

Vedanta

407 MAY - JUNE 2019

Wanted : A Strength-giving Religion

Swami Ashokananda

Samadhi or the Super-conscious Experience

Swami Ritajananda



Divine Wisdom

Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 4



QUARREL!

It is not good to say that what we ourselves think of God is the only truth and what others think is false; that because we think of God as formless, therefore He is formless and cannot have any form; that because we think of God as having form, therefore He has form and cannot be formless. Can a man really fathom God's nature?

Continued on the inside back cover

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Swami Vivekananda's Moral Ideas and Ideals – 3

Swami Vivekananda's exposition of the Vedanta forms not only a universal philosophy of religion applicable to all creeds, cults, societies and countries but also a universally applicable code of ethics. He gave a new form to Vedanta. He reinterpreted Vedanta in his own inimitable way freeing it from the technicalities of traditional Vedantic scholasticism and thus making it accessible to all. The nature and scope of his work can best be described in his own words: 'To put Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular and at the same time meet the requirement of the highest minds – is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The abstract Advaita must become living – poetic in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogism must come the most scientific and practical psychology – and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work.'¹

What are the principles of Vedanta which form the basis of Vivekananda's ethics?

The two fundamental principles of Vedanta

- Potential divinity of the soul
- Unity of all Existence,

may be said to form the centre around which all other moral ideas and ideals of the Swami revolve. To quote from his works: '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 movement of life.'²

Vedanta claims that man is divine.., 'Everything that is strong and good and powerful in human nature is the outcome of that divinity, and though potential in many, there is no difference between man and man essentially, all being alike divine.'³

'The central idea of Vedanta is this oneness. There is but one life, one world, one existence. Everything is that One, the difference is the degree and not in kind.'⁴

Now let us consider the implications of these two principles of Vedanta.

Potential Divinity of the Soul

The doctrine of the potential divinity of the Soul or Atman was, for the Swami, not merely a metaphysical assumption but a teaching which had tremendous practical implications in the life of man. The Atman as a spiritual entity with all power, purity and perfection inherent in it, manifests through the process of evolution. The change or improvement that comes in this process of evolution he compared to water being let out of an irrigation tank. If the opening of the banks of the tank is widened and the obstructions removed then more and more water would come out. In the same way, as better and better body-mind is evolved, the infinite potentiality, irrespective of the condition of the outer body-mind covering manifests, is the implication of the Atman doctrine. Says the Swami in his own inimitable way:

'Every one of us, every being, has as his own background such a reservoir of strength, infinite power, infinite purity, infinite bliss and existence infinite – only these bodies are hindering us from expressing what we really are, to the fullest.'⁵

'From the lowest worm that crawls under our feet to the noblest and the greatest saints, all have this infinite power, infinite purity and infinite everything...'⁶

‘This is the one great idea to understand that our power is already ours, our salvation is already within us... you must have to believe in that, believe in the possibility of everybody – that even in the lowest man there is the same possibility as in the Buddha. This is the doctrine of the Atman.’⁷

Swami Vivekananda believed that faith in one’s inherent nature as the Atman is the source of all strength and goodness and would generate fearlessness. The absence of this faith owing to ignorance of one’s own nature was the source of all fear, misery and evil. This Vedantic doctrine of the Divinity of man was, according to him, a common point for all the Hindu sects. All sects believed that the soul in its essential nature is spirit, pure and perfect, infinite and blissful. Only the dualists believe that its powers are contracted in bondage, and the monist that ignorance has made the soul forget its divinity. In fact, he also said that all religions too believed in this essential divinity of man though they were present in a hidden form in their mythologies. He says: ‘the one great idea that to me seems to be clear, and comes out through masses of superstition in every country and in every religion, is the one luminous idea that man is divine, that divinity is our nature....’⁸

Thus we come to Swami Vivekananda’s famous aphoristic dicta which form the core of his message of the divinity of the soul. ‘Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity 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.’⁹

The concept of Divinity of the soul leads us to the concept of ‘Freedom’ which according to the Swami, is the goal or end of morality. Says he: ‘Morality of course is not the goal of man but

the means through which freedom is attained.... The Vedanta says that Yoga is one way that makes man realize this divinity. The Vedanta says that this is done by the realization of the freedom within and that everything will give way to that. Morality and ethics will arrange themselves in their proper places.’¹⁰

Freedom the goal of morality

Swami Vivekananda pointed out that the struggle to free themselves from the limitations placed upon them by Nature is one of the most important traits of not only conscious beings but insentient things as well. He said: ‘Everything that we perceive around us is struggling towards freedom, from the atom to the man, from insentient, lifeless particle of matter to the highest existence on earth, the human soul. The whole universe is in fact the result of this struggle for freedom.’¹¹

This idea of freedom is inherent in man and cannot be explained away. He further says: ‘Man has freedom already, but he will have to discover it. He has it but every moment he forgets it. That discovering, consciously or unconsciously, is the whole life of everyone. But the difference between the sage and the ignorant man is that one does it consciously and the other unconsciously.’¹²

The root cause of evil is that the ignorant man seeks it outside of himself instead of within himself. That is why he says: ‘..... under the impulse of this tendency (freedom) that the saint prays, and the robber robs. When the line of action is not proper, we call it good. But the impulse is the same, the struggle towards freedom.’¹³

Furthermore, he says: ‘there is to be found in every religion the manifestation of this struggle towards freedom. It is the ground work of all morality, of unselfishness, which means getting rid of the idea that men are the same as this little body.’¹⁴

Thus, we see, that according to the Swami, the struggle for freedom is some sort of elemental impulse in the universe in general, and an inseparable attribute of human life in particular. There is in every human being, a tendency to go out of its limited individuality and dissolve into the freedom of the boundless. The reflection of this tendency in the ethical realm is morality. At lower levels too we find this quest for freedom finding its expression through every action of man. Only it is misdirected. When one seeks wealth and power, he does so in order to free himself from the bondage of poverty and powerlessness. When one seeks pleasure through the senses it is because he feels that it will help him to get rid of sorrow and a sense of unfulfillment. When a man finds that the scope of this freedom is limited and that there is a higher freedom to aspire for, he seeks it through intellectual and other aesthetic pursuits. It is only when he realizes the futility of these lower types of freedom, he seeks for moral freedom which leads, ultimately, to true spiritual freedom or Mukti which is the goal of morality. That is why the Swami says: 'The greatest goodness is the highest freedom.'¹⁵ And 'to become pure is the shortest path to freedom.'¹⁶

By making 'Freedom' the goal of morality Swami Vivekananda gave a universally acceptable moral ideal for humanity irrespective of one's caste, creed or religious belief. He says: 'The goal of all nature is freedom and freedom is to be attained only by perfect unselfishness; every thought, word, or deed that is unselfishness takes us towards the goal and as such is called moral. ... Every selfish action, therefore, retards our reaching the goal; that is why the only definition that can be given of morality is this: That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral... That definition, you will find, holds good in every religion and every system of ethics.'¹⁷

This unselfishness or self-abnegation forms the basis, the rationale of moral life. Before we attempt to discuss this, we turn our attention to the other fundamental Vedantic principle mentioned earlier, viz., 'The unity or Oneness of all Existence.'

Unity of all Existence

One idea which comes out very prominently from the Upanishads, according to Swamiji, is the Unity of all Existence, the Solidarity of the Universe. The central doctrine of Advaita that there is but One Existence can best be expressed in Swami Vivekananda's own words: 'In the whole of this Universe there is but One Existence; and that one Existence when seen through the senses is called the world of matter. When it is seen through the mind, it is called the world of thoughts and ideas; and when it is seen as it is, then it is the one Infinite Being. ..It is not that there are three things in one, the body and the mind and the Self. Although that is a convenient way of putting it in the course of explanation: but all is that Atman, and that One Being is sometimes called the body, sometimes the mind, and sometimes the Self, according to different visions.'¹⁸

Swami Vivekananda further pointed out that this principle was in accordance with the latest discoveries of science. Western scientists have established the solidarity of the whole universe by showing how each individual in it is merely a wave or wavelet in the midst of an infinite ocean of matter. He further pointed out that Indian psychology had demonstrated long ago that the same is the case with the mind. Going a step further Vedanta shows that there is but One Soul throughout. This infinite oneness of the Soul is the eternal sanction for all morality and has a Universal appeal.

