

# Vedanta

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403 SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2018

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**Spiritual Life in an Industrial Age**

*Swami Ranganathananda*

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**An Outline of Hindu Psychology – 2  
(The Subconscious and the Superconscious)**

*Swami Gnaneswarananda*

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## Divine Wisdom

### Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 2



### **THE CHAMELEON**

ONCE a man entered a wood and saw a small animal on a tree. He came back and told another man that he had seen a creature of a beautiful red colour on a certain tree. The second man replied: "When I went into the wood, I also saw that animal. But why do you call it red? It is green." Another man who was present contradicted them both and insisted that it was yellow. Presently others arrived and contended that it was grey, violet, blue, and so

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## Editorial

### Swami Vivekananda's vision of social progress - 1

Swami Vivekananda's vision of society is fundamentally spiritual. *He says:*

*"On planes physical, ethical, and spiritual, an ever-broadening generalisation — leading up to a concept of Unity Eternal — is in the air; and this being so, all the movements of the time may be taken to represent, knowingly or unknowingly, the noblest philosophy of the unity man ever had — the Advaita Vedanta."*<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, he says, *"The whole of our lives is one; we are one, even in thought. Coming to a still further generalisation, the essence of matter and thought is their potentiality of spirit; this is the unity from which all have come, and that must essentially be one. We are absolutely one; we are physically one, we are mentally one, and as spirit, it goes without saying, that we are one, if we believe in spirit at all. This oneness is the one fact that is being proved every day by modern science."*<sup>2</sup>

So according to him social progress is nothing but a relentless movement towards unity – the bringing together of all human beings at the physical, mental, and ultimately spiritual planes. It also leads to the idea that social progress is a relentless movement towards equality – whether manifested in political terms or sociological terms or in terms of gross material pursuits – but all part of a deeper recognition of the spiritual equality of human beings as 'Sparks of the Divine'.

The other idea that follows is that social progress can also be seen as a relentless movement towards universality and harmony – as human beings first clash at the levels of villages and tribes, kingdoms and nations, and even at the civilizational level – and then find new understanding of the other, a new vision of a

reconciled truth greater than the two truths previously in conflict with others. Out of this relentless progress comes a greater acceptance of the diversity of pathways and equal validity of all these pathways in a larger human sense.

Swami Vivekananda used to say that all progress humanity ever made was a result of its fight against nature and not due to succumbing to its pressures. If human beings were mere passive participants in this larger canvas, then centuries of struggle and centuries of growth and decline, fortune and failure, good actions and evil deeds, all await human beings. But human beings are not passive participants. They are the active ingredients of this larger canvas. The quality of progress of human beings on key dimensions, individually and collectively, can determine the quality of the social progress on the larger canvas.

These dimensions of human progress, which can determine or shape the larger canvas of social progress include the answers to these questions: What is the motive for human progress? What is the framework for collective action? What is the metric for human progress?

The motive for human progress, in the final analysis, is the recognition by each human being of essential freedom, essential strength and fearlessness, the essential infinitude within oneself – in short, the recognition of the Divinity within oneself. All other motives of human progress such as power, wealth, expansion and achievement, are distractions from this essential motive, and are causes to take society into multiple by-lanes or pathways.

The framework for human action derives from this core motive for human progress and is built on the ultimate ideal of unity, universality, and equality. The farther the framework is from this ultimate ideal – the more flawed or confused it is likely

to be – liable to confuse not just individuals, but whole nations about what is right and what is wrong. This framework proposed by Swami Vivekananda is the principle of ‘Unselfishness’. In fact, according to him it is the only true test of religion or spirituality. The more and more unselfish the action is, the more it will take us closer to the ideal of society. Thus, a framework that proposes a strict transaction or a give and take policy and competition (such as ‘eye for an eye’) is less suited for real social progress as compared to a framework based on ‘enlightened self-interest’ (win-win and co-operation). Even this, of course, is still a distance away from the principle of unselfishness.

A society with a framework for human action – translated into a shared system of ethics and values – based on the higher ideal of unselfishness and a more immediately achievable ideal of enlightened self-interest, will be better suited for social progress than one trapped in an ethics born of selfishness.

What would be the metric of human progress in the spiritualized vision of social progress? The metric would be the manifestation of human possibilities. In so far as a society creates the space for, supports and enables, encourages and rewards human beings in their endeavors to manifest their full potential as human beings, such a society would be aligned to the ideal of social progress.

What does this manifestation of human possibilities really mean? It is born from the recognition of the human being as having infinite possibilities within – waiting to unfold and manifest. This recognition is a spiritual recognition that human beings are essentially infinite and divine.

Even an a-priori recognition (without ‘proof’) can lead a human being to struggle and manifest the possibilities and

potentialities within. The more these possibilities unfold, the a-priori recognition (or initial faith) turns into greater and greater faith in one's own divinity until the initial faith becomes a realized truth.

A society based on the core spiritual truth of infinite potentialities within will be one where millions of individuals will be enabled to manifest their full potentialities at a physical level, at an intellectual level, and at the most fundamental spiritual level. Such a society will experience the fruits of human development in all its myriad forms, while avoiding the blind pathways where human beings are denied a chance to become themselves more fully.

Thus, we see that according to Swami Vivekananda these three dimensions of human progress (i) the motive of realizing the human state of infinitude, freedom, and fearlessness, (ii) the framework of human action based on unselfishness (iii) the metric of human progress based on manifestation of one's total potentialities together hasten mankind along the journey towards unity, on a larger scale of society.

This human progress can be seen as a double dynamic: an outer, impersonal dynamic based on unity, equality, and universality, and the deeper, causal, dynamic based on human progress around a motive that transcends society itself, an ethico-social framework based on unselfishness, and a social architecture designed to help human beings manifest their infinite potentialities and possibilities. When we ignore the deeper dynamic, the outer dynamic takes humankind through a rough and often cruel path. Where we accept and focus on the inner dynamic, the outer dynamic and the inner dynamic get aligned –

i.e., human progress at an individual scale both supports and is enabled by social progress on the universal scale.

Seen from another perspective, Swami Vivekananda's vision of 'Social Progress' is built around his understanding of the real relationship between society and human beings. He did not believe that human beings existed for society but rather that society existed for human beings. This shift in perspective is fundamental. When human beings exist for society, then it is natural for us to chase economic growth at the cost of deep economic inequalities, at the cost of deep social schisms, and at the cost of millions of human beings remaining unfulfilled in their lives, and living no better than brutes, without even a glimpse of their true potential as human beings – individually, collectively, and as a race.

On the other hand, when society exists for human beings, then it becomes incumbent for us to design a society that does not simply deliver external indicators of economic growth like skyscrapers, cars, the latest gadgets, faster communications, and perhaps many life- saving technologies. We see how this partial view led to indicators like GDP (Gross Domestic Product) proposed by economists like Simon Kuznets in the early 20th century, followed by other indicators like SPI (Social Progress Index) proposed by Michael Green etc., which are still used to measure social progress or societal development.

Rather such a society must necessarily be organized to help human beings realize their full potential – which Swami Vivekananda said – meant recognizing themselves and others as essentially Divine with the capacity to manifest infinite potentialities – in short, enable human progress. He once wrote, *"That society is the greatest wherever the highest truth becomes practical*

*– if society is not fit for the highest truth, make it do, the sooner the better.”<sup>3</sup>*

Swami Vivekananda’s vision of Human Progress is comprehensive in scope, combining the deepest spiritual dimension with the most practical aspirations at the level of physical manifestation. At the heart of his vision for society is the human being – and the relentless reorganization of society – so that every human being can thrive and grow into the highest truth through society’s aid and support.

This vision can be expressed as a single emergent whole, based on Swami Vivekananda’s own realization of Truth – both at the microcosmic level and the macrocosmic level. His vision of social or human progress can be thought of as a multi-layered one (i) progress at a spiritual or human fulfilment level (ii) progress at the mental level and (iii) progress at the level of physical manifestation in society.

We shall try to explore each of these three dimensions briefly, also noting that each level of manifestation is both independent and yet shaped by the deeper dimensions. That will be the subject of discussion of our next editorial.

