swamiji pointed out in the Parliament of Religions,

"May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you. . . . The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his

11. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, page 1.

12. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, page 180.

13. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, page 371.



own law of growth. . . . The Parliament of Religions. . . has proved. . . that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. . . . Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written in spite of. . . resistance, 'Help and not Fight,' 'Assimilation and not Destruction,' 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.' " 14

This attitude of catholicity and sincere appreciation was never academic and scholastic to him. He found this method of reciprocity and sympathetic understanding very rewarding and enriching. In one of his famous letters, Swamiji expressed the vital need of such a reciprocal approach:

"Therefore I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the *Vedas*, nor the *Bible*, and the *Koran*. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose that path that suits him best. For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta brain and Islam body—is the only hope." 15

Unlike the other two opinions, this third proposition does not require the necessity of creating a universal religion. As for this third view, a universal element can be found in every traditional religion. Every religion has two aspects, the ethnic or

sociopolitical, and the spiritual or universal. We are born to ethnic religion and most of us die in it by clinging to certain creeds and dogmas in the name of religion. When real thirst after genuine spiritual experience comes into our life, only then do we enter into the higher phase of religion, one of pure spiritual adventure. Here religion means the entire scheme of self-improvement geared to the experience of ultimate truth. Disciplines are observed with a view to develop integrity of character, harmony of life, joy in fellowship and sincere longing for the vision of truth within and without. This higher religious impulse comes from within. When our life is truly awakened to this quest, moral consciousness quickens and we feel spiritual progress in our lives. This is verifiable truth. It culminates in that plenary experience which enriches life, broadens our views, and purifies us with Divinity. Then we truly enjoy life and can radiate peace of joy. Vivekananda said, "This is the real science of religion. As mathematics in every part of the world does not differ, so the mystics do not differ."

The scientific temper of the human mind cannot remain satisfied with superficial, dogma-ridden, ethnic religion. Swami Vivekananda, lamenting over this great loss of the human resources due to our stagnation in ethnic religion, remarked,

"My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every moment of life. . . . Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt.

Then Swami Vivekananda also said,

14. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama 1931) page 45.

15. *The Complete Works*, Vol. 6, pp. 415-16.

"My Master used to say that these names as Hindu, Christian, etc., stand as great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man. We must break them down first. They have lost all their good powers and now stand only as baneful influences under whom black magic even the best of us behave like demons."<sup>16</sup>

The spiritual insight of Swamiji discovered the seeds of a universal element in every religion worth the name. He pointed out,

"And that universal religion about which philosophers and others have dreamed in every country already exists. It is here. As the universal brotherhood of man is already existing, so also is universal religion. Which of you, that have travelled far and wide, have not found brothers and sisters in every nation? I have found them all over the world. Brotherhood already exists; only there are numbers of persons who fail to see this and only upset it by crying for new brotherhoods. Universal religion, too, is already existing. If the priests and other people that have taken upon themselves the task of preaching different religions simply cease preaching for a few moments, we shall see it is there. They are disturbing it all the time, because it is to their interest."<sup>17</sup>

Four fundamental ideas of universal religion, as envisioned by Swamiji, are being studied: acceptance of the plurality of religion, uniqueness of each religion, inter-religious dialogue, and an acceptance of a common standard of validity. Swamiji visualized the attainment of spiritual culture based on mutual respect and accep-

tance. Plurality of religion, to him, was not a hindrance but an opportunity to develop maturity. Instead of hostility, we can have spiritual fraternity without giving up our individuality. Swamiji said,

"I believe that they (religions) are not contradictory, they are supplementary. Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth, and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, addition, not exclusion. That is the idea. System after system arises, each one embodying a great idea, and ideals must added to ideals. And this is the march of humanity."<sup>18</sup>

The second point of Swamiji's is the acknowledgement of the special features of each religion. Each religion has, to Swamiji, a special trait, a central theme. The dominant values in Christianity are love and fellowship. Buddhism places special emphasis on high moral qualities. It extols renunciation, compassion, non-violence and rationality. The dominant characteristic of Islam is its spirit of equality and brotherhood. Hinduism lays special emphasis on spiritual practice in order to have direct, intuitive experience of the divine. The attitude of acceptance rather than tolerance stems from the philosophy of Vedanta extolling the unit of spiritual consciousness. Swamiji had the unique capacity to appreciate the special merit of each religion. His motto was "Each is great in his own place." "Each race, similarly, has a peculiar bent, each race has a peculiar *raison d'être*, each race has a peculiar mission to fulfill in the life of the world."<sup>19</sup> It is well-known that Swamiji's training under Sri Ramakrishna gave him the master-quality and "habit of seeing every

16. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, page 301.

17. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, page 367.

18. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, page 365.

19. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, page 108.



people from their strongest aspect."<sup>20</sup>

Swamiji believed that every religion has a unique mission in the world apart from its special features. We have given his views in this respect earlier. The third principle of universal religion as envisioned by Swamiji is the whole-hearted acceptance of the spirit of other religions. This admiration will motivate for assimilation and, thereby, enrichment of the total personality will take place. Swamiji set the tone of this accommodative spirit in the Parliament.

Regarding the fourth point—an acceptance of one non-changing, common standard of validity—Swamiji extolled the beauty and rationality of Vedanta. In the world there is nothing more mysterious than the human being. Vedanta unravelled this great mystery at the very dawn of human history. Hindus discovered the great truth through their intuitive knowledge that man is divine, infinite powers are lying deeply embedded within himself; the supreme goal of religion is to manifest this divine power through the practice of religious discipline. The truths declared by Vedanta are the ultimate unity of existence, the immortal self of man, harmony of religions and the attainment of freedom through spiritual intuitive experience. Without the recognition of the spiritual oneness of mankind, the dream of universal religion will never be accomplished. This is the common ground where all people coming from different backgrounds can meet and profit.

Vedanta alone can provide this standard of validity. Vedanta is not one of the many faiths, but the common basis of them all. It deals with eternal principles which underlie the various other faiths and their

practices. It teaches not one particular aspect or concept of God, but several; it prescribes not one particular spiritual discipline or method of worship, but several. It recommends different religious courses for the seekers of different capacities. The goal is one and the same, but the various paths are recommended. "All roads lead to Rome," said Swamiji in the Parliament.

"As the different streams having their sources in the different places all mingle their waters in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."<sup>21</sup>

This acceptance of religious plurality as a law of life, acknowledgement of the recurring themes of each religion, and the constant dialogue with a view to assimilate the values of others, with the scientific and rational philosophy of Vedanta being used as a common basis of all religions, was the scheme of universal religion envisioned by Swamiji. Needless to say a rational mind will find his principles relevant. Despite all their differences, religious people should live together like one family.

Swamiji initiated the idea of having inter-religious dialogue in the Parliament and now it is the spirit of the age. Swamiji gave prophetic articulation for all thinking people. His words formed the blueprint and the manifesto of universal religion aimed at harmony and peace through inter-religious dialogue. Therefore, universal religion demands the happy coexistence of other religions.

"Our watchword, then," Swamiji said, "will be acceptance, and not exclusion."

20. Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him*, page 228.

21. *The Complete Works*, Vol 1, page 4.

Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy, and I do not believe in it. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not a blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one.

"Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutations to all the

prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future ! "22

Mere pious wishes or utopian attitude, or possessing a critical yet sympathetic attitude will not usher in such an enlightened attitude as expressed by Swamiji. Inner life has to be quickened through intense spiritual practice in order to be universal. The major religions of the world should be united to wage a relentless war against the common enemy of all religions worth their names vis-a-vis materialism, positivism, love and loyalty to nationalism, humanism and secularism. The present attitude of posing oneself as a universalist based on study or so-called refinement of character cannot reach the goal. Different religions should not engage themselves in the destructive purposes of killing one another theologically. It is a great waste and breeds cynicism. The spirit of rivalry and aggressive attitude will only force the people to shun religion and never make them friendly. Therefore, the high task of establishing spiritual fraternity depends on the development of inner life of the follower, more so than the so-called intellectual discussion of the academicians bereft of spiritual experience. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" within as well as without.

22. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 373-74.



"...there is a mass of thought which is at the present time struggling to get expression. This new thought is telling us to give up our dream of dualism, of good and evil in essence, and the still wilder dream of suppression . . . It teaches us that it is not a world of bad and good, but good and better—and still better. It stops short of nothing but acceptance. It teaches that no situation is hopeless, and as such accepts every form of mental, moral, or spiritual thought where it already stands, and without a word of condemnation tells it that so far it has done good, now it is the time to do better. . . . It, above all teaches that the kingdom of heaven is already in existence if we will have it, that perfection is already in man if he will see it.

—Swami Vivekananda, in a letter to Miss S. Farmer dated 29th December, 1895.



# The Chicago Addresses—Prefatory Note

SISTER NIVEDITA

*This introductory note appeared in the earliest editions of the booklet: "Chicago Addresses" by Swami Vivekananda, published by Udbodhan, Calcutta.*

The reader might be informed here that four gatherings [were] held in connection with the World's Fair at Chicago, in 1893. It has become customary to associate with the great international exhibitions which are now so common in the West, congresses of science, arts and letters. Thus it is expected that each such occasion will render itself memorable in the history of those subjects whose progress is the concern of humanity. Medicine, Law, Engineering, and the interchange of abstract research and practical discoveries on many branches of knowledge, are all regarded as ends to be promoted by the vast assemblies of human beings who are brought together in the name of an international exhibition. With American daring and originality, however, it occurred to the city of Chicago that the crown of all such congresses would be a congress of the leading religions of the world. It proposed to offer a hearing, therefore, to delegates from each of these, and to listen seriously and sympathetically while they set forth, each man his own reasons, for the faith that was in him. Meeting thus on a footing of equality, and ordered freedom of speech, the delegates would form a parliament, and a parliament of religions. "The grounds for fraternal union in the religions of different peoples" would surely thus be set clearly before the mind of the world.