Says the Swami: '... the rational West is earnestly bent upon seeking out the rationality, the *raison d'être* of all its philosophy

and its ethics; and you all know well that ethics cannot be derived from the mere sanction of any personage, however great and divine he may have been. Such an explanation of the authority of ethics no more to the highest of the world's thinkers; they want something more than human sanction for ethical and moral codes to be binding they want some eternal principle of truth as the sanction of ethics. And where is that eternal sanction to be found except in the only Infinite Reality that exists in you and me and in all, in the self, in the Soul? 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 spirituality.'¹⁹

Moral perfection, in the Swami's view is reached through a gradual process of self-sacrifice. He denies first his individual egoistic aspirations and desires in the interest of his family, relatives and friends, at a later stage, perhaps for the sake of his country or people, proceeding in this way to cover not only the whole humanity but the whole universe and its beings. This expression of universal love is the result of consciously or unconsciously seeking Unity, the Oneness of all existence.

Says Swami Vivekananda: 'Every action of our lives, the most material, the grossest as well as the finest, the highest, the most spiritual – is alike tending towards this one ideal, the finding of Unity. A man is single. He marries. Apparently, it may be a selfish act but at the same time the impulsion, the motive power is to find that Unity. He has children, he has friends, he loves his country, he loves the world and ends by loving the whole world.'²⁰

Now, we shall proceed to discuss what may be considered a corollary to the above Vedantic principle of Oneness of Existence viz., the idea of unselfishness or self-abnegation which is the basis of moral life.

Unselfishness or Self-abnegation – the basis of ethics

As we have already seen, Swami Vivekananda firmly believed that Utilitarian or Hedonistic theories of Western Ethics could never provide a firm basis for moral life. He says: 'The vain ideas of individualism to which men clings when he is trying to find...infinite pleasure through the senses, have to be given up...say the law of ethics. You have to put yourself last and others before you. The senses say: 'Myself first.' Ethics says 'I hold myself last.' Thus, all codes of ethics are based upon this renunciation, destruction, not construction, of the individual on the material plane....so man has to give up the plane of matter and rise to the other spheres to seek a deeper expression of that Infinite. In this way various ethical laws are moulded but all have this one central ideas, eternal self-abnegation. Perfect Self-abnegation is the ideal of ethics.'²¹

He, therefore, points out in very clear terms that it is fallacious to think that individuality is essential for morality and that moral chaos will set in if the sense of individuality is abandoned, as some of the Western ethical schools hold. The opposite, however, is the truth and the history of the world shows that those who never thought of their little individuality were the greatest benefactors of the human race.

The Swami identifies two forces that have been working side by side on parallel lines. The one says 'I' and the other says 'not I'. the one is '*Pravritti*' and the other is '*Nivritti*'. '*Pravritti*', which means 'revolving towards' includes all those things which are

enriching the 'I and mine' by wealth, power, name and fame and which are of a grasping nature, always tending to accumulate everything around one centre, that being 'myself'. Thus '*Pravritti*' is the natural tendency of every human being to take everything from everywhere and heap it around the centre, that centre being man's own sweet self. When it is '*Nivritti*' or 'going away from' then begin morality and religion. This '*Nivritti*' is the fundamental basis of morality and religion, and the very perfection of it is entire self-abnegation, readiness to sacrifice mind and body and everything for another being. Stress on '*Pravritti*' or individuality leads to competition cruelty and immorality, while the renunciation of individuality or '*Nivritti*' and establishment in the sense of unity leads to morality, Universal love and peace. Thus '*Nivritti*' helps us to attain true individuality; our true nature as the eternally perfect, pure and Infinite Being that cannot be divided, by giving up this limited individuality. This is Self-abnegation. Swami Vivekananda says in his '*Inspired Talks*': 'there is no real individuality of the Jiva, eventually, it as a compound will go to pieces All struggles for the preservation of this illusive individuality are really vices. All struggles to lose this individuality are virtues. Everything in this Universe is trying to break down this individuality, either consciously or unconsciously. All morality is based upon the destruction of separateness or false individuality, because that is the cause of all sin.'²²

(To be continued)

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Ethics always says, "Not I, but thou." Its motto is, "Not self, but non-self." The vain ideas of individualism to which man clings when he is trying to find that Infinite Power, or that Infinite Pleasure through the senses, have to be given up, say the laws of ethics. You have to put yourself last, and others before you. The senses say, "Myself first." Ethics says, "I must hold myself last." Thus, all codes of ethics are based upon this renunciation; destruction, not construction, of the individual on the material plane. That Infinite will never find expression upon the material plane, nor is it possible or thinkable.

The work of the ethics has been, and will be in the future, not the destruction of variation and the establishment of sameness in the external world, which is impossible, for it would mean death and annihilation--but to recognise the unity in spite of all these variations, to recognise the God within, in spite of everything that frightens us, to recognise that infinite strength as the property of everyone in spite of all apparent weakness, and to recognise the eternal, infinite, essential purity of the soul in spite of everything to the contrary which appears on the surface.

- Swami Vivekananda

Wanted: A Strength-giving Religion

Swami Ashokananda

I

In addition to the eternal universal religion, the Sanatana Dharma, which is fundamental to all minds in all times, every age requires a Yuga-dharma or religion of the epoch. The Yuga-dharma lays emphasis on those specific principles of religion that are especially suited to the needs and qualifications of the people of its particular time.

Many different qualities and powers of the mind have been considered basic to spiritual development and hence stressed by different religions. Among these qualities and powers of the mind are kindness, charity, compassion, knowledge, truthfulness, peacefulness, purity, self-discipline, self-abnegation, renunciation and strength. Even with individuals such virtues receive varying emphasis. One spiritual aspirant thinks the cultivation of purity most important; a second favours self-abnegation; a third, compassion; and so on. Looking historically and in wider perspective at this tendency to preference, we see that different epochs in the religious life of humanity are also characterized by accentuation of different virtues.

I believe that the present age in every part of the world needs a religion that emphasizes strength above all other qualities. One cannot of course say that any religious practice is devoid of strength, because it is impossible to call a practice religious unless it is strength-giving. However, the strength usually derived from religious practices in general is not what I have in mind. In addition to such strength, our age requires special emphasis on the acquisition of strength as an ideal in itself.

Why do I propose for this age a religion with such emphasis on strength? Because we are in a very sorry plight. Humanity has sunk deep into an unprecedented materialism. I admit materialism has prevailed before among some people in certain times and countries, but mankind as a whole has never suffered from so gross, widespread and deep-rooted a materialism as now. If human nature is to be rescued from the ravaging effects of this, it will have to cultivate a strength of will proportionate to the strength of the evil it would conquer.

Is it not logical to think that our progress depends on our own power of will? In our present state we are bound by ignorance and its effects—attachment to things which are unreal or poisonous; lack of desire to think about the truth, even when it seems self-evident; and lack of self-control. We can free ourselves from this condition of confused understanding and paralysis of will only by somehow evoking a countervailing strength of will.

Considering the situation in this light, we must admit that whether we follow the path of devotion, reason, action or concentration to realize our spiritual ideal, strength of will is needed above everything. Without it we make no real advance. We progress and then retrogress; we reach a certain point but cannot go beyond it. Everyone has noticed that some spiritual aspirants remain in the same state of development for many years. Often, they ascribe this to karma, to heredity, or even to some mysterious influence. But whatever the reason given for spiritual stagnation; its real cause is weakness of will.

However, do not waste time and energy asking how weakness of will originated. All that matters is to be rid of it—and to be rid of it means developing its opposite. To the degree the will is strengthened, realization of Truth is achieved. With only moderate

will-power we make moderate progress, but with a strong will our progress is rapid. Even if there are obstructive elements in our mind in the beginning, we can overcome and destroy them by sheer force of will and so go ahead.

II

The most fundamental doctrine of the non-dualistic Vedanta affirms that the soul or self contains all perfection within itself and that this perfection is not damaged in the slightest by its apparent bondage. Just as a king may dream of wearing rags and begging for food, so we imagine ourselves sinful and weak. In spite of his dream the king does not really lose his kingdom. And though we are under the influence of illusion, we do not really lose our pristine purity, but remain fully illumined, strong and perfect. If we are to be reminded of anything concerning ourselves, shall it be of our ignorance and illusion, or of our true, original nature, which is eternally existent within us? Shall we tell ourselves that we are poor beggars, or that we are really the king of the world, who lacks nothing? Is not our waking self truer than our dreaming self?