#### References:

1. (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (CW) - III. 347)
2. (CW. II. 249)
3. (CW:2:85.)

## Spiritual Life in an Industrial Age

Swami Ranganathananda

**A**t no time in the history of humanity has the need to define the goal of human existence been felt so keenly as today. It is not a mere academic question; it wells up in the hearts of modern men and women, both Eastern and Western.

That spirituality is the goal of human life was accepted by humanity all these thousands of years under the guidance of its religious heritage. But the force of that religious heritage has waned in recent centuries due to an intellectual and social revolution initiated by the West European peoples. It has become necessary therefore to evaluate critically the nature of that revolution and to restate the goal of human existence in that light.

Humanity the world over has felt the impact of the powerful technological civilization originating in Western Europe in the seventeenth century through the observational and experimental methods of modern science. This impact has been pervasive of thought and belief as much as of life and practice. The methods and results of rational investigation of nature and human experience came inevitably and increasingly into conflict with the untested dogmas and assumptions of Western man which had filled a large part of the thought background of his religion for over a thousand years. With the discrediting of that old thought background by modern thought, religion itself became discredited; and the nineteenth century saw modern Western man shifting his loyalties from religion to mundane values. The technological revolution initiated by modern science in the seventeenth century helped to accentuate these mundane values and to sharpen man's worldly appetites during the next two and a half centuries. These

impacts were felt with greater or less severity in the rest of the world as well, through the world-wide political, commercial and cultural penetration of the modern West. Today the whole world is in the grip of forces—physical, mental and social—initiated by the scientific revolution of seventeenth century Europe.

These forces consist of both benevolent and malevolent elements. The former constitutes an impressive feature of modern civilization: annihilation of distance and the physical unification of the world, the theory and practice of democracy based on the dignity and worth of the individual, the plans and measures for all-round social welfare on a world-wide scale, the increase of religious tolerance, and the gradual emergence of an international outlook. All these are the products of the conquest of external nature by science and are achievements unparalleled in human history.

The malevolent elements began to obtrude themselves at the end of the nineteenth century: an increasing tempo of selfishness, violence and war. Seventeenth century Europe had banished religion as the centre of human loyalty as a reaction against the Thirty Years' Religious Wars of that century and substituted sensuous values in its place. In thus banishing religion, Western man had a keen feeling that he was banishing a thing of deep value from life, but he could not help it, because that value had been presented to him enclosed in elements irrational and anti-social, and alien to his new-found scientific and rational temper, aims and methods.

"The outburst of moral indignation at the iniquity of the Wars of Religion", writes Prof. Arnold Toynbee, a contemporary authority on the subject of world history, "was the explosion that blew the irreparable breach in the massive fortifications of the

Medieval Western Christian *Weltanschauung*. One practical expression of this moral revolt was a deliberate transference of seventeenth-century Western Man's spiritual treasure from an incurably polemical Theology to an apparently non-controversial Natural Science: and the consequent progressive demolition of the intellectual structure of Medieval Western Christianity was thus an after-effect of a previous revolt against its moral pretensions." <sup>1</sup>

The scientific revolution of the seventeenth and succeeding centuries, though it involved the banishment of religion and the secularization of life yet gave to modern man a large measure of control over external nature; but it also led to a diminishing control over his internal nature resulting in an impoverishment of his inner life and the emergence of the maleficent elements of modern civilization. Religion had held before man a discipline leading to freedom from the senses: modern civilization, on the other hand, invited him to a path leading to freedom of the senses. Being the easier of the two, man everywhere was attracted by the latter path, since it allowed free rein to his natural impulses and inclinations. The philosophy of modern civilization thus stimulates the natural appetites of man while its ever-improving technology strives to satisfy those appetites. This process of the mutual chasing of appetites and satisfactions, unrelieved by the checks and restraints which religion imposes, merrily proceeded from the beginning of the seventeenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, throwing up philosophies and ideologies aglow with melioristic hopes, and articulated in the slogans of enlightenment, rationalism, humanism and progress.

"In the eyes of Western Man in the later decades of the seventeenth century," writes Toynbee, "to try to create an Earthly Paradise looked like a more practicable objective than to try to

bring a Kingdom of Heaven down to Earth. Recent Western experience had shown that the specifications for a Kingdom of Heaven on Earth were a subject of acrimonious and interminable dispute between rival schools of theologians. On the other hand, the differences of opinion between practical technicians or between experimental scientists would be likely to remain at a low emotional temperature and would be certain to be cleared up, before long, by the findings of observation, and of reasoning about the results of observation, on which there would be no disagreement." <sup>2</sup>

"There was no realization of the truth", continues Toynbee, "that, by their non-controversial inventions, these apparently harmless technicians were creating power of a new kind which would be used eventually by other hands, if not by theirs, to upset the existing balance." <sup>3</sup>

After two and a half centuries of revolutionary scientific, technological and social achievements, the nineteenth century closed with Western man's undimmed hope that a perfect world was just around the corner. "God's in his heaven—All's right with the world," sang Browning, reflecting this mood of the "Century of Progress."

This naive optimism received its first shock from the devastating World War of 1914-18. The malevolent elements of greed, violence and war in the heart of a sense-oriented civilization had begun to assert themselves. The war initiated a movement of self-criticism and heart-searching among modern Western thinkers; the subject "What is wrong with our civilization?" became a theme for much serious criticism and comment. Historians like Spengler wrote about the decline of the Western civilization; other thinkers defended its fundamental secular features advocating

only minor adjustments through international co-operative endeavours. But the crisis of the First World War did not clear up at the end of that war; it continued in a chain of crises, through the Bolshevik revolution and the grim Fascist and Nazi interludes, in a mounting tempo of greed, intolerance and violence, to burst out eventually into the unprecedented crisis of the Second World War of 1939-1945 towards the end of which the atom bomb—Frankenstein's monster—was born. The close of this war saw humanity's hope and faith in the promise of an earthly paradise held out by the modern technological civilization shattered. It also saw humanity ushered into the nuclear age of human history in which hope in a glorious future for man, if wisdom were to guide his thought and steps, alternated with fear in a final world catastrophe, if folly were to continue to be his guide.

"We are in the middle of a race," says Bertrand Russell, "between human skill as to means and human folly as to ends". He concludes: "Unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow."

Indian thought had long ago proclaimed that the sensuous man is the focus of tension, strife and sorrow. Secular knowledge only sharpens his animal appetites and deepens his inner tensions. A civilization that knows man only as a sensuous individual and that sharpens his animal appetites and panders to their satisfactions is an unstable structure built on sand: it is bound to topple over sooner or later from its own inner tensions and contradictions. The West had ignored the warning of Jesus contrasting the wise man who built his house on rock with the foolish man who built his house on sand. Certain modern thinkers, who were sympathetic to Indian thought, discerned this disturbing feature of modern civilization.

"The whole of Western civilization will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years", Swami Vivekananda had declared in the last decade of the nineteenth century, "if there is no spiritual foundation. It is hopeless and perfectly useless to attempt to govern mankind with the sword. You will find that the very centres from which such ideas as government by force sprang up, are the very first centres to degrade and degenerate and crumble to pieces. Europe, the centre of the manifestation of material energy, will crumble into dust within fifty years, if she is not mindful to change her position, to shift her ground and make spirituality the basis of her life.' <sup>5</sup>

India has consistently upheld the idea that spirituality is the bedrock on which alone a stable character or civilization can be raised. It judged a society or a civilization by the amount of spirituality acquired by its citizens. It proclaimed human excellence to consist in the manifestation of the divine within man. The discipline that makes this possible is religion, and not physical science, technology or politics by themselves. The latter are secondary, but religion is primary. By bringing order and brightness to the external life of man, they help religion to enrich and deepen his inner life. In the context of human life, there never is or can be any conflict between these two sets of values and disciplines. It was unfortunate that religion in the West was intolerant and anti-science. It was still more unfortunate that religion and science appeared as two conflicting disciplines and values also to the seventeenth century Western scientist and technician and their successors for three centuries. Western religious intolerance does not prove that intolerance is essential to religion. Indian experience has been otherwise. In the light of its philosophy of all-comprehending unity, India finds and

upholds harmony not only between science and religion, but also between religion and religion, as between people wending their ways to the same goal: for the goal is one but the paths are many.