Entirely unaware of the formalities of invitation and election proper to the sending forth of a delegate, a little group of disciples in Southern India hastened to urge upon their own Guru the desirability of

being present on this occasion, to speak on behalf of the religion of the Hindus. To their unbounded faith, it never occurred that they were demanding what was humanly speaking impossible. They thought that Vivekananda had only to appear and be given his chance. The Swami himself was as simple in the ways of the world as his disciples, and when he was once sure that he was divinely called to make the attempt, he put no further difficulties in the way. Nothing could have been more typical of the unorganisedness of Hinduism itself than this going-forth of its representative unannounced, and without formal credentials, to enter the strongly guarded doors of the world's wealth and power. When he reached Chicago, however, the Swami discovered the actual facts of the situation. He had been sent by no recognised body, in accordance with invitations issued and accepted. Moreover, the time for adding to the number of delegates had gone by, the lists were full. In what deep discouragement he must have turned away from the closed doors of Chicago, in order to follow up some chance introduction in Boston, before returning to India!

Thus without foresight or plan of his own, he was led to one—Professor Wright, of Harvard University—who could recognise his genius, and feel with his Madras disciples, that the world must hear this man's voice at the forthcoming Parliament. "To ask you for your credentials," wrote Professor Wright to him later, "is like asking the Sun to state his right to shine." Such was the love and influence that sent

the Swami back in Chicago, and opened the way for him there, to recognition and place, as an accepted delegate. When the Parliament actually opened, he was on the platform, and though not the only Indian, or even the only Bengali present, he was the only representative of Hinduism proper. Others stood for societies or churches or sects, but he and he alone had for his theme, the religious ideas of the Hindus, those ideas that that day for the first time, through him, received unity and definition and form. The religion of India—as he had seen it in his own Master at Dakshineswar, and afterwards in years of wandering up and down India—was what poured from his lips. And always it was those ideas in which India is at one, and never those in which she is divided, of which he spoke. The international aspect of the Parliament of Religions took seventeen days of paper-reading. The Swami Vivekananda's paper [on Hinduism] was read on the 19th [Sept.]. But ever since the first day, when a series of formal addresses of welcome had been offered to the delegates and their replies heard, the Swami had been in touch with his audience. His reply had come late in the afternoon, and the thrill that passed through the great assembly when he uttered the simple Indian greeting, "Sisters and Brothers of America"—when he, a monk from the East, put women first, and called the whole world his family—has often been described to me by those who heard. "Not one of our own people had thought of that!" they say. His success was probably assured from that hour. Afterwards, it became a common practice with the promoters of the meetings, to bribe a troublesome audience into patience, by promising them that at the end, if they waited, the Swami would tell them a story or make them a speech. Some few of these fragments have been preserved, and these appear in this little book as short intercalary utterances.

This religious congress marks an era in the history of Hinduism, whose importance will be more and more deeply understood as time goes on. And merely from the point of view of external brilliance and splendour, the assembly of delegates must at its opening and close have offered a spectacle whose like none in our time shall see again. The religious beliefs of hundreds of millions of men were represented on the platform, and in striving to realise the scene, we may quote a passage from the authorised history of its proceedings, by the Rev. John Henry Barrows, (quoting the words of an eye-witness—Rev. Wendte of Oakland, California):

"Long before the appointed hour the building swarmed with delegates and visitors, and the Hall of Columbus was crowded with four thousand eager listeners from all parts of the country and foreign lands. At 10 o'clock there marched down the aisle arm in arm, the representatives of a dozen world-faiths, beneath the waving flags of many nations, and amid the enthusiastic cheering of the vast audience. The platform at this juncture presented a most picturesque and impressive spectacle. In the centre, clad in scarlet robes and seated in a high chair of state, was Cardinal Gibbons, the highest prelate of his church in the United States, who, as was fitting in this Columbian year, was to open the meeting with prayer.

"On either side of him were grouped the Oriental delegates, whose many-coloured raiment vied with his own in brilliancy. Conspicuous among these followers of Brahma and Buddha and Mahommed was the eloquent monk Vivekananda of Bombay, clad in gorgeous red apparel, his bronzed face surmounted with a huge turban of yellow. Beside him, attired in orange and white, sat B.B. Nagarkar of the Brahmo-Samaj, or association of Hindu Theists, and Dharmapala, the learned Buddhist Scholar from Ceylon, who brought the greeting of four hundred and seventy-five millions of Buddhists, and whose slight, little person was swathed in pure white, while his black hair fell in



curls upon his shoulders.

"There were present, also, Mahomedan and Parsee and Jain ecclesiastics, each a picturesque study in colour and movement, and all eager to explain and defend their forms of faith.

"The most gorgeous group was composed of the Chinese and Japanese delegates, great dignitaries in their own country, arrayed in costly silk vestments of all the colours of the rainbow, and officially representing the Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian and Shinto forms of worship.

"In dark, almost ascetic garb, there sat among his fellow Orientals, Protap Chunder Mazoomdar. Mr. Mazoomdar, the leader of the Brahmo-Samaj or Hindoo Theists in India, visited this country some years since, and delighted large audiences with his eloquence and perfect command of the English tongue.

"Another striking figure was the Greek Archbishop of Zante, his venerable beard sweeping his chest, his head crowned with a strange-looking hat, leaning on a quaintly carved staff, and displaying a large silver cross suspended from his girdle. A ruddy-cheeked, long locked Greek monk from Asia Minor, who sat by his side, boasted that he had never yet worn a head-covering or spent a penny of his own for food or shelter.

"The ebony-hued but bright faces of Bishop

Arnett, of the African Methodist Church, and of a young African prince, were relieved by the handsome costumes of the ladies of the company, while forming a sombre background to all was the dark raiment of the Protestant delegates and invited guests."

Well might the Swami Vivekananda, in his closing speech,\* compare the world-convocation he saw before him, with the Council of Asoka or the conventions of the Emperor Akbar, thus indicating his own estimate of its historic importance. Only the audacity of the youngest of nations could have conceived a scheme so vast in its ambition, only the height of civic energy and enthusiasm could have found the means to carry it out. The constitution of the parliament made it an extraordinary *mise-en-scene* for the pronouncement of the all-inclusive ideas of Hinduism. The haughtiest and most exclusive faiths of the world were all gathered there on a simple democratic basis, of equality and mutual respect and courtesy. It is not likely that they will ever again submit on such a scale to such an ordeal. The Chicago Parliament is likely, for a very long time to come, to stand alone in history. Meanwhile these were the surroundings, and this was the scene, in which Hinduism first spoke to the western world.



"We believe that every being is divine, is God. Every soul is a sun covered with clouds of ignorance, the difference between soul and soul is due to the difference in density of these layers of clouds. We believe that this is the conscious or unconscious basis of all religions, and that this is the explanation of the whole history of human progress either in the material, or intellectual or spiritual plane—the same spirit is manifesting through different planes. . . .

"We believe that it is the duty of every *soul* to treat, think of, and behave to other *souls* as such, i.e. as *Gods*, and not hate or despise, or vilify, or try to injure them by any manner or means."

—Swami Vivekananda, in a letter to KIDI dated 3rd March, 1894

# Women's Education in India till the Mahabharat age

PRATIVA DEVI

*Women in ancient India were accorded due status and trained properly in various fields of learning. This short article by a teacher of Orissa throws light on this interesting fact.*

Not only charity but education too begins at home. The parents can impart best possible education to their children. In the famous line of Satapatha Brāhmaṇa it is said: "*Mātrmān pitṛmānācāryavān puruṣo veda*," which means that a child does not receive so much good from any other person as he does from his loving mother and father.

Prior to the Upaniṣadic period woman's education was very popular. Learned women were called *ṛṣikās* and *Brahmavādinīs*. The young unmarried daughters were qualified for marriage on the basis of their education. The *R̥g Veda* mentions: "An unmarried young learned daughter should be married to a bridegroom who like her is learned. Never think of giving in marriage a daughter of very young age." (R.V. 3:55:16) The *Yajur Veda* repeats the same thing and so it says: "A young daughter who has observed brahmacharya (i.e., finished her studies) should be married to a bridegroom who like her is learned." (Y.V. 8:1) The *Atharva Veda* says clearly that: "*Brahmacaryeṇa kanyā yuvānam vindate patim*," which means a maiden wins a young husband through brahmacharya or Vedic studentship. The *R̥g* and *Yajur Vedas* speak of women's education in the following verses:

"Mother should impart proper education to her children so as to broaden the horizon of their ideas."

(R.V. 5:47:6) So it is directed: "O King and other nobles: make adequate arrangements to train lady teachers for imparting training to girl students who, on obtaining maturity, select for themselves their partners for marriage." (Y.V. 10:6)

The Vedas mention a number of *Ṛṣikās* or learned ladies in their various verses: The foremost of these *Ṛṣikās* is Ghōṣā (R.V. 10:39-40), the wife of the great seer, Kākṣivān. She has been mentioned in the *R̥g Veda* in two long hymns: 39 and 40 of the tenth maṇḍala stand to her credit. This daughter of a king (R.V. 10:40:15) is equally important in her concept of divinity and the invocation of the *Aśvins*, who in consequence of her prayer to them, give her Kākṣivān for her husband in an advanced age. Lopāmudrā (R.V. 1:179:1-6), another lady, is credited with having composed a hymn jointly with her husband Agastya. Apālā (R.V. 8:91:1-7) addresses hymn 91 to the tenth book, and in like manner invokes Agni in the fifth book. To Romaśā (R.V. 1:126:6-7); (S.V. 550-51; 1016:18; 1631:33), another wife of Kākṣivān, and the daughter of King Svanaya, and the grand-daughter of Bhāvya, is ascribed a beautiful verse of fine imagery and tender feeling in which she says that she is as harmless and docile. This she utters to her father-in-law, the father of Kākṣivān, while presenting herself after her marriage to the kinsmen of her groom. The seer and speaker of the first verses of hymn 18 of the tenth book of the



*R̥g Veda* is Vasukara's wife, while the mother of the Gaupāyanas along with her sons, Bandhu, Subandhu, Śrutabandhu and Viprabandhu, is that of 10:60. The latter is also the independent seer of the sixth verse of that hymn.