Swami Vivekananda called attention to the fact that dualistic religions have usually stressed man's weakness and dependence. This unfortunate attitude of the dualistic religions has made progress in spiritual life difficult. If a man's worship and meditation are accompanied by the feeling that he is weak and helpless, this feeling will persist in him and vitiate all his spiritual efforts. On the other hand, if strength is emphasized at the outset, great progress is possible and can be easily achieved.

Why do you think religion made the mistake of emphasizing weakness instead of strength? In the first place, since knowledge

is progressive, even religion has taken time to find itself adequately. Though in ancient days there were men who had seen God and knew ways by which He could be realized, many other better ways of knowing Him remained to be discovered, and at least some of them have been discovered with the passing of the centuries. I venture to say that in the course of future ages we shall know even more about God and about the ways of realizing Him than we do now. Undoubtedly men will always find surer, truer paths of attaining to the Highest. I am not saying that all the conclusions of religion are wrong, but that improvements can be made. Thus, by remembering that religion is progressive, we understand why some teachers in the past emphasized weakness rather than strength.

Secondly, even some of those who believed in the Divinity of man have said: "Though the human soul is perfect and Divine, as long as we are ignorant of it, we should not speak about it" ; or "If you feel you are body and mind, why say you are Divine ? Say so only when you actually perceive you are Divine". Such an attitude represents a reversion to the tenet of weakness, which is explainable only as a part of the general tendency to maintain the so-called normal state of existence, the accustomed mode of consciousness.

People assume all kinds of attitudes to avoid changing their present state of existence. Many conceive an extreme hatred for religion. Others are supercilious and patronizing. They say, "Let the superstitious have a few toys to play with, if they must. We, however, are enlightened; we have gone beyond religion". Still others accord religion only a psychological value: they believe it has a quieting effect on the mind, but no reality.

Then there are those who accept the truth of religion, but do not want to realize it fully. Only a few, they say are meant to become

mystics—the vast majority are not intended to have God-vision; all God expects of most men is that they live a moral life in the world and die with a prayer on their lips. Also, there are men and women who have a little taste, a little sentiment, for religion, but who cannot say from experience that they have perceived God or the Self or that they have attained immortality—they relegate such experiences to life after death. Others justify their present mode of life by declaring that God has pre-determined the rate of our progress in each life. They say, "Since God has graduated our development, is it not wrong to force our way to Him? Concentration and meditation, which intensify spiritual progress, are surely harmful!" Still others are afraid of religion. They find that if they become spiritual all fun goes from life. "Oh," they complain, "I was so happy before; religion has taken away my happiness."

Thus, the majority of us hate religion, desire a weak religion, fear the results of religion, or assume some evasive attitude toward religion, because we want to remain the miserable finite self that we feel ourselves to be. Clinging to the meanness and narrowness of our present state, we nevertheless hope somehow to reach a condition of perpetual blessedness!

The mind certainly has peculiar ways of trying to maintain its status quo. It does not want to change, and it resists with great might any effort to follow a new path. So, we tread the same path over and over again. The mind is playing tricks upon us; seeming to indulge us, it really prevents our going forward. We have to recognize this tendency of the mind and combat it. If, while we try to combat it, our religion tends to increase our weakness and fear, it becomes a positive disadvantage. What we need is a religion which stresses our true, divine nature, and of all religions Vedanta alone does so.

Other religions begin with the assumption that we are ignorant, impure, imperfect; that we have been born, we shall die. We are dependent on God. We pray, beg for mercy, ask for kindness, and expect to make progress through God's grace. Not finding God, we seek a man and take the same attitude toward him. But by starting with the assumption that our present imperfect state is normal and that we are by nature worldly, we find it very difficult to make spiritual efforts in the right spirit.

Sri Ramakrishna used to tell the story of a lion that came upon a flock of sheep and was amazed to see another lion grazing with the flock and bleating. When the lion approached the sheep-lion, the latter fled in terror. The lion bided his time and one day succeeded in catching the sheep-lion and dragging him to a brook. The sheep-lion bleated and quaked in fear. "Why are you so frightened?" the lion asked; "You and I are alike; we are both lions. Look at yourself!" The sheep-lion gazed at his reflection in the brook and saw he was the same as the other. "Now," said the lion, "roar like me!" But when the sheep-lion tried to roar, he could only bleat. So, the lion got some red meat and thrust it into his mouth. With the taste of blood, the sheep-lion began to roar and knew he was really a lion.

Just as a lion made to live among sheep behaves as a sheep, so a man made to feel weak and ignorant behaves accordingly. Far from being the weak, cringing, dependent creatures we think ourselves to be, we are the all-powerful Self.

III

Some say, "Until we learn self-discipline, conquer the senses, forget the world, and become pure, it is impossible for us to feel

our inner strength". In speaking so, they put the cart before the horse. How are you ever going to conquer the senses unless your lust goes beyond the senses? Whenever you succeed in dominating your senses, you feel yourself as above them. You may not observe it, but that is what happens psychologically. In any conquest of the senses, you invariably have a feeling of your higher being; and because of this feeling it becomes possible for you to see the limitation and worthlessness of the senses and hence to rule over them. Conquest always comes with the realization of our superiority over what we are trying to conquer.

Therefore, to those who ask if we can feel we are the Self before fully conquering the senses and body consciousness, I say that it is indeed possible. Seek the help of those who have already realized the Self! There is nothing like a burning lamp from which to light your own lamp. It is easy to warm yourself near a roaring fire. Be in the company of those who do not speak of the body and worldly things or try to drag your mind down to them, those who are not identified with the lower self but with the higher. The fire of such souls will communicate itself to your heart, and then the consciousness of the true Self will not be difficult to attain.

If you are unable to find such souls, you can still dwell on the truth of your Divinity. At first this truth will be only verbal to you. But since it is the truth, it will gradually create a reverberation in your being.

Hitherto silent chords of your memory will resound in answer to the call. While repeating, "I am not this body, not this mind." try by all means to conquer your senses. But never forget to say to yourself, "Always, even in the deepest ignorance. I am still the shining Self, the Eternal One".

In ancient books one of the names given the Self is *Abhih*, the Fearless One. Swami Vivekananda used to delight in that word. We are the Fearless One! We can look the whole universe, infinite time and everything contained in infinite time and experience in the face and say. "You have no power to dominate or conquer us". Is it not true? Even though misfortunes come, even though destruction rains upon us, we outlast them all.

The human soul surmounts every conceivable circumstance; nothing can stand against it. Death has come to us many times; nevertheless, we have outlived death. The only thing in the whole universe which survives all destruction and is truly *abhih*, fearless, is the real Self of man. Therefore, be fearless! Say, "My name is the Fearless One. *Abhih!* I conquer every difficulty!" Fear is crippling our strength and fear is the result of our identification with the lower self. Our greatest need is to be jolted out of such identification.

The one doctrine that can jolt us out of it is the doctrine of the Divinity of the Self, which says: "You are Divine; you are the free one. Never were you born; never will you die. All that happens in time— birth, death, everything—is just a dream. You, the dreamer, are really the free one, the witness. Infinite truth and power are within you".

Though a man may have the faith that he is the perfect, illumined infinite Self and constantly affirms himself to be such, faith and affirmation alone are insufficient; he must live up to them. We cannot say we are the birthless, deathless one, and the next moment seek the comforts and pleasures of the body and other self-indulgences. It is like planting a tree and immediately destroying it. Renunciation of our false identity must always accompany the affirmation of our true nature, and it should be a triumphant renunciation, the renunciation not of the weak, but of

the strong. We renounce the lower vision in order to live up to our higher Self. When the beggar discovers he is really a prince, he throws off his rags, puts on royal raiment and mounts the throne. The lower gives way to the higher.

Achievements in the lower planes of existence are paltry compared to those resulting from renunciation. Men enjoy earning their livelihood and having a pleasant home and family life, but they do not know of the inconceivably greater enjoyment which is theirs when they overcome the limitations of their little selves and find their unity with all, when they are able to enter into the hearts of all.

Remind yourself of the implications of affirming your own true nature, and then every smallness will fall off. Deliberately get rid of all that is holding you to the lower vision. That is renunciation. It is not a coercion of the self: it is not giving up what is essentially ours. It is renouncing what does not belong to our true Self.