"Pharisaism has been the besetting sin of the religions of the Judaic family," writes Toynbee, "and this sin has brought retribution on itself in a tragic series of atrocities and catastrophes. The fruit of Pharisaism is intolerance; the fruit of intolerance is violence; and the wages of sin is death." <sup>6</sup>

And referring to the Indian religious spirit, he says: "It seems to be a matter of historical fact that, hitherto, the Judaic religions have been considerably more exclusive-minded than the Indian religions have. In a chapter of the World's history in which the adherents of the living higher religions seem likely to enter into much more intimate relations with one another than ever before, the spirit of the Indian religions, blowing where it listeth, may perhaps help to winnow a traditional Pharisaism out of Muslim, Christian and Jewish hearts." <sup>7</sup>

Both science and religion have as their avowed aim the enrichment and enhancement of human life. Religion without science is helpless while science without religion is risky. While both are thus complimentary, religion goes deeper into the human problem and sets the direction for all human activity and striving. And this direction is the spiritual direction, the liberation of the spiritual value lying embedded in every man and woman. Religion not only sets the goal but also defines the path. The goal is spiritual freedom—freedom from all bonds, physical or mental, external or internal, so that the human soul may shine in its essential, pure and divine nature. And the path is education, through the understanding and control of nature—external nature through science and internal nature through ethics and religion. Thus, life

and experience become a continuous school of intelligent self-discipline for man by which knowledge of the external and the internal become synthesized and fused into wisdom. This is the Buddhi Yoga of the Bhagavad-Gita which exhorts man to rise above the sensuous level and take refuge in buddhi, wisdom:

'Work (with selfish desire) is verily far inferior to that performed with the mind undisturbed by thoughts of (selfish) results. O Dhananjaya, seek refuge in this evenness of mind. Wretched are they who act for (selfish) results.'" <sup>8</sup>

This teaching of the Religion Eternal of India is expressed in a compressed and comprehensive statement by Swami Vivekananda:

"Each soul is potentially Divine.

The goal is to manifest this Divine within by controlling nature, external and internal.

Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy, by one, or more, or all of these — and be free.

This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details." <sup>9</sup>

In the dissatisfactions and tensions experienced by modern man in spite of the immense knowledge and power placed in his hands by modern science and technology, and in his search today for saving wisdom, we get an echo of the story of much-learned Narada seeking wisdom at the feet of Sage Sanatkumara as narrated in the Chhandogya Upanishad.

"Please teach me sir," said Narada, and after recounting all the vast array of knowledge that he had already gained and confessing that he was still in the grip of sorrow and tension, he added, "I am only a knower of words and their meanings but not of the Atman

(the true Self of man), and I have heard from great teachers like you that only the knower of the Atman overcomes sorrow: help me therefore, O Master, to cross this ocean of sorrow."<sup>10</sup>

The teacher expounds the nature of wisdom and the way to attain it; he then concludes in a majestic utterance of spiritual hope for man: "When the sense impressions are pure, the mind becomes pure. When the mind is pure, the memory of one's divine nature becomes steady. When this memory becomes steady, all the knots and bondages of the heart are destroyed, and man becomes free in this very life." <sup>11</sup>

And the Upanishad adds: "To Narada, who had disciplined himself into utter purity of heart, Sage Sanatkumara revealed the Light (of God) beyond all darkness of ignorance." <sup>12</sup>

Indian thought holds that freedom is of the very essence of the Spirit of man; man, however, finds that in actual life he is not free; nature without and within thwarts him at every step. The presence of this freedom in the core of his being and the consciousness of bondage in actual life makes man the only restless pilgrim among God's creatures and converts his life into a battle-field for the realization of freedom and peace. This is the meaning of history with its ceaseless record of strivings and struggles for material sustenance, social delights, political liberty, intellectual knowledge, moral elevation and spiritual emancipation.

This striving for freedom has been the most persistent and the most impressive search of man throughout history. The Spirit of man refuses to be thwarted by the forces of its environment; when it succeeds in overcoming these forces in the external world man achieves civilization: this is achieved through the help of science and technology which have progressed from the primitive to the atomic stage in the course of human history. When the Spirit

overcomes these forces in the inner world of mind and heart man achieves culture and spirituality; this is achieved through ethics and religion which also progressed stage by stage to reach their highest formulations in the great world religions.

A study of history reveals that this value of freedom, and with it peace and fulfilment, is achieved in its purest and fullest form only in the inner life of man. It can find only a limited expression in his external life, in the fields of his economic, political, social and intellectual endeavours, even at their highest and best. A measure of external restraint in these fields is inevitable; no romantic philosophy can spirit it away. It will be at its minimum in a civilization where spiritual values predominate, and at its maximum, to the point of being oppressive and galling, in a civilization where sensuous values predominate. With all the contemporary talk about freedom, true freedom seems to be a vanishing quantity in the modern world. Even if a world state were to emerge tomorrow through wisdom and peace or folly and war, there is no prospect of freedom becoming less illusory and more real if the present secular *Weltanschauung* were to continue to inspire world civilization.

"In these circumstances", writes Toynbee, "it might be forecast that, in the next chapter of the World's history. Mankind would seek compensation for the loss of much of its political, economic, and perhaps even domestic freedom by putting more of its treasure into spiritual freedom" <sup>13</sup>

And : "In a regimented world, the realm of the spirit may be freedom's citadel."<sup>14</sup>

Pleading for a spiritual re-orientation of our atomic civilization, Toynbee writes: "The time has come for us, in our turn, to wrench ourselves out of the seventeenth-century mathematic-physical line

of approach which we are still following, and make a fresh start from the spiritual side. This is now, once again, the more promising approach of the two. if we are right in expecting that, in the atomic age which opened in A.D. 1945. the spiritual field of activity, not the physical one, is going to be the domain of freedom."<sup>15</sup>

Indian philosophy proclaims that the universe is spiritual through and through. In the heart of its finite and ephemeral manifestations is a reality which is Infinite Existence. Infinite Consciousness and Infinite Bliss. The end and aim of finite man is the achievement of fullness through the realization of this Infinite Being: "He who realizes Brahman attains the Supreme. With reference to that very fact it has been declared: "Brahman is Existence, Intelligence, Infinitude; he who realizes Him treasured in the cave (of the heart), in the highest ether, fulfils all wants together, as Brahman the omniscient."

That spirituality is the goal of human life is an eternal truth for Indian philosophy; it is as relevant in this technically advanced atomic age as in the age of the Upanishads when it was expounded in India thousands of years ago. This eternal truth finds beautiful expression in a memorable verse of one of the Upanishads: "Man may try through his technical advances to roll up the sky itself as if it were a piece of leather; but for all that he will never succeed in achieving peace and the end of his sorrows without realizing the luminous Divine within him." <sup>17</sup>

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1. An Historian's Approach to Religion, p. 169.
  2. Ibid., p.184.
  3. Ibid., p. 186.

4. Impact of Science on Society, pp. 120-1.
5. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. III, p.159.
6. An Historian's Approach to Religion, p.294.
7. Ibid., pp. 282-283
8. Bhagavad-Gita, 2.49.
9. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I, p. 119
10. Chhandogya Upanishad, 7.1.1-3.
11. Ibid, 7.26.2.
12. Ibid
13. An Historian's Approach to Religion, p.244.
14. Ibid, p.249.
15. Ibid, pp.284-5.
16. Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.1.
17. Shwetavatara Upanishad, 6.20.

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The infinite oneness of the Soul is the eternal sanction of all morality, that you and I are not only brothers — every literature voicing man's struggle towards freedom has preached that for you — but that you and I are really one. This is the dictate of Indian philosophy. This oneness is the rationale of all ethics and all spirituality. Europe wants it today just as much as our downtrodden masses do, and this great principle is even now unconsciously forming the basis of all the latest political and social aspirations that are coming up in England, in Germany, in France, and in America. And mark it, my friends, that in and through all the literature voicing man's struggle towards freedom, towards universal freedom, again and again you find the Indian Vedantic ideals coming out prominently. In some cases the writers do not know the source of their inspiration, in some cases they try to appear very original, and a few there are, bold and grateful enough to mention the source and acknowledge their indebtedness to it.