Indrānī, the powerful consort of Indra, is the speaker of the verses 2:4-7; 9; 10; 15; 18; 22; and 23 of the hymn 86 of the tenth book of *R̥g Veda*. She is also the independent Ṛṣi of a powerful hymn entitled "The Jealous Wife's Spell." (R.V. 10:145) Yamī, an important lady, is the author of the hymn no. 10:10, jointly with her brother. In the entire *R̥g Veda* she stands as a lady of her own type. The dialogue, contained in the hymn of which she is the principal speaker, is the earliest example of dramatic expression. Another lady of such stature can be seen in the character of Ūrvaśī, who was part author of hymn 10:95 with an *apsarā*, wedded to King Purūravā in contractual marriage, and was the seer and speaker of the verses 10:2; 5; 7; 9; 11; 13; 15; 16; and 18 of *R̥g Veda*.

In the *R̥g Vedic* period the ladies had their military training for self defence. Even they accompanied their husbands to the dreadful battles. Viśpalā, the wife of King Khela, like Kaikeyī of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, accompanied her lord to the battlefield where she loses her leg, which was replaced with an iron one by the Aśvins. The *R̥g Veda* describes this incident in the following lines:

"When in the time of night, in Khela's battle, a leg was severed like a wild bird's pinion, straight ye gave Viśpalā a leg of iron that she might move what time the conflict opened." (1:116:15)

One more example can be cited here which speaks about the courage of a lady because of her military training at the

*gurukul*. Mudgalānī (10:102:2) was a woman equipped with military training. She was the wife of Mudgala and is credited with having driven the chariot for her husband in battle, like Subhadra of the *Mahābhārata*. She conquered her husband's enemy. The heroic deed is described in the *R̥g Veda* in the following lines:

"Loose in the wind the woman's robe  
was streaming  
what time she won a car-load with a  
thousand.  
The charioteer in fight was Mudgalānī.  
She, Indra's dart,  
heaped up the prize of battle.  
In hope of victory that bull was  
harnessed:  
Kāśī (Mudgalānī), the driver, urged  
him on with shouting.  
As he ran swiftly with the car behind  
him his lifted  
heels pressed close on Mudgalānī."  
(10:102:2-3)

In the *R̥g Veda*, like Ghoṣā, Godhā, Viśvavarā, Apālā, there are as many as twenty-seven women poet-seers who contributed their writings. One of the seers, Vāc, the daughter of the sage Ambhr̥ṇa, realizes her oneness with the Absolute and cries out in delight: "I am the sovereign queen. . . . He who eats does so through me; he who sees, breathes or hears does so through me. Creating all things, I blow forth like the wind. Beyond heaven, beyond the earth am I, so vast is my greatness." (R.V. 10:125) *R̥g Veda* speaks about women singers (9:66:8), women dancers (1:9:1:4), and women warriors (10:39:40). Patañjali has written about a woman spear-bearer. (4:1:15:6). Besides these educated ladies there are a few more to add. They were:

1. Kadrū (R.V. 2:6:8)
2. Viśvavarā (R.V. 5:28:3)
3. Vāgāmbhr̥ṇī (R.V. 10)
4. Paulomī (R.V. 10)

5. Jaritā (R.V. 10)
6. Sāvitrī (R.V. 10)
7. Devajāmi (R.V. 10)
8. Nodhā (S.V. *Pūrvārchhika*, 13:1)
9. Ākrṣṭabhāsā (S.V.)
10. Sikatānivāvarī (S.V. *Uttarārchhika*, 1:4)
11. Gaupāyanā (S.V. *Uttarārchhika*, 22:4)

As in the Vedic period, the Upaniṣadic period too had its women's education. The women were ranked very high among the scholars. Maurice Winternitz, without any hesitation, admits: "In the Upaniṣads however, we find not only kings but also women and even people of low birth who take active part in the philosophical efforts and are often in possession of the highest knowledge."<sup>1</sup> Gārgi, the learned daughter of sage Vacaknu, did not leave Yājñavalkya without argument when he dared to claim the reward of the thousand cows offered by King Janaka. She intervened twice, challenging Yājñavalkya to debate, as we find in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, and ranked among the eight scholars of that period. (B.U. 3:6, 3:8). In the *Ṛṣitarpana*, while offering water to the sages, among the male sages, including Gārgi, two more women sages: Vāḍavā Prātitheyi and Sulabhā Maitreyi, are also recited as homage to the women sages. (*Āswal-āyana-Gṛhya-Sūtra*, 3:4:4) In the same *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2:4:3), Maitreyi boldly refuses to accept the property from Yājñavalkya and politely argues: "What should I do with that worldly wealth through which I cannot be immortal?" Umā Haimavati, a woman scholar who discourses on Brahman, cannot be ignored in the *Kena Upaniṣad*. (3:12) R.D. Ranade has classified the women of the Upaniṣadic period into three different types: "Kātyāyani, the woman of the world, who is only once mentioned in the

*Bṛhadāraṇyaka*; Maitreyi, the type of a spiritual woman, a fit consort to the philosopher Yājñavalkya; and Gārgi, the Upaniṣadic suffragette, who, fully equipped in the art of intellectual warfare, dares to wrangle with Yājñavalkya even at the court of King Janaka where a number of great philosophers are assembled."<sup>2</sup>

The position of women in the entire Vedic-till-post-upaniṣadic period was very high in the society. To think of women as the gate of sin was unknown to the people. *Manu-Smṛti*, one of the most ancient of all Smṛtis, pays the greatest tribute to the women in a voice that cannot lose its rhythm in course of time:

"Yatra nāryastu puḥyante ramante tatra  
devatāḥ.  
Yatraitāstu na pūḥyante sarvāstatrāphalāḥ  
kriyāḥ."  
—"Where women are honoured, there the  
gods are delighted,  
but where they are insulted, all sacred rites  
become futile."  
(M.S. 3:56; cf. *Mahābhārata* 13:45:5)

Till the post-Vedic period women were entitled to wear the sacred thread. Gobhila, one of the well known lawgivers of the post-Vedic period, describes in connection with the marriage ceremony, that the bridegroom should lead the bride properly clothed and wearing the sacred thread (*Gob. Gṛhya-sūtra* 7:2:1:19 & R.V. 10:85:41; & A.V. 14:2:4), and reciting Vedic mantras, participating in the *Yajñas* (Vedic sacrifices).

Etymologically, the word *Patni* (wife) itself is evidence that women were participating in *Yajña* (*Pāṇini* 4:1:33). *Pāṇini*

1. Mauric Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature* (New Delhi: Oriental Book Reprint Corporation, 1972) 1: 211-212.

2. R.D. Ranade, *A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1986) pp. 42-43.



referred to the women's education during his period. A woman student of the *Kaṭha* school was called *Kaṭhī*, and of the *R̥g Vedic Bahv̥rca* school, *Bahv̥rcī*. Kātyāyana and Patañjali refer to Brāhmaṇa women students studying the grammatical system of Apisala Brahmani. (*Aṣṭa* 4:1:14, *Vār* 3) Pāṇini refers to female students as *Chhātri* and their hostels *chhātri-sālā*. (*Aṣṭa* 6:2:86) The wife of an *ācārya* is referred to as *ācāryāṇī* (*Aṣṭa* 4:1:49), but *ācārya* was the title of female teachers corresponding in status to an *ācārya*.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, which are later than the *Upaniṣads*, are the best documents for citing more examples of how women were educated in Ayodhya during the period of Rāmā (*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa: Ādi Kāṇḍa*, Ch. 6) and they were entitled to *Upanayana* or initiation for Vedic studies. In the age of the *Mahābhārata*, Gāndhārī, Kuntī, and Draupadī were the examples of such women who were taking part in politics of that period.



## Renunciation and Service

(Continued from page 526)

ourselves, or when we become unselfconscious. Himself a perfect personification of *tyāga*, Sri Ramakrishna advised householders to renounce mentally and not to give up the world.<sup>5</sup> Living in the world one can practise renunciation and service.

5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) page 561.

According to Vivekananda, the national ideals of India are renunciation and service, and he asked Indians to intensify Her life in these channels and he assured that the rest would take care of itself. But no individual or nation in the world can forget these moral principles and yet live happily. Ours is a global family. We have to work and sacrifice a little for the welfare of that wonderful family.



“...you will find that in the Vedic or Upanishadic age, Maitreyī, Gargī, and other ladies of revered memory have taken the place of Rishis through their skill in discussing about Brahman. In an assembly of a thousand Brahmanas who were all erudite in the Vedas, Gargī boldly challenged Yajñvalkyā in a discussion about Brahman. Since such ideal women were entitled to spiritual knowledge, why shall not the women have the same privilege now? What has happened once can certainly happen again. . . . That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future.”

—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, pp. 214-15.

# The Transcendent Experience

GARGI

*The Vedanta Society of Northern California, U.S.A., organizes every year a special retreat programme at Olema, a forest retreat. About 1000 non-devotees attend it. The learned writer read this insightful paper at the retreat. It highlights the infinite dimension of man. The article is in the form of an informal talk.*

When I was asked to speak today on the Transcendent Experience, the first thing that came to my mind was a story in Vedantic literature. It goes like this, with slight adjustments: In ancient India there was a king who desired to know the highest truth. So this king went into the forest where there lived a great sage. He approached the sage and said, "O Sage, please tell me the highest truth, tell me about the Transcendent Experience." The sage, who was sitting cross-legged under a tree, looked at the king and then closed his eyes. He said nothing. After a time, the king asked again, a little louder, "O sage, I have come to learn about the Transcendent Experience. Please tell me." The sage remained silent. Again and again the king put his request. No response. Finally this king became annoyed. "Look here, my good sage, I have been asking you again and again to tell me about the Transcendent Experience. Now, kindly answer me!" At this the sage opened his eyes and, looking serenely at the king, said, "O King, I have been answering you all along. Its name is Silence."