If we want the renunciation which accompanies the affirmation of our higher nature to be real, it must be accompanied by asceticism, tapasya. Asceticism not only includes meditating on our true nature, but it means trying to break the bondages of the senses, the body, and the mind. It means that we starve the lower nature in order to throw it off easily.

Mortification of the body, when we still fully identify ourselves with the body, is harmful. Perhaps it is because self-mortification has often been practised with unfortunate results by those who are dominated too intensely by body consciousness that the word has gained certain disagreeable connotations. The Sanskrit word tapasya suggests only beauty and joy. It brings to mind the consciousness of Universal Being, of freedom from all entanglement, of a tremendous power by which to master the

forces trying to dominate us. Without the feeling of triumph implied by the word *tapasya*, self-mortification certainly is harmful. But with this triumphant consciousness it becomes a wonderful instrument to help us attain our shining goal.

IV

The doctrine of the Divinity of the Self represents the quickest, straightest path to the goal, not only for individuals, but for mankind collectively. It should therefore receive wide dissemination. Swami Vivekananda said: "Go from door to door and tell this truth to men and women, old and young, saint and sinner, learned and ignorant. Give everyone this life-giving, strength-giving doctrine of the Divinity of the Self. Teach it from village to village. Every other thing that human beings need, such as economic rehabilitation and so on, should be offered only after the human mind has been flooded with the idea of man's true being."

The Swami, knowing your greatest need, drew your attention again and again in the course of his teaching in this country to your true Divine nature; and although he knew that the most pressing need of the Hindus was to solve their economic and social problems, in India too he focused attention on the Divinity of the Self. It was his prescription for all humanity. It was the dominant note in all his teachings everywhere. And more and more, as I observe the trend of things, I see no other way for peace, prosperity and the growth of man along the right lines, no other way for the salvation of man, than remembering what man really is. To the extent religions fail to emphasize this, they can serve only partial needs.

Do churches have any legitimate place in the life of Western nations, or, for that matter, of Eastern nations? Throughout the last few centuries they have been only tolerated by the intelligentsia.

You may protest, "But we go to church". Yes, perhaps you do, but nevertheless you are plunged in materialism. Your whole civilization is based on the exploitation of others. You are not giving adequate place or time for individuals to enjoy life truly or to recognize and realize deeper values. Almost all institutions, even those that are religious, are geared directly or indirectly to material ends.

Why has this happened? Every church, every religion, has a supreme purpose to fulfil in the life of man, and that is not merely to inspire belief and faith in Divine Reality, but to bring about actual experience of It. Religion means changing within. It is constant change toward the end of being able to say, "I have seen God; I have found the Eternal". When you have found the Eternal, nothing in time will continue to be precious to you. Even infinite time is nothing, compared to eternity. Do you think a person who has touched eternity can attach value to things in time? He goes beyond temporal values. This is what religion must lead us to do; and I say this must be emphasized continually so that man's outlook may undergo a fundamental change. Otherwise, materialism will hold man its prisoner forever.

Only by sheer strength shall we be able to maintain the new vision of ourselves. The new vision is itself made of strength. The one who says, "I am the resplendent Self", cannot be a cringing person. He cannot whine, "I am weak". The accent should be ever and always on strength, and therefore religion should be based on strength. I have not the least hesitation in saying that religions which do not provide this element of strength in our existence, if not actually discarded, will be of scant help to us in the present age. They may serve the purposes of a handful of people but will fail the majority. This applies not only to religions outside India, but also to certain religions in India.

Yet hope lies in the fact that all religions can, if they wish, embody strength in one form or another. Sri Ramakrishna used to say again and again: "He who says he is sinful, sinful he becomes." Religions, even as individuals, can learn to insist on only the highest consciousness. The Master could not tolerate anyone's thinking of himself as ignorant, sinful or bound. He would permit such talk from no one, whether devotee or jnani. He would say: "What! You have taken the name of God today, and you say you are impure? You are a child of God, a devotee of God, and still you say you are ignorant, bound, impure?"

As a boy he had heard people declare that to take the Lord's name was purifying, and yet he had found them daily asking for purity! "Yesterday he took the name of the Lord and was purified. Why, then should he ask to be made pure again today? Has he not already been purified?"—thus the boy would wonder. But as he grew up, he understood and so emphasized the necessity of maintaining one's identity with the Self. He would invariably say: "Never call yourself impure! We believe that God is our Father and that we are His children. Is this a make-believe relationship?" We are indeed His children, and if we are children of God, we are God Himself. Children of God are bound to be Divine, even as children of men are human. Sri Ramakrishna taught this essential monism to all. He showed that this strength-giving, spiritualizing, transforming idea, by which we are awakened from our dream of imperfection and weakness, can be embodied even in devotional religions.

Religions certainly do not have to remain what they are. In fact, they cannot avoid changing. Show me a religion which has not undergone profound changes! Unfortunately, some of the changes have not been religious in nature or purpose. But let us forget the mistakes of the past. All religions can now, with the best of motives,

with the best of effects, change from an emphasis on weakness to an overwhelming emphasis on strength. Men are verily incarnations of Light. This doctrine is seen in Christianity in the Gospel of St. John. Not only is Christ the Divine Light, but all other men are living incarnations of Light. Why not emphasize this? Why hold to the doctrine that we are born sinners, doomed to fear and supplication? That is an unwholesome doctrine. How great an obstruction dualistic religion present to spiritual progress by teaching us to say, "O Lord, I am a miserable creature; be kind to me!" It you are convinced to begin with that you are miserable, it is psychologically impossible for you to learn to feel otherwise. Every time you say, "Oh, miserable that I am!" you are cultivating and perpetuating your misery. Under such negative conditions progress is at best slow.

V

Religion has not only its eternal aspect, as a means to God-realization, but also its secular and temporal aspect. Of millions of men everywhere who go to churches and temples, only a few earnestly practise religion in its higher aspect. The rest go through the forms of religion, honouring it as belief and doctrine. Even on them, to the extent that it regulates their lives, religion doubtless has a certain effect.

In addition to helping in the realization of purely spiritual ends, religion should so guide and inform secular activities as to make these lead directly to the realization of spiritual ends. The so-called worldly life can be lived in many ways, some of which are more in consonance with spirituality than others, and therefore preferable. Also, if secular life is lived richly and in a most dignified and self-respecting manner, it can be transcended soon and easily.

Though religions have often influenced secular life profoundly, this influence has not always been salutary. The great zeal developed by proselytizing religions has in some cases not been used strictly for spiritual purposes or to uplift humanity but has rather been used to disrupt the life of mankind. Some religions have inculcated aggressiveness, with the result that their followers have become fierce and self-aggrandizing on the material plane. Other religions have emphasized peace, gentleness and non-injury, with the result that their followers have become timid or almost cowardly, incapable of resistance and self-defence even when these are imperative.

Since religions affect even those who are not seeking spiritual illumination, the responsibility of religions for producing unfortunate results in the worldly life of such people cannot be ignored. I am not forgetting for a moment that the essential function of religions is to lead men to spiritual illumination, not to worldly power and prosperity. But considering the history of the various religions and in view of the benefits and blessings of strength when it is truly conceived and is unaccompanied by subversive influences, we must admit that the masses of men will be best served in the affairs of their daily life by a religion emphasizing true strength. Yes, even in secular and temporal affairs the accentuation of strength will be most beneficial.

It is because there is a trend in America emphasizing strength that creeds such as Christian Science, New Thought and Unity flourish here. These religions tend to create an attitude of strength in business and domestic affairs and so benefit the temporal, secular life of the people. The followers of every one of them have borrowed directly or indirectly from the Indian Vedanta. For instance, Mrs. Eddy in her early editions of Science and Health quoted from two translations of the Bhagavad-Gita, though these

quotations have been omitted from later editions. (I myself have read those earlier editions)

Why is there this trend in America toward the Vedantic doctrine of strength? Because this doctrine is in accord with the genius of your people. Yours was a pioneer country. Men had to be strong and ready to fight in order to overcome difficulties and establish themselves. They required self-confidence. Had they thought that they were weak, miserable, helpless sinners, America would not have accomplished what she has.