- Swami Vivekananda

## **An Outline of Hindu Psychology – 2**

(The Subconscious and the Superconscious)

Swami Gnaneswarananda

Western psychology studies the subconscious in its own way; but concerning the superconscious it is very sceptical. At least, it does not want to commit itself to any definite proposition about the existence of the superconscious. Hindu psychology, on the other hand, maintains that the superconscious is that 'amount' of consciousness that has not yet been used in the formation of concepts. It is a cosmic plane in which time does not exist. There is neither past nor future in it. Things are. (It may, of course, have a past and a future, but that is beyond our comprehension.) It is the storehouse of things which exist and which offer to the conscious mind stimuli of a different nature from the stimuli received from outer, or objective, perception, or those brought up from the subconscious. Hindu psychology holds that cosmic *china* is the background of all thoughts, past, present, or future, and these are all existing at the same time in the cosmic *china*. It is only appearing to us now as present. Hindu psychology admits of the superconscious because of certain manifestations which cannot be ascribed to the subconscious or the conscious plane.

The subconscious is that force which, having once been on the surface, remains hidden below the level of consciousness, controlling imperceptibly our thoughts and actions. A concept is an image or an idea that floats on the surface of our consciousness. On the surface is our world of concepts, but our dealings are not controlled just by the concepts that float on the surface. When a concept is thrown into the consciousness it creates an agitation, as when a pebble is thrown into a pool of water. Then it leaves the

surface region, or the conscious plane. Anything that has ever been thrown into the pool of our consciousness remains there, in some form or other. When it settles down to the lower layers of consciousness it is called the subconscious. In our *buddhi* is the individual storehouse of concepts we have gathered, in this life or in previous lives, and every conscious being starts life with his storehouse of concepts retained in the *buddhi*.

Let us take up the study of the subconscious. The subconscious is that layer of our consciousness that retains within itself, in the form of very subtle potentialities, all the vibrations of thoughts and actions that were once present on the conscious plane, either in this life or in previous incarnations. It is the receptacle of our *karma*. Hence, Hindu psychology explains the birth of geniuses, prodigies, or any special trait of personality, in the light of the subconscious. Modern psychology tries to explain such phenomena by the theory of heredity. But if we analyse certain cases very closely and critically we find that the theory of heredity does not explain them. In many cases it is found that in those families into which such a genius was born there never had been a manifestation of those qualities that characterize that particular genius. By establishing a relation between the subconscious and reincarnation, Hindu psychology explains these 'supernormal,' 'subnormal,' or 'abnormal' cases.

In noting the Hindu viewpoint regarding the subconscious, let us analyse the process by which impressions are retained. I perceive an object, which creates an agitation in my consciousness: and it eventually takes the form of a concept. Leaving that aside, let us go deeper and find out what happens to the agitation caused by the perception on the surface of consciousness. After a while that agitation ceases on the surface, but it still continues

underneath. From the conscious plane it goes into the plane of memory. In other words, all conscious impressions are retained in a subtle state in a deeper layer of consciousness. When we go into that deeper layer, get hold of those subtle impressions, and bring them back to the conscious plane, we call it memory. I speak: at the time of my speaking a definite process takes place on the surface of your consciousness. Presently, that process on the surface percolates into a deeper layer of your consciousness and remains there in the form of what we call, in the Sanskrit language, a *samskara* (a subtle impression of a previous perception). Suppose a month later you want to recall what I told you today. What do you do? You dive deep into that lower layer of consciousness, get hold of that *samskara*, not in the form of a concept but in the form of a subtle stimulus, and you project from the *buddhi* on to the surface of your consciousness certain other images interpreted in terms of the previous perception. That is what is called memory, which is like getting a duplicate print from an old photographic plate preserved in an underground vault. Since these impressions can penetrate very deep it becomes impossible sometimes for the ordinary mind to dive that deep, to find them out, and bring them back to the surface of consciousness. But, although we may fail to recall these impressions, although they may escape our 'memory', *we* cannot escape them! They control every thought and action of our conscious plane, exercising a very potent influence over our personality. That is how instinct, and what is vaguely called inspiration or intuition, can be largely explained and included in the analysis of psychological reactions. Otherwise, like 'conscience', they would always remain as inexplicable and mysterious as ever. They are there, indelibly recorded on the book of life and retained at the very bottom of our consciousness in the form of subtle *samskaras*. These *samskaras* form the foundation of *karma*, the

sum-total of impressions one has received and retained in the lower layers of consciousness.

Now, the subtle form of these *samskaras* is not destroyed with the disintegration of the physical body, because it is not the physical body which contains them. The subtle body forms the receptacle for them. For that reason, it would be wrong to jump to the conclusion that these subtle impressions, or *samskaras*, are annihilated at death. To give an illustration, let us take the analogy of the chemical process of crystal-formation. Here is a jar that contains one kind of chemical, and into that jar we put another chemical. When these two chemicals combine, a reaction and agitation occur on the surface of the fluid. Now, this process of reaction and agitation on the surface could very conveniently be compared to our process of perception. Here is the jar of our physical body which contains the 'chemical' of consciousness, and some other kind of 'chemical' is applied to it in the form of a stimulus, or impression. Next, an agitation starts on the surface, which in the next step is projected in the form of the percept. In the case of the chemical experiment this process of reaction on the surface results in a precipitation, which gradually settles at the bottom in the form of sediment. A similar process happens in the case of our perception. As a result of this reaction on the surface some fine substance starts towards the bottom of our fluid of consciousness, and remains there in the form of habit, tendency, or traits of character. It is deposited there in the form of a *samskara*. In the case of our chemical experiment, if the sediment is allowed to remain undisturbed for a considerable time at the bottom of the jar, it develops into crystals. When this sediment is once crystallized you may break the bottle, but the crystals find a market. Similarly, with our *samskaras*. They are, as it were, the crystallized

form of our *karma*, and are not affected even by the breaking of the bottle' of our physical body. They find a market in reincarnation.

Thus, there are two stages in the formation of *samskaras*: firstly, the stage of precipitation during which they can be brought back to the surface again, which is called memory; and secondly, the stage of crystallization in our subtle body after which they cannot, under ordinary circumstances, be recalled to memory. But a specially developed mind can recall them. Our *karma* consists of *samskaras* in both stages of formation. This psychological theory of *samskara* very reasonably meets the challenge of modern agnosticism to the teaching of reincarnation, when it asks: 'If we existed before, why do we not remember it?'

In the light of this theory we can explain all otherwise inexplicable inequalities of life. Suppose we come across a child born with an exceptional musical talent. With the help of this truth of the subconscious — the doctrine of *samskara* and *karma* — we may say that in his former existence the child must have been a very proficient musician; that whatever impressions in the form of education and culture he received were deposited in the form of crystals, or *samskaras*, at the bottom of his consciousness; and that these were not destroyed with the dissolution of his previous physical body. They formed the potentiality in him to find another body in which to materialize and manifest them. That is why he was born again as a human child and manifested musical talents so early in his life. He had already worked for it and is reaping now what he had sown. The same applies in the case of other inequalities of an inexplicable type. This doctrine should not be confused with fatalism which ascribes everything to fate and holds that human life is only a machine controlled by the hands of Providence. On the contrary, the Hindu truth of the deeper

subconscious region declares with a voice of strength, of hope and of consolation: 'Thine only is the hand that holds the rope that drags thee on. Then cease lament! Let go thy hold.' — to quote from one of Swami Vivekananda's poems.

In the concrete manner of Hindu psychology, the Yogis even go so far as to localize the seat of these *samskaras*. They hold that in the subtle body, at a place corresponding to the base of the spine, there is a receptacle called the *muladhara* which receives, retains, and preserves the *samskaras*. The Yogis believe that one can recall the memory of everything that was once on the surface of consciousness, either of this or previous incarnations, if, by concentration, one can get absolute control over that mystical centre, the *muladhara*. They hold that everything that was once on the plane of consciousness must be retained somewhere in our system, and if we know the process of diving deep into that secret chamber of *samskaras* we may discover and bring it all to the surface of consciousness.