Well, I thought that story contained a fine solution to the present situation. I would just stand here a few minutes in silence and then sit down. What better and truer discussion of the Transcendent Experience could there be than that? So, with this in mind, I readily agreed to speak here this afternoon. It wasn't until later than it occurred to me that Silence would be

meaningful only when it came from a sage, that is to say, only when it was rich to overflowing with the actual experience of the Transcendent Experience. Otherwise it would be just silence—empty silence. So there was nothing for me to do but read a paper on the Transcendent Experience. And it is an honour to have been asked to read a paper to you today, and a pleasure to do so.

Now, this paper will consist of words about the Transcendent Experience according to my understanding of the Vedanta philosophy, or, to be more specific, according to my understanding of Advaita or nondualistic Vedanta, a very ancient philosophy that originated in India and upon which almost all of India's living religions are based. Nondualistic Vedanta stands, in fact, as a basis for all the religions of the world, and this was one of the reasons that Swami Vivekananda taught it in this country.

Let me say, for the benefit of those of you who don't know Swami Vivekananda, that the Swami was the chief disciple and apostle of Sri Ramakrishna, a nineteenth-century Hindu saint, who is today considered by many millions the world over to have been an Incarnation of God. Swami Vivekananda came to the West in 1893 when he was thirty years old and spoke at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. For three years or so thereafter he gave many lectures and held classes in



America and England and returned to India at the close of 1896. He came again to America in 1899, and this time he visited California, where he taught for about six months. During the course of his two visits in America, he founded two Vedanta Societies that are still in existence, one in New York and one in San Francisco. The latter is the present Vedanta Society of Northern California, *this* Society, and it is the Swami's teachings to which this Society (and many other Vedanta societies in the West) is dedicated.

Now, excuse me here if I give you a very brief explanation of Vedanta, so that we will all have a chance of knowing, more or less, what this paper is about. Vedanta (the kind of Vedanta we are discussing) teaches, first of all, that there is an ultimate Reality and that that Reality is the Absolute Brahman, or Absolute God—the One Being. There is no second being; there is only one. It teaches that knowledge of the Absolute Brahman (Knowledge with a capital K) is *the* Transcendent Experience. That Knowledge, or that Experience, cannot be described in words nor can it be accurately thought about, for thought cannot by any means reach it, let alone encompass it. That is why its name is Silence. Nor is it an experience like any other experience, only more exalted; it is not like an experience of, say, Olema, or of an emotion or a concept; it is an experience of *being*—pure and simple being. That experience is not *of* Brahman, as of something outside; it *is* Brahman.

Although the Vedantic scriptures speak of Brahman as "That from which all speech with the mind turns away, not having reached It,"<sup>1</sup> still, according to Vedanta, one *can* reach It—indeed, the whole point of spiritual practice (or, rather, the whole point of life) is to reach Brahman, to know

Brahman, to become one with Brahman. The individual can know Brahman only by becoming identified with Him. Therefore another scripture states, "He who knows Brahman, becomes Brahman."<sup>2</sup> And that is the ultimate Transcendent Experience. When you have become Brahman you have transcended everything—you have become infinite, eternal, perfect, full of joy and peace, complete. There is, they say, nothing more to be desired.

Well, I am not only using words, I am using the wrong words. I should not be saying "*become* infinite, eternal," and so on. One of Vedanta's primary teachings is that all of us are *here and now* the Absolute Brahman, there is no "becoming" about it; the thing is simply to realize the already existing fact: the whole universe is Brahman, and the individual soul that perceives this universe is Brahman, or Atman, and these two—the subject and the object—are One. That is the crux of Vedanta.

I should explain here that the terms Brahman and Atman are almost interchangeable. Brahman is the Absolute Reality in respect to the universe; whereas Atman is the same Absolute Reality in respect to the individual. Atman is the Self, our own inner reality, our true being. Since the subject of this paper is "The Transcendent Experience," and since any kind of experience is always subjective, always our *own*, I shall hereafter use the words *Atman* or *Self* more often than Brahman, and you will know that I mean Reality with a large capital R, our own Reality, which is identical with the Reality of the universe.

Now, Vedanta (that is to say, nondualistic Vedanta, which is what we are talking about) includes many concepts and

1. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2:9.

2. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3.2.9.

experiences of God—an infinite number, really. There are many stages of spiritual growth before we attain the experience of identity between the essence of the universe and the essence of ourselves. It is as though one veil after another were lifted, and as each veil lifts we experience a clearer and clearer vision of the divine Being, the divine essence behind, or within, the universe and behind, or within ourselves. Of these many preliminary transcendent experiences—all wonderful, all true—Swami Vivekananda said

The soul passing through its different stages goes from truth to truth, and each stage is true, it goes from lower truth to higher truth. This point may be illustrated in the following way. A man is journeying towards the sun and takes a photograph at each step. How different would be the first photograph from the second, and still more from the third, or the last, when he reaches the real sun!<sup>3</sup>

But the view from each step of the way is so wonderful that it is apt to seem ultimate. That is why Vedantic teachers always counsel: "Go forward! Go forward!" Who in his heart of hearts does not want the real sun? Who does not want to transcend relative existence altogether and realize one's true infinite nature? There are innumerable limitations about our lives that rattle us. We fight against them all the time. We are caught here in a web of time and space, we have bodies that grow old and die, we want to achieve something great, we can't because our minds are limited, our abilities are limited, we want to love with all our hearts and souls—we can't because we have hangups and fears that we can't overcome, or, if we can love greatly, we can do so only for a very limited time,

nothing lasts. Everything is transient, everything betrays us by turning sour or by disappearing, even thought is shot through with error, it very seldom, if ever, attains truth, reason is circular, science has its notorious limitations. We grope around in a fog of ignorance, which seems to become only more dense as we try to penetrate it. Most of us plug along at this kind of life, smiling, and making the best of it. What else to do?

I don't mean to sound gloomy or pessimistic. This is just the way it is. You can't get around it—but you *can* get above it. The great thing about this state of affairs is that we *don't* like it, we don't like it at all, we are constantly trying to transcend it. There is something in us that really cannot tolerate these limitations. We want out.

Now, some of you may say that to want to get out of this so-called normal existence is to want to escape from it, and "escapism" is considered to be a sort of wimpy attitude, the implication being that we can't face reality. Who can prove that this limited world that we seem stuck to is real? Scientists can't—try as they will, in fact, they prove just the opposite: the world as we perceive it is not real at all; it is a sort of structure we have made for ourselves—out of what? What the basic building blocks, out of which we have constructed this world, are I don't think anyone has yet discovered, in fact, the very concept of basic building blocks has been discarded: there is nothing there. Energy? No one knows what energy is. So what sort of reality is it that we are supposed to face? What we are given is a constantly changing but never, not ever, straightened-up mess, no one in his or her right mind would want to do anything but jump out of it into something more acceptable, more akin to the human spirit.

Yet one has to admit that this relative

3 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama) Vol. I, page 385



reality, the world as we perceive it, is at present real to *us* and important to us. As long as we *think* it is real, for all intents and purposes it is real, and we have to deal with it. Yes. But Vedanta says that we will be able to deal with it a great deal more effectively if we understand that it is only *apparently* real; it is not *really* real. Its hold on us is not absolute. We can shake it off; we can become detached from it.

The crux of the matter lies in a shift of consciousness. Just as this world is real to us in our present state of consciousness, so will a world perceived in a higher state be real to us—more real, far more valuable, more beautiful, more fulfilling, because closer to Absolute Reality, closer to our true Self. It will not be a different world, but we will see it in a different and a truer light; nor will we be so wretchedly caught up in it; we will not be so dependent on it. Vedanta says such transcendence is not an escape *from* reality, but, rather, a flight *toward* Reality. It is a loosening of the bonds that hold us here. *Any* transcendent experience—greater or lesser—is a release, a step toward freedom. The ultimate Transcendent Experience is Freedom itself.

What is the use of being bound? The very fact that we acknowledge the limitations of our present existence shows that there must be something within us that is not limited. If limitation were natural to us, we certainly wouldn't fret against it. And we do fret all the time. That is the glory of a human being.

The Vedantic view of a human being is that he (and of course she) is one hundred per cent Spirit. A human being is a spiritual being, not a body or even a mind. *Spirit* in this context does not mean a ghostly something floating around. Indeed, Spirit is substance itself; it is the noumenon, the ground of all phenomena; to be more

accurate, it is both the Ground *and* the phenomena. But let us just say that Spirit is not matter as such, it is not mind as such, it is not limited by time or space or by the laws of cause and effect. Spirit, Atman, is that within us that says "I am" and "I know." It is Existence and Consciousness. It is also said to be Bliss, for simply to be and to know is the very essence of Bliss. That is the Vedantic idea of what a human being really is. Moreover, as I said before, Vedanta teaches that the purpose of human life (indeed of all life) is to realize that eternal Self or Spirit.

Now, maybe some of you don't believe that a human being can realize his inmost Self. But I think you would believe it if you knew someone who has done so, someone who is established in the Self, who lives in complete accord with it. Such people are very rare, nor do they hang out a shingle. You have to seek them out. If you are lucky you will find one, and if you are luckier still, he (or she) will talk to you. It is difficult to describe such people, because there are no two alike—as is the case with all living things. Yet, all Knowers of the Self, it is said, have something in common that the rest of us haven't got or don't seem to have. I can only describe that something as *fullness*. They are *full*. They are complete; nothing is lacking in them. There is a verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* in which a sage of transcendent experience (or, as the *Gita* puts it, a "man of steady wisdom") is described as being "full to the brim and grounded in stillness."<sup>4</sup> One senses in such people that inner fullness and stillness. There is a vastness about them, a sense of infinity. They are full of joy, full of peace, full of love; they have no desires—what should they desire? They are totally selfless, living only to serve others by giving of their own fullness, which is never lessened. Their

4. *Bhagavad Gītā*, 2:70.

words carry authority; even their silence carries authority, like the silence of the sage I spoke of in the beginning. In their company, which is indeed holy company, our own minds become serene; we feel uplifted, joyful; whatever sorrows or problems we may have had evaporate; something within us awakes as though in response to the Spirit which is so manifest within them. One feels that one is seeing for the first time a true human being, someone whose total potential has been realized—although the total potential of a human being is—it is clear from the very depth and shine of such a person—limitless. One feels, moreover, that one can *also* become limitless; one can also realize that state of being, and one knows that that is exactly what one has wanted all along.