Swami Vivekananda used to say that in the West people were taught by the gentle teaching of Christ but actually followed the strong teaching of Sri Krishna, while in India they were taught the strong teaching of Sri Krishna but actually followed the gentle teaching of Christ! The paradox amused him. There is no denying that you Westerners did not follow the Christ's teachings in becoming what you are. If you had turned the other cheek when the Red Indians had attacked, either you would have remained always on the Eastern coast or you would have gone back to Europe. If you had given your cloak when your coat was taken, you would not now be possessed of this rich country.

Everywhere the Western people have gone, they have seized all they could lay hands on They have even sent missionaries to try to gain possession of people's souls! That has certainly been the exact opposite of following the Christian teaching. Moreover, Christ said you should take no thought for the morrow. Is this a civilization which is not thinking beyond today?

So it is that you, having ignored the religion you profess, have taken to the Eastern doctrine of strength, but have stopped far short of any true application of it. The application thus far made by Western borrowers must, indeed, be called rather crude and limited.

But as time passes, I think the majority of you will learn to assimilate it in a better spirit, even in the temporal field; you will certainly find a higher application mandatory in relation to true spiritual achievements. When you do apply it properly, there will come a tremendous transformation. I am not saying the majority of people will plunge into deep meditation or go into the forest to devote themselves to tapasya, but they most assuredly will become alive to their spiritual nature to a degree heretofore undreamt of.

Perhaps you are unaware of how urgent it is that the American people become more conscious of their higher nature. They were formerly reputed to be very generous, but lately they have tended to become somewhat calculating. They are now generous mainly when their basic self-interest is not affected, and thus their heritage of generosity has been partially lost. They are reverting to the ways of the older civilization which they repudiated in order to establish this country, and in so doing are violating their fundamental nature.

However, the God of America will probably not allow this reversion to continue. When the American people truly understand and apply the religion of strength, which until now they have accepted only superficially and have applied chiefly in the interests of worldly gain, a veritable miracle will come to pass. They may not go to churches or kneel down to pray, but they will certainly be actuated on all planes to live up to the highest that is in them—they will manifest their best on the physical, mental, aesthetic, moral and spiritual levels.

I believe this is the religion that the world is waiting for.

In conclusion let me tell you something of the doctrine of kundalini, with which you are no doubt partially acquainted. Its essential idea concerns a power latent in man. When this awakes, he realizes God. As there is individual kundalini, so there is

collective kundalini, the kundalini of all humanity, called Brahma-kundalini.

Swami Vivekananda once said with great solemnity: "Do not forget that in this age the Brahma-kundalini has been awakened!" At no other time has this been possible, because in this age alone all humanity has become one. Parts of nations and civilizations have sometimes in the past been galvanized by spiritual power, but in this age the supreme miracle has taken place—the Brahma-kundalini, the sleeping Divinity of the whole of mankind, has been awakened!

Remember, then, that these are most auspicious days, and that many wonders shall be realized. Vast masses of men the world over will be actuated by the higher consciousness. In the cold season even, the hardiest tree finds it difficult to develop one green shoot, but when spring comes, all nature puts forth leaf and blossom in abundance. How symbolic it is! In this age the awakening of a spiritual spring has indeed come. I fully believe it is just a question of time before tremendous spiritual fervour will be evidenced everywhere and the great majority of men and women will be transformed.

Do not, however, count on this miracle and sit idle in the meantime. Since we are truly the pure, perfect, eternal Divine Spirit, let us face our problems at once, whatever they are, and begin to live up to the truth of our being. Let us manifest the Divine Self from this moment on, and at every moment!

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Samadhi or the Super-conscious Experience

Swami Ritajananda

The Hindu religion considers that the Ultimate Reality can be perceived through direct experience and is not something unknown and unknowable. This idea is given even in the early religious literature, the Vedas. The concept of God as the power behind the universe, full of grace and love is accepted by the devotional Hindu. But he believes that the God he worships is within his reach. " God can be seen," says Sri Ramakrishna, " we can speak to Him and feel His presence near us ". Our ordinary eyes cannot see Him because He is pure spirit. The whole world is the manifestation of the Divine and in human beings the manifestation is greater than in other creation. The Hindu religion has for its goal, the realization of this Ultimate Reality both as the divinity manifesting outside as well as within us. This realization is considered to be the highest form of spiritual experience, bringing with it a unique transformation in one's life and outlook. Through this experience, a person is completely freed from all selfishness and it is said that even a sinner by this experience becomes a saint. It is called the highest type of knowledge brought through one's own experience (*anubhava*). The better-known term is ' samadhi'. This word is often associated with some physical manifestations although it means perfect absorption of thought into the one object of meditation. In the following paragraphs we shall consider this state of samadhi as it is described by different schools, devotional, monistic and yogic, and also the physical manifestations and the behaviour after the experience by all people, whatever may be their approach.

The most popular aspect of Hinduism is the worship of the personal God. There have been hundreds of men and women who

have followed the path of devotion throughout India and had convincing experience of the reality of God. The devotional literature points out that God is within the reach of an earnest seeker. If a person loves God wholeheartedly, he will be blessed with the vision of God, in whatever form he wishes to see Him. God is formless but He assumes forms to suit the attitude of the seeker. The ancient religion of Hinduism has absorbed many different traditions. There have been people who worshipped God as Shiva, the supreme Lord, or as Shakti, the Divine Mother, or as the Lord Vishnu, who took many incarnations. The devotional religion does not prescribe the approach, but it is interested in the direction of the emotion of love. Consequently, we find the Hindu devotee of God to be different from people of other theistic religions. All the Hindus do believe that the Lord is one but can be worshipped in different forms. *Ishta Devata* (Chosen Ideal) is not a favourite among other existing deities, as Dr. Betty Heimann points out (Hibbert Journal, April 1955), but the favourite form of the One, chosen by the worshipper. The names and forms and also the method of directing one's emotion of love are of secondary importance and are extremely personal. These are bound by one's innate nature. Sri Ramakrishna explains the nature of God to be like an infinite ocean and the devotion of the seeker is like freezing which gives forms to the formless expanse of water, and this explanation is the connecting link between various types of Hindu worship of the personal God. The devotee chooses a path by following which he can sublimate his love. When this love for God becomes a passion, the person loses all interest in the outside world and an absorbing concentration results, which finally leads to the beatific vision. But this vision can be had only after the individual has purified himself from all attachments to this world. For this purpose, the constant thought of God is the discipline. The devotee

dedicates all his actions and thoughts to God. When the mind is freed from all worldly ideas, it easily concentrates on God, who is most dear to the devotee, leading to the state of samadhi. According to the worshippers of Shiva, the realization leads to one's own *Shivatwa* or divine nature. One section of Shaivites consider the realization as complete mergence in Shiva; the others consider that in that state the devotee enjoys the knowledge of God, or enjoys blissful association with Him. The worshippers of Shakti have to pass through many hard disciplines to transform the animal nature of man. Due to the fact that love for the mother is the purest form, the Shaktas worship God as the loving Mother, and by Her grace the devotee enters the highest state of super-consciousness, which fills him with an indescribable joy. The worshippers of Vishnu also insist on constant prayer as the only method of winning divine grace. When a person attains steadfast love for God, he realizes Him through his whole being and feels His presence everywhere. This state is also known as bhava.

The followers of the Advaitic or monistic school consider the Ultimate Reality is Brahman and It alone exists and It is to be known. The Upanishadic literature is full of explanations of the ideas related to Brahman and to the individual soul or Atman, and how there is no difference between them. The followers of this school take a rational attitude and consider that we have to go beyond all duality. The four necessary qualifications are the capacity to discriminate between the Real and the unreal, dispassion for all types of enjoyment here and hereafter, perfect ethical character, and the desire for liberation. Instead of using his emotions the follower of this method uses his intellect and keeps it constantly attached to the One behind the many. He starts the discriminative process by enquiring into the reality of his own self, distinct from the body, the prana, the mind, the intellect and

emotion. To a person equipped with a keen intellect and good character, the path is clear, and when he gets the final instruction from his teacher about the identity of his individual self with Brahman, his individual consciousness merges into the Universal and the seeker dives deep into nirvikalpa samadhi (contentless Consciousness). This state is compared to milk being poured into milk, when it has no more a separate identity.