We say that in an ordinary case of recalling something to memory we actually plunge to the bottom of our consciousness, take hold of a hidden *samskara* which we want to recall, bring it to the surface of our consciousness, and then re-interpret it. Take an illustration: Suppose I put my watch somewhere a few minutes ago, and now I cannot remember where I laid it. What do I do in order to recall it to memory? I concentrate, or in other words I push away from the surface of my consciousness other ideas, impressions, or thoughts that may be disturbing or occupying my consciousness at that time. Then, settling the mind, I go right back in consciousness to that time and place when I had put the watch somewhere. I get back that lost impression from my consciousness, and then by recalling the whole event I recover the lost watch.

If we analyse the process of recalling anything to memory it will be evident that what we actually do, after having gone into that deeper layer of consciousness and having found that particular impression which was lying in a subtle form, is to bring it back to the surface, and interpret it. That is how we always recall or bring back into consciousness any forgotten impression: the principle being that whatever was once on the surface of consciousness must be below in a very subtle form. The psychological method of control and retention of these impressions is to practise going at will into that subtle layer of consciousness, finding out exactly the *samskaras* we want, bringing them to the surface of our ordinary consciousness, and thus comprehending them.

This is also true with regard to our impressions of former incarnations. Those *samskaras* also are present now in a very deep layer of our consciousness. By the practice of concentration and meditation, one learns to dive deep into that basic receptacle which retains all impressions, and so discovers and brings back to the surface any image one wants to recall from previous incarnations. There have been various authentic instances in the history of Hindu mysticism, in which mystics recalled and demonstrated many surprising events from their previous incarnations, beyond any doubt or contradiction. It is said of Buddha that he remembered forty or forty-five of his previous incarnations—how he was born, what he did, who were his parents, how he died, how much he achieved in spiritual life, and so on.

There is another very important point I should like to explain in this connection. What a person is now, is, to a large extent, the result of the influence of his subconscious. The personality of an individual is guided and controlled almost seventy-five per cent

by the subconscious, which has been formed not only by the impressions of his present incarnation, but also by those of previous ones. You will find some people responding to a very strong and meaningless sense of fear, and you cannot explain, nor can they understand, why they should be so overpowered by such silly reactions. Analysing their past life you cannot find any event, incident, or environment which could explain their particular instinct. When it fails to explain any phenomenon by taking into consideration the past facts of a person's life. Hindu psychology goes further back and concludes that he has been born with a set *samskaras*, deriving from his previous incarnations, which is influencing him now in the form of such spontaneous fears. This is true about all human instincts, the formation of which we cannot explain on any empirical data.

What, then, according to Hindu psychology, is the explanation of instinct and inspiration? We commonly use these words without understanding what they mean psychologically. Instinct is nothing but the sudden expression of subconscious *samskaras*. Suppose you have been studying music for a long time. At first it was very difficult for you to handle the keys of the piano. You had to look and watch and study carefully each particular key. Then gradually, as you proceeded further in your practice, instinctively your fingers found the right keys. Instinct is nothing but the consummation of practice, or habit. By practising for a long time we prepare such a strong and subtle *samskara* within, that, the technique having become habitual, we no longer need the same process of repetition. It seems to come automatically, so we call it instinct. Such instincts control our personality in many respects. A speaker, for instance, after exercising the faculty of speaking for a long time, gets into such a habit that he does not have to give much

thought to his speech. When he gets up to say something he almost always gives a good lecture. But on certain occasions, although he may be trying hard, he does not achieve much success. We say he does not have inspiration. Does inspiration then come by mere chance? It is not so. This can be explained on the basis of *samskara*. He has formed such *samskaras* in his subconscious that unthinkingly he draws his inspiration from there. On the conscious plane he may not have made any preparation for his lecture, but as soon as he stood up he gave a brilliant talk. This ability to draw impetus and technical knowledge from the unfathomable storehouse of past *samskaras* is generally called inspiration. In a case when he was not able to do that, and we think he was not inspired, it was because his conscious plane was so active that it thwarted his ability to dive deep within himself.

If you want to train yourself to be a musician, for instance, and want to be inspired, let concepts go into you deeply. See that you can do the thing looking at it, or without looking at it. Learn to play your instrument with your fingers or with your toes, and then when you perform forget everything. Then inspiration will come from the depth of your *samskaras*.

In most cases we remain entirely ignorant of the source of our supply, which we carry from previous incarnations. If a person is born with a good storehouse of *samskaras* he will naturally be outstanding in many ways. And that cannot be explained with the help of any phenomenal process of investigation. The principle of *samskaras* seems to be the only explanation for this.

*Samskaras* can be controlled by discrimination. They can be positive or negative, constructive or destructive. They are fashioned by our concepts; and habits are crystallized concepts. We can counteract destructive habits by good habits. We should

train our consciousness to be antagonistic to undesirable concepts. Thus, we may store up an abundant supply of good *samskaras* which will result in an improved personality. How do we refrain from something which in our estimation is immoral? By the exercise of the power of discrimination. Suppose you feel like taking another's property. How do you refrain from doing it? By exercising your power of discrimination, you figure out that it is wrong. It is meanness, in the first place, you think. Secondly, if you are found out you will be put to shame, disgrace, and maybe punishment. Thus, the force of abstinence has to be roused and nurtured, very often with great difficulty, in the face of temptations. This shows that the force of resistance is not coming from the subconscious store of *samskaras*. but from the surface layer of thinking only. But one can culture one's *samskaras* in such a way that it will be simply impossible even for the physical system to feel inclined towards evil. Even if that which he considers wrong were forcibly done to a man, or imposed upon him without his knowledge, he would automatically recoil.

In the life of Shri Ramakrishna we can see how the subconscious can be cultured to such a degree of subtlety that if a temptation or an evil is presented, even without one's knowledge, one's subconscious will refuse it. For a long time, Ramakrishna meditated on the vanity of wealth. He would say that money and mud were the same. Taking a lump of clay in one hand and a coin in the other he would constantly repeat to himself: 'In reality, there is no difference between this lump of clay and this piece of silver.' Later in his life the suggestion had such a deep hold upon his consciousness that he could not touch a coin, a piece of gold, or even a metal utensil. One day his disciple, Swami Vivekananda, decided to test him. Very secretly he put a small silver coin under

the mattress of his bed. Soon after, Ramakrishna came into his room and sat on the bed. He felt a sort of electric shock as soon as he touched the bed, and immediately jumped up. Everyone present was anxious to know what the matter was. They started to look into the bedding to find out what had given Ramakrishna that shock. Only Vivekananda did not move. He sat in a corner watching it all, with a grave, thoughtful expression on his face. And what did the disciples find in the bed? Just a very small silver coin, hidden under the mattress. Ramakrishna laughed and said to Vivekananda, who was obviously the culprit, 'Yes, test me all you want!'

Once one of the householder disciples of Ramakrishna wanted to test him. He arranged for three or four very attractive dancing-girls to be brought before him. Ramakrishna was a young man at the time. The girls came to his room, and with all their wiles danced before him. But what was Ramakrishna's reaction? He saw only 'Mother' — the name he gave to his God — in those courtesans. Ramakrishna had so trained his mind to look upon all women as 'Mother', that, good or bad, he saw only the 'Mother', his God, in all of them. And his reactions were always to that stimulus, never to anything worldly.

Such incidents happened almost daily to Ramakrishna. If we reject such wonderful data for deeper research in psychology, testified in the lives of great mystics, we shall never be able to discover any law, and mysticism will always remain covered with a mist. In the life of Ramakrishna we find glowing illustrations of the development of the subconscious mind, which responded even when he was asleep. No study of psychology is complete without a careful study of his life.