Whether we know it or not, the soul is ceaselessly crying and crying for its own divinity. And that Self, that divinity keeps peeping out, as though through chinks in a wall, or as though a veil briefly lifts. This is another way we can become convinced that we can realize our divine Self: In moments when we are off guard it takes its chance—and there it is! Who has not had glimpses of a higher reality? When we have momentarily forgotten our little egos, when, say, we are lost in listening to beautiful music, or in looking at beautiful scenery, or caught up in religious fervour, or deep in some creative work—who has not during such moments of self-forgetfulness been suddenly aware of a beauty beyond all description, of a peace truly beyond understanding? All such experiences can be called transcendent, because they do indeed transcend our ordinary experience; they transcend the realms of reason, of science, and of what we like to call common sense. In childhood, perhaps, we are more prone to such moments, for we have not yet plastered up our walls and sealed ourselves off from all communication with our inmost Self. But in

adulthood, too, those moments come. Sometimes they come with overwhelming richness. "Now and then," Sri Ramakrishna said, "man catches a glimpse of this real Self and becomes speechless with wonder. At such times he swims in an ocean of joy. It is like suddenly meeting a dear relative."<sup>5</sup> Yes, the Self, the Atman, is ever our own and never to be denied. It will always have its word in our lives, it will always make itself known to us.

If Brahman is the One existent Reality, It is Real *now*; if you and I are identical with that Reality, we are identical with It *now*. The fact is that Brahman is right now shining through each and every one of us as pure Consciousness, as our Self. Not only does It flash out now and then, but It is a steady background. It is because of that background Consciousness (with a capital C) that we can know anything at all; it is because of the constant, unwavering existence of the Self that we experience what we call the outside universe.

And that which we experience—that, too, is Brahman. We have covered Brahman over, as it were, with innumerable, continually changing forms, sometimes dark as decay and death, sometimes bright and as beautiful as beauty itself, sometimes clear as crystal through which one suddenly sees the shining Spirit, sometimes muddy and obscuring as the densest fog. Whatever form the outside world may take, whatever sense of duality it may impose upon us, its Reality, its substance is Brahman or God. It is nothing else.

Hear Swami Vivekananda: "Brahman alone is perceived by every being. It is all there is to be perceived. That which says 'I' is Brahman; but although we day and night

5. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math), pp. 392-93.



perceive It, we do not know that we are perceiving It. As soon as we become aware of this truth, all misery goes. So we must get Knowledge of the Truth. Reach unity; no more will duality come."<sup>6</sup>

Now, here a big question arises. If this is the case, if we are all in truth Brahman or Atman here and now, if we are part and parcel of divinity—then why in the world *don't* we realize it—here and now? If the Transcendent Experience is an experience of Reality, then why are we experiencing something else? I would say that we are experiencing something else (or think we are) because that is precisely what we *want* to do. Most of us are so helplessly involved in the world, entangled in its meshes so tightly, that we do not even *want* to break lose. We don't want to transcend this world of sense experience. But a genuine desire to be free of this relative existence is considered by orthodox Vedantins to be one of the most important qualifications for the study of even the primers of Vedanta, let alone for attaining the Transcendent Experience. So right there, at the very outset, we are disqualified.

Yes, I just now spoke of how we all want to transcend our present experience. But ~~that is a deep yearning, for the most part~~ unconscious. On the conscious level of our lives we manifestly have innumerable desires that we try again and again, *persistently*, to satisfy here. There is this contradiction: we both do and do not want to be free from limitation. If we fully wanted freedom, we would this moment have it. If we fully wanted limitation, or were not even aware of it, there would be no problem. Perhaps huge-jawed fish swimming in fathomless depths of the ocean have no problem with the darkness of their environ-

ment or with the tremendous pressure they are under—perhaps they happily swim about, eating one another, not at all aware of the unseemliness of their condition. They do not, I imagine, develop a religion. We, on the other hand, are aware of our predicament, and, as I said earlier, that is the glory of a human being.

Now, is there *really* a contradiction in our consciousness; or are our present desires only distortions of one basic, subconscious longing to be free? It is said that ordinarily our lives are driven by three or four cardinal desires: the desire for a mate, the desire for progeny, the desire for possessions, and the desire for recognition and power. These desires are basic to the psycho-physical human being, and they find expression in a wide variety of ways; they drive us along all kinds of roads; indeed they create the roads. But what drives these drives? One might say they are evolutionary mechanisms that ensure the survival of the species. Well, let's not say that. Let us say that on the deepest level of our being, barely known to us, there is a craving that never ceases. It is (as I have already indicated) the craving to know our true Self, our true Being, the craving, in short, for the Transcendent Experience. It is ~~ever-present, nagging, goading, like a dimly~~ remembered dream of glory. We go about trying to realize that dream in fantastic ways. At the very core of our existence we *know* we are the Infinite Being; we are continually trying to realize our own vastness—so what do we do? We try to swallow the universe, to possess and possess and posses. We long to be at one with all others, so we form attachments. We long to be great—so we try to attain fame and power. And so on and on. Sometimes these attempts to find love and glory, to know joy and power take very dark and twisted turns; but twists in a road do not change the origin of the road or its destina-

6. Swami Vivekananda, *Inspired Talks*, 13th ed. (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1980), p. 98.

tion. The road starts from our true Self and reaches back to our Self. This is matter of *cosmic* evolution, not merely the evolution of life on our planet, it has to do with our inmost nature.

The divinity within us ceaselessly tries to express itself. We are constantly trying to broaden our horizons and extend our love and our knowledge—though in the wrong ways. We are restless, insatiable. This is the Transcendent Experience calling to us from within. Eventually, this call is bound to be heard and responded to in the right way by each and every individual being—perhaps, as nature takes its slow and winding course, after many, many lifetimes—if you believe in the doctrine of reincarnation. But why should we wait, undergoing life after life of a more or less unsatisfactory existence, without ever knowing that this is not the way it has to be?

According to Vedanta, this situation in which we find ourselves is due to a sort of cosmic ignorance (called *māyā*), an ignorance in which we partake and by which we are completely bamboozled. But this state of consciousness where ignorance and confusion prevail is really of our own choosing, and this being so, we can, if we choose, change it—lift it. No one has condemned us to it, no one has to redeem us from it. It is true that now and then, in accordance with some marvellous cosmic arrangement, great souls come to this earth, such as Buddha and Christ and Ramakrishna, and in their compassion try to wake us up. Sometimes we hear, mostly we don't.

The trouble is that we *like* this world the way it is, with ninety percent of our minds we like it, and that is a very great barrier to attaining the Transcendent Experience. Anyhow, let us say that with the ten percent of our mind that is not deluded (to use

a Vedanta term) we want to transcend this present state. What can we do? Earlier I mentioned the wonderful effect of holy company. If we can find a man or woman who is established in the Transcendent Experience, and if he or she lets us sit and stare at him, follow him about, listen to his words—then we are exceedingly blessed and on our way. Or again, there are the rare transcendent glimpses which sometimes can convince us of the existence of a higher and more valuable and desirable state than the present one. But both these methods are dependent on circumstance and luck—some say on the grace of God, but even the grace of God cannot be counted on, God is not law abiding.

However, there is, I think, a sure way to reinforce the ten percent of our mind which is at least half awake, asking questions, fanning. This is simply to gain knowledge. The only remedy for spiritual ignorance is, of course, spiritual knowledge, but *intellectual* knowledge is not a small thing, and while it will never take us the whole way or even part of the way to the ultimate Transcendent Experience, it can dispel doubt, it can convince us that there is a transcendent Reality, and that we can attain it, and it can keep us headed in the right direction. Indeed, sound intellectual knowledge of the philosophy and psychology of spiritual states can open up for us a whole new world of aspiration and hope.

The present age is very fortunate in this respect. As you all know, mainline religions the world over have been extremely closed mouthed about mysticism, which deals with the Transcendent Experience. For the most part, they have discouraged any dabbling in it among their followers—lay and monastic both. In other words, the vast majority of people have been excluded from the real core of religion, from the *spiritual* flame at its heart. Where has been



the teaching of the soaring transcendence that great religious Teachers of all religions have spoken of in words of fire? Ideas about transcendence, realization of God, of the Self, and so on have not been emphasized at all; they have not been generally taught to the *people* or given a place in their lives.

This has been the case not only in the West but also in India, where Vedanta originated, but where traditionally only the upper crust was allowed even to *hear* Vedantic scriptures, and where only a few of those few, after long training, took the vows of sannyas or monasticism. It was rigidly thought, moreover, that only sannyasins (monastics) could attain the Transcendent Experience. (Buddhism smashed this exclusiveness—but later on, Hinduism only intensified it.) Thus in both East and West, the real, transcendent nature of man has been, in effect, kept secret from the vast majority. Then came Swami Vivekananda.

Like Buddha, Swami Vivekananda deplored this kind of spiritual elitism. He condemned particularly the idea that only a certain select group of people could hear the highest Vedantic truths. One of the greatest things the Swami did for mankind was (and I quote him), “to bring Vedanta from the forests to the marketplaces of the world.” “These conceptions of the Vedanta must come out,” he declared, “[they] must remain not only in the forest, not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the Bar and the Bench, in the pulpit, and in the cottage of the poor man, with the fishermen that are catching fish, and the students that are studying. They call to every man, woman, and child whatever be their occupation, wherever they may be.”<sup>7</sup>

Swami Vivekananda never tempered

his teaching of Vedanta. In my opinion, he did not do so for three reasons. First, because that was the way he saw things—literally. He perceived that all things and all beings are Brahman and nothing but Brahman; everywhere he looked he saw that truth, and he could not teach anything else. Second, he knew that there were *some* men and women among his listeners (perhaps two or three) who were prepared to realize what he taught. Third—and this was for the rest of us—he wanted to give us an *intellectual* understanding of the true nature of ourselves and the true meaning of our lives. With all his heart he wanted us to understand the great teaching of Vedanta—that we are the divine Self—he wanted to awaken that dormant knowledge within us and, from wherever we presently happen to stand, he wanted us to go for it.