So far we have considered two interpretations of samadhi, as presented by the worshippers of the personal God and by those who seek the Impersonal. These two systems, though they mention samadhi, do not go into a deep study of the subject. It may be experienced by the followers of those systems, but no deep study of the experience is made by them. Samadhi, being intimately connected with the thinking faculty and consciousness, is systematically dealt with in yoga. The purpose of the practice of yoga is to lead one to samadhi. Yoga means control of the modifications of the mind in a broad sense, leading to concentration; and the highest state of concentration is samadhi. Since all types of religious disciplines lead finally to an intense state of concentration, we find the connection between different spiritual disciplines and yoga. All the great religious leaders practiced yoga in some form. It is the meeting point of various schools of religion. The devotee, in his desire to see God, purifies his mind and pushes away all ideas that are not related to God, while the Vedantin, wishing to avoid the world of multiplicity, frees his mind from all ideas related to it. Thus, both of them have the same ideal of controlling the wandering mind. The process of purification of the mind is never possible unless one leads a virtuous life and hence, we find the books on yoga start with ethical disciplines called *yama* and *niyama*. Although there are different systems of yoga, the most popular one goes under the name of

Raja Yoga. Patanjali, whose life is very little known to the world, composed a set of aphorisms describing the essentials of Raja Yoga. In that book, he describes the nature of *chitta*—which is broader than the concept of mind—its modifications, the causes of the modifications, its control, and the result. The final result is called samadhi. The yogic discipline may be divided into two sections. One deals with the purification and preparation of *chitta* for concentration, and the second one deals with concentration, meditation and samadhi. It is in the latter section we find the meeting ground of various religious disciplines. Patanjali mentions different types of samadhi and some of them, when they become part of *samyama* (the combination of concentration, meditation and samadhi) on any subject, have very little to do with spiritual experience. But he gives the highest place to *nirbija* samadhi or the samadhi which is attained after freeing the *chitta* from all latent impressions. This will lead to liberation. Patanjali's system is a scientific study. He does not depend on any religious ideal. It is a broad explanation of a phenomenon, which may be experienced by any person who learns the art of handling the *chitta*. By the study of the Yoga Aphorisms we understand the process of intense meditation and where it leads. It is interesting to note here, that although Patanjali did not consider worship of God as an essential part of yoga discipline, he mentions that by the worship of God one can experience the state of samadhi.

Thus, we find samadhi as a religious experience in Hinduism. Its manifestation is a gradual process. While the mind loses all consciousness of the outside world, very often there is a corresponding physical change. Such a process was observed in Sri Chaitanya and later on in Sri Ramakrishna. Although both of them were well-built and strong, the intense longing for God made them indifferent to bodily comforts and their nerves became

extremely sensitive. Whenever they heard the name of God, they went into a state of trance. But it was not a painful experience and their faces expressed the great bliss they were having in that state. Compared to that, even the highest type of worldly pleasure seemed tasteless. At a certain stage there was complete oblivion of the world. This state of inertness is called *jada samadhi*. This physical aspect of samadhi happens to be more widely known than the spiritual side, since it is visible, while the latter is a personal experience. Sri Ramakrishna passed through different types of samadhi. Whenever he heard devotional songs, his mind soared up to the land of the Spirit. He suddenly lost all worldly consciousness and remained seated or standing with eyes transfixed. In that state he did not seem even to breathe. In nirvikalpa samadhi this state continued for days, but fortunately someone took care of his body. The yoga books mention that in nirvikalpa samadhi the individual consciousness merges in the Absolute and no trace of ego is left. The person does not die, although the body shows no sign of consciousness. Perhaps it is interesting to recall the descriptions of two persons who were in this state of nirvikalpa samadhi, besides Sri Ramakrishna. The biography of Sri Sankaracharya mentions that his teacher Govindapada was in a cave on the banks of the Narmada river. Govindapada was in a state of samadhi for years and many holy men were waiting to see and talk to him. Guided by the people Sri Sankara went to the place where Govindapada was. It was a small cave the entrance of which was very narrow. Inside it was all dark. Sri Sankara took a lighted lamp and entered the cave. There on a rock was a tall figure seated in the Padmasana posture. The body was emaciated. There was no sign of life and it appeared as if he was stone sculptured out of the surroundings. But when Sri Sankara's eyes fell on the face, he was overwhelmed with

admiration. Even through the dry skin the radiance of inner peace was visible. Then after a while he began to sing a hymn in admiration and Govindapada slowly opened his eyes and started breathing. Such a state has been described of the saint Sadasiva Brahmendra who was buried under sand for some months. But this outward expression of losing consciousness may be induced by other means and has therefore no spiritual significance. By the practice of retaining breath one can show the outward signs of samadhi.

The true significance of samadhi has to be understood by the spiritual experience of the person and his later behaviour. Sri Ramakrishna used to give an illustration of a magician, who lost all worldly consciousness while he was showing some tricks and woke up from that state after many years, shouting, "Come illusion, come delusion". The saint loses consciousness through the thought of God. He is one with God in that state of samadhi and comes back to the world with the knowledge of God. This experience transforms his outlook on life entirely. He sees God everywhere. The world in which he lived before the experience is not just the same. He has no desires, no doubts and no duties. He is filled with an ineffable joy and all-pervading love. Such is the transformation which is brought by the super-conscious experience of samadhi. Only people who lead a very virtuous life, who have no desire for any enjoyment and whose minds constantly dwell in the realm of God can have this unique experience.

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A Call to Dedication and Service - from Swami Vivekananda's Letters to Sister Nivedita

(Swami Vivekananda wrote some of his most inspiring letters to Sister Nivedita. The following is made up of extracts from those letters which urged her to dedicate herself to the ideal of service. It may be recalled by readers that she nobly responded to the call and lived and died for India, her adopted country.)

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.

This world is in chains of superstition. I pity the oppressed, whether man or woman, and I pity more the oppressors.

One idea that I see clear as daylight is that misery is caused by ignorance and nothing else. Who will give the world light? Sacrifice in the past has been the law: it will be, alas, for ages to come. The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of the many, for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundred are necessary with eternal love and pity.

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 a thunderbolt.

It is no superstition with you, I am sure; you have the making in you of a world-mover, and others will also come. Bold words and bolder deeds are what we want. Awake, awake, great ones! The world is burning with misery. Can you sleep? Let us call and call till the sleeping gods awake, till the god within answers to the call. What more is in life? What greater work? The details come to me as I go. I never make plans. Plans grow and work themselves. I only say, awake, awake!

... Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man but a woman—a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women specially.

India cannot yet produce great women: she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination, and above all, Celtic blood makes you just the woman wanted.

Yet the difficulties are many. You cannot form any idea of the misery, the superstition, and the slavery that are here. You will be in the midst of a mass of half-naked men and women with quaint ideas of caste and isolation, shunning the white skin through fear or hatred and hated by them intensely. On the other hand, you will be looked upon by the white as a crank and every one of your movements will be watched with suspicion

Not one European comfort is to be had in places out of the cities. If in spite of all this you dare venture into the work, you are welcome, a hundred times welcome. As for me, I am nobody here as elsewhere, but what little influence I have shall be devoted to your service.

You must think well before you plunge in, and after work, if you fail in this or get disgusted, on my part I promise you I will stand by you unto death whether you work for India or not, whether you give up Vedanta or remain in it. "The tusks of the elephant come out but never go back" : so are the words of a man never retracted. I promise you that

"Why should there be suffering? This is a familiar question, asked by everyone who has begun to think about the deeper mysteries of life. "Why does the Almighty permit pain? Shame on Him! If God

were the least bit humanitarian, He would have abolished misery long ago or would not have included it in His plan."

On the other hand, there is the story of Kunti, the mother of the Pandava brothers, who prayed that she might never be free from distress. "Pain," she said, "drives my mind to the Lord Krishna. So, let me always suffer, in order that my thoughts may always run to Him."

And I recall the remark of a senior swami, commenting on the questionable activities of a certain individual. "Yes, what he is doing is wrong. But let him be. What he is doing will cause him to suffer; and suffering will wake him up and make him stop."

Although I am repelled by misery and would escape it, yet I have come to see something wonderful in it. Beneath the unpleasant is something beneficial. Pain is the whip that Providence uses to drive us— against our will—to our best destination.

Every one of us is looking for bliss. This search may, for example, make us fall in love. I pursue an earthly object because of the promise of beauty I see in it. There are moments of joy in such human relationships; but as everyone knows, these are mainly the come-ons—the sales pitches of the barkers out in front of the carnival tent. Once inside, you find the show not up to the advertising.