It is a basic law that if we would respond to certain principles of life spontaneously, we must carry them deep into the subconscious. Spontaneous actions in every step of one's life is the true sign of greatness. On the other hand, if our actions occupy only a surface level of our consciousness they will not have power, they will seem insincere and affected. You will find people who respond to the spirit of courtesy naturally; again there are others who do so formally. Such formal responses fail to create a deep impression, because we know it covers only the surface of the personality concerned. Unless and until an education, culture, or virtue has been carried deep into the layer of the subconscious, it does not produce good results in life. A parrot was taught to repeat sublime passages from the Upanishads. 'I am immortal, I am Brahman!' and so on—he would repeat constantly. But once a cat attacked him and all he could shout was. 'Kya! Kya!' in great terror and dismay.

When such subconscious traits have been retained from a previous life they become all the more intense, and response to them is as natural as breathing. It has been observed that in many cases people born with certain spiritual qualities respond to spiritual truths so naturally and spontaneously that they create a powerful influence over the people they contact. However, any culture carried into the depth of the subconscious becomes established, influencing our personality distinctly.

If this is true of good *samskaras*, we have to bear in mind that it is equally true in the case of bad *samskaras*. If a bad habit goes deep into the lower levels of the subconscious it will be difficult for a person to get rid of it, unless by long practice and discipline he controls the basic layers of his *samskaras*. Only by regular and steady practice of meditation and concentration can our old, bad

habits, or *samskaras*, be cured, because meditation takes us into the subconscious and gives control over it. It happens this way:—When we meditate the surface of our consciousness becomes less active because we are receiving fewer impressions or external stimuli at that time. So naturally, the deeper layers of our consciousness begin to be active instead and create a ferment which brings into prominence some of the forgotten *samskaras*. It often happens that certain ideas and thoughts manifest vividly in consciousness during, and just after, meditation, which we never suspected to be in our consciousness. Some people experience such phenomena more than others. As soon as they begin to meditate, or even when they do not actually meditate but are in a quiet mood, they clearly realize certain unique thoughts, or get unusual visions. Dreams also indicate deep-seated *samskaras*. In dreams many have unique experiences which they never believed could have existed in 'normal' consciousness. Such expressions of unknown *samskaras* are very often accepted as hunches, premonitions or psychic experiences. They come from the subconscious, and may be good, bad, or indifferent.

However, it should be remembered that all *samskaras* are bondages; a good *samskara* binds the soul as strongly as a bad one. All *samskaras* are thieves. There is a humorous story told about this. Here the *samskaras* are described as being of three qualities, corresponding to the three *gunas*. or qualities of *prakriti*, which we shall discuss later on. First is *tamas*, gross, dark, full of ignorance and inertia; second, *rajas*, bold, egotistical, full of desire: third, *sattva*, good, helpful and uplifting. So, the story is told that a man once encountered three thieves while passing through a forest. They dragged him deeper into the forest and robbed him. Then *tamas* said, 'Let s kill him!' *Rajas* said, 'No. take his money, tie him

to a tree and leave him!' The third one, *sattva*, lingered on and untied the man, guided him to the road, and pointed out his house to him. The man felt so grateful that he asked the thief to go home with him so that he could reward him. But the thief said, 'No. Don't forget that I am a thief. I can't go there!'

So, all *samskaras* in the last analysis are thieves. A bad one may be got rid of by a good one, but eventually we have to abandon the good one also. Ramakrishna explained this in a very simple and beautiful way. He said, 'If you get a thorn in your foot, you can remove it with another thorn. Then you throw both of them away.'

Daily practice of meditation has been compared to sending the mind to the laundry, to wash out all the dirty spots on it. It is meditation alone that unmistakably lays bare our deep-rooted *samskaras*, which otherwise do not appear in our conscious thoughts or actions. And it is in meditation that we can detect and then eradicate many undesirable and obstructing *samskaras* that hinder our advancement.

Any practice, education, culture, unfoldment, or acquisition, if it has not penetrated to the depths of our consciousness, is only superficial and cannot stand the test of adverse environment and circumstances.

We can feel secure about our achievements only when by long practice they have been sent to the very bottom of our consciousness, governing and controlling our activity from there. If we want to be truthful, let us be truthful by the power of *samskara*. If we want to be loving, let us be so from that spontaneous region of the subconscious. So with regard to everything. It is obvious that when a reaction or expression comes from that deep layer of consciousness, and spontaneously controls and governs our

personality, it is ours, having been well assimilated and incorporated into our system. Otherwise, it appears superficial, unnatural, affected.

We should remember that our personality is the sum-total of our *samskaras*. This discussion of the *samskaras* must be viewed from all angles—practical, psychological, educational, character-forming, personality-building, and spiritually liberating. As you proceed in the study of this you will find so many avenues of approach and, perhaps, of rescue.

The superconscious has never been described by any philosopher, poet or mystic. Ramakrishna said that it is the one state of being that has never been defiled by definition. He also told this beautiful little story about it: - 'Once upon a time a little salt doll wanted to fathom the depth of the ocean. It went way down into the deep, where it dissolved and became one with the ocean. The salt doll never came back to tell its story.' That is what happens to those who enter into that state of super consciousness. Into that state the senses cannot go: the mind has no entrance there: and the *buddhi* and other finer faculties find it impenetrable. It is the state of 'Being and Becoming'. For that reason, it can never be described by human language.

Many times, Ramakrishna went into that transcendental state of super consciousness, in trying to describe to his disciples what he had felt and experienced; but as his consciousness neared that state, all speech stopped, all outer consciousness went. He was, indeed, like the little salt doll of his story. But, such was his great power that he could return from that state of absorption; yet he could not describe it.

Nevertheless, let us try to comprehend, to a certain extent, what is meant by the superconscious. The theory is that the Absolute

Reality, which is called *Brahman*, is the basis of all consciousness. Since *Brahman* is the only Conscious Being, it is the consciousness of *Brahman* which manifests through the consciousness of those who, by transcending the limitations of the senses, mind and intelligence, go back into that state of *Brahman*-consciousness, which is called the superconscious. To be conscious of God is to be superconscious. The consciousness of a person in the *samadhi* of Hindu mysticism is superconscious.

There are different layers of consciousness in *samadhi*. In some of these certain spiritual sights, sounds and visions come to a Yogi. The knowledge of the saints, the wisdom of the prophets, are drawn from one of these layers of super consciousness. Going deeper and deeper the Yogis become totally absorbed in the transcendental consciousness which is beyond all expression. Since the real nature of the superconscious is super sensuous, it cannot be explained, defined or described. One can only *become and be* that.

The superconscious is realized in that state of illumination, when the body, the senses, the mind and other limiting *upadhis* of our consciousness fade away: when the infinite, fundamental basis of consciousness alone exists; and when the subject-object distinction vanishes altogether. What remains is that Reality, attaining which one becomes perfect.

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## The Mother We Adore

Swami Aseshananda

The life of Shri Sarada Devi is a masterpiece of the Divine artist's noble creation. As daughter, sister and wife, she played her part remarkably well. But, the most outstanding trait of her character is her motherly love, which manifests itself in an overwhelming surge, unbaffled by the barriers of race, creed or colour. She felt equally for all. Her sympathetic hand was stretched to wipe the tears from the eyes of all. A stranger would come to her door, and leave her presence addressing her as mother, so charmed he would be by her cordial hospitality. A Muslim villager would stop to receive some presents, and tears would roll down the cheeks of the Mother when she listened to his sorrowful tale of hardships and the depressing uncertainty of his future.

A Western devotee would find in her affable manners, a sign of dignity: in her sweet home, a place of rest after a tiresome journey through the pilgrimage of life. Sister Nivedita, an English disciple of Swami Vivekananda, writes in her beautiful style, "Dear Mother, you are full of love, and it is not a flushed and violent love like ours, and like the world's, but a gentle peace that brings good to everyone and wishes ill to none. It is a golden radiance, full of play. I felt such a wonderful freedom in the blessing you gave me, and in your welcome home. Dearest Mother, I wish I could send you a wonderful hymn or a prayer. But somehow even that would seem too loud, too full of noise. Surely you are the most wonderful thing of God—Shri Ramakrishna's own chalice of His love for the world—a token left with his children, in these lonely days, and we should be very still and quiet before you—except indeed for a little fun! Surely "the wonderful things of God" are

all quiet, stealing unnoticed into our lives — the air and the sunlight, the sweetness of the gardens and of the Ganges. These are the silent things that are like you. ... Is not your thought, now and then, of the high calm that neither loves nor hates? Is not that a sweet benediction that trembles in God, like the dew-drop on the lotus leaf and touches not the world?"