The point I think Swami Vivekananda often made is that intellectual understanding of our own essential nature is enough to start with. He tried with all his might to burn this understanding into our minds and hearts. He was certain that if thousands of people the world over were told the doctrine of the Self, the doctrine of Transcendent Consciousness, this knowledge, albeit intellectual, would soon become a conviction. Conviction, charged with emotion, with love, becomes a burning faith, and that faith, in turn, creates longing for the Transcendent Experience—which longing, intensified, brings about realization. “That yearning,” said Sri Ramakrishna, “is like the red sky in the east at dawn. After such a sky the sun must rise.”<sup>8</sup> Once born, intellectual conviction about spiritual things matures, until eventually intellect transcends itself and becomes Knowledge with a capital K—in other words, it becomes *experience*.

7. *Ibid.*, page 245.

8. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math), page 338.

This, at any rate, is one way of lifting ourselves into a spiritual realm. There are, of course, many ways, many paths—as many, perhaps, as there are people. But I think a firm conviction, faith, is common to them all, and in our present times faith in the divinity of man would lift this unhappy world into a higher, more joyous and light-filled level of existence. Just consider. Say one had the faith that one was even now the pure Self—immortal, infinite, eternal, and totally fulfilled. Say that one believed that every other living being was that same Self, how could our relationship with others be anything but a relationship of reverence and how could our action toward others be anything but acts of worship, with no thought but for their welfare? Again, if we were convinced that we were the immortal Self, how could we fear death—a fear basic to many other paralyzing fears that we harbour and nurture and that twist life into strange patterns? In short—“in short” because I could go on indefinitely here—how could we hang on to the little image of

ourselves that we hold so dear and think so important? Would we not understand that that little self is nothing but a speck of dust on the immensity and magnificence of our true Being? Convinced of the natural glory of the Self, would we not become invincibly strong, great in thought and deed, standing on, acting and reacting from that immortal centre?

I am reminded here of one of the men who were held hostage by the Iranians. For five endless years he was held in solitary confinement, chained and tortured. He did not crumble; he told himself that his jailers could do anything to him, even kill him, but they could never destroy the Spirit that was within him, that was his *Being*. That is the kind of strength and faith we all need. We are held hostage to our small selves, but actually there is nothing to prevent us from acting every moment as though we were bathed in the Transcendent Experience, because, as a matter of fact, we are. We *are* the Transcendent Experience.



Be brave and be sincere; then follow any path with devotion, and you *must* reach the Whole. Once lay hold of one link of the chain, and the whole chain must come by degrees. Water the roots of the tree (that is reach the Lord), and the whole tree is watered; getting the Lord, we get all.

One-sidedness is the bane of the world. The more sides you can develop the more souls you have, and you can see the universe through all souls—through the Bhakta (devotee) and the Jnani (philosopher). Determine your own nature and stick to it. Nishtha (devotion to one ideal) is the only method for the beginner; but with devotion and sincerity it will lead to all. Churches, doctrines, forms, are the hedges to protect the tender plant, but they must later be broken down that the plant may become a tree. So the various religions, Bibles, Vedas, dogmas—all are just tubs for the little plant; but it must get out of the tub. Nishtha is, in a manner, placing the plant in the tub, shielding the struggling soul in its path. . . .

—Swami Vivekananda, *Inspired Talks*, 23rd June, 1895.



# Vivekananda's Voyage to the West

DR. P. C. ALEXANDER

*Dr. P.C. Alexander, Governor of Maharashtra, delivered the following inspiring talk on 31 May 1993 at the function organized by the Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay to commemorate the Centenary of Swamiji's visit to the West to attend the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago.*

Today, Monday, 31 May 1993, we are commemorating the voyage of a great son of India, Swami Vivekananda, to a distant continent 100 years ago, a voyage which was to change the course of the history of modern India. Last week, I attended a function to commemorate the centenary of the voyage of yet another great son of India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, to another distant continent, a voyage which also served to change the history of India.

By a strange coincidence both Gandhi and Vivekananda left India on their voyages abroad within a few days of each other in the same year. The purpose of their voyages was quite different. For Gandhi the twenty-three-year-old barrister, it was a professional visit, to appear in the court on behalf of a Gujarati Muslim trader in a dispute he had with another Gujarati Muslim trader. He was then a briefless lawyer little known even in his own home state of Rajkot. He seized the first good professional opportunity that came his way, but the young lawyer soon found he had a greater mission to take on, and that was to fight for justice and fairness for his fellow Indians in South Africa.

When Gandhi returned to India after his epic fight against racial discrimination and arrogance, he found himself in the vanguard of the independence movement and continued his fight for justice and freedom against the British colonial masters using the techniques he had perfected in

South Africa. We are all familiar with the tumultuous history of those years and how Gandhiji gave new life and vigour to the nationalist movement which eventually was to bring freedom for the country. He was so different from all other political leaders the world had so far seen that Albert Einstein was to say about him that generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth. A grateful people hailed him as the Father of the Nation.

Unlike Gandhi, Vivekananda was already a well known figure in India when he embarked on his voyage to the West in 1893. He went to America not to represent a particular sect, or community, or religion, but as a simple sannyāsi of India to explain to the people of the West the harmony of all religions and the universalism of Vedic thoughts. He was no politician, but his visit turned out to be a turning point in our country's history because his personality and philosophy had a profound impact on the nationalist movement which was then in its nascent stage. It was in grateful acknowledgement of the inspiration his life and message gave to the cause of national liberation and reconstruction that Subhash Chandra Bose hailed him as the spiritual father of India's nationalist movement. Let me quote to you what the great revolutionary and charismatic leader Subhash Chandra Bose said about Swami Vivekananda:

"His personality was rich, profound and complex and it was this personality—as distinct from his teachings and writings—which accounts for the wonderful influence he has exerted on his countrymen. . . . Reckless in his sacrifice, unceasing in his activity, boundless in his love, profound and versatile in his wisdom, exuberant in his emotions, merciless in his attacks but yet simple as a child—he was a rare personality in this world of ours. . . . A yogi of the highest spiritual level in direct communication with the truth, who had for the time being consecrated his whole life to the moral and spiritual uplift of his nation and of humanity—that is how I would describe him. The foundation of the present freedom movement owes its origin to Swamiji's message."

Who but Swami Vivekananda can match this reference? Who but Swami Vivekananda can get these choicest words of praise? But, unfortunately, you and I who claim to have studied Swami Vivekananda's life and philosophy, have in our thoughts and in our speeches and writings given very little place for Swami Vivekananda's role as the spiritual father of the country's nationalist movement. We remember him as a great exponent of Vedanta; we adore him as a silver-tongued orator; we admire him as a great authority on all the great religions of the world—not merely of Hinduism—, we respect him for his great integrity and courage to put across the truth about his religion, but very few of us today remember him with that degree of gratitude that he deserves as one who provided the spiritual inspiration for the nationalist movement.

I shall try to explain the importance of Swamiji's role in this field by recalling the state of the Hindu religion at the time he came on the scene and then by explaining

the importance of spirituality as a source of inspiration for the nationalist movement.

The early half of the 19th century can be described as a period when Hinduism touched the nadir of its spiritual strength. It looked as if the country had entered a phase of spiritual sterility or torpidity. At this low point of the history of Hinduism we see the emergence of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa with the mission of rejuvenating the religion and electrifying the spiritual consciousness of the world through the strength of spirituality. I shall quote now Swami Ranganathanandaji, who is present at this meeting; and let me confess, it is through his writings and speeches that I have learnt to understand Sri Ramakrishna's and Swami Vivekananda's philosophy. In his very very beautiful and inimitable style Swami Ranganathanandaji explains how Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's spiritual energy revitalised Hinduism at a stage when it appeared to be in a state of near torpor. Swami Ranganathanandaji says:

"What did Sri Ramakrishna do in his time? Apparently he did nothing. He lived a quiet life outside the political and social movements of his time. But the energies that he created and released from his inner life, powerfully influenced men and movements around him, and bid for at the not too distant future, to transform the modern world itself. He lived the life of the spirit in all its intensity and extensity and showed the authenticity of man's spiritual life."

What a beautiful sentence! Note particularly the reference to the energies that he *created and released*. With the emergence of this great spiritual force, or "with the creation and release of spiritual energy," the course of the history of Hinduism turns, and again, as in several times in the past, it is set on the path



of rejuvenation.

After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, his great disciple, and the authentic interpreter of his Master's philosophy, Swami Vivekananda, takes the process of spiritual revival to further heights. His call to the people was a very simple one—"go back to the Upanishads." By telling the people that they would find strength, freedom and fearlessness in the Upanishads he was explaining to them that the sources of spiritual energy were already there in their own religion and they had only to discover these themselves. Let me quote Swamiji's inspiring words:

"...let me tell you that we want strength, strength and every time strength. And the Upanishads are the great mine of strength. Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world: the whole world can be vivified, made strong, energised through them. They will call with trumpet voice upon the weak, the miserable, and the downtrodden of all races, all creeds, and all sects, to stand on their feet and be free. Freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom, and spiritual freedom are the watchwords of the Upanishads."

Swami Vivekananda's message was simple and forthright and that was whatever strength you wish to acquire is there in the Upanishads if only you make an effort to search for it. At the time when Swamiji spoke of "*physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom*" colonialism had been at its zenith in India and there was very little consciousness or awareness among the ordinary people about the concept of freedom. The message of Swami Vivekananda was intended to instil in the minds of the people self respect and also confidence and pride in their own heritage. He understood very well the malady that

had overtaken the people at that time, and as Swami Ranganathanandaji said earlier in his introductory speech, he had "a remedy for every malady." His remedy for the malady of the people of India in the 19th century was strength through spirituality.