My search for pleasure has brought me pain. This again drives me to continue the hunt for bliss. I try something else. But again, the same thing occurs. Each shiny apple turns rotten as soon as I bite into it. But something good is happening. The alternatives open to me are diminishing. Pain is driving me from one position to another, each as untenable as the previous ones. At last I have nowhere to stand at all. I have come to the end of the world. There is now nothing left but God.

We have been told countless times that renunciation is the indispensable condition of religion. We know it, but we can't put it into practice. Who can renounce willingly, rationally, because it is the right thing to do? Attachments have to be torn away: or we have to drop them because to hold them hurts us more than to let them go. We don't renounce we are forced to relinquish, and pain is the thing that does it.

I can see that tribulation is God's instrument of mercy. Instead of berating him for having made suffering a part of his scheme. I should thank God for having done so. Pain is the Lord's special invitation for bringing us to his side.

Question: Why does the Hindu religion allow different castes? Are these castes still strictly kept on? Are there still many Untouchables?

Answer: Caste is not a religious, but a social institution. Society was divided into four principal sections in ancient India, mainly on the basis of occupation. They were not called castes, which is from the Portuguese 'casta' meaning 'stock', but 'varnas', literally meaning 'colours'. The four divisions of society were the priestly class, the military class, the agricultural and artisan and trading class, and the labouring class. In the course of time these divisions became rigid. Before this happened, a cultured labourer or trader could move into the next caste above, and even higher up.

Sri Krishna, who, in the post-Vedic period, taught the Bhagavad Gita tried to restore spiritual equality and establish social equality. He may be said to have succeeded only in the former, but Buddha succeeded in establishing equality both spiritual and social. In the Buddhist period, however, the pendulum swung too far on the side of equality without proper cultural elevation, and the whole of society dreaded the loss of both cultural quality and ethnic purity. Then appeared some reformers of the Hindu fold—about the first

or second century A.D.—who warned society about the grave danger and restored the original division of four classes. Unfortunately, to these four were added a number of sub-divisions, and the whole system again became too inelastic. Those who belonged to the upper classes exercised only their rights and privileges and forgot their duties and responsibilities to the lower classes.

The bigotry of Untouchability is traceable at least to the days of the decline of Buddhism. Even in Vedic times we hear of the Dasyus and other low-class people who were beyond the pale of the four classes. Buddha's gospel of equality may have done some good to them, but after the decline of Buddhism and the absorption of its followers into the mother church of Hinduism, some were left out, either because of their unwillingness to be assimilated, or because of the reluctance of the Hindu authorities to re-admit them. These became the Untouchables of Hindu society, the fifth class, as it were—though there was already a fifth class in Vedic times. They are the poorest, being mostly landless, and they lack culture and education. When the conscience of Hindu society was roused in the 19th century, and Hindu reformers wanted to help them, they found that it could not be done without legislation. The British Government expressed its warm sympathy, and did what it could for the Untouchables, but declined to pass any legislation on account of the bitter lessons it had learnt at the time of the Indian Mutiny. It would not have anything to do with social reform or, for that matter, with Hindu society. The Untouchables were much benefitted by Christian missionary efforts in education and in the general elevation of their social standard. Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi thundered against the social injustice of the caste system and Untouchability and practised and taught the Gospel of Service.

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Cradle tales and their calling

Vayu Naidu

Sister Nivedita (1867-1911) embodies the power of listening and perception in her transformative telling of the Cradle Tales of Hinduism (Advaita Ashrama,1975).

Storytelling – oral and written- is an essential ingredient for the emotive and intellectual development of both children and adults. Tradition across cultures begin the association with language from the dreamtime of cradle tales. Reading stories from Cradle Tales to retell them to a child requires reflection, and a dedicated understanding of the purpose (*karanam*) of disseminating the content of these tales. These features are particular to, and embedded in, the Indic orality traditions of devotional stories, histories and hagiographies. It means that the retelling of the stories is not solely an episodic reiteration; it is the quest for illumined discovery by both, listener and teller/writer.

Her Guru, Swami Vivekananda, had that profound insight of her potential for cultural immersion through the spiritual training he imparted. By her own transformation into ‘Nivedita’, it culminated in establishing aspects of co-curricular education for girls and women at the time. For her, other institutions fell short in the frontiers of faith, but in the telling of these tales she is sparked with a calling. Entering into the spirit of such storytelling, her intention becomes the journey sourced from the Upanishads as it unravels knowledge to wisdom’s fountain, within.

Let us explore these claims from the perspectives of Location and Language, content and awakening, even after more than a hundred years of Sister Nivedita writing *Cradle Tales*.

Context as location:

Sister Nivedita of Scots-Irish parents was born in County Tyrone on 28 October 1867 and christened as Margaret Noble. In celebrating 150th anniversary year of her birth, Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission commemorated the occasion in Northern Ireland with prayers and

meditation. There was direct interaction with local school children chanting Sanskrit slokas. The human bridge of exchange was initiated, not through commerce, trade, or political diplomacy - but through the reverberation of the sound of the words and their meaning of the slokas sung across generations in this small part of Northern Ireland.

It is appropriate to turn the clock to a time, and dates do not matter in this, when Margaret Noble left Ireland to teach in a school in England. The specific impact of that educational doctrine inspired from practice developed in the methods of Froebel lay in the emphasis of Learning through Play. It was here that she came in contact with the critical study of Art with a co-teacher, and visual artist. The Play of materials from the vision of the art springing from the artist's inner eye seems to be the soft, but not formulaic, diagram of how 'Play' as activity is sublimated to 'Learning' before it could be processed into Education. To put it simply, it is about recognising how play for a child is inspired from an inner source. The spontaneity to manifest this 'play' into performative or spatial objects is driven by image integrating cognition. Combine this with a spark or motivation which is essential to retain as memory and sustain for continuity. This 'discovery' is channelled into method by observationists, and then compartmentalised into subjects that formalise the flow chart of what we acknowledge and consume as Education.

The core of this kinaesthetic learning sourced from daily tactile forms as well as the natural world also informed emotions and behaviours which are principal factors in the intellectual development of the child – as discourse and intention informs the artist's progression.

Language

Sister Nivedita's father's life as a religious Minister as well as her Scots-Irish linguistic heritage, would have familiarised her with the musicality of parables and the cadence of texts from the gospels of the Bible. With the Irish revivalism of local histories and Gaelic, she would have had figures of speech and song from the wakes for the dead thrumming in her heart and head. By the time she moved to London

as a teacher, she was part of Literary circles and engaging with the metaphors of Art and the discourse of Criticism as well.

But the precise location where everything came to full meaning, an enlightenment that allies the forces of the power of word, action, realisation and dynamics to propel the same was at the first meeting of Swami Vivekananda in London (1896) where she heard him speak.

The 'cradle' is an interesting title for her book. It is not iconic and actual. Iconic as we hear the terms of 'cradle of civilisation'. It is not a birth, but the experience of a beginning. When she came to India, and with the awakening of the country as a civilisation through the teachings of Swami Vivekananda from England, and her encounter when she arrived possibly, made her understand what 'cradle' signifies from a Hindu perspective. A symbol of total abandon - or even surrender - as a sleeping infant. The chord with the world of waking and activity was the lullaby of a mother, or grandmother or kin. It's wouldn't be too far from the truth to suggest that she too had that deep surrender as she dived into the teachings of her Guru, and the India of her time. This state of entelechy manifested in her immersion in India as it was and could become. Not as an Irishwoman in an age of empire, but as a seeker of the dynamic spirit of India. To enable this transformation within herself and in her interactions in India Swami Vivekananda's method was clear:

'The method will come to you, if only you desire it sufficiently. But you have to forget your own past and to cause it to be forgotten. You have to lose even its memory.'

Naming her the dedicated, Margaret shows us the power of 'becoming' Nivedita through the journey inward, to the Eternal companion, the *Atman*.

Content and awakening;

Cradle Tales of Hinduism are symbolic in their approach. As mentioned before, it is not an episodic narration that is recitative minstrelsy which has its place in keeping the oral traditions alive in

audiences who are initiated into the culture and can discern the nuances of the story as Indian Oral traditions have done for literate and non-literate, alike.