The most significant role that Shri Sarada Devi played after the death of Shri Ramakrishna is that of a guru — spiritual teacher and guide. The necessity of a guru as an awakener of the soul and a dispeller of darkness has been recognized from the early Vedic days down to our modern times. As Shankaracharya beautifully portrays it in his Crest-Jewel of Discrimination, "There are pure souls who have attained peace and greatness. They bring good to mankind like the coming of Spring. They themselves have crossed the dreadful ocean of this world. Without any selfish motive they help others to cross."

It is the very nature of these great souls to work of their own accord to cure the troubles of others. Just as the moon of its own accord, cools the earth when it is scorched by the fierce rays of the sun.

True to the tradition of the spiritual culture of India, Holy Mother initiated many disciples, irrespective of their worthiness and necessary qualifications. Her magnanimous heart could not refuse anyone that came to her door for succour and help. Swami Premananda, a direct disciple of Shri Ramakrishna, once said in astonishment "What a power Holy Mother is! The poison which we cannot digest we send to Holy Mother. But how wonderful it is, the very person whom all gave up as hopeless turned over a new leaf and became a regenerated soul, by the magic of her words, and the power of her touch."

The words of Holy Mother had an irresistible force, because they came not from the study of books, but from her own personal experiences. The gift of highest realization, which arose from inner purity and divine contemplation, made her competent to solve the most intricate problems of spiritual life in an infallible manner. To the question of how one can lead a spiritual life and at the same time perform the humdrum duties of life, her reply was, "You must do your normal work. Many are known to do great works under the stress of some strong emotion, but a man's true character is revealed from the manner in which he does his insignificant daily duties. But then prayer and meditation are also necessary. You must meditate at least twice a day, despite your heavy activities. That will be like a helm to a boat. It is idle to expect that dangers and difficulties will not come. But for a man of prayer, they will pass away under the feet like water. One who makes a habit of prayer will easily overcome all difficulties and remain calm and unruffled in the midst of the trials and vicissitudes of life."

Shri Ramakrishna says, "A jeweller alone knows the value of a diamond and not a vendor of vegetables." The direct disciples of Shri Ramakrishna alone knew the greatness of Holy Mother and recognized who she really was. The following letter written by Swami Shivananda, the second President of our Order, will speak for itself. It was addressed to a disciple of Holy Mother, who was overcome by a spirit of dejection after the passing of his beloved guru, the torch-bearer of the soul. It was written in Bengali from our Belur Monastery in 1920. I have translated it for Western readers, but the sweetness and grandeur of the original can hardly be reproduced.

'The physical body of Holy Mother is no more visible to our mortal sight, it is true. There is no doubt that her devotees are feeling a great pain on account of her passing away. But they should have full conviction in the thought that Holy Mother was not an ordinary woman. She was neither a seeker after truth nor an illumined soul. She is a special manifestation of the eternally free Universal Mother. Just like the ten manifestations of the Divine Mother, she is one of Her beautiful expressions. In this age, the Mother has appeared in the world as Shri Saradamani Devi, with her form made of the attributes of pure sattva, for the redemption of mankind, and to help the cause of Shri Ramakrishna, the Avatara of our times, in His divine mission. Those that have received her grace, have fulfilled the very purpose of life. They are blessed. They will certainly be able to see her the moment they implore her with a longing heart to reveal herself unto them, repeating the name 'Mother, Mother.' I request you not to give way to depression. When the earthly mother dies, her children cannot see her in spite of their long wailings and moanings. But that is not true in the case of this Mother, the Mother of the world, who has descended to the earth to lead her children to the abode of peace and freedom.

'The Mother will grant her vision to a devotee, if he cries with an importunate cry. You are extremely fortunate, because you have been initiated by her and received her grace. Whenever you will pray to her with an anguished heart, being unable to bear the pang of separation, she will appear before you and console you. Take this from me; it is true. The way that you have expressed your sorrow to me, in the same way convey your sorrow to her, and you will be comforted. This is not a human affair. It is a supernatural affair—an act of God as the token of His love.

Therefore. I advise you not to lose heart. Have firm and unwavering faith. Let not your faith be shaken even if the head be severed from the body and the world reduced to dust in the twinkling of an eye. Always cherish constructive thoughts and say to yourself, "I am Divine Mother's child. She has showered her grace upon me, what should I fear from the world? Why should I worry about my future? I am already free and my freedom cannot be taken away even by death." Always keep awake in faith and absolute trust in the Mother. I am not telling you all this just to console you. These words are unmistakably true. They have come from my heart, and from the very depth of my soul. What more can I say? Accept my sincere blessing. That Holy Mother may keep you in peace and grant you your heart's desire—is my prayer.'

(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West, November-December 1971)

The Holy Mother accepted a human body in order to awaken womanhood all over the world. See how soon after her advent an awakening has come among women in all countries!

The Holy Mother was the mother of all. Her kindness, her forbearance, and her patience were wonderful. How little of her do we ourselves know? But she has out of her mercy let me realize that she is none other than the Mother of the universe. None can understand her real nature, unless she in her mercy reveals it to us.

-Swami Shivananda

(For Seekers of God p.206)

## **A vision of Sustainable Development based on *Atmasraddha* or 'innate Self-respect'**

V.Srinivas

**C***an you raise the masses? Can you give them back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature? – Swami Vivekananda*

### **A vision of Sustainable Development:**

The power of a nation lies in its vast majority. These millions, often unheard, often oppressed, often treated as mere votes and cannon-fodder, represent the hidden, extraordinary strength of a nation.

How are these millions to be raised? This is the question Swami Vivekananda answers in this statement.

\* One approach is through food or economic security.

\* A second approach is through political and social freedom.

\* A third approach is through access to work, access to medical and other social resources, access to the larger society in which they live.

\* A fourth approach is through peace and stability – and the absence of war, strife, and constant threat to one's life and property.

Philosophers, political and social leaders, intellectuals, have argued for ages on which comes first – food? freedom? access to resources? stability? Or some other basis for raising the masses?

Swami Vivekananda transcends all these approaches – though time and again he emphasizes the importance and value of each of these approaches – and focuses on 'the lost individuality' of the masses as the one thing necessary to raise them up again.

What does 'individuality' mean?

In contemporary language, we would call it self-esteem, or self-respect, but what it really means is the Indian term '*atmasraddha*' – faith in oneself.

To Swami Vivekananda, '*atmasraddha*' is the lever through which the millions in India can be raised.

When an individual develops 'faith in oneself', he/she views him/herself as valid, significant, a single unit of 'free choice', an individual capable of creating one's own destiny. This *atmasraddha* gives the individual power, energy, the will to work, the capacity to receive and enjoy freedom, the desire to escape any form of beggary or dependence.

Through *atmasraddha*, one becomes capable of using whatever resources are available and bettering one's state of living.

Without *atmasraddha* a person who receives food will become a slave to the provider of food, the person will be incapable of receiving, retaining and valuing the freedom he/ she has received – political or otherwise, the person will not make the necessary effort to access and utilize the resources & infrastructure made available by society.

Without *atmasraddha*, the person will not benefit from help, and will instead become a burden on the help-giver.

Thus, *atmasraddha* is the foundation, the basis on which all forms of help will bear fruit.

Seen another way, even if we feed, clothe, house, and give knowledge and freedom to the masses – we will not benefit them on a sustainable basis.

On the other hand, when we give them '*atmasraddha*', we give them the power to raise themselves with the help of the resources they receive in the form of aid and support.

In the long run, they become productive and effective units of society, capable of contributing to others who are in the same situation, which they have not escaped from.

Swami Vivekananda adds a further caveat to this. He says that this individuality must not be at the cost of their innate spiritual nature. This means that the '*atmasraddha*' or 'individuality' that is given to the masses should be linked not to their possessions or capabilities, or even membership, but rather to a more fundamental vision of human beings as having infinite potential and intrinsic value.