Swami Vivekananda's famous exhortation: "Arise! Awake!!" is well known to people today because it is now being quoted by practically every speaker on Swamiji's life and philosophy. A few sentences from this are relevant to the point I am trying to make and I quote:

"Let us proclaim to every soul—Arise ! Awake !! and stop not till the goal is reached. Arise ! Awake !! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. Too much inactivity, too much of weakness, too much of hypnotism has been, and is, upon our race. You modern Hindus, dehypnotize yourselves. Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. The way to do that is found in your own sacred books. Teach yourselves, teach everyone, its real nature. Call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes."

The next sentence in this message was quoted by Swami Ranganathanandaji in his introductory speech today:

"Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity."

Remember he was not a politician asking the public for their votes; instead he was asking them to be aware of the degeneration that had beset their religion, and exhorting them to awake from their slumber. We can find in this powerful message the true source of inspiration for the nationalist movement of which Swamiji

was rightly acclaimed as the spiritual father.

Swami Vivekananda did not go to America in a mood of pride and arrogance that he was representing a five-millenia-old civilization. He went there as a humble sannyāsi. However, when he addressed the Christian congregations in America he did not hesitate to tell them plainly what he considered was their main malady. He told them with absolute frankness that they had forgotten the essence of the teachings of Jesus Christ and that they were guilty of hypocrisy and double standards in their own lives. He did not exhort them to follow the upanisads, but only asked them to be true to their own Master, Jesus. Fortunately, he knew more of Christianity than most theologians of the West. He could quote from the Bible and interpret the teachings of Lord Jesus with greater knowledge of Christian theology than most of the prelates, theologians, and scholars whom he was addressing. He told them to their face that if they wanted to be true Christians, they should go back to Christ. He exhorted them with astonishing candor:

"If you want live, go back to Christ. You are not Christians! No, as a nation, you are not. Go back to him who had nowhere to lay his head. Better you be ready to live in rags with Christ than to live in palaces without him."

You must be knowing what he meant by the words "go back to him who had nowhere to lay his head?" Swamiji was quoting the words which Jesus had used while addressing the crowds which used to follow him. He told them: "the birds have their nests and the beasts their lairs, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head." Swamiji while addressing his Christian listeners was advising them to go back to him who had nowhere to lay his head.

I cannot conclude my talk about the role of Swamiji as the spiritual father of India's national movement better than by quoting C. Rajagopalachari. This is how Rajaji summed up the role of Swami Vivekananda:

"Swami Vivekananda saved Hinduism and saved India. But for him we would have lost our religion and would not have gained our freedom."

This is exactly what I have been trying to say in my own way during the last thirty minutes or so—Swamiji saved Hinduism at a time when it seemed to have lost its identity and strength and provided the inspiration for the nationalist movement through the message of spirituality, freedom, fearlessness and self respect.

May the courage and wisdom of this great sage continue to inspire us.



"My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody, and then let men and women settle their own fate. Let them know what our forefathers as well as other nations have thought on the most momentous questions of life. Let them see specially what others are doing now, and then decide. We are to put the chemicals together, the crystallization will be done by nature according to her laws."

—Swami Vivekananda, in a letter to his disciples in Madras dated 24th January, 1894.



## Reviews & Notices

SRI RAMANA DEVAMALAI & RAMANA PURANAM, by Sri Muruganar. Translated into English by Dr. T.N. Pranatharthi. Published by the Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Banagalore; First edition 1992; pp. 135; Rs. 25/-.

Ramana Maharshi is one of the pure Advaitins of twentieth century India. He, by his noble life and thought, attracted people from India and abroad. Although the sage of Arunachal did not write much, since writing virtually diverts the contemplative mind, now there is not any dearth of literature on him in several languages. And his message is being universally received as that of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

The present book is a twin edition of "Sri Ramana Devamalai" and "Ramana Puranam", including the Tamil text and English translation. The edition is a Birth-centenary publication brought out in honour of the author, Sri Muruganar (1892-1973), one of the closest devotees of the Bhagavan Ramana, at Tiruvannamalai. The author, it is reported, was the humblest of the humble and was content with the anonymity of being in the shadow of the Master's feet. But no one was more soaked in Ramana's teachings. The Centenary offering to one who understood the true value of "surrender to the Sadguru" deserves our commendation.

Soon after coming into contact with Sri Ramana in Sept. 1923, Muruganar started speaking and writing about his Master's teachings. He identified the Master with Siva. At times he enjoys Ramana as Kumara, son of Siva, come to fulfil the task of destroying ignorance and bestowing knowledge.

The first of the two works under review, namely "Sri Ramana Devamalai", was first published in Tamil in 1939 with financial help from Sri Ramanapadananda. It contains 207 verses. Muruganar's love for his mother and his concern for her liberation are expressed in it. The following verse may be taken as representative of the theme:

She bore in her arms as a child,

I entrust her as a child in your arms,  
You are a child though, Venkatava,  
It is your duty to protect her as a  
mother.

Verse 33.

Like a true devotee, he requests the Master to expedite grace, and also at times, threatens the Master with the blame for his own death, if grace is delayed.

The other work, "Ramana Puranam", contains 540 verses. Of these Muruganar composed two hundred lines on the glory of Venkata Ramana in the style similar to "Siva Puranam" of Manikkavachagar. Ramana Maharshi not only approved the title of the work, but also added three hundred lines more. Thus the work has a special sanctity. It is a joint venture of the Master and the disciple. The earlier part, composed by the latter, is a testimony to the transforming magic of faith in the hallowed feet of the Master. The faith destroys the *vāsanās*. This is amply clear in verses like the following:

Of your feats I am able to sing, which is  
my fortune,  
Enquiring in the source of 'I' in the  
heart, where 'I'  
does not rise;  
Those who catch you firmly  
With the five senses dead,  
Their mind in Sivam, O holy source!

Verse 525.

The greatness and beauty of Muruganar's poetry is that he is successful in communicating the supra-human joy of the Self as Ramana. The bliss and the beatitude of Self-knowledge could be enjoyed by many. But it is difficult to communicate the experience in cognitive terms. A state which is beyond words and thought, *avāṅ-manasagocara*, has been clothed by Muruganar almost completely. Through his poetry the author invites all of us to share the joy of bathing in the pure waters of the ocean of joy, *Ramana-ānanda*—Ramana's state. The reader is absorbed in the bliss and gets merged in the limitless space of



Ramana's silence. The words have the power to transport one beyond limits.

Dr. S.P. Dubey  
Jabalpur

PATHS TO PEACE, Edited by John Matthews. London: Rider Books, 1992; pp. 224; £ 9.99

*Paths to Peace* is a collection of prayers, ceremonies and chants from many traditions. The author, John Matthews, is one of the leading spiritual writers in the U.K. This book reminds one of the need for peace, and the practical ways of achieving it, in an increasingly tense and divisive society. The book is the result of the author's personal experience of the harrowing times that the Gulf crisis of 1991 evoked. He was deeply moved by the simple faith of the people, who, irrespective of the religion and discipline they belonged to, prayed for a means to end the conflict. A notable feature was that these people were ordinary men and women who saw the utter futility and mindless violence of war.

This neat and elegant book contains a compilation of inspiring and spiritually exalting traditions of prayers, poems, and thoughts on the themes of peace. They are drawn from North American, Indian, Judaic, Buddhist, Pagan, Islamic, African, and many more traditions. There are six thought provoking chapters, each offering a fresh insight into the efficacy of prayer and meditation as a practical means to spiritual reformation. These prayers transcend all creeds and cultures and promote a truly international understanding of universal brotherhood. The sixth chapter, however, is worth more than a cursory study. It ends with Mikhail Gorbachev's conviction that "There are enough elements of confrontation, but the forces wishing and capable of stopping and overcoming that confrontation are growing in strength and scope before our very eyes." (p. 205)

This book brings home with intense clarity that it is faith alone as revealed in prayer that can mitigate the horrifying reality of war. When the mind is cleansed of egoism and petty prejudices, then personal

and global conflicts can be obliterated. The author's meticulous and loving compilation of the eternal truths found in the varying religious traditions of the world speak of his sagacity, and sincerity regarding the creation of a peaceful and harmonious world.

Eminently readable, this book will, no doubt, awaken and inspire the deep core of spirituality that lies within all of us. For those who care about the future of the human race and the universe, it may be a valuable guide to 'spiritual peace-work'.

Dr. Rama Nair

HEALTHY VALUES OF LIVING, by Swami Tathagatananda. Published by Mr. S.K. Chakraborty, 137 Ramdula Street, Calcutta 700 006; 1991. pp. vi plus 146; Rs. 20/-.

The book under review is a collection of thirty articles by the author, originally published in various journals such as *Yuva Bharati* and the *The Bhavan's Journal*. The author is at present the Head of the Vedanta Society, New York, U.S.A. These articles, covering a significant variety of themes, are obviously the outcome of the author's deep study of the basic problems of spiritual life in terms of a holistic attitude towards total human development.

This attitude is seen by the author as embodied in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples and devotees. In this context the article, "The Baranagore Math" is very illuminating. In the articles on "Sashi Maharaj", "Rolande Genet", and "A Labour of Love"—discussing the dedicated lives of Swami Ramakrishnananda, a direct disciple, and Rolande Genet, Katharine Whitmarsh ('Prasanna'), the two American devotees of the Master—the author explores their spiritual significance illuminatingly. These articles change the readers' conception of the nature and function of tapas in spiritual life. Similarly, the idea of seva or service is discussed with great insight in the articles on "The Gita and Gandhi", "Above Human Bondage", and others. We get in them the author's highly pertinent views on the spiritual and moral values of life which sustain and unfold the inherent poten-



tialities of the individual. In other articles, viz, "Way to Happiness", "Sane Living", "Worry and Its Cure", "Psychic Cure and Vedanta", the author cogently and convincingly—citing great savants such as Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Arnold Toynbee, Bertrand Russell, Albert Schweitzer, and C.G. Jung—establishes the fact that spiritual values act as antidote and curative medicine for the various vicissitudes of life. Indeed, human progress is inconceivable in the absence of these values.

There are also in the book, vivid description and fascinating accounts of pilgrimage to Amarnath and visits to historical places such as Nalanda.