Sister Nivedita's immersion into the spirit of India in embodying Swami Vivekananda's teaching was to understand the gems of Upanishadic revelation tightly packed into *Purana*, that unravelled as mythopoeic Histories. It was something the ordinary western reader could not engage with because of the convention of stories that they were accustomed to; through a chronological linear way of understanding 'story' in terms of History, Religion, philosophy, geography, Poetry – with a particular attitude.

By Swamiji's clarity of method and experience of both east and west, she was empowered to encounter and steep herself in listening to stories of resilience and content of the undying flame of the awakened Atman that is India; in spite of the external visage of burden brought on by colonisation.

Cradle Tales addresses the notion of time and stories in Cycles. Not as repetitive, but as branches of stories in which characters from past lives and present ones revisit and interconnect, to fulfil some purpose. In the Preface (1907) she indicates her sources derived from classical versions and her preference for 'the story received by word of mouth to that found in the books'. It is possible the authenticity she refers to about the interpretation of the tale by its teller that is deeply felt.

She makes mention of the dramatic retellings of the epics and stories forming the 'outstanding educational agencies of Indian life' indicating the authoritative understanding of ethics, statecraft and web of familial relationships to villagers and city dwellers. The Storyteller's responsibility was to convey the content through interpolations, while keeping to verse and meter.

Apart from the Cycles, there is a whole section on bhakti, *Tales of the Devotees* where Krishna is the central figure both in historic time as well as the Hindu concept of all-pervading time. She evokes this notion in

the story of Prahalada and his father Hiranyakshipu. The son's faith is unwavering. With all kinds of threats Prahlada continues to devote himself, without any assurances of triumph, to the musical companion the one without a beginning – Vishnu. Time is a concept allied to timelessness.

Hiranyakashipu takes the final step too far, and his tyranny faces the consequence. Narasimha explodes from the pillar and gorges the tyrant. Nivedita's immersion into the concept of time across the idea of devotion and fulfilling the cycle of births is evoked in her folding of the tale in: *"...and out sprang One, half like a man and half like a lion, who leapt upon him and tore him into pieces!... some say Hiranyakashipu was glad of this release.*

For once upon a time, long before, they say, a great sainted soul had been driven back to birth by some evil fate. ...a choice had been offered him. He might pass out of this bondage, it was said, after seven births as the friend of God, or three as His enemy. ...he chose three births as the enemy, that he might the sooner return to God. Wherefore he became Hiranyakashipu, Ravana, and yet again Shisupala, whose story is still to tell."

Further in the text what she has interpreted as Storyteller is that the wicked are also journeying through many births and the cycle of Time, to attain to the Eternal, Brahman. It is not a tale with a beginning, middle, and end within the conventions of western folklore and fairy tales that was popular and familiar at the time. The idea is to go beyond good and evil.

The challenge in transposing the presence of the 'idea' of the spirit of India in English conventions of thought was a leap of direct engagement with a people and their culture as an insider. For its time, *Cradle Tales* also attracted disoriented western educated Indians to relook at the journey inward as the true progress; to connect beyond the little self within the greater ocean of possibilities.

Leaves from an Ashrama 67

Exploration of New Frontiers
Swami Vidyatmananda

Popular trends, and life-styles of the spiritual seeker, are usually at odds. Whereas the seeker wants to look within, popular propaganda tries to woo him into looking out; whereas he wishes to reduce his desires, the world bids him increase them. But the present moment seems to bring something unusual--may be one of those rare periods when the popular mood and the mood of the aspirant are in conjunction. It is becoming chic to be austere! The good life is the simple life. It is the conservationist, the environmentalist, who is considered today's progressive.

This trend was given an official backing in early 1977 when President Carter promoted a program in the United States for the conservation of energy. The conspicuous consumer--long the ideal of the advanced nations and the idol of the underdeveloped--suddenly found himself in disfavour. And the "Greens" have projected that idea into a program. A model citizen now was not he who wasted nature's bounties and dirtied the air in a huge vehicle, as formerly, but a prim stay-at-home perhaps working in his garden and doing necessary errands afoot or on a bicycle. One who had learned to say, with Thoreau: "A man is rich in proportion to the things he can afford to let alone."¹

An ashrama member must needs smile, for this has been his attitude all along. He has been given at last official sanction for doing what he has always done. The proponents of the no-growth view of the world are at one with him. The development and maintenance of sattvic attitudes has become one's patriotic duty!

Sri Ramakrishna said, "In his last life a man becomes sattvic." This can be stated the other way around also: "As one becomes

sattvic one concerns oneself with eternal things." A situation of no-growth is not bad at all; it tranquilizes the distracted and motivates men toward finer ends.

Returning from the one pilgrimage he made outside Bengal, Sri Ramakrishna announced: "All that is there is here." How long does it take most of us to learn that! For by "here" the Master meant: In the recesses of the heart. Benares or Shangri-La are here. What we hope to find in Paris or Polynesia, but never do, is here. Paradise itself is here.

We are always hearing what a shame it is that there exists no longer any frontier. But yes there is. It is ever here in the land of the spirit. This is where the new discoveries are to be made. In no-growth (as here defined) is to be found the possibility for great growth. In his "India's Message to the World" Swami Vivekananda said that "Brahmanhood is the solution to the varying degrees of progress and culture as well as that of all social and political problems." Gregory of Nyssa² spoke of the perfect spiritual man as the man who is moving forward, deeper into the mystery of God. Heaven itself in this view consists in an eternal progress into the love and light and life of God, where each fulfilment contains in itself the impulse to further exploration. Another explorer of the world of sattva,³ Swami Brahmananda, reported back that that spiritual experience goes on and on, concluding with the explanation: "Light, more light, more light, more light. Is there any end to it!"

References:

1. Henry Thoreau (1817-1862) American writer influenced by Indian spirituality and German idealism.
2. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 331-395). Father of Greek church.)
3. Sattva - One of the three gunas (sattva, rajas and tamas) is characterized by harmony, light, and purity.

Programme for May - June 2019

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation
at the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

May	5	Day Retreat	
May	12	Swami Bhuteshananda's Class Talks on Jnana Yoga	Swami Tripurananda
May	19	Swami Bhuteshananda's Class Talks on Jnana Yoga	Swami Tripurananda
May	26	Day Retreat	
Jun	2	The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 36	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jun	9	The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 37	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jun	16	The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 38	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jun	23	The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 39	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jun	30	Day Retreat	

Day Retreats

Swami Sarvasthananda will introduce a special Day Retreat with
Dr Subhadra Desai, international classical singer and scholar.

At the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 5th May
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Day Retreat with Swami Baneshananda , Swami Vimokshananda Swami
Sarvasthananda and Swami Tripurananda

At the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 26th May and 30th June
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Fortnightly Saturday Class - Message of the Upanishads - Ancient Solutions for Modern Problems - by Swami Sarvasthananda

May 25 (Saturday)

June 22 (Saturday)

Time 4:00 p.m to 5:30 p.m

Venue: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,
4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HE

continued from front cover

This kind of friction exists between the Vaishnavas and the Saktas. The Vaishnava says, 'My Kesava is the only Saviour', whereas the Sakta insists, 'My Bhagavati is the only Saviour.'

Once I took Vaishnavacharan to Mathur Babu. Mathur welcomed him with great courtesy and fed him from silver plates. Now, Vaishnavacharan was a very learned Vaishnava and an orthodox devotee of his sect.

Mathur, on the other hand, was a devotee of the Divine Mother. They were engaged in a friendly discussion when suddenly Vaishnavacharan said, "Kesava is the only Saviour." No sooner did Mathur hear this than his face became red with anger and he blurted out, "You rascal!" He was a Sakta. Wasn't it natural for him to say like that? I gave Vaishnavacharan a nudge!

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Everything progresses in waves. The march of civilization, the progression of worlds, is in waves. All human activities likewise progress in waves art, literature, science, religion.

Great waves succeed each other, and between these great waves is a quiet, a calm, a period of rest, a period of recuperation.

All manifest life seems to require a period of sleep, of calm, in which to gain added strength, renewed vigour, for the next manifestation, or awakening to activity. Thus is the march of all progress, of all manifest life in waves, successive waves, [of] activity and repose. Waves succeed each other in an endless chain of progression.

Religion, like everything else, progresses in waves; and at the summit of each great wave stands an illumined soul, a mighty spiritual leader and teacher of men.

Swami Vivekananda