When individuals respect themselves and others for who they are rather than the possessions and talents, then such respect for others and themselves is sustainable and will have deep roots.

Swami Vivekananda therefore offers us a vision for sustainable development based on 'innate self-respect' and 'respect for others based on their intrinsic right to be respected and valued' rather than on any external criteria.

### **Awakening the Purpose within:**

What is the purpose of life? Any man who thoughtfully evaluates this question will discover that it is well-nigh impossible to answer this question meaningfully as long as one remains convinced that this short life – 70 years or more – the Indian average – is the be all and end-all of existence.

Such a life – devoid of purpose – other than merely eating, sleeping, gaining a little, losing a little – with its short-lived joys and sorrows – cannot be the sustenance of any great thought or work.

On the other hand – a view of life that assumes man to be on an infinite, evolutionary journey from the Centre back to the Centre – is one that invests every act with significance, every role with profundity, every word with meaning.

It is from this standpoint – that man is a continuously growing, evolving, being who is constantly seeking, often without realizing it, a higher state with purer attributes and greater capabilities to do universal good – that we must understand the idea of service.

Service then becomes an instrument of personal growth, an instrument that will enable man to continuously decide between two fundamental choices – the good of oneself and good of all.

This choice – me or All – is the central question that must be answered in our quest for the Infinite. If it is me, then, here I am, condemned to continual transactions with the rest of the universe – restricted at every stage by forces that will prove to us how small and limited any one being is.

On the other hand, if it is All, then I am ready at every stage, to stand up and declare, do not fight this petty being, do not restrict this finite being, for this being is ready, at every stage, to be offered at the Altar of Universal Good.

Suddenly, this limited human body, carries within itself an unlimited idea – the idea of Universal Good – and there are, from now on, no more restrictions – no, mind you, mental restrictions, no emotional restrictions, no artificial restrictions laid down by a mind that calculates the profit or loss of each venture, each undertaking.

There will still be physical restrictions of the world that will exist, but they are not obstructions which cannot be surmounted with a good fight.

Such a human being, unrestricted within, ready always to be offered for Universal Happiness, is a veritable powerhouse. All of this human being's diverse energies are now directed and focused on the single idea of Universal Good. And from this focus will flow tremendous sincerity, clarity of thought, and most important, honesty of purpose.

This honesty of purpose, in turn, will sweep away most of the weapons that the physical world uses to bind a human being – wealth, power, fame, the prospects of comfort, the feelings of achievement.

The human being is now truly powerful, and the world truly powerless.

It is this human being that must go out and rouse this nation. Fight in its schools, its hospitals, its fields, and its villages. It is this human being that Swami Vivekananda asks for and to whom he exhorts, “Stop not till the goal is reached”.

*Srinivas Venkatram is the Founder-CEO of Illumine Knowledge Resources – an “ideas to actualization” lab based in Mumbai, India. Illumine has developed several assimilation products that help people build self-esteem, new models of learning, adopt positive engagement with life, citizenship thinking, agility, resilience, etc. They are primarily based on the man-making and character-building ideas and ideas of Swami Vivekananda.*

*Illumine has designed & developed several large-scale interventions based on the principles of Cognitive Empowerment including the Awakened Citizen Program now being conducted in 4000 schools across India; the Contributor Program being conducted in more than 500 engineering colleges including IIT-Delhi & IIT-Jammu; interventions related to building meaning, purpose, citizenship, innovation and agility in some of India’s largest companies; besides working on innovative community change programs.*

*Illumine has also set up a dedicated lab to support young people in the career space.*

## Leaves from an Ashrama 64

### How Less might be More

Swami Vidyatmananda

In the January 24, 1974, issue of The New York Review there appeared a long article entitled: The Human Prospect. The author was Robert L. Heilbroner of the New School for Social Research. The astonishing question that Heilbroner asks and tries to answer is: Is there hope for man?

The author finds that for the first time in history there are valid reasons for wondering whether man will be able to sustain himself permanently on this planet. Heilbroner mentions four forces which could wipe out human life. The first is a population too large for the earth to support. Furnishing food for so many mouths would be only one problem. More serious would be the increased heat injected into the atmosphere in providing for the needs of so many individuals, and other environmental disequilibriums. Second, oblitative war. Third, the depletion of natural resources, caused by the modern dedication to abundance and growth. Fourth is the presence of science and technology as driving forces, responsible for the success in the first three areas.

Suppose man were to avoid self-destructive war and to stabilize the birth rate. There could still come a time when the globe would run out of everything, producing intolerable competition and consequently the controlled distribution of available goods. A foretaste of such a situation and its consequences was provided by the oil crises of the 1970's. Programs for the reduction of consumption would be imposed upon the population. Growth would be arrested entirely. All but necessary products would be nonexistent, and opportunities for

material enjoyments would be curtailed. Citizens would be forced to live frugally. Simple, self-sustaining habits of life would be favoured, replacing the present conspicuous consumption.

Such a reversal is hardly imaginable, when wanting less would be more socially acceptable than wanting more! Yet for the Vedantist that prospect would not create serious worries. Heilbroner describes the future in this fashion: It is therefore possible that a post-industrial society would....turn in the direction of many preindustrial societies--toward the exploration of inner states of experience.....Tradition and rituals, the pillars of life in virtually all societies other than those of an industrial character, would probably once again assert their ancient claims as the guide to and solace for life. The struggle for individual achievement, especially for material ends, is likely to give way to the acceptance of communally organized and ordained roles.

Would this be a return to something like the rhythmic, placid life of Vedic times? Would such be so undesirable? Instead of further exploitation of the fragile outer world, there would be a turning to the conquest of the inexhaustible universe within. A new avatar always ushers in a new era, and Ramakrishna's teachings certainly stress the values which Heilbroner describes as belonging to a post-industrial society. Could it be something like this that Swami Vivekananda foresaw when he wrote to Swami Brahmananda in 1895: From the day Sri Ramakrishna was born dates the growth of Satya Yuga ...the Golden Age?

## Programme for September - October 2018

Sunday discourses begin at the  
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 p.m.  
Tel: 01628 526464 www.vedantauk.com

Sep	2	Sri Krishna Puja	
Sep	9	Notes of Class Talks at Math -1	Swami Tripurananda
Sep	16	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 23	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep	23	Notes of Class Talks at Math - 2	Swami Tripurananda
Sep	30	Notes of Class Talks at Math - 3	Swami Tripurananda
Oct	7	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 19	Swami Sarvasthananda
Oct	14	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 20	Swami Sarvasthananda
Oct	21	Sri Durga Puja	
Oct	28	Day Retreat	Swami Sarvasthananda Swami Tripurananda

### Special Classes on Practical Vedanta

By Swami Sarvasthananda  
Friday 5<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> October (6 to 8 p.m.)  
at Sattvis Patidar Centre, Forty Avenue,  
Wembley Park HA9 9PE

### Durga Puja

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October  
at Bourne End 3:30 p.m.

### Day Retreat

With Swami Sarvasthananda and Swami Tripurananda  
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 28<sup>th</sup> October  
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm  
Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

continued from the front cover

forth and so on. At last they started quarrelling among themselves. To settle the dispute, they all went to the tree. They saw a man sitting under it. On being asked, he replied: "Yes, I live under this tree and I know the animal very well. All your descriptions are true. Sometimes it appears red, sometimes yellow, and at other times blue, violet, grey and so forth. It is a chameleon. And sometimes it has no colour at all. Now it has a colour, and now it has none." In like manner, one who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature; he alone knows that God reveals Himself to seekers in various forms and aspects. God has attributes; then again, He has none. Only the man who lives under the tree knows that the chameleon can appear in various colours, and he knows further that the animal at times has no colour at all. It is the others who suffer from the agony of futile argument.

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Ay, let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind every one, there is that Infinite Soul, assuring the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good. Let us proclaim to every soul: — Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached. Arise, awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness.

Teach yourselves, teach every one his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

- Swami Vivekananda