In short, the worthwhile contribution made in the Swami's valuable book lies in its insistence on spiritual awareness as the core of significance for any activity in life. As such, it is a welcome addition to the treasures of timeless wisdom.

*Swami Brahmasthananda  
Hyderabad*

**CONSCIOUSNESS AND CREATIVITY—**  
A study of Sri Aurobindo, T.S. Eliot and Aldous Huxley, by Sumita Roy, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1991: pp. 200; Rs. 175/-

Sumita Roy concludes her preface to the book by expressing the hope that its readers will find it interesting and "in some way useful." One may truthfully say that her hopes are not belied. The book is certainly interesting. It gives the reader a bird's eye view of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, Eliot and Aldous Huxley. The ideas are put forth simply so that they are within the grasp of even a lay reader, yet precision is not compromised.

Whether one agrees with the experiences of the three literateurs studied here or not, their seriousness and depth is easily felt. It may seem strange that the three are considered in one study, for their spiritual convictions are not the same. Besides, one is a yogi, the second a poet, and the third a philosopher. Yet, what Sumita Roy strives to establish through the study is their unity in arriving at spiritual solutions to the conflicting and often devastating human experien-

ces that they have perceived. All three, as true creative artists, have striven to find a harmony, point a way to synthesis, and a way out of the chaos and disharmony of human life as it is today. Their methods and answers are varied; yet significantly, there is a common thread of spirituality. They all highlight the need to shift attention from materialistic and partial preoccupations to a unified perception of consciousness. And in all three these solutions spring from their own spiritual growth and experience, it is not mere moralising or philosophising. It is this rootedness in experience which makes their works truly creative, says Roy, and thus authenticates the experience to the reader as well. It is this which renders their works of great relevance by awakening in the reading public an awareness of greater beauty and meaning to life. For the same reason a study of their works is of special use in drawing attention to those aspects which are significant to the spiritual growth of society itself. By bringing them together in one study, Sumita Roy has achieved the purpose of highlighting that even varied approaches and temperaments when sharpened with creative insight must necessarily find spiritual keys to the world puzzle. In this manner she gently indicates in which direction our answers lie as well.

*Dr. Sarada Natarajan  
Bangalore*

**SHRI ANNAMACHARYA, A  
PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY,** by H.L. Chandrasekhara. Published by vidya Shankara Prakashana, Mysore-4. pp. xvi plus 288. Rs. 60/-

Sri Annamacharya is one of the great saint-musicians of South India who lived in the 15th century A.D. An ardent devotee of Sri Venkateshwara of Tirupati, Annamacharya composed thousands of songs of high literacy and musical value, in Telugu. His compositions, not as widely known as those of Tyagaraja and other saint-musicians, were recently given publicity by some scholars and musicians of Andhra Pradesh. The temple authorities of Tirupati are also giving their help and support in this



endeavour.

The book under review is an attempt to highlight the philosophy in Annamacharya's musical compositions. The saint was a follower of Visishtadvaita Philosophy of Sri Ramanuja, and hence this finds a prominent place in his compositions. Annamacharya, however, was first and foremost a mystic, and the beauty of his compositions is more due to his mystical outpourings than due to any philosophy he expounded.

Swami Vivekananda said that "the abstract Advaita must become living and poetic in everyday life"; that intricate mythology and 'yogi-sm' must be put in a form that even children can grasp. This is exactly what the bards of India, Annamacharya among them, did. They converted high philosophy into simple rhythmic songs which even the ordinary folk could sing and enjoy. Thus they helped prevent the sanatana dharma from becoming extinct, despite the increasing illiteracy and repressive social customs of the day.

The present book is actually a doctoral dissertation. The author needs to be congratulated for putting in a sincere effort to analyse and present in a systematic manner, the philosophy in the musical compositions of Annamacharya. This will help music lovers understand and enjoy the songs better. The book could have been offered at a lower price.

Dr. Kamala Jayarao

GREATSWAN, Meetings with Ramakrishna, by Lex Hixon. Published by Shambhala Publications, Horticultural Hall, 300 Massachusetts Ave., Boston, Mass., 02115, U.S.A., 1992. 316 pages + xvii; \$ 16.00

Sri Ramakrishna showed humanity in concrete terms the ways and means through which God can be realized. By making his readers participate in the inspired life and animated conversations of this God-man, Lex Hixon takes us to a unique realm of experience of Supreme Reality—the reality Sri Ramakrishna calls *my blissful Mother*.

Sri Ramakrishna was not a man of

knowledge in the conventional sense of the term. To him knowledge meant only the knowledge of God: to know God is knowledge and not to know Him is ignorance. To know God is also to know that God is as much with form as He is without form, and that He is beyond both of these also. There is no harm in holding on to whatever is one's faith on the question of form versus formlessness, but one should never be so dogmatic as to say that one's *own faith alone* is good and that every other is false. One should remember that he who worships God in an image or in an icon does not thereby worship the clay or the picture, but the spirit that is represented in the image or the icon. Further, one seeking knowledge of God should know that by whatever name one calls on God—be it Kali, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, or Allah—these are all expressions of the same indivisible Consciousness and Bliss. In other words, to know God is to know the truth that God is the only Reality and the God Himself has ordained many ways of worship to suit the varied temperaments and levels of spiritual attainment of His worshippers.

Why is it that God is the only Reality? Because God alone is eternal, while everything else in the world—money, fame, and worldly pleasures—lasts for a while only. Knowledge of God demands that man must cultivate the sense of discrimination between what is eternal and what is impermanent. Naturally, the goal of life should be the search for what is eternally real and not what is ephemeral. If a man visualizes God as Mother of the Universe, then he must cry to Her like a *child*, and cry by all means with a yearning heart. When the yearning for God is intense enough—as intense as the three things—namely, the love of a worldly man for wealth, the love of a mother for her child, and the love of the chaste wife for her husband—when the intensity of these three are put together, then the vision of God follows. He finds God the quickest whose yearning is the greatest.

Along with yearning and earnestness, the only other thing necessary for the vision of God is dropping the ego of "I-ness" and "my-ness". When egoism drops away, divinity is seen. One doesn't have to leave



the world in order to drop this sense of "I" and "mine" in regard to worldly objects. One may very well live in the work-a-day-world and lead a family life, provided one experiences a deep longing for God and attends to all one's duties by keeping one's mind fixed on God. One must live in the knowledge that all of one's worldly relations and worldly possessions belong not to one's self, but to God alone, that one is merely acting out for a while the "part" that has been assigned to him in the drama of life by the Director, that is God.

In thirty-three chapters, the book provides stimulating accounts of meetings between Sri Ramakrishna and the eminent personalities of his time, such as Vidyasagar, Keshab Sen, Bankim Chandra, Pandit Shashadhar, Dr. Mahendra Sarkar, Sarada Devi—the Holy Mother, Narendra—the roaring fire, and Girish—the young actor. The book shows how the great Master made these personalities enter their own inner chamber of primordial awareness to swim in the current of wisdom and enjoy thereby selfless peace and delight. With the remarkably outstanding literary as well as spiritual gifts that the author possesses, he conveys in his chosen literary form a spiritual atmosphere which is authentically that of Sri Ramakrishna. The presentation, commentary, contextualization and translation are his own. He builds on certain passages from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and enriches them further with reference to the entire Ramakrishna literature, including more detailed descriptions of Sri Ramakrishna and his environment. Another remarkable feature of the book is that instead of pontificating with his interpretation of Sri Ramakrishna, the author has stepped aside at the appropriate places and allowed Sri Ramakrishna to invoke the Truth in his own words, actions, and experiences. *Great Swan* is not about Sri Ramakrishna, but simply is Sri Ramakrishna.

In a word, Lex Hixon's book is at once intellectually stimulating and spiritually satisfying. To come to such a book is to come to God and know the essence of life as well as living.

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### Books Received

*Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarasidass, Pvt. Ltd., Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. Pages 509, price Rs. 250/-.

*Steps to Happiness*, J.P. Vaswani, India Book Distributors, 107/108 Arcadia, Nariman Point, Bombay, 400 021. Pages 197, price not mentioned.

*Burn Anger Before Anger Burns You*, J.P. Vaswani. Gita Publishing House, 10 Sadhu Vaswani Path, Pune, 411 011. Pages 112, price Rs. 25/-.

1. *Interviews and Inner Views*, J.P. Vaswani, Pages 144; \$ 1.50

2. *Joy Peace Pills*, by J.P. Vaswani, Pages 144; \$ 1.50

*The above two books can be had from Mira Publications, 10 Sadhu Vaswani Road, Pune 411 001.*

*In the Absence of God*, Anne Feldhaus and S.G. Tulphule, University of Hawaii Press, No. 2840 Kolowalu Street, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96822; 1992.

1. *From Freud to Frankl*, John H. Morgan, 1993. pages 220; Rs. 200/-.

2. *Thirsty Vision* (Poems), Ratan Das, 1992. Pages 87; Rs. 40/-.

3. *Accuser and Accused*, Jean Starobinski, 1992. Pages 36; Rs. 30/-.

*The above three books are published by Mayur Publications, C-5, Unit-3, Kharavala Nagar, Bhubaneswar, 751 001, Orissa.*

*Rg Veda*, Malati J. Shendge, 1989. Rangadatta Vadekar, 1603 Sada Shiv Path, Pune 411 030. Pages 36; Rs. 30/-.

1. *Question Box on Basic Education*, Pages 85.

2. *Hindusthan Hamara* (Our India).

3. *Liberation* (Mukti), Pages 156.

4. *St. Francis of Assisi*, Pages 194

5. *Dharmadvaitham*, Parts I & III, Pages 509 & 278.

*The above five books are published by Anthony Elenjmittam. Basic Education Publications, Aquinas Hall, Bombay, 400 050. Prices not given.*

*The Physics of Karma*, V. Dwarakanath Reddy. 1992. Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd., Chidambaram, Ahmedabad 380 013. Pages 167; price not given.

*Naranarayaneeyam* (Malayalam), K.J. Thampan, 1992, President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Puranattukara, Trichur 680 551. Pages 374; Rs. 32/-.

